

***ARTFUL PLACES: CULTIVATING ARTS, CULTURE AND NATURE IN  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT***

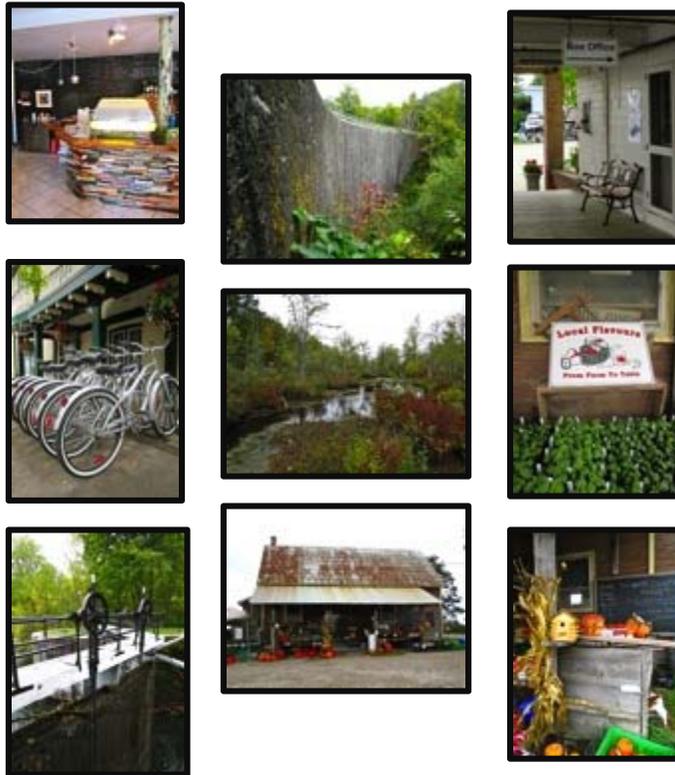
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# **Artful Places: Cultivating arts, culture and nature in rural development**



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Working Paper for The Monieson Centre,  
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## Introduction

A driving question in rural economic development seems to be: why do some rural communities have a unique artistic cultural identity and others don't? In other words, why do some rural regions capture the imagination of residents, businesses and visitors alike in terms of distinctive cultural, natural and artistic amenities, quaint small-town feeling and a vibrant arts and culture scene? How have these places managed to leverage the arts, culture and nature for both tourist attraction and sustained economic development?

The purpose of this paper is to explore these questions with a particular interest in applying lessons learned to rural Ontario, in general, and Eastern Ontario and the Frontenac Arch Biosphere in particular. The Frontenac Arch Biosphere is a beautiful, if yet, undiscovered region in southeastern Ontario that could be described as an "arts-ready" place, but it has not yet capitalized on its potentials to become a well-known artful place in Canada. Many of the ingredients are there: the region has a good mix of artisans and cultural amenities, several quality theatres, art galleries and museums, quaint heritage preserved small towns, and outstanding natural features. Its natural landscape is such a "place of great beauty" that in 2002 UNESCO designated it as one of only 16 Biosphere Reserves located in Canada, and over 600 worldwide. The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve extends roughly 2,700 square kilometers in the southeastern portion of Ontario, making it the most bio-diverse region in Canada. With its "long and rich cultural heritage it serves as the historic gateway through the St. Lawrence River to all of Canada" (UNESCO, 2013). But why, with all these assets is it relatively unknown? Why doesn't the region make the list of artful towns<sup>1</sup> and/or regions in Canada? Why do towns like Stratford (Ontario), Banff or places like Saltspring Island, Charlevoix, or Trinity and Fogo Island (Newfoundland and Labrador) make the grade?

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, books like John Villiani's "The 100 Best Small Arts Towns in America"

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In this paper, we seek to answer these questions. To do this, we first define what we mean by arts and culture in the context of economic development, making a clear distinction between cultural industries, artistic occupations, and often more ambiguous terms like “creative class” and “creative economy”. Next we review the academic and policy literature on the role of arts and culture in rural revitalization. We pay particular attention to newer approaches to arts and culture, which view arts and culture as integral to the rural economy. Contrary to popular belief, arts organizations and artists are not simply a “frill” consumed by the local market, but in fact the presence of artists and arts-related organizations add an “artistic dividend” to a community that otherwise would not exist (Markusen and Schrock, 2006).

Furthermore, artists – especially in rural areas – are deeply inspired and connected to the natural landscapes and have much in common with businesses that draw on the land for their livelihood, such as artisanal craft makers, food producers, eco-tourist operators, and other tourist and retail businesses. We argue that protected natural landscapes add a “nature dividend” (Donald and Hall, 2014) to a community that otherwise would not exist. We then turn to our case study and present some of the findings from interviews and a survey conducted with arts, nature and culture businesses, artisans, and organizations in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere. We conclude this paper with thoughts and recommendations for recasting rural development using a multifaceted “arts and nature” approach to help ‘art-in-progress’ places become better known as “artful places”.

## **Clarifying Concepts**

Before we begin our review, it is important to clarify some key cultural and creative concepts and explain how they have been used in economic development<sup>2</sup> (Donald et al., 2013). Terms like “creativity”, “cultural economy”, “creative class” and “cultural industries” have been all the “buzz” in economic development policy over the last ten

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasize that we are examining the term “creativity” in relation to economic development, but we recognize, of course, that it can be defined in multiple ways and from different theoretical and practical perspectives.

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years, but often the terms are misused or misunderstood and can create confusion when thinking about the arts (broadly defined) in economic development, especially in the rural context.

### *Defining creativity*

At the most basic level, creativity as used in the context of economic development is defined as the invention of a new product, process solution or idea that has some value.<sup>3</sup> More recently, the term has been used to capture the longer-term structural changes occurring in advanced economies, especially with respect to the nature and organization of work. Traditional physical inputs in production are still necessary, but the ideas and creative process behind the best way to use and adapt these inputs are becoming increasingly important. Scott (2007) has called this the “cognitive cultural economy” where “intellectual and affective human assets” play out in a variety of sectors: high technology, health care, neo-artisanal manufacturing, media and other cultural-products industries. Pratt (2008: 107) argues that the cultural industries are essential to study because they are “practical examples of the hybrid and complex relationships between production and consumption, the symbolic and material” (see also Donald et al., 2013).

