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ECONOMIC IMPACTS AND FUTURE PATHWAYS: COVID-19 IN ATLANTIC CANADA

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Introduction

Atlantic Canada is made up of four provinces - Nova Scotia (NS), New Brunswick (NB), Prince Edward Island (PEI) and Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) - with a total population of 2.44 million. The most populous of the provinces is Nova Scotia at almost one million and the smallest is PEI at just under 160,000 (Statistics Canada, 2021c). Population and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the region has been steady over the past decade with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador which has experienced contractions (Statistics Canada, 2021a), primarily due to its reliance on an offshore oil and gas sector that has been impacted by global economics and a hydro-electric megaproject that was mismanaged, leaving the province with billions of dollars in cost overruns and the highest debt to GDP ratio in the country (Abdelrahman, 2020; LeBlanc, 2020). Prince Edward Island, on the other hand, has experienced growth well above the national average in both population and GDP in the last five years in particular.

In terms of socioeconomic status, Atlantic Canada has long been characterized as a 'have-not' part of the country, yet the region is one of the richest in terms of history, culture, and identity. To quote a recent article in the Financial Post published after the major airlines suspended flights to the region - an "untethering," if you will - "Life among the castaways in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island isn't gloomy. Rather, and dare they say it, the area generally hailed as the very Cradle of Confederation and habitually derided since as a bunch of aging hard-luck cases reliant on federal transfer payments isn't looking at the flight cuts, let alone a lethal virus, as the end of days, but as an opportunity to forge a different future," (O'Connor, 2021). It is that attitude, shared values, community cohesion, and a culture of innovation borne out of necessity, that will ensure a thriving Atlantic Canada in a post pandemic world.

In regard to managing the COVID-19 virus, the region has performed very well. They have among the lowest case rates in the country and only 91 COVID-related deaths in the entire region as of February 11, 2021. PEI has the lowest case rate in the country, at 71 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 2,150 nationally. PEI also has no recorded COVID-19 deaths: Newfoundland has four, New Brunswick 22 and Nova Scotia 65. As of this same date there have been 21,088 COVID-19 deaths in Canada. The case rates and death counts for the Maritimes closely mirror those of Canada's northern territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut) resulting in this group of peripheral Canadian regions having drastically different COVID-19 experiences from the rest of the country (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2021).

Border restrictions, along with tough public health measures implemented early, are believed to be the reasons for the region's success in containing the virus (Gordon, 2020). As of the writing of this report, four of the other ten Canadian provinces have no travel restrictions in place and no self-isolation requirements for domestic travellers, whereas all the Atlantic provinces have self-isolation measures in place and, all but Nova Scotia, continue to prohibit non-essential travel into their province (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, 2020). The region gained nationwide notoriety for its 'Atlantic Bubble' forged after the first wave of the pandemic (Jackson, 2020). Opening July 3, 2020, the Bubble allowed for residents of the four Maritime provinces to

travel to the other Atlantic provinces without having to isolate themselves upon arrival. The low case numbers and allowances of a Bubble had many viewing Atlantic Canada as “the best place to be right now in Canada,” (April & Petracek, 2020). Unfortunately, when cases began to spike in New Brunswick in October, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador pulled from the arrangement and the Bubble was officially put to rest in November of 2020 (Grant, 2020; Groff, 2020). As of the date of this report, the Atlantic Bubble remains closed, causing mixed emotions and anxious awaiting its return.

Economic impacts of COVID-19 in Atlantic Canada

The four Atlantic provinces have effectively slowed the spread of the virus in the region, which has allowed for some earlier economic recovery than the rest of Canada. Because key trading partners such as the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario, as well as the United States, continue to struggle to contain the virus, the economy of the Atlantic provinces will remain severely impacted for the foreseeable future.

EMPLOYMENT

The economic contraction in Atlantic Canada was similar to the rest of Canada between February and April 2020. In that period, 171,000 jobs were lost in the region, a change in unemployment year-over-year of four percent compared to 7.3% national (Statistics Canada, 2021b). By July 61% of those jobs lost were regained, compared to a recovery of 55% of jobs nationally (Atlantic Provinces Economic Council [APEC], 2020b; Statistics Canada, 2021b), a trend which has continued throughout. The impact on employment has varied across the region. Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick have fared better than other provinces early on due to quicker containment of COVID-19 cases which allowed for an earlier reopening of their economies (APEC, 2020a; O'Connor, 2021). New Brunswick's employment recovery slipped in the second half of the year as they had to increase restrictions after outbreaks in the second wave of COVID. Urban areas recovered faster than rural. In fact, Atlantic cities outperformed many larger cities in the country like Toronto, Montreal and Calgary, illustrating the positive relationship between the economy and health directives that contain the virus. Rural areas host several of the industries that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19, such as the primary sector, manufacturing and construction, which accounts for lagging rural recovery (APEC, 2020h).

HARDEST HIT INDUSTRIES

Tourism, seafood, offshore oil and parts of manufacturing and retail are all still quite far from an economic recovery. Much of this is because international markets are critical for Atlantic Canada's prosperity. Atlantic exports were valued at 29% of the region's GDP, supporting over 118,000 jobs. These exports were down 50% in May 2020, from 12 months earlier. In comparison, commercial services such as professional and financial services were down only 8% (APEC, 2020d).

Table 1: Atlantic Canada Hardest Hit Industries Economic Summary

Sector	% GDP 2019	Revenue decline 2020 (CDN\$)	YOY change 2019 to 2020	Employed 2019
Tourism	2%	\$3.3 billion	- 60%	100,000
Restaurants	0.5%	\$700 million	- 60%	66,000
Retail	2.7%	\$1.6 billion	5% (June)	150,000
Construction	7%	\$3.3 billion	- 26%	85,000
Oil and mining	2.6%	\$1.3 billion	- 20%	17,300
Manufacturing	15%	\$3 billion	-8%	78,000

Tourism

The hardest hit industry in the region is tourism and accommodations with a contraction of almost 60% or about \$3.3 billion Canadian (APEC, 2020d). It is expected to be the slowest industry to recover and affects several other industries such as restaurants, retail, arts, entertainment and recreation. The tourism industry accounts for 4% of jobs and 2% of GDP across the region with the highest rates in PEI at 7% and 4% respectively (APEC, 2020d).

While the Atlantic Bubble lessened the contraction of the region's tourism and accommodations industry, with Martimers already typically accounting for only one-half of the region's visitation and spending less when they do visit (APEC, 2020c), the outlook overall is in the range of a 30 - 60% contraction across the region (McEachern, 2021). Surveys of Atlantic Canadians and tourism statistics both indicate a strong preference for non-commercial accommodations (i.e., staying with family and friends) and outdoor activities.

“They show higher levels of comfort walking, biking, and visiting parks and beaches, than with visiting indoor historic sites, art galleries or museums. Atlantic Canadians are also more comfortable participating in a tour with their own travel party rather than with others not in their party, and prefer to dine outdoors at restaurants,” (MQO Research, p.2).

