DEVELOPING CREATIVE CITIES: A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE UK

Kevin MURRAY[1], D. ADAMS[2] and K. CHAMPION[3]
[1] Past President, Royal Town Planning Institute, United Kingdom
[2-3] Urban Studies Department, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom

Abstract

Culture and creativity have been promoted as the panacea to reversing urban decline in the knowledge age. The posited benefits of becoming a 'creative city' cut across many aspects of policy and evidence suggests that unlocking creative potential may well improve the prospects for successful urban regeneration. Such activity may be cultivated to attract economic gain (in the form of investment, developing the creative industry sector, business start up locations, tourism spend and knowledge workers) and also social cohesion (strengthening identity, civic pride and accommodating cultural diversity). There are some caveats to this approach: the benefits may be overstated and are often hard to measure. There is evidence that unintended consequences of policy in this area can include gentrification, a loss of distinctiveness and the pricing out the creative sector pioneers. This paper presents an overview of UK activity, drawing on approaches undertaken in three main categories of creative industries, public art and events programming.

Keywords: Creative cities, creative industries, public art, events programming

1. Introduction

Cultural resources are the raw materials of the city and its value base; its assets replacing coal, steel or gold, Creativity is the method of exploiting these resources and helping them grow. (Landry, 2004: 7).

In a speech earlier this year UK Prime Minister Tony Blair asserted that arts and culture has become part of the 'core script' of government in the UK, "no longer to be on the periphery, an add-on...but an essential part of the narrative about the character of a new, different, changed Britain". Often perceived as a cost effective way of achieving a range of policy goals, culture and creativity have moved towards centre-stage, not only in cultural and arts policy, but in economic - and even now in urban - policy, as we move beyond the industrial and manufacturing era that lies behind so much of the UK's urbanisation.

A raft of strategies has been adopted by many UK cities aiming to engage with creative processes and capture the value that can be generated by culture, the arts and creative businesses. These processes can empower and animate, allowing participation in and ownership of regeneration and stimulating economic growth locally. Successfully re-imaging and re-imagining cities as creative places may unlock possibilities for revitalisation and investment. Nonetheless, the pursuit of this goal is complex since there are a number of tensions and challenges to be understood and mediated. Culture, like long-term economic strength, needs ideally to be rooted in the community. Furthermore, a simplistic policy approach to cultural development that ignores it's intrinsic value will, we contend, fail to develop the distinctiveness and committed ownership necessary for successful city revitalisation.

The purpose of this paper is to review some of the contemporary tools and methods being utilised to foster creative cities in the UK. The first two sections provide an introduction to the relationship between culture and cities and a brief historiography of the rise of instrumentalising cultural resources in wider policy. The following sections tackle three broad categories of mechanisms within the field: creative industries, public art and events programming. These categories are briefly introduced with reference to their recent development, a rationale for their expansion and some tensions inherent in their proliferation. At each section we draw from parts of an ongoing survey we have been conducting with a sample of UK city authorities on their approach to policy in support of creativity.

2. Culture and Cities

The quality of urban life, culture and environment are increasingly recognised as one of the hallmarks of a successful society. Many cities have many assets which make them more – not less – significant in an increasingly globalised world (Parkinson et al, 2004: 9).

The city is chosen as the central unit of interest for this study because cities have become distinctive economic and social drivers in recent years. Extensive regeneration investment in many of the traditional UK cities has improved the apparent quality of urban life and begun to balance a traditionally sub-urbanising trend with a greater inclination toward city living. In the words of the 2004 ODPM report "cities are back" and after several decades of decline it is asserted that they "are not economic drains upon - but the dynamos of - the national economy" (Parkinson et al, 2004: 5). The cultural functions possessed by urban areas are derived from being nodes of a dense locus of human interrelationships and as important sites for consumption (Scott, 2000). Many of these are based on regional 'capital' or hub status, with some, such as Edinburgh or London, also having a strong international catchment.

Structural changes in the economy have contributed to an increasing focus on creativity as a central contributor to innovation and growth in these larger settlements. For instance, the transformation from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy has resulted in greater product differentiation and thus a greater creative content to the design of a wide range of products and services. Reduced working hours and greater disposable income for many has also meant greater time to devote to leisure and an increasing demand for consumption, a broader choice of which is available in city centres. The provision of a strong cultural infrastructure has been identified as a contributor to quality of life by businesses and individuals, and therefore as a consideration in their locational choices. The presence of such infrastructure can help attract and retain a mobile skilled workforce and is therefore seen as a key factor in pursuing economic development and prosperity in the knowledge age (Myerscough, 1988), (Florida, 2002).

