

RESEARCH NOTE OPEN ACCESS

Recentring Resource-Based Livelihoods: Prosperity Beyond Extractivism and Pastoralism

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ABSTRACT

This research note, informed by qualitative fieldwork with resource harvesters in Nova Scotia, explores the effect of economic change and ecological crisis, the outcomes of rural development strategies, and demographic shifts that have shaped the province's rural areas in recent years. It argues that our present moment is ripe with opportunities for a renewed sociological attention on livelihoods in this region, which should take as its focus the relationship that people, communities, and government have with their physical environment. Rural places tend to be valued for their natural endowments, either industrially extracted or preserved and sold as a pastoral idyll. Nova Scotia's recent past has exacerbated this bifurcation. New work is needed to help find prosperous ground beyond both tendencies. This note attempts to spark that effort.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette note de recherche, qui s'appuie sur un travail de terrain qualitatif mené auprès d'exploitants de ressources en Nouvelle-Écosse, explore l'impact des mutations économiques et de la crise écologique, les résultats des stratégies de développement rural, ainsi que les changements démographiques qui ont façonné les zones rurales de la province ces dernières années. Elle soutient que la période actuelle offre de nombreuses opportunités pour un regain d'intérêt sociologique envers les moyens de subsistance dans cette région, qui devrait se concentrer sur la relation que les individus, les communautés et les pouvoirs publics entretiennent avec leur environnement physique. Les zones rurales ont tendance à être valorisées pour leurs richesses naturelles, qu'elles soient exploitées à des fins industrielles ou préservées et vendues comme un idylle bucolique. L'histoire récente de la Nouvelle-Écosse a exacerbé cette dichotomie. De nouveaux travaux sont nécessaires pour aider à trouver un terrain propice à la prospérité au-delà de ces deux tendances. La présente note vise à donner l'impulsion à cet effort.

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The cultural aspects of being generations away from resource use in your family play a big part in all of this. ... You look at the history of the integration of farming and forestry in Nova Scotia as an example. There was a point in time—and many of them still do—but on the back end of every farm there was usually some forest land, and that forest land was often harvested and tended in the winter months when the farm crops were under the snow and it was another source of financial resource for the farm, so whether they were taking it and milling it and using it for themselves, you know, to expand on the barn or to fix things ... or they are selling it to the local lumber mill and off it goes ... it's how you pay for the kids to go to university or what have you, it's those kinds of interactions that when we start to lose them, we don't understand them, and when you don't understand them it is really easy to think what you want to think.

This statement comes from an interview conducted with a representative and advocate of the aquaculture sector of Nova Scotia and was part of a discussion about the resistance to sea farming in a number of coastal communities around the province, which, in part, he felt came from a broad disengagement and thus misunderstanding of resource-based livelihoods. Without dismissing the legitimate contention around certain aquaculture operations in the province, in the midst of this undeniably romantic perspective about rural resource work, it is possible to see a kernel of truth—direct interaction with the surrounding environment by way of cultivation, harvesting, processing, subsistence, and commercial use is no longer a central part of everyday life for many rural Nova Scotians.

This has important consequences for lives and livelihoods; it is not a result of conscious choice, but rather a historical arc drawn by economic and ecological shifts. In parallel fashion, perhaps causally linked, resource harvesting has not been a central part of Canadian Sociology in recent times. Surveying the last decade of issues of the *Canadian Review of Sociology*, which does not define the discipline nationally, but does hold significant weight as a flagship journal, there have been zero articles directly engaged with the livelihoods of resource workers (a few pieces have dealt with tangential issues: Bonner 2022; Quinlan 2020; Weiler and Zavits 2025). This is puzzling in light of decade-old calls (Matthews 2014; Stanbridge 2014) to return to the foundations, or should I say “dirt,” of the discipline through an embrace of Innisian regionalism; a call for studies that take the unique “geographical, economic, and social resources” (Mathews 2014, 112) of places seriously and renew our focus on the “staples” at the core of Canada’s regional economies, while also dealing with the contemporary complexities of neoliberalism, colonialism, and environmental degradation not part of Innis’ original project. The call has been to do this from the ground up (Stanbridge 2014) via “dirt research”, an ethnographic style of scholarship, premised on interdisciplinarity, historicity (Matthews 2014, 112), a “deep physical and emotional awareness of Canadian conditions” (Stan-

bridge 2014, 391), and commitment to national self-understanding (ala. Hiller 1982).

