

## **Placemarketing and the Discourse of Creativity in Toronto's "Creative City" Revitalization Strategy, 2003-2008**

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### **Abstract**

Using critical discourse analysis this paper critiques five urban planning documents to assess the constitutive role they played in efforts to brand and placemarket Toronto as an emerging world-class creative city during the period 2003-2008. In these documents creative city discourse provides a unifying language and justification for supporting local cultural activity in the broader interest of placemarketing Toronto as a world-class creative city. The analysis ties the documents together to illustrate an over-arching shift in how "Toronto-as-creative city" was envisioned in the initial 2003 text to the 2008 document. The paper concludes that this discourse is a constitutive feature of urban revitalization strategies aimed at creating a distinctly promotional milieu to attract creative workers and activities from the cultural sector. In the case of Toronto during this distinct timeframe, planners and marketing companies link identity-building to their distinctly promotional images of Toronto.

**Keywords:** urban communication, placemarketing, creative city discourse, cultural economy.

### **Introduction**

Placemarketing practices have received a great deal of attention in the urban communication literature not only as a planning strategy but also as a subject of critical cultural analysis. Of particular relevance for this paper is the urban communication literature which investigates how the political economy of urban development

intertwines with the social construction of urban meaning through branding and placemarketing strategies rooted in the concept of the creative city.

Using critical discourse analysis this paper critiques five urban planning documents to assess the constitutive role they played in efforts to brand and placemarket Toronto as an emerging world-class creative city during the period 2003-2008. In these documents creative city discourse provides a unifying language and justification for supporting local cultural activity in the broader interest of placemarketing Toronto as a world-class creative city.

In February 2000 Toronto city council directed its new Culture Division to develop a strategic plan to guide the city's cultural development over the following decade. Council set out two key goals for the development of this plan: (i) to position Toronto as an international cultural capital; and (ii) to define culture's role at the center of the economic and social development of the city. What emerged was a document titled "Culture Plan for the Creative City." Adopted by city council in June 2003 this "Culture Plan" was designed to function as a long-term placemarketing strategy for Toronto's creative city building strategy. This ten-year plan called for the aggressive positioning of Toronto as a "world-class" creative city by mobilizing its artistic and cultural aspects to ensure its place as a global cultural capital. Specifically, arts, culture and heritage would "play much more than supporting roles in Toronto's intensification" (Culture Plan, 2003, p.6). In fact they would be key to attracting "the educated, mobile newcomers we want, keep our best and brightest at home and make our economy among the strongest anywhere. Arts, culture and heritage will be the future Toronto's heart and soul" (Ibid.).

Four more planning documents followed the "Culture Plan" over the next five years, building on certain of its key elements. Through these documents consultants explore what they perceive to be Toronto's extant opportunities, assets, and target markets, and then specific goals are set out. An examination of each of these five documents forms the basis of this paper.

I wish to make clear at the outset of this paper that it is not my intention to assess the five documents for their effectiveness in terms of their merits as planning or marketing strategies; the objective is not to conduct an evaluation of these policies and their implementation. Consequently it is not the purpose of this paper to evaluate whether the five documents are successful as an overarching culture plan and urban development strategy. Rather my intent is to study the five planning documents in their specific historical context to gain insight into the nature of creative city discourse and how these planning documents in fact function as promotional documents for the creative city model of urban placemarketing and economic regeneration.

### **Review of literature**

The creative city approach to urban development differs from other forms of culture-led regeneration efforts. Unlike other strategies for urban revitalization the target population consists of neither tourists nor investors. Rather, arts and culture are deployed in order to attract a specific fragment of the middle class that is said to hold the key to urban economic and social prosperity. This relationship between creativity and economic development has become a key feature of the theoretical and practice landscape of urban politics since the early 2000s. The concept of creative cities has gained prominence among urban planners and policymakers, as well as academics with interests in urban affairs generally. While definitions of 'creative industries' and a 'creative class' are in themselves contested, what is not disputed is that increasing numbers of urban elites are focusing on reinventing their cities as being 'creative' in a more explicit way (Atkinson and Easthope, 2009, p.65).

