

**Jill L Grant and Karin Kronstal**  
School of Planning, Dalhousie University  
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**DRAFT**

***SMART CITY / COOL CITY:***  
**ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENTED AND CREATIVE WORKERS**  
**IN HALIFAX<sup>1</sup>**

Since the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the creative class ideas of Richard Florida (2002a; 2005a; 2005b) have drawn the attention of economic development agencies. Cities across Canada have committed to developing strategies to better attract and retain talented and creative workers who they see as vital to the engine of growth. Place-marketing strategies enthusiastically engage in what Peck (2005, p. 753) described as an “interurban war for talent”. Like many other Canadian cities, Halifax, Nova Scotia, invited Richard Florida to address its business interests (HRM, 2004), and began to underscore the importance of the creative class to the future of the city.

The Greater Halifax Partnership, a public/private partnership formed in 1996 to promote growth in Halifax Regional Municipality (GHP, 2007a), initiated a marketing campaign to brand Halifax as a “smart city”, based on census results that showed that the city led the nation in the proportion of residents with post-secondary education. The Partnership commissioned background research to calculate the city’s scores on Florida’s various indices: Gertler and Vinodrai (2004) showed that Halifax was 4<sup>th</sup> on the Talent Index (bachelor degree or higher), 7<sup>th</sup> on the Bohemian Index (proportion working in artistic and creative occupations), and 19<sup>th</sup> on the Mosaic Index (proportion foreign-born). The economic development strategy adopted in 2005 eased back from using the smart city language to focus instead on “smart growth” and creating a positive climate for business as those making policy decisions took the combined approach of seeking to create jobs while making the city more attractive to the creative class (GHP, 2005a). In 2006, the Partnership absorbed the Halifax Regional Development Agency to become the official economic development department of the municipality (GHP, 2007a). With its revised mandate to promote the interests of both urban and rural parts of the region, the Partnership adopted a new branding slogan: “Smart business, strong community.”

In the post-war period, Halifax grew relatively slowly as a military and government town, but by the early 1990s the trajectory was clearly changing. In 1986 the Shambhala Buddhist movement chose Halifax as its new spiritual centre, initiating an influx of hundreds of talented and creative workers and entrepreneurs, mostly from the US. In the early 1990s, bands like Sloan and Thrush Hermit drew attention to the creativity of the Halifax music scene. The G7 summit in Halifax in 1995 brought federal funds to the city

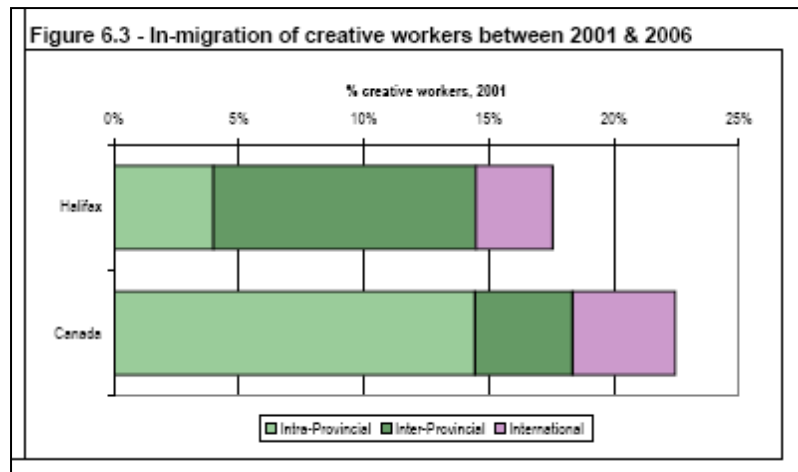
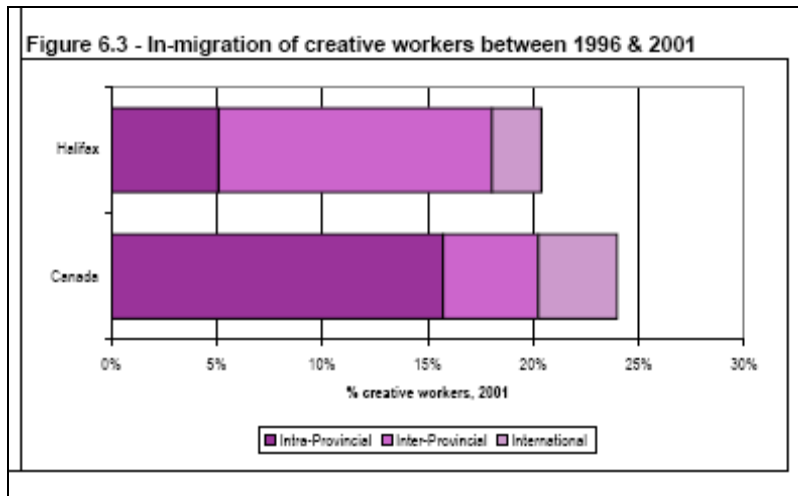
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<sup>1</sup> Funding for this research project was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (grant 412-2005-1001); the principal investigator on the project is Dr David Wolfe at the University of Toronto.

to improve the waterfront, creating the first portions of a boardwalk that grew to span the downtown area. Offshore oil and gas exploration and development pumped new energy into the economy. By the time of amalgamation of the cities, town, and county into Halifax Regional Municipality in 1996, Halifax was becoming an area of declining unemployment, targeted migration, and tourist interest. Its universities and research facilities were nationally respected and improving in their competitiveness.

