

Regional Collaboration and The Economy of the Burin Peninsula



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Introduction

In the fall of 2009, the Burin Peninsula Regional Council of the Rural Secretariat, partnered with the Department of Geography, Memorial University to explore opportunities and challenges to collaboration in the Burin Peninsula. The research will also investigate how theories associated with the new regionalism and collaborative regional economic development have been applied in circumstances comparable to the Burin Peninsula and explore the potential for transferring lessons and approaches from these models to the Burin Peninsula. The objectives of the research were: a) to suggest opportunities for positively impacting economic growth and diversification on the Burin Peninsula based on the experiences of other rural regions, and b) to address gaps within the academic literature, in particular the application of rural regional governance models and approaches to regional economic development within the rural Canadian, and particularly Newfoundland and Labrador context.

The Burin Peninsula Regional Council is tasked with the responsibility to review and provide commentary to government on the long-term regional sustainability of the Burin Peninsula. Through its work to date the Council has come to realize that to achieve long-term sustainability for the region, communities, business and citizens alike will have to both think and act regionally. Community engagement sessions conducted by the Council in 2007 and again in 2009 further reinforced these issues and the need for communities and citizens to work together more, supporting one another and sharing services and resources where possible. The participants of these sessions believe that working together is a key part of the equation in both communities and the region as a whole becoming sustainable in the long-term.

The Burin Peninsula Regional Council identified three priorities in their 2008-2011 Activity Plan: regionalism, economic growth and diversification, and demographic change (Burin Peninsula Regional Council, 2008). Through discussions with community residents and review of documents this report contributes to the understanding and discussion of each of the three priorities.

This report summarizes interviews conducted with 16 individuals of the Burin Peninsula. Discussions focused on previous and current regional collaboration examples, barriers to collaboration, opportunities for economic development, and the future of the Burin Peninsula. The report serves to identify opportunities and challenges within the region and facilitate discussion to assist the Burin Peninsula region in cooperation, collaboration, and creating a prosperous future.

Data Collection

Information for this report was collected through three sources: interviews with community residents, focused dialogues sessions, and existing reports, documents, and literature. The Burin Peninsula Regional Council identified community leaders with diverse knowledge and experiences of the region. In brainstorming individuals, the Council strived to include geographic representation from all areas of the Burin Peninsula, businesses, volunteer organizations, and youth. Invitations to participate in an interview were circulated by email to each of the 21 individuals identified. Responses from the individuals selected were positive and 16 interviews were conducted from December 2009 to February 2010. The timeline for interviews proved difficult for a number of individuals who did not participate in an interview. To accommodate commitments and travel requirements, interviews were conducted in-person (n=9) and via the telephone (n=7). Interviews were a semi-structured series of open-ended questions exploring illustrations of collaboration, barriers to collaboration, economic development opportunities, and the future of the Burin Peninsula. Interviews ranged from 45 – 120 minutes in duration, with an approximate average of 60 minutes.

Two focused dialogues were held with members of the Burin Peninsula Regional Council. Each session provided an opportunity to validate initial findings and brainstorm additional barriers to collaboration, economic development opportunities, and the future of the Burin Peninsula.

Additional perspectives on the Burin Peninsula were collected from reviewing publically available reports. Reports were reviewed for organizations such as Human Resources, Labour and Employment, the Rural Secretariat, Schooner Regional Development Corporation, and Statistics Canada. A list of the reports utilized in this research is contained at the conclusion of this document.

The research activities were submitted to and reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research to ensure research activities adhere to the nationally accepted policy. The Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research found the project to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy.



The Burin Peninsula Region

The Burin Peninsula Rural Secretariat region consists of the area south of, but not including, Swift Current (see Figure 1). The region encompasses the entire peninsula. A of communities can be Rural Secretariat's website – www.gov.nl.ca/rural. Throughout this report the Burin Peninsula Rural Secretariat Region will be referred to as the Burin Peninsula.

