Building Futures: Career and Community Development in Small New Brunswick Towns

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Abstract

Communities in New Brunswick are facing the reality of shrinking populations and outward migration. As post-industrial economies develop in Canada, a clear shift in geography is taking place: young people are leaving small communities in New Brunswick to live in larger urban centres. This study of two secondary schools explores the possibilities for career development and community sustainability in this environment. The two communities examined in the study differ in their geography. Bathurst is in the economically depressed north of New Brunswick, while Sackville is in the expanding southern region near Moncton. Sackville also has a clear connection to knowledge work, as it is a university town. This study examines how youth in New Brunswick navigate their career development with respect to their family and community and asks whether knowledge/creative work can help to sustain small Maritime communities. The findings, based on interviews with teachers and focus groups with students, indicate that young people have a clear desire to stay in the province; however, students and teachers also realize that the possibilities for career development in their respective communities are limited and the reality of outward migration looms in the future for many young people.

Résumé

Les collectivités du Nouveau Brunswick sont confrontées à la réalité du déclin démographique et de l'exode des jeunes. Au fur et à mesure que les économies post-industrielles se développent ailleurs au Canada, un changement clair se fait sentir du point de vue géographique : les jeunes quittent les petites collectivités néo brunswickoises pour s'installer dans les grands centres urbains. La présente étude de deux écoles secondaires explore les possibilités de développement de carrière et la viabilité de la collectivité dans un tel contexte. Les deux collectivités examinées dans cette étude n'ont pas la même géographie. Bathurst se trouve dans une région économiquement défavorisée au nord du Nouveau Brunswick, tandis que Sackville se situe dans une région en pleine expansion dans le sud de la province, à proximité de Moncton. Sackville a aussi un lien clair avec le travail intellectuel, comme c'est une ville universitaire. La présente étude porte sur la façon dont les jeunes Néo Brunswickois orientent le développement de leur carrière en tenant compte de facteurs familiaux et communautaires et se penche sur la question de savoir si le travail intellectuel ou créatif peut contribuer à soutenir les petites collectivités des Maritimes. D'après les entretiens menés auprès du personnel enseignant et des groupes de discussion formés d'élèves, les résultats indiquent que les jeunes veulent clairement rester dans la province; or, les élèves

et le personnel enseignant se rendent également compte que les possibilités de développement de carrière dans leurs collectivités respectives sont limitées et que l'exode est une réalité envisagée par de nombreux jeunes.

Career planning for youth today is complex and often non-linear. The transition students make from school to work is complicated by unpredictable labour markets and a shortage of quality employment at the entry level. For students in New Brunswick, career planning can be particularly challenging due to the province's regional and rural economies. In essence, young people in the province must align their early academic training and career goals with the demands of today's knowledge economy, although such work may not exist in their communities or even in their region. Secondary education serves as the starting point for students' active engagement in career planning and is often where they establish courses of action for their adult lives. In this process, secondary school teachers, among other social actors, act as career counsellors who shape students' expectations, goals, and attitudes in terms of "realistic" career pathways. Problematically for Maritime communities, secondary school teachers are potentially placed in the position of indirectly counselling students to leave their home communities to pursue careers elsewhere in Canada or other parts of the world (Corbett). Because of the emphasis placed on knowledge attainment as a marketable commodity, communities within New Brunswick face the considerable challenge of keeping their highly trained knowledge workers in the region, even in the urban centres of Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton (McHardie). This paper explores the challenges communities and teachers face in maintaining community while developing young people as future workers. It compares the views of students and teachers in the small communities of Sackville and Bathurst, New Brunswick, on the possibilities for youth to develop their careers in local communities and the Maritime region.

Michael Corbet's study of schooling in Digby Neck, Nova Scotia, shines a light on the problems faced by many rural communities in the Maritimes. Quite simply, schools are educating young people to leave the communities that once fostered growth, identity, and belonging. Corbet identifies a clear disconnect between the fishing culture present within the community and the school's focus on the skills students needed for knowledge work. Specifically, the town of Digby does not provide students with employment opportunities connected to the knowledge work being taught in schools. Students seeking employment outside of fishing are left to search for work outside the community, resulting in an exodus of young people from the community. Of course, with no young people engaged in knowledge work, the town remains stagnant and risks losing the industries necessary for its sustainability.

Connected to the small and stagnant economies of Maritime communities is the associated "habitus" students bring into the classroom. As articulated by Bourdieu, the habitus that helps to define students' tastes and preferences also shapes their understanding of the possibilities of academic development and growth (Bourdieu and Passeron). In Yoon and Gulson's study of Vancouver neighbourhoods, we see that school choice and program selection are greatly influenced not only by the class location of their parents, but also by the culture of the community. Students' peer interactions in their neighbourhoods and in the everyday moments of community living, as expressed through community programs and organizations, result in parents and students having very different understandings of schooling and its intended benefits. In other words, the habitus carried by students in their academic decisions (one of them being career development) are tied up in a myriad of influences, with community serving as a key structural determinant.

