

MADE IN CAPE BRETON:  
EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRAFT PRACTICE AND PLACE

by

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## **Dedication**

*For Dr. Sandra Alföldy, who warmly and enthusiastically spoke with me multiple times in the development of my research project. The craft world lost an important voice on February 24, 2019.*

*Also, for my family, who are always there for me.*

## Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	v
Abstract .....	vi
List of Abbreviations and Symbols Used .....	vii
Acknowledgements .....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: Examining the Literature .....	6
2.1 <i>The Original 10-Digit Machine: Situating Craft</i> .....	6
2.2 <i>A New Image of the Place: A Discussion of Place</i> .....	21
Conclusion .....	31
Chapter 3: Methods .....	33
3.1 <i>Semi-Structured Interviews</i> .....	33
3.2 <i>Ethnographic Approach</i> .....	36
3.3 <i>Ethics</i> .....	39
3.4 <i>Analysis</i> .....	41
Conclusion .....	42
Chapter 4: State of Craft in Cape Breton .....	43
4.1 <i>Head and the Heart: Is There an On-The-Ground Definition of Craft?</i> .....	43
4.2 <i>I Could Be Big: A “Dying Craft” or Strong Contributor to the Future?</i> .....	50
4.3 <i>It Always Comes Down to HR and Cash: Craft Sector Opportunities</i> .....	59
Conclusion .....	68
Chapter 5: The Relationship Between Craft and Geography .....	71
5.1 <i>There Are Two Cape Bretons: Identifying the Boundary</i> .....	72
5.2 <i>There Is Something There: The Contribution of Landscape</i> .....	78
5.3 <i>The Practical Reality of Winter Here: How Weather Factors In</i> .....	83
Conclusion .....	88
Chapter 6: Craft and Community .....	90
6.1 <i>You're an Ambassador: The Importance of Craftspeople to Community</i> .....	90
6.2 <i>They Have to Be Here: The Importance of Community for Craftspeople</i> .....	97
Conclusion .....	102

<b>Chapter 7: Craft Marketing .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b><i>7.1 A Piece of Cape Breton: Marketing Cape Breton Craft.....</i></b>	<b>105</b>
<b><i>7.2 Craft Versus Craft: The Two Streams of Craft in Cape Breton .....</i></b>	<b>115</b>
<b><i>7.3 As Long as It's Pretty: Meeting a Demand and Staying True to Oneself .....</i></b>	<b>120</b>
<b><i>Conclusion .....</i></b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Chapter 8: Technology and Place .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b><i>8.1 What's Going on in Margaree?: Using the Internet for Craft Sales.....</i></b>	<b>131</b>
<b><i>8.2 I Can Just Google It: Connecting Craftspeople to Their Craft .....</i></b>	<b>137</b>
<b><i>Conclusion .....</i></b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Chapter 9: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b><i>9.1 Considerations of Craftspeople: Craft Practice Rooted in Place .....</i></b>	<b>147</b>
<b><i>9.2 A Distinct Destination: Craftspeople Rooted in Place .....</i></b>	<b>150</b>
<b><i>9.3 Moving Forward.....</i></b>	<b>155</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>Appendix A: Interview Guide .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Appendix B: Email to Potential Participants.....</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Appendix C: Consent Form.....</b>	<b>174</b>

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1.	Map of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia .....	71
Figure 2.	Map of Cape Breton Island's four counties .....	73
Figure 3.	Driftwood on Grandique Point's beach .....	80
Figure 4.	Mabou Beach as an example of Cape Breton's landscape .....	82
Figure 5.	View of the Cabot Trail near Chéticamp .....	111

## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I examine the relationship between craft practice and place, situating my case study on Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island. I consider the dynamics of how craft is made, marketed, and distributed in relation to the elements of a specific location, including the regional political economy, physical geography, embodied perceptions, and history. Supplemented by academic and grey literature, the thesis draws on data collected via ethnographic fieldwork involving semi-structured interviews with craftspeople and regional craft representatives. I argue that the experiences of craft producers and organizations on Cape Breton are influenced by place in many ways, with five key themes structuring the thesis: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and support within the craft sector; the impact of geography; the power of community relations; the role of marketing and tourism; and the effect of evolving Internet accessibility. Place, then, shapes craft practices, and a consideration of place enriches craft studies.

## **List of Abbreviations and Symbols Used**

### ABBREVIATIONS

ACOA	Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
CBCCD	Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design
CBRM	Cape Breton Regional Municipality
CCF	Canadian Crafts Federation
CCH	Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage
CNSLC	Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council
ECBC	Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation
HR	Human Resources
ICCA	Inverness County Centre for the Arts
NSDCC	Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council
PEI	Prince Edward Island
TCPS 2	Canada's 2014 Tri-Council Policy Statement

### SYMBOLS

®	Registered Trademark
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Crafts in Nova Scotia were not so much the continuation of age-old traditions handed on through the generations as they were the products of a conscious state policy of meeting the expectations of tourists, who came to the province expecting to find quaint, handmade articles that were somehow “typical” of Nova Scotia.

(Ian McKay, 1994, p. 157)

In his book *The Quest of the Folk* Ian McKay (1994) discusses how craft production in Nova Scotia was carefully constructed and managed by the provincial government during the 1900s. Instead of local residents using traditional methods passed through generations, controlled systems were introduced to establish a craft industry as one response to a decline in natural resource extraction in the province. Handicraft sales were not viewed as an all-encompassing solution to the loss of industrial jobs; instead, they were part of a larger initiative to increase tourism in the province by presenting the region as untouched by modernity and, as such, the ideal vacation spot for North Americans looking to escape the tribulations of their hectic, fast-paced lives. To sell this image, government-approved “traditional” items were produced by hand so that tourists felt they were experiencing a special process spanning generations instead of being surrounded by mass-manufactured items available to them at home. This program was dismantled in the 1950s but the enduring idea that tourism within Nova Scotia had an impact on its craft industry inspired the research for this thesis.

Similar marketing techniques are still evident. In 2012 the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design (CBCCD), the primary craft organization on Cape Breton Island, Nova

Scotia, fostered connections between craft production and place in their marketing campaign, calling Cape Breton a “Craft Capital” (originally the “Creative Island” until a copyright issue emerged) and commissioning a song and television advert to emphasize the link. Channeling similar imagery, Film and Creative Industries Nova Scotia, the government department designated to represent craft amongst other creative industries until it was closed in April 2015, used romanticized notions of an old time and place surrounded by a modern world to attract potential businesses to the province, writing on their website in 2014: “Old world charm mixes with new world vibes to create a Nova Scotia culture shaped by the sea and the spirit of the people.” Recognition of the value of craft media is not limited to Cape Breton or Nova Scotia; craft is gaining renewed attention across Canada. The Canadian Crafts Federation (CCF) declared 2015 a Craft Year, “a year-long, nation-wide festival aimed at promoting craft as a key player in Canadian Culture” (Canadian Crafts Federation, n.d.-c, Craft Year 2015 section), with 884 affiliated events across Canada and internationally, an increase of 25% from the previous Craft Year in 2007. Thus, craft practices contribute to – and draw upon – the economic drive, projected image, and cultural composition of the country.

Inspired by Nova Scotia’s history of craft in the 1900s and seeing craft still being used to market place alongside other romantic imagery, I wondered if craft producers in 2015 had to balance their creativity with elements or expectations tied specifically to their location. If a region depended heavily upon tourism, did that have an effect on how producers practiced their craft? Do people take up particular crafts because some supplies are easily accessible while others are not? Does the landscape or sense of place inspire particular styles or themes in craft? For the purpose of this project, I developed a research

question to address this line of inquiry: "How are the practices of craft producers in Cape Breton bound up with place?" The flexibility provided by key terms, "practices" and "place," allowed for engagement with the topic extending beyond the initial inspiration of the project. "Practices" enabled me to consider the connection between producers and place through how craft is made, marketed, and distributed while "place" allowed me to touch upon the regional political economy, place marketing, geography, and history. Thus, instead of focusing solely upon how the work of craft producers may be influenced by government or organization tourism initiatives, I was able to consider a wide range of situations where craft and place intertwined in Cape Breton. The avenues of exploration identified here are addressed in the following eight chapters.

In order to situate this work within a broader discussion, Chapter 2 is a literature review, providing context upon which my research builds. The chapter opens with an examination of the term craft, considering definitions of the term and challenges to such classifications. The focus then shifts to the relationship between craft and value, addressing the role perceived authenticity and tradition play in the production and consumption of craft. Building upon the concept of tradition, the chapter closes on the topic of marketing and tourism with an emphasis on how those fields are interwoven with craft production in Nova Scotia.

Chapter 3 covers research methods, breaking down how I approached the research question using ethnographic methods and why. This chapter also outlines the ethics process undertaken for the project, in accordance with Dalhousie University's Research Ethics Board. In addressing these topics, this chapter provides readers with an

understanding of how the broad line of inquiry about craft production developed into a qualitative study.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 are the core chapters of original ethnographic research, moving the thesis from establishing its theoretical methodological framework for the research to analyzing the material gathered. The arguments of these chapters draw on interviews with participants in this project. While the initial project and interview questions were constructed out of an academic and theoretical knowledge of craft production and Cape Breton's history, these chapters address the lived experiences and understandings held by members of the local craft sector.

Chapter 4 situates Cape Breton's craft sector as participants identified it in 2015, relating it to Cape Breton's social and economic circumstances. It explores the challenges craftspeople and organizations encounter in applying the term "craft" to what they do and considers what initiatives are (or should be) in place to strengthen the industry.

The impact of Cape Breton's geography on the regional craft sector is examined in Chapter 5. The significance of physical distance and political boundaries are considered alongside a discussion of landscape as an inspirational feature in producing craft items. The influence of local weather patterns on how and when craft was produced, distributed, and consumed is also addressed.

Chapter 6 approaches the research question by considering the reciprocal relationship between members of the craft sector and the communities they live and work within. It does so by determining ways in which craftspeople feel they can support their communities, particularly fellow craft producers and business owners, while also recognizing ways producers receive support from community members.

The interaction between Cape Breton's craft and tourism industries is analyzed in Chapter 7. The discussion draws upon previous chapters by considering how much autonomy craft producers and sellers have in the creation and distribution of their wares, particularly in regards to marketing trends and the influence of consumer expectations versus creative drive.

The eighth chapter moves the research question into virtual places, examining how Internet resources have been adapted by craft producers to expand their reach beyond physically-local networks. The chapter considers how these online channels can both circumvent an emphasis on place being geographically rooted while also enhancing the connection.

The conclusion, Chapter 9, synthesizes the information presented in the previous chapters, bringing everything together in response to the original research question: "how are the practices of craft producers in Cape Breton bound up with place?" It sums up the thesis, threading together overarching themes discussed throughout. The chapter also notes changes to Cape Breton's craft sector since 2015 and makes recommendations for future research in the subject area.

## **Chapter 2: Examining the Literature**

Before introducing the findings of my ethnographic study in Cape Breton, the context surrounding my research question, “How are practices of craft producers in Cape Breton bound up with place?”, needs to be addressed. This chapter is divided into two sections, situating key themes and concepts related to the research question. Section 2.1 examines discussions around craft production, opening with a short consideration of when craft became a topic of interest, particularly in relation to industrial work and in contrast to art. Academic, organizational, and policy-based understandings of craft follow, with a particular interest in the contributions of social science research to the topic. A consideration of place is the focus of Section 2.2, starting with a brief contemporary history focused on Cape Breton Island, as the physical location of this study, before moving to the concept of place as an embodied experience. The chapter closes out with a discussion of tourism as it relates to place marketing and the purchase of craft as a memory of travel to places, which comes back to the question of the perceived or real value assigned to craft.

### **2.1 The Original 10-Digit Machine: Situating Craft**

If craft production and distribution reflected the images projected through major craft online sales platform, Etsy, the work would always be pleasurable and creative and would allow for producers to construct a more fulfilling world through their craft sales (Krugh, 2014). This is an ideal, however, and it fails to capture the range of understandings, applications, and tensions that shape contemporary craft in Europe and North America. This topic is complex and extensive but some key approaches and

discussions around craft practice and production are addressed here to situate you, the reader, within the world of craft.

One longstanding dichotomy in defining craft is the value assigned to manual, handmade labour versus production that uses machines and technology. Two writers credited in craft literature for addressing this debate are watercolourist and art critic, John Ruskin, and designer, William Morris, both British. Morris is considered an important founder of the Arts and Crafts movement in Europe and North America in the late 1800s, having been inspired by earlier works from Ruskin as well as German political philosopher and social theorist, Karl Marx (Jones, 2016). Morris and Ruskin were worried about the increase in industrial mass production and what this meant for craftsmen. Ruskin (1853/2009) sets out his concern in a discussion of Gothic architecture, critical of the emphasis in Britain on perfection in production and of increasing divisions of labour. He stated that a worker can be taught to make things perfectly but at the loss of any deep thought process. Ruskin argues that it is better to have a workman who has an imagination and let some of his personality, his humanness, come through in the finished product, saying “[old Gothic cathedrals] are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone and a freedom of thought” (p. 163); here he suggests that an important element of Gothic architecture is the *savageness* or “creations of ungainly shape and rigid limb, but full of wolfish life; fierce as the winds that beat, and changeful as the clouds that shade them” (p. 157). Signs of perfection, he warns, are actually signs of the slavery of Englishmen who no longer have the freedom of thought or expression. He continues to say that this value placed on perfection prevents workers from fostering creativity as all of their concentration is on forming a perfect line or replicating the plans



of someone else; the result of this demand is bland products which do not bring beauty or interest into the lives of those who produce or encounter them.

William Morris (1888/2010), building upon Ruskin, outlines three eras of production: the middle ages, defined by individualized production with little division of labour and no overhead capitalistic employers; the introduction of workshops, divisions of labour, and machines used as an aid to human labour, in the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; and finally the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – the era when the workman became an aid to the machines that once helped him. Morris is concerned with the third stage and the conditions this imposes on workmen by not providing them with something to be interested in or the opportunity to develop their skills, writing, “this toil degrades them into less than men” (1882/1919, p. 94). Morris does not only blame machines or the capitalist, however, but the general public who demand cheap products and are both ignorant enough to not hold a standard of beauty to the work but who also do not care enough about the workman to pay more to provide him with an enjoyable job (1882/1919). For Morris, there needs to be a renewed appreciation in craft to free the worker from his oppressed state under the machine but the appreciation also has to come from the public at large who also, perhaps unknowingly, need beauty in their lives.

William Morris had been influenced by Karl Marx, who he never met although they were alive at the same time. Morris began reading *Capital* in French 1882 and much of his work and activism followed this period, informed by socialist ideals (Ellison, 2018). One clear theme in the arguments of Ruskin, Morris, and Marx is that of *alienation*, where craftsmen, through industrialization, become estranged from the labour they were once so connected to. The worker becomes a commodity, producing something

alien to them as private property that belongs to someone other than them (Marx, 1844/1974). As Roberts (2015) maintains, Marxist arguments agree with the romantic anticapitalist approach of Ruskin and Morris that the classic image of a medieval craftsperson is closely aligned and connected with the production and distribution of their work, making them unalienated from their labour. Where the two views differ, however, is that Morris and Ruskin understand industrial work to be the antithesis to a satisfied and free craftsperson while Marx notes that the artisan's identity is so entrenched in their work that they cannot escape from it. Roberts explains:

Marx finds a hidden freedom in the condition of the alienated industrial worker under capitalism: that is, his or her capacity to *disidentify* with his role as a worker, and therefore imagine his labor and creativity as distinct from the coercions of wage-labor. This is a kind of freedom *in* alienation, because although the worker is separated from the integral skills that the medieval craftsman takes for granted – losing as a result his secure place in the collectivity of labor – at the same time he or she is able to envisage himself or herself as a freely determined individual. (p. 142, emphasis in original)

While all three writers were concerned that workers who originally showed intelligence, innovation, and satisfaction in their work were turning into mindless cogs in a machine, churning out mass-produced and uninspired products that have little, if any, connection to the human life that produced them, they prioritized different aspects of the argument.

A second common dichotomy when defining craft is the phrase “arts and crafts”. This suggests that art and craft are two separate, though related fields. In comparison to artists, craft producers, as a number of authors identify (Crawford, 2009; Markowitz,

1994; Paxson, 2012; Ruskin, 1853/2009; Sennett, 2008), are often believed to be disconnected from creative thought and production; an interesting contrast to the prior works of Ruskin, Morris, and Marx, premised on assumptions about the intelligence of artisans. In her work on the social production of art, Wolff (1984) argues that artists are often attributed with the romantic label of genius, seen as possessing divine inspiration worthy of celebration above that of craft. Wolff shapes her discussion around the idea that this popular stance ignores the social and historical factors that produced the artist and their perceived innate talent while also failing to acknowledge the intelligence and talent of craftspeople. As she develops her argument, Wolff suggests using terms like “artistic product” and “cultural producer” instead of “works of art” and “artist” as ways to recognize the role these people play while acknowledging the historical and social factors that afforded them their positions, instead of playing up the mystical and unrealistic expectations surrounding them. Adopting a similar approach, Markowitz (1994) posits that the elitism within the art-craft debate stems from *mind-body dualism*, particularly as considered by philosopher René Descartes. She argues that the tendency to divide mental and physical attributes is rooted in this thinking, with *normative dualism*, a concept discussed by philosopher Alison Jaggar, placing greater importance on mental over physical production. Markowitz identifies popular approaches to categorizing art versus craft, dividing them into an *aesthetic criterion*, encompassing claims of aesthetic value in art not present in craft, or *semantic criterion*, encompassing claims of intended meaning in art not present in craft. These categories demonstrate how entrenched the mind is with art and the body is with craft, though Markowitz’s intention is to call into question the legitimacy of this dichotomy. Wolff and Markowitz demonstrate how the relationship

between craft and art is structured, with art on a pedestal above craft and manual work although they emphasize that this is a highly constructed position that does not necessarily represent an actual hierarchy of quality, talent, or experience.

Contemporary discussions of craft demonstrate a range of values and characteristics deemed important to defining the term. Stoddard, Evans and Shao (2012) provide one definition, writing that crafts are “handmade items where the artisan pays attention to the material, design, and workmanship of their product” (p. 95). Krugh (2014) also recognizes the emphasis that definitions of craft typically place on making products by hand although she quotes furniture designer David Pye who says, “*‘Handcraft’ and ‘hand-made’ are historical or social terms, not technical ones*” (p. 282, emphasis in original), further suggesting that as almost everything is made with the help of tools, the difference is really between production of individually-crafted items and mass-produced ones. McBrinn (2007) says the significance of craft comes from the fact that it can transform regular handmade objects into items with powerful symbolic meanings associated with identity, tradition, and authenticity. Jakob (2013) recognizes that defining craft is a difficult task but notes common themes: “It is a form of labour that requires a high degree of manual dexterity and/or artistic skill” (p. 129). She continues to explain the relationship to the production process, saying:

Crafting is an act of the combination of head and hand and an engagement with materials, knowledge, experiences, problem finding and problem solving, cooperation and collaboration. It is therefore also a process of self-consciousness as well as a production of public goods and community. (p. 129)

Despite some variation, these definitions suggest that “craft” is less about particular forms of making, such as weaving or pottery, and more about an ambiguous connection between the hand, mind, and material.

Craft-affiliated organizations are another source of craft definitions and categories. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (2010), commissioned by the United Kingdom’s Crafts Council to research the contemporary craft market in England, divides craft into three categories: craft (“by original, handmade craft, we mean any object that has been made by hand”; p. 11), contemporary craft (“original handmade craft that was recently made and/or produced by a living craft maker”; p. 11), and cutting-edge contemporary craft (“work which is high in quality, innovative in its use of materials and aesthetic vision, and the result of an individual process of investigation and critical enquiry”; p. 11). Etsy, a popular online marketplace, uses the term “maker” in reference to someone using their own hands or tools to create an item, in contrast with a designer who designs an item but does not physically produce it (2019, Handmade policy section). These examples are indicative of the overlapping and complex interpretations of craft that organizations meant to legitimize craft and uphold standards are faced with.

National craft organizations also demonstrate a variety of approaches toward situating craft. The Canadian Crafts Federation (CCF) Advocacy Committee requested input from researchers and community members by April 2018 to help define “professional craft,” asking readers to “wish us good luck” (Canadian Crafts Federation, n.d.-a, Defining ‘Professional Craft’ section); no definition has been publicly announced as of mid-2019. Likewise, the American Craft Council does not have a clear interpretation of craft on their website but does have an article by Joyce Lovelace (2018)

listing a number of themes that came out of asking people within and outside of the field how they would define craft. Themes ranged from craft as an action (“craft is a verb – an active, activist one, evolving and involving ... craft is a moving vehicle”; para. 40) to craft as universal (“craft as a value that can apply to any endeavor, be it music, gardening, food, film, even lifestyle ... there’s magic in handling materials with thought and care, an ideal all of us understand, appreciate, and pursue”; para. 9). Craft Scotland recognizes that common definitions of craft include making items by hand, yet says there are many instances of businesses they would call craft which do not fit that mould. Instead, the organization notes: “The thread that connects all of these craft businesses is that the design and mastery of materials belongs with the maker and any batch is under their direct supervision” (2019, About section). It continued to state that it cannot represent some visual art fields such as painting for funding purposes but it can accept craft producers who use painting as a medium in their work, blurring lines between craft and fine art. The collection of guidelines for categorizing craft, or lack thereof, by craft organizations further supports the ambiguity of the term. While the concept of craft as handmade is present, so is an allowance for mental engagement in the production process, providing flexibility to a constantly evolving creative field where artisans may not have the skills to make every aspect of their work but can bring together outside elements to fulfil a vision.

At a regional level, the Prince Edward Island Crafts Council (2018) provides a non-exhaustive list of craft media, including pottery, quilting, felting, knitting, rug hooking, leather goods, jewellery, decorative painting, printmaking, medal sculpture,

bone carving, bookbinding, wood carving, candlemaking, and preserved flowers. They expand on their stance on craftsmanship in their *Standards Guidelines*:

An artisan is a person who makes objects from original or traditional designs, using specialized technical, manual, and design skills to manipulate material in a way that demonstrates an understanding of its inherent qualities and characteristics. Of primary concern is the integrity of the work and its presentation. The artisan is the prime source of those fine things by which the senses are engaged and life is enriched. Artisans are the guardians of the highest standard of quality. Their work asserts the absolute priority of the personal in a mechanized society (p.3).

This statement of standards reflects values discussed throughout the chapter such as the contrast between craft and industrial production and the relationship between artisans and cultural capital. A second regional organization, the Craft Alliance Atlantic Association (2019), a trade association between the provinces of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, defined craft in four ways: “to make by hand” (para. 2), “objects handmade, a trade, or occupation requiring special skill, esp. manual skill and dexterity” (para. 2), “an object of functional, decorative and aesthetic value embodying the technical and design skills of a craftsperson with direct control over hand, tool and machine” (para. 2), and “the members of a trade or profession collectively; a guild” (para. 2). This approach recognizes the multiplicity of uses of “craft” as a term, identifying a few understandings of the word yet not emphasizing one over the next. Regional approaches to conceptualizing craft, then, mirror national and international policy and organizational ones, being intentionally ambiguous to provide flexibility in

gatekeeping who is able to access services and opportunities for craftspeople while acknowledging an importance for design quality and a manual (or handmade) element.

Within anthropology and the social sciences more broadly, craft has been at the heart of many studies ranging from archaeological studies using pottery design to sequence burial site dates (Petrie, 1899) to artisanal chocolate production in contemporary France (Terrio, 1999). A recurring theme amongst contemporary approaches to craft is an emphasis on the production process, particularly in relation to the producer's mindset. Sociologist Richard Sennett (2008) is not concerned with the form the final product takes when identifying a craft producer but with how the person goes about creating it; what makes someone a craftsperson is the engagement and dedication they have in relation to their work. This dedication means the person is working due to an appreciation of their craft and performs to the best of their abilities instead of doing something to make more money or ignoring problems to avoid dedicating extra time to a project. Tim Ingold (2010), an anthropologist, posits that a key factor to the broader process of "making" is reacting to the constantly evolving state of materials while working toward the final product, instead of imposing a finished concept onto inactive materials. In other words, the process of making is active, dynamic thought between the maker, the material, and other influences. Fellow anthropologist, Heather Paxson (2012), draws from David Pye, a furniture designer, to support a similar notion. Pye refers to a *workmanship of certainty*, where industrial methods of production use technology and machines to ensure consistency and standardization amongst each item produced. This concept is in contrast to the *workmanship of risk* of a craftsperson, where each step in the process, from raw material to completed product, requires evaluation and



response to create and maintain quality; a finished item is created in response to elements that arose during the production process instead of a completed thought applied to material. Thus, the materials used to create a product and the final form presented to consumers are not as important to social scientists as the lived experience of the intermediate transformation process.

Erin O'Connor (2007), an anthropologist examining craft practice through the medium of glassblowing, applied sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to her conception of craftsmanship. When Bourdieu writes of habitus, he suggests that people have agency yet act and react to the world around them based on the social structures they have been exposed to. In other words, an individual is embodied with their unique background and experiences which influences (although does not determine) how they encounter and interpret the world (1979/1984). O'Connor (2007) argues that a novice is distinguishable from a craftsperson because the production process is not yet an embodied "whole" but a string of stages consciously performed and completed individually; a professional craft producer does not have to focus on each task and tool as they encounter new situations, relying upon embodied knowledge built over time and practice. A novice, however, does not have the confidence, acquired skill, or history in their craft to react without piecing together a combination of established technique and knowledge from other areas of their lives that they are more familiar with. Paxson (2012) also draws upon a discussion of Bourdieu's conception of habitus, writing "For Bourdieu, individuals are socially conditioned but not in a cookie-cutter fashion; there is room for individual improvisation in our actions and self-presentations. In his interpretation, *habitus* names a reflexive feel for strategic action under contingent circumstance" (p.

152). She uses the concept to speak about the embodied experience of craft production by professional artisans, particularly cheesemakers who can “sense” when a cheese is ready instead of relying on technology to guide them through each step in the process. Paxson extends the discussion further, explaining that understanding the artisan’s embodied work means examining their lives outside of the studio to foster a better understanding of the relationship between the two. What may appear as the natural instinct of professional artisans is, O’Connor and Paxson suggest by way of Bourdieu, a practiced approach to their work that develops over time into an embodied understanding of their craft.

Craft also plays a role in the social reproduction of class, reflecting a hierarchy within society in a way closely tied to Bourdieu’s theories of capital. For Bourdieu, people are situated in society based on the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital they have; the more “correct” capital they have in a particular field, the higher their position within that field’s hierarchy. Capital can be consciously acquired but is often subconsciously rooted in an individual person’s background, affording more opportunities to gain capital to those who possess a greater amount already. The more cultural capital a person has, the more refined their “taste” is, taste being a social construct rooted in such hierarchies of capital (Pret, Shaw & Drakopoulou Dodd, 2015). Anthropologist Susan Terrio (2000) explores this relationship between craft professionals and cultural capital in her work on artisanal chocolatiers in France. She notes that craftspeople fit between categories of class and social status. On the one hand, craft production is a form of manual labour, not always rooted in academic study, and can have low economic return, all of which are devalued in western society. Craftspeople do, on the other hand, often run their own businesses and can have high cultural capital,

affording them access to a higher social status than most labourers. Bourdieu acknowledges this as well, saying “Artistic craftsmen and art-dealers, who earn their living from industrial and commercial profits, and are close in those respects to other small businessmen, are set apart from them by their relatively high cultural capital, which brings them closer to the new petite bourgeoisie” (1979/1984, p. 122). In her 1999 work on the shop-keeping wives of male artisans, Terrio found that the women also negotiated a space between classes as their clientele were often people of a middle or upper class with a lot of cultural, social, and economic capital or tourists hoping to demonstrate such capital through the purchase of craft (*objectified cultural capital*). Despite holding their positions due to marriage instead of accumulated education or business sense, the women were viewed by customers as being in possession of the social and cultural capital to determine taste and subsequently recommend the best item to suit their needs. This is reminiscent of Bourdieu’s argument that artists (or craftspeople) gain distinction because of the social, economic, and cultural capital they are able to obtain and present to others, not because of an innate talent. As he puts it, “technical competence is less important than familiarity with the culture of the dominant class and a mastery of the signs and emblems of distinction and taste” (1979/1984, p. 141). Craft therefore can provide recognition to artisans who have or develop through their work cultural capital which is then used by consumers who purchase their products as a signifier to others that they carry that capital as well.

