

# The Consequences of the Creative Class: The Pursuit of Creativity Strategies in Australia's Cities

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## Abstract

*The idea of 'creative cities' has gained prominence amongst urban planners and policymakers who often now find links between economic development and the 'soft' attributes of cities. While definitions of the 'creative industries' and the 'creative class' continue to be contested, many key urban policy actors continue to focus on developing strategic programmes and policies to boost 'creativity' and economic growth. In this article we review recent attempts to implement creative city ideas across five Australian state capitals. Following the analysis of interview material derived from contact with 100 key community and policymaker actors, we first develop a typology of approaches to creative city ideas: concerted action, engagement and strategic drift. We then move on to consider how the idea of the creative city provides a simultaneously criticized yet powerful organizing device that informs local strategies in relation to prosperity. Our analysis highlights a series of connected consequences around four key issues: (1) arts projects and gentrification; (2) housing affordability; (3) revanchist strands to public space management; and (4) relative rates of social investment. We find that the rhetoric of universal social potential accompanying creative city ideas continues to overlook those unable to participate in this new economy, as well as those who are more actively excluded.*

## Introduction

The relationship between creativity and economic development has become a key feature of the theoretical and practice landscape of urban politics in the last decade. For some commentators, this is already a tired formula whose implications are as likely to be the dislocation of low-income households as the creation of innovative and tolerant milieus (Peck, 2005). Yet the idea of an economy based fundamentally on creative skills and services has become a popular and driving discourse that has deeply affected the ground rules for securing economic development and competitive advantage. Ideas around creativity have thereby affected the tone and strategic direction by which many cities, more or less gifted in these attributes, seek to manage their economies and, increasingly, the arts and place-based qualities that are seen to underpin the attraction of talent and innovative capacity. Where Florida's initial analysis (Florida, 2000) highlighted the coming wave of opportunities for all cities based on a prescriptive list of ingredients and actions, his more recent work (Florida, 2005a; 2008) has emphasized a 'flight' of creativity and, by implication, capital and economic security. In short, we are presented with a context in which city-regions, rather than countries, are the primary unit of analysis when considering any competition for a globally footloose class of creative types; the perceived basis of high-profit sectors underpinning the most successful and

desirable locations and economies. It is in this context that urban governance is presented with an apparent challenge — how to attain (or indeed maintain) a significant position on this kind of hierarchy of place, by producing the kind of environment that will attract talent and subsequent economic success.

For all the boosterism of Florida's analysis, his work has often imprinted itself on the strategies of Australian cities. A visiting speaker at several key events in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney, Florida's aggressive blueprints for the pursuit of competitive advantage have appeared to influence debate about building competitive advantage around a globalized pursuit of innovation by the Australian state capitals. In this article, we detail Florida's position, given his apparent charismatic influence in Australia, the creative cities literature, and proceed to consider the broader social consequences that this pursuit of a creative class appears to bring. We structure our analysis in three distinct phases. First, we review the international and Australian research literature, examining the influence of ideas around creativity on strategies of urban economic and social development, with particular emphasis placed on the work of Richard Florida as well as that of Charles Landry. It is to Florida and Landry that policymakers and urban leaders have particularly turned in pursuing and legitimating a wide range of programmes, interventions and investment decisions. In the second section, we examine the degree to which strategic thinking, action, policymaking and partnerships have engaged with these ideas about urban creativity. This work is based on interview data with 100 key actors working in senior roles as state officials, consultants, city bureaucrats and community representatives in five of the Australian state capitals, and also on policy documents and state budgets. The final section of the article considers the likely longer-term impacts of this shift within city governance for more marginalized residents.

## The influence of creative city ideas

The concept of 'creative cities' has gained prominence among urban planners and policymakers, as well as academics with interests in urban affairs more generally. While definitions of 'creative industries' and a 'creative class' continue to be contested, what is not disputed is that increasing numbers of urban governors are focusing on reinventing their cities as being 'creative' in a more explicit way (e.g. London, Tampa Bay, New England, Silicon Valley, Auckland, Brisbane). These efforts have been visibly promoted through initiatives such as the European Union's 'European Capital of Culture' and the UNESCO Global Alliance 'Creative Cities Network'.

The ideas underpinning this shift in emphasis should be understood in the context of two major economic shifts. The first is a concern on the part of cities to survive, by connecting their capacities to what are seen as deep changes in the conditions of the global economy (Mommaas, 2004: 21; see also Pink, 2005; Scott, 2006). The second is recognition of the growing importance of the creative economy in comparison with other economic sectors (Mommaas, 2004). If the focus of cities and regions during the industrial age was on attracting capital to promote economic development and provide employment, the shift into an economy focused on informational attributes has seen the attraction of groups of people seen to have those skills that tie in with this emerging economy. As a result, many major metropolitan areas around the world are now drawn to a formula that combines a focus on the new economy, investment in cultural resources and an attempt to create a vibrant sense of place. Two of the best-known names in the creative city movement are Englishman Charles Landry and American Richard Florida. While there are some similarities in their arguments, both theorists approach the issue of the creative city in distinctive ways.

