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LIVE, WORK, AND STAY? GEOGRAPHIES OF IMMIGRANT RECEPTIVITY IN ATLANTIC CANADA'S

ASPIRING GATEWAYS

ABSTRACT. Global research on new immigrant destinations prioritizes the study of places experiencing rapid demographic change. Immigration is increasingly promoted, however, as a policy tool to encourage stability in peripheral regions, cities, and communities. This paper introduces the concept of the aspiring gateway to describe locations that attract few immigrants but proactively aspire to become welcoming communities. We make this case through an examination of the geographies of immigrant receptivity in Atlantic Canada. Our findings are based on 22 interviews with participants in the immigration sector in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Highlighting the powerful role of non-state actors and public discourses, our analysis considers the ambiguities and mixed messages of the place-based immigration policies of this region. We argue that a more pluralistic understanding of immigrant gateways must include peripheral spaces that are relatively isolated from international migration flows. Aspiring gateways require a rethinking of assumptions formed in and about new immigrant destinations. *Keywords: immigration, immigrant receptivity, new immigrant destinations, urban, Canada.*

“What can Appalachia learn from Atlantic Canada?” asked a 2018 editorial in *The Roanoke Times*, referring to pro-immigration strategies in Canada's easternmost provinces and their

potential to address economic challenges in Virginia’s coal counties. Along similar lines, a recent proposal for a place-based visa – the Heartland Visa – calls for U.S. immigration reform to aid struggling regions, citing the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) as a model (Ozimek et al. 2019). Unlike the U.S., encouraging immigration to and supporting integration in non-traditional destinations have become some of the central goals of Canadian immigration federalism: the system of shared management of immigration by the provinces, territories, and federal government which emerged in the 1990s (IRCC 2018; Paquet 2019). Pro-immigration proposals in America’s coal counties stand out in a period in which anti-immigrant rhetoric is increasingly prevalent (Marrow 2020). At the same time, calls that celebrate Atlantic Canada as an immigration success story are surprising given the region has the lowest immigration levels in Canada (Statistics Canada 2017). These contradictions illustrate the need for migration studies in peripheral regions. How are international migration experiences transforming places and regions on the periphery, and conversely, how are such locations transforming themselves to encourage international migration? What, if any, approaches can be adapted?

Writing from St. John’s, Canada’s easternmost city, our questions are inspired by calls to decenter urban studies to consider what takes place beyond major cities, on the periphery, and in unconventional urban spaces (e.g., Roy 2011; Derickson 2015). Global research on “new immigrant destinations,” while integral to this goal, prioritizes the study of places receiving *new* influxes (Winders 2014), rather than considering how the absence of these flows also drives immigrant receptivity. While researchers have considered post-industrial cities, who seek out immigrants as agents of economic change (e.g., Glick Schiller & Çaglar 2010; Filomeno 2017), they have not paid enough attention to peripherality (see McAreavey 2017). Our objectives here

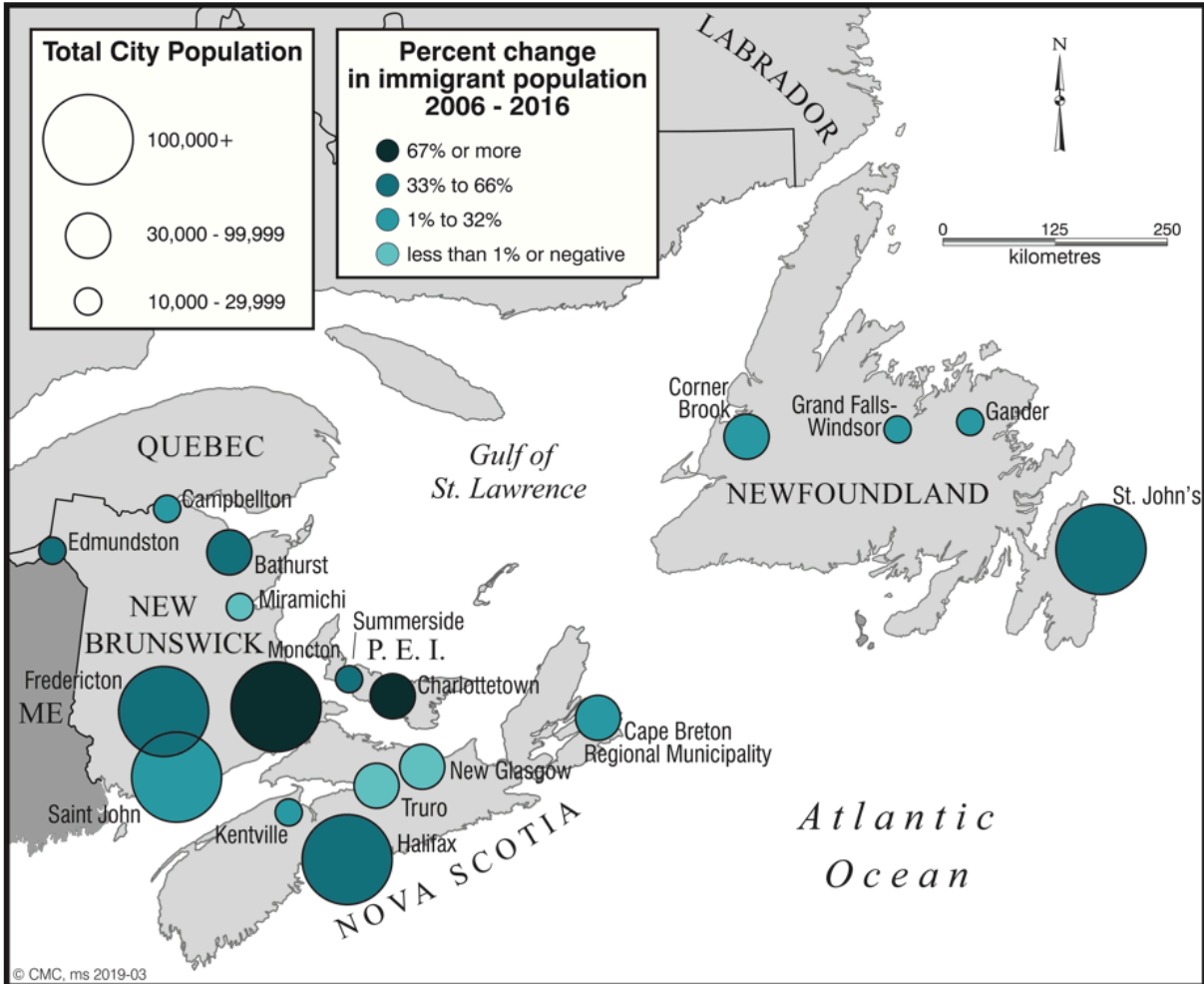
are to contribute to ongoing discussions about the expanding diversity of migration destinations and in a way that broadens the concept of the immigrant gateway; and, to reflect on the innovations, challenges, and pitfalls of the Atlantic Canadian experience with immigration in recent years.

