Conceptualizing social policy as development domestically: An exploration of Employment Insurance in Canada

Kaylee O'Meara

Department of Political Science, McGill University, Montréal

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Existing academic literature describes that domestic social program spending is comparable with foreign development aid contributions but no conceptual connection between the two kinds of spending is made explicit by the Government of Canada. This paper analyzes literature on social policy and two international development studies (IDS) concepts - development economics and dependency theory - for conceptual similarities in the Canadian context. The paper then examines the case of Employment Insurance (EI) and Atlantic Canada's experience with EI. Atlantic Canada was selected as a case because it has comparatively high levels of unemployment and high rates of EI use. This is a small-scale qualitative case study. Methodology is two-pronged. The first prong includes document analysis and triangulation of five Government of Canada documents. The second prong consists of data from 14 semi-structured interviews with policy professionals who have familiarity with development, EI, and Atlantic Canada. Interviews indicate some evidence for conceptual similarities between international development and social policy. While the paper's hypothesis that Canada does not call its social policies 'development' policies because we are a 'developed' country was not supported, findings illuminate some dependency between EI and its recipients in Atlantic Canada which supports the paper's secondary hypothesis that rural and urban dynamics in Canada echo dependency theory from IDS.

Résumé

La littérature académique existante décrit que les dépenses des programmes sociaux nationaux sont comparables aux contributions de l'aide étrangère au développement, mais aucun lien conceptuel entre les deux types de dépenses n'est explicité par le gouvernement du Canada. Ce document analyse la littérature sur la politique sociale et deux concepts des études du développement international - l'économie du développement et la théorie de la dépendance - pour trouver des similitudes conceptuelles dans le contexte canadien. Il examine ensuite le cas de l'assurance-emploi et l'expérience du Canada atlantique en la matière. Le Canada atlantique a été choisi comme cas parce qu'il présente des niveaux de chômage comparativement élevés et des taux de recours à l'assurance-emploi importants. Il s'agit d'une étude de cas qualitative à petite échelle. La méthodologie comporte deux volets. Le premier volet comprend l'analyse et la triangulation de cinq documents du gouvernement du Canada. Le second volet consiste en des données provenant de 14 entretiens semi-structurés avec des professionnels de la politique qui connaissent bien le développement, l'assurance-emploi et le Canada atlantique. Les entrevues révèlent certaines similitudes conceptuelles entre le développement international et la politique sociale. Bien que l'hypothèse du document selon laquelle le Canada ne qualifie pas ses politiques sociales de politiques de "développement" parce qu'il est un pays "développé" n'ait pas été confirmée, les résultats mettent en lumière une certaine dépendance entre l'assurance-emploi et ses bénéficiaires dans le Canada atlantique, ce qui soutient l'hypothèse secondaire du document selon laquelle les dynamiques rurales et urbaines au Canada font écho à la théorie de la dépendance de études du développement international.

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Canada's social safety net has many holes and people fall through our patchwork system daily. It has been a privilege to research complex and political topics that affect people's lives and livelihoods. It is our collective duty to think critically about how and why people fall through the cracks and in our collective interest – in academia and far beyond – to do better.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
ACOA	Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
G20	Group of 20
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IDS	International Development Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MPs	Members of Parliament
ODA	Official Development Assistance
RDAs	Regional Development Agencies
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations

Introduction

The Canadian state engages in both international development and domestic social policy programming. In the 2022 budget, the Government of Canada pledged more money for both development policy via foreign assistance ("Budget 2022: A Plan to Grow Our Economy and Make Life More Affordable" 2022, 132) and social policy via increased benefits for the elderly ("Budget 2022: A Plan to Grow Our Economy and Make Life More Affordable" 2022, 189). While definitions for development vary greatly, the practice is generally charged with achieving betterment however defined. Similarly, social policy is broadly charged with ensuring citizens are faring well (hence 'welfare'). A connection between international development and social policy is not made explicit by the Government of Canada but the literature suggests some similarities between international development policy (aid) and domestic social policy. This paper examines the concept of 'development', in-part via a case study of Atlantic Canada's experience with the social policy, Employment Insurance (EI). This research focuses on the *concept* of development with some lessons from international development studies (IDS), particularly development economics and dependency theory. IDS is highly interdisciplinary and it is examined only in a theoretical sense in this paper.

The goal of this research is to better understand what it means to 'develop' in the context of Canadian social policy. Canada is classified as a "major developed" and "high income" economy by the UN ("Country Classification," n.d.). Canada is also internally economically unequal. For example, the wealthiest 20% of households account for 67.9% of net worth while the bottom 40% accounts for just 2.6% ("Distributions of Household Economic Accounts for Income, Consumption, Saving and Wealth of Canadian Households, Fourth Quarter 2022" 2023).

Economic inequality in Canada also has regional elements. Inter-regional inequality and redistribution in Canada can be contentious. Equalization grants – designed to close gaps in differences in fiscal capacity of provinces – is a frequent topic of public debate in Canada (Banting 2005, 131). Also important are the inter-regional transfers "implicit to national social programs" like EI (Banting 2005, 131). Social programs are especially helpful in the poorer provinces of Atlantic Canada where there are more needy people benefitting the programs, though the taxpayers in that region pay a smaller proportion of the total taxes needed to finance the programs (Banting 2005, 131). Atlantic Canada's economic realities will be examined to exemplify what 'development' means in that region and how social policies like EI are conceptualized.

There are 64 EI regions in Canada and benefit rates and eligibility criteria vary based on the region's respective unemployment rates ("Employment Insurance (EI) Program Characteristics," n.d.). The data suggests that the higher the unemployment rate of the region is the lower the number of insured hours required to qualify for benefits. For example, as of January 2024 data, the EI region of Newfoundland and Labrador has an unemployment rate of 14% and one must have 420 insured hours to qualify for benefits while the region of Toronto, Ontario has a 6.8% unemployment rate and a requirement of 665 insured hours ("Employment Insurance (EI) Program Characteristics," n.d.). When a region requires fewer hours, this suggests that more people are on the program and out of the labour force.

My thematic research question is: *could social policy mean 'development' at home?* This research is timely and important partly because the current cost-of-living crisis – in Canada and abroad. High inflation became a global phenomenon in 2022 (Lopez 2022). According to the IMF, most G20 countries – especially advanced economies – are still experiencing inflation well

above central banks' targets (Georgieva 2023). What with the world experiencing a financial crunch, it feels important to investigate how governments seek to alleviate economic inequality.

The federal government uses the term 'development' in several senses. This research interrogates how 'development' is defined and *spoken about* to enhance understanding about economic inequality alleviation.

One place where the term 'development' does come up in federal public policy is at Canada's seven Regional Economic Development Agencies (RDAs). The seven regions include Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Northern Canada, Southern Ontario, Northern Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia. The only Canadian region not covered by the RDAs is central Ontario.

The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) is required to have a "Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy" which includes reporting on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals ("2023-24 Departmental Plan - SDG" 2023). The RDAs are overseen by the department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISEDC) ("Canada's Regional Development Agencies" 2021). Gudie Hutchings is currently the Minister responsible for ACOA, an agency charged with job creation and economic development ("The Honourable Gudie Hutchings" 2021). ACOA grants financial assistance to individuals and businesses in the region ("Application for Financial Assistance" 2021). It is charged with "growing the economy of Atlantic Canada" ("FAQs" 2021).

