

WORLD CITIES CULTURE FORUM

**Culture and Inclusive Growth in World Cities:
Seizing the Opportunity**
Policy Briefing 4: London Summit 2015

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The World Cities Culture Forum (WCCF) was founded in 2012 by London, New York, Shanghai, Paris, Tokyo, Sydney, Johannesburg, and Istanbul. It provides a way for policy makers in 32 key cities to share research and intelligence, and explore the vital role of culture in their future prosperity.

In November 2015, senior policymakers from member cities met in London over a three-day programme for the annual World Cities Culture Summit. This document is the fourth policy briefing of the World Cities Culture Forum, based on the collective knowledge and latest evidence assembled at the London summit.

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The Next Big Challenge: Inclusive Growth

In the last two decades, global cities have grown rapidly, creating tremendous new economic, social and cultural opportunities. As part of the World Cities Culture Forum (WCCF), city leaders have looked for ways to make the most of this, allowing innovation and creativity to thrive in our growing cities.

Most cities in the Forum are reporting a new phase of city development. There has been a sharp increase in big business investment, either buying buildings or funding large construction projects. This often goes hand in hand with the fall of public ownership of buildings and the rise of private or gated spaces, replacing a dense mix of urban uses. These trends threaten what the world's greatest cities are about: a cosmopolitan mix of people and their capacity to make the city's history and culture.

This goes to the heart of cultural policy and provided the major theme of the World Cities Culture Summit 2015 in London. How are world cities going to provide cultural spaces that are genuinely public, inclusive and human, as the money continues to flow in, funding ever bigger skyscrapers? Growth, and the movement of people and money, have always been important parts of urban development. A growing economy, high levels of migration and technological innovation all provide great opportunities, but the way these changes are managed is what matters.

As the World Cities Culture Report 2015 shows, these broader urban developments put culture's long-term sustainability at risk. At the same time, cultural innovation helps tackle major challenges in cities around the world. It could become the golden thread between policy areas, creating inclusive urban growth plans. City leaders agree that, unless growth is for everyone, it will not be sustainable. At the summit, they shared ideas for solving the problems faced by our cities and their cultural sectors today.

New Approaches to Creating Cultural Districts

Culture is now widely recognised as vital for urban regeneration. London's former Olympic site, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, provided the perfect example for discussing the challenges and successes that come from delivering truly sustainable, culture-led projects. The site will soon host 'Olympicopolis', a new world-class cultural and education district, including additional sites for University College London, the University of the Arts London, the Victoria and Albert Museum and Sadler's Wells. The Smithsonian Institution could also join the scheme and discussions are underway.

Developers, policy makers and artists increasingly work together to make space for culture in the planning process from the start. London's 'Olympicopolis' and the re-development of the Royal Docks show this is necessary to deliver an ambitious cultural vision. Reaching agreement with developers is not always easy, as cultural institutions and policy makers aim for high-quality products and take artistic risks. Toronto's experience of the Evergreen Brick Works shows it helps to get a process agreed with everyone involved to feed the cultural vision into the final plan.

A challenge for cultural institutions is to provide long-term leadership and support for new venues, without affecting existing operations. One way of doing this is to give each site a different but complementary focus. In the case of London's Victoria and Albert Museum and Sadler's Wells, their new 'Olympicopolis' sites will provide opportunities for building relationships with different audiences. On top of this, the function of cultural institutions is increasingly changing. There is less emphasis on specific buildings and more on providing cultural activities that may take place in many different spaces and situations.

Another ongoing challenge is meaningful communication with local artists and residents. One solution is to include existing cultural spaces and their needs in plans for development. For instance, Sadler's Wells will recruit much of its new workforce from networks of local artists, rather than moving current staff to the new site. In addition, city governments can include community groups in the planning process. It's in their interest to do this, as these are the people who will be voting in the next local elections. Involving the whole community has helped Montreal's Quartier des Spectacles programme focus on local needs, and build on existing strengths. Listening to both residents and artistic communities is not just important for completing major new cultural districts, but essential for putting culture at the heart of plans for sustainable urban growth.

Taking Part: Cultural Opportunities for All Citizens

The multicultural populations of world cities continue to grow rapidly. The need to build genuinely inclusive infrastructure and public spaces grows with them. Culture can provide a bridge between different groups, from day-to-day arts performances at local theatres to ongoing regeneration plans, up to big events like the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio.

