

"Canadian Club, Cars, Casino":
The Historical, Urban, and Economic Growth of Windsor, Ontario

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Abstract

This paper describes the historical context of urban growth and development in the manufacturing centre of Windsor, Ontario, in the extreme south of the traditional Canadian core. The paper starts with details of the siting and settlement of the region, with discussion of the early employment characteristics and growth through municipal restructuring in 1935 and 1966. The economic base and demographic characteristics of the CMA are also considered. The four stages of Windsor's growth are described in the context of a "Canadian Club, Cars, Casino" model of historical and urban growth. This details the shift from early settlement expansion and industrialization to the rapid growth of the auto industry, following the start-up of a Ford plant in Windsor in 1904. Following WWII, a period of "auto boom-bust" occurred. This shifted with post-industrialism to growth of low-order service, hospitality/tourism-related business, particularly following the 1994 opening of Casino Windsor. Windsor's growth stages are then compared to the growth of the Canadian urban system, and the North American system as described by the Borchert model. A detailed investigation of the role of the U.S. in Windsor's past and future growth follows, including possible inclusion of the area within the U.S. rustbelt. The paper is completed with a discussion of some of the important contemporary issues, including the CMA's transition within an atmosphere of globalization, the recent municipal boundary disputes in Essex County, and the future potential of Windsor being one of Canada's "shrinking cities".