### *Defining “creative industries”*

Cultural industries are defined most basically as industries that have origin in individual creativity that have potential for wealth creation through intellectual properties (DCMS, 2001). They include such sectors as advertising, architecture, arts and antique markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, video and photography, software, computer games and electronic publishing, music and the visual and performing arts, publishing, television and radio (DCMS, 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> As appreciators of the arts, we believe of course that art provides values far outside the economic realm and these values cannot be conflated with its economic dimensions. The purpose of this paper, however, is to primarily document the economic reasons why art should be nurtured in a regional economy and make recommendations (see also Markusen and Schrock, 2006).

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While there is still a lot of debate on what industries to include in cultural industry definitions (see UNCTAD, 2008; 2010 for a thorough review), the most recent studies recognize the importance of not only commercial cultural industries that generate intellectual property, but also not-for-profits, informal and publicly funded agencies as well as for-profit, formal and private sector activities (such as museums, art galleries, theatre companies, etc.)(Pratt and Hutton, 2013). This is because there is a direct relationship between the production-related activities of the creative economy (e.g., the art produced) and the value chains required to sustain such products (the places the art is shown and consumed). Similar to Pratt and Hutton (2013), De Propriis (2013) has recently argued that cultural industries are not simply a “frill” to be consumed during economically vibrant times but that they contribute to the process by which the culture of a society is formed and transmitted through production, distribution and marketing in the wider economy.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has grouped their definition of cultural industries into four main areas: (1) heritage; (2) arts (3) media and (4) functional creations (see Table 1). This seems like a particularly helpful way for rural communities to think about where they may fit along the creative industries geographical value chain. Rural communities are likely strongest in the first two groupings: heritage and the arts. Rather than see urban places as inherently “creative” (as much of the “creative class” literature has done) and rural places as not, this grouping captures the relational character of creativity. In other words, artistic and creative activity in rural places feeds into larger cultural industry value chains.

**Table 1. UNCTAD Definition of the creative industries**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Geography</b>
<b>Heritage</b>	Defined as the origin of all forms of arts and the soul of cultural and creative industries. Group comprises the traditional cultural expressions of arts, crafts, festivals and celebrations; as well as cultural sites (archaeological sites, museums, libraries etc.).	Origins in rural or urban places
<b>Arts</b>	Group includes creative industries based on arts and culture. Group comprises the Visual arts (painting, sculpture, photography and antiques) and Performing arts (live music, theatre, dance, opera, circus, puppetry etc.).	Origins in rural or urban places
<b>Media</b>	Comprises media that produces creative content with purpose of communicating with large audiences and thus: publishing and printed media (books, press and other publications) and audiovisual films (television, radio and other broadcasting).	Some activity in rural areas, but more likely to thrive in a densely populated urban milieu
<b>Functional creations</b>	Comprises more demand driven and services orientated industries creating goods and services with functional purposes which includes design (interior, graphic, fashion, jewelry and toys) and new media (architectural, advertising, cultural and recreational, creative research and development (R&D), digital and other related services) and also creative services (architectural, advertising, cultural and recreational, creative research and development (R&D), digital and other related creative services.	Consumer-driven largely originating from large global cities and many of the production functions require an urban agglomeration economy

Source: UNCTAD (2010); Donald et al., (2013)

### *Defining Creative Economy, Creative Class*

In addition to the cultural industries approach, several authors have focused more on the professions or occupations that make up the larger “creative economy”. In this context, the “creative economy”<sup>4</sup> is defined as those aspects of the economy

<sup>4</sup> Florida (2002: 8) defines the creative class as “people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new content”. His definition of the creative worker is much broader than those who make up the core occupations in the cultural industries. He argues that some regions in the world are becoming centers for the creative class because of their attractiveness based on his “3 Ts” (technology, talent, tolerance) economic development model. His research became popular with economic policymakers because he argued that those cities and regions that could attract the creative class would be economic winners relative to other places.

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(industries, sectors, people) that are engaged in knowledge-intensive economic activity. Most would agree that notwithstanding some important earlier work (e.g., Scott, 1997 and Hall, 1989) widespread recognition of the growing importance of creative work was stimulated by Richard Florida's arguments about the significance of creativity and his creative class thesis. His ideas are well known, so they won't be repeated here in any depth. Very briefly, however, Florida argues that creativity (that is, the invention of new ideas, new technologies and/or new creative content) is a key source of competitive advantage in today's knowledge driven society. Creativity to Florida has the potential to exist in virtually every industry, but what distinguishes his work from others is his focus on the creative class (Florida, 2002).

The ranking and rating of cities and regions based on their "creative class" quotient became very fashionable in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but the creative-city discourse had the effect of marginalizing smaller cities and regions that couldn't possibly compete on a policy application of a theory that was largely premised on the necessary conditions of an agglomeration economy, including a deep and diverse labour market (see for example Hall and Donald, 2009; Hall, 2011; Lewis and Donald, 2010; Sands and Reese, 2008).

Florida's work unleashed a wave of criticism as scholars began to challenge many of the conceptual and empirical underpinnings of the theory and how it was applied (see Donald et al., 2013 for a review). One important critique came from Anne Markusen, who argued that the creative class approach was too broad and "fuzzy" and obscured many of the differences within the creative workforce in terms of organization, labour market and innovation dynamics. Workers in artistic and design-related professions, for example, have variegated and diverse sets of practices and their contributions to economic development are unique (Markusen and Strock, 2006).

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### *Defining Artistic Occupations and the Artistic Dividend*

Ann Markusen (see for example 2011; 2013; Markusen and Schrock 2006; Markusen and Isserman, 2012; Markusen and Gadwa, 2010a; 2010b; Markusen, Gadwa, Barbour and Beyers, 2011) is a world-renowned expert in regional economic development and has spent a lot of time thinking about the role of artists in regional development as well as the impact of public investment in cultural facilities and programming.

Markusen and Schrock (2006) define artists to include performing artists (actors, directors, dancers, choreographers), musicians, writers and visual artists (painters, photographers, filmmakers, ceramicists, textile artists, sculptors, and printmakers). They argue that artists contribute to the regional economy in many explicit and implicit ways. Traditional arts impacts studies are important because they make the case for public and philanthropic investments in the arts. They also detail the probable expenditures of local and tourist arts patrons on things like tickets, restaurant meals, hotels and other local purchases. While there are always methodological challenges, these studies do show “a not-insignificant economic return to non-artistic businesses and the regional economy as a whole” (Markusen and Schrock, 2006: 1662). One of the limitations of these impact studies, however, is that they approach the arts as a local-serving industry. The economic base analysis relies on industry definitions rather than occupations in identifying these base components. As a result, artists are not generally considered part of the economic base of the region. They are seen as initially creating for a local market, but “such an approach seriously understates the full economic contribution of an artistic community to a regional economy” (1662).