Last year's Transformational Cultural Projects Report described a series of schemes that used culture to engage different communities in a meaningful way. But debates at this year's summit showed the overall challenge remains. If we want to avoid making culture only accessible to the elite, reproducing existing inequalities in the process, cultural policy leaders must nurture the cultural capability of their cities at every level.

Places like Moscow and Warsaw have been thinking about ways to engage hard-to-reach groups like teenagers. They had the best results when they used information about teens to create specific ways of talking to them. For instance, Moscow found it helpful to think about distinct interest groups within the broad 'children and young people' category that is often used. Rio de Janeiro introduced a 'cultural passport' that lets young people collect stamps from different cultural institutions across the city and appeals to their competitive spirit. Other cities have involved citizens in making decisions on cultural projects. Private foundations in Los Angeles use this technique and have seen a significant increase in engagement as a result. In Seoul, the metropolitan government began a cultural funding programme allowing citizens to propose and vote for their favourite projects. Cultural leaders in New York have found drawing on best practice and networks from outside the cultural sector can be useful. It makes it easier to talk to people in those hard-to-reach groups, as the conversations take place in settings they already find familiar.

Another challenge that cities like Madrid are grappling with is how to support their 'cultural fabric' and grassroots arts scenes. In response, San Francisco, London, Montreal and Rio have all introduced grant schemes for individuals or individual artists. In Rio, this meant overcoming the legal challenge of not being able to hand out grants to individuals. This was solved by turning the money into a prize, awarded according to the winner's proven record of cultural engagement. Rio also 'scouts' for artists to encourage applications from new talents. Singapore has used a very similar approach, by identifying less predictable applicants. The city also increases artists' ability to work by supporting them in the application process. All these schemes required city leaders to commit to risk-taking, experimentation and cutting bureaucracy.

Bringing about these changes in attitude is a real challenge, especially when other government departments are involved. But such changes are vital to protect informal cultural life. If world cities want culture to be for everybody, and to create inclusive and truly public spaces, they must encourage cultural expression in every corner of society.

Many cities have started thinking about managing common problems that occur around informal cultural activities. For instance, following frequent confrontations between street performers and police in Rio, cultural policy makers have installed dedicated stages in some of the main squares for them. Other cities have gone even further to provide a legal framework that creates conditions for such activities, as in Los Angeles. In an attempt to address the city's problems with so-called 'food deserts', where there is little provision of fresh fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods, they commissioned artists to plant fruit trees in accessible public spaces, including parks. But it happened because the city recognised the potential of work by a guerrilla gardener and artist, who illegally planted fruit and vegetables on sidewalk green spaces across the city. The law was changed because leaders recognised the cultural benefits of what he had done and wanted to support it.

Culture + Technology: a Powerful Growth Cocktail?

The digital economy has grown massively in the last ten years. While many tech companies were founded in science parks or on university campuses, they increasingly base themselves in urban spaces, often with creative and cultural businesses nearby. Across the member cities of the World Cities Culture Forum, there is a range of tech scenes. Amsterdam has a lot of technology service companies, while San Francisco and Shenzhen have a much stronger base of digital makers. In Shenzhen, for instance, digital makers directly supply major industrial hardware companies. Meanwhile in London's tech sector, quick growth has been due to a strong focus on consumer market technologies and a willingness to take risks.

One of the key questions for cultural policy makers is, how much can a lively cultural scene fuel tech-based urban growth? Amsterdam certainly sees a special connection between the arts and the tech sector, with people from both industries increasingly sharing workspaces. Similarly, London's 'tech city', one of the largest concentrations of digital companies in Europe, gets much of its vibrancy and appeal from its melding with the city's creative industries.

A strong tech industry can also benefit a city's cultural development. In Shenzhen, the strong maker movement has promoted innovation and creative collaboration among the arts community.

But rapid tech-based growth also provides a number of challenges for cultural policy makers. One of these is, how to encourage digital growth while keeping spaces for culture? There has been a recent trend in London and Amsterdam where, as a result of big firms reducing their workforce, tech sector SMEs are directly competing with creative businesses for subsidised workspace. One of the ways Amsterdam has dealt with the tricky question of who should get priority, is to make workspace occupancy temporary, restricting it to three to five years.