This paper introduces the concept of the aspiring gateway to describe places that have few immigrants but proactively aspire to become welcoming, new destinations. They adopt forward-looking initiatives to increase immigration for demographic or economic purposes. Aspiring gateways are places that are relatively isolated from international migration flows but aim to attract newcomers through incentives that will encourage not only their economic participation but also more widely in society. This phenomenon is increasingly prevalent as places and regions from the Canadian Atlantic, to the American Rust Belt, to small towns in the Arctic and Southern Europe seek “stability though mobility” by promoting openness towards outsiders (Aure et al. 2018, 52).

We make this case through an examination of the geographies of immigrant receptivity in Atlantic Canada, where efforts to attract and retain immigrants are unfolding from small municipalities to mid-sized cities ranging in size from 10,000 to over 400,000 (Figure 1). Our findings are based on 22 interviews with key informants working in the immigration sector in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. This paper begins by locating the aspiring gateway theoretically within scholarship on new immigrant destinations, gateway typologies, and immigrant receptivity. In two parts, we then explore the concept in Atlantic Canada, by examining strategies to attract and retain newcomers on a regional level, before focusing on the case of St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador. Highlighting the powerful role of non-state actors and public discourses about immigration in

this region, our analysis considers the ambiguities and mixed messages of the place-based immigration policies of this region. We argue that a more pluralistic understanding of immigrant gateways must include peripheral spaces that are relatively isolated from international migration flows. Aspiring gateways require a rethinking of assumptions formed in and about new immigrant destinations.

Figure 1. Immigration and urban change in Atlantic Canadian cities



Data source: Statistics Canada (2006; 2016)

CONCEPTUALIZING ASPIRING GATEWAYS

Within urban studies, there is a growing interest in decentering urban theory, as scholars such as Lawhon et al. (2016), and Roy (2011) have argued that it is imperative to consider the plurality

of urban experiences in the so-called urban age. One goal of researchers seeking to decenter urban theory is to challenge the notion that there is a “singular ‘urban story’” (Derickson 2015, 651) by interrogating the “local and specific social assumptions embedded in all theory” (Lawhon et al. 2016, 1612). A more pluralistic understanding must include peripheral spaces that are “never really brought fully under the auspices of the logic and development trajectories that characterize a center” (Simone 2010, 40; Roy 2011). We are interested in exploring what can be learned from the Canadian periphery about the processes that shape immigrant receptivity.

Scholarship on “new immigrant destinations” (NIDs) offers a starting point, by studying what happens when communities become receivers of immigrants (e.g., Singer 2004; Massey 2008; Marrow 2020). NIDs researchers initially focused on the emergence of new Latino “boomtowns” in the southern and midwestern U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Zúñiga & Hernández-León 2005; Massey 2008; Lichter & Johnson 2009, 497). Much of the American NIDs scholarship examines the convergence of the illegalization and securitization of migration and the dispersal of the Latino population (Zúñiga & Hernández-León 2005; Marrow 2011). A defining feature of NIDs continues to be their experience of rapid demographic change, where “immigration feels like a very ‘new’ and unfamiliar thing” (McAreavey 2017, 2). They therefore lack the institutions and resources (culturally appropriate health services, public transportation, access to affordable housing, and host communities with cross-cultural experience) needed to address newcomers’ needs (Marrow 2011). Further, immigrants are not part of the “dominant understandings” of local identity in NIDs, which have little experience receiving immigrants in the recent past (Winders 2014, 159).

While NIDs reflect critical new terrain for studying immigration debates and experiences, most NIDs scholarship remains U.S.-focused. There is also a tendency to treat NIDs as

“everything other than a handful of famous gateway cities,” diminishing the analytical power of the concept (Winders 2014, 158). In Canada, for example, researchers have focused primarily on the three major gateway metropolises, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, distinguishing these from “non-gateway metropolises” (e.g., Fong et al. 2015). The widely cited U.S.-based immigrant gateway typologies do acknowledge destinations with little recent growth in their immigrant populations, such as “low immigration metros,” “former gateways” (Singer 2004; 2015), and “minor” destinations (Hall 2013). But the experiences and dynamics of such minor destinations have not often merited further study.

