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# Fostering the Creative City



Carol Coletta, August 2008

## FOSTERING THE CREATIVE CITY

**By Carol Coletta**

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The definition of the Creative City is elusive. It seems irretrievably intertwined with starchitect-designed temples to art; arts districts that make cities more lively and raise real estate values; tourist-friendly art and arts events; attempts to harness the economic impact of the arts and build international civic reputations; attracting and retaining a so-called “creative class”; using art to showcase diversity and build understanding among people; building an economy of creative industries; recognizing creativity as a precursor for innovation; even adopting a creative approach to civic problem-solving.

The Creative City is probably a bit of all of this and more. Let’s take a look at each of these aspects of the Creative City, see how alternative futures might unfold and where undiscovered opportunities may lie.

### **(1) Building Temples of Art**

There is a long history of selecting star architects to build museums and performing arts centers. The most famous contemporary example is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, designed by Frank Gehry. Opened in 1997, the museum became the much-photographed symbol of the city and its transformation. As the *New York Times* noted, “The city became synonymous with the ensuing worldwide rush by urbanists to erect trophy buildings, in the hopes of turning second-tier cities into tourist magnets.” The addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum by Santiago Calatrava, Rafael Viñoly’s Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia, the Carnival Center for the Performing Arts designed by Cesar Pelli, Zaha Hadid’s Contemporary Art Museum in Cincinnati all resulted, in part, from the ambitions of various civic leaders to make major statements about their cities through architecture to serve art purposes. Beyond cultural facilities, great urban design and architecture have become important signals that a city is “creative,” bringing desired attention and creating additional value.

### **(2) Using Art Districts to Stimulate Urban Redevelopment**

Is there a U.S. city that doesn’t have or aspire to have an arts district? Galleries, artist workspaces, rehearsal spaces and theaters in close proximity can create new excitement in a neighborhood. They often spawn new cafes, restaurants, bars and design-forward retail. Together, they raise real estate values, as people discover the “cool” new arts district. Examples include Lincoln Road on Miami Beach, the Wynwood Arts District of Miami, Old City in Philadelphia, the Pearl District in Portland, Denver’s Arts District on Santa Fe. Even smaller cities like Memphis (South Main) and Kansas City (The Crossroads) have used the arts district strategy to stimulate development. Research by The Reinvestment Fund shows that cultural engagement indicators are important predictors of real estate market improvement. So it only makes sense that concentrating arts activity into districts can have a powerful effect on real estate values and that cities would encourage their development.

Ann Markusen viewed the creative city rubric as having the potential to tie urban planning, economic development and arts and cultural policy efforts together, but in 2006 she also noted that for the most part, that had not happened in most American cities. Most arts districts emerge from the efforts of individual artists and developers, which only later begin to attract government support. However, to stimulate the emergence of arts districts, some communities have adopted tax incentives. Paducah, Kentucky, has an artist relocation program, which offers 100 percent of financing for purchase and rehabilitation of buildings, loan packages, free lots for new construction and money for architectural services. Rhode Island designated nine arts districts as tax-free. Maryland was the first state to designate Arts and Entertainment Districts on a statewide basis, with 12 designated since 2001. Iowa has designated 19 cultural districts in the first two years of its program and hopes to invest \$40 million in historic preservation tax credits over the next 10 years in these districts, in addition to other incentives.

### **(3) Promoting Cultural Tourism**

In Boston, Providence, Chicago and many other cities, arts, culture and tourism are housed in the same department in City Hall, reflecting the belief by mayors that arts and tourism are linked. The U.S. Conference of Mayors also addresses these issues as one. There is plenty of evidence that the arts do, indeed, attract tourists. Thirty percent, or 35.3 million, of American adults say that a specific arts, cultural or heritage event or activity influenced their choice of destination.<sup>1</sup> Seventy-five percent of visitors last year to the new galleries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art were from outside New York's five boroughs. It is increasingly common for cities to support the packaging and promotion of art in various forms to increase tourism – Art Basel in Miami, the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta, TBA in Portland, Bumbershoot in Seattle. The list of such festivals is long and getting longer.