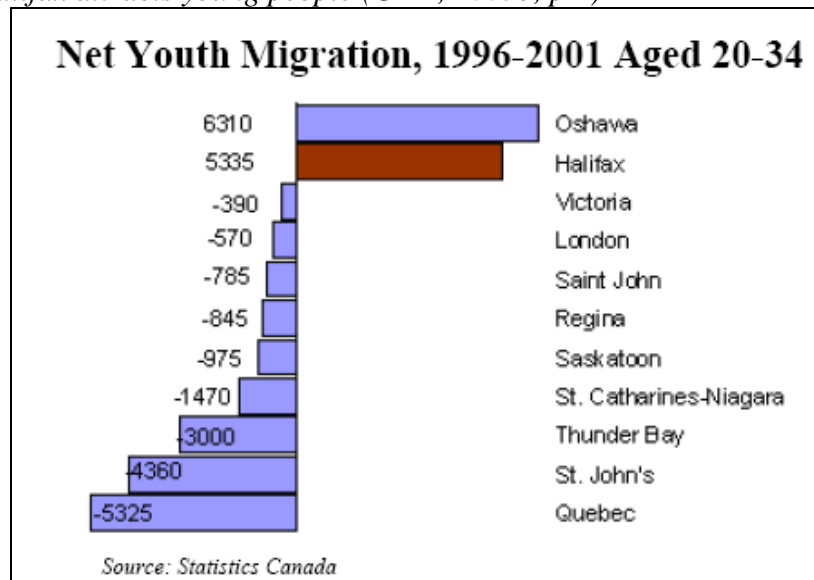
The 2001 census indicated that Halifax had 37.4% of workers in creative occupations, compared with 29.2% in Canada (Spencer and Vinodrai, 2006). Population was growing faster than the national rate. Despite the fact that wages remained below the national average, as Figure 1 shows, Halifax enjoyed a higher rate of inter-provincial migration among creative workers than was typical in Canada. Halifax had become a destination of choice for creative workers.

Figure 1: In-migration of creative workers to Halifax (Spencer and Vinodrai, 2006, p 7; 2009, p. 7))



With post-secondary educational institutions expanding their capacity for students to remedy budgetary shortfalls, attracting students to the city became a greater priority in the late 1990s. The 2001 census hints at the success of the strategy (see Figure 2): Halifax enjoyed substantial intra-provincial in-migration in the 20-24 and 25-29 year age brackets in the period from 1996-2001 (GHP, 2005b). Given the high proportion of young people, and the large numbers of bars and nightclubs in the city, Halifax seems likely to score highly on Florida’s (2002b) “coolness index”.

Figure 2: Halifax attracts young people (GHP, 2005b, p 1)



By 2004, Halifax was ahead of many communities on some key indicators. With unemployment at 6% in Halifax (compared with 6.8% in Vancouver, 7.6% in Toronto, and 8.5% in Montreal), authorities worried about a potential labour shortage (GHP, 2005a; 2005b). The economic strategy 2005 noted that “The best way to head off a crisis is generating upscale, high-salary jobs in growth industries... to make our community a magnet for highly trained immigrants and expatriates” (GHP, 2005a, p. 14). Consultants hired to help identify the factors which attract and retain young talented and creative workers to Halifax advised the Partnership that young professionals look for a “cool city” where they can live first and work second (Next Generation Consulting, 2007). Focus group studies and surveys revealed that urban amenities, such as bike lanes and access to water, matter to these workers. Halifax has a quality of life and night life that appeals to young people. As the consultants reminded authorities, though, “lack of employment opportunities is the number one issue in Halifax’s ability to attract and retain talent. Young professionals feel they must leave Halifax to gain career advancement” (Next Generation Consulting, 2007, p. 6).

Florida’s contention that talented workers migrate to attractive locations and then find employment that drives economic growth has come under scrutiny in recent research. Houston et al (2008) found that job prospects proved pivotal in attracting talented workers to Scotland: in the absence of a job offer, people would not relocate. Donegan et al (2008) argued that traditional economic variables of industry composition and human

capital explained growth and competitiveness in US metropolitan areas more robustly than Florida's talent, technology, and tolerance. Wolfe and Bramwell (2008) noted that the decisions of firms and talented workers interact: if firms do not choose to locate in a region, then it is highly unlikely that talented workers, apart from entrepreneurs, would remain. Storper and Scott (2009) emphasized the complex relationship between the location of firms and the movement of labour: individual choices are inevitably constrained by the spatial logic of productive activity and personal context. In a recent study of Canadian regions, Florida et al (2009) suggested that a combination of technology, amenities, and tolerance may account for patterns in regional development.

The exploratory study reported here looks at the factors affecting talent attraction and retention in three sectors of the Halifax work force as reported by participants in that market. We hoped to gain a better sense of the social dynamics and effect of place in affecting the choices that talented and creative workers made in coming to Halifax. We also explored Donegan et al's (2008) suggestion that different factors might affect choices among varying components of the creative classes. Our analysis suggests some parallels in the factors that attract and retain workers in the health research and music sectors, and identifies important linkages between the successes of these sectors. Factors influencing talented and creative workers in the built environment consulting sector differ considerably from those affecting the other sectors. While all respondents appreciated the natural beauty and size of Halifax, choices of those in the health research and music sectors depended on the unique social dynamics of their employment sector in the Halifax context, and on their personal decisions about their career trajectories and accommodation ambitions. The findings indicated that a perceived lack of diversity in the wider community did not affect the attraction or retention of talented and creative workers in Halifax.

Between 11 June and 20 August 2007 we conducted 26 semi-structured interviews in Halifax with a total of 28 respondents<sup>2</sup>. The interviews involved three categories of respondents: talented and creative workers, employers or supervisors of creative workers, and representatives of intermediary organizations in the local development community (Table 1). Related but slightly different interview schedules were used for each category of respondent. Most interviews took between 40 and 90 minutes and were recorded for transcription and analysis. Sixteen men and 12 women participated in the interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Aaron Pettman, Rebecca Butler, and Jeff Haggett for their excellent research assistance in data collection and processing.

