LOCAL IDENTITIES, DISCOURSES, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE:

AN EXAMINATION OF VOLUNTARY MUNICIPAL AMALGAMATION IN

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the phenomenon of voluntary municipal amalgamation by observing four cases in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This project draws on insights from scholarship in historical and discursive institutionalisms as well as rhetoric and identity discourses to explore the question of why communities voluntarily amalgamate. The comparative case study observes four cases of amalgamation debate in rural communities of Newfoundland and Labrador: three cases (Fogo Island, Roddickton-Bide Arm, and Trinity Bay North) in which amalgamation occurred; and one case (Labrador City and Wabush) in which the communities considered and decided against amalgamation. The results support the hypotheses that 1) amalgamation is chosen voluntarily when community members believe they are facing urgent challenges that are insurmountable as a single community and 2) resistance to amalgamation is identity-driven, and may be overcome by discourses related to regional identity and community survival. Using the independent variables of regional identity discourses and concern for community survival, a framework is proposed to assist policymakers and local government scholars when assessing the likelihood of voluntary amalgamation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background – Local Government in Newfoundland and Labrador

The nature and definition of local government and communities in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) has been a point of contention for multiple centuries (Whalen, 1974; Cadigan, 2009). Until 1938, there were no official local government bodies outside of the City of St. John's and, since that time, there have been a series of programs and policies aimed at enabling and/or coercing institutional change at the local level across the province (Crosbie, 1956; Whalen, 1974; Kennedy, 1997). These programs and policies have included multiple government-sponsored resettlement programs, regional economic zoning, amalgamation of municipalities, and the incremental incorporation of formerly unincorporated communities. Recently, the sustainability and survival of rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador has been of particular interest with 48% of municipal council seats acclaimed or left vacant in the municipal elections of 2017 and an overall population decline of 8% projected by 2036 (Simms & Ward, 2017; Community Foundation of Newfoundland & Labrador; Harris Centre, 2018). These challenges of both governance and population suggest a need for regional solutions, particularly for rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Implementing regional solutions in Newfoundland and Labrador is complicated by a number of factors which make the context in this province unique. Firstly, the history of the provincial government-sponsored resettlement programs beginning in the mid-1950s affects discourse and both the conveyance and reception of ideas regarding regional solutions (Kennedy, 1997). For the purposes of this study, "resettlement" refers to the government-sponsored relocation of people and households of a community to a new geographic location known as a

"receiving centre" (Martin, 2006). In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, resettlement has a storied and controversial history which has, at times, involved the forcible closing of municipalities, and relocation of residents and households. A study conducted by Curran (2018) and the Harris Centre showed that, despite facing demographic and fiscal decline throughout the province, many municipal leaders and citizens still have negative perceptions of regional solutions, associating "regionalization" with "resettlement." Next, institutional change at the municipal level must be considered in the context of identity in rural communities of the province, which influences the political will to propose and to adopt changes. Finally, as Crosbie (1956) notes, incorporated municipalities outside of St. John's did not come into existence until 1938, a relatively recent advent for modern municipal institutions in North America, and there has been significant institutional change in Newfoundland and Labrador since that time. This last point is compounded with the fact that Newfoundland and Labrador has a geographically dispersed population residing in incorporated and unincorporated communities across the province. As of October 2019, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has 276 incorporated municipalities and 176 Local Service Districts, with populations ranging from five residents in Tilt Cove, to 108,860 in St. John's (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2017).

1.2.   Purpose of this Study

This study sets out to examine the phenomenon of voluntary municipal amalgamation to provide benefit for both academic and non-academic audiences. In particular, the aim of this thesis is to gain insight into the question of why communities voluntarily amalgamate by investigating the ideational and discursive factors that influence the related decision-making processes. The results of this study bridge gaps in the related scholarship by providing a novel

application of the theoretical lenses. The study also offers valuable insights for policymakers—confronting the realities of dwindling resources and the challenges of delivering municipal services in rural Newfoundland and Labrador—who may wish to encourage voluntary amalgamations and avoid the political costs associated with forced amalgamations and regionalization.

1.3.   Conceptual Approach

This study uses concepts related to identity, discourses, and new institutionalisms to consider the policy question of why municipalities voluntarily amalgamate. In particular, concepts developed by Terlouw (2017) in relation to local and regional identity discourses, and by Schmidt (2005; 2008; 2010) in relation to discursive institutionalism, are considered in the context of voluntary municipal amalgamation in Newfoundland and Labrador. These concepts are applied, alongside related scholarship discussed in Chapter 2, to provide a novel theoretical lens through which the four cases found in this study are examined. Using these concepts, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1) Amalgamation is chosen voluntarily when residents and political leaders believe they are facing urgent challenges that are insurmountable as a single community;

2) Resistance to amalgamation is identity-driven, and may be overcome by discourses related to regional identity and community survival.

These hypotheses are tested using the independent variables of regional identity discourses and concern for community survival, and a framework is proposed to assist policymakers and local government scholars when assessing the likelihood of voluntary amalgamation. The proposed framework, discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, uses the discursive dimensions of shared concern for community survival and existing regional identity and provides a typology for the examination of the four cases considered in this study. The results of the qualitative comparative

case analysis support the hypotheses presented above, and provide an example for application of the proposed framework.

1.4.   This Study: A Roadmap

In the following chapters, the policy question of why municipalities voluntarily amalgamate is examined through the lenses of identity and discourse. A qualitative case study is undertaken to analyze four cases in which amalgamation was considered in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. In the first three cases—which resulted in the amalgamated municipalities of Fogo Island, Roddickton-Bide Arm, and Trinity Bay North—amalgamation occurred. In the final case—the discussions of amalgamation between Labrador City and Wabush—amalgamation was considered and declined twice. The examination of these cases was conducted using elite interviews (n=8) and document analysis to identify the ideational and discursive factors that influenced the decisions to voluntarily amalgamate or the decision against amalgamation.[1]

The next chapter of this study examines the academic literature regarding regional solutions and municipal amalgamation, institutionalisms and local government studies, local and regional identities, and rhetoric, discourse, and amalgamation debates. The literature review grounds this study in identity discourses and new institutionalisms, and identifies gaps in current local government scholarship related to amalgamation. Following an examination of the related literature, the third chapter presents a detailed discussion of the methodology: outlining the qualitative case analysis used in this study, discussing the limitations of these methods, presenting two hypotheses based on the related literature, and proposing a typology through which the cases will be analyzed. The fourth chapter provides results and analysis for each case

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[1] Recruitment of interviewees, while already challenging, was further complicated by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

study, and the fifth and final chapter provides a discussion of the overall study including key findings, contribution to scholarship, policy implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1.   Regional Solutions and Municipal Amalgamation

The three most common changes to boundaries of municipal government in Canada have been annexation, the creation of multi-tier regional government, and amalgamation (Sancton, 2014). Regional government tends to be a system of two-tiered local government, wherein multiple municipalities fall under a "region" governed by a single government entity while each retains a lower-level municipal government which holds certain responsibilities. The terms annexation and amalgamation tend to be used interchangeably. The former involves a relatively large municipality absorbing another smaller municipality, while the latter term describes the process of merging multiple municipalities into a larger bounded municipality with a single-tier government (Sancton, 2014).

While amalgamations have occurred around the world, notably in other countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Demark, and Israel, Canada is somewhat unique in the fact that municipalities are "creatures of the provinces" under the Constitution (Sancton, 2014). This presents a challenge in that there is no consistent approach to amalgamations, and provincial governments may legally force municipalities to amalgamate without the consent of local government. In Newfoundland and Labrador, according to s 3.1 of the Municipalities Act, amalgamation may occur by order of the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council on the recommendation of the minister and subject to a feasibility study (Municipalities Act, 1999). Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia all experimented with a series of province-led amalgamations throughout the 1990s, a process which Sancton (2000) calls uniquely Canadian.

The modern North American iteration of municipal amalgamation, in which multiple municipalities merge to become a single municipal entity under one government, originated with

Philadelphia in 1854, and the best known North American amalgamation is that of New York City in 1898 (Sancton, 2003). Zimmerbauer and Paasi (2013) describe amalgamation as a process of de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization at the local level, and Terlouw (2013) refers to amalgamation as "one of the most dramatic and visible changes local politics has to deal with." Municipal amalgamation differs from other regional solutions in that it involves a complete consolidation of local government, while other regional solutions may involve shared responsibility for specific services such as public transit or waste management, or may involve a re-configuration to include multi-tiered governance structures. As Sancton (2003) notes, municipal amalgamations have had varying impacts and inconsistent application in Canada and the United States.

The inconsistent application of amalgamation as a regional solution for local government challenges suggests a need to examine the question of how and why the decision to amalgamate municipalities is made in a context such as the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. In recent decades, there has been significant discussion regarding urban regionalization in Canada; however, there has been less consideration for regional solutions in rural communities (Keil, Hamel, Boudreau, & Kipfer, 2016; Sancton, 2014; Sancton, 2000). Sancton (2003) refers to the trend of amalgamations that occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s as a "merger mania" and an "assault on local government," but this primarily refers to urban amalgamations imposed by provincial governments where promises of fiscal benefits have since come under scrutiny. Studies of urban amalgamations and annexations occurring in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia have tended toward analysis of the effectiveness of amalgamation as a regional solution, while focusing on provincial government-led urban municipal mergers (Keil, Hamel, Boudreau, & Kipfer, 2016; Garcea & LeSage, 2005; Sancton & Young, 2009).

An examination of the literature reveals a gap in research related to the decision-making processes for rural municipal amalgamations led by municipal governments in Canada. This thesis considers municipalities amalgamating with voluntary consent of the municipal governments. This direction is not to suggest that the study of compulsory amalgamations is not of value, nor should the existence of compulsory amalgamations be ignored in the discussion of voluntary amalgamations. In fact, a study conducted by Holms and Wikstrom (2010) found that voluntary amalgamations—commonly approved by citizens' referendum—may produce greater population growth rates and may be more sustainable, resulting in fewer de-amalgamations than compulsory municipal amalgamations. This latter point is relevant in the Canadian context, given the fact that Quebec experienced a de-amalgamation process in the decades following attempts at provincially led amalgamation of communities, and there is an ongoing discussion in Ontario regarding the potential reversal of amalgamations which occurred in the 1990s (Sancton, 2014; Miljan & Spicer, 2015). Forced urban amalgamations have been politically controversial, involving political costs for the governments that impose them. A more voluntary approach to amalgamation, where policymakers see amalgamation as a desirable outcome, may offer significant political advantages.

2.2. Institutionalisms and Local Government Studies

Lowndes (2001) has argued that the fields of local government and urban studies have largely positioned themselves in opposition to traditional institutionalism, to the detriment of those fields. Given Zimmerbauer and Paasi's (2013) framing of municipal amalgamation as the de-institutionalization of municipalities and the re-institutionalization of a new, combined municipality, institutionalism provides a uniquely relevant lens for the study of such phenomena. Specifically, the "new institutionalisms" of political science, which include historical and

discursive institutionalism, provide useful frameworks for analysing the reasons for, and challenges in, redesigning local political institutions. The subject of local government and amalgamation relates to the new institutionalist frameworks of historical and discursive institutionalism, and this thesis applies what Schmidt (2008) refers to as discursive institutionalism in the tradition of historical institutionalism. Historical institutionalism provides a framework for analysing the influence of power asymmetries, the relevance of path dependencies and critical junctures, and the integration of other factors such as ideas in the decision to alter or maintain municipal institutions (Lowndes, 2018). While historical institutionalism often relies on assumptions regarding self-interested actors pursuing strategic behaviours in relation to the incentives provided by existing institutional structures, discursive institutionalism calls on observers to ask questions about the beliefs of actors and the subjective aspects of institutions themselves in explaining political outcomes. Discursive institutionalism provides insight into the role of ideas and discourse in municipal institutional change (Schmidt, 2008). The frameworks provided by new institutionalisms are particularly applicable to the study of municipal amalgamation given the role of regions and regional identities in the related decision-making processes, as well as the fluidity of municipal borders compared to higher-level provincial or national borders.

Institutions are conceptualized as both products of human society and social forces upon society while also acting as an interdependent network in which actors influence, and are influenced by, institutions (Grafstein, 1988; North, 1990). Lowndes (2005) theorized an institutional matrix for local government, consisting of "distinct but interacting rule-sets in which forces for change and continuity coexist." New institutionalism, which considers informal conventions in addition to the formal rules and structures of traditional institutionalism, therefore

provides a valuable lens for analysing how municipal actors and institutions interact with, and influence each other, during the process of institutional change (Lowndes, 2001; March & Olsen, 1984). While Lowndes (2001, 2005) focuses on changes within municipal institutions of the United Kingdom, a unitary state and simple polity, the framework developed is also applicable to federal systems such as Canada. The concept of rule-sets that evolve at different rates and reflect power relationships, historical and spatial contexts, and the creative spaces between institutional stability and volatility helps frame what Lowndes (2005) describes as the conflicting narratives of transformation and immovability in local government.

Pierson and Skocpol (2002) suggest three features of a historical-institutionalist approach that support its application to the examination of municipal amalgamation in Newfoundland and Labrador: 1) substantive agendas, meaning that scholars in this tradition begin by asking big questions about real-world phenomena; 2) temporal arguments, meaning that the investigation is grounded in tracing historical processes, focusing both on timing and sequencing of events; and 3) attention to institutional contexts and configurations, acknowledging that variables are interdependent and that constraints such as time and place constrain the generalizability of theories developed from case analysis. A substantive agenda is inherent in the question of why communities amalgamate. Given the current context in Newfoundland and Labrador and the ongoing discourse regarding regional solutions around the world, examining how and why local governments choose to merge is both substantive and of interest to broad publics and fellow scholars. Temporal arguments are also important when discussing local government and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, given events such as the creation of local governments after 1938, Confederation with Canada in 1949, the ending of the forced resettlement program in 1975, and the beginning of the cod moratorium in 1992. Historical

arguments are relevant in the cases included for this study due to the influence of exogenous and endogenous events such as the cod moratorium and resettlement to or near the communities being analysed.

Pierson (2000) argues further that path dependence, a key element of historical institutionalism, is "a social process grounded in a dynamic of increasing returns," and describes increasing returns as "self-reinforcing or positive feedback processes." Increasing returns processes are described as: 1) dependent on the sequence of events because early events hold greater influence on outcomes than later events; 2) unpredictable because events occurring early in the process are at least partially random and have a stronger effect than events occurring late in the process; 3) inflexible because it becomes harder to change from one alternative to another as institutions proceed down a path; 4) non-ergodic meaning that the system holds a deep attachment to history and does not visit all alternatives, and; 5) potentially inefficient because the chosen path may, in the long term, generate lower pay-offs than an alternative path would have (Pierson P. , 2000; Arthur, 1994). Pierson (2000) argues that political institutions have an inherent bias toward maintaining the status quo because political actors who design the institutions are compelled to constrain themselves and their successors from altering the institutions and the institutional designers therefore "create large obstacles to institutional change."

The concepts of path dependence, increasing returns, and status-quo-bias in historical institutionalism are grounded in the assumption that political actors will resist institutional change due to the institutional arrangements and individual investments in the institution in addition to the self-reinforcing nature of institutions. This would suggest that, once a municipal institution is established, the longer it continues to exist, the more difficult it will be to change or

replace that institution. Historical institutionalism, therefore, helps to explain certain resistance to municipal amalgamation while also providing a lens to analyse the temporal contexts and sequencing leading to the current state of a municipal institution; however, this does not account for the existence of shared local and regional identities, ideas and discourse regarding community survival, and how these concepts interact with municipal institutions to produce support for, or resistance to, municipal amalgamation.

