



Trading on Culture: Planning the 21st Century City

Industrial Relocation Leads to Artistic Appreciation

When the future is in doubt, look to your heritage. A new UN-HABITAT publication, *The State of the World's Cities Report, 2004*, illustrates the growing trend of refurbishing and re-branding cities as cultural havens - a creative attempt by many local governments to revitalize economies in need of urban renewal mechanisms.

As more and more cities seek to sustain themselves in the wake of the industrial flight that often accompanies globalization, many are being recreated as "cities of culture." Whether or not a city has a cultural heritage to draw upon, or merely a survivalist's need to succeed, banking on the financial draws of culture - be it artistic, historic, athletic or religious - has proved to be a blessing for many urban officials and planners. However, as with the many endeavours that globalization engenders, this new exercise in artistic appreciation has forced many of the urban poor and middle-class into an exodus out of the cities that no longer seem to appreciate *them*.

Current trends in many parts of the world suggest that culture will play an increasingly important role in the future of cities. The culturally driven redevelopment of inner-city areas has included the preservation of historic buildings as well as revival of traditional crafts for enhancing the global tourism potential of cities; and gentrification of inner-city residential areas. Gentrification has transformed the older sections of many cities into some of the most sought-after real estate. These restored buildings may now glisten in all their historical splendor, but they are no longer home to the people who, historically, used to live in them.

Creative accounting

On the assumption that culture can be a motor of employment growth, governments are directing investment toward new cultural industries and districts, including public spaces whose cultural amenities are intended to harmonize different social interests and improve the quality of urban life. Although each city presents its own cultural strategies as a way of distinguishing itself from other cities, demonstrating its social cohesiveness as well as its unique creative force, the UN-HABITAT Report points out that these ideas and practices are worked out in a competitive framework. The race to get ahead in this new global economy has pitted city against city, each one actively promoting its uniqueness, positioning themselves as "the" destination for the discerning and cultured tourist.

However, development approaches that rely on this cultivation of urban culture have been both enthusiastically embraced and harshly criticized. Not only is urban culture a tool of economic development whose benefits and costs are distributed unevenly, it can also be used as a political instrument in pluralistic societies to help define cultural identities, placing certain population groups in positions of privilege, while excluding others.

Thinking big

This new capitalization on culture goes beyond traditional definitions of the word. It comprises material aspects, such as physical infrastructure, public spaces, buildings and other artifacts of the urban environment. In countries where the budgets of cultural institutions are under central government controls, this confluence of forces has led to the pursuit of 'grand projects.' For example, the success of the Beaubourg in France inspired the European Union (EU) to establish an annual competition to select the European City of Culture, which similarly serves to promote economic development.

As an example of the deliberate economic development of culture, the report profiles Bilbao, Spain, which received international attention as city officials deliberately invested in dramatic new infrastructure and facilities that would create cultural images in their own right and pay not only for a new museum, but also for the art to fill it. By doing so, Bilbao has attracted multinational business services, especially banking and finance. The city hired famous architects from outside its borders to design stations for the new metro, to draw up guidelines for the waterfront plan, to design the terminal at Sondika Airport and the Zubi Zuri Bridge over the Nervion River. The city also hired renowned architect Frank Gehry to create the architectural design for what was to be the major draw - the Guggenheim Museum. The result was a new cultural Mecca, attracting tourists and art aficionados from around the world.

Florence has invested in art restoration. Glasgow put money not only into a new museum, but a festival to go with it. Singapore is now home to a waterfront complex that houses a world-class theatrical complex that draws international talent. *The State of the World's Cities Report 2004* also points out that this cultural re-branding is not unique to the developed world. In the early 1980s, the movement for the preservation of cultural heritage buildings had spread to many developing countries. For example, during the mid 1980s, in Zanzibar, Tanzania, the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority was established to plan and coordinate conservation activities in its 'Old Town.' By the 1990s, with the growth of Cultural Heritage Tourism, more and more cities in developing countries were investing in the conservation of old historic buildings and thus tapping into their 'cultural capital.'

In a variation on cultural heritage preservation, the revival of traditional crafts has been used to attract international tourists. In Nairobi, Kenya, promoters of traditional textiles, jewelry and carvings have started using the internet for global marketing of their products. The Dakshinachitra crafts museum in Chennai, India, also illustrates this approach in global marketing of developing country cities on the basis of cultural heritage.

While this rush to culture can generate jobs, and may be accompanied by spatial restructuring of the urban fabric, according to the Report, in a growing number of cities, the record shows that not everyone benefits. Indeed, a recent review of several hundred projects in 20 nations and five continents concluded that the promoters of multi-billion dollar mega-projects systematically and self-servingly misinform parliaments, the public and the media in order to get construction approval. It reveals an unhealthy cocktail of underestimated costs, overestimated revenues, undervalued environmental impacts and overvalued economic development effects.

