

**From Fishing Centre to Tourist Destination
The Restructuring of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia**

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1. Introduction

The world fisheries are in crisis: marine resources are in global decline (McGoodwin 1990). Coastal communities ranging from Havana, Cuba, and Reykjavik, Iceland, in the Atlantic, to Borocay, The Philippines, in the Pacific, and Split, Yugoslavia, in the Mediterranean -- all previously dependent on marine resources -- have now turned to tourism, the largest and most expansive industry in the world, to cure their ailing economies. But in all these cases, this economic remedy has come at a price including degradation of the environment, increased emigration, higher costs of living, more community conflict, restructuring of the workforce, de-skilling of labour, commodification of culture and the invention of traditions.

This paper will focus on the last two consequences of tourism -- commodification of culture and the invention of traditions -- as they affect a Canadian coastal community. Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, has apparently found prosperity as a tourist destination. Over the last twenty years, its economy has gradually moved from one based primarily on fishing and its related industries, to one heavily dependent on tourism. Through this process, fishing has changed from a lived experience of many to that of a few. Fishing, as a way of life, has become a commodity, an historical artefact, a romantic adventure, which has been used to promote tourism. This paper will discuss the general process of Lunenburg's restructuring and two specific inter-related examples of the commodification process -- the Fishermen's Memorial, and the Fishermen's Reunion and Picnic, formerly known as the Fishermen's Exhibition.

2. The Context

The most recent studies of fishing-dependent communities of the North Atlantic rim, notably by Apostle and co-workers (1999), and Newell and Ommer (1999), focus on the restructuring of the fishing industry and the sustainability of these communities and their maritime environments. Few researchers, with the exceptions of anthropologists Marie Anne Powers (1998), Karen Szalamek and Kara McIntosh (1996) in the case of Newfoundland, and historian Ian McKay (1994) and his graduate students in the case of Nova Scotia, have looked at the social or cultural impacts of tourism on communities in Atlantic Canada. To date, no one has examined in depth the role tourism has played in restructuring Atlantic Canadian fishing-dependent communities.

The process of becoming a tourist designation involves the creation of a product, which can be bought and sold (Cohen 1988, MacCannell 1989). In the case of Lunenburg, this commo-

dification focuses on its historical ties to the sea and particularly the fishery. Lunenburg was established in 1753 as a government sponsored settlement of “foreign Protestants” -- Palatinate Germans -- who made their living primarily from lumbering and farming, and before long, from fishing. Lunenburg rapidly became the premiere port in the Maritimes for the schooner fishery and the auxiliary industries of boat building and fishing supplies. For the next century and a half, Lunenburg thrived on this mixed economy while the steady economic growth of other industries (e.g., foundries and engine factories) smoothed out the boom and bust cycles of the fishery. This prosperity was embodied in the wealthy merchants' stores, dry-docks, wharves, and the Lunenburg Foundry located along the harbour. Captains' and merchants' stately homes, churches, and retail establishments gradually filled in the landscape from the shore to the top of the hill where the Lunenburg Academy proudly stood. A town hall, courthouse, Masonic temple, and an opera house, built in a grand style, marked the centre of town. The historical development of Lunenburg -- physically, economically, and culturally -- forms the framework for today's tourist development.

Through the process of commodification the historical and culture entity of Lunenburg, is being transformed into a distorted reflection of itself. It claims authenticity and yet it is not (Cohen 1988, Urry 1990). In 1992, Lunenburg's old town was designated a national historic district, and in 1995 an UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) world heritage site. As it rapidly metamorphosed from fishing centre to tourist destination, the tourist transformation focused on the "old town." These changes include not only the "gentrification" and commercialisation of historical buildings and other aspects of the physical landscape, but also include modifications to the social and cultural landscape. The blacksmith, who once made anchors and other hardware for fishing vessels, now creates decorative ironwork (e.g., light switch plates and andirons for fireplaces) to grace tourists' homes. The revitalised shipyards and chandlers now service yachts and other pleasure craft where once they built fishing schooners and other vessels. Captains' houses, fishing company warehouses, and corner stores have been turned into swank Bed and Breakfasts, up-scale restaurants, and tourist shops, all proclaimed as historical properties by plaques outside their doors. The Fisheries Museum along the waterfront preserves the history of the fishery, while rusting hulls of groundfish trawlers made redundant from the latest downsizing bob in the harbour adjacent to the museum quay where the first trawler – the ‘Cape North’ – is tied up for daily visiting. Local events have been transformed to reflect

