'Port Phillip's Creative Class'

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In this brief presentation I will discuss the latest 'cultural turn' in inner city urban regeneration initiatives and city marketing. You'll be familiar no doubt with these increasingly high profile initiatives which come variously under the rubrics of 'creative industries', 'cultural regeneration', 'creative cities', 'cultural planning' and most recently, the 'creative class'. The logic of this 'cultural turn' is to ensure that urban development facilitates possibilities for community and citizenly social democratic participation; culture is thought to be an ideal tool for ensuring both diverse community representation and participation. However, to what extent are the cultural components of urban regeneration schemes window dressing for middle class cultural consumption, or are there real social and cultural benefits for a diversity of publics and communities?

A selection of American, Australian, British and Canadian newspaper articles clipped over the last two years demonstrate the general acceptance of the 'just add culture and stir' school of thought: 'Cool cities may defy planning: Leaders believe new image could boost state economy' (Singer, 2003:1)— for the Governor of Michigan cafes, hip clubs, street vendors and loft homes are the winning formula for the attraction of the 'creative class'; 'Mid-sized cities get hip to attract young professionals' (Nasser, 2003:1) reports that in Cincinnati 'young professionals… want to be part of the city's makeover' and first to go will be the pig sculptures in the city's downtown 'which recall Cincinnati's golden era as a pork-processing centre'; 'Can the arts cash in on cities' creativity buzz?' (Taylor, 2003:1)–'the Canadian arts community has caught a whiff of the urban-renewal agenda and is hot on the scent'; 'Regeneration sexy? It is now' (Weaver 2001:1)—documents 'concerns that an urban renaissance will lead to a form of social cleansing in British cities, of the kind that has occurred in New York under… Republican mayor Rudolph Giuliani'; 'Can culture save us?' (Becket 2003:1)—on the massive investment in cultural regeneration in Newcastle and Gateshead in the North East of England; 'Not just a place to live, but a place to work' (Macken 2002:22)—lifestyle, 'not the exchange rate, brought one entrepreneur to Sydney'. My newspaper clipping folders are overflowing with articles espousing the miracle of culturally led regeneration or development for cities large and small or for specific places within cities; these are former often waterfront industrial sites or declining city centres.

Variations on the 'just add culture and stir' answer to the complex problems that attend urban redevelopment are being hawked globally by predominantly British and American consultants who develop ever larger international consultancies out of governments' willingness to believe in the boosterist claims of quick fix solutions. These international consultants are being sought out by Australian government's ready to apply the 'just add culture and stir' recipe to problems as diverse as the decline of industry in regional Australia or the gentrification of inner city suburbs; for instance, the British consultant Charles Landry, famous for his development of the notion of the 'creative city' (2000), is currently the government sponsored 'thinker in residence' in Adelaide. Richard Florida, the American economist who has developed the notion of the 'creative class' (2002), is currently in Australia consulting with the NSW State Government on regional and rural development and the QLD State Government on creative industry development.

It is this notion of the creative class that I want to explore in relation to Port Phillip. Florida's version of the 'just add culture and stir' formula is laid out in his highly

influential book, *The Rise of the Creative Class and how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life* (2002). He argues that a city or community will achieve the best economic growth if it is able to attract people who are members of the creative class. According to Florida the creative class consists of two categories: the 'Super Creative Core' of the creative class which includes people working in computer and mathematics; architecture and engineering; life, physical, and the social sciences; education, training and libraries; and, arts, design, entertainment, sports and media occupations (328, 2002). The second category is the 'Creative Professionals' and includes just about every other white collar worker, that is, management, business and financial; legal; healthcare; and, high-end sales management—note that Florida doesn't consider that people who work in the service industries are creative thus, for him, software programmers and sales representatives are more creative than chefs (ibid.)!