*Table 1: Gender of respondents [n= 28]*

Creative Worker <sup>3</sup>		Employer <sup>4</sup>		Intermediary*	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
7	6	6	1	3	5

\* One interview with intermediary organizations involved two female respondents while another interview involved one male and one female respondent.

Table 2 indicates the categories of respondents interviewed. We selected three sectors for investigation: health research (science, high tech), consulting (knowledge based services), and music (creative industry).

- Halifax has become an important site of health research in its universities and hospitals. Biomedical research is a significant high-tech cluster in the region, attracting researchers from around the world.
- Halifax has a concentration of planning / architecture/ design and engineering consulting firms that do contract work throughout the region and beyond.
- Halifax attracts musicians and music sector workers from across the country to its internationally-recognized indie music scene. It has a significant cluster of creative workers in the art and culture sector.

*Table 2: Interview sessions by type [n=26]*

Sector	Creative Worker	Employer	Intermediary Organizations	Total
Consulting	4	4	0	8
Music	6	0	1	7
Health	3	3	2	8
General	0	0	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>26</b>

Whenever possible, we interviewed workers and employers/supervisors within the same organizations, and intermediaries within the same sector. We asked respondents from general intermediary organizations that work to facilitate economic development in the city to speak about the ability of Halifax to attract and retain talented workers in various industries. We begin our presentation by identifying themes that came up commonly across sectors before highlighting the differences we found between sectors.

<sup>3</sup> We asked creative workers for their place of birth: six were born in Nova Scotia (two in Halifax); four came from Ontario, and one from Alberta; two were born outside Canada.

<sup>4</sup> Although we used slightly different interview schedules for employers in the health research sector than in other business sectors, we combined the results for this analysis.

## **Why do talented and creative workers live in Halifax?**

We asked respondents open-ended questions to encourage them to identify the factors that attracted talented and creative workers to the Halifax region and helped keep them there. Respondents across all sectors and respondent categories offered particular themes with considerable frequency (see Table 3). For instance, 22 of 28 respondents spoke about the natural beauty of the city and region: the ocean, lakes, proximity to nature, parks, and/or the waterfront. Easy access from the city to rural areas of natural beauty and recreation represented a distinct advantage for Halifax.

Another common set of themes related to the ability to live comfortably in the city. Twenty-one respondents spoke about the cost of housing, most indicating that Halifax was relatively affordable compared with many Canadian cities; some respondents worried that inflation in housing costs and gentrification were beginning to undermine that advantage. Quality of life, lifestyle, and the laid-back pace of life in Halifax came up in 19 interviews. Many respondents noted that the size of Halifax represented a clear asset: large enough to have many amenities of a big city but small enough for people to feel comfortable and known. Worker respondents often commented on the ability to live close to work and without a car in a city that they find walkable and attractive. The lack of traffic and ease of commuting represented an advantage cited in 14 interviews. Employers and general intermediaries interviewed pointed to the international airport with good connections to Europe, the eastern seaboard, and central Canada as an advantage for Halifax. Fifteen respondents described the vibrant arts and culture sector in the city as an asset. Worker respondents often cited the vibrant night life and music scene as attracting them to the city. Two respondents described Halifax as a “cool city,” while those in the music industry and the health research sector indicated the city enjoys international recognition as being leading-edge in their fields.

*Table 3: Some themes spontaneously generated in interviews as characteristics of the city region attracting workers to Halifax*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research sector n=8</b>	<b>Music sector n=7</b>	<b>Consulting sector n=8</b>	<b>General intermediaries n=3</b>
Nature, ocean, waterfront	4	6	8	2
Urban / rural proximity	2	1	6	2
Quality of life, lifestyle, pace	4	4	8	3
Cost of housing	6	7	7	1
Walkability	4	4	5	1
Less commuting and need for car	5	2	5	2
Weather	5	3	1	1
Universities – quality, number, size	6	4	2	3
University and college students	6	5	3	2
University location downtown	4	0	1	0
NSCAD art college	0	5	4	1
Art and culture	4	6	3	2
Music scene	4	6	2	0
Night life, party town	5	4	3	1
Small city / big city	5	7	5	1
Design, form, heritage	2	6	5	1
Ability to live near work	1	1	6	0
International airport, good connections	4	1	4	2
Schools, infrastructure	3	1	2	2
Pool of talented workers	4	6	1	3

Many respondents pointed to the cluster of universities in Halifax as a clear advantage for the city. Development intermediaries noted that they used the high proportion of educated workers to market Halifax as a “smart city” to attract investors. Fifteen interviews raised the quality, number, and size of the universities as factors attracting talented people to the city. Sixteen respondents noted that the pool of students brought to the city was vital to its success: in the research sector, talented students prove integral to the research mission; in the music sector, students provide reliable audiences to sustain a live music scene and much of the creative talent that grows within the music scene. Ten respondents specifically mentioned the art college -- NSCAD University -- as a key asset in the city: five of seven respondents in the music sector acknowledged the creative energy that the art college brings the city, and spoke about the musical talent originating there.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the physical characteristics of the city region which helped to attract and retain talented and creative workers, respondents pointed with some frequency to positive social characteristics (see Table 4). In half of the interviews respondents suggested that the region had a strong emotional pull on former residents who may have grown up in or

<sup>5</sup> Although NSCAD does not have a music program, well-known recording artists such as Sarah McLachlan and Sloan formed their bands while studying art there.

attended university in Halifax; development authorities worked with that knowledge on a marketing strategy to encourage talented workers to “Come home to Nova Scotia”. People in the city were described as friendly and welcoming to newcomers, while the city itself was seen as safe and a good place for raising children. Respondents in the music sector and in the research sector identified Halifax as enjoying a unique level of collegiality and mutual support among peers that they had not experienced in work environments elsewhere in Canada.