Table 2: Atlantic Canada Tourism Indicators Year- over- Year Change 2019 to 2020

Province	Accommodation sales	Campsite sales	Domestic visitors	International visitors
Nova Scotia ₁	-55%	-40 to -17%	-65%	n/a
New Brunswick ₂	-56%	-21%	-80 to -40%	-80%
Newfoundland and Labrador ₃	-57%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Prince Edward Island ₄	-65%	-38%	-50%	-96%

Sources: (1)<https://tourismns.ca/research/tourism-statistics>; (2) https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/thc-tpc/pdf/RSP/Indicators_Indicateurs/IndicateursDuTourisme2020TourismIndicators.pdf; (3) https://www.gov.nl.ca/tcar/files/Tourism-Performance-YTD-Oct-2020_-1Dec2020.pdf; (4) <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/202011tourismindicatorsrptfin4.pdf>

It is important to note that these are the same preferences Atlantic Canadian visitors had prior to the pandemic (culinary experiences, hiking/walking, beaches, coastal sightseeing, parks). The loss of other domestic and international travelers has impacted roofed accommodations and indoor attractions such as historical sites and museums most significantly. One bright spot in the tourism market was golf, which saw an increase in memberships by 20 per cent and rounds played by 15 per cent. Geoffrey Irving, president of Mill River Resort in PEI gave the following explanation, "We seem to have a lot of people who were members once upon a time, and whether it was because they were now working less or working from home, they seem to have that extra time to play," (McEachern, 2021).

Achieving this level of tourism activity within the Bubble required encouragement and confidence from the respective provincial public health leaders and political leaders, pivoting marketing campaigns to regional markets year- round and discounted prices (CBC, 2020e; Vigliotti, 2020). Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador reported average room rates down 24% and 13% respectively (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, 2020; Tourism Nova Scotia, n.d.-b), indicating the level to which operators discounted their properties in order to stimulate staycations and regional travel. The numbers of travelers did increase each month through the summer and into the fall of 2020 indicating an increasing level of comfort travelling within the restrictions and safety protocols (MQO Research, 2020; Tourism Nova Scotia, n.d-b)

The two major passenger airlines that service the region, Air Canada and WestJet, indefinitely eliminated many services to the region - WestJet eliminated 80% of its seat capacity and Air Canada closed two stations and eliminated 14 routes (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation,

2020; Quon, 2020a; 2020b). The Atlantic Canada Airports Association (ACAA) predicts air passenger traffic will decline by three-quarters in 2020 and will take up to four years for air travel to recover (APEC, 2020b). Finding ways to safely reopen domestic and international travel are critical for the region's recovery of tourism and the broader economy.

Taking this all into account it appears that on balance, Atlantic Canadians, with encouragement through political messages, marketing campaigns and discounts, possibly travelled as much in the region in 2020 as they have in previous tourist seasons. The heaviest losses of 50 and 60 percent in accommodations and indoor attractions can be accounted for by the restriction to travel from outside the Bubble and outside of Canada.

Restaurants

The restaurant and bar industry in Atlantic Canada accounts for 0.5% of the region's GDP and employed 100,000 people in 2019. Atlantic restaurant and bar sales had a sharp decline of 57% in the first months of the pandemic but rebounded to 23% below previous year's sales by July (APEC, 2020d). The rebound is attributed to innovations by many restaurants adding online options, changing the dining experience to make customers comfortable, and the ability of the region to ease public safety measures due to low COVID- 19 case counts.

Retail

The retail industry employs about 150,000 people in the region making it the second largest employer after the health care sector. Atlantic retail sales were down by 16% in March-May over 2019, but, by June, sales were 5% over those in 2019 due to the region being able to ease restrictions and the pent-up demand from the earlier period of closure. All four Atlantic provinces saw smaller contractions in retail trade than nationally over the course of the pandemic. Most retail categories saw a decline in sales with clothing stores and large-ticket items like automobiles and furniture being hardest hit. National online sales grew 60% in 2020 and grocery stores, building materials and gardening retailers did better than expected as consumers stocked up on food and essentials and invested in home projects and renovations (APEC, 2020c).

Construction

Construction contributes about 7% of Atlantic Canada's total GDP and is the 4th largest employer. Construction was deemed an essential service during the pandemic so work continued, but at a lower level as companies adjusted to new rules and health restrictions. Larger projects were delayed with the largest impact in Newfoundland and Labrador where several energy sector projects have been delayed due to low oil prices and COVID- 19 (APEC, 2020d).

Real Estate

While many economists predicted employment disruptions would negatively impact the Canadian housing market, the pandemic directly influenced only six percent of Canadians to sell their home according to a survey conducted by RE/MAX (2020), a major national real estate agency. This can be

explained by the findings of a national Labour Force Survey which showed that the majority of the job losses due to COVID-19 were either for part-time employment or for individuals in the younger cohort - two labour segments which are less likely to purchase real estate (Siatchinov et al., 2020). In Atlantic urban centres, housing activity has been driven primarily by out-of-province buyers and 'move-up' buyers who have either expedited retirement plans or find themselves working from home. According to the Canadian Real Estate Association, home prices are up strongly in the Atlantic cities of Moncton, NB; Halifax, NS; and Charlottetown, PEI, but also in rural areas such as the Nova Scotia south shore, Cape Breton Island, NS, and northern New Brunswick.

With the narrowing of the tourist market, demand for short-term rentals is down and average rental prices have decreased which has potential to push down prices for condominiums in cities. New housing construction has also slowed, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador. Prince Edward Island's housing starts continue to rise, up 13% led by new apartment construction (APEC, 2020g).

Oil and mining

The oil and mining sector experienced an estimated 20% contraction in the spring of 2020. Low oil prices and weak global demand have put the oil sector at risk in Newfoundland and Labrador (APEC, 2020b). There are nearly 17,300 people employed in Atlantic Canada's oil and mining sector, about 1.5% of employment, the majority (55%) of which are in Newfoundland and Labrador. Weak oil prices have led to a decline in capital spending, a slowing of planned production and a deferral of exploration. The immediate impact and the lost future revenue for firms and governments is substantial (APEC, 2020c).

Manufacturing

Atlantic Canada's manufacturing sector provides about 7% of all employment and almost 15% of GDP in the region. Manufacturing was deemed an essential service in Atlantic Canada through the pandemic, but those who continued to operate were faced with reduced productivity in order to comply with health directives and some large operations temporarily stopped or scaled back production. The impact has been felt in several sub-sectors. For example, Irving Shipbuilding laid off 60% of workers in March, an oil refinery in Newfoundland and Labrador closed, and aerospace exports are down, especially impacting PEI. Demand for live seafood collapsed with the closures of dining rooms and cruise ships, and seafood exports contracted 24% in the second quarter of 2020. However, commodities such as lumber, frozen blueberries and fresh potatoes saw year over year export gains (APEC, 2020e).

A number of manufacturers were able to pivot production to personal protective equipment (PPE). Early in the pandemic the federal Canadian government partnered with eight organizations to supply medical-related goods, including two in Atlantic Canada. Stanfield's Ltd. initially laid off 200 employees and was able to hire most back after agreeing to supply medical gowns and masks using locally sourced material. Irving Oil began producing hand sanitizer for a federal contract valued at \$5 million Canadian. The National Research Council also provided some funding that enabled a metal fabrication company to produce face shields and Top Dog Manufacturing in PEI to produce

medical gowns. In Top Dog's case, they had to add more work shifts to meet demand for this new product (APEC, 2020e). A number of other examples are presented in subsequent sections of this report.

DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED GROUPS

Low-wage earners

Low-wage earners have been among the hardest hit of anyone in Atlantic Canada during the pandemic. Employment for wage earners under \$15/hr went down 39% year-over-year in April, while employment for jobs paying more than \$15/hr declined by just 8%. Further, employment in jobs over \$15/hr fully recovered by September while low-wage employment remained 18% below its 2019 levels. Many low-wage earners are people under the age of 25 and those without a post-secondary education. Many of these jobs are in tourism-related industries: accommodations, retail and food service (APEC, 2020g). The recovery of these industries, and therefore, these jobs, is not expected for a number of years. Interventions of continued interim support programs, retraining and industry stimulus are recommended in the final section of this report to mitigate the economic damage to this demographic.