Population

The population of the Burin Peninsula, 21,600 according to the 2006 Statistics Canada Census, is decreasing (Statistics Canada, 2006). Since 1991, the region has experienced a negative total net migration, resulting in population loss (Rural Secretariat, 2007). From 2001-2006, the population of the Burin Peninsula decreased by 8.9% or 2,100 people. As a province, Newfoundland and Labrador experienced a population decrease of 1.5% during the same period.

Smaller communities throughout the Burin Peninsula have witnessed a more profound decrease in population than towns in the region (Rural Secretariat, 2007). The demographic dynamics of the region demonstrate an out-migration of young adults from the region. The rate of population loss is much higher than the 1.5% population decrease experienced by the province of Newfoundland and Labrador during the same period (Rural Secretariat, 2007, p. 37).

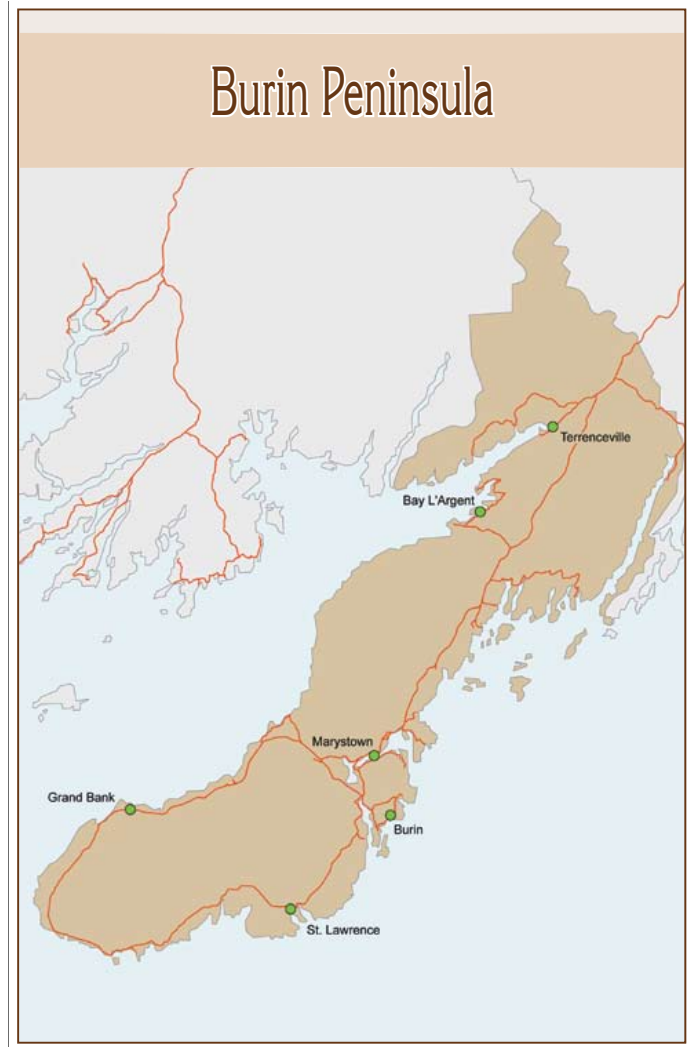
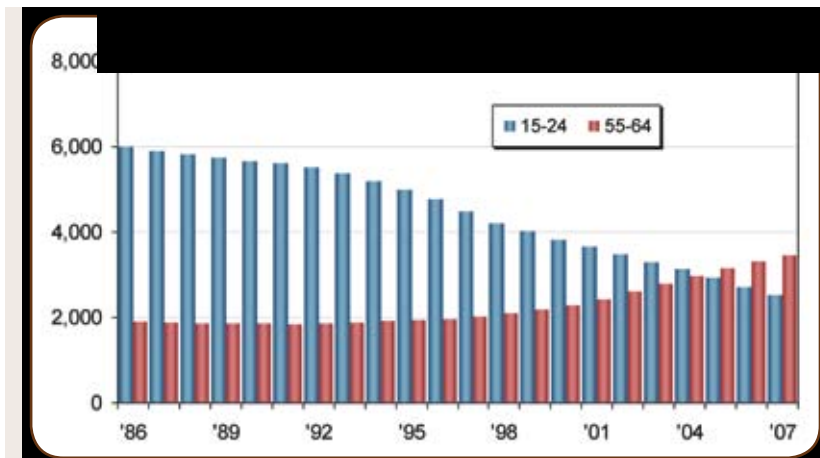