3. Harnessing Creativity

Although our attention is drawn to the current potential of utilising culture to achieve instrumental aims, there have also been historical precedents for this activity. For instance, there has been a long tradition of attempting to widen access to the arts (specifically high art) as a vehicle for social improvement or integration, based upon the idea of their ennobling value (Matarasso and Landry, 1999). In the UK, the focus changed during the 1960s when the Arts Council broadened funding guidelines to include more varied contributions, challenging the traditional distinction between high and low art and encouraging participation.

During the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increasing concentration on cultural policy's influence on and support for economic development. During this time however there was less fiscal autonomy for local authorities and reduced national government contributions, so much of the innovation and creative capacity came from the commitment and success of local networks of people in what has been describes as a 'creative milieu' - a locational hub combining hard and soft infrastructure, acting as a crucible for creative people and enterprises (Landry, 2000). Some of these were 'funky' low rent locations formerly in industrial use, such as The Custard Factory in Birmingham, others were reinforced by the presence of art colleges, as in Belfast Cathedral Quarter or Covent Garden in London.

In addition to the creative milieux, the characteristics of the social and economic networks are considered to be important in fostering creativity to assist economic advantage. Drawing further from Landry, it is contended these factors are:

1. personal qualities, including a motivation and capability to innovate
2. will and leadership, both moral and intellectual , to guide and mentor others
3. human diversity and access to varied talent, in age and outlook, from the available urban pool
4. organisational capacity, both to learn and also to follow through and deliver
5. local identity, an awareness of people and place
6. urban places and facilities, a combination of public spaces and more private venues
7. networking dynamics, embedded both within and between sectors

Where then, does urban planning and policy activity sit in terms of supporting such creativity if it is deemed so important to city – and even city-regional – well-being? There are a number of themes that have been pursued in recent years that seek to connect the less tangible notions of a creative city with the more overtly physical processes of place-making.

The next three sections explore three such themes, as policy strands aimed at developing creative cities. These are:

1. Creative Industries
2. Public Art
3. Events and festival programming

In our sample survey, all responding cities claimed to have policies and strategies for all three of these themes. Most also claimed to have current projects and programmes running, except in public art which received a lower response.

The following sections provide an overview of their roles, including how they feature in contemporary practice.

4. The Creative Industries

Britain's Creative Task Force defined the Creative Industries as "those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property"(DCMS, 2001: 3). The list of activities shown below, was adapted from DCMS and used in our survey. There is increasing evidence of the rising public profile of this sector, constituting 8% of the UK's GVA in 2003 and growing at a faster rate between 1997 and 2003 than GDP as a whole (Frontier Economics, 2006: 6). The creative sector is thought to be high value-added due to the extent of specialisation and creative content. As well as a belief that the creative industries as a sector can provide direct benefits to the UK economy it is suggested that they also provide advantages to the rest of the economy through a multiplier effect. The global market for creative and cultural products is expanding as communications technologies and tourism grow. Much research has been undertaken to determine different mechanisms for developing the sector, with considerable emphasis placed on the potential of clustering, for instance, in and around neighbourhoods termed cultural quarters.

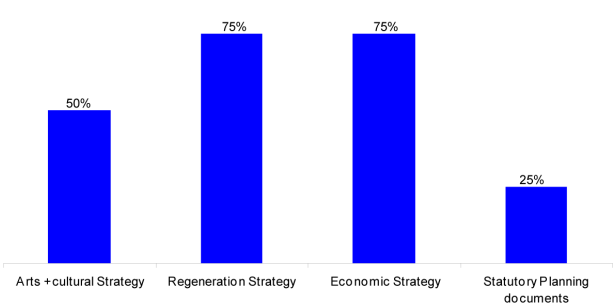
Creative and Cultural Industries (Adapted from DCMS, 2001: 3)	
Advertising	Designer fashion
Film & video	Art & artists (incl Public art)
Television & radio	Music – jazz, classical, popular
Sound	Theatre and performing arts
Software	Publishing
Digital animation	Crafts (eg jewellery)
Web design	Heritage & museums
Architecture & design	Photography & graphic design