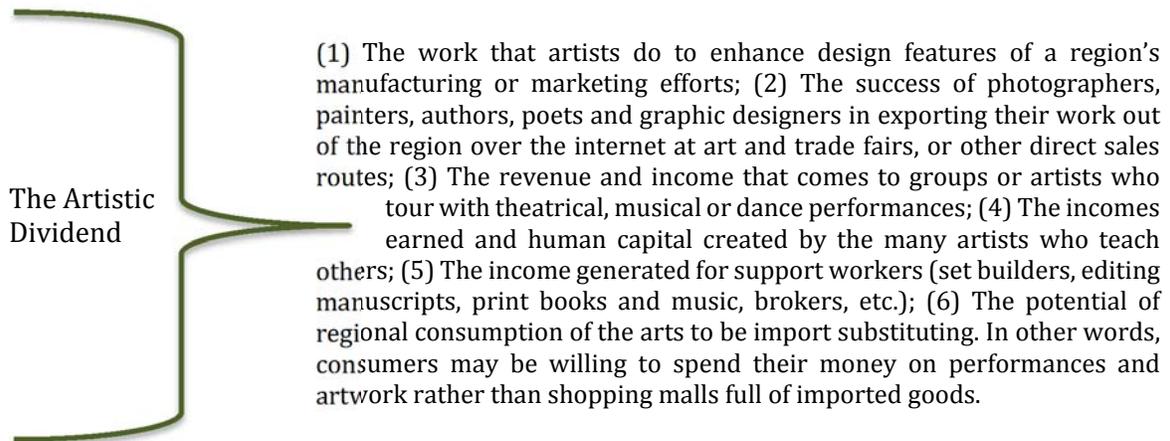
Markusen and Schrock (2006) go on to detail several of the components of the contribution of an artistic community on regional development. Figure 1 summarizes these contributions and taken together these components make up what they call the *artistic dividend* for a regional economy. They define the artistic dividend as “the

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additional economic impact that would not occur without the presence of artists” (1662). So, from a strictly economic impact,

Artists are thus not simply earning income from local activities. They are contributor’s to the region’s economic base – goods and services exported out of the region that enable the producers to earn incomes that are in turn spent in support of local-serving businesses as well as on imports of yet other goods and services (1662-1663).

Figure 1. The Artistic Dividend



Source: Adapted from Markusen and Schrock (2006)

The artistic dividend is also part of a public good. Becker (1982) calls this the “art worlds” in which past investments in a place by a variety of arts patrons, philanthropists, government bodies and individuals come together in human capital and physical infrastructure to create a vibrant region. A vibrant arts scene is what Florida (2002) credits for providing further pull to attract new employees from elsewhere and other artists into the region. By the same token, Markusen and Schrock (2006) note that a vibrant arts scene can also reinforce loyalty and ‘lovability’ for current residents and businesses.

Markusen and Schrock (2006) go on to operationalize their artistic dividend thesis through a study of occupations rather than industries. One of the challenges for any researcher studying in this area is that there is no accurate data that assesses the

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value of artists' direct exports from the region, the value of their work on contract to non-arts businesses, or their role in inducing innovation in other suppliers or sectors. Surveys and interviews can get at some of the components, but it is very difficult to put a value on many of these components. For Markusen and Schrock, they adopt an occupational approach. In their study of artistic concentrations for the top 29 US metros by employment, they found that once the largest cities are taken out of the mix, artists tend to sort themselves out unevenly across space, which is not necessarily related to city size.

## **Arts and Rural Economic Development**

So where does this leave the small rural regions and towns? There is no question that most of the “creative” economy literature has focused on the larger centers, mainly because there is much more comparative data available on these places and because as many scholars have demonstrated, agglomeration economies will drive artists towards large cities. These trends in some ways seem irreversible, but it does not mean that there isn't a place for arts in rural revitalization.

### *Arts and Rural Economies*

Many studies have found a presence of artistic colonies in small towns and rural regions. For example, using creative class definitions, McGranahan and Wojan (2007) discovered that certain occupations are pulled to rural places that have a particular mountainous geography and climate. In Canada, Denis-Jacob (2011), Olfert and Patridge (2011) and Petrov (2007) have all found that creative people (using various definitions) are drawn to places in the Rocky Mountains and on the Pacific coast, but also to places near major urban centers, especially around Montreal and Toronto. There are also several case studies of smaller places in the UK and Australia that have been successful in developing an artistic cultural base for their regional economy (Waitt and Gibson, 2009; Wood and Taylor, 2004). According to Polèse (2012: 1813), smaller places, given the right attributes, can attract artists less anchored to the city, especially those artists that do not require “scale-sensitive infrastructure” to thrive.

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Moreover, the Internet, email and wireless connections are making it easier than ever to live and work in different locations.

### *Why arts and rural economies?*

In her study of the potential of arts-based development in rural economies, Markusen (2007) argues that for many rural communities, economic survival has been particularly difficult and spending on industrial recruitment has often been disappointing. Cultural facilities and programming however can “provide a particularly vibrant form of locally oriented growth potential” (9). Markusen offers four main reasons for this. First, cultural facilities and programming allow local citizens to divert expenditures that they would have spent on other forms of consumption elsewhere into local purchases that in turn support other local incomes. Second, these cultural facilities are attractive to footloose artists who would be encouraged to relocate in a community with these kinds of facilities. These artists bring their own export sales (or grant-getting abilities) with them and may bring new ideas and creativity to the region. Third, if these artists are successful in the local market, they may begin to attract tourists to the locality. Fourth, if cultural facilities are located in historic downtowns, they can play a role in revitalizing main streets and spur other retail investments and arts-related visits (Markusen, 2007: 19-20). Her work also demonstrates the value of the arts to rural economic development using case studies of three small towns and rural areas in Minnesota. These examples show how actions made on the part of local agents in terms of investing in physical capital, such as artists’ centers, artists’ live/work buildings and performing arts centers have increased local spending, attracted artists as residents and drawn in consumers especially from the surrounding areas.

