Urban cultural policy and creative city making

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1. Introduction

Creative city policy has been in circulation for two decades. Far from a fad, the creative city concept has been taken up in a diverse range of cities despite seemingly fatal academic critique, a vague policy target, and questionable policy outcomes (e.g. Markusen, 2006; Peck, 2005; Pratt & Hutton, 2013; Scott, 2006, 2014). Local and state governments have nonetheless latched onto the concept in the belief that creative activity, broadly defined, can be harnessed as an urban economic resource. In the process, the creative city policy field has become an emblematic form of policy transfer (Pratt, 2009) evolving into multiple models that have been adapted in myriad ways (Grodach, 2013). Yet creative city programs appear to hide rather than reduce urban inequalities and reproduce similar problems across different places (Gerhard, Hoelscher, & Wilson, 2016). At the same time, new movements are emerging that may take the creative city field in new directions.

The purpose of this paper is to revisit the history behind the creative city and critically engage with these emerging movements. In so doing, our aim is to provide a deeper understanding of creative city policy formation and determine if these new movements represent a more progressive direction for policy. In the following section, we draw on academic literature and archival research to discuss the formative narratives and public discourse that positioned cultural policy as an instrument of urban development underpinning the rise of creative city policies.[i] Next, we delineate the key modes of urban cultural policy and the subsequent formation of the creative city policy field. We demonstrate that while discourse has evolved, creative city policy is largely a selective repackaging of 1980s policies with an expanded set of actors and interests. The result is a fragmented and contested policy field. Reflecting on this context, the following section explores two emerging movements around the concept of "making" - creative placemaking and the urban manufacturing/maker movement. We attempt to show how

these "making" movements reshape prior creative city concepts to produce a more progressive policy *discourse* around cultural production and community development. However, proponents must address significant challenges if they are to achieve the outcomes they aspire to.

2. The narratives of urban cultural policy

Creative city policy derives in large part from the urbanization of cultural policy. Urban cultural policy developed in the 1980s as local governments in North America, Europe, and Australia grappled with 1) economic restructuring and urban decline, 2) neoliberal governance, and 3) changing demographic and social trends.[ii] By the 1980s, many cities faced declining urban conditions and an insufficient tax base due to the loss of manufacturing related employment. Concurrently, urban economies were restructuring around high wage finance and business services, including design and other creative industries, and lower wage jobs in retail, tourism, and hospitality. Many cities pinned their hopes of recovery on these growth industries guided by the neoliberalism of the Reagan-Thatcher era. Their program of fiscal austerity and privatization encouraged local governments to concentrate on facilitating development over regulating growth (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). This included a focus on place image through attention to cultural amenities, urban design, and consumption (Zukin, 1996). Urban strategies also attempted to capitalize on changing demographics to sell an urban lifestyle and generate redevelopment. Declining household size and an increase in non-family households coupled with longer commute times led to claims of a "back to the city" movement (Laska & Spain, 1980).[iii] This concept merged with attention to "loft living" (Zukin, 1982) and was reinforced by growing critiques of suburbia as not only bland and homogenous, but environmentally harmful (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2001).

Within this context, three interwoven narratives encouraged local governments to approach arts and culture as a development asset.[iv] First, governments approached the arts as an amenity to boost consumption,

[i] Archival sources include newspapers, magazines, and trade journals from Factiva and ProQuest 1975–2000. While we focus on urban cultural policy, we recognize that there are other formulations that focus more on creative knowledge industries or a cognitive-cultural economy (c.f. Musterd & Murie, 2010; Scott, 2014).

[ii] There are of course variations across different places in terms of the scope and impact of these trends as others discuss in more detail (Grodach & Silver, 2013; Hutton, 2009; Scott, 2000; Zukin, 1996).

[iii] In the US, households with children declined from about 50% in 1970 to 30% in 2007 (Birch, 2009). Though the reality of middle and upper income suburbanites moving to central city neighborhoods is contested, the idea has shaped policies to remake center cities (Hyra, 2015).

[iv] In focusing on these three narratives, we emphasize certain aspects of urban cultural policy and may omit certain directions and tensions in the formation of policy. See Adams & Goldbard, 2005; Ashley (2015), Evans (2002), and Wyszomirski (2004) for alternative accounts.

fuel property development, and enhance the city image. Second, cultural industry work was increasingly considered vital to a "post-industrial economy" and as a "replacement" for the loss of manufacturing activity. Third, stemming from these narratives, the idea of the arts as a force for gentrification crystalized in popular media and urban policymaking.

2.1. Narrative 1: staging the city for consumption

In perhaps the dominate narrative of the time, the arts became a vehicle for consumption and place branding. As a prominent arts advocate told city leaders, "You must make your downtown a stage. Not through a public relations agency, but through museums and culture and performing arts centers" (Robert McNulty in Hartley, 1989). Prior to the 1980s, only a few cities with established reputations as cultural capitals built arts complexes expressly to improve the city image and generate area reinvestment (e.g. New York/Lincoln Center, Paris/ Centre Pompidou). By 1985, as one art museum director quipped, "any American city of 10,000 people or more must now have a going museum or two, and also one on the drawing board, preferably by a fancy architect" (quoted in Glueck, 1985). Art became a "new fuel for urban growth machines" as local governments and developers partnered with large cultural institutions to redevelop vacant land (Ashley, 2014; Whitt, 1987, p. 17).

