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**Cultural Regeneration & Global Neoliberal Political Economies:
Amsterdam – A Case Study**

Introduction.

This paper seeks to explore the practice of urban design as a function of cultural policy for regenerating declining central city cores. I argue that the practice and implementation of cultural policy for the purpose of economic development and inter-city competition in the global marketplace reinforces the globalized neoliberal political economy. A discussion of the city of Amsterdam is used to provide an example of how the process is playing out, in terms of its urban design, place-marketing, and disassembling of its social welfare state. This paper will look specifically at the tools of urban design as they are used by city planners as a means to appeal to the so-called "creative-class". Additionally, this paper places Amsterdam in the larger context of the global political economy and looks at how globalization has shaped, and is shaping, the city.

The Global Neoliberal Political Economy and Cities

In order to discuss the concept of urban cultural policy, it is important to first develop an understanding of why it exists as a means to regenerating declining central cities. Specifically, why are central cities in decline and what are cultural planning initiatives attempting to address? As noted by Nijman (1999), cities are attempting to reconcile their globally-oriented economic functions with the locally-rooted effects it places on society and culture. One of the main themes running thru the globalization thesis is that because of advances in technology, transportation, and information systems, corporations have become independent global entities that are no longer territorially beholden

to a specific country, government, or set of laws. As a result, cities across the globe have become locked into an inter-local competition to attract mobile private capital investments and jobs. (Nijman, 1999; Wansborough, 2000; Montgomery, 2003; Peck, 2005; Florida 2004).

The results of inter-city competition are all too familiar, from Hong Kong to Amsterdam to Louisville. Richard Florida begins his argument in *Revenge of the Squeelchers* with the discussion of an 875,000 square foot Rite Aid distribution warehouse outside of Boston. He notes that \$7.1 million in taxpayer money went to help build the warehouse. Florida predicts that several million more in public sector subsidies to the private corporation are still to come in a ménage of forms, such as roads, tax incentives, infrastructure investments, and transportation for workers who live in the central city. He argues that this practice appears to be state-sponsored socialism instead of a "free market" (Florida, 2004).

The example of the Rite Aid distribution warehouse is one of several ways that the cycle of mobile capital plays out. The following, more commonly discussed examples are derived from various literature concerning urban politics and urban political economies (Montgomery, 1990; NewRules.org; Mitchell 2000; Shuman 1998; Williamson, et al 2002) The Wal-Marts, Best-Buys, and McDonalds type of chain stores (food and retail) that move into a locality destroy the local economy, and siphon money out of circulation in the local economy by rerouting the profits to a faraway corporate headquarters. Montgomery (1990) complains

of an “utterly banal... transatlantic monoculture”. These corporations generally have no local roots, and therefore contribute little to the city by means of philanthropic support. They pay lower wages to their workers, offer fewer benefits (if any at all) than the locally-owned businesses they ran out of operation, and also have a propensity to be environmentally destructive. Big box chains tend to build huge stores which require massive infrastructure investment, and they are generally located on the outskirts of towns, which consumes green farm land by turning it into an ocean of pavement. Other corporations, such as chemical plants, might be major regional polluters. The fact that their corporate governors are not residents in these locations (thus, their children and families do not have to breathe the air), makes the practice of environmental irresponsibility convenient (Montgomery, 1990; NewRules.org; Mitchell 2000; Shuman 1998; Williamson, et al 2002).

In addition to the previously mentioned broad negative externalities associated with the neoliberalization of the global political economy, urban localities are also subjected to many additional devastating effects on their daily realities. Since cities are competing for jobs and investment, they have to offer incentive packages to attract investment, which lowers the tax base and decreases social services expenditures. Increasingly, cities find themselves to be in a helpless situation. They undermine their local economic autonomy by becoming dependent on outside, mobile capital investments to keep their residents employed.

