

Innovation and Creativity on the Periphery

Challenges and Opportunities in Northern Ontario

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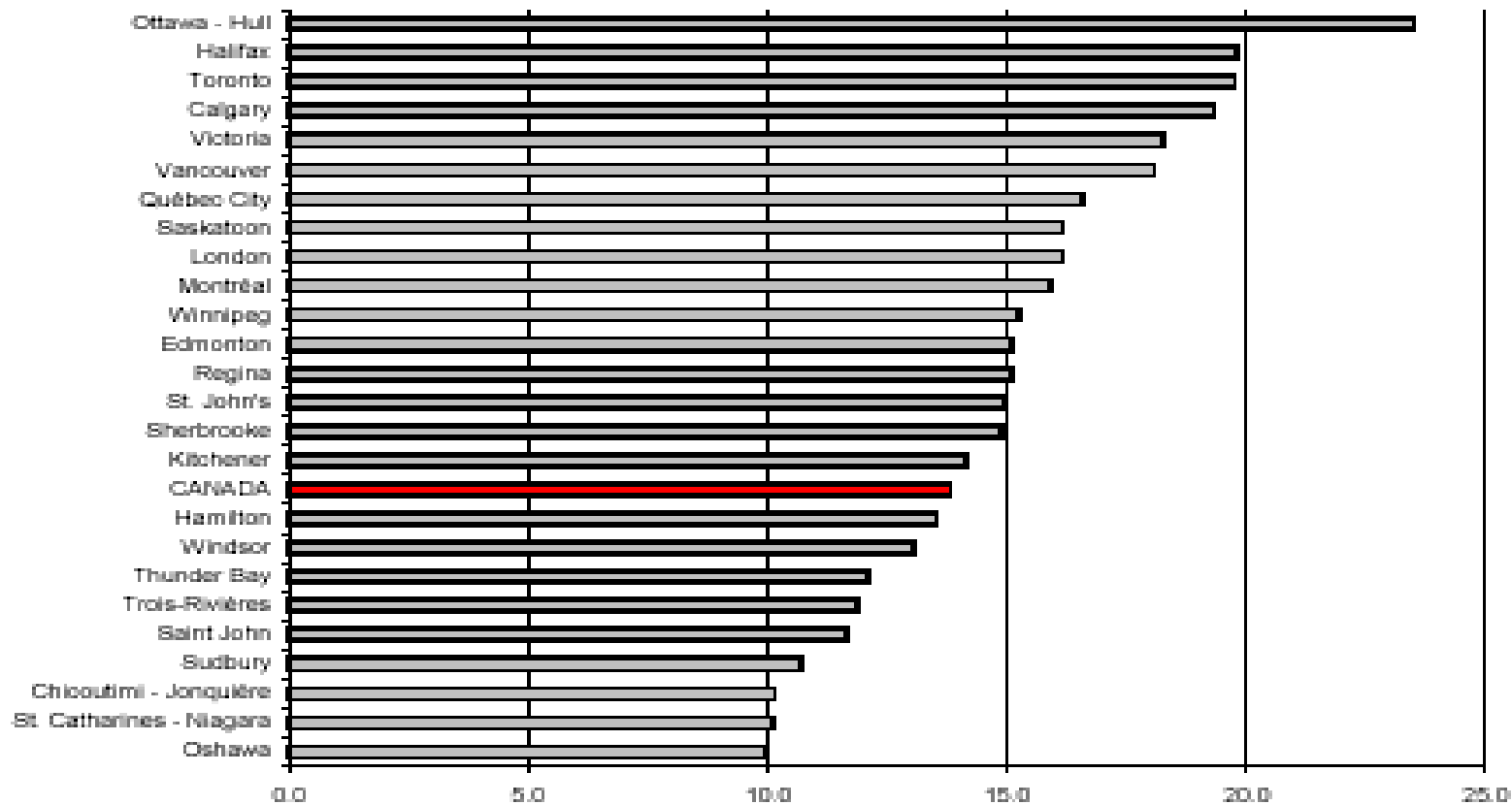
Outline

- **Introduction**
 - Biases in the contemporary economic geography literature
- **Introduction to Northern Ontario**
- **Innovation and Creativity on the Periphery**
 - Mining and Forestry
 - 'Creative Pioneers'
- **Challenges**
- **What we can Learn from the Periphery**
- **Conclusions & Recommendations**

Introduction

- **Focus on core, large metropolitan areas as the obvious spaces where creativity, innovation, and knowledge thrive**
- **Creative Economy Literature**
 - Biased by design to favour core, large metropolitan areas
 - Smaller, peripheral places end up at the bottom of league tables

Talent (% pop. 18 or older with BA or higher)



