

EDCO Insight: Northwest Region

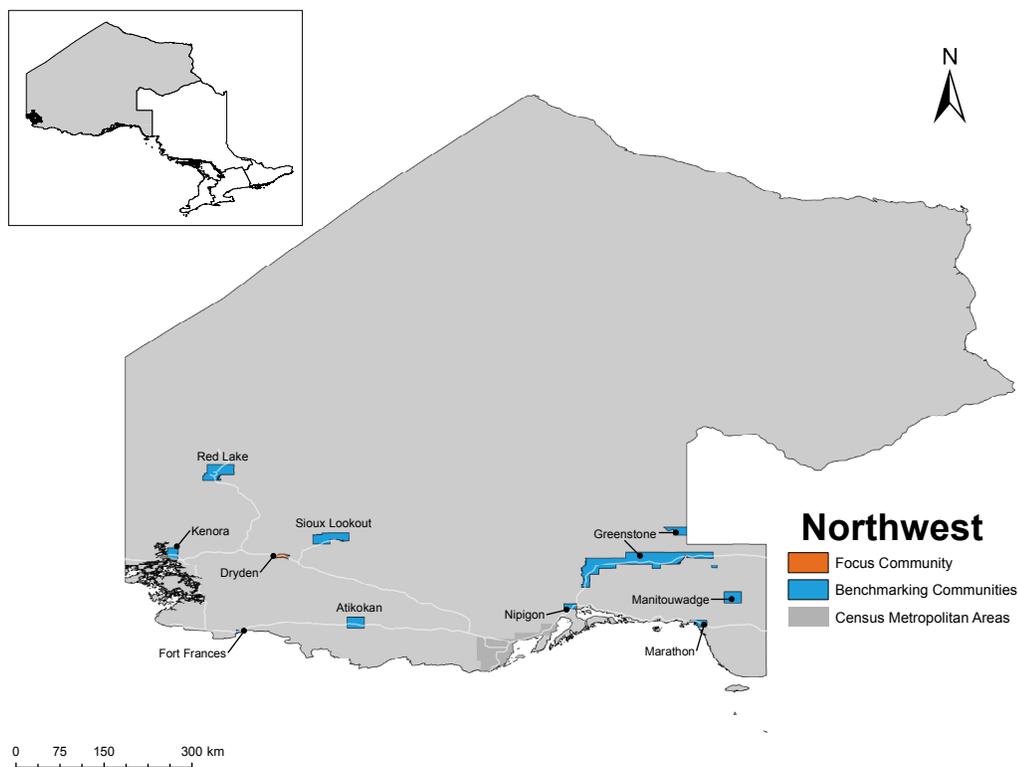
The Martin Prosperity Institute recently completed a large scale research project for the Economic Developers Council of Ontario, funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, which provided benchmarking and analysis of Ontario’s rural creative economy. The project divided the province into five regions, from 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 second insight in a series of six, which will examine each region one by one, and will discuss the overall findings of the report. The full report is 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 Northwest Region and the benchmarking community of Dryden, Ontario.

“Toronto of the North”

Dryden is a mining and industrial town located roughly halfway between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg. The town is becoming known as the “Toronto of the North” because of its role as a hub for financial services and industries that support the growing mining economy. Dryden is also home

Northwest region

Exhibit 1



to the confederation college, but the closest Universities are in Winnipeg (University of Manitoba) and Thunder Bay (Lakehead University). In 2009, the City of Dryden adopted a Municipal Cultural Strategy intended to enhance the cultural assets of the City, also strengthening unity and community pride.