*Table 4: Some themes generated in interviews as social characteristics of the city region or the industrial sector that attract workers to Halifax*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research sector n=8</b>	<b>Music sector n=7</b>	<b>Consulting sector n=8</b>	<b>General intermediaries n=3</b>
Coming home, attachment to place	5	1	6	2
Collegial, supportive work environment in sector	4	6	2	0
Tolerant environment to diversity within sector	4	4	3	0
Opportunities to volunteer	3	3	0	1
‘Small pond’ – opportunity to be known	2	4	2	1
Friendly, welcoming	2	5	3	2
Making do with limited resources – ‘can do’ attitude	4	3	0	0
Good for raising kids	4	5	4	1
Safe	4	6	3	0

Some respondents acknowledged particular advantages to Halifax. The size of the city and its social characteristics provided opportunities for talented workers to engage with persons of authority, like government ministers: to be “big fish in a small pond”. Celebrities could walk the streets of the city without being pestered for autographs or photographs. The city offered many opportunities for workers to volunteer their services and make a significant contribution to the community.

Respondents generally described their own sectors as tolerant to diversity while acknowledging that the population of Halifax was relatively homogeneous. As Table 5 indicates, 13 respondents noted that the city had little immigration and limited ethnic diversity: four respondents (all workers) alluded to a degree of racism or segregation towards African Nova Scotians and First Nations peoples. Twelve people called the city a conservative place, while the same number complained about bureaucratic processes and patronage politics in government.



*Table 5: Some themes spontaneously generated in interviews as characteristics of the city region that limit success in attracting or retaining talented workers*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research sector n=8</b>	<b>Music sector n=7</b>	<b>Consulting sector n=8</b>	<b>General intermediaries n=3</b>
Need to go away for success	4	4	4	1
Conservative place	3	4	5	0
Bureaucratic processes, patronage politics	4	3	4	1
Limited population diversity, little immigration	3	4	5	1
Lack of innovation and support from government	3	2	5	1
Limited local market	3	5	4	1
Distance from larger centres	2	4	1	0
Transit	1	2	3	1

Respondents described some organizational, geographic, and economic considerations as barriers to retaining talented workers. Eleven respondents saw governments at varying levels as resisting innovation and failing to support sectors appropriately: the local government received considerable criticism. The small size of the local market came up in 13 interviews, with acknowledgement that growing opportunities would help keep people in the region. Seven respondents talked about the geographic isolation of the city at some distance from the nearest large cities. The cost of travelling was a major concern for musicians who toured outside the region; two music sector workers suggested, however, that Halifax's isolation helped nurture its originality and unique musical style. Seven respondents talked about transit in the city region, with most suggesting that service needed to be improved.

## **Sector Perspectives**

While respondents agreed on many of the factors affecting decisions to come to or stay in Halifax, we noted some significant differences between the sectors profiled.

### *Development intermediaries*

We met with five economic development intermediaries during three interviews. They highlighted the quality and number of universities as special strengths of the region, and spoke about government policies and programs to encourage immigrants and businesses to locate and stay in Halifax. To illustrate the tolerance of the city, they described inclusionary hiring programs in the police and fire departments. They named a recent initiative to create a social network of young professionals as a strategy specifically targeting the retention of talented workers<sup>6</sup>. Development intermediaries pointed to regional infrastructure of schools, arts and culture, medical centres, airport, and port as assets for the region. They also indicated that the quality of life and lifestyle of the area presented a marketing opportunity for development.

When asked to identify the features of the city region that limited its attractiveness, development intermediaries talked about the need to keep salaries competitive and to grow the economy to provide additional jobs for people. They identified property and provincial income taxes as barriers to attracting and retaining businesses and talented workers. One suggested that national immigration policies have tended to favour Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, to the detriment of smaller regional centres like Halifax.

### *Health research sector*

We interviewed three employer/supervisors, two intermediaries, and three workers in this sector. None of the workers was born in Halifax, but one had completed a degree in the city. Respondents in the health research sector indicated that their primary reason for locating in Halifax was the ability to do leading edge work in a place they like. The concentration of good quality universities, excellent students, and high calibre research facilities came up repeatedly as advantages for Halifax. Respondents talked about Halifax “punching above its weight” in terms of the academic strengths of the universities. Talented workers have options to go elsewhere, as similar research was occurring in other large university centres. Although most of those interviewed had no previous connection to Halifax, five of eight respondents in this sector said that Halifax attracted people who wanted to “come home” or back to where they studied for their degrees.

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<sup>6</sup> Several initiatives discussed by the intermediaries appear to have come from the Next Generation Consulting (2007) report recommendations.

Text box # 1 : Respondent 08, Health research sector employer / supervisor

I mean we have a lot of universities in Halifax, so we have a lot of smart people, if you will. And I don't know if other people find this, but certainly I find having students in our environment makes it a much more vibrant, creative place to be. So by virtue of the fact that we have all these universities in this very small area, we have a very talented pool of student employees. And obviously those students go on to become your staff in centres and projects and things like that.

I think it's pretty easy for us to attract people to Halifax too. I know you'll get to some questions about what it takes to get people here, but I mean Halifax is a lovely city aesthetically. It's fairly inexpensive to live; it's walkable; the climate's not bad; it's close to Europe; it's close to the States, you know? So from that point of view, Halifax itself is a pretty easy sell when you're trying to attract people.

I think the other thing too -- certainly in my world -- Halifax is small enough that you tend to know most people who are doing work like you're doing. So it's pretty easy to pick up the phone and call whoever: you know, over the years you've bumped into them many times at meetings and conferences, whatever. So there's a real -- I guess my boss would say it's because we're under-resourced in this region, that we do this. But we're able to do a lot with very little. And we're able to pool our skills and pool our ideas and resources. There is that willingness to work together and to collaborate. And that's maybe just the Nova Scotia way. I mean you may not see that in other big cities, but we're small and we can do it, and there's a willingness to do it, so we do. So from that point of view, I think Halifax is a good place to do research.

