



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. Such “culture-led development” or “cultural development” plans and programs have led many cities to expand existing cultural agencies and programs, and to establish new ones. These cultural agencies and programs serve nonprofit cultural amenities such as museums and theaters, target cultural industries such as film and music production, and, more recently, have begun to focus on supporting the artistic workforce.

However, cities have done less to recognize and systematically 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 educated workforce that cultural development means to attract.

Background

Over the past decade, many cities have focused substantial economic development and revitalization efforts and resources on enhancing their “creative” character (see

Landry 2000). Economic development scholar Richard Florida has promoted an enormously influential image of successful 21st century cities as places where social tolerance and natural and cultural amenities draw educated workers and new-economy businesses (Florida 2003, 2007, and 2008). Florida’s work is grounded in Jane Jacobs’ path-breaking conception of healthy cities as vital places where streets, parks, neighborhoods, and downtowns are used by diverse populations for mixed purposes in daytime and at night (Jacobs 1961).

Unfortunately, the policy agendas and infrastructures that have evolved to build “creative cities,” support the “creative economy” and attract “creative-class” workers are not helping cities to fulfill Jacobs’ vision of what makes a city live. Many analysts have critiqued policy developed out of Florida’s ideas as having undermined the diversity of urban populations and uses because it propels gentrification and privileges real-estate development over other kinds of economic and community development that benefit a broader urban population (for example, see Peck 2005). There also are important ways in which the cultural policies and cultural policy infrastructures of today’s cities are less responsive, transparent, and democratic than they must be in order to cultivate diverse and sustainable urban cultural life.

This brief examines four defining characteristics of city cultural policy and traces how these characteristics affect cultural development and the cultural life of neighborhoods. The brief is informed by policy forums held in New Orleans in 2008 and 2009. While plans for rebuilding the city post-Katrina were being imagined and developed, the impact of cultural policy in urban, and particularly underserved, neighborhoods became clear in new and stark ways. These forums were designed to bring together national experts and activists from around the country with local residents, cultural leaders, and policy-makers to address key policy issues confronting neighborhood cultural life.

Four Characteristics of City Cultural Policy and Their Effects on Neighborhoods

1. Cultural development tends to concentrate cultural resources into downtown business and cultural districts and away from neighborhoods. The cultural assets of neighborhoods are under-recognized and insufficiently supported.

Jane Jacobs' vision of a vital city was imagined, in part, as a reaction to the modernist architecture and urban planning predominant in the 1950s. These

movements, she argued, had depopulated cities and destabilized urban social arrangements by ignoring the multiple and diverse uses to which residents put city spaces. Jacobs provided a litany of examples showing how the failure to consider people's active, varied use of city space negatively affected streets and neighborhoods, parks and downtowns. She also discussed the costs of isolating and concentrating cultural resources into the kind of "cultural or civic centers" that were being developed in the post-World War II period, calling such projects "tragic in their effects on their cities" (box 1).

Today's urban cultural development focuses less on building the sort of cultural campuses that Jacobs criticized (although they are still being built, with varied success) and more on supporting downtown amenities and cultural districts. However, this contemporary focus does continue the tendency to geographically isolate and concentrate cultural resources around large arts and cultural institutions or commercial avenues. These cultural amenities can be easily packaged and marketed to suburban visitors and tourists. What is left out of plans and programs conceived around a notion of cultural development as a driver of economic development and urban revi-

Box 1. Isolating Cultural Resources Can Depress City Life

"Cultural or civic centers . . . isolate uses—and too often intensive night uses too—from the parts of the city that must have them or sicken. Boston was the first American city to plan for itself a decontaminated cultural district. In 1859, a Committee of Institutes called for a 'Cultural Conservation,' setting aside a tract to be devoted 'solely to institutions of an educational, scientific and artistic character,' a move that coincided with the beginning of Boston's long, slow decline as a live cultural leader among American cities. Whether the deliberate segregation and decontamination of numerous cultural institutions from the ordinary city and ordinary life was part of the cause of Boston's cultural decline, I do not know. One thing is sure: Boston's downtown has suffered miserably from lack of good mixtures in its primary uses, particularly good mixing in of night uses and of live (not museum-piece and once-upon-a-time) cultural uses."