the changing economic realities. Activities such as the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival (Music), Nova Scotia Folk Art Festival, and Heritage House Tours also commodify and sell Lunenburg's past.

This romanticisation of the past is not new. For example, the folklorist Helen Creighton portrayed the "fishing folk" in the 1920s through 1960s as kind and simple people -- men of steel who went out in wooden boats to do battle with the sea (MacKay, 1994). What is new is the extensive and systematic use of this image to sell the area through tourist brochures, community events, the print media, and productions for TV and film. Even 'Good Morning America' has broadcast from the wharves of Lunenburg proclaiming the town's advantages as a tourist site. But the romantic portrayal of the past has little to do with the stark economic realities, which have plagued the Lunenburg area over the last three decades.

3. Restructuring of Lunenburg

By the 1960s, Lunenburg had become the base for the major commercial deep-sea fleets, which harvested groundfish and scallops off the shores of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador. The extension of the exclusive economic zone (200-mile limit) in 1977 and the re-structuring of the fisheries throughout the 1980s were to herald a new golden age for the fisheries. Alas it was not to be. Since 1993 Atlantic Canadian fishing communities have been decimated by the Cod Moratorium which virtually shut down all harvesting of groundfish in the sea off Nova Scotia north of Halifax, throughout the Gulf of St. Lawrence, off the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador into the Davis Straits. The message sent by the Federal government through their relief package, The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS), which came to an end in the summer of 1998, has been loud and clear: get out of the fishery, retrain, develop alternative industries -- most notably tourism -- and resettle in areas of the country where there are jobs. But both "cures" for these economic ills, emigration and alternative employment, have substantial side effects.

My most recent research has focused on the impact of Atlantic Canada's fisheries crisis on fishing-dependent households in Lunenburg and Halifax counties (Binkley, 1995, 1996, In Press). Although fishers from this area can still catch groundfish, the crisis has led to massive declines in cod quotas, a reliance on scallop and lobster stocks, and a general recession in Lunenburg's economy. The crews of commercial deep-sea vessels owned by vertically-integrated companies based in Lunenburg have either been laid off or had their number of fishing trips sub-

stantially reduced. Fish plants have closed or work at reduced capacity. Independent coastal fishers have sought the same few lucrative stocks as the deep-sea fishers, but they have also started fishing under-utilised species such as dogfish and sharks. The decline in the fishing industry and the subsequent decline in incomes of fishing-dependent households, the need for alternative employment for members of their households, and the decline of local businesses, have all contributed to the growing importance, both relatively and absolutely, of Lunenburg's tourist industry. The parallel decline of the fisheries and the rise of tourism have resulted in a more massive and rapid economic and social restructuring of Lunenburg than if these events had occurred separately.

The distribution of wealth within the community has changed dramatically. Although there has been a re-investment of “old” town money derived from the fisheries and other related industries, there has also been an influx of “new” money from outside the town. Entrepreneurs from Halifax, many of them emigrants from the U.S., have joined with retirees and exurbanites from central Canada, some of them Maritimers returning home, to invest in Lunenburg's new economy. Tourists, ranging from long-term summer residents to those just coming for the day, start arriving in Lunenburg in the late April, the numbers peaking in August, and then tapering off to a trickle by the end of October. Most come from Nova Scotia, other parts of Canada, and New England, but more and more Europeans, particularly Germans, have bought a little piece of the Nova Scotian shoreline or lake frontage to build their summer chalet. (A local real estate agent claims an affiliation with Sotheby's.) Investment by tourists and entrepreneurs has resulted in increased value in houses, land, and rental property. But for many local long-term residents these increased property values cannot be realised unless they sell their current home and move elsewhere. Financially hard pressed fishing families are selling their houses and leaving, or else staying in the area but in rental accommodations or with family.