The value of a craft item is not solely rooted in the aesthetic, mental, or functional properties of the producer or the product itself. Outside influences such as politicians, business owners, taste-makers, and (constructed) historical backgrounds can shape what,

how, and why craft practices and products are valued for individual or collective purposes (Terrio, 1999), explored further in the next section. The role of the consumer in determining value is, also, not always passive and their perception of craft values can have an impact on craft producers and distributors. In her study of Etsy, a web-based craft sales platform, Michele Krugh (2014) determined that while online shoppers cannot evaluate the physical qualities of a craft item, they can evaluate what they consider to be the added value of the product through the seller's profile. Krugh quotes Dixie Laite, a vintage collector on Etsy who wrote a blog post on marketing for Etsy sellers which stated, "[A] big part of the appeal is the authenticity and personal aspect of what you do. The story behind your products can attract customers because it makes what they're buying special – and by extension, it makes them feel special" (p. 293). This demonstrates how perceived value is not solely in the product or production process, the seller is expected to share part of themselves in the transaction. Further, part of the draw of craft items is the ethical stance that makers are assumed to be influenced by, such as supporting family businesses, local producers, small-scale, sustainable, anti-globalization, anti-sweatshop, and fair-trade movements (BOP Consulting, 2012; Krugh, 2014; Paxson, 2010; Paxson, 2012). In this sense, perceived added value can help the craftsperson promote their personal moral values but can also place pressure on producers to market part of their own identity or portray specific ideals that consumers expect of them in order to make a sale.

The critique of a perceived added value is addressed by Paxson (2010) in her research on terroir and American cheese producers. She mentions a moderator at the American Cheese Society's annual meeting who, in response to a claim that the taste of

one stray thistle can be tasted in a cheese, responded that if people off the street could not tell the difference in the cheese, these claims crossed the line into pure marketing technique. Likewise, Gowlland (2009) draws from anthropologist Roy Dilley, suggesting that consumers unable to see the actual production process of an item are purchasing a *sign value*, buying a product based on presumed authenticity. Gowlland himself suggests that a current problem with craft is that as with any skill, people have to be trained to see value and often consumers are unable to see it which is where it becomes important to consider the presumed authenticity Dilley speaks of. The inability for many people to properly identify the value they seek in an item can affect the methods craft producers use to make their wares and how they sell them. Gowlland's research found that zisha pots, a traditional unglazed pottery coming out of China's Jiangsu Province, were often not made using traditional methods as the majority of consumers could not identify a traditionally-made pot from one made using a mould; producers reduced their workload, increased their free time, and still claimed to use traditional methods while charging the value-added price without customers knowing the difference. As a counterpoint, philosopher Walter Benjamin (1968) would argue that the aura of a craft item may still present (whether it can be detected or not) and represents a certain uniqueness that deserves value over a mass-produced version. This aura would not be present, however, in the moulded zisha pots as Benjamin argues that what makes an item unique is closely tied to tradition and the production of an authentic item not reproduced through technical processes. Therefore, while the customer can choose whether or not to purchase a product with added value they may be unable to detect, this does not necessarily discredit the value of the aura associated with it.

This examination does not answer the question of “what is craft?” with one simple response; craft is multi-faceted. Craft can refer to a physical production process or a mindset. Craft can involve machines or be destroyed by machines. Craft can represent social structures of acceptance and it can represent individuality. Craft can be valued for aesthetic characteristics commonly attributed to fine art and for the perceived moral stance behind the producer and the piece. As a noun and a verb, craft can apply to a person, an action, an object: a craftsperson is trained in the craft of crafting craft. The discussion of craft and value will be examined further in the next section which considers “place”, both as a physical and abstract location.

## **2.2 A New Image of the Place: A Discussion of Place**

As with the term “craft”, “place” has a wide variety of understandings and applications. This section explores place as both a physical location to live and visit, Cape Breton Island, and as an imagined one, experienced by residents and tourists alike. After outlining the current contemporary history of the region and discussing place, the section develops into a consideration of craft purchases as a tool for tourists to remember their visit to a distinct place.

Cape Breton Island is the most northern and eastern region of the province of Nova Scotia on Canada’s east coast. Much of Cape Breton’s recent history is rooted in the impact that industrial work has had on the region. Key industries in the region were coal and steel which began a long, serious decline in the 1920s, extending into the 1960s (deRoche, 2003). As of mid-2019, there is one coal mine on the island, in Donkin, which is in the process of re-opening but not yet fully operational (Ayers, 2019). As Massey

(1994) describes, large companies often split production up and locate skilled and semi-skilled labourers in different geographic spaces. Semi-skilled work is located in areas where the labour can be found at a low cost and in abundance, and the resulting factories do little to create links with the local people or culture. As a result, regions that are already experiencing inequalities are used by industries to provide a cheap and disposable labour force, a situation that people in wealthier regions would not be as likely to accept. This argument pairs well with Harvey's (2005) assertion that capital appears in one space only to destroy that space at a later date as capital and labour move around to avoid overaccumulation. The decline of industry has left many residents of Cape Breton Island to turn to part-time and precarious jobs in order to make ends meet.

This recent industrial history of Cape Breton has had social and political repercussions. deRoche (2003) spoke of people within regional community economic development groups who felt there was a *culture of dependency* shaping the livelihoods of residents in Cape Breton; this view assumes that people in Cape Breton are lazy and happy to shift their dependence onto the government with the decline of company towns, placing blame on victims of the situation. A statement reflecting this sentiment about Atlantic Canada as a broader region was even made by then Leader of the Opposition Stephen Harper in 2002, when he said, "There is a dependence in the region that breeds a culture of defeatism" ("Harper plans to battle", 2002). Local people, however, often feel the government has abandoned them or given up on the region after creating many of the policies and promoting many of the industries which left them in such a condition (deRoche, 2003). This is not an unreasonable belief, with Wray and Stephenson (2012) comparing government response to industrial decline in the United Kingdom to Cape

Breton and explaining that old industrial communities were no longer given money under the expectation that those towns would die and, as such, the money was diverted to a “winning region” (p. 335). Cape Breton residents had very little control over the decline of industry yet have been admonished for asking for support from the very system which allowed companies to come into the region and leave with few consequences.

Towns did not die out, however, as the commitment to town and community by local people expanded beyond the loss of regional industries (Wray and Stephenson, 2012). A sense of the collective was strong in Cape Breton leading up to and during industrial booms, with Barber (1990) reporting a culture of reliance on community and kinship in the face of adversity. She points out that the experience of living and working in a mining town could be difficult and undesirable, resulting in people *making do* or turning to their local support networks, rooted in a shared sense of place and identity, to survive. Even once the decline of regional industrial work began, deRoche (2003) noticed this collective action in response to government closures of a number of schools and post offices, writing, “when people protest school amalgamations and post-office closures, they do so in the name of community identity and coherence” (p. 236). Despite community members coming together to support each other in response to a lack of adequate formal assistance, there has been a trend of out-migration and, as Wray and Stephenson (2012) discuss, the region’s isolation and prevalence of precarious work mean significant new opportunities are unlikely to appear. Calls to separate Cape Breton Island from Nova Scotia and form a new province have been made, fueled notably by Senator Dan Christmas (2019) who wrote of Cape Breton’s current economic climate, “But when you consider the numbers on Cape Breton, we’ve already been declining for



quite some time, and worse than we imagined. The bleak reality these figures paint is this: Cape Breton/Unama'ki is slowly bleeding to death.” The role of community in Cape Breton is crucial to the well-being of residents and the continuation of the region yet is also associated with a historical sense of discontent.

Place is not limited to a physical location bounded by firm political lines or features of the landscape. Anthropologist Martha Radice writes of place, “place is widely understood to be made by the people who use and imagine it. Place equals space plus meaning; individuals and groups make places relevant and meaningful through their actions and ideas” (2011, p. 13). In her fieldwork on Rue Saint-Viateur, a street in Montréal, Radice found that while the street itself is a physical location, like Cape Breton Island, people who used the street did not have a uniform understanding of the street as a place, drawing their own meanings from it, while casual users may not experience the street as a place at all but part of a broader space to move through. Expanding upon the concept of place, Escobar (2001) outlines a number of discussions within academia around the term. While there is variation, a common thread is that place is constructed by people and, although informed by physical space, is not solely rooted in it. As such, embodied experiences of place cannot have firm, unchanging borders, nor can they be applied to everyone in the same manner. In craft production, one popular approach to the term place is the concept of *terroir*, which Paxson (2012) explains is conceptualized in France as, “not only the material conditions of a locale – soil, topography, microclimate – but also to the collective, cultural know-how behind agricultural products that helps to constitute place as a locus of shared tradition and affective belonging” (p. 188). Thus,

while boundaries can inscribe a physical place upon people, place is also a collective, embodied experience based on history and values.

One approach that decision-makers in some locales are taking in an attempt to recover from deindustrialization is *selling place* or *place marketing*. According to Kearns and Philo (1993), selling place is the action of promoting a place based on a (highly curated) history of the region and a concept about the livelihoods of the local people. They explain, “places become ‘commodified,’ regarded as commodities to be consumed and as commodities that can be rendered attractive, advertised and marketed much as capitalists would any product” (p. 18). Through selling place, former industrial areas, Cape Breton included, are capitalizing on livelihoods rooted in place, attracting businesses, tourists, and other consumers or investors to a specific region based on the opportunity to structure their businesses or lives around what the region offers over others. Local residents are not immune to the process, organizers of place marketing campaigns want their image to become an accepted reality by influencing how place is viewed by those who encounter it every day; selling place initiatives can even be fueled by active participation of community members. An example of artisanal products being tied up with tourism and place marketing was discussed by Paxson (2010) in her work on artisan cheese producers in the United States. She explains how the development of specialized cheeses and the romanticism attached to rural working landscapes has led to the Vermont Cheese Trail, incorporating an entire industry of restaurants, gas stations, and inns. Selling place or place marketing can bring about positive and negative changes to regions as residents and policy-makers shape physical and historical truths to suit market demands.

As noted in Chapter 1, the link between place marketing and craft production in Nova Scotia is strong. Ian McKay, a historian with many publications on tourism and marketing in Nova Scotia, addresses this topic in depth in his book, *The Quest of the Folk*, published in 1994. He speaks of the revival of folk craft in Nova Scotia between 1930 and 1950. At the time, people across North America were nostalgic for older ways of life and the seemingly simpler times which handicrafts embodied. As the province faced economic hardship stemming from the industrial foundation it had structured its economic prosperity upon, many workers were left without jobs as core industries declined. With Quebec promoting its own success through a new program linking craft with tourism that profited from such nostalgia, Nova Scotian officials came to view craft as a way to build the tourism industry to foster job growth, particularly in rural areas of the province. The effort was led by Mary E. Black, Supervisor of Handcrafts in the department of Industry and Publicity, and resulted in Nova Scotia becoming known for its “craftspeople untouched by modern notions” (McKay, 1994, p. 178) who produced items representative of *maritimicity*, defined by McKay as, “that special *bricolage* of stuffed lobsters, brass bric-a-brac, lobster traps, and ‘crafts of the sea’” (p. 197). The response was overwhelmingly positive, contributing to a rise in both tourism and craft sales across the province.

Handcrafts are not the only aspect of Nova Scotia’s image that was carefully constructed through place marketing techniques, particularly for tourism purposes. In addition to the craft industry being historically manipulated, particular heritages were over- or under-represented in the region. Of relevance to this research is the emphasis placed on Scottish culture, particularly in Cape Breton. A term that can be often tied up

with place marketing is *invented tradition*, defined by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) as: “both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (p. 1). Invented traditions are not necessarily aligned with historical events, nor do they always demonstrate continuity, and they can be fueled by social or political motivations. In Nova Scotia, one form of invented tradition to emerge in the mid-1900s was *tartanism*, “a matrix of ideas about and images of nature, history, and race, all testifying to the Scottishness of Nova Scotia” (McKay, 2010, p. 254). In fact, there were no strong promotional connections between Nova Scotia being a “new Scotland,” other than in name, until the 1930s (McKay, 2010); while people did immigrate from Scotland, particularly to Cape Breton, the promotion of Scottish heritage as representative of the provincial population was significantly overblown with the 1921 census reporting that only 28% of the province was of Scottish descent (McKay, 1992). Little (2015) points out that while the presence of people of Scottish heritage was not overwhelmingly embraced before the 1930s, a fair amount of earlier travel literature mentioned the Scottish people in Cape Breton, yet not always in a flattering light. Angus L. Macdonald, Premier of Nova Scotia from 1933 to 1930 and 1945 to 1954, was a key figure in promoting tartanism, using his influence in the province to promote and fund various initiatives in support (sometimes superficially) of Gaelic culture. This push for reinventing Nova Scotia as reminiscent of Scotland at one time even had officials at all levels of government trying to source heather for the Cape Breton hillsides to make the very landscape of the province to seem more Scottish (McKay, 2010). While these cases are

specific to the context of Nova Scotia, manipulating fact to market place is not unique to the province. MacDonald's 2011 article on the tourism industry on Prince Edward Island (PEI) points out that Lucy Maud Montgomery's book, *Anne of Green Gables*, published in 1908, continues to have a major influence on the island. Despite the fact that the book's protagonist, Anne Shirley, and main location, Green Gables, have never existed, visitors travel to PEI to connect with the beauty and emotion portrayed in the book. Historical fact, then, can be less about history and fact and more about presenting an audience with a story that continues to captivate their minds.

In addition to (perceptions of) craft production contributing to place marketing initiatives, Stoddard et al. (2012) identify a second link between craft and tourism: the hedonic nature of craft consumption. They explain that craft purchases are typically hedonic instead of utilitarian, meaning that a consumer does not necessarily have a need or use for a particular product but will have an enjoyable emotional experience from the purchase. The authors suggest that, as people typically feel more guilt about buying hedonic rather than utilitarian goods, it is best to sell craft items in a context where people are more likely to rationalize the purchase. The location where people are most likely to make hedonic purchases is at tourist sites, where their purchases are generally either unique (and therefore unavailable at home) or specific to the tourist site. In fact, McKay (1994) goes even further with the idea, explaining, "a handcrafted and distinctive souvenir bears witness that the tourist has indeed made the journey, and it thus plays a role in authenticating his or her individual saga" (p. 154). Stoddard et al. and McKay both argue that crafted items become symbols that tourists look for on vacation, which act as physical proof of their trip to others and, therefore, become a justifiable purchase.

A term imbedded within the relationship between craft sales and tourism is that of *souvenir*. The word *souvenir*, stemming from the French word, *souvenir*, or “to remember,” was adapted as an English term in the 1700s (although popularized with the rise of mass-market gift shops) as “an object through which something (a place, a person, an experience), is remembered” (Potts, 2018, p. 2). In Gordon’s (1986) discussion of *souvenirs*, she identifies local crafts as a subcategory of the broader “local products” classification. She notes that craft products are often made by people perceived as different in some way, reminding tourists of a time, reality, and place removed from daily life. That is despite the fact that, “crafts are often produced by non-marginal individuals and the shops run by ordinary entrepreneurs, but the reality need not beat out the perception for it to persist on a structural level” (p. 144). As a *souvenir* within the context of tourism, craft products serve as a memory of travels or experiences once had yet are not necessarily an accurate depiction of the place they are meant to represent.

As demonstrated in Nova Scotia’s history, the stereotype or dated image tourists have of people and a region can have a real impact on their lives. Potts (2018) speaks of *staged authenticity* where reality is suspended or hidden for the sake of presenting an image tourists have created. He writes, “As often as not, travelers’ expectations had economic stakes, and local communities that grew to rely on the tourist trade wound up ‘performing’ semi-fictional versions of their own cultures” (p. 83). McKay (1994) explains that, in her efforts to have Nova Scotia recognized as an important location in the craft revival, Mary E. Black focused her attention on introducing and promoting a European style of weaving while neglecting forms of craft production that had been present in Nova Scotia for generations, mostly the production of household items such as

sweaters and rugs. Not only were true Nova Scotian craft items deemed unacceptable but Nova Scotian craft producers were not permitted to participate in the craft revival.

McKay ironizes, “It would probably be for the best if Nova Scotian crafts were made by Europeans. They, far better than the aesthetically misguided Folk of mining towns, farms, and fishing communities, could root ‘good design’ in the unforgivingly provincial soil” (p. 187). Likewise, Graburn (1967) reported that Naskapi First Nations changed their production of wood carvings to soapstone carvings when the artificially “traditional” soapstone art of neighbouring Inuit communities became a popular souvenir, wanting to capitalize on the trend. Over time, the soapstone art styles blended into one generic look which Graburn noted as the merging of separate cultures into an “undifferentiated ‘native lower caste’” (p. 33), feeding into what consumers expected of a traditional souvenir yet was actually a state-promoted endeavour. The place presented to visitors, therefore, is not always representative of the lived experience of local residents and can be harmful to their traditions, livelihoods, and practices.

Consumer demand, particularly from tourists looking for the ideal souvenir, can have a significant impact on craftspeople and their livelihoods but that does not necessarily mean artisans do not have agency. In discussing authenticity in island craft sectors, Prince (2017) acknowledges that while many craftspeople want to live an idyllic rural lifestyle and make a living from exercising their creativity, this is not a realistic situation for many. Instead, they separate their authentic creative identity and their need to sustain a living, producing items directed at tourists to build up the funds and following to produce what they want. In a study for the CCF, consultant Peartree Solutions Inc. (2003) considers craft’s worth from an economic standpoint, its role as a

commodity to sell, versus from a cultural vantage point, where the most important aspect of craft is the creative process involved in its conception and production. They point out that the same person may adopt different professional titles, may produce different styles, and may sell in vastly different forms of retail outlets depending on what the situation calls for; economic benefits of craft may hold weight in some scenarios while its artistic merit may be prioritized in others. In Prince's (2017) scenario, craft was primarily a commodity in the minds of producers when they made items to suit tourist demands, capitalizing on those sales in order to practice craft as a truly creative endeavour. Tourist conceptions of craft producers and the role they expect craft products to play in their experience with place can be problematic but some artisans manipulate those expectations to their benefit.

Place, for the purpose of this thesis, means the island of Cape Breton as a physical location, bounded by lines drawn both politically and by the Canso Strait, separating residents from the rest of Nova Scotia. Interviewees' perceptions of place do not necessarily fall within such a rigid, physical location, however, understanding place as a locale that is meaningful to their everyday experiences as residents and craft producers in the region. A third concept of place appears throughout the thesis as somewhere people like to visit, explored via considerations of the implications of tourism on the Cape Breton craft sector.

## **Conclusion**

To address the connection between craft production and place within the context of Cape Breton Island, this chapter laid out key concepts. Craft proved difficult to pin



down, as an artistic practice that does not, by nature, have one proper approach. Craft can be viewed as an intelligent, creative process compared to industrial work yet also understood to be lacking in intelligence and creativity when compared to art practices. Craft can be signified by the use of hands instead of machines during production, while other arguments posit that tools are necessary in creating craft items, instead placing emphasis on mass-production versus small-batch techniques. Craft can be qualified by the embodied experience makers have in the creation and development of a product, it can also be a term assigned to the artisan's finished item. Complementary and competing definitions of craft, causing both confusion and flexibility, constitute a theme threading throughout the remainder of the thesis. Place, although somewhat easier to discuss than craft, is still structured around a necessary ambiguity as it is a constructed understanding built around accepted boundaries and life experiences as much as it is enveloped in physical location. Later chapters apply this discussion when considering the impact of historical and contemporary experiences of residents in Cape Breton and of tourism and marketing campaigns on Cape Breton's craft sectors.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

To effectively address my research question, “how are the practices of craft producers in Cape Breton bound up with place?” I conducted ethnographic fieldwork, holding a series of interviews with members of the Cape Breton craft sector over a period of one month in the summer of 2015. This chapter addresses why I used interviews as a research method and how I identified and recruited participants, moving into a consideration of the ethics involved in conducting this research and, finally, an overview of how the analysis transformed data from individual interviews into a broader discussion of the relationship between craft production and place.

### **3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were the primary research method used for this project. This style of interview, referred to by Bouma, Ling and Wilkinson (2012) as “a semi-directed conversation” (p.286), allowed me to approach interviews with specific questions in mind (Appendix A) yet also provided flexibility to adjust the course of questioning based on topics emerging from responses. This system made it possible to look for similarities and opposition in the questions asked of everyone while also following down paths of inquiry related to the research topic which I had not previously considered or accounted for in my original study design. In total, I conducted 13 interviews, speaking with 17 participants from across Cape Breton. The interviews ranged in length from fifty minutes to over three hours, depending on the number of participants, the level of detail provided, and amount of additional topics discussed.

Before conducting the interviews, I had to establish parameters for who I wanted to speak. I set a goal to recruit 15 to 20 participants as a logical balance between obtaining a suitable range of opinions and experiences yet not extending the project beyond what is manageable for the scope of a master's project. Of these participants, I wanted there to be representation from producers, craft organizations, craft event organizers, craft sellers (or gallery owners), and people who worked in policy or tourism in Cape Breton; the final composition of participants included, in some aspect, all of these categories. More often than not, participants fulfilled multiple roles: teaching craft by day, producing craft by night; working for craft organizations while advocating for policy changes to benefit the craft sector; organizing craft events and selling at others.

I did not set specific criteria within each of the categories discussed in the previous paragraph, instead allowing participants to self-identify as such (see the report *Craft in an Age of Change* (BOP Consulting, 2012) for a similar approach). I aimed to avoid excluding people who felt they were part of the Cape Breton craft sector even if one definition of craft did not qualify them. This was particularly important for discussing the relationship between craft and place as Cape Breton Island does not have a separate arts council creating a distinction between “artist” and “craftsperson” (complete with separate resources). Had this study occurred in a location with a craft council and an arts council, it is possible participants in this study who identified as visual or fibre artists would have declined the interview request. The lack of strict guidelines also resulted in the inclusion of an Irish participant who runs his craft business from his home county in Ireland. He was not an obvious choice for an interview about the Cape Breton craft sector, yet he had experience organizing craft events in Cape Breton, he had spent time in

Cape Breton working with craft producers, he was in the process of developing a craft tourism venture between Cape Breton and Ireland, and he was able to provide some context to craft on the island versus other places. Representation of the Cape Breton craft sector in this project became more authentic through this self-identification process as latent connections to craft were revealed.

Although I did not want to impose definitions upon participants, I did have to figure out how to identify initial contacts. About half of the participants were recruited through information I found while doing Internet searches for craft producers in Cape Breton and from brochures and contact cards left in information racks at a variety of locations: Nova Scotia visitor information centres (Halifax waterfront, Halifax Stanfield International Airport, and Port Hastings), Chéticamp Visitor Information Centre, Cape Breton Highlands National Park, and Inverness County Centre for the Arts (ICCA). I collected the information of any person or organization who seemed to be involved in producing or selling items in small batches (through words such as handmade, natural, authentic, craft, art) on Cape Breton Island. I used this information to email potential participants (Appendix B).

The rest of the participants were recruited using a simplified snowball sampling method. Bouma et al. (2012) describe snowball sampling as an initial group of participants who then provide the researcher with contact information for people they know who they felt would be suitable participants and, once recruited, they provide further names. My method involved asking everyone I contacted via email to relay my information along to anyone who the initial contacts felt would be suitable. Additionally, the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design (CBCCD) forwarded my email to its

extensive mailing list (which is not limited to its members). This approach worked well for the project, expanding the request for interviews beyond craftspeople who had advertisements, brochures, and websites.

The interviews were held in a location of the participants' choosing, often in their studio, gallery, or home. Often this was the primary area of business for participants and they were able to supplement the discussion with a quick tour of their workspace, demonstrating how they displayed products, showing me what route visitors typically took around the space, and grabbing promotional materials they had on hand as the interviews covered relevant topics. The ability to be on-site during interviews helped immensely as I was able to not only see the areas as a consumer might but also to gain insight into how the craftsman understands their space. This experience was possible through an ethnographic fieldwork-inspired approach.

### **3.2 Ethnographic Approach**

Ethnography, a qualitative-based approach to research common in anthropology, involves observing people over an extended period of time and participating in the activities that make up their lives in order to collect descriptive data. Fieldwork is the process of immersing oneself into the world participants experience (Fedorak, 2013). In my case, this meant spending one month in Cape Breton during the summer of 2015. I stayed in a dorm room at Cape Breton University in Sydney and drove to communities across the island as my interview schedule dictated, meeting with members of the region's craft sector and gaining a better understanding of life on the island.

This process of conducting ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to speak face-to-face with participants, often in their place of work. On many occasions, the place of work was connected to the artisan's residence, either as a purpose-built studio or existing space such as a garage or spare room. While entering a personal living area often felt slightly intrusive to me, some participants regularly hosted visitors in these spaces as a necessity for conducting sales. The sense of openness, genuine or fueled by expectations, that producers presented to visitors recalled Prince (2017) who wrote, "The creative space of the craft-artists become meeting spaces, fueling a discourse of rural spaces as idyllic bearers of authentic products and experiences" (p. 111). If makers are encouraged to market personal elements of themselves to sell their products (Krugh, 2014) and Portland craft producers provide virtual "windows" into their studios (Marotta & Heying, 2018) to give customers a personal touch, what value could be applied to an item when consumers not only saw where it was made but got a sense of how the person who made it lives?

My presence in the work spaces of participants provided other insights into the life of a craftsperson on Cape Breton Island. My interview with Dennis Doyon and Joanne Fitzgerald of Arts North was scheduled around a strict production timeline so that they could have gallery shelves stocked before the rush of weekend tourists while Anne Morrell Robinson multitasked, working on a quilt while responding to my questions. Roughly half of my interviews were paused at least once as customers stopped into studios and engaged with participants about their work and Cape Breton, amongst other topics. When participants spoke of feeling guilty or having difficulty scheduling time away from their professions during the tourist season, either for pleasure or work obligations, I understood the dilemma as each moment spent away from the studio was a

lost opportunity to create more product or conduct sales. How did artisans prioritize personal and professional obligations and desires – moving between the cash register, the pottery wheel, and the kitchen, as it were?

Being in Cape Breton also helped me truly understand the impact that geography could have on various stakeholders within Cape Breton’s craft sector. Each drive I made to and from a studio or craft organization started and ended each day in Sydney. Having obligations on specific days meant that I could not base my travel plans on what the weather was like, even though rain could make stretches of road, including Nova Scotia Highway 125 out of Sydney, particularly treacherous for hydroplaning (“Cape Breton fire chiefs”, 2015), or thick fog, notably encountered on Kelly’s Mountain, could reduce visibility on high-traffic, winding roads. Further, interviews arranged for particular times meant I was unable to stop for long breaks if I was tired unless I had accounted for it at the start of the journey. This pattern was perhaps more in line with one that a craft producer would have to follow if attending craft markets a few times per week or driving to Sydney for supplies and workshops instead of one a tourist leisurely travelling around the island would follow.