This place promotion framework signals the extent of urban development activities that fit clearly within the purview of city marketing strategies (Gibson and Lowes, 2007). Efforts to market a city necessarily reflect its economic environment, but also signal an acceptance of marketing strategies as suitable to the role and purposes of civic government. Marketing techniques advocate

assessing the product, the targeted audience, and the existing reputation of the product. Consequently the specific promotional strategy of any one city depends a great deal on its 'product' and its existing resource, and these include its culture and the potential for aspects of its culture to generate tourism as well as its locational resources such as low taxes and favorable geography for trade relations with others.

The applied practice of urban placemarketing typically consists of the promotion of a location not only as a place to do business but also as a place to live, and these images of lifestyle tend to be predominantly anchored around culture (Gibson, 2007; Duxbury, 2004). It is a central tenet of creative cities discourse that the place quality of cities is crucial for economic prosperity and social well-being and, in turn, that only those cities tapping into the creativity of all citizens and sectors will reach their full potential.

Placemarketing, then, is a defining feature of urban entrepreneurialism and is best understood as a larger strategy that entails more than just the branding and promotion of a city: it is fundamentally about city building to the end of creating, or re-creating, an image of place (Kavaratzis, 2007). In this sense Barke (1999) argues that urban placemarketing has become an industry in its own right, encompassing many tools and objectives. The main goals of placemarketing are to advance the competitive position of the city, attract inward investment, enhance city image, and improve the well-being of its population (Paddison, 1993). In an environment of fierce interurban competition, placemarketing figures prominently as a key feature of urban revitalization strategies (Gibson & Lowes, 2007; Lowes, 2002; Paddison, 1993). Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1993) stress that marketing place is about improving place, and can be about designing a city that meets the needs and expectations of its target markets, such as citizens, businesses, visitors, and investors. Place marketers are concerned with more than just "selling," or the promotion of place: they endeavor to adapt the product, or place, to be more attractive to tourists and potential residents. Branding is one instrument of place marketing employed to help create an image of place in the eyes of the consumer.

While the concept of branding is not new, 'place branding' is a relatively new feature of placemarketing, born of a realization of the value of mental images and their ability to create emotional and psychological associations with the city (Kavaratzis, 2007). Urban places are a distinct type of product with a multiplicity of ambiguities and complexities (spatial, human, and otherwise), rendering place branding a distinctive form of product branding (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2005). Urban place branding also provides an opportunity to re-position a product that was once stigmatized, and to create a new, more positive image of whatever is being sold (Gibson, 2007). A positive place brand can be a long-lasting means to attract tourism, talent, and encourage investment: "One of the great advantages of brands over commodities is that they are an infinitely sustainable resource; that is, as long as their value is maintained through careful marketing" (Anholt, 2004, p.29). The reason for the purported durability of an urban place brand is that an image of place exists chiefly in the mind of the consumer, rather than the producer of the image, making the image more difficult to destroy.

Placemarketing in both theory and practice is most often criticized for creating an image-reality gap that is supported by entrepreneurial-focused city boosters who often downplay macroeconomic consequences (Lowes 2004, 2002; Paddison, 1993). Waitt's (1999, p.1056) claim that "places are more about myth than substance" echoes the concerns of other scholars regarding the ability of place marketing to communicate a 'true' image of the city versus one predicated on an idyllic image of city life. This is a common theme in placemarketing literature (Barke, 1999; Gibson, 2007; Gibson & Lowes, 2007; Harvey, 1989a; Holcomb, 1993; Lowes, 2004; Paddison, 1993; Rutheiser, 1996; Waitt, 1999). As Kotler and Gertner (2004) suggest, "Most country images are stereotypes, extreme simplifications of reality that are not necessarily accurate" (p.42). Zukin (1995, p.16) refers these images as "imaginative reconstructions," and asserts they rarely reflect real city spaces because of concern that unsavory images may hinder consumption. Beneath this gloss of new images, often the realities of urban decay and social concerns are removed from the promotional discourse.