Youth

Young people have found themselves in a further precarious position- as high-risk transmitters of COVID-19 with minimal symptoms or likelihood of becoming ill. Despite the fact that youth have not been classified as vulnerable, their lives, and consequently their health, have been severely impacted by the pandemic (CBC, 2020h). In spite of grants and various targeted government support programs (Abraham, 2020) young people find themselves struggling to acclimate (Snell, 2020). Several universities in the region have seen higher levels of enrollment than what was anticipated at the onset of the pandemic, however, online education does not work well for many students, deprived of in-person labs and access to their professors and peers. The lack of high-speed internet can also be a challenge for students from rural communities (APEC, 2020g; Weeden & Kelly, 2020).

Across Atlantic Canada there is resounding evidence that the youth and student population are suffering from mental health and anxiety issues. In Nova Scotia there has been a spike in youth engaging with the Kids Help Phone service (Price, 2020). Newfoundland and Labrador reported deteriorating mental health among their youth as a result of job losses (Bird, 2020). In light of this, Children First Canada has been working to raise awareness on the impacts of children and youth during COVID. In New Brunswick, children's advocates are working to ensure schools stay open as long as possible to protect children's rights to education and socialization (Child and Youth Advocate, 2020; Fortnum, 2020; Lachance & Stuebing, 2020). New Brunswick is not alone, there has been a notable increase in attention drawn to protecting the rights and wellbeing of children and youth during this pandemic. In PEI there are exemptions to isolation requirements for interprovincial co-parenting as children "required to self-isolate ... would experience a detrimental impact" (PEI Justice and Public Safety, 2021). The Nova Scotia College of Social Work delivered an

open letter to the province's Premier, Minister of Community Service, and Chief Medical Officer outlining steps they believe would best protect vulnerable children and youth (Stratford, 2020).

In New Brunswick, officials have struggled to connect with their young people despite active measures. Specifically, targeted content has been shared on social media platforms, such as TikTok, to garner the attention of New Brunswick youth and provide them with the facts of COVID-19. The content has been critiqued by young people and experts alike as "general" and "repetitive". Even though experts warn against patronizing and fear mongering (Silberman, 2021b), the province's Chief Medical Health Officer was quoted as saying, "a large number of young people who have contracted the virus and have spread it to others by going to gatherings while infectious," and wants residents "to start thinking of the consequences of their actions," (Brown, 2021).

Nova Scotia faces a similar disjointment between youth and officials. The Premier of Nova Scotia called out young people of the province for "living as if COVID-19 doesn't exist" (CBC, 2020i). One 22 year old resident spoke against this suggestion, claiming that it has created a divide between age groups and shaming young people would only make them less willing to cooperate and get tested (CBC 2020i). Public Health workers have also noticed that shaming young people has contributed to a hesitancy among Nova Scotian youth (Smith, 2021).

Despite the negative effects of COVID- 19 on the mental health of youth, in Prince Edward Island, they were celebrated for their cooperativeness (CBC 2020j; Gomersall, 2021). In PEI, students were initially critiqued for their reliance on the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) by Premier King, and some international post-secondary students found themselves stranded on the Island struggling to find jobs and afford basic necessities (Thibodeau, 2020; Zavrise, 2020). Still, the 20-29 age demographic showed their support to vulnerable communities when the Chief Public Health Officer requested all be tested for COVID- 19. Within days, more than 4,000 young people turned up at testing sites (CBC, 2020j).

Women

Women are also experiencing the pandemic relatively more intensely. Employment losses have been consistently larger for women than men by a few percentage points (APEC, 2020g). Women hold nearly 60% of jobs in industries closely tied to tourism, so recovery of employment for women is likely to lag behind that of men. There is also evidence of working women bearing disproportionate stresses due to shifting responsibilities both at work and at home. Women are more often employed in front-line roles, carrying the extra burden of contact with the public and the risk of becoming infected. Closures of schools, day cares, in-home-cleaning services and food service all added to the responsibilities of working mothers, in particular, single parents (Drake & Daboo, 2020; Yarr, 2020c).

Women often find themselves in caregiver roles as well and are experiencing 'caregiver fatigue' as respite services have been scaled back to prevent the spread of the virus (Mackinnon, 2021). In the report, *Gender and COVID-19 in Prince Edward Island*, released by the PEI Council on the Status of Women, council members chronicled these experiences in the hopes they would not be repeated. As the council's Executive Director put it, "It felt like those old defaults, like, who takes care of

emotional work, who takes care of the laundry, who takes care of the cleaning, that had become more balanced over time, all of the sudden when we were all stuck in our homes, their perception was that it came back to women." One of the interviewees in the report hit the point home in saying, "We're not set up to be full-time caregiving and full-time working — that was the main thing...I think it really exposed who is carrying the weight in our society, and are we taking care of them?"

Indigenous communities

Indigenous communities in Canada were worse off than most others before the pandemic and were described as living in 'third world conditions'; lacking access to clean water and adequate housing, high rates of chronic disease and systemic discrimination (Coletta, 2018). These issues have become even more threatening to the lives of Indigenous Canadians during the pandemic (Somos, 2021). Multiple generations and sometimes multiple families living in one home makes containing the virus extremely difficult, comorbidities make the health risk associated with the virus dire, and lack of access to health care resources further complicates the precarious situation (APEC, 2020c). Indigenous youth who rely on cultural practices and group events for healing have been hard hit due to ceremonial events and sacred practices not being held, 'retraumatizing' families who suffered from these practices being outlawed in Canada in previous generations (Yousif, 2021).

Over the past decades, some First Nations have been successfully growing their own economies. However, the pandemic has resulted in lower revenues with especially large impacts in fishing, hospitality, gaming and tourism for Indigenous businesses. It is estimated that these community revenues will decline by roughly 40% in 2020/2021. According to a survey commissioned by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat, almost half of Atlantic First Nations businesses expect a 50% or more drop in revenues due to COVID-19, compared to 30% for all Atlantic businesses.

Further to their unique challenges, Indigenous community governments have less access to financing for deficits because they are not allowed to use reserve land as collateral. Also business and individual eligibility for federal or provincial support is often compromised because they are tax exempt and may not file a tax return which is typically a requirement for government support (APEC, 2020c).

Gig economy

The so-called 'gig economy' workers - self-employed and contract workers, artists and those working in the creative industries - have been among the hardest-hit as a direct result of lockdowns and social distancing rules resulting in cancellation after cancellation of projects and performances. Statistics Canada data shows that the percentage of gig workers in the labour force is steadily increasing; but in 2016 the median net gig income was a mere \$4,303 Canadian (Subramaniam, 2020). With no employer to fall back on, and most living gig to gig, these Canadians have had to rely on federal government support such as the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) created in the early days of the pandemic as a guaranteed income safety net. The program initially discriminated against gig economy workers and was later adjusted due to backlash (Samfiru

Tumarkin LLP Employment Lawyers, 2020). In December 2020, the federal government announced that many who received CERB payments might have to pay the money back when the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) deemed they were ineligible. Many gig workers claimed they had applied in good faith after receiving conflicting eligibility criteria from CRA staff, which has since been corroborated (Zimonjic & Cullen, 2020). Making it even more difficult for gig workers, Atlantic Canadians were recently reminded that if they use their vehicle for delivery purposes, they would not be covered by their insurers (Are you covered, 2021). For the creative industries, some important relief has come through arts organizations receiving government funding to employ artists and musicians to create mostly online programming through the pandemic (Watson, 2020).