Additionally, because a corporation can decide to disinvest in a city at any given moment, they have the upper hand in terms of power dynamics. This arrangement defeats democracy at the local level, as residents are denied access and the ability to participate in the decisions that shape their local realities. Rather, democracy is replaced with an authoritarian decision-making process marshaled by unelected, unidentifiable, corporate CEO's under the guise of the "free market" (NewRules.org; Mitchell 2000; Shuman 1998; Williamson, et al 2002). In reality, the global neoliberal political economy it is a system of corporate welfare that subsidizes the international economic elite, while marginalizing the concepts of social and environmental welfare as nothing more than loathsome governmental hand-outs for the lazy masses or mere communist, leftist, anti-competitive, regulatory burdens.

Decline and Hopes for Regeneration thru Cultural Policy

Now that we've developed an understanding of the problem, we must next look to the problem of decaying central cities. As stated earlier, the process of economic, corporatist globalization has a tendency to send older town centers into decline. Decline is the end result of various converging problems, such as small businesses being driven under, disinvestment in public infrastructure (such as transit systems, utilities, public schools, libraries, etc...), sprawl, and increased crime rates (Kotkin and Siegel, 2004; Duany et al, 2001; Williamson, et al 2002). Kotkin and Siegel note that there has been a history of "fads" that city politicians and economic development officials tend to grasp onto as a magic bullet for

rebuilding their inner cities and reestablishing the middle class (Kotkin and Siegel, 2004). They point to the 60's and 70's downtown malls, the 80's and 90's convention centers and stadiums, and identify the new "fad" as the "latte index", referring to the density of Starbucks as a measure of pending economic success (Kotkin and Siegel, 2004).

What Kotkin and Siegel are referring to is the current school of economic development and city planning thought that places culture at the center of its strategy for growth. The "creative economy", the "creative class", "cultural regeneration", "café culture", "cultural planning", these are various monikers used to refer to what Peck coins as being "the supply-side promotional strategies that are globally reproduced to compete for mobile capital investment, jobs, and discretionary [tourist] spending" (Peck, 2005). Global urban creative-warfare, or the "my city is cooler than your city" battle, entrenches cities in a process of publicly subsidizing the commodification of culture for the purpose of place marketing with an artistic intonation. It is the contemporary version of the 60's and 70's downtown malls.

The Carnegie Mellon economist Richard Florida has become associated as the father of this school of thought over the past four years. However, cultural planning and policy has roots stemming back much earlier. A basic literature review on EBSCO turned up several articles published in various academic journals prior to the publication of Richard Florida's popular book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. The earliest discussion that surfaced under the search terms of

urban culture and urban design (which represent the co-mingling of the two concepts) was an article by John Montgomery in the U.K.-based journal *Planning Practice and Research*. In his article *Cities and the Art of Cultural Planning*, Montgomery criticizes U.K. cities for being less “lively, diverse, and stimulating” than continental European cities (Montgomery, 1990). He discusses the effects of big box retail and notes that the result has been growth by “civic depletion”. He reasons that the cause of this disparity is rooted in the British planners’ lack of imagination and their failure to invoke a cultural approach to urban development. Montgomery blames the lack of culture for a diminution in the quality of urban living (a strong sense of place, civic pride, livability, and citizenship).

Montgomery and others (who follow), generally start their arguments with an effort to define the concept of culture. In general, they tend to refer to the sense of place and ways of life of a city and its residents, including how they spend their time working, eating, being entertained, thinking, talking, relating to each other, etc... In his 1997 article, *Café Culture and the City: The Role of Pavement Cafés in Urban Public Social Life*, Montgomery has refined his concept of culture by using the term “urban public social life”. In general, both of Montgomery’s articles point to the battle between European cities for being the most cultural, which is a necessary precondition for regenerating central cities.

Richard Florida’s pop cultural book, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How its Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life*, has made

him not only wealthy, but also a star in the world of city planning. Florida piggybacks his “creative class” concept on the building trend of cultural policy literature. He makes his argument by connecting it with the white-collar professions he identifies as being “creative” with post-materialist concerns, and which therefore support and seek out a cultural city. Florida’s concept of the creative class is predicated on the notion that white-collar professionals, “creative workers”, do not move to cities for jobs, but rather select locations based on the urban culture. He invented indices for measuring a city’s culture (concentration of bohemian artists, gay population, technology workers), and posits that the city’s potential for overall economic development and future growth rests upon its ability to embrace his “three T’s – Talent, Technology, and Tolerance” in order to attract the creative class.