Cultural quarters have been widely developed over the last fifteen to twenty years as mechanisms for synthesising the cultivation of creative industries with urban regeneration objectives. There are many high profile examples of this including Covent Garden in London, Temple Bar in Dublin and The Merchant City in Glasgow. The most successful examples of cultural quarters usually had some longstanding cultural activity or venues, more recently augmented by cultural 'pioneers' attracted to the marginal and cheap working and living space. This was the case in the Temple Bar area in Dublin where the state bus company triggered a fall in rents, whilst buying up property for a proposed transport re-development. This fall acted as a magnet for artists and large numbers of studios, small shops, bars, restaurants and creative businesses were established. The value of the area was recognised and its development as a cultural quarter was championed by the Temple Bar Development Council, set up in the late 1980s when Dublin was designated a European City of Culture. The property was refurbished and redeveloped and new creative entrepreneurship fostered. By the end of 1996 the number of people employed in Temple Bar had increased by over 300%. (Montgomery, 2004: 8) A significant proportion of the employment generated was in the creative industries. A similar story applied to Covent Garden in the 1980s, after proposals for its demolition were halted in the 1970s, although it subsequently progressed to become an expensive central London location, squeezing out much of the lower rent creative activity.

In addition to cultural quarters, commonly utilised public policy tools include helping creative business start-ups with the provision of incubator or studio space, resources and training. Networks are considered to be important to help offset the high level of risk in the sector and projects may thus be aimed at improving communications, setting up support forums for interaction, introducing sector clustering policies and developing technology, such as high volume-high speed internet. The Round Foundry Media Centre in Leeds is a leading exemplar, located in a former iron foundry, and now the focus of a new urban village. By contrast WASP studios forms a network of studios across Scotland's cities oriented to supporting artists with flexible, affordable space.

Many cities have undertaken all of these tactics, which highlights a caveat for policy in this area, the assumption that this sector can be developed and replicated anywhere. Our sample survey indicated most creative industry sectors are represented across responding cities, but that architecture, design, and webdesign are particularly strong, with sound and 3-D design less well developed. Despite the presence of many of these creative industries in UK cities, the formulaic 'cookie cutter' approach to policy can fail to recognise the specifics of place which are central to developing the sector (Oakley, 2004). Many cities blindly followed the Dublin example in the 1990s, but with wholly different local conditions and outcomes. A further problem is that it may be difficult to determine the real needs of the sector, as conducting research in this area is complex due to difficulties with definition and measurement. Therefore policy response can be crude. From our sampled research most cities claim to have policy to support creative and cultural industries, normally located in the dual strands of economic and regeneration policy. Arts and cultural policy is also used, and it is significant that planning policy is only very rarely a key instrument.

Where does the LA promote supporting policies for **creative industries**?

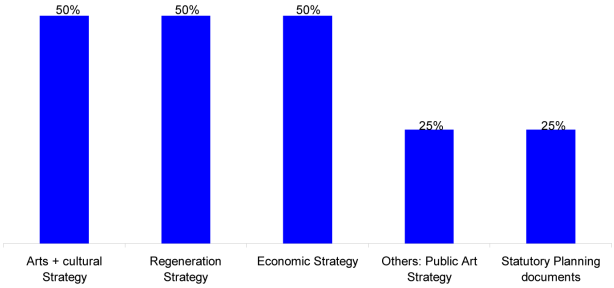


5. Public Art

Public art, simply defined as art in an open public space (Miles, 1997), has been a relatively longstanding component of regeneration strategies, notably in Birmingham, Gateshead, Glasgow, parts of London, and in some new towns. After a period of dominance by murals in 1970s urban renewal, there was increasing interest in the development of public art strategies during the 1980s and the Arts Council Percent for Art initiative was launched in 1988. This encouraged local authorities to promote a wider range of public art and to encourage the adoption of a voluntary percent for art policy (Roberts and Marsh, 1995). The deployment of public art programmes increasingly became a key part of many redevelopment proposals, particularly larger commercial or civic schemes from the 1990s. It is claimed they can contribute to identity building and place-making, engaging communities in sometimes dramatically changing situations. Public art is used to address problems of exclusion, disempowerment and decline (Hall and Smith, 2005). The art, it is maintained, can act as a symbol for rebirth, renewed confidence and dynamism for the people who live and work in a place.

