Journal of Rural and Community Development

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Abstract

This paper examines community attitudes toward tourism as a rural economic development strategy in four small towns in rural regions of the Atlantic Provinces. We view rural tourism through a political economy lens, asking: by what relations of power and historical precedents do communities find themselves with tourism as the best or most obvious local development option? Whose interests are served, and in what ways, when tourism is used to bring economic activity to rural communities? Does tourism bring local communities more or less control over their economic affairs? We find that rural residents' views toward tourism contain three themes: first, the key to unlocking tourism potential is simply to "market the place," inclusive of its natural beauty, lifestyle and friendly people, to tourists elsewhere. Secondly, research participants emphasized the centrality of volunteers—and their dwindling numbers and energies—to extant tourism efforts, signalling that the current mode of tourism development is unsustainable, and casting doubt on tourism's job promises. Finally, tourism is understood not as the best choice, but as the last resort for communities where primary industry is believed to be dead and impossible to revive. We conclude by connecting these community views back into the political economy framework outlined at the beginning, in an effort to understand the historical and socio-political contingencies that bring rural communities to a place where investing in tourism seems to be the best way forward.

Keywords: tourism, sustainable rural development, Maritimes, Atlantic Canada, political economy

1.0 Introduction

Globally, tourism has been one of the fastest growing industries in the last several years. One point four billion tourist trips were made in 2018—an increase of 5% over 2017's numbers, and two years sooner than the United Nation's World Tourism Organization predicted tourism figures would go so high. The industry is widely regarded as "a key driver of social and economic development, job creation and equality" when it is managed and grown sustainably (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019, para. 3). This depiction of tourism appears in the discourse of global organizations like the UN, as well as in the national tourism initiatives that

most countries have established—such as *Destination Canada, Brand USA,* and *South Africa Tourism*. It also guides what is said and done about tourism at local levels, from urban centres to rural peripheries.

In this paper, we ask whether people living in rural or small-town areas believe that the hope attached to tourism as an economic development strategy is warranted. To that end, we take Atlantic Canada as a case study of rural inhabitants' perceptions of tourism, combining an analysis of focus group data from four small towns with a critical examination of the social and historical contingencies that shape perceptions and impacts of tourism development in the region. We view rural and small-town tourism through a political economy lens, which means attending to power relations, conflict and interests in the study of economy. We ask: by what relations of power and historical precedents do communities find themselves with tourism as the best or most obvious local development option? Whose interests are served, and in what ways, when tourism is used to bring economic activity to rural communities and small towns? Do rural residents believe that tourism brings their communities more or less control over their economic affairs? Why is tourism appealing—or not—as an economic development strategy? In linking residents' perceptions to a political economy perspective, we offer a view of tourism development as something not forced from outside *or* pushed from inside a community, but simultaneously advanced *by* communities with their own power and *on* communities by structural forces beyond their immediate control.

We find that rural and small-town residents' views toward tourism contain three themes: first, the key to unlocking tourism potential is simply, in residents' articulations, to 'market the place' to tourists elsewhere. The tourist market is envisioned, hopefully, as something any community could tap into if it highlights its natural beauty, lifestyle and friendly people, and commodifies the recreation (and in some cases, such as fishing, the work) residents already freely enjoy. Nevertheless, secondly, research participants emphasized the centrality of volunteers—and their dwindling numbers and energies—to extant tourism efforts, signalling that the current mode of tourism development might be unsustainable, and casting doubt on tourism's job promises.[1] Finally, tourism is understood not as the best choice, but as the last hope for communities where primary industry is believed to be dead and impossible to revive.

Overall, residents identified the benefits of tourism by contrasting them with the drawbacks of the mills and mines of the past, and the gas drilling many industry leaders are pushing for in the future. Some key differences put tourism at the front of mind: it does not appear to threaten the (also seasonal) natural resources sectors (fisheries or agriculture) that provide jobs and define community identities; and its operations *must* be local—unlike some industries of the past, which they know from experience can thrive without delivering lasting, equitable benefits to the local community, and can leave when the resource runs dry or the workers get too expensive. But the question of exactly how to kick-start growth in tourism at the community level, and convert volunteer work to paid jobs, eludes them. We argue that this discrepancy between the ease with which a person can imagine tourism opportunities, and the difficulty actually setting them up in a way that brings stable profits, stems from the same but always evolving global capitalist relations of

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[1] We use the term 'sustainable' in the general sense of an activity that can be kept up in the long term without exhausting its necessary resources. We do not mean to wade into the important debates about what actually constitutes ecological sustainability.

production that brought these and other communities to a point where primary industry is unfathomable or unappealing. This insight, gleaned by connecting these Atlantic case studies to a political economy framework, is instructive for academics and rural citizens interested in rural economic development that brings local communities economic security and control over their economic affairs.