Florida has attracted critics from both the right and the left. From the right, neoliberal friends of big business criticize the fact that cities all around the world have embraced his rhetoric and are implementing cultural policy in an attempt to spur economic development, while raising taxes on business to pay for it. In *The Curse of the Creative Class*, Steven Malanga accuses Florida of making “dubious leaps in logic” by assuming a causal connection between his indexes and economic growth. He also objects to the economics Florida uses to support his theories. Malanga points to Florida’s “talent magnets”, New York and San Francisco, arguing that they actually experienced a net negative domestic migration pattern. Malanga’s largest peeve is the fact that “a generation of

leftish policy-makers and urban planners” are uncritically implementing what he derogatorily refers to as a “Floridazed brand” of big government spending policies.

Florida’s socio-economically concerned critics in the center and on the left point to the subordination of more pressing causes to yet another scheme focused primarily on an economic development agenda as the cure-all for society’s problems. Centrists Kotkin and Siegel concede that Florida’s appeal is easy to understand, as it offers a way around confronting the tough problems of failing schools, poor zoning and regulatory policies that stifle business, and thick urban politics with an anti-everything bias that deflects entrepreneurial investment. They equate the signing of the Memphis Manifesto by the “Creative 100” (espousing the mission to remove the various barriers to creativity: mediocrity, sprawl, intolerance, poverty, etc...) to the 1934 Soviet Constitution. Rather, they advocate for “common sense” approaches to tackling hard problems, such as more policing, public schools not under the control of teachers unions, and a business-friendly environment.

Peck’s critique of Florida comes from the far left. He argues that the notion of catering to the creative class is worse the chasing down private mobile capital investment because the creative class is a vague, semi-autonomous collection of individual decision makers who can never be pinned down. His point is that at least you can target a business to come into your city and provide jobs. Under Florida’s creative class strategy, cities are indulging in “selective

forms of elite consumption and social interaction”, which is elevated to the status of a public policy objective. The creative class, according to Peck’s summary of Florida’s theory, is dependent upon people “trapped in low-wage service jobs” who cater to their lifestyle. Peck reiterates that the basis of the creative class economic development agenda is predicated on and reinforces the “profoundly neoliberalized urban landscapes” by locking cities into zero-sum competitions for mobile capital investment, jobs, and mass tourism. In other words, cultural policy initiatives “do not disrupt [the] urban policy orthodoxy”, they instead pander to the major sources of the problem in the first place. Peck argues that creative-city strategies are designed for the neoliberalized terrain. They rest on the assumption of a hollowed out nation state in which the human scale is no longer the determinant of meaningful social actions, and creativity is derived from distant and dysfunctional forces beyond individual control.

Peck also points out that the popularity of Florida’s book can be linked to the favorable ratings he gave to cities like New York and San Francisco, who tout his book therefore providing him with indirect marketing and promotion. Peck notes that Florida periodically revises his tables, indexes, and rankings to generate national interest and to continuously build support for his thesis. He points to the fact that Florida’s organization sells reports to cities for \$495, and then suggests the next step is to invite him to speak to the local decision makers. According to Peck, Florida’s speaking fee is now in the five figure range. Additionally, Peck points out that Florida has written a new book called *The*

Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent, in which he argues that U.S. cities are the impending victims of massive creative-class attrition to more competitive Northern European and Canadian cities. His final point is that the creative city trend is “saturated in and superficially oblivious to the prevailing market ideology”, and that it enables elite growth machines to glorify gentrification as a positive model for success.

The criticisms of cultural policy initiatives in terms of their reinforcement of neoliberal urban political economies are evident in the discussions of Montgomery (1990) and Griffiths (2006). Both authors frankly discuss the battle of European cities for the title of most cultural in the clear terms of being the most competitively positioned to attract investment. More specifically, they are referring to the European Capitol of Culture competition, of which Amsterdam was the 1987 winner and Rotterdam the 2001 winner. According to Griffiths (2006), many smaller former industrial cities are locked into a competition between cities that are a part of the established hierarchy of urban cultural destinations. Montgomery (1990) discusses the “weapon for mayors” of these cities as being quality of urban life and a sense of place, which gives them hope for “attracting investment, relocating companies, and would-be employees”. Montgomery (1990) points to Barcelona, Milan, Paris, and Berlin as centers of culture based on their concentrations of fashion, finance and innovation. Yet, the discussion does not go further to tackle issues of socio-economic justice, or to define the notion of developing small-scale economies that are locally rooted.