However, Kavartzis (2007) suggests that criticizing the image-reality disparity ostensibly created by placemarketing actually only applies to the promotion of place, which, like branding, is only one aspect of place marketing. Placemarketing is a wide reaching and long-term undertaking that begins with choosing a vision for the city and then implementing various spatial and promotional practices (Kavartzis, 2007). In this sense the tools of placemarketing provide the means of communicating a new and improved image of place.

Paddison (1993) provides a prime example of the challenges of conveying an "authentic" version of the city in his examination of city marketing and re-imaging in Glasgow, Scotland, in the 1980s. Paddison illustrates how urban marketers attempted to re-image the city as one revived by culture, arts, and a diversified economic base through "Glasgow's Miles Better" campaign. Paddison concludes that a successful re-imaging of a city is often far removed from reality. Economic woes, high unemployment, urban decay, all unpleasant images of society, are kept out of the promotional discourse in order to communicate a pure image of place. Since the very nature of marketing is to highlight the positive attributes of a product, it stands to reason that a more sanitized version of what is really a complex reality is what is ultimately offered for consumption.

### **Case study**

Five documents form the basis of Toronto's "creative city" redevelopment initiative, 2003-2008, and these are examined here using critical discourse analysis. As often noted by its practitioners, critical discourse analysis is not a positivistic science but rather an interpretative practice. In general terms critical discourse analysis examines the form, structure and content of discourse. It is a method of analysis enabling a vigorous assessment of what is meant when language is used to describe and explain, to frame issues and opinions in a particular way. Critical discourse analysis analysts posit that texts, language and ultimately communication should be examined in their social context; they should be examined for the means by which they both shape and are informed by wider

processes within society and the exercise of power by vested interests. In this manner texts do not merely passively report upon the world but rather imbue it with meaning, consequently shaping perspectives on it. Critical discourse analysis can therefore be used as a method of analysis designed to enhance an understanding of government policy-making -- especially in relation to the implementation of creative cities redevelopment strategies and discourses by urban elites.

For the research this paper is based on I relied on the textual analysis component of Fairclough's (1992, 2003) approach to critical discourse analysis. Of particular interest is his emphasis on examining the content of specific discursive formulations with an analysis of their effects to highlight how the proliferation of certain terms and arguments legitimizes activity and structures the parameters of policy intervention. This is especially germane to the study of creative cities discourse and urban placemarketing campaigns such as that employed by Toronto city officials from 2003 through 2008.

Against this background my analysis focuses on how these particular texts operate as constitutive features of the discursive construction of Toronto as a so-called creative city. The concern is with how these planning texts position the city's culture industry, its workers, and its built environment as discursive objects within a broader framework of urban regeneration and development. A chronological analysis of these five documents provides insight into the construction of a creative image of the city of Toronto by the producers of the texts and their political boosters. The analysis ties the documents together to illustrate an over-arching shift in how Toronto-as-creative city was envisioned in the initial 2003 text to the 2008 document. These key documents are as follows:

1. *Culture Plan for the Creative City* (2003)
2. *Culture Plan Progress Report* (2005)
3. *Imagine a Toronto: Strategies for a Creative City* (2006)
4. *Agenda for Prosperity* (2008)
5. *Creative City Planning Framework* (2008)

*Text 1: Culture Plan for the Creative City (2003)*

Released in 2003, the *Culture Plan for the Creative City* is the foundational text outlining the creative city place marketing strategy for Toronto at the outset of the twenty-first century. Rather than arguing for the arts on the basis of their intrinsic benefits, the Culture Plan constructs an economics discourse, extolling their role in fostering economic competitiveness as quality-of-life amenities. Given a chance, the argument runs, the arts "bring to Toronto much more than material rewards. They give a great city an image of its soul" (p.44). In effect this keystone text sets the tone for the plan by setting out how the creative city is conceptualized: "Creative Cities are dense urban centres whose economies are dominated by ideas, and by people who bring new ideas to life...Their populations display a potent mix of high education and cultural diversity" (p.8). According to the *Culture Plan* the inspiration for this position is "the American economist Richard Florida and his colleagues [who] have found a correlation between a city's creative sphere and its economic competitiveness; they call it the Creativity Index" (ibid.: 9; see also Gertler et al., 2002).