Landry's focus is on bringing creativity into the practice and policies of urban renewal. He argues that 'the creativity of those who live in and run cities will determine future success' and recognizes that while this has always been the case, the need to think

about creativity with regard to city policy and practice is of particular importance today when cities face significant periods of transition ‘brought about by the vigour of renewed globalization’ (Landry, 2000: xiii). At the same time, cities are facing a number of new and accelerating problems. These include increasing social fragmentation, growing dissatisfaction with the physical environment, awareness of the inequity of mobility (i.e. its social selectivity and unequal distribution), an increase in fear and alienation of city residents, and ‘the diminishing sense of locality, of shared place and identity’ (Landry and Bianchini, 1998: 14–15). *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* describes how creativity can (and should) aid in ‘a new method of strategic urban planning’ (Landry, 2000: xii) to address these economic and social problems. Landry’s vision of a creative city is a place where people feel free to use innovation to tackle social problems.

Florida’s ideas differ from those of Landry, arguing that a ‘creative class’ has emerged in American and other Western societies. This creative class is important, according to Florida (2000; 2005a; 2005b), because in an economy increasingly driven by creativity, cities and regions with creative people will be those that succeed. This apparently circular argument has a long history. Peter Drucker coined the term ‘knowledge worker’ as early as 1959 (Drucker, 1983: xvii), and in 1973 Daniel Bell argued that theoretical knowledge was becoming increasingly important in the economy and that there was a growth of a ‘knowledge class’ of scientists and engineers (Bell, 1973: 328). Later, during the recession in America in the early 1990s, Robert Reich (1993: 178) argued that the economic future of America would depend upon the skills of individuals, in particular ‘symbolic analysts’, rather than the profitability of corporations. Similarly, in 1989, Castells spoke about the importance of an ‘informational mode’ of development (Castells, 1989).<sup>1</sup> According to Florida, a successful economy can be connected to a recipe of economic development consisting of three ‘Ts’: technology, talent and tolerance. While Florida’s focus on technology and talent harks back to discussions on the ‘information society’ and the ‘knowledge worker’, what is new about his analysis is the addition of ‘tolerance’. Florida’s argument is that in order to attract creative workers to a city, that city has to have a lifestyle attractive to the new ‘creative class’, a group who value diversity and tolerance in the places in which they live. For Florida, companies follow creative workers (rather than the reverse) and creative workers have a large degree of choice over their location.

For both Landry and Florida, cities must compete with each other to attract and retain investment and creative human capital. Indeed, Jensen (2005: 4) notes that cities have been attempting to make themselves attractive in the market economy for a long time but that these urban branding activities are becoming increasingly ‘professionalized’. For example, an important part of the process of urban branding and place competition is the ranking of cities (*ibid.*: 13) — a device that Florida himself has actively pursued.

The popularity of these ideas can be partially explained by their promotion by both Landry and Florida themselves. Both have travelled around the world to speak about their ideas and to consult for different urban governments. In Australia, Landry promoted his ideas as an early contributor to Brisbane’s *Creative City* strategy in 2002, as a ‘thinker in residence’ in Adelaide in 2003 and as a speaker at the 2004 Canberra Ideas and Innovation Festival. In 2004, Florida gave talks in Melbourne (Flew, 2004) and in Sydney (Parliament of New South Wales, 2004). However, there are more substantial reasons behind the popularity of these authors. First, the ideas of both Florida and Landry fit well with a broader recognition of the importance of the cultural industries in the economy (see Gibson, 2003; Musterd and Deurloo, 2006 on Florida). Second, particularly in Florida’s formulation, the creative class thesis is not at odds with economic rationalist or neoliberal policies (see Gibson and Klocker, 2005; Peck, 2005; Gibson, 2006). For

1 For comprehensive overviews of these developments, see Healy (2002), Jensen (2005) and Pink (2005).

example, the creative class thesis normalizes flexible labour-market conditions (Peck, 2005: 764) and it is the connection of these ideas with such practices that forms the investigative concerns of the research we now report on.

## The research

The research that informs this article set out to unpick how Australian cities are engaging strategically with ideas of creativity and creative class formation and attraction, and whether relationships can be identified between such drivers and particular community outcomes. The research included consultation with 100 key actors across 82 interviews in five of the eight Australian state and territory capitals — Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart. Local community and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, city governors and state officials were interviewed. These interviews provided detailed information and views on the existence of strategic actions and policies around creativity, how any such plans and policies were enacted in daily practice and, finally, the impacts of such approaches on broader outcomes such as economic development, housing and public space.

Our analysis of these data followed a range of prescribed categories and ideas drawn from the literature and our own working hypotheses. Our analysis involved the use of NVivo for transcripts of all of the interview material. This generated a significant number of open codes, which were organized and merged, as a stronger analytical framework grew around the ideas, theories and emerging viewpoints. In order to assess the relationship between city/governance and community perspectives, we deployed a matrix analysis through NVivo that enabled us to distinguish between the viewpoints and interests of our key actor participants. This enabled our analysis to be structured around both the thematic concerns of the research and the position of key actors (i.e. whether they were university staff, consultants, NGOs or community organizations and so on) and at two key levels (city governance or 'community'). We were thereby sensitized not only to the range of problems and consequences but also to the relative interests of the key actors identifying particular issues.