A survey conducted in June 2020 by the Singapore Times (MacDonald, 2020), asking people to rate their most and least essential jobs, found artists to be the least essential. In response, well-known New Brunswick musician J.P. Cormier (2020) posted an impassioned letter on Facebook describing how musicians have been devalued over the years, and the pandemic has exposed just how undervalued the arts are by being asked to perform for 80% less than he would have received before. The lifeline for him - and many artists in Atlantic Canada - has been to pivot to online performances, where audiences 'pay what they can'. Because of audience generosity, he has been able to survive the pandemic and have his faith restored that humanity recognizes the role music plays in people's happiness and well-being. He points to the irony: "the very medium (the internet) that completely decimated the record companies by making music basically free, is now a major lifeline for us AND our fans and supporters" (Cormier, 2020). As many have noted, it's been the creative industries that have gotten people through the pandemic: books, Netflix, video games, and music have all been a connection, a comfort and an inspiration during trying times.

Resilience factors and assets

Here we view resilience as a process of adapting as opposed to an ability to bounce back to a previous state. A return to a pre-pandemic state would be a return to the conditions that created the problems we face and is therefore not desirable. Further, it should be stated that the view of resilience factors and assets is not straightforwardly better versus worse because what is considered an asset in one context is often a liability in another, and vice versa, as is evident in the examples throughout this section. For illustration purposes, take the case of health care in peripheral places. Typically we view them as lacking personnel and equipment. In the case of the pandemic, this lack gave birth to the resilience to close borders and keep the virus out of communities (Kelman, 2021).

GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS

In regard to resilience in Atlantic Canada, it seems pertinent to first acknowledge the actions taken by the federal and provincial governments to provide financial support for individuals, businesses and non-governmental organizations. Their quick and ongoing support has allowed the vast majority of society to keep functioning. While the bailout is massive and the end of it is unclear, so

far economists feel the spending is manageable for the country as Canada was in a good financial position prior to the pandemic (APEC, 2020b). Newfoundland and Labrador with their high debt is in a more precarious position but will most likely be able to lean on the federation to see them through. Inevitably, Canadians will be paying for these deficit-financed bailouts in higher tax rates or reduced spending for years to come.

SMALL BUSINESS

A mix of loan and tax payment deferrals, wage subsidy, rent relief, and funding for safety measures point to a complex ecosystem that both stimulates and supports small business and involves all levels of government. Statistics Canada reported in December 2018 that 97.9 percent of business employment in the country comes from small businesses, 1.9 percent from medium-sized businesses and 0.2 percent from large (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2019).

Examples of entrepreneurship and innovation in this sector appear to be countless and they paint the picture of a sector that not only showcases ingenuity, but one that was motivated by a sense of community and generosity- wanting to help relieve the impact of the crisis and to give back. The Tourism Nova Scotia government web page titled “Industry Innovation and Inspiration” has created a listing with summaries of fifty-five inspiring innovations across their province alone (Ntim, 2020). These pivots range from making masks and hand sanitizer to online and delivery options including the inventive online wine tasting and trivia combination. Getting food and meals into the hands of those who are impacted through income loss or being a front-line worker is a very common theme of pubs, restaurants, growers and retailers, with many of their initiatives including a component of monetary or food donations to local food banks. A true proof point to how some small enterprises are indeed finding ways to raise significant money is none other than the success of My Home Apparel, a Truro, NS, based apparel company that has raised almost \$100,000 for charity with their “Stay the Blazes Home” T-shirts.

Another small town Nova Scotia business, Ignite Labs, has received attention for its thoughtful contribution to the pandemic (Ntim, 2020). Ignite itself supports start-ups and in doing so makes use of 3D printers for prototyping. They shifted gears for the pandemic making PPE with their printers and even went so far as to invent an ‘ear saver’ to alleviate irritation that front line workers were experiencing from wearing masks for many hours a day. According to their own Facebook page, more than 600 health care workers benefited from the ‘game- changing’ ear saver in one week. Beyond that, Ignite recognized the importance of the safety of workers in other local industries and quickly started producing for them. In the words of the owner of IMO Foods, Phil LeBlanc, “These shields were sold out locally and online, so having Ignite use their in-house technology to produce face shields locally on demand, virtually in minutes – not weeks on backorder – is sort of unbelievable.” Another player in this community-minded business ecosystem is the local Credit Union which provided funding to support the production of the ear savers. In the words of their CEO, “How well we cooperate with one another will impact the outcome of this pandemic significantly. It was great to see Ignite and others step up and repurpose themselves during this pandemic. It’s a great example of leadership and community spirit” (Comeau, 2020).

Pre-pandemic, LuminUltra, a New Brunswick based company known for their water testing technology, had developed a niche in the global market with customers as far away as Australia. When the CEO heard the Prime Minister issue a call to action for companies to help the country in March 2020, he quickly realised that his company's technology could be transferred from water testing to virus testing. After receiving Health Canada's approval for its rapid-test kits in December, the company, now at 115 employees, has been shipping 500,000 units a week (O'Connor, 2021).

In New Brunswick, Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre, in St. Andrews, found a new way to keep art alive and stay connected to the community through their 'Artist in the Window' initiative. During the pandemic, local artists began taking turns spending a few days working on a piece of art from inside the window of the art gallery where passersby could be reminded of and feel inspired by the creative industries. "It allows people to come by, say hello... because a lot of other places are closed," says artist Renate Roske-Shelton (Ntim, 2020).

A number of First Nations communities across the region are taking on food insecurity by creating and operating their own geothermal greenhouses that can produce fresh food year-round. According to their spokesperson, on-reserve food options are limited and well-stocked grocery stores can be fifty-plus kilometers away, leaving some to rely on the local convenience stores for sustenance. The project will not only make fresh, local food accessible in these communities, it is providing jobs for those who have lost them in the pandemic (Edwards, 2020).

A great example of crises being the birthplace of innovation is NL Eats which started as a Facebook page for showcasing local cuisine and became a food bank that delivers. The shift happened after a conversation around the family dinner table where the group were feeling grateful for the good food they had to eat and wondered what they could do to help other people (Walsh, 2020); and help they have indeed. In the words of one of the family members, "We were reliant on a food bank once upon a time when we first came here ... so we started the food bank and over the year things just snowballed into a lot more stuff" (CBC, 2021c). The idea started as a six-person operation out of their garage to one that now serves more than 1,300 people with the horsepower of 150 volunteers.

To be sure, this characteristic of entrepreneurship combined with caring for others is indeed a part of Atlantic Canada culture. This might not be more sweetly or sincerely expressed as by two ten-year-old entrepreneurs who were "upset that people can't come to PEI because of the Corona virus" and created a business to "bring PEI to you." These young boys busied themselves making and selling PEI care packages so that people wouldn't miss out on what they both so clearly love and appreciate themselves, pointing to the "amazing views" and various PEI memorabilia beautifully captured on a CBC video (CBC Prince Edward Island, 2020).

A theme of the case study analysis of rural Atlantic Canada's response to COVID by Hall and Vinodrai (2021) is the active role of various chambers of commerce and business associations in not only advocating for their membership in regard to government policy and support, but also in creating campaigns to engage customers. Examples of buy local campaigns can be found in both Cape Breton Island, NS, Saint Andrews, NB and Charlottetown, PEI. Cape Breton relaunched their shop local program #CapeBretonFirst in multiple languages, including merchandise and a

partnership that gives back to a local organization that supports individuals with complex challenges due to disabilities. To make customers feel safer while shopping, Saint Andrews downtown blocked parking through their main street to create wider sidewalks and allow businesses to expand out into the sidewalk. They marketed the area as safe and open for tourists and the pilot project was enthusiastically received (Hall & Vinodrai, 2020). The Charlottetown Chamber is taking a bit of a different tack asking Islanders to make ten percent of their annual spending local. According to their CEO, local businesses recirculate \$45 of \$100 back into the local economy and a ten percent shift would “support 460 new jobs and contribute approximately \$16 million in wages to Islanders” (CBC, 2021a).

