

From Cars to Creativity?

The Changing Dynamics of the Rural Economy in
Essex County, Ontario

Fostering Entrepreneurship in the Creative Economy
Conference

The Monieson Centre
Queen's University School of Business

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OVERVIEW

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 - The Rural Development Dilemma
 - Creative Rural Economy
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 - Method

- Case Study Area – Essex County, Ontario

- Research Results
 - Art, Culture & Heritage
 - Creative Food Economy
 - Greenhouse Production
 - Renewable Energy

- Challenges & Barriers

- Conclusions

THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA

- Rural regions face significant economic development challenges.
- Alternative methods of economic development based on existing assets and amenities.
- A growing body of literature that focuses on culture and creativity in rural and small town regions.



(Photo Credit: Micoo, 2010)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS & METHOD

■ Research Questions

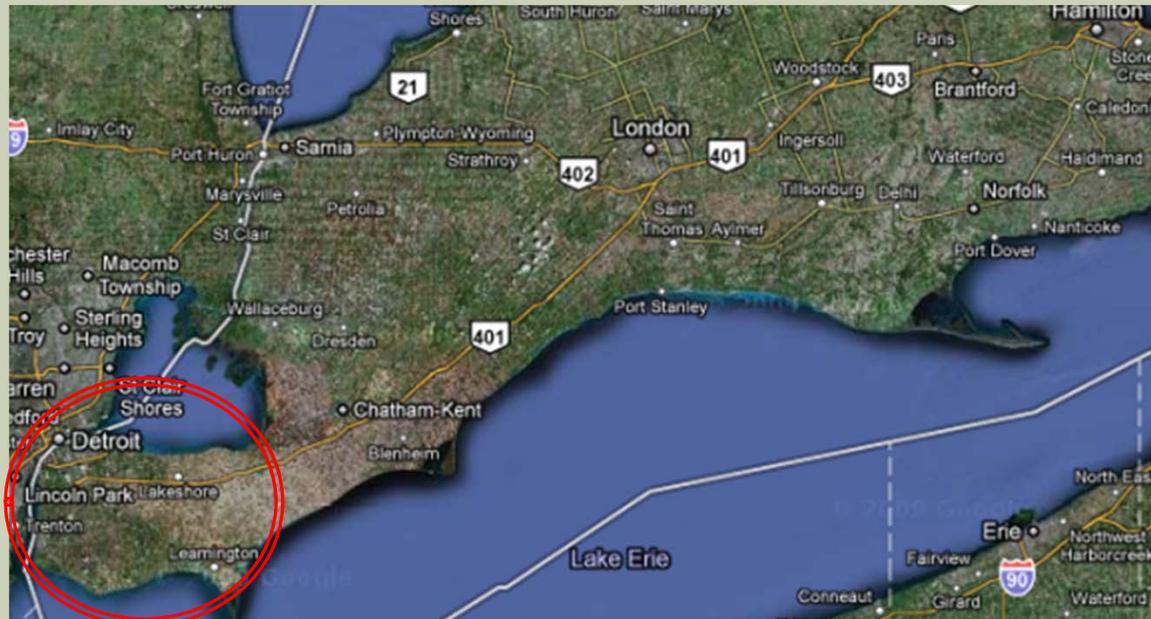
- *Is there evidence of a transition towards a creative economy in rural regions?*
 - *What are the potential pathways to a prosperous rural creative economy?*
 - *What are the barriers and challenges associated with such a transition to a creative economy?*

■ Method

- Key Informant Interviews
- Statistics Canada Data
- Media Reports
- Local/Regional Government Documents

ESSEX COUNTY, ONTARIO

- Location & History



- Immigration Trends
- Education Attainment
- Industries/Occupations

ART, CULTURE AND HERITAGE AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

■ Cultural Infrastructure

- *“...here there and everywhere...the arts society right now is spearheading the fundraising to put in a performing arts centre. So they will have a permanent home...it’s an uphill battle you can imagine” (KI-01, June 2009)*

■ Authenticity

- *“...one of our biggest assets from a tourism perspective in the county is that it’s real, it’s authentic; it can’t be replicated from anywhere else” (KI-14, June 2009).*

■ Municipal Cultural Planning

- Cultural Mapping Exercise (2010) – 2,593 cultural assets identified

CREATIVITY IN THE FOOD ECONOMY

- Local & Organic Food

“We have this local food thing that people have been living for a 100 years. We’ve had more food and vegetable stands than you can shake a stick at...here we have a 1km diet just from the fruit from the fruit wagon and on the corner you can get any vegetable you want...It’s already here because we live it, the whole culinary thing, it’s maybe not gastronomy, but it’s certainly about food in and of the area” (KI-06, July 2009).



CREATIVITY IN THE FOOD ECONOMY

- **The Growing Wine Industry**
 - Requires a varied skill set (science, hospitality, management)
- **Cross-sectoral entrepreneurship**
 - Winery owners previously in manufacturing/engineering occupations

“... For us it was getting out of what was going to be a very difficult future in the automotive world...now I wouldn't want to be in that business, for any amount of money” (KI-06, July 2009).