1.1 Atlantic Canada in Political Economic Perspective

Atlantic Canada is comprised of the four easternmost Canadian provinces of Prince Edward Island (PEI), New Brunswick (NB), Nova Scotia (NS), and Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). The region is home to 2.3 million people, or about 6% of the national population, and it is one of the most rural parts of the country, with 40 to over 50% of the population in each of its four provinces living outside major urban centres. In line with rural outmigration trends worldwide, young people born in rural parts of Atlantic Canada are more likely to leave their communities than remain in them, and the people remaining are growing old (Foster & Main, 2017). Rural families are separated by the westward pull of oil economy jobs (Norman & Power, 2015); major industries and employers are shifting operations to places with lower wages and looser regulations; and tax and consumer bases are too weak to hang on to local schools, grocery stores, hospitals, libraries and community centres (Stalker & Phyne, 2014).

At the same time, some rural communities and small towns in Atlantic Canada are undergoing transitions, if not revivals. In some cases, social enterprises and their investors have established maker-spaces, tourist attractions and small business 'hubs' in deindustrialized communities, bringing culture, sociality and commerce back to once-shuttered main streets. Farmers' markets, independent cafes and restaurants, craft industries of all kinds, small organic and free-range farms, and sustainable, community-owned aquaculture, internet, and woodlots seem to have mounted a small but noticeable challenge to the dominance of corporations and factory farms (Dacin & Dacin, 2019; Lim & Farber, 2017; Perdomo, 2012; Samson, 2018). While the region's economic growth has consistently lagged that of the country as a whole, it has also been praised as a locus of 'inclusive growth' because incomes—particularly across generations—are more equitably distributed in the Atlantic Provinces (Corak, 2017).

Yet it is the narrative of rural Atlantic decline that has become hegemonic (Ibbitson, 2015 Moreira, 2009). Atlantic Canadian economies, for as long as they have existed as such, have been seen as a 'problem' to be solved through government policy (Neill, 1991). From the 1970s onward, the solutions to the Atlantic problem have become increasingly, though by no means largely, influenced by market fundamentalism (Somers & Block, 2014). Economic development in the region is almost an industry unto itself, with many careers built and sustained by it, in the ever-evolving and name-changing regional development agencies tasked with identifying and cultivating industries with growth potential (Hodge & Robinson, 2013; Langford, 2017; Savoie, 2006). But in the 150 years since Confederation, despite continuous government intervention in rural economies, from the 'smokestack chasing' of mid-20th century, to the mantras of 'opportunity,' 'competitiveness' and 'growth' that drive development agendas today (Foster, 2016; Savoie, 2006), Atlantic Canada's rural population has steadily declined at varying speeds with only a handful of periods of stability (Statistics Canada, 2018).

A key moral in the narrative of rural decline—and a key piece of the political economy that makes tourism attractive—is that of the risks faced by the 'single industry' town. Such towns are places whose economies are dependent on one major activity (Randall & Ironside, 1996). In Atlantic Canada, the fisheries, forestry, agriculture, and mining have historically employed significant proportions of the labour force, generated a large share of the region's GDP, and comprised much of each province's exports. The region has seen several 'single-industry', resource-dependent communities rise and fall with the availability and market value of their primary resource, whether it is lobster, cod or coal.

These regional experiences with resource booms, busts, and disasters in the past inform economic development discourse in the present. While large industries tempt municipal and provincial governments to incentivize their establishment in rural communities, local communities are hesitant to put 'all of their eggs in one basket', and the proliferation of smaller subsidies and grants for rural businesses reflects this reluctance to develop small places around single industries (Stern & Hall, 2015). As Krawchenko (2014) finds, rural communities in Atlantic Canada are eager to engage in new forms of economic development such as community economic development, but often lack the capacity to succeed in these efforts. At the same time, Atlantic Canada has difficulty competing with lower-wage jurisdictions for industrial development opportunities anyway, and many employers in the region's rural areas and small towns—especially in agriculture and food processing—complain about a 'skills mismatch' between their job vacancies and the local labour force (Akbari, 2015).

All of this means that in many communities around Atlantic Canada, there are few obvious and uncontroversial economic development paths to prosperity, either in the short- or long-term. However, tourism appears to be a noteworthy exception—a 'benign' industry, peaceful and sustainable compared to alternative development possibilities such as mining, oil and gas, or manufacturing (Bianchi, 2018, p. 2). While it has environmental consequences—such as the carbon footprint of air travel, or the impacts of increased foot traffic in fragile ecosystems—and is subject to the vagaries of currency fluctuations, airfare prices and consumer trends, it nevertheless benefits from the impression that tourists are a renewable resource, and that small, peripheral places with 'nothing' compared to the metropolis still have *something* to 'market' to travelers (e.g., the rural idyll of isolation, simplicity, nature, and a slower pace). Moreover, tourism cannot be outsourced, as it is tied to place.