It is fair to ask why we should devote more attention to the study of “staples” if, as the opening quote indicates, fewer people are engaged in this kind of work. I maintain that there are many good answers to that question, not least that the way we harvest, process, and engage with resources is a fundamental part of our socio-ecological metabolism (Marx 1976) and is directly tied to local food sovereignty, affordability, climate resiliency, and many other pressing social issues of our contemporary moment. I contend that the loss of resource-based work should not be accepted as an inevitability or reason to turn scholarly attention away from these livelihoods, and that with deliberate effort, in part by researchers, growth in good and new resource-based work can occur. To achieve this, we should follow Matthews’ (2014) instruction to switch the “directionality of explanation” of Innis’ project such that the most pressing social dynamics of Canadian society are studied for their impact on resources and resource livelihoods rather than the other way around. What I understand Matthews to mean by this is that a diminishment of good resource-based work should be analyzed as part of new social and economic dynamics that debase it, and if social dynamics are key, then sociology as a field should play a central role. I will note from the outset that there is important scholarship happening about resource livelihoods in many fields, particularly policy and governance-oriented fields (see Barnett et al. 2017; Neis et al. 2013; Sumaila et al. 2024), but I contend sociology can play an increasingly important role in critically engaging with a set of broader dynamics that impact resource work, especially those connected to the relational ties that exist between people and rural environments.

What I aim to do hereafter is explore what a renewed attention to resource work might mean for Nova Scotia. With careful extension, these insights might be applied elsewhere in Atlantic Canada and beyond. This exploration is based on a year of fieldwork with people working in resource sectors in Nova Scotia. As part of this work, 30 interviews were conducted, primarily with fishermen (the preferred term for both male and female fishers), boatbuilders, sea farmers, and a handful of other occupations (sawyers, riggers, managers, and bureaucrats). The reflections below emerge from dominant themes that arose in these conversations.

Ultimately, I argue that we are at a moment in which the description and creation of good resource harvesting livelihoods needs to be brought back more centrally into the conversation of Nova Scotian rural life, that there are historical and contemporary values and ethics within rural populations which support this effort, but that there are also novel forces related to rural economic development ideology, new flows of migration, and fundamental reorientations to the rural landscape and its affordances that thwart such a movement. Because of this, there is an opportunity and need for more direct community-engaged research on rural resource work. My argument is based on the understanding that Atlantic Canada has gone through two distinct phases in recent history. The first period, spanning the second half of the 20th century, was characterized by profound transformation and crisis in which industrially scaled resource harvesting work (most emblematic being the cod fishery and coal mining), which

brought prosperity to many rural communities, disappeared or became incredibly difficult to access as a result of overharvesting, economic rationalization, and ultimately de-industrialization. The second period, bringing us to our present day, consisted of a systematic response to these crises, which entailed the strengthening of culture, tourism, and amenity-driven economic activity to keep rural places afloat (Baum 1999; Corbett 2005; Foster and Main 2020; George and Reid 2005; Lousley 2021; Sullivan and Mitchell 2012; Summerby-Murray 2002; Overton 2007; Pocius 2000; Thompson 2019). I argue that this history has deeply shaped Atlantic Canada's current relationship with its rural environment, which seems bifurcated between extractivist and pastoral orientations. On the one hand, especially at the community and municipal level, rurality has become increasingly aestheticized and sold for its amenities. On the other hand, there has been a movement by provincial and federal governments to re-industrialize the region, encouraging new large-scale resource projects, like uranium mining and natural gas processing in Nova Scotia (Donovan 2025; Kusters 2025; MacDonald 2026) to fuel economic growth. Luke (2002) and Stoddart and Sodero (2015) similarly identify these divergent orientations in development regimes and label them *attractive* and *extractive*. This has resulted in new and important questions of livelihood and prosperity that have not yet garnered enough attention. Except for a few select contributions (Foster 2018 and Peters et al. 2018 are examples in this journal), sociology in this region has focused too little on envisioning rural prosperity in ways that fully account for our present context.