Multiple studies have analysed municipal amalgamation through a lens of historical institutionalism while acknowledging a gap in terms of addressing the interaction between local institutions and ideas and discourse regarding local identities and community. Broekema, Steen, and Wavenberg (2016) used the concepts of path dependence and increasing returns to analyse the amalgamation experience in the Netherlands and Flanders, but acknowledged the role of local identities in explaining the difference between cases in terms of incremental versus drastic change. Conteh and Panter (2017) applied the concepts of path dependence and increasing returns to analyse the adaptability of governance structures in the Niagara region in response to changing global economic pressures. While acknowledging the relative lack of research applying historical institutionalist concepts to local government, Conteh and Panter (2017) also noted that "cities, along with their economic opportunities, cultural resilience and ecological fragility, command a visceral claim on the collective consciousness and identities of individuals and communities across the world," acknowledging that path dependence and increasing returns arguments do not fully address the interaction between ideas, discourse, and local institutions.

Recognizing these gaps in the historical-institutionalist analysis of local institutions, discursive institutionalism provides a valuable lens when considering recent developments in identity discourses and how they relate to municipal institutional change (Sedlacek, Kurka, &

Maier, 2009; Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013; Paasi, 2003; Paasi, 2010). Using Schmidt's (2008) framing of discursive institutionalism, which acknowledges overlap between historical and discursive institutionalism, we can relate this approach to analysis of municipal amalgamations in four ways. First, we can focus on the ideas of, and discourse regarding, regional solutions to help understand how and why communities amalgamate. Recent studies of municipal amalgamation have foregrounded identity discourses and the social construction of regions, and a discursive approach allows for analysis of these concepts (Terlouw, 2017; Paasi, 2010; Sedlacek, Kurka, & Maier, 2009). Next, we can set those ideas and discourses in the local institutional context. This allows us to analyse how identity discourses, regions, and municipal institutions interact and influence each other. This application is particularly relevant given recent scholarship relating regions to social practices and discourses, acknowledging that regions "condition and are conditioned by politics, culture, economics, governance, and power relations" (Paasi, 2010). Finally, discursive institutionalism posits that ideas and discourse may overcome obstacles that other approaches may view as insurmountable. This final point will be important when applied in tandem with historical institutionalism, as this thesis examines how ideas and discourse impact institutional change in local communities of Newfoundland and Labrador.

2.3.   Local and Regional Identities

Given the focus of this study, and the influence of regions on the success or failure of municipal amalgamations, it is important to define concepts related to regions and regionalism. These concepts have most commonly been applied in the discipline of geography; however, concepts related to regions, regionalism, and regional identity are increasingly being applied within cognate fields, particularly in European studies and International Relations (Risse, 2011; Katzenstein, 2005; Paasi, 2009). Regions, regional identities, and regional boundaries are

acknowledged to be social and discursive constructs while representing both cognitive and emotional concepts (Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013). Tomaney (2009) outlines five types of regions: cartographic, which is a functional definition of the region based on either pre-existing regions or patterns derived from data; economic, which conceptualizes the region through the spatial divisions of labour and is used by policymakers for economic restructuring in response to inequality between geographic areas; cultural, which focuses on the cultural identity of regions and the construction of regions through cultural identity, an area of scholarship which has grown in importance during the late 20th century; political, which recognizes the region as a political arena through the devolution of certain authority to regional governance bodies; and ecological, which recognizes the natural existence of ecoregions through which the physical environment places constraints on human settlement. While the unit of analysis for this study, the municipality, foregrounds the cartographic and political categories of the region, all regional categories interact through the political decision-making process involved in municipal amalgamation. In the Newfoundland and Labrador context, the cultural, economic, and ecological concepts of the region are relevant to the influence of regional identities, as well as the influence of industries on human settlement and the influence of physical environments on chosen industries for communities.

Paasi (2010) outlines three modalities of regions as studied in geographical research: the region as a given unit of spatial framing; the region as the end product of a research process; and the region as a social and discursive construct which "conditions and is conditioned by politics, culture, economics, governance, and power relations." While the application of these concepts of the region varies within the study of geography, the region as a social and discursive construct is most applicable to the study of municipal amalgamation. This conceptualization recognizes the

region as a contested process and a territorial and relational concept involving the articulation, deconstruction, and reconstruction of multiple layers of borders by actors (Zimmerbauer, Suutari, & Saartenoja, 2012). Regional restructuring can trigger activism, either in support or opposition, based in local identities (Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013; Zimmerbauer, Suutari, & Saartenoja, 2012; Terlouw, 2018). As Zimmerbauer and Paasi (2013) discuss, resistance to amalgamation may be explained by opposition to the rationale (e.g., improved fiscal sustainability, service provision, etc.) or fears related to loss of public services or democratic autonomy, but opposition may also be mobilized through strong emotional identification with an existing, institutionalized region. This latter application of regional identities is particularly relevant in the study of municipal amalgamation as it can be instrumental in the success or failure of a newly institutionalized, amalgamated municipality.

Regionalism is a term originating in geography but is of increasing interest in cognate fields such as sociology and political science, and is used to describe the "performative discourse [which] seeks to achieve legitimacy for definitions of boundaries and to obtain approval for this definition in cultural and political, and popular and official understandings" (Tomaney, 2009a). This form of regionalism, often referred to as "new regionalism" because of its evolution since the mid-20th century, is used by actors in government, business, and civil society to promote a shared sense of place (Paasi, 2010; Terlouw, 2018). While recognized as a contentious concept within the field of human geography, Tomaney (2009a) argues the focus on political and cultural construction of regions is increasingly applied across multiple disciplines. Regionalism also foregrounds the concept of regional identity, a key concept for the study of municipal amalgamations, defined by Zimmerbauer et al. (2012) as "the regional consciousness of residents."

Local and regional identity discourses demonstrate similarities to patriotism, and are referred to as "local patriotism" by Zimmerbauer and Paasi (2013) who argue these identities can be sustained even after changes to geographic boundaries. In Newfoundland and Labrador, this is exemplified in the history of resettlement and the romanticizing of former communities through song, art, and other forms of remembrance. These factors are likely to trigger groupthink in communities, which may exacerbate resistance based in regional identity (Zimmerbauer, Suutari, & Saartenoja, 2012). Zimmerbauer et al. (2012) observe, through a case study of amalgamation of Finnish municipalities, that resistance to amalgamation can be caused by a variety of cognitive and emotional factors. In a context such as Newfoundland and Labrador, where groupthink may be a concern in the presence of local identities, this resistance identity may manifest in activism against a proposed amalgamation (Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013).

Regional identities are created by artificial boundaries and may act in synergy with, or opposition to, local cultural identities (Zimmerbauer & Paasi, 2013). Terlouw (2017) found that cultural identities—based in religion, ethnicity, language, and other group identity traits—may differ between neighbouring communities and act as a resistance identity when facing institutional change such as municipal amalgamation. In a case study of two towns located on an island in the Netherlands, Terlouw (2017) found that local cultural identities motivated resistance against government-imposed amalgamation in 2011, but suggested that local cultural identities may be displaced by a secondary "thin" regional identity based in the newly amalgamated region. Newfoundland and Labrador has experienced growth in regional cooperation that transcends municipal boundaries, and the provincial government has promoted multi-community regions as tourism and economic drivers. This may foster what Terlouw (2017) refers to as a secondary regional identity which could supplant existing local identities in cases of

amalgamation and may be cultivated by community leaders. Therefore, when de-institutionalizing existing municipalities for the institutionalization of amalgamated municipalities, advocates for amalgamation may wish to consider existing local identities and new regional identities which are being constructed in tandem with amalgamation. This may be approached by constructing identity discourses for the newly amalgamated entity through intentional association with existing regional identities (Terlouw & van Gorp, 2014).

2.4.   Rhetoric, Discourse, and Amalgamation Debates

Public policy scholars have developed multiple frameworks for the analysis of policy discourse which relate to the study of municipal amalgamation. Schmidt (2008) describes ideas as the "substantive content of discourse" which may exist at three levels—policies, programs, and philosophies—and can be categorized as cognitive or normative. Discourses are described as the "interactive processes through which ideas are conveyed" and comprise both structure (i.e., what is said, where it is said, and how it is said) and agency (i.e., who signaled and who received the signal) (Schmidt, 2008). Discourse, as it relates to policy and institutional change, is further categorized based on factors such as the type of idea, the actors involved, the purpose of the discourse, the elements of the policy frame at stake, and the type of polity in which the discourse occurs (Schmidt, 2008; Bhatia & Coleman, 2003).

Bhatia and Coleman (2003) define four ideal types of discourse: rhetorical, instrumental, challenging, and truth-seeking. The first two classifications are augmentative, meaning they support the dominant policy frame by reinforcing (rhetorical) or justifying (instrumental) the frame. Rhetorical discourse is used to reinforce and further institutionalize existing policy while instrumental discourse is used to make minor adjustments to policy through altering the settings of policy instruments (Bhatia & Coleman, 2003). Challenging and truth-seeking discourses are

transformative, according to Bhatia and Coleman (2003), in that they seek to change the dominant policy frame or inspire fundamental debate regarding the policy frame. The discourses outlined by Bhatia and Coleman (2003) may involve any of the three levels of ideas, with rhetorical and truth-seeking discourses categorized as cognitive and instrumental and challenging categorized as normative.

Schmidt (2008) further classifies discourse as coordinative or communicative, with the former occurring among policy actors at the centre of policy construction and the latter occurring between policy actors and the public. Coordinative discourse consists of individuals and groups involved in the "creation, elaboration, and justification" of policy ideas, and may comprise loosely connected individuals with shared cognitive or normative ideas, or coalitions more closely connected by ideas and access to policy making (Schmidt, 2008). The coordinative discourse process may also include policy entrepreneurs or mediators, who Schmidt (2008) describes as catalysts for change who "draw on and articulate the ideas of discursive communities and coalitions." Communicative discourse processes involve "the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of political ideas to the general public" with the aim of persuading the public to support or adopt policy ideas developed through coordinative discourse among policy actors (Schmidt, 2008). The configuration of discourses—using Bhatia and Coleman's (2003) and Schmidt's (2008) ideal types—are helpful concepts in the context of identity and activism which arise either in support of or resistance to municipal amalgamation (Drew, Razin, & Andrews, 2019; Zimmerbauer, Suutari, & Saartenoja, 2012).

In addition to the question of which ideas are conveyed, how they are conveyed, and by whom they are conveyed, the institutional context also influences the nature of the discourse and the likelihood of an idea succeeding (Schmidt, 2008; Schmidt, 2010; Schmidt, 2005). The

complexity of, and preference toward, coordinative or communicative discourses are influenced by a number of factors, including whether it involves a simple or a compound polity. Schmidt (2008) argues that simple polities, where governing activities are channeled through a single authority, tend to involve more elaborate communicative discourse where a narrow set of policy actors develop and impose policies without much consultation with the public or across epistemic or advocacy communities. Despite the authority of the executive in simple polities, a reliance upon communicative discourse may lead to challenges of legitimacy due to the tendency to leave the public outside of the policy development (Schmidt, 2010; Schmidt, 2005). Challenges of legitimacy in simple polities may be mitigated by increasing public participation in the coordinative stage of policy development, which tends to take the form a "semi-coordinative discourse within the communicative sphere" either through government-led public consultation or through the devolution of certain powers to interest groups (Schmidt, 2005).

Alternatively, governments in compound polities tend to rely more heavily upon coordinative discourse due to "the dispersion of power in multiple authorities, the wide interest in consultation, and the consensus-oriented politics" (Schmidt, 2005). This results in a thick coordinative discourse among policy actors, promoting negotiation and cooperation between advocacy and epistemic communities and decision makers, and a thin communicative discourse which tends to be led by a central government (Schmidt, 2005). Schmidt (2005, 2008) argues that challenges of legitimacy arising from an emphasis on coordinative discourse may be mitigated by: including the most relevant groups in the coordinative process; ensuring transparency by holding public meetings which are broadly promoted; and responding to, and being open to, modification in light of feedback. Leslie (2002) describes compound polities as being relatively highly institutionalized entities in which significant decisions are made at

multiple levels of central and non-central governments, and for which internal and external borders are clearly delineated. Under this definition, Canada is a compound polity, as are each of the provinces and territories, given the centralized authority of the federal and provincial governments with regionalized provincial and municipal systems, respectively.

A recent study by Drew, Razin, and Andrews (2019) examined how rhetoric is used to persuade key stakeholders during amalgamation debates by analysing proponent and opponent rhetoric in Australia, Israel, and Wales. The study suggests that proponents of amalgamation tended to be in government and hold power to force amalgamation while opponents tended to be citizens who held little power in the amalgamation debate. Opponents to amalgamation were found to be more likely to use "dreadful consequences" rhetoric, arguing that the community would be significantly worse off if amalgamation was successful, and were more likely than proponents to experience negative personal consequences in the case of amalgamation (Drew, Razin, & Andrews, 2019). While proponents also employ "dreadful consequences" rhetoric, Drew et al. (2019) found that "merely good" arguments were the most common proponent rhetoric used in favour of amalgamation. This form of rhetoric leans heavily upon arguments related to the effectiveness of amalgamation as a public policy instrument, as opposed to suggesting unlikely negative consequences if the choice is made to maintain the current local institutions (Drew, Razin, & Andrews, 2019). Drew at al. (2019) suggest that the reason for this difference in opponent and proponent rhetoric is based in the fact that amalgamation is zero-sum —either amalgamation occurs or not—and that the benefits of amalgamation are broadly experienced by residents of the community while the negative consequences are experienced by a specific sub-set of the community which holds less power than proponents.

Terlouw (2017) also applies a discursive approach when examining how resistance identities emerge in opposition to amalgamation and how regional identity discourses may succeed or fail in displacing existing spatial and cultural identity discourses during amalgamation debates. In Newfoundland and Labrador, this latter point is especially relevant given the impact of provincial government-imposed resettlement and other centralized initiatives on discourse related to local institutions in rural areas of the province. As the fear of loss of local identity has been shown to act as a dominant motivation for opposition to amalgamation, a history of government-driven displacement and perceived loss of local identity through resettlement may serve to entrench local resistance identities (Terlouw, 2017). Terlouw (2018) examined how local identity discourses were used in political debates as tools to resist external threats such as municipal amalgamations and to attract external resources through municipal amalgamation. The study of two cases of amalgamation in the Netherlands provided support for three archetypes of local identities: local resistance identity discourses, which focus on historical roots and inter-community differences to oppose amalgamation; regional identity discourses, which use alignment of similar or complementary identity discourses to encourage support for amalgamation or collaboration; and divisive local identity discourses, which support collective action such as amalgamation to protect local identities against external forces (Terlouw, 2018).

2.5. Conclusion

The preceding literature review considered scholarship on regional solutions and municipal amalgamation, new institutionalisms as they relate to the study of local government, local and regional identities, and rhetoric and discourse in the context of municipal amalgamation. While municipal amalgamation has been extensively examined in urban contexts in which the amalgamation has been a top-down, provincial government-led process, a gap exists

with regard to the study of voluntary rural amalgamations in Canada. Furthermore, while the effectiveness of municipal amalgamations has been studied in provinces such as Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, the decision-making processes related to amalgamation in Canada is understudied. While historical institutionalism provides valuable concepts related to the self-reinforcing nature and status quo bias of institutions, the theoretical lens does not fully explain resistance to, or support for, voluntary amalgamation of communities. To better understand the process of voluntary amalgamation, while examining the question of why communities voluntarily amalgamate, it is useful to consider the influence of local and regional identities and how ideas and local institutions interact through discursive processes. Drawing on the work of scholars, including Terlouw, Schmidt, Bhatia and Coleman, and Drew et al., discourses related to voluntary rural municipal amalgamation in Newfoundland and Labrador are likely to be coordinative, with challenging or truth-seeking discourses likely used in support of amalgamation, and discourses in opposition likely rhetorical or justifying. Building further on Terlouw's archetypes of identity discourses, one can expect regional identity and divisive local discourses—both supportive of amalgamation—to be presented as challenging or truth-seeking discourses while local resistance identities—used in opposition to amalgamation—may be presented as rhetorical or justifying discourses.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Hypotheses

In this study, the unit of analysis is the municipality, and attributes of municipalities – specifically the factors which lead to amalgamation – are being examined. As discussed in the previous chapter, investigation of the political process of municipal amalgamation has largely focused on European countries, with Canadian studies focusing on amalgamation of urban municipalities. This thesis aims to contribute to the scholarship on amalgamation of rural municipalities in the Canadian context. First, this chapter provides justification for the case analysis method, and discusses case selection, data collection and analysis methods, as well as addresses limitations of this methodology. Following the discussion of methodology, this chapter presents two hypotheses for this study, provides relevant definitions, and proposes a typology for considering how discourses regarding regional identity and concern for community survival influence the likelihood of voluntary amalgamation between multiple municipalities

3.1. Comparative Case Study Method

Case studies focus on the investigation of instances of specific phenomena and may involve single cases or comparison between cases (Ryan, 2018). This thesis uses a comparative case study approach in the analysis of municipal amalgamation, analysing four cases in which voluntary amalgamation was considered in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. A combination of cross-case comparisons and within-case analysis is used to analyse instances of rural municipal amalgamation. Ryan (2018) refers to this as a diagnostic case study, in which cases are selected with the intention of explaining a phenomenon with certain theories in mind. This is a small-N study, in which the cases have been selected based on the dependent variable of municipal amalgamation. Geddes (1990) warns that this form of case selection may lead to selection bias, an issue which will be addressed in the following section.