Of course, this recognition of varied student expectations and consequent "success" in schools is not new. Paul Willis, Jean Anyon, and Michael Corbett, to name a few, clearly demonstrate the disconnect that can exist between students and school culture. It should be noted that these studies, as well as much of the research on school-to-work transitions, demonstrate a disconnect that is primarily driven by the institution of schooling and the middle/upper-class values associated with academic "success." Similarly, career development as part of the schooling experience impresses upon students the need to meet the middle/upper-class demands of the marketplace (Apple; Bowles and Gintis; Hyslop-Margison and Graham; Lehman and Taylor; Aronowitz). Schools offer students a global understanding of work rather than a student- or community-specific understanding of career. Students are placed in a position where their dreams and aspirations must continually be assessed against trends in the workplace and in economic development rather than simply in terms of their desires or their community's needs. The general push to deliver knowledge and skilled-trade workers to the economy leaves many teachers and students with only a general and surface understanding of viable workplace options, and can result, particularly for communities in New Brunswick, in little connection between career and community. With this disconnect between career and community, there is a real danger that students in New Brunswick, particularly in smaller communities, will fail to see their community as a viable place to develop their career; they may assume that careers must take place elsewhere.

Richard Florida posits that cities will emerge as the loci of economic activity and creativity and place greater strain on small communities by pulling human resource capital into urban settings. Working primarily from the thesis that it is the creativity of the labour force that drives a local economy and not the other way around, Florida argues that cities, towns, and the employers that reside within these communities must find ways to lure, develop, and retain creative workers. The creative class, according to Florida, not only attracts knowledge workers, but has the potential to directly expand the economy and create sustainable growth for cities and towns (*The Rise; The Flight; Who's Your City?; The Rise Revisited*). Many critics have pointed out that Florida's data and analyses are "putting the cart before the horse," as much of the positive effects he associates with the creative class are simply a reflection of an existing robust economy in a city or region that attracts highly skilled workers to the area (Krätke; Rich). Whether speaking in terms of "knowledge workers" or a "creative class," there is a clear indication that the shifting modes of production in this country (and for the most part globally) are altering the expectations of employers and students in the school-to-work transitions of youth (Apple; Lehman and Taylor; Aronowitz). The once-stable work in primary and manufacturing industries is disappearing, replaced by highly skilled and technical knowledge/creative work. With a greater emphasis on knowledge and creative work, where does this leave communities in New Brunswick in terms of stability and growth?

Historically, Maritime economies have suffered from shifting economic bases and have experienced an outward migration to the rest of Canada. In the past, shipbuilding, forestry, fishing, and mining industries have produced prosperous moments for Maritime communities; however, much of the success was short-lived as fluctuating commodity prices and changes in technology left many Maritime communities scrambling to stay afloat. The history of Moncton, currently the fastest-growing city in the Maritimes (Statistics Canada, *Annual Demographic Estimates, 2015*), typifies the instability of the region. Much of Moncton's economic development has involved reinvention alternating with successive collapses of stale and outmoded industries. Founded on a prosperous shipbuilding industry, Moncton first experienced economic hardship when wood ships powered by wind were replaced with the steam-powered shipping vessels built in the United States (Conrad and Hiller). After that economic setback, Moncton was fortunate to be the hub of railway manufacture in the Maritime region. However, with the

closure of railways in the 1980s, Moncton faced considerable economic hardship and yet another moment when the economy required reinvention to avoid collapse. In fact, the motto adopted by Moncton in 1875, "Resurgo" ("I Rise Again"), prophetically describes the persistent pattern of collapse and resurgence that defines the economic history of the city. It should be noted that the economic and industrial collapses that have occurred in Moncton over the past century-and-a-half are not unique to the city; rather, Moncton's history is typical of the economic development in the province and region since Confederation. Whether it is the collapse of coal prices and mining in Cape Breton, or the loss of cod off the Grand Banks in Newfoundland, or even the manufacturing and textile industries of Nova Scotia, much of the economic history of Atlantic Canada has been connected to industry loss.

