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*Fogo Island  
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Deux Case studies are presented here: One on the Maritimes' Fogo Islands and one on the Collective Impact Project.

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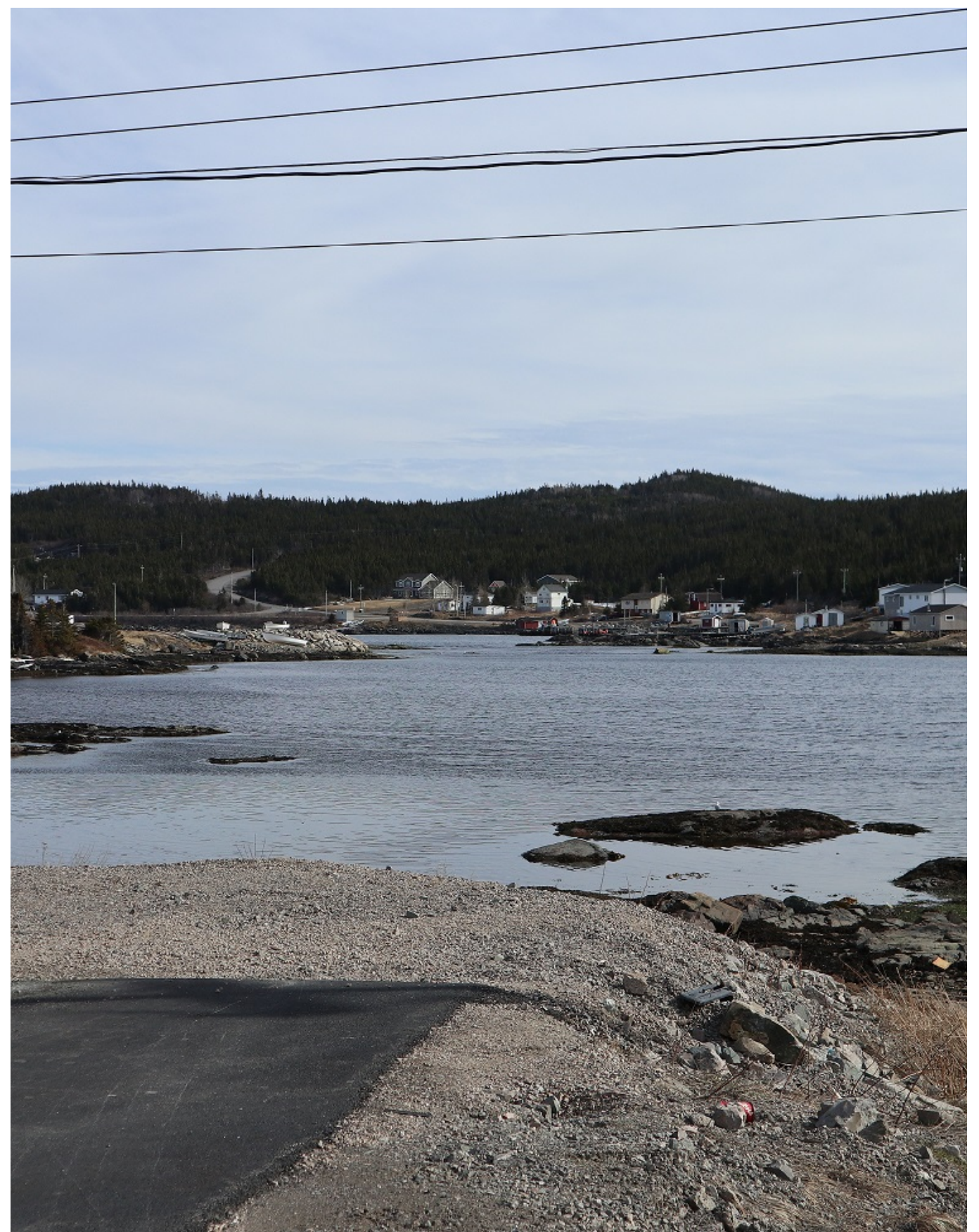
# ÉTUDES DE CAS | CASE STUDIES

## *Social enterprise as economic salvation? The case of Fogo Island, Newfoundland*



Par | By:  
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Rural Canada is experiencing social, economic, and demographic changes that have fundamentally altered community networks and cultural landscapes (Parkins and Reed, 2013). The response to these shifts has been varied, and in more recent years has included an interest in the notion of ‘social enterprise’ as a model for social and economic regeneration (Steiner and Teasdale, 2016). Through this paper, we aim to link these two points - social enterprise and rural vitality - and consider how they might interact in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada’s most eastern province, which has experienced significant economic changes and rural population fluctuations in the last decades (Bollman and Clemenson, 2008; Vital Signs, 2018). To frame our work, we will draw on a case study based in Fogo Island, Newfoundland: the Shorefast Foundation, which is a self-identified social enterprise, and one that is structured as a profit-driven organization that is devoted to supporting community-conscious



**Figure 1:** The community of Seldom, Fogo Island, Newfoundland, Canada. April 2019.

change (Shorefast, 2018).

