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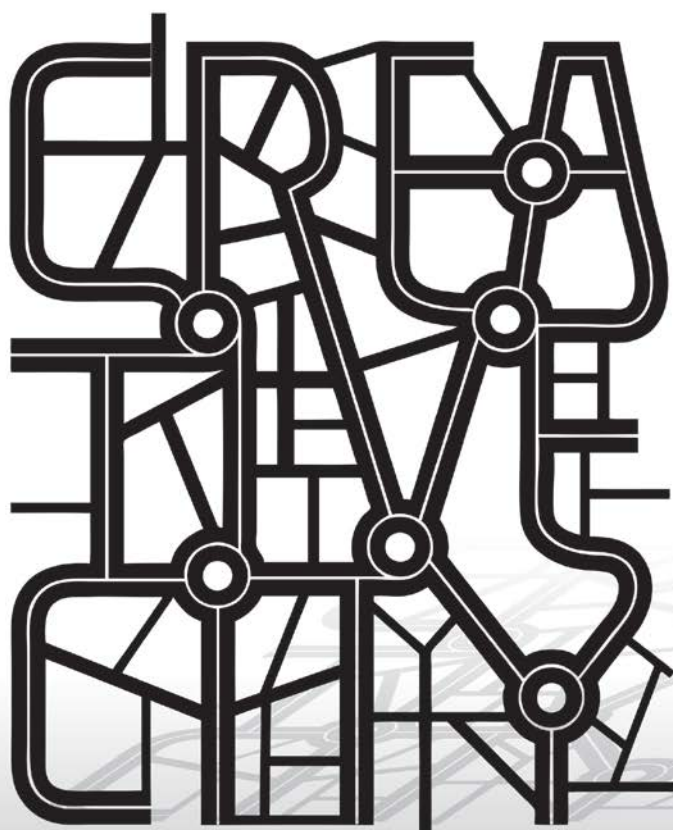


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# THE IDEA OF CREATIVE CITY



The urban policy  
debate Cracow  
17 - 18 October

# 2013

**PROCEEDINGS**

**THE IDEA OF CREATIVE CITY**  
*The urban policy debate / Cracow 17 - 18 October 2013*

Edited by

Dobrosława Wiktor-Mach and Piotr Radwański

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# LOOKING FOR THE CREATIVE CITY: URBAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EDUCATION AND CULTURAL STRATEGIES IN MEDELLIN, COLOMBIA

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## Abstract

The city of Medellin, Colombia, has been recognized as a paradigm of urban change and promotion of creative urban policies for integral development and achieve transformation of vulnerable communities in the informal peripheral areas of the city. Medellin is Colombia's second largest city (4million inhabitants) and achieve in a short period of time a urban transformation through inclusive urban policies and city development management strategies that prove to be a powerful tool to transform urban conditions and communities, changing the traditional top-down approaches of urban planning for renovated bottom-up strategies involving creative clusters, communities, city administration and private sectors through strategic planning, promoting of IT developments and cultural and educational strategies. These ideas have been used by other Colombian and Latin-American cities to rapidly improve urban conditions and provide a better living to the vulnerable populations in large and intermediate cities. This paper will first analyze the evolution the creative city concepts and present some of the strategies that the Medellin city planning administration have implemented on education and inclusive policies to transform cities and communities.

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**Keywords:** Creativity, Innovation, Urban Development, Strategic Planning, Urban Economy

## Evolution of the Creative City concept

The last two decades have marked the emergence and proliferation of the entire world of research and public policy agendas that focus creativity as a new and powerful tool to stimulate economic regeneration, urban planning and design. Particularly, the concept of "creative city" developed by Charles Landry (1995), had an important influence on strategies that support urban growth and the renovation of urban communities. This concept suggests that talented people are the key to economic growth and that cities rich in diversity, design and heritage are able to create physical and social conditions for empowering local entrepreneurship and encouraging the global export of innovative ideas and technologies.

Urban planners and public policy makers adopted these creative city strategies for creating new sources of employment and improve the level of income by strengthening the cultural and artistic districts and the creative *cluster* incubators, as defined by Florida (2002). Also, they have been concentrating on strengthening the critical infrastructure of intellectual resources, social diversity and cultural middlemen; not only as a way of improving vitality and economic competitiveness among cities, but also as a way of strengthening social cohesion and citizen's identity.