3.2. **Case Selection**

Four cases of amalgamation debate in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador will be examined:

1) the amalgamation of Fogo, Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay, Seldom-Little Seldom, Tilting and the Regional Council of Fogo Island into the Town of Fogo Island in 2011;

2) the amalgamation of Roddickton and Bide Arm into the Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm in 2009;

3) the amalgamation of Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose into the Town of Trinity Bay North in 2005, and subsequent annexation of Little Catalina by Trinity Bay North in 2010, and;

4) the debates and decisions against amalgamation in Labrador City and Wabush in 2009 and 2019.

These cases are selected based on a number of factors: the experience of amalgamation debate at the municipal level (either resulting in amalgamation or a decision against amalgamation); the amalgamation decision occurring between 2000 and 2019, in an attempt to ensure a robust sample of interviews and documents; a combined population of less than 10,000; the involvement of incorporated municipalities, an important distinction given the high number of unincorporated municipal entities in NL; and the communities being in rural areas. The cases represent a geographic diversity in the province: the Town of Fogo Island is an island off the northern coast of the island of Newfoundland; the Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm is on the eastern coast of the Northern Peninsula, in the north-western region of the province; the Town of

Trinity Bay North is on the Bonavista peninsula, in the north-eastern region of the province; and Labrador City and Wabush are in the western region of Labrador.

While studying all cases within the universe of cases of amalgamated municipalities in NL would be ideal, it is not feasible given the scope and timeline for this project and the detailed analysis required of each case study. This challenge is exacerbated by a lack of comprehensive records on amalgamations in Newfoundland and Labrador and the resulting need to compile a list of amalgamations in NL for this study.[2] Cases of amalgamation since 2000 were identified through analysis of government communications, media, and records from other related organizations such as Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL). The selection of cases for this study was approached with non-random intention, which – while common among small-N comparative research – may lead to researcher-induced selection bias. While Geddes (1990) acknowledges that including cases selected from both ends of the dependent variable (i.e., communities that amalgamated and those that did not) is "a step in the right direction," she argues that this form of case selection is still at risk of selection bias leading to mistaken inferences. To address these limitations, in addition to including the case of Labrador City and Wabush in which amalgamation was declined, a variation of Przeworski and Teune's (1970) "most different design" strategy was applied to select cases based on the following factors: geographic diversity, including ecological and spatial differences; different numbers of pre-amalgamation communities, varying from two (Wabush and Labrador City) to seven (Fogo Island) communities; and different experiences with histories of resettlement, with one case resisting resettlement in the past, one case involving a resettled community, and two cases not having been directly involved with resettlement.

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[2] The researcher pursued this information through access to information requests, as well as comprehensive searches in the Provincial Archives (The Rooms NL) and the NL House of Assembly Legislative Library.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Case studies were analysed for this study through the use of document analysis and elite interviews. These methods were chosen to ensure a comprehensive and consistent analysis across the four cases and to allow for interviews and/or documents to address information gaps and to validate claims. Document analysis for these cases includes, but is not limited to: feasibility studies conducted regarding the amalgamations in question; the Hansard for the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly; town council meeting minutes; media releases and other government communications; and internal correspondence between government officials that were available through access to information requests. Secondary sources such as academic articles and books, newspaper, television, and radio media are also included, where applicable. While survey data for the residents of the amalgamated communities would be useful in addressing the research question, pre-amalgamation survey data does not exist for these communities and a current survey of the population would likely be invalid given the amount of time that has passed.

Potential interviewees were selected based on their status as "elites," defined as those with the ability to provide information and perspectives that are critical to the understanding of each amalgamation (Johnson, Reynolds, & Mycoff, 2019). Elites for the phenomenon of amalgamation included individuals who were in the following roles at the time of amalgamation: mayors and councillors of the pre-amalgamation communities and the amalgamated communities; Newfoundland and Labrador Ministers of Municipal Affairs; Members of the House of Assembly for the districts in which amalgamation occurred; leaders of municipal associations, such as Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador; provincial government staff

who were engaged with negotiations between communities; and town administrators for the pre-amalgamation and post-amalgamation communities. Elites with special knowledge of the events due to their roles since the amalgamation, such as current mayors or councillors, are also included. While in the cases of Drew, Razin, and Andrews (2019) and Terlouw (2017), the local governments held the balance of power in amalgamation, the provincial government holds legislative power over amalgamation in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is an important distinction, as the provincial government has actively incentivized regional solutions such as amalgamation in recent years and has the legislative power to unilaterally amalgamate municipalities. This fact influenced the selection of interview participants, motivating the inclusion of provincial government officials who were involved with the selected cases.

Issues of validity and reliability are exacerbated by open-ended questioning in elite interviews; however, given the nature of this study, open-ended questioning is valuable (Berry, 2002). Specifically, open-ended interview design is necessary to ensure that all pertinent elements of the amalgamation cases are considered. This, however, leads to challenges in ensuring the intended concept is measured (validity) and that the results of the interviews are consistent (reliability). To address the validity and reliability concerns of elite interviewing, suggestions made by Berry (2002) were followed as closely as possible. To address validity and reliability concerns related to choices made by the researcher during interviews, a standard set of questions was used for semi-structured interviewing, and probe notes were integrated to supplement core questions when information was not voluntarily offered by interviewees. The interviews included questions regarding: the impetus for the amalgamation conversations to begin; the situation and context of the pre-amalgamation municipalities at the time of amalgamation debates; the political processes involved in decisions related to the

amalgamations; the decision-making processes – both individual and institutional – throughout the amalgamation debates; the challenges facing the pre-amalgamation communities; and the sense of community identity for elites and residents of the communities, and the influence this sense of identity may have had on the process.

Given the amount of time that has passed since amalgamation in the cases under examination, and the relatively low number of individuals being interviewed (n=8), corroboration is necessary to ensure validity of what is collected from interviewees.[3] This corroboration has been pursued through multiple means. First, the interviews were recorded and permission for follow-up was acquired where possible. This allowed the researcher to verify information provided by participants with that provided by others with knowledge of the events. Next, in pursuing document analysis for the events, information gathered from interviews was validated against recorded accounts and vice versa.

As outlined, data was collected through the use of both primary and secondary sources, with a particular focus on feasibility studies, internal communications between government officials, and town council minutes, where available.[4] Documents were acquired through a variety of means, including: Access to Information requests, NL House of Assembly Legislative Library, Municipalities NL, town offices, and internet archives. Document acquisition was limited by inconsistent record-keeping across municipalities; however, information was supplemented with additional documentation and interviews. Process tracing was conducted for within-case analysis to analyse causal mechanisms and to understand the sociohistorical context

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[3] All interviews were conducted between September – December 2020, and there was at least one interviewee directly involved with each case.

[4] Internal government communication was acquired through Access to Information requests, resulting in a variation in type and quantity of available documentation between cases. Town council minutes are held by municipalities, and record-keeping varies significantly between municipalities. This led to inconsistent acquisition of documents.

for each case. Mill's joint method of agreement and difference was applied for cross-case analysis, first identifying common factors across cases where amalgamation occurred and next evaluating whether those factors were absent in the case where amalgamation did not occur.

3.4.   Hypotheses

The two hypotheses being tested are:

1) Amalgamation is chosen voluntarily when residents and political leaders believe they are facing urgent challenges that are insurmountable as a single community;

2) Resistance to amalgamation is identity-driven, and may be overcome by discourses related to regional identity and community survival.

Based on the history of resettlement in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the associated resentment from those who were resettled, the experience of resettlement among residents in the community may act as an antecedent variable in the relationship between community identity and resistance to amalgamation. This is significant because, as Terlouw (2017) argues, the community identity may be supplanted by an existing or new regional identity. The existence of resettlement resentment among residents and/or decision makers may further entrench community identity and lead to greater resistance to amalgamation.

3.5.   Definitions

This study adopts the definition of amalgamation provided by Zimmerbauer et al. (2012): the de-institutionalization of one set of communities and the institutionalization of a single, amalgamated community. For the three cases in which amalgamation proceeded, the pre-amalgamation municipalities were de-institutionalized and combined as new, amalgamated communities under provincial legislation. To measure the independent variables – attitudes toward community challenges and community identity – a multi-method approach is taken through document analysis supplemented by elite interviews, as outlined above.

The concepts of community challenges and community identity must be clearly defined and operationalized, particularly due to the amount of time that has passed since the events in question and the methods being pursued. For this study, community challenges are defined as social and economic issues experienced by residents and/or local government of the pre-amalgamation communities and which are viewed as either under the jurisdiction of, or influenced by, local government. The latter part of this definition is crucial, as it relates to public perceptions of the roles of local governments of pre-amalgamation municipalities.

The concept of community identity is based on the definitions of regional identity applied by Zimmerbauer et al. (2013), simply stated as the community consciousness of individuals stemming from "spatial socialization [and having] both cognitive and emotional aspects." This definition of the regional identity concept is useful as it allows for examination of both the pre-amalgamation community identities and the new regional identities which may emerge with amalgamation. As regional identities are expected to evolve to match the new boundaries of a region after amalgamation, pre-amalgamation regional identities will be analysed through discourse analysis (Terlouw, 2017). This study also adopts the definition of resistance identity as framed by Zimmerbauer et al. (2013): "forces opposed to the dominance practiced by the central authorities and regional administration," as a foundation for the concept of resistance to amalgamation in this study.

3.6.   Typology

This thesis proposes that discourses regarding regional identity and concern for community survival influence the likelihood of voluntary amalgamation occurring between multiple municipalities. Specifically, as represented in Table 1, it is argued that cases in which there is 1) a strong regional identity, and 2) a high level of shared concern for community survival, will

experience strong support for voluntary amalgamation when it is proposed as a solution. It is further posited that cases in which there is: 1) a high level of concern for community survival but weak or non-existent regional identity will likely experience a desire for a solution but local resistance identities will pose a barrier to amalgamation; 2) a strong regional identity but a low level of concern for community survival will likely experience some support for amalgamation but will lack urgency for a regional solution; and 3) a weak regional identity and low level of concern for community survival will hold a low likelihood of voluntary amalgamation due to local resistance identities and a lack of urgency. As discussed by Terlouw (2018), local resistance identities emerge in opposition to amalgamation and regional identity discourses may be used to overcome or displace local resistance identities. A shared concern for community survival may overcome the self-reinforcing or positive reinforcing processes which are described by Pierson (2000) as leading to a status quo bias in institutions. Discourses regarding community survival may counter those which seek to maintain the status quo while also overcoming the "dreadful consequences" rhetoric used by opponents to amalgamation as described by Drew, Razin, and Andrews (2019).

Table 1. *Factors Affecting Community Support for Amalgamation*

Shared Concern for Community Survival

		High	Low
Existing Regional Identity	Strong	Strong support for amalgamation	Support for amalgamation may exist; urgency is lacking
	Weak or non-existent	A solution is desired, but local identities may resist amalgamation	Voluntary amalgamation unlikely due to lack of urgency and local resistance identities

As outlined in Chapter 2, Tomaney (2009) defines five types of regions – cartographic, economic, cultural, political, and ecological – and Paasi (2010) defines a region as a social and discursive construct which "conditions and is conditioned by politics, culture, economics, governance, and power relations." This aligns with the discursive institutionalist perspective that ideas and discourses both influence, and are influenced by, institutions (Lowndes, 2001; Schmidt, 2005). The social and discursive construct of a region may, therefore, influence regional identities based on cartographic, economic, cultural, political, or ecological dimensions which interact with each other and the region, and with municipal institutions in that region. Regional identity discourses may overcome or displace local resistance identities which may be used to support collective action against external threats, such as amalgamation, while also supporting the viability of municipal amalgamation within the region. A strong regional identity may not only help to overcome resistance to amalgamation but may motivate support for

amalgamation to more formally institutionalize the region. If regional identity discourses are weak or non-existent, local resistance identities may motivate opposition to amalgamation and pose challenges to political elites who are proposing a regional solution. Strong local resistance identities, in the absence of regional identity, will increase the likelihood of "dreadful consequences" rhetoric arguing that the community will be worse off if amalgamation is successful (Drew, Razin, and Andrews, 2019).

Concern for community survival may overcome status quo bias as well as "dreadful consequences" rhetoric by increasing community support for a regional solution. In the Newfoundland and Labrador municipal context, concern for community survival may arise from economic or demographic shocks or crises leading to uncertainty regarding the future of the existing municipality. As described by Pierson (2000), increasing returns processes are unpredictable, inflexible, attached to history, potentially inefficient, and dependent upon the sequence of events. Increasing returns processes therefore influence actors to design political institutions with an inherent bias toward maintaining the status quo (Pierson, 2000). While conventional wisdom within historical institutionalism suggests an exogenous shock is needed to overcome increasing returns processes, discursive institutionalism provides a deeper understanding of how ideas and discourses regarding municipal institutions may overcome related increasing returns processes. Therefore, ideas and discourses regarding community survival may overcome or displace status quo biases during consideration of municipal amalgamation, leading to a greater sense of urgency for a regional solution. Strong concern for community survival may also displace or overcome local resistance identities, while ideas and discourses related to community survival may overcome "dreadful consequences" rhetoric used in opposition to amalgamation.

Community survival and regional identity discourses are aligned with the challenging and truth-seeking discourses, respectively, as defined by Bhatia & Coleman (2003). Challenging discourses are transformative and normative, as they seek to change the dominant policy frame through altering beliefs and norms within the institution. Discourses regarding concern for community survival may, therefore, act as challenging discourses to motivate political actors to consider amalgamation as a viable – or even necessary – solution. Truth-seeking discourses are also transformative, but they act on the cognitive dimension, which may influence the social and discursive construction of regions and regional identity. Given the bottom-up decision-making process for voluntary municipal amalgamation, in which municipal councils approach each other and then the provincial government to activate amalgamation discussions, community survival and regional identity discourses in this context are likely to exist as coordinative discourses, described by Schmidt (2008) as involving the "creation, elaboration, and justification" of policy ideas, and promoting negotiation and cooperation between advocacy, epistemic communities, and decision makers.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

The following sections provide analyses for each of the four cases of amalgamation deliberation considered in this study. Each case analysis begins with a brief history of the communities, followed by a description of the decision-making process(es) regarding amalgamation, and a discussion of how identity discourses and concern for community survival affected the case. The three cases in which amalgamation occurred are presented first, in alphabetical order, followed by the case of Labrador City and Wabush where amalgamation was considered and declined twice.

4.1. Fogo Island

The case of amalgamation for the communities on Fogo Island offers an interesting example in which all three of Terlouw's identity discourse archetypes – regional, local resistance, and divisive local – are present, and the concern for community survival was strong enough to overcome any challenges to amalgamation.[5] When amalgamation discussions officially began in 2008, Fogo Island had four incorporated communities, and a regional council which provided local government for three local service districts as well as the unincorporated areas of Fogo Island. Among the cases examined throughout this study, Fogo Island offers a unique example: a mixture of incorporated and unincorporated communities; seven communities, the highest number of communities in a single amalgamation discussed in this study; a regional council governing multiple entities under consideration for amalgamation; and the island location, providing a natural region for the communities of Fogo Island.

