

New study looks at Toronto region's economic competitiveness

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The Global City Indicators Facility, a research program based at the University of Toronto, has just released a study looking at the Toronto region's competitiveness and prosperity. The goal: offer a regional perspective on economic development opportunities in the GTA. The challenge: it's very hard to actually know how we are placed, as a region, because the Toronto region is a patchwork of municipalities, and there isn't an established, consistent way of reporting and sharing relevant data.

The Toronto region is made up of dozens of municipalities, with different governing structures. Some are single-tier, like Toronto, which operates as its own city. Others are dual-tier, for instance Ajax, which falls under Durham Region. This patchwork of systems makes it very difficult to aggregate data for the region and conduct the kind of analyses we need, the report found.

"The uneven distribution of characteristics across [a] region," reports the study, "can point to areas where improvements can be made to increase the competitiveness of the region as a whole." For instance, one map the study put together "shows how commercial and industrial areas are distributed across municipalities, which can point to strategic locations for international firms and also places where local governments might want to make land available to improve employment opportunities."

That's precisely the sort of analysis we need to be able to do more of, if we are to grow as a region, rather than fall prey to intra-regional fights—as sometimes happens when various GTA municipalities vie, for instance, to be the home of a new corporate head office.

In the absence of this robust data, it's difficult to fully assess the local picture and identify opportunities for regional enhancement, much less compare the Toronto region to economic activity elsewhere: "The Pilot has demonstrated the need for a coordinated data platform for municipalities in Ontario," the study says.

As a next step, the Global City Indicators Facility is calling for the creation

of an Ontario Municipal Open Data Platform, which "will become a strategic base of data and information to guide policy on trade and investment and build globally competitive cities in Ontario." It would pull information from all levels of government and relevant agencies—ranging from Statistics Canada, to provincial ministries, to local municipalities, to regional initiatives like the Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI)—and use it to generate widely available data sets that would allow for open, and sophisticated, regional economic analysis.

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Source: [Data, Boundaries, Competitiveness: The Toronto Urban Region in Global Context](#) (Study)

Correction: We originally mistyped OMBI as OMB, which refers to an entirely different agency. We regret the error.