Nevertheless, the world economic crisis in 2008 set up significant challenges for the agendas of creative economy as a mean of urban development. It is believed that the idea of creative city originated from the financial service boom and the real-estate powered by long-term credits. Public policy creators and cultural merchants have been continuously benefited and entrusted with schemes of new forms of massive consumption, corporate sponsorship and urban regeneration led by the real estate market. These processes have also been encouraged by public investment in cultural facilities and programs of "urban revival".





Image 1 Scheme for Creative City, developed by the author

The continuous anxiety about world economy and policies of fiscal austerity challenge many of the suppositions that used to nurture the creativity agenda as the catalyst for urban and social development. The urban planner Peter Hall (1998) is focusing how this era of austerity impacts the thoughts of the creative city. The current world financial and fiscal crisis will make doubts and critiques of the concepts associated with the creative city of the 90's more visible.

## Urban Economy and Creativity

The recent research on creative economy as a catalyst for urban development had also explored the interrelation between the public investment in culture and education and the real estate market. While it can be observed that the creative boom offers new opportunities to artists and cultural promoters, the long term implications on the integration of cultural actors and stakeholders into urban regeneration projects have not been clearly studied so far.

For example, the role of artists and the importance of cultural qualities of places have been recognized as essential elements in the initial stages of urban production economies. However, the final goal of regeneration commonly materializes in big scale commercial and residential complexes, promoted by urban marketing. This situation usually physically displaces (or puts beyond of budget reach), the small and intricate spaces that are more adequate for emerging and amateur urban artists. The economic geographer Tom Hutton also suggests that the economic success of the urban renovation policies based on heritage and culture, frequently carry also the “seed of its own destruction” (2010). When the once forgotten areas of the city are reintegrated, the increasing rent and real estate prices and the demolition of old buildings displace the very same people that could play an important part in the future the source of cultural and creativity revitalization.

Due to the increasing interdependence between real estate developments and the policies of urban regeneration, the concept of “creative cities” could be perceived now as an empty political idea that provides a façade to the real restructuring of urban labor markets, based on the exploitation of the increasingly high values of urban land and the new demand for housing. If not careful in applying the formula of the “creative city”, it could fail when not providing a real contribution to the understatement of the deep postindustrial realities that most of the world cities present today.

## **Economic crisis and urban creativity**

The recent economic uncertainty calls for a reinterpretation of the Creative Era from the 90s, where new visions of urban renovation can lead to a better policy making respond. The moments of crisis usually generate new perspectives and ideas, and historically in times of economic depression the creative industry had led process for urban development. One of these scenarios was the NY area during the 70's crisis, where whole districts had a new economic and social dynamic using cultural branding and innovation hubs, in the areas of Greenwich Village and Hudson River former industrial areas. Nevertheless, the impacts on land speculation and gentrification produced a displacement of the very same cultural stakeholders that promote the cultural branding of their urban zones.

On the other hand, London recession beginning the 90's did not create a new class of urban creativity clusters, but a high income real estate development in the center of the city. In the actual era of austerity, it is important to explore the new relationship between creativity and urban economic restructuration, particularly according to the drastic reductions on cities budget on education and support of cultural activities, and the impact of theses on the new policies for urban wellbeing and housing. Finally, regarding this urban processes, the cultural theorist Malcolm Miles (1997) states that "...now we are moving into a different phase of the creative agenda, recognizing the true value of the social capital as a key factor for an integral economic revitalization of urban areas".

## **Case Study: Medellin Creative Strategies for urban development**

The city of Medellin is the second largest urban agglomeration in Colombia, with a population of 4 million inhabitants in its metropolitan area. During the 80's, this city has had one of the highest crime rates in the world, due to the mafia war over controlling the drugs business. However, in the last 10 years the city has been undergoing a process of revitalization, achieving great results and improving urban life, especially in the marginalized areas where more than 1 million persons used to live without access to the city's infrastructure such transport, public services, public space and education. The city planning department adapted the strategic planning principles and created Integrated Urban Plans (PUI) (*Medellin Planning Department*) that integrated strategic lines in the most urgent areas for urban recovery and integration.

This strategic plan had a bottom-up vision instead of the usual master planning tools that were not effective for the rapidly changing conditions of the informal areas of the city, and approached the communities with a capacity building strategy, implemented in many similar cities by UN Habitat (*United Nations Development Program*). One of the most interesting human capital resources of this population was their strong cultural background, while the city administration supported this capabilities of the population with a Creative Cluster strategy included in their strategic plan for the city.