This research draws principally from the discipline of political science, specifically Canadian politics and social policy, with some concepts from IDS like development economics and dependency theory.

International development informs and is informed by how societies see the world socio-economically and politically. Both social policy programming and international development aid

involve monetary transfers, to individuals and states, or institutions, respectively. Reducing inequalities is part of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy ("Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy" 2018). Both social and international development aid policies arose in the same eras and geopolitical contexts to meet the challenges of reducing poverty at home and abroad. Both international development aid and social policy programs are priorities for the Government of Canada. The government's most recent Speech from the Thone in 2021 emphasized supporting Canadian seniors – whose economic circumstances are improved by social policies like Old Age Security (OAS) – while also pledging to increase spending on foreign assistance for development annually ("2021 Speech from the Throne" 2021).

Framework and Hypotheses

My hypothesis is that despite social policy and international development's conceptual similarities, social policies in Canada are not called development policies because a country as wealthy and 'developed' as Canada would not need development policies. Thus, it is a choice to separate the concepts. The term 'development' can, thus, be very important because its use or omission can be powerful and political. It is worth noting that the federal government uses the term, at times, to describe both 'economic development' and 'social development' in relation to employment and other policy matters ("Employment and Social Development Canada" 2020). Because of this, I pay direct attention to how the government speaks *about* development regarding domestic policies in both policy documents and my interviews.

My precise research question is: *How does EI resemble development economics?* I use an understanding of development economics to study EI. I contrast development economics with EI, a key example of federal social policy in Canada. Development economics is a subfield of IDS principally concerned with reducing and eliminating poverty, inequality, and unemployment

(Todaro and Smith 2015, 17). EI provides temporary income support to unemployed workers so they can pay their bills while they look for employment or upgrade their skills ("Employment Insurance (EI)" 2016). EI is a policy response to prevent the risk of poverty while individuals are detached from the labour market (MacKinnon 2013, 22). Another research question pertaining to the regional element of EI is, *does – and* how *does – EI alleviate regional economic inequality in Atlantic Canada?*

Table 1 displays my three research questions.

Table 1: Research Questions

Type of question	*Question*
Thematic question	Could social policy mean 'development' at home?
Precise research question	How does EI resemble development economics?
Regionally specific question	Does – and how does – EI alleviate regional economic inequality in Atlantic Canada?

A secondary hypothesis involves a specific IDS concept called dependency theory. Dependency theory will be explored in the literature review section. As mentioned previously, the only Canadian region not covered by an RDA is central Ontario where the largest city – Toronto – is located. I hypothesize that Toronto remakes dependency theory as the 'centre' and the 'periphery' is less economically prosperous regions of the country like Atlantic Canada. Other large cities like Vancouver and Montréal could also be centres of their own regions. This may help illustrate scales of inter-Canadian inequality with large cities as the microcosm of a larger macrocosm of uneven development.

My intention is that this research contributes to Canadian social policy scholarship by exploring the socio-economic dynamics of EI in Atlantic Canada with concepts from IDS for the first time. Insights from this research may paint a fuller picture of the social policy's implications in this regional context and encourage policy makers to think more critically about concepts from the IDS discipline.

A note on terminology: by 'Atlantic Canada', I am referring to the four easternmost provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. The term 'Maritimes refers to the same provinces minus Newfoundland and Labrador.

Literature review

In selecting what scholarship was relevant for this research, I reread articles and policy documents I had read previously – whether for courses or other research – and found others using citation networks like the McGill Library and bibliographic research.

This literature review links existing research on international development and social policy in the pursuit of poverty and economic inequality reduction with attention to EI and Atlantic Canada. Poverty and economic inequality are global problems. Of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), "no poverty" is number one and "reduced inequalities" number ten ("The 17 Goals | Sustainable Development," n.d.). This section seeks to demonstrate an existing connection between the two policies in the literature, provide an overview of Canadian social policy, development economics, and dependency theory as well as contextualize the EI program in relation to Atlantic Canada.

Social policy and international development in scholarship

The scholars that speak most directly to the similarity between international development and social policy are Alain Noël and Jean-Philippe Thérien. Their 1995 paper "From Domestic to

International Justice: The Welfare State and Foreign Aid" examines how values get institutionalized within states and reflected in foreign relations (Noël and Thérien 1995, 524). Their argument, like mine, is interdisciplinary. They propose that development aid programs are a projection of the social relations and income-redistribution mechanisms in developed countries (Noël and Thérien 1995, 524). The scope of their argument is OECD countries. They explore OECD's countries' respective foreign aid programs and domestic social welfare spending programs (Noël and Thérien 1995, 524). Thus, the variables in their argument are 1) foreign development aid contributions representing IDS and 2) social welfare spending representing social policy.

Their paper contextualizes welfare policy not as one single policy but as the lasting impact of socio-political conflicts over distributive justice and they argue that welfare states actually emerge from this conflict (Noël and Thérien 1995, 524). As societies debate socio-economic inequities based on concepts of distributive justice, the welfare state emerges to meet the challenge. Importantly, welfare principles that are institutionalized domestically shape the participation of developed countries in the international aid regime (Noël and Thérien 1995, 552). Thus, social policy and development aid are similarly aimed at reducing economic inequality. In fact, the authors argue that both programs respond to the needs of alleviating inequality between the rich and poor created or maintained by the market economy (Noël and Thérien 1995, 523).

The scholars found that studies with different methodologies have turned up different findings about how social policy and development policy emerged and influenced each other. Quantitative studies showed that strong welfare programs and strong international aid programs are underpinned by the same values (Noël and Thérien 1995, 527). Qualitative studies found that

the rise of the welfare state is one factor in the creation of development aid policies (Noël and Thérien 1995, 526).

Rather than investigate what may appear as a 'chicken and the egg' causal conundrum between development aid and the welfare state, this paper is more concerned with the acknowledgement that social policies and development policy share notable similarities. Importantly, both regimes emerged from the same socio-economic eras and contexts. For instance, the contemporary welfare state arose as a product of the 1960s and 70s, making it "not an elderly institution" (Noël and Thérien 1995, 551). A similar timeline is true for international development which arose in the aftermath of World War II (Noël and Thérien 1995, 551). Both policies also have similar objectives. Both are concerned with income-redistribution within states and internationally through development aid (Noël and Thérien 1995, 526). Noël and Thérien link social policy with development aid with clear variables and scope, making their paper the most helpful in supporting this paper's central claim: that social policy and international development are notably similar in their pursuit of alleviating poverty and reducing economic inequality.

Contextualizing Canadian social policy

When examining how social policy shows up internationally, Béland and Petersen's 2014 book *Analysing Social Policy Concepts and Language* is helpful. The book contextualizes global social policy and maps relationships to development institutions. According to the scholars, social policy refers to what's commonly called the 'welfare state' or 'social security' and it has and World Bank (Béland and Petersen 2014, 297). The IMF and the World Bank are also huge players in international development (Cypher and Dietz 2009, 497). The concept of the 'welfare state' is likely the most influential social policy concept found in national contexts (Béland and

Petersen 2014, 297) while the concept of 'social security' emerged in the U.S. following President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s (Béland and Petersen 2014, 298). Social policies are prolific globally and while specifics vary country-to-country, they are part of a global compact on socio-economic security.

