

Regulation, Recycling and the Rise of Informality: Deposit Beverage Container  
Collection on the Halifax Peninsula

by

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for the degree of Master of Arts

at

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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# Table of Contents

<b>List of Tables</b> .....	vi
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	vii
<b>Abstract</b> .....	viii
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 2 Theoretical Perspectives on Informality</b> .....	5
2.1 The Myth of Marginality.....	7
2.2 Is Informal Recycling a Marginal Activity? .....	10
2.3 A Review of Informal Recycling Research.....	12
2.4 The Research Design.....	15
<b>Chapter 3 The Creation of the Informal Recycling Sector in HRM</b> .....	19
3.1 The Introduction of Environmental Stewardship Regulation.....	23
in Nova Scotia	
3.2 The Enviro-Depot as a Social Economy Enterprise.....	26
3.3 Attempts to Curb Informal Recycling.....	31
3.4 Policing Informal Recyclers.....	33
3.5 Connecting Informal Recycling to the Formal Regulatory.....	38
Environment	
3.6 Connecting Informal Recycling to the Formal Economy.....	40
<b>Chapter 4 Why do I do this? Well, it's Better Than a Kick in the Pants!</b> .....	43
4.1 Categorizing Informal Recyclers.....	43
4.2 Informal Recycling as an Alternative to Formal Employment.....	48
4.3 The Advantages of Personal Autonomy.....	50
4.4 Supplementing Forms of Income Assistance that Preclude.....	53
Formal Employment	

4.5 Supplementing Canada Pension Plan Payments.....	55
4.6 Supporting Addiction.....	57
<b>Chapter 5 The Practice of Informal Recycling.....</b>	<b>59</b>
5.1 Logistical Tactics: Using Space as a Resource.....	60
5.2 The Significance of the Shopping Cart.....	64
5.3 Social Networks.....	67
5.4 Mitigating Competition between Cart Recyclers.....	70
5.5 Competing with Vehicular Recyclers.....	72
<b>Chapter 6 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>80</b>
6.1 Policy Implications.....	80
6.2 Concluding Remarks.....	84
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Appendix A Informal Recycler Project Consent Form.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Appendix B Institutional Participant Project Consent Form.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Appendix C Interview Guide.....</b>	<b>99</b>

*List of Tables*

**Table 3.1**    *The Halfback Deposit System*.....24

## ***List of Figures***

<b><i>Figure 2.1</i></b>	<b><i>Map of research area denoting recyclable collection days.....</i></b>	<b><i>16</i></b>
	<b><i>and Enviro-Depot locations</i></b>	
<b><i>Figure 3.1</i></b>	<b><i>Flows of resources in between actors in the HRM.....</i></b>	<b><i>41</i></b>
	<b><i>recycling sector</i></b>	
<b><i>Figure 5.1</i></b>	<b><i>Image demonstrating the correct manner in which to.....</i></b>	<b><i>65</i></b>
	<b><i>load a cart</i></b>	

## ***Abstract***

Why do some people in Halifax, Nova Scotia work collecting recyclables rather than in other—more formal—means of employment? Some scholars argue that informal economic activity is the product of a shift towards flexible work regimes and reductions to the social welfare system (the informalization thesis) and/or that increasingly marginalized people are forced into informal economic activities by economic necessity (the marginalization thesis). Drawing on a close analysis of provincial and municipal recycling policies and ethnographic fieldwork with informal recyclers, I argue that the informalization and marginalization theses are based on overly deterministic models of informal employment. Demand for informal recycling in Halifax is supported by a complex raft of environmental legislation designed to increase the rate of recycling. People willingly choose informal recycling as an alternative to formal employment for various reasons, but above all because it offers a tax-free, honest living, autonomy and a decent income.



## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

*In the early hours of the morning, at a time when most people are just finishing their first cups of coffee and heading off to work, a hotchpotch of individuals converge from all directions to form a queue in front of the Bin Doctor, an Enviro-Depot centrally situated on Halifax, Nova Scotia's peninsula. The work day of these men and women is nearing its end. Each one of them has spent the last several hours piloting a shopping cart along Halifax's broken sidewalks and weathered asphalt, all the while combing the curbside for blue-bagged recyclables. Their loaded carts now brimming with bottles and cans of different makes, sizes and colors, they mill about the depot's large corrugated aluminum door, smoking cigarettes and joking with one another. As the clock strikes half past eight the door rises and the queue pushes forward. A man passes his cart to an awaiting material handler who dumps its contents, bag by bag, into a wooden trough. With hands moving at lightning speed the counter flips each spent container into a bin until the cart is empty. The man is then passed a slip of paper detailing the cart's contents, which he redeems for forty-five dollars and change. Gripping the bills he exits the depot, emboldened by his success as the next in queue steps forth and the process is repeated.*

This scene is reenacted every weekday and these people are Halifax's informal recyclers, or simply 'recyclers' as they refer to themselves. Recyclers are a familiar sight and sound to the residents of Halifax's peninsula. On almost every street the low rumble of a shopping cart, loaded with glass bottles and aluminum cans, can be heard as its contents trundle along the uneven concrete. Recycling has existed in one form or another since antiquity and some elderly residents of the city will have memories of the tinkers (who collected tin used to mend household utensils) and rag and bone men (who collected rags, bones, metal and other waste to be recycled into salable goods) who preceded present day recyclers. Since the advent of welfare capitalism, informal recycling had been on the wane in developed economies and became an activity limited to a handful of scrap collectors. This trend has shifted in Halifax. Over the past

fifteen years the city has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of individuals pursuing recycling.<sup>1</sup> This poses several problems for the city, formally known as Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM).

The first problem concerns the dumping of debris by informal recyclers on or adjacent to the property of residents, who then become responsible for its proper disposal. HRM is committed to providing its taxpayers with a dependable waste collection service. As a result of informal recycling, the municipality must address the complaints of irate residents who, having properly set out their recyclables for collection, find non-deposit containers or other refuse scattered over their property. The second problem concerns the loss of revenue derived from the recovery and processing of deposit containers by the municipality and its contractors. HRM had considered its residential recycling program to be a secure source of municipal revenue. This is no longer the case. Now the municipality must compete for curbside recyclables against an ever growing number of informal recyclers. Although HRM perceives informal recycling to be a problem and has passed a series of prohibitions designed to discourage such activities, it has not endeavoured to understand why people work at collecting recyclables rather than other—more formal—means of employment. My thesis aims to answer this very question.

Before I am able to answer why an increasing number of individuals have taken to collecting curbside recyclables on Halifax's peninsula, it is important to first address how the economic, social, institutional and environmental conditions of the city have combined in a configuration that fosters informality. I begin in Chapter 2 by examining Portes' and Castells' (1989) influential contributions to the theoretical literature on informal economies. Portes and Castells adopt a macro-structural perspective, which views informal sector growth to be the result of an occupational structure that favours cheap part-time, temporary or sub-contracted

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<sup>1</sup> Although By-Law Services does not keep records on the number of informal recyclers, this is the consensus among the recyclers whom I interviewed.

labour and a social welfare system that only offers the bare minimum in compensation to the ‘victims of the market’—the unemployed and unemployable. This perspective assumes that informal actors, especially informal recyclers, are marginal individuals performing marginal activities. I argue that this portrayal is not accurate. Although this macro-structural perspective may sufficiently outline the institutional frameworks that contribute to the growth of informality in some regions, it does not apply in all instances. It also denies the agency of informal actors, does little to explain the social factors which reproduce informality, and provides no explanation as to how informal activities are maintained. I end Chapter 2, by introducing the context of my research on Halifax’s informal recyclers.

In Chapter 3, I expand on the arguments presented in Chapter 2 by analyzing how the institutional framework of the state contributes to the growth of informality. Specifically, I examine the manner in which informal recycling is integrated into the formal economy, and the role that the formal regulatory environment plays in both enabling and maintaining this relationship. This section presents a macro-structural analysis of how provincial and municipal regulations have combined to foster informality, yet also how the local government has taken steps to curb this activity. I argue that the configuration of Halifax’s informal recycling economy does not necessarily reflect the broad offensive of capital against Keynesian welfare capitalism described by Portes and Castells. I take the position that this divergence results from a formal regulatory environment that precludes informal recyclers in this region from the exploitative relationship that often characterizes informal recycling in other jurisdictions. This section is based in part upon interviews with state actors as well as informal recyclers.

Following this section, I use ethnographic data to explain why some individuals work collecting recyclables rather than in other more formal employment, and to illuminate the socioeconomic factors that reproduce informal recycling. My ethnographic research suggests

that informal recycling in Halifax is not the result of a shifting occupational structure, as Portes and Castells (1989) argue. Instead, it is an activity which is pursued for various reasons, including: to supplement forms of income assistance, such as disability and welfare, which preclude the recipient from formal employment; to supplement Canada Pension Plan (CPP) payments; to gain a level of personal autonomy not available in a formal work environment; as an alternative to formal employment; and to support addiction.

This discussion leads into my analysis of the means by which individuals maintain their informal activities. I apply the theories of de Certeau (1984) regarding strategies and tactics to informal recyclers' utilization of space and time as resources. A tactic is perceived by de Certeau to be a clever utilization of time in the absence of power; it is "the art of the weak" (ibid: 37) it operates in isolation and exploits opportunities. The tactics of informal recycling are exemplified in activities such as the targeting of specific areas based on municipal collection days, the construction and maintenance of relationships with residents to secure reliable sources of recyclables, the skillful manner in which a cart is loaded to maximize space and increase efficiency, the informal mechanisms used to mitigate competition between cart recyclers, and the use of concealment and intimidation to frustrate the activities of vehicular recyclers. Finally, my concluding chapter summarizes the findings of my research and demonstrates its applicability to both government and law enforcement.

## ***Chapter 2 – Theoretical Perspectives on Informality***

The informal sector is an ambiguous concept; its definition has been the subject of scholarly debate throughout the last four decades. From its theoretical inception, the informal economic sector attracted researchers from multiple disciplines including anthropology, sociology, political economics, geography, and development studies. It is difficult to give a single concise definition of the informal sector, as definitions tend to reflect the diverse of research interests and methodologies characteristic of various disciplinary affiliations; the informal sector, as a theoretical construct, does not exist in any empirical sense. It is an expansive category that includes all economic activities, legal, illegal and extralegal, that exist beyond the shifting boundaries of the formal sector. In fact, prior to the rise of the formal economic sector, the distinction between informal and formal sectors would not have existed. Attempts to narrow the concept of the informal sector through job- or activity-based definitions, have all presented the informal sector as an abstraction defined by features which are absent, leading to confusion as to what degree of insufficiency would qualify an activity as informal. The International Labour Organization (1993: 6.1) defines the informal sector as follows:

- (1) The informal sector is regarded as a group of production units that form part of the household sector as household enterprises or, equivalently, unincorporated enterprises owned by households.
- (2) Within the household sector, the informal sector comprises (i) 'informal own-account enterprises'; and (ii) the additional component consisting of 'enterprises of informal employers'.
- (3) The informal sector is defined irrespective of the kind of workplace where productive activities are carried out, the extent of fixed capital assets used, the duration of the operation of the enterprise (perennial, seasonal or casual), and its operation as a main or secondary activity of the owner.

This definition was developed by the ILO with the intention of creating a standard, international definition, for statistical classification. For my purposes, it is useful to adopt this definition as it regards the informal sector as a unit of production within the household sector, which facilitates analysis of the relationship between the informal sector, the formal sector, and formal regulatory environment.

Within the theoretical academic discourse, the informal sector is generally viewed through the macro-structural perspective of Portes and Castells (1989), who contend that informality is the product of a capitalist strategy to circumvent both organized labour and state-imposed labour regulations. This macro-structural perspective, termed the 'informalization thesis' by Williams and Windebank (1998: 29), views informal sector growth as a symptom of the declining influence of Fordist-Keynesian economics and the rise of neoliberalism, a process which promotes deregulation, entrepreneurialism, and the deindustrialization of production, while also opposing social investment and redistribution. Under neoliberal conditions social welfare is seen as an anticompetitive cost that is antagonistic to the objectives of economic development. Portes and Castells contend that in highly institutionalized economies, deregulation has shifted the occupational structure towards flexible work regimes (such as part-time, temporary or sub-contracted work), which prevent workers from accessing benefits and secure job security (1989: 30).

As a result of the loss of employment in the formal sector and the reduction of the social welfare system to only offer the bare minimum in compensation to those who have been 'victimized by the market'—the unemployed and unemployable—are forced to pursue informal activities out of economic necessity (Centeno and Portes 2006: 33-34). This view places informal employment at the bottom of a hierarchy of flexible types of employment and is "based on the assumption that formal and informal work are substitutable and that the rise of one leads to the

fall of the other” (Williams and Windebank 1998: 30). This view is so widely held that Pahl (1988:249) suggests this position is “in danger of becoming a social scientists’ folk myth”. Informal economy theorists who promote the informalization thesis assume that informal sector actors are marginal individuals—the poorest of the poor—performing marginal activities. This position, termed the ‘marginalization thesis’ by Williams and Windebank (1998: 31), commonly equates the informal sector with “a locus of urban poverty” (Smith and Koo 1983: 225). These theses work ‘hand in glove,’ as informalization is considered to create the bad jobs that marginalized persons fill. Williams and Windebank rightly argue that these theses are based on a deterministic model of informal employment which completely disregards the individual agency of those involved and views informality “solely as a response by people reeling from the universal and homogeneous process of the restructuring of capital” (1998: 33). These views are especially held regarding the marginality of informal recyclers (e.g. Castillo Berthier 2003: 195; Sanchez and Maldonado 2006: 374; Gutberlet et al. 2009: 733; Whitson 2011: 1412). Some theorists have gone so far as to state that, as an activity, informal recycling “epitomizes the informal sector” (Medina 2007: 64).

## ***2.1 – The Myth of Marginality***

Marginality, as a concept, is often casually used throughout the academic discourse to refer to “the poor in general, the jobless, migrants, members of other subcultures, racial minorities, and deviants of any sort” (Perlman 1987: 93). Although many theorists have explicitly stated that informal recyclers constitute a marginal population, they have done so without defining marginality and without detailing how informal recycling manifests the features of marginality theory. In the following paragraphs I will endeavor to buck the trend, as it were. Using the groundbreaking work of Perlman (1976) who has devoted her career to the subject, as

a base for my research, I will lay out in exact terms what constitutes a population as marginal. I will then outline why it should not be assumed that informal recycling constitutes an activity that is socially or economically marginal.

By definition, marginality is a relational concept; a population cannot be marginalized in and of itself, as marginality is only discernible in relation to another population. This 'other' population is typically implicit in any discussion of marginality and is generally conceived of as the central population; the 'mainstream' within a society or economy to which everything else is referenced. When considering what constitutes the mainstream of society, Perlman states that, "what was considered 'mainstream' and what was considered 'marginal' has come to be determined less by what is done by the numerical majority or minority, and more by what is done specifically by the middle and upper classes" (1976: 92). In this sense, the perception of the 'mainstream' has more to do with the ideal society than with the everyday realities of those who live within it, and requires a superior-inferior status differential which, as Perlman points out, relates to societal notions of equality stemming from the post-enlightenment period (ibid: 95). This historical antecedent is reflected in Perlman's proposal of an ideal type of marginality which she compiled based on an extensive interdisciplinary review of marginality theory (ibid: 130).

Perlman's (1976) ideal type of marginality conceptualizes social marginality as embodied by groups that lack internal cohesion and that are also externally isolated within the context of the city. The lack of internal cohesion is characterized by competition, the absence of trust and mutual help, and high incidences of antisocial behavior, such as crime, violence and substance abuse. Marginal populations are presumed to be poorly integrated into the wider urban context of the city; their social networks are homogeneous and their interactions restricted to those who share similarly precarious backgrounds (ibid: 136). As a result of their external isolation,



marginalized populations are thought to be limited in their ability to establish social networks within the city. They must therefore rely on their downtrodden counterparts as their only means of social support. This exacerbates their poor integration into mainstream society, and continues the reproduction of social inequality. When discussing her ideal type, Perlman takes care to note that marginality is not a question of absolutes but rather a question of degree. As she states, "it is apparent that a person could be marginal in some senses, or in regards to certain spheres of life and certain institutions, while being quite well integrated in other respects" (ibid: 129). This is significant as one might be tempted to pigeonhole a population to the mainstream or margins of society based on certain characteristics, while ignoring others that may be of equal influence.

Within the literature, economic marginality has often been closely associated with the urban poor, the unemployed, the underemployed, or the unstably employed. Perlman argues that the determining characteristic of economic marginality "is an economic-occupational one dealing with lack of work or with unstable, low-paying jobs which are not part of the mainstream economy and do not contribute to it" (Perlman 1976: 94). The identification of the economic-occupational contributions to the mainstream economy by suspected marginal populations is integral to understandings of economic marginality, as it references market integration which, as a process, relates to the structure of economies and the extent to which they are segmented within, or excluded from, the mainstream economy. It would be far easier to argue that an economy or occupation should be viewed as marginal if it is segmented within, or excluded from, the mainstream economy, than if it were well-integrated and increased socioeconomic participation and income earning opportunities. However, integration is not always beneficial. In instances where power is concentrated, such as in a monopolistic or

monopsonistic economy, integration can be adverse and result in the economic marginalization of a population (Kanubar 2007: 4-5).

The deterministic model promoted by the marginalization thesis maintains that the informal economy is segmented within or excluded from the formal economy, and that the income-earning opportunities of informal actors are restricted by their inability to participate in the formal economy. If this were true, one would expect to find evidence that informal actors are worse off economically than persons sharing a similar socioeconomic background employed in the formal economy. However, research comparing levels of success between informal and formal actors of similar backgrounds has found that this is likely not the case. The findings of McKeever's (1998: 1235) comparative analysis of occupational status and income attainment in South Africa's informal and formal economies suggest that "stratification of occupational status and income according to race, gender, experience and education levels will be similar in both the informal economy and the formal economy". These findings indicate that persons who are informally employed are no more likely to be marginalized than persons of similar standing who are formally employed, because marginality itself is not an intrinsic characteristic of informality, but rather a function of low human capital. Whether an individual is employed in the formal or informal economy is essentially incidental. Indeed other studies have come to similar conclusions, finding that informal actors are no more likely to live in poverty or prosperity than their formal counterparts (Smith & Koo 1983; Fortuna & Prates 1989; Medina 1998; Millar 2008; Suharto 2002; Maloney 2004).

