



[EDITORIAL](#) [LETTERS](#) [COLUMN](#)

OPINION COLUMN

Column

SIEGEL: Hey Niagara, diverse communities do better 0

By [David Siegel](#), Special to QMI Agency Niagara
Tuesday, July 21, 2015 11:03:51 EDT PM



People in Niagara frequently wring their hands about why economic growth seems to be sluggish here.

In 2009, Brock University's Niagara Community Observatory produced a policy brief that pointed out the main reason Niagara had a low proportion of young people was because we are not attracting our share of young people from other areas.

Richard Florida, one of the gurus of economic growth, describes how at one point in his research he had a map of the high-growth areas in the United States. He showed his map to a colleague who was doing research on the areas with large gay populations, and they discovered their maps were very similar.

Could the presence of a high proportion of gays in a community cause economic growth?

It turned out it was not that straightforward, but there was a connection.

Florida ultimately refined his argument to suggest high-growth communities possessed the three Ts — technology, talent, tolerance.

He found growth communities were tolerant of and welcoming to a diverse group of people, whether that diversity was based on immigrant status, skin colour, religious belief, sexual orientation or occupational status such as artist or actor.

Florida argues economic growth is driven by innovation, and that innovation is the product of diverse groups interacting with one another, identifying problems, sharing ideas and coming up with solutions to those problems.

Florida's three Ts suggested a diverse group of people in a community would make for an interesting living environment in terms of things like varied entertainment options, inviting shopping, interesting food choices, a good music and theatre scene and stimulating recreational opportunities.

These opportunities would in turn attract talent in the form of highly skilled people looking for an interesting place to live.

The presence of these highly skilled people, including young people, would in turn attract businesses based on technology because these businesses would locate where the people they want to employ live.

Florida's approach to economic development stood the traditional thinking about economic development on its head.

The traditional approach had been that first you attract new businesses and then people will move to your community to take the jobs offered by those businesses.

Florida's idea was that first you attract a strong workforce (talent), then businesses will locate in your community because that's where the workforce they need to attract lives.

This all starts with tolerance — creating the kind of community that will attract a diverse group of highly skilled innovative people.

So it's not the presence of gays that stimulates growth, but it is the encouragement of diversity. Whether an area is welcoming to gays is an indicator of how that community feels about diversity generally.

One of my students put it well when he asked: Are you more likely to develop a vibrant, innovative community by welcoming a diverse group of people to join your community, or by putting up signs making it clear that only certain groups are welcome here?

It is up to the leaders of the Niagara community to step up and decide what kind of signs we want to post on the boundaries of our community.

- - -

David Siegel is the interim Dean of the Faculty of Education and professor of political science at Brock University