

# The Industrial City in Transition: A Cultural and Environmental Inventory of Greater Saint John

Robert MacKinnon

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## The Industrial City in Transition: A Cultural and Environmental Inventory of Greater Saint John

LIKE OTHER INDUSTRIAL CITIES, Saint John, New Brunswick, is facing many challenges. Labour force restructuring, the decline of traditional industries, out-migration of the young, population loss to suburbs, low rates of immigration, and an aging public infrastructure have created many challenges for citizens, community organizations, local government, businesses, and community leaders alike. Recent interest and investment in the energy sector in the form of the construction of a liquefied natural gas terminal, the announcement of plans for a second petroleum refinery in the city (Eider Rock), and the prospect of the refurbishment and expansion of the nearby Point Lepreau Nuclear Generating Station have stimulated the economic prospects of this sector. Still, the Saint John urban region has been experiencing significant levels of social and economic adjustment.

This presentation focuses on a unique collaboration between the University of New Brunswick Saint John (UNB Saint John) and several institutions – the New Brunswick Museum, the Saint John Human Development Council, the Atlantic Coastal Action Program, and the Kingston Peninsula Heritage Inc. – a collaboration that has resulted in a Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The project, entitled “The Industrial City in Transition: A Cultural and Environmental Inventory of Greater Saint John,” commenced in March 2004 and its objective is to examine the industrial/post-industrial transition currently underway in the Greater Saint John urban region. Specifically, it is documenting how a relatively small industrial city of 120,000 people is attempting to reshape its economic base, sustain a cultural life, and protect and conserve its natural environment in the face of many forces beyond immediate, local control. Thus, this cultural and environmental inventory of Greater Saint John is addressing a wide array of topics, including social and environmental history, demography and multiculturalism, urban and rural planning, and cultural representations of the city and its environs. This collaboration is also enhancing the research capacity of UNB Saint John and participating community groups, and is providing valuable training opportunities for UNB Saint John students. This Greater Saint John case study can also be viewed as a model of the industrial/post-industrial transition that is currently taking place in other urban settings across North America.

The image of Saint John presented in the regional tourism literature is that of a small city that is low-rise in nature, pedestrian-oriented, and historical in atmosphere – due primarily to the large collection of late-Victorian buildings concentrated in the city’s southern peninsula. Still, the contemporary urban landscape reflects much evidence of the region’s mercantile and industrial character, with waterways, market slips, and port facilities as visible relicts of the importance of shipping, timber, and trade in the city’s history while pulp mills, an oil refinery, railway lines, and former industrial sites (such as the Saint John Dry Dock and the Lantic Sugar Refinery) provide evidence of the city’s industrial character. At the same time, cruise ships are a regular presence in Saint John Harbour in summer, and an aggressive inner city and waterfront revitalization strategy is beginning to show results along the edge of the

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waterfront and throughout the “uptown” district (for example, Harbour Passage walkway, Centre-Beam Place, and new restaurants, bars, and niche businesses in the inner city). These all point to the emergence of new tourism- and quaternary-based economic sectors in Saint John.<sup>1</sup> For example, the 55 cruise ships expected to visit the Port of Saint John during the 2007 summer season are expected to bring more than 130,000 passengers to the city. This is a significant increase over 2006, which saw 34 cruise ships and 88,000 passengers visit the port.<sup>2</sup> New industry associations have also been established, including PropelSJ, whose mandate is to support and sustain the growing information and communications sector, and Fusion, whose mandate is to promote the City of Saint John as a destination for young professionals and entrepreneurs in the 20 to 40 year age cohort.<sup>3</sup> These are some specific examples of an “industrial city in transition.”

This Community-University Research Alliances research programme is organized around four broad and interrelated themes:

- 1) The People of Saint John: A Community and Neighbourhood Profile
- 2) The Environmental History of Saint John
- 3) Urban and Rural Planning and the Changing Shape of Greater Saint John
- 4) Cultural Representations of Greater Saint John

Several distinct projects contribute to each of these broad themes. Under the “People of Saint John” rubric, the character of the urban region’s demographic base is being examined. Often perceived as the “Loyalist City,” the degree to which Saint John can be considered multicultural is emerging in studies of several minority communities in Saint John. An analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of the neighbourhoods that make up the Saint John urban region as well as the scale of labour force restructuring that has taken place in Saint John is underway. The Social Indicators Project is identifying a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators for Greater Saint John that can be used to monitor socio-economic change across the urban region in both inner city and suburban neighbourhoods. Collectively, these projects are exploring the characteristics of an urban region that has been characterized by low levels of in-migration and immigration, an aging labor force, and concentrated pockets of inequality and poverty. Population growth in suburban municipalities and the decline of the central city have been distinctive features of the Saint John urban region since the 1970s. However, the City of Saint John and the surrounding municipalities are anxiously anticipating unprecedented levels of economic activity and related demographic growth associated with several energy-related as well as remedial initiatives underway or announced. Some of the research projects that are central to the “People of Saint John” research theme include the following:

- 1 The quaternary sector refers to high-order tertiary activities, including information and knowledge-based employment. See William Coffey, “The Role and Location of Service Activities in the Canadian Space Economy,” in John N.H. Britton, ed., *Canada and the Global Economy: The Geography of Structural and Technological Change* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), p. 339.
- 2 See *Annual Report 2006*, Saint John Port Authority, and *Port Progress*, June 2007, <http://www.sjport.com/english> (accessed 16 November 2007).
- 3 See <http://propelsj.com/> (accessed 16 November 2007).

- The First Nations Experience in Saint John
- Minorities in Transition: A History of the Black Community, the Jewish Community and the Francophone Community in Saint John
- The Morphology of Saint John: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile
- Labour Force Change in Saint John, 1960-Present
- The Social Indicators Project

The “Environmental History of Saint John” theme traces the impact of human activity on the land, water, and air of the Greater Saint John region as well as on plant and animal life. The several projects under this theme are collectively contributing to the construction of knowledge about environmental sustainability as well as to an academic and public discussion of environmental issues in Greater Saint John. The New Brunswick Museum (NBM) and the Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP) are playing leadership roles in this research theme, and these projects are generally dependent upon field-based research. These projects are all advancing our understanding of the environmental impacts of industrialization on the natural environment of Greater Saint John while enhancing current interpretation programmes at the New Brunswick Museum. Some specific examples of these projects are as follows:

- Lichens as Indicators of Air Quality in the Saint John Region: Establishing a Baseline for Assessing Future Change
- Shallow Water Plant and Mollusc Communities in the Lower Saint John River System
- Understanding Saint John’s Geological Past and Its Cultural Tourism Potential
- Fishers and Fisheries in an Industrial City
- The Extent, Distribution, and Use of Urban Green Space in Greater Saint John

The third research theme of this CURA specifically acknowledges the role that urban planning has played in the evolution of the urban fabric of contemporary Saint John. Modern planning strategies in Saint John began in the 1920s, but the first master plan for the city was not completed until 1946. Planning reached a new level in the 1960s and early 1970s with “slum clearance,” public housing projects, the amalgamation of adjacent municipalities (Simonds Parish and the City of Lancaster), and the development of a comprehensive community plan.<sup>4</sup> The extent to which planning strategies have addressed, or are addressing, a wide range of urban issues in the Greater Saint John region is under investigation by members of this CURA project, and a sample of these projects demonstrates this diversity:

- Urban and Rural Planning Strategies in the Greater Saint John Region
- Post-War Settlement Patterns in Portland Place, 1946-1951
- Twentieth-Century Saint John: The Built Environment

4 Greg Marquis, “Urban Renewal in a Mid-Sized Canadian City: Saint John, 1955-85” (paper presented to the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, 14 May 2005).

- A Rural Community in Transition: A Community Profile of The Kingston Peninsula
- Development of an Urban Neighbourhood Plan for Brookville-Torryburn
- Cultural Rural Tourism and Community Economic Development on the Kingston Peninsula

The fourth theme of this CURA project – “Cultural Representations of Greater Saint John” – addresses the manner in which Greater Saint John has been represented, and is currently being represented, in cultural terms within a variety of media. Projects included in this research theme are enhancing our understanding of the cultural history of the urban region while also assisting the New Brunswick Museum in re-evaluating the position of Greater Saint John in provincial exhibits. These projects are also highlighting the centrality of culture as an important cornerstone of the evolving economy of Greater Saint John. Some specific examples of projects in this research theme include the following:

- The Achievements of the Natural History Society of New Brunswick
- The Vibrant Art Scene of Saint John in the 1930s and 1940s
- The Manner in which Saint John has been Represented in Literary Terms in the Growing Body of Maritime Regional Fiction
- Missionaries and Mariners: Understanding Saint John’s International Connections
- The Church as an Index of Urban Change in Greater Saint John