Our central aim was to consider the range of actions by city government and other institutions that might coalesce to form considered and latent outcomes by policy, related interventions and investments that explicitly or implicitly port ideas of creativity to the local urban arena. While Brisbane has been the only city to date with a formal creative cities strategy in place, rhetoric reflecting creative cities ideas was apparent to varying degrees in all of the state capitals we studied (see Table 1).

Ideas around economic development were strongly linked to creativity in all five cities, and creativity itself was seen as an obvious baseline issue. Yet we found that, at the same time, many key actors were also critical of these concepts, particularly in relation to the influence of Florida. We now focus on three of our case study cities in fleshing out

**Table 1** The adoption of creative cities ideas in Australian cities

City	City Governance	State Involvement	City Involvement	Official CC Strategy	De facto CC Strategy	Ad hoc Policies and Actions
Brisbane	Unitary	High	High	Yes	-	Yes
Melbourne	Multi	High	High	No	Yes	Yes
Sydney	Multi	Moderate	Low	No	No	Yes
Adelaide	Multi	High	High	No	Yes	Yes
Hobart	Multi	Low	Moderate	No	No	Yes

a typology of such engagement, organized around varying levels of engagement with the creative cities discourse.

### Position one: concerted action – the example of Brisbane

Brisbane was the only one of our case study cities with a published creative cities strategy. In 2002–03, Brisbane City Council, along with the consultancy firm COMEDIA (founded by Landry) and Brecknock Consulting, unveiled *Creative City: Brisbane City Council's Cultural Strategy 2003–2008*.<sup>2</sup> The strategy is not simply a cultural policy and appears to follow Landry's argument that any creative city strategy needs to include three elements, which are often in tension: arts policy, cultural policy and an organizational change agenda built around creativity and innovation.

What is particularly interesting about Brisbane's *Creative City* strategy, however, is that the political process has appeared to have stripped it of much of its initial promise and depth. The final report includes a range of core principles: embracing history; building a cultural capital; ensuring access and equity; encouraging innovation; investing in culture; and providing leadership. Under each of these headings, the report lists what is being done and what could be done in each area. As one local government official noted during an interview, these areas became more of a 'wish list' of projects than a strategic framework or plan.

Earlier drafts of the strategy, on which Landry himself was consulted, were much more comprehensive and included discussions on the difference between a creative city strategy and an arts or cultural strategy; the importance of a human, social, cultural, intellectual, creative and environmental capital, as well as new ways of valuing and measuring progress, and new ways of managing the need to attract, support and retain creative people. In discussions with Brisbane City Council officials, we discovered that when the strategy was being written, the then Mayor had been very supportive and there had also been a number of visits to the city by Florida, initiated by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and the City Council. However, the strategy ultimately focused on a series of concrete arts infrastructure investments, such as the Powerhouse arts venue, and the final Creative Cities document was released as part of an electoral campaign. With a change of Mayor, the focus on creative cities ideas dissipated. The fact that it was a 'wish-list' and not a policy framework appeared to make it easier to ignore, and provided an example of how political processes might erode the promise of some of the deeper elements of any creative cities prescriptions.

Yet there are a significant number of projects that continue to run in Brisbane which draw on these ideas. In particular, there is significant interest around the intersections between the city government, its universities and the development of a creative economy. This is articulated through research and development capacities, including state expenditure on these headings, as well as the strong promotion of particular localities with links to creativity, such as the Powerhouse and Kelvin Grove Urban Village (a mixed-use development incorporating residential development, retail, parts of Queensland University of Technology and a 'creative industries precinct').

Despite the apparent embracing of the ideas of both Florida and Landry in Brisbane, some interviewees cautioned against the simple adoption of these ideas in the management of the city of Brisbane. As one explained, Landry deals with the regeneration of cities in decline, while Florida deals with cities booming due to information technology and tourism. In Queensland, many economic imperatives are increasingly focused on controlling growth and the possibility that inadequate infrastructure spending will hamper the ability to live in the city-region.

2 URL [http://www.brecknockconsulting.com.au/07\\_downloads/AU-Q-BCC\\_creative\\_city.pdf](http://www.brecknockconsulting.com.au/07_downloads/AU-Q-BCC_creative_city.pdf) (accessed 4 March 2009).

## Position two: engagement – the example of Adelaide

While Brisbane is the only Australian city to have a formal creative city strategy, Adelaide has also been heavily influenced by creative cities ideas, in particular by the work of Landry. Indeed, one interviewee noted that Landry was in Adelaide at the time when the state strategic plan (Government of South Australia, 2004) was drawn up for South Australia, which includes 'fostering creativity' as one of its main principles. The plan also states that Adelaide will aim to achieve a ranking in the top three regions of Australia in Florida's Creativity Index within 10 years.

In fact, an interest in 'creativity' and the arts is long-standing in Adelaide, and goes back prior to the writings of Florida and Landry. Creativity was seen to be one of Adelaide's great strengths in the 1970s and it was a driving passion of Don Dunston<sup>3</sup> to establish Adelaide as a creative city. This focus shifted and, in the last 3 years, there has been a more singular focus on Adelaide as a creative city. Landry was invited to Adelaide because of increasing interest in this issue under a new government and at a time when the economy of the state was improving.