Urban Design as a Function of Cultural Policy

What exactly does cultural policy or creative city planning look like?

Firstly, it is a given that these initiatives are almost always connected to the larger goals of economic development, place marketing, and city competition for capital investment. Cultural objectives are now informing the process of urban design. Urban design professionals understand how the built environment fosters cultural development, and intervene with the tools to push the physical environment in the cultural direction (Wansborough, 2000). In other words, physical design tactics are used to achieve the policy objective of cultural regeneration in blighted and declining urban environments, all of which are supposed to be good for economic development on a larger scale. These physical design initiatives are part of cultural policies, such as percent for art programs, art districts, and cultural quarters. This section of the paper will outline the characteristics of urban design commonly being used as part of the cultural regeneration equation.

Starting out, Montgomery (1990) describes his definition of cultural planning as being holistic approaches that "...embraces three main sub-areas: cultural economics and production, cultural policy and the arts, urban design and revitalization." He notes that the primary concern is consumption of the arts and their provision. Montgomery outlines the objectives, which consist of achieving a "balanced provision of the arts", programming of year-round events, ensuring multiple venues, supporting and sustaining the arts, and finding additional means

of funding to ensure diversity and choice. He notes that cities in North America and Northern Europe are using art as a means for branding and re-imagining the city to attract tourists and business elites. Wansborough (2000) agrees, adding that the idea of using art for city marketing purposes was developed in the USA by urban growth coalitions of banks, corporations, property developers, arts organizations, and local governments, which produce strategies for consumption of the arts by locals and tourists.

Montgomery (1990; 1997) and Wansborough's (2000) discussions of the role of urban design in cultural regeneration are in lockstep. Wansborough discusses the integration of arts policy with "mundane services" such as transit, crime prevention, and hard/soft forms of services. Montgomery (1990) advocates for the "fusion of policy with support services" (such as trolleys for gallery hops). He also makes the case that in order to be successful cities need to combine popular culture with select elite and avant garde lifestyles. The two authors prophesize about "potential contributions" of creative/cultural policies in an almost identical manner. Their lists include the following:

- Public art, mixed-use development, and cultural quarters for environmental improvement
- Revitalization of run-down areas, or development of a critical mass with the right balance of socio-economic use to make an area work, or restoring derelict areas via cultural repurposing (translation.... gentrification)
- Development of an evening economy, or consumption that generates economic activity

Wansborough (2000) jumps into a philosophical overview of the "post-modern approach to urban design". He explains that it represents a return to

traditional urban processes and spaces within the context of new development. He points to the newly revived interest in street grids and public squares, an ethos of conservation, the elevated importance of localism and historic preservation, with an emphasis on uniqueness and a concern for continuity in tradition and forms. He discusses the physical attributes associated with the trend, which includes a mixture of building types, sizes and uses (residential, commercial, and cultural), human scale, individual character, and intrinsic identity. In other words, the ideas are to move into the old built environment and develop within the existing framework a high concentration of cultural facilities with clear identification, repurpose warehouses for loft living, and using public art to enhance the existing built environment in general. Wansborough (2002) points out that urban development corporations have been moving into declining areas to develop concert halls, galleries, and museums. He outlines the “synergy” of mixed-use developments and cultural districts that attract tourists and locals because of the various offices, shops, cafés, restaurants, and cultural facilities.