Maritime labour force participation and outward migration patterns in recent years point to a continuing trend of economic stagnation in the region. The unemployment rates for the Atlantic provinces are above the national average, with rural areas in the region experiencing even greater unemployment (Statistics Canada, *Labour for Characteristics*). Overall, the outward migration patterns point to a net loss for the Atlantic region (Statistics Canada, *Annual Demographic Estimates, 2006 to 2011*). Even when offset by international immigration, the Atlantic region suffers from relatively low growth rates compared to other regions in Canada, with New Brunswick experiencing almost non-existent or negative growth. The areas that have experienced recent growth within the Atlantic region are primarily the urban centres of Moncton, Halifax, and St. John's (Statistics Canada, *Annual Demographic Estimates, 2015*). The interregional migration points to a move from rural to urban centres: the non-census metropolitan areas for the Atlantic region experienced a net loss in terms of migration (Statistics Canada, *Annual Demographic Estimates, 2006 to 2011*). Furthermore, the non-census metropolitan areas are experiencing greater rates of aging than the urban centres (Statistics Canada, *Annual Demographic Estimates, 2006 to 2011*). These findings point to an outward migration of young people from small communities in the Atlantic region and hint at an outward migration from the region as a whole.

In attempting to understand the demographic findings presented above, it is pertinent to frame them in terms of the agency exhibited by students and teachers in planning career pathways for young people. On the surface it appears as though human capital theory could explain most of what is taking place; the data showing the flow of young people to urban centres nicely connect with the work of Florida. However, there are likely underlying influences of community that relate to career choices made by students. For example, a student's social and cultural capital has a significant influence on his or her path trajectory. Furthermore, the habitus carried by the student, which not only reflects parental and class influence, but is also related to the community (Bourdieu; Yoon and Gulson), also shapes these patterns. Students who have inherited significant social capital from their parents and their community—for example, some students in Sackville—may plan and act out post-secondary career paths quite differently than students with differing cultural and social capital (Antonelli; Raffo and Reeves). As well, contrary to human capital theory, we see that an education-job skills gap is emerging that places many young people in employment situations where their knowledge is undervalued and unused (Livingstone); many do not have the opportunity to ply specific knowledge learned in the classroom within their home communities. Could these latter points influence students, especially those with a highly technical or skilled knowledge base, to seek out alternative forms of employment that may exist in a reinvented Maritime economy?

Methodology

The two study sites present a contrast in economic stability and local culture. Sackville is located in the southern part of the province and benefits from a relatively large and stable employer in Mount Allison University. Conversely, Bathurst is in New Brunswick's northern region, is a larger town, and is dependent upon a natural resource–based economy. Recently, Bathurst experienced significant job loss with the closure of a local mine (Bell); however, the area is still being explored for lucrative mine sites ("Trevali Maintains Positive Momentum"). The two high schools are similar in their student population, with teachers from both schools indicating a slightly higher socioeconomic student population for the school in Sackville.

In this study, interviews with teachers and students explored their understandings of career development in their communities and the Maritime region. In one-on-one interviews, fourteen teachers were asked specific questions about their pedagogy and strategies for student development and student success. The teachers provided insight into past moments and future trends in student development, mobility, and success. Fourteen students were interviewed in two focus groups and were asked specific questions about their plans for future employment and how their community fit into their career development. Input from the principals was used to ensure that the sample included a cross-section of student abilities and aspirations relating to school and career development. The interviews and the focus groups lasted roughly forty-five minutes to one hour each.

As expected, themes emerged around community life, migration, potential success for students' careers, local and regional economies, and possibilities for community and regional development. Many of the themes were generated prior to the interviews through specific questions (i.e., local and regional economies, success for students, migration, and community life); however, other themes were generated through a comparative analysis of the teacher interviews and the student focus groups. Similar answers emerged around regional economies that connected and grouped responses under development themes related to community, region, and the economy. In addition, further sub-themes on quality of life and aspirations for self and the community developed during the coding stage. All of the data were organized and analyzed using NVivo coding software.

Findings

Quality of Community Life

It was evident from the interviews with teachers and students from both communities that there is tremendous appreciation among participants for their towns and for the Maritimes as a region. At the forefront of this appreciation is the perceived high quality of life. Specifically, teachers and students described their community as a great place to raise a family. The closeness of community members, the lack of congestion in both roads and neighbourhoods, and the perceived safety and low cost of living made their home towns very attractive to participants. The following exchange between two students in a focus group speaks to the closeness of the community and the positive effects of the connectedness of community members:

> Student 1: Yeah, it's safe. I would raise a family here and I think that, I remember growing up here was great and I'd want this environment, probably, for my kids for sure.