A growing number of destinations, however, aspire to become NIDs. These locations have immigrant populations much smaller than their national average. Unlike NIDs, they are not surprised by new populations, but pre-emptively embark on projects to rebrand and to remake themselves as welcoming destinations. Atlantic Canada’s low immigration numbers, for example, persist despite two decades of policy effort to attract immigrants as a remedy for population aging, out-migration, and slow growth (Akbari 2015; Allain et al. 2019). Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs) – federal-provincial immigration agreements – have been in place in the Atlantic provinces since 2002 (Paquet 2019). Employers have also become vocal advocates for immigration in Atlantic Canada, from fish processing plants to video game developers (Marschke et al. 2018; Pottie-Sherman and Lynch 2019). Yet, retaining newcomers is an ongoing challenge due to a lack of full-time employment, limited education, recreational and cultural opportunities, social isolation, and exclusion (Randall et al. 2014; Fang et al. 2018; Tastsoglou and Sevgur 2019). Across the region, municipalities, non-state organizations, and the private sector are working to convince newcomers to “live, work, and stay.” These places, we argue, are more aptly described as aspiring gateways.

In making this argument, we connect to recent research on “downscaled” cities which illustrates how non-traditional post-industrial destinations have hung their hats on the potential of immigration to reverse the dislocations wrought by deindustrialization (Glick Schiller and Çaglar 2010; Filomeno 2017; Pottie-Sherman 2018). Recent initiatives in the U.S. Rust Belt, for example, the country’s former manufacturing heartland, highlight this aspirational-symbolic nature. Cities and non-state actors across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, western New York and Pennsylvania have invested in the potential of immigrant and refugee-centered urban revitalization (Pottie-Sherman 2020). A uniting thread across these analyses concerns the entrepreneurial agendas of local projects to attract immigrants in the context of neoliberalism, as well as their convergence of social justice-minded and development-oriented arguments in support of community openness. The downscaled city thesis does not apply neatly to Atlantic Canada, where regional disempowerment reflects not only the most recent collapses of natural resources (the cod fishery and offshore oil) but also layers of core-periphery relations between the former colonies and their imperial centres; and, between central Canada and the eastern provinces (Innis 1956; Kaida et al. 2020). Political economists have noted, for example, that the Maritimes experienced deindustrialization at the time of Confederation because national economic policy prioritized manufacturing in central Canada (the “core”) (Brodie 1997). As Brodie (1997, 252) notes, “by the 1920s, the region had been drained of much of its industry and population and had lost a good measure of political power.” Like NIDs, the experiences of Atlantic Canadian communities with immigration also reflect the combinatorial effects of economic restructuring and demographic change on local receptivity (e.g., Massey 2008).

There are also essential divergences in immigration federalism between the U.S. and Canada. In the U.S., neoliberal devolution has generally meant an increase in state, county, and

municipal efforts to control resource access by undocumented immigrants (e.g., enforcement, policing, and local ordinances) (Varsanyi et al. 2012). Local governments often react to perceived immigration failures at higher jurisdictional levels (Varsanyi et al. 2012, 143). In Canada, the neoliberal localization of immigration policy has, in contrast, involved the downloading of settlement service responsibility (see Trudeau and Veronis 2009; Mukhtar et al. 2016; Lowe et al. 2017). This shift has increasingly prioritized multi-sectoral participation in immigrant selection and settlement, including through PNPs and the involvement of the private sector, higher education institutions, and non-government organization in service delivery, especially in non-traditional destinations (Dobrowolsky 2013; Flynn and Bauder 2015; Graham & Pottie-Sherman 2020).

The emergence of Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) since 2008 represents a unique municipal development within Canadian immigration federalism (Walton-Roberts et al., 2019). LIPs are federally-funded local coalitions, often housed within municipal governments, tasked with developing welcoming community strategies and coordinating the work of settlement and mainstream organizations (IRCC 2013). Each LIP follows a proscribed process which begins with the creation of the partnership council, includes research and local place-specific strategy building and working group formation, alongside annual reporting (ibid). LIPs first emerged in Ontario, as the province and the municipalities lobbied for a greater voice in immigration policy as well as settlement resources (Bradford and Andrew 2011). These partnerships reflect the federal government's desire to manage municipal responses to immigration, enhance the coordination of settlement services, and minimize duplication. They also align with the common neoliberal trend of "centralized decentralization," whereby the "state is able to control non-profit delivers at a distance through their funding and accountability arrangements" (Lowe et al. 2017,

21). These trends are unfolding in Canada against a backdrop of consistent federal support for immigration and multiculturalism, although municipal approaches vary (Good 2019).

Despite their differences, there are clear threads of dialogue across regions like the American Rust Belt and Atlantic Canada, as our opening example shows. In this paper, we offer the aspiring gateway concept as a step in unraveling these threads, arguing that is important to pay attention to the pitfalls and opportunities of immigrant receptivity in these destinations. Writing from the Atlantic Canadian province of New Brunswick, for example, Allain et al. (2019) warn that an overall climate of “conditional welcoming” has emerged in which host society attitudes hinge on the ability of newcomers to rescue the region’s struggling communities. Through an analysis of a “sip, greet, and meet” immigration networking event in Fredericton, they underscore the unequal power relations between white settler hosts and racialized newcomers. Welcoming is practiced only as long as this power dynamic is maintained, preserving Fredericton as the “property of unmarked settler whiteness” (Allain et al. 2019, 10). Immigrants who choose to leave Fredericton are seen as defying the norms of guest-host relations. This finding illustrates that immigration may function as a problematic symbol in the “dreams of brighter futures” of aspiring gateways when their actions fall back on established performances of “state-sanctioned multiculturalism” (Allain et al. 2019, 5).