For many of the people we spoke with, discussions on creative cities strategies raised the issue of innovation and the knowledge economy. Indeed, as discussed above, the creative cities arguments themselves have grown out of this concern with the 'new economy'. In South Australia there is a focus on innovation and on growing 'the creative industries' in the state and, in particular, digital creative industries. The sorts of companies in that industry tend to have workers who are assumed to want a city-based lifestyle and so it was anticipated that they would have a significant impact on Adelaide's central business district (CBD).

These changes have been reflected in a growing concern with the importance of clustering creative arts-based organizations in Adelaide, in particular in the western part of the city. The West End is home to Arts SA (South Australia), the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, the Adelaide Festival and the Jam Factory,<sup>4</sup> as well as numerous hotels, bars and clubs. The West End has a long arts and entertainment-based history, with two of the earliest theatres in Australia being built there in the 1840s. However, in the 1990s Hindley Street, one of the major streets in the West End, had gained a reputation as 'the Kings Cross<sup>5</sup> of Adelaide', and vacancy rates in the area were high. Adelaide City Council encouraged arts organizations to move into the West End for purposes of urban renewal.

While both 'the arts' and 'innovation' in the sense of the 'knowledge economy' were raised in relation to the utility of creative cities ideas in Australia, these two issues were seldom dealt with together. As one interviewee noted, 'people think of creativity in terms of arts, culture etcetera, but not in terms of linkages in other areas. There is a lack of creativity about that'. In contrast, an officer in the South Australian Department of Planning noted that discussions around innovation do not, in fact, tend to address the arts:

The only time arts gets a mention is things like public art in urban development and urban regeneration and . . . the 'airy-fairy stuff', like let them do this and let them do that. We'll do some public art and that'll make the place nice as opposed to . . . how do you facilitate that critical mass of people and ideas so that will create artistic projects, *that* sort of thing is not necessarily catered for.

## Position three: strategic drift – the example of Sydney

Florida's and Landry's ideas have permeated the thinking and planning of policymakers and planners in Sydney, Australia's largest city, yet have not been taken up to the same extent or as explicitly as in Brisbane and Adelaide. However, the tag line for Parramatta

3 The Premier of South Australia in 1967–68 and 1970–79.

4 A centre for the design, production, exhibition and sale of ceramics, furniture, metal and glass.

5 An area in Sydney known as both a red light district and entertainment destination.

City Council's<sup>6</sup> 2005 *Arts Facilities and Cultural Places Framework* is 'Towards a Creative City' and one of the framework's seven major strategy areas is 'growing cultural and creative industries: generating new wealth and new cultural expression' (Parramatta City Council, 2005: 4). Elsewhere in New South Wales, Florida's ideas have gained some traction and cabinet ministers have been interested in them, particularly in terms of developing regional areas. Former Premier Bob Carr and Planning Minister Andrew Refshauge were interested in Florida's ideas of reinvigorating areas by attracting creative people and institutions. Florida has also spoken in Sydney on a number of occasions and, at one point, suggested that Sydney host the inaugural World Creativity Forum, bringing in Bill Clinton and other 'big names'.<sup>7</sup>

However, in general, our interviews in Sydney indicated that both city governors and state actors in New South Wales already perceive Sydney (especially the CBD) to be in a very strong creative and economic position. As a result, a formal strategy has not been a priority. Indeed, employees of both the New South Wales government departments of Planning and State and Regional Development explained that creative city strategies had not gained much of a grip due to 'arrogance on Sydney's part' and confidence in Sydney's position as a global city. Indeed, some of our participants expressed concern about complacency in the city and the possibility that other cities may out-compete Sydney in the future.

## Community impacts and the creative drive: the consequences of the creative class

At the moment, there is a dominance of economics over culture in terms of what is important. Creative cities point to economic development as part of the argument, but if economic development is the only argument I'm not sure where some of the most marginalized people can participate (NGO Director, Sydney).

Both Landry and Florida have recognized a number of social issues related to the creative economy. For example, Florida (2005b: 172) notes that there are a number of negative externalities that may be related to a creative urban economy, including uneven regional development, sprawl and ecological decay, mounting stress and anxiety for individuals, as well as political polarization. In particular, he points to housing affordability and congestion as problems that require management frameworks to prevent them from becoming a brake on the economy. Yet the fundamental question we turn to here is whether, in fact, the very pursuit of creativity either masks or sets in motion particular directions of development activity that may exclude or diminish the role or engagement of particular constituencies.

It has become quite clear that there is a core question around social equity and creative cities policies that requires further attention. A number of commentators have already alluded to these issues (e.g. Bradford, 2004; Peck, 2005; Gibson, 2006) and it is these concerns that we operationalize here by seeking to assess the everyday practice and implementation of creative city schemas. To take one key example, we might focus on the need for safety and a supportive open milieu that are seen as important to Florida's diagnosis of the key features needed to attract a creative class. Yet, the results of such policy may be a perverse emphasis on gentrification and the displacement of social difference to enable an urbanizing class to feel safe (Peck, 2005). Indeed, Florida's arguments have been seen to be divisive, splitting society into the 'creative' class and by extension, the 'un-creative others' (Bradford, 2004; Peck, 2005; Gibson, 2006; Gibson and Brennan-Horley, 2006). Florida himself has recognized that inequality is strongest in

6 Part of greater metropolitan Sydney.

7 This did not happen because of the cost.

city-regions at the top of his creativity scale. However, he sees this as a set of problems that requires action, rather than recognizing any connection between the privilege of much of the creative and professional classes and the low-wage economies that surround and service them. It is these kinds of critique and problematics that set the context for the remainder of this article.