Figure 1. Map of Burin Peninsula Rural Secretariat Region
(Source: Rural Secretariat, 2007)

Figure 2. Potential Labour Market Entrants and Leavers, 2007

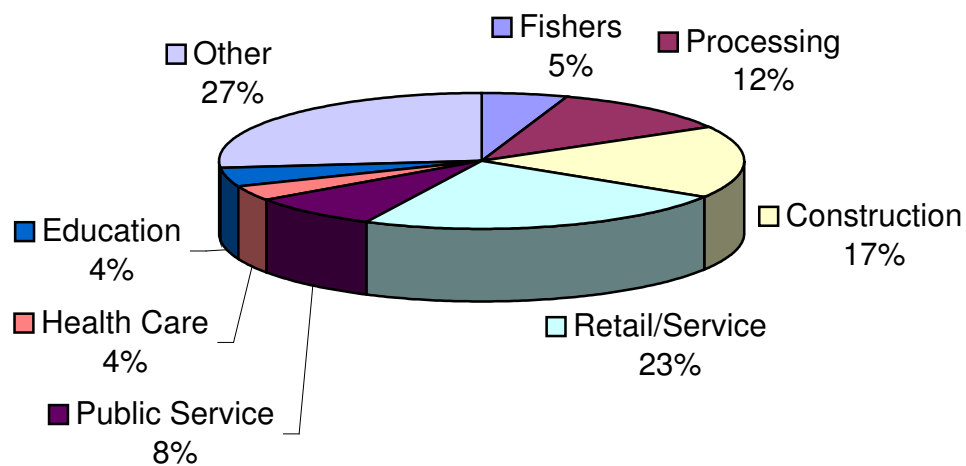


Source: Rural Secretariat, 2007

Economy of the Burin Peninsula

The economy of the region is diverse yet characterized by four main sectors: manufacturing, fishing, health and social services, and retail trade (Human Resources, Labour and Employment, 2007). These four sectors comprise 57% of the workers in the region. Employment by sectors of the economy further illustrates the diversity in the Burin Peninsula (see Figure 3). The Burin Peninsula's economy was built upon the fishery, not dissimilar to other regions of Newfoundland (Burin Peninsula Regional Council, 2009). Grady and Kapsalis (2002) noted the Burin Peninsula region has a seasonal unemployment rate of up to 26%.

Figure 3. Employment by Sector, 2008



Source: Schooner Regional Development Corporation, 2008

Illustrations of Collaboration and Barriers to Working Together

Interview participants were asked to share regional collaboration examples of organizations and initiatives in the Burin Peninsula. Participants discussed a number of current and previous collaboration initiatives and organizations and associations. Discussions focused on how collaborative initiatives started, who is/was involved, why they were important, and why the initiative has continued or no longer exists. Participants were also asked to identify barriers to collaboration existing in the Burin Peninsula.

Collaboration Initiatives

A participant remarked the Burin Peninsula has a “culture of cooperation” which has been fostered through necessity, survival, and adversity. The culture of cooperation noted by the participant emerged throughout each interview. Further interview participants contributed that cooperation in the region tends to be focused on key themes or section, which change over time. Most of the regional collaboration noted by participants occurs at the grassroots level. These groups recognize the value of collaboration and the benefits that can be ascertained.

Below are highlights of the collaboration initiatives described in the Burin Peninsula. The list below is by no means exhaustive of all collaboration efforts; rather, the list should be considered illustrative of some of the region’s initiatives.