At the same time, aspiring gateways also reflect important *potentially* inclusive places. Practitioners, scholars, and journalists have celebrated Dayton, Ohio’s “Welcome Dayton” process, for example, as a community-driven model of intentional welcoming grounded in a social justice perspective (Housel et al. 2018; McDaniel et al. 2019). In a city with an immigrant population of less than five percent, the process centered around the question: “what if Dayton was to become intentionally welcoming to immigrants?” This process, according to Housel et al.

(2018, 386), reflects “an unfolding of and continuous aspiration towards the latent potential of community.” By choosing the welcoming process, residents and city officials in Dayton transitioned away from the “acquiescence of current reality and toward critical, creative, and engaged participation in societal transformation” (Housel et al. 2018, 391). This research suggests that the activities of aspiring gateways to recruit newcomers may not be purely instrumental projects aimed at economic development.

This article contributes to these ongoing discussions of NIDs, immigrant gateway typologies, and immigrant receptivity by analyzing recent developments in Atlantic Canadian communities.

RESEARCH METHODS

The findings for this study are drawn primarily from 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants working in the immigration field, across seven urban communities in Atlantic Canada. Prior to conducting these interviews, we reviewed policy documents and government websites, namely: the immigration websites and policy documents of the four provincial governments, LIP documents and newsletters, and City initiatives. Combining interviews with document analysis is a common “within-method” strategy of data triangulation in qualitative research (Natow 2019). This initial scoping review informed our interview guides and helped us to identify potential participants. Data triangulation is also important in open-ended, inductive studies because it allows us to corroborate information, compare narratives, and to discover points of tension across the complementary methodological techniques (Warshawsky 2014).

We conducted the interviews in two phases, between June 2018 and September 2019.

To examine the broader urban landscape of immigration in Atlantic Canada, we interviewed all seven coordinators of LIPs in Atlantic Canada (St. John's, Halifax, Fredericton, Greater Moncton, Saint John, Cape Breton, and PEI). These interviews allow us to chart immigrant-receptivity activity across Atlantic Canada. We asked participants about their involvement with the LIP, its evolution and focus, the opportunities and challenges of local migration-related practices, and for their perspectives on migration-related change in their region more generally.

We also conducted fifteen interviews with key informants whose work touches on the immigration sector in St. John's, including participants from the public, non-profit, and private sectors. We asked participants about their organization's involvement in immigrant receptivity efforts in St. John's and about their perceptions of migration-related change in St. John's. As a medium-sized city with a small settlement sector (St. John's has one immigrant settlement provider), the fifteen interviews we conducted allowed us to reach saturation, spanning diverse perspectives from the major advocates for immigration and immigrants in St. John's. Both phases of interviews ranged in length from 45 to 75 minutes and were conducted in person (with the exception of six of the LIP interviews, which we conducted by telephone). We transcribed all interviews verbatim and coded them inductively according to their emerging themes. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the 22 interview participants by location and sector.

TABLE 1—CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS (N= 22)

PROVINCE	LOCATION	SECTOR/ORGANIZATION TYPE
Newfoundland & Labrador (16)	St. John’s (16)	Non-Profit Organization (9)
New Brunswick (3)	Cape Breton (1)	Local Immigration Partnership (7)
Nova Scotia (2)	Charlottetown (1)	Private Sector (4)
Prince Edward Island (1)	Fredericton (1)	Public Sector (2)
	Halifax (1)	
	Moncton (1)	
	Saint John (1)	

We present our findings in two parts. In the next section, we discuss the central themes of our interviews with LIP representatives across Atlantic Canada. In the following section, we focus on the case study: St. John’s.

“WE WANT THOSE PEOPLE:” WELCOMING COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS IN ATLANTIC CANADIAN COMMUNITIES

Although Atlantic Canadian communities are not classic new destinations, their dynamics are important for understanding the evolving geographies of immigrant receptivity. In this section, we draw on our interviews with LIP coordinators to consider the points of departure between this region and NIDs. As we show, Atlantic Canada’s aspiring gateways have become important sites of state-driven experimentation in the involvement of non-state actors in delivering settlement supports, and retention and welcoming community initiatives.

All eighteen Census Metropolitan Area and Census Agglomerations in Atlantic Canada had immigrant proportions less than 10% in 2016, and only five had immigrant shares greater than 5% (Halifax, Charlottetown, Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John). As Figure 1 shows, most of these locations do not exhibit the NID trait of rapid growth in immigration recognized by

scholars such as Massey (2008) and Zúñiga and Hernández-León (2009). Of these, Charlottetown most closely reflects the NIDs characteristic of “rapid change” from a “small base” (Winders 2014, 154): in the decade after 2006, its immigrant population increased by 148%, from 2,555 to 6,335. It is important to note PEI’s particularly acute challenge with retention: only 16% of immigrants who landed there in 2011 still resided in that Province five years later (Statistics Canada 2016). The question of permanence – and the potential impermanency – in new destination status is a uniting thread across this context and other NIDs (see Winders 2014).

Like NIDs, newcomers arriving in these destinations may “know little about” them (Winders 2014, 160). One participant referred to the “shock” value involved in moving from an international city of millions of people to a small city like Moncton. Moncton seems “like a park, you know?” she explained. “We had an [employee] from Italy and on his first day he arrived he said, ‘could you tell me where the best men’s shoe store is?’” she continued. “We don’t have those: shoe stores, I thought in my mind ‘this probably isn’t going to go well.’” Newcomers to aspiring gateways like Moncton may have little pre-existing knowledge of the community, reflecting a common experience with NIDs.