Accordingly, local economic development conversations in the Atlantic region have zeroed in on growing and supporting tourism as a key strategy to improve local economic indicators, nourish local businesses, raise incomes and create jobs (Stoddart, Catano & Ramos, 2018). This trend reflects a nationwide—and worldwide—embrace of tourism as a specifically rural development strategy (Cawley, 2009; Vodden, Douglas, Markey, Minnes, & Reimer, 2019). In Atlantic Canada, tourism is emphasized not just locally but also in extra-local government initiatives such as the Atlantic Growth Strategy (c. 2016). The fourth of the latter's five priority areas is to "expand business activities between Atlantic Canada and international markets, and *strategically market the region as a whole* by displaying the best Atlantic Canada has to offer the world *to attract new investments and grow tourism*" (Government of Canada, 2017, *Five Pillars,* emphasis added). Tourism also dominated economic development discussions over the summer of 2019, with controversy flaring around provincial government investment in a ferry from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia—a small town in the province's southwest—to Portland,

Maine, that failed to launch after receiving funds (Gorman, 2019) and a proposal to create a new airport in rural Inverness, Cape Breton (Ayers, 2019). Both of these potential investments have been criticized as poor uses of public money, because the ferry's passenger counts have never met expectations, and because there is already an airport near Inverness and no real evidence of demand for another.

Despite the controversial nature of these specific tourism efforts, the general population appears to accept tourism as a necessity; it is accepted (e.g. in newspapers and other public fora) as a promising avenue for economic development, particularly in the region's rural communities and small towns. Support for the Yarmouth ferry and the Inverness airport, while far from universal, is considerable, and those in favour of such developments argue that tourists spending money are key to survival—and perhaps the key to unlocking growth—for many Atlantic Canadian communities.

Across several qualitative studies, including the one presented further below, we have found that informants contemplating opportunities for development in their local communities tend to reach for tourism first, expressing a desire to 'market' the good things about their area to 'attract' tourists and their spending, mirroring the language and the assumptions in the Atlantic Growth Strategy. Other research in Atlantic Canada has examined local reactions to and perceptions of tourism, finding that rural residents view tourism as helping the local economy rather than generating profits for business owners (Sullivan & Mitchell, 2012). However, other scholars have argued further that residents want to see tourism development but lack the "entrepreneurial spirit to carry it out themselves" (Rockett & Ramsey, 2017, p. 309). Even if they manage to establish a tourism economy, communities in Atlantic Canada can find themselves commodifying, and thereby ironically sacrificing, their way of life in order to perform a so-called 'authenticity' that fits tourists' perception of the rural idyll (George & Reid, 2005; Kelly, 2013; McKay, 1994; Overton, 1996).

Still, there is demonstrable faith in tourism, and it is not limited to rural communities looking for new horizons. For the first time, tourism got its own 'Economic Strategy Table' in the 2019 Federal budget, a multi-sector panel with a mandate to guide government policy and investment around tourism. Thus, the tumultuous and marginalizing economic history of Atlantic Canada has delivered the region to a moment where investing money and hope in tourism appears to make sense, particularly in rural areas. But studies in other locales suggest there are winners and losers in tourism development, and that there is good reason to cast a critical eye on claims about tourism's inherent sustainability, and about the equal distribution of its benefits to local residents.

1.2 A Political Economy of Tourism in Atlantic Canada

A strong critique of tourism along these lines can be found in research with a political economy theoretical framework. Across works identifying with Marxist, cultural, critical or other brands of political economy, the overriding principle is that understanding any given social phenomenon requires some attention to power, and the social, political and economic relations "through which power is exercised" (Bianchi, 2018, p.18; cf. Su, Bramwell & Whalley, 2018). If there is any abiding theme in political economy beyond that, it is that 'the economy', however one defines it, is an inherently political and social thing. It is not a separate, neutral sphere, but is deeply 'embedded', to borrow from a related theoretical perspective, in social and political relations. Contrary to depictions of the economy as a machine set in motion by an invisible hand, everywhere there are decisions about economic

policy, investment, strategic direction, legislation and so on that are made by *real* actors in 'diverse relational networks' with interests, biases, preferences, values and beliefs.

The political economy perspective has long been applied in studies of Atlantic Canada, most notably within the Maritime political economy (MPE) school of thought originating in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Barrett 1980; Bickerton, 1982; Brym & Sacouman, 1979; Clow, 1984; Veltmeyer, 1978). [2] Maritime political economy coalesced as a response to the orthodoxy of its time—including Harold Innis's (1956) staples thesis, which posited that natural endowments of resources and work ethic disadvantaged Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island—Newfoundland and Labrador had not yet joined the country in Innis's time—and led to their lower household and provincial incomes. MPE scholars, applying neo-Marxist critiques to Atlantic Canada, argued that the real culprits were political arrangements and policies that favoured central Canada, and capitalist economic arrangements that exploited land, sea, and people (Sacouman, 1980), using case studies of the fisheries (Barrett & Apostle, 1987; Burrill & McKay, 1987) and agriculture (Bitterman, 1988; Winson, 1985) to make this case.