MARITIME CULTURE AND ISLANDNESS

Throughout history, islands have played an important role in understanding disease control. This pandemic is no different. Much of their success has to do with that little-known but innately grasped concept of ‘islandness.’ Because islands are part of the make-up of Atlantic Canada and play a major role in the consciousness of Atlantic Canadians, it is important to look at how islandness has helped Atlantic Canada weather the pandemic. Indeed, the ‘Atlantic Bubble’, described elsewhere, created a metaphoric island of Canada’s east coast.

In a time of global pandemic, where viruses have no regard for borders, islands have an advantage: a natural geographic boundary, the water. They are naturals at physically distancing. And this ‘moat’ means limited access points at ports, marinas, ferry terminals, airports, and bridge entry points where screening to keep the virus out can take place. Thus, islands with a strong and effective governance structure, with the ability to control their borders and create ‘made-on-the-island solutions’ – and which have the power to enact them – are more likely to weather the pandemic than those that do not (Brinklow & Whitten Henry, 2020).

Islands, and the Atlantic Region, are known to have relatively tight-knit social structures and small populations, and an ability to pull together in the face of adversity. This rich social capital and ‘lifeboat’ mentality enables islands to demonstrate resilience in the face of external threats. Smaller population size and strong community connections have allowed for successful contact tracing which has proven to be invaluable in controlling community spread. However, the downside of strong bonds is being fearful of outsiders, a characteristic that has reared its head in the Maritimes and will be covered in the subsequent section of this report.

Other aspects of Maritime culture have shone through during this crisis and served the region well. As expressed in one Financial Post article “East Coasters by nature aren’t much for boasting. They are indeed a pretty laid-back bunch, which is part of the region’s charm. But their secret — making money, innovating, being able to afford a house and never getting stuck in traffic — is bound to get out” (O’Connor, 2021). This long-standing culture of ingenuity out of necessity has allowed many businesses to turn their vulnerability into opportunity, mitigating their losses by getting creative with their businesses.

The communities of Atlantic Canada also found ways to adapt their culture and strengthen their community ties through technology. Some examples of this include hosting online kitchen parties

(MacEachern, 2020), online readings of *Anne of Green Gables* to raise money for musicians (The Guardian, 2020), and CBC Newfoundland's "Far From Home Series" (White, 2020). A recent development in online culture is a growing community of content creators celebrating sea shanties, something most Atlantic Canadians have grown up with (Belmonte, 2021). A Newfoundland musician who spoke to this viral trend is Séan McCann, who studied folklore. He explains that historically "shanties tend to rise in popularity "during times of duress, and pressure," (DeMont, 2021). While the crisis has highlighted the role of culture for 'cohesion and mental wellbeing' (de Luca, et al., 2020), no one knows the long-term implications of these shifts to online forums for the typical small population characteristics like knowing everyone and tight-knit communities (Kelman, 2021).

The region also has a track record of high levels of participation in civic duties such as voting (Statistics Canada, 2020c) and immunization (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020). One could suggest that this sense of duty has translated into compliance with COVID- 19 health care directives. Generosity is another established aspect of the regions culture as captured in volunteering and donations statistics (Turcotte, 2015) and has been frequently reported on during the pandemic such as the 'volunteer angels delivering care packages in New Brunswick (Silberman, 2021a), countless food donations (Tourism Nova Scotia, n.d.-a), books for newcomers (Davis, 2020), friendships programs with seniors (Winkie, 2020), and the list goes on.

POPULATION GROWTH

Population growth is helping the region weather this storm. Overall, population and GDP growth in the region has been steady over the past decade; but when viewed provincially we find that PEI has outperformed the rest of the country, especially in the past five years, while Newfoundland and Labrador has experienced contractions.

Urban areas have been growing largely due to immigration and a slowing of out-migration while rural areas continue to have net population declines. More people have been staying in Atlantic Canada in the last decade because of its recently diversified economy, increased employment opportunities, lower housing prices and access to nature. People have also been moving into the region since COVID-19 as it is seen as a safe area. In fact, net interprovincial migration to the Maritime provinces was over 1,200 in the second quarter of 2020, up from 600 in the same quarter in 2019.

Immigration has been stimulated by government programs and employment among this population has, for the most part, mirrored that of the rest of Canada during the pandemic, suggesting that they are not uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic (APEC, 2020g). Even though much of the immigrant population is expected to make its way to large cities, there are cases in the Maritimes where the rural immigrant population is booming. In the Miramichi, New Brunswick, immigration went from single digits to 300 new immigrants between 2018 and 2020. This growth is attributed to the community "embracing the idea of newcomers and welcoming them" (CBC, 2021b). Craig Mackie, Director of the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada, describes the importance of immigration in his province in this excerpt, "Beyond dollars, immigration has brought

us diversity in terms of people, culture, languages, and especially food. Immigration has also given us a broader global view that has connected PEI to the rest of the world” (Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island & Institute of Island Studies, 2019). While immigration has dropped off for 2020-21 due to the pandemic, the federal government announced that it would be raising its immigration targets over the next three years to compensate for the slower flows this year (APEC, 2020h) which bodes well for the region.

DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY

A diversified economy has been a strength in light of the pandemic. Segments such as financial services, professional services, transportation, IT, food production and the public sector have been impacted to a lesser extent. If a crisis of the same nature as COVID- 19 were to have taken place in the 1980s or earlier, this region would most likely have been more severely impacted economically due to its high dependence on farming, fishing, forestry and tourism. Since then, Atlantic Canada’s economy has diversified.

The region has fared well in securing public service jobs by leveraging its ‘have not’ status to lobby for federal government service centres to be located in the region to provide employment. For every 1,000 people, Newfoundland and Labrador has 109 public sector workers, Nova Scotia has 99, Prince Edward Island has 95 and New Brunswick has 85 (Moore, 2021). To date there have not been pandemic related cuts to the public service. Innovative sectors including the digital economy, clean technology, aerospace and biosciences are also doing well. The bioscience sector of PEI added 200 jobs since the pandemic began and seven of its companies are planning expansions (CBC, 2021e). PAL Group of Companies’, a New Brunswick based conglomerate employing 1,500 Atlantic Canadians, finds its aerospace arm is booming and global instability and geopolitical turmoil boding well for its surveillance business (O’Conner, 2021). According to the co-founder of St. John’s, NL, digital security company Verafin, which recently sold to Nasdaq for \$2.75 billion US, this is just the beginning for Newfoundland and Labrador’s technology sector. He says his company’s recent sale “...creates some fuel in the ecosystem, which has already been bubbling here for quite some time,” referring to a group of tech companies doing ‘interesting things’ in St. John’s (CBC, 2021d).

