Arts and Culture: Key to Creative Cities

Friday, August 13, 2004 – Creative cities are vital to meeting our community and national economic and social goals. By happy coincidence, the conditions that foster creative cities also foster economic innovation, social inclusion, democratic engagement and environmental sustainability.

Four new papers from CPRN underline the key role of the arts and culture in that enterprise, especially in today's knowledge economy.

As Neil Bradford puts it, "the lifeblood of the arts is creativity, imagination, experimentation, and appreciation of difference. These are precisely the habits of mind and modes of expression required of all sectors, from business and government to communities, in building creative cities in Canada today."

Bradford is CPRN's Research Fellow in Cities and Communities and the author of two of the four papers released today by CPRN. The papers summarize the state of our current knowledge about creative cities, review current examples of approaches to creative cities here and abroad and lessons to be drawn from them, and identify public policy challenges and future research needs.

Three of the papers – ***Creative Cities Structured Policy Dialogue Backgrounder*** by Bradford, ***Creative Cities: What Are They For, How Do They Work, and How Do We Build Them?*** by Meric Gertler of the University of Toronto, and ***Creative Cities: Principles and Practices*** by Nancy Duxbury of the Creative City Network of Canada – provided the basis for a structured policy dialogue, held in Ottawa in June 2004. The dialogue brought together users and producers of urban policy knowledge and demonstrated the importance of community-based networks of urban expertise.

Dialogue participants addressed the following questions:

- What makes a city creative?
- Why does it matter if a city is creative?
- What do we know is working?
- What can we learn from those cities making progress?

In the fourth paper, ***Creative Cities: Structured Policy Dialogue Report***, Neil Bradford draws together the key ideas and conclusions arising from those discussions.

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An important distinction emerged between creativity and innovation, the former perhaps more utopian, the latter more pragmatic. But creativity is essential to innovation.

"While artists and cultural producers may not be directly involved in innovation," says Bradford, "their work can steer the process in exciting and previously unimagined directions."

Participants agreed that creative cities express their uniqueness and authenticity in three principle settings: the arts, commerce and in community.

"Creative cities excel in bringing together 'people, place and investment' in ways that tap the contribution of *all* their population," Bradford says. "And it is this creative inclusiveness that makes them the magnets of the knowledge economy."

Dialogue participants argued that involvement in the arts and culture helps develop a community's creative capacities. Specifically, they drew connections between creativity and successful cities in the following areas:

- Governance Innovation – breaking with tradition, harnessing diversity.
- Civic Innovation – applying new problem solving skills to contemporary challenges.
- Economic Innovation – creativity makes cities "innovative milieux".
- Social Innovation – participation in the arts and culture is a route to inclusion of marginalized communities and to revitalized neighbourhoods.
- Artistic and Cultural Innovation – cities support the arts and culture for their contribution to inclusion and innovation.

Participants outlined barriers to developing creative cities – lack of awareness among policy and planning communities and the general public, poor collaboration within and between governments, undervaluing of the contribution of the arts and culture, for example – but they also saw tremendous potential in tapping the creativity of Canada's diverse cultural communities.

"Above all, they agreed on one overarching point," says Bradford. "Local places provide the most promising scale for creativity and innovation, but they require adequate and sustained support from upper level governments. Creative cities are built through *multi-level and cross-sectoral collaboration*."

Note: This group of publications are a product of CPRN's Research Program in Cities and Communities. To learn more about the Program go to http://www.cprn.org/en/doc.cfm?doc=1079

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