

Focus on the Central Region

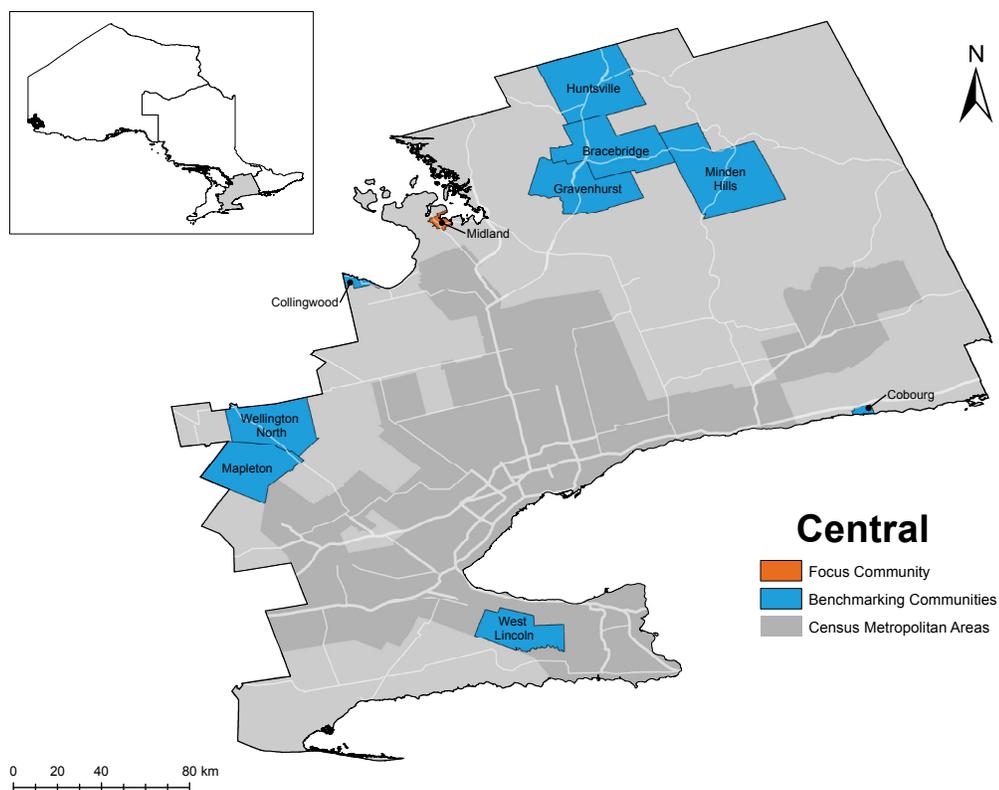
The Martin Prosperity Institute recently completed a large scale research project for the Economic Developers Council of Ontario, funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, which provided benchmarking and analysis of Ontario's rural creative economy. The project divided the province into five regions, within which one focus community was selected and compared to nine benchmarking communities. Each community was compared across a host of indicators from creative class share to population density, to the number of arts and entertainment facilities. This is the third insight in a series of six, which will examine each region one by one, and will discuss the overall findings of the report, with the full report available online at <http://martinprosperity.org/research-and-publications/publication/benchmarking-the-creative-economy-in-rural-ontario>. This week, we will take a look at the Central Region and the benchmarking community of Midland, Ontario.

“Economic Centre of Georgian Bay”

Midland is a tourist destination located on the south side of the Georgian Bay Thirty Thousand Islands, which is a popular tourist and cottage destination in Ontario. Located 130km away from Toronto and only 50 km north of Barrie, Midland has a local economy which is well balanced

Central region

Exhibit 1



across the occupational classes. With 22% of the labour force in the creative class, 47% in the service class and 31% in the working class, this is displayed by the variation within the main employers in Midland, from Elcan Optical Technologies, to Georgian Bay General Hospital, Weber Manufacturing and the New England Business Systems Business Forms Ltd., among others. In particular, tourism, recreation, art and culture are successful parts of Midland's economy that are continually growing with the building of attractions such as the Midland Cultural Centre, which is slated to open in spring of 2012. Midland is also home to the regional campus of Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology, and is close to both Georgian College and the Orillia campus of Lakehead University. Midland is also close to York University (one hour and a half away), and is within driving distance to other Toronto universities, in addition to Wilfred Laurier University and the University of Waterloo.

