

Charlottetown Perceptions of Change Survey – Executive Summary

How residents of Atlantic Canada perceive change, and whether or not they are open to it, is a question of pressing social and policy importance. The region has been experiencing some of the most profound economic, social, cultural, physical, and environmental changes in recent Canadian history. However, a lack of data on the region has hampered the ability to systematically examine those changes and public perceptions toward them.

For this reason, the Perceptions of Change project was launched at Dalhousie University, with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In consultation with colleagues at Memorial University, University of New Brunswick, McMaster University, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, and Western University, a team of researchers at Dalhousie conducted a telephone survey of Charlottetown residents in the spring of 2017. The purpose of this survey was to assess what changes Charlottetown residents have observed over the last five to 10 years, both in their own neighbourhoods and in the city as a whole, and to better understand how they feel about those changes.

Overall, survey results show that Charlottetown residents have observed a significant increase in ethnocultural diversity from immigration over the last five to 10 years. When asked about the changes within their neighbourhoods, a slight majority believed that the social and cultural changes have been for the better. Charlottetown residents also reported new construction and economic improvements in the city. Participants' opinions were mixed on the subject of changes in the natural environment and in their neighbourhoods.

Executive Summary:

- Participants most frequently identified increased ethnocultural diversity as the biggest change, followed by changes in business and economy, the built environment, and population growth.
- Sixty-two percent reported overall improvements in the city's economic conditions.
- Participants were less likely to observe economic improvements in their neighbourhoods, and the majority did not believe that their neighbourhoods had become more affordable.
- Participants overwhelmingly observed more ethnocultural diversity and more senior citizens.
- Within their neighbourhoods, participants' perceptions of social and cultural change were mixed; 57% reported overall change for the better.
- On average, residents believed that 58% of their neighbours shared similar values and beliefs to them, and, in general, they reported high levels of "fitting in" to their neighbourhoods.
- Ninety-six percent of participants noted the construction of new buildings and homes in their city, and 74% within their neighbourhoods.
- The majority believed that their neighbourhood facilities and amenities were sufficient. Few noted changes in amenities, except for public transit, which most agreed had improved.
- The majority of participants reported no changes in the natural environment in their city or neighbourhood.
- Perceptions of the ethnocultural make-up and unemployment rate of Charlottetown neighbourhoods were similar to the figures reported in 2016 Census data for the city overall. Participants estimated higher numbers of low-income residents, seniors, and residents with university degrees in their neighbourhoods than census data reports for the city as a whole.

