

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

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Cities around the world are building and branding urban cultural life as a way to develop local economies and revitalize urban centers, expanding existing cultural agencies and programs and establishing new ones to serve nonprofit cultural amenities, cultural industries and the artistic workforce. However, cities have done less to promote the cultural lives of urban neighborhoods and their residents. When cultural agencies do not consciously and actively incorporate communities and their needs into cultural development, their policies and programs can in fact conflict with and threaten the cultural health of urban neighborhoods. Ultimately, this will undermine a city's cultural vitality and undercut its ability to appeal to the developers, tourists, creative sector businesses and the educated workforce that cultural development means to attract.

Urban cultural policies and cultural policy infrastructure significantly impact the ways in which neighborhoods are served. Cultural development tends to geographically concentrate cultural resources into downtowns and cultural districts and away from neighborhoods. The cultural assets of neighborhoods are under-recognized, insufficiently supported and poorly incorporated into existing cultural policy infrastructure. Few cities have specified and institutionalized a role for city government in the cultural lives of urban neighborhoods. Authority and oversight is unclear in the public cultural sector. In most cities, there is no office or point-person tasked with overseeing city governance of the cultural sector. Further, there is a mismatch between the narrow focus of cultural agencies and the broad policy environment that impacts neighborhood cultural activities. Cultural agencies and cultural sector leaders are not well integrated into broader policy conversation and decision-making that impacts culture and some key cultural policy decisions are tasked to other agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cultural development should be dedicated to supporting the diverse cultural lives of city residents.
- Cities should designate an agency responsible for assessing and supporting neighborhood cultural life.
- Licensing and permitting of cultural activities should be governed by codified, transparent processes overseen by a cultural agency.
- Public sector cultural agencies should be better integrated into decision-making and implementation of policies that impact cultural activity.
- In cities with a large and diverse cultural sector or those initiating major cultural development, a central cultural authority should be designated.

Brief available at <http://www.urban.org/publications/411937.html>