Student 2: Yeah. Like, it's not something that you find in bigger cities. There's always kind of that theory…

Student 1: When you're walking on the streets you can look in the other people's eyes when they're walking by. (Bathurst focus group)

The students in this focus group were referring to the friendliness of people in their town and contrasting it with the perceived "coldness" of city life. They weren't particularly enamoured or drawn into the adventure of "big city life" and spoke with trepidation about their future lives away from their home communities:

Student 1: We're so used to being in this little town where there's not much going on. It's really quiet and chill and then it's like going into the bustle of a huge city and actually have people everywhere and cars and everything. It's like, whoa!

Student 2: And if you had to take a bus somewhere or something.

Student 3: We wouldn't know…

Student 1: Whoa! What's that? What's a bus? (Bathurst focus group)

This fear of the unknown and of urban life seemed more acute among the Bathurst than the Sackville students. This may be related to the relative remoteness of Bathurst from large urban centres. Comparatively, Sackville is within a two-hour drive of five urban centres in the Maritimes and has an international airport forty kilometres away. The university also presents opportunities for students to engage with people from around Canada and the world. For the Sackville students there seemed to be a relative comfort with travel and with experiencing larger urban centres.

Student: I wouldn't mind going out west or other places in Canada. I've travelled and I do have family that lives in Ontario and out west. So that wouldn't be a problem. Or even looking at it teaching-wise and whatnot, I know there's more jobs out west and up north and even different places in the world, not even, like, outside of Canada and I wouldn't mind that as well. (Sackville focus group)

The differing habitus of students in the two communities seemed to be present in their descriptions of their home communities and the real possibility that they might have to leave them. Perhaps Sackville provides a more cosmopolitan community for its young people, and therefore opened up more possibilities for national and global connections to place. However, although this could be perceived as a benefit to the individual students, it clearly threatens the community.

The desire to stay in home communities was not entirely related to a fear of the unknown. Much of the push to stay in home communities emanated from a desire to stay close to family and friends. Even among the students in the Sackville focus group, there appeared to be an appreciation of familiarity that pushed students to prefer small-town life:

Student: I think right now it might be a fear of leaving, for a lot of us. Like, a fear of the unknown and the risk that would come from moving across the country. We have a safety net in the Maritimes that is our parents, I guess. (Sackville focus group)

Student: Kind of like everyone else has mentioned. We all kind of have this tether that keeps us here. Mainly it's our family, how we want to stay close to them and it's also too,

the Maritimes is very nice and I'll say seems quiet. Like, it's nice here. Around here it's peaceful almost and getting away from the Maritimes I can't imagine how it's been 'cause I've never really left for that long but I'd probably stay near the Maritimes in the end but it's kind of, if something is better elsewhere, maybe go towards that. If needed. (Sackville focus group)

Despite their love of their community, students knew it will be a challenge to remain and raise their own families in their hometowns. Therefore, students took the approach that they will have to leave, at least temporarily, to establish careers and make enough money to start paying down inevitable student loans. They clearly recognized the social elements that make their community strong, but also realized that economic development and sustainability is lacking and presents a challenge to finding quality employment.

Student 1: I think we all love Bathurst.

Student 2: Yeah, it's this nice sense of community but there's no way we could stay here and actually make good money and have a good, solid base for our lives. (Bathurst focus group)

The employment challenges are not solely related to desire to have established and permanent careers; it is currently difficult for youth to find *any* paid employment in their home communities. In both the Bathurst and Sackville interviews with teachers, the dearth of part-time service work for young people was mentioned as a significant obstacle to career development in the community. The lack of adequate part-time employment hampers students wishing to pursue post-secondary education near their home communities, as many find it difficult to cover tuition costs without the part-time income. For those choosing not to pursue post-secondary education, the lack of entry-level work in the home community makes it problematic to enter the workforce and become financially independent. Teachers in both Sackville and Bathurst specifically mentioned the lack of hiring at McDonald's, an organization that traditionally hires young people to staff their restaurants, as symbolic of the dire straits for young people looking for work in their home communities:

They feel it at home but now you're starting to hear the 15-year-old can't work at McDonald's anymore because they're getting the 25-year-old who can't find a job now. So why would they hire a 16-year-old? They're getting mothers who have twenty years, because husband's lost their jobs, they're coming back. So who are you going to hire if you're a manager? A 16-year-old who's going to call to cancel because he's going to a rock concert on Friday night or a dependable 25-year-old, 30-year-old woman who needs to work and is going to be there? (Bathurst teacher)

It is clear that the scarcity of quality work in these towns has made for fierce competition for the few jobs that are available; unfortunately, this means that young people are often shut out of the hiring process.