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[5] Local resistance identity discourses act in opposition to amalgamation by focusing on historical roots and inter-community differences. Regional identity discourses and divisive local identity discourses may support amalgamation, with the former using similar or complementary identity discourses to encourage collaboration, and the latter supporting collective action to protect local identities against forces external to the communities.

4.1.1. History of Fogo Island

Fogo Island is the largest of Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore islands, and is located in Notre Dame Bay, off the northeast coast of the island of Newfoundland. The island of Fogo was first used by Beothuk as a summer settlement, and Spanish, French, and Portuguese settlers arrived in the sixteenth century, with the island of Fogo appearing on a Portuguese map as early as 1529 (Smallwood & Pitt, 1981). The earliest permanent European settlements on Fogo Island were the communities of Fogo and Tilting, each settled in 1729, with the communities of Joe Batt's Arm and Barr'd Islands appearing on fishing censuses in 1773 and 1778, respectively (Shorefast, 2018). Between the late-18th and mid-20th centuries, the population of Fogo Island continued to increase as the inshore fishery in the area prospered due to the locational advantages (Smallwood & Pitt, 1981). The settlement patterns on Fogo Island were influenced by advantages for fishing operations and groupings of religious denominations, and the resulting communities are therefore coastal and dispersed across the island (DeWitt, 1969). Prior to amalgamation and the incorporation of the Town of Fogo Island, the island had four incorporated communities: Fogo, Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay, Seldom-Little Seldom, and Tilting, which were incorporated in 1948, 1972, 1972, and 1975, respectively (Smallwood & Pitt, 1981). The island was also home to three local service districts: Stag Harbour, Island Harbour, and Deep Bay. DeWitt (1969) observed the lack of municipal organization on Fogo Island in the 1960s, arguing that the Town of Fogo (the only incorporated community on Fogo Island at the time) was incorporated due to influence by outsiders, in spite of local opposition, while efforts to incorporate other communities on the island were unsuccessful until the 1970s, due to fears concerning taxation and leadership.

During the 1960s, the provincial government considered resettlement for residents of Fogo Island due to the closure of multiple significant businesses and increased competition from neighbouring communities, such as Twillingate and Lewisporte (Smallwood & Pitt, 1981). At that time, some residents of Fogo Island had personal experience with resettlement due to resettlement to, and relocation within, the island. In 1959, 16 families were resettled to Stag Harbour from the nearby community on Indian Islands, while 41 families relocated internally from the communities of Cape Cove, Wild Cove, and Lion's Cove to larger communities on Fogo Island (DeWitt, 1969). In the mid-1960s, some residents advocated for taking advantage of the government resettlement program because of the poor state of the economy. At the time, most of the island's merchants had shut down operations and approximately 60% of the residents of Fogo Island were receiving welfare (Loo, 2020). Residents of Fogo Island acted collectively to overcome the challenges faced by the communities on the island, ultimately resisting resettlement by the end of the 1960s. The threat of resettlement motivated the establishment of the Fogo Island Improvement Committee which helped create the Fogo Island Shipbuilding and Producers Co-operative Society in 1967, resulting in the acquisition of multiple fish plants and a shipyard during the 1970s.

Attitudes toward resettlement from Fogo Island during this period were influenced by multiple actors and groups, including clergy, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the National Film Board of Canada. DeWitt (1969) found that clergy held strong influence over attitudes toward community action and that religious denominations were originally divided on the issue of resettlement: the Anglican Minister was in favour of resettlement and even encouraged high school students in Joe Batt's Arm to leave the island after graduation; the Catholic priest was in favour of economic development on Fogo Island and opposed

resettlement, a position that set him at odds with many parishioners; and the United and Pentecostal churches attempted to maintain neutrality while acting as conduits for information on the issue. Religious divisions also caused competition between communities on Fogo Island, which held different denominations, in most cases (DeWitt, 1969). In 1967, a film crew, in collaboration with Memorial University Extension Services and the National Film Board of Canada, captured 27 films featuring residents of Fogo Island discussing life on the island. These films were intended to enhance community identity and inspire collective action in the face of mounting challenges for Fogo Island (Loo, 2020). The documentaries and the resulting conversations among residents and politicians who viewed the film – which have come to be known as the "Fogo Process" – are credited with building a sense of community on Fogo Island toward resisting resettlement (Loo, 2020; DeWitt, 1969). The success of the Fogo Island Shipbuilding and Producers Co-operative Society also contributed to the communities remaining on Fogo Island and, by 1981, the combined population on Fogo Island had increased to 4,056 (Smallwood & Pitt, 1981).

By the 1980s, the economy on Fogo Island continued to rely almost solely on the fishery, with 75% of its workforce employed either fishing or by the Fogo Island Shipbuilding and Producers Co-operative Society. Following the cod moratorium of 1992, the communities on Fogo Island experienced demographic and economic decline with the school-aged population declining by 72%, from 1,008 students in 1989 to 284 students in 2008 (Whey Consulting, 2009). The population of Fogo Island had declined from 4,056 in 1981 to 2,395 in 2011, comprising 658 residents in the town of Fogo, 685 residents in the town of Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay, 427 residents in the town of Seldom-Little Seldom, 204 residents in the town of Tilting, and 421 residents in the unincorporated areas of the Fogo Island Region

(Smallwood & Pitt, 1981; Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Labrador Statistics Agency, 2011).

In 1996, the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly passed the *Fogo Island Region Order* to establish the Fogo Island Region, encompassing all incorporated municipalities, local service districts, and other settlements on the island of Fogo Island (Government of Newfoundland & Labrador, 1996). By that time, through relocation of residents and amalgamation of communities, the number of communities on Fogo Island had decreased to seven: four incorporated municipalities in Joe Batt's Arm-Barr's Island-Shoal Bay, Fogo, Seldom-Little Seldom, and Tilting; and three local service districts in Stag Harbour, Island Harbour, and Deep Bay. In accordance with the *Fogo Island Region Order* (1996), the Fogo Island Regional Council was established to: assume the powers and responsibilities of a municipal council for the unincorporated areas of the region; construct and operate regional solid waste disposal sites; provide animal control services to the area; provide auxiliary fire protection services; construct and operate regional recreation facilities; provide certain area planning activities for unincorporated areas, and; provide other technical and administrative services, as specified in the *Fogo Island Region Order,* to municipalities. The Fogo Island Regional Council held nine seats, with representation from the towns of Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay, Fogo, Seldom-Little Seldom, and Tilting, as well as the local service districts of Stag Harbour, Island Harbour, and Deep Bay. The representatives from the incorporated municipalities were appointed from the elected town councils, while the representatives from the unincorporated areas were elected as ward representatives.

4.1.2. Amalgamation Discussions

In 2008, the town councils of the four incorporated municipalities on Fogo Island and the Fogo Island Regional Council officially began discussions regarding amalgamation. In May 2009, the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly appointed a consultant to prepare a feasibility study on the establishment of one municipal council for Fogo Island. The feasibility report was released in November 2009, and recommended the amalgamation of incorporated municipalities and the remaining areas in the Fogo Island Regional Council under a single municipal government. Negotiations were conducted over the following 12 months, and a memorandum of understanding was signed by all five councils on December 10, 2010, announcing plans to amalgamate as well as provincial government funding of $4.8 million in support of amalgamation to write down combined outstanding debt (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2010). In February 2011, the first council for the Town of Fogo Island was elected, and the town was officially incorporated on March 1, 2011 (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2011).

4.1.3. Regional Identity

The case of Fogo Island exhibits shared regional, local resistance, and divisive local identity discourses while also presenting a context in which competition and conflict between the involved communities were relatively high compared to the other cases in this study. Fogo Island is clearly an ecological region, given that all communities in discussion have the shared ecology of the island. The island has also existed as an economic region for multiple centuries as the communities on Fogo Island were almost exclusively supported by the fishing industry until the end of the 20th century. Fogo Island also represents a cartographic and political region, particularly since the establishment of the Fogo Island Regional Council in 1996. Finally, Fogo

Island encompasses a cultural region as there has long existed a shared culture on the island, bolstered by isolation, and the fact that it can still only be accessed by air or sea. Regional identity, grounded in the aforementioned categories of regions, is exhibited through discourse regarding amalgamation, regional governance, and regional cooperation dating back to the 1960s and the "Fogo Process". Local resistance identities were present in some communities which were hesitant during the amalgamation process, and there is a history of divisive local identity discourses conveyed against external threats exemplified by the resistance to resettlement in the 1960s.

Unlike the three other cases of amalgamation discussed in this study, the communities of Fogo Island existed under an institutionalized regional government arrangement prior to amalgamation discussions beginning. From 1996, when the *Fogo Island Region Order* was passed in the House of Assembly, four incorporated communities and three unincorporated communities shared the political arena of the Fogo Island Regional Council. While conventional wisdom would suggest that the existence of a formal regional institution would strengthen regional identities and enable regional cooperation, this was not always the case for the communities of Fogo Island. A senior bureaucrat described the regional council as dysfunctional, stating: "it had administrative problems, it had financial difficulties […] it wasn't a cohesive council […] it was a lot of upheaval" (Confidential interview, 2020). A senior official with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador also described tensions between the pre-amalgamation communities, referencing a 1999 conflict regarding the proposed placement of a regional hospital and saying there was "very, very bad blood" between the communities on the island (Confidential interview, 2020). At the time, there were disputes between multiple communities on Fogo Island regarding where the regional hospital would be placed, with

residents of the Town of Fogo calling for the hospital to be located in their town, while other communities were advocating for a more neutral location on the island (CBC News, 1999). A resident of Fogo Island described the tension between communities, saying "This is never going to die. Because the hatred is brought out so much now. I never thought that I would see such hatred on Fogo Island. It'll never be better. It doesn't matter where it goes" (CBC News, 1999). The consultant for the feasibility study found a "prevalence of competition and distrust [that] demonstrated the perception that any sort of amalgamation would be a disservice to the communities on the island, and result in reduced quality of services and community identity" (Whey Consulting, 2009). This observation suggests opposition to amalgamation aligned with the "dreadful consequences" rhetoric described by Drew et al. (2019). Despite these tensions between communities, regional identity discourses were historically exhibited on Fogo Island from the development of the local improvement committee, and the resulting co-operative society, to the regional council, and through more informal processes and discourses. These regional identity discourses appear to be less prevalent than the regional identity discourses in other cases examined in this study.

The competition and distrust between communities, as referenced in the feasibility study report, demonstrates, in part, local resistance identities as local residents expressed concerns that amalgamation would weaken or destroy existing community identities. In the summer of 2010, a protest group in Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay submitted a petition, signed by over 400 residents, opposing amalgamation and calling on the town council to hold a plebiscite on the question of amalgamation with the other communities on Fogo Island (ATIPP, 2020a: 100). This petition, and the related discussion, demonstrate local resistance identity discourses in Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay. It is of note that the petition garnered over 400 signatures in a

community with a population of 685 residents, suggesting strong local resistance identities approximately two years into the amalgamation discussions.[6] In response to this resistance, the town council of Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay distributed information on the proposed amalgamation and met with residents in an attempt to address concerns (ATIPP, 2020a: 100). According to documents obtained through ATIPP, the provincial government and communities involved in negotiations considered excluding Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay from the amalgamation unless the resistance was sufficiently addressed (ATIPP, 2020a). These challenges were overcome in time for Joe Batt's Arm-Barr-d Islands-Shoal Bay to be included in the amalgamation.

Divisive local identity discourses, defined by Terlouw (2018) as discourses used to support collective action, such as amalgamation, to protect local identities against external threats, were also present on Fogo Island prior to, and during, the 2008-2010 amalgamation discussions. In the late-1960s, divisive local identity discourses were used to build opposition to resettlement from the island and gain support for economic development. These divisive local identity discourses were exhibited by clergy and other local leaders as well as the Fogo Island local improvement committee, and are prevalent in the films created by the National Film Board on Fogo Island during that period (Loo, 2020; DeWitt, 1969). Loo (2020) suggested that the National Film Board documentaries intentionally focused on these divisive local identity discourses that were in opposition to resettlement and in support of collective action. Forty years after divisive local identity discourses opposed resettlement from Fogo Island, similar identity discourses were used to encourage regional cooperation. A former senior bureaucrat with the provincial government suggested divisive local identity discourses supported the idea that an

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[6] It is unclear from available documentation whether the petition was signed only by residents of Joe Batt's Arm-Barr'd Islands-Shoal Bay or if residents of other communities were permitted to sign the petition.

amalgamated entity could be more effective than multiple smaller entities, saying "They came to the realization that Fogo Island as a united body could be far more successful than if they were all out here trying to do it on their own" (Confidential Interview, 2020). The emergence of the Shorefast, a registered charity and suite of social enterprises founded by Fogo-native Zita Cobb in 2006, also presented an external threat which increased divisive local identity discourses. A senior official with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador referred to Shorefast as "the elephant in the room," explaining that "somebody investing that much money, having that kind of impact on your local services, your local resources, the local economy […] that was an unwritten playbook, it didn't exist" (Confidential Interview, 2020). While Shorefast, the organization which founded the Fogo Island Inn, among other enterprises which provided local social and economic benefits, does not present as an "external threat" as described by Terlouw. Instead, it acted as a motivating factor in the unified decision-making among the communities of Fogo Island.

4.1.4. Shared Concern for Community Survival

In addition to identity discourses, discourses related to concern for community survival were present throughout the amalgamation discussions for the communities of Fogo Island. It is evident that concern for community survival overcame local resistance identity discourses to support amalgamation of the communities. Concern for community survival is exhibited in the feasibility study and related submissions by, and surveys of, residents; elite interviews conducted for this study; and review of other related documents. The feasibility study for the amalgamation of communities on Fogo Island underscored this discourse, stating "above all, the feedback received during the study process indicated that there was significant concern for the future of Fogo Island by the people who call this island home" (Whey Consulting, 2009).

Despite the existence of local resistance identity discourses and competition between communities on Fogo Island, concern for community survival was clear throughout the 2008-2010 amalgamation discussions. All communities on the island were facing demographic, economic, and fiscal challenges, perhaps most clearly represented by the 74% decrease in school-aged children between 1989 and 2008 (Whey Consulting, 2009). A former senior bureaucrat with the provincial government, referencing a review of the financial position of the regional council at the beginning of amalgamation discussions, stated "at the end of the day, it was like 'well, this isn't working' [and] from there, we got into the [prospective] amalgamation of the communities" (Confidential interview, 2020). A survey of high school students on Fogo Island during the feasibility study showed there was strong concern for community survival among school-aged children. In the survey of 62 high school students, 97% of the respondents indicated they would leave the island for post-secondary education, with 24% stating they would not return after completion of their studies, and 58% indicating that they were unsure whether they would return to the island (Whey Consulting, 2009). The feasibility study noted four reasons respondents indicated they would not return to the island:

- Limited employment opportunities (80% of respondents);

- Limited services (44% of respondents);

- Uncertainty of future viability of the Island (44% of respondents);

- Lack of social facilities/programs (43% of respondents);

While the survey population was relatively small, it indicates that concern for community survival was high among high school students at the time, suggesting a discourse of concern for community survival in which the youngest members of the population were preparing to leave the island and not return.

4.1.5. Conclusion

The case of amalgamation on Fogo Island offers a valuable example in which there were formalized regional entities and related regional identities, however, local resistance identity discourses were also present among community residents. It appears that local resistance identity discourses were offset by divisive local identity discourses which advocated for the communities to build a unified voice. The communities of Fogo Island already had a history with these types of identity discourses dating back to the threat of resettlement in the 1960s. Ultimately, it appears that the challenges posed by local resistance identities were overcome by the concern for community survival for Fogo Island, as amalgamation was viewed as a necessary path forward. Notably, Fogo Island is perceived as an economic and political success study, having transitioned from an island at risk of resettlement to an example of rural recovery.