Further on the welfare state, Esping-Andersen describes the concept as the state's responsibility to secure a basic modicum of welfare for its citizens (Esping-Andersen 1990, 19). Social policy subfields include policy areas like old age pensions, family policy, and social services (Béland and Petersen 2014, 301). Canada's welfare state is a liberal welfare state with "relative equality of poverty among state-welfare recipients, market-differentiated welfare among the majorities, and a class-political dualism between the two" (Esping-Andersen 1990, 27). Thus, there is a significant class divide between the rich and poor in Canada.

MacDonald offers a helpful characterization of Canadian social policy:

> Canada, a federation of ten provinces and two territories, has constructed a modern-day welfare state characterized by a complicated system of redistribution across federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions with programs designed to ameliorate economic and social insecurity resulting from poverty, unemployment, disability, sickness, old age and regional inequality (MacDonald 1998, 389).

Canada is a federation wherein the federal and provincial/territorial governments are each involved in the mechanisms of social policy (Banting 2005, 93). Equalization is a social policy program essential to understanding regional politics, among other things, in Canada. Equalization payments are federal transfers to "poorer" provinces designed to help enable them to deliver public services without resorting to above average levels of taxation on their citizens (Banting 2005, 93).

Daniel Béland and Rianne Mahon's *Advanced Introduction to Social Policy,* describes social policy program specifics in Canada. In general, there are three types of social programs. There are social assistance programs which is need-based, social insurance programs based on

past contributions, and universal programs that are citizenship-based (Béland and Mahon 2016, 13). Employment insurance aligns with the second, social insurance-based format. Rice and Prince write that unemployment was one of many problems, along with disability and industrial accidents, prompted by economic development in the early 20th Century (Rice and Prince 2013, 9). It was this era of early industrial capitalism that social programs began to be created.

Esping-Anderson describes that economic development of a society is essential for welfare state development because economic growth "allows redistribution" (Esping-Andersen 1990, 112). Indeed, market capitalism brought both economic development and new inequities (Béland and Mahon 2016, 5). Rice and Prince argue that social welfare is in part a response to industrial capitalism and urbanization (Rice and Prince 2013, 57). Principally, social programs re-created fundamental structures evident in pre-industrial society among kin and community, essentially reproducing relationships of reciprocity and redistribution (Rice and Prince 2013, 9). With more and more people moving to cities for work, senses of rural community faded and city lifestyles required more social policy programs that rural life had previously (Rice and Prince 2013, 44).

Canada's welfare state has limitations. Federal and provincial governments made cuts to Canada's social safety net over time and this has created holes that people have fallen and continue to fall into (Smith 2022, 275). This gaps are often filled by local actors and Indigenous-led groups that stretch the social safety net to cover more people and "mend the holes with duct tape" (Smith 2022, 275).

A piece of scholarship important to my understanding of internal economic inequality is Shauna MacKinnon's 2013 paper, "The Politics of Poverty in Canada". MacKinnon argues that poverty, regardless of how it is measured, is unacceptable in a country as wealthy as Canada (MacKinnon 2013, 19). In fact, Canada's own national Poverty Reduction Strategy similarly

states: “in a country as wealthy as Canada, we cannot stand by while our fellow citizens struggle” (“Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy” 2018).

Typologies of poverty and its social exclusion drive policy responses in Canada (MacKinnon 2013, 19). MacKinnon describes that the most common policy response to poverty in Canada is focused on labour market attachment yet benefit programs for those not currently in the labour force like EI are on the decline in terms of accessibility, breadth and depth of support as Canada has shifted from more “passive to active” poverty reduction methods (MacKinnon 2013, 43). She notes that this policy change aligns with the ideological shift from Keynesianism to neoliberalism as countries with neoliberal welfare states like Canada take a narrow approach to poverty through policies aimed at labour market supply in direct response to labour market needs (MacKinnon 2013, 22). Interestingly, the federal Poverty Reduction strategy implies a reliance on the labour market for poverty reduction with the following statement: “by working to reduce poverty, Canada will promote economic growth, foster community and help more Canadians join the middle class” (“Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy” 2018). MacKinnon notes that for poverty reduction to be effective, it must be a political priority (MacKinnon 2013, 23). MacKinnon’s work is a compelling prompt for my hypothesis on why Canada has no domestic ‘development’ policies.

Social policy concepts and definitions must be read critically. Scholarship notes that definitions of social policy concepts like the ‘welfare state’ vary, are vague, controversial or even problematic (Béland 2011, 1). Definitions are subject to interpretation historical constructions (Béland 2011, 1). Policy ideas also change significantly over time. When policy ideas are institutionalized, the ideas shape the definitions of interests and “this influence can last generations, even when the ideas are no longer held” (Steensland 2008, 13). I include this to

remind me to challenge my own assumptions and biases on complex topics like social policy which are wrought with power relations.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that social policy exists because of and in the context of inequality. As put by political scientists Helen Ingram and Anne Schneider, systemic biases with the economic and social systems are the "best explanations for the very different rates of economic, social, and political success" (Schneider and Ingram 2005, 11). This research does not see to understand economic inequality in Canada as a whole but, instead, focuses on EI as it potentially intersects with economic development.

Lessons from International Development Studies

There is no universal definition of what international development means or does. Interpretations differ across the scholarship and industry. Plus, this paper only engages selectively with the development literature, which is a vast, interdisciplinary field of its own. IDS teaches us to apply to a lens through which we can conceive of the world socio-economically and geopolitically.

Scholars that inform my understanding of development economics include James Cypher and James Dietz with their 2009 book, *The process of economic development*. World poverty, the stark difference between rich and poor countries, and poverty within countries prompted interest in development economics in the late 1960s (Cypher and Dietz 2009, 9). Development economics is a subfield of IDS principally concerned with reducing and eliminating poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Todaro and Smith 2015, 17). Cypher and Dietz's book maps the ways in which development is measured – in academia and in practice – through economic means. For example, the Gini coefficient measures wealth inequality within a country (Cypher and Dietz 2009, 37). Canada's Gini coefficient is the most equal of the G7 countries but is

behind several European countries like Belgium and Denmark ("Inequality - Income Inequality - OECD Data," n.d.). Thus, inequality is always relative.

Development aid specifically has been characterized as "attempts to promote long-term, self-sustaining political and economic improvements in poor areas" (Wenar 2003, 293) whereas humanitarian aid refers to aid for emergency food, water and shelter for those in immediate danger (Stone 2012, 375).

There are many other ways to measure development in IDS. Development can include extending "fundamental human values" to as much of the world's population as possible and/or improve deliverables such as food and shelter, "meaningful" employment, a "reasonable level" of healthcare, democracy and political participation, and social security in old age (Cypher and Dietz 2009, 10).

Cypher and Dietz describe the practices of development institutions. The World Bank and IMF take money from economically advanced countries to grant or loan money to poorer countries (Cypher and Dietz 2009, 497). The donor countries receive voting shares in the institutions' decision-making processes in return, proportionate to their monetary contributions (Cypher and Dietz 2009, 497). Foreign aid for official development assistance (ODA) is used primarily for the economic development of the receiving (Cypher and Dietz 2009, 492) or Global South country. This economic understanding of what it means to develop is helpful for my research because, as noted by Noël and Thérien (1995), is comparable to domestic social welfare spending and programs.