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)

talization is support for the everyday cultural lives of city neighborhoods and residents. This is compounded by several factors, including ignorance about the cultural assets of neighborhoods, a lack of resources and planning to support those cultural assets, and even fear and tacit redlining of certain neighborhoods.

City neighborhoods, however, have cultural lives. The cultural lives of neighborhoods include block parties, school and church fairs, public barbeques, Halloween parades, street performances, and styles of home adornment and landscaping. Public library branches, school arts programs, historic houses and sites, public parks, and community centers are important cultural assets in neighborhoods as are smaller cultural sector businesses such as galleries, dance and artist studios, and independent and used book, music, and video stores. Coffee shops, bars, and restaurants that serve as community gathering places and that exhibit artwork, hold readings, and sponsor live music are key components of cultural life in neighborhoods. Some neighborhoods also are home to museums, theaters, annual festivals, indigenous cultural practices, and music and dance venues—places and activities that appeal to visitors from other parts of the city, from the surrounding suburbs, and from farther away. Neighborhoods possess distinctive cultural assets and needs that must be attended and served in distinctive ways that are typically overlooked by cultural development strategies (see Stern and Seifert 2007).

2. Neighborhood cultural assets and needs are poorly incorporated into the existing cultural policy infrastructure of most cities. Few cities have specified and institutionalized a role for city government in the cultural lives of urban neighborhoods.

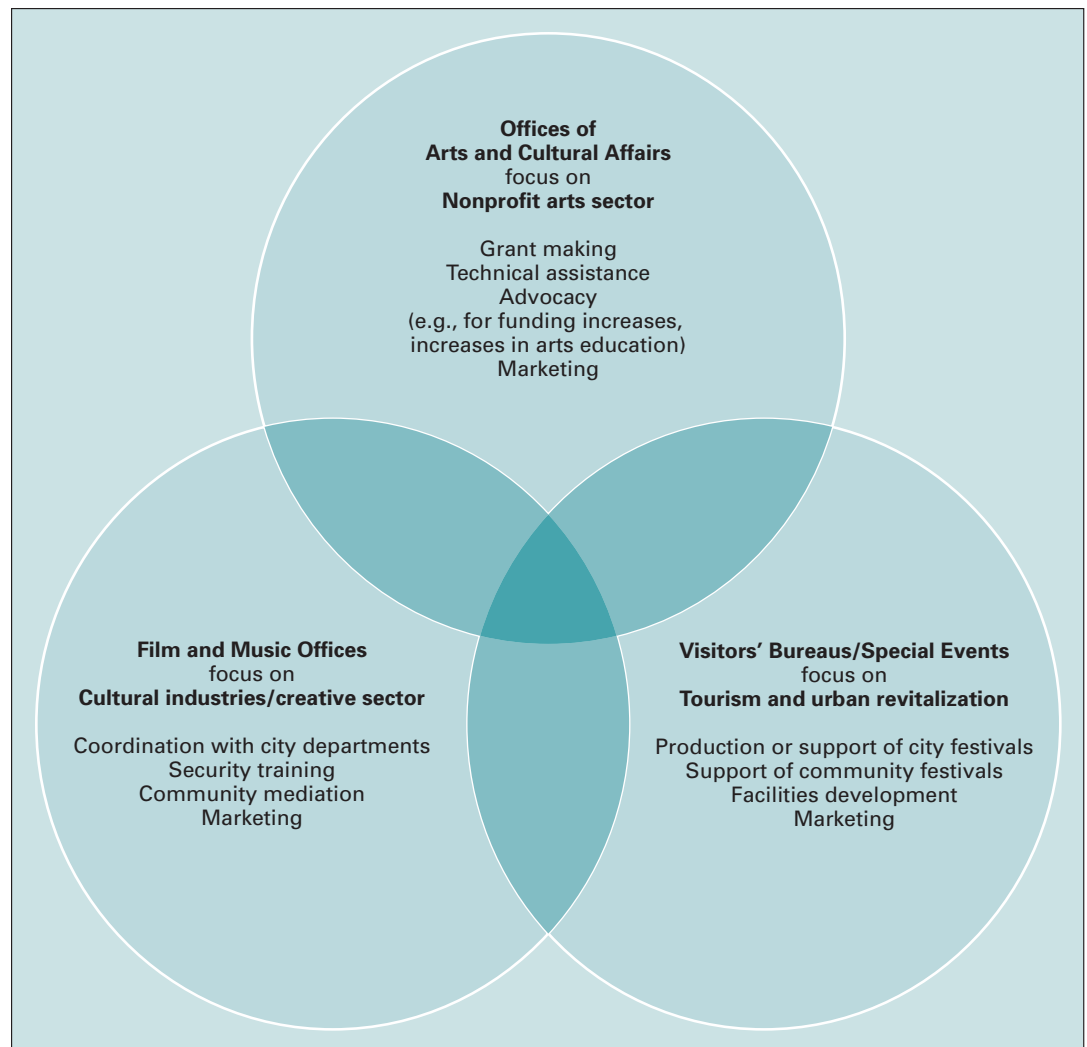
Most cities serve the cultural sector through three types of agencies (figure 1). **Local arts commissions** or offices of arts and cultural affairs provide grants and technical assistance to nonprofit arts organizations, advocate for increased