### *Canadian revitalization examples*

In Canada, there are several good examples of places making an explicit investment in arts-based infrastructure to spur local economic growth. Stratford, Ontario, with a population of 30,000, is a particularly interesting example. Once a vibrant railway and furniture making town, Stratford’s manufacturing economy declined in the

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immediate post-war period with the collapse of the rail industry and other manufacturing industries. In 1953, Tom Patterson, a local journalist and civic entrepreneur, convinced the City Council and civic leaders that Stratford should invest in the Stratford Shakespeare Festival with the aim of making Stratford one of the world's premier designations for Shakespearean live theatre (Shaw, 2012). Since then the town's theatre and arts-community has gone from strength to strength. Recently, civic leaders have built upon the areas deeper agricultural roots to link artistic experiences with epicurean experiences for local residents, businesses and tourists. Local businesses and residents have also worked with urban designers and planners to preserve many of the heritage qualities of the town and build up an extensive park system. All these features further complements the artful place attributes of the town. Today, almost 30% of the town's business comes from the Chicago area and the average tourist spends over \$288 dollars a visit on local dining, shopping and hotels. According to Polèse's (2012: 1821) study of arts presence in 135 Canadian cities, Stratford has the highest location quotient for arts-related employment of any Canadian city. He attributes much of Stratford's success to its festival investments and location close to Kitchener-Waterloo, London and Toronto.

No province in Canada celebrates its rural history, arts, culture and nature quite like Newfoundland and Labrador. The "Find Yourself Here" marketing and advertising campaign, which launched in 2006, has showcased the province to the world as a unique travel destination. The latest ad campaign welcomes people to "the edge of the continent" to "witness the first sunrise in North America" set against beautiful imagery of Newfoundland and Labrador's natural landscape. In another, the dialects of the province are celebrated against the backdrop of small fishing communities (NL Tourism, 2013; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013). The tourism strategy is focused on inspiring "travellers through authentic experiences that embrace our natural creativity, environment, and unique culture for the sustainable benefit of our people and our province" (Department of Tourism, Recreation and Culture, 2009). According to Tourism Minister, Terry French, out-of-province visits

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have grown three percent per year and spending by tourists has increased five percent per year since the launch of the campaign (CBC NL, 2013).

In terms of a local example, the Rising Tide Theatre, created in 1978 in the town of Trinity, is a creative and innovative leader of the arts in the province. One example of this is their 'New Founde Lande Trinity Pageant', which started in 1993. Patrons walk through the lanes and roads of the town watching the summer theatre company perform and celebrate the history of Trinity and the province. They estimate that over 190,000 visitors have walked through this seaside town since its first performance while the theatre receives roughly 20,000 visitors on an annual basis (Rising Tide Theatre, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c). This is especially impressive given that the population of Trinity is only 137 people (Statistics Canada, 2012a). The town has a long history connected to the fisheries and is located along the Bonavista Peninsula with stunning views of the Atlantic Ocean (Town of Trinity, 2012).

Another example that has recently captured plenty of media attention in NL and across Canada is Shorefast located on Fogo Island and Change Islands. These Islands are located off the northeast coast of NL with a combined population of roughly 3,000. According to Shorefast (2013a), these islands represent "endangered rural communities", an endemic issue across the country. In response to the challenges faced by these Islands, Zita Cobbs created the Shorefast Foundation, a registered charity, which is focused on the principles of social entrepreneurship (Shorefast, 2013b). Cobbs was born on Fogo Island and eventually moved away from Newfoundland for education and then went on to work for a California-based fibre optic company. She retired in 2001 and almost immediately started assisting Fogo Island with her time, expertise, global connections, and private capital (Howes, 2011). In 2006, Shorefast was created and named after a line used to connect a traditional Newfoundland cod trap to the shore. This name takes into account the strong historical connection to the cod fisheries and it also represents "a metaphor for being bound to place and community" (Shorefast, 2013b). Aside from a 5-star inn constructed on the island, one of their main projects is an 'Arts Residency' or artist-

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in-residence program including four studio spaces. The goal is to attract writers, artists, filmmakers etc. from around the world to immerse themselves in island living and be inspired by their natural surroundings (Shorefast, 2013c). The Foundation is built on the principles that a “responsible fishery, the arts, and a carefully managed geotourism industry, working together, will be a powerful force in finding new meaningful ways in an old continuity” (Shorefast, 2013d). Their initiatives have received support from the federal and provincial government along with investment from Cobbs (Howes, 2011).

*What can we learn from these examples?*

These Canadian case studies provide several important insights for arts-ready places. First, successful arts places in Canada seem to have put public investment in physical arts-based infrastructure. Much of this initially came about, however, by a shared vision realized by risk-takers and civic entrepreneurs in these communities. There also appears to be a business, non-profit and community culture that enables these visionaries to shine through, and a public sector that really allows creativity to thrive. Proximity to a large metropolitan area also seems to help. Furthermore, and perhaps most pertinent for us to consider, is that all of these successful places have an attractive natural setting, in terms of being close to either a seashore, mountains, or lakes. Not only are these natural landscapes essential for nurturing an artistic milieu, but these naturescapes also provide a “nature dividend” that adds additional economic impact that would not occur without the presence of such stunning and preserved natural surroundings.

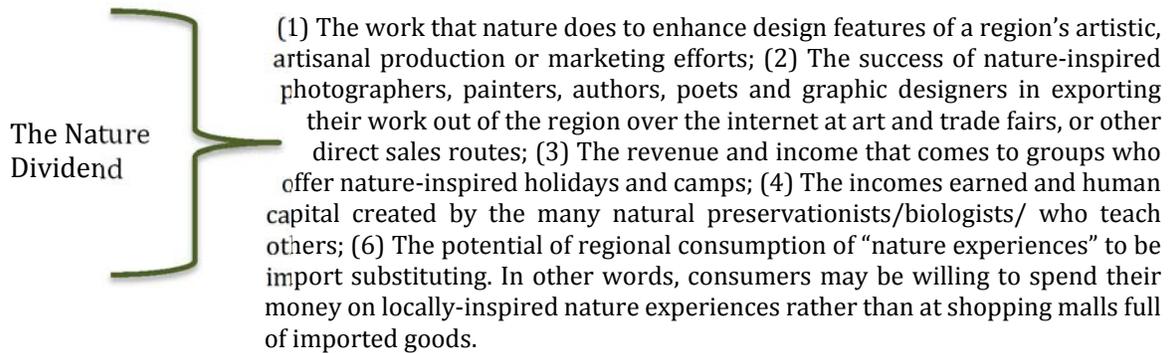
*New considerations- “a Nature Dividend”?*

For many small towns in Canada, nature is an asset from which to build cultural formation and identity. In addition to traditional arts-based development, rural Canada can also leverage natural assets. Traditionally, a “natural dividend” in ecological economics is defined as the unearned income from the harvest of renewal resources (Daly and Farley, 2004). But we would like to propose the idea of a “nature dividend” that is more closely aligned to the value nature provides in terms of cultural

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production and reproduction. Figure 3 provides elements of the components of this dividend (Donald and Hall, 2014).

