

Creative Cities: Structured Policy Dialogue Report

by

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Main Messages from the Background Papers

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The Background Papers are available at
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Main Messages from the Background Papers

The discussion paper authors were all charged with three basic tasks: 1) to take stock of the existing research on creative cities and report key gaps; 2) to review case study experience with creative city approaches in Canada and/or elsewhere and report on the lessons; and 3) and to identify the outstanding public policy challenges facing governments at all levels in making our cities creative places. In taking up these common issues, each author also brought his or her own perspective and priorities to the creative cities agenda. As such, the package offered a discussion starter for the participants who came from a wide range of sectors and places.

Bradford's paper begins with a helpful description of the key features distinguishing the creative city:

Creative cities are dynamic locales of experimentation and innovation, where new ideas flourish and people from all walks of life come together to make their communities better places to live, work, and play. They engage different kinds of knowledge, and encourage widespread public participation to deal imaginatively with complex issues. In their decision making they value holistic thinking, and act on the interdependence of economic, social, environmental, and cultural goals. While all cities are characterized by population density and organizational proximity, only in creative cities do these features become assets in collaborative efforts to solve the perennial urban problems of housing, congestion, inclusion, preservation, and development. As Sir Peter Hall puts it in his landmark book *Cities in Civilization*, such cities “have throughout history been the places that ignited the sacred flame of the human intelligence and the human imagination.”¹

Bradford goes on to note that in today's knowledge-intensive global age, cities represent the ideal geographic scale and social space for the intensive, face-to-face interactions that generate new ideas and innovative practices. And it is the premium now placed on creativity in responding to the daunting social and economic challenges concentrated in our cities that reveals the value of the arts, culture and heritage activities. As Bradford puts it, the “lifeblood of the arts is creativity, imagination, experimentation, and appreciation of difference,” and “these are precisely the habits of mind and modes of expression” required across all sectors, from business and government to the community. Providing a comparative and historical perspective, Bradford catalogues major intellectual contributions to the contemporary understanding of creative cities, tracing ideas across a diverse group of urban cultural analysts spanning several decades: Jane Jacobs, Richard Florida, Mario Polèse, Richard Stren, Patsy Healey, Frank Fischer, and Charles Landry. He then reports on how some of these ideas have been successfully applied in selected creative cities in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

From the scholarly literature and case studies, Bradford finds that creative cities contribute significantly to meeting local and national policy goals: economic innovation, social inclusion, democratic engagement, and environmental sustainability. Referencing the many challenges presently faced by Canadian cities, Bradford proposes a new place-sensitive urban policy paradigm. What's crucial for creativity is *collaboration* among the many policy actors in the

¹ Peter Hall. 1998. *Cities in Civilization*. New York. Pantheon, 7.

city: between government departments, across levels of government, and among governments, the private sector, community organizations, and engaged citizens including artists and cultural workers themselves.

Meric Gertler's paper builds on Bradford's overview, bringing a number of themes into focus. For Gertler, the critical issue "revolves around the fascinating interrelationships between three Cs: creativity, competitiveness and cohesion." He emphasizes that the concept of "local place quality" not only enhances the dynamism, resilience, and overall competitiveness of the national economy, but equally, the quality of life and opportunity for a broad cross-section of Canadians. Here Gertler makes a bold call for active and critical adaptation of themes from international debates about creative cities to the Canadian context. If Canadian values inform the way we pursue creative cities, Gertler argues, the result will be *socially inclusive creative places*, distinguished by their "strong vibrant neighbourhoods, relative freedom from social deprivation, and access to employment and social services such as shelter, education, nutrition and health care."

From this vantage point, Gertler details the most recent research demonstrating how creative activity enhances the vitality of a city-region by enhancing both its innovative capacity and quality of place. He reports on new studies that are beginning to provide "hard evidence" of the relationships. These studies document developments such as: the rapid growth of design activity within the economy and its contribution to a wide range of economic sectors; the positive impact of artistic workers in cities on the overall productivity and earnings in the urban and regional economy, and on regeneration of distressed urban neighbourhoods; and the value of unique, distinctive and original cultural products in affirming the authentic identity of cities and communities.

Gertler next asks how we build creative cities. For him, two factors are critical. First, investments must be made in the "soft" and "hard" infrastructures of urban creativity. Soft infrastructure – what Gertler also calls the city's "connective tissue" – comprises the social networks and shared spaces facilitating interaction among creative people. The more familiar hard infrastructure refers to the physical environment of highways, public transit, sewer and water supply networks, and so forth. Second, Gertler underscores the pivotal public policy role in nurturing a city's creative assets and infrastructures. Governments establish the institutional and regulatory context for private sector and non-profit organizations to make their own unique contributions. Gertler's discussion outlines numerous specific proposals for each of the federal, provincial, and local levels of government. His examples constitute an inviting policy roadmap to the creative city.

Nancy Duxbury's paper joins the discussion from a municipal cultural planning perspective, seeking a vision and framework in which artists and cultural organizations are fully recognized as central actors in the creative city. Indeed, she begins with a paradox: despite society's growing preoccupation with creativity and innovation, the explicit cultural dimension is often missing. Here Duxbury points to an important Canadian difference. While American and European debates about the creative city have been driven mostly by economic concerns (American competitiveness or European regeneration), she argues that Canadian traditions have better

appreciated the intrinsic, multi-faceted value of urban cultural expressions. In a 1993 City of Vancouver report, Duxbury finds the Canadian vision of the creative city:

A city where: the arts are respected for their aesthetic importance and for their ability to foster understanding and communication; cultural diversity is embraced and the expression of creativity in all its forms is encouraged; people can enjoy creative activities in their everyday lives; the arts are viewed as an educational necessity and creativity is recognized as an invaluable skill in the Age of Information; the arts are valued for their important role in the economy as well as for their spiritual, intellectual and social benefits.²

From this perspective, Duxbury describes cultural planning activities in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, and Halifax. Some key principles guide the process, principal among them: respect for the unique offerings of each city; support for public participation in the arts; and appreciation of a community's cultural ecosystem and networks. Across these cities, Duxbury also identifies major challenges confronting cultural planners, notably: the lack of government resources and coordination; and the shortage of affordable studio space for artists and venues for community arts groups.

Duxbury concludes with a call for more robust reporting frameworks for evaluating the impact of cultural policies and investments in cities. Given the complexities of such measuring exercises, she notes the value of a "narrative" approach to capturing returns on investment. This approach is more attuned to important intangible outcomes such as resident observations of positive change in a neighbourhood, or heightened senses of community identity and pride.

Plenary Dialogue: Creative Cities: What, Why, How?

Jumping off from the three papers, the day's plenary discussion proceeded in two parts. In the first part, the organizing theme was "Creative Cities: The State of the Art." In the second part, it was "From Theory to Practice: Case Studies and Shared Experiences." For both sessions, the participants were further guided by two specific questions. In the first part, they were asked: (1) What makes a city creative?; and (2) Why does it matter if a city is creative? In the second session, they responded to: (1) What do we know is working?; and (2) What can we learn from those cities making progress? Reported below are key ideas and conclusions emerging from the discussions.

² City of Vancouver. 1993. *Toward the Creative City*.