Further to the origins of both international development and social policy, Karen Dubinsky, Sean Mills and Scott Rutherford's *Canada and the Third World: Overlapping Histories* is helpful. They write:

> In the aftermath of World War II, popular campaigns in industrialized countries for social welfare and better working conditions were transforming the social contract between governments and citizens, and between labour and capital. Canada was no exception to these trends. The idealism of a world without want and a new era of human progress that could emerge from the ruins of war inspired the founding of the United Nations in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights three years later (Dubinsky, Mills, and Rutherford 2016, 91).

The idealism of the postwar era created the space for expanded social programming for welfare. Development aid policies have also been a part of Canadian policy since the end of the second world war (Dubinsky, Mills, and Rutherford 2016, 88).

Foreign aid for ODA can flow through international organizations like the World Bank (Cypher and Dietz 2009, 522) or it can be given bilaterally from one country to another ("Report to Parliament on the Government of Canada's Official Development Assistance" 2018). Canada first committed itself to the internationally recognized goal of contributing 0.7% of GNP to ODA in 1970 (Pratt 1989, 41) but it has never reached this goal. In 2022, Canada contributed 0.370% of its GNP to ODA ("Official Development Assistance (ODA) - Net ODA - OECD Data," n.d.). By contrast, Canada spends much more on domestic social expenditures. In 2020 (the last time the data was available), the Canadian state spent 24.9% of GDP on social expenditures ("Social Expenditure Database (SOCX) - OECD," n.d.).

Given the regional element to this paper, here are two definitions for regional development. A scholarly definition of regional development is a "general effort to reduce regional disparities by supporting employment and wealth-generating economic activities in regions" (Pike, Rodriguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2017, 18). The OECD defines regional economic policy as the "general effort to enhance well-being and living standards in all region types, and improve their contribution to national performance and more inclusive societies" ("Regional Development Policy - OECD," n.d.).

Dependency is a Marxist development studies theory about unequal relations between two countries wherein one is the 'centre', representing developed capitalism, and the other is the

'periphery', representing the "underdeveloped" region (Ghosh 2019, 1). In dependency theory, the centre or the more powerful region will "draw away" resources – both physical and human – from the periphery with backwash effects such as migration, capital outflow, and unequal trade (Ghosh 2019, 4). The theory arose in Latin America in the 1970s and its proponents reasoned that underdevelopment was due to "imperialist confiscation of resources" from the periphery to explain dependent economic systems (Katz 2022, xi). Dependency theory helps us understand "underdevelopment" of the periphery (Katz 2022, xv) in relation to a more prosperous 'centre'. Again, I hypothesize that Toronto remakes dependency theory as the centre and peripheries could be less economically prosperous regions of the country like Atlantic Canada.

Urbanization is relevant to international development. In 2006, Robinson wrote that cities only recently had started to be considered and promoted as particular sites of economic growth and valued through providing employment opportunities for growing populations in policy circles (Robinson 2013, 123). The 1990s brought a new understanding of urban economies as "engines of economic growth", rather than as "parasitic drains" on national economies (Robinson 2013, 124). I include this to emphasize the importance of cities to explorations of regional inequality.

Employment Insurance and Atlantic Canada

Many countries have a form of employment insurance. Globally, unemployment insurance is a social policy program that generates much political conflict in modern industrial society (Béland et al. 2021, 573). While most social policy programming resides in provincial jurisdiction in Canada (Béland, Marchildon, and Prince 2019, 5), unemployment insurance in Canada is an entirely federal policy jurisdiction (Banting 2005, 93).

Campeau's 2005 book *From UI to EI: Waging war on the welfare state* provides a historical analysis of EI since its inception in 1940 as Unemployment Insurance (UI) (Campeau 2005, vii). Campeau provides key insights into the Canadian social safety net wherein UI institutionalized "rights for the jobless" (Campeau 2005, vii) at a time when industrialization had created mass unemployment "over which the individual has almost no control" (Campeau 2005, viii). Prior to UI's creation, unemployment was viewed as strictly a "problem of the unemployed" (Grundy and Laliberte Rudman 2018, 811). According to Campeau, UI was created as a compromise over state intervention reached by employers' associations, unions, and the ruling political class – the compromise being the insurance part of the policy (Campeau 2005, ix).

UI was Canada's first major social insurance program and the first to establish benefits as rights (Banting 2005, 105). Essentially, unemployment is a "risk" that the welfare state seeks to insure against via unemployment insurance (Béland et al. 2021, 585). A major retrenchment of the program in 1971 expanded coverage and increased replacement rates (Béland et al. 2021, 581). Rates increased to 66% of wages and extended benefits in regions with the highest levels of unemployment (Banting 2005, 107). The increased rates were reversed in the 1990s though, resembling the same rate in 1996 as it did in 1940 at 50% (Banting 2005, 119). Essentially, EI is a social policy area that has experienced both expansion and retrenchment over time (Béland, Prince, and Weaver 2021, 3). At the time of this paper's writing, EI pays "up to" 55% of earnings and up to a yearly maximum of $63,200 with some family supplements available ("EI Regular Benefits" 2024). Canada has one of the lowest replacement rates for unemployment insurance among OECD countries (Courchene and Allan 2009).

In general, Campeau reads as critical of reductions to EI eligibility and coverage. He implies his support for the unemployed with the following statement: “with EI, have the ‘insured persons’ not become the victims of a system that takes their premiums and puts them to uses other than compensation for unemployment?” (Campeau 2005, 179). In 1996 when replacement rates were reduced to 50%, decreases in employee contribution barely budged, generating an “immense surplus” for the federal government treasury (Banting 2005, 119). He goes further to describe that EI is an “income guarantee” as claimants all pay premiums into it (Campeau 2005, 180.) and while dominant market forces further “erode employment relationships”, it is more important than ever to hold a “collective responsibility” for the employed and unemployed (Campeau 2005, 181).

Hale’s 1998 paper “Reforming Employment Insurance” is essential for understanding EI dynamics in Atlantic Canada. He argues that the federal government has an imperative to “regionally redistribute” and that large-scale transfers to Atlantic Canada and parts of Québec became mainstays of these regional economies in the 1970s (Hale 1998, 430). Hale also states that UI became a “linchpin” in Canada’s system of distributive federalism wherein income and wealth is transferred from prosperous regions to less prosperous regions (Hale 1998, 430). Hale describes that UI was the largest federal transfer program to individuals in the “five provinces East of the Ottawa River, especially in Atlantic Canada” (Hale 1998, 430). The scholar describes Atlantic Canada as experiencing “chronic structural” unemployment and seasonal employment in rural areas and proposes that the program is part of a “vicious cycle of underdevelopment and dependence” (Hale 1998, 442). Moreover, Vickers describes that EI has shaped decades of public policy in Newfoundland, has created “an extreme dependency on social programs”, and has shaped how rural economies are developed (Vickers 2010, 24). Principally, EI has created

"path dependence" and has been used as an "income supplement" rather than an income insurance program (Vickers 2010, 24).

