



Policy Brief 4

Viability of Newfoundland and Labrador Coastal and Small Island Communities: The Case of Change Islands, NL

KEY MESSAGE

Small communities along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador hold a cultural, economic and strategic significance for the province and Canada as a whole. However, throughout the province's history there has been concern that small, rural communities and their ways of life are threatened, that little value has been placed on them or effort devoted to ensuring their long-term viability. This is particularly true of the communities located on small islands off the coast of Newfoundland. The key messages of this brief focus on the need to officially recognize the importance and capacity of small island communities while providing a regulatory and policy framework that would allow them to chart and work towards their own development goals in specific areas of opportunity.

BACKGROUND

Today, an estimated 22 settlements with year-round occupation remain on small islands accessible only by boat. Half of these are on Fogo Island, now amalgamated under one municipal structure. The fact that today we do not know the exact number of small island communities that have been lost during and since the resettlement era is an indication of low priority placed on them from a research and rural development perspective. What we do know is that between 1954 and 1972 some 27,000 people and over 220 communities throughout Newfoundland were resettled. Many of these were on small islands, with the islands of Placentia Bay, Bonavista Bay and Notre Dame Bay together with southwest coast of Newfoundland most affected. The number of rural communities in the province continues to decline, most recently with the resettlement of the community of Grand Bruit in 2010.

Demographic trends, changing economic and social realities and the collapse of the cod fishery have all contributed to the decline of coastal communities. However, a government policy of resettlement, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, contributed to the loss of many of the coastal and small island settlements. The policy, with the explicit goal of transforming the population from "a peasant subsistence-level society into a market-oriented industrial one," has caused irreversible changes that can still be felt today. The effects of the resettlement policy were further exacerbated by an insistence upon an industrial fisheries model that sidelined the small scale, inshore fishery, and at the same time created unsustainable harvesting pressure on the fisheries resource.

Since such policies did little to ensure the long term viability of small island communities, it is obvious that alternative approaches to the development of small coastal and island communities should be explored if we are to maintain and further develop the potential of these unique areas of the province.

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

A series of interviews with local residents of Change Islands (seasonal and permanent) provided an insight into how they see their community in terms of existing development capacity, level of services provided, and future directions of the community.

All of the interviewees characterized the community as an island and fishing community. They would often describe it as scenic, beautiful and small. Also, there is a small amount of distrust towards seasonal residents as expressed among younger

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residents. Some newcomers indicated that they sometimes feel isolated from the rest of the community.

In the provincial context, all respondents saw communities such as Change Islands as being of outmost historical and cultural importance to the province. They would use phrases such as: “The historical heart of the island is the outports,” or “It’s communities like this, what defines the province.”

Most of the residents were satisfied with health and transportation services provided on the islands, recognizing that the ferry availability is tied to the future of Fogo Island. However, younger residents felt the service could be improved. The Province put in place a ferry replacement strategy in 2007, developed through consultations with stakeholders. A second ferry was added to service the islands and handle heavy summer traffic in the summer of 2011. Strong support for transportation services is a signal to the coastal and island communities that they are valued and that their development needs matter.

Interviews with Change Islanders revealed that the education system is seen as adequate. While the teacher-student ratio is excellent and the school is well equipped, several participants expressed concern that the students are not taught any skills that would keep them in the community. Several fisherpeople indicated the lack of locally available professional development and education programs for adults as a concern. They would like to see some sort of distance courses on practical aspects of navigation, boat safety, etc. as well as a better relationship with the university.

In terms of governance and future development, all of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with their current mayor and council, but also expressed frustration with provincial and federal policies that don’t take into account the specific realities of their communities especially in terms of fisheries regulation and business regulations. Several residents expressed the need for funding opportunities such as micro-loans and for better co-operation between Fogo Island and Change Islands to ensure the future of both islands. Recent joint planning efforts and initiatives in tourism, fisheries and agriculture represent steps in this direction.

The aging population, outmigration of youth, and regulatory barriers to business and economic development, all contribute to a sense of helplessness and resignation among many of the remaining residents in coastal and island communities. It is urgent to ensure that the concerns of the local residents are given proper consideration in order to maintain and build upon the existing capacity in those communities. That capacity is still substantial and it extends to a much wider scope of activities than fisheries.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

A range of economic development opportunities for Change Islands have been identified and can be broadly divided into four main groups: fisheries, culture and heritage, tourism, and agriculture. While all those initiatives may be observed separately, it is important to note that there is a sense that these activities should be brought together as a part of a comprehensive development plan.

Fisheries

The current policy of rationalization through measures such as ‘enterprise combining’ is creating significant obstacles for Change Islands’ inshore fisherpeople

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trying to stay in the industry and tends to favour larger boats. This is a worldwide trend that may yet result in complete collapse of fisheries as pressure on fishing resources continues to increase. The most striking example of what is at stake for the local fisherpeople and the fish can be observed off the coast of Mauritania where Atlantic Dawn, the largest fishing vessel in the world, catches in a month what 7,000 local fisherpeople catch in a year.

Studies in many parts of the world have shown that a system supporting small-scale fisheries with a degree of community control over the resource represents more sustainable industry and produces a higher quality catch. A simplified regulatory system, increased local control over the fishing resource, and enhanced support for smaller, diverse, and sustainable fisheries would all significantly contribute to viability of small coastal and island communities (see Policy Briefs 1 to 3).

