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VOTING WITH THEIR FEET: ACTUAL QUALITY OF LIFE RANKINGS

In most 'best places to live' lists, subjective stats, skewed perspectives paint an unfair picture

COURTENAY – It seems like every few months, a new 'best place to live in Canada' list pops up in media outlets across the country.

Focusing on a range of factors like weather, housing prices, culture, and even the number of luxury cars in a community, these oft-subjective lists are helpful in generating headlines (and anger amongst communities left out of the beauty pageant-like winners list), but in terms of real value: they're lacking.

The Island Coastal Economic Trust decided to do its own analysis with a different - and incredibly straightforward - methodology:

The communities that are most desirable as a place to live are, quite simply, the communities that attract the most new residents compared to the number of former residents who move away.

When that metric is applied to people who moved within Canada between 2006 and 2011, all seven urban centres in the ICET region attracted significantly more new residents from elsewhere in Canada than they lost. Who suffered the biggest outflow of Canadian residents? Toronto and Montreal, which were net exporters of 70,000 and 50,000 residents, respectively, to the rest of Canada.

Looking only at 25-49 olds (people in their prime working years) moving into a community versus out of a community, the Courtenay area ranks 14th nationally out of 147 urban centres with a net inflow of more than 1,200 people. Nanaimo is just behind, ranked at #16, with Campbell River coming in at #25. In fact, all seven of the ICET-region communities come out on the positive side of the ledger. So much for the perception that the region only attracts retirees.

"The bottom line is that there are a wide range of subjective lifestyle factors that people consider," said Line Robert, CEO of ICET. "The number of days of rain may not matter if it means there is no snow to shovel and you can golf, mountain bike and play soccer year round. We feel that the best measure is looking at how many new people, especially the young community building demographic, are choosing to make our communities their home for the long term."

Not surprisingly, ICET communities also fared well in the rankings for those aged 50+. This group tends to be more reflective of 'pure' quality of life, as employment becomes less of a pressing concern.

In the 50+ category, Parksville ranked #5 nationally, with Courtenay at #6. All seven ICET-region communities ranked in the top-third nationally. Once again, Canada's major metro areas ranked poorly, becoming the country's largest exporters of Baby Boomers.

The report, titled 'Voting with their Feet: Actual Quality of Life Rankings in Canada', was prepared by ICET's consulting economist, Jamie Vann Struth using data from Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey.

"The typical 'best place to live' lists are wildly out-of-touch with the actual location decisions made by Canadians," stated Vann Struth. "One of those publications said that Port Alberni was the worst place to live in Canada, even though it attracted 465 more residents than it lost, including nearly 200 people of prime working age. It's clearly a desirable place."

To be fair to those major urban metros, they do fare well when it comes to attracting new international in-migrants (different from immigrants, as some of the people could be Canadian citizens returning from living abroad, or foreigners moving here temporarily).

"There are lots of places with great weather and natural beauty, but if there are no job prospects, is it really a great place to live? And there are places in Canada with huge opportunities for earning, but if the money wasn't there, people wouldn't be there either," said ICET Chair Phil Kent. "The truly 'best places to live' are the ones that have a combination that works for real people, and on that score, the Island Coastal region consistently stands out among the top places in the country."

Read the full report here: islandcoastaltrust.ca/RESOURCES/ECONOMICANALYSIS.

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

The Island Coastal Economic Trust is a \$50 million endowment established in 2006 by the Government of British Columbia to help diversify the economies of central and northern Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast.

ICET is guided by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials and MLAs and five appointees. This exceptional team of leaders collaborates to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community-centred decision-making process, ICET has approved \$47.6 million for over 125 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects on the Island and Sunshine Coast since implementing its grant program in 2007. ICET investments have leveraged more than \$268 million in incremental funding into the region.

A full overview of ICET can be found at www.islandcoastaltrust.ca.

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