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**Course: IST 6120 Research Practicum Paper**

**Project Title: The Habitability of Prince Edward Island**

**Focus Area: Local Economy, Indicator 30 (Housing).**

## **Introduction**

### **What is habitability?**

Habitability is the concrete core for assessing the sustainability of an island. Every sustainable society has to be habitable to survive, develop, and keep its resilience. As long as the logistics are efficient and sufficient, an island society has all presumptions to be habitable; there are children in the school, ample workplaces and affordable houses, and islanders feel secure and comfortable.

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On the Finnish island of Kokar, one of sixteen land islands in the northern Baltic Sea, the idea of habitability for small islands was developed between the year 2018 and 2020. (Abo Akademi University, 2022). Based on the United Nations Sustainability Goals (United Nations, 2022), this more in-depth assessment of habitability places a greater emphasis on the conditions necessary for a sustainable society that can look after its citizens (old and new), its environment (present and future), and the nearby sea. People can assess small island's existing sustainability level and potential for further sustainable development by conducting a habitability analysis on it.

According to the Habitability Handbook (Abo Akademi University, 2022), Islands have very dynamic fluctuations in their populations which usually range from the Islanders themselves, visitor (tourists, students and settlers) and it is expected that the “Land Owners” i.e the islanders

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abo.fi/en/centre-for-lifelong-learning/habitability/habitability-handbook/the-habitability-handbook-an-assessment-tool-for-viable-island-communities/#:~:text=What%20is%20habitability%3F,develop%2C%20and%20keep%20its%20resilience.>

are expected to plan adequately in terms of policies, infrastructure and other developmental requirements to make their islands habitable.

## **Prince Edward Island**

Prince Edward Island is Canada's smallest province, making up just 0.1 per cent of Canada's total land area. It is situated in the Gulf of St Lawrence and separated from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick by the Northumberland Strait. PEI was known to its earliest settlers, the Mi'kmaq as Abegweit, meaning "cradle in the waves," and was described by Jacques Cartier in 1534 as "the fairest land that may possibly be seen."<sup>2</sup>

## **Population**

According to report, on March 22, 2023 Statistics Canada published its provincial population estimates for the fourth quarter of 2022. The data shows Prince Edward Island's population is estimated to be 173,954 as of January 1, 2023. This represents a yearly increase of 7,096 persons, the highest year-over-year increase on current record. This year-over-year growth rate was 4.3 per cent, the highest growth rate among provinces and territories, ahead of Alberta at 3.7 per cent growth. This compares to a rate of 2.7 per cent for Canada as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/prince-edward-island>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/finance/pei-population-report-quarterly>



## PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POPULATION REPORT 2022

### OVERVIEW

DIAGRAM 1: PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POPULATION, AS OF JULY 1, 2003 - 2022

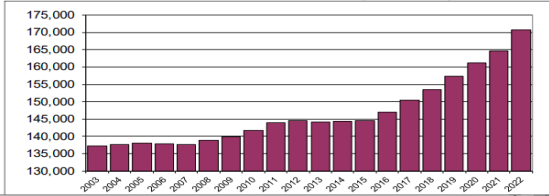


image credit to<sup>4</sup>

Prince Edward Island maintains a largely rural character, and population growth in the province has been most apparent in and around the capital city of Charlottetown and in the second largest city, Summerside. With fewer than 5,000 residents each, the island's other main towns—Alberton, Georgetown, Kensington, Montague, Souris, and Tignish—have exhibited little change in size. Prince Edward Island's population is relatively evenly divided between rural and urban communities. Family farms are increasing in acreage but decreasing in numbers. Kings county is the province's least-populated area (Baldacchino, et al., 2023)<sup>5</sup>.

### The Habitability Indicator

The handbook consists of 7 focus areas and 45 indicators which every island may use as a benchmark to the habitability of their islands as this would help identify areas of strength and weaknesses as well as areas to focus on in terms of strategic intervention to making their islands attractive and livable especially for the new people visiting the islands for the first time.