Redevelopment of urban spaces

The European Union's annual endeavor to locate and promulgate its Cities of Culture ratchets up the level of competition between cities for redevelopment funding. Local governments fall in line to lobby for European Regional Development money to renovate and expand existing museums and concert halls. Critics complain that this heated competition to host special events, including the Olympics, creates in a city, a false dynamic in which local decision-makers exhaust whatever resources they have in the preparation of endless bids. Winning cities take the lion's share of available funds, leaving the losers wondering why they bothered in the first place. Moreover, the investment of so much money into the fixed capital of cultural facilities creates an imbalance: concentrating resources in the urban centre, ignoring the needs of the many citizens who don't happen to live there.

Taking the long view

How then, are the planners of 21st century cities going to promote cultural economic growth while ensuring that their cities provide shelter and opportunities for those members of society who do not benefit from all this cultural money spending? *The State of the World's Cities Report, 2004* suggests that the challenge to policy and management is to introduce a longer time frame for decision-making. Some cities and citizen groups have begun initiatives to encourage this longer perspective – for example, the 2050 programmes in Buenos Aires, Barcelona and New York, each of which asks urban actors to consider the hopes and fears of citizens for their cities in 2050, and how short- and medium-term decisions would have an impact on the longer term.

Establishing a longer-term vision is much more than just physical planning. Indeed, the consultation process in these three cities has already demonstrated that citizens are concerned with a broad range of economic, social, environmental and political issues. They ask how economic and environmental justice can be protected in the face of new processes of change and actors from distant places. They worry about whether their locally elected institutions have the capacity to anticipate these changes.

This future-focused popular participation unleashes strong creative and imaginative energies that pose new questions for urban policy and management, beyond the normal daily concerns of municipal authorities. In this regard, establishing a longer time frame can be a major asset in assuring the sustainability of the benefits of urban life, while at the same time anticipating new problems. The UN-HABITAT Report suggests that this kind of visioning must be seen as an important new dimension of strategic urban planning.

The report cites Cuitat Vella, in Barcelona as one instance of inclusive cultural planning. This historic, cultural and leisure centre, containing most of that city's historic, cultural and artistic heritage, was experiencing major deficiencies in education, and healthcare delivery, housing and urban infrastructure, loss of economic activity, marginalisation and unemployment. In response, the city council, in partnership with citizens and the private sector, formulated an integrated plan to rehabilitate housing, improve public infrastructure, promote local economic development and implement social welfare programs. Along with the construction and renovation of museums, a public university, civic centres and a public hospital, more than 2,000 public residential dwellings were built and 22,400 others were rehabilitated.

This challenge, however, raises the issues of public values: of tolerance for differences, of social inclusion rather than exclusion, of participation and representation rather than centralized management, of transparency and accountability, and the need to make these values concrete and immediate by embedding them in daily public practice.

Towards an inclusive urban culture

In planning for multicultural cities, the inclusion of diverse populations takes on special significance. The Report cites New York City, which, like many other cities, is an unintended assemblage of constructions, a collage of collages, and a place where urban culture is hammered out, or negotiated in public spaces: streets, parks, stores, cafés, and the media. If there is a single measure of urban culture, the Report says, it is this multiplicity of dialogues and interactions, but it is also – in both a material and a symbolic sense – a multiplicity of evictions, erasures and avoidances.

Culture, it seems, has many meanings. As a practical human activity, it is an inherent part of both individual and collective development, from the education of a single child to the finest artistic expression of entire peoples and nations. Both historically and in terms of the future, culture suggests the capacity to survive *as well as* adapt to change. Especially in cities, culture takes form in the environment of palaces, temples, opera houses, art museums, places of entertainment, parks, memorials, marketplaces, shops and restaurants. These, in turn, become visual symbols of local identity. But while busily imprinting their individual stamps on the window advertisements of tourist agencies globally, many “cultural accountants” forget to plan for the future of those who helped give these cities their flavour in the first place.

The flows of people and money which pass through global cities continually replenish the supply of potential creators. But to nurture creativity, a city must have a generous and inclusive culture; it must have ‘an attitude’. What, in the end, creates the culture of New York City, for example? A fashion critic recently observed that New York has excelled as an originator of style because it has ‘moxie’ (courage, energy, audacity, nerve), a broad racial dispersion...and an unquenchable thirst for the new². Often this combination of racial diversity and an impatient desire for new things explodes into an astoundingly uncivil society, characterized by oppositional cultures in which men and women speak frankly of their differences and struggle openly to protect their rights. This, however, is the price that today’s global cities have to pay for creativity and cultural inclusiveness.