public and private funding for the arts and art education, and market local arts organizations and smaller local arts businesses such as galleries and theater companies. These entities may be a part of city government or, in many cases, are incorporated as 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations. **Film and music offices** have been developed to attract film and music production to cities through tax incentives and marketing programs and by streamlining processes for obtaining permits and licenses from police, streets and sanitation, and other city departments. Some film and music offices have begun to serve as bodies that create policies and procedures for resolving conflict between commercial cultural producers and city residents, for example by developing noise ordinances or special parking districts. **Visitors' and convention bureaus or offices of special events** focus on developing tourism and marketing large-scale cultural activities such as citywide festivals, holiday celebrations, sports, and entertainment. In some cities, these agencies have overseen development of large-scale cultural facilities or arts and cultural districts. These three types of agencies and offices typically are housed within a city's economic development department, although many are part of a mayor's office and some are independent.

In some cities, an arts commission or office of special events will sponsor limited programs serving neighborhood cultural activities such as community festivals. However, these agencies do not typically have any articulated, institutionalized role in preserving and fostering the cultural lives of urban neighborhoods. They focus on entities and activities in the nonprofit, for-profit, or public sectors and tend not to plan across sectors. The small-scale cultural ecosystems found in neighborhoods are fundamentally hybrid, and their needs are not well addressed by this system (Stern and Seifert 2008).

This gap has several important consequences. Neighborhoods often are left out

FIGURE 1. City Cultural Policy Infrastructure



of the primary resource streams created through the local cultural policy infrastructure because they do not fit the types of programs that city cultural agencies were designed to target. For example, neighborhood cultural activities often are unincorporated and thus are ineligible for most grants. Neighborhood associations that are incorporated as 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations may not be competitive with organizations whose programs focus on arts and culture. Marketing efforts, a priority of all three agency types, often focus on downtown or designated arts districts, overlooking many neighborhood-based businesses and nonprofits. This is especially true for urban neighborhoods that are considered “blighted” or “dangerous,” inappropriate

places for tourists or suburban visitors. Many city residents will never be directly served by their city cultural agencies, as a majority of agency activities are focused on large-scale cultural institutions or delimited cultural districts that serve visitors, tourists, and a limited segment of the population.

