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Introduction

Occam's curse, dialectics, and the creative city

All things being equal, the simpler solution is the better one
Occam's Razor

As scientists we are all taught Occam's Razor. Unfortunately, this too often loses its preamble and becomes 'simple is better.' However, when 'things' are not equal, simple is not better – *better is better*. For academics, the need to communicate complex research findings to the public, governments, and each other encourages over-simplification. For those investigating the creative city, research and results are being focussed on questions like: Do amenities or jobs drive regional development? Is understanding industries or occupations more important? Does human capital or the creative class do a better job of predicting regional success? Should conventional or more inclusive planning approaches be used? Or, as this special issue considers: Do creative city or more traditional economic development approaches lead to better regional development?

Although this 'either/or' approach is simpler and often perceived as better, in his book *The Opposable Mind*, Martin (2007) argues that the best solution to a question often requires embracing constraints and changing the nature of the question from 'or' to 'and.' In other words, the best solution is not found by creating a false dichotomy but rather by asking a new question. Thus, 'how' can creative city and traditional economic development approaches be combined to generate regional development? Or as Marx put it – dialectics, adding in his famous "Theses on Feuerbach" that the real test of any theory was not simply how well it could interpret the world, but whether it would change it.

On that score, the creative city thrust has done well. Yet it has been the source of considerable debate, misunderstanding, and conflict in the real world. Yet, it is in the reaction to and impact on the real world that we find the seeds of new and improved theory, better questions, and improved understanding. In his book, *The Creative City* (2000), Landry notes that even though creativity provides the basis for a solid, democratic urban agenda, a decade on, it has done little to reduce inequality and tension. The creativity agenda has certainly done much to open up the conversation about cities and urbanity and to enable new actors – from artists to gays and lesbians – to gain a seat at the table. Still, the uneven and spiky nature of global cities has caused some to raise questions about the almost fetishized implementations of the creative city. Some have even drawn an association between the creative class and the creative city and neo-liberalism. This is essentially being tarred with a very broad brush. There is no question that global cities have become more economistic and in some cases more unequal with the gaps between rich and poor growing. But is this the consequence of the creative city agenda? Left-leaning mayors of cities like London and Toronto may have mitigated the extremes of these forces, but these cities have both grown significantly more uneven and unequal over the past decade or so. Does that make those well-intentioned and hard-working mayors complicit with some abstract neo-liberal agenda? Of course not; rather, a better and more realistic explanation is that the changes in our cities are the result of deep structural forces creating greater unevenness and spikiness globally. These forces can consume and reorient even the most well intentioned policy thrusts.

Others warn of the dangers of generic and formulaic approaches. Luckman, Gibson and Lea note that "the paramount danger is that an increasingly formulaic creativity city agenda is imposed upon places in a damaging and/or unrealistic manner...running roughshod over local needs, aspirations and already existing or vernacular creative expressions" (Luckman, Gibson, & Lea, 2009, p. 72). We agree and acknowledge that as long as cities are all distinctive and different, formulas will never work. Early on, in *Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida, 2002), we noted the need for communities to go beyond 'generic' and focus on their real underlying authentic assets. As the debate grew, the idea of a fourth T emerged – territorial assets which focus on the unique and authentic attributes communities bring to the table.

The creative city agenda has forced us to revisit the long-standing interplay between place and community and more specifically, how individuals construct meaning. As Melinda J. Milligan notes, "It is crucial to study what people say, what they do, and the meanings they attribute to their actions and beliefs, for example, through detailed research on the actions and experiences of the creative class over time in specific concrete locals. It is through such social psychological studies of city life and interaction that the whys will be answered" (Milligan, 2003, p. 25). Such calls remind geographers, planners, and urbanists, who have too long been bound by structuralism and economistic, reductionist and overly deterministic conceptual approaches to open their eyes – and their theories – to capture much more of individual behaviour and human and social psychology. Creativity is as much a psychological

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construct as it is an economic construct, if not more so. Indeed, any attempt to understand the geography of creativity and the creative city must also endeavour to understand the psychology of creativity and the sociology of cities.

By extension, a better understanding of the creative city requires a more nuanced understanding of the creative class. Just as Cohendet, Grandadam, and Simon argue that we need an anatomy of the creative city, we need to consider how creative cities and communities can transition from mere containers of the creative class to incubators of prosperity. We need to move beyond simply identifying instances of inequality to determine how cities and communities can become truly great by tapping and harnessing the creativity of all citizens. In particular, we need to identify the infrastructures, supports, and ecosystems that will enable this. This requires an investigation of how different layers of the creative city – firms and institutions on the one side, individuals on the other and communities mediating in between – interact with and influence one another (Cohendet, Grandadam, & Simon, 2010, p. 92).

As the creativity thrust becomes more prominent in economic, cultural, and societal debates, we must define the themes, terms, and methodologies that are part and parcel of our understanding and conceptualization of "the *Creative* city" in its myriad forms.