Text box 1 gives a flavour of the myriad factors respondents in the research sector believed make Halifax attractive. The social characteristics of the region and especially of the sector itself made the city desirable. Four of eight respondents talked about the collegiality of the research sector, saying that they had previously experienced research environments in other cities that were much more competitive or antagonistic. The willingness to collaborate and the ability to succeed with limited resources came up frequently as positive social features of the work environment in the city region, especially for workers. Employers and intermediaries in the sector worried about the competitiveness of Halifax salaries in the national marketplace, but workers did not raise this issue.

Most respondents in the sector talked about the cost of housing, with most finding it advantageous: the cost of homes in Halifax compared especially favourably against places like Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary. Respondents liked the size of the city, the vibrant night life, the weather, easy access to arts and culture, and the lively music scene. Workers said they appreciated the location of the universities near downtown.

The research sector faced some challenges in attracting and retaining talented workers in part because of the nature of the discipline. Half of the respondents talked about the need for scholars to train at a range of institutions – generally in larger centres -- to demonstrate their competence and advance their careers. Employers and intermediaries spoke of the difficulty of holding onto “high flyers” who may get lured away by institutions with better resources and prestigious titles. Retaining the top talent in this

sector required good funding to equip labs and hire good students. Employers also worried about finding appropriate jobs in the city for workers' spouses<sup>7</sup>.

### *Music sector*

We interviewed six music sector workers and one music intermediary: only one of them was originally from Halifax. These respondents migrated to Halifax because they saw it as a unique and valued location to make music. Although respondents acknowledged that Toronto and Montreal had larger music scenes, all of them suggested that Halifax was a hotbed of musical creativity, innovation, and collaboration. They noted that Halifax attracted musicians from around the region and across Canada to hone their craft. Nationally and internationally recognized musicians have made a name for themselves out of Halifax, and some continue to live in the city or return regularly for creative inspiration.

Perhaps most importantly, music sector respondents said that the Halifax music scene had a reputation of being incredibly socially supportive and collaborative with a strong sense of community (see Text box # 2). Many respondents talked about the ease of integration for newcomers to the music scene, and the willingness of people within the sector to share knowledge and services. The supportive social context created opportunities for musicians to develop their performing skills within a system of mutual aid and respect. A range of musical genres have grown up in the city, with a significant concentration of singer-songwriters and indie bands.

**Text box 2 : Respondent 15, Music intermediary**

Well, there's a lot of creativity here. The music is the best it's ever been right now, and people are very collaborative in their approach to creating art. So there's this great story...printed in *Halifax Magazine*, where someone interviewed David Myles and he's talking about how he moved to Halifax from wherever he came from, Ontario or PEI or something. He was recording at the Sonic Temple, and the engineer kept saying, "I need someone to come in and do some slide guitar on this". He was like, "Oh that sounds cool". The next day a guy shows up: it's Joel Plaskett! Joel plays slide guitar, for no money, just because the engineer said "Joel, I have this song and it really needs some pedal steel", or whatever, you know? And he was like, "Well, alright then, if the song needs that, it needs it". Then all of a sudden, this whole parade: Jill Barber's coming in, Matt Mays is coming in, and all these great players are coming in. They're all doing it for nothing. We're doing it because the art is what matters.

The features those in the music sector cited most commonly as benefits of Halifax itself included the small size of the city and the reasonable cost of living. Music sector workers typically lived in the North End, downtown Halifax, or central Dartmouth: these areas included pockets of affordable housing that attracted clusters of musicians. Venues for live music also occurred in those areas. The large pool of students, the significant military

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<sup>7</sup> Donald (2001) explains that finding employment for the partners of highly skilled workers can present a serious constraint in smaller job markets.

complement, and tourist visitors provided reliable audiences for musicians to find paying gigs.

For music sector workers, a vibrant arts and culture scene contributed significantly to the attractiveness of Halifax. Five of seven respondents talked about the role of the art college in the community: it has been the catalyst of myriad bands and performers, as well as a producer of audiences interested in alternative music forms. Four respondents talked about the supportive role provided by provincial music funding and programming designed to help musicians develop business skills to succeed in the era of the internet. Music sector workers often commented on the supportive community response to their work: Halifax had good audiences. Musicians looking for a comfortable community to make a home base from which they could make their art the way they wanted to away from the hubbub of the major commercial music scenes found Halifax a sympathetic locale.

Those in the music sector identified some challenges to attracting and retaining creative workers in the region. The loss of live music venues threatened opportunities for musicians to practice their art: many respondents talked about the closing of the Khyber building by the city and complained about the need for an attractive and comfortable facility to seat larger crowds. Respondents said that musicians who hoped to make it big in their career sometimes found they had to relocate to a larger city with more venues, or to a more central location where touring became less expensive. The lack of music industry professionals (agents, managers, promoters) in Halifax made it difficult for new acts to secure representation and advice. Two respondents despaired of the government's fixation on Celtic music in its promotional material for the province, suggesting that those who pursued alternative music genres found it more challenging to gain support for their work. Some respondents worried about gentrification in neighbourhoods that musicians inhabit.

### *Consulting sector*

We interviewed four workers and four employers in the built environment consulting sector. Some firms specialized in planning and design, while others also engaged engineers: they ranged in size from small (about 10 employees) to branches of large national firms. While the consulting industry had traditionally been regionally based, in the contemporary context firms were competing for projects outside the region and outside the country. They described a shortage of some kinds of workers, especially landscape architects, senior planners, registered architects, and specialized engineers. Many indicated that some categories of talented workers changed employment fairly frequently.

Respondents in the consulting sector pointed consistently to the physical characteristics of the city region as attracting talented workers. Natural beauty, walkability, living close to work, being near rural areas, and the size of the city were important to this sector. Five of the respondents indicated that the form, heritage, or density of the city attracted them. The ease of travel to international destinations came up in four interviews.