Burin Peninsula Partners Network

For the past three years, a group of government and community-based funding agencies have come together as the Burin Peninsula Partners Network. The network’s members include federal departments, provincial departments, and community/regional organizations. Through monthly meetings the Network encourages sharing of information on services and programs available in the region.

Burin Peninsula Trade Network

The Burin Peninsula Trade Network engages businesses from the Burin Peninsula seeking to export their goods and/or services into the St. Pierre et Miquelon market. Current exports to the French territory include products such as aggregate and sod. The Trade Network has existed for the past 1-2 years and has witnessed a steady flow of products to St. Pierre et Miquelon. Developing trust and relationships with organizations in St. Pierre et Miquelon is a challenge for the Trade Network. The College of the North Atlantic has offered French classes that have assisted in language barriers encountered with exporting goods to the French territory.

Heritage Run Tourism Association

Created in 1992, the Heritage Run Tourism Association is a member-based organization of tourism operators in the Burin Peninsula. The Association has approximately 150 members from throughout the Peninsula and also in St. Pierre et Miquelon and is governed by a volunteer board of directors. Promoting the Burin Peninsula as a tourism destination and fostering the development of tourism attractions are key objectives of the Heritage Run Tourism Association.

The Heritage Run Tourism Association has been successful in attracting funding for projects in the region, such as the View Parks Project and a regional museum project. The View Park project developed new infrastructure to flow people throughout the Burin Peninsula through a series of turn-offs along the highway, each directing visitors to the next View Park. Partnerships and collaboration with multiple municipalities was required. An agreement for maintenance and liability was signed between the Heritage Run Tourism Association and five communities. The View Park project was described as “a breakthrough for trust – people realized that all communities benefit.”

A second project coordinated by the Heritage Run Tourism Association was the regional museum project. This initiative assisted to develop a unique identity for 12 partnering museums. Challenges related to getting volunteer museum board members together in for meetings were encountered, however, the initiative has been successful.

In 2007, the Heritage Run Tourism Association approached the five largest town councils of the region and proposed 40¢ per capita levy to support the activities of the association. The levy has been successful in raising funding for the association to offset costs associated with marketing and human resources.

Regional ATV Trails Association

Recently, 22 regional all terrain vehicle (ATV) groups from across the Burin Peninsula have come together to develop an organization and initiative to connect the ATV trails in the region. The Heritage Run Tourism Association has provided the administrative and financial infrastructure to provide the new organization an opportunity to receive funding through the federal government’s stimulus funding program. As the new regional ATV association builds capacity the responsibility for administration and financial management will be transferred from the Heritage Run Tourism Association. The new association will administer a \$30 membership fee for accessing the trails to offset the expenses of maintenance and liability/insurance.

The Association is working with both government departments and the private sectors. Meetings have been held with the Department of Environment and Conservation to ensure appropriate environmental stewardship, particularly related to the perseveration of bogs and caribou calving grounds. The Association is working with the private sector, primarily ATV retailers, to collect a fee on each unit sold that will be used to support trail maintenance.

Joint Municipal Council

A regional council of the five largest municipalities was created approximately 15 years ago as an opportunity for mayors/councilors to discuss local issues, share information, and discuss regional initiatives. The lack of inclusiveness of the Joint Municipal Council was raised as a concern given the organization only represented the five largest towns in the region. The Joint Municipal Council is no longer active in the region and reasons for its discontinuation relate to conflicts among personalities, politics, and a lack of desire to continue meeting by members.

Schooner Regional Development Corporation

The Schooner Regional Development Corporation is one of the 19 Regional Economic Development Boards in Newfoundland. The Schooner Regional Development Corporation strives to encourage investment, diversify employment, and foster economic development growth in the region. The Corporation has an elected board of directors ensure representation from all sub-regions of the Burin Peninsula.

Shared Services

A number of examples of towns in the Burin Peninsula sharing services were provided. Examples include:

- shared ambulance service in Grand Bank and Fortune,
- shared emergency planning and animal control in Burin and Marystown,
- shared fire services in Burin, Fox Cove, Mortier, Lewin's Cove, and Rushoon, Parker's Cove, Baine Habour,
- Shared sewer, water, and fire fighting training in Grand Bank and Fortune, and
- Joint fire service in Burin and Marystown.