We will now discuss some of the connections articulated by our key actor interviewees between the relative emphasis on a creative mode of economic development, strategies to realize these outcomes and the potential social impacts of such strategies. Writers like Florida have been strongly critiqued for producing accounts of development that stress a particular mode of neighbourhood development that has long been associated with a softening-up of neighbourhoods for capital (Zukin, 1995). In this final section, we trace some of the problems and consequences of the pursuit of creative city strategies on existing communities.

### Support for arts projects and seeding gentrification

The relationship between the role of the arts in the creative economy and strategies for economic growth is highly complex. However, one feature of this relationship has been the way in which both *laissez-faire* and more targeted economic approaches now see the arts as having an important role in such growth. We found examples of low-rent units and space in cities like Brisbane and Melbourne — designed to promote diversity of neighbourhood central city uses to encourage an environment that tourists, visitors and creative professionals more generally might come and visit. There is a strategic 'savvyness' to these lines of engagement with economic development — diversity is seen to pay much broader dividends than any potential losses from lower rents that such provision might initially imply. A further issue is the often tacit understanding of the ways in which encouraging artists provides a seedbed for a kind of staged gentrification.

On the one hand, these shifts have resulted in a greater optimism toward the role of arts and communities in the development of the city, but also the much clearer elevation of artists as the temporary vanguards of creative strategies, often displaced by the subsequent raising of rents through commercial and residential gentrification. While writers like Florida have been keen to assert the need for 'garage' and cheap space for business start-ups, creative enterprises and other seeding approaches, there is a fundamental contradiction in the way that many Australian cities now operate. This occurs not least in the way that low-cost accommodation for 'creative' and artistic uses is celebrated, while space for 'non-creative' labour and social groups is lost. In addition, we found that the work of NGOs, in using the arts to build community capacity, is often glossed over in favour of large arts infrastructure or commercially oriented arts projects, such as key exhibitions and festivals.

### The impacts of gentrification on housing affordability

In Melbourne there isn't really a strategy here but issues around livability are critical and there are significant public monies spent on attracting creative, high-tech and other facilities, festivals and events to bring in more money. Gentrification has been running for some time with significant displacement, fuelled by labour market changes as well as macro economic settings. The livability agenda has created mono-tenure affluence. The affordable housing agenda *does* seem to be pushed under concerns for the trickle-down benefits of big investment (NGO research manager, Melbourne).

Differentiating between housing market impacts derived from a specific drive to attract creative professionals and existing economic forces operating through the housing market is clearly difficult. Gentrification has become a concern in all of the cities we



examined, and this concern is not restricted to the community groups and NGOs we spoke to. Many officers operating in state and city arts organizations and others recognized that the loss of social diversity and housing stress among low-income groups has become a critical issue. However, for actors working in the city sector, there was a strong sense that gentrification is something that has happened *to* these cities and that it is essentially beyond the control of local governments. Certainly, it is the state housing authorities who control access and relative investment in public housing that might ameliorate some of these issues. Yet, the authorities have seen successive state and Commonwealth government funding retrenchment over the past decade. For some NGOs, it is this kind of response to emerging social problems that has led to criticism that state and city governors are more interested in the bright lights of a creative economy than retaining the investment required to accommodate and sustain poorer social groups in the city, increasingly unable to compete for housing resources.

While gentrification has created problems of localized pressure on housing markets, it is important to recognize that a lack of affordable housing has become a pervasive social problem in Australian cities. This has occurred for a range of reasons, primarily demographic and housing supply-side; the extent to which local governments have been directly culpable in failing to respond to these problems is not immediately clear. However, many key actors in the community sector felt that the pursuit of a creative class was synonymous with a desire actively to promote gentrification and thereby supplant more needy communities by affluent groups who might also facilitate the improvement of the physical fabric of the city. All of this leaves the impression that there is a fractured policy drive around creative economies and gentrification: while some local organizations see potential for a holistic and innovative approach to community development, other splinters of government and politicians appear keen to see higher-income residents within their constituencies. This process was described in Brisbane by an NGO official in these terms:

The reality is that when artistic communities are attracted into areas, there's often corresponding gentrification of those communities . . . and I don't think that cultural strategies have necessarily grappled with that. So you can end up with a city that's got a lot of hallmark cultural opportunities and at the leading edge of culture and creativity, but there may be a further sub-set of people who are further excluded within that city because they can no longer afford to live there. So, the presence of artistic and creative communities is not the only determinant of gentrification, but it is usually part of a broader process of gentrification. And I think if governments are going to pursue these kinds of active strategies, then they need strident strategies to ensure the social diversity of a city is sustained (NGO official, Brisbane).