### **(4) Capturing the Economic Impact of the Arts**

Economic impact studies have become a popular justification for investments in the arts. Ann Markusen's theory of "cultural consumption" claims that there is an economic benefit when city residents divert income that they would have spent on goods and services from outside the region to local cultural spending. According to Americans for the Arts, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity every year in the U.S.—\$63.1 billion in spending by organizations and an additional \$103.1 billion in event-related spending by audiences – generating 5.7 million full-time equivalent jobs, \$104.2 billion in household income, \$7.9 billion in local government tax revenues, \$9.1 billion in state government tax revenues, and \$12.6 billion in federal income tax revenues. Although the methodology for such studies can be questionable (If someone did not attend the ballet, would this money not be spent elsewhere in the local economy?), such numbers are persuasive in making the case for public investments in the arts.

### **(5) Building International Reputation with the Arts**

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<sup>1</sup> Travel Industry Association of America and Smithsonian Magazine, *The Historic/Cultural Traveler*, 2003 Edition.

Arts can help cities build international reputations. Art Basel has contributed to the transition of Miami from party town to sophisticated global player. But to attract international attention, the arts gesture must be unique, even dramatic. Just as generic business appeals don't help cities attract more than their fair share of attention, neither do generic arts strategies.

### **(6) Attracting and Retaining the Creative Class**

With the publication of Richard Florida's book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, in 2004, the importance (and the existence) of a creative class has been embraced by a wide range of interest groups – artists, gays, mayors, downtown enthusiasts and economic developers. The designation is often misinterpreted as referring exclusively to young adults. However, the definition includes people of all ages and a much broader range of occupations than normally assumed – 38.3 million Americans working in occupations as unlikely as financial services, teaching and insurance.

Florida's book was preceded by one by Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million Americans Are Changing the World*. They viewed this "subculture" as carriers of a new progressivism that grew out of the social movements of the 60s. As Florida defined it, the creative class is a very desirable market. In 1999, the average salary for a member of the creative class was nearly \$50,000, compared to \$28,000 for a working-class member and \$22,000 for a service-class worker. The need to attract this demographic is used to justify almost any investment in amenities – the arts, professional sports stadia, bike paths, beautification. Unfortunately, many urban leaders misunderstand that fundamental to the attraction and retention of the creative class are the availability of opportunity, tolerance for difference, a sense of possibility, inclusiveness, and progressive ideas in circulation.

### **(7) Using the Arts to Promote Diversity**

Closely linked to creative class theories is the importance of diversity. Tolerance is one of Florida's "3 T's" (the others are technology and talent) linked closely to the creative class. Tolerant cities are more likely to attract and retain the creative class, according to Florida, who measured tolerance as the presence of artists and gays in a community. The arts, then, can serve as an indicator of tolerance.

Crossroads Charlotte is an example of a program to create an inclusive and equitable community that incorporates artists in all of its community engagement meetings in order to deepen discussions of diversity. Urbanist Jane Jacobs also emphasized the importance of diversity –in buildings and urban landscape, in people, in the streets and activity to facilitate interaction. In Jacob's view, cities with such diversity are considered more attractive places and, as in Florida's theory, more likely to attract creative individuals. The arts can also amplify the presence of diversity by putting on display the culture of people of various nationalities, minorities, various demographic groups, and special interest groups.

### **(8) Using Art and Art-Making as Indicators of Creativity**

Certainly, the presence of a healthy arts community is prima facie evidence of the presence of a creative city at some level. The more original art that is created in a community, the more creative that community is likely to be judged.

## **(9) Building Creative Industries**

In John Howkins' conception of the "creative economy," new ideas, rather than traditional drivers such as money or physical infrastructure, are seen as driving today's economy. Creative workers and industries are vital to economic success, with individual talent and skill being the most important ingredients. The creative and cultural industries include the arts, publishing, broadcasting, architecture, advertising and design, performing arts, and museums. They account for 2.2 million jobs (1.9 percent of all jobs) in the U.S. That is 400,000 more than the 1.8 million jobs that manufacture transportation equipment, for example. And because design, especially, adds value to products, services and experiences of other industries, the creative industries have a wider impact still. The so-called "super creatives" – architects, writers, artists, designers, engineers and people in entertainment, sports and media – number more than 4.4 million, or 3.4 percent of all workers in the U.S. Four million of them live in metro areas. In the top 50 metro areas, two out of five creative jobs are within three miles of the central business district.

The creative industries are generally made up of very small businesses and very large businesses. Many creative workers don't work for "businesses" at all – a quarter of them work for themselves, compared to 5.6 percent of all workers. A number of cities are actively pursuing creative industries and occupations as a way to regenerate and build their economies. In Detroit for example, a group of philanthropists is pushing for a "Creative Corridor" along Woodward Avenue to restart the local economy and improve the city's ability to attract knowledge workers.