Burin Peninsula Summer Games

Approximately every two years a municipality is selected to host the Burin Peninsula Summer Games. The first games were hosted in 2003 in Grand Bank, followed by summer games in Rushoon/Parker's Cove (2005), and St. Lawrence (2007). The next edition of the Burin Peninsula Summer Games will be hosted in Burin (Herridge, 2009). Sports teams from across the region will be invited to participate in the sports of basketball, softball, soccer, and ball hockey. The Burin Peninsula Summer Games facilitate informal connections between communities through sport.

Barriers to Working Together

In the discussions of examples of regional collaboration initiatives, interview participants identified a number of barriers impeding collaboration. All of the barriers have been grouped into six broad categories: financial, geographical and transportation, knowledge of collaboration and generational, relationship, human resources, and external factors.

Financial Barriers

- The most frequently mentioned financial barrier to collaboration was competition for limited resources and the notion that collaboration will dilute limited financial resources. This perception was noted as a contributing factor for a number of activities not moving forward in the region.
- Very few organizations are able to cover financial expenses for volunteers to attend meetings in the Burin Peninsula. Expenses related to participating in regional initiatives may serve as a barrier.
- Volunteer and community organizations have a heavy reliance on government job creation programs for staff funding which does not necessarily provide stability for staff or the organization. In addition, participants expressed a concern that current funding opportunities do not always correlate with local priorities. The reliance on project funding necessitates that organization apply for funding in non-priority areas to ensure a source of funding. This often places priorities on the 'back burner' until appropriate funding is available. It also inhibits the ability to implement collaboration. strategic plans that have been developed once shared priorities that have been developed.

Geographical and Transportation Barriers

- The physical geography of the Burin Peninsula was expressed as a significant barrier to collaboration as the distance between communities can prevent face-to-face meetings. Further to physical distance, weather was cited as a barrier often preventing transportation in the winter.
- Many members of the region, especially seniors, elect not to travel at night on the highways. This hampers the ability for face-to-face meetings among boards and volunteers.
- The lack of regularly scheduled public transportation between communities of the Burin Peninsula was identified as a barrier. Participants noted existing charter service to St. John's and from Grand Bank/Fortune to the College of the North Atlantic campus. The lack of public transportation between Burin Peninsula communities creates two hindrances. First, it can hinder the ability for groups to meet. Second, and more important to one participant, the lack of public transportation does not permit relationships to develop between communities and their residents. "If you do not travel to other communities you are less likely to build relationships and understand common opportunities and challenges."
- Need to get ensure travelers leave the Trans Canada Highway to visit the Burin Peninsula. Too often, people simply drive by the turn off.
- Prior to the highway, physical isolation was the largest barrier to collaboration. People did not know each other.

Knowledge of Collaboration and Generational Barriers

- There is a lack of understanding of how cooperation and collaboration can benefit the entire region. In some instances, participants explained there can sometimes be a fear of collaboration as the "rules of engagement are either different, flexible, or undetermined".
- Community residents are concerned cooperation and collaboration will lead to amalgamation or a loss of autonomy.
- Many youth in the region view cooperation as a natural and required for the region; in contrast, there are some in the older generation who view the need to "protect their community's turf". This polarization of creates tensions among youth/young adults and 'older generations'.
- "Historic barriers, real or perceived, are still alive and well among some people in all communities throughout the Burin Peninsula which impedes collaboration efforts."

Relationship Barriers

- To build regional initiatives time is required to build relationships and trust. There are few funding opportunities to support relationship building.
- Need to ensure respect exists between all communities of the Burin Peninsula. “We have to respect every community and what they have to offer. It does not matter if you are a community of 7,000 or a community of 500. There is an opportunity for all communities to contribute”
- Individual personalities can interfere with regional initiatives in the Burin Peninsula.
- Municipal leaders are elected to serve and “defend their community’s interest”. This attitude serves as a barrier to cooperation in the region.
- Rivalries between communities in the Burin Peninsula hamper regional initiatives. “Rivalries do not do anything for cooperation on the Burin Peninsula.”
- It can be difficult sometimes for community residents to see developments in neighbouring communities as good for the region. Too often new developments in neighbouring communities are viewed negatively.