Teaching Challenges

Schools in New Brunswick are facing challenges similar to those found in other parts of the country, especially regarding public funding. With a shrinking population comes a shrinking tax base and less revenues for all levels of government. The economic challenges in the province have resulted in

school closures and reductions in teaching positions and staff ("Peter Fullerton Decries Budget Cut"). These cuts have occurred in all schools in New Brunswick, but the teachers in the study felt that the small size of their schools meant that these reductions made it even more challenging to deliver a full curriculum and varied career opportunities. Students in both focus groups felt that teachers did the best with what they had, but cited some obvious shortcomings in course options:

> Student: Um, we're obviously a pretty small school so we don't have as many course selections but that's not really our teachers' fault. It's just because there wouldn't be as much students enrolled in the classes. So we don't get much selection, I guess, in all. (Bathurst focus group)

Students recognized that a lack of course options was a problem in schools in small communities and believed that larger urban centres were able to offer courses that had great appeal and were relevant to career planning. Even the resources that were not directly controlled by the school and were part of the community, such as small businesses and other government-run operations, were unable to provide sufficient options for cooperative education—a key program for workplace preparation in most schools. Some of the students wishing to pursue specific work of the type that normally can be taught in cooperative programs were left wanting.

> Student: Especially for people who want to take an industrial trade. For my example, there's not much given here where it's like I'm taking that welding after school and there's only, I think, one metals, it's a metals processing class, but it just touches the basics. (Bathurst focus group)

> Student: Yeah, like, there's good intentions, like, to have a program. I think, I know someone went, one of my friends wanted to be a lawyer. So he co-opped with a lawyer but it wasn't a lawyer in the field that he was looking, it was like a family lawyer. He didn't want to be that at all but it was what was here in Bathurst. They're like, "Go get a taste of the workforce," but often it's not really the workforce you're going to be in. So… (Bathurst focus group)

The problems of shrinking economies in these small towns also presents issues related to student learning and success. The teachers in the study pointed out that poverty in the town adversely affected performance in the classroom:

> I think too, like, the students that come to us, you know, I guess I'll speak for myself. I came from a household with two parents, we sat down at supper and we talked, like, you know, I would say a typical upbringing but I know, we know, that not everyone in our room has that and there could be a large portion that do not have that stability and those good role models and so I think you got to use the teachable moments. (Bathurst teacher)

> As dismal as I have ever seen it. And I see the very bad side of things. One of the reasons why my room is full like this is because we're seeing kids with no clothes. We went out and got churches to donate clothes and we also have a food program here. I'm seeing the bad side of all the economy. When we say…it's easy for the paper to report 20 percent unemployment. (Bathurst teacher)

The instability of family life was not only tied to issues of poverty; the working arrangements of some parents made for an unstable home life. It is not uncommon for one parent to work out of province where wages are much higher. Arrangements are made with the company to work intensively for several weeks in exchange for weeks off from work. Such work arrangements allow someone to reap the financial benefits of a high wage in one part of the country, while continuing to live for part of the year in their home community in New Brunswick. However, when parents are involved in this work arrangement, some problematic moments may emerge in their children's lives:

> That's tough when one of the parents is away for three weeks at a time. So for every month, they're gone three weeks of it. That's difficult but that's the reality of where these people feel the need they have to go outside to get work. So that's how desperate it is. (Sackville teacher)

> I mean, it's a lot of it, as you say, a lot of the jobs are disappearing and so are a lot of the families. They're leaving with them and so the ones that are here still, I think there's still that type of family here but a lot of people are now leaving our community and so there's high unemployment rates and things like that which are not, I don't think, very conducive to instilling in a lot of people the value of getting more education, getting more knowledge. It's hopelessness. What's the difference? (Sackville teacher).

Although it is not optimal, the arrangement to spend most of the year out of province may be necessary to keep the family unit financially afloat. Teachers felt they could not blame the families for participating in this type of work arrangement. Families that work out of province are able to provide for their families financially and are able to give them the home and community life they value in New Brunswick.

Student Success

Key themes emerged from the interviews around student success and the success of the community. It was clear that the two themes were intertwined and that there was a palpable discomfort when discussing the possibilities that both students and community might experience success in tandem. Teachers seemed to know they are in the position of teaching students to find success even if it means pursuing work elsewhere in the country. Teachers were committed to student success, and the understanding of success appeared to connect more with national and global interests rather than the specific needs of the community. In other words, teachers could not identify a uniquely regional or local form of success for their students and instead opted for more general pathways toward career success. The pathways were clearly couched in more contemporary, knowledge-based understandings of success, similar to Florida's creative class. Fitting students into this framework brought a clear realization for many teachers that for a student to succeed in this way, he or she must succeed elsewhere:

> I don't see many kids after they graduate from high school. I really don't see them after that. It's almost like working in a senior citizens home. Once they leave, they don't come back and that's the nature of the beast and it's even—I have four children, one's in Ontario, one's in Korea, one's in Halifax, one's still at Mount A, but there's just nothing here for them and they have to go. (Sackville teacher)