The *Culture Plan* advances the claim that in Toronto "culture has come to mean more than ballet, opera and theatre" (p.7). Typically these institutions are disparaged as "high culture," what Zukin (1995, p.19) describes as the "patrician culture of art museums and public buildings." In this document, however, a message of inclusivity is the focus, suggesting that Toronto is a creative city, "[f]or the people, of the people, by the people" (City of Toronto, 2003, p.30). In practice, the large cultural capital projects cost an estimated \$800 million in contrast to the (recommended only) commitment for one per cent of total arts funding to go towards public art in the city (p.2). Jenkins (2005) points out that this massive investment in Toronto's landscape was also in the face of major cuts to cultural funding for agencies such as the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council in the late 1990s, which funds smaller cultural and artistic endeavors. Believing that a stronger image of place will be created by



these large cultural icons, seemingly, the city supported these large institutions over more grassroots forms of culture – this implies there is a substantial opportunity cost to major flagship construction.

The *Culture Plan* declares that all great cities of the future will be creative cities, and offers 63 recommendations for how cultural elements of the city (e.g. festivals, museums, and public art) can be mobilized to ensure not only the economic and social development of the city, but also the title of global cultural capital. Considerable attention in the text is devoted to the fact that Toronto spends less per capita each year on arts, culture, and heritage than Vancouver, Chicago, Montreal, San Francisco, and New York – all identified as creative city competitors.

*Text 2: Culture Plan Progress Report (2005)*

A follow up to the 2003 document, the *Culture Plan Progress Report* (2005) is a descriptive report on initiatives tabled two years prior. Not an extensive document, its main focus is on the continued financial challenges of creative city building in Toronto. The *Progress Report* details some evidence of a new vision in terms of what constitutes the creative city, and how Toronto can be set apart from its interurban competitors.

Similar to its predecessor this document constitutes a promotional discourse that runs contrary to practice: the producers claim that public art programs “have long been centerpieces of development and revitalization” (p.24). However, the *Progress Report* document reports that public art initiatives had yet to receive any funding in 2005. This suggests that public art – what may be considered key symbols of the grassroots nature of the creative city – is not regarded as a central feature of Toronto’s symbolic economy.

Overall, this document is still indicative of the outward-looking orientation of the creative city plan at this point (2005). The image of the creative city constructed by the document’s producers is primarily geared towards tourists, and attracting the creative class

from abroad, rather than stimulating creative energies in local populations. The *Progress Report* document is particularly significant because it demonstrates how the cultural continues to intersect with the economic in a variety of ways. The document's producers attempt to capitalize on Toronto's culture in order to attract creative workers for strategic economic reasons. The underlying principle seems to be that creative laborers will eventually attract investment from a competitive global marketplace. Overall though, the producers neglect what Landry (2006) calls "social citizenship" (p.190); this signifies the potential of the creative city to be a place where the residents come together to share ideas and imagination, and ideally make the city a more tolerant place.

*Text 3: Imagine a Toronto: Strategies for a Creative City (2006)*

*Imagine a Toronto* constructs particular vision of Toronto as a creative city, one which emphasizes imagination and "grassroots creative activity" as the key force driving the city's regional economy. In particular, the image of the creative city constructed in this document is a departure from the previous two because it constructs a distinctly promotional placemarketing discourse which is based on imagination and neighbourhood development rather than large scale flagship projects and attracting tourist audiences. In effect, the document posits that Toronto's unique and revitalized neighbourhoods, and the cultural experience they offer to urban consumers, is a key aspect of the creative city brand Toronto's creative city boosters wish to market.