A central feature of all of these research projects is student training. Since 2004, more than 60 undergraduate students have been involved in this CURA as part-time or full-time research assistants, and eight graduate students have completed theses or worked as graduate research assistants on various CURA projects. Indeed, this CURA was designed to dedicate approximately half of its overall budget to student training and mentoring initiatives. Working one-on-one with university or community-based researchers, or in small research teams, students have been engaged in archival and library-based research, statistical data collection and analysis, survey and questionnaire design, mapping and field observation, field-based sample collecting, laboratory classification and cataloging, and conducting interviews. Students from a variety of academic backgrounds have worked on this CURA (from the faculties of Arts, Business, Science, Applied Science, and Engineering), and some have been directly involved from research design and the development of research ethics applications (where applicable) through to the actual conducting of the research (generally from May to August). Many have had an opportunity to participate in one of the three CURA mini-conferences held between 2004 and 2006 where the results of the summer’s full-time research season were presented to the whole CURA team, and some have participated in the New Brunswick Museum’s more formal annual speakers’ series.

With researchers and research assistants from a variety of disciplines and community partners with distinctive mandates, this CURA has provided an opportunity for a variety of traditional and non-traditional research outcomes. Traditional research outcomes for academic and museum-based researchers frequently consist of peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations, and

these are important components of our research team's dissemination plan. Several peer-reviewed articles have appeared, with some of these including student researchers as co-authors.<sup>5</sup> A mid-term conference for the CURA project was held on 20 April 2007, which attracted approximately 120 participants to discuss preliminary results from several of the "Industrial City in Transition" projects. Invited keynote speakers at this conference addressed the role of inner city planning in small cities in other settings (Nanaimo, BC, and Gävle, Sweden), and the variety of ways in which culture has been used as an engine for economic growth.<sup>6</sup>

One of the distinctive advantages of the CURA partnership programme is the opportunity to participate in a variety of research dissemination and knowledge transfer activities that make research findings accessible to civic leaders, policy makers, and members of the community at large. To that end, the team leading this "Industrial City in Transition" CURA has developed a range of outreach and knowledge translation activities using non-traditional dissemination methods. An advantage of working closely with community-based partners is that each community organization has various ways and means of disseminating the results of their projects. The Saint John Human Development Council, for example, has been involved in the completion of three community reports: "Poverty and Plenty," which represents a collaboration between the Human Development Council, Vibrant Communities Saint John, and this CURA; "Taking Stock 2006," a collaboration between the Human Development Council, the Greater Saint John Community Foundation, and this CURA; and, more recently, "Vital Signs 2007," which represents a partnership between the Human Development Council, the Greater Saint John Community Foundation, and this CURA.<sup>7</sup> Data collected as a component of Human Development Council-led CURA projects has contributed to the preparation of all of these reports, and student researchers and members of our CURA team contributed to their production. Each of these reports was launched at a public community event that attracted members and leaders of the Greater Saint John community.

One of the benefits of the close working partnership that has developed with the New Brunswick Museum is that research completed as part of this CURA can be utilized for the development of museum exhibits. An exhibit entitled "In Transition: Recent Discoveries of the Kingston Peninsula" was shown during the autumn of 2006 at the John Fisher Memorial Museum on the Kingston Peninsula as well as during the winter of 2007 at the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John. This exhibit presented

5 "The Industrial City in Transition" Web site has a summary of conference presentations and publications; see <http://www.unbsj.ca/cura/> (accessed 16 November 2007).

6 The keynote speakers were Mr. Andrew Tucker, Director of Planning and Development, City of Nanaimo, BC, who presented "Growth Management and Downtown Revitalization in a Small B.C. City" and Dr. Ross Nelson, Thompson Rivers University, who presented "Innovative Cities in Sweden." This mid-term conference was held at the Mary Oland Theatre, New Brunswick Museum, Market Square, Saint John.

7 See *Poverty and Plenty: A Statistical Snapshot of the Quality of Life in Greater Saint John* (Saint John, NB: Vibrant Communities Saint John and The Human Development Council, 2005); *Saint John, 2006: Taking Stock* (Saint John, NB: Greater Saint John Community Foundation, 2006); and *Greater Saint John's Vital Sign's 2007: Our Region's Annual Check-Up* (Saint John, NB: Greater Saint John Community Foundation, 2007). These community reports are available at <http://www.humandevlopmentcouncil.nb.ca/page4.htm>.

research results from the Kingston Peninsula Heritage Inc.'s Community Profile and the Built Heritage of the Kingston Peninsula project as well as various aspects of those environmental history projects that involved field research on the Kingston Peninsula. A virtual exhibit entitled "Saint John: An Industrial City in Transition" is currently available on the New Brunswick Museum's Web site.<sup>8</sup> This exhibit of 1,100 photographs, maps, and archival documents reflects the strength of our CURA's collaboration with the New Brunswick Museum as well as links to government departments such as the E-Learning Educational Programmes and Services unit of the New Brunswick Department of Education. This Web exhibit is being used as a teaching resource for students and teachers in a range of grade levels from middle school to high school.