## ***2.2 – Is Informal Recycling a Marginal Activity?***

This raises an important question. If informal actors are no more likely to live in poverty than their formal counterparts, then why is the perception of informal recycling so widely

perceived to be a marginal activity in the academic literature? Several theorists have offered explanations. Medina suggests that the negative evaluation of informal recycling is a reflection of recyclers "...daily proximity with garbage and their sometimes raggedly appearance" (2001: 236). Reno suggests that the negative evaluation arises from the assumption that, as an activity, informal recycling is inherently "...degrading and dirty, thus, people would not do it unless they had to satisfy basic needs" (2009: 33). Both explanations suggest that the negative evaluation of informal recycling is in some way based upon recyclers' close association with waste and its perceived worth. In a sense, both researchers allude to a symbolic interpretation of waste which neither fully captures or develops. Whitson has, however, extended such an explanation in a compelling theory which I am inclined to support. She argues that the negative evaluation of informal recycling is a symbolic expression of social inequality in a world where waste is perceived as "both valueless and valuable" depending on the observer's position within "the social structure as well as their relation to hegemonic definitions of waste and value" (Whitson 2011: 1415). She suggests that when waste is defined as valueless by society, so are waste workers and their position within the social hierarchy.

A review of the theoretical discourse raises several significant questions concerning the nature of informal recycling, which must be answered if we are to fully comprehend why people work collecting recyclables rather than in other more formal means of employment. These questions include: Is the portrayal of informal recycling as a marginal activity performed by marginalized individuals accurate? Does the negative perception of informal recycling, as a less than advantageous activity pursued out of basic necessity, reflect the lived experiences of its practitioners? Are informal recyclers victims of a capitalist strategy that has deprived them of formal employment and left informal recycling as their only available means of economic survival? I address these questions in the following sections.

### ***2.3 – A Review of Informal Recycling Research***

Informal recycling has often been portrayed as a marginal activity (Castillo Berthier 2003: 195; Sanchez and Maldonado 2006: 374; Gutberlet et al. 2009: 733; Whitson 2011: 1412), performed by marginalized individuals. Is this an accurate portrayal? Some researchers suggest not (Smith and Koo 1983; Fortuna and Prates 1989; Gowan 1997; Medina 1998; Williams and Windebank 1998; Millar 2008). In their study of Manila's informal economy, Smith and Koo (1983: 226-227) found that the range of informal and formal sector earnings overlapped, with one third of informal-sector workers earning more income on average than formal-sector workers. While a large proportion of informal sector workers were poor, so too were a large proportion of formal sector workers. They therefore argue that: "it is incorrect to regard them en masse as constituting an identifiable social stratum characterized by underemployment or marginality" (ibid). Medina's study of informal recycling at the Nuevo Laredo landfill, Mexico, also contests the characterization of informal recyclers as poor and marginal. Medina found that informal recyclers who exclusively collect aluminum cans earn a median weekly income of twice the minimum wage, which places these individuals in the top 5% of income earners in that city (1998: 123). These income levels are equivalent to those of the Brazilian informal recyclers studied by Millar (2008: 27), who also earned on average twice the minimum wage. Fortuna and Prates' study of the Montevideo informal recycling industry produced similar conclusions, finding that "informality was not enmeshed in poverty and marginality alone. The relative success and satisfactory earnings derived from informal activities ... surpassed, in some cases, the levels achieved by workers in the formal sector" (1989: 79).

The prospect of income on par with formal workers is not the only advantage to informal work; unlike formal sector workers, workers in the informal sector are autonomous. Autonomy is advantageous because it grants these workers the personal independence to make

and act upon their own decisions, without fear of reprimand. Millar's study of Brazil's informal recyclers found that autonomy was a characteristic of informal labor that participants valued (2008: 27). While most informal recyclers were drawn to the activity because they were unable to find formal employment, autonomy became "a motivating factor to continue working or, following an absence, to return to work on the dump" (ibid: 28). Working in the absence of a supervisor, manager or boss, informal workers are in a position to determine the pace, schedule, and intensity of their work; they receive immediate payment for their labour, and are not subjected to disciplinary measures. As Millar states "picking garbage on the dump is not just an occupation for those who are formally unemployed or underemployed. It is also a choice taken by those who no longer wish to endure certain working conditions in the formal labor sector" (ibid: 28).

Millar's findings are also supported by Gowan's study of homeless informal recyclers in San Francisco. Gowan found that the majority of informal recyclers sampled had a long history of "stable blue-collar employment and only hit skid row life in their 30s or later" (1997: 175). Those who worked most actively in informal recycling were typically individuals who had "previously held long-lasting and decently paid semi-skilled or skilled jobs in the formal economy" (ibid: 176). Gowan's study suggests that informal recycling may attract a certain type of individual, one who has been socialized to the routines of a blue collar worker, who typically finds it difficult to change into a street hustler, and views informal recycling "as a way for them to do an honest day's work, without having to hustle or cheat" (ibid: 173). The function of informal recycling for these individuals is not merely a survival strategy but a way for them to build self-respect and a sense of solidarity through their work routines. Gowan astutely notes that although many informal recyclers would be "likely candidates for the victim role" that the marginalization thesis would assign them, recyclers do not resent their work. They instead

“enthusiastically embrace [recycling] as a way to prove their worth in a society which has reduced them to the status of ‘bum’” (ibid: 161).

In my view, Perlman had it right when she stated that “marginality has been used in many debates as a smokescreen behind which old ideological battles—such as the nature of the social system, the process of modernization, or the implications of capitalism and imperialism—continue to be fought” (1976: 91). Although Portes and Castells’ macro-structural theories sufficiently outline the institutional frameworks that enable informal economies to develop, they deny the individual agency of informal actors, and do little to explain the social factors which reproduce and maintain informal activities. As Williams and Windebank note, the “dialectical relationship between structure and agency is the essence of the process that structures social formations” (1998: 33). The findings I have drawn on characterize informal recyclers not as individuals struggling for survival against structural inequality and marginalization, but as individuals with agency, as individuals who pursue informal recycling not out of desperation but because it is a relatively financially lucrative and personally liberating form of work. This is not to deny that many individuals feel a degree of desperation as they face Nova Scotia’s economy, but assuming informal recyclers’ marginality is misguided, because such assumptions misinterpret the manner in which the informal economy integrates labour into systems of formal production. The manner and extent to which the informal economy is integrated into the formal economy is contingent upon regional conditions that combine in different ways, not all of which are conducive to the growth of informality and not all of which are inherently exploitative. Whether an informal economy can be characterized as exploitative or munificent is therefore an empirical question which must be examined in light of the type of work undertaken, as well as the historical, social, and regional contexts (Sharpe 1988: 328). I will examine such variability in more detail in the Chapter 3.

## **2.4 – Research Design**

To engage my research question, my research involved fieldwork over a three-month period between July and September of 2011 on the Halifax Peninsula. For this study I employed four forms of qualitative research methodology. The first was documentary analysis. This was used to gain an understanding of history and function of Nova Scotia's environmental stewardship legislation. The second was interviews conducted in person or over the telephone with several institutional actors. These interviews provide the institutional perspective of informal recycling. The third was participant observation among informal recyclers at an Enviro-Depot centrally located on the Halifax Peninsula. The fourth was a particular kind of participant observation, the phenomenologically based 'go-along method' (Kusenbach 2003), which entailed accompanying participants during their routine daily activities. By adopting the go-along method I was able to interview and interact with participants *in situ* as they performed their routine activities during different days, at different times, and in different spaces. This method allowed for a wider range of observations by providing access to spatialized perceptions of the environment, which would not have been available through more stationary methods of interviewing or participant observation. Observing participants in their routine activities also allowed my research to be visible to other recyclers. The fact that I was seen interacting with recyclers, often for several hours, facilitated contact with additional participants.

Qualitative methods such as the go-along method enable the researcher to gain a greater comprehension of complex social situations through observation and personal interaction with individuals. These approaches tend to be strong in validity, but, because of their focus on in-depth personal experiences, they tend not to produce generalizations which are able to reliably describe large populations. Therefore this study should not be considered representative of informal recycling as a global phenomenon, but should and can be considered



to advance an in-depth understanding of why households in Halifax, Nova Scotia engage in informal recycling and the structure of that region's informal recycling sector. This can then indicate the scope or parameters of the phenomenon which might be useful in understanding other contexts.

Figure 2.1: Map of research area denoting recyclable collection days and Enviro-Depot locations  
Source: halifax.ca (2011)



The selection of the research area involved two stages. The first was to determine the Halifax Peninsula as the area for study (Figure 5.1). The Halifax Peninsula measures 3.3 km at its



widest and 7.5 km at its longest and is connected to the larger Chebucto Peninsula by a 2.6 km isthmus. I decided to restrict my research area to the Halifax Peninsula mainly because it represents the core of the city of Halifax; there are many informal recyclers in the area; there are three Enviro-Depots within its boundaries; and the geography of the peninsula provided a physical boundary for my research as well to informal recyclers (the nearest mainland Enviro-Depot is located over 6 km from the Halifax Peninsula).

The second stage was to contact and obtain permission from the three peninsular Enviro-Depots to conduct my fieldwork on their premises. Of the three I was only able to obtain permission from the North-End and Central Enviro-Depots. The South-End depot refused outright, citing the privacy of its employees as its main concern. This was understandable considering that this particular Enviro-Depot exclusively employs youth facing barriers to gaining meaningful employment, on 28 week work terms. I did obtain permission from the North-End Enviro-Depot but was informed by its owner that it is seldom frequented by cart recyclers. This was subsequently confirmed by the recyclers themselves, who describe this particular depot as the 'depot of last resort' (many believe that they are intentionally short changed). Ultimately I limited my fieldwork to the Clifton Recycling Centre, my reasons being that the owner was extraordinarily cooperative, giving me free license to interview any and all employees, and that by all accounts it is the Enviro-Depot most frequented by informal recyclers, who call it the 'cart recyclers' depot'.

Participants were approached while engaged in their recycling activities. After introductions, I would present a project consent form, with which I obtained oral consent to participate in a semi-structured, one-on-one interview and have our conversations recorded with a digital audio recorder. Participants were informed of the research intent through the project consent form, which was accompanied by an oral summary of its contents. The location

of the interview influenced its duration. Interviews which were conducted around the Enviro-Depot ranged from thirty minutes to an hour. Interviews conducted during go-alongs ranged from thirty minutes to over six hours, depending on how much time participants spent pursuing their recycling activities and how willing they were to be accompanied while doing so. During the course of the study I interviewed thirteen participants who are active informal recyclers.

To add an institutional perspective, I also conducted semi-structured interviews, in person or over the telephone, with the owner of the Enviro-Depot I frequented and officials from RRFB Nova Scotia, HRM By-Law Enforcement, HRM Police Services and HRM Solid Waste Resources. In total, twenty individuals participated in this study. All recyclers' names that appear in this study are pseudonyms and identifying information regarding their residence, relatives or present and past workplaces were altered during transcription to ensure participants anonymity. All institutional actors are identified by name as these individuals are public officials (Mr. Wheatley, who will be introduced in Chapter 3, being the exception).

### ***Chapter 3 – The Creation of the Informal Recycling Sector in HRM***

The established view regarding economic development is that economies have a linear trajectory. As economies advance, economic activities naturally shift from the informal to the formal sector (a position that Williams and Windebank term the formalization thesis). In this view, the informal activities of ‘traditional’ rural/agricultural economies in the Third World are perceived to be a manifestation of these economies’ underdevelopment, and the assumption is that these activities will cease as modernization occurs (Williams and Windebank 1998: 27). However, research has shown that the proliferation of informality is dependent upon urbanization and industrialization, and that it is more than just a feature of rural/agricultural economies: it “is a permanent, not a short-term, phenomenon; and is a feature of modern capitalist development, not just traditional economies” (Chen 2006: 77). As economies advance, industries develop and expand, producing a wider range of opportunities for individuals to engage informally in domestic and global value chains. This is why “the informal economy should be viewed not as a marginal or peripheral sector but as a basic component—the base, if you will—of the total economy” (ibid). Thus, if we are to fully comprehend the relationships that enable informal employment, it is important to first examine the composition of the total economy.

The total economy, as defined by the System of National Accounts (1993: 4), is composed of all the institutional units within a given economic territory, these being government, corporations, non-profit corporations, and households. Within the SNA’s definition of the total economy, the informal sector exists as defined by the International Labour Organization, that is “as a group of production units which form part of the household sector as household enterprises or, equivalently, unincorporated enterprises owned by households”

(1993: 6.1). Within the structure of the total economy, the informal economy is not a marginal sector, but its position is subordinate to the formal economy. The formal economy interacts with the informal economy which in turn plays a role in the reproduction of labour, supplies some of its production and of course, recycles some of its products (Sharpe 1988: 316).

It is the formal economy that creates demand for the products and services the informal economy provides, but demand, as a mechanism of the market, does not wield the necessary power to create the complex informal economic and social relationships which fulfill this demand (Ferman & Ferman 1973: 12). If we are to understand how exactly the formal economy contributes to the growth of informality, we must discard definitions of the formal economy that have “tended to blur the distinction between the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment,” the former referring to regulated economic units and protected workers and the latter referring to government policies, laws, and regulations (Chen 2006: 83). Such definitions, which combine the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment under the umbrella term of the formal economy, present government and corporate units as a single unit.

This is a misrepresentation. The formal regulatory environment is not a product of the formal economy but of the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. It should therefore be thought of as a distinct unit, capable of exerting its own influence over the growth and configuration of the informal economy. In Canada, the bureaucratic apparatus, which controls the formal regulatory environment, is not a unified whole. It is a federal system which disperses authority and divides sovereignty among the various levels of government. Within this system, power is decentralized and divided among the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government, which produces overlapping spheres of influence. As a result, there exists not a single state actor who implements policy but a series of “state agencies as actors within the state itself, often

competing for political importance, policy mandates, and the resources that each allows” (Cross 1998: 42).

Centeno and Portes (2006: 28) state that “[a]n informal economy will develop *when and where it can,*” but *what* creates the conditions necessary for the development of an informal economy? Fernandez-Kelly’s answer to this question is that “it is the state embodied in multiple practices, agencies, departments and divisions that creates the conditions for the expansion or contraction of the informal economy” (2006: 3). When considering the role of the state in the creation of informal economies, Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia posit that states do not act as passive manifestations of socioeconomic and political processes. Instead, they “act in a relatively autonomous manner implementing policies that often lead to unintended as well as intended consequences” (1989: 250). They contend that the growth of informal economies is driven by three overlapping factors: legislation introduced and altered over time by different levels of government, the capacity of government to enforce legislation, and the actions and policies of government agencies with varying, and often contradictory mandates (ibid: 251). Informality is therefore often the unintended consequence when several levels of government operating independently from each other introduce contradictory regulation, which produces interstices in the structure of the formal regulatory environment. This in turn influences the manner in which the informal sector is articulated to the formal economy. If the cost of policing the informal economy cannot be justified or if the economic return for doing so is too small, the state may choose to ignore informal activities and allow informal actors to operate with relative impunity (Cross and Pena 2006: 58).

Although I discuss the formal regulatory environment at some length, it is not the only system of regulation governing informality. There are also extralegal systems of regulation which are internal to the informal economy, described in the literature by de Soto (1989),

Roberts (1994) and more recently by Cross and Pena (2006). These consist of informal norms, as well as rules borrowed from the formal legal system, which enable informal actors to self-regulate their informal social relationships and activities. Informal regulation allows informal actors to control not only competition for resources, but also objectionable behavior that could prompt complaints to law enforcement, both of which represent an added transactional risk from the perspective of the informal actor, since confrontation with other informal actors or a crackdown by government could disrupt the acquisition of revenue and jeopardize the activity's long-term stability (Cross and Pena 2006: 64-65).

Taking into account the formal economy, the formal regulatory environment, and the informal regulatory environment, one can easily see that the configuration of informal employment is dependent upon economic, social, institutional and environmental conditions, which vary from region to region and combine in different ways. Not all combinations are conducive to individuals' participation in informal employment. The informal labour market has different configurations, with different characteristics, in different places (Williams and Windebank 1998: 46). These regional configurations have a substantial range; some informal activities may have a significant economic potential while the economic potential of others may be minimal (Roberts 1994: 8). In order to accurately characterize the nature of informal activities in different regional contexts it is important to determine how they are structurally articulated to the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment.

This structural articulation can be determined by analyzing how inputs from informal enterprises support the accumulation of capital in the formal economy, and how income opportunities produced by the formal economy and formal regulatory environment support informal enterprises (ibid). This analytic approach was first formulated by Portes and Schauffler (1993) and then developed by Roberts (1994). Roberts asserts that there are three components

of this structural articulation, which make it possible to analyze the regional configurations of informal economies: the market principles which guide informal sector operations; the relationship of the informal sector to the formal regulatory environment; and the informal sector's relationship to the regional labour market (1994: 8). For example, Loayza, Oviedo and Servén's (2006: 124) analysis of the relationship between the formal regulatory environment and informality suggests that the formal regulatory environment comprises three categories of regulation: fiscal, labour, and product-market regulation, and that increases in labour and product market regulation are linked to lower economic growth and an expansion in informality (ibid: 142-143).

These researchers demonstrate the importance of maintaining a balanced approach that incorporates both macro- and micro-structural perspectives when examining the relationship between the formal and informal sectors. I argue in the following pages, that in Halifax, the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment—the total institutional framework of formal economic activity—have enabled the growth of the local informal recycling economy. This macro-structural approach will lead into an analysis beginning in Chapter 4 and continuing through Chapter 5 of the micro-structures, the socioeconomic particulars of informal recyclers that reproduce informality and the strategies and tactics that maintain their informal activities.

### ***3.1 – The Introduction of Environmental Stewardship Regulation in Nova Scotia***

During the last decade of the twentieth century, with countless landfills nearing capacity and a shortage of new landfill sites, the management of solid waste became an increasingly pressing issue for many provincial and municipal governments. In April 1989, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment convened to develop a national solid waste

management strategy. During this meeting, the National Packaging Protocol was established, which set an ambitious target: a 50% reduction in the volume of solid waste entering Canadian landfills by the year 2000 through the management of packaging, source reduction, reuse and recycling (National Packaging Protocol 1990: 1-2).