Other factors have also led to an increased cost of living for long-term local residents. Tourists and entrepreneurs demand particular facilities and speciality items not “traditionally” available in the area. By creating these new demands for services and commodities, new entrepreneurial possibilities arise; however, other commodities used predominately by long-term residents are displaced and/or replaced by more expensive alternatives. People with disposable income welcome this influx of more up-scale consumer goods. But for some, these new goods are well beyond their economic reach. Inflation in the price of basic commodities and the replace-

ment of these goods with the more expensive alternatives preferred by tourists means that financial pressure is intensified on low-income families. Moreover, in the winter many facilities are closed, forcing locals to travel to shopping centres, notably in Halifax, to buy necessities.

Members from fishing-dependent households are seeking work in the tourist industry to supplement or replace the incomes they derived from fishing, but these new jobs, associated with the service sector, are fundamentally different from their previous employment. Fishing related jobs were relatively high paying full-time year-round employment for men on the boats or full-time year round or seasonal shift employment for men and women in the fish processing plants. Many of the people laid off from the fishery have low educational levels. The jobs available to them in the tourist sector tend to be seasonal, part-time/split shift work at minimum wage and are primarily for women. Moreover, there is little or no new employment available in the area during the winter months. This transformation of employment opportunities, and the de-skilling and feminisation of work have exacerbated the economic problems facing fishing families and other long-term residents.

All of these changes can lead to tension between long-term residents and newcomers, and these conflicts are being played out in many different ways within the community. One example is the modification of municipal by-laws, which favour the new economic activities and disadvantage other more established activities. Conflicts have arisen between new residents and commercial fishing enterprises. Many tourists see small brightly coloured wooden fishing boats as quaint and romantic, but living beside a fully operational fishing enterprise brings strange smells and sounds. Tourist enterprises, bed and breakfast owners and motel operators, have successfully closed two fishing enterprises through changes in the town by-laws. Such conflicts, and worse, are likely as tourism increases, especially if the fishery continues to decline.

Against this backdrop, I would like to discuss two tourist attractions. The first, the Fishermen's Memorial and Tribute site commemorates fishermen who have lost their lives at sea and celebrates the lives of those who work on the sea. The second, the Lunenburg Fishermen's Reunion and Picnic, which used to be called the Fishermen's Exhibition, celebrates a way of life, which is rapidly disappearing from the coast, by gathering together families still engaged in the fishery for a picnic with family, returning friends, and tourists. Both of these inter-related attractions have very different meaning for the community and the tourists.

4. The Fishermen's Memorial and Tribute

The Fishermen's Memorial and Tribute, unveiled August 25, 1996, is located on the waterfront at the end of the parking lot of the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic and beside the warehouses of Adams and Knickle. The monument shaped as a compass rose, comprises eight three-sided columns at each compass point. Inscribed on these black granite columns are the names of mariners, primarily fishermen from Lunenburg County who lost their lives at sea from 1890 to 1995. The central four-side black granite column bears this inscription: "Dedicated to the memory of those who have gone down to the sea in ships and who have never returned and as a tribute to those who continue to occupy their business in the great waters."

In the early morning of 31 January 1993 the Cape Aspy, a scallop-dragger based in Lunenburg, sank off the shores of Cape Sable Island while on her way to the George's Banks. The captain and four men drowned: the remaining eleven crew members survived. After this tragedy, it was suggested that the Fishermen's Memorial Room located in the fishermen's exhibition Hall (now known as the Lunenburg Community Centre) be relocated somewhere more prominent along the waterfront. After much discussion and negotiation, the memorial room was moved to the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic and the monument was built outside the Museum, paid for by public subscription.