For many of the NGO and community representatives we spoke to, the lack of a response to housing stress and the welfare of lower income groups highlighted a callous face of urban governance that was perceived to have been corporatized and directed primarily at the needs of existing and footloose industry and creative/professional groups. In Melbourne, the Docklands development<sup>8</sup> was regularly singled out as a prime example of the kind of place-making that was being delivered for these groups, with next to no affordable housing component. While the documentation associated with Docklands stresses the diversity of this community as a hallmark of its sustainability, this was significantly at odds with the perception of community groups, although it was acknowledged to have provided public space infrastructure for the broader community.

For many NGO and community organizations, the role of the city council was seen to be one of promoting business interests leading to a disconnection between these interests and those of the existing community. For many, gentrification was the hallmark of this search for 'the right kind of people'. In Sydney City, where most city revenue comes

8 Further information about this development can be found at the following website: URL <http://www.docklands.com> (accessed 4 March 2009).

through business rates, the implication appeared to be a reliance on business and the small high-income residential population. In both Melbourne's Yarra and Port Phillip City Councils, the problem of gentrification was associated with the broader growth challenges of the wider metropolis and was seen as problematic, yet difficult to change.

Often these concerns ran side by side with social programmes designed to engage with local communities through arts and creative strategies. The tension here lies in the fact that local governments, while closest to the community, receive relatively small amounts of financial support. Even if brakes could be placed on the gentrification process through the growth and maintenance of public housing, this would be managed by the states who have historically defunded public housing in tandem with the Commonwealth government. Even if public housing were seen as a possible response to these issues, local experience in many local government areas has shown that there is often significant opposition to what has become an extremely socially residualized tenure.

All of this has left many cities under-prepared, even if they wanted to maintain affordable housing in the city, for the impact of gentrification. As one official bemoaned: 'It is the property market that will dictate the kinds of communities we live in' (Yarra City Council, Melbourne). While there have been some initiatives that seek to address these issues, like Brisbane's Kelvin Grove Urban Village, these are relatively rare, and even Kelvin Grove has provided a negligible contribution to the need for affordable accommodation in the central city.

## Revanchist strands to the control of public space

I know that architects in Victoria, for example, have designed street furniture that is intended to be hospitable to homeless people. So, you know, opportunities to actually go with the diversity instead of using public art to fight it. But the alternative too is that you see some public installations of benches and stuff that have had bars and things put on them so that people can't lie down on them . . . Creative industries can be used to dismantle diversity, or to support it (Community Arts Group, Brisbane).

Another linkage between the emphasis on creativity and the new economy and local communities appeared in some of the more aggressive policies and ad hoc decisions that have made it harder, or intolerable, for certain social groups to live in the cities. We should add here that the ethnic diversity of Australian cities has generated much less political friction and segregation than their North American counterparts. This means that the ethnic-political consequences of creative city strategies, where these can be located, have not tended to play out along these social lines. However, as we indicate later, the apparent targeting of the urban Aboriginal population remains a problematic feature of Australian urban institutional life. In fact, the targeting of particular groups appears to have emerged as the result of two key factors: first, the drive to create clean and safe spaces to encourage social and economic investment; and, second, the emergence of new communities in cities who are themselves less tolerant of some of these social problems. The result of these forces has been to create a climate in which social difference and more marginal social groups have been policed, designed and priced-out of central city areas. The general story for Melbourne city was described in the following terms:

With gentrification there has been more high-cost housing and it has produced a different social and cultural mix (that is, high net worth individuals and affluent young professionals). These groups are more likely to want cleaner streets and less diverse social and cultural amenity. There is pressure on local government for measures for getting rid of buskers and beggars, these are the risks and downsides of stimulating creative growth (NGO researcher, Melbourne).

In Adelaide and Brisbane, local bylaws have been passed to prevent forms of public drinking that target Aboriginal and homeless people. Interviewees also noted physical changes in the city's structure so that these groups found it increasingly difficult to maintain a presence:

Homeless people used to sleep in toilet blocks in Victoria Square. The buildings were very old and could have been heritage listed. They were knocked down. Also the square was made into a 'dry zone' [i.e. alcohol free]. You cannot argue that it was for any other reason but to get rid of the unsavoury elements. So these people moved out into the parks surrounding the inner-city. The parks around the city hide these people. Adelaide has a really cleansed look, an engineered city thing going on. They were just relocated, with no provision of services (NGO representative, Adelaide).

Other examples of local 'NIMBYism'<sup>9</sup> could be found between new residents and existing users of these spaces. While examples can regularly be found of newly resident professionals complaining about existing music from pubs, we also found evidence of complaints about initiatives that might help to alleviate the problems of homeless people:

The council started a station at Newfarm Park for homeless people with showers and lockers for them to use, but the local residents complained and council backed down (NGO representative, Brisbane).

In addition, we found even more aggressive policies of social displacement in evidence in Brisbane:

There have been 'move-on' powers in Brisbane now for 1–2 years. Council applied to the state government to be able to move people on in five areas of the city . . . The areas they targeted included . . . traditional gathering places for indigenous and homeless people. Now virtually any council in Queensland can move people on. But there is not necessarily a strategy of where they are being moved to. Anyone who is thought to be causing stress and disquiet to people can be moved on (NGO representative, Brisbane).