Soon after the protocol was introduced, provincial governments began instituting the environmental stewardship legislation and infrastructure required to achieve the 50% reduction target. In 1996, with the aim of diverting solid waste from landfills, Nova Scotia amended its Environment Act, establishing a province-wide beverage container deposit-refund system as a component of its solid waste resource management regulations. Under Section 102 of the Environment Act, which sets out the solid waste resource management regulations, the Nova Scotia government introduced a deposit system as well as product market regulations requiring that all distributors of beverage containers sold in Nova Scotia ensure that their products be either refillable or recyclable, in order to conduct business in the province.

Table 3.1 The Halfback Deposit System

<b>Container</b>	<b>Deposit Paid</b>	<b>Deposit Refunded</b>
Non-Liquor less than 5 L	10¢	5¢
Liquor 500 ml or less	10¢	5¢
Liquor greater than 500 ml	20¢	10¢
Refillable domestic beer bottles	10¢	10¢

These regulations also established the Recovery Resource Fund Board (RRFB), an independent, non-profit Crown Corporation responsible for the administration and operation of the deposit-refund program. The RRFB also governs a network of 83 Enviro-Depots, which are



licensed to accept deposit beverage containers from the public on the RRFB's behalf. Nova Scotia's deposit-refund program, which came into effect April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1996, operates as a halfback system whereby a ten-cent consumer deposit levied on beverage containers is collected by the RRFB from distributors, based on their sales numbers. The RRFB is funded by the half of the deposit it keeps, unredeemed deposits, and the revenue generated from the sale of materials it receives. The halfback deposit essentially operates as a consumer tax, which in 2011 produced \$38.6 million in gross revenue for the RRFB. Consumers are entitled to a tax rebate—the halfback deposit—if they choose to take their empty containers to an Enviro-Depot, and receive a five cent refund for aluminum, plastic, and glass containers, or a full ten cent refund for refillable domestic beer bottles (*see Table 3.1*).<sup>2</sup> Individuals may also bring paint and electronic waste to Enviro-Depots, although they do not receive compensation for these materials. In 2010, 79% of beverage containers sold in Nova Scotia were returned to Enviro-Depots for recycling—a total of 309 million containers (Resource Recovery Fund Board 2011).

After materials are received from the Enviro-Depot, they are then sent to the RRFB's regional processing facilities in Sydney, Kemptown and Wynott Settlement, NS, where the materials are baled and prepared for distribution. After processing, the materials are marketed by the RRFB to several post-consumer material recycling centres located throughout Atlantic Canada and the United States. When I spoke with the RRFB's Director of Operations, Jerome Paris, he stated that, "it would be a perfect world to sell it all in Atlantic Canada but that just doesn't happen as of yet" (interview, Sept. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011). Plastic *poly(ethylene terephthalate)* (PET) containers are sent to NovaPET in Amherst, NS, which is the largest post-consumer recycling centre in Atlantic Canada. Once received at NovaPET containers are 'flaked' into small pieces of plastic, which are then sold to American manufacturers. Non-dairy gable-top cartons and tetra-

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<sup>2</sup> Before the implementation of the halfback deposit system, compensation was based on market value and was determined by weight.

packs, which are viewed as problem containers, are sold to Great Northern Recycling, a broker in Halifax, and then resold to various markets to be recycled into paper products. Glass is sold to Rayanne Investments, which processes the glass in Moncton, New Brunswick. Aluminum cans, after being crushed into bales, are shipped to Alcan aluminum in Oswego, New York. All other assorted metals are sold to John Ross & Sons, a scrap yard located in Halifax (Jerome Paris, interview, Sept. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

### ***3.2 – The Enviro-Depot as a Social Economy Enterprise***

The province's Enviro-Depots are independently owned and operated, although the RRFB does govern their operations through specific policies designed to maintain uniform practices in areas ranging from insurance requirements to inventory processing. The RRFB has custom software known as the Recovery Operations Collection and Payment System (ROCAPS), which is used to inventory and track bags (for aluminum, plastic, and tetra-packs) and tubs (for glass) of containers using a tag and scanner system. The ROCAPS system is what enables the RRFB to determine how much a particular Enviro-Depot should be compensated for its inventory. The remittances collected from distributors by the RRFB are then used to reimburse their Enviro-Depot network for the halfback consumer refund, plus a \$0.0399 per container handling fee.

The Clifton Street Recycling Centre receives material through two channels: its front door and its back door, each representing a separate component of the business. The front door receives recyclable materials brought by residents and informal recyclers. The back door receives recyclables collected from bars and restaurants by trucks operated by the Enviro-Depot. The business model of the Enviro-Depot is not based on the sale of the materials it receives but on the processing of its inventory. The more containers the Enviro-Depot receives

and processes, the more its labour costs are subsidized by the RRFB and thus the more workers it can afford to employ. Relying on data from firms operating in Canada and the United States, the US-based Container Recycling Institute (CRI) has quantified the net gains in fulltime equivalent (FTE) domestic jobs per 1000 tons of recyclable beverage containers recovered and recycled through a variety of programs aimed at diverting such containers from landfills. The study found that Container Deposit Return programs with a five cent refund (as is the case in Nova Scotia) create 11 to 38 times more direct jobs than curbside recycling programs alone. This is because deposit-return programs have a recovery rate double that of curbside programs in Canada (Morris and Morawski 2011: 36). The secondary driver of FTE jobs is the number of workers required to collect, sort and transfer containers to material recycling facilities (MRF). Per 1000 tons of recovered material, an average of 6.71 FTEs were needed for collection, 0.28 FTEs for administration, management and maintenance and 0.35 FTEs for transportation (ibid: 25). This translates to approximately 7.34 FTEs per 1000 tons of recyclable material recovered through a deposit program compared to 4.46 FTEs recovered through a manual curbside program (ibid: 37). In short, deposit programs such as Nova Scotia's recover more materials and generate more materials than mere curbside collection.

The Enviro-Depot meets Lionais and Johnstone's definition of a place-based business (2010: 123) in that it attempts to ground circuits of capital within the local community while engaging in external value chains. Its labour, management, ownership, supply chain, and built capital are all situated within the local community and its aims are social, economic and environmental sustainability, which are the structures and processes that build the social economy (Mook and Sumner 2010: 159). McMurtry defines the social economy as "economic activity neither controlled directly by the state nor by the profit logic of the market, prioritizing the social well-being of communities and marginalized individuals over partisan political

directions or individual gain” (2010: 30).<sup>3</sup> These objectives are reflected in the hiring practices of the Enviro-Depot, which used to purposefully restrict its labour pool to individuals from the local community who otherwise might not have had access to meaningful employment.

Employees at the Clifton Street Recycling Centre were predominantly hired from the district of Halifax-Needham. Since Halifax’s founding in 1750, Halifax-Needham has served as dumping grounds for the city’s working poor as well as its undesirable industrial facilities. During the 1840s many black residents settled to Africville, a vibrant all-black community built on fifteen acres of land straddling Halifax-Needham’s periphery. In 1858, Halifax moved its night soil depository near Africville, which was soon followed by Rockhead Prison, the Infectious Diseases Hospital, power transmission towers, oil storage tanks, a coal-handling facility, a fertilizer manufacturing plant, a slaughterhouse, and in 1958, the city’s open refuse dump. Branded a slum by the city’s white residents, the municipal government voted in 1964 to evict Africville’s inhabitants and to raze its structures under the auspices of urban renewal. By 1970, the entire community had been demolished, its residents evicted and relocated to public housing (Erickson 2004: 129-144).

This was one several redevelopment schemes the district of Halifax-Needham suffered through during the latter half of the twentieth century; schemes that concentrated low-income families in the area, which made local businesses unprofitable, socially stigmatized the community, and hastened the economic depletion of Halifax-Needham at a time when many were moving to suburbs on the Halifax mainland (Erickson 2004: 169).<sup>4</sup> The symptoms of such depletion, poverty, unemployment, substance abuse and crime are still keenly felt. In 2006, 20.5% of families in Halifax-Needham had low income status compared to 14.4% and 11.7% of

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<sup>3</sup> Enviro-Depots are independently owned and operated. The state’s involvement extends only as far its policies designed to maintain uniform practices, as stated on p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> At the height of redevelopment between 1961 and 1976, the population of Halifax-Needham declined by 42% (Erickson 2004: 169).

families in the neighboring districts of Halifax-Citadel and Halifax-Chebucto and 10% of families in HRM. Unemployment rates are also higher than the municipal average. In 2006, unemployment in Halifax-Needham was at 8.4% compared to 7.6% and 7% in the neighboring districts of Halifax-Citadel and Halifax-Chebucto and 6.3% in HRM (Nova Scotia Department of Finance 2012).

Mr. Wheatley, owner of the Clifton Street Recycling Centre describes the economy of this Enviro-Depot model as being designed “for the lower part of the economy, to keep the people working for \$9.50 to \$11.00 an hour” (interview, Sept. 8, 2011). The objectives of this model have been frustrated by the same problems that plague the local community. Mr. Wheatley estimates that in the year and a half since he took ownership of the Clifton Street Recycling Centre he has hired and fired thirty to fifty employees who hail from the local community, because of either shiftlessness or theft. As a result Mr. Wheatley has emulated the hiring practices of a nearby Enviro-Depot which had been plagued by similar issues.

I’ve had to bring in people from other countries so that they’re not stealing. It is very sad as an owner because I’ve been in here for a year and a half and I think I’ve had thirty to fifty local employees and they either don’t want to work or they steal (interview, Sept. 8, 2011).

As an alternative to hiring from the local labour pool, Mr. Wheatley hired three workers on temporary work permits from the Philippines, which supplies the greatest proportion (13.9%) of non-permanent residents working in Canada (Thomas 2010: 37). Although he no longer hires from the local community, Mr. Wheatley feels that hiring temporary foreign workers is compatible with his business’ continued commitment to support the local community socially, economically and environmentally.

It gives these guys a great life. These guys are used to making a dollar a day in the Philippines but they can make \$80 a day here. It’s a big difference. So once they’re here they can get their forklift ticket, they can become skilled, they can become Canadians... And they’re good people. So it’s great that we can bring good people into society because as we see with the socioeconomic situation we’re losing some [Canadians] at

the bottom. They could have been good people but for a number of reasons they're not (interview, Sept. 8, 2011).

For his employees, a temporary work permit provides the opportunity to achieve earnings higher than in their home country, and the training which will enable these workers to become skilled, a prerequisite which will facilitate their eventual transition from temporary worker, to landed immigrant, to Canadian citizen.<sup>5</sup>

In response to low birth rates and a rapidly aging population, Nova Scotian governments have increasingly advanced the temporary foreign worker program as a means to counter labour shortages in the private sector.<sup>6</sup> As Ramos notes, "the temporary foreign worker program is increasingly seen as a quick means to avoid such problems" (Ramos 2012: 2). The current government's position, as stated by Minister of Immigration Marilyn More, is that: "temporary international workers have the technical skills and international contacts our companies and communities need to remain innovative, productive and competitive" (NS Department of Immigration 2011). Temporary foreign workers are desirable as potential landed immigrants as they have already settled in the region and have Canadian work experience (ISIS 2011: 3). Census data shows that in Canada between 2001 and 2006, 30% of landed immigrants had been issued a temporary permit for work or study before 2001 (Thomas 2010: 39). This trend is reflected in Nova Scotia. Between 2005 and 2009, the number of temporary foreign workers entering Nova Scotia nearly doubled, increasing from 1,495 to 2,795 persons. In 2009, 380 temporary foreign workers became landed immigrants in Nova Scotia, representing 48% of all temporary residents who became landed immigrants (ISIS 2011: 1-2). Temporary foreign workers in Canada are also an average of five years younger than Canadian-born or landed

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<sup>5</sup> Employees are provided with forklift operator certification by the employer.

<sup>6</sup> All provinces except Ontario and Quebec support applications by temporary foreign workers for permanent residence through the provincial nominee program. Skilled workers have always had access to the nominee program, and recently, some unskilled workers have also been granted access (HRSDC 2009).

immigrants (Thomas 2010: 39). This is significant given the negative impact Canada's aging workforce is expected to have on economic growth, productivity, and tax revenues (Carriere and Galarneau 2011: 14). However, the reported 'needs' of the Canadian and Nova Scotian economies should not overshadow what Gardiner Barber refers to as the 'Janus face' of migration – immigration in the Philippines where “[o]ne side favours elite players in migration industries in both contexts, the other entails the hardship, risk and hopes of Filipino women and men seeking a better more economically secure future” (Gardiner Barber 2008: 1282). Nor should they ignore the potential for backlash from local workers who may feel deprived of jobs. In short, recourse to temporary foreign workers is not as simple or innocent a solution as Mr. Wheatley suggests.

### ***3.3 – Attempts to Curb Informal Recycling***

Although many consumers choose to convey their recyclables to Enviro-Depots for redemption, they do have the option not to redeem their deposits and instead place their containers at the curbside for municipal collection. Since 1999, HRM has required, by law, that residents separate all recyclable material, including tetra-packs, milk cartons, tin cans and unredeemed deposit beverage containers, from the refuse stream into blue bags to be placed at the curbside for municipal collection. Miller Waste Management is currently contracted by HRM to service non-commercial residences (buildings with fewer than six units); commercial buildings are serviced by independent contractors in the industrial, commercial and institutional waste (ICI) sector.

In Nova Scotia, access to curbside recycling has increased from 5% in 1989 to 99% in 2003 (Walker 2004: vii). Although Nova Scotia has high access to curbside recycling, recyclables placed at curbside or in the garbage represent only 6% (23.5 million containers) of the total

volume of beverage containers sold throughout the province (Jerome Paris, personal communication, Sept. 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011). Curbside recyclables collected in HRM are transported to the regional Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) located in Bayer's Lake Business Park. The Bayer's Lake MRF is one of eight municipally operated MRFs located throughout the province that have established agreements with the RRFB to operate as non-public buybacks. Once recyclables are received at the MRF, they are processed and then transferred to the RRFB, which pays the municipality the same \$0.0399 per unit handling fee that the Enviro-Depots receive plus the unclaimed halfback deposits on all of the curbside recyclables its contractors have collected.

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999, HRM City Council ratified By-Law S-600, the *Solid Waste Resource Collection and Disposal By-Law*, with the aim of providing citizens with a controlled and dependable waste collection service. This By-Law also introduced a series of legal prohibitions designed to discourage the itinerant collection of recyclables by informal recyclers. These prohibitions, which are outlined in Section 16.1 of By-Law S-600, state that individuals are not allowed to:

- a) pick over, remove, disturb or otherwise interfere with any waste material that has been set out for municipal collection;
- b) collect waste material placed for municipal collection; or
- c) remove a container or organics collection cart placed at curbside.

The purpose of these prohibitions is twofold: firstly, to prevent the illegal dumping of debris (commonly in the form of non-deposit containers) by informal recyclers on or adjacent to the property of residents, who then become responsible for their proper disposal; secondly, to secure revenue derived from the recovery and processing of unredeemed deposit containers by the municipality and its contractors. HRM's Solid Waste Resource Advisory Committee (SWRAC) reports that Halifax receives approximately \$167,000 in net revenue from curbside recyclables



and estimates that an additional \$200,000 – \$300,000 in net revenue is lost annually to informal recycling (HRM Feb 3rd, 2004). The SWRAC report also noted that informal recycling and illegal dumping occurs most often in the urban core and particularly often on the Halifax peninsula (ibid: 4). In addition to these issues, the SWRAC reported that collection contractors had been previously threatened with physical assault by recyclers who wished to be left alone to sort through recyclable material.<sup>7</sup> In order to ensure their safety, municipal contractors adjusted their operations which may have led to delays in collection and increased operating costs for the contractor (ibid: 3).<sup>8</sup>

### ***3.4 – Policing Informal Recyclers***

Responsibility for enforcement of By-Law S-600 falls on HRM’s By-Law Services, whose operations comprise the governmental policies which inform By-Laws, the administration of By-Laws, the enforcement of By-Laws, the issuing of permits, and remediation. The policy directives for By-Law S-600 are the Provincial Solid Waste Resource Regulations. By-Law services deal solely with the enforcement of this By-Law. By-Law enforcement officers are police officers who have a special constable designation for enforcing By-Laws. By-Law Enforcement is a complaint-driven service which receives roughly ten complaints regarding informal recyclers annually. When a complaint is received through the HRM 490-4000 complaint phone line, a case is opened for investigation and assigned to an officer. If there were any witnesses identified, the officer interviews the witnesses, and then patrols the area where the activity took place (Tanya Phillips, Manager By-Law Services, interview, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> During the course of my research I did not observe any such altercations. On the contrary, I observed several cordial encounters between municipal contractors and recyclers. In one instance I even observed a municipal contractor remove blue-bagged recyclables from the rear of his vehicle and pass them to an informal recycler.

<sup>8</sup> The report does not specify how municipal contractors adjusted their operations to address safety concerns.

By-Law Enforcement views its role to be primarily educational. The message that By-Law Enforcement communicates to informal recyclers is that they should not rip open blue bags and create a mess; rather, they should untie and retie the blue bags. When I asked about this aspect of enforcement, Supervisory By-Law Officer Scott Hill stated that:

We want to go out and make sure that people are aware of the By-Law and they can make their choices after that. If they continue with the action and we continue to get complaints then the next step will be taken (interview, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

The majority of recyclers seem to be receptive towards this message, although very few are aware of By-Law S-600. Jake, a recycler of fourteen years' experience, is typical. When I asked him about By-Law S-600 his response was "By-Law? What By-Law? The only By-Law I know of you can't tear the blue-bags open. You got to untie them. That's the only one I know about." Although Jake was not aware that By-Law S-600 prohibits the collection of waste material placed for municipal collection, he was aware that By-Law enforcement officers prefer blue bags be untied and retied rather than torn. For the most part, By-Law enforcement officers have noticed a decrease in the amount of garbage left by recyclers. Several recyclers even carry tools for the specific purpose of opening tightly knotted bags. One such individual is Walt, a consummate professional, who at fifteen years experience is one of the first and longest practicing of Halifax's recyclers. Walt looks at it this way: "if you can untie your boots you can untie a bag. If you can't untie your boots leave the goddamn bag alone!"

