WORLD CITIES CULTURE FORUM

Sustaining Success

Policy Briefing 3: Amsterdam Summit 2014

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The World Cities Culture Forum is an initiative of the Mayor of London. It was founded in 2012 by London, New York, Shanghai, Paris, Tokyo, Sydney, Johannesburg, and Istanbul. It now includes 27 member cities from around the world. By bringing together their cultural expertise and knowledge, the participating cities have created a new unique research and policy forum to address the role that culture plays in their cities, and to strengthen their policy responses to the challenges they face.

In November 2014, senior policymakers from partner cities met in Amsterdam over a three-day programme for the annual World Cities Culture Summit, which was generously hosted by the City of Amsterdam. This document is the third policy briefing of the World Cities Culture Forum, based on the collective knowledge and latest evidence assembled at the Amsterdam summit.

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Sustaining Success

In recent years, city leaders have been hugely successful in securing recognition, political support and investment in culture. Across the globe, cities are increasingly making culture central to their strategies. The members of the World Cities Culture Forum, with their ongoing work programmes and through the Forum, have themselves played a vital role in this, producing a substantial evidence base on the value of arts, culture, entertainment, heritage and creative industries in making 21st century cities vibrant and economically competitive.

All of this, however, has come at a price. A major theme from the Amsterdam Summit 2014 was how cities can face and manage the challenges associated with this economic success. The 'privilege and responsibility of being a world city' requires us to acknowledge that the principles of good stewardship and sustainability should be central to cultural policy. The abundance of global capital, tourists, property development and commercial enterprise may all be welcome, but they also threaten the physical infrastructure, social fabric and cultural distinctiveness that made our cities so successful in the first place.

There could be fewer better places to have these discussions than in Amsterdam. One of the original world cities, for centuries it has existed, and thrived, by balancing the competing forces of commerce and culture, land and water, cultural diversity and social cohesion. It is also, of course, renowned as one of the great historic centres for tolerance, freedom of expression and the exchange of views: the ideal place in which cities from around the world can come together to have open and frank conversations about their common goals and challenges.

Cultural Authenticity in the Age of Mass Tourism

A highly visible instance of how culture contributes to a city's economic wealth is through tourism. More than a third of all global travel is for leisure purposes, and a significant proportion of such tourism is attributed to culture. In cities such as London, for instance, research has shown that eight out of ten tourists cite culture as their reason for visiting, while the success of large–scale cultural events, such as Notting Hill Carnival, has boosted both international perceptions of the city, and numbers of overseas visitors.

Around the world, this has been increasingly recognised and governments have become more adept at integrating culture into a city's brand and promotional offer. The 'I amsterdam' campaign, for example, brings together previously distinct promotional organisations into a single, coherent agency and brand, working with a wide range of commercial and public partners to deliver on a shared strategy. Crucially, Amsterdam's cultural institutions are at the heart of this – and the city's diverse cultural life, from famous museums to its nightlife and festivals, are a key marketing tool that have helped the city become one of the world's top 20 tourist destinations, while conference and business delegates have also increased significantly.

But the achievement of Amsterdam and other cities that have implemented similar promotional strategies should not blind us to some of the associated problems and policy challenges. While large, spatially diffused cities might be better able to absorb large visitor numbers, for smaller historic cities the problems of congestion, anti-social behaviour, over-crowding at cultural venues and degradation of public spaces are all serious concerns. Barcelona, for instance, now attracts more than seven million people a year, dwarfing its population, and putting considerable strain on the city, especially as these visitors tend to be highly concentrated in particular locations. Tensions between visitors and residents have arisen, further exacerbated by the rise of online services, such as Airbnb, that enable short-term visitors to stay in residential buildings rather than designated hotels. The city government has already responded to some of these challenges by introducing an admission fee for tourists only to iconic Park Güell. This has reduced visitor numbers from 30,000 a day down to 6,000. This has helped raise the attraction's quality experience and brought 13 million of revenues in the first year which will go towards creating a new museum in the park.

The lesson is that cities need to do more to promote themselves to their own citizens, to help visitors become better integrated, and to encourage people to feel pride in and responsibility for their city. As part of this, there needs to be better storytelling around the cultural life of the entire city. Too often, tourism campaigns and communications are structured around trails of iconic sites and world-famous attractions. The result is that smaller, less well-known cultural venues, in need of visitors and revenue, miss out, while those on the standard paths become disenchanted with a mass tourism experience that lacks authenticity or a sense of discovery. For world cities, the integration of culture and tourism that has brought such economic benefit needs to be built upon, with more targeted strategies and promotional campaigns that reflect their diversity, and which encourage visitors to be more adventurous and experience the full cultural offer.

Balancing Heritage and Identity with Modernity

One of the most obvious tensions associated with the economic success of world cities is the pressures it brings upon a city's heritage: its built environment and architectural and archaeological assets, as well as its traditions and sense of identity. Mass tourism is an obvious instance of this, but as cities grow in population and wealth, there are also domestic increases in congestion and environmental impact, putting pressure on housing, transport, public space and infrastructure.