Six of eight respondents indicated that the desire of Nova Scotians to return to the province helped firms recruit talented workers. Few respondents in this category suggested that a collaborative work environment kept workers here, but two workers indicated that the corporate culture of the firms that employed them created a positive social environment that kept them from leaving.

This sector identified several barriers to attracting and retaining talent that differed from the other sectors. Six of eight noted that salaries in the region were not competitive with other parts of Canada, especially Alberta and British Columbia. The nature of labour mobility meant that workers were often lured to the west, or “stolen” by competing firms within the region. Small firms found it difficult to offer the upward mobility that some workers hoped to achieve. Three employers noted that low wages for architects were undercutting consulting fees and salary structures in the region. Some companies therefore had turned to bidding on projects outside the region where they could charge higher fees. Five respondents suggested that they found a lack of innovative projects within the region, making it more difficult to keep talented staff members who want the opportunity to work on leading-edge designs; these companies looked for work in larger centres to develop such projects. Four respondents said that talented workers in this sector often had to go away to develop the range of experiences they needed to advance their careers within the region (see Text box # 3).

**Text Box 3 : Respondent 02, Consulting employer**

Most people want to stay here, unless they're a young graduate who needed to go away for the experience and wants to come back. And it still seems quite prevalent that you're considered a much more important contribution if you've gone away and come back. In planning or in lots of other fields, Ontario has the most money, the most jobs. Go to Ontario; get your feet wet; see what you see there; come back. And you bring a lot of added value with you. That happens quite a bit.

Five respondents saw the province as conservative and reluctant to embrace innovation. Respondents in the consulting sector came closest of any of those interviewed to suggesting that they found the lack of diversity and tolerance in the region problematic. Three mentioned racism and two described having encountered sexism in their practice. Despite these concerns, however, none indicated a desire to leave Halifax.

**What factors effectively attract and retain talented and creative workers to Halifax?**

Respondents interviewed consistently indicated that they had no immediate plans to leave Halifax. Although some noted that they were not fixed in their determination to stay in the region, many suggested that they could earn more money, receive more opportunities, enjoy greater cultural diversity, or live closer to family elsewhere. They stayed in Halifax because they preferred it over other places. They recognized the weaknesses of the city, but they believed that the benefits available to them in their jobs and in the city outweighed the problems; those who may have concluded otherwise already left.

In all sectors respondents acknowledged the quality of life and quality of place that makes Halifax stand out in the Canadian context (see Table 6). Those in the research and music sectors chose Halifax to do important and innovative work in a socially supportive work environment. Those in consulting pointed more commonly to the qualities of place in Halifax as keeping them rooted in the city. Some respondents came to Halifax to return home, or to a city that they learned to love as university students. For the most part, talented and creative workers did not come to Halifax for the money. They did not come to Halifax to find social diversity. They did not move to Halifax to become famous. Talented people came to Halifax because they believed it offered creative and lifestyle opportunities not affordable or available elsewhere.

*Table 6: Primary factors affecting retention in Halifax*

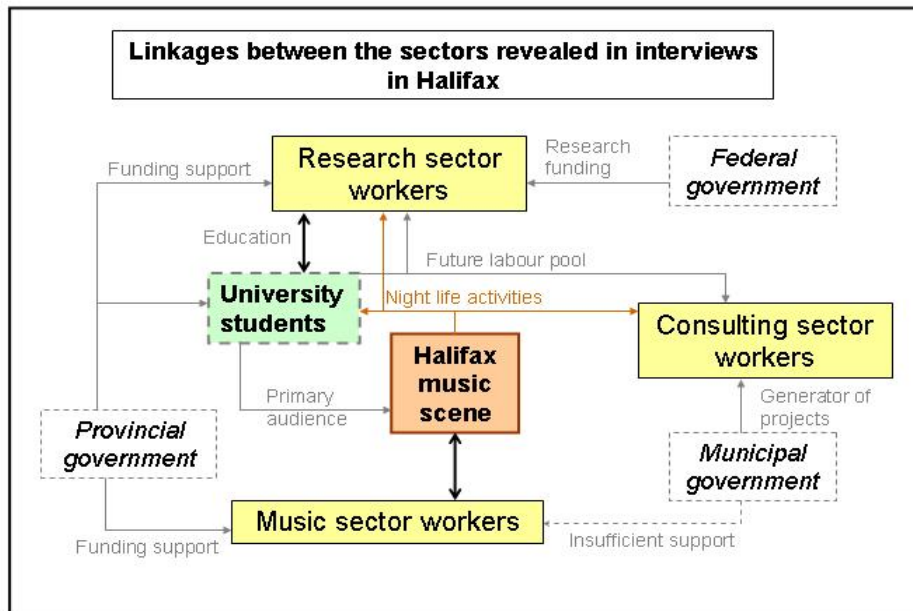
	<b>Health research</b>	<b>Music</b>	<b>Consulting</b>
<b>Primary factors keeping workers</b>	Social dynamics of the work environment Creativity potential of work environment	Social dynamics of the work environment Creativity potential of work environment	Features of place: nature, heritage, affordability, night life
<b>Secondary factors attracting workers</b>	Features of place: nature, heritage, affordability, night life	Features of place: nature, heritage, affordability, night life	Family, friends, personal history
<b>Barriers or challenges to retaining workers</b>	Some high-flyers lured away by opportunities elsewhere	Size of market and access to career opportunities	Limited creative potential of work environment Salary levels and career potential

Workers in all sectors dealt with pressure to leave the region at some point in their careers to legitimize their occupational expertise. Research workers said they were expected to train in different places to broaden and demonstrate their competence, but once they took permanent positions in Halifax they would no longer need to relocate. Because the centres of cultural influence and power lie outside the region and the region proved too small to sustain touring, musicians noted some felt the need to leave to “make it”. In some segments of consulting people said workers moved from the region to gain experiences they cannot find locally, or to improve their earning levels. Across the sectors respondents suggested that working in other parts of Canada conferred credibility and authority, not because Atlantic Canada lacks talent or meaningful work, but because of a cultural legacy that privileged knowledge generation in the larger cities of the country.