Bags are untied and retied for three reasons: to simply not leave an unsightly mess, to maintain amiable relationships with residents and avoid their ire and to avoid provoking law enforcement. Officer Hill informed me that he has only "...had to talk to three people in six years that [he has] actually caught ripping open a bag, understanding that it's near impossible to catch offenders in the act, but just the luck of the draw had [him] driving down the road as they were doing that" (personal communication, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011). The maximum penalty for violation of

Section 16.1 of By-Law S-600 is \$5000. However, the standard fine is a significantly lower \$340.21, although Officer Hill stated that warnings are generally issued before tickets are given (ibid). Warnings are likely a more efficient deterrent than the strict enforcement of the By-Law. Many recyclers suggested that if they received a ticket it would never be paid. The following response reflects the view held by most recyclers.

If they ever wanted to enforce that law, I don't know how they would enforce it, I really don't. I mean you can give me a ticket but I'm not going to pay it. So what's the sense of wasting the paperwork and wasting some guy's time to issue a ticket that's never going to get paid?

Warnings are preferable to tickets as both would essentially result in the same outcome. My experiences suggest that if a strict enforcement of the by-law was adopted, it could in fact exacerbate the present situation. Currently, recyclers take their time collecting; they untie the bag, remove any deposit containers and retie the bag before moving on. If fines became a real threat, recyclers would continue their activities but would likely do so at a greater speed, with less care. My research suggests that warnings are effective. Recyclers know that leaving refuse strewn over the property of residents is unacceptable and feel morally obliged to avoid doing so. When a recycler is reproached, news spreads by word-of-mouth and is remembered for some time. When I asked recyclers whether they had heard of anyone being stopped they often recalled many instances extending back several years. This speaks to the success of By-Law's efforts to educate recyclers about what is considered acceptable practice.

Although By-Law S-600 is in the jurisdiction of By-Law services, other offenses, occasionally committed fall under the jurisdiction of Halifax Regional Police. The mandate of the Police Force is broad, which permits a level of interaction with recyclers that is not afforded by the narrower jurisdiction of By-Law services. When filing reports, the HRM Police Department does not identify individuals as recyclers, so it is impossible to determine the extent to which recyclers commit prohibited acts (Superintendent Sean Auld, HRM Police Services, interview,

Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011). Generally speaking, offenses commonly committed during informal recycling activities are: trespassing on private property, which has a correlation with property crime such as theft, impeding the flow of traffic, and public drunkenness, which is closely associated with the additional offense of possession of open liquor.

Certain recyclers, while in search of blue-bag recyclables, trespass on private property by entering the backyards or garages of residents. This offense, which falls under *The Protection of Private Property Act*, is prevalent, even though many recyclers view those who venture farther than the curb with disdain. Abstaining from this practice is regarded as a matter of personal integrity and those who engage in it are perceived to be desperate, drug-addled individuals. This perception is reflected in the experiences of C.K., a white male in his late twenties, who originally turned to informal recycling as a means to fuel his opiate addiction.

When we spoke, C.K. was recovering from his addiction with the aid of methadone maintenance treatment and had finally begun to reconnect with his daughter and rebuild his life. At the height of his addiction, informal recycling served as his primary means of income, and C.K. had no qualms about trespassing on private property if he thought it would help him get his next fix. C.K. readily concedes his embarrassment when he now considers his conduct as an addict.

I used to be a real prick and take [recyclables] out of people's yards. Then I realized, why would you do that, because it might be someone struggling like my own self and a lot of the times you can just ask and they'll give them to you. It's just the right thing to do. Yeah, so what I used to do sometimes, I'd get frustrated because I couldn't find anything and that was just wrong because the whole point I'm doing this, is so I'm not doing something illegal. So why would you steal from someone's yard?

Research suggests property crime in Canada is predominantly committed with the intent of obtaining money to purchase narcotics (Pernanen et al. 2002: 57). It is usually residents who report instances of trespassing; however, one recycler I interviewed stated that he, upon observing another recycler emerging from a resident's backyard with four full blue bags, went so

far as to flag down a police officer and report the incident himself. Once police respond to such a call and once they locate a suspect, they notify that individual that if they are to return to and enter that property, charges will be laid. HRM Police Superintendent Auld, whom I interviewed, was not aware of any cases where a person went back and was charged for such an offence after they had been instructed to leave the area (interview, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

The impediment of traffic is another offence which occurs frequently. When I asked recyclers if they preferred to push their cart on the sidewalk or the road, most recyclers indicated that generally the road was their preference. Pushing a cart down Halifax's uneven sidewalks creates a great deal of noise and can cause glass bottles to shatter; a broken bottle is not only lost revenue but also presents a hazard to recyclers. Taking the cart onto the road is also done as a courtesy to pedestrians. Recyclers are keenly aware that pushing a loaded cart down the street poses an impediment to traffic; however the general consensus is that they would rather have the cart block a portion of the road than wholly block a sidewalk used by children, the elderly and the disabled. A loaded cart can get exceptionally wide, something to which Enviro-Depot Owner Mike Wheatley attests. He stated that when a few of the more skilled recyclers arrive at the depot, "...sometimes they can't get through side by side and the garage door is about fourteen feet wide" (interview, Sept. 8, 2011). Police do receive and respond to calls from motorists concerning recyclers. Such complaints are addressed by simply asking the recycler to move to the far right out of the travel portion of the road, a request with which s/he normally complies (Superintendent Sean Auld, HRM Police Services, interview, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

A more common offence is public intoxication and/or the possession of open liquor. Police generally issue warnings only as they recognize many of the recyclers' difficult situations. However, public intoxication and/or the possession of open liquor are prohibited under *the*

*Liquor Control Act* and in some circumstances police will issue a summary offence ticket (ibid). Walt had a particular habit of stopping at the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC) after procuring a large, high quality shopping cart at Costco, which he would pilot down Northwest Arm Drive to Halifax. This habit resulted in Walt receiving several warnings to move off of the road because he was impeding traffic and tickets for public intoxication. The last time he was stopped, Walt received a ticket for \$121 for being publicly intoxicated. At the time we last spoke Walt still had not paid the fine.

### ***3.5 – Connecting Informal Recycling to the Formal Regulatory Environment***

In Halifax an unusual system has materialized that highlights how entangled the informal economy, the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment are. Within the informal economy literature, the formal/informal economic division is generally viewed through the macro-structural perspective of Portes and Castells (1989). They contend that informality is the product of a capitalist strategy to circumvent state—imposed labour regulations and undermine what remains of Keynesian welfare capitalism. This macro-structural perspective aptly portrays many informal economies documented in the literature. My research, however, suggests that Halifax’s informal recycling economy is not characteristic of the broad offensive of capital against the old economic regime. It is my position that this divergence results from the manner in which informal recycling is structurally articulated to the formal recycling economy through Nova Scotia’s formal regulatory environment.

If we focus on the institutional frameworks that enable informal recycling and ignore, for now, the socioeconomic factors that reproduce and maintain informality, we can understand how informal recycling is structurally articulated to the formal economy and what role the formal regulatory environment plays in enabling this relationship. Most of the literature on

informal recycling describes an activity driven by the value of recyclables as a raw material in the global market (Fortuna & Prates 1989; Gowan 1997; Medina 2007; Millar 2008). To make my case I will specifically examine the recycling of aluminum, which is not only the most widely recycled material, but is also the only packaging material whose market value covers the cost of collection and reprocessing.

Aluminum cans are traded in the global market as a commodity. This results in variability of price. As of September 2011, Standard & Poor's valued aluminum at \$0.90 per pound (a pound being approximately thirty-five cans). Buy-back centres, which pay cash for recyclable materials, are for-profit enterprises, which means that the amount paid for materials must be less than market value. For example, a firm I contacted in Dallas, Texas, pays the individual \$0.65 cents per pound of aluminum cans. Because compensation is determined by weight, buy-back centres commonly require individual sellers to bring recyclables pre-sorted by material. In these contexts the value of recyclable materials is so low that it is unprofitable for formal recycling firms to provide a comprehensive collection and sorting service employing formal workers with defined wages and benefits (as the Central Halifax Enviro-Depot I frequented does). However, by 'subcontracting' informal labour, these firms avoid paying wages and benefits. This enables formal recycling firms to provide a cheap collection service linking consumers to their capitalist enterprises. The outcome of this is a double tiered system where informal labourers are paid less than market value for materials, the collection and sorting of which is done for free, while formal recycling firms profit from recyclers' labour through the resale and reprocessing of informally collected and sorted materials. This is an exploitative relationship that gives credence to Portes and Castells' macro-structural perspective.

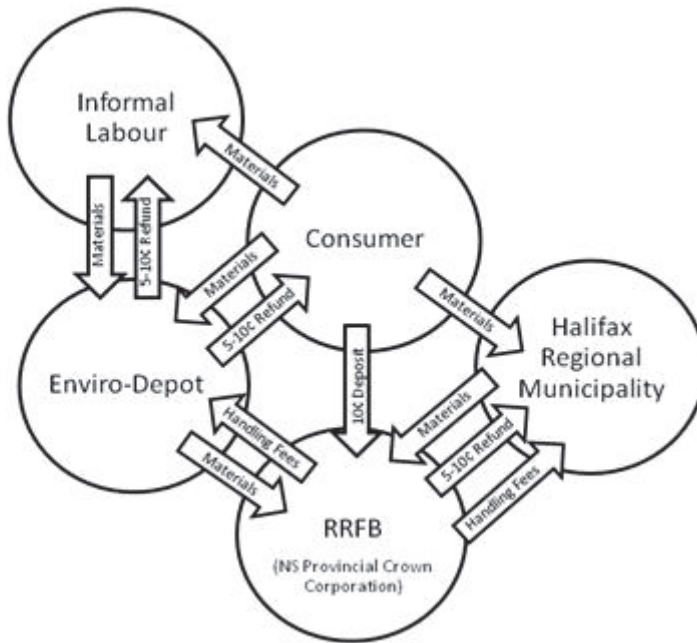
### ***3.6 – Connecting Informal Recycling to the Formal Economy***

What makes the Halifax informal recycling economy so interesting is that the relationship between informal and formal actors differs from the exploitative capitalist strategy present in other jurisdictions. This divergence can be attributed to the formal regulatory environment, specifically the ten cent consumer deposit legislated by the provincial government, an amount which is significantly higher than the market value of a container. A pound of aluminum cans may be worth \$0.90 in the global commodity market but it costs the Nova Scotian consumer \$3.50 in deposit fees. Because the RRFB is engaged in both the collection of deposit fees and the sale of materials, it grosses \$4.04 on every pound of aluminum it receives. This money is redistributed through several mechanisms, which results in the value of recyclable materials being different for individuals, Enviro-Depots, and HRM. In Halifax the value of recyclables is perceived by individuals in terms of the provincially legislated halfback consumer deposit; by Enviro-Depots in terms of volume handled; and by the municipality in terms of both the halfback consumer deposit and volume handled. If in Dallas, Texas, a pound of aluminum cans fetches \$0.65, in Halifax, the same pound would fetch a far higher \$1.75 for the individual, \$1.39 for the Enviro-Depot, and \$3.14 for the Municipality.

In Halifax, informal recyclers receive almost double the market value of aluminum. This is because the recompense informal recyclers receive for their materials is dependent upon the formal regulatory environment and is not at the discretion of formal recycling firms, who, incidentally, are also dependent upon the formal regulatory environment for their own recompense. The economic linchpin that maintains this relationship is the entrepreneurial partnership between the RRFB, the independently owned Enviro-Depots, and informal recyclers. I argue that it is for these reasons that informal recyclers in Halifax are not subjected to the exploitative relationship prevalent in informal recycling in other jurisdictions.



Figure 3.1 Flows of resources between actors in the HRM recycling sector



This argument is supported by examining how informal recycling contributes to the formal recycling firm’s accumulation of capital. Remember that the business model of the Enviro-Depot is not based on the sale of collected materials but on the processing of its inventory. The more containers the Enviro-Depot receives and processes, the more its labour costs are subsidized through handling fees paid by the RRFB, and thus the more workers it can afford to employ. The Enviro-Depot business I frequented in Central Halifax relies on cart recyclers for almost half of its business. As a result of this, the volume of curbside recyclables that informal recyclers bring to the depot dictates the number of workers the depot can afford to employ. This is something that the depot’s owner, Mike Wheatley, is acutely aware of and makes known when the occasional recycler asks him for work.

They’ll ask me, can I have a job? And I’m like, you have a job. We’re working together. You’re working collecting and I’m paying guys to count it to give you money and I’m getting paid money because I’m paying guys to count it. So we’re in business together...if you’re not out collecting neither of us are working (interview, Sept. 8, 2011).

By examining the influence of informal labor upon the profitability of this Enviro-Depot we can clearly see how the total institutional framework of formal economic activity has contributed to the creation of the informal recycling economy in Halifax. Informal recycling in Halifax exists in the interstices of the formal regulatory environment, between two levels of government, which have introduced contradictory regulation that has fostered an economic environment conducive to informality, as theorized by Cross (1998) and Fernandez-Kelly (2006). The introduction of provincial product market regulations requiring beverage containers to be either refillable or recyclable, coupled with a deposit system which confers value upon recyclable containers and municipal legislation requiring that the latter be separated from other refuse streams, have produced an environment where recyclable materials are not only valuable, but can quite literally be found on every street corner; 391 million recyclable deposit containers were sold in fiscal year 2011 (RRFB 2011: 2).

Taken together, these provincial and municipal regulations have mobilized informal labourers, whose informal activities support the jobs of the formal labourers employed at the Enviro-Depot. The interdependent relationship between the Enviro-Depot and the informal recyclers places these two groups at odds with HRM's objectives while the RRFB profits from the activities of all of these actors. When I asked Mike Wheatley what would happen if law enforcement cracked down on informal recycling his response was "if they closed down my cart door I could still kind of run my business from my back door. I'd just employ less people" (interview, Sept. 8, 2011). Although the preceding macro-structural analysis describes how the formal and informal recycling economies are connected in Halifax, it still leaves a few fundamental questions unanswered, related to the socioeconomic dynamic that reproduces informality, such as: why do individuals become informal recyclers and how do recyclers secure a living collecting blue-bag recyclables? These are the questions which I shall now address.

## ***Chapter 4 – Why do I do this? Well, it's Better than a Kick in the Pants!***

Money is a powerful incentive but money alone does not explain why individuals choose to undertake informal recycling over formal employment (most people seek financial stability but relatively few individuals view informal recycling as a means suitable to achieving this end). In the previous chapter, I argued that informal recycling in HRM is enabled by its articulation to the formal economy through Nova Scotia's formal regulatory environment. However, if the forces which generate informal economic activities are to be understood we must look past the formal regulatory structure enabling informal recycling to the socioeconomic situation of Halifax's informal actors. In the following pages I use my ethnographic work with recyclers on Halifax's peninsula to show how their socioeconomic situation reproduces informal recycling in this regional context.

### ***4.1 – Categorizing Informal Recyclers***

The archetypal informal recycler is a white man between the ages of 30 and 50. Reflecting Halifax's demographics, the majority of recyclers were white, with few visible minorities. As for gender, my findings were similar to those of Gowan (1997: 168): very few women pursue informal recycling in Halifax, although those who do are no less skilled or successful than their male counterparts. I went along with one woman, Robyn, whose slender frame and delicate appearance suggest mainstream conceptions of femininity, but who is in fact a strong, independent-minded woman and one of the most successful recyclers operating on the peninsula.

During my 'go-alongs,' I was surprised to witness a few men abandon the area they had been exploiting after spotting Robyn working her way towards them. In one instance, Thomas, a

recycler of two years experience who engages in the activity to supplement his disability pension, had been approaching a rather robust bag of recyclables but after sighting Robyn moving towards the same bag from a greater distance, he abruptly altered his course. "There's a half decent bag there. See, I could probably beat her to it but then we'd get into something. See, I wanted to; I was going towards that bag there but I just seen her coming up." After moving several streets over Thomas informed me that for him, Robyn serves as almost a barometer by which the future potential of an area is judged "if she's still around I know people are still putting stuff out." Indeed, Robyn and her husband, who work separately but pool their earnings after their run, were consistently referred to by almost every recycler I interviewed as models of success.

Of the many recyclers operating on the Halifax peninsula, I found that all fell into two distinct categories: those who use shopping carts and those who use vehicles. This study concerns only those who use shopping carts. I found that cart recyclers could be subdivided into three additional subcategories: those who are full-time recyclers (four to six days per week); those who are part-time recyclers (three or less days per week); and those who are transient recyclers (a few minutes here or there throughout the week). All of the recyclers who participated in this study were full-time or part-time recyclers with one exception. This is due to the fact that full-time and part-time recyclers maintain a daily routine and consistently target the same areas, which makes these individuals very visible and easy to locate, whereas transient recyclers are not.

A full-time recycler is typically an individual who receives the majority of their income directly from their recycling activities. These individuals work year-round and devote approximately four to ten hours a day, five days a week to their recycling activities. All of the full-time recyclers that I interviewed had engaged in informal recycling for at least one year,

with the majority of individuals having engaged in informal recycling for eight years or more. The longest practicing recycler I encountered had recycled for over twenty years. Full-time recyclers were by far the most proficient of the three categories of recycler. This is in due in part to experience, and in part to the fact that many of these individuals have engaged in informal recycling for long enough to cultivate extensive networks of relationships with residents, who recyclers commonly referred to as their 'customers'.

A part-time recycler is typically an individual whose recycling activities supplement social assistance payments such as disability, social assistance, or pensions. Their work days are approximately four to ten hours a day, three or fewer days a week. For these individuals, informal recycling is generally a seasonal occupation which is done only when the weather is favourable. Many of the full-time recyclers told me that the number of individuals recycling on the peninsula dramatically increases during the spring, summer and fall, before declining steeply in the winter months. The commonly-held belief is that part-time recyclers have other sources of income, which enables them not only to recycle less frequently during favourable conditions, but to abstain entirely from recycling during the cold winter months.