Other non-traditional dissemination methods that have been utilized by this CURA include a campus radio talk show entitled "Open Spaces," which was broadcast on CFMH 92.5 radio during the summer of 2005. This provided an opportunity for students and listeners to call in to discuss their favourite open spaces in the City of Saint John. At the beginning of each show, the student researcher, who hosted the show, presented a brief overview of the "Industrial City in Transition" CURA. This raised the visibility of the CURA among our student body and in the community. Another CURA activity coordinated by a community partner, the Atlantic Coastal Action Program, was a park cleanup campaign that involved CURA students, researchers, and community volunteers who devoted time to cleaning up an urban park that had an illegal dumping problem. A local waste management company donated trucks to haul the rubbish away, and the City of Saint John recognized our CURA research team for this initiative with a City of Saint John 2007 Environment Award.

More difficult to measure in terms of outcomes, but equally important, is the capacity building that has taken place both for the university and for all community partners. This may be gauged broadly through the links established to other research projects and partner organizations, the additional funding opportunities that have arisen, the unanticipated benefits of collaboration that have appeared, and the skills and knowledge gained by members of the team, participating students, and individual members of partner organizations. The New Brunswick Museum, for example, has successfully utilized results from the "Industrial City in Transition" CURA to assist in other applications for funding from agencies such as the Salamander Foundation, the Summer Mentorship Program for Female Students, the New Brunswick Wildlife Trust Fund, and the Crane Mountain Enhancement Fund. UNB Saint John has benefited from this CURA through the enhancement of research skills of undergraduate students, the community connections established for faculty members, and the community-based research experience for the campus as a whole. This CURA has also resulted in invitations to participate in conferences organized by other Community-University Research Alliances projects such as the "Cultural Futures of Small Cities" based in British Columbia; to participate in two community-university expos (Saskatoon and Winnipeg); and to collaborate on other, national-scale SSHRC-

8 See <http://website.nbm-mnb.ca/Transition/English/index.asp> (accessed 16 November 2007).



sponsored collaborative research initiatives.<sup>9</sup> Examples of unanticipated benefits to the community of this CURA include an inventory of unspecified historical documents completed by a student while conducting research on the 20th-century built-environment project and the cataloguing of a set of records for a small community-based, non-governmental agency by a student with a background in library science during research for the Minorities in Transition project.

Overall, this CURA has forged closer connections between the university and all community partners and has provided benefits for partners, researchers, students, and the Greater Saint John area as a whole. Through Web exhibits, public lectures, conference presentations, community reports, publications, and a variety of other activities, this CURA has engaged in considerable knowledge translation. Perhaps even more significant are the education and training opportunities afforded undergraduate and graduate students from UNB Saint John. We have already observed that student researchers associated with this CURA have had a strong record of acceptance into graduate and professional programmes.

As we enter the final year of this CURA, Dr. Robert MacKinnon (UNB Saint John) and Ms. Jane Fullerton (NBM) continue to serve as co-directors of the overall research programme and manage its day-to-day operations. Together with representatives from each of the community partners, they will continue to work with the research team to bring the various projects to conclusion. An edited collection of essays is planned as well as a final museum exhibit highlighting overall research results and the connections between partners and projects. There is the prospect that components of this final exhibit will travel to other locations in the province for use by other local museums in New Brunswick.

Ultimately, this CURA aims to produce a greater community understanding of the myriad forces that are shaping Greater Saint John as it makes the transition from an industrial city to a post-industrial city that is more reliant upon its cultural, environmental, and historical resources. It is also enhancing the knowledge-based workforce in Saint John through its important student-training component.

ROBERT MACKINNON

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Greg Marquis and Dr. Robert MacKinnon have been invited to participate in the Multilevel Governance and Public Policy in Canadian Municipalities Major Collaborative Research Initiative (MCRI) that is coordinated from The University of Western Ontario (<http://www.ppm-ppm.ca/>) and Dr. Robert MacKinnon has been invited to participate in the Innovation Systems Research Network's "Social Dynamics of Economic Performance" MCRI that is coordinated from the University of Toronto (<http://www.utoronto.ca/isrn/>).