Culture and heritage

Activities clustered around culture and heritage are rich and varied on Change Islands and neighbouring Fogo Island. From the punt race and the revival of traditional boat building on Fogo Island to the resurgence of knitting on Change Islands, art colonies and photography workshops and the refuge for Newfoundland ponies, these activities have multiple roles and meanings to locals and visitors alike. They preserve cultural and historic heritage, help coastal communities develop unique identities, thereby boosting tourism appeal while developing local expertise and capacity that can later be applied to other ventures. For example, the restoration of stages and stores on Change Islands required local labour that now has a significant amount of experience in heritage building restoration projects.

Tourism

Tourism is emerging as a necessary and preferred economic activity among coastal populations. Tourism-based initiatives take several forms including bed and breakfasts, restaurants and cafes, specialty shops, and tours of natural and heritage sites. Specific examples include Fogo Island ice cream shop, Burgundy Squid cafe and Seven Oaks Inn on Change Islands, boat tours, etc.

At its most successful, the tourism industry sells unique destinations and experiences. Proper marketing and cooperation within a region are already a part of regional development programs and offers potential for economic growth on Fogo and Change Islands. These eco-tourism opportunities may boom in the years to come, as Fogo Island has been added to the list of places to see by the New York Times Magazine, and significant federal, provincial and foundation investments have been made in developing the sector.

Agriculture

Agriculture, in its broadest sense as cultivation and production of food, includes traditional activities such as berry picking, but there are also attempts on Change Islands to develop more complex operations in both livestock rearing and produce production. Fisheries and aquaculture could also play a role. Locally produced food adds value to the local hospitality industry and initiatives that support locally produced food and the role of cooperatives are becoming central to food security debates, offering potential price premiums. Fogo – Change Islands Agricultural Cooperative has been established to assist in growing agricultural production on the islands.

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There are other development options that may be available to coastal and island communities such as renewable energy development. However, it is crucial that development programs do not overreach a community's capacity - especially in the beginning of the development process. At this stage successes, regardless, are important motivators in sustaining community-driven development process.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The following policy recommendations aim to create a framework enabling the governments and the islanders to work together and ensure viability of the small island communities.

1. Formally recognize the importance of small island communities, fishing identity and heritage, and the unique challenges those communities face.
 - Such formal recognition of special status exists in several jurisdictions. In Croatia, the islands and island communities are subject to the Islands Act and National Development Plan for the Islands. Both of those legal mandates recognize specificities of each individual island and encourage individual approach to sustainable development of island communities. Scotland also has a specific policy guaranteeing security of tenure for small land holders in the Highlands and Islands region. In Quebec, the National Policy on Rurality, while not specifically addressing island communities, recognizes viable, vibrant and sustainable rural areas as an intrinsic part of being a modern society. Norway, similarly, has a set of rural policies aimed at slowing down the centralising out-migration process to prevent depopulation of the remote regions including its northern islands.
2. Recognize the kinds of capacity that exists in coastal and island communities and support further capacity development in order to facilitate bottom-up development process.
 - Treat each community as a unique place with its own set of economic, cultural and historic circumstances that must inform any future development.
 - Create partnerships with educational institutions, creating an opportunity for young students to do research in their own communities where possible.
 - Explore distance education development opportunities for life long learning.
3. Support the establishment of concrete development goals and related projects for individual communities.
 - Build partnerships with provincial educational institutions and institutes such as Gardiner Centre and the Harris Centre to assist in development projects.
 - Encourage and support partnerships with regional development agencies and neighbouring communities to support development projects.
 - Ensure that development projects are suitable for small coastal and island communities and build on successes.
 - Provide small funding opportunities such as startup grants or micro-loans.
4. Adapt the regulatory regime to the needs and circumstances of small island

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communities, taking into account local economic, cultural and environmental knowledge and existing infrastructure.

- Simplify licensing forms and processes, including in fisheries, to minimize required travel to larger centres for administrative tasks.
 - Acknowledge the realities of small island communities and amend the existing small business regulations, including those in tourism, so that they are appropriate for the capacity and infrastructure currently available in small island communities.
5. Create a licensing system that allows community access to and greater control over local natural resources.
 - Several jurisdictions have enacted legislation specifically governing access to traditional resources. In Scotland, policies around traditional crofting practices aim to decentralize decision making processes. In Alaska, a system of community fishing quotas ensures that the fishing resource is managed for the benefit of the northern communities. The exact regulatory regime should be developed in close consultations with communities with enough flexibility to suit the needs of different islands.
 6. Continue providing essential services such as transportation, health and education to small island communities.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

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ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief on Viability of Newfoundland and Labrador Coastal and Small Islands Communities: The Case of Change Islands, NL is part of a larger SSHRC funded project that aims to address resilience of Change Islands and other coastal fishing communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Principal Investigator Dr. Derek Smith (Carleton University) and Co-investigators Dr. Maureen Woodrow (University of Ottawa) and Dr. Kelly Vodden (Memorial University) have been working with Change Islanders to build adaptive capacity for fishing livelihoods that are viable and resilient to global markets and uncertain futures. This initiative seeks to build upon community knowledge to mobilize and improve management measures for local inshore fisheries. This series of policy briefs is intended to provide policy inputs and knowledge dissemination on aspects of fisheries and coastal community viability outlined below. The briefs are based on a series of interviews and report-back meetings with Change Islands' harvesters, Fishermen's Improvement Committee members and municipal representatives, discussions with fishing industry stakeholders and a thorough review of relevant policy documents. The briefs will be made available through a project website designed to promote a distinct heritage and fishing culture that spans three centuries.

See web link at: <http://localknowledgechangeislands.ca>

Policy Brief No. 1 Fisheries Rationalization

Policy Brief No. 2 Seafood Prices and Market Access

Policy Brief No. 3 Fisheries Regulations that Work

Policy Brief No. 4 The Viability of Coastal and Small Island Communities

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