In the face of this, policymakers are attempting to protect the beauty and heritage of their cities, while at the same time enabling them to develop, grow and prosper. World cities are not monuments but living entities, centres of social and commercial activity, and must remain so if they are to function. Again, this successful balancing of tradition and modernity is well demonstrated by Amsterdam (a city more than seven hundred years old and with its Canal Ring centre given UNESCO World Heritage Status), which continues to thrive as a business and visitor destination. The integrated approach to heritage adopted by the city government requires ongoing monitoring and intervention, and the careful regulation of planning, transport and licensing.

Istanbul is facing the same challenges but on a huge scale. There are more than 30,000 registered historic monuments in this city that stretches back 8,000 years, and houses a population of over 14 million. With congestion a major problem, a long-term priority for Istanbul was the construction of *Marmaray*, a railway tunnel running under the Bosphorus strait. Construction of the tunnel was delayed by the discovery of extensive and significant archaeological remains, and the public authorities had to balance people's demands for fit-for-purpose infrastructure against its responsibilities as custodians of the city's heritage. This was partly achieved by a programme of education and showcasing, ensuring that citizens were engaged and interested in the discoveries, and demonstrating how they shed new light on the origins and earliest history of Istanbul. The *Marmaray* has now opened, and already has a million passengers a day, while a new visitor venue is being constructed specifically to house the artefacts.

These tensions between heritage and identity versus tourism and economic development are being played out across the globe, and many world cities are innovating with their own solutions. In Madrid, for instance, the unique character of its old districts is being preserved at the neighbourhood level through the re-invention of historic buildings. A well-known example of this is the Matadero, a former slaughterhouse in the Arganzuela district. Madrid City Council converted it into a laboratory for the contemporary arts, maintaining its distinct architectural appearance, and running a highly innovative and successful cultural programme.

Other cities use natural landmarks to anchor their historic and contemporary identity. Since the 1840s, Shanghai's famous Huangpu River has been the basis for Shanghai's role as a port and global commercial centre. More recently it has provided the site for the 2010 World Expo, where a number of major new cultural facilities are now being constructed.

Culture + Regeneration: Increasing Local Capacity

Culture has long been associated with urban regeneration. Artists and cultural professionals, attracted by cheap rents and inner city living, are often among the first to move into neglected districts and turn urban 'no go areas' into economically dynamic and fashionable places to live and work. Originally seen in places such as Montmartre, Paris and Soho in New York, it is a phenomenon repeated in cities across the world.

Urban planners increasingly acknowledge the importance of culture in revitalizing cities, and few cities today would embark on an economic development strategy or masterplan without considering the role that arts and culture can play. This is the case with run-down urban areas suffering long-term industrial decline, such as La Boca in Buenos Aires, where local authorities have used the performing arts to spark revitalisation. This is also true for new districts, such as the Zuidas in Amsterdam, where developers understand that having public arts, and also artists, makes it more attractive to prospective residents and businesses. Festivals can also be an important means of regenerating neighbourhoods. Although the events themselves might be time-limited and leave no physical trace, cities such as Montréal with its 'Quartier des Spectacles' have demonstrated how they can help to create truly public spaces, improving perceptions of an area and attracting footfall and longer-term economic activity.

Culturally-led regeneration can, in turn, lead to further policy challenges. Most obvious is the problem of gentrification, where lower-income residents are displaced, or suffer from higher rental and living costs without the skills and contacts to benefit from new employment opportunities. As economic development continues, and an area becomes more prosperous and desirable, so the artists themselves become priced out by commercial and residential interests, no longer able to afford to live and work in the area that they helped to turn around.

Addressing these challenges requires a joined-up approach across city government, as exemplified by the Noord District of Amsterdam. A former industrial site dominated by Shell Oil, Noord District is being transformed by an ambitious, culture-led strategy, of which the EYE cinema arts centre on the riverbank, is the centrepiece. In just four years, the Eyemuseum has become one of Amsterdam's most visited attractions, and has helped to attract increasing numbers of creative businesses to the District. But, crucially, the city government remains committed to the Noord's longstanding residents, ensuring they don't become alienated from the creative economy that is growing around them. Through investment in social housing co-operatives, localized cultural programming and improved use of existing cultural assets and public spaces, resident communities are better equipped to benefit from the changes taking place, rather than being passive observers.

Toronto has a similarly thoughtful approach to cultural regeneration. For some years now, the city government has explicitly adopted a consultative approach to planning, acting as the facilitator and supporter of community groups. This is most clearly seen in Evergreen Brick Works, a public space in the heart of Toronto's Don Valley, which has been transformed over the last ten years by the Evergreen charity, with funds and loan guarantee support from the city government. In this case, it is not the city government but a non-profit local community organisation that has taken the lead in turning the former site of a disused quarry and a collection of abandoned factory buildings into what is now a highly successful environmental, culture and education centre.

