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Creative cities

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The idea of the Creative City is *the policy du jour*, on everybody's menu. What's not to like? Who would want to be an 'uncreative city'; even better if you can be the *most* creative city in the world. In a world where many cities have suffered either from de-industrialisation, or massive in-migration, there has been a lack of faith in traditional economic foundations to deliver; the desire for most is to attract the dwindling stock of mobile foreign direct investment, and hence bring new jobs.

Where does the creative city fit in? For our purposes we can identify three different varieties of the creative city: place marketing, novel policy process, and cultural and creative industries. I want to make a case against the first of these; that is the most popular version usually linked to the work of Richard Florida and his work on the Creative Class. I will pose the other two varieties as different and complementary alternatives.

Faced with the need to generate economic growth, and the decline of manufacturing – the activity that sustained many cities (of the Northern hemisphere) throughout their main growth periods – it is not surprising that policy makers might turn to the 'next big thing'; we have had the financial services growth and it seems clear that this is a select club of 'global cities' (although this term can be stretched too thinly) that act as command and control centres of the world economy. What's next? Knowledge, Information and Culture. Again, who could resist it? It seems to play to a particular Northern hemisphere/ old world vanity too, in a 'natural' division of labour cheap manufacturing goes to China, and 'we' get the funky design jobs. However, a moment of reflection shows the deception; there is no 'natural order' and the Chinese are just as able to deliver funky design as 'we' are. There is no 'cultural superiority' of the North.

This aside, it has not stopped many seeking to make it so by seeking to concentrate all of the creative (and significantly, high value added) elements of the world economy in its own backyard. How to do it? A line of policy debate became popular in the 1970s and has gained strength since then, it is basically place marketing. It's like a city beauty pageant; the winner gets the investment. Initially, the competition was on the basis of subsidised land or buildings, or wages; however, the bottom fell out of this market when cash incentives were offered, and this shaded into corruption. The search was on for what advertisers like to call the 'Unique Selling Proposition (USP)'. And there we have it: 'culture'. Of course, not everyone can have a world famous unique cultural celebration, such as Rio's carnival; or, physical assets such as Sydney Harbour. So, those without an obvious USP and some of those with one, sought to

create one. A favoured option is a 'starchitect' building; the more controversial (as it courts publicity) the better. Even better if it is a public building, better still if it demonstrates the 'cultured' nature of the city: an art gallery perhaps.

This is the material basis of the new competition, new buildings are held up as baubles to create a 'feel good' factor about the city, and/or to pander to the cultural mores of 'decision makers'. The knock on effect is that the decision makers bring their companies and jobs; and, hence wealth to the city. Richard Florida's work fits in this lineage; he has focused on the fact that particular cultural milieu, or ersatz bohemia, may attract a particular group of key workers- the creative class - (whom 'decision makers' will chase after).

Notice that culture is used in a purely instrumental manner in this policy. That's fine, if that's the objective. But what of all the arts and cultural budgets swallowed up in flashy buildings that once built leave little revenue to actually populate with culture or performance? What of those who do not like high art (as this is what is usually offered)? Where is the accountability in the use of taxpayers money to this cultural apartheid? It may be argued, of course, that what the workers get is jobs, so, no problem there. Why the choice? Can't we have culture and jobs?

It is in this atmosphere that Charles Landry's work on the Creative City is such a useful corrective. The thesis is not about consumption, but about process. It is about an inclusive and participatory city where arts and culture are a means and a practice of place making and living. Culture and creativity are 'ways of doing', set against the dead hand of bureaucracy or non-democratic planning. Charles's article explains this better than I can.

I want to use the rest of this article to focus on the third variety of 'creative city': that associated with the 'production' of culture. There has been much hype about the growth of the cultural and creative industries in recent years; in no small part egged on by the results of economic analyses, such as the DCMS mapping document, that highlighted the contribution of the 'creative industries' to economic output, jobs and exports. At a European level, for example, in excess of car manufacture and the chemical industries *combined*. Moreover, in some cities, the creative industries vie for third place in the whole economy (for example, London). Moreover, reports have recently shown that the creative industries continue to grow (unlike many other sectors).

Of course, in policy circles, the creative industries are not without their 'snake oil salesmen'. However, debate is settling on the power of this sector to provide real jobs, and output, as well as feeding the arts and wider cultural economy, and social life. This is the bottom line, that one the whole the cultural and creative industries (film, tv, fine art, theatre, music, computer games, architectural design, high fashion, etc) create ideas and jobs. However, here's the problem: they seem to be more deeply rooted than the footloose manufacturers of the past. Its not cheap land and buildings that are a priority, it is people and ideas, and a deep interaction with audiences and markets. As today, especially in the area of arts and culture, new ideas are a co-production of producers / designers and consumers. Moreover, such is the pace of change that information and knowledge may be particular to one place, and to a remarkably narrow time window.

In this context, the real creative city, a city based on generating new ideas, especially those that impact on social and cultural life is one that has a vibrant ecosystem of creative industries and creative workers. Another point that arises from studies is the high proportion of freelance workers in the creative sector. If you are a freelancer you need lots of options of whom to work for, you need a vast pool of potential employers if you are to be in work much of the time. Again, this biases to the major cities.

What are the implications? Well, we need to attend to, to understand and begin to appreciate more deeply just what the creative and cultural industries are, and how they operate, and the labour force and skills, and wider cultural environment that that are situated within. On this basis we may seek out what would help these activities be maintained or to grow, the analogy is a more organic one or shaping and encouraging rather than major surgery (cosmetic, or implants). We need to shift our focus away from final consumption and shopping, and to the broader processes of cultural and creative production, and how they are embedded in the city (and the links that they have across cities). In this sense a creative city cannot be founded like some cathedral in the desert; it needs to be linked to, and to be part of, an already existing cultural environment. Finally, we must note that whilst there might be attractive economic gains from the creative and cultural industries, we need to recognise that many workers begin their career either in the informal, or the subsidised sector; moreover, some for profit activities feed back into the not-for-profit. We need to appreciate to complex interdependencies of the two spheres, not to simply use one to exploit the other, if we want a real creative city.

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