None of these destinations are “new.” They all have settler colonial histories (Reid 2016). Nova Scotia was a gateway for loyalists fleeing the American Revolution, including free Black loyalists. Halifax, Nova Scotia, was once the central landing point for all immigrants to Canada. The island of Newfoundland did not experience the “explosive colonization,” as did the Maritime provinces, yet in other ways it has also served as a gateway at different times (ibid.). Gander International Airport on the island of Newfoundland – the setting of the Broadway musical ‘Come from Away’ – was a geopolitically strategic gateway for Communist defectors

from Cuba, Poland, Romania, and East Germany, who used the “Gander connection” to claim asylum in Canada (Martin 1985). These histories are important in Atlantic Canada as they are routinely called up to promote immigration, aligning with Walton-Roberts et al.’s (2019, 353) assertion that “leveraging stories of place” has become a crucial dimension of place-based immigration policy.

In the 21st century, attracting and retaining newcomers has become a key mantra for aspiring gateways in Atlantic Canada, who see immigration as imperative to rewriting their demographic and economic fortunes. As one participant explained, “There’s a real sense [that] we need to save our communities. We need to save our schools, and there’s been a lot in the paper about hospital closures, school closures, and so ... that risk, when population is in rapid decline, this is all of what’s at risk.” This comment echoes the experiences of midwestern US NIDs who also experienced profound economic restructuring and labour shortages due to out-migration and population aging (Marrow 2011; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005). But attracting and retaining immigrants in smaller cities is a challenge. Another participant noted that “If we expect a person from Shanghai, China, to come and settle down in Fredericton, I think it’s a long shot, right? [...]” These statements present immigration as a solution to demographic crisis and positioning within the urban hierarchy, following research on “downscaled” cities which see immigration and diversity as symbols of their survival (Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2010; Filomeno 2017; Pottie-Sherman 2018).

Looking more closely, Atlantic Canada also reveals how the evolving relationships between state and non-state actors shape the geographies of immigrant receptivity. One of the central challenges for Canadian regionalization policy is that settlement support is a large center phenomenon. Minor destinations have fewer immigrant service providers (ISPs), immigrant

advocacy organizations, weaker ethnic networks, and less mainstream experience with migration and diversity compared to major gateways. In the words of one participant, “IRCC [the federal ministry of immigration] hasn’t quite determined how to support immigrants across Canada, other than through large center models where settlement services are provided.” The neoliberalization of immigration and settlement policy in Canada has placed more responsibility for immigrant settlement on non-state actors – ISPs, LIPs, employers, and higher education institutions – to address this “spatial mismatch” (Flynn and Bauder 2015, 546; Mukhtar et al. 2016). Our research illustrates how this multi-tiered system is evolving to address particular challenges faced by aspiring gateways. This system is producing some successes, while other outcomes are more ambiguous. In the remainder of this section, we focus on two kinds of non-state actors that have become integral to this system: LIPs and the private sector.

Local Immigration Partnerships

Since 2013, LIPs have become crucial pillars of settlement support in seven communities in Atlantic Canada (see Table 2), through the funding of coalitions of state and non-state actors, from municipal recreation departments, to universities and schools, police and fire departments, or health services in addition to ethnocultural organizations and ISPs.

Table 2. LIPs in the Atlantic Provinces

LIP Name	Province/Focus	Contract Holder	Year Established
Halifax Local Immigration Partnership	NS – urban	Halifax Regional Municipality	2013
Prince Edward Island Immigration Partnership	PEI – rural/urban	Immigrant service provider	2015
St. John’s Local Immigration Partnership	NL – urban	Municipal government	2015
Greater Moncton Local Immigration Partnership	NB – urban	Municipal government	2015
Local Immigration Partnership Council of Fredericton	NB – urban	Ignite Fredericton	2015

Saint John Local Immigration Partnership	NB – urban	Saint John Human Development Council	2017
Cape Breton Local Immigration Partnership	NS – rural/urban	Cape Breton Partnership	2017

The development of a “one stop shop” mapping all relevant community supports for immigrants is an outcome of many LIPs across Canada (e.g., mynewstjohns.ca; IRCC 2013). In the words of one coordinator, “that’s the beauty of the LIP. We’re meant to be kind of a neutral body that tries to bring people together.” Our findings underscore recent arguments about LIPs as crucial avenues for the state to encourage multi-sectoral place-based support for immigrant settlement (Walton-Roberts et al. 2019).

In Fredericton, for example, the LIP was instrumental in encouraging the City to approve a formal immigration policy by raising awareness of the “contributions” of immigrants to society. In doing so, it engendered a greater commitment by city officials and personnel, including the introduction of a dedicated immigration portfolio on Fredericton’s City council. This increased commitment has translated into the City becoming “more open to listening to [the LIPs] propositions.” This example illustrates the place-based contributions of LIPs which take into account the “relevance of geographical and institutional context and the incorporation of local knowledge” (Walton-Roberts et al. 2019, 347).

While LIPs are often urban partnerships, the model is flexible and recognizes that larger centers are hubs for surrounding municipalities and rural areas. As Table 2 shows, two LIPs in Atlantic Canada serve both urban and rural populations. PEI’s LIP represents a coalition spanning the entire province, including two cities (Charlottetown, the capital, and Summerside), and a string of smaller communities and towns with populations under 1,500. As one participant explained, this mandate allows a network of smaller places to “access the same types of support that would enable them, empower them really, to support their immigrant residents.” Similarly,

Cape Breton's LIP represents Cape Breton island which contains Sydney and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (see Figure 1), four smaller municipalities, and many rural communities. This mandate is both an opportunity – to extend the LIPs' reach – and a challenge, for in the words of one participant, “the needs of a newcomer living in Ashby which is in the Sydney area [an urban community], are much different than the needs of a newcomer living in Ingonish [a rural community].”