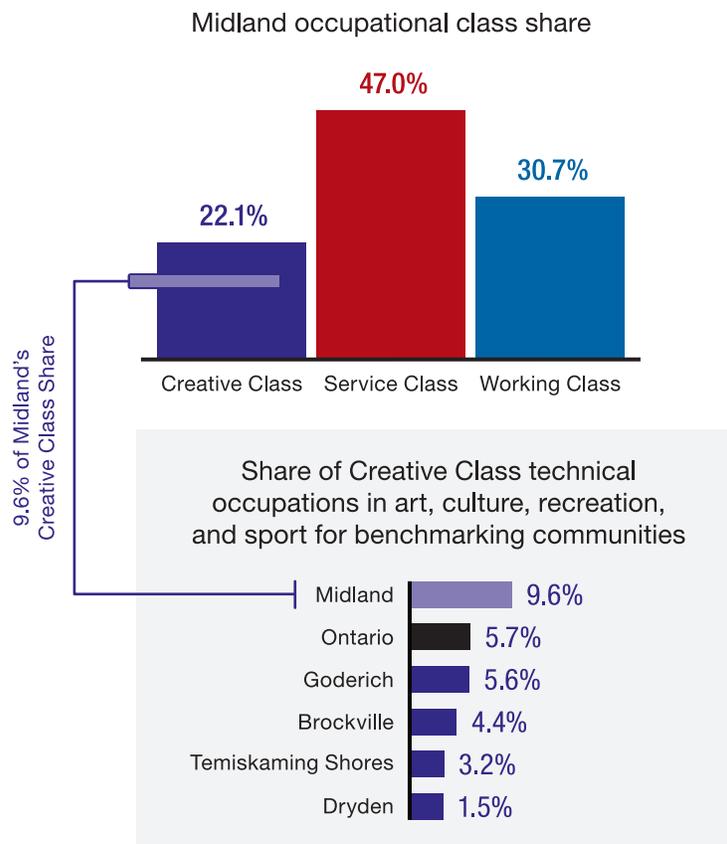
Midland was compared to the benchmarking communities of: Cobourg, Mapleton, Wellington North, West Lincoln, Collingwood, Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, Huntsville and Minden Hills. The Central Region has the highest population of the regions studied with a total of 8,215,076. Ontario's largest metropolitan area Toronto, along with 8 other metro's are located in the Central Region, and they contribute to 91% of the regions total population. Midland has a dense population of 16,300 residents, with an estimated peak summer population reaching around 100,000.

Developing an Arts and Culture Hub in Midland

In examining the occupational typology of Midland's labour force, we see that Midland has labour force characteristics similar to that of Metro Ontario, with higher creative and working class shares, and a smaller service class. This balance between three occupational classes is

Focus on Midland's occupational class breakdown

Exhibit 2



advantageous to Midland as many of the rural communities studied do not embody this. Some of the communities are overwhelmed by occupations within one dominant occupational share. Within this, while Midland has a large share of creative class occupations in medical and education related occupations, they also have a considerable percentage of creative occupations in the fields of art, culture, and recreation. This figure comprises approximately 10% of Midland's creative class, which is nearly double that of the Ontario average. Not only is Midland's development within art, culture and recreation an advantage in bolstering tourism, but provides a level of amenities and cultural facilities that are a rarity in rural economies. Combined with the introduction of the Midland Cultural Center, it is readily apparent this town is building the foundation on which it will be able to position itself even more strongly in the creative economy. The Centre could possibly also help create Creative jobs for performing artists and artisans along with cultural education and activities coordinators.

The building of the Cultural Center will allow Midland to further develop its Creative Class within art, and culture by creating a center with two art galleries, classrooms, a seated theatre and a multipurpose event centre. While there are a number of sport and recreation facilities in Midland, there was not one main cultural facility in which artists and individuals could benefit from. The Center will be built as an attraction for outside viewers, but it will facilitate local cultural groups, artists and citizens of Midland. The Center is being built downtown and fits in the towns plan to further develop and complement its current successful arts and culture occupations.

Recommendations

The balance of Midland's labour force is advantageous to its success as all three occupational classes are able to flourish without a greater than typical share of Midland's occupations being in one occupational class. What Midland also benefits from is a strong tourism industry which adds another dimension to the balanced local economy. Midland is unique in its Creative Class share within technical art, culture and recreation occupations as most small towns have difficulty developing within this occupation. The balance of tourism and a local dense population definitely have created an environment in which art culture and recreation is successful and can grow. By furthering the development of creative class occupations in art, culture, and recreation, in addition to applied and natural science occupations, Midland would then fill a current void by attracting higher wage, higher skilled professional jobs and employees within recreation and culture. This would help to alleviate challenges relating to population growth and low property values, as Midland has is currently experiencing an annual population growth rate of only 0.5%, and currently have the lowest population values in the region. The creation of higher skilled professional positions would also bring the average employment income up, which was also one of the lowest in the Central Region, while also attracting skilled people to the region. Overall Midland is a unique rural town with a balanced labour force and emerging competitive advantage in the arts and culture sector, which will help to position Midland for success in the creative economy.

The Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management is the world's leading think-tank on the role of sub-national factors—location, place and city-regions—in global economic prosperity. We take an integrated view of prosperity, looking beyond economic measures to include the importance of quality of place and the development of people's creative potential.