Gentrification is another challenge caused by the presence of tech clusters in certain parts of a city. While the highly skilled workers of digital companies tend to be paid well, local residents may be pushed out of the neighbourhood, as a result of rising property prices. San Francisco has also found mobility is ingrained in tech culture, while artists tend to be rooted much more deeply in the communities where they work. City governments have a role to play here, including working with artists to help them own property, removing the threat of being displaced.

Dealing With the Down Sides of Urban Growth

Rising property prices, infrastructure problems and increasing social and economic inequality are just some of the major challenges caused by rapid urban growth. Recent large-scale corporate investments in massive luxury housing and office projects have quickened the loss of small public spaces, streets and squares. All of these issues need solutions that include everyone – from government, the arts, business and the public. But they also directly threaten the long-term survival of the cultural sector in world cities. As production venues, artists and their audiences are increasingly priced out, world cities risk losing their rich cultural offer and their ability to innovate. Unsurprisingly, this issue is a key priority for cultural policy makers across our world cities and came up again and again at the summit.

There are no easy solutions and the problems remain in many places. But city leaders have used a number of approaches successfully. Early involvement in the planning process is one of them. For instance, Stockholm is trying to develop a process for automatic involvement with cultural matters in the early stages of property development. In London's Denmark Street, developers were very supportive of attempts to save grassroots music venues, because campaigners' involvement in the planning process came at a very early stage.

Melbourne has been taking a different approach. While their Creative Spaces Program primarily acts as a brokering agent of workspaces between artists and property owners, it has also branched out into refurbishing and managing properties in the private sector. Having raised the initial capital through partnership contributions from both public and private sectors, Creative Spaces repurposes buildings to provide affordable, accessible and suitable space for Melbourne's creative sector. The programme operates on a self-sustaining model where revenue generated from rent meets operational and staffing costs required to run the facilities and programme.

San Francisco and Toronto have both changed their planning laws, allowing private developers to increase the height or density of their schemes in return for providing more cultural or community space. However, other cities have found new planning standards less desirable or harder to implement. In London, no agreement could be reached, as other government departments feared a backlash from developers over regulation changes. Hong Kong opted against planning standards for cultural venues in order to keep flexibility for developments. Instead, they have been promoting workspaces that can be used by commercial and creative businesses. A similar strategy has been used in Shanghai, with a twist. The city found many shopping malls were struggling to make profits as the popularity of shopping online increased. These commercial retail units have now been adapted into shared working spaces.

In all cases, city governments have a role: they can help build relationships and alliances between developers, cultural contributors and government actors; they can provide advice, or become advocates for projects. London's City Hall pro-actively works with local boroughs that want to attract artists. They now provide advice on artists' needs and ways of encouraging them to move to those districts. In Los Angeles and San Francisco, the city governments are not always trusted by the arts community. To help with this, city leaders have started providing information on the cultural sector for campaigners to use when attending things like planning meetings, helping to inform their activism.

Finally, governments can define the argument about the value that culture brings to city life. Rather than focusing on what artists need, city leaders suggested emphasising what residents need to live in vibrant and interesting neighbourhoods. It is this demand which should set the course of urban planning and convince key players. The alternative, neighbourhoods that are devoid of artists and cultural life, offers a soulless, dull and unattractive vision of a city's future.

Making the Case for Culture: Actions Not Words

The World Cities Culture Report 2015 surveyed the views of 150+ opinion leaders in WCCF member cities. The results show that the importance of culture to overall city success is recognised beyond the cultural sphere. But there is still more to be done to make a better case to people working outside the artistic world. This is really important, given the fragility of public investment for culture in times of crisis. It is equally important in culture-led urban regeneration schemes; when dealing with displacement and gentrification, and when aiming for effective cross-departmental work on cultural issues. If culture is to become the golden thread binding inclusive urban growth plans together, the evidence needs to be strong. A repeated question at this year's summit was: what is the best way to make the argument?

The most important thing is the use of data to make the case for culture. A number of cities have done so successfully. Toronto Cultural Services managed to modify the biggest development application the city had ever received largely thanks to their effective use of information. The Mervish-Gerry Tower application would have meant demolishing a theatre and four warehouses used as creative industries workspaces, replacing them with three residential towers.