Atlantic Canadian tourism receives scant attention in the early MPE tradition, in part because its heyday from the late 1970s to early 1980s precedes the incredible global rise in tourism after the 1990s. James Overton's (1984) work is a notable exception, in which he connects Newfoundland's tourism development strategy—of capitalizing on nostalgia—to the displacement of Newfoundlanders to other provinces in search of work. Later scholars, writing after the original MPE school of thought wound down, have also used political economy frameworks to understand how the same structured relations of power that played a role in deindustrialization in Atlantic Canada also lay the groundwork for economic development approaches that prioritize tourism in deindustrialized communities.

For example, echoing Ian McKay's (1994) influential "Quest of the Folk", another of Overton's (2007) writings examines how Newfoundlanders came to be interested in archaeology and their heritage after the cod collapse, not out of inert curiosity but because it offered economic development opportunities (cf. Stoddart & Sodero, 2015 for another perspective on the same phenomenon). George and Reid's 2005 work, cited previously, examined a similar commodification of culture in the small, tourism-dependent town of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. In an edited volume that includes case studies from Atlantic Canada, George, Mair and Reid (2009) use a political economy lens to link the global transformation of leisure and travel to the global transformation of rural places through urbanization and economic restructuring. Looking beyond the study of Atlantic Canada, there are signs of the heterogeneous political economy perspective's increasing popularity and significance in tourism studies generally (Bianchi, 2002; 2018; Mosedale, 2011; 2016). It shows promise as a tool for directing attention to "the forces of accumulation and configurations of class and institutional power that shape the structures and distributional outcomes of tourism development" (Bianchi, 2018, p. 2).

However, it takes some additional work to reallocate some of the attention political economy perspectives pay to structures and relations of power to questions of subjectivity and agency. Other political economy scholars have argued for the

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[2] 'Maritime' refers to Nova Scotia, PEI and New Brunswick. 'Atlantic Canada' includes these three plus Newfoundland and Labrador. For our purposes, MPE's insights extend to all of Atlantic Canada.

importance of attending to such subjective matters as motivations, perceptions, and beliefs (Wittel, 2004; Levine, 2005) alongside power relations and interests, and we take up that recommendation in what follows. We are also inspired by a growing body of research from Atlantic Canada on social perceptions of, for example, neighbourhood change and tourism development (Gosse, Ramos, Radice, Grant, & Pritchard, 2016; Stoddart, Catano & Ramos, 2018).

Building on the Atlantic-focused Maritime Political Economy tradition, and taking insights from the broader and burgeoning political economy of tourism, we analyse rural and small town residents' perceptions of tourism and economic development in order to understand why tourism has become such a priority in rural economic development lumber in Atlantic Canada, and what rural and small town people think about it, in order to illuminate the connections between the global political economy that shapes the tourism industry and the local community perceptions that shape how tourism develops 'on the ground.'

2.0 Methods and Data

The seven focus groups and one Town Hall meeting analysed in this paper were conducted in April 2016 and April 2017, as part of a study in partnership with the Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia-based nonprofit Centre for Local Prosperity. The study's broad objective was to explore the potential for import replacement in Atlantic Canada, but participants were asked to reflect generally on the state of their local economy and potential avenues for future development, and tourism came up in the context of these conversations without prompting—enough to generate sufficient data for the analysis below.

The focus groups took place in four small Atlantic Canadian communities, with two each in Shelburne (Nova Scotia, population 1,743), Souris (Prince Edward Island, population 1,053), and Miramichi (New Brunswick, population 17,537), and one on the Burin Peninsula (Newfoundland and Labrador, population 17,791)—population counts are from the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2016). These communities were chosen on the basis of (a) population size, (b) age composition, (c) local services and amenities, (d) major industry, and (e) nearest major center—for services and amenities—with the objective of getting a mix of these characteristics across all four.

Shelburne, Souris and the Burin Peninsula are each about an hour away from the closest major centre, while Miramichi *is* the major centre in its area. In each community the service sector, not surprisingly, makes up the majority of employment, but fishing is also a major industry. In Shelburne, these are combined with logging, shipbuilding and repair; in Miramichi, they combine with mining and forestry; in Souris they are augmented by farming and tourism already, while in the Burin, fishing is *the* dominant industry. Each also fits the general Atlantic Canadian narrative of economic decline. Each of the communities had strong shipbuilding industries that fell off in the 20th century, and have seen the closure of major employers, such as fish processing plants and an all boys' school in Shelburne, several lumber mills in Miramichi, and more fish processing plants in the Burin.