2 | Crisis and Resilience

There is a long tradition of studying the character, challenges, and effects of resource-based harvesting in Atlantic Canada. A substantial part of this work happened during a wave of Maritime Political Economy research focused on the fisheries in the 1980s (for example, see Apostle et al. 1998; Barrett 1980) that captured the experiences of people in a changing industry affected by the forces of late modernity, including the professionalization of the trade and the increasing enclosure of access via modern licensing. Then, during the 1990s and the first two decades of the new century, attention gave way to the mounting crises of resource work (Baum 1999; Khan and Neis 2010; Lousley 2021; Neis et al. 2013; Power 2005; Stoddart and Sodero 2015) which included the cod collapse, mining closures and disasters (Summerby-Murray 2002; Thompson 2019; Verberg and Davis 2011), and the issue of how to honor State-recognized Indigenous rights to harvest resources for a moderate livelihood (Coates 2000; Pictou 2015; McMillan and Prosper 2016). These crises were part of a larger picture of livelihoods in decline across the rural West (Hodge et al. 2002; Khan and Neis 2010; Taylor 2006; Winson and Leach 2002), a result of dwindling resources caused by overexploitation, industrial abandonment and the loss of stable, accessible careers undermined by the neoliberal "labor regime" (Abbott 2005, 311). These problems have largely been caused by the unrelenting growth impetus at the heart of our capitalist and colonialist context and have culminated in a crisis of ecology and work for rural communities. For the last generation or two, it has become difficult to enact prosperous resource harvesting livelihoods; the consequences of such a history are multifaceted, but the most significant effects have been economic and population decline.

What does this mean for our contemporary moment? As Karen Foster (2016, 2018) has shown, a constant push for increased productivity and economic growth baked into rural economic development paradigms has demanded that provinces and people work harder and do more with less. In other words, in the face of ecological and economic crisis, the region has been told to develop resiliency and find a new way to become productive. In very many cases, this call has been met through a dramatic shift in economic orientation. The Atlantic region has found a way to make its geography productive again by turning rurality itself into an economic driver, by selling the rural idyll via the heightening of the "affective constellation around leisure and landscape" (Willett 2025, 6). Nova Scotia is coined "Canada's ocean playground", and like children to a swing set, many have been drawn here as a port of entry to "a world re-enchanted" (McKay 1994, XIX), as a supposed escape from the anxieties and accelerations of modern life. This attractive image is largely born of a State-led provincial pastime of "cultural selection" (p. 15)—a construction of place built on selective romantic images oriented toward the visitor (Vaughn 1994). So constructed, the province has turned tourism and culture into a backbone of the rural economy. The same is true of many places across the Atlantic region (Baum 1999; Corbett 2005; Foster and Main 2020; George and Reid 2005; Lousley 2021; Sullivan and Mitchell 2012; Summerby-Murray 2002; Overton 2007; Pocius 2000; Thompson 2019). As Ramos et al. (2016) argue, an embrace of tourism can provide people with an enhanced sense of community and provide residents with the positive benefits of interacting with visitors and sharing their culture; it can also provide jobs and increase mobility to and through rural places (Stoddart and Sodero 2015). However, critical approaches to tourist development recognize that work in this sector is often volunteer, low-paying (Foster and Main 2020), and seasonal (Joliffe and Farnsworth 2003), which limits its potential to create prosperous livelihoods and dampens its promise as a livelihood replacement.

The rural cultural turn, however, does not end with an increased focus on tourism. While rural communities have had a long-standing anxious dependence on outside investment and visitors (Weeden et al. 2022), it seems in recent years this anxious dependence has been more deeply affecting and has taken on new forms impelled by novel rural migratory phenomena and endogenous tensions between diverging rural relationalities that have only minimally been addressed by scholarship in this region. To give an example, I turn to a few reflections on the fieldwork conducted for this project.

