

Urban Structure: The Difference between Economic Patterns and Settlement Patterns

One of the most important and potentially controversial aspects of regional development is the form and change in the urban structure -- not so much with respect to where people live -- but with respect to where they locate their economic activities. In Newfoundland there has taken place in the last 25 years virtually a revolution in communications and urban structure. The original economic pattern involved the transportation of goods by coastal boat from St. John's to outport merchants. There were few services available in outports. The advent of roads connecting these outports to the Trans-Canada Highway has united all the outports in a major peninsula into a single market of 25,000 to 50,000 people who tend to buy their goods in one or two major service centres on or near the Trans-Canada Highway. Markets of this size are able to sustain stores, services and specialized businesses that are normally located in towns of 25,000 to 50,000 people. Hence a range of goods and services -- and the jobs created in providing them -- have been brought within commuting distance of many of the rural people who live in major peninsulas in Newfoundland. This pattern is not relevant for the more isolated parts of the south coast, the Great Northern Peninsula or coastal Labrador, but it is relevant for the vast majority of Newfoundlanders.