The communities differed with respect to their tourism industries. Shelburne has been a set location for some popular films, it has several museums, including a new Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in nearby Birchtown, and looks like the quaint fishing village emblematic of Canada's east coast. However, although it belongs to the South Shore region, the second-most visited region in Nova Scotia outside its

capital of Halifax, only 6% of visitors to the South Shore stop in Shelburne (Tourism Nova Scotia, 2017). Like most of Prince Edward Island (PEI), Souris boasts long, flat beaches with relatively warm ocean water, has recently kindled an 'Artisans on Main' attraction, and benefits from being less than two hours from most other places on PEI. Miramichi is frequented less by tourists, but it markets itself as an outdoor lover's destination, with camping and river fishing all around. The Burin Peninsula sees tourists, thanks in part to Newfoundland and Labrador's award-winning tourism campaigns, but its geography—a long land mass with one road in and out—limits its traffic to adventurous visitors. Thus, the communities include a mix of experiences with tourism. With these details established, we do not make claims to the representativeness of the communities—vis-à-vis other rural communities or small towns in Atlantic Canada—nor of the samples of interviewees drawn from each.

In each community except the Burin Peninsula, a 'business-government' group invited civil servants, elected officials (any level), and businesspeople, and a 'community' group invited residents of any occupational background—aiming for a mix of genders and ages—via notices in local community centers and other high-traffic locations, social media, and newspaper advertisements. After this approach failed to yield enough participants on the Burin Peninsula, six participants were recruited via a local informant with deep community ties and given literature about import replacement in advance. They convened several weeks later, in a session about how they could begin to meet local consumer demand with local production and reduce the region's reliance on imports. A 'town hall' style meeting was also held to gather views from a wider audience.

In general, participants were asked to discuss the state of their local economy, how they make decisions about participating in it, and what they think should be done to improve it. With the exception of the Burin group, halfway through the focus groups, participants were presented with the idea of import replacement and asked to consider it as a strategy for economic development in their communities. They were also given a short, anonymous survey about consumption and employment to fill out after the focus group. The discussions lasted approximately two hours. Sixty-eight people participated in the focus groups: 23 in Shelburne, 21 in Souris, 18 in Miramichi, and 6 in Burin. There were 35 women and 33 men, ranging in age from mid-20s to 80s.

Groups were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts analyzed separately by two researchers using an open qualitative coding process. Each researcher, after an initial reading of each transcript, created codes relating to emerging themes. Codes were compared, organized, and combined for a second reading of each transcript. The codes attached to most themes in this article were 'tourism' and 'marketing the place'.

3.0 Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Marketing the Place

Across all four communities, common perspectives on tourism emerged. In the context of discussions directed toward economic development opportunities, participants conveyed that tourists constitute a relatively untapped market for local goods and services. They were compared to export markets, except instead of shipping products away, tourists would bring outside money in and take products— or memories—when they left. Tourism, in effect, brings the market to the goods instead of the goods to the market. In their portrayals of the tourist market,

participants described tourists as either oblivious to attractions off the beaten path or unaware of *anything* their small communities have to offer.

In Shelburne this point came up repeatedly. One participant, recalling a tourism marketing convention she attended in Portland, Maine, said there were "so many people from Portland who didn't even know how to get over to Nova Scotia, they said, 'well how do we get over there is it like Toronto?' I said 'Toronto? No.'" In her recollection, she brought them to her desk and showed them some tourism material from the province, and "they were amazed that it was so close and the beauty and everything we had to offer and they had no idea." This participant described herself in the introductions to the group as "very much interested in, you know, helping communities get together and trying to get them known."

One of the other Shelburne participants shared this objective, and was working on a marketing initiative to "try and bring attention to lobster capital of Canada which is Barrington or Shelburne county." Her counterparts agreed that Shelburne had been overshadowed by some coastal communities further up the south shore of Nova Scotia, toward Halifax, and the very popular Annapolis Valley. "You know we just got to get people past Lunenburg and get them down here whether it's for tourism or you know, to buy our fish or whatever the case may be." Another Shelburne participant echoed this sentiment, saying, "we talk about tourism. Well, it's one of the best kept secrets because you never hear about it. It's never promoted. They promote Peggy's Cove. They promote every other place except this area."

With tourists thus constituted, as people with money who simply don't know about one's community, the task becomes 'marketing' what the community has—not necessarily developing new services or attractions. Rendered thusly, expanding tourism seems like an easy economic development proposition. This logic is visible in the following quotation, from a participant in Miramichi:

> The thing is we have to be talking about the positive. I'm reminded - a few of us around this table have been at a part of a tourism marketing exercise and the consultant said the same thing. We're too down on ourselves, we're too hard on ourselves. That we have a lot of assets we have a lot to offer, but we are inward turning and we're critical and not positive and upbeat. So maybe one of the ways to deal with that is to take a conscious approach to help people become more aware of what our assets are. Instead of assuming that everyone knows about the fresh air, clean water, and everything else. That we start informing people of what are the benefits of living here so that they themselves become more positive. If you create a positive environment for business and a positive environment for investment, it'll come. If you keep talking positive—Moncton, they are in your face all the time talking about how great Moncton is. They've figured it out, they don't want to talk about the negative things they only want to talk about the positive things.