Human Resources

- Many regional organizations and initiatives are lead by volunteers. Most participants indicated a concern of volunteer burn out in the Burin Peninsula. Not only do regional organizations required volunteers, regional collaboration initiatives require representatives from existing volunteer organizations that may place increased stress on volunteers.
- A large number of volunteer organizations exist in the Burin Peninsula – estimated at over 300, although some may be inactive. Finding volunteers for each of these organizations can be a challenge.
- As young community residents depart the region there is less potential for new volunteers.

External Influences

- The economic market was noted as a contributing barrier to regional collaboration. When the economic market is good people and communities are more likely to work together.

Opportunities for Future Economic Development

During the interviews participants were asked to brainstorm potential economic development opportunities for the Burin Peninsula region. The economic development opportunities reported are suggestions based on personal experiences and local knowledge. All suggestions would need to be explored further to determine the feasibility of the economic development opportunities. Many parallels exist between the opportunities suggested by interview participants and strategic plans of region-based organizations in the Burin Peninsula, such as the Schooner Regional Development Corporation's strategic economic plan.



Natural Resource Opportunities

Participants suggested a number of natural resource-based economic developments to explore for the region. These included:

- additional fish processing (secondary processing) in the region prior to shipping the product to market
- explore opportunities for local business venture to enter the supply chain for natural resource development
- expanding the development of wind turbines currently in St. Lawrence
- the feasibility of wave power and related technologies
- economic opportunities associated with future oil and gas developments in the region
- potential small businesses related to supply for mining exploration and excavation companies
- investigating opportunities for water bottling in Fortune Bay East
- exploring market options for non-traditional and innovative use of vegetation for medicinal purposes

Throughout western Canada a number of organizations are pursuing the economic development of non-traditional vegetation. In northern Saskatchewan, small business owners are using mushrooms, berries, and syrups for medicinal purposes, ornamentals, and oils as part of an economic diversification strategy (Saskatchewan Environmental Society, 2002).

Tourism

Participants viewed tourism as an opportunity to continue to diversify the economy of the Burin Peninsula. Suggestions for economic development opportunities included:

- services and amenities catering to the ATV trail riders given the new loop trail being constructed in the region
- encourage small scale tourism operators through access to start-up support and financing
- given the number of artisans in the Burin Peninsula a cooperative of artisans may be viable
- explore opportunities for hosting arts and music festival(s) to showcase regional artists as well as celebrate the culture of the region

The cooperative model is being utilized by a number of regional art associations throughout Canada, such as the Winnipeg Beach Art and Culture Cooperative and Arctic Cooperatives Limited. The Winnipeg Beach Art and Culture Cooperative, consisting of approximately 30 members, provides coordinated marketing and promotion for regional artisans. The cooperative incorporates a route-based tourism strategy. Further information is available at www.watchtheweave.ca.

Aquaculture and Agriculture

Aquaculture and agriculture are not currently large industries in the Burin Peninsula. Participants noted the potential for further economic development opportunities in this area, including:

- farmed cod and lobster
- suitable crops for the land, such as cranberries
- mussel developments on west side of the Burin Peninsula
- re-introduction of livestock, such as sheep, in the region

Large-scale commercial aquaculture has a limited history, however, new technology offer great hope for the future (The Economist, 2003). The market for aquaculture is significantly growing. Canadian aquaculture supplied \$2.7 billion of aquaculture imports to the United States in 2004, doubling from 10 years ago (Department of Fisheries and Oceans, 2005). Aquaculture developments were viewed as a natural extension for the region given the Burin Peninsula's rich history and knowledge in fishing.

