

Editorial: Reinventing the Creative City – Cooperative Management for Urban Regeneration

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The theme chosen for the present volume of our Journal of Urban Culture Research was born from an urgent need and a vision. The need was to come up with an integrated approach which could enable cities to respond to challenges represented by rapid urbanization, migration and forced displacement, globalization, climate change and natural disasters, issues that are today aggravated by the economic crises.

The policy of an “integrated approach” in urban culture research and practice was initiated and developed in the 90’s in connection with urban projects for disadvantaged areas in an effort to promote social inclusion. Still this is a central field of study and activism as in the URBACT (Urban Action) project initiated and administered by the European Union. This project with a time frame of ten years between 2003 and 2013, and with a budget of close to 70 million Euros for the period of 2007-2013, involves, citing their aims and project description, cooperative networking among 300 cities in 29 European countries working, according to the project agenda, to develop solutions to major urban challenges that are sustainable and that integrates economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions, giving output to city policy players and planners. According to their agenda, however, no ready-made outputs are intended or expected. The stated aim is through creating city networks concentrated on seeking solutions to specific communal problems to make available solutions that have proven effective in certain situations.

And here is where the vision comes in, a vision of a close cooperation involving both planning, research, and project activities in the field between the arts and art education communities and the city administration to help solve current problems. The 9th Forum of the Urban Research Plaza produced evidence that such a co-operation is indeed possible and that, as the URBACT program acknowledges, only an integrated approach can enable cities to respond to the challenges facing us.

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We also subscribe to the policy of taking small steps, concentrating on concrete solutions to concrete problems, but within the vision of an overreaching goal inviting a break away from a compartmentalized practice, with the aim of promoting an holistic approach. A survey of papers and project report delivered at former Forums testify to the commitment of researchers and activists to this principle. And this is the very foundation of our Journal of Urban Culture Research.

We now stand at the beginning of a new dawn for the role for the arts in urban planning in our host country. I refer to the Creative Economy plans laid out at the recent TICEF (Thailand International Creative Economy Forum) held in Bangkok on November 28-30. But the beginnings were laid in August 2009 when the Prime Minister of Thailand, Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva formally announced the Creative Thailand Policy. At the same time he announced the Thai government's twelve commitments to increase the value of Thailand's creative industries from 12% to 20% of the country's GDP in 2012 and the make Thailand the creative hub of ASEAN by 2012.

These twelve commitments include the following major development initiatives:

- Enhancing the efficiency of the entire intellectual property management system within six months.
- Enhancing creative learning in the national curriculum in order to cultivate creative thinking in the Thai educational system.
- Supporting specialization in areas of design and other art forms.
- Creating added value of traditional knowledge and general income to the local people.
- Enhance the professional standing of creative Thais and popularize Thai art and culture worldwide.
- Provide creative zones (visual art zone, performing art zone) open for artists to exhibit their works.

The Creative Economy Policy includes a plan for the promotion of the so-called Creative Cluster. The idea of Creative Clusters originated in 2009 when 15 European Mayors and local representatives in the Portuguese mediaeval town of Obidos signed an agreement called the Obidos charter under the umbrella of the UBRACT scheme. This committed them to involve other small and medium sized European cities in a broader network in order as the statement goes "to turn the creativity of their citizens into one of the corner-stones of the future, sustainable urban development."

In Thailand the Creative Economy Policy evolves around four clusters of fifteen industries:

- Cultural Heritage (Crafts, Historical and cultural tourism, Foods and Traditional medicine.
- Arts (Performing arts, Visual arts).

- Media (Film, Publishing, Broadcasting and Music).
- Functional Creation (Design, Fashion, Architecture, Advertising and Software).

In all these areas the Bangkok arts and art education community, not least the Chulalongkorn University Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, through the years have demonstrated a competence and will to work with city authorities in outreach programs for the benefit of Bangkok citizens. I am thinking of such recent ventures as the Art for All creative camps for handicapped children or the mapping of Bangkok cultural resources, both initiated and organized by our Faculty, as well as projects like Imagine Peace initiated by the Cultural Ministry after the political turmoil and launched by the Bangkok Arts Community.

At the opening plenary session of the TICEF forum John Howkins, Chairman of the Creative Group England and famous author of “Creative Economy” set the agenda for the conference, urging the Government to support collaborative policy-making, encouraging the individual voice. “Listen to the people who are creative”, “Open up opportunities for people, promoting diversity and inclusion”, “Celebrate change and novelty – be tolerant.” And above all Howkins encouraged learning. “Recognize and encourage every child’s imagination”, “Give all children a creative education”, “Turn their imagination, talent and skills into activities and jobs.”

We mentioned that the concept and necessity of an integrative approach was born out of projects for social inclusion in disadvantaged urban areas. This will be a continuous focal point in our research and co-operative projects. Our common aim must be to create a more inclusive city. We must plan and act with the city authorities for every citizen to be able to participate in “urban living” according to their capacity and needs. Modern city development often means destroying traditional patterns of city living. It is forgotten that the children and elderly use the city in other ways than adults. We need intergenerational and intercultural meeting places and arenas for play and artistic activities, spaces that give character to the city and creative outlets for its citizens.

We hereby direct our heartfelt thanks for the authors who have so generously shared their experiences in this volume and invite our old and new readers to enter into our world of creative urban living.