3 | Rurality For What?

While undertaking fieldwork on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, a boatbuilder who has been operating a small independent shop in his community since the early 80s said to me, "They love the fishing community, but they don't love the smell of fish". The "they" he referred to is a cohort of wealthy, retired, American and Upper Canadian residents who have been moving in and reconstituting this slight coastal village in their own image. From his perspective, the nature of his rural community is changing, shifting toward a place that primarily affords leisure, recreation, and quaintness for retirees, rather than providing the affordances for a working life. This was one of many conversations I've had

with resource industry workers over the last year that point to a dynamic that I see as profoundly shaping the province: new migration flows and demographic changes that are sparking a strong sense of divide in the way residents relate to their rural environments.

Uncharacteristic of the population loss that has defined the region for decades, in the past few years, Nova Scotia has seen a surge of people—not merely visitors and tourists, but people who have the means to buy houses, land, and settle down in the province's rural counties (MacLeavy et al. 2025). As Doug Lionais (2024) reports in the most recent *State of Rural Canada* publication, the province “stands at the precipice” of growth and economic opportunity due to this burgeoning interest in its rural places. These new residents include young, ex-urbanite remote workers, many of whom were attracted during the pandemic, seeking escape from city living (p. 143), and a large population of those identified by the South Shore boatbuilder—wealthy older people, most often in the retirement stage of their lives, who have moved from elsewhere or are returning home from a life lived away. The influx of people may bring new opportunities, but it has also come with a dramatic increase in unaffordability, ballooning housing costs (p. 145), and increased demand on healthcare, labor, and infrastructure (p. 148).

These concerns are consistent with recent scholarship (Duxbury 2021; Michels 2017; Pilgeram 2021; Tomay and Berger 2024) that investigates the cultural turn in rural economics, global movements of counter-urbanization, and rural gentrification, all of which question how growing interest in rural places impacts the possibility of “liveable and flourishing” communities (Willet 2025). What has become clear through my fieldwork is that not only have measurable challenges spawned during this shift—like the cost of living—but deep tensions have heightened around lifestyle and livelihood. The resource harvesters I work with witness the changes around them with skepticism and fear; their primary concern is that while new residents may fend off dreaded reports of outmigration (see Harling Stalker and Phyne 2014), the way they engage with rural place is in both symbolic and, at times, direct contradiction to their ways of life and livelihood. The relationship this new cohort has with the rural environment is one defined by aesthetic appreciation and a desire, primarily, for a recreational and leisurely interaction with the rural landscape, which contrasts with the relationship enacted by resource workers, premised on using and working the rural environment toward the pursuit of livelihood and community prosperity. This division is not particular to one community; it is a phenomenon that has come up over and over again in my conversations throughout the province, and it signals not a mere shift in economic focus, but a qualitative change in the way people relate to the environment that has major implications for the future of rural life.

To provide a brief example of these dynamics, I interviewed members of a new family-run aquaculture operation in the Strait region of Nova Scotia who faced substantial resistance during a public consultation process as they established their farm. Despite expert opinion that the operation posed little environmental risk, surrounding residents claimed the farm would not positively benefit the “rural culture” of the harbor. They feared their property values would dip, that recreation would

be impeded, and that there may be a reduction in residential lease development because of the sight of the operation. In this instance, the benefits of the farm—namely, the creation of jobs and further development of local food production capacity—were contested based on the aestheticization of the harbor stemming from what Tomay and Berger (2024) call a ruralizing disposition; a middle-class tendency to pursue “a quest for/reconstruction of a ‘nostalgic rural past’” (p. 10). Of note, several people opposing the farm were relatively new to the area or seasonal residents, who the farm owner recognized as being “amenity migrants,” referring to the contemporary phenomenon of people being drawn to an area based on natural or cultural amenities, rather than for work, safety, or other basic necessities (Gosnell and Abrams 2009; Stefanick 2008).