In this text the creative city is presented as a discursive object constructed around four main elements: creative people, creative workers, creative industries, and creative activity (p.9). Revitalizing urban neighbourhoods is recognized as a path to fostering all of these creative elements in traditionally underprivileged areas of the city. The text asserts that creative cultural activity is vital to revitalizing neighbourhoods such as Regent Park, Canada's largest and oldest public housing development. "The grassroots creative activity in neighbourhoods like Regent Park represent promising but isolated

projects that need to be scaled up and replicated in other parts of the city-region" (p.14).

The word "grassroots" is a discursive signifier, deployed several times throughout *Imagine a Toronto*. Here the thrust of the creative city discourse is aimed at the importance of fostering local creativity and producing "home-grown successes" (p.6). People, as the essence of culture, and safe spaces in which to cultivate their creative abilities, are characterized as integral to mobilizing culture to achieving definite economic and social ends. Most significantly, the document implies that there are clear economic and social benefits of urban regeneration to be had. Economically, a revitalized image of place lends itself to attracting urban consumers to one of Toronto's many diverse neighbourhoods. The social return ostensibly derives in the form of local youth being granted the space to channel their creativity and potentially make a contribution to the creative economy through innovation.

*Text 4: Agenda for Prosperity (2008)*

From an analytic perspective the *Agenda for Prosperity* document offers a useful lens through which to examine the intention of building a city brand as a creative, diverse, and livable city, toward the end of positioning Toronto as "a leading global center of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (p.5). Prepared by the mayor of Toronto's Economic Competitiveness Advisory Committee, this document draws on the concept of creativity as a discursive framing device. It constitutes an articulation of an overall strategic direction of Toronto's economic growth recognizing the critical role of place marketing to such strategic planning.

The *Agenda for Prosperity* opens with a mayoral declaration that "we must put creativity at the heart of the city's economic development strategy" and stresses that Toronto must build on its "diverse, creative, talented and educated labour pool" (p.13). Stressing the strategic importance of a creative workforce, the document combines attention to growing 'strategic industry sectors'

(ibid.: 16) — ranging from aerospace and automotive manufacturing to design and screen-based industries — with a geographic or ‘place-based approach to creative sector development’ (ibid.: 26) because ‘place — and the attributes of place — matter more than ever in attracting increasingly mobile talent and capital’ (ibid.: 8).

The *Agenda for Prosperity* is filled with references to long-established markers of Toronto's city landscape (e.g. CN Tower, City Hall, public green spaces) and images of its diverse population. These markers of the symbolic landscape convey a dynamic city image to the end of what Klein (2000, p.35) terms the “branding of cityscapes.” This process of using the physical attributes of the city to create mental associations in the mind of the urban consumer is at the core of place branding. “Toronto has frequently been referred to as one of the best kept secrets on the planet...We must establish a positive, attractive brand image within Canada and internationally” (p.23).

One city marketer illustrates this observation when he characterizes Toronto's “brand” as being comprised of multiple components, all of which are grounded in a conceptual framework of culture and creativity (quoted in Baldwin, 2008, p.50). As he puts it:

[In terms of] things that brand Toronto, well, you just have to look at pictures of Toronto to see what's being advertised – you have all those iconic things like the CN tower, waterfront, Skydome, and the restaurants, shows, galleries. I think one of the newer things associated with the brand would be the changing neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are becoming more [associated] with the destination – such Kensington Market, Beaconsfield, Leslieville – all areas that are becoming gentrified but becoming their own little neighbourhoods...of course people know Toronto as a ‘nice’ place, with clean and safe streets...and more languages are spoken here than any other place in the world – this idea of diversity is also an important part of the brand.

In other words, typical symbolic aspects of the landscape, specifically large built structures, are constitutive features of the urban brand recognition process. The same holds for cultural festivals and unique neighbourhoods, which showcase the diversity of the city, are becoming important features of building widespread international brand recognition (Baldwin, 2008, p.51). Notably, images of cultural renaissance infrastructure (e.g. the ROM and the AGO) are not present in the text, implying that the large-scale cultural events are not considered central features of the city brand.