Both authors offer lists of specific formulas for achievement of cultural regeneration objectives, which will thus enable cities to become economically competitive in the era of globalization. This section of the paper concludes with the following combined list of strategies and developments from Montgomery (1990; 1997) and Wansborough (2000):

- Cultural animation – fireworks, festivals, bars, music

- Venues – art centers, galleries, museums, performing art spaces, cultural and museum quarters, music halls
- Public space designed for hanging out – open storefront windows, outdoor cafés, public squares, permeable streetscape, landscaping, public restrooms, clean streets
- Bar programming – a pub venue circuit with things such as music, pub theater, and jazz in wine bars
- Communications – a “what’s on” bulletin on cable, signage, event promotion, kiosks
- Promote and grow the café and restaurant culture
- Build on unique qualities
- Sculpture parks, paintings in parks, murals
- Property improvement
- Flexible building use
- Downtown housing
- Percent for art schemes
- Public safety
- Social tourism strategies

Amsterdam: A Case Study Analysis of the “Cultural” Global City

In this portion of the paper, I seek to make the argument that Amsterdam is the quintessential global cultural city. I will identify and discuss various aspects that root Amsterdam firmly in the category of cultural cities that have embraced the themes of place-marketing, mass tourism, and competition for capital investment. Amsterdam has a global reputation for “tolerance” in the arena of sex and drugs, making it the global capitol of consumption based on indulgence. It offers the museum quarter for arts and cultural activity consumption. The redevelopment of Westergasfabriek by MAB, is an example of an urban development corporation predicated on the basis of cultural regeneration to revitalize an area in decline, hence property-driven gentrification development. These items are in addition to heavy investment in a multi-modal

mass transit system, mixed-use development throughout the city, essentially legalized graffiti, and countless pavement cafés. This grand cultural celebration comes at the same time that the Netherlands are in the process of dismantling the social welfare state and liberalizing their economy under the guise of the being more competitive and attractive to capital investment.

In his article *Cultural Globalization and the Identity of Place: The Reconstruction of Amsterdam*, Nijman (1999) discusses his concept of “cultural globalization” as being the transformation cities have made in response to the globalization of the world’s economy. He emphasizes the phenomenon of mass tourism and the deliberate change in city-identity politics, using Amsterdam as an example. Nijman (1999) traces the historically developed identity of the city under the influences of Calvinism, commercialism, morality, and tolerance and juxtaposes the authentic city with the present-day “sex and drugs” image that is promoted for the purpose of global mass tourism.

Nijman (1999) argues that Amsterdam’s image as being a haven for “moral permissiveness” is relatively new, and that it not only supersedes the historic and modern achievements of the city but also is a contradiction of the authentic culture. He criticizes the “intricate blend of authenticity and artificiality” as making it difficult to know the real Amsterdam. Nijman outlines Amsterdam’s history of being the center of Dutch society since the 16th century as being the largest and most important port city until it was surpassed by Rotterdam. He notes that Amsterdam is quite possibly the birthplace of

capitalism, and relates its economic prosperity to the Protestant work ethic which values saving and investment while frowning on lavish spending and hedonistic lifestyles. Nijman (1999) notes that Calvinism inspired simple living, an appreciation for the ordinary, and a distaste for extravagance, all of which is fully represented in plain Dutch architecture when juxtaposed with French or Italian architectural grandeur of the same period. He notes that even the wealthy merchants built modest homes because the culture promoted a sort of “embarrassment of riches”.

Nijman (1999) argues that the historic tradition of tolerance in Amsterdam is in relation to a diversity of religious beliefs and national backgrounds. He recounts the waves of immigrants coming into Amsterdam, from the Spanish Jews to the Flemish to the Lutheran Germans. In terms of Amsterdam’s egalitarian culture, Nijman (1999) equates this development as a response to dealing with the steep wealth divide in the late nineteenth century. He attributes more contemporary egalitarian forces to the anti-establishment post-WWII attitude of the city, the presence of two universities with a high concentration of youth, the 60’s revolution, and the squatter movement.

Nijman (1999) declares that the most popular Amsterdam trait currently is tolerance, which is the result of the commodification of its image for place-marketing. To him, people go to Amsterdam to “enjoy the entertaining spectacle of tolerance” and to “let it all hang out”. He argues that the historic central city has been brilliantly transformed into a theme park resting on the basis of the

normalcy of sex and drugs, which gives the illusion of authenticity to foreigners that are easily charmed by its appearance because they are accustomed to more artificially contrived forms of entertainment. The theme park survives because it uses a pay-per-consumption model; if you have a prostitute you pay for it based on time, if you smoke a pound of marijuana you pay for it based on weight.