Our goal in this special issue is to start to unpack these issues and to help shape further research and debate on this timely topic. The papers in this issue share a desire to move beyond the monolithic understanding of the creative city. Each contributes new empirical evidence that nuances the specificity of cities, cultures and societies/communities. Moreover, by using different disciplinary starting points and methods of enquiry to investigate different cases, locations, and scales, the papers in this special issue provide different pieces of the same puzzle.

Drawing on approaches from Sociology, Urban Planning, and Economic Geography each paper uses one or more specific cases as the grounding framework for a bigger and broader discussion. These range from looking at specific occupations and/or industries to various neighbourhood and regional development projects ranging from the micro to the mega. Discussions encompassing both formal and informal approaches and even a little 'guerrilla' public art are presented. More specifically, the cases are based on research in San Francisco, Berlin, Toronto, New York City, Los Angeles, Omaha, Montreal, and Vancouver.

This issue starts with Richard Ocejo looking at the application of creativity to what has traditionally been considered a service occupation. Investigating cocktail bartenders, he finds that creativity has transformed a service into a craft and that selling unique sensory experiences generates customer value. This work offers a possible solution to the challenge of improving the working conditions, pay levels and stability associated with service occupations. As some of the bartenders in this study identify as working class, this paper nuances the rigid understanding of occupational class and Peck's (2005) critique that the creative city benefits members of the creative class at the expense of the working and service classes. Indeed, this exploratory case highlights the fluidity of such divisions on the ground.

Mike Ripmeester discusses how Toronto's 'Missing Plaque Project' makes use of public space to draw attention to little known yet politically important stories from Toronto's past. He draws distinction between officially sanctioned and alternative narratives of place as presented in public spaces and interrogates the connection between public space and public memories. He finds that alternative uses of creativity in public spaces are increasingly being supplanted by official uses of creativity.

Looking at the Kolonie Wedding project in Berlin, Doreen Jakob finds that creative city initiatives purported to create inclusivity and liveability for all do not vary greatly from traditional urban entrepreneurship and growth-driven development. Although guided arts walks were introduced to revitalize the local economy, present the neighbourhood as a creative and lively place, and create value and opportunity for residents, the result was a reinforcing of social and ethnic boundaries, increased exclusion, and advocacy of gentrification. As a result, she argues that the creative city framework needs to be reformulated with the goal of increasing urban equality instead of the mere generation of growth.

In Lisa Bornstein's paper, the creative city is considered through three inclusively planned mega-projects. Presenting case studies of Montreal, Vancouver, and Los Angeles she discusses projects that successfully address both city-building and local concerns. The specific practices and planning approaches used in each of these three projects are examined. In so doing the role of community-based actors and novel planning practices are highlighted as important elements of implementing successful mega-projects. Ultimately, although mega-projects often create a fear of displacement, gentrification, and loss of authentic identity, this paper demonstrates the potential for successfully combining global ambitions and local needs.

Michael Seman extends the analysis of creative-based economic development initiatives through a case study of Omaha's 'Slowdown' project. In particular, he demonstrates how a music scene can be a cultural catalyst for inclusive economic development. While the project has been considered a success, it has done so with very little capital investment and without displacing residents or increasing the local cost of living. By investigating a case based on music and low levels of investment and government intervention, Seman offers an example that has achieved much with relatively little. Reflecting the interplay between institutions, individuals and communities (the music scene) the case also provides evidence that such developments do not need to be either top down or bottom up and that once again local contexts and histories should guide the terms of development.

Looking in detail at the occupations for specific cultural industries and the industries for specific cultural occupations, Currid and Stolarick document the differences between New York City and Los Angeles. Both are the undoubted cultural capitals of the US, but each does so in a very different way. Staying with the theme of local specificity this paper reinforces the point that arts and culture are not monolithic and that we should recognize, incorporate, and plan for local distinctiveness. The specific composition of occupations, occupations in industries, industries and industries for occupations reveals how each city

leverages its unique advantages and skills to create its own cultural distinction. Arts and culture are not regionally uniform and metropolitan distinction results from cultural distinction across and within cultural occupations and industries. As a result, the paper suggests that regions that want to leverage arts and culture for the economic development of their creative city need to understand their own metropolitan distinction.

Returning to the scale of the individual, Chappel, Jackson and Martin support the emerging idea that artists do not necessarily benefit from cultural initiatives. This paper shows the importance of looking at what is happening on the ground by investigating the evolution of two arts districts in the San Francisco Bay area. Drawing on archival and qualitative data, they document how both formal and informal planning strategies combine for success. Moreover, they find that the importance of planning extends to even informal arts districts that are being driven by a variety of stakeholders. In the end Chappel, Jackson and Martin find that although artists derive greater benefits from informal rather than formal arts districts the lack of long-term stability is problematic.

Taken together, these papers present an interconnected view of cities, cultures, and societies that promote the importance of both formal and informal inclusionary planning practices. The findings also highlight some of the challenges and solutions that cities encounter as they transition to an economy based on creativity. Ultimately, this special issue affirms the notion that while simple can be better; a nuanced understanding offers its own kind of simplicity.

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