In this formulation the attempt to brand Toronto as a leading creative city reveals how place marketing strategies strike a fine balance between global and local appeal: "All partners must work much more aggressively to clearly define and communicate Toronto's brand and value proposition and capture the attention of potential investors and visitors by having messages that are well known and embraced locally and internationally" (p.23). For example, cultural events that fuse grassroots creativity and large cultural institutions have become centerpieces to Toronto's cultural economy, and play a key role in the brand. The *Agenda for Prosperity* document explicitly states that the city must "Leverage culture, events, and tourism to enhance international presence and expand markets" (p.26).

To illustrate this concept of leveraging culture for economic ends, a prime example is the "Luminato" festival. This ten day festival of arts and creativity in the city offering both free and ticketed events, which based on its receipt of a \$15 million provincial grant, makes a substantial social, cultural, and economic contribution to the city (Taylor, 2008). Luminato's founders perceive this event as an opportunity to both "...engage Torontonians with free shows [and] also rebrand Toronto internationally" (Taylor, 2008, R8). It incorporates a variety of cultural elements in the city (from museums, to live music, to photography) and is thus a creative undertaking. The popularity of the event suggests that building the creative city brand requires a shift towards a greater emphasis on urban experiences rather than lone-standing built structures in the city.

Toronto's creative districts (both emerging and established) are epitomized in this "Agenda for Prosperity" planning document as constituting a "place-based approach to creative sector development" central to the creative city brand (p.26). The Distillery District is a pedestrian-only historic district in downtown Toronto, an area which promotes arts, culture, entertainment. Its buildings (e.g. galleries, restaurants, theatre, boutiques) are a collection of Victorian Industrial style architecture, possessing what The *Globe and Mail* newspaper called a "picture postcard draw" (Distillery District, 2008). This heritage district is an exemplar of the brand of entertainment marketing the creative city -- heritage and culture mixed with modern spectacular entertainment venues such as theatre and niche art galleries, combining to offer a so-called "neo-bohemian" lifestyle experience (Hannigan, 2007).

The *Agenda for Prosperity* document further conceptualizes Toronto as a "hub for peace", implying a discursive construction in which openness, tolerance, and diversity are key elements of the city's new creative brand -- articulating what amounts to a unique "Toronto Urbanism" (p.40). The greater focus on annual cultural festivals and events -- instead of cultural flagship buildings and other structures with strong symbolic character -- derives from the argument that it is Toronto's cultural diversity that is its greatest creative asset and a true marker of civic social development. Major events such as the Caribana parade and festival, the gay Pride Festival, and the Toronto International Film Festival not only produce economic returns and increase international profile but -- more significantly in the context of creative city discourse -- also lend themselves to the strategic branding of the city because they are symbols of a tolerant society. These observations are significant because it is a distinctly promotional discourse which denotes that placemarketing for the creative city can encompass both social and economic goals of the citizenry -- a position often at odds with the empirical reality reported by social scientists noted above in the review of literature.

*Text 5: Creative City Planning Framework (2008)*

Produced in conjunction with the *Agenda for Prosperity* document, the text of the *Creative City Planning Framework* is similarly constructed around an argument characteristic of creative cities discourse: that "attracting and retaining a global and mobile class of creative workers and entrepreneurs is now a critical factor in determining which cities flourish while others languish" (p.21).

This formulation of cultural-led urban development that seeks economic and social growth is central to the discourse the *Creative City Planning Framework* document promotes. Going a step further than the emphasis in *Imagine a Toronto* on grassroots creativity, in this text "authenticity" is placed at the discursive core of what it means to be a creative city. Authenticity is defined in the glossary of the document as the "genuine or real article, feel, mood, fact or style as it applies to individual, collective and communal memory, emotions, experience, attitudes, stories, history, cultural attributes and creativity" (p.43).