## **(10) Using Creativity as Precursor to Innovation**

Innovation is one of five essentials to the success of cities in a knowledge economy (the others are talent, connections, distinctiveness and core city vitality). It is generally agreed that creativity is a necessary condition to innovation. Creativity can be thought of as the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new. It is the process by which the new idea is successfully exploited. As Richard Lester, innovation guru at MIT, says, four things are necessary for innovation: smart people with ideas, tolerance for risk, a supportive market for new ideas and places to share ideas. Cities with the highest concentrations of creative people and creative jobs are in a favored position to generate more ideas and more innovations.

## **(11) Promoting Creativity as a Means of Problem Solving**

Charles Landry's book, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* was published in 2002, but Landry began circulating ideas about the Creative City as early as 1995. Landry set out a radical new vision of a creative city, arguing that cities need to mobilize creativity not only to achieve competitiveness in new value-added industries but also to solve social problems. In other words, Landry called for a creative approach to problem-solving that permeated all aspects of the city, rather than being confined to the world of art, design, creative industries, or reputation burnishing. It is, in many ways, a far more challenging approach to the creative city than the other ways to understand the concept suggested so far. Rather than accepting the creative city as an "add-on" – as in, adding on art temples, arts districts, the creative class and creative industries to what the city is already doing – Landry calls for a city to change itself at a more basic level. Landry calls for cities to change the way they solve problems and seize opportunities. In Landry's theory, art is only a minor player.

## (12) Developing the Values of the Creative City

Authenticity, a planning group in Toronto, prepared a comprehensive response to the city's latest "Agenda for Prosperity" to show how creative city concepts could be woven into the strategy. The response asserts that the creative city embraces a different set of values, and it compares a utilitarian perspective to that of a creative perspective. The contrasts include:

### Utilitarian Perspective

Stretch tax dollars  
Cost  
Function  
Generic and predictable  
Ensured security  
Homogenous  
Cohesion of similarity  
Formulaic  
Delivering on expectations  
Reducing costs  
Same as the other place  
Repetition  
Convenience  
Build  
Organization

### Creative Perspective

Make beauty necessary and necessity beautiful  
Benefit  
Form indissociable from function  
Original and unique  
Planned risk  
Heterogeneous  
Celebration of diversity  
Artistic  
Novelty of experience  
Adding value  
Unique to this place  
Innovation  
Experience  
Design  
Culture

## (13) Identifying New Frontiers

A number of possible futures are emerging for what the creative city can be.

The first is focused on the *intrinsic value of the arts to the making of a creative city*. In this view, the goal would be to invest in the arts in ways that make the city a more vibrant, interesting place where creativity, expressed through the arts, is on constant display. The belief is that the value of all arts investments is essentially equal - investing in the arts in any form will always accrue to the benefit of the city. They are assumed to:

- Contribute to lively streets and neighborhoods;
- Regenerate depressed neighborhoods and increase real estate value;
- Create new work opportunities

Important variations on this theme of the intrinsic value of the arts to the creative city are investing specifically to encourage (a) arts consumption and (b) arts production. *Arts consumption* recognizes the value of increasing the size and diversity of arts audiences. Consumption can be increased by making art more accessible, affordable, familiar, and at times casual, and presenting a quality product in appealing venues. Aggressive promotion of the arts is also key to increasing consumption. Certainly, the presence of arts consumption opportunities increases the appeal of a city to its citizens by increasing its variety, convenience, discovery and opportunity. Strong arts consumption also creates a market for arts producers.

*Arts production* is an expression of creativity that is professional, unpaid community, and, increasingly, informal. As the tools of production and distribution grow far cheaper and even free, people who would not previously have produced original work in the form of blogs, stories, photos, films, music, poems, and the like for the consumption of strangers are now doing so regularly and in great numbers.

The second future is grounded not in the intrinsic value of the arts, but in *aspirations to make a city successful*. From the perspective of CEOs for Cities, that means talent, connections, distinctiveness, innovation and core city vitality. The goal would be to invest in the arts in ways that strengthen each of these (or other) city vitals. In this view, investment in the arts is not specifically for the purpose of strengthening the arts but rather to strengthen dimensions of a city essential to its success. In this view, some arts investments (those that strengthen city vitals) are better than others (those that do not) and should be evaluated on that basis. But the contributions the arts can make to city vitals are in no way trivial. One variation on this future is to favor arts investments that support seemingly more urgent outcomes—more jobs, improved incomes, better health and education attainment. A second variation is to invest in the arts in ways that help communities understand the differences (diversity) available to them in the belief that differences are a source of capital available to increase community value.