In line with other research, our study illustrates that LIPs are playing a crucial role in shaping welcoming communities. Their activities also reflect and enable the neoliberalization of immigration policy in Canada. On one hand, their flexibility means that LIP boundaries can match geographies of aspiring gateways. On the other hand, this flexibility dovetails with the downloading of service responsibilities onto the local level, addressing the “spatial mismatch” between where immigrants live and where supports are located (Flynn and Bauder 2015, 546). LIPs also mitigate the potential for duplication in service delivery at the local level, supporting the neoliberal imperative to ‘do more with less.’

Private Sector

The private sector has also taken on an increasingly important – and state sanctioned – role in the localization of Canadian immigration and settlement policy in Atlantic Canada.

One of the key developments in this regard, has been the Atlantic Immigration Partnership Pilot (AIPP), which launched in 2016. The AIPP is an agreement between the Atlantic Provinces and the federal government to attract and retain immigrants by formalizing multi-sector partnerships between employers, ISPs, and the state. The Pilot offers permanent residency to newcomers who receive a job offer from a designated employer (Government of

Canada 2019). Employers must partner with an ISP, agree to “foster a welcoming workplace,” provide non-seasonal, full-time work, and demonstrate “preparedness to receive and meet the settlement needs of international applicant(s) and accompanying family members” (Nova Scotia Immigration 2019). In exchange for these commitments, the federal government waives the \$1,000 per worker Labour Market Impact Assessment application fee usually required for international hires. In contrast to temporary worker programs, this pilot reverses Max Frisch’s famous adage, “we asked for workers, we got people instead.” Rather, the Atlantic region asked the federal government for people, and one response has been for the state to provide workers and hope that they stay. From its launch in 2016 to March of 2019, 1,896 employers participated in the Pilot, resulting in 2,535 principle applicants (not including families) offered permanent residency (Government of Canada 2019).

While the AIPP aims to address human capital deficits, it also represents an acknowledgement that access to full-time employment is a necessary but not sufficient condition to retain immigrants in non-traditional destinations. For example, Riverside Lobster International, a lobster packing plant on Nova Scotia’s south shore is a Pilot-designated employer. The company is now offering daycare, housing, and transportation to attract immigrant workers (Alhmidi 2019). Once workers arrive, a “community committee” organized by the company helps their families access needed services (Allen 2019). This program intends to generate more permanency in non-traditional destinations, which may be accustomed to “small trickle” of temporary workers and have gotten “used to them coming and leaving,” as one LIP coordinator explained. In this way, the AIPP also implicates other non-state actors, such as LIPs and ISPs who must in turn “educate the communities [where] they’re staying that not only are they staying, but this is an opportunity.”

This Pilot also encouraged the private sector to take on new settlement responsibilities by engaging state actors. Each province is responsible for generating enough employer interest in the program to fill the visa quota the federal government allocates to each province. If few employers are interested, these visas can be lost to another location. As one LIP coordinator stated, “it’s like, Halifax you’re up. But if you don’t then you lose your remaining space to another city or province. So there’s a lot of pressure to meet that [quota] because *we want those people*” [our emphasis]. Other participants also emphasized this pressure, suggesting that a place-based policy like the Pilot has the potential downside of introducing new dimensions of inter-regional competition (Walton-Roberts et al. 2019). Along similar lines, another participant noted how “people from all over Canada [saying] we want that program too.” Since the AIPP’s implementation, the federal government has also launched a “Northern Pilot” intended to drive immigration in northern Ontario (Government of Canada 2019). In this way, the Atlantic region has acted as a laboratory for new regional immigration policy models.

The AIPP exposes ongoing tensions between the potential of multi-sector relationships in enabling the positive incorporation of newcomers, and the dilemmas introduced when employers have more power in the realm of immigration. Receptivity hinges on economic participation, as Allain et al. (2019) emphasize. This program also recognizes that the successful retention of immigrants in aspiring gateways requires attention to many other dimensions of community support. At the same time, to create place stickiness, the AIPP relies on visas attached to places where there may be no settlement supports other than those their employer provides. As previous research has shown, there are Canadian examples of businesses which devote substantial resources to support their workers, but immigrant workers are also unlikely to speak out against abuses of the system (Flynn and Bauder 2015). The place stickiness engineered by the AIPP

could act as a yoke, tethering newcomers and their families to communities with limited supports.

In summary, these communities are active in the immigration arena even though they are among the least significant gateways (numerically) in Canada. Aspiring gateways have to be understood, then, as substantial nodes shaping the geography of immigrant receptivity. LIPs and place-based visas such as the AIPP have become key strategies of aspiring gateways in Atlantic Canada looking to attract but also retain newcomers. While these efforts have had some success, they are also entangled with various ambiguities. Any jurisdiction looking to this region for innovation should be aware of these realities.

