

MEDIA RELEASE

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



Leisure may provide competitive edge for smaller communities

New research into how leisure activities can benefit the development of regional communities, giving them a competitive edge, has started on the North-West Coast.

Clayton Hawkins, a Project Officer with the Institute for Regional Development, will base his PhD thesis on an exploration of how leisure activities can contribute to the profile and performance of a region, using the Cradle Coast as a case study.

His thesis - *Social Capital through Leisure: Cradle Coast's advantage in the year 2030* – aims to provide new insights into the field of regional development research.

Mr Hawkins said results of the 2006 Census reflect that leisure is very important to people in modern life, especially for young people.

“There has been very little research into examining the benefits of leisure as a driver for the development of communities,” Mr Hawkins said.

“What I am aiming to do is look at how leisure policies can contribute to the creation of social capital, ultimately making the region more liveable. This concept can be used for competitive advantage in regional development.

“Recent research from the Institute shows us that on the Coast nearly half of our young professionals plan to leave the region in the next five years.

“Leisure is very important to whether we can keep them.”

Mr Hawkins said social capital is already a well-documented theory relating to the importance of developing social networks and how they can influence and stimulate business activity.

His research will look at the relationship between leisure activities and the development of social networks.

The research will inform the adoption and implementation of appropriate leisure policies and strategies that can maximise regional benefit.

Mr Hawkins spent six years in community development at a local government level before taking up his position at the Institute, based at the UTAS Cradle Coast campus, last year.

“Traditionally, there has been a predominant focus on economic development to help build and encourage business activity, and gain a competitive advantage,” Mr Hawkins said.

“I agree it is important to have a strong economy, but I also see the value of recreational and leisure activities and how they can contribute to a region’s profile and performance.”

The research will be conducted over the next four years, with Mr Hawkins analysing ABS census data of the region and undertaking major surveys on how social resources of a community, developed through leisure activities, are established and utilised.

Mr Hawkins hopes his research will ultimately inform public policy, both in the region and beyond.

“While I am using the Cradle Coast region as a case study, hopefully the findings could actually be adopted to regional communities throughout Australia and overseas,” he said.

His research reflects the Institute’s focus on “place” where it aims to develop and mobilise regional development by working with the region’s attributes, resources and assets.

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