MacDonald describes that Atlantic Canada experiences "slower than average" economic growth and that the region is "plagued" by high levels of unemployment which has prompted high rates of "out-migration" (MacDonald 1998, 393). On top of out-migration, the region has also had trouble attracting skilled workers "in the face of greater economic opportunities" elsewhere (Akbari 2015, 227). May argues that UI transformed "the very nature of economic activity" in Atlantic Canada and benefits are a major, if not, primary source of income especially in rural areas (May 1993, 407). May describes that UI makes seasonal occupations viable and that community structures are "centred around obtaining" UI payments (May 1993, 408]). In the 1970s, regional income disparities between Atlantic Canada and the rest of the country were "noted" by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau which resulted in new regional development strategies (May 1993, 410). Created in 1988, ACOA has had "mixed success", its main accomplishment being helping "indigenous industries" survive (MacKinnon 2013, 394). Describing the seasonal work of fishing and people's ways of living, the scholar Doug May asks, "how could people who have less than a Grade 9 education and whose main source of income is UI benefits now go back to school?" (May 1993, 416). Similar to Hale and Vickers, this seems to imply Atlantic Canadians' dependency on UI. May describes that actors in the "have" regions of Canada have tended not to force through reforms that may negatively effect the "have nots", citing that costs to the "have" regions have been relatively low (May 1993, 417). Again, this seems to imply a self-perpetuating cycle of dependency on the status quo of UI use.

Use of EI by seasonal workers continues today. The 2023 Fall Economic Statement delivered by Canada's Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland, increased EI for seasonal workers.

Citing “this year’s specific and atypical economic circumstance”, EI has been extended by four additional weeks for September 2023 to September 2024 (“2023 Fall Economic Statement” 2023).

Methodology

The empirical focus of this research was an exploration of EI as it relates to economic development in Atlantic Canada. Atlantic Canada and the region’s relationship to EI was selected as the case study because scholarship notes that Atlantic Canada receives more EI than elsewhere in Canada (Hale 1998, 430). Moreover, the region is experiencing new challenges due to the rising cost of living. The cost-of-living crisis has been acutely felt in Atlantic Canada where people on social assistance are living in “extreme poverty” according to Janelle Leblanc, an advocate with the New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice (Smellie 2023). A 2021 report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives explores the monetary cost of poverty in Atlantic Canada through forgone revenue and remedial costs like higher health care spending among other things while also arguing that they did not include the costs of social assistance benefits because these costs should be viewed as meeting our obligations to one another in society, rather than a cost of poverty (“The Cost of Poverty in the Atlantic Provinces,” n.d.). This kind of humility in research reinforces how complex social policy and social problems are.

Methodology for this research was two-pronged. The first consisted of document analysis and triangulation. The second included data from 14 semi-structured interviews with professionals. The logic of inquiry was a qualitative case study approach.

Via document analysis and triangulation, five policy documents from the Government of Canada were analyzed regarding their use of the term ‘development’ in relation to rural economic development specifically in Atlantic Canada.

Table 2 details the names of the documents reviewed.

Table 2: List of the Documents Reviewed

Name of document
Rural opportunity, national prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for rural Canada (2019)
Canada's Rural Economic Development Strategy: Progress Report (2021) Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency Mandate Letter (2021)
Minister of Rural Economic Development Mandate Letter (2021)
Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency 2023-24 Departmental Plan

These five documents were chosen for analysis because they are all documents published during the Justin Trudeau administration from federal ministries, departments, and agencies. They also speak to topics central to this research including economic development and rural versus urban development. They also focus on ACOA – the RDA most important to this paper. Document analysis and triangulation was conducted by tracking how and how often terms like 'development' came up and noting what terms or concepts were absent from the documents.

I chose to conduct interviews because I wanted to create new data on the intersections between EI and development. Findings will be situated within what insights I have gleaned from document analysis and triangulation from government bodies, with analysis informed by literature on social policy and international development. This methodology will address my objective by questioning if and how EI in Atlantic Canada can be understood as 'development'. High levels of unemployment in Atlantic Canada coupled with my hypothesis that power relations within Canada can be understood through dependency theory is the rationale for my

case selection. By interviewing actors largely *in* Atlantic Canada, I will get an 'on-the-ground' view into how the concepts are conceptualized in relation to EI. I have chosen to interview policy and political actors only rather than recipients of EI for two reasons. First, this is a relatively small scale Master's level study. Second, I am most interested in the perspectives of the actors who design and implement the policies because the *conceptualization* of EI is most important to the research questions.

Interviews took place from October to December 2023. Participants were former and current professionals in Canadian social policy, economics, and development from the private and public sectors. Because of the important regional element to this research, most participants hold expertise on the economies of and social policy in Atlantic Canada. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to guide the conversations based off the interview questions. This allowed for open dialogue. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

Following the interviews, each interview was transcribed, and the transcriptions analyzed for thematic insights about the socio-economic dynamics of Canadian development, social policy, and perspectives on Atlantic Canada.

Analysis: Document Analysis

Rural Economic Strategy (2019) & Progress Report (2021)

The first document chosen for analysis and triangulation was the federal government's Rural Economic Development Strategy from 2019, presented by then-Minister of Rural Economic Development, Bernadette Jordan. I also reviewed the August 2021 Progress Report, which is the last time a progress report is available. Given that the Justin Trudeau government is still in power, these documents are relevant for analysis at present.

2019 was the first year Canada had a Minister of Rural Economic Development ("Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada" 2019) and the Minister is supported by a team at Infrastructure Canada's Centre for Rural Economic Development. The emphasis on Canada's then-new Minister for rural communities implies the government has put a conscious emphasis on rural economic development in their administration. The strategy is called a "roadmap for growth based on rural input" and is charged with accelerating "progress, creating jobs, and driving economic growth" ("Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada" 2019). It is unclear what is meant by 'progress'.

In relationship to urban areas, the strategy states that rural communities should "work with urban centres to make our country the successful, prosperous place that it is" ("Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada" 2019). Income levels in rural areas usually "lag behind those in urban communities" and rural areas allot for approximately 30% of Canada GDP ("Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada" 2019).

New technologies are "threatening to disrupt communities and their workers" who often work in agriculture, mining, oil and gas, forestry, fisheries and "aquaculture" ("Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada" 2019).

For this research, it is also important to note that Atlantic Canada has a high degree of rurality. Almost 50% of Atlantic Canadians live in rural areas whereas just one in five Canadians broadly live rurally ("Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada" 2019). Furthermore, rural Canada has a higher unemployment rate compared with the rational average despite also facing "significant" labour shortages,

particularly in agriculture (“Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada” 2019). The report highlights unemployment in rural areas of Canada as a challenge for economic development in those regions.

The strategy reports challenges for economic development as including: aging infrastructure, lack of high-speed internet, the cost of living, youth moving away for educational or work-related opportunities, a need for immigration, higher unemployment rates and lower labour force participation among other things (“Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada” 2019). The strategy highlights numerous programs and strategies the federal government has deployed to meet rural challenges but lacks clear, quantifiable goals.

The strategy explicitly calls upon the RDAs to help integrate federal policies with the help of the Centre for Rural Economic Development at Infrastructure Canada (“Rural Opportunity, National Prosperity: An Economic Development Strategy for Rural Canada” 2019).

It is worth noting that this is a political document as well as official government policy. The Minister of Rural Economic Development is a Cabinet role under the Liberal administration of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (“Cabinet,” n.d.) and the Minister has a team of political staffers at their disposal and, by extension, the public service.

The 2021 Progress Report, published by Infrastructure Canada, touts progress on internet connectivity, improved infrastructure, and affordable housing investments among other things (“Canada’s Rural Economic Development Strategy: Progress Report” 2021). The report’s tone is upbeat and positive, focusing on achievements and investments made despite the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic (“Canada’s Rural Economic Development Strategy: Progress Report”

2021). In the “next steps” section, achievements are again described but no specific goals or markers are discussed.