A transient recycler is typically addicted to narcotics. These individuals typically work for a few minutes, enough to grab two or three bags off the curb, which are taken directly to the Enviro-Depot for refund. Mike Wheatley estimates that there are approximately fifty such individuals who bring two or three bags, about \$2.00 worth of recyclables, repeatedly throughout the day. He describes these individuals as being visibly agitated due to use of substances other than marijuana or alcohol. He assumes that they recycle only enough to pay for their next hit. This has also been suggested by Bender who claims that "crack addicts lack the commitment needed to be successful, consistent informal recyclers. They may bin in a small area to get what they need for the moment, to score drugs, but they do not view

binning as employment” (2010: 9). Although they are numerous, it was difficult to locate these individuals, due to the fleeting nature of their activities. By chance, I did encounter two transient recyclers while at the Enviro-Depot. Both were visibly under the influence of opiates. The man watched me with suspicion as I interviewed Shawna, his partner. During our brief interview she emphatically stated “I never do this” and that the two had just picked up the bags to “make a couple bucks before heading to the methadone clinic.” This encounter would seem to support Mike Wheatley’s general observations, as well as those of Bender (2010).

To determine the number of informal recyclers who are active on the peninsula would require a quantitative survey of recyclers conducted over a period of many months, at all three peninsular Enviro-Depots. Such a survey was beyond the scope of this particular study. However, based on the estimates provided by the informal recyclers I interviewed, Enviro-Depot owner Mike Wheatley and my personal experience, I would suggest that there are approximately fifty vehicles, forty full-time cart recyclers, thirty part-time cart recyclers and fifty transient recyclers operating at any given time on the Halifax Peninsula. These numbers do decrease significantly during the coldest winter months. Mike Wheatley estimates that during the winter his business drops off between fifteen and twenty percent. I would estimate that the peninsular Halifax informal recycler population could be upwards of one-hundred and fifty individuals during favorable conditions.

Not a single individual I interviewed stated that they turned to informal recycling as a result of losing employment in the formal sector, as is suggested by the informalization thesis. My ethnographic research indicates that informal recycling is pursued for several reasons:

- a) as an alternative to formal employment;
- b) to gain a level of personal autonomy not available in a formal work environment;

- c) to supplement forms of social assistance which preclude the recipient from formal employment, such as disability and welfare;
- d) to supplement Canada Pension Plan (CPP) payments;
- e) to support addiction.

Of the thirteen informal recyclers I interviewed, seven people pursued recycling as an alternative to formal employment and to gain greater personal autonomy (reasons A and B), four people pursued recycling to supplement social assistance or pensions (reasons C and D), and two people pursued recycling to support an addiction (reason E). Full-time recyclers (who are the most visible and active recyclers) typically pursue recycling for reasons A and B, while part-time recyclers typically pursue recycling for reasons C and D (the receipt of government benefits is what enables this group to only recycle part-time). Transient recyclers typically pursue recycling for reason E, although there are some individuals who do recycle full-time to support themselves and their addiction.

Although I have listed these factors individually to facilitate the presentation of my analysis, they are by no means mutually exclusive. The lives of individuals are complex and their reasons for engaging in informal recycling are often multifaceted and represent the results of countless personal episodes compounded, in some cases, over many decades. For example, the autonomous nature of informal employment contributed to some individuals' decision to pursue informal recycling. However, for them, autonomy would have been a prerequisite of any employment, informal or otherwise, due to the fact that an addiction had made them undependable employees. The multifaceted motivations for informal recycling should be kept in mind as I proceed with my analysis of the socioeconomic factors that contribute to the reproduction of informal recycling in Halifax.

## ***4.2 – Informal Recycling as an Alternative to Formal Employment***

For many of the recyclers I interviewed, the decision to pursue informal recycling stems from decisions made early in life, the results of which were an inadequate education and few marketable skills. For individuals lacking human capital, there are few options in the formal economy beyond undesirable minimum wage work. Andrew, for example, began recycling shortly after the implementation of the deposit refund system. At the time Andrew was a teenager and a young offender. His youth was spent breaking into cars, selling narcotics and committing property crime. Andrew's criminal lifestyle and resultant run-ins with the law, eventually led to more than a decade of incarceration.

After serving his sentence, Andrew renounced his previously unlawful lifestyle. He is now a devoted father and stay-at-home dad. He still, however, continues to pursue informal recycling part-time. For Andrew recycling provides a "tax-free, honest living"; it is an alternative that offers autonomy, self-respect, and income above the minimum legislated wage, an alternative that he has freely chosen over employment in the formal labor market. He explains:

You walk for an hour picking up bags and you get paid. I walked five blocks and made over twenty bucks, some guys got to work a couple hours for that but at the same time I just busted my ass, I'm fucking dirty, sweaty, you know... The bottom line is at the end of the day when I go cash this up right here I'll have enough for milk, bread, cigarettes, weed, something like that. You know what I mean? I save the money up, like last Christmas, my wife and step-daughter were going away to Ontario for Easter. So as of last January, every time I went out, I just saved it up. I paid for a thousand dollar air ticket, there and back, through bottles. You know what I mean? And that's straight up. Through bottles I sent my family to Ontario and back, and I feel good about that... I've done so many things with bottle money. Well [my daughter] just graded<sup>9</sup> this year, but last year when she graded I bought her a brand new bike with bottle money. I'm so glad that I save my shit up. If I do this for a month, guaranteed I'd have enough for my rent. You know what I'm saying? A lot of people look down on us but at the same time I don't really care what other people think. I know that I have a big-screen TV, leather sofa, leather couch and love-seat.

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<sup>9</sup> This means that his step-daughter advanced to the next grade.



For Andrew informal recycling isn't a job, but it is honest work which has enabled him to contribute to his family in a meaningful way. During our interview Andrew disclosed that he has never been stably employed. He's had "a few jobs but never anything [he] liked." Andrew views himself as an "auto body guy"; a skill that was self-taught.

Andrew's lost youth has left him with few marketable skills. Those that he does possess, such as his skills in auto-body repair, are informal and would require additional training in order for him to be a certified practitioner. This leaves few options for Andrew beyond minimum wage jobs, which he considers undesirable. In this respect, informal recycling is a suitable activity for Andrew. He walks his children to school in the morning, collects recyclables for a few hours, cashes out and is there to pick them up in the afternoon. Recycling provides Andrew with an alternative to formal employment which offers more than just money; it offers the flexibility to be there for his children, a feature seldom present in formal minimum wage employment.

For Jake, a recycler of fourteen years experience, who recycled from British Columbia to Newfoundland before settling in Halifax, the decision to return to informal recycling was a direct result of his lack of education. Now in his fifties, several decades stand between Jake and his decision to drop out of high school.

I quit school too early. I regret doing that of course, I mean I have my grade 10 but I'm doing this for the simple fact that there's nothing else for me to do. I worked at [a temp agency] for a year at least. I came over here [from out of province] by myself, just to check out the scene; to check out the jobs and apartments, stuff like this before the family came over. I got working no problem. Got the family together, come over here; the wife bought a car and come over. Started working again and all that time I was working. Then about two months later everything dried up... It's a tough way to make a living b'y, it really is. I'm getting too old to do this. I've been around long enough to have grandchildren and I'm still picking.

For Jake all employment is a means to an end, that end being the timely payment of his rent and bills. After work ran out at the temp agency, Jake found it difficult to find employment given his age and lack of education. With little to no employment options available in the formal

economy, a return to recycling seemed suitable. When we spoke it had been two and a half years since Jake had been formally employed.

Right now I have some pretty high bills. My Pekinese got sick and that ran me \$450; he had to have surgery and that's my wife's little baby. She'd divorce me before she got rid of that dog. So we got that on payments. I mean I've got bills that you do, like anybody does. I have to pay bills and a lot of people don't realize this. They think that because we're doing this we don't have no decent life but excuse me all to hell, I have a brand-spanking new computer, I have internet, I have colour TV, I don't have cable, my wife has a cell phone, I don't have a cell phone but she has to have one, I hate cell phones. I mean all I'm saying is basically I have bills like anyone else does.

Recycling enables Jake to pay his bills, to buy his groceries, and provides the 'pocket money' that he uses to enjoy his leisure time. Recycling may be hard work but it offers the stability that Jake could not find in the formal economy, given his age and lack of education, and it is what enables him to live as good a life as any other citizen. Without recycling Jake would face a very uncertain future. Recycling mitigates this risk by offering Jake an alternative to formal employment. For Jake recycling is empowering, rather than marginalizing.

### ***4.3 – The Advantages of Personal Autonomy***

Personal autonomy, which is rarely a feature of formal employment (self-employment being an exception), has often been cited in the literature as a characteristic of informal employment on which informal actors place a significant emphasis (Pahl 1980; Henry 1981; Gowan 1997; Snyder 2004; Maloney 2004; Millar 2008; Bender 2010). Autonomy is advantageous because it grants these workers the personal independence to make and act upon their own decisions, without fear of reprimand. Working in the absence of a manager, supervisor or boss, informal workers are in a position to determine the pace, schedule, and intensity of their work; they receive immediate payment for their labour, and they are not subjected to disciplinary measures. Autonomy can also offer a measure of dignity that formal employment does not.

Of the individuals who stated autonomy was the principle reason they recycle, most were roughly between the ages of forty and sixty years of age and possessed little in the way of human capital; the skill set of many of these individuals was that of a general labourer. Jeff was one such individual. Jeff began recycling in Western Canada over twenty years ago and has since continued to recycle in Halifax, after moving back to the city over sixteen years ago.

It's funny, people talk to me for a few minutes and they go away thinking there's no way someone like me is doing this. It's strictly financial. I just never found anything that I was good at, at least not anything that I pursued. And you know; my education is what it is... I never thought that I'd do this for twenty years.

Informal recyclers of similar age and with similar skill sets as Jeff may find it difficult to function effectively in a formal work environment. If these individuals were to enter the formal labour market, many of them would not only end up working for minimum wage but in most cases would also be supervised by a manager or boss many years their junior. Jeff found this prospect extremely unpleasant.

I'm [in my early fifties], so chances are wherever I get a job my boss is going to be 20 years younger than me or even more; maybe 30 years younger than me. It's hard to cope with that. That's not to say that I wouldn't have respect for my boss, I always have. But when I feel that they're asking something unusual, that's when I might get fired because I might have an issue with it or something like that. And me being much older it might be harder for me to see it his way. There's potential for me to either quit or get fired. And the fact that you can collect something and get paid for it is good, it's really great.

As a result of recycling, Jeff need not suffer the humiliation of working a menial wage job commanded by a person several decades younger than himself. Recycling enables Jeff to avoid being reminded of his supposed station in life and to maintain a sense of self-respect he would not be afforded in formal employment. Jeff also values the ability he has to make his own decisions, "my boss says I can quit anytime I want [laughs]. I stop for coffee and shit like that".

For Anthony and Robyn, a married couple who recycle as a team, autonomy was the foremost reason they took up the activity. They first began recycling eight years ago, shortly

after moving to Halifax from another province. Anthony and Robyn quickly realized “that there was money all over the place”. Anthony, who possesses two skilled trades, had recently quit his job working as a chef at a restaurant for an employer whom he described as verbally abusive. Anthony took to informal recycling almost immediately, finding that the personal independence it afforded freed him from the stresses of formal employment, which had begun to manifest physically.

I was stressed right out. I used to be a chef and I was having hyper-baldness and nervous disorders and everything else because when I would say to whoever was in control, ‘All I want is this responsibility. All I want is this because otherwise I get stuck with too much.’ Cause if you’re good at something they just get you to do more...Now I’m my own boss. I don’t have anyone to answer to but myself and my wife and the landlord once in a while... I don’t have a boss. That’s my underlying reason.

Anthony’s decision to pursue informal employment was not forced, as the informalization thesis would suggest; rather it was a voluntary decision that he made after freely leaving a well-paying job in the formal economy. As has been noted elsewhere (Millar 2008: 28), the autonomous nature of informal employment allows informal actors to influence the conditions of their work. The hectic pace; the seemingly insurmountable workload; the crippling stress Anthony struggled to cope with in the formal economy: these features were conspicuously absent from his informal work. Informal recycling afforded Anthony the freedom to set not only his schedule but also the pace and intensity of his work; it allowed Anthony to avoid being called ‘dumb’ and an ‘idiot’ by his employer for making trivial mistakes, to essentially be his own boss. His wife said it best when she succinctly stated “there’s not enough money in the world to put up with that stuff. It’s just not worth the money”. The reasons behind Robyn’s decision were very much the same as her husband’s. “How many people in this world are working at jobs that they hate? I don’t hate this... I take my time. I can work as long as I want and nobody is going to say shit to me. I’m not gonna get fired. [*laughs*] It’s good work”.

#### ***4.4 – Supplementing Forms of Social Assistance which Preclude Formal Employment***

Discussions of tax-evasion by both employers and employees permeate the literature and are closely linked to the informalization thesis. The supplementation of social assistance payments forms an important subset of this discussion. It has often been argued (Roberts 1994; Leonard 2001) that the reduction of social transfers in many developed states has given rise to a situation where social assistance alone is insufficient to provide the necessities of life. Portes and Castells (1989) argue that the retraction of ‘the social safety net’ has increased pressure on the poor to supplement inadequate or absent social assistance systems through informal employment. As Weiss (1987: 231) states, “it is frequently the need to circumvent the inadequacies [of the state] that throws citizens back on informal support systems”. Research does however suggest (Lemieux *et al.* 1994) that the very structure of the social welfare system, which affords beneficiaries a marginal tax rate nearing 100 percent,<sup>10</sup> creates a strong disincentive for beneficiaries to engage in formal employment, since their earnings will be higher if they continue to receive social assistance payments while engaged in the informal economy.

My research with informal recyclers supports these findings. For those who recycle to supplement forms of social assistance that prohibit the beneficiary from taking up formal employment, such as disability and welfare benefits, a tax-free, cash-in-hand payment is advantageous. The undeclared income enables the beneficiary to enhance their earnings without instigating reductions in their social assistance payments. The reasons why Fadi, a Middle-Eastern immigrant who fell on hard times after moving to Halifax, pursues recycling are typical of those on disability:

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<sup>10</sup> Any income the beneficiary receives in addition to their social assistance payment is garnished by the state.

I start when I broke. I didn't have money so I start collecting bottles... I'm on a disability so I can't work. If I work and they know, they'll cut my income. My income statement, they give me a certain amount of money, they give me eight hundred bucks a month. Ah, five hundred twenty five for my rent and four hundred for myself to buy groceries and stuff... That's not enough for me because I smoke a lot of dope, weed, so I need the money to buy some weed.

C.K.'s circumstances were similar, although of greater complexity. At the height of his opiate addiction, recycling was C.K.'s only source of income, which enabled him to support his addiction and purchase groceries. However, he did acknowledge that his addiction often took precedence over dinner. C.K., who has been 'clean' for several months, currently receives disability payments as a result of his addiction and subsequent admittance into a rehabilitation program.

Even though he now has a stable source of income, C.K. continues to recycle, for reasons mirroring those of Fadi. He pursues recycling not out of economic necessity but so he can afford to buy his daughter gifts and take her to McDonald's, as well as to support his \$300 per month cigarette habit. Like Fadi, informal recycling provides C.K. with a mechanism by which he can enhance his earnings without reducing his disability payments:

It's all under the table so you're not getting taxed and myself, my rent's already paid and everything so all I have to worry about is cigarettes and stuff. I already have my power and everything all paid for. It's not a do or die kind of thing.

Informal recycling enables these two individuals to live a comfortable lifestyle which would be unattainable if they relied solely on social assistance. Both of these men stated that after their rent and bills were paid, they were left with only a few hundred dollars for food, which is not enough for them to maintain a steady supply of tobacco, alcohol and other non-essentials (the extent to which non-essentials are considered a basic necessity is a relative assessment).

The experiences of these informal actors challenge the informalization thesis. For these individuals, the decision to engage in informal employment was not a forced choice resulting from the inadequacies of a social welfare system offering only the bare minimum in

compensation. By all accounts, beneficiaries of forms of social assistance precluding formal employment were rather well off. Their rent, power and groceries were all adequately covered by the social welfare system. Not a single participant stated that they had trouble paying for the basic necessities of life. For such individuals, informal recycling was viewed mainly as a means through which they could conceal an additional source of income beyond that necessary to cover their basic living expenses.

#### ***4.5 – Supplementing Canada Pension Plan Payments***

My research suggests that the rationale which leads the beneficiaries of programs such as the Canada Pension Plan to pursue informal recycling closely mirrors the rationale of beneficiaries of other forms of income assistance. Thomas, a former skilled tradesman and current Canada Disability Pension beneficiary,<sup>11</sup> first began recycling after trying it with a friend. Even before he began recycling, Thomas had a history of working informally. He had often worked odd jobs for a close friend who paid him cash-in-hand. This relationship was congenial; Thomas and his friend would normally converse, smoke cigarettes and drink beer after the job had been completed. Thomas suggested that the offer of work was likely a pretext, with the job being secondary to the companionship he provided. This relationship lasted for some time before it abruptly ended with the passing of his friend after a sudden illness. “I started [recycling] a couple years ago with a friend of mine. He said ‘let’s give it a shot’, so I said ‘why not?’ ”. Thomas averages around \$25-30 per day that he goes out. He states that although the added income is not a lot “that’s good for me. It’s all that I’m looking for”.

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<sup>11</sup> The recipient of a Canada Disability Pension receives an average monthly benefit of \$842.98 compared to \$528.92 for a Canada Retirement Pension (Service Canada 2012).

Thomas has continued to recycle part-time because, like other recyclers I interviewed, the supplementary income allows him to maintain a steady supply of tobacco, alcohol and other non-essentials:

I just do it because I smoke; I know it's a dirty habit. I like my beer too. So I went out yesterday morning and got about \$25. I bought a pack of smokes, a couple cans of beer and still had a few bucks in my pocket... I'm on a Canada Disability Pension, through health, stuff like that. I shouldn't even probably be doing this, but if my doctor don't know I'll probably keep on going.

Jasper, who is a Canada Retirement Pension beneficiary, began recycling in earnest after retiring two and a half years ago, and now recycles full-time. When I asked him how he first started recycling, the answer was simple:

I retired... Even before retiring I was always dabbling in it. A little bit here and a little bit there, nothing serious until I did retire. This gives me an extra three hundred to four hundred dollars a month which really helps me out. I'll be the first to admit that there's a lot of guys out there worse than I am, who don't have any pensions or anything.