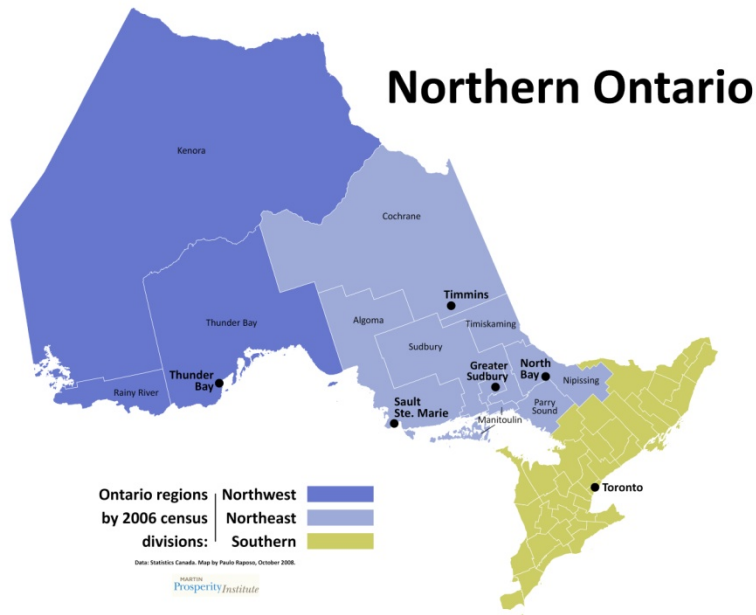
- “[p]eripheral and more distant areas have largely been ignored, as they have seldom been the target of innovation studies” (Virkkala 2007: 511)
- “[r]esource peripheries are not usually cited in relation to new economic spaces...” (Hayter 2005: 199)
- Peripheries are seen as ‘inauspicious’ spaces for the dynamic and innovative preconditions in the ‘new economy’ (Johnstone and Haddow 2003)

Spatial Bias

- **Dualistic Depiction**

- Core, large metropolitan areas are creative, innovative and cosmopolitan economy drivers
- Smaller, peripheral places are economic failures

Northern Ontario



- Symbolic region
- 90% of the Provincial landmass
- Natural Resources
- Population: 786,290

Innovation & Creativity In Natural Resources

- **In mining, companies are producing new technologies or methods to improve the efficiency, safety, and sustainability in the mining industry**
- **Mining Supply and Services Sector**
- **In forestry, companies are creating or adapting processes for pest management, reforestation, and carbon sequestering**

Pioneers in the 'Creative Economy'

■ Remote Health Care and Research

- Northern Ontario School of Medicine
- Companies working on early cancer detection using mitochondrial DNA
- A variety of health-related research laboratories and programs are emerging

■ Cultural Production

- Rugged beauty, heritage, and industrial landscapes
- Over 30 productions in the Northern Ontario
- Digital animation

■ Northern Geomatics

- GIS services

Challenges for Economic Development

In Northern Ontario

Peripheral Reality

- **Geographic isolation**
- **High transportation costs**
- **Limited transportation options**
- **Infrastructure constraints**
- **Natural Resources Complacency**

Perceptions, Power & Biases

- I think **Queen's Park is a bit out of touch with the North**. I don't think they spend much time thinking about the North and that's just my own perception that may be absolutely false but you know they're not represented well in the North and so I think we suffer from that. I think **we're often perceived for example in the Sault it's just a steel town...you know and Sudbury's just a nickel town and Thunder Bay is just a port city ...**(KI-05).
- **Ontario Centres of Excellence**
 - Located in Southern Ontario
- **FEDNOT**
 - Lack of federal support for CEMI

- “So you’ve got a government that’s at best neutral but where **there are established interests leaning on it who live next door** and another population which in theory gets treated equally but in practice has no control...” (KI-13).
- **Legendijk and Lorentzen (2007):**
 - [t]he difference between ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ is basically a difference of power” and that the “Key mechanisms of power and control, e.g. of granting access to places and resources, remain heavily founded upon territory-based practices” (462)

- Our founders were discussing equity financing with an institution in Toronto and that institution was interested in the corporate story until they realized the company was based in Thunder Bay. The comment from the institution's representative was **'I thought you said North Bay'implying that they don't finance anything further north than North Bay (KI-07).**

**What can we learn from the
periphery?**

Causality Debates

- **Natural amenities and quality of place matter on the periphery...**
 - "...tired of the rat race in Toronto..." (KI-07)
 - "he spent three whole weeks a year commuting and I thought yeah you add that up over a career and [you] think well what did I do in my life?" (KI-01)
- **...BUT Economic opportunities matter too**

Strategic Investment & Partnerships

- **Variety of regional, sub-regional, and local economic development organizations**
 - Ministry of Northern Development and Mines
 - FedNor
 - Music and Film in Motion
- **Post-secondary education institutions and research centres**
 - Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre
 - Northwestern Ontario Innovation Centre
 - MIRARCO
 - NORCAT

Civic Capital & Resilience

- Wolfe (2008) and others have been exploring the idea of civic capital to the social dynamics of economic performance of a region
- The communities in the North have been tremendously supportive...It's just overwhelming the support we get and it doesn't matter whether you're talking to a Mayor or just an every[day] citizen. Like...when we have a seminar here **it will be in the paper! The support we get in the North is just staggering for somebody who comes from Southern Ontario** (K1-06)
- ...their goal was to clean the streets in Copper Cliff like the gutters and everything, clean everything out so that when the producers got here **everything would be spit shine clean... without anyone having asked...the community rose up and did that to welcome these producers** (K1-10)

Conclusions

- “[t]here is a whole world out there and not just a few cores or clusters” (Hayter et al. 2003: 18)
- Creativity and innovation can be found in all industries and places including natural resources and the periphery
- Geographically sensitive policy approaches focused on inherent challenges and opportunities are more realistic on the periphery

Thank You and Question??

- Thank you to Betsy Donald, Richard Florida, Roger Martin, and Kevin Stolarick
- Key informants in Northern Ontario