(The Windsor Star, 2009)

- **Challenges**
 - Regulatory environment
 - LCBO

INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE: GREENHOUSE PRODUCTION

- **Cluster development and entrepreneurship**
 - *“...It is a very highly clustered industry, it just makes sense that it’s drawing in a lot of industry related to it. You know you’re getting some of the fabrication that goes along with the boiler manufacturing...biofuels, purpose grown crops are all being investigated here...like there is so much research going on based on an industry in Leamington, it’s just phenomenal” (KI-01, June 2009).*
 - **Greenhouse Processing Crops Research Centre (Harrow, Town of Essex)**



INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE: GREENHOUSE PRODUCTION

- **Knowledge sharing / exchange**

“the Ontario growers have study groups, they get together once a week taking turns going to each other’s greenhouses, critique the crops...learn from each other so the local growers very much work together” (KI-09, August 2009).

- **Cross-sectoral knowledge flows / entrepreneurship**

“...I got into the automotive sector actually, doing work for Tier 1 suppliers and that was very cyclical...I saw the greenhouse industry going on around me and I was asked by somebody expanding their greenhouse to install their heating systems. I took that contract and then was fairly quickly asked to do two, three then four more, so I got away from the automotive [industry]...” (KI-09, August 2009).

- **Challenges**

- Intellectual Property
- Energy Consumption

RENEWABLE ENERGY

- **Towards Renewable Energy**
 - Biomass, Wind & Solar Farms
 - *“definitely a lot of them are looking at renewable energy...I would say all the municipalities, especially the ones that have a larger manufacturing sector are looking at other than automotive opportunities”(KI-15, June 2009).*
- **Localization of solar panel and wind turbine manufacturing**
- **Job Creation**
- **Skilled Labour**

RENEWABLE ENERGY

■ Community Dissent

- *“...People leave cities for rural areas to put tall buildings and bustle behind them...many aren’t going to be happy living in the shadows of 120-metre-high turbines with blades that turn constantly”(Windsor Star, 2008).*

■ Government Support

- Planning Regulations



Photo: Shelburne, Ontario
(windfarms.wordpress.com)

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- **Image and Place branding**

- Difficulty in attracting visitors due to a lack of regional identity.

“We thought it was going to be bad, but there just wasn’t one, no one knew what Essex County was. They knew of Windsor from the automotive side, but certainly didn’t know the tourist side...we didn’t do a good job of marketing the region, but we also didn’t know what to market...That’s what started all of these shifts in new direction for tourism” (KI-06, July 2009).

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

■ Regional Culture

■ Overcoming the ‘manufacturing mentality’

“...we have this manufacturing mentality...We have Fords and Chryslers and General Motors...and for people to pull their focus away from that and to put it on wineries, it’s almost too difficult for them to do...when it came time for them to look at the tourism model, they went – ‘what do you need tourism for? this is how you make money’. Now that went away and they’re realizing you can’t make money doing that anymore, very few of us can...now what do we do?” (KI-06, July 2009).

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

■ Tolerance

■ Migrant Workers

“..we get about 4000 [migrant workers] here for eight months of the year, so yes, it’s a great thing...but a lot of those businesses are seasonal. It makes it really hard to get that traditional uptown image that you want to portray when the storefronts are constantly turning over” (KI-01, June 2009)

■ Creativity-led Economic Development

“...If you talk to elected officials about creative-led economic development, they’ll go... ‘it’s hippies, it’s gay people...we don’t want any of that stuff, it’s artists, artists don’t generate any economic activity’, you know, that’s their way of thinking...and that’s going to be a challenge, getting the elected side of it to understand” (KI-01, June 2009).



(Photo Credit: Micoo, 2009)

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

■ Governance

■ Competition and a lack of collaboration

- *“everyone’s trying to protect their little domain and the truth of it is that none of us could survive without the others and I realized that and anyone in business realized that, it’s the folks that are in the political realm, they know it, but it’s not prudent for them to kind of ‘walk the talk’ so to speak” (KI-06, July 2009).*
- *“There is no question that the municipalities in Essex County work against one another usually. It’s just like ‘we want the new business in our municipality so we’re going to fight you so that you don’t get it’...It’s just the old farmer way of thinking (KI-02, July 2009).*

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- **Governance**

- **Fiscal constraints**

“We need a whole lot of money like Prince Edward County, that’s always the bottom line; it always boils down to that. I think that there is an awareness even at the senior administrative level...it’s just becoming something that from a political standpoint the public wants it, I think the public wants it anyway, the public talks about it. But I don’t know if the public is willing to pay for it” (KI-01, June 2009).

- **Ad hoc & “Siloed” Economic Development approach**

CONCLUSIONS

- **Is there evidence of a transition towards a creative economy in rural regions? What are the potential pathways to a prosperous rural creative economy?**
 - **Art, Culture and Heritage**
 - **Creativity in the Food Economy**
 - **Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Agriculture**
 - **Renewable Energy**
- **Represents a wider view of creativity-led economic development that includes innovation and sustainability.**

CONCLUSIONS

- **What are the barriers and challenges associated with such a transition to a creative economy?**
 - Regional culture (tolerance, manufacturing mentality)
 - Governance
 - Need for County leadership
 - Local coordination is essential
- **Is the creative rural economy an appropriate rural economic development strategy?**
 - Provides an opportunity to build upon existing amenities and diversify the economy.
 - Consideration of the regional culture and local context, including existing local assets, is critical.

CONCLUSIONS

- **Policy implications**
 - Support nascent and emerging industries
 - Foster knowledge exchange, learning between local firms
 - Formalize economic development roles
 - Need for leadership, coordination and cooperation amongst various organizations
- Overall, the creative rural economy approach to economic development holds potential and promise for Essex County, as well as other rural regions looking to grow sustainable, prosperous economies

QUESTIONS



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