The rest of the group agreed, as shown in the following excerpts: "What holds us back is our people, because we need to think small-town charm, we need to be small-town charm, but think big city. And I always say, 'let's put people on a bus, and take them out of here, maybe to Halifax maybe to Montreal maybe to Toronto and see what they have, and then bring them back' and say, 'now, that's what those people have, what can we do here'. Cause when we go to people like Annapolis Royal and Truro and Guysborough County…they don't have much more than Miramichi, but they're happy!?"

Another respondent noted, "There's so many beautiful opportunities here, so I would like people to just think positive, like think what can we do, you know…who can go to a ballet for like $15? In Miramichi you can go to ballet, like to go to Winnipeg, go to Toronto, you're paying $150. We just had an event…and the young lady is world-renowned soprano, and we paid $30, like seriously." This was echoed by multiple respondents. One said, "I think more people from the outside appreciate what we have than what we do. I think that's the big thing." Another, who had spent time away, said, "When I moved back, a couple of years ago, my eyes were the same as yours. Like all I see is the potential, and the beauty…"

In Miramichi and the other communities, participants pointed specifically to local lifestyle as something to be marketed to tourists. Lifestyle seemed to include pace of life, access to nature, friendly people, and community connections. In Shelburne, one conversation went like this:

> Participant 1: 'So what do we sell if we want to sell something?'
>
> Group: 'Lifestyle, you sell that.'
>
> Moderator: 'So you sell the lifestyle, you sell the community, you sell the quality of life.'
>
> Participant 2: 'Also, when people come down from Halifax, yeah everybody is leaving and going to the city but they get to the city and get burnt out. We get so many refugees from the city who have come to take a few days. I just want to walk the beach, I just want to slow down.'

Later in the same group, a participant remembered a specific example of this approach working—although it was hardly coordinated enough to be called an approach. Some visitors to the yacht club, she said, "went upstairs…sat in their social circles and had a ball and looked at the harbour and said, look at the fun I've had here. So they sailed in for the harbour but they stayed for the community, the social life." Other group members agreed that the community simply had to have "people out and about," living their usual lives, to attract more people "out and about."

One participant objected to what he saw as a creep toward 'social engineering'—creating a false image of a place, or using propaganda, to attract tourists. He urged that a community should simply "just take the stuff we have and sell it. Nobody is marketing it. Nobody is taking it and finding it and market." His counterparts on the group assured him this was all they meant, too. In fact, they said, it wasn't possible to *make* a place great. When this participant claimed, "It's either

going to be a great place to live already, you just can't create it. This is a great place to live," the croup conceded: "It is a great place to live, absolutely."

In Souris, participants felt that their community should "brand itself as rural," with license plates and other promotional materials meant to highlight an intangible way of life and culture that could attract people. But lifestyle also included 'hidden gems'—places that locals took for granted, located off the beaten track. In Souris, one participant said she was working on a list of hidden gems for tourists. As she explained, "you can send, everybody…to Cavendish, but there are hundreds and hundreds of those little gems and…people love it. And that's what they take home. And we get emails back saying 'thank you for…the drive through the glen.'"

In Shelburne, this approach was endorsed, too. Participants agreed they needed to

> Build a package around what you have and you dress it up however you gotta dress it up. If you're going to spend a lot of time trying to say now, 'what do those people want?' Take the things that your community has already built—that THEY think is important…and then you get a social media site and you just push it hard. But I wouldn't try and say what do people want and then go build something you think that they want. Take what you have because everybody wants that.

Another Shelburne participant segmented tourists into groups who would appreciate different aspects of the local lifestyle. "Germans like nature, we have lots of that. The French like food, well we have lots of that….There's the outdoorsy people, the food people, there's golfing and sports people."

Across all these examples, the logic is that places have a lot to offer already, but nobody knows about them, so opening up the tourist market is only a matter of marketing what 'you already have'. Interestingly, what these communities 'already have' is not necessarily distinctive heritage or culture, as has been found in other studies of tourism and the commodification of culture. Instead, what participants pointed to was a more general 'rural' way of life that is close to nature, friendly and comfortable.

Nevertheless, in line with the tourism literature cited earlier, experiences with tourism development suggest that tapping into the tourist market *can* lead to investments that are targeted only at tourists and conflict with what local residents want and need (cf. George & Reid, 2005). In the Burin Peninsula, for example, participants remembered how a chunk of federal tourism dollars—given to the community when its fish plant closed—was spent on putting a museum inside a historic house on a side road. This investment did not attract visitors to a level that would bring the community profit from tourism, so they eventually moved the entire house onto a main road to be closer to tourist routes.

More generally, tourism expenditures struck some participants as taking away from investment in local residents. One participant on the Burin Peninsula remarked, "I says we should advertise to the youngsters the same as we do to the tourists. We might get to keep some of them."