Figure 3. The Nature Dividend



Source: Donald and Hall, 2014

Similar to the artistic dividend, the nature dividend is part of a public good. All the investments through the years in sustainable living, nature preservation and protection of special places comes together in a human capital and physical infrastructure to create a beautiful and inspiring natural setting. As McGranaham and Wojan (2009) show, this natural setting can pull new employees from elsewhere, but it can also reinforce loyalty and 'lovability' for current residents and businesses (see also Hall and Donald 2009, Greenwood et al. 2011 and Markusen's point on the artistic side above). Now let's turn to our case study to study the role played by art and nature in the formation of a unique cultural identity for the Frontenac Arch Biosphere region.

### **The Case Study: Frontenac Arts Biosphere**

The Frontenac Arch Biosphere (FAB) is roughly 2,700 square kilometres in southeastern Ontario that includes large parts of the Frontenac and Leeds-Grenville Counties with at least 6 municipalities and portions of 3 others. It is one of only sixteen Biospheres in Canada, and is part of the UNESCO World Biospheres network,

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protecting globally significant regions of biodiversity through education and sustainable community development. The Frontenac Arch is an ancient granite ridge linking the Adirondack and Appalachian Mountains forests to the Canadian Shield boreal forest. The St. Lawrence River Valley floods across the Arch, linking the Great Lakes and central North America to the Atlantic Coast. As a result, the Frontenac Arch provides a unique landscape and North American crossroads for migration and settlement corridors for forest regions, wildlife and humans (Frontenac Arch Biosphere, 2013a).

The Frontenac Arch Biosphere also has a rich history. According to the FAB Network, “people have lived on the FAB landscape for over 9,000 years” (Frontenac Arch Biosphere, 2013b). Artifacts like fragments of clay pots and tools have been discovered in many parts of the region. Many present-day communities in the biosphere region were also key locations for early settlement by the British Loyalists and would later become important military sites. As a result, communities in the Biosphere region offer a number of unique cultural and heritage assets. The economic history of many communities in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere includes agriculture, maritime transportation, military, flour mills and saw mills along with factories producing iron goods, lumber, and finished wood products (for a detailed history see Ross, 2001). In fact, the region is home to many Canadian ‘firsts’ “first glassworks, first iron works in Upper Canada, oldest railway tunnel, oldest daily newspaper, oldest stone grist-mill in Ontario” (Frontenac Arch Biosphere, 2013a). While some manufacturing and agriculture remains, many communities rely on various service sectors and tourism as major sources of economic development (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Socio-economic indicators for select municipalities in the FAB**

Municipality	Population, 2011	Population Change, 2006-2011	Median Age	Major Industries**
Brockville	21,870	-0.4	47.1	Services (inc. business, health care and retail) and Manufacturing
Westport	628	-2.6	54.4	Services
Gananoque	5,194	-1.7	48.1	Services (inc. business, health care, retail) and manufacturing
Front of Yonge	2,680	-4.4	46.0	Services (inc. business, health care, retail) and manufacturing
South Frontenac	18,113	-0.6	44.7	Services (inc. business, health care, education, retail), construction
Leeds and the Thousand Islands	9,277	-1.7	47.7	Services (inc. business, health care, retail) and manufacturing

\* Note: FAB also includes parts of Athens TP, Elizabethtown-Kitley TP and Rideau Lakes TP

\*\* Based on changes to the 2011 Census, this information is based on the 2006 Census

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2012b-2012g; Statistics Canada, 2007a-f

The FAB Network is a not-for-profit corporation interested in guiding the biosphere towards a more sustainable community. It is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and an Executive Director. Over 80 groups work together, including natural and historic conservation organizations, economic and social development groups, as well as the educational and scientific communities located within the Frontenac Arch region. This case study offers a fascinating glimpse into the challenges and opportunities of rural economic development focused on arts, culture and nature.

### *Methodology*

This research was part of a larger Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded project entitled *Research Partnerships to Revitalize Rural Economies* led by The Monieson Centre, Queen's School of Business. The purpose of this project is to develop and strengthen research partnerships and conduct research that is

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identified as relevant by rural communities. This project is also focused on two research themes: 1) Rural Entrepreneurs and Businesses, and 2) Innovation and Sustainability in Rural Communities.