Together, these two documents use the term ‘development’ in a principally economic sense but specifics are vague or absent. Unemployment is higher in rural Canada but particular strategies to increase employment are not discussed. There is no mention of EI.

Mandate letters (2021)

Two Cabinet mandate letters were analyzed. Both date to Prime Minister Jutin Trudeau’s second term in office and have not been updated since December 2021. Both letters begin with a generic message to Cabinet Ministers before proceeding to Ministers’ specific portfolios.

The Minister of Rural Economic Development Mandate Letter is addressed to Minister Gudie Hutchings and charges her with recognizing the “challenges faced by rural communities” via measures to support “economic recovery, growth and resilience” (“Minister of Rural Economic Development Mandate Letter” 2021). Also emphasized is the development of rural infrastructure, housing, and rural transit “solutions” (“Minister of Rural Economic Development Mandate Letter” 2021). With the “support of Ministers responsible for RDAs”, she is to “continue to implement the Rural Development Strategy”, build on existing investments and identify future investments to benefit rural communities (“Minister of Rural Economic Development Mandate Letter” 2021).

Minister Hutchings is now also the Minister in charge of ACOA but at the time it was Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor. She is charged with continuing to prioritize “the delivery of support to small- and medium-sized businesses” via ACOA and supporting job creation and “economic development” particularly in rural and small communities (“Minister of Official Languages and Minister Responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency Mandate

Letter" 2021). Also emphasized is collaboration other Ministers of RDAs, continued work on the Atlantic Loop, and the Atlantic Growth Strategy ("Minister of Official Languages and Minister Responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency Mandate Letter" 2021). Again, these letters imply an economic understanding of 'development'. But the letters also use the term vaguely as what is meant by 'economic development' is not elaborated upon but for increased job creation. Mandate letters are high level documents, so it makes sense that these two letters' methodologies and rationale are not elaborated upon. What is clear is that the same issues come up time and time again for Atlantic Canada and rural communities: a perceived *lack* of economic development.

ACOA Departmental Plan, 2023-24

ACOA's 2023-2024 Departmental Plan was also reviewed. The word 'development' occurs 39 times in the body of the plan. 18 of those times it occurs as 'economic development' ("2023-24 Departmental Plan" 2023). The plan charges ACOA with continuing to leverage its 35 years of experience to fuel "long-term growth" in Atlantic Canada via regionally tailored and client-centric assistance to small- and medium-sized enterprises in urban and rural areas ("2023-24 Departmental Plan" 2023). Principally, the agency should "promote short- and long-term job creation and economic development" and contribute to "economic prosperity" ("2023-24 Departmental Plan" 2023). As mentioned previously, there is a section on the UN's SDGs. Four of the SDGs are listed as relevant to ACOA's work including SDG 8, "decent work" and economic growth, and SDG 9, industry, innovation and infrastructure ("2023-24 Departmental Plan" 2023). The planned expenses for 2023-2024 is stated as $396 million ("2023-24 Departmental Plan" 2023).

I also reviewed some of ACOA's public messaging on what it means to 'develop'. In April 2023, ACOA's President, Catherine Blewett, gave a speech and remarked, "this is not your grandparents' Atlantic Canada… while some old biases run deep, we are seeing a shift in the federation and an opening in the narrative ("Public Policy Forum – Canada Growth Summit 2023" 2023). She also said that Atlantic Canada has many deficiencies including being a "low wage jurisdiction" and having "historically cheap labour and lower productivity ("Public Policy Forum – Canada Growth Summit 2023" 2023). Blewett describes Atlantic Canada in similar terms to the Trudeau government's Rural Economic Development Strategy.

Neither poverty nor poverty reduction was discussed in the five documents analyzed.

Analysis: Interview Data

I reached out to several government and non-government MPs representing Atlantic Canada to invite them to participate in this study but none replied. I was particularly interested in interviewing this group because of Atlantic politicians' historical stances on EI. Hale (Hale 1998, 440) discusses how Atlantic representatives (along with Quebec) successfully "watered down" proposed changes to EI, acting as the "UI Caucus". I am also reminded of Banting (2005)'s chapter in *Federalism and the Welfare State* which describes that while in other countries, the most vocal opponents of unemployment insurance "pitted politicians against organized labour", in Canada the most effective supporters of EI are "politicians from poor regions" Banting 2005, 119). This regional block of politicians might have had meaningful additions to my research on modern conceptions of EI but unfortunately their views are not reflected in this research.

Because I chose a semi-structured interview style, participants had ample room to expand on my line of questioning. See interview guide in Appendix A for the list of interview questions. Findings are organized below by theme.

'Akin to'

One participant explicitly linked the purpose of social policy to the purpose of international development. This participant, which I will call Participant J, characterized social policy as "akin to what I think of as international development but internal". Their definition of international development was improving access to things like healthcare and reducing poverty.

Participant C indirectly defined social policy and international development as similar concepts. In separate answers, the Participant defined both social policy and international development as "obligations". They defined international development as "the North or developed world" as having "some obligation to support the South or the underdeveloped". Similarly, they defined social policy as our "obligations to each other" as well as a social safety net. They also stated that though we are a "rich" and developed country, we have regions that would "qualify as underdeveloped". They added that, "Canada is a developed country that makes choices about where prosperity is shared and not shared".

When answering whether they consider Canada to be a developed country, Participant E responded "yes, because we have a strong social safety net". Thus, they answered the question about Canada and international development with an answer about our Canadian social policy.

Current taxes and transfers are doing their jobs

Several participants relayed a sentiment that, overall, current transfers and taxes in Canada are meeting the challenge of regional economic inequality. Two participants similarly characterized taxes and transfers like equalization as helping to "ease regional inequality". Participant E said that the market "cannot address social issues" so that is why we need social policies. Participant I called EI "a transfer network for balance", adding: "EI does not decrease inequality… but it does help survival". Participant A called EI both "an insurance program and a redistribution

program". Participant G stated that equalization "tells us how to compare the provinces" in terms of economic prosperity. Similarly, Participant A commented that inequality is the "basis for equalization".

Two participants brought up the same clause in the constitution. Section 36(2) of the constitution asserts:

> Parliament and the government of Canada are committed to the principle of making equalization payments to ensure that provincial governments have sufficient revenues to provide reasonably comparable levels of public services at reasonably comparable levels of taxation ("Consolidated Federal Laws of Canada, The Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982" 2020).

After Participant C mentioned the clause then stated that income inequality is "a political decision". Participant E reasoned that equalization and other transfers "pretty equivalent" on delivering services.

Participant F stated that regional inequality is "built into" the structure of the Canadian economy because different regions have "very, very different sources of wealth and productivity".

Urbanization and rurality

Four participants discussed cities, urbanization and/or rurality in their answers. Participant C stated that while Atlantic Canada is less economically prosperous than the rest of Canada with higher poverty and unemployment rates, Halifax has been the economic "engine" of the region and is an "exception". Furthermore, they raised inequality within the region is better in Halifax as the unemployment rate are lower.

Participant F stated that Halifax is very different economically from the broader regional economy. Furthermore, they characterized the urban areas of Halifax and Moncton as "booming" in similar ways to other urban areas in the country while the rest of Atlantic Canada is generally behind the rest of the country in metrics like income levels and "business development". They too raised that Halifax has a lower unemployment rate than the Canadian economy overall. As of

January 5th 2024, Halifax's unemployment rate is 5.1% ("Regional Unemployment Rates Used by the Employment Insurance Program" 2024) and Canada's rate is 5.8% as of December 2023 ("Labour Force Survey, December 2023" 2024).