The third future focuses on the *investment in art and creative industries as an economic development strategy*. Here, arts investments are evaluated on the basis of the jobs and income they create, and the more of each they create, the more worthy of investment they are. In this case, it is likely that arts investments will take a back seat to investments in more commercial enterprises such as broadcasting, media, engineering, publishing, public relations, advertising and architecture. However, to the extent that arts activities become important destinations for tourists, their value increases in this creative industries approach. Artists also anchor other creative industries (design and film, for instance), and their value increases when this relationship exists and when these related industries are important to the local economy.

*Focusing on creativity as a means to problem solve and to start the innovation cycle* is a fourth alternative future for the creative city. The priority in this future is to invest in the arts in ways that encourage the conditions of creativity to emerge and to think of creativity not primarily as an arts activity, but as an activity of city making and value creation through innovation. A related consideration is the making of places of innovation, places where people can come together to share ideas that may turn in to innovations. A related consideration may be to favor the production of art rather than consumption of art in the belief that more production encourages more ideas and more collaboration and idea sharing.

Underlying many of the creative city approaches outlined in this report is the assumption that creativity is about special people in special places producing special things. But a different approach is emerging, one that defines the creative city as one that recognizes the potential creativity in all assets. In this fifth alternative future, the job becomes *developing and sustaining the creative capacity of assets – people, places and connections*. By recognizing that creativity exists in everyone, the opportunity for communities to succeed and the myriad of creative resources available to them significantly expands. In this paradigm, all cities have the potential to succeed, and all

people possess the potential for creativity. Success will depend on how a city can develop and sustain this creative capacity.

In the context of a rapidly changing, complex and globalized world, cities need to be resilient and adaptable to be competitive. And to be resilient, they need people who can be adaptive, creative, imaginative, and resourceful. They need people who can bring new things into being and who can recombine existing resources to produce new solutions. The creative capacity of a city, then, is this ability to bring something new into being.

By recognizing and fostering diverse talent and knowledge and finding new ways to put it to use, more people are enabled to use their creative capacity and creative resources thus increase. And given that diverse groups translate their knowledge into innovation better than homogenous groups, diversity of talent, knowledge and creativity needs to be identified and enabled to invigorate creative performance.

A creative city, then, is evidenced not only by the presence of robust arts consumption and production. The creative city is also a city where more people see themselves as creative contributors and express that in many ways across many fields.

### **Creating a Culture of Creativity – An Example**

How to create a culture that encourages people to exercise their creativity and to collaborate with those with diverse talents and perspectives? This is a difficult challenge. However, we can begin to draw some broad outlines about what may be needed.

The most important action is to redefine who is “creative.” As *Creativity in Context* author Teresa Amabile advises, *don't ghettoize creativity*. “You want everyone in your organization producing novel and useful ideas. The fact is, almost all of the research in this field shows that anyone with normal intelligence is capable of doing some degree of creative work.”<sup>2</sup>

Consider the values of a creative city asserted in Toronto's Agenda for Change. (See item 11.) They form a good starting list of markers of a culture of creativity. Clearly, a tolerance for the new (and newcomers) and different encourages creativity. *Exposure to and embrace* of the new and different are even better.

Portland is generally acknowledged as a creative city, even though the definition of that, as should be clear from this paper, is complicated. Ethan Seltzer, a professor at Portland State University who has long been involved in that city's administrative and arts scene, had analyzed Portland's do-it-yourself creative culture and has identified the following pillars of the city's success in fostering creativity:

1. *Portland is not a corporate town*. There is no hierarchical corporate organization of philanthropy, civic life, politics or art and culture. You don't need to ask permission. You don't have to wait for your turn. If you want to do it, you can do it.