4.2. Roddickton-Bide Arm

The amalgamation of Roddickton and Bide Arm provides an example of voluntary amalgamation in which there was a high level of concern for community survival as well as a strong regional identity bolstered by shared community resources, geographic proximity and shared cultural identities. Roddickton-Bide Arm also offers an interesting case in which there were two official discussions of amalgamation, and a third municipality – Englee – was involved in initial amalgamation discussions but did not merge with Roddickton and Bide Arm when amalgamation occurred and has remained a standalone municipality. Through document analysis and elite interviews, it is clear that Roddickton and Bide Arm saw amalgamation as a solution to insurmountable challenges faced by the communities, and held a shared regional identity which overcame local resistance identities, as well as experienced divisive local identity discourses in response to external threats.

4.2.1. History of Roddickton and Bide Arm

Roddickton-Bide Arm is located on Route 433 of the Trans-Canada Highway, on the eastern coast of the Northern peninsula in the Northwest region of Newfoundland and Labrador. Roddickton, originally referred to by European settlers as Easter Brook, began to receive a settler population in 1904 when the Grenfell Mission hired workers to build a schooner in the area (Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm, 2021a). This work led to the establishment of a sawmill operation and the renaming of the community to Roddickton in the same year. The first sawmill operation closed in 1922, with only eight people residing in Roddickton at that time; however, the sawmill was re-opened in 1926 and, by 1945, the population of Roddickton increased to 548 (Smallwood & Pitt, 1981). As the lumber industry in Roddickton continued to grow, the municipality of Roddickton was incorporated in 1953, and the population increased to 1,185 by 1961 (Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm, 2021a). Throughout the 1970s, the lumber industry began to decline, resulting in out-migration from the area. Though a crab processing plant was built in the community in the 1980s, the town continued to experience economic and demographic decline through the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s.

The community of Bide Arm, a fishing community sharing a boundary with Roddickton, was founded in 1969 when 186 of the 215 residents of Hooping Harbour resettled to the area under the community consolidation programme (Smallwood & Pitt, 1981). The history of the resettlement from Hooping Harbour to Bide Arm provides an interesting case of resettlement in Newfoundland and Labrador, and demonstrates how discourses regarding regional identities and community survival affect the political decision-making process regarding local institutions. Hooping Harbour was located approximately 16 km south of Englee on the eastern coast of the Northern Peninsula and was a fishing community until it was resettled. During the late 1960s,

when the provincial government promoted resettlement through the Fisheries Household

Resettlement Plan, Booth Reid, a local pastor and businessperson, led a group advocating for

Hooping Harbour to become a reception centre for residents coming from other resettled

communities (Withers, 2020). As described by Withers (2020), Reid and the advocacy group

lobbied for provincial government-funded improvements such as generators, local road

improvements, and a community stage with the goal of convincing the resettlement committee to

select Hooping Harbour as a reception centre; however, after the Department of Highways

refused to build a road connecting Hooping Harbour to the Roddickton highway, and the

Canadian National Telegraph refused to improve telecommunications access for the community,

Reid and his advocacy group convinced residents of Hooping Harbour to voluntarily re-locate to

the area now known as Bide Arm. The local resettlement committee, chaired by Booth Reid,

constructed a barge, hired boats to transport houses and facilities, and built the community with

water and sewer services, a church and a school in 1969 (Withers, 2020). A fish processing plant

was built in the new community in the same year. The town of Bide Arm was incorporated in

1970, and the population grew to 305 residents by 1976. From incorporation until the cod

moratorium of 1992, the economy of Bide Arm was centred on the inshore cod fishery, the fish

plant, and a shipyard which constructed long liners. Prior to amalgamation, the towns of

Roddickton and Bide Arm shared a municipal boundary, and the two towns, as well as the

neighbouring town of Englee, were members of the Great Northern Peninsula Joint Council

which, by 2008, had a membership of 17 towns and local service districts.

In the late 1980s, the Town of Roddickton experienced fires that temporarily shut down

operations in the crab plant and the sawmill, with the sawmill reopening at limited capacity in

1992, but the crab plant remaining closed (Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm, 2021a). In the early

1990s, with the advent of the cod moratorium, a gradual decline in the forestry industry, and challenges in terms of maintaining industry in the towns, the region experienced increasing social and economic challenges, including declining population. Between 1991 and 2006, the population of Bide Arm decreased from 325 to 192, and the population of Roddickton decreased from 1,153 to 911 (Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2006; Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2002). The neighbouring town of Englee also experienced significant population decline over the same period, decreasing from 984 to 618 between 1991 and 2006 (ibid.).

4.2.2. Amalgamation Discussions

Discussion of amalgamation officially began for Roddickton and Bide Arm in October 1994, when the mayors of Roddickton, Bide Arm, and Englee met with the Minister of Municipal Affairs to discuss the prospect of merging the three municipalities (Clarke, 1995). The Town of Englee, incorporated in 1948, is located 19 kilometres southeast of Roddickton and 10 kilometres southeast of Bide Arm, and had a population of 527 as of the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2017). A feasibility study on the amalgamation of the three towns was requested by the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly in November 1994, and the report on the feasibility study was released in April 1995, recommending amalgamation of the towns of Roddickton, Bide Arm, and Englee (Clarke, 1995). Despite the recommendation for amalgamation, the three town councils decided not to proceed at that time.

Amalgamation discussions were renewed in 2004 between the towns of Roddickton and Bide Arm, while Englee did not participate. In 2005, the town councils of Roddickton and Bide Arm wrote to the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs to request consideration of amalgamation between the two towns, and it was determined that the 1995 feasibility study

could be used to fulfil the obligations under the Municipalities Act (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2009). Following negotiations between the towns and the provincial government, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the towns of Roddickton and Bide Arm on September 2, 2008 (ibid.). The amalgamation process began on September 30, 2008, and the town of Roddickton-Bide Arm was officially incorporated on January 1, 2009. The first council for the town of Roddickton-Bide Arm was elected on December 9, 2008 and was sworn in on January 19, 2009. The populations of Roddickton and Bide Arm as of the 2006 census were 911 and 192, respectively, and the population of the town of Roddickton-Bide Arm was 999 as of the 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2017; Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2006).

4.2.3. Regional Identity

The case of amalgamation between Roddickton and Bide Arm, as well as the initial discussions which included Englee, demonstrate Terlouw's (2018) three archetypes of the use of local identities in institutional change: shared regional identities, local resistance identities, and divisive local identity discourses. The regional identity discourses are grounded in the economic, cultural, and ecological region, as well as the political region due to the provincial district of St. Barbe – Lanse Aux Meadows encompassing all three communities, and the existence of the Great Northern Peninsula Joint Council as a regional institution. This regional identity is exhibited through discourses regarding amalgamation and regional cooperation, as well as shared resources prior to amalgamation. Local resistance identity discourses also appear throughout the amalgamation discussions, and interview participants noted that local resistance identities still exist within the community despite Roddickton-Bide Arm being an amalgamated entity since 2009. In addition to regional identity discourses and local resistance identity discourses, the

history of Bide Arm, and its resettlement from Hooping Harbour, presents an interesting case of Terlouw's (2018) divisive local identity discourses which support collective action – such as voluntary resettlement or amalgamation – against external threats. Divisive local identity discourses were also present during amalgamation discussions to unite the towns against the external threat of change imposed by the provincial government.

During consultations for the 1995 Commissioner's Report on the Amalgamation of Roddickton, Englee, and Bide Arm, Mayor Travis Gillard, mayor of Roddickton at the time, emphasized the cartographic nature of the region, describing "pull" factors that supported the option of amalgamation and argued that amalgamation of the communities would be successful (Clarke, 1995). Examples provided by Mayor Gillard, as recounted in the Commissioner's Report (1995), included the close proximity of the towns, their shared boundaries, and the existing relationships and shared resources in the communities, including a regional incinerator and regional approach to paving roads. Mayor Wayne Fillier, mayor of Englee at the time, emphasized the "shared values" held by the three communities, arguing that amalgamation would give the area a "stronger voice when lobbying [higher levels of government]" and would provide "alignment with new regional economic zones" (Clarke, 1995). The Commissioner's Report (1995) notes that Mayor Reid of Bide Arm also emphasized regional identity when voicing support for amalgamation, referencing existing regional cooperation and agreements, as well as the potential benefit of speaking as "one voice." This emphasis on unity demonstrates divisive local identity discourses in support of collective action to mitigate an external threat.

Regional identity discourses continued when amalgamation discussions were revived in 2005-2009, with references to regional cooperation and services, shared boundaries, and shared institutions, such as schools. In an interview with CBC in 2007, the mayors of Roddickton, Bide

Arm, and Englee acknowledged the growing cooperation between the three towns, reinforcing the argument that amalgamation would provide a stronger voice when dealing with higher-level governments and corporate entities (CBC, 2007). A senior official with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador reinforced this sentiment, stating "[there has been] a slow shift towards a sense that they are a region as opposed to just a collection of communities" (Confidential Interview, 2020). These arguments in support of amalgamation represent regional identity discourses, described by Terlouw (2018) as the alignment of similar or complimentary identity discourses to encourage cooperation.

The argument that an amalgamated entity would allow for a stronger voice when dealing with external entities, such as higher-level governments or corporate entities, demonstrates Terlouw's (2018) archetype of divisive local identity discourses, which are described as focusing on the protection of local identities through combining local institutions. Interestingly, divisive local identity discourses were previously exhibited when the residents of Hooping Harbour considered resettlement. While other communities in the province were mandated by the provincial government to resettle during that period of time, residents of Hooping Harbour – under the leadership of Booth Reid – chose to voluntarily resettle on their own terms. While there was no imminent threat of government-imposed amalgamation, the communities of Bide Arm and Roddickton advocated to de-institutionalize their existing communities and create a new municipal institution of Roddickton-Bide Arm to strengthen their negotiating position when dealing with external threats.

While regional identity discourses and divisive local identity discourses are exhibited throughout the amalgamation discussions for Roddickton and Bide Arm, local resistance identity discourses were also present and remain present to this day. It appears that local resistance

identity discourses were particularly strong in Bide Arm, which was significantly smaller in population than the towns of Roddickton and Englee. A Member of the House of Assembly who was engaged in the discussions noted that the resistance to amalgamation in Bide Arm was centred on ensuring the new council was structured to ensure fair representation, leading Bide Arm to argue for equal representation on the amalgamated council (Confidential Interview, 2020). This led to the Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm being divided into two electoral wards – Roddickton and Bide Arm – which, as noted by a senior official with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, is unusual among rural municipalities in the province (Confidential Interview, 2020). The town council, therefore, consists of seven people, including a mayor, four at-large councillors, one councillor representing the ward of Roddickton, and one councillor representing the ward of Bide Arm (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2008).

4.2.4. Shared Concern for Community Survival

In the decades leading to the amalgamation of Roddickton and Bide Arm, both towns experienced economic and demographic decline, resulting in significant fiscal challenges for the communities. Following the cod moratorium of 1992, the region encompassing Roddickton, Bide Arm, Englee and other communities on the Northern peninsula, experienced outmigration and declining industries of fishery and forestry. During the period between 1986 and 1991, all three towns experienced population declines, with Roddickton declining by 2.8%, Englee declining by 5.7%, and Bide Arm declining by 4.7% (Clarke, 1995). Between 1991 and 2006, the populations of the towns continued to decline: Roddickton declined in population by another 21% from 1,153 to 911, while the population of Bide Arm declined by 41% from 325 to 192 over the same period (Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2002; Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2006). The fiscal challenges experienced by

Roddickton and Bide Arm throughout this period are also evident from documentation and interviews analysed for this study. By 1995, the challenges faced by the communities were evident in their municipal budgets: long-term capital debt for Roddickton was $1.5 million, with total annual debt charges equalling 59.71% of the annual budget; and long-term capital debt for Bide Arm was $284,900, with total annual debt charges equalling 48.64% of the annual budget (Clarke, 1995).

This economic and demographic shift led municipal leaders of the three communities to approach the provincial government and begin discussions to amalgamate. When amalgamation discussions resumed in 2006, without the involvement of Englee, the Towns of Roddickton and Bide Arm put forward a series of prerequisites for amalgamation which included more than $3.5 million in funding over the first five years, resulting in a memorandum of understanding being reached between the Department of Municipal Affairs and the two towns which included $3 million in capital infrastructure investment, and $633,750 in elimination of debt owing to the Newfoundland and Labrador Municipal Financing Corporation (ATIPP, 2020b; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2009).

In interviews and documentation related to this case, discourses related to concern for community survival were demonstrated in support for amalgamation between the two towns. During the first set of community consultations, as noted in the Commissioner's Report (1995), Mayor Wade Reid of Bide Arm emphasized the debt load and accountability as reasons for amalgamation, while linking the argument in favour of merging the municipalities to the history of resettlement in Bide Arm and the benefits that the community experienced following that change. A current member of the Roddickton-Bide Arm town council, who was a resident of one of the towns during amalgamation discussions, described the ongoing benefits of amalgamation,

stating: "there's been a shift, and the shift is because of survival […] we are where we are because of survival […] Alone, we will die [and] the best chance we have is to join forces with the people around us to say 'how do we make the most of very limited, sparse, resources?'" (Confidential Interview, 2020). This attitude was further reinforced by a senior official with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador who stated: "Sometimes these amalgamations are about building a stronger council or making [municipal services] more efficient [but] in terms of Roddickton-Bide Arm, it was simply the survival of those communities" (Confidential Interview, 2020). A Member of the House of Assembly involved with these amalgamation negotiations explained further that the town councils approached the provincial government due to concerns regarding finances and infrastructure, emphasizing "it was [the provincial government] nudging as opposed to ramming amalgamation down their throats…I would say if they were adamantly opposed to amalgamation, we would've parked the conversation" and stating that amalgamation of the two towns was a condition set by the provincial government for providing further debt forgiveness to Roddickton and Bide Arm (Confidential Interview, 2020).

4.2.5. Conclusion

The rhetoric presented during amalgamation discussions, and since amalgamation occurred, demonstrates strong regional identity discourses and strong discourses related to concern for community survival in Roddickton and Bide Arm that led to amalgamation of the two towns. The regional identity discourses were supported by the historical existence of a regional economy, shared services, and the regional institution of the Great Northern Peninsula Joint Council. This case also demonstrates divisive local identity discourses both historically, through the history of resettlement from Hooping Harbour to Bide Arm, and presently, through advocacy in support of amalgamation to give the region a stronger, more unified voice. Concern

for community survival was based in both fiscal and demographic decline and was presented

through discourses which argued that institutional change was necessary. These community

survival discourses, combined with regional and divisive local identity discourses, overcame

obstacles presented by institutional status quo bias and path dependence to motivate

amalgamation of the communities. It is unclear why Englee did not participate in the second

amalgamation discussions which resulted in the amalgamation of Roddickton and Bide Arm.

While there is a lack of evidence regarding Englee, it appears that discourses of regional identity

and concern for community survival were low compared to those of Roddickton and Bide Arm.

4.3.   Trinity Bay North

The amalgamation of Trinity Bay North and the subsequent annexation of Little Catalina

by Trinity Bay North provides examples of regional identity and community survival discourses

supporting amalgamation. The annexation of Little Catalina also demonstrates local resistance

identities acting as a barrier to amalgamation where regional identity and community survival

discourses were not sufficient to overcome that barrier.[7] The following sections provide the

history of the communities of Melrose, Port Union, Catalina, and Little Catalina; describe the

two amalgamation discussions which occurred between 2001 and 2010; and discuss how identity

and community survival discourses interacted with the processes of amalgamation and

annexation for the communities.