In Florida's 'just add culture and stir' story the creative class are attracted to towns, cities and suburbs, which are culturally diverse, have diverse leisure amenities such as bars, cafés, restaurants, theatres and galleries and an active twenty-four hour street life. Florida has shown in studies done in America that places, which have these diverse amenities, and are also culturally diverse, have higher concentrations of the creative class and therefore stronger economic growth than other places. Florida's statistical analysis of the creative class includes a broad array of occupations; however, the picture that Florida paints of the creative class is not so diverse, the creative class are the bourgeoisie bohemian artists who hang out in the inner city wearing black (at least in Melbourne) drinking merlot and café latte. They're young, they're highly educated, they're wealthy, they're groovy, and they're 'bobo's'. Port Phillip in fact has a very high concentration of bobo's.

Port Phillip's 'BoBo's'- Bourgeois Bohemian's

Port Phillip has:

• one of the highest concentrations of people with post-school qualifications in VIC (1996, Census);

• Port Phillip West has the 9th and Port Phillip St. Kilda has the 16th highest median incomes of all Victoria's Statistical Local Areas (ibid.);

• in Inner Melbourne (whose major centers are the CBD and St. Kilda) 31% of the population earns 30-50K per year, nationally only 25% of the population earn this much (ALGA, 2003);

•Port Phillip is very young, in Port Phillip St Kilda the median age is 34 years old and in Port Phillip West the median age is 36 years old (1996, Census); and,

• Inner Melbourne has the highest ratio of 15-34 year olds in Australia (ALGA, 2003).

A measure of just how influential the Florida creative class thesis has been is illustrated by the fact that the 2002 Australian Local Government Association's State of the Regions Report measured Australia's regions in terms of their creative class in

addition to the usual measurements used. In the regional break down's used in this report, Port Phillip is classed as being part of 'Inner Melbourne', the main centres of which are the CBD and St. Kilda. The report shows that Inner Melbourne has significantly more than the national average of creative professionals and the second highest density of this category of people in the country (the highest density is located in Sydney). Inner Melbourne has the third highest density of the 'super creative core' in the country and therefore has the third highest density of the Creative Class overall; Sydney Outer North and Sydney Inner West rank first and second in the country.

Florida also argues that in addition to café's, bars and an active street life, in order to attract the creative class you must have a diverse population. Florida measures diversity through a combination of the gay index, which measures the amount of gay people living in an area; the bohemian index, which measures the amount of artists, authors, composers, actors, sculptors, painters and so forth living in an area; and, the melting pot index, which measures the amount of foreign born people living in an area (333-334, 2002). The combination of these indexes establishes diversity. The *State of the Regions* report did not use the gay index because of the way Australia's demographic statistics are collected; however, this report used a combination of the Bohemian and Foreign-Born index's to establish that Inner Melbourne is the second most diverse place in Australia behind Global Sydney. The combination of this diversity measurement and the creative class measurement show that Inner Melbourne's creativity index is second only to Sydney. Therefore, if Florida is right Inner Melbourne can expect to continue to grow economically very strong; that is, so long as this mix of diversity and creative class is maintained.

But what does all this have to do with gentrification? As we saw at the beginning local and state government's the world over are jumping on this civic booster bandwagon. Florida tells them that the secret to economic growth lies not in expensive infrastructure expenditure, in fact as a free marketeer he's not terribly fond of government expenditure on the cultural and social, rather governments. Should spend their money on redesigning their downtowns to encourage café's and nice restaurants, allowing buskers to play on street corners. Great! Except, this has been tried before, the artists move out because they're poor (a recent Australia Council report found that Australia's artists earn an average of $7,500 per year from their practice (Throsby and Hollister 2003)), the diversity dwindles as property prices rise and only people with large incomes can afford to drink in the café's and throw coins to the buskers. Soon your creative and diverse place becomes a Disney version of bohemia where artists are the free after dinner entertainment in a homogenous, yuppie ghetto.

Cultural Regeneration?

In the UK throughout the 1990s 'cultural regeneration' involved strategies such as public art, the beautification of high streets, and building cultural venues. One of the more famous investments in cultural regeneration on this model was undertaken in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in the North East of England. Newcastle suffered radically as a result of rapid deindustrialisation especially from the late 1970s. The region's:

• GDP is the lowest in the UK;

- unemployment is also the worst at 7.4%;

- has the highest % of households on income support;

- population is declining by 1% per year and the people who are moving away are also the highest educated; and,

- has the smallest cultural workforce at 4%.