This type of migration is even more significant in Atlantic Canada, given our history of outward interprovincial labor migration (MacDonald et al. 2006). Workers have long left the East Coast for resource-based jobs elsewhere, often in the oil and gas sector of western Canada. A growing literature on this phenomenon (Hall et al. 2026; Murray et al. 2021; Vodden and Hall 2016) has shown that outmigration can be a force of disruption for individuals, families and communities at large (Murray et al. 2021); it can shift the social fabric of place and impact the perceptions of rural life by those who stay and those who leave, but most importantly for this analysis, it has also been shown to create a distancing between work, workers, and home communities (p. 3). As local workers leave and are replaced by increasing amenity migration, we are living through significant shift in who occupies and uses rural lands and environments (Gosnell and Abrams 2009; Stefanick 2008).

As Ramos et al. (2016) note, a deep reliance on a sellable rural idyll can “mummify rural society” and produce a romanticized version of rural life often at “odds with current relationships to place and identity” (p. 210). In this context, the resource-based work that rural communities have done—or in the case of these oyster farmers, are trying to do—can be seen as an historical anachronism of a post-work setting (Thompson 2023) which must make way for the development of pristine geographies or made “static” (Stoddart and Sodero 2015, 458) enough to represent a cultural authenticity related to work of days past in attempt to attract visitors and new residents.

It is important to note that while flows of migration and a renewed interest in the pastoral quality of rural Atlantic Canada play an important role in the way communities relate to their rural environment, this is not merely a story of locals vs. “come from aways,” a harmful narrative shown to be exclusionary for newcomers (Allain et al. 2020). The dynamics are more diffuse and, in many cases, endogenous to rural communities. For instance, based on focus group research in all four Atlantic provinces with a diversity of participants from local civil servants, elected officials, and a variety of community members from various occupational backgrounds and demographic make-up, Foster and Main (2020) show that Atlantic Canadians “ha[ve] difficulty thinking of an [economic] area with the potential for growth or at least stability, except tourism” (p. 87). Furthermore, Ramos et al. (2016) report that a deep reliance on culture and nature as the primary sellable assets for rural communities means they are often dependent on reifying aspects of their lifeways

and environments and “these trends can block communities from organically innovating and changing, for fear of negating the patina of ‘rural authenticity’ that attracts visitors” (p. 212).

Furthermore, Peters and colleagues’ (2018) work on rural decline and renewal, which explicitly takes up the call for dirt research but not with resource-based workers, highlights that “locally based economic activity might not be as necessary as it once was” as a result of the capacity of new communication technology, that “allow those who do wish to connect to commercial economies to do so from a distance”. They also propose that “locally based economic activity may also not be necessary to sustain populations whose income is not from private sources, but from welfare or pensions” (p. 469).

Taken together, the insights from fieldwork and the reflections from Ramos et al. (2016), Peters et al. (2018), and Foster and Main (2020) raise important questions about the changing nature of rural livelihood and community. If enhanced communication technology, like strong internet, allows people to work for remote firms, and the increasing presence of pensioners and amenity migrants is reducing the amount of work happening in rural places generally, does this constitute an overarching ground shift in the way rural communities relate to work? Is work, and particularly place-based work that is engaged with the rural environment, disappearing as a mainstay of rural life? If Atlantic Canadians have difficulty envisioning future work beyond tourism, and if the resource work of our past is seen only as a pastoral antiquity, do we have the capacity to create new and good resource-based livelihoods? I contend that these questions constitute an important, and to this point only minimally addressed, opportunity for Canadian rural sociology. If developing new paths toward good resource-based livelihoods is a goal, it must contend with these contemporary relational socio-ecological dynamics, new rural class politics and rural gentrification, and the shifting ties people have with rurality as affected by new patterns of migration and endogenous shifts in the way we imagine rural futures.