And that's the other thing, you know. We're sending kids out here, we're educating them, we're sending them off to all these places, knowing very well that very few of them, if any, will be still here when it's all said and done. (Sackville teacher)

When they leave here you want to feel good about the fact that they're prepared to go and no matter where they go they're going to be successful, they're going to be happy. That's—I mean, that's your ultimate goal for them and for me to sit here and believe that that always happens, no, I'm not that foolish, but at the same time that would be what you're looking for. (Sackville teacher)

Students echoed the sentiments of the teachers and seemed resigned to the idea that success was likely achieved elsewhere, almost to the point that if you remained in town you were depriving yourself of a better career:

Student: The future students here are just going be in a pit of boredom and no resources of anything 'cause no one has any reason to stay here and no options to stay here. So no one can really continue in their path of anything that we're doing here, which is not much. So…again, with the whole, "We're going down." Not really any sign of going up. (Bathurst focus group)

The Sackville students echoed the sentiment above and were not at all idealistic in their understanding of career development. The top priority for students was to establish themselves in their careers rather than commit to their community, despite its perceived high quality of life. When asked if they would choose to stay in their home community over everything else related to career development, the students had this to say:

Student 1: I'd like to, but it's maybe not a priority. If there are no jobs, I can't. So my priority would be finding a job.

Student 2: Yeah, I'm willing to leave if I have to. (Sackville focus group)

Students feel the pressure from parents, teachers, and community members to stay in the area to keep the town alive. As mentioned earlier, the "tether" that keeps them to their community is one made of familiarity, family, and, to a lesser extent, guilt:

Student 1: Our parents want us to stay.

Student 2: Yeah.

Student 1: You know?

Student 2: It's like they want us to stay because it's like, "Well if you don't stay then there's nothing, nothing's really going to progress," but there's no way we could stay and actually make a good living and stuff like that. So it's like there's some encouragement to go elsewhere but there's also encouragement to stay. So it's kind of like a mix. (Bathurst focus group)

If students stay in the Maritimes, it is only for a short moment in their early career development. The emphasis placed on credentials extends this stage in their lives, so youth will often stay close to home to attend university or college. This is where Sackville seems to benefit over Bathurst in retaining

youth, at least temporarily. The university is a magnet for many of the graduating students from the local high school:

> Whether it's because their family member works there or Mount A has to offer what they're interested in, um…Many, many, most I think when they go off to university do stay in the Maritimes. I don't think that they—I think it's a very small percentage, if any, that go to Ontario or Quebec, excuse me, Ontario, Quebec, or west. If they're leaving the Maritimes, it's probably for work. (Sackville teacher)

Because many of the Sackville students are exposed to the local university throughout their youth, a culture develops in which university attendance is perceived by students as the preferred pathway to career success. This is not to imply that students do not value other forms of post-secondary education in Sackville, but the culture of the community and close proximity to a university perhaps temporarily keep youth longer in the community. It should be mentioned that the university population increases the town population by 50 percent during the school year and presents a community environment in which young people make up the largest demographic group.

It is clear that teachers did not want to tell their students to move on, but they felt it was necessary, almost an obligation, to warn them of the harsh reality awaiting students upon graduation if they wished to remain in their home communities:

> They knew that there was going be nothing here. Will they ever come home? I would say absolutely not now because they've made their life. They understood it from a young age. I hear a lot of these kids will leave for short periods of time and come back to nothing. I don't think they're being prepared for leaving. And it's sad to say to someone, "Why are you telling your kids to leave? Don't you want them to come back to the community?" I'd love it! But I also know what reality is and I can tell my kids, "Oh, it's gonna be better, it's gonna be better," and then they're living in my basement. (Bathurst teacher)

Perhaps as a possible solution to the problem was a recognition by teachers of the disjointed and often non-linear path students follow when developing careers. Teachers indicated that the careers of students would be jumbled, often involving several career changes over their lives. Some optimism emerged from this, as teachers imagined and hoped that one of a student's several careers would take them back to the Maritimes and preferably to their home community:

> I think people want to start at a high level and are disappointed when they can't get that dream job right out of school.…We're often told that people will change careers five or six times, you know, and what they start out with and staying at one job is not the way it happens anymore. I think some of that is because there's this sense of entitlement that has built its way into our society. They leave and they all want, the first year out, they want to buy a house, buy a car, and party all the time, and it doesn't work that way. (Sackville teacher)

Perhaps this teacher thought that career development is a harsh experience regardless of where it occurs and that migration away from home communities was merely one of the challenges in the early stages. Once the student "takes their lumps" and establishes him or herself in a career with experience in the

field, there is the hope that this will allow them the freedom to work on their own terms—one of which might be a return to a reinvented and reinvigorated region.