Despite some similarities in my travel patterns and those of some participants instead of tourists, I was still a tourist in some regards and I did also experience some of the challenges that craft consumers might encounter. One stand-out memory involved arriving hours late for an interview after getting lost along the Cabot Trail and only having brief pockets of cellular service to call the participant or try to sort myself out using Global Positioning System. I ended up in Chéticamp and on logging roads (a “shortcut” that I perhaps misunderstood from a gas station attendant) before being

reduced to tears and asking the participant if we could reschedule the interview. I did eventually find the studio and, looking back on the experience years later, saw a lot of beautiful corners of Cape Breton during the ordeal that I would have enjoyed, despite being lost, had I only planned to drop in as a visitor instead of as an anthropologist with an appointment. This was not the first time I had gotten lost; I spent an extra thirty minutes driving on the roads near Whycocomagh on my first day in the field after missing a turn. It is difficult for me to determine if these challenges would have discouraged me, had I been a craft consumer, or if my academic obligations prevented me from appreciating the process of tracking down rural studios for pleasure.

The insights gleaned through being in the field, present on the island and in the operational studios, galleries, and organizations of participants, do not receive as much attention as the interview content receives in the following chapters. I do not mean to imply, however, that it was not valuable as the fieldwork provided me with a greater understanding of the context and lived experiences of artisans and craft industry representatives in Cape Breton. To ensure these stakeholders in the regional craft sector were treated properly, I took the ethics surrounding my research into consideration.

### **3.3 Ethics**

Ethical concerns surrounding research involving people, outlined in Canada's 2014 Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) informed the very foundation of my research project. The TCPS 2 provides a number of core principles for researchers to abide by, with topics including the consent process, privacy and confidentiality, and conflict of interest, amongst others. To ensure my research followed ethical guidelines,



Dalhousie University required it be submitted to the Research Ethics Board for approval. That system helped me develop the project while making sure the project design accounted for the privacy and well-being of all involved.

Although this research project was minimal risk, meaning the risk of harm incurred by my participants was not greater than risks they may experience in their lives as it relates to the professional capacity I was speaking to them in (Panel on Research Ethics, 2018), it was possible participants would experience damage to their reputation or stigmatization within a professional or community setting if they said something negative about a colleague, program, or local dynamics. To address these concerns, I provided each participant with a consent form (Appendix C) prior to the interview which acknowledged the minimal risk and outlined options to counteract this. Participants who did not wish to be identified could check a box on the consent form and would be referred to in the thesis as “participant” and interview data would only be quoted if it did not have any obvious personal connections. They were also permitted to decline my request to record the session for transcription purposes so there would be no lingering evidence of them saying something they did not want attached to them. If participants were generally interested in being identified but did not want to be quoted on particular topics, they were able to specify this during the course of the interview or afterwards. While having both anonymous and identified research participants complicated the process, I wanted to offer people I interviewed the chance to be identified as a form of promotion for their craft businesses or organizations. The majority of participants chose to be identified in some capacity and their names can be found throughout the thesis and on the introductory pages.

### **3.4 Analysis**

Once interview data was collected and transcribed, the task became turning the hours of data from individual participants into a broader thesis with themes encapsulating overall participant experiences as they related to the research question.

The interview questions helped to establish primary topics that had an impact on what was discussed and the themes that arose. During the interview and transcribing process, I further developed a sense of what the thesis themes might be as I heard common or conflicting responses to questions. As such, once it was time to address the coding and analysis of my interview data, I had some general themes which I labeled: the state of craft in Cape Breton, the relationship between craft and geography, craft and community, and craft and tourism. For each grouping, I went through each transcribed interview and wrote quotes plus general ideas that appeared related to the subject along with the page number.

Once themes started to emerge within each section, I used the same system to break the data down into smaller groupings. As the thesis developed, subsections changed either the order they were in or the content they covered and some were discarded altogether. Additionally, a fifth overarching theme, technology and place, was added when I found it developed into too large of a topic to cover in small bits throughout the other chapters. As chapter content and layout changed during the writing process, I reevaluated interviews throughout to assure that I was not missing content that was relevant to the analysis that may not have been under the initial identification of categories.

In addition to using general concepts and perspectives that came up throughout the interviews, I went through each one and identified exact quotes that could be used as an epigraph or as core chapter content due to a variety of reasons including their relevance to the subject, their eloquence, the dialogue they (unknowingly) had when paired with quotes from other participants, and the participant's knowledge of the topic. I did try to have a fairly even representation of participants throughout the thesis although certain subsections may speak more to some people's experiences than others; the challenge of representation was further compounded by the fact that some wished to remain completely anonymous and others to not be identified when commenting in a controversial manner.

## **Conclusion**

In addition to reviewing academic and grey literature (Chapter 2), I had to go to the source to answer the research question, "how are the practices of craft producers in Cape Breton bound up with place?" Over the course of thirteen semi-structured interviews in one month, I was able to speak with seventeen people about the overlap of their experiences on Cape Breton Island and within the craft sector. The ethnographic approach I took, supplementing interviews with fieldwork that put me in shared physical (and sometimes mental) spaces with participants was very beneficial and contributes to the heart of the following chapters. The long hours driving and sense of isolation from being by myself for that time period affected me occasionally but speaking face-to-face with craftspeople and members of craft organizations provided me with valuable knowledge and insight into their daily lives.

## **Chapter 4: State of Craft in Cape Breton**

So that – that’s my vision – is that we bring the outside here for the benefit of people who are here and we try to develop the artists here and even, in the long term, to put together shows that can go out

-Elizabeth Whalley

ICON Communications and Research Incorporated’s benchmark study of the regional craft sector, released in 2012, was commissioned by Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC) with the objective to inform future Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design (CBCCD) projects. Using mostly quantitative data from 170 surveys or 36% of producers in the sector (including recreational producers), the result was a seventy-five-page document capturing a snapshot of what the sector needed at that time. This chapter serves, in a sense, as the parallel qualitative benchmark study accompanying this survey, providing a glimpse into how participants experienced Cape Breton Island’s craft sector from within. Discussions in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 build on the foundation established here through the consideration of three key areas: how craft is defined within the regional context, whether the industry is experiencing growth or trending toward decline, and what opportunities are (or should be) available to craft producers, shops, and organizations.

### **4.1 Head and the Heart: Is There an On-The-Ground Definition of Craft?**

The ambiguity surrounding the academic definition of craft (see Chapter 2) was similar, though not identical, to how craft was understood in Cape Breton. There was no definition established or enforced by government departments or organizations that

participants identified as being influential to their operations or even had specific knowledge of. Even official reports, such as the Framework for Progress (Dan White & Associates Limited, Market Access International Inc., and Economic Growth Solutions, 2003), used examples of craft for context (“special textiles, musical instruments, furniture, clothing, quilts, pottery ceramics”; p. 8), yet abstained from specifying the criteria used to establish such products as craft. Likewise, MDB Insight’s culture sector strategy for Cape Breton Island, commissioned by the Cape Breton Partnership for their *Prosperity Framework* and released in 2017, described *creative core* activities, craft inclusive, as: “generally produced as one-offs or part of limited production runs, the value of the [creative core activities] derives from their perceived cultural (or aesthetic) value, exclusivity and authenticity” (p. 24). Despite the lack of a clear, overarching definition, one theme emerged: the idea that craft is about putting creative thought into production of each item. This section will focus on this concept in addition to addressing the complications that arose from attempting to use “craft” as a unifying label in any capacity.

In posing the question, “Do you have a definition for craft?” the one criterion present across the majority of interviews was that the final crafted product must be the result of creative thought, with Anne Morrell Robinson calling the process a combination of both “the head and the heart” while Gina Cloud used a similar phrase: “working with your hands and your heart.” The intention behind these phrases was to exclude hobbyists using pre-made patterns and simple assembly work, yet it extended beyond this. Michael Budd highlighted an internal conflict he had, saying that there were people who are trained as craftspeople and whom he respected as businesspeople, yet he

also felt they should be called small-scale mass-producers instead of craft producers. He explained:

Michael: Sometimes it's mass-produced stuff – on a small scale but still mass-produced. It's like, "I've been producing this same thing for fifteen years and I churn out twenty thousand a year." That's not craft, you're a small time -

Grant Haverstock: You're a factory

Michael: Factory, yeah. Mass producer. You're not a craftsperson but we're all too polite to say it.

In this scenario, people used techniques perfected in craft training but the “head and heart” creative aspect of the process was no longer present. Anne Morrell Robinson spoke of a similar system used by quilt makers who provided potential clients with a limited range of pattern and colour options to choose from, making a living without straying from those patterns. She could not imagine doing this, saying: “It would get boring real fast. That's not why I'm in the business [...] I don't want to mass produce. I want to do one-of-a-kind!” Thus, while knowledge of specialized craft skills was noted in Chapter 2 as a factor in what constitutes a “craftsperson,” participants felt that meeting that criterion did not automatically give someone the right to use the title.

The matter is complicated by the fact that “craft” held different meanings depending on the context (e.g., Luckman & Thomas, 2018; Peartree Solutions Inc., 2003). One participant took a similar approach to participants in the previous paragraph, explaining that crafted items in a shop could not be simple assembly work but, while stringing beads was not an acceptable form of craft to sell in a shop, it was an adequate

form of craft in workshops where the focus was not on a standard of professionalism but on getting people to make things with their hands. Consideration of context extended beyond the gallery versus the workshop, with preferred terms and definitions changing depending on whether creative industry representatives were talking to craft producers, government officials, other craft organizations, local school children, or tourists. The manager of the Inverness County Centre for the Arts (ICCA), Elizabeth Whalley, added that defining terms could be problematic because once a term was defined, limitations could be enforced. This is of particular note on Cape Breton where craft organizations found themselves supporting creative ventures which would not necessarily be considered craft in a different region but which did not have their own council or organization to support them on the island (the prime example being the lack of a Cape Breton arts council with the provincial council, Arts Nova Scotia, located in Halifax). The situation was further convoluted by the fact that craft media change over time, with one participant predicting that the classification of three-dimensional printing would be an upcoming topic of discussion amongst arts and craft councils, particularly as it related to the idea of craft as handmade (see Chapter 2). Defining craft in concrete terms became difficult, then, when cultural organizations in Cape Breton were tasked with representing a wide scope of creative endeavours amongst a range of ages and skills.

As craft could connote a variety of understandings, my interviewees in Cape Breton were experiencing an identity crisis related to the specific word, “craft” (and, by association, “craftsperson”). While one participant felt professional craft was not

stringing beads together, a second participant's understanding took it a step further by assigning the qualifier "artisan" to the concept of a craft producer:

Craftspeople now can go and fill a shopping cart at Michaels, come home, attach all that stuff together and pass it off as crafts at something that's called a craft show. Artisans actually have to put some original thought and workmanship into it – that's mandatory. Then, to be an artisan it has to be at a certain level, you know, at an art-like quality.

From this approach, craft was a blanket term that covered such a range of items that its application to the work of professional craftspeople placed it on the same level as people at community craft markets selling bulk t-shirts and rubber lobsters. The participant's solution was to adopt artisan as a title to indicate a level of professionalism that they felt craft did not. This sentiment was echoed by a number of participants who felt that "artisan" provided a distinction from hobbyists, and was supported by the CBCCD which used the word in promotional materials, recognizing the original and creative thought and training required of producers of their calibre. This approach to craftsperson versus artisan was contradictory to how the terms were situated in the United Kingdom, with BOP Consulting (2012) using *craft careerist* to refer to a maker who had generally gone directly from post-secondary education in their field to operating a business while *artisan* was someone who had made craft production their first career yet did not have the coinciding academic education.

While there was a noticeable trend towards adopting artisan as the official title of professional craft producers in Cape Breton, this idea was not without its critics. Producers complained that "craft" had come to mean working on a Sunday afternoon



project instead of a serious job but “artisan” could be adapted in the same way. Elizabeth Whalley spoke to this:

[The struggle to define craft] is a symptom of something broader, I think, in society that has to do with marketing and advertising that our relationship to language is so predicated by advertising and the media, not by human exchange. Words become... they're owned not by people – individuals – but they're owned by advertising and marketing so we have to keep finding words that we can own to define ourselves as people and what goes on between people rather than what's being sold to us. It's the whole money thing; it's like words start to have money value so they cease to be human words. It's something that's very tricky.

What Whalley's words signal is that attaching “craft” to industrial or mass-produced products increased their value from a marketing standpoint, simultaneously decreasing the value of the label in general, hurting professional craft producers. This situation was not unique to Cape Breton or to the words craft and artisan; Wherry (2006) spoke to a similar situation in applications of the term “authentic” (see Chapter 2.2) and uses of craft by corporations to sell product are the subject of Sandra Alfoldy's book on the concept of “craftwashing” (in press). What this approach suggests is that adopting the label of “artisan” to symbolize a higher skill would only be effective until that term is deemed advantageous as a buzzword, a move that had already begun with Walmart selling “artisan bread” (Flatout Flatbread, 2018, Foldit® Artisan Flatbread section), Second Cup Coffee Company selling “artfully baked” food (Second Cup, 2016, Menu section), and Subway employing “sandwich artists” (Subway, n.d., Careers section). If the professional

meaning of craft was lost amongst other uses of the word, the use of “artisan” in Cape Breton may experience a similar loss of significance.

If endorsing “artisan” is a temporary fix to the appropriation of words by businesses to project a certain standard of quality, the issue comes back again to defining key terms. While the difficulties with enforcing boundaries around “craft” have been discussed, Michael Budd argued that part of the reason craft is so vague is because craft producers do not stand up for themselves. He explained:

We’re our own worst enemies because craftspeople should be saying: ‘This should not be called craft. This is not us and what we’re doing is craft. This is the difference between craft and a mass-produced product’. And we have to own that. We have to say, like, can you imagine [...] Coca-Cola or something like that and someone’s producing this thing and saying, ‘Yeah. This is Coke’ and it’s not, at all?

His argument was that craftspeople should stop changing professional titles when marketing companies adopt the words for their own purposes, and instead speak out against that practice. This approach did not suggest one set definition of craft would (or should) emerge but did encourage conversation about the use of "craft" as an identifier of products.

This section has addressed the absence of – and resistance to - a clear, shared definition of craft in Cape Breton. The lack of a singular definition was not unique to the region; Chapter 2 revealed that the term is complicated and there are many perspectives on what qualifies a product as craft. The general trend in Cape Breton, however, was to

move towards other signifiers of professional craftsmanship instead of "craft," which had become muddled with any and all iterations of making something by hand.

#### **4.2 I Could Be Big: A “Dying Craft” or Strong Contributor to the Future?**

Cape Breton’s population is aging, with 65+ being the only age category experiencing growth in the region in 2011. According to Statistics Canada (2012a), its median age is higher than both the provincial and national numbers at 46.6 (versus 43.7 and 40.6, respectively). The aging population is reflected in the Cape Breton craft sector too, with 40% of craft producers in 2012 above the age of 60, up from 20% in 2004. The sector differs from the general population of the island, however, in that it reported an increase in producers under the age of 30, at 9% in 2012 from 3% in 2004 (ICON Communications and Research Inc., 2012). This section examines both the concerns and the optimism that participants expressed in relation to current and future contributions of the craft industry to the regional political economy. It does so by considering the many ways in which members of the sector have experienced a sense of holding steady, growth, and decline.

ICON Communication’s 2012 Cape Breton Island Craft Sector Survey found that eight in ten artisans in the region expressed an interest in growing their business. My research did not reproduce this statistic but the discrepancy stems partially from the fact that the desire to grow a business is not necessarily the same as having the ability to do so. A major limitation identified by participants about expanding was an issue with human resources: people had reached their maximum output and could not hire additional staff. A representative of one craft organization expressed an interest in offering more

outreach and programs around the island in addition to opportunities within their town but summed up the problem by saying, “We just don’t have the HR [human resources]. It’s always an HR issue in charities, not-for-profits.” To them, the geography of Cape Breton was less of an issue with regards to programming than simply not having the budget to supply enough staff to do more programming. This was not solely a problem faced by organizations, however, as individual craft producers were also limited by it. As one participant said, “Frankly, I can’t find anyone to work cheaper than me so I can’t afford to pay ‘em.” Hiring staff meant that there would be other people who would have to be paid, reliably, each week. In a sector that may have a number of sales one week and none the next, it was a chance some were unwilling to take even if that meant reconciling with the idea that they might be losing out on sales.

Other producers, despite possibly having an interest in growing their business, were not keen on hiring the people expansion would require. The creative process can be very personal to the individual and having additional people sharing the space and who needed to be managed could take away from that experience for the artisan. Kenny Boone indicated that although he occasionally had help around the studio, he did not want to hire anyone else. He explained, “I would have the intrusion of somebody being around. I like my quiet time in my studio. If I wanna walk into my studio and there’s an employee here, it doesn’t work that way.” The possibility of adding staff was not simply a creative concern but a mental one too. Gina Cloud spoke about her interest in expansion yet mentioned staffing, in addition to time, as a barrier to expansion. Her structure of output did not allow for a major increase in time to make more items to grow her business, yet employing people to increase the workload would negatively impact her in

other ways. The presence of staff meant that in addition to her own thoughts, she would have to try to think for others and that would cause a lot of stress, leading her to the conclusion: “maybe I could never really get that big for that reason – because it’s just me.” The presence of a desire to further develop a craft business thus became wrapped up in a number of personal and professional considerations including the interruption of quiet and stress management.

Even with the intention of hiring employees, craft producers encountered difficulties growing their businesses. Brenda Reichel had products in a number of stores around the Maritimes and tried to hire people to do small tasks in order to fill the demand of those shops in addition to her own studio and Internet sales. She explained the conflict:

I could be big but it’s not the same thing. They want *my* jewellery, *my* wire wrapping and so that’s always, you know, hard. Then I’d just get them to do things like put clasps on chains and the things like that where I’d do all the creative work but once they learned how to wire wrap they’d be gone and doing their own wire wrapping so it was really tough to get help and so I had to slow down [...] I have to pick and choose, just be in a few here and there.

Her situation was challenging as it offered an opportunity for new craftspeople to develop their skills and build the foundation of their own companies which had the potential to become positive contributions as craft businesses yet also prevented an established producer from expanding her business.

While some participants were at their maximum output and unable to expand their businesses despite wanting to do so, others were content to maintain their current output. Joanne Fitzgerald had recently undertaken control of Arts North and indicated that she

had no immediate plans to physically expand the studio to accommodate more product. She knew she would not amass a fortune via the studio but that also was not her goal: “I know I’m going to make a living at it. That’s ... and I’m not interested in getting rich. As long as I’ve got food on the table.” While she did not rule out future growth, the priority was in providing for her family and she had no urgent need or desire to make changes. In a similar vein, John Frank was not interested in selling his products through more businesses, explaining:

I can mass-produce certain goods to a certain extent but, you know, having a hundred pieces here and fifty pieces is just not doable at, at the current level that I’m working at which I’m quite happy with. I’m not being stressed; I’ve been very fortunate that way.

He also indicated that he worked what is essentially a full-time job for much of the year, not associated with craft, which allowed him some financial flexibility in choosing not to attend markets nor expand further than he wanted to. When faced with the decision to grow craft businesses, the opportunity had to be evaluated amongst an array of broader life situations and did not always take priority.

For other participants, a looming retirement impacted their decisions to maintain their current output. Anne Morrell Robinson, for example, was close enough to retirement that she did not feel a desire to increase her workload only to have to wind it down a few years later. In particular, she spoke hypothetically about buying a machine which would allow her to complete the quilt-making process in her own studio instead of sending them out. She explained:

It costs seventy thousand dollars for one of those machines and I'm too old. I'll never get the pay back. If they had those machines available when I was, you know, first starting, you know, it would have made sense. But the only way you can get your pay back on them is if you quilt for other people and then you lose your creativity. It becomes, really, just business. That doesn't appeal to me

The monetary and creative cost of investing in equipment to build her business, particularly at this stage in her life, outweighed the potential benefit of increased profits at an undetermined future time when the machine would be paid off. Investment in growth, therefore, was bound up in considerations extending beyond an increase in output and was not beneficial in every situation.

Retirement was a significant point of concern in considering the long-term health of Cape Breton's craft sector. Cape Breton's population, including craftspeople, was aging but only four percent of craft producers had a succession plan in 2012 (ICON Communications and Research Inc., 2012). While producers may plateau leading up to retirement, the idea of leaving the sector without passing their business on would create a void that would not be filled. One interviewee put the situation bluntly, saying, "If we don't foster the next generation of craft producers or those who are interested as an audience, we're not going to have a sector to promote." The negative consequence of this in a region trying to establish and maintain economic growth is crucial to emphasize as the loss would extend beyond the individual. One participant involved in advocating for the cultural sector at the policy level stressed that craft businesses are not to be taken lightly, explaining that these are small and medium-sized businesses that the province needed. This comment was made during a discussion of the importance of the broader

creative industry to Nova Scotia and loss experienced by the region when cultural ventures disappear, with craft specifically mentioned.

Members of the craft sector strived to counteract a regional decline in creative industries by promoting craft as a viable profession, ensuring opportunities were in place to foster growth. They emphasized the role that programs such as apprenticeships and residencies would have in transmitting craft practice across generations. The intention behind the apprenticeships and residency programs was to bring in students who displayed an interest or had classroom experience with craft production but had not been exposed to the practical side of operating a business. The programs themselves took a number of forms through various organizations and partnerships but were not always successful: plans for residencies fell through, government funding was diverted to other initiatives, available positions were not filled. At the time of interview, a few participants indicated that they planned to take their own approaches to apprenticeships or residencies which would give them more control over the recruitment and partnership process, whether they have been successful is unclear.

Craft organizations also aimed to develop an interest in craft media by providing educational opportunities for people in Cape Breton in the form of workshops and courses. Some of these efforts began within the school system; the CBCCD, Gaelic College, and ICCA all offered in-school or holiday break courses to supplement school board art education. Adults were also provided with chances to learn and build on skills both in the physical production of items and the business management side of the sector, with some participants crediting this style of workshop as developing their initial interest



in their medium or establishing the confidence to move from a hobbyist to full-time producer.

Employees of craft organizations were not the only people focused on development; craftspeople in Cape Breton endeavoured to expand professional representation within the sector. Some participants taught courses through established organizations or as their own side-business, covering the foundational techniques of their craft or offering classes that built upon previous knowledge and skills. While sometimes successful, these efforts did not always result in fostering a long-term interest in the craft. Dianne Quimby explained that many children and adults in her classes showed considerable interest in weaving but came to prioritize other aspects of their lives over time, leaving her to find that retired women were most likely to pick up weaving and generally only for hobby. Anne Morrell Robinson noticed a similar trend, saying, “Unfortunately the younger generation ... either they don’t have time or they’re not interested so it tends to be mostly retired women [...] So that’s a big concern, um, for quiltmakers. How to get younger, younger people involved.” Thus, retirement was a transitional point in Cape Breton when professional craft producers step away from their businesses while amateur practice of craft as a hobby was believed to increase, resulting in the loss of economic enterprises yet also failing to establish thriving new ones.

The growth of the craft industry in Cape Breton also existed in social connections between producers and those surrounding them. Kinship ties played an important role in the production and distribution of craft for many producers, speaking to Barber’s (1990) discussion of making do and Halperin’s (1990) concept of the Kentucky way. While many producers were limited in what they were able to accomplish as individuals, others

recruited family members and friends to perform a wide variety of tasks to the benefit of their business and the sector overall. Participants had members of their immediate family make the signage used to direct visitors to their studios and galleries, maintain the property, design essential craft tools such as pottery wheels, provide marketing advice, and, in two cases, build their studios. These actions did not directly contribute to craft sector growth via new artisans but did help to improve how the sector presented itself to consumers and expanded the means of production. In some cases, these family members were influenced to adopt craft practice through their relationships. Anne Morrell Robinson explained:

I know quite a few guys who got into [quilting] because their wives were into it and they were engineers and the wife would say, like, ‘can you help me [...]’ and then they started saying ‘oh yeah’ ... and then they started ... and, you know, took over.

This form of exposure may not lead to a professional craft practice but could result in help for producers in completing their projects faster without paying additional employees. Additionally, craft businesses could arise from these familial connections with Dianne Quimby explaining that she learned her foundational skills from her mother-in-law “because I wanted to speak [the family] language” and has now made a livelihood from her practice, teaching the next generation of weavers. In a consideration of whether Cape Breton’s craft sector is experiencing growth, social networks became important avenues of formal and informal development through the contribution of new talent and necessary labour.

One key element to cultivating a new generation of people within the island's craft sector was the ability to attract people and provide them with an atmosphere conducive to living and operating a business in the area. Chapter 5 discusses the role that landscape plays in captivating creative individuals and inspiring them to stay in or relocate to Cape Breton but scenery alone is not enough. As one participant explained, encouraging people to start or take over regional craft practices was important in succession planning but there needed to be political, social, and economic structures in place to give business owners the best possible chance of success. When funding was limited and the majority of sales traffic was seasonal, there had to be opportunities and advantages to staying in a region experiencing overall decline, whether offered via the craft industry or broader initiatives. In other words, the foundation of support needed to be in place for creative ventures to thrive and if organizations and government agencies wanted the demographics and economy of Cape Breton to expand, this had to be acknowledged.

Although the sector was seeing plateaus and declines in some areas, this did not mean the craft industry in Cape Breton was dying. Awareness of the sector's deficiencies and active efforts by a variety of stakeholders in the region created hope for the future of creative pursuits on the island. The next section furthers this discussion by addressing what opportunities craft producers and organizations had in relation to what they needed to successfully run their businesses.

#### **4.3 It Always Comes Down to HR and Cash: Craft Sector Opportunities**

In ICON Marketing's 2012 *Cape Breton Craft Sector Study Final Report*, "lack of time, lack of capital and the state of the local economy" (p.7) were identified as limitations upon growth with study participants focusing on two key resources they required: "funding programs and marketing knowledge." (p.7) These elements were mirrored in this study, as suggested in the previous section. In thinking about the relationship between craft production and location, this section considers opportunities and support systems in place for artisans, galleries, and creative organizations within the region in addition to what they felt were gaps that should be addressed. It is important to note that in this section, I have not used direct quotes as a concern voiced by some participants that speaking against funding agencies and craft organizations could have negative impacts on their relationships moving forward.

Similar to the confusion around defining and utilizing "craft" in Cape Breton, there was not a consensus about the importance of craft organizations in developing artisanal practice on the island. The main craft organization on the island, the CBCCD, had participants praising it and criticizing it, occasionally in the same interview. These positive and negative views come up both throughout this section (and the entire thesis) as the Centre was involved in many initiatives in the region and had reciprocal relationships with various stakeholders. The organization's history began in the 1970's with Father Greg McLeod, a priest who was concerned that heritage craft would die out in Cape Breton unless skills were passed on. He approached a local handcraft guild and encouraged them to apply for a grant that helped senior citizens pass their knowledge to a younger generation. This program developed into the Cape Breton School of Crafts which would later become the CBCCD. The School of Crafts was mostly volunteer-based

and offered a number of classes such as weaving and pottery as well as hosting craft fairs but did not emphasize the professional development side of craft to the extent that the CBCCD later would.

The transition between the Cape Breton School of Crafts and the CBCCD came along when ECBC, a Crown corporation that would later be absorbed into what is currently the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), informed the school that there would not be more funding available to them but they could receive support if they focused on economic development instead. Thus, the School of Crafts became the CBCCD and the direction changed from the transfer of craft skills through generations to a greater concentration on establishing and promoting craft as a viable form of business. After this transition, one hurdle was finding a new space to expand into in order to better serve the mandate while also becoming more accessible to the community. After feasibility studies and government input, the CBCCD opened a new building on Charlotte Street in downtown Sydney. From this space, the CBCCD displays and sells the work of its members, it hosts workshops for a range of ages and experience levels, it provides studio space for craft residents and other artisans, and houses staff offices which are where much of its promotional material and support comes out of. Outside of their mandate, representatives of the CBCCD sit on various boards and have helped to foster creative initiatives such as Lumière, Cape Breton's annual "Art at Night" festival, as well as the Growing a Creative Economy Conference. Once intended to be a satellite campus of the Nova Scotia Centre for Craft and Design (with another satellite location planned for southern Nova Scotia), the Centre came to take on a life of its own and represents Cape Breton craft and art production on a regional and international level.