The team built their case against the development on hard numbers. They used research data showing the area of Toronto planned for the scheme had the city's highest density of cultural and creative industries. This was also backed up by evidence suggesting the loss of highly skilled jobs if the application was allowed. Their efforts to block it were ultimately successful.

Stockholm, Singapore and Melbourne have all spent time and money mapping cultural and heritage infrastructure in order to include the data within current planning applications. In Stockholm, these maps and systems helped create a cultural infrastructure plan now used by planners themselves. It also goes beyond merely listing buildings, and considers cultural venues' uses, reach, and range of content. Singapore's heritage survey also looked at physical heritage assets and their intangible meaning to the community. It means the Arts and Heritage Division could get involved in schemes that threaten important sites. While their intervention has not always been successful, it has at least lessened the effects of some decisions, by collecting archive materials prior to the disappearance of a site, for example.

While progress has been made, the cultural sector still lags behind in using evidence to get the message across to senior decision makers. The World Cities Culture Finance Report, due for publication early in 2016, will be one step towards improving this. For the first time, it will provide comparative data on how culture is funded in 16 cities. The report will focus on public financing models for culture. Although they make up only a small part of what sustains the cultural sector, they often play a vital role in stimulating and attracting other sources of funding, such as tax breaks for philanthropic giving. The report will help increase understanding of a complex picture.

Over and above the use of evidence, cities highlighted the importance of engaging with the agendas of other government departments. The County of Los Angeles has collaborated with other County departments, helping develop solutions to regional challenges which have resulted in a range of new funding streams for the cultural sector. The City of Los Angeles created an internship programme for artists designed to tackle a wider youth unemployment agenda. In the case of Edinburgh's new culture plan, the discussion around setting new priorities brought up a wide range of issues beyond the culture team's remit, including licensing, planning and education. The culture department brought together colleagues from across these different areas to agree how everyone could help deliver the plan, while ensuring they all took responsibility for implementing it.

However, combining cross-departmental agendas is not always easy. Rio commonly experiences issues between the cultural department and the public order department, or its on-the-ground enforcement. For example, the public order team banned a street music project sponsored by the cultural department. Some of these problems were solved through personal relationships between officials, but this should be backed up by institutional support. Montreal provides a good example of how to establish a working framework with all the different parties before problems occur. When the city decided it would no longer put on music events itself, but focus on creating the environment to make them happen, Cultural Services worked with a range of departments to create the legal framework. Artists themselves may be part of the solution too. Los Angeles has worked with artists to come up with ideas to address issues that range from offensive graffiti and tagging, to excessive noise from music events.

Finally, cities are using outside expertise to put their messages across and deliver new projects. Edinburgh and Singapore combine outside knowledge with public consultation to make their arguments even more convincing. In Singapore's heritage survey, key assets were identified using a panel of experts, but residents then created oral histories of the identified sites. In Edinburgh, an expert group of 'moral authorities' on culture led a community consultation on future priorities. This had an unprecedented response from citizens, giving the culture team a powerful mandate to take the draft culture plan to the city's elected representatives for approval.

Cultural Connections – Creating Plans for Fair and Inclusive Growth

Our cities are facing considerable challenges. As the World Cities Culture Summit 2015 has shown, city governments across the world are developing innovative solutions. They have started working with a range of people – private developers, other government leaders and, of course, the cultural sector. They recognise the need for growth that is inclusive. They have also started drawing on the huge resource the Forum represents, sharing ideas and working with each other beyond the annual summits.

Culture has the potential to become the central connector of urban policy, helping to address our cities' challenges. However, more work is needed to get to this stage. A key part in achieving this ambition will be the effective use of evidence and research for making our case. This is where the ongoing research programme of the Forum, including the forthcoming World Cities Culture Finance Report and the Culture Impact Series, will make a significant contribution. But it will also require strong cultural leadership to deliver this vision. With this in mind, the World Cities Culture Forum will develop its own leadership programme over the coming year. This may well become a cornerstone of how our cities work towards a truly inclusive, sustainable urban future.

But these are just the first steps. The challenges of ongoing urban development are bigger than ever before. City governments will need to take the lead to develop solutions on the same scale. And they will need to act quickly before our cities are transformed into endless copies of each other: privatised, sanitised and lifeless spaces.

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