Nijma (1999) traces the theme park boundaries from Central Station to Damrak, Dam Square, Rokin, Het Spui, Leidschestraat, Leidscheplein, and into the Vondelpark; he also includes the adjacent areas of the red light district, Damstraat, Waterlooplein, Regulier, Breestraat, and Amsterstraat. He notes that tourists are simply looking at other tourists along this route, and that the dead give away of the artificiality should be the fact that all the signs, menus, and information is primarily in the English language. Nijman (1999) points out that the central city is tolerant of specific sub-cultures, but not of families and the elderly. The population of the central city is relatively homogenous, consisting of white Dutch 20 and 30 somethings.

Lastly, Nijman (1999) argues that the locals are largely removed from the theme park grid. He adds that the theme park is a reflection of the fact that Amsterdam has always been predominantly devoted to making money, which is why a glass of tap water cost \$2. Amsterdam, he argues, specializes almost exclusively in consumer services and foreign tourism, and that the newly contrived identity is highly superficial. To Nijman (1999), Amsterdam has turned into a caricature or "mutant reflection" of its past. The city's authentic culture

lives in the shadows as its commercial money-maker shakes that thing in the central city for tourists from all over the globe.

Amsterdam's museum quarter is another manifestation of cultural policy. That museumplein is a product of modern cultural policy is refutable. The development of the museum quarter began in the 1800's (class lecture, also www.amsterdam.info/museumquarter). It could be argued that the Dutch are actually the pioneers of the cultural quarter concept. Certainly this historic development contradicts Montgomery's (2003) statement that the concept can be traced back to the early 1980's U.S. and U.K. developments. History being noted, the cultural or museum quarter has emerged as a cornerstone of cultural policy and development, and therefore, the museumplein will be placed in the contemporary context.

The museum quarter of Amsterdam features a high concentration of cultural venues within relatively close spatial proximity to each other, to the central station, and transit stops run directly through its center. The Rijksmuseum, the Stedelijk Museum of Modern Art, the Van Gough Museum, Coaster Diamonds, Concertgebouw, and several hotels, pavement cafés, restaurants, art galleries, shoe stores, and designer boutiques are clustered together into the area. The museum quarter is marketed heavily in most tourist literature and is prominent on the tourism and convention board's website. Tourists can purchase tickets to most of the attractions in the museumplein from locations around the city. I purchased tickets to the Rembrandt and Caravaggio

exhibit from a tourist information booth on Leidscheplein. Regardless of the fact that Amsterdam's museum quarter is the product of over a century old planning decisions, the fact is that it is a shining success and it is a representative example of a well oiled cultural machine based on arts consumption.

The Westergasfabriek Culture Park development is another example of the cultural city model in action. The former coal-gas production facility turned brownfield was redeveloped by MAB Group (Koekebakker, 2003). Koekebakker (2003) discusses the relationship between the Urban District of Westerpark and real-estate developer MAB in the appropriately titled "a cultural enterprise" chapter three of his book. The real-estate developer works on the model of gentrification of urban areas in decline in order to profit from boosted property values. According to the Koekebakker (2003) book, their formula includes residential, commercial, and leisure facilities. Koekebakker (2003) notes the double advantage for MAB as being the rise in property values and the promotion of the company's image as a partner with the "best interests of the city at heart".

Amsterdam is the quintessential cultural city oriented toward competition for capital investment, place-based marketing, and mass tourism. It won the European Capitol of Culture title in 1986 (Griffiths, 2006) and the city has paid high priced speaker Richard Florida to come discuss his hipsterization strategies (Peck, 2005). The superior culture of the city is being celebrated at the same time the social welfare state is being deconstructed. Numerous conversations

with university professors, architects, and students in Amsterdam revealed that social housing is being increasingly converted to market-rate, and state-funded student benefits are decreasing. The Netherlands was a pinnacle of Western European socialist democracy until the 1970's when its egalitarianism reached its peak and the social welfare state became allegedly expanded to proportions beyond affordability (Nijman, 1999). The Dutch welfare state is being dismantled while the grassroots movements in Amsterdam are taking a back seat to the powerful urban growth machine that developed in Amsterdam in the late 1990's alongside the rapidly expanding urban and national economies (Nijman, 1999). The urbanites in Amsterdam are on a trajectory toward living in a city with steep economic inequalities and public policies geared at catering to elite interests and tourism.