The CBCCD is not the only organization to find itself in this position. The ICCA was founded by artisans who wanted a permanent space instead of temporary locations for their various shows. They worked to have the Centre established but many were burnt out by the end of the process and are no longer involved with the ICCA. Both centres receive operational funding from Nova Scotia's Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage (CCH) and are supported as being important for providing resources to their local communities and contributing to the viability of their locations as tourist destinations. The ICCA has a gallery and studio space and works to bring both creative exhibitions into Inverness but also to expand the reach of local artisans outward. One key difference between the two is that the ICCA has a smaller scope than the CBCCD with a mandate to encourage and represent creative pursuits within Inverness County instead of the whole island although it does try to showcase a variety of Nova Scotian artists under its roof.

A heavy influence throughout these histories and continuing on to the future has been the three levels of government, particularly through funding. In many ways, funding shaped what craft organizations were able to do and how they did it. Some craft organizations, including the CBCCD and ICCA, received core funding from CCH but the allocated dollar amount restricted how many staff such organizations could afford and required them to apply for special project grants through the federal government for additional programming and initiatives. Revenue could be generated through course and workshops, fundraising, and gallery sales but that was not enough for expansive programming, particularly when restricted by perceived conceptions by funding agencies of what peripheral cultural organizations could contribute and were worth, as pointed out

by a participant. This, in turn, created negative feedback towards organizations who were unable to provide as much programming as some craftspeople expected from them. Further, one participant suggested that if the CBCCD did not have a new building and so many staff, they would not have to spend so much time applying to grants and fundraising for themselves which would leave more time for advocating for Cape Breton craft, whether that be their members or the sector overall. This was recognized as a fault in the process at the ICCA as well, with so much time spent bookkeeping (as there were not enough funds to bring someone in to do it) that time was taken away from preparing creative projects. Analysis of interviews cannot determine which views of the CBCCD or ICCA are “correct”, but what is important is that they do show disparity between various stakeholders that stems back to the financial limitations of organizations versus public expectations of their obligation to artisans and the region.

The discussion of whether Cape Breton needed more representation or less representation through craft organizations also looped back to money. Some participants wanted more organizations dotting the island that would draw in tourists looking for an experience but would also foster creative growth in communities by supplying resources such as studios, galleries, classes, supply shops and space for demonstrations. The centres would also be a response to the current difficulties artisans had in accessing workshops and courses if they lived outside of urban areas. At the same time, other participants expressed concern about having more organizations competing for the same amount of money, which could result in fewer services offered overall as each location would be trying to operate on a small amount of funding and community support. One participant fell in the middle, explaining they felt more craft establishments were not practical but

that the ones that were available should work with producers to better determine what they need and how to serve them. This was another area of contention between what different artisans wanted or needed for their own development, what they thought was best for the sector, what the existing organizations offered, and what financial structures in place could allow for.

Funding was not a concern solely at the level of organizations; craft producers indicated that funding opportunities were important to them but also were not always available. One frustration expressed with regards to government funding was that the region saw millions of dollars being put toward national and international corporations that had no real connection to Cape Breton, and therefore would leave as soon as it was more beneficial to be elsewhere (“Cape Breton call centre”, 2019; “N.S. invests \$25M”, 2012). One participant was passionate about this, explaining that that money divided amongst artisans, as small and medium-sized businesses rooted in their communities, could allow them to grow their business, improve their tools, and expand their reach. If hundreds of creative businesses around the island received a portion of the millions of dollars going to international businesses for short periods of time, he believed this would attract more people who would spend their money across the island and build the region up. The current approach, he felt, contradicted the emphasis government and policy-makers also placed on “Buy Local” schemes.

This was not to suggest that there were no opportunities for producers to receive grants. Participants spoke of receiving financial assistance to put on large craft events, to attend markets and trade shows, or to pay for advertising. Some of this funding was administered from agencies such as ACOA but other funding came from sources such as



individual counties (Cape Breton, Inverness, Richmond, and Victoria; discussed further in Chapter 5.1), which realized they could benefit from paying marketing costs for craft producers in their area or helping to bring events to the region. One form of support that some participants mentioned they had taken advantage of were grants that subsidized travel to markets, but these were no longer readily available. One participant explained that having accommodation and food covered made attending markets further away less of a financial risk because even if they did not sell well, they were not losing money and it was a great opportunity to network and gain exposure. They felt that not having access to that funding now meant that businesses trying to establish themselves were less likely to attend because of the financial burden. Further, trying to navigate the government structure to determine what opportunities were available and what processes had to be in place to complete creative initiatives was not always easy. One recommendation for improvement was the implementation of a “one-stop shop,” instead of requiring artisans and arts organizations to go through a slew of people and departments to get the information they need.

It was also very difficult at times to get the government and affiliated organizations to see economic value in craft and creative industries, a participant explained. The Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy’s 2014 report, they noted, emphasized the importance of exporting Nova Scotian goods as the provincial population is too small to sustain itself otherwise. The report itself summarizes, “Again in a small economy, it is difficult to imagine how a lasting economic turnaround and renewal might be accomplished without a lot more businesses generating a lot more exports of goods and services than is currently the case” (p. 31). Export, for craft

businesses, was not always easy and the ways that craft moved out of the region were not necessarily recognized by the federal government as export. The participant continued to explain that there was an expectation with exporting goods that it would be international, despite craft products being sent from Nova Scotia to other provinces. Further, export via tourists in Cape Breton bringing products home with them or online sales for items such as courses and patterns was not acknowledged as such. Export of craft is also difficult to track, as many statistics on craftspeople and their work are, because “craft” is generally lumped into broader umbrella categories of creative practice and industry or not recognized as full-time work (e.g., Luckman & Thomas, 2018; MDB Insight, 2017; Peartree Solutions Inc., 2001; Peartree Solutions Inc., 2003). While export challenges due to a lack of government and industry structures were not unique to Cape Breton or Nova Scotia, some regions had more money and staffing in place to help craftspeople (Peartree Solutions Inc., 2001), part of a broader trend of providing financial support to “winning regions” (Wray & Stephenson, 2012). Considering the lack of financial support participants identified as crucial to their ability to establish networks in other regions, this expectation on craft businesses to export was particularly contradictory.

This discussion is not meant to suggest that the opportunities for people within the craft sector are few and far between, difficult to access, or wrought with tension. Despite the challenges expressed by participants, there were also positive elements. Mabou Market received a number of compliments as a place to sell quality craft products although other local markets were frequented by participants as well. Annual, island-wide events such as Kitchenfest!, marketed as a kitchen-*ceilidh* or celebration of Gaelic culture with an emphasis on music (Kitchenfest! 2019, para 1), and Celtic Colours International

Festival, a broader celebration of Cape Breton's culture and physical features (Celtic Colours, 2019, para 1), provided artisans with opportunities to sell either at the events themselves or as a result of the traffic they produced. Other initiatives stemmed from those high-tourism times and were able to develop a name for themselves, including the Baddeck Fibre Festival which Dianne Quimby and the South Haven Guild of Weavers organized annually, hosting workshops and selling a wide variety of fibre products such as yarn and hand-crafted textiles (Destination Cape Breton, 2019, Baddeck Fibre Festival section). Both Kitchenfest! and Celtic Colours heavily draw upon and market themselves around the cultures, histories and landscapes specific to Cape Breton, which is salient for this discussion of the influence of place on craft production.

Opportunities to attend workshops were provided by craft organizations, guilds, and some producers although access was limited for some participants (discussed further in Chapter 5). The format, focus and attendance of the workshops varied depending on the host and the target audience with a range of participants from children to retired people, amateurs to professionals, and topics from community relations to professional development, bookmark creation to website building. Some workshops were arranged locally and specifically for people in Cape Breton although some industry experts were brought to the island with the intention of attracting interested artisans from elsewhere, contributing to regional tourism. Programming was key as a way to foster a stronger craft sector, providing the skills, knowledge, and confidence to move businesses upward and toward export. One administrator pointed out that the true value of the courses can come from what happens during breaks when artisans are sitting together networking or brainstorming solutions to issues that have come up. These opportunities were credited

by some participants as being the reason they got into craft initially and by others as providing helpful tools for growth.

In addition to programming, the CBCCD implemented a jury system to have artisans' work evaluated by an arms-length jury committee. If an application did not pass initially, feedback was provided for the applicant to consider before re-applying. Producers did not have to be members to go through the jury process but they did have to be juried members to have their items sold in the gallery shop. Some participants praised this process with one explaining they viewed it as a form of legitimization that encouraged them to continue building their business. Alternatively, the process could be viewed as elitist with participants expressing concern that processes such as jurying act to gate-keep producers who do not fit one specific idea of craft and therefore have trouble receiving formal recognition.

Despite the difficulties craft organizations and producers were having facing filling "craftsperson in residency" positions (see section 4.2), those options were available in the region and had some take-up. Residencies were not only viewed as a benefit to the region via the development of professional craft business, they gave participants a valuable chance to advance their skills. Luckman and Thomas (2018) discuss the emphasis that craft educators place on academic skills over studio practice, leaving new graduates to flounder when they enter the workforce and have to make sound business decisions. One residency coordinator in Cape Breton spoke of a young craftsperson who arrived fresh out of art school and was producing items that were fine for academic or creative purposes but which were much too heavy to sell from a practicality standpoint. After spending months on the island paired with a local

practitioner, they refined their technique and had recently had a very successful exhibition and sale. Further, the impact of apprenticeships or individual mentorship can be hard to measure as some artisans offer informal training that is not tracked through official organizations but can, as was the case for some participants, result in skilled craftspeople entering the sector.

While structures were in place to help Cape Breton artisans with a range of personal and professional development, from being exposed to their craft medium initially and establishing technical skills to exporting internationally and marketing as a business, there was room for improvement. Although not an easy fix, one of the key issues underlying much of the section was insufficient understanding by government, and therefore by funding agencies, about the role that the craft industry plays in the realm of economic development but also the function it could have if better supported. This disconnect can be partially attributed to varying perspectives on economic success - for instance, is it rooted in growth and export or about sustaining a livelihood and fostering creative desires? - and the resulting difference in priorities.

## **Conclusion**

As this is the first chapter drawing on material from fieldwork in Cape Breton, my intention was to provide a baseline understanding of what the craft sector looked like on the island in 2015. I accomplished this through a discussion of what craft was understood to mean within the local context as well as through a consideration of whether the regional craft industry was experiencing a trend of growth or decline. The chapter was

rounded out by addressing opportunities available to members of the sector versus the support they required.

This foundation provides a lot to consider within a broader conversation of the research question, “How are the practices of craft producers in Cape Breton bound up with place?” The first section reflected a general lack of consensus about the term craft and related descriptors that mirrors the ambiguity lacking overall in the discipline (see Chapter 2), although a push for “artisan” has been the local trend. The second and third sections are where regional influences stood out the most with Cape Breton’s demographics, policies and political initiatives, available programs, geography, and the seasonal tourism industry all having significant impacts on the craft sector.

The declining and aging population of the island made succession planning a critical consideration for the industry with a lot of the motivation for workshops and residencies stemming from this. In a province promoting the importance of small and medium-sized businesses exporting goods in order to stay afloat, keeping creative endeavours, including craft, operational was key. The task was difficult, however, when people were choosing to develop their skills in their retirement as a hobby instead of as a viable profession. Those who did explore craft practice as a potential livelihood faced challenges in accessing funding and support programs that could help them develop the networks, skill sets, and human resources necessary to expand their businesses, particularly in rural locales where most craftspeople live. That is not to say that there were no opportunities available, as the region had a number of organizations dedicated to promoting craft in addition to artisans themselves passing knowledge on, but there was

room for improvement, much of it wrapped up in the need for more funding to be channelled to both organizations and individual producers.

Many of the concerns and challenges discussed by participants in Cape Breton could be applied to the province. Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council (CNSLC) released a report in 2014 which stated that the provincial government failed to capitalize on the economic potential of Nova Scotia's arts and culture sector, noting that increased investment in the sector was important. Financial support from the province was one suggestion they made ("funding for the arts and culture in Nova Scotia is too low"; p. 15), reflecting artisan and craft organization representative requests for greater funding opportunities. The CNSLC also recommended greater investment in creative communities ("developing the conditions, networks, and virtual or innovative infrastructure for creative clusters to form among people, firms, industries"; p. 17), emphasizing the importance of providing necessary structures for businesses and their owners to thrive in the region. The CNSLC's final recommendation was that Nova Scotia officials should establish plans for growth ("investment must be sustainable and long-term" and "education and skills development for all ages"; p. 20), points discussed by participants as crucial for the future of Cape Breton's craft sector. While programs, funding support, and opportunities for growth were important for the development of the craft sector, Cape Breton Island as a geographic region also influenced craft practice.

## Chapter 5: The Relationship Between Craft and Geography

You draw inspiration from where you live, I know I do. You can't help it. Whether it turns up in your work or not... hard to say. But, you know, it's definitely not too hard to look out the door and see the Bras D'Or Lake and be in a good mood going to work.

-Grant Haverstock

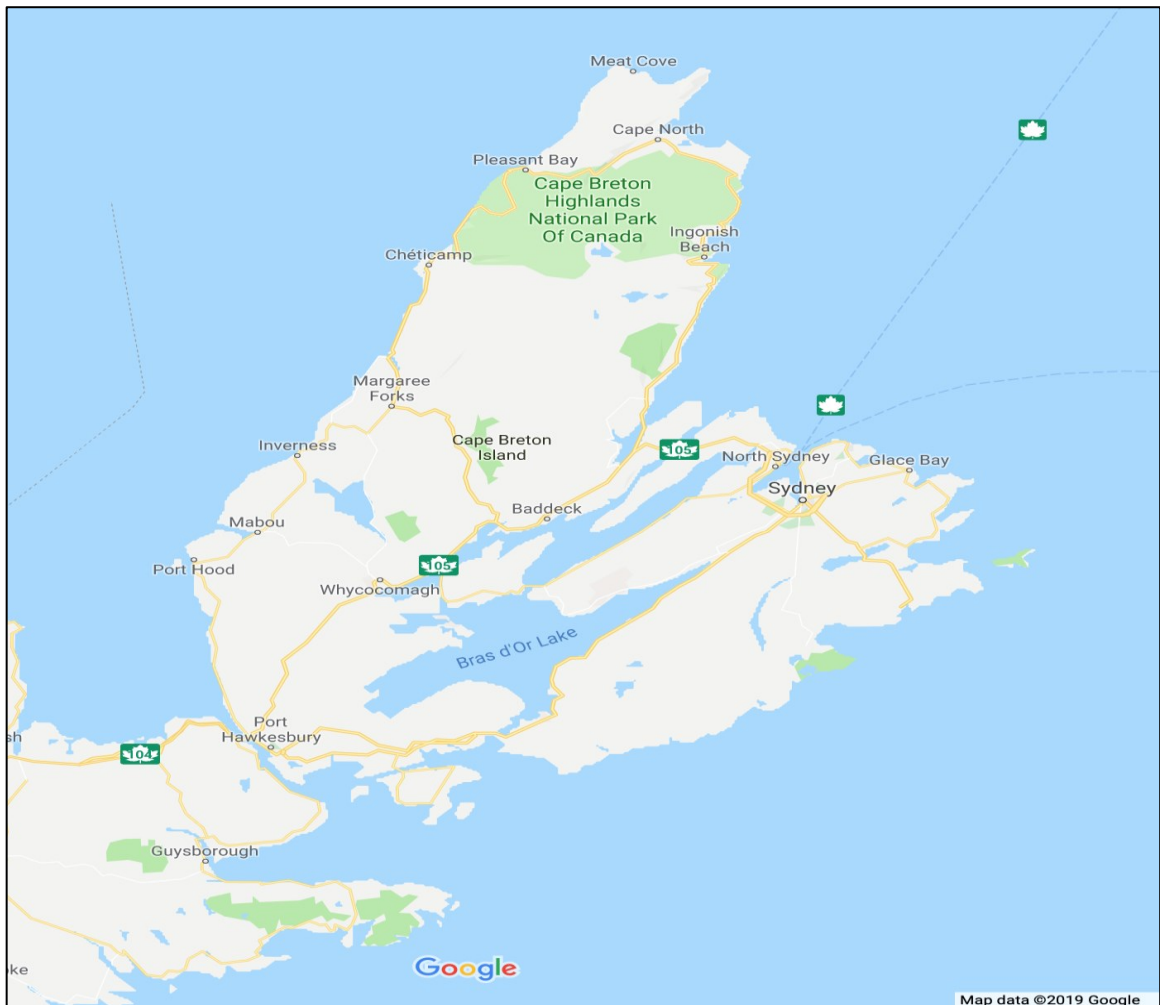


Figure 1. Map of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. From Google. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/maps/>  
Copyright 2019 by Google.

Cape Breton Island (Figure 1) is the northern tip of Nova Scotia, connected to the rest of the province (the “mainland”) since 1955 by Canso Causeway. The causeway is



about 270 kilometres away from the provincial capital, Halifax, while Meat Cove, at Cape Breton's northernmost tip, is roughly 496 kilometres from Halifax. Residents live in one of four counties: Victoria, Inverness, Richmond, and the most populous, Cape Breton County, where Sydney is. The island experiences a range of weather from heatwaves in the summer to below zero temperatures and blizzards in the winter, with rain and wind storms mixed in. Such elements of Cape Breton's location are significant to a discussion of the relationship between craft and place. The relationship is examined through a consideration of geographic boundaries that participants identify and operate within during the course of their work as well as the influence of landscape as a contributing source of inspiration and materials. The impact of weather on how and when members of Cape Breton's craft sector operate will also be addressed.

### **5.1 There Are Two Cape Bretons: Identifying the Boundary**

I set Cape Breton Island as the location for my research to confine the scope of the project to one physical location with a clear border; the coastline. Limiting the area made sense for the project, but it did not mean that participants had to identify with this perimeter. Acknowledging both physical and political boundaries, this section discusses how location can determine geographic areas people choose to identify with, and the factors informing their identification. The two primary "us versus them" divisions to be discussed were between the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM), Sydney inclusive, and people from Cape Breton outside of CBRM's jurisdiction and, on a broader scale, Cape Breton Island and mainland Nova Scotia (particularly Halifax).

The CBRM overlaps with Cape Breton County, the most populated county on the island. It is home to the community of Sydney, once Nova Scotia's second largest city before amalgamation into the CBRM, and has a population of about 100,000, three times the combined population of Richmond, Victoria, and Inverness counties (Statistics Canada, 2012b) (Figure 2).

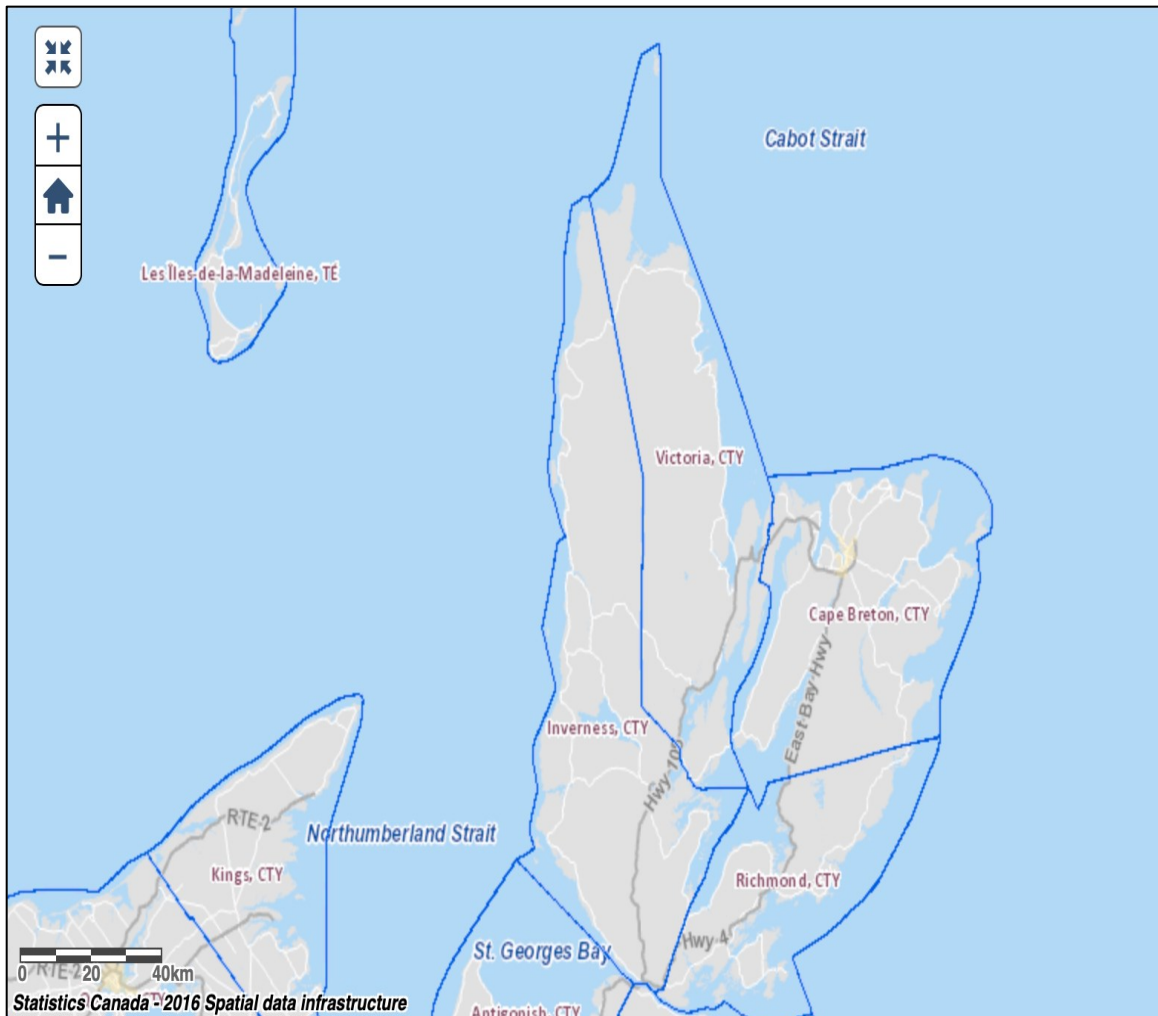


Figure 2. Map of Cape Breton Island's four counties. From *Statistics Canada* (2016). Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/geo?MM=1&geotext=Canada%20%5BCountry%5D&geocode=A000011124>

Decisions made in Cape Breton are generally made in the CBRM and many island services are only available there, frustrating participants who felt such a dynamic created

tension between Cape Breton County and the other Cape Breton counties. Grant Haverstock simplified the situation, saying, "There's two Cape Bretons – there's Sydney and then the rest of the island. So that's what we're faced with." His own recent experience with Cape Breton County and the CBRM left a negative impression after he had secured funding from all other Cape Breton counties for a large ironworks event, CanIRON X, in Baddeck. In declining to fund the event, the CBRM presented itself as only caring about events within its borders, whether intentional or not.

A related area of tension within the craft sector stemmed from the inaccessibility of services for people outside of CBRM. Most criticism was aimed towards the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design (CBCCD) although an absence of craft stores was also mentioned (Chapter 8 discusses how artisans use Internet resources in response to this). The primary critique of the CBCCD addressed the rural-urban divide with one participant summarizing, "Craft organizations – upon whom we rely – are almost exclusively based in urban areas and they don't quite understand the concept of 'you can't just run down to the local craft centre.'" The drive for people on the north, west, and southern coasts of Cape Breton ranged from an hour and a half to two and a half hours on good days, requiring producers to dedicate a substantial portion of their day to go to Sydney. Some participants even had to spend the night at a hotel after evening events at the CBCCD, forfeiting money in addition to time by participating. This system was particularly inconvenient during the tourist season when many craftspeople were working extended days in their studios and shops, unable to leave unless they had additional staff or closed their business for the day. Thus, although the CBCCD and, on a smaller scale, the Inverness County Centre for the Arts (ICCA) hosted a variety of

workshops and events of interest to rural producers, some felt the fixed location of these opportunities placed them at a disadvantage.

Mental, political and physical divisions established informal boundaries within the craft sector on Cape Breton Island and a similar partition was in place on a provincial level between Cape Breton and the provincial capital, Halifax. The geographic boundaries that producers and organizations drew for their businesses were often within Cape Breton (with an exception being online sales, see Chapter 8) and few participants were active across the entire province or in Halifax. Despite the disconnect they felt on the island, there was still a sense of being “of Cape Breton” instead of representative of Nova Scotia; the broad phenomenon of *islandness* was discussed by Conkling (2007) who wrote, “Islandness involves drawing hard lines [...] in your mind, you are either ‘on-island’ or not; there is nothing in between” (p. 200). One factor in this mentality was that Halifax was not particularly accessible to producers, a two-and-a-half-hour drive from the Canso Causeway in addition to driving time within Cape Breton. Participating in events or selling products in Halifax required cost and time commitments that most producers viewed to be substantial. Gina Cloud explained, “Driving all that way – it’s a ton of gas money and then you have to have somewhere to stay so ... you might sell really well but then you spend so much doing that.” The furthest she justified driving for a market on the mainland was Antigonish, a comparable distance to attending markets on the island from her location. Halifax was not inaccessible for all participants, however. Some did or had previously gone to the provincial capital a few times per year to pick up supplies, drop off consignment items, or participate in markets but the general consensus was that it was

(or became) too impractical for small craft business owners on Cape Breton Island to operate off the island.

The distance between Halifax and Cape Breton also created a disconnect between craft producers and organizations in the two regions. Dianne Quimby no longer affiliated with a weaving guild in Halifax because it was difficult to attend their meetings, adding:

I did know a few people by name there but not very many and, so, if you don't have that kind of social interaction very often you just don't get to know these people where here, I have a lot more involvement in the people who are living on the island. It's just natural, I think.

Although she specified that she had better connections with people on the island, she clarified that her classification of "the island" extended to artisans on the mainland between Canso and Antigonish because they participated in guild events on the island. The idea that there were organizations in Halifax which could be resources but are, in fact, not because of the mental and physical distance was mentioned by an additional interviewee. They were confident the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council (NSDCC) in Halifax would have helped build studio equipment but did not ask it to because they did not have a strong personal relationship with the NSDCC due to their isolation in rural Cape Breton. These craft resources were available provincially but Cape Breton craft producers were unable to establish rapport with organization representatives in Halifax and, consequently, were not taking advantage of the opportunities they provided.

Spokespeople for craft organizations also mentioned a disconnect between processes and organizations in Halifax and Cape Breton. The CBCCD, for example, has taken up the role of a provincial craft (and art) council for Cape Breton producers,

according to some participants. While it did not receive the funding of a provincial council, adopting the tasks of one made it easier to address issues craftspeople on the island had instead of the provincial craft council trying to effectively represent and serve craft producers spread across hundreds of kilometres in urban, shallow rural (“the middle ground between country and city”; Halperin, 1990, p. 4) and rural localities. The Manager of the ICCA, Elizabeth Whalley, also commented on urban-rural dynamics, saying that the centre was viewed by the provincial government to be a rural arts centre, suggesting they were perceived in a certain way because of this label. She made a second reference to the concept of “rural arts centre” during the interview while speaking of challenges the ICCA faced:

I think the fact that it’s in a rural location has an impact on how people... think of it. You know, the conception of a rural arts centre can be equated with a community arts centre or community centre so it has less credibility as an arts venue, perhaps?

Here, the impact of place on the craft sector had a negative effect on the centre as its location in Inverness meant that it was not perceived by government bodies or the community to be at the same standard as arts centres in urban areas. Representatives of craft organizations spoke in their interviews of the extensive programming their organizations develop yet did not receive the recognition (or funding) they felt urban or provincial organizations would have.

This section examined the impact of boundaries on the Cape Breton craft sector. The boundaries discussed had both physical and abstract aspects to them as participants situated themselves within Cape Breton amongst the broader context of Nova Scotia. We

now turn to how physical elements of the island landscape can also act as important sources for inspiration in the production of craft items.

