

## COMMUNITIES OF WINE

“The Okanagan is blessed to have sunny skies, beautiful lakes, and bountiful vineyards. When the wine industry of the Okanagan is sustainable and prosperous, it can make the local communities resilient through changing times.”



Associate Professor of Geography Donna Senese has researched wine locally, nationally, and internationally from the perspective of agritourism: value-added agriculture that draws tourists to agricultural lands, often benefiting the agricultural economy and sustaining rural places ecologically, culturally, and socially.

Although the conversion of fruit tree orchards to vineyards has raised some concern in the Okanagan region, the wine industry has helped buffer agricultural land from non-agricultural development. And vineyards attract visitors and migrants—people choose to visit and live in wine-making agricultural areas for the area's image, tradition, and lifestyle.

Senese's research took her to Italy, where she worked with *Città del Vino* (cities of wine). Here, Senese found her inspiration.

“In the wine regions of Italy there is reverence for the land,” she says. “One thing I came away with is the important role the wine industry can play in sustaining the natural and cultural worlds of rural agricultural communities.”

The image of the Okanagan Valley has changed over the last 10 years, much to the credit of the wine industry, which has helped keep tourism afloat during tough economic times.

“We used to be peaches and beaches,” says Senese. “The changing tourism demographic wasn't satisfied with this image alone. Wine has a direct connection to culture and nature, helping the tourism industry be resilient by addressing the environmental and cultural elements that many tourists seek.”

The wine industry provides a unique context that enables the agricultural, arts, and cultural industries to network and support each other, a connection that hasn't been possible through any other tourism niche.

“The key to the wine industry in the Okanagan is that in many ways it has enabled the community to float and adjust to change, whether it be of economic, political, or environmental nature,” Senese notes.

Wine production tends to foster a sense of community: it has been historically associated with slow food, tradition, family, and friends. In many Mediterranean wine regions, communities were often established based on the location of wine production, wine markets, and transportation networks connecting them.

Wine-led amenity migration is a concept where people move to an area because of a strong attraction to the lifestyle and sense of family, culture, and tradition embedded in the images of wine regions.

“There are definitely patterns of mobility in the valley that have been influenced by the growth of the wine industry here,” says Senese. “Social sustainability has strong ties to the quality of life available for the diversity of people in a community. It has a lot to do with community and the sense of belonging to it, or a ‘sense of place.’”

This sense of attachment to place is central to community resilience.

“When people have a sense of place, they tend to work and live like they want the place to last. I was so fascinated with what the Italians call a two-way reverence for the communities of wine and wines of the community. Understanding the close connection the wine industry can play in sustaining communities and vice versa was something I wanted to bring home.”