3. There is a mismatch between the narrow policy focus of cultural agencies and the broad policy environment that affects neighborhood cultural activities. City cultural agencies and cultural-sector leaders are poorly integrated into broader policy conversation and decisionmaking, and some key cultural policy decisions are tasked to other agencies.

A vibrant urban cultural life is an important city asset. However, arts and

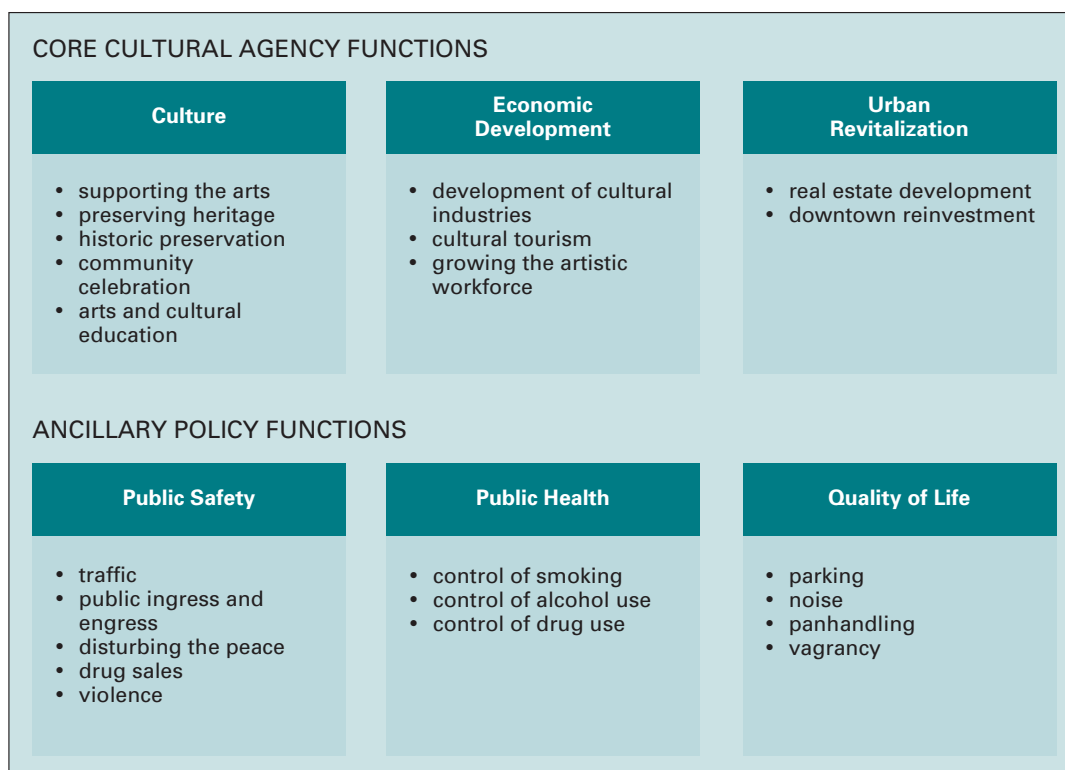
cultural activities also pose a number of challenges for city residents and city government. Parades, festivals, live music, night life, and cultural performance, production, and commerce create noise, crowds, mess, and traffic. In the cultural life of urban neighborhoods, residents, businesses, and whole communities come together at close quarters and must figure out ways to share public spaces such as streets, parks, and plazas. They must assess and plan for the best ways to balance the benefits of economic development and urban revitalization with the costs of noise, traffic, refuse, and crowding.

The primary responsibilities of the city cultural agencies outlined above include the support and development of culture, economic development, and urban revitalization. A range of other policy functions are not under the authority of these cultural agencies but critically influence cultural activities, particularly at the neighborhood level. These include public safety, public health, and quality of life (figure 2). For

example, smoking ordinances stipulating that no smoking may occur inside public spaces increase noise and crowding in outdoor spaces, especially around music venues, restaurants, and coffee shops. This can heighten tensions between business owners and neighborhood residents. Panhandling, vagrancy, and noise ordinances affect how street musicians, vendors, and live music venues operate. Zoning ordinances governing car and bus parking can present an enormous challenge in neighborhoods with museums and theaters that bring in visitors.

