CultureCase

Fostering creativity by building the ‘good city’

This research was conducted by **Justin O’Connor and Kate Shaw** at **Monash University and University of Melbourne, Australia**

Summary

Many accounts of the ‘creative city’ stress the economic benefits of the arts. This paper argues that the arts also play an integral role in fostering inclusive urban communities. Furthermore, that the centuries-old concept of the ‘good city’ should be revived to support the creative vibrancy of cities in the future.

Policymakers and scholars have long acknowledged the ability of the arts to bolster a city’s economy

However, in the US policies aimed at securing affordable artistic spaces, for example, have been replaced by those that pursue more economically-minded interests such as increasing property values. As a result, creative spaces in modern cities are being squeezed out, weakening the ‘creative’ foundation of the ‘creative city’. In the face of these economic hardships, the authors argue that we need to re-evaluate the role of the arts in the modern city, suggesting that we turn to the seemingly antiquated concept of the ‘good city’ to do so.

The ‘good city’ was based on a synergy of art, design, and urban development

It was best exemplified by 15th-century Italian city-states that utilised museums and grand architecture to project state power while protecting the cultural values of the community. Though unintentional, the sense of heritage embodied by these cities gave rise to creative tourist economies and, later, academic conceptions of the ‘creative city’.

The notion of the ‘good city’ needs to be revisited and adapted for future creative city policy

Though the idea of the creative city has (unwittingly) informed modern ideas of arts-driven development, the authors conclude that the economic focus of contemporary policy has overshadowed the fundamental components of the good city that gave rise to the creative city in the first place. Urban policymakers and citizens alike must grapple with what ‘citizenship’, ‘community’, and ‘heritage’ mean for 21st-century cities. Building the 'good city' should be part of those considerations.

This summary is by Matt Nelsen and first appeared in Issue 5 of *The Digest* from the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago

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