At its outset the *Creative City Planning Framework* articulates a distinct vision of Toronto in the 21<sup>st</sup> century predicated on the notion of Toronto as an emerging world-class creative city. "Toronto is on the cusp of becoming a world city, with creativity and culture as a core strength and resource" (p.5). This articulation of the city is notable because it draws attention to two different ideas: the world city and the creative city, and the ability of a city to possess both titles. London and New York are widely recognized as creative cities (Landry, 2006, Florida, 2005) as well as world cities (Sassen, 2000). The authors of this text designate these places "world creative cities" (p.2) -- an a propos characterization given the underlying intent to placemarket Toronto along these lines (Baldwin 2008).

The consultants who produced this text direct the City of Toronto to move beyond its existing sector-based approach and build inter-agency collaboration and a "broader vision of the tools available to government to support cultural development" (p.3). Central to the

distinctly promotional creative discourse underpinning this document work is the argument that creative economy activity takes place in "creative hubs and districts" — places where "density, diversity, authenticity and connectivity converge to generate both the raw material and the product of creative activity' (p.25; see Grodach 2012 for a more extensive analysis on this point). As such, rather than emphasizing neighborhood-based creative activity to build community capacity the cultural planning model is adapted to identify and develop nodes of a larger creative economy (Grodach, 2012, p.8).

Throughout the *Creative City Planning Framework* document it is Richard Florida's distinctive variant of urban creativity that is prevalent. Indeed even a cursory review of the document reveals a highly uncritical endorsement of both Florida the celebrity consultant and the creative city ideas which are the basis of his hugely successful international consultancy practice. This "Florida-bias" is first evidenced by the "vignettes of creativity" that are offered as examples of creative activity in Toronto (p.6). While not explicitly referred to as members of Florida's (2002) creative class, the parallel is clear: each brief narrative serves as a window into how creative class members – a scientist, an entrepreneur, a young digital program developer – make a contribution to Toronto's creative economy through their imagination and innovations.

## **Conclusion**

We see at play in this case study what Atkinson and Easthope (2009) call the "Florida formulation" as being particularly important because, even while Florida's work has been strongly criticized, "it is this recipe for action — focusing on ability to live, a quest for footloose creative talent, and generating particular varieties of social milieu — that has impacted most on these urban development actors in this case study." The critical discourse analysis of Toronto's five key planning documents in its 2003-2008 creative city placemarketing strategy demonstrates that this influence does not only run along the lines of culture and the arts but extends into



economic development, housing and other sectors of urban governance. It is clear from the findings of this case study that a creative city approach to understanding of economic growth and urban cultural development is deeply embedded among politicians, policymakers and consultants working within Toronto's urban planning apparatus.

This strategy stresses that the city is 'on the cusp' of competing with the world's greatest cities, but will lose this opportunity if it does not act. As Florida puts it, "Toronto is at an inflection point, to strive for greatness as one of the world's magnet creative cities or to be a really good second-tier city. All the ingredients are here" (AuthentiCity, 2008: 3). In the five urban planning documents comprising this case study, creative city discourse constitutes a unifying language in the broader interest of placemarketing Toronto as a world-class creative city. It is in this sense that creative city strategies are twinned with an objective of economic development that aims to create a particular milieu to attract creative workers and the activities from the cultural sector. In the case of Toronto, the role of creative city strategies in terms of identity building is linked to the role Toronto's political and business elites wish to play as a world-class creative city.

In this formulation, the drive for world-class creative city status in a highly competitive global interurban climate has contributed to an expansion of place marketing initiatives anchored in a very narrow and distinctly promotional discourse of creativity. In this environment cultural economy planning and policy are framed within the unifying discursive language of the creative city. The concept of the creative city and its attendant discourse is a much-criticized yet nonetheless powerful linguistic organizing device that forms the basis for many debates about contemporary urban economic development. Creative cities ideas incorporated into existing policy mechanisms are used to justify or bolster support for a range of creative city policy actions already in motion.