4.3.1.   History of Trinity Bay North: Melrose, Port Union, Catalina, and Little Catalina

Trinity Bay North is located on Route 230 of the Trans-Canada Highway, on the east coast of

the Bonavista Peninsula in the Northeastern region of the island of Newfoundland. Prior to

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[7] As defined in Chapter 2, "annexation" refers to one municipality absorbing another smaller municipality, while "amalgamation" refers to the process of merging multiple municipalities into a larger bounded municipality with a single-tier government (Sancton, 2014).

incorporation of the town of Trinity Bay North, the area included four incorporated municipalities: Melrose, Port Union, Catalina, and Little Catalina. Melrose, originally known as Ragged Harbour, was the most southerly of the four communities and was incorporated in 1969 (Smallwood & Pitt, 1991). Catalina, located five kilometres north of Melrose, held strong social and economic connections with Melrose throughout the 19th and 20th centuries through shared schools, a shared church parish, and the local fishery. Catalina was incorporated in 1958 and fishing was the primary industry in the community until the late 20th century when it transitioned to a commercial centre and became the site of one of the largest salt fish businesses in Eastern Canada, Mifflin Fisheries Ltd (ibid.). Following the cod moratorium in 1992, Catalina saw a decline in industry, and the population declined from 1,129 in 1976, to 995 in 2001, while Melrose experienced a decline in population from 423 to 316 over the same period (Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2002).

Little Catalina, located approximately 2.5 kilometres north of Catalina, was incorporated in 1965, and held strong economic and social connections with the neighbouring community of Catalina (Smallwood & Pitt, 1991). By 1990, the largest employer for residents of Little Catalina was the Catalina-Port Union Fisheries Products International fish plant (ibid.). Between 1991 and 2006, the population of Little Catalina declined from 710 to 458 (Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2006; Economics and Statistics Branch, Newfoundland Statistics Agency, 2002).

Port Union, located halfway between Melrose and Catalina, was founded by William F. Coaker in 1915 when the land was purchased to become the site for the headquarters of the Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU) and the Fishermen's Union Trading Company (Smallwood & Pitt, 1991). The town of Port Union was incorporated in 1961, and remained associated with

the fishery through the FPU and a Fisheries Products International fish plant until the 1992 cod moratorium. As the fishing industry declined during the final decades of the 20th century, the population of Port Union declined from 671 in 1981, to 486 in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2019).

4.3.2. Amalgamation Discussions

In February 2002, the mayors of Melrose, Port Union, Little Catalina, and Catalina, met with a representative of the provincial government to discuss the possibility of amalgamation (ATIPP, 2020c). Following this meeting, the House of Assembly requested a feasibility study on the amalgamation of the four communities, and the report of the feasibility study was completed in July 2002. The feasibility study recommended the amalgamation of Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina, but recommended against the inclusion of Little Catalina due to significant resistance from residents of Little Catalina (ATIPP, 2020c; Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002). After negotiations between the towns and the provincial government, $1.7 million was provided from the provincial Debt Relief Fund to write off a significant portion of the combined $2 million debt held by the three towns, and the new town of Trinity Bay North – merging Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina – was incorporated on January 1, 2005. Over the following years, the towns of Trinity Bay North and Little Catalina continued to collaborate while the financial situation continued to worsen in Little Catalina.

Between 2005 and 2008, annual revenues for Little Catalina decreased by 34%, while the accumulated debt for the town increased by 29% to approximately $1.8 million in 2008 (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002). In 2009, the town council of Little Catalina approached the provincial government to discuss the possibility of amalgamation

with the Town of Trinity Bay North and, in December 2009, the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly requested the preparation of a feasibility study respecting the annexation of Little Catalina to Trinity Bay North. The feasibility study was submitted in February 2010 and recommended the annexation of the town of Little Catalina to the town of Trinity Bay North (Lane, 2010). The two towns and the provincial government reached an agreement for governance and municipal services in June 2010, and a memorandum of understanding was signed in July 2010, outlining terms which included: $4.1 million in support from the provincial government, comprising a debt write-off of approximately $1.9 million; a $2 million investment in capital infrastructure over a five-year period; and funding to cover transitional costs and associated merger expenses (Department of Municipal Affairs, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2010). In August 2010, the NL House of Assembly passed the *Trinity Bay North Order, 2010*, establishing the annexation of Little Catalina to Trinity Bay North which took effect on October 1, 2010. The town council for Trinity Bay North was increased from seven councillors to nine councillors to include one additional at-large councillor and one ward councillor representing the area of Little Catalina. A by-election was held on October 5, 2010 to elect the two new councillors.

4.3.3. Regional Identity

Through document analysis and elite interviews, it is clear that the towns of Melrose, Port Union, Catalina, and Little Catalina held regional identities as an economic, cultural, cartographic, and ecological region dating back to the original founding of each community and throughout the evolution of industries in the area. The three southern towns – Melrose, Catalina, and Port Union – were also linked as a political region as they shared a number of services, including shared water and sewer services, animal control services, and a shared volunteer fire

department known at the time as the CPUM (Catalina-Port Union-Melrose) fire department (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002). The towns of Port Union and Catalina also shared garbage collection, while all four towns shared a regional incinerator for waste (ibid.). While the towns of Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina exhibited regional identity discourses throughout amalgamation discussions, the town of Little Catalina demonstrated local resistance identity discourses which acted as a barrier to Little Catalina joining the amalgamation of Trinity Bay North in 2005.

Regional identity discourses were demonstrated throughout consultations and negotiations between Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina in 2002-2005. A senior official with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL) commented that MNL was "totally outside" the formal process due to the three towns working together to come to an agreement for collaboration and eventual amalgamation, noting that officials from the towns would use regional meetings – organized by MNL – as an opportunity to enhance collaboration (Confidential Interview, 2020). A former senior bureaucrat with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador who was involved with the amalgamation discussions elaborated, saying that Port Union and Catalina "had so much similarity in their operations [and] shared services [that] the climate became right [for amalgamation]" (Confidential Interview, 2020). This collaboration and sharing of services supported a shared regional identity between the three communities to the extent that the 2002 Feasibility Study noted "the impact of establishing one local government administration for the four towns should be minimal." Furthermore, submissions during the feasibility study argued that local identities could be maintained even

after de-institutionalization and amalgamation of the separate communities. The Mayor of Port

Union made the following submission on behalf of the town council to the Commissioner:

> A concern I have heard in the past is of losing our identity. There will still be a Port Union
> if this process takes place, and our proud history and heritage will remain. The only change
> will be that of one administrative body where there are now four. What the structure of the
> Council will be we do not yet know, but it must fairly represent all residents of each
> community (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government
> Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose,
> 2002).

In addition to regional identity discourses, divisive local identity discourses were

displayed throughout the process of amalgamation. As Terlouw (2018) describes, divisive local

identity discourses support collective action, such as amalgamation, against external forces. In

this case, residents of the communities of Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina argued in favour of

amalgamation as a way to strengthen the voice of the area when dealing with the provincial

government. This was clearly articulated in the submission from the Council of Port Union to the

Commissioner for the Feasibility Study, which finished with the sentence: "we believe that by

coming together as one administrative body, we will have a much stronger voice with those

whom we need to hear us (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government

Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002).

While the towns of Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina demonstrated strong regional

identity discourses, residents of Little Catalina exhibited local resistance identity discourses in

opposition to amalgamation throughout the 2002-2005 amalgamation deliberations. Local

resistance identity discourses were predominantly displayed by members of the volunteer fire

department of Little Catalina who, during the process of plebiscite regarding the question of

amalgamation, distributed flyers opposing amalgamation with the other three communities

(Confidential Interview, 2020).[8] While it was noted during interviews that the Little Catalina volunteer fire department was not unanimous in opposing amalgamation, it is a situation in which a local institution – ostensibly below that of municipal government – encouraged local resistance identity discourses to oppose amalgamation of the towns. Multiple interviewees suggested that the volunteer fire department held strong legitimacy with residents of Little Catalina, and that this legitimacy as a local institution led to the fire department having a strong influence over public opinion during the 2002-2005 amalgamation discussions (Confidential Interviews, 2020). This situation presents an intersection of historical and discursive institutionalist concepts as it appears that members of the Little Catalina fire department held a bias toward the status quo while conveying local resistance identity discourses which counteracted regional identity discourses in the community.

The submissions from residents and council of the town of Little Catalina during the 2002 feasibility study further conveyed local resistance identity discourses through concerns related to traditional use of land, loss of identity, loss of community resources, and fiscal concerns. At the time, submissions from residents of Little Catalina included concerns about maintaining "traditional berry-picking grounds," the potential for unfair representation on council, the loss of the town hall, which was used for community events, and the loss of the local volunteer fire department, with one resident writing: "I feel that if this integration takes place we will lose our identity as a town" (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002). The submission from the council of Little Catalina also demonstrated local resistance identity discourses, asking the questions "where will our facilities be located, Town

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[8] Little Catalina was the only community of the four to hold a plebiscite regarding the question of amalgamation.

Hall, and Fire Hall? Who will be retained as office staff and maintenance staff?" (ibid.). The submissions from Little Catalina during the 2002 Feasibility Study demonstrated not only local resistance identity discourses, but also "dreadful consequences rhetoric," as described by Drew, Razin, and Andrews (2019), including arguments that the community would be worse off if amalgamation was successful.

4.3.4. Shared Concern for Community Survival

Through interviews and document analysis, it is clear that there was a shared concern for community survival in the communities of Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina, while shared concern for community survival was lower among residents of Little Catalina. Concerns were voiced regarding fiscal challenges for the communities, the ability to continue to provide services at a reasonable level, population decline, and economic challenges. A former mayor of Port Union argued that amalgamation was necessary for the survival of the communities, stating: "It was a matter of necessity. It wasn't that we wanted to, it was that we had to" (Confidential Interview, 2020). A resident of Catalina voiced a similar sentiment in a submission during the 2002 Feasibility study, stating: "Neither of the towns can function and survive without the others" (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002). While Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina showed a high level of concern for community survival, at the time of the 2002 Feasibility Study, residents and council of Little Catalina voiced opposition to concerns regarding community survival, suggesting that the community could continue alone if the other three communities amalgamated.

Fiscal challenges were central in discourses regarding community survival for Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina. When the 2002 Feasibility Study was prepared, all four towns were in

debt arrears: Catalina by $856,850; Little Catalina by $840,016; Melrose by $324,852; and Port Union by $36,200 (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002). Submissions from Melrose and Port Union during the 2002 Feasibility Study referenced the debt held by the towns, and argued that forgiveness of the debt would be a necessary condition for amalgamation, suggesting that they believed this was the only way to improve the situation for their communities (ibid.). A former mayor of Port Union acknowledged the necessity of amalgamation as a solution to fiscal challenges, stating: "Port Union was probably in the best financial position to survive […] but, just making the status quo wasn't what I considered surviving and thriving […] we sat down long and hard and we as a council decided it was best to move forward with the other communities" (Confidential Interview, 2020).

In tandem with fiscal challenges, demographic and economic concerns were present in discourses regarding community survival for the towns of Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina. Residents and councillors referenced outmigration, closure of the fishery and related industries, and a declining labour force as challenges to the survival of the three communities. A former mayor described that it was "very difficult to provide services with the decline in population […] plus we had to pay down the long-term debt from water and sewer," emphasizing: "you can't run a town with 1,400 people who all lose their employment at the one time and expect to be able to pay the bills" (Confidential interview, 2020). The town council of Melrose linked these challenges to the fishery in a submission during the 2002 Feasibility study, stating: "with the economic situation in our area, and out-migration, which has mainly been caused by the cod moratorium, the situation is not likely to improve" (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union,

and Melrose, 2002). The author of the 2002 Feasibility Study concluded the Commissioner's

Report by emphasizing the concern for community survival, stating:

> A rapidly declining population, the depressed economic situation, the high cost of service provision and delivery, a staggering debt load, and the resultant inability to consider even minimal capital expenditures, clearly indicated a need for the towns collectively to address their untenable situation. It was equally apparent from the Briefs presented and the comments made during public hearings, that this situation could not be addressed without major input from the provincial government (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002).

While it is clear from the 2002 Feasibility study, and other relevant documents, that Little

Catalina was experiencing similar fiscal, demographic, and economic challenges as the other

three communities during the 2002-2005 amalgamation discussions, it appears that concern for

community survival was not sufficient to overcome local resistance identity discourses from

residents of Little Catalina. The fish plant was closed, the population was steadily declining after

the cod moratorium, and the town was in debt arrears of $840,016; however, all 20 attendees at

the town hall meeting for Little Catalina during the 2002 Feasibility Study voted against

amalgamation by show of hands, and 241 out of 302 residents voted against amalgamation in the

Little Catalina plebiscite (Feasibility Study In The Matter To Establish One Local Government

Administration For The Towns of Catalina, Little Catalina, Port Union, and Melrose, 2002).

4.3.5. Annexation of Little Catalina

In the years between the 2005 amalgamation of Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina, and

the annexation of Little Catalina by Trinity Bay North in 2010, it appears there was increased

concern for community survival among residents of Little Catalina as well as a recognition of the

benefits experienced by the newly formed Trinity Bay North. This shift occurred in tandem with

a worsening situation for the town of Little Catalina during those years. The 2010 Feasibility

Study on the annexation of Little Catalina by Trinity Bay North made this increased concern for

survival of Little Catalina explicitly clear:

> In the years following amalgamation the new Town of Trinity Bay North has been successful in maintaining a solid financial footing while continuing to invest in infrastructure for the area. Little Catalina, however, has seen successive deficits and an accumulated debt of approximately $1.8 million. Based on financial analysis alone it is not possible for Little Catalina to remain viable, because in order to make the required payments on their debt they would need to double their existing tax revenue each year for many years to come (Lane, 2010).

The feasibility study addressed issues regarding efficiency, democratic representation,

fiscal challenges, and service provision, and also suggested that the communities within Trinity

Bay North – formerly Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina – "appear to have maintained their

identity while becoming part of a larger municipal entity," stating further that "a new municipal

body is an administrative structure designed for service delivery that need not have any negative

impact on the identities of the existing communities" (Lane, 2010). This acknowledgement

demonstrates Terlouw's (2017) concept of the construction of a thin secondary regional identity

to supplant the primary local identity through regional identity discourse, and also provides an

example in which the thick primary local identities of Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina,

continued to exist under the regional identity of Trinity Bay North, even after the towns had been

officially de-institutionalized and the amalgamated entity of Trinity Bay North was

institutionalized in their place. In addition to the worsening fiscal, demographic, and economic

situation for Little Catalina, and the demonstration of successful amalgamation in Trinity Bay

North, there was a change of leadership in the Little Catalina volunteer fire department which

supported amalgamation in 2010 (Confidential interview, 2020). This change in involvement by

the volunteer fire department represents a shift in discourse from competition to alignment

between local institutions.

4.3.6. Conclusion

The case of amalgamation in Trinity Bay North, followed by the annexation of Little

Catalina by Trinity Bay North, demonstrates discourses of regional identity and concern for

community survival as well as local resistance identity discourses. For Melrose, Port Union, and

Catalina, strong regional identity discourses emerged in support of amalgamation in tandem with

discourses of concern for community survival. In Little Catalina, local resistance identity

discourses led to the initial rejection of amalgamation, and community survival discourses

eventually overcame the barriers presented by local resistance identities to support annexation by

Trinity Bay North in 2010.

4.4.   Labrador City and Wabush

The case of Labrador City and Wabush presents an example in which regional identity is

strong but shared concern for community survival is low, resulting in a lack of urgency and a

decision against amalgamation for the communities. The towns of Labrador City and Wabush

have held two official amalgamation discussions – the first beginning in 2009 and the second

beginning in 2017 – with both processes resulting in the communities remaining separately

incorporated municipalities. In 2009 and 2017, the municipalities held municipal elections near

the end of the amalgamation negotiations, and both elections resulted in new mayors – as well as

some new councillors – being elected in the communities. In both situations, new municipal

leaders demonstrated resistance to amalgamation based in arguments that a municipal merger

was unnecessary, resulting in an impasse in negotiations between the towns.