Common strategies to stage the new downtown included land write-downs, tax credits, amenity bonuses, and other incentives to encourage the construction of iconic buildings and renovate industrial properties for cultural uses (Grodach, 2010; Strom, 2002). These cultural facilities were part of the program to attract tourists and provide amenities for new mixed-use developments. Countless cities also set up their own percent for public art programs to lend aesthetic value to redevelopment projects (Miles, 1997). By the 1990s, over 90 US cities had designated arts districts to encourage the rehabilitation of vacant industrial spaces (Frost-Kumpf, 1998) and many attempted to achieve their own "Bilbao effect" with a high concept cultural building to brand the city (González, 2011). These moves around the "economics of amenity" began to make central cities more attractive to tourists, property development, and a growing service economy workforce (Green, 1983; McNulty, Jacobson, & Penne, 1985). Many creative city policies and branding efforts are essentially an extension of this mode of urban cultural policy focused on developing spaces of consumption and aestheticizing the city to attract the creative class.

2.2. Narrative 2: post-industrial cities and cultural intermediaries

The second narrative emerged under the fiscal austerity of neoliberalism to frame arts and cultural work as emblematic of a post-industrial economy. In the US, urban and cultural policymakers began to talk about the arts as an industry important to urban restructuring rather than as a non-profit sector (Perloff, 1979). UNESCO and the Greater London Council became interested in cultural industries, which united performing and visual arts with media-based industries and focused on "the relation between cultural development, economic growth and technological development" (Garnham, 2005; O'Connor, 2010; UNESCO, 1982, p. 12). Others emphasized the role of "cultural intermediaries" (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1990; O'Connor, 1998). In the context of expanding consumption and the globalization of business services trading in specialized knowledge, artists and those in media, design, and advertising assumed increasing importance. They gained economic value as tastemakers "who have the capacity to ransack various traditions and cultures in order to produce new symbolic goods, and in addition provide the necessary interpretations on their use" (Featherstone, 1990, p. 11).

However, policymakers did not immediately understand how to implement policy around this narrative. Although arts and cultural industries

were held up as a replacement for manufacturing, in the US, the "cultural industry" was still largely synonymous with "arts institutions and the performing arts" (Perloff, 1979; Hendon, Shanahan, & MacDonald, 1980, p. 300–301). In the UK, place-based programs emerged in deindustrialized cities such as Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter and Manchester's Northern Quarter (Brown, O'Connor, & Cohen, 2000; Moss, 2002). In Liverpool, city leaders conducted a £100 million plan to "transform a run-down part of Liverpool city centre into a mecca for 'creative industries'" (Freeman, 1989). By the early 1990s, scholars were able to document numerous European examples where cities had followed similar paths (Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993). However, these programs often focused on property redevelopment and attempted to capitalize on the presence of cultural intermediaries rather than directly support them.

2.3. Narrative 3: gentrification

This helps explain the rise of a third narrative around artists as catalysts of gentrification. The mid-1980s marks the beginning of a steady progression in news coverage on the role of artists in gentrification and defined "a larger unified narrative about artists and housing in the city" (Makagon, 2010, p. 31). Artists emerged as capable of "changing land use patterns" (Cole, 1987, p. 391; Zukin, 1982) and assisting cities in waging a "war of position against an impoverished and increasingly isolated local population" (Deutsche & Ryan, 1984, p. 93) while simultaneously becoming the "victims" of the process they purportedly engendered (Makagon, 2010).

Property developers and urban policymakers alike drew on the arts-gentrification narrative. In New York, city-owned buildings were slated for renovation by and for artists in 1982 with opponents calling the program "a front for gentrification." They charged that "this is making gentrification public policy, and it will inevitably displace people who live here" (Bennetts, 1982). In 1986, Boston saw the "unlikely union of bankers and artists" partner to develop "the nation's largest artist-owned real estate venture" (Diesenhaus, 1988) and a "Midwest savings and loan corporation" was attending arts conferences on the lookout "for artists that want space and are willing to offer sweat equity to renovate these places" (Christiano, 1981).

Together, these narratives worked to urbanize cultural policy, broadening the field beyond the traditional public patronage model and setting in motion the development of the creative city concept. Growth-oriented local governing coalitions established programs that positioned culture as an urban development resource. This opened up the field of actors involved in cultural policy and ensured that the arts and cultural sectors would become a mainstay of urban policy.

3. The policy strata: foundational policy modes in the 1980s

These three narratives have framed urban cultural policy over the last 35 years. Although cultural policy has continued in the vein of public patronage, it expanded in approach and objective as it became an urban policy concern. Alongside the traditional model, three modes of urban cultural policy unfolded in the 1980s and continue today: 1) the economic impact of cultural amenities, 2) cultural planning, and 3) cultural industries (Table 1).

Each of these forms of urban cultural policy departs from the traditional justification for funding the arts on grounds of artistic excellence and enhancing access. Instead, they tend to emphasize an economic rationale and assume a broader definition of culture beyond the fine arts to encompass commercial, community, and popular culture (Oakley & O'Connor, 2015; Pratt, 2010; Wyszomirski, 2008). It is important to recognize that these approaches do not represent succession in policy practice. Rather, each approach forms a stratum of the urban cultural policy system with variations across different policy systems, patterns of development, and historical legacies.