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Queen's geographer seeks explanation for "dynamic cities"

\$2.5-million project will survey 14 Canadian cities, including Kingston

KINGSTON, Ont. – What makes some Canadian cities more dynamic and innovative than others? That question is the focus of a new, \$2.5-million multi-university study involving Queen's Geography Professor Betsy Donald, who will focus her research on Kingston, Ontario.

"An advantage of doing our part of the project in Kingston is that, although it is one of Canada's smaller cities, we will be able to do a much more fine-grained analysis," says Dr. Donald. "Economic development isn't just about low taxes and attracting businesses," she adds. "You have to think much more creatively about the social dynamics of economic performance."

The \$2.5-million project, headed by University of Toronto researchers David Wolfe and Meric Gertler, comprises 22 Canadian co-investigators and 23 international collaborators including Carnegie Mellon Professor Richard Florida, author of the 2002 best-seller *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Fourteen Canadian cities will be examined.

The teams will explore why certain cities attract and retain creative and innovative thinkers and how this in turn creates social inclusiveness, civic engagement, and a dynamic economy. Their research will focus on three themes: the social dynamics of innovation, creativity and social inclusion, and governance.

Although today's technology allows us to work virtually anywhere, some of the most creative people and firms in the world still tend to cluster in certain locations (for example, biotechnology in Boston), notes Dr. Donald. "We want to look at the social dynamics of face-to-face interaction – the dynamism that comes with social space – and learn how city space facilitates innovation."

With regard to the project's second theme, the researchers will examine the relationship between talent attraction and things like tolerance and acceptance of diversity. "A lot of high flyer thinkers want to be in a location that is socially diverse and dynamic – which is a huge challenge in cities like Kingston that don't offer a community of diversity where these people can live," says Dr. Donald.

The third theme, of governance, refers to the extent that a city is self-reflective: looking at ways to improve itself and become the kind of place where people will want to grow and learn. The role of local government leaders and civic engagement is key to making this happen, the

researchers believe.

Dr. Donald's research will involve a large number of interviews and focus groups, beginning this summer and conducted throughout the coming year. "We want to really get a sense of what's going on in Kingston," she says. "We have heard the stories anecdotally, but this will be the first time that such a systematic study has been conducted. The project gives us the opportunity to do some really good survey work."

Other cities to be studied are: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa-Gatineau, Quebec City, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, Halifax, Saskatoon, St. John's and Saint John.

Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the project is one of four selected from 34 applications to SSHRC's Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI) program. SSHRC is an arm's-length federal government agency that funds university-based research and graduate training through national, peer-reviewed competitions.

Contacts:

Nancy Dorrance, Queen's News & Media Services, 613.533.2869
Therese Greenwood, Queen's News & Media Services, 613.533.6907

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