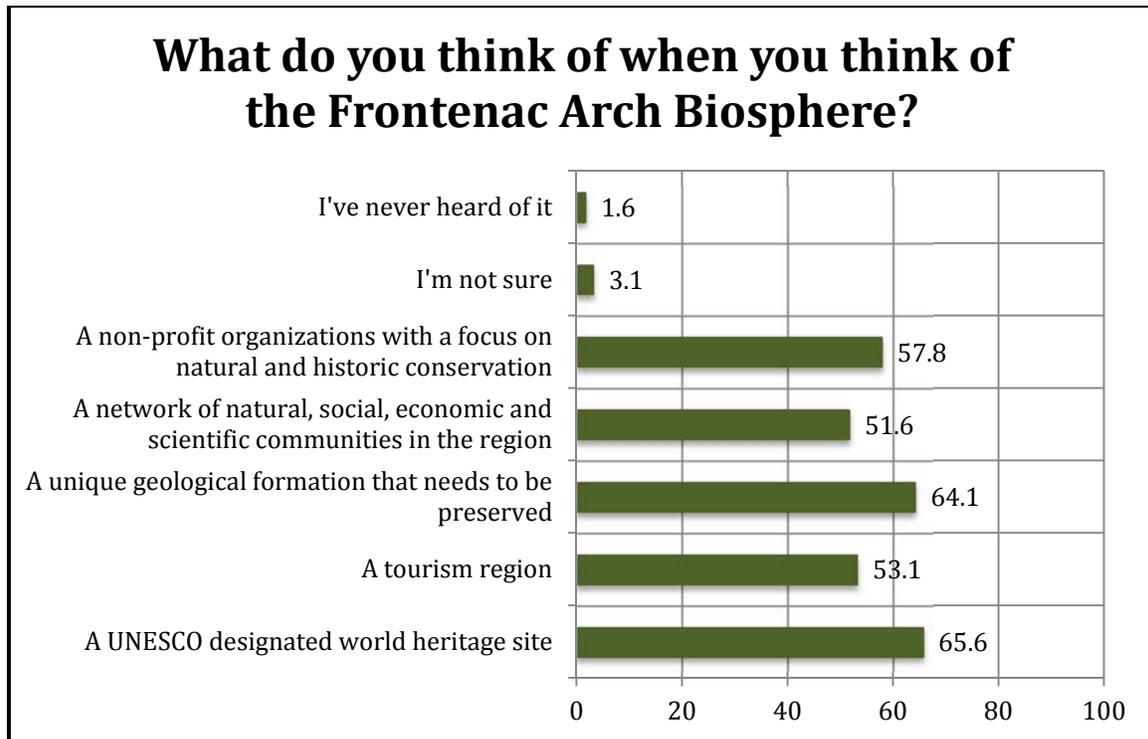
Our research team partnered with the Frontenac Arch Biosphere (FAB) Network to identify priorities and contacts. Members of the research team attended FAB network meetings and events as well as a one-day intensive field course with faculty and students in the School of Environmental Studies at Queen's University. We also did field research and spent the day touring the region and interviewing entrepreneurs and arts and culture representatives about the challenges and opportunities for economic development in the FAB region. An online survey was also created and distributed to 311 local and regional businesses including small publishers and service providers as well as arts-related businesses and organizations like artisans and art galleries. Survey recipients were identified from the FAB network and local chambers of commerce websites. Seventy-two people responded to the online survey for a response rate of 23 percent – four people opted out of the survey, twenty-two emails bounced back and 239 did not respond.

### *Results*

In the online survey we asked respondents to indicate their primary business/practice and rank in order of importance if they fell into multiple categories. Top answers included visual or performance artists (e.g. actor, musician, painter etc.); artisanal food producers (e.g. brewer, farmer, artisanal supplier [e.g., food supplier, craft and artist supply stores, etc.] cheese-maker, chef, etc.); restaurant, cafe, and hospitality, artisanal retailer; and non-food artisanal producer (e.g. woodworker, blacksmith, jewellery making, fibre art, sculpture, etc.).

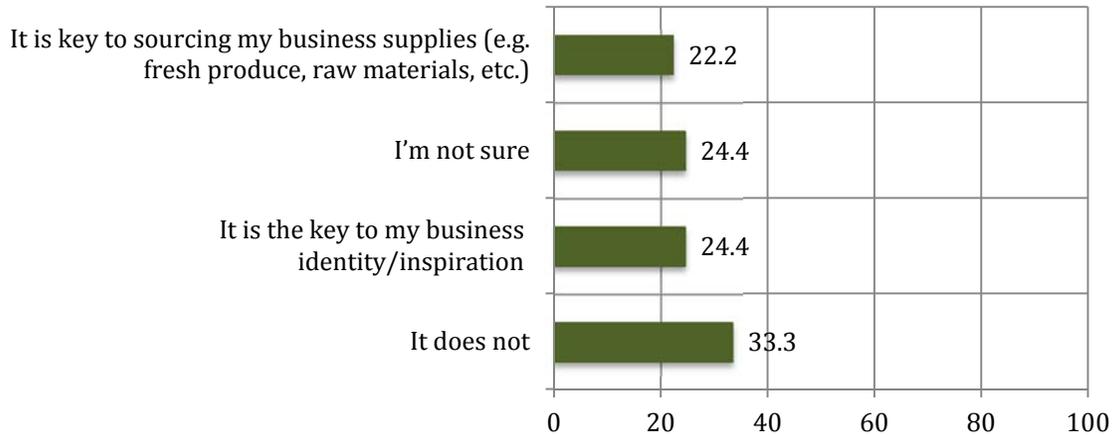
When asked, “what do you think of when you think of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere”, 65.6% of the people who responded selected “a UNESCO designated world heritage site”, followed by “a unique geological formation that needs to be preserved (64.1%)”. Other popular choices included: “a non-profit organizations with a focus on natural

and historic conservation” (57.8%); “a tourism region” (53.1%); and “a network of natural, social, economic and scientific communities in the region” (51.6%). Two people were unsure and one had never heard of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere.



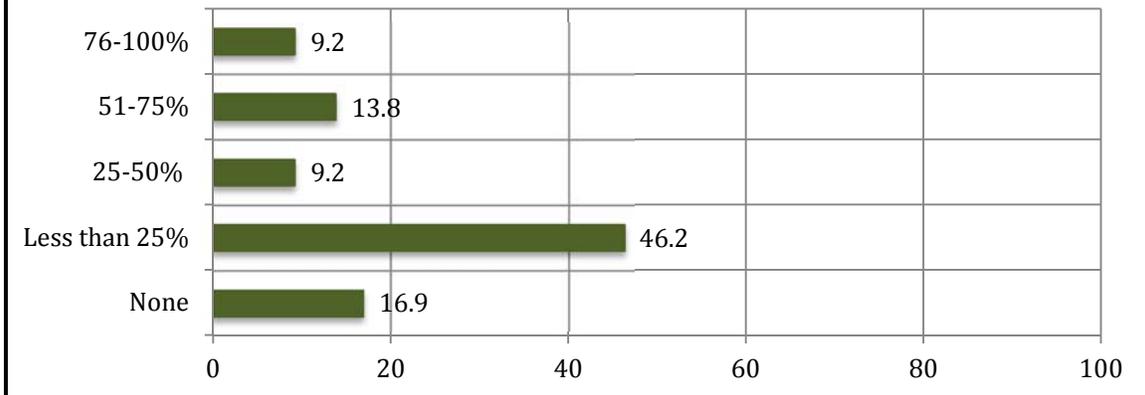
We also asked respondents to identify how the “Frontenac Arch Biosphere figures into the practice of your business/operation.” Of the 45 people who answered this question, many chose “it does not” (33.3%) and “I’m not sure” (24.4) while others selected “it is the key to my business identity/inspiration (24.4%) and “it is key to sourcing my business supplies (e.g. fresh produce, raw materials, etc.) (22.2%). In terms of “other responses”, many respondents discussed the Frontenac Arch Biosphere **Network**. For example, “we’re listed in local flavor” and “I find their newsletters interesting but have not had any influence on my business”. While a small number focused on the Frontenac Arch Biosphere **region** like one respondent who indicated that they use wood products while another talked about it being a “unique tourism draw for my B&B business”.