## **5.2 There Is *Something* There: The Contribution of Landscape**

The topography of Cape Breton Island consists of woods, lakes and waterways, rocky coastlines, and farmland. Northern Cape Breton is home to the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, a heavily-forested mountainous region often featured in regional promotional material because of its picturesque winding roads and coastal look-off points. This section discusses how elements of this landscape are important to craft producers by providing materials for their work and offering an environment that is conducive to creativity.

This thesis is titled “Made *in* Cape Breton,” yet made *of* Cape Breton is also accurate as materials from the island were often used in the creation of craft products. Brenda Reichel “shopped” at her local beach, collecting the sea glass she used in her jewellery as she walked or went swimming. Her location in Inverness was particularly beneficial as a lot of glass washes up onto Inverness Beach. She provided two theories: the glass came from an old practice of dumping garbage off local cliffs or the glass came from ships that used to collect coal and dump heavy bottles that had been used as ballast. Glass does not travel far once dumped so in either situation it stays in the area and eventually ends up on the beach. Thus, when customers bought her sea glass jewellery, they purchased a final product made in Cape Breton out of repurposed waste, often the result of Inverness’ history.

Local materials did not have to be found in nature to have a connection with geography; Dawn Silver repurposed material from the island in the form of used strings, mostly from common instruments in the area such as guitars and fiddles. The discarded strings had worth because they were recycled in a region where strings, particularly those used by local celebrities, held value. When customers purchased jewellery made from strings, they were buying a piece of the regional culture, the significance of which would not hold the same weight in an area that did not foster and promote a music genre centred around stringed instruments. Although the jewellery did not reflect inspiration being drawn from the physical structure of Cape Breton, it was made of materials discarded on the island as a result of the cultural landscape.

The use of local materials was not limited to the creation of a craft product. Gina Cloud arranged her market and studio displays around items she found on walks along her beach, including whale bones, driftwood, and sand dollars. Common themes in her work were the sea and the Cape Breton wilderness and using natural waste products as features to emphasize this helped attract people to her table. In fact, the props worked too well in some cases and customers expressed interest in buying the bones and shells instead of the handcrafted wares. She explained, “People wanna buy sand dollars and I’m like, ‘Just go find your own!’. But it’s funny people would wanna buy that. So I think there’s a market for all those things. You could sell everything. You could sell driftwood even.” The desire to acquire something “of” Cape Breton in these instances extended beyond the purchase of craft items using local materials or depicting regional scenes, placing monetary value upon shells and driftwood that could be freely obtained in abundance on the island’s many beaches (Figure 3)





Figure 3. Driftwood on Grandique Point's beach

This speaks to a category of souvenirs Gordon (1986) called *piece-of-the-rock*, noting that tourists are interested in paying for a piece of the land someone else has foraged, cans of air being one such item. The line between natural and crafted items therefore became blurred as the natural materials had the ability to engage customers and highlight the connection between craft and local environment but their presence on a table also reworked the context, taking elements from nature and presenting them as commodities to consumers unwilling or unable to visit the primary source of those products.

Cape Breton was explicitly represented in some craft items, but it was more common for landscape to provide implicit mental or emotional inspiration. Finished products depicted scenes artisans found by looking out their windows or driving down the road. Many of the items sold at Arts North, for example, had images of wildlife found

in northern Cape Breton, including whales and eagles. Kenny Boone's paintings depicted scenes from local beaches and lakes which he viewed as inevitable: "[in Cape Breton] you're being presented with all this imagery and at some point it just comes back to my studio." The emphasis within the craft sector was for elements of Cape Breton to be incorporated into works by subtly referencing local scenery instead of relying upon more explicit symbols of the region, such as fishing boats, or "Cape Breton Island" written across the product.

Inspiration from landscape was also present in a manner that was not visible to customers but was evident to the producer. As the chapter epigraph illustrates, the beauty of the island could put creative people in the correct mindset to work. Kenny Boone, for example, felt the scenery of Cape Breton was something he needed for his survival, to feed his creative flame, which cities like Halifax or New York could never provide. His state of mind spoke to the concept of the *rural idyll*, which Prince (2017) explains is a common image applied to cold-water islands and is based on view of rural areas ("the countryside") as calm, spiritual or healing in contrast to hectic cities. Even the colours present in a particular location could influence the look of the final product, as was the case for one participant who said if his environment changed, the earth tones featured in his work would likely change in response. Though participants could live elsewhere and still be craft producers, changes in scenery would impact characteristics of their work, whether subtly or dramatically.

Landscape was also important in attracting people, whether those people chose to reside on the island or simply visit. Although marketing strategies will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 7, they are relevant to this discussion as some craft marketing in

Cape Breton was structured around the island's scenery. The CBCCD's advertising, for example, had a strong focus on landscape and their commercials reflected this with the lyrics, "we live in a painting, the mountains are shaped by what the trees sing" (Cape Breton Craft, 2014). The perceived purpose of using local scenery in the commercials was selling place: to attract new craft producers through its (at times perceived) natural allure (Figure 4). A second participant explained that they heard many stories of visitors who moved to Cape Breton after they were inspired by the region's beauty, nurtured their creative desires, and were entranced by the feeling of *islandness*, described by Conkling (2007) as "a deeply held feeling of a sacred connectedness to place that blurs the sense of time" (p. 199), adding, "Islandness also means that you live a life closer to nature than most mainlanders do. Survival depends on a deep respect for the forces of nature and an instinctive understanding of one's relative powerlessness to exercise control over them" (p. 199).



Figure 4. Mabou Beach as an example of Cape Breton's landscape

Although the participant spoke to a broader mental state the island offers creative people, it referenced how physical elements of place could attract future residents and foster creativity, strengthening the cultural scene in Cape Breton.

This section addressed ways the landscape of Cape Breton is intertwined with the regional craft sector. Physical and abstract elements of the island appeared in craft products and marketing techniques of local businesses. The visual attributes of the land changed with the seasons and subsequent weather events, which affect the craft industry in their own ways.

### **5.3 The Practical Reality of Winter Here: How Weather Factors In**

It was raining in PEI and a little girl in the campground said, ‘Well you should go to Cape Breton. It never rains in Cape Breton’. We had never heard of it. So we found it on the map and we followed the road and came here.

– Dennis Doyon, 2015

Dennis Doyon arrived on Cape Breton Island at the recommendation of a young child who informed him that it never rained on the island, a fact he would soon find was untrue. The effects of weather on the craft sector merit discussion as the regional climate influenced when, how, and why decisions were made. This section examines the impact of Cape Breton’s weather on craft producers, organizations, and galleries, considering how it affects staying open year-round, storing materials, operating machines, and the creation and sales of products.

The tourism industry on Cape Breton Island is largely seasonal, open during late spring, summer, and early fall, and shuttering the rest of the year, with some studios and galleries following suit. The decision to close came with considerations beyond the decline in visitors, as business owners factored in the cost of staying open. Elizabeth Whalley, for example, would like to have the ICCA open year-round but encountered obstacles:

It seems so logical to have it open all year round and yet the reality of just managing the ploughing of the road, heating the building, just the practical realities of the winter here and the fact that it's much less populated and that the people who are here, because they are dealing with the winter, are less mobile.

They just want to get to work and get home and the idea of adding onto that is difficult.

The “practical realities” listed were not challenges unique to her business and many participants who did stay open had their studio space in their houses which they would already be paying amenities for. Winter weather in Cape Breton therefore contributes to decisions made by craft businesses to maintain a physical presence when operating costs are higher and drop-in customers are rarer.

Costs associated with building and grounds upkeep were not the only winter considerations for artisans. Although producers could typically get any materials they needed delivered to them during the winter, some, particularly ceramicists, did have to take extra precautions. If the roads were in good condition, clay could be delivered year-round but it could freeze – rendering it useless – if producers did not hire an adequate transportation company. Cool weather could also result in products freezing or taking

weeks to dry, in contrast to summer months where items could be on gallery shelves within half a day after baking outside in the sun; Gina Cloud went as far as to stop firing between Christmas and March due to these challenges. Further, a well-insulated studio keeping warm air in to prevent product from freezing during the winter was hazardous to participants as clay can cause lung cancer without adequate ventilation. Practicing craft in Cape Breton, therefore, required some producers to structure how, when, and which craft they worked on around weather and temperature fluctuations.

Attending markets was also affected by weather with snow and ice being a deterrent. One craft producer stopped participating in Sydney Christmas markets, explaining their breaking point:

You have to pack [pottery] and carry it in your car or your trailer and unpack it when you get there and then pack up whatever you haven't sold. It's a big deal. The last one we did [...] it was snow and rain when I was packing up here, packing the pots and loading them into the car and in the snow and rain and slush driving to Sydney, staying with friends and they were snowed in overnight so we had to dig out the next morning, then unpack it, get it out of the car, into Centre 200 and then – in the snow – pack up and put it back in the car the next day or two days later in the snow or ice or slush or whatever and on the way home we said "That's enough. We're not doing that anymore."

Weather conditions created an additional element of work to the show and increased the risk of breaking items, resulting in the decision to no longer attend the event. The potential for unsafe or inconvenient meteorological conditions therefore became a factor

for members of the regional craft sector to consider, weighed against the forfeit of sales opportunities and reduced vendor representation at markets.

The combination of the effects of winter weather in Cape Breton and the decrease in tourism had some participants considering leaving the region for a portion of the year. Brenda Reichel was planning to visit Florida over the winter because she found it difficult to be motivated to make sea glass jewellery with snow outside. Further, cold weather affected her joints, making it physically challenging to produce items, something she hoped the warm Florida weather would alleviate. While Brenda would still work on her craft, Gina Cloud viewed going to the United States as an opportunity to try new activities while spending winter in a warmer climate. This move would be possible, she explained, because of the seasonal restrictions associated with using her kiln and because her husband also held a job with greater summer demands. Thus, the seasonal dynamic of the industry had both positive and negative elements to it: providing craftspeople with flexibility to be away from their studios during winter months yet simultaneously taking money out of the local economy when they left.

Although winter's cold temperatures and snow were associated with the majority of climate-related challenges, sea air and humidity affected Brenda Reichel year-round. Her studio was located along the coastline, which was beneficial to her business as she sold jewellery made from sea glass and customers were receptive to products that reminded them of the scenery surrounding them. There were, however, two downsides to this. The first downside was that the sterling silver she used in her pieces easily tarnishes because of the salt air and, consequently, had to be cleaned often. The second downside was that the coastal area could be very humid and, although she mainly used a wire-wrap

technique, when she used glue it did not always dry properly. The benefit of the studio location on the road to Inverness Beach outweighed the negative effects of tarnished silver and glue not drying properly on humid days but they were still inconveniences she had to consider when operating her business.

While the weather on Cape Breton Island did create a number of issues which craft producers and business owners needed to take into consideration, some did see a benefit to the rhythm that seasonal demand brought. Fewer drop-ins during the colder months meant there were long stretches of time to focus on creating a stockpile of primary craft products (provided that cold weather did not halt production) and to work on “secondary” craft items. With regards to the term “secondary craft,” one participant explained that during the winter she had time to work on other craft interests which were sold in her studio but were not the main draw of her business. Gina Cloud used a similar method because, as previously discussed, she had a stretch of time during the winter where the kiln did not operate properly. She was able to work on items such as knit socks and mittens during this time. This was also convenient for her because those items sold more at that time of the year, were more enjoyable to create during colder months, and they did not require the kiln. In those cases, a decline or inability to work on one aspect of their business due to weather conditions did not mean the producer stopped working, instead they used the opportunity to change their focus.

This section focused on the link between Cape Breton’s weather and the local craft sector. In many ways, seasonal changes created a state of consistent inconsistency amongst producers on the island. The inconsistent schedule becomes a constant rhythm with participants structuring business operations around weather patterns.



## **Conclusion**

A Cape Breton tourism brochure titled "Cape Breton, The Royal Isle" wrote, "Here the peace and quiet of hill and glen are conserved. Here the balmy air is more vitalizing than any tonic [...] Here hurry is forgotten. Here artists linger. Come once, and we know you will come again" ([ca.1937], p.5). In 2015 that same phrasing and imagery were still evident in discussions about the theme of this chapter, the connection between craft production and Cape Breton's geography as it relates to the broader relationship between craft and place. Spatial, social, and political distance influenced the opportunities available to craftspeople, the events they could take advantage of as producers, and the people in the creative industry with whom they associated. The island's landscape provided artisans with physical materials and mental inspiration, both found in their work. Weather patterns also influenced how members of the regional craft sector created and distributed their wares. These geographical considerations demonstrate ways the island's craft industry incorporated or adjusted to the place it was situated. Like the CBCCD commercials and the 1937 tourism brochure, participants emphasize the valuable power of the local landscape to sell place, attracting new people to the island to visit or live. Tourism, craft, and nature become intertwined industries in Cape Breton, the natural beauty of the region being a source of inspiration to visitors and artisans who then create or obtain items perceived to possess its essence.

The lived reality of Cape Breton Island was not all beautiful beaches and forests that fueled the creative mind, however. As Stalker and Burnett (2016) mentioned in their research on the relationship between islands and cultural workers, the romantic view of

islands as entrepreneurial utopias where creative people had the freedom and flexibility to work as they wished ignored the realities of living on small, remote islands such as a lack of privacy, economic challenges, and seasonal work demands. Participants in Cape Breton experienced difficulties which greatly impacted the viability of their businesses as year-round, growing ventures due to their location and the greater geography of the region and the province. What was an appealing, rustic dirt road along the Cabot Trail to an artisan's studio in July became an isolated, unploughed road with little tourist foot traffic in the winter. As a result, participants adopted a form of *occupational pluralism*, performing a number of roles within the craft sector to supplement their income as seasonal and economic demands required, a practice common in Cape Breton (McCann, 1999). The rural and shallow rural locales of many Cape Breton artisans placed them at a temporal and monetary distance from craft resources such as workshops, courses, networking events, and markets during the most optimal of weather and became a safety hazard at night or in poor conditions. The organizations with access to the large regional hubs were also affected by their location, and were expected to take on the role of arts organization, community centre, or to fill gaps in provision from other sectors. Thus, the result of geographic location for some participants was that they could not expand their craft business past a point that would require additional organizational support or steady sales year-round. One approach some craft producers and organizations adopted to address such obstacles was to take their businesses online, to be addressed in Chapter 8. For now, I turn to an exploration of the connection between members of the Cape Breton craft sector and the communities in which they live and work.

## **Chapter 6: Craft and Community**

[The town says], 'Oh you're like an ambassador for us', you know, because everybody that comes through here I tell them what's going on in the area. It's not just about me, it's about the whole community.

– Brenda Reichel

Roughly half the craft producers in Canada live in small or rural municipalities of less than 50,000 residents (Hill Strategies Research Inc., 2010). This composition is reflected in Cape Breton with 55% of producers residing in the most populous county of Cape Breton County and the other 45% living in the significantly less populated counties of Inverness, Richmond, and Victoria. As Cape Breton County is home to about three quarters of the island's population, this percentage translates into a much higher per capita rate of artisans in rural areas (ICON Communications and Research Inc., 2012). With a declining population on Cape Breton Island, particularly in rural communities, members of the craft sector bring benefits simply by contributing to formal administrative aspects of their locales (such as paying taxes or being counted in a census tract). Without undermining the importance of these functions, this chapter focuses on specific impacts that craft producers, sellers, and organizations have on their communities because of the roles they fulfil within the craft industry and, conversely, the effect communities have on their creative practices.

### **6.1 You're an Ambassador: The Importance of Craftspeople to Community**

“As economies around the world struggle to transition from a manufacturing base, many jurisdictions recognize the importance of the cultural industries to their future

economic growth, and see the culture sector as one of the key areas of development” (CNSLC, 2014, p. 4). Cape Breton had a strong industrial history which structured many communities around mining, steel, and the fisheries. With regional deindustrialization (the last mine on the island closed in 2001), many communities are experiencing a transition from being supported by such industries to finding new ways forward in order to thrive economically (Wray & Stephenson, 2012), with a rise in creative businesses being one such approach. This section considers how members of Cape Breton Island’s craft sector contributed to the overall social and economic structure of their towns. It discusses the opportunities craft producers offered people and businesses within the region through sales, workshops and events, local knowledge, and donations.

Communities were enhanced by participants supporting fellow members of the regional craft sector. This form of solidarity manifested through purchasing finished craft products from local artisans and by encouraging shops to carry more Nova Scotian stock. Anne Morrell Robinson divulged her process for doing this:

There's a shop [in Nova Scotia] ... I went in there (and I love to do this to different shops). They had all these really ugly quilts made out of satin and I went in very innocent and went "Oh look at all the beautiful quilts!" I said, "I didn't realize there were that many women around here making quilts" and she said, "Oh no, they're not made by the local women" and I said, "Really? Where do you get them?" and she said "Oh, they're from Thailand." I said, "Oop! Not interested," turned around and walked out.

Her intention in this situation was to send a clear message to shop owners that they should carry products from talented producers in their own region instead of

importing low-quality, machine-made quilts. While Anne showed her dissatisfaction by pretending to be a customer and walking out, Grant Haverstock approached a similar scenario as a potential vendor at a store in his county. When the manager of the shop contacted him about the possibility of selling his work, they mentioned carrying New Zealand products, a decision Grant did not support as he felt the store could carry similar items sourced from skilled people in Cape Breton. Consequentially, he chose not to work with this business, explaining his reasoning to the manager. The approaches by Robinson and Haverstock reflect the concept of *import replacement*, the idea that local economies benefit from replacing imported products with items made in the community (Centre for Local Prosperity, 2018). In these cases, participants were not taking steps to benefit their specific businesses, but instead reacted in a way they hoped would result in greater opportunities for local craftspeople and the Nova Scotian craft industry.

Craftspeople also hosted craft events and programming in their communities, to the advantage of their peers. Dawn Silver, for example, coordinated a craft market coinciding with annual music camps her husband organized in their village. A recent market received fantastic reviews and she felt an increase in similar markets would be a good step forward for the region's economy, attracting visitors and providing greater sales opportunities for producers. As a merchant at this market, Gina Cloud spoke highly of the experience and of other events coordinated by people with the regional craft sector, saying:

Dawn did the music camp this year and she's a vendor so she knows that you have to have space around your table to get behind your table. So many places

you go they put them all together and you can't even get out to go to the bathroom... they don't know, they don't think of that stuff.

The attention paid to detail improves experiences of setting up and selling wares, gleaned from years of working at markets before organizing them, influenced which opportunities Gina chose to attend. Artisans were therefore able to contribute to their communities by bringing their drive to have greater local opportunities for craft representation while also providing the knowledge required to develop an event that responds to the needs of the vendors.

Cape Breton artisans were also crucial in establishing current craft organizations in the region which, in turn, contribute to the communities they are located in. The Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design (CBCCD) and the Inverness County Centre for the Arts (ICCA) are both the result of hard work by craftspeople who campaigned for courses and space to expand practice, development, and sales (see Chapter 4). While organizations such as the CBCCD and the ICCA were established with a mandate to support the craft sector, their advantages extended beyond it. By providing workshops, professional development opportunities, and promotional support, these organizations encouraged artisans to develop their businesses, translating into greater capital flowing into the community. The CBCCD and the ICCA, in Sydney and Inverness, respectively, were also important as destinations in their own right, with the CBCCD, particularly in its new building, contributing to efforts to make Sydney's downtown core attractive to cruise ships. Elizabeth Whalley explained that one justification for ICCA's funding from Destination Cape Breton, Nova Scotia's CCH, and the municipal government was based

on the notion that the ICCA aided in presenting Inverness as a wonderful place to visit and live.

Although the primary focus of local craft workshops and events was providing opportunities to craftspeople, their advantages extended into other regional business sectors. CanIRON X, for example, organized by Grant Haverstock and Michael Budd, was hosted in Baddeck, Cape Breton Island, from July 2 to July 5, 2015. As the premier blacksmithing conference in Canada, it attracted 600 national and international visitors to the island, many of whom came before the event or stayed afterwards to explore the region. One participant referenced the important role that conferences have in bringing visitors to the region, bringing hundreds of people, some of whom support local businesses. In addition to one-time events, annual workshops and courses bring a flow of students to Cape Breton. The Gaelic College in Englishtown, for example, attracts students and their families from across North America each spring and summer to learn the crafts, language, music, and dance of Gaelic heritage. The influx of people during these events generates traffic for the hospitality sector across the island from a population who would not have been in Cape Breton otherwise.

Local craft workshops were not always limited to professional artisans or island visitors. Participants offered a wide range of workshops, from single-day to multi-week and informal to formal, for Cape Breton residents. Participants, including Gina Cloud and Brenda Reichel referenced workshops as being their entry into a hobby which was later to become their career. As discussed in Chapter 4, classes that foster a career as a professional artisan are important to communities by ensuring the industry will continue to grow. Other workshops mentioned did not have a goal to educate craftspeople of

tomorrow as much as they provided a source of entertainment for locals, such as John Frank's leatherwork session which teaches participants how to transfer designs onto leather items such as bookmarks. Opportunities were not always even particularly related to creative endeavours, as was the case at the ICCA where craft programming was offered alongside yoga when community members did not have an alternative space. In this way, Elizabeth Whalley adapted the Centre to what Inverness needed. Her hope was not only to improve relations with residents by providing a community service but also to make them more aware of what the space had to offer from an arts perspective. In these ways, the craft industry was not an unattainable, highbrow realm that operated within the same spaces as community members (although it is not without difficulties and stereotypes, explored in Chapter 4). Instead, visitors and locals alike were provided with chances to learn rudimentary skills either for recreation or the introduction into a profession.

The Chapter 6 epigraph was pulled from Brenda Reichel's interview as she spoke about the responsibility she held as a member of the community and her recognition that she did not operate completely independently of that identity. When people visited Brenda's studio, she used the opportunity to talk about the wide range of places to go and things to see, making her something of an ambassador to her town. Craft producers also tied their businesses to their communities by donating products and percentages of sales to local initiatives. Dennis Doyon explained this relationship:

In small communities like this, so-and-so all of a sudden has breast cancer, right?

Well, you've gotta help that person get back and forth from Halifax so



somebody's gonna have a tag sale or fundraiser and you've gotta – there's no question – you're gonna contribute to that.

For Dennis and Joanne Fitzgerald, a sense of obligation to neighbours and friends overlapped with what they could offer in a professional capacity as craft producers and distributors. This was not unlike Dawn Silver who gave back to community members through her business, Encore Jewellery, via the sale of her “authentic strings” jewelry. The “authentic strings” collection was five dollars more than her other products but the consumer got jewelry made out of instrument strings previously used by well-known musicians (mostly from the area). If donors did not want the five dollars, Dawn gave the money to young local performers to further their interest in music. This is not to ignore the fact that contributing to local causes was not necessarily a completely altruistic act on behalf of craftspeople as participants gained promotion for their business and social approval within their communities in the process. Gina Cloud emphasized the importance of word-of-mouth as a business tool and spoke to the value of saying yes to fundraisers as the action resulted in more people being exposed to her work. Therefore, the lines between business owner and resident became blurred as participants encountered situations where they felt personal connection and obligation to support their towns while also promoting their own business.

The focus of this section has been to consider the impact craft producers and organizations had on the communities where they lived. Craft businesses could have positive impacts on people and industries operating in the same region by creating opportunities for others, whether that was through monetary support, skills training, tourism and hospitality connections, or simply by providing jobs for people who could

then afford to stay in their community. The next section examines the reverse: the importance that communities have on the artisans and craft organizations within them.

## **6.2 They Have to Be Here: The Importance of Community for Craftspeople**

The presence of artisans and craft organizations provided advantages to local people and businesses but the craft sector could also be impacted by residents' actions or regional dynamics. The themes addressed in the previous section arise again here as communities and their craft producers foster reciprocal relationships, the main focus being support via donations, individual and corporate patronage, network expansion, and grassroots marketing.

One form of support participants received within their communities was the contribution of craft supplies. This occurred in two ways: unsolicited and solicited donations. Brenda Reichel received items from community members without requesting them, explaining, "A lot of locals, they just walk the beach, pick [sea glass], and drop it off to me because they don't want anything to do with it but they love walking the beach and picking sea glass." Similarly, Anne Morrell Robinson recalled the moment someone at a garage sale gave her a small square of velvet because they knew she worked with fabric and thought she could use it. While previously in the interview Anne had said she was always open to taking fabric from fellow quilters, she remarked in this instance that one difficulty of donated cloth is she then felt obligated to incorporate it into a design, whether she wanted to or not. Other participants, including Dawn Silver, reached out to community members to request specific items. Her jewellery was created from discarded instrument strings so she approached musicians and businesses about donating their

strings. She was successful in receiving contributions, particularly from one of the main music stores on the island which had previously been throwing used strings away, although this did require altering mindsets: “There’s been a little bit of getting people used to the idea that this isn’t garbage anymore.” As the items could be seen as unwanted or “garbage,” donating them can become a great way for local people to demonstrate their willingness to support and assist in the success of a craft business in their community without committing a lot of money or time. Further, as Yair (2010) points out, craft practices reliant upon waste for materials contribute to a sustainable future by reducing their environmental footprint, to the benefit of their greater communities.

Community members also provided support by purchasing items directly from local craftspeople and galleries. The title of this section came from John Frank’s interview where he said, “The community knows I’m here. They need something done on leather, they’re asking.” He continued by recognizing that there were other talented people on the island making similar items so when people came to him for these items, he viewed their actions as a compliment. Other participants did not feel they relied on community purchases, but still acknowledged that people knew who they were and generated a demand for their work. In fact, during the course of one interview, a producer was informed by their partner that a local woman had just purchased one of their wares at an auction. Thus, while participants criticized various levels of government about the inefficiency of their “Buy Local” schemes, they also saw that people at the community level were making local purchases to the benefit of craft businesses.

The discussion of community is complicated by the fact that social roots can extend beyond physical boundaries of place. In addition to patronage from community

members, Gina Cloud got a lot of business from people she called “local tourists.” She explained:

[My primary customers] are local people, really. I definitely think so. I mean, if it’s tourists, it’s local tourists. It’s people who used to live here that had to move away and they come back home for different festivals... They love it here so much but they can’t necessarily live here so they want to take something back that’s made here, something that reminds them of their home.

Removed from the region, these former residents created a substantial demand for work which provided them with a physical item to symbolize that which they missed from home. Purchases by Gina’s “local tourists,” therefore, stem from the site-specific link the consumer had to their community with the craft producer providing that representation instead of the craftsman providing a product with the location being a secondary concern.

Individual craft producers were not the only participants who received patronage from the local population; those working with galleries also spoke to this. Three gallery-affiliated participants said community support was crucial for their organizations, especially if they wanted to stay open year-round. They explained that tourism was important to the galleries but that the window for tourists in Cape Breton was typically only three to five months of the year. One gallery participant experienced success in staying open throughout the year which they attributed to local residents, saying, “It’s local community who are interested in what’s going on here or if there’s new products in the [shop] and things like that.” She acknowledged that part of their ability to stay open, however, came from the proximity of their location to Sydney

and that if they were in a smaller town they would not have a large market to draw from. Expressing a similar sentiment was Elizabeth Whalley who, when asked how important community was to her organization, replied, “I think they’re essential... [the Inverness County Centre for the Arts] cannot survive in isolation... they have to be here.” There was strain in this relationship, discussed later in this section, but Elizabeth planned to ensure the organization recognized the importance of “the community’s” role moving forward. If organizations and galleries wanted to provide services and make sales year-round, backing from the people who were in Cape Breton for the seven to nine months of the year that do not experience high levels of tourism was a recognized necessity.

In addition to purchasing crafts themselves, local residents exposed their personal and professional networks to craft businesses. Gina Cloud’s sales often stemmed from local residents recommending her business. The example she provided was of a woman who brought three friends from Ontario to her studio where they spent a substantial amount of money. She appreciated this form of community support, saying, “When people that are here have people visit them, they come over. I think that’s really helpful. I mean, I like that the best, really.” Gina even received corporate support from the local bank branch making a large purchase at Christmas to send gifts to key clients. This form of patronage allowed community members to expose their own contacts to the artisan, ideally furthering the producer’s reach to new avenues of sale.