In the pages that follow, we first define the idea of ‘social enterprise’, before contextualizing the Shorefast Foundation, and situating Fogo Island (Figure 1) in wider discourses of rural change. Through our choice of case study, we will reflect on two interrelated points: first, on the seeming tension between profit-driven activity and community-focused philanthropy which sits at the centre of social enterprise models, and the Shorefast Foundation approach; and second, on the aspirations associated with social enterprise, and in particular the hope that it might provide a resilient form of economic organization, and one that could buoy rural regions. Drawing on the work of Doug Lionais (2015) on social enterprise in Atlantic Canada, and that of Banoub (2012) and Sharratt (2017) on the cultural landscapes of Fogo Island, we consider how discourses of resilience are deployed in



Newfoundland, and what that might mean for rural communities.

### Defining ‘social enterprise’

Social enterprises have varied greatly in terms of management and values, and as a result, scholars have often found it difficult to define the concept and position their work in a broader context (Maier, Meyer and Steinbereithner, 2014). Kerlin and Pollak (2010) interpret social enterprises as organizations that seek to solve a social issue through market approaches. Social enterprises are often compared to non-profit organizations, though Dart (2004) differentiates the two with respect to how they are structured. Principally, Dart (2004) argues that social enterprises exist in a blurred state between nonprofit and for-profit interests, where the sole bottom line of a traditional nonprofit is to continually strive to achieve its mission statement or social purpose; whereas a social enterprise employs a double bottom line approach of striving to achieve its mission, but also being profitable. Steiner and Teasdale (2017) additionally point out that social enterprises are distinct because of their social ownership, essentially how such ventures are typically run by communities or individuals, and not operated by governments. Atul Tandon, an entrepreneur, nonprofit executive, and author, who previously served as Senior Vice President of Donor Engagement with World Vision US, in a 2015 Forbes interview disagrees that there is any significant difference between social enterprises and nonprofits,

stating that the only difference between the two is a tax label indicating whether the organization is for-profit or non-profit (Chhabra, 2015).

Despite such variation in conceptualizing social enterprises, the concept is fairly familiar to the maritime region of eastern Canada. Doug Lionais (2015) frames the emergence of social enterprise in Atlantic Canada as stemming from the region’s geographical isolation and historic status as “have-not” provinces, having experienced half a century of high rates of unemployment, and even with Newfoundland’s newfound oil and gas wealth, the province and region continues to suffer economically. Given such economic hardships, the region has an abundant history of social enterprise, which tend to emerge in such isolated, “have not” places (Amin, Cameron, & Hudson, 2002; Hudson, 2011, as cited in Lionais 2015). One of the first examples of a social enterprise in Atlantic Canada was the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia, which began in the 1920-30s as a series of co-operatives organized by fishermen, farmers, and miners with the goal of alleviating some of the economic burden caused by a decline in the fishing, farming, shipbuilding, and forestry industries (Lionais, 2015; Sacouman, 1977; Tarr and Karaphillis, 2010). Later examples of social enterprises in Atlantic Canada include initiatives such as New Dawn Enterprises Ltd. in Sydney Nova Scotia, a non-shareholding corporation with the mission of facilitating community development and resilience (Lionais, 2015). Then there is the St. Anthony Basin Resources Incorporated (SABRI) based in St. Anthony Newfoundland. In an attempt to alleviate the economic challenges following the 1992 cod moratorium which devastated the community, in 1997 the Department of Fisheries and Oceans increased the quota of shrimp that could be harvested off the coast of Newfoundland, and gave the St. Anthony region in particular an increased allocation of 3000 metric tonnes of additional shrimp that could be harvested (Ibid, 2015). SABRI was established to facilitate the increased allocation of shrimp, and with the surplus revenue, the social enterprise invests the additional money back into the community for community development and business expansion opportunities (Ibid, 2015).