4 | Beyond Pastoral and Extractive

In many ways, this story is both new and age-old. Tensions have long existed because of diverging views on rurality’s use-value. In *The Country and the City* (2016 [1973]), Raymond Williams showed how these dynamics are deeply tied to modern capitalist development. During the great transitions of industrialization and urbanization, rural landscapes began to be used for commercial ends both through extraction and preservation. Williams says the Romantics (Wordsworth, Blake, and Ruskin, for example) wrote an uncorruptness into “nature” that maps out along a supposed city and country divide. “Nature” exists in the absence of an “unnatural” industrial urban civilization (Williams 2016 [1973], p. 87). The rural is “innocent” (McKay 1994) and untouched. The belief in and retreat to a supposedly untouched rural nature is a type of romantic reaction against industrial modernity but is itself also a form of capitalist consumption—nature in this context becomes a single aesthetic unity defined only by what is “leftover” from the otherwise corrupting forces of modernity, industry and acceleration. Our contemporary moment can be understood as another manifestation of this

history; the industrial extraction of resources, the crises of that extraction, and then the cultural turn in rural economics that has swept in to make that exploited landscape productive again are based on the fundamental capitalist impulses that have shaped rurality throughout modernity.

While concerns about the growing pastoral orientation toward rural landscapes have emerged prominently in my fieldwork, so too has the flipside of Williams’ rural duality—the issue of extractivism. I have interviewed a number of people on the North Shore of Nova Scotia who have expressed concern with efforts to re-industrialize that part of the province under the direction of the provincial government. In September of 2025, the provincial conservatives lifted a ban on uranium mining that had been in place since 1981 in an omnibus bill that also reallocated hydraulic fracking, in an effort to show that the province is open for industrial resource and energy projects (MacDonald 2026). There has been robust public pushback on this action, particularly from rural communities close to proposed mining sites that rely on well water, which, as shown by research from the Department of Natural Resources, can be contaminated by mining operations (Kosters 2025). Karen Kendry with the Ecology Action Centre says, “unfettered natural resource extraction is what got us (in this situation with climate change). Mining is one of the most polluting industries in the world and not an industry Nova Scotia should be looking toward” (MacDonald 2026). Kendry questions why less environmentally harmful forms of resource extraction, like small- and medium-scaled fishing, farming, and forestry, are not a priority for the province.

Nova Scotia has also advanced a plan for a massive offshore wind farm off the northeastern coast, which is currently seeking private partners. Many remote and rural communities across Atlantic Canada experience energy poverty, meaning they struggle to afford their energy needs and have a reliance on high-emitting non-renewable sources like oil and coal (Donovan 2025; Raghuvanshia et al. 2022; Riva et al. 2024). Many see a transition to renewables as a necessary path and one that has the potential to bring jobs and prosperity to rural places. The Nova Scotia Community College will welcome its first cohort into the Wind Turbine Technician program in 2026 (Donovan 2025). For Atlantic Canada, wind could become a staple resource as powerful as it is in the North Sea, but as Dominic Hinde (2025) has explored in the Scottish context, for the renewables industry to truly benefit communities, local people and places must have autonomy in the energy transition and see benefit through strategic funneling of profits into public hands. The most important question in this context is, once again, what kind of relationship will be struck between the environment, people, and the mediating factor of industry. If this is the beginning of a renewed resource boom, how will this region guard against the ills of large-scale extractive capitalism, which include built-in boom-and-bust dynamics, asymmetries in ownership, and highly skewed distributions of wealth? (see pages 37–39 and 99–100 in Hinde (2025) for a discussion of these issues). To see renewable energy as an economic driver does not, by any means, guarantee a progressive reorientation toward our environment. As E.F. Schumacher (1979) has warned, modernity has a “built-in tendency to grow,” and so often “it’s continuous growth pursues no particular aims or objectives; it is growth for the sake of growing. No one ever inquires after its final shape” (p. 30). We

cannot afford to omit inquiries into the final shape of this eminent transition.

