SMART CITY / COOL CITY:
ATTRACTING AND RETAINING
TALENTED AND CREATIVE WORKERS IN HALIFAX

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Background:

Halifax Regional Municipality created in 1996: area the size of Prince Edward Island; population 372,000

Economy driven by government, military, health care, education, port activities, tourism

Six universities: attracting students from across Canada

http://www.writers.ns.ca/Writers/awalker.html
From disadvantaged to “interesting”:

In the 1990s Halifax’s economy and reputation changed

Unemployment declined, tourism increased, university enrolments climbed

Government investment in waterfront and other improvements

Halifax seen as a “cool city”; indie music scene
Census information indicates that Halifax has a higher proportion of creative workers in its workforce than Canada as a whole.

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<th>2001</th>
<th>2006</th>
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<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
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People migrate to Halifax from other provinces [middle band in graphs]. The rate of in-migration of creative workers as a proportion of total workers is decreasing.

What factors affect the ability of Halifax to attract and retain talented and creative workers?

We profiled three sectors: health research, music, and built environment consulting.

In 2008 we conducted 26 interviews with 28 individuals:

• 16 male, 12 female
• 13 creative workers, 7 employer/supervisors, 8 intermediary organisation reps
Common factors across sectors:

Beautiful natural setting, access to nature

Quality of life in the city: affordability, ease of commuting

Size of the city: “just right”

Vibrant arts and culture; night life and music scene

Good international connections

Cluster of universities
Social factors attracting people to Halifax:

Attachment to place

Friendly, welcoming city

Good place to raise a family

“Small pond”; opportunity to be known and appreciated
Social factors common to research sector and music sector:

Collegial, collaborative, and supportive work environment within sector

Making do with limited resources: “can do” attitude

Small community enables serendipitous encounters
Barriers or challenges to attracting and retaining talent:

Conservative place; politics and bureaucracy

Need to go away for success within profession

Limited size of local market
Issues highlighted by development intermediaries:

- Initiatives to encourage immigrants and business to come
- Inclusionary hiring practices for police and fire departments
- Creating a social network group for young professionals
- Good regional infrastructure

Problems: taxes, low salaries

“Sgt. Atwell says she has experienced racism and sexism since she was hired as a constable in 1993.”

http://robynatwell.com/officer_alleges_police_racism_co.htm
Issues particular to the health research sector:

Doing leading edge work

“Punching above our weight”

Collegial work environment

Affordable housing

Attractive city and environs

*Problems*: Hard to keep “high flyers”; local grads need to go away for experience.

*Halifax is small enough that you tend to know most people who are doing work like you’re doing. …my boss would say it’s because we’re under-resourced in this region, that … 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.*

[Health research worker]
Issues particular to the music sector:

Supportive, welcoming, and creative music community

Artistic community: NSCAD University, North End scene

University students for audiences; Venues for live music

Affordable housing and rehearsal space; provincial government funding

*Problems*: lack of music industry professionals; size of market

[David Myles] 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… 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.

[Music intermediary]
Issues particular to the built environment consulting sector:

Natural and built environment attractive

Able to attract people to “come back to Nova Scotia”

*Problems:* some skills in short supply, limited opportunities for creative work, salaries not competitive

*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.*

[Consultant employer]
Smart City/ Cool City: Halifax is an important centre of innovation and creativity for music and for research. The success of the sectors is linked.

The vitality of the Halifax music scene attracts university students and young workers to Halifax. The university students provide reliable audiences for the music scene and a talent pool for the research and consulting sectors.
Tolerance and diversity did not emerge as an important theme for respondents in Halifax. The city is seen as having limited diversity and some lingering racism, but respondents categorized their own sectors as tolerant and the city as welcoming.

The need for greater job opportunities for those graduating from local universities and for the spouses or partners of new hires did arise as a concern.
Questions or comments?

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Dr David Wolfe is Principal Investigator of the project “Social Dynamics of Economic Innovation”