“LIVE, WORK, AND STAY” IN ST. JOHN’S: CANADA’S EASTERNMOST CITY AS A MIGRATION
DESTINATION

Several dimensions distinguish NL from the maritime provinces, including that it did not enter the Canadian Confederation until 1949. NL occupies a relational as well as topologically peripheral position within Canada, both geographically isolated and reliant on a boom and bust natural resource economy centered on the fishery and offshore oil (Graham & Pottie-Sherman 2020). A substantial portion of the province’s population relies on extended intra-national labor mobility, including long-distance commuting to Alberta (Walsh 2012). After the oil price collapse in 2015, by 2018, the unemployment rate reached 15.5 percent (the highest in Canada by 9 percent) and the provincial debt load reached \$14.7 billion (Government of Canada 2018). NL has the lowest immigrant population in Canada, and while most immigrants in the province reside in St. John’s, immigrants comprise only four percent of the population in that city

(Statistics Canada 2017). With an unfriendly labor market, challenging weather, and geographic isolation, NL struggles to retain immigrants and refugees (Fang et al. 2018).

There is increasing state-level consensus that immigration is necessary to address multi-layered economic and demographic challenges. In 2017, the Province launched *The Way Forward* on Immigration, stating that it would focus on “ensuring that Newfoundland and Labrador becomes a destination of choice for newcomers and their families, while also enticing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians abroad to return to their home province” (Government of NL 2016). The dual intent of attracting and retaining newcomers as well as repatriating NLeers reflects longstanding patterns of out-migration. *The Way Forward* promises to raise immigration levels by 50 %, to 1700 new immigrants per year. This modest figure represents the province’s attempt to mitigate the potential economic threat that immigration symbolizes in a province with high out-migration. As one participant explained, “We have got time to get it right...we haven’t seen a huge influx so it has given us that time to prepare so now we have got to get it right, *we have to get it right*” [our emphasis]. This statement contrasts with much of the scholarship on new destinations, which do not foresee the arrival of new populations (Winders 2014; McAreavey 2017).

Welcoming in NL means building consensus about immigration in a predominantly white, homogenous context (Baker et al. 2015) where “mainlanders” are also outsiders in NL, Newfoundlanders are outsiders in Canada, and Labradorians are marginalized vis-à-vis the island of Newfoundland. A recurring theme of our interviews concerned the challenges created by these overlapping layers of insider/outsider status. In Atlantic Canada, the term “come from away” (popularly, ‘CFA’) has long been used to refer to a “visitor from beyond” and residents who are originally from the mainland. The more recent Come from Away phenomenon (that is,

popularized by the success of the musical, *Come from Away*, which celebrates Newfoundlanders' hospitality) represents an ambiguous unifying narrative for the welcoming movement and municipal projects such as Welcome NL. This tension is also reflected in debates about dropping the term or substituting "Newfoundlander by Choice" to more positively define newcomers. Like NIDs, immigration in NL represents "new faces in new places" (Massey 2008). These debates illustrate the complexity of welcoming projects in aspiring gateways with layered core-periphery relationships.

Immigration is not a defining narrative of the province's recent past. NL's low levels of immigration today have also contributed to, as one participant put it, a pervasive "notion that immigration is something recent." Proponents of immigrant receptivity have emphasized NL's European colonial migration history in their efforts to raise awareness about the benefits of immigration. "Welcome NL" is a Provincial Government initiative in partnership with the non-profit organization Municipalities of Newfoundland and Labrador running consultations on building welcoming municipalities across the province. These consultation meetings feature discussions about historical migration flows. As one coordinator explained,

immigration has been a huge part of the history of this place going way, way back. So the Spanish Fleet to the Portuguese and ... [...] And so the notion that immigration is something recent, that's another big myth that we sort of tackled early on in the consultations. And it was really... that was the kind of heartwarming moment in many instances where people were sort of saying, oh yeah, we had so and so and that particular business in town that was run by this Palestinian family for X number of years.

In other words, part of the task of creating a welcoming NL is making the province's experience with migration and settlement, including its colonial history, more visible and "recallable." Low retention rates have also shaped how the public sees immigrants because of the underlying expectation that newcomers will eventually leave. As one participant (a former refugee) put it, it is "customary to ask, 'when are you going to go back home?'" This expectation can be alienating for newcomers. The question is not intended to be offensive, but "it's because [NL] is accustomed to be passing through," he noted, continuing "the culture in [NL] is 'we take care of ourselves, because we're an isolated region,' and everybody else is just coming through. Landing here, refueling, and moving somewhere else." As a consequence of these experiences of peripherality, Newfoundlanders may be welcoming, but on the "surface." This experience as an in-between space – on the edge of the North Atlantic, part of Canada but not quite part of it, "not fully brought fully under its the auspices of the logic and development trajectories that characterize a center" (Simon 2010, 40) – shapes its receptivity to immigration.

There is also hesitancy to embrace immigration because of the political divide between St. John's, home to half of the province's population, and the rest of the province. As one participant noted, this divide makes promoting immigration a risky political strategy in rural communities, where the perception is that "nothing is being done" to keep young people from leaving. "I think that is our biggest barrier right now," explained one participant in St. John's, referring to the challenges of building province-wide consensus on immigration. She continued: "I have actually heard people say this out loud, [it's] the political system that is tied to it... [...] If you're a local politician coming out talking about immigration, you may not get elected. So are you going to talk about immigration?"

St. John's city government has become active in the immigration arena, including by formally housing the St. John's Local Immigration Partnership since 2015. The mayor and some city councilors make regular public statements about the value of immigration, including promoting St. John's as a place to "live, work, and stay." This version of the more popular adage "live, work, and play" references the local imperative to both recruit and *retain* immigrants and young people. Echoing urban entrepreneurial strategies to attract the creative class, this statement also strikes us as acknowledging the difficulties of living on the edge, both topologically and relationally.