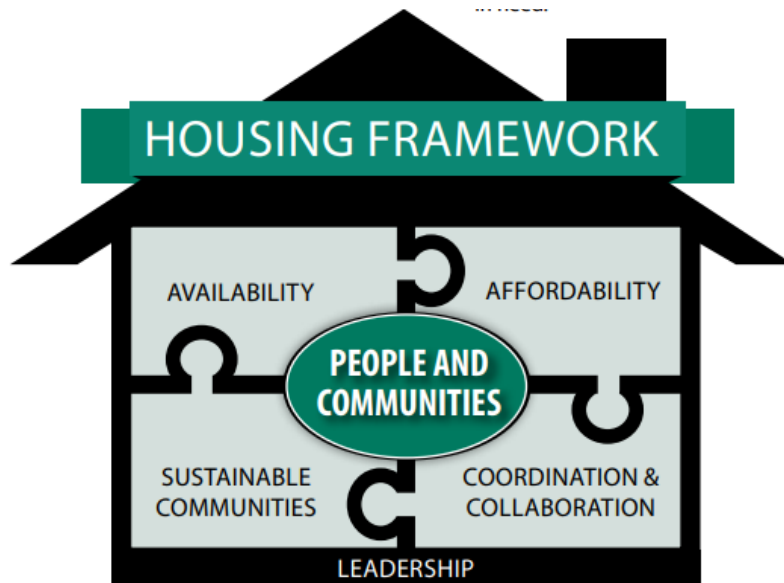
Looking at all seven focus areas and 45 indicators and streamlining it to the context of Prince Edward Island with respect to habitability, one prevalent indicator that stood out for me as a student and a new comer to this island is the indicator 30 under the Focus Area 5 which is on local economy.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/pt\\_pop\\_rep\\_0.pdf](https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/pt_pop_rep_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Baldacchino, G. and O'Grady, Brendan Anthony (2023, May 24). Prince Edward Island. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Prince-Edward-Island>

According to Leonard Ng Keok Poh, Country Market Director, Singapore in (Chiara Lissandrello et al., 2022), a range of factors make places liveable. Liveability is measured by quality-of-life factors, such as access to fresh water, food, housing, transport, health care, education, and a safe and stable built and natural environment<sup>6</sup>. Going by these metrics, habitability/liveability also depends on access to affordable and available housing regardless of the individual's status (temporary or permanent resident) <sup>7</sup>.

Also, the Prince Edward Island Action Plan 2018-2023 has as part of its goals to ensure housing availability for “All” islanders as well as provide affordable housing options.<sup>8</sup>



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<sup>6</sup> Chiara Lissandrello, Sébastien Bruyère (August 21, 2022). Resilient Societies and Liveability. <https://www.ramboll.com/lets-close-the-gap/what-makes-a-city-liveable>

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Housing Action Plan for Prince Edward Island, 2018-2023 accessed via [https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/pei-housing-action-plan\\_2018-2023.pdf](https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/publications/pei-housing-action-plan_2018-2023.pdf)

### **Indicator 30: Housing**

“Small island communities are experiencing a peculiar paradox: the number of permanent residents is decreasing, but there is still a shortage of housing for new and returning islanders”, ESIN wrote in its report “Meeting the Challenges of Small Islands” in 2007. The demand for vacation homes and second homes creates inflation on the island property market (Abo Akademi University, 2022).

According to Atlantic CTV News, Lack of housing brings with it other problems, such as difficulty in attracting and retaining people and students, said Cory Pater from the group P.E.I. Fight for Affordable Housing "A lot of people who come here move away almost immediately," Pater said. A one-bedroom apartment in Charlottetown costs about \$1,200 a month, he said. Rents increased about eight per cent from 2021 to 2022. Green party Leader Peter Bevan-Baker said the lack of sufficient housing has made it difficult to attract workers in health care, construction and other fields<sup>9</sup>.

For the purpose of this research, I will be focusing on housing especially renters (students) due to the fact that I being one also had my fair share of housing challenge and this is not peculiar to me alone as I have had to speak to a couple of other of my friends in church, colleagues at work who are students as well and we all share similar stories.

According to Erudera<sup>10</sup>, there are currently 807,750 international students across all study levels who have study permits in Canada, out of this number, Prince Edward Island has about 4,485 international students as at 2022. The question to ask then would be

- What is the admission and graduation ratio annually?
- Do these tertiary institutions and the province have sufficient accommodation (in school and outside) to cater to this number of intakes annually?

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<sup>9</sup> Hina Alam (2023) The Canadian Press was first published March 17, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Erudera (2022, June 2). Canada International Student Statistics. <https://erudera.com/statistics/canada/canada-international-student-statistics/>

- How affordable, available and accessible are these accommodations?

I am an international student (graduate) and lived on a mainland but works on an island in my country of origin (Lagos Island, Nigeria) and I must say, housing is readily available however, what might constitute a gridlock is accessibility in terms of cost. On getting admission and visa, the search for a suitable accommodation started for a place I have no human contact, school accommodation was filled and to a certain extent pricey and not suitable/available for families, I read stories of desperate people falling victim of fraud and people who barely knew one another coming together to rents a 2/3-bedroom apartment to share bills and rent among others.

Habitability of Prince Edward Island would depend on all 7 focus areas and 45 indicators however, dependency on one indicator might be the weighting factor that determines others and I think housing is one of the key factors that is considered when an individual is thinking of relocating or settling in a location. Prince Edward Island is growing and immigrants (students and tourist who visit and may want to stay) are one of the major contributors to this growth. Availability, accessibility and affordability of housing is key in attracting and retaining new comers to the island.