Law and policy governing public safety, health, and quality of life usually have been developed and adopted without reference to cultural activity and without input from the cultural sector, which could inform policymakers about the policies' unintended consequences and help communities create and plan for changes. Also, these laws are enforced by police officers who typically have little professional training or education regarding cultural activi-

FIGURE 2. Core and Ancillary Policy Functions That Affect Cultural Activities



ties and the first amendment rights of artists and communities to engage in cultural practice in public space. Because urban cultural activity genuinely can introduce opportunities for conflict, crime, and violence, it is vital that police officers are able to prioritize public safety and not become entangled in low-level quality-of-life conflicts between neighborhood residents, artists, and businesses.

Further, in many cities, police departments—not cultural agencies—are implementing regular city permitting and licensing procedures with significant and varied impacts on culture. Permitting and licensing enable city government to evaluate impacts and producer legitimacy and to recoup city expenses through fees. When a license or permit must be obtained to engage in a given cultural activity, the city government has an opportunity for fair or unfair promotion or regulation. In some cases, fees may be waived by city governments to provide support to certain cultural activities. Fees also can be used to inhibit certain activities or producers by being increased to high or unprecedented levels. In some cities, film offices mediate between various departments and cultural

producers to facilitate movie production by speeding up these procedures. In other cases, permits or licenses may be denied to certain producers, entities, or activities. Because these laws control the very ability for cultural producers to operate, it is important that procedures and authority governing them be transparent and that decisionmakers be accountable and knowledgeable about the cultural sector (box 2).

4. Authority and oversight is unclear in the public cultural sector. In most cities, no office or point-person is tasked with overseeing city governance of the cultural sector.

The 2008 U.S. Conference of Mayors' 10-Point Plan called for the federal government to form a Cabinet-level position to oversee culture and tourism:

The arts, humanities, and museums are critical to the quality of life and livability of America's cities. It has been shown that the nonprofit arts and culture industry generates over \$166 billion in economic activity annually, supports over 5.7 million full-time jobs, and returns over \$12 billion in federal income taxes annually. Governments which support the arts on average see a return on

Box 2. San Francisco's Policy to Coordinate Oversight of Cultural "Entertainment" Activities

San Francisco's Entertainment Commission includes members representing neighborhood associations or groups, entertainment associations or groups, urban planning, public health, and law enforcement. It issues permits, "develops 'good neighbor policies' that appropriately balance the cultural, economic, employment, and other benefits of a vibrant entertainment and late-night entertainment industry with the needs of residents and businesses in the vicinity of entertainment venues; . . . mediates disputes between persons affected by cultural, entertainment, athletic, and similar events and establishments, and the organizers of such events and operators of such establishments; . . . fosters harm reduction policies, including but not limited to reduction of risks from substance use, hearing protection, heat exhaustion, and relevant health and safety measures; and plans and coordinates City services for major events or which there is no recognized or adequate organizer or promoter, such as Halloween bacchanalia in the Castro district and New Year's Eve festivities." (City of San Francisco Administrative Code, Chapter 90, Section 90.1 [2002])

investment of over \$7 in taxes for every \$1 that the government appropriates. Furthermore, federal, state, and local governments, private foundations, corporations, and individuals provide access to artistic activities for peoples of all races, creeds, and income levels. Recognizing the importance that the arts play, many countries throughout the world have established national cabinet-level positions for culture and tourism. The nation's mayors urge the creation of a Cabinet-level secretary of culture and tourism charged with forming a national policy for arts, culture, and tourism. Federal resources must also be invested in nonprofit arts organizations through their local arts agencies with full funding of the federal arts and culture agencies. (Palmer 2008)