Conclusion

As discussed, cultural/creative-city policies are predominantly a function of the neoliberal political economy, which serve to reinforce the dominant economic development paradigm and uphold the prevailing status quo. Planners, local governments, and urban growth machines invoke traditional neoliberal rhetoric, espousing the necessity of competitiveness in order to attract external capital investment and jobs. Cultural/creative-city strategies devalue local cultures and artists by providing a mechanism which allows the urban growth coalitions to market and profit on their backs. Generally, artists are the losers in the creative-class cultural regeneration game. They rarely increase the sales of their work,

and their lifestyles become nothing more than an entertainment commodity (interview any of the gallery owners in downtown Louisville about their sales as related to trolley hops).

Artists are many times the impetus for the process of gentrification in declining central city neighborhoods. They have relatively low incomes and many times, these inexpensive properties in undesirable and underserved urban neighborhoods are the only properties in their price range. Artists increase their property investments thru sweat equity by rehabbing old historic homes (painting, exposing brick, landscaping, refinishing floors, etc...) that many times double as living space and a studio or gallery. Artists who hope to see more like individuals in their neighborhood tend to alert other artists of good deals on properties, leading to the development of spatial clusters of artists in particular areas. Soon, property developers will begin to purchase land or buildings in the area and the property values begin to rapidly increase. Often times, artists who are renting in these neighborhoods are run out due to high rents, along with the other working class renters who were the original residents.

The basic premise of arts and culture consumption is based on reducing the individual artist to nothing more than an object from which said economic development potential can be extracted by opportunistic and entrenched elite power structures. The cultural policies are gladly embraced by struggling arts organizations that have no broader obligations to protecting the socio-economic welfare of the larger community, as scarce public funds are redirected from other

social investments (such as workforce development programs) toward cultural programs that only serve to benefit a narrow segment of the population.

In general, many of the urban design functions associated with cultural development initiatives need not necessarily have a high public cost. Pavement cafés, street furniture, and bike lanes are relatively low-cost public amenities that have the potential to serve a larger portion of the community than just the so-called creative class. Mixed-use developments are more flexible and can help to make rehabilitation of old structures or the development of new structures more economically feasible.

The wrong turn that the creative-city strategies take is in the fact that they seek to reinforce neoliberal political economics. Rather than upholding this failed cycle of self-defeating practices, creative-city strategies should seek to develop place-based, localized economies on the basis of import substitution (a concept that argues the path to economic independence is refusing to accept mobile capital investments, replacing imported resources and goods with locally produced resources and goods, and not consuming beyond the means the local region can sustain). The notion of developing an intricate network of disorganized capital and small businesses that are territorially rooted can serve to reinstate a community's economic independence, begin to ameliorate environmental problems, and restore the health of democracies from the bottom up (because Democracy does not have a trickle down effect).

Certainly the arts and culture deserve representation at the local level. But do they deserve overrepresentation as more serious social problems are being put to the side? Most artists would deplore the tactics of the creative city if they understood the political economics behind it. Additionally, they would likely object to being commodified as a function of elite wealth accumulation (especially the elite wealth who comprise the urban growth machine that are likely not contemporary art collectors). The gentrification that takes place as a result of creative-city strategies is also a glaring failure. Hopefully efforts to develop mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhoods will serve to be a next generation attempt to refine the process of revitalizing urban neighborhoods. Not only do we need to be concerned about developing smaller-scale economies, we also need to develop an ethos of inclusion and assimilation of all people, regardless of income, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, education level, profession, and ethnicity. It is important to deconstruct the creative-class and cultural regeneration rhetoric to uncover the inherent flaws. Only by learning from mistakes can society move forward toward a more promising future.

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