

Summary of Winning Research

**Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
Business, Finance and Management Research Grant**

\$87,000
2008-2011

The Creative Food Economy: a new menu for sustainable economic development

Betsy Donald, Queen's University (PI)
Richard Florida, University of Toronto (Co-PI)
Kevin Stolarick, University of Toronto (Co-PI)

Alison Blay-Palmer, Wilfred Laurier University (Collaborator)
Yolande Chan, Queen's University (Collaborator)

This research will examine innovation in the creative food economy in Canada's largest city-regions. The 'creative food' economy is defined as the specialty, ethnic, and organic small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that respond to new consumer demands for local, fresh, ethnic and fusion cuisine (Donald and Blay-Palmer 2006). Previous SSHRC-funded research has identified the creative food economy as the most dynamic element of the food industry in the Toronto city-region (Donald 2007, Donald and Blay-Palmer 2006, Blay-Palmer and Donald 2006). Yet little empirical evidence exists on this sub-sector in other parts of Canada.

The shift in consumer demand for healthier, local, sustainable and/or more culturally appropriate foods raises new research questions:

- (1) Which are the most innovative and dynamic creative food enterprises in Canada?
- (2) What are the intra- and inter-firm elements that have made them innovative?
- (3) Is there a new role for multi-scaled policy initiatives that advance the development of this dynamic sub-sector of the food industry?
- (4) How does the alleged shift-change in the way people are eating advance theories of economic development and urban creativity?

To answer these questions, we will first build upon an original database that documents the most creative food enterprises across the entire food supply chain in the Toronto area (Blay-Palmer and Donald 2006). This will be extended to other parts of Canada, with particular emphasis placed on those enterprises that have responded to emerging environmental, health and cultural markets now part of a cosmopolitan city-region economy. Drawing on insights from the innovation systems and creativity literatures, we will explore, through forty (40) in-depth case studies and one hundred and thirty (130) interviews, the intra- and inter-firm dynamics that both hinder as well as facilitate innovation in the particular enterprise. This will involve conducting interviews, undertaking field research, and collecting secondary data on creative food enterprises that feed off three of Canada's most dynamic city-regional markets: Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.

This research is significant because it contributes in an important way to new developments in management, business and finance research and in particular to path-breaking work on innovation, creativity and city prosperity led most notably by Professor

Richard Florida at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto. This project will also build upon a current project examining creative economies in an eastern Ontario region that has made its developing creative food industry the keystone of its economic development strategy. This latter project is sponsored by a partnership between the Monieson Centre at the Queen's School of Business (Director, Professor Yolande Chan) and the Prince Edward Lennox Addington Community Futures Development Corporation (PELA CFDC). The Monieson Centre mission is to disseminate academic knowledge to practitioners involved in promoting community economic growth, business development and entrepreneurship. Collaborating with this pioneering institute allows for effective knowledge dissemination to practitioners engaged in the development of creative food enterprises, prosperous places and sustainable economic development in Canada.