The struggle for housing on Prince Edward Island continues to be a concern for both islanders and newcomers, the pressure may seem lighter for islanders who have been on the island for ages and are able to navigate the terrain either by moving in with families, friends and others alike, but same cannot be said for a newcomer who knows no one and is just coming to the island for the first time either as a student, a tourist or potential settler.

According to a news article published in 2022, the housing shortage cuts across the major cities on Prince Edward Island. MLA Lynne Lund, Summerside-Wilmot, said that since she was first elected three years ago, health care and housing have been, by far, the two issues she has been contacted for assistance with the most. On the housing issue, she described the crisis as being at a boiling point in Summerside. She hears from people from all socioeconomic backgrounds and age

groups who can't find affordable housing – or in some cases any housing at all. Many of those people are facing housing insecurity for the first time in their lives or are paying far more than they can afford just to keep a roof over their heads, leaving less money for other necessities like food, medication and transportation, “(The problem) is not slowing down in any way,” said Lund<sup>11</sup>.

Housing is a national crisis as each city and town with an annual influx of students may experience it as a local issue. However, the data indicates that it is a national issue, connected to a few fundamental facts that form the basis of all the unique and local stories. The key figures are how much universities now rely on tuition and, consequently, high-paying international students to cover their costs because government support has not kept up with inflation. The second is what it has meant in terms of the volume of foreign students' Canadian university towns have been attempting to accommodate. In a report from 2020, Statistics Canada, these two factors were clearly stated<sup>12</sup>.

Fewer international students have families they can stay with while attending school than their local counterparts. 60 to 70 percent of Canadian students end up being tenants, according to data from Utile, a Quebec-based non-profit that conducts research on student housing issues. However, it is 100% among students from other countries. International students, according to Mr. Kumar from CFS, haven't made housing issues any worse than they previously were in a number of places with extraordinarily low vacancy rates. But compared to students who are Canadian residents, they have it harder to rent apartments since landlords frequently need them to produce references from their previous landlords or proof of their income which may not be available at the time, they are seeking accommodation<sup>13</sup>. These among others are some of the obstacles faced by newcomers/students especially on the island.

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<sup>11</sup> Colin MacLean, (2022), <https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/i-just-dont-know-what-to-do-islanders-continue-to-struggle-on-the-street-as-housing-crisis-grip-tightens-in-pei-100770273/>

<sup>12</sup> Bula, F. (2022, March 9). Solving the student housing crisis. University Affairs. <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/solvingthe-student-housing-crisis/>

<sup>13</sup> ibid

## **Recommendations**

### **Government**

- Good housing policies with strong commitment to affordable, accessible and available housing schemes that helps the growing population. Also review of existing policies, adjustment of permit processes among others
- Better transportation system that connects neighboring towns as this will reduce pressure in the cities where the schools are located. This will make commuting easy.
- Encourage Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) where companies/individuals construct low-cost housing specifically for students and temporary residents.
- Offer housing incentives as well as waivers to construction companies
- Consider converting unoccupied or abandoned buildings to residential buildings

### **Schools**

- Consider admission ratio to graduation ratio when offering admissions for new intakes
- Provide more accommodation options (hostels, shared rooms, single occupant apartments, house for students with families)
- Publicize more the option of host families especially for first year students
- Engage in partnerships with hotels and Airbnb for students arriving the island for the first time/first year for discounts.
- Explore the option of satellite campuses.

### **Regulatory Bodies**

- Unsuspecting people have fallen victim of fraudsters who capitalize on the housing shortage to defraud people, regulatory bodies need to rise to the occasion and rid the system of these fraudsters



- Develop harmonized or regulated platforms where people can source and secure accommodation without fear of being defrauded.
- Constantly engaging the government on housing trends and innovations

### **Combined bodies of Builders and Association**

- Make proposition to relevant government bodies on affordable housing options
- Collaborate as a body (housing material producers, electricals, builders, engineers etc) to ease the housing pressure with a joint intervention such as temporary buildings that can be unassembled after use and these materials can be stored for a future use.
- Come up with mobile homes/mini homes, temporary house with all the basic amenities to meet the housing shortage.

### **Conclusion**

According to the Habitability Handbook, some of the indicators consist of basic facts, such as the area and the population size while other indicators are numerical on a scale of 1–4, where 1 (red colour) stands for a critical state, 2 (yellow colour) is bad but not in need of immediate action, 3 (light green colour) is good, and 4 (dark green colour) is excellent.

Going by the above scale and considering this paper on Housing in Prince Edward Island, the proper score for housing on the island is 1 as this housing deficit has a major impact on the growth and habitability on Prince Edward Island.

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