Our interviews revealed the perception that Halifax is an important centre of innovation and creativity for music and research. In both those sectors the quality of the social environment within the sector plays a significant role in attracting and retaining talented workers in industries with good opportunities in other city regions. The interviews elicited some unexpected yet important linkages between the research and music sectors (Figure 3). Researchers come to Halifax because of the quality of the universities and the research they could conduct, and the variety of activities the city offers; the universities thrive because of the quality and number of students they enrol; students come because of the quality of the universities and the perception that Halifax has a lively night life and

music scene; the music scene and night life persist because large numbers of students provide “renewable” audiences. Respondents exposed an important symbiosis between sectors linked by university students. Halifax illustrates the “artistic dividend” which Markusen and Schrock (2006) argued that artists can generate for places; in this case the music industry helps to drive the research engine so vital to innovation in the region. Thus we might argue that ensuring the viability of the music sector in Halifax may prove fundamental to strengthening economic development in the city region<sup>8</sup>.

Figure 3: Linkages between the sectors studied in Halifax



Each sector had its own labour force dynamics that affected talent attraction and retention. Even within sectors, the dynamics differed by job categories, with some workers being easily retained while others changed positions often. In the health research sector the availability of funding for research and top quality students proved critical to attracting and retaining top level researchers at the research institutes. Researchers said they go where they can do leading edge work, so the availability of funding sustained the talent base, and the quality of the talent attracted additional funds to the universities. For individuals making choices between positions in Halifax, Toronto, Calgary, or Vancouver, the cost of housing may also influence choice. While assistant professor or researcher salaries are relatively constant across the country, the cost of housing varies dramatically, making Halifax a desirable choice for those with ownership ambitions. The health research sector continues to strengthen in Halifax.

<sup>8</sup> Wojan et al (2007) examined the links between the university sector and Bohemians in a US study. They concluded that “a city’s attractiveness to artists is an important indicator of its ability to retain and attract creative workers” (Wojan et al, 2007, p. 734).



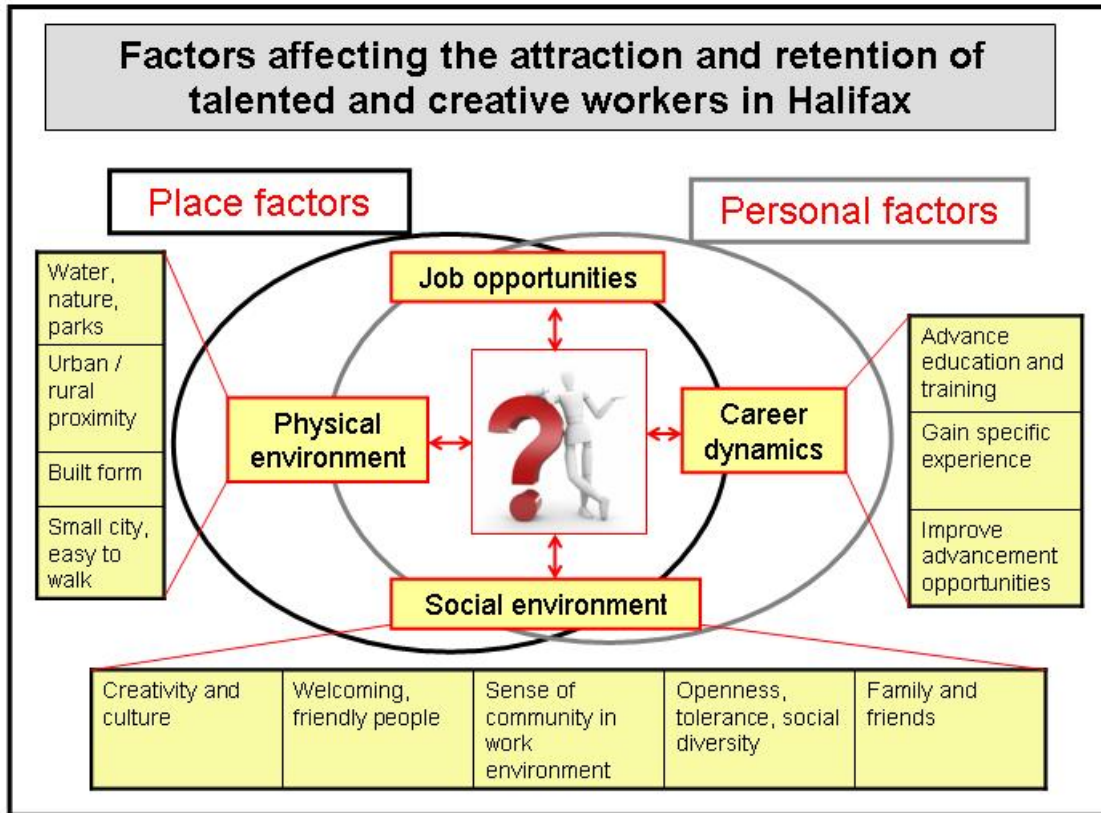
For the last decade or more, Halifax has provided an incubation function for the music sector. Music sector workers came to Halifax to hone their craft. Some musicians stayed and based their creativity in the city while touring to earn an income. Others left to try to make it in the big markets of Toronto, Montreal, Nashville, or New York. The transition from an industry driven by large record companies to downloading tunes from the internet created a context within which artists found greater choice in where they could practice their art. Maintaining the affordability of housing and practice space, and ensuring the availability of live performance venues are important to protecting the continuing viability of the sector in Halifax. Respondents proved especially critical of municipal policy: local authorities, they believe, have not recognized the contribution of the music sector to community development nor implemented policies to support it.