Community members did not limit their recommendations to people they knew, however. Participants recognized the role that local people, companies, and Visitor Information Centres played in guiding tourists to their businesses with Brenda Reichel explaining, “[The community] send people here all the time to me. Everybody in town

knows me, from the restaurants, from the hotels... so yeah, the community are really supportive of me.” In addition to this sentiment, she mentioned there were exceptions and local support was not unanimous. She felt the local paper failed to acknowledge her range of accomplishments and the ICCA did not have a strong history of connecting with craft producers under their jurisdiction. Overall, however, participants felt they could attribute some customers to the recommendations of locals who may not have found them otherwise.

Although participants recognized the value of their community and its relationship to their craft businesses, they also raised the concern that community support was not enough for craft to thrive in rural Cape Breton. When discussing whether they could survive by only marketing their business in the local region, one participant explained that it would be incredibly difficult to do so:

This place here... it's out of the way and, of course, there's more traffic during the tourist season but I think you'd starve to death trying to limit your encounter with your users, with your customers, to just a place like this. Almost impossible.

Their sentiment touched upon themes of weather and seasonal demands of tourism, discussed in Chapter 5, which impacted who had access to producers and when, but it also spoke to the Census information on Cape Breton's low population and the saturation point for craft business support within small locales. A similar opinion came from Dawn Silver who praised her community yet also referenced a conversation she had with a visual artist about how important a wider audience is, something the small Cape Breton population simply could not provide. She explained, “You need the tourism, you need the

bigger audience to really make it worth your while to put your time and everything into it.” Reliance upon community support could also be fickle and one participant warned that it was possible to lose that form of support if the producer, as a resident, upset people in their small town in any way.

This section considered the elements of the community where craft producers and organizers are located that influence how their businesses are operated. There were some participants who did not feel that their towns and the residents in them had a major impact on the work they produced, yet most attributed local businesses and townspeople with participating in their craft ventures.

## **Conclusion**

The two sections of this chapter have shown that relationships between craftspeople and the communities where they reside were not unidirectional. Producers and organization members could be beneficial to the people and businesses surrounding them, providing opportunities for education, employment, and growth. Local networks may see positive effects of Cape Breton’s craft sector, but they could also contribute to its success via grassroots marketing of artisans, supply donations, and purchases.

The findings within this chapter are not unique to Cape Breton Island and its craft businesses within it. In fact, Karen Yair produced a report in 2011 for the United Kingdom’s Crafts Council that aligned closely with these themes, writing that makers contributed to the development of their rural communities in four ways: innovation (“new ideas and ways of working to rural areas, as well as new products and services, attracting other businesses and investment”; p. 5); local trading (“consciously sourc[ing] local

suppliers, distributors and retail outlets”; p. 5); new uses for local waste materials (“craft businesses often discover and market new uses for other farmed materials [...] transforming these natural – and often waste – materials into high profit commodities”; p. 5); and skills development (“engaging isolated or excluded young people and helping them find satisfying work”; p. 6). Elements of Yair’s themes align closely with benefits of the relationship between craft and community identified in this chapter, yet they transpired in ways bound up in the context of Cape Breton.

Stalker and Burnett (2016) wrote of cultural producers on small Scottish islands, with many of their findings reflected in this study. They explained that island life often required a balance of privacy and contribution to community, writing, “*Working at island living is often recognised as demonstrating sufficient engagement with each other as befits the social norm of island etiquette that largely foster or ‘oil the wheels’ of everyday harmonious social relations*” (p. 202). Life in rural locales and particularly on small islands, then, required work and constant social and emotional contribution from community members to be successful, as demonstrated in Cape Breton by expectations to contribute products to fundraisers and the knowledge that relationships between neighbours could impact the success of craft businesses. The approach to craft production and community life was reminiscent of Halperin’s (1990) discussion of *the Kentucky way*. Despite the name, the Kentucky way refers to a specific approach to economic and social life outside of urban centres all over North America, particularly in shallow rural locales, emphasizing strong family and community ties, adapting to tasks that have to be done instead of specializing in one field, and placing value in a local identity removed from the city. Although such rural dynamics were not unique to the region, they did have



to be addressed when considering ways Cape Breton craftspeople were bound up in place as they produced a different experience and impact than urban settings.

Additionally, how the broader relationships between artisans and community manifested themselves was dependent on location. This chapter discussed how some waste materials, such as sea glass and violin strings, were a direct result of Cape Breton's cultural and industrial heritage and would not stem from a craft scene that did not have that history. If marketing schemes such as the CBCCD's "Cape Breton Island: The Craft Capital" and individual efforts of artisans to host events were not in place, regional tourism built around an interest in craft might not exist, and that in turn could reduce community stakeholders' support of craft businesses. Thus, how producers experienced Cape Breton's craft sector may be similar on a macro level to how it was experienced in any rural community in, say, the United Kingdom, but the micro level provides elements specific to the island. The marketing techniques and motivations of craftspeople, including the benefits local communities may experience as a result, are addressed next.

## Chapter 7: Craft Marketing

When you're doing art I think it's more what's coming out of you than what people are expecting to come out of you.

– John Frank

“Paint yourself in the picture [...] for your hands-on vacation, visit the Craft Capital (.ca)” (Cape Breton Craft, 2014). The Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design’s (CBCCD) advertising campaign from 2012 onward relied heavily upon verbal and visual imagery of artisans to inspire tourism and promote the region’s strong cultural connection to the creative industries. Using a similar approach, Destination Cape Breton, the island’s official Destination Marketing Organization, promoted the island’s cultural sector to visitors in 2014, writing “Discover art that is as diverse as what stirs us and is brimming with our history, our joys and sorrows, and our hopes and dreams. You may return home after your vacation but your heart will never leave” (para. 2). The interconnected relationship between Cape Breton’s tourism, marketing, and creative industries, particularly craft practice, is a strong and long standing one, emphasizing themes addressed in previous chapters such as the influence of landscape and the importance of community. This chapter considers the range of methods members of the island’s craft sector utilize to promote themselves. It then examines complications stemming from “craft” applying to a wide range of products. Finally, it addresses whether artisans alter their professional creative drive to accommodate expectations from tourists.

### 7.1 A Piece of Cape Breton: Marketing Cape Breton Craft

Regional tourism data suggests that between five and ten percent of expenditures by tourists are spent on crafts and giftware (ICON, 2012). That is not an insignificant amount of money although with craft businesses and gift shops at every turn, how individual business owners market their work to consumers becomes important to evaluate. One key consideration is the techniques that studio and gallery owners employ to encourage sales, such as providing demonstrations of how a product is made or could be used. Building upon demonstrations and explanations of products, the concept of experiential tourism in Cape Breton is examined. The section closes with a discussion of how and why traditional forms of promotion, such as print advertisements, are utilized.

The ability to speak directly with customers was an important sales technique for participants. Instead of having items sit on a shelf for people to evaluate on their own, craftspeople and gallery workers emphasized the benefits of talking to them to promote the products. In the examples participants provided, this was particularly effective for helping customers understand the uses of craft beyond the obvious options. Gina Cloud tried to open the eyes of visitors, explaining, “You have to sometimes encourage people to think about something a little differently. Just like a little bowl. What would you use it for? You just have to name ten things right there what they could use it for, you know?” This approach helped improve sales, while imaginatively diversifying a set selection of products on the shelf. A similar process is used at Arts North with staff recommending items such as handcrafted cutting boards as classic gifts when people are hesitant to buy for themselves. By speaking with consumers directly, participants were able to influence their thought processes and direct their attention towards otherwise overlooked items. While craft purchases are typically hedonic in nature (Stoddard et al., 2012), the narrative

could be changed by providing utilitarian purposes of items or emphasizing the value they hold as a unique gift for others, increasing opportunities for sales.

In addition to speaking with customers and explaining to them the potential that craft products have, participants showed them the labour involved in creating their pieces. Actively working on something around visitors allowed craftspeople to multitask during their downtime but it also attracted attention which could then be used to encourage sales.

Dawn Silver explained:

People do look for the demonstration. And even if they can just come up and kind of look at the elements that go into your product and ask questions about it, and, you know, they like that. It gives them a connection. And then, uh, if they do happen to purchase something, when they bring it back to wherever it is and give it as a gift, then they have the backstory that goes with it and that adds value.

In stores and markets where items were often presented to the consumer as a finished product far removed from the development process, an experience that exposed elements of creation stood out, leaving a lasting impression and therefore obtaining value that other products could not provide.

A step beyond showing people the process of creating a product was providing them with an entire experience around craft practice. If customers added value to an item they saw being produced and could associate a memory or story with it, then being involved in the process itself was laden with even more value. As discussed in Chapter 2, experiential tourism has been adopted by creative businesses internationally as a way to offer a deeper connection between consumers and what they consume. This form of tourism is not associated with a specific time requirement: some experiences may last an

hour while others last two weeks, depending on the skills and craft medium involved (Yair, 2011). Some forms of experiential tourism existed in Cape Breton already, including Grant Haverstock's "Blacksmith For a Day" course which involved forge safety training followed by making a small item from iron. He felt the course was a "no-brainer" and that it had paid off, resulting in a steady stream of people. I became one of those people as Haverstock gave me the opportunity to make a small hook which became physical proof that I had been in Cape Breton for fieldwork and, as such, a source of personal pride; every time I look at the hook on my bookcase, it conjures up the memory of being hunched over an anvil while watching iron slowly take shape with every hit of the hammer, of the sensescapes (Meacci & Liberatore, 2018) I experienced. That style of tourism exposed people, including myself, to situations they otherwise may not have been able to access in their lives and left them with not only a new appreciation of the work that goes into craft production but a souvenir they had made themselves.

The scope of experiential tourism in Cape Breton expanded beyond people unfamiliar with craft practices visiting studios to make simple items. Professional artisans spoke of travelling outside the region to attend workshops, with similar programs bringing craft peers to Cape Breton. As discussed in Chapter 4, there were initiatives by craft organizations and guilds to bring well-known experts from various craft disciplines to Cape Breton which were meant to enrich the knowledge of producers in the region but were also to bring new visitors to the island. The connection between the craft sector and tourism came into play here as craft producers from other places attending courses in Cape Breton were expected to contribute to the tourism industry through paying for

accommodations, food, and sight-seeing. This could be a reciprocal relationship, however, with one participant explaining:

Tourism is all about providing visitor experiences, you know. Scenery is nice, good food is nice, but, um, and all of these things complement each other but if you have a unique experience, that will make it more of a destination attraction. People don't come to stay in hotel rooms and, uh, not all of them come for great food – some do. I don't think we're strong enough to attract a lot of culinary visitors but we can certainly please people with high standards who are coming for other things we do, like culture and nature.

The craft sector was not only responsible for encouraging money to be spent in various areas of the island's tourism industry, but also worked to enhance the experience of visitors who were not drawn to Cape Breton for the craft sector but were searching for things to do beyond spending money on food and accommodations. One such experience offered to tourists combining craft and nature were Dennis Doyon's outdoor adventure packages. While not an opportunity to physically create a handcrafted item, the packages provided a chance to immerse oneself in nature through hiking and whale-watching tours before leaving with a craft souvenir from Arts North that was made and inspired by the same area they had just been immersed in. Thus, the craft and tourism industries in Cape Breton worked in tandem with each other to improve the overall experience of the island to visitors.

For craft producers, a key deterrent to advertising was the cost of running advertisements. Participants identified many avenues for promoting their businesses yet few branched out to actually using more than a couple of them, referencing cost as a

barrier. One common form of marketing was individual advertisements such as rack cards, brochures, business cards, and, for Dawn Silver, branded guitar picks, which complimented her instrument-themed business, Encore Jewellery, but also were intended to be a constant reminder to users of the picks to donate their old strings. Some participants received funding to cover a portion of their marketing costs but even with this support, it could be difficult to determine how effective spending money on advertising was. Anne Morrell Robinson explained that a joke within her family was that she should change her cards each year so they could become a collector's item because otherwise people take them only to later throw them away at a cost to her of twenty-five cents each. Despite the cost, this approach to self-promotion provided a greater level of control over what was spent and how, also allowing producers to conduct some "guerilla" marketing by placing their content anywhere they saw available space.

Money invested in formal advertising campaigns were not necessarily more transparent in their outcomes. Tourism Nova Scotia's Doers and Dreamers Travel Guide was one such example mentioned by many participants, although their experience varied. In stark contrast, one participant praised it as a very effective resource, while another paid thousands of dollars per year to advertise with the guide but found the costs increased while distribution decreased. As a result, they stopped purchasing the advertisement and did not discern a change in sales the following year which allowed them to allocate those funds elsewhere.

Additionally, regional tourism campaigns, including the Doers and Dreamers Travel Guide, promoted so many activities and businesses that individual experiences could get lost in the mix. As with the Vermont Cheese Trail mentioned by Paxson (2010)

in Chapter 2, there were a number of trails in Nova Scotia for tourists to follow, supported by (and supporting) outdoor experiences, shops, restaurants, and accommodations. One participant explained how the tourism routes can be counterproductive to their business:

A lot of those trails are so inferior to the Cabot Trail in terms of the ... a view every five minutes kind of thing, going around the Cabot Trail [...] I mean, the Lighthouse Route [...], gosh! You can go for half an hour and all you've seen is spruces, right? So there's that kind of thing, you know? And people go there before they come here and I've – I've seen that [...] people will say, "Oh yeah. We came to Nova Scotia ten years ago and, uh, we went to Halifax, we did the Glooscap Trail, couldn't really see what all the fuss was about. Now we come to Cape Breton and holy crap! Now we know what they were talking about"



Figure 5. View of the Cabot Trail near Chéticamp



With the Cabot Trail (Figure 5) being the northernmost route promoted in tourism campaigns, the participant's experience was that visitors encountered multiple scenic routes first, marketed as equal to the Cabot Trail yet arguably inferior to it. This resulted in a provincial asset being underutilized and Cape Breton craft producers missing out on business.

On another note about transparency, the frustration expressed previously in this chapter about professional craft products from Cape Breton being promoted alongside imported factory-manufactured items extended into this discussion with some participants expressing dissatisfaction toward campaigns that gave equal weight to studios and galleries that represented 100% Cape Breton handmade versus shops that carried a small percentage of local products yet were able to draw on the same client base because they were featured in the same advertisement. At the very least, one participant argued, the sector should enforce an informal rule which they felt had been in place but was being less respected, that each business advertised had to say what percent of their stock was made in Cape Breton or, at the very least, Nova Scotia. They explained that this was helpful for visitors who wanted to support local craft instead of purchasing items that simply had a chance of being from the region.

One major generator of promotional material on and about the island was the CBCCD. As discussed in Chapter 1, the CBCCD developed an entire marketing campaign around the vision of Cape Breton being a "Craft Capital" which was an influential factor in establishing this research project. The initiative to capture all of the creative outlets the region had to offer had first been known as the "Creative Island" but the CBCCD ran into a trademark issue and adopted their "Craft Capital" branding

instead. Despite the change in wording, the organization still represents a broad cultural scope in their campaigns, emphasizing the history, landscape, and music of the region to distinguish themselves from the rest of Nova Scotia. In fact, the focus of their television advertisement was local handmade items, so they endeavoured to have every element of the video itself be from the island, from the music to the videographer, from the artisans to the models. The success of that campaign resulted in rave reviews from participants featured in the videos, who remarked that they still received business from them, as well as from tourists who, an interviewee heard, credited the commercials as a reason they visited Cape Breton when polled by the Destination Cape Breton Association, the island's official Destination Marketing Organization.

Additional elements to the CBCCD's marketing catalogue include a new logo, new street-level branding at their Sydney location, an updated website, social media platforms, paid advertisements affiliated resources, newspaper ads, physical mail-outs, email lists, seasonal billboards, and the rare radio spot. The content of the campaigns changed depending on their objectives, from workshop registration to gallery purchases to fostering international tourism initiatives. The focus on the CBCCD in this chapter underscores two points: as the primary craft organization on the island, it had extensive promotional procedures in its own right but also, due to its position within the sector, many artisans and galleries had been exposed to or incorporated into their marketing campaign in some fashion.

Participant opinions on CBCCD marketing focused mainly upon two channels: their commercials and the Artisan Trail Map (Figure 3). As mentioned previously, artisans who referenced the television commercials had been featured in them and felt

positive about them with Brenda Reichel saying, “it was only supposed to run I think one year, I think this is the third or fourth year, they keep running it and running it so that’s really great for me.” Opinions on the Artisan Trail Map, however, varied. As with other avenues of marketing discussed, participants found it to be expensive which, for some, prevented them from participating. Some artisans felt having the CBCCD represent them required paying additional fees for every little thing, which frustrated them, while others simply could not afford to take advantage of the marketing opportunities despite an interest. The cost was not a barrier to everyone as some artisans felt the benefits were worth the price while others received partial funding from county representatives who recognized that tourists following the Artisan Trail Map were likely to support a number of regional businesses en route to each listed craft destination. This was a conceivable notion as Dawn Silver illustrated, “Being able to participate in this [Artisan Trail Map] has brought me some – it gives you recognition as far as being, I guess, ‘bona fide’, you know? But it has also brought people here that said, ‘If you weren’t on the map, I wouldn’t have known at all.’” The Artisan Trail Map, then, can be a difficult hurdle for craft producers trapped in a situation where they want to promote their business for growth but do not have the financial support to do so yet it can also be a form of motivation for tourists to expand their range within Cape Breton, providing points to stop at around most of the island.

A theme throughout this section has been the financial constraints that participants experienced in advertising their craft businesses. Although some craft producers and organizations received funding to alleviate the burden, many were unable to access desired forms of marketing. Self-promotion and the opportunity for a more

enhanced consumer experience face-to-face also helped to produce sales but had a greater reliance upon other forms of marketing to get the customer into the studio or gallery shop initially.

## **7.2 Craft Versus Craft: The Two Streams of Craft in Cape Breton**

Although craft producers and organizations on Cape Breton Island worked to promote professional, creative, local work, the lack of clarity around the term “craft” discussed in chapters 2 and 4 extended beyond the industry. Participants referenced shops around the island which marketed themselves as craft outlets and sold items customers may have thought were made locally but that were often cheap, imported goods. Marotta and Heying (2018) explained that the label “Made in [location]” is used by tourists to help identify what they believe to be an authentic, local product. A label does not always depict the truth, however, and the desire in Cape Breton to present a product representative of the area to visitors was so strong that one participant reported knowing of a business that covered over “Made in China” with a “Made in Nova Scotia” sticker. This section considers confusion around the concept of local, handmade craft in the relationship between the craft sector and consumers, with a particular focus on what was being done or should be done to address moral work around craft.

In addition to professional studios or galleries selling local craft, Cape Breton had shops selling mostly mass-marketed forms of what Gordon (1986) calls *symbolic shorthand*: “[t]hey evoke a coded or shorthand message about the place or time they come from. An oversize sombrero from Mexico, a stuffed toy in the shape of the Loch Ness monster from Scotland”; p. 142) or *markers* (“souvenirs that in themselves have no

reference to a particular place or event, but are inscribed with words which locate them in place and time. A T-shirt by itself has little meaning, for example, but when marked ‘Cayman Islands’ [...] it becomes a memory-trigger”; p. 142). Some of the outlets selling these mass-marketed souvenirs capitalized on terms including craft and local to make sales. Despite the conflict, participants were generally not concerned about losing business to establishments selling mass-marketed items presented as craft. One interviewee did not feel there was a point in addressing such stores, stating, “that’s almost not even worth talking about anymore. If people are going to do that, they’re gonna do that but that’s not... it has nothing to do with the creative economy, nothing at all.” While the presence of those shops seemed inevitable, the sense was that most people looking for quality goods would evaluate what was being offered. One participant had a store nearby which sold a lot of low-quality goods and occasionally customers would ask them about it. Instead of saying anything negative about it, she encouraged visitors to develop their own opinions about the quality of the two businesses, telling them, “Oh they have craft stuff there but it’s totally different than this place [...] Check it out. You’ll find out what it’s all about.” This could be inconvenient to craft aficionados, resulting in additional stops at shops that were not of interest to them, but overall, participants indicated that they believed people who were looking to purchase local craft items would do so.

Although the sentiment was that people who were looking for high-quality crafted products would be able to discern the difference between the two forms of shops, participants were frustrated that those locations were able to use words they felt were meant to represent professionally crafted products. Grant Haverstock phrased this bluntly:

I think it does a disservice to artisans on the island, I think it's – it's, like, just not authentic and I think it's bullshit and I think there fucking should be something to say, like, you know, if you're going to advertise artisans, you know, you just can't fucking sell Chinese shit. I think it does a great disservice to the island as a whole to have places like that that are in existence

This drew on a larger conversation Grant and Michael Budd had, also quoted in Chapter 4, that artisans and arts organizations needed to take responsibility for speaking out against businesses adopting buzzwords to sell products that did not truly represent craft. On a similar wavelength, another participant remarked that craft organizations needed to do better at limiting membership to people who produced works of a certain standard that suited the title of “craftsperson” to reduce confusion around what craft was. Mabou Market was one location that had recently taken initiative and reminded sellers that they had to provide quality local products to consumers. Dawn Silver explained, “they have a standard and jewellery vendors cannot just buy a cord and a pendant and put the pendant on the cord. There has to be more transformation.” She continued, noting the market was popular with tourists and she thought the market organizers were keen to provide them with genuine products, prompting the reminder about standards. A challenge in achieving this goal, as discussed in Chapter 4, was that some artisans operated outside of a conventional understanding of what craft was. Craft organizations seemed hesitant to provide too much power to one definition which could eliminate the potential for creative enterprises not specifically aligned with the classification of craft presented. Thus, in promoting craft in Cape Breton, a responsibility was placed upon members of the

industry itself to ensure as best as they could that what was being presented to consumers satisfied the title while also not regulating creativity with too strong a grasp.

While participants were fairly confident that craft enthusiasts could identify quality craftsmanship, they knew many people who ventured into a gallery, studio, or shop did not have a solid grasp of the time and cost that went in to the production and distribution of each item. There were techniques artisans employed to generate sales from these people, addressed in the next section, but this category did generally also require more explanation about the difference between a mug from a potter versus the mug available down the street for a dollar. The promotion of craft as a professional practice in Cape Breton then extended beyond establishing official guidelines for classifying a product, process, or shop as “craft” and into educating the public. As a quilt producer, Anne Morrell Robinson spoke of the procedure she follows to explain why her quilts cost thousands of dollars:

Everybody that comes in said “Oh my grandmother made quilts” or “I used to buy them from the little lady down the road for three hundred dollars” and I’m like, “Yeah but she’s not charging anything for her *time*. Like, somebody just put a thing, um, “The Real Cost of Quilts.” Like, they did an online posting and they didn’t even get it right. Like, they had “well if you charged, like, say twenty dollars an hour which you would get as an educated, skilled labourer or whatever, and the cost of your materials and all that” and they came up to a more realistic price but they didn’t add in their insurance, their overhead, their elec-power, their sewing machines.

With hundreds of dollars involved simply in the fabric and machine quilting, she was not able to compete with the low prices hobbyist or retail stores demand while earning a living wage. The disparity in cost could sometimes be reflected in quality, however, and she referenced a friend who hosted a show featuring a big-box retail chain quilt and pointed out all of the issues with the quilt to explain why it was forty dollars while other quilts were thousands of dollars.

Anne was not the only participant who had encountered this disconnect between consumers and craft products. Artisans had to be thick-skinned, according to Dawn Silver, as people would question the value of their work. She explained to people at her market table that the jewellery was a genuine product, handmade in Cape Breton: “you’re not gonna go – it’s not from Claire’s where there’s twenty-four more exactly like it.” This lack of awareness surrounding the creation of a craft product extended into items used daily by much of the population. For this reason, Dianne Quimby set up a small loom at each market she attended to educate attendees on how fabric is created, saying, “I really want the kids to see this because they have no other way to learn that a piece of cloth is made somehow. But often it’s also adults who have no idea how things were put together.” When it was normal to only see the end result of a machine-made, mass-produced item, the significance of a product being individually created, often by hand, sometimes needed to be emphasized to the consumer.

In some instances, customers did not need a demonstration of the difference between the quality of mass-produced retail goods and handcrafted products because they had experienced it. John Frank spoke of customers who would stop at his market booth and say they were tired of buying twenty-dollar belts that would last three months at big-



box stores so they were finally getting something that was more expensive but that would last. Similarly, Grant Haverstock explained that by the time some people approached him, they had already purchased and re-purchased the same product multiple times from chain companies and were frustrated that it kept breaking. Instead of purchasing from him initially and having ironwork that was “basically an heirloom,” they essentially threw money away before paying for real craftsmanship. These customers may not have understood the time or work involved in creating a product but, through trial and error, they came to recognize the longevity and quality associated with a craftsman’s work.

This section has discussed the multiplicity of craft forms presented to consumers on Cape Breton Island, in addition to their own impressions or assumptions of craft and its value. While some people searched out handcrafted products, members of the regional craft industry were working to advocate for professional craft practice to attract customers who would otherwise be uninformed. The next section addresses this further by considering the weight that participants placed on providing what customers were looking for versus their creative desire.

### **7.3 As Long as It’s Pretty: Meeting a Demand and Staying True to Oneself**

Nova Scotia’s ongoing history of tourism and the craft industry heavily influencing each other since the 1900s to suit an image of “Cape Breton: The Unspoiled Summerland of America” (1928) produced the question: how much is current craft practice in Cape Breton shaped by expectations from tourists about what will be available to them? This section considers that question by discussing how participants met market

demands, how they formed a compromise between creative desire and the sales capacity, and how they felt they were not restricted by the opinions of consumers.

Providing products consumers were looking for was very important to some participants. They believed that it was only really possible to survive as a craft business by knowing what customers were looking for and providing those items. One interviewee referenced artisans who had come and gone over the years after producing what they wanted, not necessarily what the market was interested in. They explained, “You learn after a while that, you know, you can have your own tastes and what you want to do but, uh, you may not be able to sell it.” When a livelihood is on the line and particularly when craft ventures are expensive, it could be critical to produce items that meet consumer expectations or run the risk of not being able to afford to stay open. This could be a fine line between creating products that customers liked while meeting creative desires versus altering craft practice to suit expectations of the masses until all sense of the artisan is gone (e.g., Crawford, 2009; Graburn, 1967; McKay, 1994).

Not all participants emphasized providing what customers are looking for to the same degree. After spending time mimicking local artists who made money depicting classic Cape Breton scenes such as fishing boats in the harbour, Kenny Boone took a financial risk and focused on painting in a way that exercised his creativity. He had been warned that he might experience a loss of sales but had actually seen an increase in sales after becoming “one hundred percent me.” Alternatively, when financial success was not a primary concern, catering to others became less important. John Frank had a job that covered most of his bills which allowed for a fairly laid-back attitude about whether his products would sell. He explained:

I put it out there – if you like it, it’s yours, take it away and that’s all well and good and of course it’s ego-boosting but, um, you know, it – it – I don’t have that economic or emotional fear of people rejecting everything so, you know, I don’t have that edge to it, I guess?

At a separate point of the interview he commented that he enjoyed speaking to people about what leatherworks they needed that he could develop and he was a vendor at the local market but he was able to work without restricting himself to consumer demand. Exerting artistic desires without a primary consideration of profit presented a risk to craft businesses but was not necessarily a deterrent to all participants and in all scenarios.