Figure 2: Stormbound sheep in the community of Tilting, Fogo Island, Newfoundland, Canada. April 2019.



Given such examples, social enterprise is therefore often viewed by communities in Atlantic Canada as a form of economic salvation or rural revitalization, a chance to not only revitalize the physical community, but also the social and cultural identities associated with the community (Lionais, 2015). In Nyström's comprehensive review of the empirical evidence on the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic salvation / growth, she concludes that entrepreneurship as it relates to employment growth as a measure of economic growth, in the short-term has questionable benefits, though in the long-term, yields more positive results (Nyström, 2008). This helps demonstrate the notion that social enterprise and social entrepreneurship may indeed not lead to immediate economic growth in the short-term, but over time often prove to be justified and advantageous endeavors for communities to pursue.

### The Shorefast Foundation as a social enterprise

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The Shorefast Foundation was established in 2006 by Zita Cobb and her brothers Alan and Anthony Cobb. The Shorefast Foundation defines itself as a social enterprise with a mission to foster economic and cultural resilience on Fogo Island (Shorefast Foundation, 2018). It is a registered Canadian charity devoted to developing social, business, heritage protection, and sustainability programs on Fogo Island, including:

- Fogo Island Arts, an artist-in-residence program;
- New Ocean Ethic, a series of environmental training and awareness programs on ocean stewardship;
- Geology at the Edge, a geologist-in-residence program; an academic-in-residence program;
- the Fogo Island Shop, a furniture and craft social business; boat building; small-business loans;
- various heritage restoration projects; and,
- an Economic Development Partnership with the amalgamated town of Fogo Island, a joint venture to facilitate further economic growth (Shorefast, 2018).

Through their Canada Revenue Agency submission in 2017, the Shorefast lists 15 full-time and 24 part-time employees, and revenues of just over \$2-million

CAD (the majority from donations), and expenses of around \$2.8-million CAD (the majority spent on charitable programming) (CRA Shorefast Foundation Quick View, n.d.). On the same 2017 submission, the Shorefast lists their purpose as supporting social and economic development on both Fogo and the neighbouring Change Islands, including social enterprise approaches, arts-based programs, and micro-lending, with a view to supporting the local community (CRA Shorefast Foundation Quick View, n.d.).

The creation of the Shorefast Foundation has been detailed extensively in popular media, and is at once an instructive story of dedication and perseverance, and the stuff of legends: Zita Cobb, who grew up on Fogo Island, left for university and work, and later returned to Fogo as a retired multi-millionaire in the fiber optics industry, spearheading the development of the Shorefast Foundation and its first project, the Fogo Island Inn (McKeough, 2010). Zita Cobb continues to be central to the Shorefast, both as CEO and as a key spokesperson for the foundation at speaking events, fundraisers, and media interviews (see Shorefast News & Events, n.d.), and was awarded the Order of Canada in recognition of her rural revitalization work on Fogo Island (McCabe, 2017). The Fogo Island Inn remains the most visible and well-known component of the Shorefast project, with its large white- and grey-face, and towering stilt foundation, set above the community of Joe Batt's Arm (Figure 3). Designed by architect Todd Sanders, a Newfoundlander now living in Norway, and largely



Figure 3: The Fogo Island Inn and Joe Batt's Arm, Fogo Island, Newfoundland, Canada. April 2019



funded by Zita Cobb (Bailey, 2018), the Fogo Island Inn was completed in 2013, and is a 29-suite luxury hotel with rates starting at \$1,975 CAD.

As a social enterprise, the Shorefast Foundation has developed a unique formula for sustaining its community-focused economic and cultural activities: luxury tourism, high-value products, and place-specific commodities. This encompasses several initiatives, including: the Fogo Island Inn which welcomes guests year-round; a furniture making enterprise with a shop in Fogo and an online catalogue, with small items starting at \$40 and hand-crafted benches from \$8,800 (The Woodshop, n.d.); and Fogo Island Fish, an initiative led by Anthony (Tony) Cobb which uses a cod-potting fishing method, and employs upwards of 50 fishers to supply restaurants in Canada and beyond (Fogo Island Fish, n.d.). Of these, the Fogo Island Inn is the most financially successful and became profitable in 2016, just a few years after opening (Shorefast Foundation, About Us, n.d.). For all products - the Inn, furniture, etc - the Shorefast provides what they term 'economic nutrition labels', or, a breakdown of how visitor spending is segmented behind-the-scenes. For instance, a night's stay at the Fogo Island Inn includes 11% of the rate going to food and room supplies and 4% towards sales and marketing, (Fogo Island Inn Rates, n.d.), while the price of a quilt throw at the Fogo Island Shop includes 17% of direct materials and 16% on production overhead (Fogo Island Shop Quilt Throw, n.d.). For both a quilt and a night's stay at the Inn, 49% of revenue goes to labour, and 15% returns to the Shorefast for their local activities - with these proportions (of around 45-51% labour; and 15% as surplus to Shorefast) consistent throughout most products with an 'economic nutrition label'.