Migration

As mentioned earlier, students at these schools engaged with teachers and learning in a climate of few job opportunities and low possibilities for economic success. Even within the schools, students could see that the teaching staff remains fixed, somewhat permanent because of provincial hiring freezes and a more recent push toward staff reductions. In the end, students in the interviews said that they saw little opportunity in their regions and home communities and viewed other provinces as having greater potential for career and economic success. The most commonly cited possible destination was western Canada, most notably the oil fields of Alberta. Students were accustomed to seeing community members do well in Alberta, with high-paying jobs seemingly at every turn. Working "two weeks on and two weeks off" allowed some people in New Brunswick to reap the financial rewards attached to working in Alberta, yet to still experience, albeit part-time, a lower cost of living and perceived higher quality of life in the Maritimes. "I think that's why a lot of people fly in and out because it's easier to have bought a home here, because there's a lot for sale, but working there and flying…" (Bathurst student). There was clear uncertainty in the voice of the student in contemplating a life of extensive and frequent airplane commutes. But the draw of high salaries and the possibility of remaining in their home community has pushed many students to imagine this lifestyle as a way to "have their cake and eat it, too."

> Student 1: He's [inaudible], welding and steel fabrication out west. Before overtime and all that, he makes $68 an hour and he comes home and he's only making $20.
>
> Student 2: Holy, wow!
>
> Student 1: He comes home for the wintertime because he wants to spend time with his family, but he works six months of the year out west, six months home. So, like he says, he can work one week out west and you'll have to work three weeks here to make the same amount of money that he's made out west. (Bathurst focus group)

Putting aside the clear economic advantage attached to work in other provinces, students also expressed disappointment with the options available to them in their home communities to develop a career:

> Student 1: A little bit because you think of all those fun-sounding occupations but in reality you can't do that here. It's like, I think it sucks for us because people in other provinces, they can continue on with that and be like, "I want to do this. I can because I have the tools to do that," but here our dreams kind of are crushed in that aspect. You kind of might veer towards doing something you're not passionate about because it makes money or because there's job availability. I find that's not fair. (Bathurst focus group)

In this instance, the student demonstrated students make the choice to leave because it is necessary to do so to build a career that matches their career interests. Sacrificing a fulfilling career might be simply too much for young people to bear. In other words, it is not a matter of taking less money to stay at home; rather, students develop areas of interests, and for some, a passion for specific vocations that simply cannot be pursued in their home communities. As one teacher expressed:

> Do you want to stay here and work at a supercollider? 'Cause that's not going to happen. We don't have any of those. How badly do you want to stay here? Do you want to stay

here and just work at a job that is not stimulating? That might be what you need. Do you want to stay here and work below your dream income level? (Sackville teacher)

The participants in this study were acutely aware that sacrifices needed to be made in order to remain in their community. For most, this choice seemed unreasonable and as stated above, "unfair." The respondents saw the possibility in migration and spoke optimistically of the opportunities to develop their careers elsewhere.

In a few instances, respondents questioned whether it was a bad idea to leave and experience other parts of the country. Many of the teachers spoke of students being young and in the prime of life—the perfect timing to embark on an adventure. One teacher felt that if one wanted to see the world, it is best done young, in the days before marriage and children. Another teacher spoke directly to the poverty of the town and simply wondered why some of his students would want to stay in their hometown. In fact, the teacher almost viewed leaving as necessary in order to break the troubling cycle of poverty that has damaged generations of families in his home community:

> And I really believe, as cruel as it sounds, that they have to leave to break that cycle. A lot of them have been in that perpetual poverty or perpetual horrible dynamics since they're five years old. So we praise them, give them skills but they keep returning to it so the skill doesn't solidify. And so, in two years' time, they start at home. Not all, some of them get the urge. But we do see at twenty-four, twenty-five, you'll meet them on the street and it's almost like someone hit them with a hammer. There is a change. It took four or five more years after school. They finally sat down on their couch and said, "You know what? The only one that can get out of that situation is me." Sometimes it takes growth, maturity and it only hits at twenty-four, twenty-five. A lot of them end up back in their homes, that's sad. (Bathurst teacher)

With all the talk of moving away, almost all of the participants in this study reflected on a desire to return to the Maritimes and possibly their home community later in life. Teachers seemed to think this would be done near or at retirement, often joking that New Brunswick has become Canada's largest retirement community. But for the students, there was a sense of optimism that they would return to start families of their own with an aim toward giving their children a life that closely resembled their own childhood.