Changes in economic opportunities and changes in perspectives and mindsets

FROM ‘HAVE NOT’ TO ‘HAVE’

It is no surprise that several people interviewed for the *Financial Post*’s recent article on Atlantic Canada commented that the region’s cohesion - a legacy from its history, geography, and perceived socioeconomic status as a basketcase - create a metaphoric island and will mitigate the ‘untethering’ of Atlantic Canada from the rest of the country. As one interviewee noted, “One of the biggest challenges that we face right now is the shackles of our region’s past, where we have fallen into a trap of thinking that we are restrained, cut off, isolated, poor, unsuccessful and unable

to achieve great things” (O’Conner, 2021). A commentator from Newfoundland notes, “The comparative success of Atlantic Canada in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has gone little remarked in the national media. I put this down to willful ignorance. How to square our ‘culture of defeat’ with our occasional success has always stumped the mainland. It’s hard for a hack in Toronto to see political leaders in Newfoundland and Labrador defer to science and medical expertise while Ontario’s leadership defers to spin studios” (Riche, 2021).

While numerous media articles suggest that the rest of Canada is oblivious to the success of the Atlantic region during the pandemic, it clearly isn’t lost on everyone as net interprovincial migration continues to rise, seeing a 100% increase in 2020 over 2019 (APEC, 2020g). Together the region’s GDP is about \$130 billion, making it the fifth largest economic player in Canada. At the premiers’ table, the Atlantic premiers constitute 4 out of 10 voices, highly disproportionate to their population. As Dominic Cardy, New Brunswick’s Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development says, “There is never going to be another opportunity like this. This is a time for us to figure out what we want to do — and get to it.” The alternative is holding on to what he calls “stodgy economic development plans” and giving tax dollars to the same companies that have always received them. Further, Jake Trainor, Chief Executive of the regional air carrier PAL, notes, “We are extremely optimistic about the future of Atlantic Canada” (O’Conner, 2021).

HEALTH

In 2020, millions of Canadians experienced increased feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression. Calls to crisis lines doubled and the demand for mental health services remains at an all-time high (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2020). Atlantic Canada has the highest rate of diagnosed depression in all of Canada (Bell, 2020). Despite the mental health implications of COVID-19, Atlantic Canadians reported less of a decline in their overall life satisfaction than western Canada during the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2020a). Perhaps it is the case that Atlantic Canadians are more accustomed to being out of work, spending time with family and working around the house. More generally speaking, it seems that through the broad encouragement from public health officials and influencers to be aware of one’s mental health and to stay healthy in the face of isolation and uncertainty, we may be witnessing significant inroads in destigmatizing and normalizing experiences of anxiety, depression, and loneliness as evident in social media, local media coverage, and the increased engagement with support programs like phone lines.

Increased focus on wellness and prevention are also having impacts economically in the bioscience sector of PEI which has experienced significant growth during the pandemic. While some product lines like cough lozenges have taken a dive due to the apparent absence of a typical cold and flu season, sales for items like multi-vitamins are spiking (CBC, 2021e).

LEISURE AND RECREATION

The shifts in how people are spending leisure and recreation time during the pandemic has many wondering about the potential for long-term changes in consumer preferences. There is plenty of evidence of massive increases in sales for gardening, home improvement, baking, seasonal outdoor

recreation items (e.g., kayaks, paddle boards, snowshoes, skis) (MacLeod, 2020), and pastimes like puzzles and crafts. All this along with spending more time with family, in nature and vacationing in your own province. There has been an "explosion of people" in remote New Brunswick trails (Fowler, 2021) and 57% of Newfoundlanders planned an overnight trip in their home province (Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation, 2020). PEI was a proof point of changing tourism and culture with its popular offerings in small venues and a circuit of outdoor movies and live entertainment (CBC, 2020d; de Luca, et al., 2020; Friend, 2020; Stewart, 2020). A waterfront restaurant in Halifax has now had to hire back all of its staff and are booking months in advance after the overwhelming popularity of its cozy, outdoor dining huts that will be repurposed as greenhouses in the spring to grow their own fresh herbs and vegetables (CBC, 2021f). These examples point to new directions for tourism and leisure tastes towards exclusive and curated experiences. Advocates of sustainable tourism are hoping these experiences will have more people "question the consumerism and capitalistic lens that has contributed to mass growth across the touristic landscape and instead, choose a system that fosters sustainable and equitable growth - which in turn, 'slows down' our ways of consuming the world around us..." (Benjamin, et al., 2020).

INSIDER-OUTSIDER

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the insider-outsider tensions inside Atlantic Canada through the rise in confrontations and conflict with seasonal residents (Kingdon, 2020; VOCCM, 2020), and rotational workers (Smith, 2020; Harding, 2020; Pineau, 2020). Some have taken to publicly shaming their own community members on issues like wearing masks (April, 2021; Larter, 2020), but most shaming is reserved for outsiders. Prior to its closing, Maritimers were not keen on expanding the Bubble beyond their Atlantic neighbours (MacKinnon, 2020) and the four provinces were not shy about making these insider-outsider tensions known (Battis & Jones, 2020).

Tensions were evident in PEI where accounts of license "plate-shaming" were widespread in the media (The Canadian Press, 2020; CBC, 2020c; Wright, 2020). These stories have negative implications for the tourism industry and PEI's reputation as the 'gentle' and hospitable Island (MacEachern, 2020; Yarr, 2020a&b). In PEI in June, seasonal residents (many of whom had Island relatives and owned summer homes on PEI) were allowed to return provided they self-isolated upon their arrival for 14 days. They were monitored daily and, where appropriate, tested for the virus (CBC, 2020a). Although this move was met with some opposition, it was defended as allowing "home" those who were really Islanders in spirit (CBC, 2020b; Randall et al., 2021). Island Studies researchers commented on social bonding capital versus social bridging capital: "island cultures tend to be very good at maintaining tight social networks but not as skilled at building bridges to include others" (Jenkins, 2020). In New Brunswick people with Ontario plates found locals were "rude" and "presumptuous" (Walker, 2020), while one visitor from Quebec warned others away after an unkind confrontation (Silberman, 2020). In light of this, some visitors have taken to putting notes on their own cars explaining their visitation in hopes of avoiding confrontation (Smith, 2020).

In Newfoundland and Labrador these tensions are visible in the form of protests and a lawsuit. Residents of Newfoundland have enjoyed unrestricted access to the Lower North Shore of Quebec during the pandemic, but in turn, North Shore residents were not able to visit their second homes in

NL. This situation led to protests that blocked the Quebec Ferry Terminal (CBC, 2020f). A woman is suing the province for not granting her entrance to attend her mother's funeral on the basis of discrimination (Bradbury, 2020).

Some rotational workers in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have felt the strain of returning home to fears that their fellow community members have towards them as high-risk carriers. In Nova Scotia, stories of threatening and shaming rotational workers became so widespread the Chief Medical Officer felt inclined to make a statement on the need for compassion among the public (Groff, 2021). On P.E.I., one rotational worker reported feeling "hated while working in Alberta" as well as when they "come home to P.E.I." (Harding, 2020). Other rotational workers in PEI find that the tests and rounds of isolation, while inconvenient and mentally draining, are one way for them to support their community and play their role in keeping P.E.I safe (Mayich 2021; Smith 2020).

HOUSING

High vacancy rates in offices, hotels and short-term rentals are putting downward pressure on rents and leases amid community tensions over rising housing prices and lack of affordable housing. One might hope it is only a matter of time before more organizations put two and two together as was the case of the John Howard Society in Fredericton. They are now in the final stage of approvals with the city of Fredericton to turn Fredericton's City Hotel into a multipurpose facility with affordable housing units, support programs and an emergency shelter. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has \$500 million available for projects such as this across the country (Bird, 2021).