The goal of this range of Shorefast initiatives is to support existing economic activity (fisheries, crafts, tourism), create meaningful employment opportunities on Fogo Island that seek a reversal of the long-standing out-migration trend, and encourage new avenues for cultural, social, and economic sustainability. The deliberate emphasis on luxury tourism is linked to revenue-generating potential, but also to a desire to protect Fogo Island from overwhelming rates of visitors which would

noticeably disrupt the rhythm of communities (Rockett & Ramsay 2017). While still a comparatively new organization, the Shorefast has certainly made a mark, both in terms of putting Fogo Island on the global tourism map, and in generating a range of new economic activity on the Island.

## Rural resilience and the role of social enterprise

The Shorefast approach is based to a vision of rural resilience which sets economic and cultural vitality on an equal footing and emphasizes the uniqueness of place as a basis for revitalization (see: Integrity of Place, n.d.). The notion of 'resilience' is often defined as the ability of a community to thrive in the face of change and mobilize a range of resources to overcome uncertainty (Steiner & Atterton, 2015). In Newfoundland those vectors of change have been notable, including the resettlements of the 1960s and 1970s (Martin, 2006), the 1992 cod moratorium which closed the northern fisheries and buckled close-knit economic and community networks, and shifting demographics, social, and economic trends into the 2010s that have seen considerable out-migration, with many families seeing one partner fly-in/fly-out for work (Vital Signs, 2018; Coles, 2019). These provincial trends are evident on Fogo Island, where the collapse of the cod fishery in the 1990s contributed to a period of deep economic decline, with increasing out-migration and limited economic opportunities on the island (Banoub, 2012).



**Figure 4:** Tower Studio, part of the Shorefast Foundation artist-in-residence program, Fogo Island, Newfoundland, Canada. April 2019.



In part, the Shorefast Foundation is responding to these economic trends. Yet, the organization also builds on a long tradition of resilience in Fogo, dating back to the 1960s when the island experimented with early forms of social enterprises. These early forays into social enterprise emerged through what is known as the ‘Fogo Process’: in 1967 the National Film Board (NFB), as part of their Challenge of Change activist documentary program (NFB Challenge for Change, n.d.), initiated dialogue amongst Fogo communities through the medium of film and storytelling. The resulting film includes individual and family interviews about fishing, daily life on the island, and the rich history and heritage of Fogo, many of which can be viewed on the NFB website (NFB Fogo Island, n.d.). The ‘Fogo Process’ had material impacts as well: the Fogo Island Improvement Committee and the Fogo Island Shipbuilding and Producers Co-operative were created (Bandoub, 2012); and the Fogo Island Co-operative Society established. The latter of these - the Fogo Island Co-op - is active today, and brings together fishers from across the island, with three processing plants on Fogo working with a range of products, including snow crab, shrimp, cod, herring, and sea cucumber, amongst others. Through their website, Fogo Island Co-op describe the Fogo Process as a ‘life-altering decision’ (Fogo Island Co-op, n.d.), and argue that Fogo was spared the painful process of resettlement because the distinct island communities came together in the late 1960s, taking over privately-owned fish processing plants, and created what today would be described as a Fogo-wide fisheries social enterprise.

This history of social enterprise and social innovation on Fogo, and in many other regions of Newfoundland, has been noted by state actors as well. In 2018, the provincial government announced a Social Enterprise Action Plan, emphasizing a desire to increase the amount of social enterprises in the province, and offering additional support for existing social enterprises (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2018). The department of Tourism, Culture, Industry, and Innovation is leading the development and implementation of the plan and acknowledges the vital role social enterprises play in the economic development of rural communities (Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, 2018). It

would seem that social enterprise is viewed as a way forward, with much hope and aspiration tied to the idea that economic development can be beneficial to communities - if it places community well-being at its heart. In this context, the work of the Shorefast Foundation can certainly be viewed as contributing to rural resilience, not least through its micro-credit programs, encouragement of local entrepreneurship, and enthusiasm for heritage preservation.