However, these impressions should also be added to other, more progressive, strategies. For example, in Melbourne we found that state and homeless organizations had produced a protocol with the police to stop homeless people being moved-on prior to the Commonwealth games in 2006. Policies and practices are uneven where they focus on the displacement or inclusion of the poor or groups perceived to be problematic. Indeed, it is not clear the degree to which relative propensity to engage in ideas around creativity can be linked to outcomes such as these and it is certainly difficult to see a strong creative strategy as some direct policy correlate of aggressive stances around public space management.

## Reduced social investment

The final area we consider is the potential for a political/economic trade-off between investment in the drive for strategies around place promotion and competition for talent, on the one hand, and reductions in action around community and social investment, on the other. The clearest example of this can be found in what was seen in cities such as Adelaide and Brisbane to be a lack of consultation around the emerging strategic effort on these issues. There was a certain irony to this as city officers often discussed how much effort had been spent on ensuring adequate consultation:

9 Not in my backyard.

I think generally the community does get left out. They've done some consultations for the state strategic plan and they were holding community forums and those sorts of things, but it was sort of an invitation thing and that whole thing of getting people to fill out a survey on the internet and putting an advertisement in the paper and telling people to, you know, "You can contribute to our state strategic plan, tell us what you want for South Australia", isn't necessarily an effective way of consultation (state government official, Adelaide).

Many of the NGO representatives we spoke with noted that interest in engaging communities has tended to be slight. The strong economic growth over the past decade and a general shifting of investment has not seen lower-income groups improving their position. As one state housing official argued:

Socially inclusive communities [e.g. including people with low incomes] are critically important to a tolerant society. To the extent that the state doesn't see those things I worry (state government official, Brisbane).

Also in Brisbane we found that much of the broader social ethos underpinning the *Creative City* strategy had been supplanted by a more aggressive focus on business, as well as the general downplaying or ignoring of the strategy itself.

It would seem that there is a benign ignorance of much of the social pain, loss and general discomfort that lower-income families have experienced during the long boom of the past decade. In this context, the creative city holds the allure of an inclusive and exciting prospect for city and state policymakers and charismatic leadership in the government and corporate sectors. For the community and NGO sectors, creative cities are perceived to maintain the privilege of privilege and cut few paths towards a more sustainable position for those on lower incomes. The latter are seen to be potentially threatening to the investment of footloose creative 'gentrifiers' or business investors. This appears to have had the result of creating an irregular patchwork of actions and efforts that unevenly address either a 'creative cities' or social inclusion agenda.

## Conclusion

In this article we have sought a fresh take on debates about creativity, local economic development and the broader impacts of this for more deprived groups in the city. We started with the question of the degree to which writers like Florida and Landry have influenced strategic policymaking and partnerships across Australia's cities. We found that ideas about the importance of 'creativity' are strongly embedded in ideas of economic development and advantage across Australia's eastern seaboard, but that these 'strategies' and policies are unevenly expressed, are frequently ad hoc and often rely on the actions of charismatic individuals. Furthermore, far from being 'Florida groupies', the majority of key actors working in city and state government, think-tanks, community organizations and NGOs demonstrated strong interest in, but also sophisticated critiques of, the degree to which such recipes for action might be effective.

The general absence of documented creative city strategies belies the fact that a creative city-inflected understanding of economic growth and city development is deeply embedded among policymakers and key personnel working within state, city and other 'upper level' institutions in Australia. The Florida 'formulation' is particularly important because, even while his work has been strongly criticized, it is this recipe for action — focusing on ability to live, a quest for footloose creative talent, and generating particular varieties of social milieu — that has impacted most on policymakers in the Australian context. This influence does not only run along the lines of culture and the arts but extends into economic development, housing and other sectors of urban governance.

A global context of anxieties around competitive advantage remains fixed on the creative industries in the context of a post-industrial economy. In addition to the embedding of this paradigm at the level of networked and ad hoc urban governance practices, the language, parameters and assumptions contained within Florida and Landry's reading of creativity and urban success have also proved to be deeply engrained in the views of those working in community and NGO organizations. This appears to be a result of taking on the realities of debates about economic vitality and spinning these off into two interpretive frames. The first of these is one of acceptance, in order to achieve sustained legitimacy and funding within current frameworks. The second highlights the significant role of communities, inherent human capacities, innovation and local problem-solving. The common features of these approaches can be summarized as follows:

- The raising of knowledge/high tech, creativity and (commercial) research and development to a higher value under conditions of perceived urban competition between cities within Australia and individual cities competing for talent and investment with other cities globally. This can be related to a search for core product development and service systems that can be produced with relatively little infrastructure investment.
- A story of urban development and growth that is fundamentally anchored to understandings of the role of creative talent as a feature of existing populations and the tacit linkage of prosperity attached to a city's ability to attract such talent from external sources.
- An almost unshakeable and universal belief in the uniqueness of place and a discourse of singularity that connects competitive place-advantages to existing urban culture, creativity and other 'soft' attributes.
- The largely contradictory placing of competitive and corporate understandings of growth side by side with largely rhetorical devices stressing community sustenance and development.