City by City: Trading on Culture

- **Plateau Beaubourg:** Other European cities did not fail to note the example of the Plateau Beaubourg. Unlike in the US, where nearly all public museums and other cultural facilities are supported by local government and private donors, in many European countries the central governments generally control the management and budget of cultural institutions. When central governments became more involved in regional redevelopment during the economic crisis of the 1980s, they started connecting economic and cultural strategies. Indeed, the more socially devastated a region appeared, and the less likely to experience new industrial growth, the more governmental authorities turned to marketing cities as centres of culture in order to create a new business climate.
- **Loft living in New York, US:** New York, where ‘loft living’ became fairly common during the 1970s, was pressed to legalize the situation by the hundreds of artists who moved into lofts, aided by the close relations these artists had with socially prominent patrons. When two industrial districts of Lower Manhattan were rezoned to permit artists’ housing in SoHo, and residential reuse, in general, in Tribeca, the city government cast its vote for an ‘artistic mode of production’ that would complement a postindustrial renewal of the local economy. Cultural production bloomed not only because American artists migrated to Lower Manhattan, but also because artists, actors and musicians came to New York from other parts of the world, notably Europe and Asia. They created artwork and were written up in newspapers and magazines in other countries. This media coverage maintained the city’s reputation as the global capital – for cutting-edge cultural creation.
- **Glasgow, UK: culture as a new economic base in declining cities:** In Glasgow, where traditional industries and ship-building had long since entered a terminal decline, local groups started an annual arts festival, Mayfest, and opened a new museum, the Burrell Art Collection, in 1983. The district council declared that Glasgow would find a new role for itself in business services, higher education, media industries and the arts. When the Scottish Development Agency hired McKinsey and Company, an international consulting firm, to devise an urban redevelopment strategy, they proposed building on these initiatives by promoting Glasgow as a cultural centre.

- **Ciutat Vella Project, Spain:** Ciutat Vella is Barcelona's main historic, cultural and leisure centre, containing most of Barcelona's historic, cultural and artistic heritage. Despite this, the district was experiencing major deficiencies in education and healthcare delivery, housing and urban infrastructure, loss of economic activity, marginalisation and unemployment. In response, the city council, in partnership with citizens and the private sector, formulated an integrated plan to rehabilitate housing, improve public infrastructure, promote local economic development and implement social welfare programmes. Work done includes the construction and renovation of museums, a public university, civic centres and a public hospital, over 2000 public residential dwellings and rehabilitation of 22,400 residential dwellings.
- **The Esplanade, Singapore: city-branding in the south:** Singapore, which during the 1990s committed itself to building the Esplanade, a new cultural complex on the waterfront for performing arts, focused on creating large-scale facilities that benefited touring foreign artists. But this policy neglected the city's own considerable pool of talent. Although they were active and energetic, native artists, musicians and theatrical performers lacked products that would attract a big, multinational audience. Singaporeans were expected to support blockbuster exhibitions at the art museum and imported attractions such as the Cirque du Soleil. They would profit eventually, city officials believed, from a new and broader climate of cultural consumption. Singapore would attract the attention of multinational media and, eventually, would also attract more regional offices of multinational corporations. Unfortunately, the 'hardware' of the new cultural infrastructure tended to support local citizens' cultural consumption, rather than their cultural innovation and production.
- **Zanzibar, Tanzania: preserving the historic Stone Town:** By the early 1980s, the movement for the preservation of cultural heritage buildings had spread to many developing countries. For example, during the mid 1980s, in Zanzibar, Tanzania, the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority was established to plan and coordinate conservation activities in the Old Town. By the 1990s, with the growth of Cultural Heritage Tourism, more and more cities in developing countries were investing in the conservation of old historic buildings and thus tapping into their 'cultural capital'. As a result of the concerted efforts of the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority and its partners, several buildings in the Stone Town have been gazetted as monuments, while numerous others have been repaired and restored and 80 per cent of the streets in the Stone Town have been paved.
- **Dakshinachitra, Chennai, India: using traditional crafts for global marketing cities:** Since the 1980s, cultural officials and non-profit groups have supported the development of the crafts museum of Dakshinachitra, which is located several kilometres outside of the city. This cultural complex, on the one hand, is touristic and educational, with reconstructions of buildings that exemplify styles of local and regional architecture, demonstrations of traditional crafts, and videos showing the region's rural past. On the other hand, it promotes traditional craftwork, such as indigo dyeing, by employing artisans and craft workers to produce high-quality work for affluent consumers. Critical observers have commented that Dakshinachitra presents these forms of traditional culture in a framework that values the higher status of the Brahman caste while de-emphasizing the different culture and language of the non-elite, indigenous Dravidians. However, the Dravidian government of Tamil Nadu has been emphasizing elements of Dravidian culture in the dimensions of its cultural policy implemented in the city's public spaces.

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