Canada's efforts to ensure that senior citizens receive an income sufficient to prevent severe poverty are exceptional. Between 1980 and 1995, as a result of programs such as the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), the percentage of seniors in the bottom income quintile fell from 40% to 17% of all seniors, 3% below the percentage of the general population within the bottom income quintile. Research has found that approximately 80% of seniors who moved out of the bottom income quintile moved into the second and third income quintiles (Myles 2000: 18). Indeed, the introduction of Canada's retirement security system and its subsequent impact on poverty reduction among senior citizens over the past three decades has been lauded as "the major success story of Canadian social policy in the twentieth century" (Osberg 2001: 170).

I found that although many of the recyclers I encountered during my fieldwork were between the ages of thirty and fifty, I encountered relatively low numbers of senior citizens. I suspect that the low numbers of senior citizens compared to the relatively high numbers of



individuals in their middle years may be partly due to the success of Canada's retirement security system. For Walt, who has recycled full-time for fifteen years, Canada's retirement system will finally enable him to lock up his cart for good. "I'm [approaching sixty] next month. It's getting closer and closer to me stopping doing this. I figure fifteen years is long enough".

I suggest that the nature of Canada's retirement security system may actually enable recyclers to give up informal recycling, instead of contributing to their decision to pursue recycling, as is suggested by the informalization thesis. The stability of the income afforded to senior citizens by programs such as the CPP, OAS and GIS may be enough to enable recyclers to get by without relying on recycling for a disproportionate amount of their income. Jasper has noticed that the amount of recyclers out at a given time is often tied to the time of the month. He has found that,

At the end of the month, when pay-day comes around, when the government issues the checks, I usually find that there's a lot less people around for the next two weeks. They figure 'I got some money, I'm not going out'; but when the money runs out towards the end of the month, that's when most come back out.

Those who continue to recycle like other beneficiaries of social assistance likely do so not out of desperation, but as a means of maintaining a steady supply of tobacco, alcohol and other non-essentials, the cost of which would be beyond the calculations used by government when budgeting the costs of rent, bills, and foodstuffs.

#### ***4.6 – Supporting Addiction***

For the few informal recyclers I encountered who pursued recycling as a means of supporting themselves and an addiction, the decision to recycle was itself predicated upon their addiction. One such participant was Chester, a carpenter by trade, who used to be financially stable. However, his life spiraled out of control after his girlfriend suddenly died. Chester turned to the church in an attempt to come to terms with her loss. He alleges that while at his

psychologically weakest, he was molested by the priest to whom he had come for guidance. This only added to the emotional trauma Chester was already dealing with and ultimately led him to turn to narcotics as a way to cope with life's unpleasant realities. Chester's cycle of dependence on opiates caused him to be an unreliable employee and left him unable to maintain his formal employment. As a result of his addiction, recycling became Chester's only means of income.

Yeah I'm collecting bottles, but you know what? It's because I lost everything. I lost work, everything. I just tried to forget what happened between that priest and me and I picked up a drug habit... I can't function without it. That's how I am now. It didn't take long. I didn't mean to become a drug addict. I'm [in my early forties] and I didn't do any drugs until I was [in my early thirties]... It only took a week for me to become addicted.

For Chester, it is the income he earns recycling that enables him to afford his rent, his bills, his groceries and his cigarette habit, as well as his addiction to opiates. It is recycling alone that enables Chester to maintain his residential stability and some semblance of normalcy in his life. If he were to lose the income he gains from recycling without receiving treatment for his addiction, Chester would face a very real risk of losing all that he has left. His example demonstrates that contrary to the marginalization thesis, informal recycling is not itself a marginalizing occupation but is rather an occupation which can empower persons who would otherwise be likely candidates for marginalization.

## ***Chapter 5 – The Practice of Informal Recycling***

“Everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others”.

- Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Having ascertained the factors that reproduce informal recycling in Halifax, it is important that we now turn to the means by which individuals maintain their informal recycling activities; their mode of practice, as it were. What struck me about recycling in Halifax was that in spite of the element of chance, recycling tends to yield returns in proportion to the effort and expertise mobilized by the individual. Recycling is not an activity that can be profitably pursued by anyone with a shopping cart and time. It is a matter of experience for which nothing can substitute apart from practice and persistence. Accordingly, a working phenomenological knowledge of the spatial and temporal environment must be acquired before one can be considered a capable practitioner. In the following chapter I will apply de Certeau’s (1984) concepts of strategies and tactics to informal recyclers’ utilization of space and time as resources, as we endeavor to understand the working knowledge which allows recyclers to maintain their activities.

De Certeau (1984: 36) perceives a strategy to be the establishment of power through the rationalization of space. This theory maintains that once a space can be delimited it can be known and that this knowledge can be capitalized upon to control uncertainty and to manage external targets or threats. De Certeau states that “a strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it” (ibid: xix). By de Certeau’s definition, a strategy can only be employed by an individual or corporate entity, such as Halifax’s municipal government, that maintains sovereign

control over a defined space. This definition would preclude recyclers, who lack a space of their own, from the use of strategies in their informal activities.

Recyclers do however employ a series of tactics, which draw power from their spatial and temporal knowledge of municipal collection strategies. A tactic is perceived by de Certeau as a clever utilization of time (our most valuable resource) in the absence of power; it is “the art of the weak”, operating in isolation and exploiting opportunities (ibid: 37). As described by de Certeau, a tactic

has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect from circumstances. The ‘proper’ is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’ (ibid: xix).

This theory can be applied to informal recyclers’ use of tactics such as the targeting of specific areas based on municipal collection days; the construction and maintenance of relationships with residents to secure reliable sources of recyclables; the skillful manner in which a cart is loaded to maximize space and increase efficiency; the informal mechanisms used to mitigate competition between cart recyclers; and the use of concealment and intimidation to frustrate the activities of vehicular recyclers.

### ***5.1 – Logistical Tactics: Using Space as a Resource***

De Certeau argues that “the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power” (ibid: 37). The organization imposed upon informal recyclers by proprietary powers (i.e. the municipality) becomes instantly recognizable when one examines their mode of practice. Beginning in South End Halifax on Monday, recycling days rotate counterclockwise with Tuesday pickup in the North End and Wednesday pickup in the West End. Pickup then moves off the peninsula to

Fairview/Clayton Park on Thursday, with Friday pickup occurring across the Northwest Arm in Spryfield before coming full circle and returning to the peninsula on Monday (see *Figure 2.1 on p. 16*). This means that depending on the day of week, blue-bag recyclables are only placed at curbside by residents in specific areas of the peninsula; this concentrates the supply of blue bag recyclables. The cyclical rotation of municipal recycling days delimits the availability of blue bag recyclables, and as a result, informal recyclers' movements mirror those of weekly collection. Their informal activities begin the night before collection, when residents first begin bringing their refuse to curbside. The influence of the municipal collection cycle on informal recycling activities is reflected in the amount of business Mike Wheatley conducts at his Enviro-Depot during the first three days of the week, compared to the latter half when collection occurs off the peninsula.

Our busiest day is Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and then Thursday is usually quiet because all the pick-up's up in Clayton Park. Friday, the students and stuff are drinking on Thursday nights so the guys can go on their route and collect some stuff and then Saturday is decent but a lot of homeowners... I've got some guys who come six days a week and some guys only come one day a week. They'll work the Saturday afternoon and Sunday night route and come Monday and that way you see a few guys with huge carts. They'll come with \$120 [worth of recyclables] and that gives them spending money for the week and they're done then. So they work hard those days. So there's the odd one of them, but the more consistent ones, you won't see them Thursdays. Thursdays is like everyone's day off and Friday they'll go and get the students and see if they can get some [empties] from the drinking Thursday night.

Because the availability of recyclables varies in space and time, it is essential that informal recyclers be logistically mobile. A territory with reasonable potential must be located within a short distance of a redemption centre. Logistical mobility is therefore the key to economic success for informal recyclers who adhere to a tactic of itinerant collection, such as those on the Halifax peninsula.

The tactics of collection employed by many recyclers do suggest that the recyclers' routes are tethered to the nearest Enviro-Depot. The example Jake provides illustrates this

reality. During our time together, Jake initially joked that the tactics he employs are based solely upon “a wing and a prayer and good eyesight [*laughs*]”. However, as we spoke Jake let on that recycling is undeniably more complex:

If it's early enough, like if I hit a street six in the morning and it's fairly early, because they don't put their stuff out until seven anyway, then I'll go back down and do a double-check depending on where I am. Like these streets here [Seaforth and Dublin streets], it's not worth it because there's so much. But the place I go to; I'll go through that whole area three times. It's my shortest run. It takes me about two hours to do the whole run and it's my best paying run of the whole week... New houses, three stories high, nice cars, families, kids... I pulled \$60 there one day. I had to go back for a second trip. There was nobody else in there and it was packed. So I went and cashed my big load in, went back up again and came out with another \$15, holy shit man, what a good day.

By knowing where their route will terminate, recyclers are able to initiate collection at a fair distance from it, which allows them to accumulate a substantial number of deposit containers while working towards their end point, as Jake describes:

I gain ground while my cart is empty and I slowly lose ground until I am done, but sometimes you have to come back up a hill. We have our own specific start and end points. This is my end point right here for today and the bottle depot is over there and I start at the other end of Mumford and slowly work my way through. When you're done that trip don't forget that you're some tired. It's not easy work. Anybody that thinks that this is easy better get their head examined 'cause this is definitely not easy work.

By limiting the distance travelled with a fully loaded cart, the recycler minimizes unnecessary physical strain and the amount of time committed to collection, while also maximizing the value of the load. This is the most efficient means of collection and clearly demonstrates that recyclers' activities are not disorganized but do in fact display a 'clever utilization of time,' as proposed by de Certeau.

The achievements of Anthony and Robyn, who were by far the most successful of any recyclers interviewed, can be attributed in part to their command of such logistical tactics. De Certeau argues that a tactic not only takes advantage of opportunities, it depends upon them; for what it wins (spatially) it cannot keep. Continuing this argument he states that “this nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the

moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment” (de Certeau 1984: 37). In the past this couple had worked together with a single cart; however, ever-increasing competition for what is a finite resource has created scarcity and resulted in a poor rate of return given their time and effort.

Anthony and Robyn have responded to scarcity by altering their tactics in order to enhance their rate of return. They no longer work together with a single cart but take two carts and divide their efforts in order to cover a wider area than they had exploited previously. “Robyn and I used to work together using one cart and that was plenty because there was plenty out there. Now she has to push her own cart and I have to push my own cart. We go to separate areas and try to clean up; it’s the only way we can make our living now.” Working mostly during the mornings, Anthony and Robyn recycle five days and two nights a week following defined routes. They begin their day routes around 6:00 am and are normally finished before 1:00 pm.

When I first interviewed Anthony, he had just completed a route through the South End that had begun at 6:30 am and finished at 10 am, his cart being fully loaded by this time. Anthony explained to me that he begins his route at one end of the collection area just as Robyn begins her route at the opposite end; the design of each route directs their movements towards the Central Halifax Enviro-Depot. Once the area of collection has been fully exploited and their carts are fully loaded, they stop to rest at predetermined points before pushing their heavily loaded carts a short distance (just over 1 km) to the Enviro-Depot, at which point they meet to cash in their loads and pool their earnings. Use of this tactic contributes to earnings of approximately \$50 each per route, for a combined total of \$100 a day.

## ***5.2 – The Logistical Significance of the Shopping Cart***

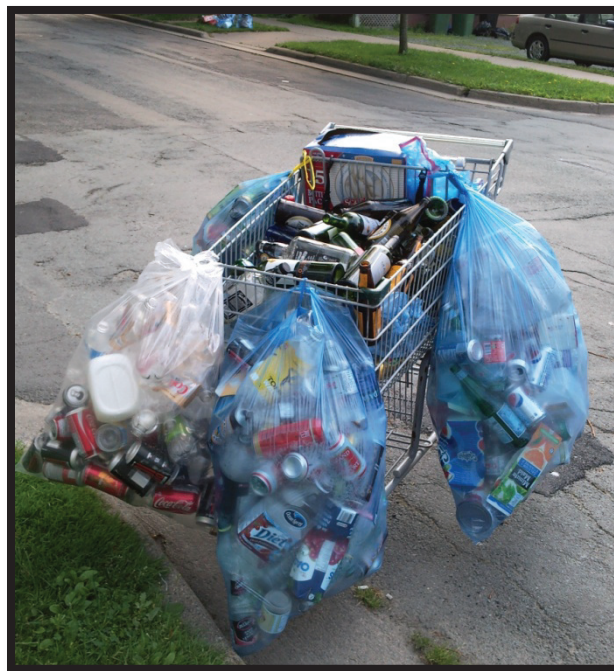
The range and length of recyclers' logistical forays increases in relation to the number of individuals who are actively engaged in informal recycling. As the number of individuals increases, the efficiency of collection decreases, due to a more rapid depletion of recyclable materials. As a result of competition, a street that the recycler would have travelled once in the past must now be revisited several times if he or she is to maintain his or her rate of return. The nature of recycling in a competitive environment was perhaps most succinctly captured by Thomas: "If you're stubborn and persistent, you'll do good. I was going down this street a while ago but I'll go back down again. I'll tell you why. Between 7 and 9 in the morning in certain areas, some people are going to work, school, whatever." The distance at which recyclables can be gainfully procured relate to the rate of return and the ability to effectively transport materials. In this sense the greatest benefit to informal recyclers is the ubiquitous presence of shopping carts, which are the most common means of conveyance for collected materials.

By loading recyclable materials into shopping carts, informal recyclers are able to increase not only the volume of their load, but their range as well. Using such a tactic stabilizes the recyclers' earnings by maximizing his/her ability to range further within the collection area; this mitigates the effects of resource depletion due to increased competition. The carts most suited to informal recycling activities are older model carts with a deep cage. These carts are coveted by recyclers and are often brought home and stored or hidden near their residences for extended periods, although few recyclers keep carts permanently. Some recyclers even use bike locks to secure their carts and prevent their theft. Shopping carts are obtained three ways: they are either abandoned carts recovered from various locations around the peninsula, retrieved from the depot in the early hours of the morning, or removed from businesses.



Shopping carts removed from grocery stores are the most common type of cart. The loss of carts has led businesses to install electronic wheel clamping systems, which lock one of the cart's front wheels if it goes past the store's property line, at almost all of the peninsula's grocery chains. Newer models with the clamping feature also tend to have a shallower cage, which makes these carts even less desirable. The most prized model of shopping cart are those owned by Costco. These carts are intended for bulk purchases and are very large with deep cages. Costco carts facilitate the accumulation of exceptional loads. Walt proudly recalled that he "had forty-six dozen beer bottles on a Costco cart one day. That's six-hundred pounds because twenty-three dozen weigh three hundred pounds, plus I had the blue bags; only had sixty". Costco is located approximately 8 km from the peninsula, a distance which would be travelled by foot. As a result, these carts seldom make it onto the peninsula.

Figure 5.1: Image demonstrating the correct manner in which to load a cart (load is below average).



Knowledge of how to load a cart and maximize its space is one of the recycler's most important tactics. Blue bags filled with aluminum cans and plastic bottles are tied to the exterior of the cart because they are the lightest materials. Blue bags are overlapped with the heavier bags on the bottom and the lighter bags on top. Glass bottles are then placed inside of the cage to act as ballast and keep the cart on an even keel. Having ballast is important as the cart becomes extremely difficult to maneuver once it is fully loaded. This knowledge is not intuitive; it is either learned through trial and error or taught to new recyclers by those experienced in the art of cart management. CK learnt through trial and error. He states that:

When I first started doing this I didn't have a clue what I was doing. So I wouldn't get half as much in my cart that I do now. But after you practice, and practice, and practice, you get almost a routine that you know how to tie it down and if you're really, really good at it, I know some of the old-timers will put all the cans together and all the bottles together and all the glass together. I normally just put the cans and bottles together and glass separate.

Walt's first experiences managing a cart loaded with recyclables were very similar to those experienced by C.K.

Well when I first started using the cart I couldn't figure out for the life of me why the cart kept tipping on me. Then it clicked in, even it out all around. Sure, it tips on me every once in a while. That's normal, especially if I hit the curb.

Using this method between thirty and fifty loaded blue-bags can be tied around the exterior of a cart. On a good day a recycler will work until the cart is completely loaded and no room is left for additional material. Mike Wheatley estimates that if you were to average each load of recyclables brought to his depot on any given day, the median value of a cart would be approximately \$25.

A good cart is worth \$80. If it is packed with thirty bags, it's about \$80. If a guy brings two carts in you'll see like Labour Day Monday a \$125 for one guy. He's probably worked Saturday afternoon and then Sunday afternoon so he's probably put in ten or twelve hours and he's making \$10-\$12 per hour cash.

Blue bags themselves are almost always reclaimed from curbside. Recyclers begin by filling half-filled bags with material from bags with only a few bottles or cans. These bags, now

empty, are kept and reused later on. Many recyclers have a bag tied to their cart specifically for non-refundable containers. These bags are slowly filled as recyclers' sort what is redeemable from what is not and once full they are deposited back on the curb.

Cans are the most coveted container, which is a bit counter-intuitive because domestic beer bottles fetch the highest price. Cans are coveted because they are light and can be crushed with the hand or foot so that a greater volume can be carried. Some bottles, particularly wine bottles, are commonly left behind because of their weight and because their large size reduces the number of smaller bottles of equal worth which can be loaded into the cart. Having a lighter cart also makes it possible to cover a wider range.

### ***5.3 – The Establishment of Social Networks***

The tactic which trumps all others is the establishment of networks of 'customers' throughout the various collection areas. Generally, most residents are friendly and embrace informal recycling, with those who disapprove enough to vocalize their opinions being in the minority. Jake describes the situation this way:

They're in a very small minority. They really are. They just, I don't know, maybe they didn't get laid that morning or something like that. But the majority, I would say, of people are pretty good about it. They'll come out of their houses. I got a shot I do on Friday. I'm probably more well known than the mailman is. Everyone knows me right. I'm not a threat to anybody, I don't make a mess. I untie the bags and I retie them, they like that kind of thing. There's also an area where if you tear the bags open they will call the law on you.