3.2 JOBS! Or...Unpaid Tourism Work

Tourism may or may not divert money away from initiatives that benefit local residents, but it certainly diverts volunteer labour. The data from the four Atlantic Canadian communities suggests that there is a core group of volunteers in each locale who support the tourism industry and economic development initiatives. According to participants, these volunteers are doing a range of tasks, from serving on the boards of non-profit heritage sites to coordinating and running festivals to serving pancake breakfasts in community halls. In some cases, these are initiatives that were started with only the local residents in mind, while in others, the initiatives are designed with attracting tourists in mind. Regardless, focus group participants said it is the same group of people volunteering for everything. On the one hand, this is part of what makes tourism a source of low-hanging fruit: volunteers are already assembled, not expecting to make money, but willing to contribute to their communities, whether in events that cater to locals or those that target visitors. In Shelburne, one participant surmised that to attract tourists, "you take what you can— you take all those things that you have that volunteer groups have been putting together forever." A participant on the Burin peninsula explained that this is what has been happening in his community for a long time; but from his perspective the conditions were worsening:

> …Now one time at least you'd get a bit of administrative funding if you were delivering a program, but now you don't get any type, so everything has got to be done on a volunteer basis, you know, like me and [my wife] and a few more people down there, working fulltime almost for nothing. Especially [my wife], I mean she spends most of her day working the rural development association, on a volunteer basis, right. But at least if she's not getting money from no one, there's nobody to tell her what she should be doing.

Thus, there are pros and cons to limited interference in a community's tourism development, but small places are armed with few resources and little information and left to solve the problems of their community the best way they know how. And in most rural communities, the volunteer base is growing old and there is little hope of replacing it.

There are also difficulties trying to recruit and retain younger volunteers alongside those who are ageing. As a participant in Miramichi put it, "we have a lot of discussion on it... the older generation, a lot of the times, [has] control—has the money, and the younger generation has the ideas. But neither of them want to deal with each other." Respondents also pointed out other barriers to younger people volunteering, such as the number of people who travel 'out west' to work for periods of time. In Shelburne, "one of the scary parts of the volunteer economy," said one participant, "is that we have an ageing population and we need to be able to feed, bring some of the younger people into that system because they older folks just can't keep doing it."

The volunteering done by—often older—community members contributes to tourism. In Miramichi, the very popular festivals (music, craft, etc.) are a prime example of volunteer-driven tourism. One participant told us:

> When you think festivals in Miramichi, like you said we have a lot of festivals, and most people that work around each of those festivals are all volunteers. Right? So if you can imagine the amount of volunteers that are involved in each of these festivals, I don't even know how many number-wise.

Festivals are events that ostensibly bring in tourists, and with them, hope for a revived local economy. But primarily staffed and supported by the unpaid labour of volunteers, festivals are a precarious, risky and perhaps unsustainable source of tourism dollars. Moreover, they might put a strain on local volunteer-led initiatives—such as volunteer fire departments, children's play groups, community clean-ups—that are primarily meant to benefit residents.

Indeed, volunteer burnout was frequently reported across our case study sites. In Miramichi, a community member pointed out an event that used to happen in the community that garnered a lot of attention for the community, but that stopped happening because volunteers got burnt out. Respondents told a similar story in Shelburne. A community member in Shelburne also remarked that burnout happens because "…it's the same ones doing everything."

Certainly, tourists can enjoy the outcomes of initiatives for residents and vice versa, it is likely that many initiatives will benefit one group more than the other, as tourist needs and community needs may not often converge. And to be sure, people might feel some inherent benefits through volunteering. However, from the interviews in the four communities, it is evident that the way volunteering currently works is unsustainable, with what seems to be a small group of people carrying much of the load. Meanwhile, in the four case study communities, the people who *do* have work in the field of tourism, either self-employed or employed by others, often do that work as a post-retirement activity, or supplementary to a primary career.

All of this suggests that more research should build on ours and others (e.g., Rockett & Ramsey, 2017) into whether tourism actually delivers on the 'jobs' promise that runs throughout pro-tourism discourse. Tourism may well depend on local people's labour, but are they being paid for it? And if they are, are tourism jobs the kind that people want? Are they stable (e.g. full-time, year-round, salaried, permanent or recurring jobs)? Evidence from our case studies suggests that a lot of tourism work is performed by volunteers; further research into what the paid jobs are like is also warranted.