Many participants tried to find a balance between producing what consumers wanted and what was creatively satisfying, echoing the idea that the identity of a craftsman could be negotiated instead of imposed (Prince, 2017). One method used to consolidate the two was for participants to be conscious of what sold but put their individual touch on it. Brenda Reichel applied her own technique to upcoming trends, saying “I can’t think of myself, I have to think of everyone, the whole. At first, you know, I have to find out what’s on trend like, for instance, I make these adjustable bracelets because right now they’re on trend so I incorporate sea glass into those designs.” This was not specific to artisans in their studios, Dennis Doyon of Arts North outlined a similar procedure when he considered what to carry in the gallery. He kept an eye on what was popular and communicated the demand to their artisans. This could take the form of saying they needed five more versions of a particular item but it could also be noticing the trends or styles that seem to sell which, at Arts North, were often environmental pieces. Dennis explained:

So you start to say, “Well wait a minute. Is this a pottery shop or is this a pottery shop with an environmental tendency?” And then you go and you start contacting your other artists, all, you know, twenty-four, twenty, whatever it is, artists and you say, “Listen, um, we’re getting a lot of support for our environmental stuff. How about you, when you’re doing your baskets or when you’re doing your woolens or when you’re doing your silks or whatever, can you make sure that there’s a strong environmental emphasis aimed at northern Cape Breton.”

He further pointed out that this was not a particularly difficult task when craft producers were based in locations like northern Cape Breton and were inspired by the landscape around them, often incorporating these elements into their work to begin with. This approach allowed for creative flexibility in how nature themes were incorporated into products but also provided some guidance toward what may be more likely to sell.

Another common approach to balancing customer desires and creative ambitions was to offer an assortment of items for everyone who might stop in. Instead of solely making expensive, high-end craft products for the people specifically looking for professional Cape Breton craft, most participants tried to stock items that would generate sales across a range of prices and interests. Grant Haverstock had a small collection of bottle openers in the shape of treble clefs, particularly popular with tourists during Celtic Colours for the musical connection. When asked about them, he said, “Oh that, those are scrap material from other jobs that I just roll into a circle and weld. It’s not really blacksmithing but they sell. Tourists seem to like them.” This served not only as a way for producers to use up what may otherwise be waste but it provided an opportunity for

craftspeople to make money from a greater percentage of visitors. Anne Morrell

Robinson explained:

I started doing the jewellery just to have inexpensive items for when people came in ... like a lot of people come in, they just want to see the quilts. And they might spend an hour or two hours looking at the quilts and asking me all about techniques, especially if they're other quilters. Like, they really want free lessons and they spend two hours of my time and they don't buy anything so I started doing things like the jewellery to entice people to buy a small item to take back with them.

She did continue to say she had slowly been weaning out of that practice, however, as it took a lot of time to source the materials and there was not a large margin of profit for something that was already a secondary product in her studio. This method of producing a diverse assortment of wares then helped the craft industry compete with the "craft" shops discussed earlier in the chapter, appealing to people who happened to stop in but did not have the budget or interest for spending a significant amount of money on artisanal goods.

Small, inexpensive items served a second purpose for craft businesses as the impact of tourism weighed on decisions of what to sell. When much of the traffic to studios and galleries came from visitors to the island, participants had to be conscious of how customers would transport purchases home. Gina Cloud demonstrated both an interest in offering a range of prices and an awareness of size restrictions for tourists when she said:

I try to have something for everybody (laughs). That's the plan. And a lot of things different prices. I think it's good to have a bunch of things that aren't very expensive because that way people, when they want to, like, support you, they're able to. And something that's not that hard to pack in a suitcase or whatever, too. Like, I sell a ton of ten dollar things.

This is particularly relevant as her studio is located near cabins that often host divers who bought items such as mittens, which could fit in suitcases between diving gear, unlike her larger pottery. While some tourists were limited to suitcases, others travelled to Cape Breton in their recreational vehicles. Although much bigger than suitcases, Dennis Doyon noted they were not ideal for safely storing fragile handcrafted items such as pottery and did not have a lot of available space outside of the living area. In an area that is so reliant on tourism for business, the constraints that travel could place on sales becomes an important factor for many craft producers and organizations to acknowledge and build into their business plans.

Craft producers also incorporated what customers were looking for into their work by doing commissions. Commissions had downsides with some participants explaining that they felt it was difficult to turn down the opportunity yet it could be stressful or they simply may not enjoy the work. Despite these negative elements, positive aspects were also identified. If a customer appreciated the specific style or approach of an artisan but were not interested in the items currently available, the commission process allowed them to still make a sale; Dawn Silver, for example, could change the colour used in a bracelet by the time a client completed a circuit at the market. The commission process also provided opportunities to incorporate a personal touch into

the final product. As discussed previously, Brenda Reichel's studio was located on the beach road to Inverness Beach, perfectly situated for a sea glass jewellery business. In addition to sales by people inspired by their surroundings, she regularly received commissions from people who wanted the sea glass they found on the beach turned into items: "I had a fourteen-year-old boy that found a purple piece and he's trying to be so macho coming in here, 'I found this piece of purple. Can you, uh, make me something for my girlfriend back home?'" This enhanced their connection to the jewellery as they not only experienced the beach but they sourced the key sea glass element from it. Commissions, then, fostered an intimate dialogue between producers and clients about the necessary elements of an individual artisan's style in relation to the values attributed to craft items by the end user.

Consumer demand had an impact on the Cape Breton craft sector but some participants were wary about attributing too much significance to it. Their argument is that the dialogue should not be unidirectional from customers to artisans about what they are looking for; it needed to be reciprocal. When asked about whether the ICCA endeavoured to stock their gallery with items people are looking for or whatever craftspeople provide, Elizabeth Whalley responded:

A little bit of both, a little bit of both. If something sells really well then we definitely hope and... but... there's that balancing act between the market and between, also, you know you educate your market as well. So you don't want to be just a passive purveyor of goods that have sold in the past, sometimes you bring in something that people aren't expecting and they learn to appreciate it so I feel like there's a back-and-forth in that respect as well.

Instead of creating what is expected of their discipline, artisans also played an important role in expanding public and professional conceptions of what craft could be. When he approached a Dublin gallery about retrieving work that had not sold, Michael Budd was told that they would be sad to see his work go. Although the piece had not been purchased, it had often been displayed in the window because it intrigued people, bringing traffic into the gallery. Determination to treat craft practice as an opportunity to educate consumers can be a precarious stance to take when your livelihood was dependent upon sales but is also crucial to the development of craft as a profession and commodity.

The key theme in this section has been compromise; Cape Breton's craft sector was represented in a flexible balance between personal vision and consumer demand. Most artisans relinquished some amount of creative control in order to respond to what customers, particularly tourists, were looking to purchase. How they chose to address the situation varied by participant and factored in questions of financial stability, practicality, and personal objectives.

## **Conclusion**

The history of constructing an overblown and, at times, false narrative of tartanism and craft-producing "folk" in Nova Scotia in order to attract visitors to the region and ignite local pride was a major influence in the creation of my research question: "How are the practices of craft producers in Cape Breton bound up with place?" I had visited Cape Breton before conducting ethnographic fieldwork and had listened to Celtic music while browsing through plush lobsters, keychains inscribed with "Cape



Breton”, and tartan-themed clothes in one of Cape Breton’s gift shops, so I knew that elements of that history, particularly tartanism and maritimicity, were present on the island and presumed such items were stocked in stores because there was demand for them. Despite the prevalence of such products and the ever-present reminders of Celtic culture, participants in Cape Breton’s craft sector did not mention either feeling constrained by or having desires to capitalize on the popularity of such themes. When such themes did appear, they were thanks to peripheral connections to participants (such as selling wares in large, Celtic-themed tourist events including Celtic Colours and KitchenFest!), personal interest, or were meant to turn a gift shop customer into a craft studio customer.

The ways that craftspeople and members of craft organizations interacted with consumers, particularly tourists, involved compromise. Most participants compromised on consumer expectations, incorporating popular elements into their work while also using their own techniques or designs. Compromise was also present in the reactions of some participants toward the gift shops that use craft as a buzzword; despite the confusion and, for some interviewees, the misrepresentation they, both styles of shop met particular expectations of visitors to the island and competed for the business of people open to both. Compromises were made with marketing opportunities, which as they were too expensive for participants to utilize in their entirety. Returning to the debate between craft as an economic tool versus craft as cultural expression (Peartree Solutions Inc., 2003) and incorporating the discussion of agency from Prince (2017), these compromises were not, overall, presented by participants as negative restrictions on how they produced

or distributed craft. Instead, they were decisions that acknowledged what customers wanted, and evaluated that against what craft producers and craft distributors wanted.

While the influence of what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) called invented tradition was not as present as I had expected, I also did not feel a sense of staged authenticity (Potts, 2018). Craftspeople invited strangers into their homes, revealing a (potentially curated) personal living space, to conduct sales. They also opened up their studios for visitors to watch them in what was identified by some artisans as a particularly intimate creative moment, while others were enthusiastic about educating tourists about their craft and helping them realize that craft does not have to be practiced solely by people deemed “authentic” to the stereotype of the craft. In the next chapter, I address this concept of craftspeople opening up personal and professional elements of their lives as it manifests online.

## Chapter 8: Technology and Place

I didn't want a computer in this space, for the longest time I refused, refused a cell phone. I only started using a cell phone three years ago or something. I didn't like technology but I recognize that if I didn't get on board I was going to be left behind so I had no choice but to keep a computer in my space.

– Kenny Boone

As the primary focus of this study has been the relationship between place and craft production, previous chapters have addressed this topic with the concept of “place” being static and rooted in the physical location of Cape Breton Island. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, the craft sector in North America is gaining a strong web-based presence. One of the primary online marketplaces, Etsy, boasted over 1.6 million active sellers in 2015, generating 2.39 billion dollars in sales (Etsy, n.d.-a). The establishment of these online craft retail outlets, paired with a rise in social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, make it important to consider whether these virtual spaces change how craftspeople experience concepts of space and place. This is particularly timely on Cape Breton Island as Internet accessibility is in its early stages of growth for many parts of the island. In February 2016 the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) provided Seaside Wireless Communications with a repayable loan of \$2 million towards improving Internet connection in the northeastern Nova Scotia (Connors, 2016) with federal and provincial government funding following suit ((Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2016; “Province to spend”, 2018). Reliable high-speed Internet was identified as a major factor in attracting and retaining people and

businesses in the announcements of the funding initiatives (Connors, 2016; “Province to spend”, 2018). This suggests that many craft producers have only been able to add an online element to their business within the past few years or will only be able to within the next few years as Internet services in rural Nova Scotia improve, so changes in how place is perceived due to web resources are only beginning to develop. To address the influence of Internet resources on the Cape Breton craft industry, this chapter first discusses how craftspeople were using various platforms to promote and sell their products. Second, it addresses the role the internet played in accessing materials, techniques, and conversations beyond the local level.

### **8.1 What’s Going on in Margaree?: Using the Internet for Craft Sales**

The primary use of the Internet for craft businesses in this study was for promotion and sales. The *Cape Breton Craft Sector Study Final Report* found that 73% of craft producers considered having a website to be the greatest channel for their business, with social media being important to 67% of the respondents (ICON Communications and Research Inc., 2012). This section examines how craft producers were using online resources to promote themselves and make sales while also considering some of the difficulties they encountered during these processes.

Mirroring the findings of the *Cape Breton Craft Sector Study Final Report*, the majority of participants indicated that they had a website or were in the process of developing one. Two common themes emerged regarding what websites were used for, the first of which was introducing potential customers to the work of craft producers and giving them an idea of who the producers are. Gina Cloud, for example, suspected that

her website was not attracting many new customers due to high shipping costs, yet she enjoyed working on it and felt the site was a great place to direct people to learn more about her business. Online photo galleries of current or recent creations can also give people an idea of the artisan's work, with Brenda Reichel explaining that this helped to make long-distance commissions easier because customers were able to reference relevant colours and styles from past pieces. In these examples, websites aided in communicating the image artisans wanted to put forth of their business, alleviating some obstacles that came with generating and conducting sales while not sharing a physical location with consumers.

The second common use for websites was to attract tourists who were doing preliminary research about where to go when they visit Cape Breton. The title of this section comes from Anne Morrell Robinson's interview, during which she explained that people saw her website because it was common for tourists to type into search engines before their visits variations on the question, "What's going on in Margaree?" The primary search results were webpages listing activities to do and places to see in the region ([www.margareens.com](http://www.margareens.com) and [www.cabottrail.travel](http://www.cabottrail.travel), for example), on which her studio was often mentioned and a link to her website provided. Websites also allowed for more details to be shared than other forms of promotion such as print or radio advertisements. Joanne Fitzgerald, for example, said that all the photographs of Cape Breton on the Arts North website "tell the story," which recalls the discussion in Chapter 2 on the added value of marketing personality and place in conducting craft sales (Krugh, 2014). The narrative told by the collection of photos, paired with a selection of positive reviews and a description of the business worked together to sell the region to travellers

and, particularly, encouraged them to visit that studio. Other forms of advertising did not have the flexibility to achieve this. Craft businesses' websites therefore allow them to both take greater advantage of and contribute more to tourism on the island.

The professional websites of craft producers and organizations were not the only web pages used to draw tourists to craft businesses. A few members of the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design (CBCCD) felt they had received support from the organization via online outlets such as the website or social media, but other websites were also identified. Echoing Anne Morrell Robinson's comment about Google searches, Dennis Doyon said that when he was running Arts North, visitors often mentioned that in addition to looking at the official website, they would read reviews of places to establish where they should go. He explained, "[The traveler has] already seen the Arts North website and the Trip Advisor reviews of Arts North so she knows she wants to stop at Arts North." Another group of websites that showed up in search engine queries about what there is to do in Cape Breton are county websites. Gina Cloud only found out that her information was available on the Richmond County website when people who stopped to see her studio told her that was where they had found out about her business. County websites helped producers and gallery owners by promoting their businesses but also helped the county itself, highlighting reasons tourists should explore the area. Thus, as with personal websites, being featured on affiliated web pages could be valuable in advertising participants' businesses, simultaneously playing a beneficial role for the organization that mentions them.

In addition to websites, social media resources that craft producers and organizations found useful were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even, for one

producer, Pinterest. Most respondents used those sources to promote their business. For example, craft producers reciprocally supported each other by reposting or retweeting their events and their work on Facebook and Twitter (touched upon in Chapter 6). This reflected Wellman's (2004) concept of *networked individualism*, the personal network Internet users can develop online of people and organizations with shared interests instead of being limited by options in their neighbourhoods; networked individualism allowed craft producers and organizations to make broader, yet potentially more relevant, connections than local sources might provide. This style of promotion was discussed at length by Grant Haverstock and Michael Budd, who attributed some of their success to this form of mutual promotion and support and, conversely, attributed some galleries' and organizations' failures to lack of it. Where some organizations went wrong, they explained, was by only promoting their own events and only within the circle of local followers they already had instead of creating a group dynamic that expanded interest in their own work while also supporting others. As the primary organizers of CanIRON X, part of the reason they felt it was so successful was because they used social media to spread the message beyond the confines of the blacksmithing world and the host region, attracting people who would not normally have known about such an event. Essentially, these craft producers argued that platforms such as Facebook and Twitter could play an important role in the promotion of craft businesses and events, but wide-range, mutual support was much more effective than each business or organization staying within a regional bubble and only promoting their own accomplishments.

Facebook was also identified by some craft producers and organizations as a useful instrument for keeping people up to date with what they are doing. As the

chapter's epigraph illustrates, Kenny Boone was not keen on having an online presence, yet he explained that Facebook had benefits for small creative businesses as it was a free resource and its basic commands were fairly easy to learn. It could also provide prompt feedback: "If I feel good about [my work], I put it out there and you get an instant response from an audience and then you recognize the strength of the painting from the response that you're getting through Facebook." "Liking" a post does not take a lot of commitment from the audience, so it was an easy way for them to express a positive opinion of the work a craft producer was creating while also, as another participant pointed out, giving the artisan an idea of who was interested in what they were doing. Further, these platforms allowed craftspeople to communicate with their followers to let them know when they were at a particular market or if an in-demand item was back on shop shelves. These social media outlets, therefore, permitted craft businesses and consumers to connect in real time and transfer information to each other quickly with minimal effort, unaffected by spatial constraints.

While the interviews indicated that the Internet was being used more for promotion (which could lead to sales) than direct sales, some participants were conducting sales through online platforms. In general, those who were doing online sales said they made more money during the tourist season from their studios or through consignment at other shops, while web-based purchases made up a greater amount of their off-season sales. One of those producers, Dawn Silver, expressed that she would like to grow the online aspect of her business, saying that those orders are "easier to manage," continuing, "through the summer I'm out there face-to-face with people but in the winter there isn't that opportunity but you need to keep the revenue going and it really



does slow down.” Her primary online point of sale was Facebook, though other producers also used their websites as an initial point of contact for purchases. Although most participants were interested in increasing online sales, they faced difficulties in doing so. Two obstacles, identified by Gina Cloud, are that high shipping costs and the slow postal system were turning customers away from her, particularly people from the United States who, she felt, were used to cheaper and faster post. The response from participants illustrated that this aspect of craft businesses in Cape Breton was gradually developing, particularly to fill a seasonal void, yet its success depended partially upon factors beyond the producer’s control.

One notable online sales outlet that did not have a large presence in the Cape Breton craft sector was Etsy. A handful of participants said they created an Etsy account and some even enlisted an Etsy Ambassador, someone trained by Etsy to help sellers set up and maintain their accounts, yet they still favoured conducting sales on their own websites or through Facebook and email. Anne Morrell Robinson said she considered getting an Etsy account but felt she would probably only succeed in selling small, secondary crafted items instead of her large, expensive quilts. Even if the quilts were available on Etsy and people were willing to pay the price, Dawn Silver pointed out that there were still challenges in making sales. She explained, “It probably is difficult for people to find me because it’s based on traffic and I’ve had the Etsy account for a year and a half but I haven’t had a lot of traffic through there.” Instead, the account was primarily used to direct anyone who did find it to her website and Facebook pages where they could request orders. Thus, while there was a growing interest in generating more online sales, via the “global community” of Etsy (Etsy, n.d.-b, para.1), it did not appear to

be the primary outlet for transactions in Cape Breton, despite the services it offers as a marketplace for craft producers.

As the craft sector in Cape Breton expanded into the online realm, producers and distributors were utilizing web-based resources to establish communication between their business and consumers. Internet platforms also enabled craftspeople to communicate with each other, allowing for the exchange of materials, specialized knowledge, and ideas.

### **8.2 I Can Just Google It: Connecting Craftspeople to Their Craft**

Discussion of the benefits of Internet to craftspeople generally focused on the capacity it provided to communicate with consumers but the Internet played many other important roles. Online resources allowed participants to order from a broader catalogue of materials (providing a greater range of combinations and more flexibility), acquire new skills or improve to current ones, find inspiration, recruit new craft producers, explore new avenues of monetizing craft knowledge beyond selling finished craft products, and share ideas with other members of the global craft sector.

Access to materials on Cape Breton Island before widespread Internet usage was not always limited to the region. A number of participants referenced previously ordering supplies from outside of Cape Breton over the phone or through mail-order catalogues. What had improved, however, was the ordering process, as discussed by Anne Morrell Robinson. Before she had Internet, she used to order fabric from catalogues which typically had about four cotton prints to choose from. She was fortunate, she explained, because she knew a nearby salesman who sold fabric throughout the region and she could

order from him directly after seeing samples of fabrics. Now when she ordered fabric she could choose from many websites, each with a wide variety of patterns, colours, and textures. In addition to the broader selection of sources, she could often get fabrics and threads at a cheaper price than she could in the region. Further, those orders could be shipped to the closest post office instead of requiring her to drive to Sydney where most of the fabric stores were located. Dianne Quimby had a similar response, saying she liked to support local stores and would do so if she was buying materials for her own use, but if she had to buy materials on a budget, she would find better prices for online purchases. Thus, while Chapter 6 discussed how craft businesses put money into the local economy by purchasing supplies from other businesses, this chapter considered how online resources provide flexibility to craftspeople when regional options placed constraints on what they could produce, with what materials, at what cost.

The Internet had also been useful for craft producers because it made it easier to be exposed to new ideas or different ways of doing a craft. Brenda Reichel used the Internet to learn of current and upcoming trends in relation to colour and style, which she then incorporated into the jewellery she produced. Further, she spoke of Facebook as a useful resource because there were a number of pages and groups available to creators who used sea glass where they could discuss glass they had found and share experiences. This was echoed by John Frank who said that although he did not use the Internet as a tool to promote or market his business, he did find it useful for picking up new skills:

I'm always looking for new techniques, you know. There are techniques that I don't know that I'll research out, and that's where online comes in handy, too, because instead of having to travel down to places like the southwest U.S. where a

lot of the leather carving is done, you can get tips and things like that and exploring new ways of working with [leather]. There's always something different to learn like any other art form.

What this quote highlighted is that the transfer of knowledge and skills from craftspeople was not necessarily limited to a geographic region, even if the techniques were originally established in one place. Internet resources had allowed producers to be exposed to a much wider range of techniques and styles in their own homes instead of relying upon second-hand skills picked up by travelling craft producers or allotting business funds to travel to locations where particular practices are taking place to learn new skills first hand.

In addition to acquiring new techniques, Anne Morrell Robinson explained that being able to access the Internet had changed how she researched details used in the imagery that appeared on her work. Before she had Internet, she would make trips to the library to look at books with images of what she planned to incorporate into her quilts, such as specific plants. Now, she says, "I can just Google it and I get a gazillion images of whatever thing I want." She occasionally took her research one step further if she encountered difficulties getting in touch with clients, searching their names online to find any social media profiles they had with information that would give the quilt a personal touch, ranging from their hobbies to the breed of dog they owned. Thus, while she had a system that worked before, gaining Internet access had diminished her reliance on limited library resources and opinions of what the client may or may not like.

Video-sharing sites such as YouTube (in addition to television) had also been playing a role in attracting new people to various crafts. Kenny Boone had a short

documentary-style video on YouTube, produced by his friend, which followed the development of his work over a period of two years. While he was not sure that he would have time to feature in future videos, he thought this one and videos like it were beneficial, explaining, “If I was a kid and I had seen the video that is being presented right now on YouTube, I would be, you know, fascinated by that – that someone’s giving out that information.” This was particularly relevant in his situation as he had previously explained that when he was a child, exposure to the creative world was limited in Cape Breton and he usually had to order in books on anything he wanted to learn about. Grant Haverstock and Michael Budd also praised YouTube and other media as ways for their craft, blacksmithing, to attract new talent. They explained that shows and films such as *Game of Thrones* and *Lord of the Rings*, in addition to YouTube videos, exposed viewers to forges, fostering an interest in the craft and resulting in more hobby and professional blacksmiths, a trend reported from Australia to Ireland (Nancarrow, 2017; Gallagher, 2018). Although there were difficulties attracting new people to the craft sector (see Chapter 4), participants viewed Internet and media sources as valuable resources for recruiting future craft producers, particularly those who would otherwise be socially or geographically inaccessible.

Adding to both the discussion of expanding access to techniques and introducing new people to various craft fields, some participants knew of producers within their professional circles who had begun to sell not only finished products online but patterns and courses. One producer, Dianne Quimby, spoke of a Cape Breton-based colleague who they likened to “a small rock star” in the creative community because of her large online following and popular instructional videos on craft techniques. This producer, she

said, was an example of how people involved in craft could expand their horizons if they were willing to put themselves out into the world in creative ways. An alternate way to approach running an online craft information business, as mentioned by Anne Morrell Robinson, was through the sale of patterns to people who wanted to create products but did not want to (or could not) design the pattern themselves. These ventures would likely not support craftspeople full-time, but the examples showed how craft producers were able to manipulate a demand internationally for online resources to supplement their income while remaining within the regional craft sector.

In various ways, then, the Internet was used by craftspeople in Cape Breton as a way to be part of a larger conversation. They could learn new techniques from each other, they could provide inspiration to other craft producers, and they had access to a greater selection of products from sellers across the globe. Grant Haverstock and Michael Budd emphasized such interactions in their interview as an important part of who they were and how they represented themselves and their craft. The previous section explored how they used social media effectively to reach audiences generally unfamiliar with their craft but they also used Twitter to voice opinions and connect with practitioners of their craft worldwide by using a hashtag (#blacksmith), allowing them to see who is doing what and where. They also praised social media as an outlet for their opinions and forum where they could challenge the status quo, a move they considered to be crucial for necessary change. Both men were comfortable speaking against institutions and processes meant to protect or represent craftspeople that they felt were not doing an adequate job. Twitter provided them with a public platform to raise their critiques to the intended organization

yet also allowed fellow craft producers to see the interaction. They explained the importance of this:

Michael – I’ve challenged things consistently over the years [...] but what I’ve found was that people aren’t vocal and wouldn’t stand up and support you but then quietly they say, “Do you know what? Thanks for doing that”

Grant – Oh yeah, I’ve gotten it too. “Thank god someone had the balls to say something” is what I get.

Michael – But then they give somebody else the impetus to say, “Do you know what? Yeah, I don’t like that” or “there’s actually this thing over here I don’t like” and then they start... so what I found is people are really now starting to get it because there’s a few core people that [publicly address issues].

This interaction provides one example of a theme that occurred throughout the interview about the accountability they believe craft producers should take for the state of the craft sector (see Chapter 4). It also highlights how social media could amplify their voices in a way that speaking at a local level could not do. Internet platforms, to these craft producers, were not only resources for developing their techniques or purchasing materials but were important for creating a conversation about problems within their craft and initiating change.

Previous chapters have discussed how there were many local, in-person interactions within the Cape Breton craft sector which provided opportunities to learn from each other, obtain materials, and initiate conversations. This section has demonstrated how some craft producers were using virtual space to circumvent

restrictions faced by their physical place which they then used to further their craft businesses at a local level and online.

## **Conclusion**

As the chapter epigraph suggests, the craft sector on Cape Breton Island was moving towards establishing a presence in the online sphere, whether or not individual craft producers supported this. Most participants had some form of presence online, either personal websites or social media platforms, and most were interested in expanding this form of visibility for their businesses. The first section of this chapter focused on the primary use of Internet by craft businesses, the promotion and sale of items, illustrating how technology had helped the growth of mutually-beneficial relationships between craft producers, their own regions (particularly through tourism), and other craft producers and organizations. It also explored the ways that new technologies had provided platforms for consumers to converse with producers and purchase products online. The second section examined how producers viewed the Internet as a way they could develop their craft by gaining exposure to new ideas and new skills, gaining access to a wide selection of craft materials, and participating in conversations with craft producers regionally and across the globe.

This thesis is dedicated to how craft practices are linked to a physical location: Cape Breton Island. With the increasing emergence of online resources and mediums for promoting, distributing, and engaging with fellow craftspeople and potential craft consumers, concepts around a craft sector being strongly rooted in one place need to be challenged. As participants spoke of Internet outlets primarily as being relatively new (or



future) aspects of their businesses, it is difficult to identify what long-term changes this creates for the relationship between craft production and place on the island. From a preliminary standpoint, however, it seems that the online realm has not taken away from the connections between craft and Cape Breton that were discussed in previous chapters inasmuch as it appears that the sector was incorporating the experience of being from Cape Breton into their use of these new resources. Further, in a region concerned with attracting and maintaining people and industry, Internet access anchored craftspeople to the island, allowing them to operate their creative businesses while removing restrictions that being isolated in rural Cape Breton previously had.

The connection between craft production and place via Internet platforms is not experienced solely by the craftspeople. Wellman (2004) points out that forms of communication have changed as Internet developed, with people now connected instead of places. Personal accounts online make it possible for artisans and consumers to contact each other directly, in any location, as long as they had a device with Internet access. This changes the dynamic from when both parties could only connect if they were in the correct place (in-person at the studio or near landline telephones, for example), which limited interactions and placed a greater importance on physical place. As Marotta and Heying (2018) state in their work on localism and the craft industry in Portland, the emergence and broad use of social media platforms means “*there is no need for the consumer to be local in order to feel local*” (p. 145, emphasis in original). They use the concept of a virtual *window* which artisans can “open” in the form of text, photos, and videos, giving consumers insight into the production process and the producer insight into the consumption process. This style of interaction opens up the possibility that online

followers around the globe have a better sense of what is happening in an artisan's studio than the person next door (Wellman, 2004).