The number of people working from home increased dramatically during the shutdown demonstrating for many that remote work is possible. Most companies continue to have a high share of remote work and many anticipate continuing this after the pandemic (Statistics Canada, 2020b). This may be an opportunity for rural regions to attract urban residents from within the region, as well as attract those who have left the region earlier for employment (Fürst & Eibner, 2021). As a result of these trends in employment, housing preferences are changing. Increased space has become a prominent buyer demand with detached homes serving as the most popular home type in cities like Moncton, Saint John and Charlottetown, a trend expected to persist in 2021 (Remax, 2020).

Future trends, pathways to develop positive economic futures

This review of the economic impacts of COVID-19 in Atlantic Canada in 2020, suggests numerous paths forward to an even more resilient and sustainable future. These include themes in regionalization, tourism, local economic development, supports for vulnerable groups and the green economy.

REGIONALIZATION

Atlantic Canada has a long history of being lumped in together and treated like the poor cousin by the rest of the country. Within the region we might be called an Islander (PEI), a Caper (Cape Breton) or a Newfy (NL); but in the rest of Canada we are often referred to by our common identifier, a Maritimer. The rising 'have not' tide coupled with the success of the Atlantic Bubble, has commentators, politicians and industry leaders once again surmising the possibilities of a Maritime Union. The idea was bandied around even before confederation and while an ad-hoc union of sorts has played out on particular regional issues like fisheries and now a global pandemic, a more permanent strategic approach is in the air (O'Conner, 2021; Riche, 2021).

There are a number of substantial reasons a union makes good sense. Firstly, the combined GDP would make an 'Atlantic mega-province' the fifth largest economic player in Canada (O'Conner, 2021). Quebec having 'islanded' the region from western oil and gas by stalemating the previously proposed 'energy east pipeline', now has the Prime Minister in his most recent Speech from the Throne, floating the notion of an 'Atlantic Loop' - starting with further development of hydro-electric projects to fuel electricity for the region (CBC, 2020g). A strategy that would lower emissions for the nation.

Recovery in the Atlantic region will require addressing transit. The loss of modes of travel into the region impacts not only tourism, but also business development, immigration, outmigration and health care. Some call for a regionally or nationally funded carrier to enter the marketplace for the long-term betterment of the region. As one proponent put it, "Before the pandemic, service and schedules were poor, and predatory pricing was deployed to drive out competition when it appeared" (Riche, 2021). A state owned air service would not be a revenue generator but could be strategically deployed for economic development of the region as opposed to the bottom line of private firms. Historically, Atlantic Canadian traveler's would be routed to Toronto or Montreal in order to reach neighboring destinations in western Europe and eastern United States. Providing more access to these destinations could induce intriguing changes to the potential of the region. One of the major airline carriers for Canada recently stated, "It's impossible to say when there will be a return to service without support for a coordinated domestic approach," (Quon, 2020b) underscoring the need for a non-market intervention. "We are likely to see a different regional market and different players in the market coming out of the pandemic," according to the CEO of NB based PAL Airlines, which expanded its service into Moncton, NB, in the summer of 2020 as Air Canada and WestJet reduced their service. "We are well-positioned to fill the void that is left" he added (O'Conner, 2021). Ideally the response to this challenge will be homegrown and grounded in regional strategy and leadership.

TOURISM

Re-establishing tourism will hinge on enhanced safety and easing of restrictions in a manner that bolsters public confidence (APEC, 2020d; McEachern, 2021; MQO Research, 2020). Given the experience of 2020, there is a real risk of backlash when travel into the region is resumed. Strong communications and assurances from public health leaders along with a staged reopening of

borders will be required to minimize any negative impact, such as the possibility of Atlantic Canadians themselves resisting travel within the region. Communications, marketing and enforcement of public safety will also be a key feature in stimulating tourism demand as it will both keep the area safe and reassure traveler's that they too will be safe (MQO Research, 2020). Given the public health track record of the region during this pandemic, there is plenty of fodder for safety oriented brand and marketing campaigns.

The opening of the Atlantic Bubble likely resulted in about half of tourism revenue for the region compared to the year before. It is expected to take two to four years for the sector to recover (APEC, 2020d; McEachern, 2021; MQO Research, 2020). Many operators will not be able to survive on such reduced margins and volumes. Much of the season in this part of the world takes place in the two months of July and August; however, there has been some success in extending the season from June through October, supported mainly by cruise ship traffic. For many small tourism operators, such as those renting cottages and providing tours like fishing expeditions, these business ventures provide supplemental income. With such a bleak outlook for tourism, some operators didn't bother to open for the season in 2020. Others already have and will continue to change their offerings, perhaps moving to more sustainable models in the long-term, through product diversification, increasing online experiences, continued promotion of the 'staycation' model year-round and discounted pricing. Policymakers may begin to look at further diversifying away from tourism for economic development, especially the aspects that are particularly unsustainable like cruise ship tourism and continue to reorient the economy away from the global to a more local or regional economy (Brinklow & Whitten Henry, 2020).

On the other hand, there are rumblings of pent up demand, the so called 'revenge travel' (Shadel, 2020) that may have some operators scrambling to keep up. According to a Captain Troy Bruce, one half of Bruce Brothers (tuna fishing) Charters, normally they would take groups out about one hundred days per season, but in 2020, they were out for only three days. Most of their clients rolled their 2020 bookings over to 2021 and are hopeful that through vaccines or testing they will be able to travel to PEI for their fishing trips in 2021. In addition, he received three calls in one week from new clients for bookings in 2021, suggesting revenge travel may indeed hit the shores of Atlantic Canada (Galloway, 2021).

On the ground, the reality is that planning for the next tourism season requires a 'crystal ball'. As one tourism operator in PEI expressed it, "Our planning process now isn't quite as straightforward as it had been in the past. We're having to adapt constantly...when we look at what's happened in 2019, what happened in our summer and fall in 2020, we use that to do our best guess about what's going to happen in 2021" (MacEachern, 2021).

FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL

Indeed, shifts from global to local through buy local campaigns, staycations and general slowing down of economies and lifestyles is having a much needed positive impact on the environment and could extend into the future. Localized food supply chains means fewer transportation emissions,

fewer vehicles on the road and oceans; allows for safer transportation routes, less pollution and less stress leading to healthier individuals, communities and ecosystems.

When thinking about the traditional notion of local versus global, the food system is compelling. The Atlantic restaurant scene, rather dismal only a decade ago, is now one of the 'most exciting on the continent' (Riche, 2021). Most, if not all of these internationally renowned successes such as The Merchant Tavern in NL, and the Inn at Bay Fortune in PEI, focus mainly if not entirely on local, quality ingredients, which has been a great stimulus for smaller, sustainable farmers and fish harvesters. In addition, the region boasts a vast array of locally- made, high- quality, value- added food products such as wine, beer, chips, cheeses and much more. Consumer taste is the usual argument for continuing to truck food in from places like California and Mexico. With the availability of local, fresh produce and specialty items, the reasons for choosing food that has been mass produced, harvested early and shipped thousands of miles, resulting in less flavour, are becoming few and far between (Riche, 2021).

Another important angle on global to local for this region to consider is summed up well in this quote from Pat Whalen, Chief Executive, Luminultra Technologies Ltd., "People are going to realize that it is possible to build an international company from Atlantic Canada" (O'Conner, 2021). Increasing numbers of small and medium size businesses in the region like Luminultra, Verafin and Honibe are growing leaps and bounds. The growth in these companies and industries is attracting diaspora, new immigrants and weary city dwellers to interesting careers options in a part of the world where they find relatively affordable homes and ready access to nature and breathtaking views (O'Conner, 2021). In the wake of the pandemic, businesses around the globe will be reassessing their supply chains (APEC, 2020b) and they will find that Atlantic Canadian businesses are safe and reliable, even in the face of a global crisis. Together these trends set the stage for further growth in these emerging industries as locally based, global suppliers.

SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

After seeing the federal government of Canada turning on what was essentially a guaranteed income program in a matter of days and weeks, Atlantic Canadians have strengthened their position in advocating for a long-term approach in the region. PEI has been lobbying the federal government to partner on such a program in their province since 2019. Seeing the difference it could make has also fueled the discussion in Newfoundland. According to the Newfoundland and Labrador food bank manager, "What's needed is more secure and adequate income for low-income households. I think as Atlantic Canadians ... we need our governments to step up with something like a basic income." St. John's social service groups reported a drastic decrease in their number of clients once CERB came into effect and since the benefit stopped in September, numbers are back up, plus there is a new segment of clients: people who have yet to return to their full-time jobs (Ericsson, 2020; Walsh, 2021).

Further advancement of the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations is integral in pandemic recovery. Of note in this region is just allocation of economic benefits of natural resource industries (Council of Construction Associations, 2020), in particular, fisheries, oceans and mining. To move

forward and rebuild in the face of great economic losses from the pandemic, local First Nations will need help for their business to shift to e-commerce, investments in broadband, and retraining for community members who have lost work (APEC, 2020c).

Strategies for employing displaced low-wage earners, youth, and fossil fuel industry employees will also be key for this region's future. Stimulus and investments in automation, digitization, green energy infrastructure and natural capital would not only build resilience in the face of climate change and possible future pandemics, it would also provide employment (APEC, 2020d; 2020e; International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2020). Investments in training and reskilling would be a focus of this strategy. Canada, and Atlantic Canada even more so, has a poor track record of adopting automation technologies, making this especially important for major industries to remain competitive globally. Given the aging demographics of the region, the demand for health care workers and senior care will continue to rise and provides opportunities for skilled employment in meaningful work for the local population as well as recruits from elsewhere. For those in rural areas of Atlantic Canada, the availability of high-speed internet can be a challenge and has long been a pain point for rural Canada. This affects education, businesses and outmigration and is a key pillar of economic development in any part of the world. All four Atlantic provinces and the federal government along with private-sector partners are investing to improve internet access in rural areas but it will take several years to reach more remote regions (Weeden & Kelly, 2020).

Lastly, the pandemic highlighted pain points for women, especially mothers. Recommendations for this large and critical populations include building more resilience in child care, education and elder care systems, and improving employment opportunities so as not to be so heavily reliant on frontline work and low- wage jobs.

GREEN ECONOMY

In the late summer of 2020, the Federal Liberal government was poised to table a bold, green economy recovery plan that would transform Canada to a carbon-neutral economy, but these plans were thwarted when public polling in June showed that Canadians priorities had changed through the pandemic. A year earlier, the top concerns of Canadians were health care (37%) and the environment and climate change (30%) taking second place over affordability (26%) (Bricker, 2019). In June 2020, the top response was coronavirus (31.7%), followed by jobs and the economy (21.8%). Only 8.7 % chose environment/climate change as the issue that should receive the greatest attention (Nanos, 2020). This does not change the reality that continued reliance on exploiting natural resources is not sustainable and future health, wealth and growth are to be found in a sustainable and green economy (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2020), but it does mean that public support has waned, at least for now, and the feds responded by adjusting their short-term goals to reflect these new public priorities.

Prior to the pandemic, Atlantic Canada was on its way to developing its green economy. Perhaps it too sprung from being a 'have not' region in need of employment opportunities and a historical dependence on imported energy. With the exception of NL, the region has not benefited greatly from the fossil fuel industry. They have however, been blessed with winds and tides and a culture of

ingenuity. A recent report shows that NS has been successfully decoupling GHG emissions from its GDP since 2005 and the province has set some of the most ambitious climate targets in the country. Further, the Environment and Clean Technologies sector grew by 31 percent in NS between 2012 and 2018, compared to 19 percent nationally, and jobs in the sector grew by 27 percent compared to 17 percent nationally (Canadian Institute for Climate Choices, 2020). New Brunswick surpassed its emissions reduction target of 30%, achieving 34% reduction by 2020 (Environment and Local Government, n.d.). In October, in the midst of the pandemic, PEI released its report *A Path Towards Net Zero*, a framework for achieving net zero emissions by 2040 and becoming the country's first province to do so (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2020). The government of Newfoundland on the other hand, currently in the final hours of a provincial election, has been more focused on getting its major industry projects back on track. While they are doing that, a range of non-governmental organizations and institutions are developing strategies and programs for a post-oil future and moving the discussion towards net-zero (Fürst & Eibner, 2021).

It appears for the most part, Atlantic Canada leaders and their constituents seem to understand what experts have been arguing for years, that green economy goals are not in competition with, but rather complement their strategies for addressing both climate change and other regional challenges of economic development, employment, equity and healthy environments. The buy-in and support of the federal government is key in helping the region move capital intensive projects forward and the recent Speech from the Throne in September 2020, with its promise of an 'Atlantic Loop' of renewable energy suggests that support is still there despite COVID- 19. In the words of the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development in New Brunswick, "Going green is the way forward... and not in a wild-eyed, ban-all-fossil-fuels way, but as a goal to achieve through increments and innovation (O'Conner, 2021).

Concluding remarks

Atlantic Canada is resilient, boasts numerous assets and is well positioned for an exciting, sustainability- focused future. With their shared values, community cohesion, and culture of innovation, the region is likely to thrive in a post- pandemic world. Critics question the political will to create truly sustainable communities, especially in the face of high unemployment; however, much of the region has made both commitments and strides in doing so and have kept momentum on these strategies through the pandemic. Newfoundland and Labrador is an exception. They are in a tougher economic situation than the other Maritime provinces and dependent on the oil and gas industry. One could still argue that they are well resourced to forge their path forward, drawing on a depth of character and lessons from the economic and political blunders of their past. Being an attractive place to live with a variety of budding industries and an entrepreneurial spirit will play a role in Atlantic Canada firming up its position as a 'have' part of the country.

Even though the tourism industry, which was becoming increasingly unsustainable with ever growing numbers of cruise ship visits, has yet to become a target of restructuring discourse in the region, with the right kind of policy direction, adaptation in this sector could take on a number of

exciting advancements that are more sustainable for the environment and for workers. One gets the feeling that there is an economic life beyond tourism for this region. Like other regions reflecting on the impacts of a global pandemic on their society, Atlantic Canadians have a sense that they are being given a huge opportunity to 'build back better'. Quickening the pace of development of the green and digital economies is a strong theme around the world, rings true for Atlantic Canada, and will be critical in maintaining their long standing role as an international supplier and trading partner.

With the growing realisation that together they can accomplish great things, a new cultural confidence is emerging as well. A confidence that will be needed to face the challenges ahead and embrace the opportunities. Hopefully this maturing into a new self will bring with it a softening of fear of outsiders and a strengthening of the regions long standing reputation as a warm, welcoming and laid back place to be.

RESOURCES

Atlantic Provinces Economic Council - COVID- 19 in Atlantic Canada <https://www.apec-econ.ca/covid/>

Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation- Rural Insights Series on COVID- 19 <http://crrf.ca/covid19/>

CBC <https://www.cbc.ca/news>

The Chronicle Herald <https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/>

The Financial Post <https://financialpost.com/>

Institute of Island Studies - COVID- 19 Island Insights Series <http://islandstudies.com/island-insights-series/>

Statistics Canada <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/start>

University of Waterloo, Department of Environment, Enterprise and Development, Heather Hall

<https://uwaterloo.ca/school-environment-enterprise-development/people-profiles/heather-m-hall>

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