For rural communities to build true prosperity, a diverse economy is needed that includes good resource-based work. Research engagement that helps people envision, create, and accept this future is necessary. While this may come across as a version of bootstrap economic ethics, it is not—it may share a similar desire for innovation and grassroots effort, but it also understands that contemporary approaches to rural development so often uncritically adopt growth-oriented mantras which merely pressure communities to export and compete in a global economy without real attention to the way that production impacts lives. Foster calls for rural development policies that nurture people's desire to engage with locally produced goods and says we need "right-sized strategies that enable rural communities to stay viable rather than pressuring them to grow, export, and be competitive" (2018, 81). Furthermore, Neis et al. (2013) argue that rural livelihood development should not take the individual harvester or worker as their starting point but rather the community-embedded small-scale industry. Such an expansion in perspective allows one to consider a broad set of factors that influence livelihood, such as household-level economic strategy, intergenerational and gendered dynamics of resource work, and, if we expand beyond the industry into the wider community, we can capture varying orientations toward rurality itself.

If the kind of scholarship called for here is to blossom, a strident attention must be given to defining the "good" in "good resource work". We have important examples of that effort in studies that articulate the value of community-embedded production (Apostle et al. 1998), the value of local ecological knowledge (Felt and Neis 2000), the resiliency of smaller-scaled work (Neis et al. 2013), and methods of good treaty relationality (Pictou 2015). We should also draw on past work examining intergenerational livelihoods (Corbett 2005; Neis et al. 2013), which helps us understand the experiences of young workers, especially how education, training, and employment opportunities incentivize or disincentivize them from pursuing resource livelihoods. Scholarship on labor outmigration (Hall et al. 2026; MacDonald et al. 2006; Murray et al. 2021; Vodden and Hall 2016) should also play a central role in this effort. This literature has contested popular conceptions that assume rurality is defined by rootedness and immobility (Milbourne and Kitchen 2014), but analysis is often conducted at the level of the family (see Murray et al. 2021). A further opportunity exists to integrate this literature into a broader study of how migration, both in and out, reshapes rural relationalities. Could a refocus on good resource-based work in Atlantic Canada help bring some of these workers home? How would that impact community life?

"Good" should continue to be worked out in intricate ways but must minimally include anti-neoliberal and anti-productivist orientations (i.e., a focus on quality of life and work, not just growth), ecological awareness, a strong decolonial ethic, and a support of pursuits that go beyond pure extractive economies; part of this includes focusing not merely on staples goods, but also the diverse and growing ways we can add value to resources in burgeoning local and export markets. All of these pursuits require deep attention to those social and economic dynamics that only "dirt research" can capture.

Peter Thompson (2019) has argued that de-industrialization is an ongoing process, and that denying its continuation into the present risks covering over its effects. I largely agree, but also argue that the recoil of the de-industrializing period is settling into a new and only partially studied contemporary moment defined both by an understanding of rurality as an aesthetic realm, and a push to re-industrialize without clarity on the role and benefit for people and places. This is a situation that is now profoundly shaping rural Atlantic Canada, not least by inciting new social and economic dynamics related to contemporary patterns of migration and reorientations toward the rural landscape, but also by sidelining questions of what good resource-based livelihoods might look like in the future. I feel this circumstance is precisely where Matthews (2014), Stanbridge (2014), and others want attention paid. For Stanbridge, a "deep physical and emotional awareness of Canadian conditions" (2014, 391) is a necessary part of the revival of dirt research. I would like to suggest that for new generations of sociologists, the frameworks that compose our canon literature may, in ways, no longer reflect the deep awareness we have of our place. For instance, the ecological and economic disasters of the previous century may not feel like distinct events that demand adaptive resiliency; they may have faded instead into a broader underlying condition of existence, and if this is the case, scholarship should begin to engage with frameworks that help make sense of this context, or the present "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977)—perhaps framed as a new engagement with the outcomes of the actions of resiliency of our communities. This new direction holds the possibility of forging a number of new strands of sociological work in Nova Scotia, the Atlantic region, and beyond: a reinvigorated engagement with the meaning of rurality, a new class politics that directly engages in issues of livelihood and lifestyle, a complex reorientation of what work means for rural places, and most importantly, the creation of a vision of rural wellbeing based on principles of diverse and locally-driven economies in which good resource-based livelihoods play a central role.

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