

Capacity-building in rural regional development: a preliminary study of Eastern Shore, Nova Scotia, Canada

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The immense, sparsely populated, and distinctively varied landscape of Canada presents numerous unique challenges for regional development. Sustainable and responsible development of far-reaching suburbs, satellite towns, rural areas, and hinterlands in the face of increasingly congested small number of major urban areas is both an objective and a problem for planners, businesses, and communities.

On the Atlantic coast, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) in the province of Nova Scotia oversees a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas comprising 5,475 square kilometres, just slightly smaller than the metro area of Toronto, Canada's largest city but with less than 10% of the equivalent population. As the business, finance, and educational centre of Atlantic region of Canada, the central urban area of Halifax has experienced fast-paced growth comparable with other major cities across the country. Such centralised demand has created problems for example in affordable housing, as well as labour shortages. Thus, whilst provincial government leaders aspire to a doubling of the province's population within the next few decades (Gorman, 2024), 'smart growth' strategies are required to develop regions and avoid exacerbating further urban pressures.

Tourism in HRM and Nova Scotia has enjoyed buoyant growth in recent years, with overall revenues increasing by 10% to C\$3.5 billion in the most recent reporting period (Tourism Nova Scotia, 2025). HRM accounts for a third (C\$1.3 billion) of Nova Scotia's tourism revenues, which local policy-makers aim to increase nearly ten-fold by the year 2031 (Discover Halifax, 2021).

However whilst the central urban district of Halifax continues to attract tourist activity, periphery regions have struggled thus far to take advantage. For example, the Eastern Shore tourism region overlaps three municipalities including HRM. Fragmented by a lack of service infrastructures, the Eastern Shore consists of over 300 communities spread out across the a peninsula of approximately 200 km width in which even the largest of settlements is under 1,000 population. Yet statistics (Halifax Partnership, 2025) indicate that although the region accounts for only 2% of the province's tourism revenues, average stays and gross revenues in Eastern Shore are approximately 1.5 times higher than the provincial averages. Such figures suggest that with targetted intervention, there is potential for Eastern Shore to become a significant contributor both to tourism growth for HRM and general growth for the province.

The present research is a preliminary investigation of current attitudes of local businesses, entrepreneurs, labour, and other stakeholders in relation to tourism development. 'Small town' politics and mentalities (Vlachos, 2017) can hinder rural development. A significant intervention is planned by local development authorities to encourage tourism preparedness and growth in Eastern Shore. The findings of the present research will help to reveal pre-existing assumptions, perceived challenges, and concerns of the proposed participants in order to tailor a development programme which will fulfil local aspirations, address concerns, and respect indigenous peoples' perspectives. This preliminary research will be carried out using qualitative research methods including stakeholder interviews, policy documents review, and media analysis.

Keywords: rural development, tourism development, Canada, Atlantic region, stakeholders analysis

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