Yet, most cities do not themselves centralize authority over their local arts and cultural programs and agencies. Cities have not effectively bridged cultural programs and agencies dealing with nonprofit arts, cultural tourism, cultural industries and small businesses, public libraries, parks and recreation, broadband access, cultural exchanges like sister-city programs, and arts education. Because cities lack a central cultural authority, community concerns cannot be heard and addressed effectively. Cultural-sector leadership is poorly represented and underused to inform policy decision-making. New forums, commissions, task forces, and committees must be developed for each new challenge faced by the sector. This can lead to serious unintended consequences, poor local buy-in, and ineffective implementation of new policies. Around the country, mayors make cultural issues a priority, but few places have institutionalized the essential processes of listening, reflection, and assessment so they can be maintained across administrations and actually influence policy implementation.

For neighborhoods, the gap in authority is important in two ways. First, residents have no clear place to direct their concerns and hopes. The need for residents

to speak up for their neighborhoods is made more pressing by the city-level cultural policy systems described here: where neighborhood cultural assets go unrecognized, where there is no agency or office invested with responsibility to see that the cultural lives of neighborhoods are being served by local government, and where policies that affect neighborhood culture are implemented by departments with no cultural agenda. In this system, residents are invested with the responsibility of ensuring that their neighborhoods are served. Second, there is no place in local government empowered with the authority to balance the needs and benefits of various components of the sector and the wider community. Since most cities have no adjudicating body responsible for thoughtfully considering and planning for the impacts of law and policy on cultural activity, they lack efficient ways to resolve conflicts. When cultural-sector challenges and tensions are not addressed transparently and effectively, it is difficult to maintain a diverse ecology of cultural offerings and a healthy mix of residences and cultural amenities in neighborhoods, exacerbating the tendency to concentrate cultural resources away from neighborhoods.

Recommendations

To foster a more coordinated and holistic approach to developing and managing cultural activities that affect neighborhood cultural life, the following steps should be undertaken:

- Cultural development should be dedicated not just to economic growth but also to supporting the diverse cultural lives of city residents, including everyday and neighborhood cultural activity.
- Cities should designate an agency responsible for supporting neighborhood cultural life, invest in neighborhood cultural asset mapping, and plan for ways to serve neighborhoods by promoting identified cultural assets.

- Licensing and permitting of cultural activities should be governed by codified, transparent processes overseen by a cultural agency that is accountable to both the cultural sector and neighborhoods.
- Public-sector cultural agencies should be better integrated into decisionmaking and implementation of policies that affect cultural activity.
- In cities with a large and diverse cultural sector or those initiating major cultural development, a central cultural authority should be designated responsible for bridging various components of the cultural sector, communicating cultural-sector priorities to other government agencies, and evaluating policy and programs to see that they are serving the cultural needs of city residents.

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About the Research

The three policy forums that inform this brief were held by *The Living Cultures Project*, a joint program of Tulane University, the University of New Orleans, and the University at Buffalo–SUNY in partnership with the Urban Institute and the Backbeat Foundation. The forums

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"Police-Community Relations and Community Cultural Practice" (December 11, 2008) included presentations by

- Steven Baird, Executive Director, Community Arts Advocates/Street Buskers' Alliance, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts;
- John Wood, Political Director, San Francisco Late Night Coalition, San Francisco, California; and
- Harley DuBois, Director of Community Services and Playa Safety, Burning Man, San Francisco, California.

"Intellectual Property and Community Cultural Practice" (March 16, 2009) included presentations by

- Greg Younging, Chair, Indigenous Peoples' Caucus, Creator's Rights Alliance, Vancouver, British Columbia;
- Todd Lindgren, Vice President of Communications, Film LA, Los Angeles, California; and
- Ashlye Keaton, Director, Entertainment Law Legal Assistance Project, New Orleans, Louisiana.

"Licensing, Zoning, Permitting and Community Cultural Practice" (May 19, 2009) included presentations by

- Natalie Avery, Executive Director, MidCity Business Alliance, Washington, DC;
- Lisa Kersavage, Director of Advocacy and Policy, Municipal Arts Society, New York, New York; and