Possibilities for Communities

Much of the optimism from participants regarding sustainable communities stemmed from the hope that once young people were established in their careers, there would be opportunities for them to return. Some participants hoped that the province's recent financial problems were part of a temporary downswing in the economy and noted that many other parts of the country were facing similar issues. Participants were also hoping that some of the recent explorations into shale gas and a proposed pipeline to eastern refineries would mean a possible boom for the province that would allow youth to stay close to home. Also, participants viewed changing economic and workplace practices involving technology and flexible work as hopeful changes for their home communities. As one Bathurst teacher noted: "A lot of technology and that's going to be…that may help Bathurst too. Because you could live here, do your job and your job could be in, you know, in Boston or anywhere in the world." It's unclear whether technology will make work flexible to the point that geography and proximity to urban centres becomes

unnecessary; however, it should be noted that this workplace practice was one of the few concrete solutions presented by respondents to deal with the disconnect between desired work and home life.

For the most part, participants were not optimistic when discussing the futures of their home communities. In Bathurst, there seemed to be a fixation on the closure of the mines and a resignation that things will only get worse. In Sackville, an interesting paradox emerged. Many of the participants cited the university as the town's saving grace. Participants in the Sackville study site viewed the university as a solid employer and were not worried that it would shut down or move away. However, there was also the understanding that the university was not going to expand or provide growth to the town and instead would simply exist as it had in the past. Furthermore, neither the teachers nor the students thought that the university would employ the youth in town; they thought faculty positions were likely to be taken by people from outside the community or province. The university helped create a creative class; however, there are few opportunities for this group to ply their knowledge. The economic stability provided by the university ensures stability, but not growth. Workplaces like the university, the hospital, and the local schools provided a handful of well-paying and stable jobs, but these workplaces were not growing and would not produce the economic booms of the shipbuilding, mining, fishing, and forestry industries.

Conclusion

It is clear that community has an influence on the career pathways of youth in New Brunswick. Students and teachers carry their community experiences into the classroom and their career expectations are clearly tempered by family and community histories. The habitus of teachers and students lowers the expectations for quality work within home communities and places career success outside of the province. Although it appears the habitus differs somewhat for students in Sackville and Bathurst, resulting in differing career expectations and trajectories, in neither case does it provide a significant economic benefit to the community. In Sackville, where a relatively large creative class has a significant influence over the schooling in the community, students' career aspirations do not match those available in the region. Similarly, Bathurst students' and teachers' exposure to work in primary industries like mining and skilled work in the trades still place career development outside of their community. Teachers and students in both study sites feared that the economic stagnation in the province would make it difficult for students to simultaneously be true to their career development and remain in their home communities.

The participants in both study sites expressed fondness for their communities. Students appreciated the upbringing they had in their town and the closeness they experienced with community members. Teachers enjoyed the quality of life afforded to them and the quieter and simpler lifestyle in their home communities. However, the habitus developed around community and the importance of family was clearly being challenged by economic pressures to succeed in particular careers. The sluggish and small economies of these towns do not provide opportunities to develop success locally and many of the obstacles attributed to learning in the schools were connected to the economic struggles of the community. Despite the great hope that students could find success elsewhere and return home at a later date, both teachers and students tempered their optimism with the reality that New Brunswick's aging and shrinking population would likely make returning to the province a reality only when today's students entered their retirement years. The option to work seasonally or in alternating two-week stints in western provinces like Alberta, as is done currently by some in the

province, presents one strategy for maintaining small communities. However, as was clearly identified by teachers in the study, this is a temporary fix that often leads to many problems for family, community stability, and career development. Instead, in addition to hoping for a fortuitist discovery of oil or gas, respondents noted the shifting ways of performing work and hoped that one day technology would allow them to connect to larger economic and urban centres while setting up their home life in their respective community. They hoped that they could lead a work life in cyberspace and a home life in the real world of their small town.

In the end, the comparison between the two towns revealed a clear connection between the stability of the community and the strength of the local economy. In Bathurst, there appears to be a clear understanding among participants that local mining and resource extraction needs to return if the town wishes to keep young people in the community. The employment in this industry is well-paying and is stable work in terms of regular hours and pay. For Sackville, the strength of their creative class seemed only a surface solution to employment and sustainability in the community. Yes, Sackville has strong employers in the form of the university, hospital, and local schools; however, at the moment these organizations do not offer employment opportunities for young people. A stronger creative class seems to be emerging in Sackville than in Bathurst, but without an opportunity to secure employment in creative work or in resource extraction, young people in both regions are existing in a habitus shaped by economic stagnation, and most assume that success exists elsewhere, not in their cherished communities.

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