## Conclusion

The Fogo Island case study - and the work of the Shorefast Foundation - is instructive, innovative, and holds considerable potential to alter the challenging economic, demographic, and social dynamics of rural Newfoundland. At the same time, the notion of social enterprise as a form of economic salvation - to borrow from Lionais (2015) - also leads to some difficult questions, not least about how profit-driven activity can be balanced with community-focused philanthropy. In the paragraphs below, we outline some of these tensions.

Over the last few years, the Shorefast Foundation has thrust Fogo Island on the global stage by bringing world-wide attention to the rugged remote island, and with it, affluent tourists who could boost the local economy. Yet, we might argue, the Shorefast faces a dichotomy: on the one hand, through its role as social enterprise and community-focused philanthropic organization, it aims to help Fogo Island develop economically and grow into a resilient, sustainable community; but on the other hand, in terms of the continual profitability of the Foundation, it cannot allow Fogo to develop *too* much, as the main attractant for tourists is the island’s remoteness, quaintness, and picturesque charm. Such a predicament gives way to critical questions regarding the commodification of Fogo, and the motives behind the Shorefast Foundation’s production of Fogo (cf. Banoub, 2012; Rocket and Ramsay, 2017; Sharratt, 2017). In equal measure, the success of the Shorefast Foundation owes much to the vision and energy of Zita Cobb, whose economic capacity funded nearly 75% of the Fogo Island Inn’s construction (About Shorefast, 2018), and enabled Fogo to be internationally recognized as a rural success. Indeed, the success of the Shorefast





Figure 5: Warf and stand in the community of Fogo, Fogo Island, Newfoundland, Canada. May 2018.

Foundation and how it has helped with the rural revitalization of Fogo Island should be rightfully praised, but it is a unique story and thus not easily replicable with other rural, struggling communities in Newfoundland.

Some of these questions - on the uniqueness of the Shorefast Foundation, the pivotal role of Zita Cobb, and the non-transferability of the Fogo social enterprise experience - have been examined elsewhere (see: Banoub, 2012; Slawinski, 2016; Rocket and Ramsay, 2017; Sharratt, 2017). Of these, the work of Natalie Slawinski (2016; also covered in Adey, 2019) makes the most compelling counter argument to suggestions that the Shorefast model cannot be duplicated elsewhere. In particular, based on a seven-year research project partnered with Shorefast, Slawinski has developed a model with the acronym 'PLACE', which seeks to promote community champions (P); links long-time residents and newcomers (L); complete asset assessments (A); convey or tell interesting and captivating stories (C); and finally, put aside either/or narrative and engage with inclusive thinking (E), (see: Adey, 2019 for a summary). Slawinski's work is compelling, providing a roadmap for Newfoundland (and other) communities to start building new initiatives, recognize the value of local identities and knowledge, and initiate rural economic revitalization. The challenge in the PLACE model (of which only early results are currently available) has to do with funding (where will start-up capital come from?), demographic challenges (how will such processes run in aging rural communities?), and the temporal crunch experienced by many community leaders

(many causes, all vital, but little time to fully engage with each one).

Added to this is an emerging institutional tension in Newfoundland. With the provincial Social Enterprise Action Plan (see above, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2018) identifying this approach as a formal economic model, the idea of social enterprise as a panacea for rural communities has been introduced. Based on the success of the Shorefast Foundation, we see merit in this approach. At the same time, in a period when out-migration and economic decline are deeply entrenched in some rural areas, the Newfoundland and Labrador Social Enterprise Action Plan carries hints of neoliberalism: the province is, effectively, pulling back from economic development and offloading responsibility for regeneration to already under-pressure rural communities. If social enterprise can seem like a form of economic salvation, then this salvation will depend heavily on the capacity of individuals and existing community networks to re-organize, adapt, and mobilize (or commodify) local histories, skills and traditions for consumption by new audiences, including tourists seeking a specific experience that plays on remoteness, rurality, and a vision of outpost life more closely tied to pre-1992 (cod moratorium) Newfoundland than current, fly-in/fly-out and out-and-gas dependent economies.

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*Roza Tchoukaleyska's research examines the role and meaning of public space in urban and rural settings, comparing experiences in France and Canada. I am particularly interested in how notions of 'the public' are*



constituted, the ways in which community spaces are invested with meaning, and the interplay of these factors in defining citizenship rights.

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