3.3 The Last Resort: Nostalgia, Anxiety and Doubt

None of the foregoing should be read as an indictment of residents' hopes invested in tourism. Nor should it be understood that participants were blindly supporting tourism with no sense of its pitfalls. However, in each of the four communities, participants had difficulty thinking of an area with the potential for growth or at least stability, except tourism. In part, this view of tourism was formed by participants comparing a rosier past to an uncertain, and potentially bleak, present and future. Thus, in our focus group transcripts we see nostalgia feature in a different way than it has in previous Atlantic tourism research (e.g., Overton, 1984). It is evident in the following remarks from a participant in Miramichi who had moved to the town from elsewhere:

> I'm from away but I came from away so long ago that I can't even think of it anymore. And when I moved here, the mills were going strong and people were spending all kinds of money because of that and there was more stores you could buy things in. And groceries weren't as astronomically expensive. They were very cheap, actually, when we came here because of the mill. Restaurants were really powerful because the mill would be working, ship out all these things. So a lot of it went too when the mill went down and then when the air force left, the army, whatever they were—the air force. Things just fell apart and I have found that nothing has come in to fill it, is what I find.

Participants like the one above had lived in their communities long enough to witness their economic decline, and were resultingly doubtful that prosperity could be possible in the future—at least if it followed the same paths of boom and bust that led to the present. As a participant in Souris said, "so, that's the main problem I see, is we just don't have the room to grow or expand with the possible exception of tourism." Changes in the global economy mean that people do not see a future in the industries that once supported rural people's livelihoods—agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Instead, they view tourism as a possible way to thrive again. One resident of Miramichi put it like this: "Without tourism we're sunk." Nostalgia is not, in this case, a marketing tool; it is a longing for a past that cannot be recovered, and tourism is positioned as a means to simply revive the community's economy. But the residents of these communities did not seem to have illusions about their prospects. In both business-government and community focus groups, they talked about demographic and economic challenges with awareness of the challenges they face, and a sense of anxiety about the future. It is out of this anxiety that tourism is considered as an option. But it seems rather out of desperation—when other industries have failed to provide prosperity, and facing demographic and economic collapse, community members turn to tourism a sort of last resort. Tourism is a means to save a cherished home, not cash in on a lucrative industry.

Moreover, participants understand that even tourist markets can be fickle; they behave like global markets, prone to disruption. One participant in the Burin recalled a moment in the 1990s, in a tourism planning initiative called Vision 20/20:

> They didn't know then that people were going to plan their tours online and every little detail. You know? So the planning that they put into it, like even the amount of money that they planned for advertising could have been significantly less and more could have been put into the delivery. But they didn't… they were planning beyond their vision. It's like driving in the fog.

4.0 Conclusion: Driving in the Fog

How do we make sense of the way perspectives on the past, hope in the present and anxiety about the future intersect in discussions of tourism-driven economic development? If tourism is taken for granted as a sensible market simply because it exists, we miss the political economic conditions that make it possible. One such condition, as others have noted, is global inequality (Bianchi, 2002). The top 5–10% of income earners globally have enough disposable income to allocate thousands of dollars per household per year on vacations, generating enough demand to employ middle- and low-income earners in the hospitality industry worldwide. But there are many economic development avenues with promise. What makes tourism so attractive in rural communities and small towns? The three themes from our focus group data—marketing the place, volunteer 'jobs' and tourism as a last resort—suggest that tourism is front of mind and palatable to local residents because it is perceived as being possible to build from the ground up.

Compared to the industries of the past, which now have significant barriers to entry—such as agriculture, fishing, and manufacturing—tourism built on 'what a community already has' requires little capital investment. And almost anyone can be involved, if tourism development just needs people to live their ordinary lives in a way that is welcoming and interesting to tourists. Even marketing initiatives can be free, with the ubiquity and accessibility of social media. Tourism, in other words, is what a community does when it has nothing else to sell and no money to invest in new production. This perception helps reveal tourism development as not only some requirement compelled by some external force, but as a strategy that becomes common sense among people living in a community too.

Yet it is a political economic situation insofar as it concerns the distribution of wealth—locally, provincially, nationally and globally—not only in the present but in the past. Indeed, an important task in developing a political economy of rural and small-town tourism in Atlantic Canada is to link these perspectives from the present to the histories on which they are contingent. For example, communities like the ones in our focus groups invested heavily in a handful of export-oriented industries not because local residents desired it, but because such industries were deemed to be in the national interest and subsequently supported by federal funding and development programs. These same industries eventually collapsed; some sought lower wages and taxes and a larger labour supply elsewhere (manufacturing and processing); some self-destructed due to under-regulation (fishing); in some, consolidation pushed most locals out of the market (agriculture).

If tourism is now to help communities in the ways they imagine it will, it is important to critically examine claims and perceptions of tourism's benign character, job creation, and innate sustainability. Our data suggest that communities have good ideas about how to take advantage of the global boom in tourism, but they might need help mounting the 'marketing' campaigns they envision. They also need way to broaden their volunteer base, as 'the same ones who are doing everything' are ageing and burning out. Finally, tourism development will arguably come together better if it is part of a comprehensive, community-driven economic development plan designed around a vision of what the community wants to be—what about its past would it like to restore? Keeping rural residents' perceptions in the same frame as a critical interrogation of power and inequality is arguably essential for appreciating tourism development's possible benefits and risks in rural communities.

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