4.4.1. History of Labrador City and Wabush

The towns of Labrador City and Wabush are located in the Southwestern region of Labrador

commonly referred to as *Labrador West*, a title that is used both informally by residents and

formally through place branding for the region and province. Both municipalities are located off the Trans-Labrador Highway, with Labrador City located near the Quebec border and Wabush located 7.5 km Southeast of Labrador City. The towns are closely associated with the iron ore industry and were founded by mining companies in the early 1960s. Labrador City, originally named Carol Lake, was founded as a temporary work camp in late 1959 by the Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC) which largely controlled the planning and development of the community for its first years of settlement (Stantec Consulting Ltd., 2017). IOC began construction on the townsite following the start of mining operations for iron ore of the Labrador Trough at the Smallwood Mine located approximately 13 km Northwest of the townsite (Smallwood & Pitt, 1991). The temporary worker camp was initially supplied by airlift, until a rail connection linking the area to Sept-Iles, Quebec, was completed in May of 1960 (ibid.).

The population continued to grow and, by September 1960, approximately 1,200 IOC workers and their families were living full-time in the community of Carol Lake in addition to a similar population of seasonal contractors (Smallwood & Pitt, 1991). Camp-style residences were gradually replaced with single-family homes and long-term infrastructure, and Carol Lake remained a privately-owned company town until incorporation as a Local Improvement District in 1961, when it was renamed Labrador City (Stantec Consulting Ltd., 2017). Despite the Local Improvement District of Labrador City being administered by an elected Board of Trustees, IOC sponsored or initiated much of the community infrastructure – including a shopping centre, recreational facilities, health care facilities, and a school – to encourage a more stable workforce in the first years after incorporation (Smallwood & Pitt, 1991). Throughout the 1960s, the Local Improvement District of Labrador City continued to develop, with the emergence of private businesses, churches, a high school, a community newspaper, and a full-service hospital

throughout the decade. By 1971, the population of Labrador City had increased to more than 7,500 and continued to grow to approximately 12,000 by 1980, the year in which the Local Improvement District was incorporated as the town of Labrador City (ibid.).

The Town of Wabush, located 7.5 km southeast of Labrador City, also originated as a temporary worker camp and was founded by Wabush Mines in 1962 (Cuff & Poole, 1994). Wabush went through a similar development process to that of Labrador City in which the mining company planned and developed the townsite as full-time workers immigrated to the area. Wabush was privately owned by Wabush Mines until 1967 when it was incorporated as a Local Improvement District (Stantec Consulting Ltd., 2017). By 1971, the population of Wabush had increased to 3,500, and continued to grow to 4,000 by 1981 (Cuff & Poole, 1994). In 1979, the designation of Wabush changed from Local Improvement District to Town due to the passing of the *1979 Municipalities Act.* For their first decades of settlement, both Labrador City and Wabush were only accessible to the rest of the province by air, a mode of transportation provided to both communities by the Wabush airport (Cuff & Poole, 1994). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, rail and road connections were developed between the Labrador West region and Quebec, and in 1992 the region was linked to Churchill Falls and Happy Valley-Goose Bay by the Trans-Labrador Highway (ibid.).

Due to their close association with the mining industry, Wabush and Labrador City have experienced economic booms and busts that have aligned with the state of the industry. Throughout the 1980s, the iron ore mining industry experienced a downturn due to decreasing global demand for steel which in turn led to the first layoffs and shut downs at the Wabush and Labrador City mines (Cuff & Poole, 1994). A former town manager of one of the communities referenced economic downturns as inspiring greater collaboration between the two towns and

leading to discussions of regional solutions over time (Confidential Interview, 2020). A former town councillor for one of the communities referred to economic uncertainty over a period of nearly 10 years on Town Council and linked increased interest in regional solutions to economic downturns in the area (Confidential Interview, 2020). In the 1980s, the downturn in the mining industry experienced by Labrador City and Wabush led to a decline in population for both towns, leading the provincial government to implement local development initiatives such as the establishment of a Royal Newfoundland Constabulary detachment and an Arts & Culture Centre in the region (Smallwood & Pitt, 1991).

The economic climate and demographics of Wabush and Labrador City have continued to ebb and flow during recent decades and, as of the 2016 census, the populations of Labrador City and Wabush were 7,220 and 1,906, respectively. The average age in the two towns is significantly younger than the average age for the rest of the province: 36.7 years for Labrador City and 35.5 years for Wabush compared to 43.7 years for the population of Newfoundland and Labrador.

4.4.2. Amalgamation Discussions

There have been two official amalgamation discussions between the towns of Labrador City and Wabush, with both processes resulting in the decision to continue as separate municipalities. The first process began in 2009, and was initiated by the Town Council of Wabush which was home to the recreational facility used by residents of both towns. In April 2009, the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly requested the preparation of a feasibility study to examine the possibility of amalgamating Wabush and Labrador City (ATIPP, 2020d). In the following months, consultations were conducted by a consultant and an interim report was submitted to the Department of Municipal Affairs in July 2009. The interim report of the

feasibility study indicated that residents in both towns were hesitant regarding amalgamation (ibid.). Municipal elections were held in Fall 2009, in which new mayors were elected for both towns, and the amalgamation process was discontinued following the elections.

In 2017, discussions regarding amalgamation of Labrador City and Wabush were renewed, with the town councils requesting the preparation of a feasibility study in February 2017 to explore potential amalgamation (Stantec Consulting Ltd., 2017). In May 2017, the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly tabled an order for the preparation of a feasibility study. Prior to the completion of the feasibility study, the town council for Labrador City submitted a request to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment to defer the municipal election – scheduled for September 26, 2017 – for both towns to allow time for completion and review of the feasibility study (ATIPP, 2020e). This request was denied by the Minister, and new mayors were elected in both towns. On September 18 2017, the consultant submitted the report on the feasibility study which recommended that the towns of Wabush and Labrador City amalgamate to become the Town of Labrador West (Stantec Consulting Ltd., 2017).

In December 2018, the town councils issued a request for proposal for facilitation of public consultation sessions to present the findings of the feasibility report and to determine if town residents supported proceeding with a plebiscite on the question of amalgamation (Spicer, 2019). Two consultation sessions were held in March 2019: one session in Labrador City and one session in Wabush. Of those who attended the consultation sessions (representing 1.7% of the region's population), 68.60% supported proceeding with a plebiscite, comprising 81.58% of participants from Labrador City and 45.24% of participants from Wabush (ibid.). During polling conducted following presentations at the consultations, 51.67% of participants indicated support

for amalgamation of the two communities (ibid.). In May 2019, the report on the community sessions was submitted to the town councils of Labrador City and Wabush, which both reviewed the report and tabled motions to proceed with plebiscites. At these meetings, the motion for plebiscite was approved in Labrador City while it was defeated in Wabush. This resulted in an impasse with both town councils deciding not to proceed with amalgamation.

4.4.3. Regional Identity

The towns of Wabush and Labrador City have a strong existing regional identity, represented in the joint branding as "Labrador West", which was present during both 2009 and 2017 amalgamation negotiations.[9] This regional identity was recognized during interviews, as all participants from Labrador City and Wabush acknowledged a strong, shared, regional identity while also acknowledging strong local identities for each town. A former Town Manager for one of the towns acknowledged that improving collaboration is a consistent topic of discussion between the two towns, and this has led to multiple discussions of potential regionalization or amalgamation efforts over the years (Confidential Interview, 2020). While Labrador City and Wabush share a regional identity, most clearly demonstrated by a website under the label "Labrador West", it appears that the only official regional services shared by the towns are a shared waste management facility in Labrador City and a shared airport and recreation centre in Wabush. Attempts to further regionalize services, including discussions to regionalize fire services and recreation, have led to impasses between councils (Confidential Interview, 2020).

Under Tomaney's (2009) categorizations of regions, Labrador West is a cartographic, economic, cultural, and ecological region, but is not clearly a political region. It is a cartographic region because the two towns have been historically isolated from the rest of the province,

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[9] See www.labradorwest.com

creating a natural region in the southwest of Labrador. Labrador West is both an economic and cultural region because of its shared industry – iron ore – and the common history of both towns originating as worker camps, transitioning into Local Improvement Districts and then incorporating as towns, all within a similar time period. The area of Wabush and Labrador City also represents an ecological region, demonstrated by the iron ore deposits throughout the region, the bodies of water bordering both towns, and the shared flora and fauna in the area. While Wabush and Labrador City have joint-branding of "Labrador West", it is not yet a political region as there are no formalized regional governance bodies holding authority.

During interviews, participants referenced discussions of shared resources as motivation for, and points of contention during, amalgamation negotiations. One member of a town council stated "It was all about recreation. In 2009 that's what it was about, and in 2017 that's what it was about" (Confidential Interview, 2020). The Town of Wabush hosts the only recreation centre in the region, as well as the only airport in the region, both of which are used by residents of both towns. The Town of Labrador City hosts the regional landfill, which is managed by a waste management committee with representatives from both towns. Other services, such as fire services, snowclearing, and road maintenance are managed by each town. Interviewees from both towns pointed to discussions regarding the recreation centre as motivating consideration of amalgamation in both 2009 and 2017 and commented that, prior to 2009, the majority of financial support for the maintenance of the facilities was provided by the Town of Wabush (Confidential Interview, 2020). In 2009, the Town Council of Wabush approached the Town Council of Labrador City to discuss increasing shared support for the recreation centre, resulting in discussions of amalgamation. After amalgamation negotiations ended after the 2009 municipal election, the two towns came to an agreement for shared support of the recreation centre. In

2017, discussions regarding the shared recreation centre were renewed, this time in relation to possible funding from the federal government to build a new facility (Confidential Interview, 2020). Interviewees expressed an understanding that funding for a new facility was contingent on improving integration in the region, leading some councillors to advocate for amalgamation (Confidential Interview, 2020). While Wabush approached Labrador City to discuss amalgamation in 2009, Labrador City approached Wabush in 2017, leading to resistance from some councillors on Wabush town council who argued that there was no need to build a new facility nor amalgamate, but only a need for greater collaboration on supporting the existing recreation centre (Confidential Interview, 2020).

Another issue which sparked regionalization and amalgamation discussions over time was the relationship between the two towns and their respective mining companies. A senior official with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador referred to the situation as "a pretty tiny David in the face of a massive Goliath", referencing the fact that each town has its own international mining company due to the way in which the towns developed, and suggesting that negotiating as one, amalgamated, municipality would put the region in a better position (Confidential Interview, 2020). This view was not held by all participants, as one former town manager argued that uncertainty caused by amalgamation discussions could weaken the stance of the towns when negotiating with the mining companies (Confidential Interview, 2020). This is relevant in the context of the political region, as there may be opportunities for Wabush and Labrador City to become more aligned as a region when negotiating with mining companies and other corporate entities.

Participants also referenced discussions regarding potential regionalization of municipal services, most notably the regionalization of fire services. All of the participants interviewed

expressed interest in increased regional collaboration while expressing varying degrees of support for formalized regionalization or amalgamation. One participant referenced attitudes related to "big town versus little town", commenting that resistance in Labrador City was related to concerns of increased tax rates while resistance in Wabush tended to be related to concerns of "being swallowed up" and losing local identity (Confidential Interview, 2020). This suggests that, while Labrador City and Wabush do have a strong shared regional identity, there are still strong local resistance identity discourses acting in opposition to more formalized regionalization or amalgamation.

4.4.4. Shared Concern for Community Survival

While the towns of Labrador City and Wabush hold a strong regional identity, represented by the title Labrador West, there is little evidence of shared concern for community survival. Multiple participants referenced the "boom-and-bust" nature of the Labrador West economy and commented that regional solutions tend to be raised during economic downturns, while one member of a town council expressed confidence in the viability of two separate towns calling Wabush "a small town with a big town mentality", stating:

> This little town, although we're small, I doubt there's any other communities out there this size that has the money that Wabush has […] we had a budget of 8 or 9 million dollars with 2000 people […] most communities our size…they're lucky if they get a budget of 1 million dollars. (Confidential Interview, 2020)

4.4.5. Conclusion

The case of amalgamation consideration in Labrador City and Wabush offers an interesting contrast to the three other cases examined in this study. First of all, Labrador City and Wabush appear to have the most explicit example of regional identity, represented by the *Labrador West* branding. Like other cases, the two towns have some shared services; however, unlike Roddickton-Bide Arm or Fogo Island, the towns do not have a regional council. While the

existence of regional branding and regional services produces strong regional identity discourses, there are also local resistance identity discourses demonstrated in opposition to amalgamation. Labrador City and Wabush also exhibited perhaps the clearest example of Terlouw's divisive local identity discourses with some community members advocating for increased regionalization to defend against the external threat of the large, international mining companies. It appears from interviews and document analysis that, in both cases of amalgamation deliberation, shared support for the recreation centre in Wabush was the inciting issue, and that both conversations evolved from discussing shared support to regionalization and amalgamation as potential solutions. This path differs significantly from those of the three successful amalgamation cases in this study as amalgamation negotiations were not motivated by a shared concern for community survival, but were motivated by the need to better support a specific resource used by residents of both towns. Ultimately, it appears that the towns decided against amalgamation twice because, while regional identity discourses existed, discourses regarding concern for community survival were not present.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1.   Project At A Glance

This study examined the phenomenon of voluntary municipal amalgamation, considering the question of "why do municipalities voluntarily amalgamate?". This research question was considered through a comparative case study of four cases in Newfoundland and Labrador: the amalgamation discussions and completed amalgamations of 1) the Town of Fogo Island, 2) the Town of Roddickton-Bide Arm, and 3) the Town of Trinity Bay North; and the two amalgamation discussions and decisions against amalgamation between the Towns of Labrador City and Wabush. Elite interviews were conducted with participants who had special knowledge of the decision-making process, including former and current town administrators, mayors and councillors, Members of the House of Assembly, leaders of municipal associations, and provincial bureaucrats. Document analysis was conducted on relevant documents including feasibility studies, council minutes, news media, media releases and government communications, legislation, and internal government communications.

Two hypotheses were tested during this study:

1) Amalgamation is chosen voluntarily when residents and political leaders believe they are facing urgent challenges that are insurmountable as a single community, and;

2) Resistance to amalgamation is identity-driven, and may be overcome by discourses related to regional identity and community survival.

Hypothesis 1 relates to the theoretical lens of historical institutionalism and the concepts of path dependence and increasing returns, suggesting that local government institutions have an inherent bias toward status quo. A historical institutionalism approach emphasizes the status quo bias in municipal institutions and would lead us to predict that a crisis event is necessary for

significant change such as municipal amalgamation. Integrating insights from discursive institutionalism helps us to examine how ideas and discourse influence change by asking how community members perceive crises and how they assess the solutions. Hypothesis 2 is more directly related to discursive institutionalism in that it considers the relationship between ideas, discourse, and institutional change, acknowledging that resistance to municipal amalgamation is based in local identities and positing that discourses related to regional identities and concern for community survival may overcome this identity-driven resistance. This study has examined the cases through a discursive lens, considering the existence of identity and concern for community survival discourses and the influence these discourses had on the outcome of amalgamation discussions in each case.

The comparative case analysis used in this study provides support for Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. In all cases for which amalgamation occurred, it was clear that members of the communities believed they were facing urgent challenges that were insurmountable for a single community. Furthermore, in the case of Labrador City and Wabush, where amalgamation was denied twice within a ten-year period, it was clear that members of the communities did not believe they were facing urgent challenges. In the case of Little Catalina, where amalgamation into Trinity Bay North was at first denied but the town requested to be annexed by Trinity Bay North less than five years later, it appears that community members did not believe amalgamation was a necessary solution during initial discussions but these attitudes changed after neighbouring towns amalgamated. In relation to Hypothesis 2, all cases displayed primarily local resistance identity discourses through incidents of resistance to municipal amalgamation. These identity discourses of resistance were presented through arguments around concerns of loss of infrastructure, tax increases, decreasing effectiveness of local government, historical

conflict with neighbouring communities, and loss of local identity. For cases in which amalgamation occurred, it is evident that regional identity and divisive local identity discourses helped to overcome local resistance identities to gain support for amalgamation.