## How does the Frontenac Arch Biosphere figure into the practice of your business/operation?



Respondents were also asked “what portion of your business inputs (e.g. fresh produce, raw materials, etc.) do you source from businesses and suppliers in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere area”. Of the 65 people who responded, 46.2% indicated that less than 25% while another 16.9% indicated none of their business inputs are from the FAB area. Other responses to this question included: 13.8% indicated that 51-75% of their business inputs are sourced from the FAB area, 9.2% selected 76-100%, and 9.2% chose 25-50% are from the FAB area. When asked to describe in more detail why local inputs are important many responses were focused on the importance of economic benefits staying local as well as knowing where products come from. For example, one person stated, “*good to know where you food comes from!*” while another explained “*supporting the local economy keeps the money in the homes of our neighbours and potential clients. It keeps our community healthy and stable in order to welcome visitors who in turn invest in our community.*”

## What portion of your business inputs do you source from businesses and suppliers in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere?



Respondents of the survey and the interviews also identified a number of challenges and opportunities for working in the region. Many of the challenges were focused on the economic and demographic issues as well as infrastructure constraints. For example, one respondent explained, *“people are economically challenged, many plant closures, not overly optimistic, fairly cautious”* while another stated: *“depressed economically, few jobs to keep young people around”*. A number of individuals also discussed the difficulties associated with **seasonality** like one who stated: *“winter is a struggle for many, there isn’t enough variety to offer visitors and maintain steady support to the local economy.”* The lack of high speed-internet was also cited as a major challenge. For example, one respondent explained: *“biggest challenges is lack of high speed internet access for rural businesses, whereas online avenues are a key component of how we engage with our customer base and how they engage with us”*.

In addition, a lack of awareness of the importance of the biosphere and local businesses were cited as significant challenges. For example, one survey respondent noted, *“preservation of the FAB [region] and education around its past and present importance”* while other respondents explained *“You’re better known from away than you are from home. The Frontenac Arch has world designation, and most people in this*

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*region have no idea. They don't know or don't care" and "The Frontenac Arch Biosphere as a destination is relatively unknown and needs more promotion."* Another explained: *"It is a designation whose potential has not yet been fully realized. While the possibilities are broad in scope, the biosphere has yet to achieve defining status within our community when compared with other attributes (i.e. the Rideau Canal)."* Several respondents explained the region needs more *"innovative marketing"* and that *"the region desperately needs a professional expert to promote and market the works of local artisans"*. This issue was also emphasized by another respondent who detailed, *"to improve would be: enabling a better outlet for area products, an enhanced artisan profile of area merchandise. We have no Voice."*

Political buy-in and support for local businesses and the biosphere were also cited as challenges. For example, one entrepreneur stated: *"I've had investors come through looking to help me and they were completely underwhelmed by the municipal economic development and municipal leadership."* Another respondent detailed the challenges associated with convincing community members about the importance of tourism and the arts:

*In fact a retired factory worker- we were having meetings - and he got up and told the council that "I don't make a nickel from tourism and I'll never make a nickel from tourism. And I don't want town council to give another nickel of my hard earned tax money on this." And the mayor said "I understand that, but if the tourism industry goes away, let's say the holiday inn, if they close, there's \$125,000 of their money that goes into the town. If you want your roads and services are you going to pay that \$125,000? You may not earn the money but they're replacing the money you don't have to pay."*

Other respondents also cited the lack of prominence the region has with provincial authorities. For instance, one individual explained there is, *"not [a] very high profile with the provincial authorities (who seem to focus more on the south and north)"* while another stated: *"government thinks the world ends at Scarborough"*.

Respondents also identified a number of opportunities associated with the unique natural landscape and the quality of life and inspiration it provides. For example,

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several respondents noted the importance of the landscape for tourism: “*good tourism draw*” and “*beautiful scenery and historic element. It’s a boating paradise*”. Others discussed the untapped potential to inspire and source products in the biosphere. For example, one respondent simply stated, “*the local area provides a lot of inspiration*” while others detailed: “*the natural beauty, quiet, and privacy help me create beautiful wood sculptures*”. Related to this, one local business respondent discussed how they’re linking their product to the **terroir concept**, which is creating a niche market for their business. Several respondents also discussed the economic opportunities of being located in the FAB region. For example, one individual explained: “*easy to access local products and supporting the local area and heritage*”, while another stated, “*lower overhead [costs] and a beautiful place to live.*”

Many respondents explained the FAB region has a number of opportunities for expanding tourism and new ideas for economic development. For example, one individual explained, “*this region remains a summer resort destination as well as a world heritage site so opportunities are open-ended, inviting new creative ideas [and] programs*”, while another mentioned there are “*excellent opportunities for expanding ecotourism*”. One respondent described in more detail:

*Because the region is large, tours could be promoted by providing daily, weekend or weekly packages that can include artists studios, theatre, concerts, accommodations, restaurants, nature walks, cycling, boat cruises, fishing, wine tasting and farm visits. Perhaps even including tour guides too, thereby creating jobs as well!*

Others simply stated: “*the FAB is unique...and has great potential*” and “*Opportunities: the outdoors, endless development opportunities*”.

#### *A FAB “Nature Dividend?”*

Earlier we introduced the concepts of the ‘artistic dividend’ (Markusen and Schrock, 2006) and the ‘nature dividend’ (Donald and Hall, 2014) as a way to rethink rural development using a multifaceted “arts and nature” approach. In addition to the traditional arts-based development, many rural communities can also leverage their surrounding natural assets. We argue that these natural landscapes are essential for

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nurturing an artistic milieu, but these naturoscapes also provide a “nature dividend” that adds additional economic impact that would not occur without the presence of such stunning and preserved natural surroundings.