For local governments the creative city model stands out from the other models in part due to a simple and apparently captivating

narrative: mobile creative people drive economic development, and municipalities can make investments that attract this group and produce economic growth. Additionally, because the creative class concept and the policy associated with building a creative city is broad, vague and flexible, it can be manipulated to fit multiple agendas, and to justify now-established roles of local government like marketing and central-city property redevelopment. Another result of the poorly articulated creative city policy is that, while the model remains powerful at the level of discourse it has not become fully institutionalized in policy even in these self-styled creative cities. However, after a decade of employing the creative city language, we are beginning to see new hybrid programs emerge such as Toronto's Creative Convergence Project and 'Placing Creativity' that, while framed under the creative city banner, draw on and reinterpret other models. These programs foreshadow new, potentially more positive, directions for cultural economy planning based on longer-term coordinated action. Still, it remains to be seen if such approaches will address the problems associated with the creative city model, namely gentrification and social exclusion, including their impact on those outside the cultural economy lens.

A conclusion we can draw from this case study, which offers a more general insight into the deleterious consequences of urban place marketing strategies anchored in a creative cities discourse promulgated by Florida and others, are the deleterious effects of cultural gentrification. These are a direct consequence of creative city policy and development practices which derive from the broader creativity discourse. For instance, in an article entitled, "Why I don't love Richard Florida," the celebrated critic of contemporary urban culture Jane Jacobs (2005) argued that Florida's greatest fault is that he has taken qualitative (and oftentimes banal) observations about human creativity and turned them into something quantitative. She insists that Florida exaggerates both the size and uniqueness of the creative class, and their impact on the economy. In a similar vein Bradford (2004b) notes that by focusing on high-end (and often high-paid) 'creative' talent as the core of the creative city perpetuates the trend of excluding marginalized, 'non-creative' groups from the creative city discourse.

This is a pattern observed in cities for decades now, as pointed out in Zukin's (1982) groundbreaking work and developed further since then by scholars working in many disciplines. Here artists colonize cheap and dilapidated property and, in time, those seeking a bohemian-themed culture move in so as to be close to the artists. The key point for cultural entrepreneurs and artists is that as the art galleries and rich loft owners move in the artists are forced out due to rising prices. As Pratt (2008) has observed, some policymakers and consultants contend that gentrification may be a price worth paying for growth; however, it is not too big a stretch to argue this not necessarily a productive way to promote urban cultural industries or the creativity so often celebrated in them. The popular and increasingly scholarly image of the creative city is of street-level spectacles, trendy bars and cafes, i-Pods, social diversity and funky clothing outlets. Creative city discourse has indeed become a major component of the urban imaginary and the planning processes which underpin it.

Finally, what we have the five planning documents at the core of Toronto's 2003-2008 creative city placemarketing strategy is a distinctly promotional expression of an almost unshakeable belief in the uniqueness of place and a consequent discourse of singularity that connects competitive place-advantages to existing urban culture, creativity and other soft attributes. The concept of the creative city and its constitutive discourse is a much-criticized yet powerful organizing device that forms the basis for many debates about future economic development. Furthermore, creative cities ideas incorporated into existing policy mechanisms are used to justify or add support to a range of policy actions already in existence (Atkinson and Easthope, 2009, p.77). However, if creativity is not the universal boost to the city economy and community infrastructure that many of our strategists claim it to be, then it is also not clear whether the consequences of the creative class can be seen as being linked to these strategies. While a rhetoric of engagement and universal social potential is often at the core of creative city discourse, it appears from the results of this Toronto case study that urban governance approaches grounded in a creative cities paradigm seek to enhance the potential returns associated with this agenda and

yet have been generally ignorant of those excluded from, or unable to join, the new economy.

Consequently, it is at this point we can see a key problem emerging, to the extent that the creativity paradigm can be used to encompass so many aspects of economic development and urban governance. There is, then, a concerning vacuity to the creative cities strategy advanced by its boosters that has been used as a boilerplate design to legitimate contentious public policy actions. Creativity becomes not a theoretical lens or way of understanding shifts in strategic decisions, resource allocation and place-competition, but more the very broadest, and thereby bluntest, instrument by which rationales of urban life and policymaking are conceived.

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