## **Medellin Urban Innovation**

As result, the city of Medellin is now one of the most recognized cities for urban revitalization and a best practice example for Inclusive architecture, new urban spaces and social recovery. During the last year, the city hosted the Ciudades Creativas Conference organized by the Fundacion Kreanta, a Spanish based organization that supports the discussion on the evolution of the creative city concepts and their effective adaptation in processes of urban renovation (*Foundation Kreanta*).

## VISTA SUR ESTACIÓN JUAN XXIII



**Image 2** Project for Metrocable in Medellín informal areas, developed by Medellín City Administration and Colombian Transport Ministry.

The MIT Senseable Lab, directed by Prof. Ratti is also collaborating in expanding this vision into a Digital City strategy supported also by Ruta N, and the City Planning Department (*MIT Senseable Lab*). The idea is to make urban processes more effective using urban digital infrastructure to improve the access and communication in different areas of the city, reducing the physical and social barriers between city areas and offering vulnerable communities access to technical education that will allow them to enter the city labor market in a faster way. This innovation in urban planning had been acknowledged with several prizes for sustainable urban development such as the Holcim Award, the UN Habitat Scroll of Honor and the city have been elected to host the next World Urban Forum in April, 2014 (*World Urban Forum 7*), which is the largest world forum for thinking and transfer knowledge in the area of urban development.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

While the concept of “creativity” has been generally associated with originality and innovation in arts and sciences, since 1980 this concept has been expanded to cultural, social and economic transformation of companies and cities. During the 90s and 2000s, economists and business theorists started to argue that the growth of contemporary capitalism depended on the constant urban creative innovation and the ability to adapt to constant changing conditions of urban competitiveness. The idea was that the periods of uncertainty in everyday life are the inevitable result of global processes of creative distress.

This has led to the emergence of urban development forms and particular urban dynamics that disregard the consequences of working life based in personal flexibility. According to the UNTAC report (2010), the recent era of creative classes, creative clusters, creative neighborhoods and creative industries have led employment conditions to be increasingly short-term, casual and precarious in quality and benefits. New forms of work have become to privilege people with certain kind of class connections, skills, appearance and life styles. The public politic agenda in Medellín has been based on entrepreneurship and flexibility, instead of basic concepts of employment, labor laws and benefits.

The following list shows pros and cons for Creative Cities, developed from research on Creative City in the Faculty of Habitat Sciences, Program of Architecture and Urbanism, La Salle University:

**Pros:**

- Use of technology to make connections
- Potential for Renovation of problematic urban areas
- Cities not depending on manufacturing sectors
- Value in creation and innovation
- Promote Cultural and Art activities that may increase social cohesion and capital.
- City or districts branding may lead to tourism sector increase

**Cons:**

- Urban Renovation may lead to gentrification
- Can increase the segregation gap in the cities
- Renovated districts become intellectual ghettos
- Large amounts of former manufacturing employees out of work
- Land Value and Real State Bubble Effect
- Employees in the creative sector may not have labor security

Education has played a significant role in a creative vision in Medellin, and in which public schools increasingly emphasize capacity building in technology, media and visual arts as top career aspirations. At the same time, universities offer courses in “Business and Creativity” as research focuses creative industries throughout its range of action. To understand the real possibilities of urban creativity, it is necessary to perform an in-depth analysis of the way in which these theories have been implemented by stakeholders, private and public institutions, and also our academic urban research community. As suggested by the urban geographer Steve Millington (2009) “the creative agenda in some cities have created even more marginalization and inequality, putting more emphasis on the economic growth instead of reducing the social and physical disparities on the city. This has created private worlds of hipsters and fashion districts, increasing the atmosphere of segregation and urban division”.

This suggests us to stop for a while the dependency on creativity, or at least to look for alternative ways instead of the homogeneous creative city advertize as the panacea for urban decline. Also suggest to make a more sensitive and objective valuation of the great impact of the “creative urbanism” per se, and the necessity to reevaluate and consolidate working class and institutions that provide all the people, and not only a few fortunate creative class, with the capacity to explore their own intrinsic capacities for invention and imagination in urban development.

Final recommendations:

1. Integrate all people into the urban revitalization process
2. Keep local residents in urban renovated areas through real state price and rental control
3. Redistribute income into city development for poorest areas
4. Local development policy with community participation from the beginning.
5. Offer better labor security to new employees
6. A diverse city is an active city
7. Offer more inclusive public space for integration
8. Promote cultural and educational activities that integrate all classes, not only the creative class.

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