Over the last decade or so, many projects have also benefited from National Lottery and Arts Council funding, sometimes partnered by private sources, and leading to more potentially transformational projects. Of the surveyed authorities, all claimed to have current policies promoting public art, mainly spread across cultural, regeneration and economic policy arenas. Statutory planning was only rarely used to capture public art intentions.

Where does the LA promote supporting policy for **public art**?



Perhaps the most prominent recent example of the power of public art is the Angel of the North in Gateshead. The local council had been involved in environmental and public art from the 1980s, but it was the building of the Angel of the North, commissioned as a millennial image, which brought intense public and media interest. The decision to build Antony Gormley's 65 feet high sculpture was initially met with a furore by the public and it generated intense media scrutiny. However its popularity and symbolic presence have ultimately allayed any fears for its success. This success was forged by a strong sense of ownership by local people, exemplified by the draping of the Angel in a Newcastle United football shirt not long after its erection. The art captured not only the imagination of local people, but many across the country, where it has been seen as an optimistic symbol of city-regional renewal, a regeneration that has moved beyond the nature of the art itself. (Bailey et al, 2004: 55)

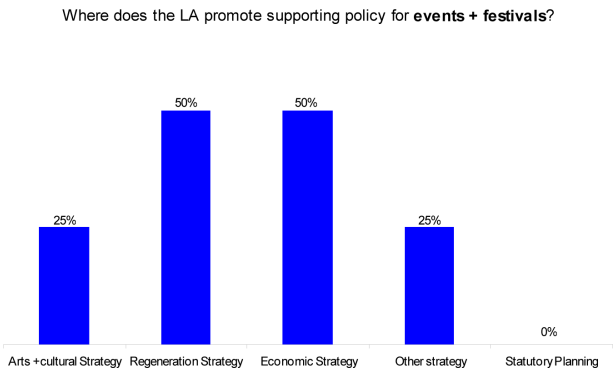
Angel of the North, Gateshead

As the Angel of the North shows, public art can provide aesthetic intervention and enrich the physical fabric of cities, but it can also bring other benefits, most notably those associated with re-imaging. Both external and internal perceptions may be altered by the symbolic meaning generated by public art. Externally, it is hoped to provoke and inspire new attitudes towards a place and the creation of a positive destination brand for cities - encouraging investment, attracting leisure and tourism visitors as well as an inward movement of skilled workers. Internally, enhancing civic pride, fostering social cohesion and self confidence, are often explicit aims of such projects and many of the social benefits of public art are thought to be derived from active local participation. This is suggested to increase social cohesion and capital by developing networks between participants and also mutual respect (Roberts and Marsh, 1995). This dimension of proactive participation with artists has now been taken forward as a television programme, The Big Art Project by Channel 4. After submissions from 1500 communities, six have been selected to work with leading artists on local public art projects over the coming year. The interaction with artists is viewed as important an ingredient as the public art output.

As the television programme will show, there are significant tensions in regeneration approaches based around public art, even where all are willing participants. Capturing identity is a challenging process and as such can act as a 'carnival mask' rather than a catalyst for regeneration. There can be an inherent mismatch in the aims of place-promotion and those trying to reflect an authentic local identity. For instance, many cities focus their attention on the core CBD area and thus deepen the gulf between the commercial centre and more peripheral, disenfranchised areas.

The power of interpellation of public art is both a source for consensus and conflict within the reinscription of place. Within official discourse, the benefits of public art are expressed in its ability to instil civic pride and to contribute to local distinctiveness, yet the ability of public art to be seen as at odds with its intended symbolism emphasises its contentious nature (Sharp et al, 2005: 1020).

6. Events and festival programming



Of the sampled cities, all had policies and programmes in support of events and festivals, whether local or national and international in focus. Half of the respondents cited economic strategies and regeneration strategies as the locus for this support. Around a quarter referred to their arts and cultural policies, or related types. However, none of the respondents cited planning documentation as a source of policy support. This suggests that economic benefit may be the main driver in the majority of cases.