We found the consulting sector substantially grounded in place: for decades, consultants needed to work from the regional centre to maintain visibility for governments and large clients. In the last decade, however, economic conditions have expanded the scope of the industry. The sector engaged elements of the natural and built environment of place in its daily work. Workers in the sector valued the attributes of place more highly than did workers in other sectors, yet in some ways they seemed less rooted to their positions and least satisfied with the political and social context of the city. Although they appreciated factors such as tolerance, they pointed more commonly to issues of salary and the quality of work challenges as factors likely to affect retention. Salaries were high in some occupations (landscape architects, certain kinds of engineers, registered architects); firms struggled to find staff in some of these skilled categories. In other occupations, like junior architects, salaries were described as low and retention relatively unproblematic (because alternative job opportunities are so few). Some firms had developed organizational strategies to help retain talented workers. Consolidation of firms and corporate take-overs were increasing the size of some of the companies and providing upward mobility options for talented workers.

Talented and creative workers consider a range of factors in deciding where to locate for their work (see Figure 4). Some of those factors relate to place, while others reflect personal choices and ambitions: many overlap both spheres of influence. In the Halifax interviews, respondents identified many elements of the physical environment that attracted them to the city. However, respondents sometimes acknowledged that their own personal considerations affected how they related to place: for instance, those who like water sports or living near water may choose Halifax, while those who prefer skiing may move to Vancouver. The social environment factors that people mentioned included some closely connected to Halifax, like the warmth of the people and the cultural creativity, while some related specifically to the work environment within the sector. Respondents appreciated the degree of openness and tolerance within their own social circle, without demanding diversity in the wider community. Workers' career ambitions and the dynamics of career trajectories in their sector played an important role in attraction and retention: sometimes those bring people to Halifax; sometimes they take them away. The final cluster of factors affecting attraction and retention were job opportunities and material conditions. The small size of the labour market in Halifax presents a significant constraint. At the same time, however, the interviews suggest that if the regional

economy could provide more jobs it could attract and retain talented and creative workers to fill them at least in part because the opportunities for home ownership and quality of life are very good in Halifax.

Figure 4: Factors affecting talented and creative workers in Halifax



## Conclusions

Our findings indicate that local development agencies and respondents in Halifax used some of the language of the creative class, but their programs also promoted traditional economic development strategies of expanding the local economy to attract and retain talented and creative workers, rather than the other way around. As Houston et al (2008) found for Scotland, the attractiveness of the region alone is not sufficient to bring talent: people need jobs. Respondents saw Halifax as a desirable place to live and work, but they also recognized the availability of jobs or economic opportunities as limiting factors in the city region.

The Halifax case study illustrates the way that occupational trajectories may affect small or medium-sized regional markets. In many fields talented and creative workers need particular types of experiences for career validation. In larger cities or in regions with large markets workers can achieve such experiences without relocation because of abundant options for job mobility. In smaller or remote regions such career validation

may require out-migration. For talented and creative workers in these fields returning to Halifax represents a significant relocation cost that many undertake only with a job offer in hand.

Nova Scotia has not entirely shed its image as a conservative place, but Halifax shows signs of creative energy and growing tolerance. Perhaps, as Florida et al (2008, p. 616) argued, “The strong presence of culturally creative individuals can act as a signal of openness and inclusiveness across a region that enhances regional attractiveness to other talented individuals.” Growing numbers of talented and creative people in the region undoubtedly contribute to enhancing diversity and tolerance within the city. Certainly we found little evidence from respondents to suggest that people came to Halifax primarily because they perceived it as a tolerant and diverse city. By contrast, we learned that the strength of the artistic community and the music scene in Halifax does attract young and talented people to the region (see Figure 5). The beauty of the natural setting, the size of the city region, and the affordability of housing give Halifax a competitive advantage over other growing cities in the country.

*Figure 5: Selling the local nightlife is essential to the marketing strategy of Halifax universities*

<p>Saint Mary's University information for prospective students (SMU, 2009)</p>
<p><b>Why Halifax?</b></p> <p>Nestled on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, this cosmopolitan port city offers the best of two worlds - a rich history with a close connection to the sea and a vibrant, young culture. As Nova Scotia's capital, Halifax is the major centre of the Maritimes and is the largest city east of Quebec City and north of Boston. With its steep streets, stunning harbour, and the famous Citadel overlooking the city, Halifax is renowned for its beauty and character.</p> <p><b>Cool City</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explosive music scene (you probably have a Halifax band on your MP3 player)</li><li>• Over 450 great restaurants</li><li>• Museums &amp; galleries</li><li>• Pub &amp; Club city</li><li>• Exciting city life yet is only a twenty minute drive to the gorgeous Nova Scotia countryside</li></ul> <p><b>Smart City</b></p> <p>Halifax has built its economic base on knowledge industries. With a highly educated workforce, that's a high collective IQ. Here's more:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 81.1 post-secondary students per 1000 people, three times the national average</li><li>• The highest rate in Canada of a working population with post-secondary education - over 60%</li><li>• Halifax is accessible - it's only a few hours by plane to Boston, New York, London</li></ul>

The particular circumstances of a small/big city in a remote part of the country undoubtedly affected the social dynamics of attracting and retaining workers in the

sectors we investigated. In both the music and the health research sectors, workers formed strong mutually-enforcing social networks which they characterized as unique to the region. As Gertler (2001, p. 124) argues, such networks and the knowledge they generate “constitute an important, regionally specific intangible asset which enables and facilitates the establishment and maintenance of collaborative, social learning relationships”. Finding ways to support and take advantage of the strong social networks and the creativity and innovation they enable may be the key to future growth in the Halifax city region.

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