On the basis that making the city more attractive to people with higher levels of education would be Newcastle's economic saviour large amounts of money was invested in a number of landmark cultural projects. The twenty metres high public sculpture, *The Angel of the North* by British artist Anthony Gormley, was installed in 1998 at a cost of around $3 million (au) (£1 million). The popular success of 'the Angel' has been credited with influencing the success of Newcastle and Gateshead City Council's applications for funds from the European Regeneration Fund and the Lottery Fund to redevelop a brown fields site in East Gateshead directly across the river from Newcastle city. This space was a classic post-industrial space and exhibited all the trademarks of degradation as a result of the closure of shipping industry. The Gateshead Council received £125 million from Lottery, Millennium Funds and other related arts funding, and £100 million from other forms of public sector funding such as European Regeneration Funds to develop The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art which is a conversion of an old heritage listed building which was previously a flour mill into a modern art gallery and the Sage Music Centre designed by Norman Foster, one of Britain's top architects. Finally, the award winning Millennium Bridge was built across the Tyne River to form a footbridge between the café's restaurants and bars on the Newcastle side to the Baltic and Sage on the Gateshead side. The bridge opened in 2001 and cost £22 million. Thus, in a region suffering severe economic degradation with the accompanying social and cultural problems a massive expenditure on culture was thought to be a key tool in addressing the region's problems. In fact, the Newcastle/ Gateshead Quays development has attracted a substantial amount of private investment. As a direct result of this public investment a further £600 million worth of private investment has been attracted to East Gateshead-this investment is in residential developments and a business park. So it would seem that Florida is right?

The 'just add culture and stir' answer to urban problems has been developed in the UK in various forms since the mid 1980s with the Greater London Council. There has been a sharp realisation of the effects of investment in culture on gentrification. Further, there has been a increasing querying of the 'trickle down effect' on which theories such as Florida's are based. That is, is a place can attract a creative, highly educated workforce which is economically productive for the region, there will be a trickle down effect where the combination of economic growth and cultural capital will address the social problems of the region. It is far from clear that the massive investment in Newcastle/Gateshead and the resulting massive private investment has any benefits whatsoever for the region's poor who are increasingly displaced at the inner city starts to gentrify around the cultural precincts. The other big losers from inner city gentrification as we know are the artists and musicians who rely on cheap access to multi-use spaces only available in the inner city and declining industrial

areas. As the 'creative class' moves into the now spruced up inner city it is precisely the arts and local creative practice, which is displaced.

Increasingly in the UK cultural regeneration involves not just investment in venues for cultural *consumption* but also expenditure in resources and venues, which will facilitate local cultural *production*. In Newcastle-Upon-Tyne it has not been the massive expenditure on international cultural venues that has been most important to the regions local cultural industry; rather, it is the awareness of the potentially negative effects of gentrification and the strategic government expenditure related to it. For instance, the City Council has purchased a number of buildings in the inner city which provide cheap rent to house start-up businesses of every kind including artists' studios, artist run galleries, graphic design and computer animation businesses and so forth. The devices of the market will not provide for this kind of local micro cultural practice or business and yet if Florida is right it is precisely these locally based activities which should be supported in order to make a place attractive to 'the creative class'. If artists are not to be the free after dinner entertainment government must help them survive the mechanisms used to attract their wealthier sisters and brothers. Even more importantly it is local cultural practice, which reflects a regions' specific characteristics and maintains its diversity. So while the attraction of 'the creative class' may produce economic growth in order for a region to continue to have the local identity and 'authenticity' which Florida says in most attractive to the creative class government must invest in cultural practice which is not necessarily economically successful. Thus, it is not the market but only government intervention, which will ensure that places do not become Disneyland bohemias of cultural consumption but also retain spaces for the production of local cultural content.

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