The important role of the 'grands projets' has been well recorded (Matarasso and Landry, 1999) and cities pursuing large events such as the European City of Culture explicitly set out economic and social, as well as cultural, goals – their aspired legacy of participation. Economically it is hoped that an event of this scale will create significant employment opportunities and revenue from visitor spend. It is also anticipated that the event will contribute to the identity and social cohesion of the city. These are among the potential benefits for Liverpool, City of Culture in 2008. For a modest amount of funding, the status can lever enormous additional value, branding, whilst also setting new benchmarks along the journey of cultural renewal.

In the case of Glasgow, hailed as a success story, images of deprivation and decline were initially transformed by a Garden Festival in 1988, the accession to the title of European Capital of Culture in 1990 and subsequent status as UK City of Architecture in 1998. Glasgow was the first city to use the milestones of such an events program explicitly as a catalyst for urban regeneration. The ambitious approach procured a high level of funding from local authorities and private sponsors, helping to develop cultural resources such as the Burrell Art Collection, Tramway and Arches venues and the major Scottish Exhibitions and Conference Centre (SECC) . There have been vast improvements to the physical fabric of the city including public spaces, new retail and conference centres, hotels and luxury apartments.

Together with the buildings, spaces and events such as the Jazz Festival and Art in the Square, a key legacy has been the radical transformation of the city's image from old stereotypes such as razor gangs, unemployment and alcoholism to the celebration of Glasgow as a fashionable shopping destination and culturally vibrant business city (Garcia, 2004b: 107).

The programming of smaller scale events, such as those orientated around cultural forms like music or art, also contribute to a creative milieu and can contribute a multiplier effect to the local economy in terms of repeat visits and possible conference hosting opportunities. These events are also important mechanisms for community involvement and capacity building, not only around creativity – but in combining expression of cultural identity with community cohesion in an increasingly diverse population.

There is a temptation amongst local authorities to import stories of success in other cities into their own, without understanding the need for events to be rooted in the historical and cultural fabric of the area.. One of the most important challenges is for cities to forge a distinctive identity rather than replicating standardised approaches from elsewhere, which are often unsustainable in a different context or culture. High profile spectacular events are costly to host and not every city can maintain the flagship infrastructure necessary to host such activity.

Unless measures are taken to embed these cultural events, they may serve to alienate the indigenous residents and increase polarisation between rich and poor, or between culturally attuned and the rest.

7. Issues for the future

This short overview paper points towards a number of areas that need monitoring, review and ongoing research to optimise the linkages and benefits that could accrue to truly creative cities. These include:

At a strategic level…

As creativity and cultural innovation becomes more important in contributing to city and national economies, there is a need to find new ways to connect it to local people and local identities, to provide genuine differentiation and distinctiveness at a national and global level.

The risk of loss of authenticity in the 'art' dimension through overly prescriptive policy approaches, is likely to work against attracting and holding genuine talent for whom space for innovation is the driver, not rules and policies.

Creative and cultural production, as well as consumption, requires investment, funding and support, particularly in the early phases of start-up businesses. Cities become unhealthy if they are exclusively consumption-driven

At a city level…

At a city level, whilst the central city is most accessible, care must be taken in providing for the needs and creative contributions of the wider community, not just businesses and tourists.

There is the geographical risk that, with the city centre as a focus of cultural consumption, it could become increasingly disconnected from the peripheral catchments it serves. There needs to be some investment in these other areas, where so many spend the bulk of their lives.

Ideally, cultural infrastructure should be for local consumption (to attract new local audiences) as well as for visitors. It should not be dependent on the latter.

Mixed activity urban villages with a strong identity may be the way to address this.

At the level of urban planning …

Urban planning policy could play a more sophisticated role in the development of urban creativity, for instance by planning for and maintaining lower cost start-up clusters or cultural quarters to nurture creative businesses, rather than focusing on physical renewal and redevelopment.

Urban planning could play a strong role in building a vision of a dynamic, creative city with stakeholders and the community. To be successful in the knowledge age, urban change must embrace the community and not simply be imposed 'top-down', as in the mentality of the industrial era.

The urban planning function, if imaginatively applied, could track the effects of creative change over the long-term - not just impacts and outputs, but some consideration of the intrinsic value of the artistic cultural and creative contribution to the success or otherwise of the creative city concept.

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