Austerity politics and an "extreme cost sensitivity" limit the City's ability to address some of the central settlement and integration challenges identified by immigrants. Not having access to reliable public transit, for example, was a recurring theme of our interviews. Today, like many other new immigrant destinations, St. John's lacks the critical masses necessary to sustain a large number of ethnic entrepreneurs, although its slowly growing immigrant population has diversified demands for cultural products and services. In the words of one participant: "it is not like we have a Chinatown or Koreatown." This statement has to be critically examined in light of past urban planning decisions which erased immigrants' marks on the urban fabric. During the period of urban renewal in the mid-20th century, portions of the downtown were slated for "slum clearance" and redeveloped. Phyne and Knott (2016, 173) have documented the presence of Lebanese and Chinese immigrants on New Gower Street, including eleven Lebanese immigrant-owned businesses and seven Chinese immigrant-owned businesses operating in the 1940s. Wright (2017) notes that this area was one of the central spaces in which "Chinese and non-Chinese residents encountered each other" in early 20th century St. John's. As Phyne and Knott (2016, 167) write, however, "by the early 1940s, plans were initiated that over

the next 20 years resulted in the resettlement of this population elsewhere in St. John's, including New Gower.

Several participants complained that the province and city were overemphasizing the economic benefits of immigrants, rather than taking a more holistic approach.

since there's been the problem with outmigration and low birth rate and an aging population, immigration has been the go-to word in plan or strategy to increase population here...[...] it's more of, 'Okay, we need immigration to fix this problem.' Right? That's the way it is now. It needs to move to where we see immigration as a *necessary part of life*. [our emphasis]

Among our participants, there was a sense of frustration that by now, the "problems" NL faces in retaining immigrants are well-understood, and that the next task is to generate creative solutions.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: DECENTERING NEW IMMIGRANT DESTINATIONS

Our contribution is to ongoing debates about 'how and from where' theory about immigrant experiences develops. In this article, following the logic of scholarship decentering urban studies, we have sought to decenter research on immigrant receptivity by considering what the NIDs concept explains about Atlantic Canada's immigration experience; and, what it does not. Our approach acknowledges the "locatedness" of all theory (Lawhon et al. 2016, 1612-14) as a pathway to greater understanding of the plural geographies of immigrant receptivity. This article had two objectives: to re-examine the concept of the immigrant gateway in light of the experiences and activities of minor destinations; and to consider the geographies of immigrant

receptivity in Atlantic Canada. Although they are not experiencing rapid demographic change and are minor destinations in the Canadian immigration landscape, they are highly active in the immigration arena. Aspiring gateways require, then, a rethinking of assumptions formed about NIDs, namely their experience of reactivity in the face of unanticipated and significant demographic change. In conclusion, we highlight three central themes emerging from our study.

First, our analysis highlights the evolving relationships between state and non-state actors in Canadian immigration policy. Non-state actors are increasingly involved in matters of immigration and settlement in Atlantic Canada, a finding which aligns with the broader neoliberalization of Canadian immigration policy (e.g., Trudeau and Veronis 2009; Dobrowolsky 2013; Flynn and Bauder 2015; Lowe et al. 2017). The state has given the private sector more control over the recruitment and settlement of immigrants in aspiring gateways in Atlantic Canada. As the AIPP illustrates, this trend also involves the downloading of settlement service responsibility onto employers, as well as the responsibility of creating welcoming environments capable of retaining workers and their families in places with few settlement services and small ethnic networks. This theme aligns with U.S.-based analyses of NIDs, which have also emphasized the importance of employers in recruiting workers and their families (Zúñiga & Hernández-León 2005).

Second, our study illustrates the powerful role of public discourse in immigrant receptivity. In contrast to NIDs, immigration plays a significant discursive role in Atlantic Canada, where dominant narratives celebrate the potential of immigration and the risks of failing to attract and retain newcomers. LIPs and other welcoming projects “leverage stories of place” (Walton-Roberts et al. 2019, 353) to encourage communities to view migration as part of their local identity. While these efforts involve “well-rehearsed” discourses of Canadian

multiculturalism (Allain et al. 2019), they also engage with localized understandings of migration and gateway status. In smaller communities accustomed to decades of youth out-migration and isolation from contemporary immigration other than temporary workers, LIPs must convince residents that immigration is an opportunity. For NL, if immigration is to be the way forward, welcoming movements must address settler colonialism, its status as an in-between space, and narratives of loss associated with resource collapses and labour migration. Within this context, debates about the expressions “come from away,” “live, work, and stay,” and “Newfoundlander by choice” represent negotiations of peripherality. They reflect, as Aure et al. (2018, 54) note, that “places and landscapes are always in motion; they are work-in progress and stories so far.”

A third theme concerns the ambiguities and mixed messages of the place-based immigration policies of aspiring gateways. Immigration discourses in Atlantic Canada reflect tensions between instrumentalized framings of immigrant workers and the recognition that it is necessary to move beyond the instrumental. Job offers attached to visas may promise economic integration, but aspiring gateways also recognize that other spheres matter for long-term retention. But employer hospitality can also be disciplinary (Allain et al. 2019), and place-based visas may bind immigrant workers and their families to places with few resources. Further research is needed to examine newcomers’ experiences of the support services they access and in the communities in question, as well as on the local economies of integration as organized by employers.

While aspiring gateways reflect an entrepreneurial approach to immigrant receptivity, they are also locations where *how* best to welcome and retain newcomers is a guiding question for local actors. As such, we find them potentially inspirational in times of increased hostility to

international migration, especially as peripheral or disempowered regions, cities, and towns may act as symbolic anchors for anti-immigrant nationalism (Marrow 2020). Future researchers will need to continue to trace research on the periphery of immigration policy. In making this argument for aspiring gateways, we hope to elicit new conversations across minor destinations.

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