Optimizing Infrastructure for Competitive Advantages

Participants noted the Burin Peninsula is rich in infrastructure to support existing and new economic development opportunities. Unique examples of infrastructure in the region includes:

- Fortune: The only international port on the Burin Peninsula, ecological reserve for tourism. The international port facilitates trade opportunities to St. Pierre et Miquelon.
- Grand Bank: Manufacturing companies.
- Marystown: Ship building facilities.
- St. Lawrence: Mining and wind farm developments.
- Burin: Land is being re-zoned near the health centre to attract medical companies.

The Rural Policy Institute in the United States recommends regions must identify their unique competitive advantages founded on their distinct economic assets to succeed in the new economy (Drabenstott, 2008). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development declared the new paradigm for rural economic development needs to include competitive advantages of regions. Given the notion of competitive advantages and the current infrastructure the Burin Peninsula appears to be well positioned to define its competitive advantages.



Moving Forward

Interview participants were asked to envision future challenges and opportunities that may be encountered in the Burin Peninsula. For the most part, participants discussed similar themes of barriers to collaboration and future economic development opportunities. Some participants expressed uncertainty of the future of the region, “You don’t have to be Einstein to see all the changes in the past ten years and to be honest with you I am not sure where it all will end.” Interview participants were also asked to describe their optimism for the Burin Peninsula to be a prosperous region in the future.

The following is a summary of their responses.

Challenges Moving into the Future

- Continuation of inter-community competition for limited resources. “At times, we are our own worst enemy”.
- Volunteer burnout is anticipated to increase in the future.
- Out-migration of youth from the region. “Young people are leaving the region, but they are doing it for the right reasons.”
- The ups and downs experienced with natural resources industries make it difficult for young people to remain in the region to ‘wait out’ the down times.
- Misunderstanding and confusion of the mandate of organizations and associations in the Burin Peninsula.
- If all potential developments being discussed for the region come to fruition the demands on municipalities, business community, and volunteers may be greater than anticipated.
- Anticipate that some communities in the Burin Peninsula will experience further population decreases; some community may disappear.
- The regional economy is dependent on external markets. Consequently, the region needs to be proactive to save for the ‘down times’.
- To make evidence-based decisions organizations and associations need to be able to access accurate and useful information and data.

Opportunities Moving into the Future

- Continued relationship with St. Pierre et Miquelon. Unique opportunities for tourism, exporting to the French territory, and access to European markets.
- Building relationships among community residents in the Burin Peninsula is critical for successful collaboration.
- Opportunities for municipal councils to work together again. It is suggested the councils could work on small projects to start off, such as joint tenders for computer equipment to decrease expenses for all communities.

- Anticipation former Burin Peninsula residents will return to the region if employment opportunities become available. Without new employment opportunities a continued out-migration of youth will transpire.
- Optimistic for ongoing operational funding to assist organizations and associations.
- Young adults entering municipal politics.
- Continued strong tie to the region and sense of place among Burin Peninsula residents.

Overall Optimism for the Future

Of the 16 interview participants, 14 participants indicated they were optimistic or very optimistic for the future of the Burin Peninsula. In drawing this conclusion participants noted the existing infrastructure, potential project developments, and the spirit of communities and residents of the region. One participant stated they were not optimistic for the future due to the lack of employment opportunities and the large number of individuals leaving the region. The participant indicated youth and families with young children cannot afford to “sit and wait” for economic development opportunities to materialize. The out-migration of youth deprives the region of long-term residents, new volunteers, labour, and community spirit.

Multiple participants indicated a need for a forum for regional discussions that could serve to build relationships among community residents, organizations, and associations of the region. Although the region is home to many organizations, participants noted current organizations have relatively narrow mandates that limit ability to include all communities or to explore areas of common interests and opportunities for initiatives with mutual benefits.

In speaking with community residents of the Burin Peninsula this report highlights a number of examples collaboration in the region but also challenges and opportunities for the future. Identifying and understanding regional collaboration initiatives and barriers to collaboration can enhance future planning in the region.

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