Participant D characterized urbanization as helping Atlantic Canada. Principally, migration is aiding economic growth in Atlantic Canada where urban centres like Halifax are more affordable than Toronto. They added that urban centres are more "economically dynamic". In terms of income sources, Participant F stated that "outside of the cities", Atlantic Canada is still "predominantly resource-based" with industries like forestry, mining, and fisheries plus tourism.

Participant H characterized Atlantic Canada's high level of rurality as distinct. They stated that the region lacks an urban centre. While the population is growing, the region is still without an urban area with a population above one million. Plus, the region is further from "larger markets". They advised that regional development should focus on rural development. Similarly, Participant N highlighted that half of Atlantic Canada's population lives rurally and that even their largest cities are small. For example, 2.5 million people live in Atlantic Canada which is less than the population of the Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver metro areas[1]. According to Statistics Canada, Atlantic Canada has the "highest share" of people living in rural areas ("Population Growth in Canada's Rural Areas, 2016 to 2021" 2022). I could not find a recent official count of the total population of Atlantic Canada but my tally of the four provinces put together is 2.6 million based on Statistics Canada 2023 Q3 numbers ("Population Estimates, Quarterly" 2023).

[1] The population of the Toronto region is over six million ("Toronto at a Glance" 2022), the Montréal region has a population of over two million ("Ville de Montréal - Montréal en statistiques" 2023) and the City of Vancouver population is over 600,000 ("2021 Census of Population - Vancouver" 2022).

'Allowed to cry poor'

Four participants raised economic successes in Atlantic Canada. When asked what their perception of the economy of Atlantic Canada is, Participant A responded that it is "actually a very prosperous economy that's allowed to cry poor". They added that after tax incomes plus transfers to the region make it prosperous "when you factor in the lower cost of living compared to the large cities" but that "typical metrics" declare the region "laggard which justifies the transfers".

Participant M also highlighted positives: the economy has had a resurgence especially with population growth since the pandemic and while incomes are lower, so is the cost of living. Participant K described that the Maritimes specifically is "doing well these days" because of the nation's housing crisis. According to them, this makes the East Coast more attractive for inter-provincial and international migration. Participant D echoed similar sentiments, adding that Atlantic Canada is doing "better than doom stories of the past" and that the cost of living in a city like Halifax is more attractive than Toronto.

'There is no Atlantic Canada'

A sentiment echoed by several participants is that the grouping of four distinct provinces as Atlantic Canada can be problematic. Four participants mentioned a distinction between the three Maritime provinces and Newfoundland and Labrador, as the latter province has economically benefited from offshore oil and gas profits in recent years. Participant K stated that the Maritimes is the true "economic region" and "there is no Atlantic Canada" in the same economic sense.

Yet, as Participant B raised, all four provinces have high rates of seasonality and unemployment.

Characterizations of EI

Participants offered many metaphors for EI. Participant I called EI both a "scotch tape" and a "crude instrument" for "holding communities together during hard times". Participant G characterized EI as an "ointment that smooths and facilitates transition in the labour market", adding that EI "equalizes regions" and "corrects for differing natures of employment". They offered the example of fishing as seasonal work. Similarly, Participant F called EI an "essential economic balancer to seasonality". Participant D remarked that EI "smooths economic cycles". Participant D simply defined EI as the "insurance against the risk of unemployment and loss of income associated". They added that in terms of social policy generally, EI is "seen as more legitimate than income assistance because you pay premiums".

Participant A remarked that EI currently lacks a clear definition or purpose. They cautioned that academics make the mistake wanting to tie a program and purpose to an instrumental outcome but that "the reality is, with politics, you introduce a program on one justification, and by the time you're done with it, it has basically become something that people want it to be".

Commenting on the *insurance* component of EI specifically, Participant B stated that EI is a social program and is "not just an unemployment insurance program now". Similarly, Participant J stated that while EI used to be pure insurance, it is now "an equalizer too".

Functions of EI

The topic that participants elaborated upon the most was on the functional impacts of EI in Atlantic Canada specifically.

Most participants said that EI is not regional development. For example, Participant E stated that EI is not regional development because it has not helped "grow these (Atlantic

Canadian) regional economies" or help increase incomes. They added that EI helps keep people "out of abstract poverty but hasn't necessarily helped growth and modernization". Similarly, Participant F called EI an "economic stabilizer" for continually "episodic" and seasonal industries like fishing and forestry. Participant M qualified that while regional development involves "attracting industry investment", EI supports workers "when industry leaves". Participant N added that even the re-training component of EI is only available *after* one both loses their jobs and qualifies for EI. Not all people who are unemployed qualify for EI.

On a structural level, Participant K stated that EI is "largely doing its job" and is "not altering the structure" of the Atlantic Canadian economy".

Participant G offered a definition of regional development: the social aspect of development includes things like schools, housing and health and an economic development element includes income opportunities and access to income growth. They pointed out that EI does neither. They also added that EI is "not designed to be a development program" and while ACOA "claims to do development", this has nothing to do with EI.

Further on the topic of ACOA, Participant C reasoned that ACOA does "not think through" the connection between EI and regional development. Participant H stated that regional development is a "heavy lift" and that ACOA focuses on "factors to support the region" like international market development and entrepreneurship.

Participant I went further, stating that EI has "no relation" to regional development because EI creates "dependency". Similarly, Participant A offered: EI is now seen as an "impediment to development" because it is "overly generous" to seasonal work.

When asked if and how EI alleviates regional economic inequality in Atlantic Canada, participants had mixed responses. Participant A said yes, because it transfers money directly to

workers who “choose to remain in seasonal industries”. Participant J responded yes because eligibility requirements are “less stringent on the East Coast”. Participant K added, Atlantic Canada earns more from EI than, say, Alberta and that this is income redistribution doing its job. Participant M stated EI is “not necessarily” alleviating economic inequality but asked, “What would be the impact if EI *wasn’t* there?”.

Participant C called EI “critical for the social safety net of Atlantic Canada”, especially for seasonal workers. They exemplified that while you need more hours to qualify for EI in Toronto than Atlantic Canada, “there is no fishing in Toronto”.

Proposed improvements to EI

Participants offered some recommendations on how to improve EI. Participant A stated that while EI is currently a “transfer mechanism to keep the region comfortable”, more could be done to make it a “more efficient insurance scheme”. Two participants encouraged EI to have a stronger mandate for training and re-skilling. Participant L wondered if the current 62 EI regions are the “right ones”.

Participant E cautioned that there is “no political constituency” to change EI. Participant F also cautioned “mainstream Ontario economists” to stop talking about EI as a welfare program but rather as an essential component of the “modern rural economy”. Participant N mused about if EI’s seasonality is a “barrier to further economic prosperity” but added the caveat that we would need more data to know for sure.

Three participants brought up the idea of Universal Basic Income (UBI). One said EI “acts as UBI” in Atlantic Canada and the other two voiced support for UBI for the region so that EI can return to being a purer form of insurance.

Discussion

This section explores how the data answers the research questions. The research questions were:

- Could social policy mean to develop at home?
- How does EI resemble development economics?
- Does – and how does – EI alleviate regional economic inequality in Atlantic Canada?