In order to avoid disturbing what has been placed out for collection by residents and to prevent the enforcement of By-Law S-600, recyclers often carry tools or knives to open tightly knotted bags. By leaving trash neat and orderly, recyclers avoid the ire of residents and building superintendents; this enables them to build relationships with these individuals, some of whom make special accommodations for recyclers which increases their efficiency and ease of

collection. The establishment of affable relations with residents is of great importance because it is these individuals who will retain bags for specific recyclers. Having a network of customers stabilizes the supply of recyclables and moderates the effects of scarcity.

The trajectory of a recycler's route in a specific collection area is often influenced by a recycler's network of customers. C.K. informed me that it is this knowledge that shapes his route. "Usually I have a good idea of who will be putting stuff out so I'll go down those streets." Once a routine is established with a customer, that individual will usually hold off placing their blue bags at curbside until a specific time when they believe that their recycler will be by to collect. Some residents will even keep blue bags away from the curb on a porch or hidden from view on the side of their house, with the understanding that only the recycler with whom they have a standing agreement will cross their property and remove those recyclables. As Anthony explains:

Citywide there's probably about two hundred places that save for me. [My routes are] very specific because we have the same people who see us at the same time; people are creatures of habit, absolutely creatures of habit and if they get used to you being there at a certain time then you get their stuff because they wait, "Ah, he should be along soon" and out it goes. That's what makes me an extra two to three hundred dollars a week.

These relationships can become so entrenched that residents will actually become confrontational with other recyclers who attempt to remove bags intended for the recycler with whom they have a standing agreement, as C.K. experienced when he attempted to remove a bag intended for Robyn:

Once I picked a bag off the side of the street that was meant for [Robyn] and somebody lit into me and said that that was meant for [Robyn] and something or other. Lit right into me and I said 'OK I don't want no trouble'. And now actually you'll go out sometimes and see that people will actually put their bags on the side of their houses now sometimes just for specific people and make sure that [Robyn] gets the bag and someone else doesn't because there are so many people out there doing it.

While going along with Walt I was fortunate to witness several interactions with his customers. In the first instance a man came out of his house and asked Walt if he had got the beer cans he had placed out for him, which he had. Walt explained, "He puts them out for me. He doesn't like the other guys. I've known him for quite a few years. I don't know his name." Another encounter I observed lasted for well over twenty minutes. Not only did Walt receive an extensive cache of recyclables, which was a significant addition to his load, he was also afforded the opportunity to sit, rest, converse and smoke with his customer, on a day that was one of the hottest of the summer.

Relationships with residents also have added benefits beyond that of just blue-bag recyclables. This is perhaps best exemplified in Walt's description of the best day he ever had recycling, which had occurred close to Easter.

The best day I ever had was a Saturday. I was out to my buddy's place in [place name]. He had three bags for me and he passed me \$20. So, I got back to Bill's other place there in Harrietsfield. I saw a woman I knew at the time, so I had to go in and say hi. She said, 'Just the man I wanted to see' I said, 'Shit, what the hell have I done now?' she said 'No, no, no. It's different'. A woman had gone to the mall in [place name] and got donations of \$100 [cash] and gave it to this other woman to give to me. And then I had \$65 worth of stuff on the cart anyway. So I made \$185. That was a good day... It helped get Easter dinner for me and my sister, cat food, tobacco, and beers, of course.

Seasonal gifts given to recyclers by their customers were not uncommon. Such gifts are given to recyclers in appreciation of their service and are akin to tips given to a paper boy for timely delivery throughout the year. As Anthony states, "Christmas time is great. One guy gives me \$100 every Christmas; another one \$50; another one \$20." The giving of gifts serve as an important testament to the role the resident plays in the informal recyclers' activities and underscores the positive way in which some people view informal recycling.

#### ***5.4 – Mitigating Competition between Cart Recyclers***

Informal recyclers respect spatial boundaries. They have subtle ways of assigning individuals to specific streets as a way to decrease cut-throat competition. Typically, when a recycler sees another individual he or she heads in an opposite direction. “I’d move on to the next street. I’ll be respectful; sometimes they’ll come up and ask me which streets have been done. Sometimes I’ll even ask them if they’ve done this street yet and if they’d mind if I went down it.” Some recyclers even view the negation of this courtesy as a form of theft.

Never steal from another picker. That’s a golden rule. Hey I don’t give a damn; go down there and rob a bank I don’t care about that. But never steal from a picker. For instance, I’m standing here. Most pickers will go over there to that corner, see me standing here, see my cart and they’ll go over to the next street. I just makes sense, common sense b’y.  
[Jake]

The cost of an outright confrontation to defend the use rights of a specific street would certainly be higher than the benefit of gaining what bags may be on the street. Defense is impractical because resources are sparse and occur variably and unpredictably in time and space. I was informed of this repeatedly whenever I asked about competition between cart recyclers. “The guys with the carts, I have no problem with them, they’re just honest competition”. However, this dynamic appears to be changing.

When the halfback deposit system was implemented, informal recycling was an activity pursued by only a handful of individuals. Public awareness of the activity had been relatively low, but soon rose quickly after recycling and its negative externalities, particularly the issues of illegal dumping and the lost municipal revenue, began to receive coverage within the local media which sensationalized the activity with headlines such as *The blue-bag bandit blues* (The Daily News 2002: 15). The subsequent media coverage increased awareness of the activity, including among the individuals who would soon join the ranks of Halifax’s incipient informal recycling economy. As Walt recounted, “When I started [in 1996] there was about five or six of

us doing it. Then this idiot from up in Cowie Hill ran his mouth to the media about how much he could make in a day or a week and that did it. It went downhill in a handbasket... It's not like it used to be, when I first started doing this I was making \$89 a day. I'll be lucky to get \$40 nowadays". Walt estimates that there are dozens more recyclers today than there were when he started fifteen years ago and "half of them couldn't find their ass with both hands in the dark".

Jeff was also one of the first of Halifax's informal recyclers. Jeff began recycling in Halifax shortly before the implementation of the halfback deposit system. At this time, compensation was still based on market value and was determined by weight. Jeff states that during this period he received \$0.70 per/lb of aluminum cans. Based on his earnings immediately after the introduction of the halfback deposit system I estimate that Jeff would have been earning \$32 per month then. In the period immediately after the implementation of the halfback deposit system, Jeff's earnings increased dramatically but in recent years, as a result of increased competition, they have been steadily declining.

After they put the deposit on everything, I was making \$800 a month. Now I'll be lucky if I make \$400 a month. And it just seems that I have to go out twice as often for half as much... I just wish there was more of it. I kind of think of myself as a cod fisherman, it's all fished out; I'm a dying breed. That's what it's like out here, it's like being a cod fisherman.

Jeff was not the only recycler to draw on the fisherman analogy; Craig, another member of Halifax's first cohort of recyclers, described the present situation in similar fashion. "It's a hunter-gatherer existence isn't it? It's almost like a fisherman. You go out, the bags are your net, and how many fish did you catch? I caught \$33 today somehow".

The numbers of individuals have indeed been increasing. An event that occurred while I was going along with Thomas highlighted how intensively some areas are actually being exploited. Thomas had just finished gathering a side street off the main road, which we were

moving towards, before heading to another side street. As we moved up the street we approached a crossroad. What occurred at that crossroad was comical to the point of absurdity. Just as we reached the main road, we looked to the front of us and we looked left and right. At every point standing and staring dumbfounded at each other was a recycler, six in total, all gripping the bars of a partially loaded cart; it seemed for several silent seconds that there was nowhere to turn. Each recycler had just exploited the area from whence they had come. After a long pause we all waved to each other before heading off in alternate directions. Thomas and I walked past several streets before settling on a side street that looked as though it might be profitable. Many days later I was going along with Jake when he recalled this incident without realizing that I had been present. “Right in that general area there was seven of us. We all just happened to meet up at once [*laughs*]. It wasn’t deliberate or anything. It’s just the way it went down.”

High population density may increase competition and result in defensive behaviours such as intentionally targeting the predicted route of other recyclers when coordinated collection has become inefficient due to overcrowding. Because of his age and his relative inexperience, C.K. was more of a target for such behaviour than some of the older, more established recyclers that I accompanied:

People can be very cut-throat. Some people can be very kind and say hi when you go by and other people will try to take certain areas. The people who are territorial are the ones who have been doing it for years and don’t like other people doing it. There’s a lot of people doing it. I guess back in the day there wasn’t as many people doing it and now there’s a lot of people doing it, so it’s getting a lot harder for them and the ones that are young might get scared off by an old guy right.

### ***5.5 – Dealing with competition from vehicles***

Although mechanisms exist to discourage cut-throat competition among cart recyclers, competition between cart recyclers and vehicular recyclers is fierce. In our conversations, cart



recyclers regularly contrasted themselves to vehicular recyclers, who were universally viewed with disdain. My research suggests that the highly competitive dynamic, which exists between these two groups but is largely absent among cart recyclers, may result from the perceived 'otherness' of vehicular recyclers, who are viewed as outsiders external to the core of the informal recycler population. This theme was repeatedly brought to the fore in all of my interactions with cart recyclers, who perceive the scarcity of recyclables to result directly from an increasing number of people doing informal recycling on the peninsula with vehicles. Anthony has had countless run-ins with vehicular recyclers and described the present situation this way:

There is such a hate on between us and them. It's a dynamic, it feeds on itself... and if they aren't facing the same opposition that we are, they're going to keep going. When I first started eight years ago there was Victor, there was Donny, and there was Bob and maybe three or four others. Now in the whole city, there's probably about fifty of them and they're each getting a smaller piece of the pie but they seem pretty satisfied. I don't know. How do you run a car, even a brand new one and go through oil changes, insurance, and everything else you have to pay for and you're getting marginalized more and more all the time but they still keep doing it.

While vehicular recyclers have unquestionably had an impact on the availability of deposit containers, this is certainly not the only factor that has contributed to their scarcity. It is important to remember that deposit containers are basically consumer waste, meaning that the availability of containers is a reflection of the volume of beverages sold. If the volume of beverage sales drops, especially sales of alcoholic beverages, then so does the volume of deposit beverage containers entering the waste stream.

The Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC), which has been responsible for the receipt, distribution and control of all beverage alcohol available throughout the province since the establishment of the Liquor Commission in 1930, reported on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 that its number of retail transactions dropped by 5% during the first quarter of 2011 when compared to the same time period of 2010 (NSLC 2011: 1). This drop was driven primarily by an 8% decline in

the volume of beer sold. The NSLC states that weather has the greatest influence on the sale of beer and during the first quarter of 2011, “the number of sunny days decreased by 67 per cent when compared to first quarter of last year. According to Environment Canada, June had the second highest amount of rain in five years, and was the coldest since 2002” (ibid). Mike Wheatley confirmed that weather has an impact on the volume of containers his business processes. “I would say that this year the numbers are down because the weather is horrible. Weather is very, very, indicative of what goes on in the recycling business”. The drop in volume of beer sold is significant as beer cans and bottles are not only the most abundant deposit container, they are the containers with the highest deposits. For these reasons any drop in the volume of beer sales would adversely affect the activities of informal recyclers and cause a drop in their earnings.

Losses are also intensified by the reality that an increasing number of individuals are engaged in the collection of what is essentially a finite resource; the supply of deposit bearing containers being limited to the volume of beverages sold. This results in a situation which is ‘Pareto optimal’ as defined by microeconomic theory, as each recycler’s gains are balanced by the losses of other recyclers (Bowles 2004: 37). Because supply is finite but demand is not, informal recycling, as it exists on the Halifax peninsula, constitutes a zero-sum game.

Although competition between cart and vehicular recyclers is very real, my research suggests vehicular recyclers serve as scapegoats to whom all manner of problems, including scarcity, can be attributed by cart recyclers. The very use of a vehicle limits interaction between these two groups; not only is the vehicle highly mobile, it is also a physical partition which segregates the vehicular recyclers from the cart recyclers, who form the core population of informal recyclers. Although both groups engage in the same activity, vehicular recyclers are not integrated into the core population; their existence is largely peripheral to the core and

individuals from these dissimilar groups rarely socialize, as is common among cart recyclers. As a result, vehicular recyclers are seen as outsiders by the core, which makes them convenient targets for misplaced blame.

This is compounded by the fact that cart recyclers perceive those who recycle with vehicles to be infinitely better off than themselves, which is tremendously frustrating when they must make do with less from an activity that had supported them so well in the past. As Andrew said:

This morning I saw two trucks and a car. I don't think that's right. If you have a vehicle, you got money. Why are you taking money from my pocket collecting bottles and cans if you got money? It's not right.

This belief is further reinforced by sightings of new model cars and trucks engaging in recycling activities, as C.K. reported:

I hate that, especially if it's a brand new truck. It makes no sense to me. You're driving a brand new truck going around collecting bottles. It would be different if it were a beat up pickup truck or something but it'll be a brand new truck.

Not only are vehicular recyclers perceived to originate from a superior socioeconomic position relative to that of the typical cart recycler, but the vehicle itself is considered to contribute to this advantaged position. Cart recyclers believe that the very use of a vehicle increases both the speed and efficiency of collection, which in turn facilitates the exploitation of a wider area, faster than could ever be achieved through use of a cart alone. In this sense, the competitive dynamic present between these two groups is understood as a competition between unequal powers. This widespread belief has contributed to the perception that it is a growing population of vehicular recyclers who are to blame for the problem of scarcity.

Cart recyclers also blame the problem of illegal dumping on vehicles who flout the guidelines governing what is considered to be acceptable practice by both recycler and law enforcement. I was informed by many recyclers that it is not those who use carts who rip open

sealed blue-bags and leave refuse strewn over the properties of residents, but those who use vehicles. "It's the vehicles. People stopping in the vehicles and grabbing what they want and leaving holes in the bags. They don't care". Slipshod actions such as these are viewed as being particularly reprehensible, as they jeopardize the amicable relationships that cart recyclers strive to maintain with residents.

Adding to the animosity present between these two groups is the fact that vehicular recyclers are unaware of, or intentionally ignore, the informal system of use rights which mitigates cut-throat competition among cart recyclers. Many cart recyclers recalled times when vehicles had pulled up immediately in front of them and grabbed what they felt were 'their blue-bags' before speeding off. This issue was central to Walt's disagreement with vehicular recyclers. "I don't agree with the vehicles. They're all over the place. They'll get right up in front of you and take the bags". Moreover, it is alleged that vehicular recyclers frequently trespass onto the private property of residents and remove blue-bags left for cart-recyclers with whom the resident has a standing agreement. As Anthony told me:

You wouldn't believe what they do. Up in Clayton Park there's one guy who puts his bottles on his porch for me in regular blue-bags and these guys will stop their cars trucks vans, go up on the porch, and try to steal them. And this little old lady who saves them for me will be just yelling at them 'Get the fuck out of my yard'. And that's illegal, that's trespassing but again it's catching them and documenting it. You'd have to feel very strongly about it.

Aggressive actions such as these can escalate existing tensions and result in verbal or even physical conflict, as exemplified by Anthony's experiences.

This one guy got out of his car and said, 'You got a problem with me?' and I said, 'You bet I do you fucking asshole!' and he says, 'One of these days we're gonna go at it!' and I said, 'Well why not right now?' and he looked at me like I was nuts, and I will do it because win or lose they'll be damage on both sides.

As a result of both direct and perceived competition between cart and vehicular recyclers, some cart recyclers have adapted their logistical tactics in order to beat vehicular recyclers to collection areas. However, such tactics are not always successful.

It's getting hard because you have the vehicles, you have the cars. You have people just going out and grabbing bags. I see people going to the bottle depot and they have like three-hundred bags, right. And like I said, I usually go out at six thirty [am]. I went out at five this morning and tried to beat them but I didn't. It sort of backfired on me, right. I usually pick this in two hours. It's now nine o'clock; almost nine thirty. I've been at this for five hours and I've barely made my quota. (Chester)

Tactics such as this (the alteration of a set schedule to compensate for competition) are unreliable, because they draw their power from an imperfect knowledge of the tactics employed by vehicular recyclers. They also assume that vehicular recyclers are solely responsible for scarcity, which as I showed above is influenced by market factors and is not based on competition alone. In this instance, it is unknown whether the tactic was unsuccessful as a result of vehicular or cart recyclers having previously exploited the area or if it was that the residents simply had fewer deposit containers to place at curbside.

Although the adaptation of logistical tactics has mixed success, cart recyclers do have other tactics in their arsenal, the effectiveness of which has been proven. Cart recyclers have developed defensive tactics which they employ in order to protect known sources of recyclables, such as concealment:

I double back through once and come back because I go there in the beginning to screw the cars up. I'll pick up the bags, sometimes I'll throw them in the green bins just so they don't get them. It pisses them off. (Jerry)

The difference between logistical and defensive tactics is that logistical tactics are used to plan and control movement in time and space whereas defensive tactics are used to protect known sources of recyclables from other recyclers. As with most tactics employed by cart recyclers, the power of defensive tactics derives from their phenomenological knowledge which is wielded to their advantage. Although the rationale for such tactics is to frustrate vehicular recyclers, they

could also conceivably frustrate the activities of other cart recyclers, as well as municipal contractors.

Another defensive tactic that cart recyclers occasionally employ is intimidation. Intimidation, unlike concealment, is a targeted defense, the aim of which is to dissuade vehicular recyclers from concurrently exploiting streets alongside cart recyclers. Intimidation is typically achieved by hurling verbal abuse at vehicular recyclers in the hopes that they will back down from the confrontation and take flight, leaving any blue bags behind.

There's one woman out there right now that's got an old blue Chevy Caprice... I called her a cunt but I have to do that because if she gets mad, it throws her off her game and she peels off leaving everything behind. If I want to make money that day I have to do something with her and there's others like her. You give them the finger and you see them just instant road rage... I've had guys get out of their cars and I've said, 'You better get in that fucking car or there's going to be trouble'. Never came down to it 'cause I'm not going to hit someone over five dollars worth of bottles. That's just pathetic but they are willing to. (Anthony)

Defensive tactics such as these are more effective than logistical adaptation because they actively work to secure known sources of recyclables, which is preferable to blitzing an area of unknown potential and 'accepting the chance offerings of the moment'. With defensive tactics, success or failure is immediately ascertained whereas the success of logistical adaptation is an objective calculation which must be based on experience compounded over time.

