

St. John's: People like the increasing diversity, but are uncertain about the economy

A new survey of people living in St. John's shows that residents are uncertain about the economy, but are pleased to see an increase in social and cultural diversity. Researchers at Dalhousie University launched the Perceptions of Change project to understand how residents perceive the economic, social, cultural, physical, and environmental changes.

The researchers conducted a telephone survey of 473 St. John's residents to determine what changes they observed in the city and in their neighbourhood over the last five to 10 years. Researchers also aimed to better understand how people feel about the changes they see. The survey has a 95% confidence level, or 19 time out of 20, with a +/- 2.5% margin of error.

St. John's residents are highly attuned to economic fluctuations, and many participants noted an economic "boom and bust" over the last five to 10 years. Residents said that the city experienced unprecedented growth in business, housing, and population, but noted an economic downturn in the last couple of years. Participants often attributed these economic changes to fluctuations in the oil industry.

St. John's residents also noted significant increases in cultural diversity: 82% of participants believed the city was becoming more socially and culturally diverse in the last five to 10 years. Participants were generally satisfied with these social and cultural changes in their neighbourhood: 53% believed changes were for the better.

Participants expressed concerns about increases in crime and drug use in the last five to 10 years, as well as concerns about infrastructure failing to keep pace with the city's growth. St. John's residents were also concerned about the affordability of housing in the city. Only 18% were in agreement that their neighbourhood had become more affordable in the last five to 10 years.

Memorial University sociologist Mark Stoddart points out, "With our current economic and demographic challenges, the main storyline we often hear is of impending crisis. However, our results tell a different story. Despite concerns about change, we also see a great deal of optimism about the diversification of St. John's and an openness to social and cultural change that is essential to meeting the challenges ahead."

The Perceptions of Change project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Surveys were also conducted in Charlottetown, Moncton, and Halifax. For more information about the project, or to find out survey results from other Atlantic Canadian cities, contact Dr. Mark Stoddart at mstoddart@mun.ca (709.770.2595) or see the full report at the project's website: <http://perceptionsofchange.ca/neighbourhoodchange.html>