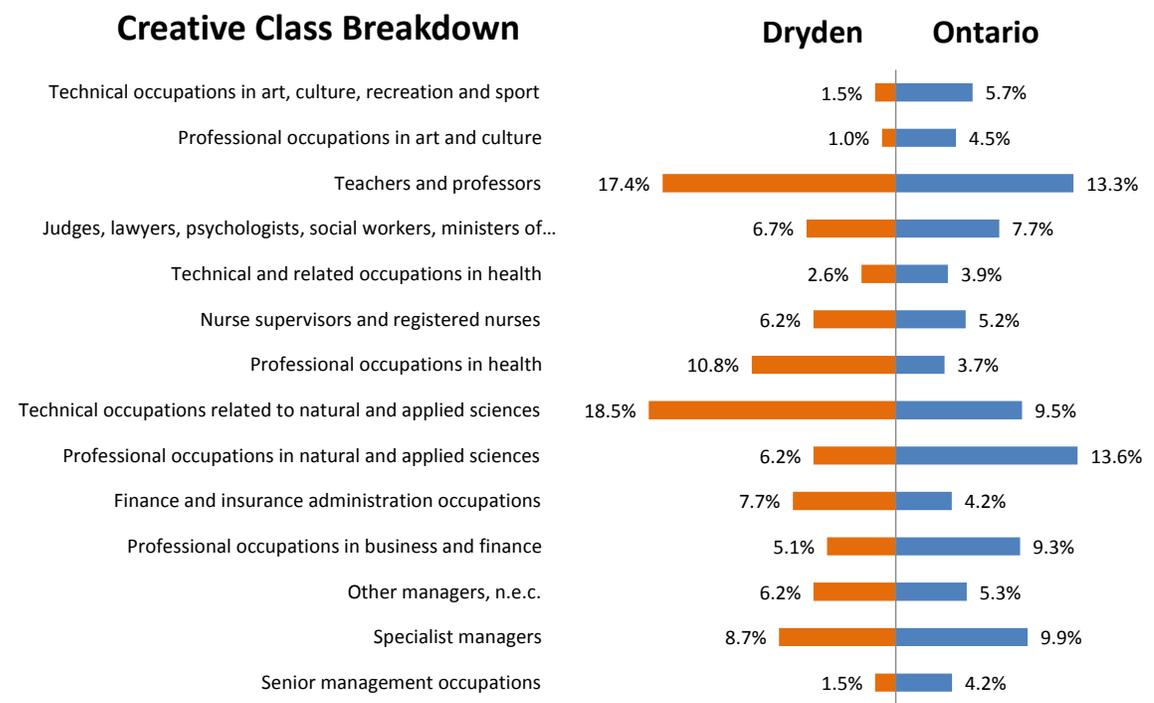
Dryden was compared to the benchmarking communities of Red Lake, Kenora, Fort Frances, Sioux Lookout, Greenstone, Nipigon, Marathon, Manitouwadge, and Atikokan. The Northwest region has the smallest population of the regions studied, with the entire Northwest Region home to a population of 245,026. Of this, 50% of the region is in the metro of Thunder Bay, while Dryden has a population of 8,195. From the analysis we see that Dryden has performed in the middle of the pack on almost every indicator.

Focus on the Creative Class

As was briefly introduced, Dryden has a thriving mining and resource economy, which has resulted in the growth of related financial services industries. Overall, Dryden's creative class share is 23.3% of the City's labour force, compared to 50.4% in the service class and 24.6% in the working class. The community is known for being a hub of regional support centres and extraction based companies along with extraction support, services and education. Like many rural economies, Dryden has a high number of its creative class share in teaching and health care. However, Dryden has 18.5% of its creative share concentrated in technical occupations related to natural and applied sciences, which is nearly double that of the Ontario average (9.5%). This suggests that Dryden has an unique geographic advantage and expertise in this field, supporting its development as a regional leader in mining and applied sciences.

In Dryden the median income was \$29,701 in 2005, which puts the city in the middle of the pack for this region, and slightly over the provincial average. However, in examining the occupational class breakdown of the labour force in Dryden, we see that half of the population are currently employed in service class occupations. . There is evidence of a growing financial services

Creative Class breakdown Exhibit 2



sector around mining in Dryden (7.7% of the City's creative class share, compared to the Ontario average of 4.2%), which offers employment in creative class occupations, but on the other hand, half of the population is employed in lower wage service class employment. The available data suggests that Dryden is home to higher wage service occupations, but also higher paying creative class jobs that are pulling up the median income. Dryden should work to monitor this situation and find ways to improve the wage and job content of service jobs to ensure these are positions that can continue to become higher skilled and higher paying occupations.

Recommendations

For each benchmarking community, our report ended with several recommendations. With respect to the creative class, Dryden's strength lies within the field of natural and applied sciences, and in the development of its growing mining sector. Dryden should seek to build upon this foundation and use this to their advantage as there is already technology and innovation based infrastructure within the community. By working to attract educational facilities to the region, Dryden would be able to further the development of their creative class around applied sciences. As Dryden has a lower level of professional occupations in natural and applied sciences (6.2% of the City's creative class share, compared to 13.6% in the provincial average), we see this as a key area for the region to strengthen. However, overall it is evident that Dryden is in the unique position of becoming a key regional mining hub and leader in this the Northwest's 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.