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<sup>2</sup> Teresa Amabile extract in the article: Bill Breen, 'The 6 Myths of Creativity', Fast Company Magazine, 12.19.07

2. *Portland is a place of many small things.* Portland has more manufacturing employment than Pittsburgh or Baltimore, but it's concentrated in little firms. Even property in Portland comes in little bits, as 100 acres is a large parcels, even in rural areas.
3. *Portland is a place of in-migrants.* You don't have to be born into the place to make a mark on it.
4. *Portland is cheap.* Portland is 48<sup>th</sup> in tax burden and doesn't fund people or culture or education very well. This leaves the field open to civic-side DIY. There are, of course, many downsides, especially a lack of regard for equity. But there is plenty of access, since there is no status quo to defend.
5. *Portland is young.* There are lots of 25-34 year-olds, for whom anything is possible. There is no Greek Chorus chanting, "it won't work." Few things have long track records, therefore the memory of failure is dim, unless the failure was truly memorable.
6. *Portland is in the west.* The classic narrative of the region is one of rebirth and renewal. If it didn't work in Cleveland, move farther west and try again!
7. *Portland is out of the mainstream.* It is not a world city, not the biggest/fastest/richest/etc. Innovation happens away from the center, not in the midst of prevailing themes and trends, and "away from the center" defines Portland.
8. *Portland didn't lose its focus during suburbanization.* Unlike many cities across the nation post-World War II, Portland didn't completely devalue and deface the city (though Portland tried).
9. *Portland has been lucky.*

### **Additional Insights from Experts in Creativity**

John Thackera, author of *In the Bubble*, suggests that the "free zones" in Rotterdam and Brussels, left deliberately unplanned, are breeding grounds for creativity.

Elizabeth Sanders, author of *Scaffolds for Building Everyday Creativity*, writes that there are four levels of everyday creativity: doing, adapting, making, and creating. A culture of creativity, she proposes, will make opportunities for people to do these things.<sup>3</sup>

Stephen Tepper, drawing on lessons of the creative campus, writes that creativity thrives "where there is abundant cross-cultural exchange and a great deal of "border" activity between disciplines, where collaborative work is commonplace, risk taking is rewarded, failure is expected, and the creative arts are pervasive and integrated into campus life."<sup>4</sup> Implicit in Tepper's assertions is the notion that networks and connections are vital to fostering creativity. In his overview of the ideas of various authors, themes of recognizing and rewarding creativity, curiosity, continuous learning, and intense experience of engaging with ideas (the concept of "flow") emerge as important underpinnings of a culture of creativity.

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Sanders, 'Scaffolds for Building Everyday Creativity' in *Design for Effective Communications: Creating Contexts for Clarity and Meaning*, Jorge Frascara (Ed.) Allworth Press, New York, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Steven J. Tepper, 'Taking the Measure of the Creative Campus', Spring 2006

## **Investing in the Creative City**

Do these descriptions of how creativity can be encouraged point clearly to how a private foundation hoping to stimulate a culture of creativity should invest its funds? No, they do not. This is due, in part, to the muddled and multivalent definitions of the term. Another reason is that many discussions of the creative city are driven by arts advocates, who begin with a different goal in mind.

There is nothing wrong with the goal of increasing arts consumption and production. There is nothing wrong with supporting arts facilities and districts. There is nothing wrong with trying to attract and retain the creative class. These are all worthy goals that can add value and vitality to cities. They may also contribute to encouraging people to recognize and exercise their own creativity.

But they are not the same as fostering the creative city by developing and sustaining the creative capacity of all citizens. This is a somewhat different, albeit related goal.

In this broad view of a creative city, the conditions for growth and the realization of human potential are the guiding priorities for investment. Nurturing the new values of the creative city versus the old utilitarian values is fundamental to bringing a more sophisticated idea of the creative city into being.

## **Final Thoughts**

How can cities cultivate a belief that everyone has something important to contribute, and, therefore, everyone is an asset? In many ways. This is the essential question for any city that aspires to be a creative city. But it is an aspiration for which we have few models.

The opportunity for foundation funding is to tackle this challenge head-on by investing in a consortium of partners eager to engage this issue. The consortium should include an arts partner, but likely should not be led by an arts partner. The consortium should be prepared to keep a tight focus on the goal of unlocking the creative potential of a city's assets, most particularly of its people. If that leads to arts investments, all the better. But it should be clear that the outcome being sought is not simply and foremost an arts outcome.

Will such an effort be successful? Where a culture of creativity does not exist, can it be willed into being? Where it does exist, can focus and funding accelerate its growth and broaden its impact? We simply don't know. But we believe the answer is yes. Even a relatively small amount of money invested in an initial exploration of the creative city using this framework could produce important new understanding and possibilities. (The opportunity to learn how to manage culture change in cities, of learning more about how communities can move toward a culture of creativity, can be deeply useful.)

Creativity and cities are natural partners. They can strengthen each other. It is important to recognize how careful investments in a city's creative resources, especially its people, can be used to bring into being the creative city that benefits all members of the community.