The following sections discuss, in further detail, the typology developed through this study, the key findings, the contribution to academic scholarship, the policy implications, the limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research in this area.
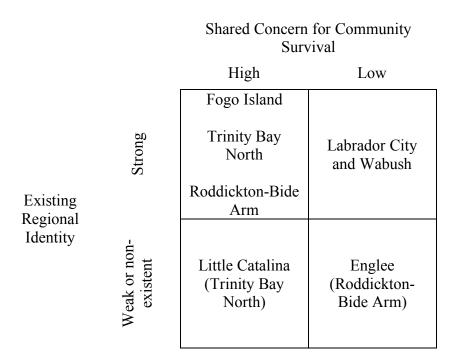
5.2.   Typology

In alignment with the related literature of institutionalism and regional identity discourses, this study proposed that regional identity and the sense of concern for community survival influence the likelihood of voluntary amalgamation occurring. The following typology suggests that cases for which there is 1) a strong regional identity and 2) a high level of shared concern for community survival will experience strong support for voluntary amalgamation when it is proposed as a solution. It is further posited that cases in which: 1) community members exhibit a high level of concern for community survival but weak or non-existent regional identity will likely experience a desire for a solution but local resistance identities will pose a barrier to amalgamation; 2) community members exhibit a strong regional identity but a low level of concern for community survival will likely experience some support for amalgamation but will lack urgency for a regional solution; and 3) community members exhibit a weak regional identity and low level of concern for community survival will hold a low likelihood of voluntary amalgamation due to local resistance identities and a lack of urgency.

To further demonstrate the utility of this typology, and place it within the context of this study, each of the cases and/or communities involved with each case may be placed into a quadrant based on the regional identity and concern for community survival discourses displayed

during amalgamation discussion. In the case of Fogo Island, strong discourses related to regional identity and concern for community survival were present. For Trinity Bay North, all four communities displayed concern for community survival, while only three of the communities (Melrose, Port Union, and Catalina) displayed strong regional identities, leaving Little Catalina outside of the amalgamation until five years later when concern for community survival had increased to the point that there was a sufficient sense of urgency. In the case of Roddickton-Bide Arm, the towns of Roddickton and Bide Arm held strong regional identities and concern for community survival, while the town of Englee held neither regional identities nor concern for community survival, resulting in Englee not proceeding with the amalgamation. In the case of Labrador City and Wabush, in which amalgamation was considered and the decision to remain two separate municipalities was made twice, there are clearly strong regional identities but a low concern for community survival, resulting in support for amalgamation among some community members but a lack of urgency among decision-makers.

Table 2. *Factors Affecting Community Support for Amalgamation – Case Application*

		Shared Concern for Community Survival	
		High	Low
Existing Regional Identity	Strong	Fogo Island Trinity Bay North Roddickton-Bide Arm	Labrador City and Wabush
	Weak or non-existent	Little Catalina (Trinity Bay North)	Englee (Roddickton-Bide Arm)

5.3. Key Findings

Through the examination of the four cases studied in this thesis, there are a number of observations which should be highlighted. Firstly, all cases appeared to exhibit both local and regional identity discourses, albeit at differing levels. In all four cases in which amalgamation was considered, there was an existing regional identity discourse among at least two of the communities involved. These regional identity discourses appear to be supported by shared services, and particularly strong where there is a regional governance institution such as the Great Northern Peninsula Regional Council or the Fogo Island Regional Council. With that in mind, there were two particular cases – Englee and Little Catalina – in which regional identity discourses were not strong enough to supplant local resistance identity discourses. In both cases, the other communities engaging in the discussion moved forward with the amalgamations without the aforementioned communities. Englee is still a standalone municipality, while Little Catalina has since been annexed by Trinity Bay North at the request of Little Catalina. In the case of Fogo Island, local resistance identity discourses were also present during the amalgamation negotiations, but appear to have been supplanted by either regional identity discourses or concern for community survival. Divisive local identity discourses, defined by Terlouw (2017) as discourses which support collective action such as amalgamation against an external threat, were also present in the three cases in which amalgamation occurred. The external threats in these cases were represented by the provincial government and private industry. While regional identity discourses were present in all cases in which amalgamation was considered, they did not supplant local resistance identity discourses enough for amalgamation to

pass in all cases. It appears that regional identity discourses are necessary but not sufficient for voluntary amalgamation.

The second key finding is related to the level of concern for community survival in the cases under examination. All communities that voluntarily chose to de-institutionalize and re-institutionalize as a new, combined, municipality (the process of amalgamation) showed strong discourses of concern for community survival. In the cases of Roddickton-Bide Arm, Fogo Island, and the first three communities to amalgamate into Trinity Bay North, the concern for community survival fostered a sense of urgency that, combined with regional identity discourses, led to amalgamation. Little Catalina, which initially refused to join Trinity Bay North but later requested annexation to the amalgamated municipality, displayed strong concern for community survival but regional identity discourses were not sufficient to supplant local resistance identity discourses during the first amalgamation discussions. In the case of Englee, it is unclear whether regional identity discourses existed and concern for community survival was not sufficient to support amalgamation. In the case of Labrador City and Wabush, it is evident that the area holds strong regional identity discourses but low concern for community survival. Concern for community survival is therefore necessary but not sufficient for voluntary amalgamation.

These findings support the hypotheses of this thesis, specifically that 1) amalgamation is chosen voluntarily when residents and political leaders believe they are facing urgent challenges that are insurmountable as a single community, and; 2) resistance to amalgamation is identity-driven, and may be overcome by discourses related to regional identity and community survival. In the three cases for which amalgamation was chosen voluntarily, there was a clear discourse showing that community members believed they were facing urgent challenges that could not be overcome as single communities. The cases in which the communities declined amalgamation

and the communities remain separate (i.e. Labrador City and Wabush; Englee) did not show evidence that the community members believed they were facing urgent challenges. All four cases in which amalgamation was considered presented local resistance identity discourses in opposition to amalgamation. In the successful amalgamations, it appears that the combination of concern for community survival and regional identity discourses overcame identity-driven resistance to amalgamation, while the cases in which amalgamation did not occur did not display strong enough regional identity discourses or concern for community survival to overcome local resistance identity discourses.

5.4. Contribution to Academic Scholarship

This study has contributed to filling multiple gaps in scholarship related to municipal institutions, particularly in the rural Canadian environment. In applying the concept of discursive institutionalism to the local government context, this study has also offered a unique application and test of this relatively new concept. While municipal amalgamation has been studied in Canada – most prominently by Sancton (2000; 2014) – existing research has largely focused on: 1) effectiveness of municipal amalgamation in terms of fiscal efficacy, service provision, and democratic strength; 2) urban amalgamations in provinces such as Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia; and 3) top-down amalgamations, mandated by provincial governments. This study, in contrast, examined the decision-making process for voluntary, rural amalgamations. Studies examining the decision-making process for voluntary amalgamation (see Drew et al. (2019), Terlouw (2017), and Zimmerbauer & Passi (2013)) have been conducted in European contexts, and this study provides a compliment from the Canadian context.

Furthermore, this study provides a novel application of discursive institutionalism, a relatively new concept applied most commonly to national and international contexts, by

examining the relationship between ideas, discourse, and local institutions. The theoretical frameworks of institutionalism, particularly new institutionalisms, are clearly relevant when considering the de-institutionalization of existing municipal institutions and institutionalization of new municipal institutions. Historical institutionalism, a theoretical framework traditionally applied to the examination of institutional change, does not provide a sufficient lens for the examination of how identity and community survival discourses influence institutional change in local government. This gap, along with recent studies examining discourses and identities in municipal amalgamation, presents an opportunity to apply the theoretical framework of discursive institutionalism to the study of municipal amalgamation. This study should provide an example to support the use of discursive institutionalism as well as motivation to apply the theoretical framework in sub-national contexts.

5.5. Policy Implications

The findings in this study offer valuable insight and possible applications for policymakers at sub-national levels, particularly for local governments and the provincial government in Newfoundland and Labrador and for similar local government contexts. Specifically, this study offers a framework for assessing the likelihood of voluntary amalgamation by local governments through discourses related to identities and concern for community survival. This typology, based on the strength of existing regional identity and concern for community survival, should provide governments with a tool for identifying cases in which communities are likely to support voluntary amalgamation. Decision-makers may also benefit from using this framework to consider how they may encourage voluntary amalgamation by providing a context that fosters regional identities and concern for community survival.

Many communities in Newfoundland and Labrador are experiencing challenges related to population decline, an aging population, and economic decline, as well as related fiscal and service provision challenges. These challenges at the local level mirror those being experienced by the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The province of NL has a population of approximately 520,000 people living across 276 incorporated municipalities and 175 Local Service Districts, as well as more than 100 unincorporated communities (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2019; Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2021). For comparison, Nova Scotia has a population of approximately 992,000 people across 49 municipalities (Statistics Canada, 2021; Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, 2021). In New Brunswick, which has a population of 789,225, the provincial government recently announced a plan to reduce the number of local entities from 340 to 90 through a series of municipal mergers which will combine incorporated and unincorporated communities across the province (Statistics Canada, 2021; Poitras, 2021). As was presented in three of the cases in which voluntary amalgamation occurred, many communities in Newfoundland and Labrador have experienced economic decline since the implementation of the cod moratorium in the early 1990s, and many communities in NL have experienced outmigration resulting in a smaller and aging population. The high number of local service districts and unincorporated communities results in high costs for the provincial government, such as a 2013 estimate of $7,500 per kilometre of road per year in LSDs and unincorporated communities (CBC News, 2013).

The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador has recently indicated that regionalization and action related to local government institutions are high priorities. A focus on institutional change in local government has been signalled by actions such as Premier Andrew Furey making regionalization the focus of the 2021 Premier's Forum on Local Government,

recent changes to the Community Relocation Policy to reduce the community vote threshold and clarify financial requirements for resettlement, an ongoing review of the Municipal Legislation, and recommendations in the Report of the Premier's Economic Recovery Team related to tax structure for Local Service Districts (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2021b; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2021a; Premier's Economic Recovery Team, 2021). In February 2022, the Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs for Newfoundland and Labrador released the Report of the Joint Working Group on Regionalization, which made a series of recommendations related to two-tier regional governance (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2022). While amalgamation or annexation of municipalities has not been explicitly put forward by the current government, it is likely under consideration given the discourse regarding regional solutions and the challenges presented by the high number of communities in NL. It is clear from interviews and document analysis conducted during this study that provincial governments of NL in recent decades have preferred the bottom-up, or voluntary, approach to municipal amalgamation as opposed to the "top-down" approach of coercing or mandating municipal amalgamations. The framework presented in this study may assist provincial governments to encourage voluntary amalgamations while avoiding forced amalgamations that are politically unpalatable and potentially less effective.

5.6.   Limitations of the Study

The conclusions of this study should be considered in the context of some methodological limitations. Firstly, due to logistical challenges, the sample size for elite interviews is small (n=8). Acquiring interviews was constrained by the amount of time that has passed since most of the cases occurred, which meant most of those involved with decision-making are no longer in those roles, with some having retired and others unfortunately having

passed away. Interview participants were invited and interviews were conducted during the

COVID-19 Pandemic which also placed constraints on interview acquisition and the actual

interview process itself.[10] Those who were interviewed provided a diverse representation of all

cases, with some participants being directly involved with multiple cases while others were

involved with a single case. In addition to limitations related to the size of the interview sample,

participants were not evenly distributed by case, leading to thicker descriptions in some cases

than others. To address the limitation of small sample size and representation in interviews, a

document analysis was conducted which examined media records, feasibility studies, meeting

minutes, the Hansard for the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador, legislation,

correspondence acquired through access to information requests, and other relevant

documentation. Secondary research was also conducted by examining existing studies of the

communities under consideration, particularly the histories of the communities which had

undergone previous institutional change through processes such as resettlement or

amalgamation.

In addition to limitations with the sample size of interview participants, there were

challenges related to acquisition of documents which limited the number of documents examined

in this study. There was particular difficulty acquiring town council meeting minutes from the

period in which amalgamation was under consideration. The exception is the second period of

consideration of amalgamation for Labrador City and Wabush, for which meeting minutes are

published online. This anomaly is likely due to the fact that this case was more recent than the

others and that the entities of Labrador City and Wabush did not undergo amalgamation, leaving

the municipal institutions intact and resulting in greater maintenance of records. In one case, a

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[10] One interview was conducted in-person, while seven interviews were conducted via videoconference or telephone in alignment with public health restrictions.

Town Clerk for one of the amalgamated entities indicated that the meeting minutes related to the amalgamation were likely locked in a town office safe for which no one knew the lock combination (Personal Communication, 2020). To address the limitation of documentation, a broad sample of documents was examined, including existing research where possible. The combination of elite interviews and document analysis is intended to address the limitations of both approaches as best as possible.

5.7.   Recommendations for Future Research

To further assess the typology presented in this study, address some of the methodological limitations, and examine questions arising from this study, there are multiple recommendations for future research. Firstly, this area of research will benefit from survey-based examination of cases in which consideration of voluntary amalgamation is ongoing. Such a study could involve the development of a survey instrument to measure the strength of Regional Identity and Concern for Community Survival through the lens of discursive institutionalism. An instrument measuring these two variables would further test the typology presented in this study while operationalizing the related concepts. Development of a survey instrument would also enable the investigation of discourses of identity and concern for community survival among residents of the communities considering amalgamation, addressing the issue of small-n sampling and providing a thicker analysis of how these discourses affect likelihood of voluntary amalgamation. Furthermore, a study in which amalgamation is actively being considered would mitigate challenges associated with document acquisition. While the document analysis found in this thesis relied upon and was constrained by the document management and retention of municipal and provincial governments, a study of an ongoing amalgamation process would allow

researchers to acquire and retain relevant documents as they are produced and to record information on the process as it occurs.

In addition to the recommendations to address limitations by 1) developing a survey instrument to test the typology developed in this study and 2) conducting a study of communities in which voluntary amalgamation is under consideration, there are multiple questions for future research that arise from this study. Two research questions that clearly arise from the cases examined in this study are 1) how the existence of a regional body, such as the Great Northern Peninsula Regional Council and the Fogo Island Regional Council, influences discourses regarding regional identity and concern for community survival, and 2) how third-party convenors, such as Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and regional councils or committees, influence consideration of voluntary amalgamation. These questions could be examined through standalone studies or in tandem with the research agenda suggested above.

5.8. Conclusions

The preceding study has examined the research question of why communities voluntarily amalgamate, using a comparative case analysis of four cases in which municipal amalgamation was considered in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Based on the observations throughout this study, a typology based on discursive variables of concern for community survival and regional identity has been developed and applied to the communities involved in the cases. The findings of this study support the two hypotheses presented at the outset of this project, and offer valuable insight in terms of academic contribution and policy implications. While conventional wisdom of historical institutionalism would perhaps neglect the discursive elements examined in this study, the findings support using the lens of discursive institutionalism to better understand the decision-making process related to voluntary municipal

amalgamation. This represents an interesting local government application of discursive institutionalism which has traditionally been applied to analysis of national or international affairs. The typology and findings presented in this study should benefit national and sub-national governments when considering amalgamation of their municipalities, as it presents an approach that may allow for the identification of communities which are favourable to amalgamation and the encouragement of voluntary amalgamation instead of mandatory or coerced amalgamation. While this study is not without its limitations, namely the small interview sample size and limited related documents, the findings presented should encourage future research on how the interaction of ideas and discourses – particularly those related to community survival and identities – influence the institutional change at the municipal level.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide with Potential Probes

1. Take me back through the history of [community] that led to the consideration of amalgamation.
Were there particular events that caused amalgamation to be considered?
Prior to officially being considered, were there people advocating for amalgamation? Opposing amalgamation?
How did you feel about amalgamation when it was first brought up?

2. Can you describe some details of the conversations that took place while amalgamation was being considered?
Did you learn more about amalgamation during this process?
Did you have a position on amalgamation during the initial conversations?

3. Can you walk me through the process that was involved with deciding whether amalgamation would occur?
Did your feelings about amalgamation change during the process?
How did you feel at the beginning, middle, and end of the process?
Do you feel that the process was led by a community or the provincial government?

4. Was there a good understanding of the implications of amalgamation in your community? on council? in the other communities?
Why?
How?
Was there effort made to help the community better understand amalgamation?

5. Can you describe a specific incident that acted as a turning point in the discussion of amalgamation?
Did this affect your understanding of the events?
Why was this incident significant?