Regarding the first research question, this study shows some support for social policy equating to development domestically in the Canadian context. The literature suggests an equivalency between domestic social welfare spending and international development aid. One participant directly connected the policy areas with the statement, social policy is "akin to international development but internal". Two more participants indirectly linked the two concepts by using the same key words to describe the concepts. One participant called Canada developed *because* of our "strong social safety net". As discussed, 'safety net' is a common way of describing social policy and the welfare state. The other participant characterizing international development and social policy both as "obligations" to each other. This reaffirms insights from the literature about the policy areas as being projections of a society's social relations (Noël and Thérien 1995, 524). Additionally, poverty was brought up in three interviews. Poverty reduction was discussed as a component of international development and poverty was acknowledged as being both higher in Atlantic Canada and the social policy of EI helping to keep people out of poverty. Overall, this research has demonstrated at least some similarities between international development and social policy in concept. Social policy may mean to develop at home.

Addressing the second research question is more complicated. Development economics seeks to reduce or eliminate poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Todaro and Smith 2015, 17). EI is a policy response to preventing the risk of poverty (MacKinnon 2013, 22) by providing

temporary income support ("Employment Insurance (EI)" 2016). These definitions are similar but does not make EI synonymous with development economics. There is, however, some support for their resemblance in this research. While poverty was not discussed in the five documents analyzed, unemployment was. The documents echo what we know from the literature: that unemployment is higher in Atlantic Canada. And what is amply discussed in the documents is job creation. If the documents reviewed are an indication, creating jobs is certainly a political priority for the government. Moreover, while EI addresses poverty and may act as a strategy for poverty reduction, Canada has low replacement rates compared with other OECD countries (Courchene and Allan 2009). Interview participants' responses suggest that EI certainly makes a positive difference in reducing poverty in Atlantic Canada, but poverty is still an ongoing issue.

On the strand of reducing or eliminating inequality, regional economic inequality is also addressed by EI. This is addressed directly by the 62 EI regions with their differing eligibility criteria based on regional unemployment rates. Interview participants also emphasized EI's function as a redistributive program and as a regional equalizer. A participant added that EI alleviates regional economic inequality in Atlantic Canada because it transfers money directly to people who "choose to remain in" seasonal industries. Seasonality also has a regional element because, as another participant said, there are no fisheries in Toronto.

The last question is also complicated to answer. The question is partially answered. The question was not addressed by any of the policy documents. Interview participants, however, answered mostly in the affirmative. They commented on how barriers to entry are lesser in Atlantic Canada and that EI addresses and "offsets" seasonality, as mentioned above. The question posed by a participant, "what would be the impact if EI wasn't there?" implies that the

program has positive impacts on recipients' economic circumstances. Participants also expressed that EI is what keeps seasonal industries alive. This in turn sustains the regional economy and, by extension, the people. Yet another participant refuted the idea that EI decreases inequality, stating that it only helps survival and perpetuates a cycle of dependence. Therefore, it depends.

Conclusion

This research suggests that the concept of EI can be partially understood as a kind of development policy in Atlantic Canada, but this statement is heavily caveated by definitions for development significantly varying across academic, programmatic, and political contexts. This research has illuminated a multiplicity of definitions for development in literature, in government documents and messaging, and in interview data. As the research has shown, EI can also perpetuate dependency rather than development. EI is a significant social policy program that impacts the lives of millions every year. It is also a complex and approaching 100-year-old program.

I hypothesized that Canadian social policies are not called development policy because a country as wealthy and 'developed' as Canada would not need development policies. My hypothesis is not supported by the data. This does not mean it cannot be proven with further research but this study's scope ends here.

This research was considerably light on international development and the empirics of this project were mostly social policy based. One theme related to development that did come up a surprising amount in both the literature and in interviews was the idea of EI dependency. My estimation that regional economic inequality resembles dependency theory from IDS was somewhat supported. Scholars like Hale and Vickers (and May in a more indirect way) observe dependence on the program, at least historically. Dependency on EI and on federal transfers to

Atlantic Canada more generally also came up in interviews. The importance of Canadian cities like Toronto as booming centres of economic prosperity, especially in contrast to high rurality in Atlantic Canada, supports my idea that cities and rural areas in Canada perpetuate dependency theory's components of 'centre' and 'periphery'. More research should be done to garner further insight on if a dependency theory-like relationship is relevant to describing Atlantic Canada and 'central' Canada.

One takeaway from this research is that the term 'development' is incredibly ambiguous. It can refer to processes of international development aid but in the Canadian domestic context it can also refer to metrics like income growth, employment income increases, high-speed internet, urbanization, market development, and entrepreneurship among other things.

Limitations

First, this was a small-scale, qualitative, Master's level study that does not provide a systematic engagement with the vast international development studies literature. Second, EI is a is a social insurance program financed through payroll contributions. A needs-based social assistance program might have been better suited to demonstrate economic need in Atlantic Canada but EI has the advantage of being a federal program, while social assistance programs for working age people are run by the provinces. Third, I was unable to interview politicians from the region. Some nuance in how the EI program is politically conceptualized in Atlantic Canada may be missing. Finally, this paper also did not explore EI's other uses including parental, sickness, and caregiving benefits. As expressed by Banting (2005), using EI for policy needs like maternity leave can be problematic. For example, using EI for maternity leave excludes women who are not in the labour force (Banting 2005, 107). Two participants brought this up in interviews.

Agenda for Future Research

Future research should delve into the similarities between social policy and international development in a deeper, less purely conceptual way and with greater emphasis and empirics on international development. Other social programs beyond EI should also be investigated. While development policy and social policy are institutionally distinct programs administrated by separate governmental units and are complete opposites by geographic jurisdiction, both policies are similarly motivated by a desire to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality. Future scholarship can address the limitations of this paper by expanding the use of international development literature.

Policy Recommendations

This research encourages policymakers to rethink how social and development policies are regarded in relation to each other. While the administration of the different types of cash transfers must be separated, the capacity for innovation and knowledge sharing across government is untapped. Document analysis and interview data from this study does not indicate that government units currently working on social policies draw knowledge from international development concepts or policies. There could be untapped potential for knowledge sharing and collaboration. Furthermore, an acknowledgement that both types of cash transfers – social policies and international development policies – seek to alleviate inequality because our society views such a pursuit as valuable may be a worthy contribution to Canadians' understanding of their governments' actions. While a uniform definition of development is neither required nor realistic, future policy debates should both embrace and analyze how the concept is used across jurisdictions and disciplines.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. What is your name, position, and organization?
2. How long have you been with your organization?
3. How did you come to join your organization?
4. In general, how would you describe the work or mandate of your organization?
5. In your opinion, to what extent is Canada unequal?
6. To what extent, in your opinion, is Canada regionally unequal?
7. What is your understanding of international development?
8. In your opinion, is Canada a 'developed' country and why?
9. What is your understanding of social policy?
10. What is your understanding of Employment Insurance (EI)?
11. Why does Canada have EI?
12. In your opinion, is EI an important program?
13. In your opinion, is EI successful program?
14. What is your perception of the economy of Atlantic Canada?
15. How would you compare Atlantic Canada to the rest of Canada in terms of economic prosperity?
16. In your opinion, does – and how does – EI alleviate regional economic inequality in Atlantic Canada?
17. What is the relationship with between EI and regional development?
18. What should be done to improve EI?