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

Many of the themes discussed in Chapter 4 through to Chapter 8 are not unique to Cape Breton. The term “craft” had a multitude of understandings and applications within the Cape Breton craft sector as elsewhere, aligning with the complexities of assigning definitions to craft experienced by craft activists, academics, organizations, and companies, outlined in Chapter 2. Members of the craft sector were embedded within the rural communities where they lived, establishing a complex dynamic of reciprocal support between craft businesses and local stakeholders (Marotta & Heying, 2018; McKay, 1994; Paxson, 2010; Paxson, 2012; Prince, 2017; Stalker, 2009). Casual craft consumers relied heavily upon indicators such as “Made in Cape Breton” stickers and demonstrations to confirm real or perceived values they associated with craft, such as authenticity, tradition, and local production (Gowlland, 2009; Marotta & Heying, 2018; Meacci & Liberatore, 2018; Yair, 2011). Recent marketing campaigns focused on Cape Breton Island, particularly in relation to craft production, relied on manufactured imagery and techniques used both regionally and internationally (MacDonald, 2011; McKay, 1994; McKay 2010; Terrio, 1999). Landscapes attracted creative people to the region and inspired them, but Cape Breton is not the only locale artisans report being inspired by (Prince, 2017; Stalker & Burnett, 2016). Although the general concepts are not unique to the craft sector on Cape Breton Island, narrowing the scope in to a specific location allows for consideration of how broad trends and themes play out within a particular context.

In her work on craft production as embedded in place, Stalker (2009) argues that a consideration of place is more important than the space the actual work occupies. She

explains that the studio space and medium of craft could be the same but that the physical results and the meaning associated with them would be different, saying: “the nature of a place shapes the culture and social relations of locality and thereby makes the motives and meaning for work different. It is how the worker perceives and interacts with a place, not just the spatial environment, which is important” (p. 417). Her statement reflects the root of my research question which asked: “How are the practices of craft producers in Cape Breton bound up with place?” If the basic physical steps to weaving a rug on a loom are the same in Sydney, Cape Breton and Sydney, Australia, what is it about living in Sydney, Cape Breton, that influences the craft producer, production process, final product, and distribution methods? To address this, we must return to the two key elements of the research question: craft practice and place.

### **9.1 Considerations of Craftspeople: Craft Practice Rooted in Place**

To address the relationship between practices of craft producers and place, with a focus on Cape Breton Island as the physically-bounded location, a primary element of examination was the influence that aspects of place had on craft practice. In this context, the concept of craft practice refers to how craft producers, distributors, and organizations operate their businesses, taking into consideration the influence of the dynamics of their location on these processes.

While no official, shared definition of craft was identified within Cape Breton’s craft sector, a common theme identified by participants was that craft production involved physical and mental contributions with an emphasis on creative thought. The term “artisan” was a popular descriptor of professional craft producers, in contrast to preferred terms in other locations, such as “maker” in the United Kingdom (BOP

Consulting, 2012). One reason for not establishing a firm definition was that craft organizations in Cape Breton were tasked with representing a broad range of creative endeavours, including filling the role of a regional arts council. The matter was further complicated by the prevalence of shops claiming to sell “craft” items, capitalizing on the desire of tourists to purchase souvenirs they perceived to be authentic and representative of place while not having the cultural capital required to discern what professional craft is. Conceptualizations of craft practice on Cape Breton Island were necessarily broad, then, to accommodate regional deficiencies within the creative sector yet members of the professional craft sector also had to contend with souvenir shops adopting craft as a buzzword to generate sales from tourists.

Craft producers and organizations in Cape Breton are generally considered to be small or medium businesses, with several participants being the sole worker in their company. This required the craftsperson to run all elements of their business, from bookkeeping to studio maintenance, instead of fully focusing on their craft. When help was needed, participants often relied on their kin instead of hiring anyone, noting the seasonal nature of the work and inability to afford employees as deterrents. As small operations, producers could only take on so many orders at one time, selling mostly within Cape Breton yet exporting through tourist sales and a slowly growing trend of online sales. Craft organizations were cognizant of the role that artisans could play within the region’s political economy (discussed further in Chapter 9.2), offering workshops, courses, and residencies to build both craft and business skills although access to these opportunities was limited, particularly for rural producers. Unlike common practice under European conceptions of terroir (Paxson, 2012), which see producers churning out

products under a regional claim, or mass-producing items with little variation while demonstrating traditional techniques (Gowlland, 2009), craft practice in Cape Breton was a small industry based around individual producers as entrepreneurs.

Craft practice in Cape Breton was shaped partially by the shifting schedules artisans had to adhere to. Local weather patterns could have major impacts on craft production and distribution, a consideration artisans had to make when establishing their business in the region. Tourism on Cape Breton Island is seasonal, with tourists attracted to warm summer weather and beautiful fall colours. High volumes of tourists during this time, participants reported, meant it could be difficult to close their studios or shops for personal reasons, to work on products, or to take advantage of opportunities within the craft sector. Summer temperatures could speed up the production process for some items, such as pottery, while hindering production for others, including jewellery pieces made with glue. Once temperatures cool and tourism slows, some artisans were able to work on creating a stockpile of product for the next season, online sales, or holiday markets, yet others were unable to work with their materials in cold weather or operate their business due to isolation caused by snowfall, so were forced to take a break. To counteract seasonal downtime, some artisans worked on a secondary craft product that was not affected by the weather. Craft producers in Cape Breton have little flexibility in structuring their work, instead reacting to dynamics of the location around them.

Developing skills in a second craft medium was also beneficial to producers in Cape Breton because it helped them respond to the needs of tourists, a major industry in the region. As Stoddard et al. (2012) noted, craft purchases are typically hedonic in nature and therefore are often sold in high-tourism areas (see also Gordon 1986). While

producers prioritized their primary craft, several had a second option that was quicker, smaller, and cheaper to make; it was better to make some money from tourists visiting the studio than none at all. A consideration of tourism was also incorporated into primary craft items, with studios and galleries carrying a range of sizes and prices to account for the cheap souvenir carried home in a suitcase and the expensive quilt purchased by someone who drove to Cape Breton with the specific intention of spending hundreds or thousands of dollars on craft purchases. Further, artisans offered additional elements to their practice to demonstrate the value of handcrafted work or provide visitors with a memorable experience, increasing their chances of capitalizing on the regional tourism industry. Most producers did account for the demands of the tourism industry in some way, although the extent they chose to incorporate aspects of it into their practice varied.

How connections between craft practice and place form and are expressed varies greatly. My research narrowed in on one physical region to consider this question, Cape Breton Island, and still, the lived experiences of my participants did not always align. General themes did arise, however, with tourism and Cape Breton's weather patterns performing significant roles in shaping elements of the regional craft sector.

## **9.2 A Distinct Destination: Craftspeople Rooted in Place**

The concept of "place" was the second key element of my research question, threading through each chapter in some form. Members of Cape Breton's craft sector did not experience the impact of place solely in how they produced and distributed their wares, but in how they lived and the opportunities available to them based on their location and embodied sense of place.

Working in a region with a recent history of industrial decline and precarious work opportunities, with a shrinking and aging population, craft producers in Cape Breton are necessarily shaped by these elements. The long-term success of small- and medium-sized businesses is a key focus of regional stakeholders, including government agencies, craft organizations and advocates, because that is what is believed will structure regional prosperity moving forward (Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council, 2014; Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, 2014; MDB Insight, 2017). This emphasis on entrepreneurial initiatives, including craft businesses, for the sake of boosting the local and provincial political economy, has created a push toward succession planning and export as priorities for craft producers and organizations to strive toward in Cape Breton.

The expectations placed upon craft businesses and organizations to participate in the future economic well-being of Cape Breton and funding allocations in 2015 were conflicting, with participants noting that places, namely their primarily rural and shallow-rural locations, were subjected to perceptions, at times negative and incorrect, of what they could offer a region before being allocated financial support. The impact of this was threefold. One, craft organizations assigned to represent the entire island or smaller regions within it did not have the budgets to provide the scope of programming they wanted to, limiting their reach and fostering tensions within the craft sector and with local communities who did not feel they were adequately supported. Two, craft producers had access to fewer funding opportunities that would allow them to travel to populated markets in Halifax or further abroad, making it difficult to establish the connections they required to sell their wares wholesale or for export. Three, participants expressed



frustration toward government agencies which they felt financed projects that did not improve Cape Breton's prospects, and towards craft organizations which they understood to compete against craft businesses for funding. Members of Cape Breton's craft sector have to navigate the funding opportunities available to them as individuals and the regional craft sector overall, the availability of which is influenced by their location within Canada, Nova Scotia, and Cape Breton.

Perceived government and organizational actions also contributed to the mental structuring of place by members of the craft sector. As addressed in Chapter 2, place can be associated with physical location but it is also a sense of embodiment, built around lived experiences by the people using the space (Radice, 2011). While my research focused on a physical place, Cape Breton Island, to the study in an effort to contain the scope, Escobar (2001) argues that conceptions of space must have an element of permeability to them to account for such embodied understandings. The imbalance of governmental and organizational resources presented to some regions, craft businesses, and craft endeavours influenced where craftspeople placed mental boundaries as being representative of where they live and what they represent.

As Barber (1990) noted during the decline of industry, residents of Cape Breton have developed strong connections to their community, particularly when various levels of government did not provide them with necessary support. A strong connection to community, as a group of people and a socially-constructed place, was evident in participant interviews, with craftspeople and their communities forming a reciprocal relationship. Residents of the rural and shallow rural locales that many producers resided in knew of the local craft businesses, directing potential customers to it, dropping off

supplies, and providing them with their patronage. Conversely, the presence of craft studios and organizations could contribute to the viability of communities, artisans advocated for other local businesses and initiatives, and they participated in their communities simply by being members of the community, an important aspect in an area experiencing a population decline. The small-town element, as experienced by participants, was generally one of mutual patronage and promotion, that which might not take the same form in an urban environment. However, as Paxson (2012) and Stalker and Burnett (2016) mentioned in their works on creative production in rural locations, and as one participant in my study warned, craftspeople in small communities have to constantly police their actions so as not to fall out of favour with this support system. Such a dynamic means that artisans on Cape Breton Island can potentially meet with success or failure depending on whether residents of their close-knit community embrace them or reject them.

Place as a physical location also had an impact on members of the Cape Breton craft sector. Place, for some participants, was structured around life on the island and a sense of islandness, with MDB Insight writing, “By its very nature as an island, Cape Breton is a distinct destination. The very act of crossing the causeway creates a sense of arrival on the Island and this ‘Islander’ mentality underpins a great deal of Cape Breton culture and identity” (2017, p. 39). The island as a whole imposes a shared identity and physical boundaries upon residents and, in many ways, craft sector participants incorporated Cape Breton Island as a place into their lives. The geography of the island alters participant experience, however, as artisans living along the northern side of the Cabot Trail had a long trip, sometimes impossible due to weather events, to reach other

areas of Cape Breton, restricting their interactions with people and organizations deemed to be representative of the same “place”. Likewise, craft producers along the southern edge of the island were closer to some mainland locations than they were other communities in Cape Breton, shifting their sense of place to incorporate elements of northern mainland Nova Scotia. While island life can unite craft producers and organizations under a broad shared identity, how this identity is experienced varies based on the artisan’s specific location.

Place marketing, as discussed by Kearns and Philo (1993), is an established form of restructuring the narrative of a location to attract visitors and new residents. While not unique to Cape Breton, how place had been marketed in the region resulted in specific impacts on local craft producers and organizations. The historical emphasis on tartanism, maritimicity, and quaint folk craftspeople (McKay, 1994; McKay, 2010) was still evident in marketing campaigns and consumer demand, playing a crucial role in shaping the island’s tourism sector. How this impacts an artisan’s technical practice was explored in Section 9.1 but on a broader scale, successful narratives pushed to sell the region resulted in a strong tourism industry and a number of large, annual events which brought consumers into shops and galleries. Conversely, craft businesses and organizations were anchors within communities, contributing to the marketability of place, as demonstrated through the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design’s (CBCCD) Craft Capital campaign, amongst other examples. Thus, place marketing within the context of Cape Breton influences members of the regional craft sector by structuring a major industry around tourists, with their particular conceptions about what it means to be in Cape Breton and what items represent their journey.

The relationship between craftspeople and place has been increasingly taken to the virtual realm. High-speed Internet access was not available to many individuals and businesses in Cape Breton in 2015 and several participants who did use it were still evaluating its use as a tool for their craft business. The slow development of Internet accessibility and usage in Cape Breton was, in itself, an element of place that impacted craft practice and distribution in the region, preventing artisans from using web-based resources they are now utilizing. Crucially, Internet access did not elevate craftspeople above their connections to Cape Breton, it helped root them in place; participants became able to order a wider range of supplies, learn new techniques, and foster connections with colleagues across the globe, conduct sales year-round and with a wider customer base, and market their work using photos of that which inspires them in Cape Breton, all without leaving the region. While craftspeople were able to transcend their physical location using the Internet, they can maintain, and even deepen, elements of their relationship to Cape Breton explored throughout my research.

In locating their business in Cape Breton, craft producers and organizations were not only influenced in how they engaged with consumers and shaped their craft practice, they were immersed in political, economic, and social dynamics around them. This encompassed both physical and embodied experiences of place, understandings of which were also bound up with individual and communal interactions.

### **9.3 Moving Forward**

The purpose of this research project was not to make recommendations for developing Cape Breton's craft sector, but to provide a snapshot of the craft industry as it stood in 2015 in the eyes of people experiencing it. Participants spoke of aspirations they

were unable to accomplish in 2015 due to challenges they encountered, many which may remain as roadblocks to growth and success. Since completing my fieldwork, however, a number of changes have happened regionally, provincially, and nationally which may have altered how craft practice is conducted on Cape Breton Island.

Several reports and policies related to craft and creative industries have been released in the region since 2015. Prior to my fieldwork, The Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, also known as *Now or Never: An Urgent Call to Action for Nova Scotians* or the Ivany Report, was released in 2014. The Commission's mandate was to engage in discussions with various stakeholders in Nova Scotia's future to gain a better sense of potential for economic growth and the challenges preventing such growth. One criticism of the Ivany Report voiced by one of my research participants is that creative industries and the impact of culture on Nova Scotia's political economy are not adequately addressed. In February 2017, *Nova Scotia's Culture Action Plan* was launched, prepared by Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. This set out a plan to recognize and capitalize on the strengths of Nova Scotia's cultural sector. October 2017 saw the release of the cultural sector element of Cape Breton Partnership's *Prosperity Framework*, a strategy focused on the economic future of Cape Breton and Mulgrave (a small town across the Canso Causeway from Cape Breton Island), authored by MDB Insight. The *Prosperity Framework* considers the economic future of Cape Breton in a much broader sense than creative industries but, as of mid-2019, the cultural sector team was the only team with a published strategy for prosperity (Cape Breton Partnership, n.d.). The Centre for Local Prosperity published *Import Replacement: Local Prosperity for Rural Atlantic Canada* in February 2018,

recommending import replacement as an approach to supporting local economies, a process craft businesses could be involved in. June 2019 saw the release of *Rural Opportunities, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada* by Infrastructure Canada and *High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy* by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. Both federal documents emphasized the importance of internet connectivity in fostering growth to rural communities and economies with a committal to have even the most remote of Canadian towns connected to high-speed internet by 2030. These reports and strategies provide steps and suggestions which, ideally, contribute to an economically and culturally strong region, yet whether and how initiatives will actually be implemented remains vague.

Developments in Cape Breton since 2015 mean that there are more arts organizations to help support artists and artisans. The New Dawn Centre for Social Innovation opened in 2013 and is home to various creative organizations including Rylene's School of Music, the Cape Breton Orchestra, and The Art Room plus a number of semi-private studio spaces. It is currently housed in an old high school in Sydney while renovations are completed at an adjacent space called "The Convent". The Convent should be ready in autumn of 2019; with this renovation is expected to be more studio space and an annual artist subsidy (New Dawn Enterprises, n.d., The Convent section). In 2018, the CBCCD worked with officials in Port Hawkesbury to renovate a heritage building and turn it into a craft incubator, The Customs House Artisan Incubator, which houses a gallery and studios for artists in residence ("An industry town", 2018). These developments follow from the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council's 2014 report

which recommended revitalizing unused spaces to bring new creative clusters to communities; such an approach turns abandoned buildings into elements crucial to selling place.

In addition to the new residency space opened in The Customs House, new residency opportunities have emerged in a partnership between the CBCCD and Parks Canada. Chapter 4 discussed the role residency programs play in attracting and retaining artisans as well as in developing their skills, if successful. Likewise, when the Cape Breton Partnership's *Prosperity Framework* was released in 2017, it recommended partnering with Parks Canada (p. 42) which was identified as a cultural anchor in Cape Breton (p. 54). That same year, Parks Canada partnered with the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design and announced a pilot artist-in-residence project in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park for up to six weeks in the fall. The application was open to all forms of creative media and international applicants were welcome to apply (MacDonald, 2017, October 17) with an abstract painter from Montréal winning the competition (MacDonald, 2017, December 1). The program, with some changes, was repeated in 2018 (Patterson, 2018) and in early 2019 the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design was promoting a four-day June residency partnership with Parks Canada based in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park (Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design, n.d.-b, Artist in Residence section). Given that participants identified residencies as a valuable way to attract and retain craftspeople while providing them with the tools and promotion they need to succeed, such partnerships could have a great impact on the region; the program has certainly seen results already as the initial Montreal artist moved to Cape Breton full-time in 2018 (Patterson, 2018).

The CBCCD also went to tender on July 23, 2019 to procure an assessment of the feasibility of a partnership with the Inverness County Centre for the Arts (ICCA). The objective outlined in the tender document is “to determine what funding is required to ensure a sustainable partnership between the two organizations AND to determine the organizational structure needed to oversee such a partnership” (Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design, 2019, p. 4); a plan to achieve a long-term partnership is also requested. While the tender process does not guarantee a future alliance, it does indicate a serious interest from both organizations to work together to represent craft and other creative industries on Cape Breton Island.

Nationally, the Canadian Crafts Federation (CCF) is gearing up for another Craft Year in 2020, promoting a range of craft initiatives including exhibits, fairs, conferences, workshops, and publications (n.d.-d, Craft Year 2020 section). The CCF also hosted a timely conference in Nova Scotia in October of 2018 titled: “Placemaking: the unique connection between craft, community + tourism”. The key question of the conference asked: “What does craft look like in relation to community?” (n.d.-b, Conference section). The CCF has also partnered on a marketing campaign led by Craft Ontario called “Citizens of Craft” which asks people to support professional craft practice. This campaign includes a manifesto for Citizens of Craft to follow (Ontario Crafts Council, 2019) in addition to a podcast which outlines in greater detail some of the key aspects of the manifesto and speaks of craft practice more generally (n.d.-e, Current projects section). Craft education undertaken by the CCF is targeted at different audiences, with some events and resources focused upon furthering conversations within Canada’s craft



sector while others, such as Craft Year 2020, are meant to engage with both new and long-term supporters of craft.

The changes that transpired in Cape Breton in relation to creative industries demonstrate the perceived value that craft and other artistic ventures are able to bring to the region. As these new initiatives, programs, organizations, and reports become enveloped into the makeup of Cape Breton society, a new study on how they impact the relationship between local craft practice and place will be necessary; a policy-oriented study of the relationship between craft policy and bureaucracy would also be timely. Further, as discussed throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter 8, the growing role that high-speed Internet access plays in small businesses in Cape Breton, including craft producers and distributors, could have a drastic impact on the future of craft production on Cape Breton Island and how place is embodied and experienced. For craft producers, these changes could result in new funding or creative opportunities, increased tourism, or better networks of support. Conversely, the new reports and initiatives could produce little change to the lives of producers, particularly those in rural locales, even presenting new challenges surrounding funding, favouritism, or expectations of their business outputs.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Guide**

### **Interview Questions for Craft Producers**

1. How would you define 'craft'?
2. How did you get into your medium of craft?
  - What things do you make
  - What materials do you use
  - What training did you have
  - What does a typical day look like
  - Where / how do you sell your craft
3. In what ways do you feel living in Cape Breton influences your work?
4. Does geography influence what materials you use in your work?
  - In what ways
  - Which kinds / scales of geography e.g. is it view from the window, walks you take, local area, local village or beach, or CB / NS in general?
5. Are there any programs, organizations or events for craft producers in Cape Breton?
  - How important do you think they are? In what ways?
  - Have you personally signed up to any or benefitted from them? Do you intend to? If yes, why / If no, why not?
  - Do you feel they are accessible? If yes, why/ if no, why not?
  - Do you know of programs, organizations or events for craft producers in other parts of Canada that you have experience of or think would work well here?
6. Have you worked as a craft producer in a different region?
  - How does your experience in Cape Breton compare?
7. Does your location play into how you market your wares?
  - If yes, how? If no, why not?
8. Are you looking to expand your business?
  - If yes, have you experienced limitations?
9. Has your work changed over time?
  - If yes, how?
  - Why do you think this is?

### **Interview Questions for Craft Sellers**

1. What is your definition of craft?
2. How did you come to sell the particular craft items that you sell?
  - a. Do you favour a particular craft medium?
    - i. Why/why not?
  - b. What characteristics or features do you look for when bringing craft producers in on consignment?
3. How do you market the crafts you sell?
4. How important is the idea of place in your marketing strategy? In what ways – can you give me a concrete example of how that would work out in your everyday activities

5. How important is consumer demand in making decisions about what to sell?
6. Are there any programs, organizations or events that you take advantage of to sell craft items?
  - a. How important do you think they are?
7. Are there any programs, organizations or events that you would like to be able to take advantage of?
  - a. Why?
8. Are there any programs, organizations or events that you are unable or uninterested in taking advantage of to sell craft items?
  - a. Why?
9. What mediums do you use to market and sell craft (for example: personal website, Etsy, the Cape Breton Artisan Trail map)
  - a. Why?
  - b. Are you interested in using other mediums?
  - c. Is there a particular medium (or mediums) you would not consider?
10. Have you noticed changes in the craft market now versus when you first started your business in Cape Breton?
  - a. What are they?
  - b. Why do you think this is?
  - c. Would you consider the changes to be positive or negative?

#### **Interview Questions for Craft Consumers**

1. Where have you come from today? What brought you to this place?
2. Did the availability of local crafts influence your decision to visit Cape Breton Island?
3. Did you specifically plan to visit this craft location?
  - a. If so, why? If not, what drew you to it?
4. How would you define craft?
5. What type of craft, if any, are you looking to purchase?
  - a. Why?
6. Is there a particular craft item or style of craft that you think of when you think of Cape Breton?
  - a. Why?
7. Is there any craft medium you feel is missing that you would like to see?
8. How important is it to you to know of, know about or meet the craft producer who made a craft item?
  - a. Why?

#### **Interview Questions for Craft Organizations and Policy Makers**

1. Is there a particular definition of craft used by your organization?
2. What role do you play in the craft sector here?
3. How much interaction do you have with craft producers, sellers and consumers?
4. Are there any trends related to craft that you are noticing through your position?
  - a. What are they and why do you think they are happening?
5. Are you aware of any policies or reports that have an influence on craft in the region?

- a. If yes, do you feel they are positive or negative?
6. What steps are being taken through your organization to change the craft sector?
  - a. What informs these changes? (For example: outcomes of a report, suggestions from craftspeople)
  - b. What is the intended result?
  - c. Are you experiencing particular limitations?
7. Does your organization market or promote craft?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. Who is the intended audience?
8. What is the process for deciding who gets funding or support? (For example: who is allowed to be a member of a craft organization)
9. Have you noted any major changes in the craft sector and how it is marketed or operated since you were first employed?
  - a. What are these changes?
  - b. Why do you think they happened?

It is important to note that participants may be asked a mix of these questions if, for example, they produce crafts but also sell their own products or run a gallery.

## **Appendix B: Email to Potential Participants**

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Emily Fraser and I am working on my masters thesis in Social Anthropology at Dalhousie University. My topic considers the relationship between craft practices and place, with a particular focus on Cape Breton Island. More specifically, I am interested in thinking about the ways in which craft production, marketing, distribution and regulation might be tied up with geography, economy, and history of Cape Breton, as well as the image of the Island that is portrayed to potential visitors. With this understanding I hope to be able to add to current literature on craft and compile suggestions for ways in which craft in Cape Breton could become more efficient and beneficial to craftspeople.

I hope to conduct interviews (two hours at most) with people who represent various angles of the craft sector including craft producers, gallery or shop owners, craft event organizers, policy makers, and craft organization members. Those interviewed will be given the option of being identified or remaining anonymous and the interviews would take place at a time and place that suit the interviewees. If you are interested or know anyone who may be interested in this project please do not hesitate to email me back.

Thank you for your time,

Emily Fraser

## Appendix C: Consent Form



*Faculty of Arts and  
Social Sciences*

### CONSENT FORM

Crafty Capers: Examining the relationship between craft practices and place

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by me, Emily Fraser, a graduate student in Social Anthropology as part of my Master of Arts degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to better understand how craft and the place it is produced are bound up with each other through regional geography, history, economy, and place-marketing. This research will be conducted through a combination of up to forty interviews, five instances of participant observation, and content analysis of websites and policies. I will write up the results of this research for my master's thesis.

As a participant in the research you will be asked to answer several interview questions about your experiences within the craft sector in Cape Breton. This interview should take between one and two hours and will be conducted in a location of your choice. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded and notes will be taken. It is very likely that I will quote short excerpts of your interview to illustrate themes in my master's thesis. When I do, I will use a pseudonym, not your real name, and I will remove any other details that could identify you from the quote. That being said, if you would prefer to be identified, for instance so that your work can be recognized and discussed, please inform me as I can make that possible as well if it does not threaten the anonymity of others. If you choose to be identified but would like to say something during the interview process which you would not like attributed to you, please inform me. This research is of minimal risk and should not cause any issues beyond those experienced in daily life in connection with this topic.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer, and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview is over, you can do so until October 31, 2015. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that time, because I will have completed my analysis, but the information will not be used in any other research.

Information that you provide to me will be kept private and will be anonymized (unless you prefer to be identified), which means any identifying details such as your name will be removed from it. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the unprocessed

information you offer. I will describe and share general findings in my final thesis and conference papers or publications arising from it. While I may use direct or indirect quotes from the interviews, nothing that could identify you will be included in the thesis (unless you have waived confidentiality).

There will be no direct benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on the interactions between craft producers and the places in which they are located. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me via email (or check the box on the signature page of this document) between now and December 2017 and I will send you a copy of my masters thesis upon completion. I can also send you a copy of your transcribed interview if you wish.

If you have questions or concerns about the research please feel free to contact my supervisor or myself. My contact information is [E.Fraser@Dal.ca](mailto:E.Fraser@Dal.ca). You can contact my supervisor, Dr Martha Radice, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University on (902) 494-6747, or email [martha.radice@dal.ca](mailto:martha.radice@dal.ca).

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email [ethics@dal.ca](mailto:ethics@dal.ca).

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**Signature Page**

**Project Title:** Crafty Capers: Examining the relationship between craft practices and place

**Lead Researcher:** Emily Fraser, Dalhousie University, E.Fraser@Dal.ca

**General Information:**

I would like to be identified by name in this study (including the final thesis)

Yes  No

I agree that the researcher may quote me in the final thesis

Yes  No

If quoted, I would like the quote to be attributed to me by name (this is not applicable if you responded “no” to one or both of the above two statements)

Yes  No  Not Applicable

I agree that the researcher may audio-record the interview with me

Yes  No

I would like to receive an electronic copy of the transcribed interview

Yes  No

I would like to receive an electronic copy of the final thesis

Yes  No

If yes to either of the above two statements, please provide an email address to be reached at: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant’s Consent:**

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered. I agree to take part in the study. I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave the study at any time without consequence.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_