This chapter demonstrates the significance of tactics to informal recyclers. The use of logistical tactics allow recyclers to maximize the value of their load while also limiting the distance they travel, physical strain, and the amount of time committed to collection. Although a growing recycler population coupled with below average beverage sales has resulted in scarcity, recyclers' use of shopping carts and their establishment of networks of customers have moderated its effects and have stabilized recyclers' earnings. Another consequence of scarcity, cut-throat competition, has generally been averted among cart recyclers through an informal system of use rights which preclude the concurrent exploitation of streets. The same cannot be

said of competition between cart and vehicular recyclers, which has led cart recyclers to employ defensive tactics such as concealment and intimidation, in order to protect known sources of recyclables from vehicular recyclers. Tactics such as these illustrate how recyclers exercise their phenomenological knowledge of the spatial and temporal environment and provide a working example of de Certeau's (1984) concepts of strategies and tactics.

## ***Chapter 6 – Conclusion***

This thesis has examined the reasons why a growing number of individuals work collecting recyclables rather than in other—more formal—means of employment. Particular attention has been paid to the structural articulation of the informal recycling economy to both the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment. This study has determined that the introduction of provincial product market regulations requiring beverage containers to be either refillable or recyclable, coupled with a deposit system which confers value upon recyclable containers and municipal legislation requiring that they also be separated from other refuse streams, have produced a regional environment that is conducive to informality. The growth of informal recycling in Halifax has largely been driven by the formal regulatory environment at the provincial and municipal levels of government that, in an effort to attain a high recycling rate, have legislated a price paid for recyclable material which is attractive enough for some individuals to turn to employment in the informal sector. Recyclers become involved in the informal recycling economy for a number of reasons, but the decision is theirs alone. They are not forced into informal recycling as the informalization thesis assumes, but enter it willingly because it is an alternative to formal employment that offers a tax-free, honest living, autonomy and a decent income.

### ***6.1 – Policy Implications***

The growth of informal recycling poses two problems for HRM, these being: (1) the illegal dumping of debris by informal recyclers on or adjacent to the property of residents, who then become responsible for their proper disposal and (2) the loss of revenue derived from the recovery and processing of deposit containers by the municipality and its contractors. My



research suggests that the first problem, the illegal dumping of debris, has been largely mitigated by the success of By-Law Services' efforts to educate recyclers about what is considered acceptable practice. Although many recyclers are unaware of By-Law S-600 itself, they are aware that the illegal dumping of debris by recyclers is an issue and have adapted their tactics of collection to address these concerns. Examples of such adaptations include the retying of opened blue-bags, using tools to open tightly knotted blue-bags (as opposed to ripping holes in bags to access materials) and reusing bags specifically for non-deposit containers which, when full, are retied and promptly deposited at curbside for municipal collection. Acceptable practices are further reinforced by the extralegal systems of regulation which are internal to the informal recycling economy and govern recyclers' activities. Recyclers invest a great deal of time and effort in establishing networks of customers, whose goodwill is counted upon to moderate the effects of scarcity. The illegal dumping of debris represents an added transactional risk from the perspective of the recycler, as confrontation with residents or a crackdown by government could jeopardize the activity's long-term stability. I would advocate that By-Law Services continue to educate recyclers about what is considered acceptable practice, as opposed to strictly enforcing By-Law S-600.

The second problem, the loss of revenue derived from the recovery and processing of unredeemed deposit containers by the municipality, is essentially an issue of ownership. Who owns the trash? The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in the case of *R. v. Patrick* that the seizure of bags of garbage by police, which the appellant had placed for municipal collection at the rear of his property adjacent to a public alleyway, was lawful. The Court ruled that until garbage is placed at or within reach of the property line, the householder retains some control over it. However, it found that the appellant had abandoned his garbage before its seizure because he had committed the bags to the municipal collection system and the bags were "unprotected and

within easy reach of anyone walking by in the public alleyway, including... bottle pickers... and the police” (R. v. Patrick, 2009 SCC 17, [2009] 1 S.C.R. 579).

This ruling suggests that the moment residential waste is committed to the municipal waste collection system the resident abandons ownership. However, HRM By-Law S-600 Section 4.1 states that residents must: “(f) ensure the proper preparation of all collectible waste in accordance with this By-Law; and (g) ensure that collectible waste is placed for collection in accordance with this By-Law”. This section of By-Law S-600 indicates that even after the resident commits their waste to the municipal waste collection system, their ownership of said waste is maintained up until it has been accepted into that system. This aspect of the By-Law is at odds with the findings of R. v. Patrick and suggests that the ownership of residential waste, once it has been committed by the resident to the municipal waste collection system, is somewhat of a grey area.

Although the Solid Waste Resource Advisory Committee (HRM Feb 3rd, 2004: 4) estimates that the municipal waste system loses \$200,000 to \$300,000 annually to informal recyclers,<sup>12</sup> the municipality does not have the legal authority to claim ownership of uncollected residential waste, nor would it want to, as that responsibility would carry steep financial costs. I would therefore suggest that if the municipality were to examine the negative externalities of informal recycling, it should concentrate its efforts exclusively on the illegal dumping of debris and ignore the possible loss of revenue from the collection and processing of blue-bag recyclables as a result of informal recycling, because focusing on the recuperation of revenue implies a costly responsibility for trash put in this liminal zone near the property line. Even so, if the municipality were to attempt to exert pressure upon informal recyclers in an effort to secure recyclables as a source of revenue, I recommend that the municipality focus solely on vehicular

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<sup>12</sup> My experiences suggest that this a conservative estimate.

recyclers. However, it is important to remember that HRM spans the whole of the former Halifax County and includes large rural areas where vehicles are the only means by which recyclables can be procured.

Although this study's scope was restricted to cart recyclers, the consensus among participants was that the population of vehicular recyclers has grown substantially in recent years.<sup>13</sup> Reason suggests that the use of a vehicle would enable these recyclers to exploit a wider range, faster and more effectively, than could be accomplished through use of a cart alone. This group would therefore present a larger threat to municipal revenue than that posed by cart recyclers. More importantly, vehicular recyclers operate beyond the extralegal systems of regulation which govern illegal dumping and competition among cart recyclers. As a result, an increase in the number of vehicles pursuing this activity could exacerbate the problem of illegal dumping and escalate existing tensions between vehicular and cart recyclers from verbal to physical altercations, creating additional problems for police services.

If the municipality were to exert pressure upon vehicular recyclers it would be difficult to do so by enforcing section 16.1 of By-Law S-600, as the high degree of mobility granted by a vehicle would make it next to impossible to catch these individuals in the act of collection.<sup>14</sup> However, section 15 of By-Law S-600 outlines several restrictions placed upon vehicles carrying waste, which could serve as an effective deterrent. The nature of these restrictions would enable By-Law Services to enforce By-Law S-600 without catching vehicular recyclers in the act of collection, as section 15.1 (g) states that "the Administrator may inspect vehicles used for the collection or carriage of waste materials at all reasonable times to ensure compliance with this

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<sup>13</sup> Without additional research I am unable to suggest why the population of vehicular recyclers has grown, but I suspect vehicle owners may be pursuing informal recycling in order to help pay for the rising cost of gasoline.

<sup>14</sup> The vehicular recyclers I witnessed collecting recyclables only spent a few seconds outside their vehicle, long enough to pick up a blue bag and toss it in the back, before driving off. Cart recyclers take the time to untie the blue bag, remove and sort deposit containers, and then retie the blue bag.

By-Law". By-Law Services could monitor redemption centres where fines could be levied for violation of section 15.1 (d) "the absence of a tailgate or other restraining device, or the absence of a tarpaulin in the case of open vehicles"; or section 15.1 (f) "not keeping the vehicle in a sanitary condition". In addition, these individuals would be licensed operators of a registered motor vehicle which would simplify the pursuit of payment and the administration of penalties for non-payment.

## ***6.2 – Concluding Remarks***

Halifax has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of individuals pursuing informal recycling over the past fifteen years. Contrary to the informalization thesis advanced by Portes and Castells (1989), Halifax's recyclers are not 'victims of the market,' forced to engage in informal recycling out of economic necessity. This position denies the agency of informal actors, who welcome informal recycling's autonomous working conditions and the freedom it grants from the pressures and anxieties confronted in formal employment. My research establishes that the growth of informal recycling in Halifax is a direct result of the provincial halfback deposit system, which integrates recyclers into the formal recycling economy and differentiates recycling in Halifax from recycling in other jurisdictions.

By examining the institutional frameworks that enable informal recycling and the manner in which the informal economy integrates labour into systems of formal production, we see that the informal recycling sector is not at the bottom of a hierarchy of flexible types of employment nor is it inherently exploitative, as the informalization thesis suggests. Rather, informal recycling is so well integrated into the Central Halifax Enviro-Depot that it forms the base of its business: by supplying a significant proportion of the deposit containers processed at the depot for a handling fee paid by the RRFB, not only does informal recycling support the jobs

of the formal employees at the Central Halifax Enviro-Depot, it is also what enables the Enviro-Depot to succeed as a social economy enterprise. This relationship is perhaps summed up best by Mr. Wheatley's words to the occasional recycler who asks for work: "You have a job. We're working together... we're in business together" (interview, Sept. 8, 2011). My research has shown that this is not the exploitative relationship theorized by Portes and Castells where one side takes unfair advantage of the other, but a mutually beneficial partnership. Without the volume of recyclable material brought to his depot by informal recyclers, Mr. Wheatley's business could only operate on a much smaller capacity, with far fewer staff.

Informal recycling does carry a social stigma that arises from hegemonic definitions of waste, value, and the position of waste workers within the social hierarchy, as is argued by Whitson (2011: 1415). However, my analysis demonstrates that informal recycling in Halifax is not a marginal activity, as is suggested by the marginalization thesis. Although recyclers may display characteristics of marginalized populations (some possess low human capital while others hold at least one skilled trade or degree), these characteristics are not intrinsic to informality and typically predate their involvement in informal recycling, which empowers these individuals, raising both their social and economic prospects. Moreover, informal recyclers are not economically worse off than persons sharing a similar socioeconomic background employed in the formal economy. Due to the fair price they receive for their materials, a price that is nearly double the market value, their earnings are on par with those employed in minimum wage jobs. Despite the inherent power relationships involved in informal recycling, recyclers are not socially marginalized as a result of their activities; in fact, to be successful, recyclers must expand their social networks and build a clientele upon whom they can rely to combat the effects of scarcity (which has added benefits as is demonstrated by the examples of gift giving on pp. 69). The social and economic advantages of working as an informal recycler on the

Halifax Peninsula are numerous, but the work has never been easy. Success requires hard work, dedication, persistence, ingenuity, and a little bit of luck. Increased competition from vehicles and other cart recyclers have only made recycling more difficult in recent years. Success today is defined differently than it was when the halfback deposit system was introduced in 1996. Recyclers now work longer hours for fewer deposit containers, but as Thomas states, “it’s better than a kick in the pants”.

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## ***Appendix A: Informal Recycler Project Consent Form***

### **Project Consent Form**

#### **Informal Recycling: Deposit Beverage Container Collection on the Halifax Peninsula**

Researcher: David J. Atchison  
Master's Student, Anthropology  
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology  
Dalhousie University  
1459 Oxford Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 4R2  
Phone: (902) [phone number]  
Email: David.Atchison@dal.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Martha Radice  
Master's Supervisor, Assistant Professor  
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology  
Dalhousie University  
1459 Oxford Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 4R2  
Email: Martha.Radice@dal.ca

#### **Introduction**

My name is David Atchison and I am a graduate student at Dalhousie University. I invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in Social Anthropology. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time by telling me that you no longer wish to participate. The study is described below. This description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort which you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with me.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the economic role of informal recycling, the institutions which enable informal recycling in Halifax, and gaps within theories of the informal economy. This study focuses on why people work collecting recyclables rather than other—more formal—means of employment. I hope to work with about 20 people to complete this study

between July and September, 2011. Individuals will not receive compensation for participation in this study.

### **Study Design**

If you agree to participate, I would like to hang out with you during your daily recycling activities. During this period I will interview you, asking you questions about your experiences and knowledge of collecting recyclables, your background, and your employment history. The interview could last from 30 minutes to five hours, depending how much you want to say and how long you want me to accompany you. If you give me permission, I will record our conversations using a digital recorder and a notepad. Also, if you give me permission, I may contact you to hang out and interview you again.

### **Confidentiality & Anonymity**

I assure you that I will keep your name and any other identifying information confidential and will not use it in any reports or publications about the research. Only I will know who you are and what was said during our conversations. You are not under any obligation to discuss anything that makes you uncomfortable and you may choose not to respond to particular questions. You may choose to end the interview at any time.

I will write research reports and publications based on what you and other people tell me in interviews. If I need to include any direct quotes from you in the reports, I will give you a made up name like “John Smith”. Excerpts of some interviews may also be published in academic publications. Due to the uniqueness of the knowledge you may provide there exists a possibility that someone personally familiar with yourself may be able to identify you, although the risk of this occurring is low. If you wish to view the results of this study please contact me – my contact details are at the top of this letter.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me, or my thesis supervisor Dr. Martha Radice. If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director of Dalhousie University’s Office of Human Research Ethics Administration, for assistance at (902) 494-1462, Catherine.connors@dal.ca.

Thank you,

David J. Atchison

**Consent script:**

**The researcher will orally present the information above and will give a paper copy to the interviewee. He will then ask the following questions and will immediately record the participant's answers, either on digital audio or in a notebook.**

- **Have you read or listened to the letter of information? [yes/no]**
- **Do you understand its implications? [yes/no]**
- **Have you been able to clear up anything you did not understand or are not sure about? [yes/no]**
- **Are you aware that you are not obliged to participate? [yes/no]**
- **Are you aware that you are free to withdraw at any time? [yes/no]**
- **Are you aware that your identity will remain anonymous? [yes/no]**
- **Do you consent to take part in this study? [yes/no]**
- **Is it OK if I record our conversations on a digital audio recorder? [yes/no]**
- **Do you agree to be anonymously quoted in the report and publications I write based on this study? [yes/no]**
- **I may want to meet with you again to ask some additional questions as this project develops. You can withdraw from the study at any time, so you can say no then, but is it OK for me to contact you for a meeting in the future? [yes/no]**

## ***Appendix B: Institutional Participant Project Consent Form***

### **Project Consent Form:**

#### **Informal Recycling: Deposit Beverage Container Collection on the Halifax Peninsula**

Researcher: David J. Atchison  
Master's Student, Anthropology  
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology  
Dalhousie University  
1459 Oxford Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 4R2  
Phone: (902) [phone number]  
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Supervisor: Dr. Martha Radice  
Master's Supervisor, Assistant Professor  
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology  
Dalhousie University  
1459 Oxford Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 4R2  
Email: Martha.Radice@dal.ca

#### **Introduction**

My name is David Atchison and I am a graduate student at Dalhousie University. I invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in Social Anthropology. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time by telling me that you no longer wish to participate. The study is described below. This description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort which you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with me.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the economic role of informal recycling, the institutions which enable informal recycling in Halifax, and gaps within theories of the informal economy. This study focuses on why people work collecting recyclables rather than other—more formal—means of employment. I hope to work with about 20 people to complete this study



between July and August, 2011. Individuals will not receive compensation for participation in this study.

### **Study Design**

To add an institutional perspective to this study, I would like to invite Enviro-Depot employees, and By-law enforcement officers to participate in semi-structured interviews. Interviews may range from 30 minutes to an hour. During this period I will interview you, asking you questions concerning the activity of informal recycling and personal interactions with informal recyclers. If you give me permission, I will record our conversations will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and a notepad.

### **Confidentiality & Anonymity**

I assure you that I will keep your name and any other identifying information confidential and will not use it in any reports or publications about the research. Only I will know who you are and what was said during our conversations. You are not under any obligation to discuss anything that makes you uncomfortable and you may choose not to respond to particular questions. You may choose to end the interview at any time.

I will write research reports and publications based on what you and other people tell me in interviews. If I need to include any direct quotes from you in the reports, I will give you a made up name like “John Smith”. Excerpts of some interviews may also be published in academic publications. Due to the uniqueness of the knowledge you may provide there exists a possibility that someone personally familiar with yourself may be able to identify you, although the risk of this occurring is low. If you wish to view the results of this study please contact me – my contact details are at the top of this letter.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me, or my thesis supervisor Dr. Martha Radice. If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director of Dalhousie University’s Office of Human Research Ethics Administration, for assistance at (902) 494-1462, [Catherine.connors@dal.ca](mailto:Catherine.connors@dal.ca).

Thank you.

David J. Atchison

**I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to take part in this study. I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.**

Signature:

Name:

Date:

## ***Appendix C: Interview Guide***

### **Who collects recyclables?**

- How long have you collected recyclables?
- Do you collect recyclables full-time or part-time?
- Do you have any other current occupations?
- What other occupations have you held?
  - For how long?
  - Do you still work there?
  - Why did your employment end there?
- What is your highest level of education?
- Do you consider yourself to be successful at collecting recyclables?

### **Why are recyclables collected?**

- How did you start collecting recyclables?
- How come you still collect recyclables?
- How does the deposit system work?
- Why do other individuals collect recyclables?
  - Is it for the same reasons as you?
- What proportion of your income is derived from recyclable collection?
  - Do you receive social assistance?
- What would you do without the income?
- What do you do with the income?

### **Where are recyclables collected?**

- Is there a particular area that you target?
  - Do other informal recyclers target that area?
  - Has there ever been conflict between yourself and other individuals over an area?
    - Has there ever been conflict between others over an area?
- Do you follow a route?

- Does this route change?
- Are there particular residences that you frequent?
  - Do you have a relationship with these residences?
  - How long have you had a relationship with these residences?
- Where do you take your recyclables when you cash out?

**When are recyclables collected?**

- How often do you collect recyclables?
  - How much time do you spend collecting recyclables per day?
  - How many days do you spend collecting recyclables per week?
  - Do you work at night, during the day or both?
- Do you collect recyclables all year?

**How are recyclables collected?**

- Do you prepare yourself before you collect recyclables?
- Do you wear any special clothing?
- Where did you get your cart?
  - Do you use one cart or do you use what is available?
  - Do you prefer a specific type of cart?

**Is By-Law S600 enforced?**

- Are you aware of By-Law S600 (the By-Law against informal recycling)?
- Have you ever been stopped by By-Law enforcement or the police for collecting recyclables?
  - If so what happened?
- Do you know of anyone who has been stopped by By-Law enforcement or the police for collecting recyclables?
  - If so what happened?