In many ways, communities and organizations within the Frontenac Arch Biosphere have invested in protecting and preserving this diverse natural setting. More importantly, they view it as an asset. As we noted earlier, survey respondents discussed how the area provides inspiration and a perfect setting for their work. One respondent eloquently described: *what I make is the identity of the biosphere region. The ‘artistry of nature’ is what I try to expose in all of my work.*” This notion of the ‘artistry of nature’ really captures the essence of an arts and nature approach to rural development. We also heard how one local business is linking their product to the terroir concept, which “refers to an area or terrain, usually rather small, whose soil and microclimate impart distinctive qualities to food products” (Barham, 2003: 131). For this business, the terrain is providing a product but also inspiring a new craft market.

We also noted earlier how the natural setting or ‘nature dividend’ can pull new employees from elsewhere as well as reinforce loyalty and ‘lovability’ for current residents and businesses. In the Frontenac Arch Biosphere, many respondents talked about the beauty of their surroundings, the quality of life it provides, and their strong connection to the land. For example, one respondent explained:

*I’ve lived here all my life and the funny thing is that I just thought: “hey why not stay here? I love it!” It’s funny, my daughter and her boyfriend are looking for a place nearby [...] – I mean our family who [if] you look on the hill, my parents are on the original homestead from 6 generations ago. My sister lives up the road on a farm, my brother lives up the road on a farm, my nephew is now living where my grandmother’s house was, I live down the road, [...] – and our kids are actually wanting to you know – Yes the family connections, but also you love the land.*

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Many residents in rural communities have a strong attachment to the surrounding natural amenities (Hall and Donald, 2009) and related to this a strong ‘commitment to place’ (Greenwood et al., 2011).

That being said, we argue that the Frontenac Arch Biosphere is an undiscovered region in southeastern Ontario. It could best be described as an “arts-ready” place, but it has yet to capitalize on its potential to become a well-known artful/natureplace in Canada. On the positive side, the region has made some important past investments in preserving and protecting beautiful green spaces, parks and landscapes. The UNESCO designation -- and the leadership involved -- was an important milestone in the natural and historic preservation of the biosphere region. Additionally, the region’s relative slow-growing economy in some ways has been beneficial on the heritage preservation front because many of the small towns still have an authentic and distinct Eastern Ontario feel. As one participant made clear, *“the only thing that destroys heritage faster than the lack of money is money”*. Now these landscapes offer something distinctive and authentic to the visitor and resident alike. In recent years, several new retail businesses have moved in and capitalized on this unique and affordable main street architecture around the region.

Our findings, however, also revealed some key challenges. A common theme emphasized by a number of respondents is the need for regional collaboration, a regional strategy, and better marketing of the Biosphere.<sup>5</sup> As noted above, the FAB region is unique but its significance is poorly understood. More importantly, a number of respondents discussed the importance of more collaboration between businesses, community leaders, and organizations within the FAB region. A regional strategy focused on a small number of strategic priorities with local political buy-in is also needed. Finally, a marketing campaign celebrating the FAB region and its unique history, natural amenities, and opportunities is imperative.

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<sup>5</sup> The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network recently redesigned their webpage, which includes more up-to-date information about the Biosphere in a user-friendly format. They also started using social media to help market and spread knowledge about the Biosphere.

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## **Conclusions and Recommendations: Building a Rural Arts and Nature Approach**

In this paper, we started by asking why some rural regions capture the imagination of residents, businesses and visitors alike in terms of distinctive cultural, natural and artistic amenities, quaint small-town feeling and a vibrant arts and culture scene? We wanted to know how these places leverage the arts, culture and nature for both tourist attraction and sustained economic development. We reviewed the literature on creativity and rural economic development, and found the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)'s definition of cultural industries helpful in thinking about artful places in rural community development. Rural places are likely strongest in the first two groups: heritage and the arts. Heritage is defined as the "origin of all forms of arts and the soul of cultural and creative industries" and includes traditional cultural expressions of "arts, crafts, festivals and celebrations". Arts, on the other hand, is defined as creative industries based on arts and culture including visual arts (painting, sculpture, photography and antiques) and performing arts (live music, theatre, dance, etc.).

Like Markusen and Schrock (2006), we argue that artists contribute to the regional economy in many explicit and implicit ways and taken together the components of the contributions of an artistic community on regional development constitute an "artistic dividend" for a regional economy. This is the "additional economic impact that would not occur without the presence of artists". Building on their thesis, we explore the idea of a "nature dividend" for regional development (Donald and Hall, 2014). We are not speaking here of a traditional understanding of a "natural dividend" as in the unearned income from the harvest of renewal resources, but rather our idea is more closely aligned to the value nature provides in terms of cultural production and reproduction.

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Similar to Markusen and Schrock's (2006) "artistic dividend" thesis our "nature dividend" thesis is part of the public good: all the investments a region has made in sustainable practices, preservation, protection and restoration come together in a human and physical infrastructure to create a bucolic and uplifting natural setting. As we show in this paper, previous research has found that a beautiful and inspiring natural setting can pull new creative talent and business from elsewhere, but it can also reinforce loyalty and 'lovability' of place for current residents and businesses.

As we highlighted, in the Canadian context many researchers have found that creative people and businesses (using various definitions) are drawn to places with attractive arts-based and natural surroundings. But a desirable arts-based and natural setting isn't enough. Success comes to those regions that have actually made an explicit investment in their physical arts-based infrastructure and natural surroundings – whether it be preserving and protecting natural beauty, or restoring it. Our examples also highlight the importance of a shared vision realized by risk-takers and civic entrepreneurs in these communities. This requires collaboration on a common strategy and marketing plan. We also noted that proximity to a metropolitan area matters.

Our case study of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere finds a beautiful, if yet, undiscovered region in South Eastern Ontario. The region has made some important past investments in preserving and protecting beautiful green spaces, parks and landscapes. The UNESCO designation -- and the leadership involved -- was an important milestone in the natural and historic preservation of the region. Additionally, the region's relative slow-growing economy in some ways has been beneficial on the heritage preservation front because many of the small towns still have an authentic and distinct Eastern Ontario feel. This artistic heritage authenticity is now highly valued as a tourist and quality of life draw for residents, visitors and creative businesses alike. Findings from our empirical research point to a region that still doesn't see itself as a region. It includes at least 6 municipalities and portions of 3 others in two counties. One possible solution is a regional strategy focused on a

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small number of strategic priorities with local political buy-in. This, in combination with a marketing campaign celebrating the FAB region and its unique history, artistic and nature-dividend, is imperative for turning the region from an arts-ready place to an strong and well-recognized artful place in Canada.

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