Developing Cultural Capability in All Citizens

All of the tensions, problems and policy responses described above are variants of the greater, overall challenge of developing capability: ensuring that arts and culture are accessible to all, and that world cities are places in which the cultural lives of its citizens, regardless of their background, can flourish. This is increasingly important in light of the growing gap between rich and poor in world cities.

In the first instance, culture needs to be more broadly democratized and this means making sure that the treasures of a city can be accessed and experienced by all of its inhabitants. Many of the great museums and galleries are free, or at least affordably priced to residents, but a comprehensive strategy for inclusivity needs to go further than this. In New York, the new city government is developing such an approach, building on the success of the previous administration in the provision of culture, but focusing on how it is distributed, presented and accessed. This strategy will critically examine the present distribution of cultural provision, identifying and addressing spatial inequalities and also disparities in access between those of different ethnicity and income. It will also mean examining, and challenging, cultural institutions, working with them to ensure that the professionals who curate, manage and promote publicly–funded culture in the city reflect the diversity of its citizens. In Seoul, the Seoul Art Space programme has turned nine disused and derelict former industrial spaces into new cultural facilities designed to give hard-to-reach citizens and marginalised communities the opportunity to express themselves.

City governments increasingly understand that active civic participation is key to developing successful local cultural programmes. Seoul has recognised the need to encourage citizens to think of themselves not just as audiences for cultural services but also creators of culture. The metropolitan government has a citizen participatory budgeting programme, which for culture focuses on a selection of projects citizens propose and vote for. However, these efforts to work 'bottom up' and to enable local residents to take the lead in the delivery of cultural activities are not easy. The effective implementation of these citizen-led projects has been a challenge – because of some bureaucracy and inertia within the government but also sometimes due to the lack of capacity, skills and commitment coming from the citizens.

A key means to develop cultural capability and to widen access to culture is through education. This includes the outreach and learning programmes of cultural institutes and organisations, as well as embedding high-quality cultural education within schools. This is more than just developing future audiences and artists, but also contributing to the all-round personal, social and academic development of children and young people. While it can be difficult to make space for culture in an education curriculum usually imposed at the national level, many world cities are developing their own strategies, often through intermediary 'bridging' organisations, that work with artists and educators. In Singapore, for instance, programmes to bring artists into schools and to apply arts practices across a range of subjects, are helping to stimulate the creativity and expression of pupils. In Los Angeles, some 1,300 schools have signed-up for Arts for All, a collaboration between the county's Arts Commission and Office of Education with backing from the private sector, and which provides teaching resources, coaching and tools to improve cultural education.

Enabling the cultural life of citizens to truly flourish requires a strategy that goes beyond formal arts and education institutions, and that seeks to work with artists and community groups who are often making unrecognised but significant contributions to their cities. The case of Bogotá's graffiti artists provides a powerful example of what can be achieved when this happens. Actively discouraged by municipal government and regarded for many years as a social problem, tensions between graffiti artists and the authorities had become acute until a new approach was adopted, one which worked with the community to jointly agree guidelines, to regulate rather than penalize, and which celebrated graffiti as a form of contemporary art, with grant funding, educational projects and showcasing events. As a result, Bogotá has become a recognised world centre for graffiti and its associated street art forms, such as hip hop music, attracting artists and visitors from across Latin America.

A challenge for the World Cities Culture Forum will be to find ways to capture and measure these kinds of cultural activity. Mapping the number of galleries, historic monuments and libraries is an important task that has proved enormously valuable to governments. But much more evidence and understanding is needed on a diverse range of informal cultural activities, so that informed policy can be made to best help them prosper in cities around the world.

Conclusion: Doing It Together

When it comes to international rankings, world cities invariably score highly for business competitiveness, global trade and inward investment. But it is often smaller, low population density cities which score better on measurements of 'liveability', such as the quality of the environment, health and recreation. Arts and culture may increasingly be recognised as an important element of a city's profile, but cultural policies are often tilted towards economic metrics, rather than those more intangible factors contributing to the well being of citizens. Whether it is the problems associated with mass tourism, the gentrification of urban districts or the need to protect a city's heritage and identity, policymakers need to give greater consideration to how culture impacts on quality of life; to how it enables their citizens to flourish.

The challenges may be considerable, but cities themselves hold many of the solutions to their problems. Great cities generate great ideas. And city governments have initiated policies and projects that have spread around the world, from bicycle hire schemes to Nuit Blanche festivals. Of course, ideas need to be applied rather than just repeated and it is not simply a case of replicating policies, but rather a case of learning, recognising the inter-dependency of cities but also their individual context. This is exemplified by the principles and practice of the World Cities Culture Forum, which recognises that no single city has a monopoly on wisdom, and that by sharing common challenges, building up evidence and learning from one another, cities can develop policies to more effectively improve the lives of their citizens. It is in this spirit that members of the Forum left the Amsterdam Summit 2014, and will continue to work together in the months and years ahead.

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