Every tourist site has both a front and back. The front is the public view, what the community wants the tourist to see, and what the tourist sees, interprets and takes away from the event. Of course, these interpretations of the same site may be different. The back view, is what the site means to community. This meaning is usually much deeper. At the unveiling of the monument, the Anglican Bishop Hiltz attempted to summarise what he thought this memorial meant to the community. He began by asking these questions:

What do these stones mean? In response to that question, what will we tell our children?

What will this generation tell the next of their significance? ...

For the community the location of the monument on the wharf next to the old fishing storehouses of Adams and Knickle, is important. As Hiltz stated:

First of all, *their very location is telling* (Hiltz's emphasis). Not up on the hillside, but down here on the waterfront, looking out to sea -- these stones are a sign of the vocation of all who are lured by the sea -- by its beauty and its fury, its rhythms and its rage, its

abundance in harvest and its poverty in stocks that have been depleted. This location is that place from which they sail and that place where they land their catch. This is that place of departures and fare thee wells, that place of returns and happy reunions with family and friends. Truly, these stones are where they should be.

Moreover, the monument is exposed to the elements symbolically reproducing fishermen exposure to the elements in their daily work.

For most fishing families I spoke to about the monument, its primary function is as a memorial. A way of keeping a memory fresh a memory of a grandfather, father, brother, son or husband although they also recognise it as a celebration of life that they are still engaged in. For many tourists the memorial aspect of the site dominates their understanding of the site. In our society the erection of stone monuments commemorate major events that have shaped a people or a nation. The most common are those monuments related to war veterans. By erecting this monument the community of Lunenburg has stated that the fishing industry has shaped their lives and recognised the sacrifice that fishermen have made in order to make a living. Through this process they have codified an aspect of their culture and created a tradition -- adding names as disasters happen. This codification creates a formal mechanism by which the community remembers and celebrates in a public place – not the semi-private Fishermen’s Hall. At the same time the process has limits and commodifies an aspect of their culture, which was previously individual and varied in nature and tone.

5. The Lunenburg Fishermen’s Picnic and Reunion

The Fishermen’s Exhibition was annually held in August and featured display of fishing boats, gear and other equipment, fish plant equipment such as fish filleting machinery, and safety equipment including survival suits. Fishers, manufacturers, fish plant managers and owners, fish buyers and other people engaged in the industry would make a pilgrimage to the Exhibition to either buy or sell their wares and to see what was the “latest” in the fishery. The exhibition also supplied a venue for fishers and plant workers to pit their skills against each other by competing in skill based competitions such as fish filleting or scallop shucking. The event was so important that Lunenburg erected an Exhibition Hall and used the arena to house the Exhibition. Within the Exhibition Hall a small room was set aside as a memorial room dedicated to the memory of

fishers who have lost their lives at sea. Of course both of these venues were used throughout the year for other events.

With the decline of the fishery, the Exhibition lost its focus. The dealers no longer came to sell their wares. Instead, the event, renamed the Fishermen's Reunion and Picnic, now attracts fishing-dependent families for a picnic with their family and friends. The competition still happens but the men who compete are older and the winners of the events do not have the same pride of accomplishment they once had. The Hall no longer bears the name Fishermen's Hall: it is now the Lunenburg Community Centre. The memorial room has been moved to the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic. These changes clearly symbolises the removal of the fishery and fishing-dependent families from the core of the community's self-definition. Yes it can be argued that these changes make the memorial more public, more visible, and less private and but it also indirectly has become a tribute to an industry and a way of life that once was.

In this paper I have attempted to argue that tourism has been seen as a panacea for economically ailing fishing-dependent communities. But this medicine has some strong side effects associated with the economic and social re-structuring of the community. The question is: Are the results worth it?

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