It is at this point we can see a key problem emerging, to the extent that the creativity paradigm can be used, rather pointlessly, to encompass so many aspects of economic development and urban governance. There is then, as many theorists and practitioners recognize, a dangerous vacuity or catch-all nature to the creative cities formulae advanced either by Florida or Landry that has been used as a kind of 'tape' that can be applied to address any concerns around economic development or to legitimate unpalatable or contentious actions that exclude those who are already marginal to the life of the urban economy. For example, a council officer in Brisbane provided us with an example of infrastructure development (a new road tunnel) being justified as promoting liveability under the Florida formulation. Another example would be the use of creativity as a mode of general problem-solving by communities and policymakers. Here creativity becomes not a theoretical lens, or way of understanding shifts in strategic decisions, resource allocation and place-competition, but more the very broadest, and thereby bluntest, instrument by which rationales of urban life and policymaking are conceived.

While the degree of strategic engagement that connects policy to practice and organizational working is generally weak, we have found that cities are fearful of a globalized system of competition for labour, yet often simply repeating creativity as a solution regardless. Dialogues about being left behind provide a major spur to these plans for economic futures. Yet the precise direction that strategic efforts take beyond these commonalities is, as we have shown, diverse, complex and often ad hoc. For those cities that effortlessly rode the preceding long economic boom (Sydney and Brisbane), interest and action is variable; for those with more to gain (Adelaide), there is a history of more intense interest in these ideas.

In short, the idea of the creative city is a much-criticized yet powerful organizing device that forms the basis for many debates about future economic development. Furthermore, creative cities ideas incorporated into existing policy mechanisms are used to justify or add support to a range of policy actions *already* in existence.

In the second part of this article, we discussed whether the rise of a creativity agenda in local urban politics meant the relative displacement of welfare and other agendas, such as access to housing, from city, state and Commonwealth policies. Here things become much muddier and the demonstration of any causal linkages more difficult. Our interviews with key actors from NGOs and community organizations highlight a concern with the way that economic growth in the previous decade has bypassed those groups they deal with, and has raised the prospect of exclusion from this new prosperity. There is also a disjunction between the perceived attempt to attract young and affluent groups, and the inequities that this has generated in many neighbourhoods through patterns of gentrification. However, it remains difficult to calibrate the influence of these policy flavours and directions given the way in which the wider private economy of household investors has effected these changes without strategic direction or support from the public sector.

If creativity is not the universal boost to the city economy and community infrastructure that many of our strategists might hope, it is also not clear whether the consequences of the creative class can be seen as being linked to these strategies, or more to the patterns of supra-city economic drivers and city-regional flows of investment, economic growth and household change/affordability. In cities like Sydney and Brisbane, the costs of gentrification and household displacement appear certainly to have come largely as the result of these broader economic cycles of investment and shifts in the nature and locations of local economies that have undercut less well-off communities. What is clearer is that the cities and states have acted ineffectively in seeking to ameliorate the problems associated with this economic growth. The bright lights of the newly creative city are tinged with the development of anti-social and regressive policies and injunctions, which have, in some cases and localities, taken on the hue of revanchist policies — against the homeless and marginal urban communities such as indigenous communities. While a rhetoric of engagement and universal social potential is often seen accompanying ideas around the creative city, it appears that urban governance approaches seek to enhance the possible rewards associated with this agenda and yet have been generally ignorant of those excluded from, or unable to join, the new economy. All of this suggests that the trenchant critiques of North American approaches to the creative economy have value in seeking to understand the directions and impacts of urban governance in Australia. However, the significant contextual differences between metropolitan centres and their respective social, economic and political histories remain important in explaining the variability of the consequences to these strategic directions.

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## Résumé

*Le concept des 'villes créatives' se fait plus présent auprès des urbanistes et des décideurs politiques qui, désormais, découvrent souvent des liens entre développement économique et attributs 'non quantifiables' des villes. Si les définitions des "industries créatives" et de la 'classe créative' restent contestées, nombre d'acteurs clés de la politique urbaine continuent à privilégier l'élaboration de programmes stratégiques et*

*de politiques publiques dans le but de stimuler 'créativité' et croissance économique. Cet article passe en revue de récentes tentatives de mise en oeuvre d'idées propres aux 'villes créatives' dans cinq capitales d'États australiens. Suite à l'analyse d'entretiens tirés de contacts auprès d'une centaine de communautés et décideurs politiques prépondérants, les auteurs ont d'abord conçu une typologie des approches des idées liées aux villes créatives : action concertée, engagement et mouvement stratégique. Est ensuite étudié comment le concept de ville créative procure un outil d'organisation à la fois critiqué et solide qui éclaire les stratégies locales par rapport à la prospérité. Une série de conséquences connexes est mise en évidence autour de quatre enjeux essentiels : projets artistiques et gentrification; accessibilité financière au logement; tendances revanchistes à la gestion de l'espace public; et cadences relatives de l'investissement social. Il en ressort que le discours sur le potentiel social universel associé aux idées de ville créative néglige toujours ceux qui ne sont pas en mesure de prendre part à cette nouvelle économie, ainsi que ceux qui sont plus activement exclus.*



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