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Cultural Value

Creating Space: A re-evaluation of the role of culture in regeneration

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Executive Summary

Academic critiques of culturally-led urban regeneration, as this review makes clear, are manifold and persuasive. But to the despair of many commentators they have not yet weaned city governments off the idea of cultural regeneration or its related narratives of the 'creative city'. This review considers why this might be the case and, by looking at what is now a global literature on the problems of gentrificationand uneven development seeks to go beyond critiques of cultural regeneration, not to negate them, but to build on them in order to test the possibility of new narratives about the relationship between place and culture.

By looking at literature beyond large urban centres, in smaller cities and the countryside and by considering how more localised activist-led cultural projects are working, the reviews aims to examine the potential for counter-narratives of cultural regeneration, different understandings of culture and of creativity that can help build a body of evidence, which can inform policy and education in the future.

Key words

Cultural regeneration; gentrification; inequality; cities

Introduction

In July 2013, the city of Detroit filed for bankruptcy, becoming in the process the largest US municipal bankruptcy in terms of debt and the largest city to file for bankruptcy in US history. It had been a long time coming. As Binnelli in his excellent account of the city's 'last days' comments, 'Detroit has long functioned as a cautionary tale' (2013: 12). Even before the worst of the global financial crisis, the city had seen its population collapse from close to 2 million in 1950 to just over 700,000, there was an estimated 90,000 abandoned buildings, the highest murder rate in the country, and half of all its children lived in poverty.

Vying for column inches with the story of Detroit's collapse however, are the story of Detroit's rebirth and prominent among such rebirth narratives is of course, culturally-led regeneration.

As Binelli writes,

> "The only serious competitors to urban farming as a saving-Detroit story was the arrival of the artists....they came to Detroit from Brooklyn, as Detroit was the new Brooklyn; they came to Detroit from Europe because Detroit was the next Berlin (2013:257).

Bankruptcy has failed to dampen such narratives. The creative industry advocacy organisation Culture Lab Detroit recently commended the flourishing of the city's art scene where, "an architectural consortium can sprout up in a former auto body shop" or "an artist collective can take hold of an abandoned warehouse" (Culture Lab Detroit, 2014). Whether one sees this as evidence that hope springs eternal, or as a rather cavalier attitude to the former employees of warehouses and auto body shops, the significance for this review is that not only is Detroit casting around for cultural industries as a source of its future economic prosperity, but indeed these industries have played a huge role in the life of the city, up to and including its collapse.

There are competitors, but Detroit had a reasonable claim to being one of the most culturally influential cities of the late 20th and early 21st century. Its reputation as the birthplace of Fordism has for a long time sat alongside its influence on popular music from Berry Gordy's Motown Records, at one time the largest black-owned business in the US, via hardcore punk and hip hop, to being the birthplace of techno and a source of continuing influence on worldwide electronic dance music.

Such cultural influence has neither disposed it towards, nor protected it against, severe economic and social distress. Detroit, of all cities one might think, should display some scepticism towards the notion of cultural regeneration. Yet the fact that some within the city continue to look towards culture as a source of its revival says something about the dense entanglement of both the contemporary idea of culture and that of the city. The idea of cultural regeneration combines an older narrative, that of the cultural life and influence of the city, with a more recent one which focuses on these elements as definable, and exportable, industries and as such, as sources of employment and prosperity for the urban inhabitant.

Academic critiques of culturally-led urban regeneration, as this review makes clear, are manifold and persuasive. But to the despair of many commentators (Kanai & Ortega-Alcázar, 2009; Jakob, 2011; Elsheshtawy, 2012; Boren & Young, 2013), they have not yet weaned city governments off the idea of cultural regeneration or its related narratives of the 'creative city'. In part, as Jamie Peck famously pointed out (2005), this is because successful models for the regeneration of post-industrial cities in the Global North are not exactly thick on the ground. But it is also because of the nature of this entanglement of culture and the city. While it is possible, as I discuss later, to separate the production of culture from the urban, it is very difficult to separate the production of the urban from culture. Cities need cultural resources of various sorts – from meeting places and events to a built environment - in order to function, and in a world where the symbolic has become industrialised and sometimes commodified, such resources have become part and parcel of the urban economy.

In recent decades however, what was sometimes presented as a benign narrative, has become a clearly problematic one. Even those charged with promoting the role of culture within cities recognise this to some extent. In a report of a meeting in Istanbul in late 2013 of the World Cities Culture Forum1, a grouping of policymakers from so-called global cities, the introductory section was entitled 'beyond boosterism,' and much of the discussion reflected an awareness of the threats even to 'successful' urban cultural economies – of gentrification, rising property prices, over-development and myriad forms of social exclusion - all of which threaten cultural vitality.

And indeed, the person many regard as the foremost advocate of links between cultural activities and economic growth, Richard Florida, has recently been, if not recanting, then at least expressing concern about some of the consequences of the policy approach he is credited with popularising.

> "On close inspection, talent clustering provides little in the way of trickle-down benefits. Its benefits flow disproportionately to more highly-skilled knowledge, professional and creative workers whose higher wages and salaries are more than sufficient to cover more expensive housing in these locations. While less-skilled service and blue-collar workers also earn more money in knowledge-based metros, those gains disappear once their higher housing costs are taken into account (Florida, 2013:4).

This critical review is premised on the need to go beyond critiques of cultural regeneration, not to negate them, but to build on them in order to test the possibility of new narratives about the relationship between place and culture. The aim is to examine the potential for counter-narratives of cultural regeneration, different understandings of culture and of creativity and to help build a body of evidence, which can inform policy and education in the future.

Gentrification and cultural regeneration - a very brief history

[1] See http://www.worldcitiesscultureforum.com

Nearly three decades after Sharon's Zukin's seminal text, Loft Living (Zukin, 1982) described the relationship between artists moving in and gentrification of lower Manhattan, empirical and theoretical debates about the links between culture and processes of urban change continue. For Zukin this gentrification process was accomplished in part by artists' symbolic appropriation of space, and use of their own labour in terms of renovation, later seized on by investors keen to exploit the 'rent gap' (Smith, 1996), the difference between the economic value of property in an unmodernised state and its future value once an area has been 'regenerated.' As Smith pithily noted, "For the real estate industry, art tamed the neighbourhood, refracting back a mock pretense of exotic but benign danger (1996:19)

While Marxist-inspired analyses such as Smith have always stressed the role of capital in such urban property cycles, liberal analysis (eg. Ley 1986) tends to stress the role of consumer demand, with the gradual occupation of certain areas of inner cities by middle class incomers seen in terms of changing consumer preference, for more 'edgy' inner cities over the suburbs, for example. Other work (Shaw 2002, Grodach at el, 2014) has attempted to bring these two sides together and treat them as mutually constitutive elements of a process.

Hackworth and Smith's 'waves of gentrification' thesis (2001) remains one of the best accounts of these processes with each 'wave' being ended by a major recession, thus creating the conditions for the next wave. While 'first wave' gentrification of the early 1970s was associated with the deindustrialisation of cities in the global north, and thus set the stage for the growth of a service and leisure-based economy, it was the second wave of the 1980s which saw the arts taking a leading role for the first time, famously in the case of New York. This was a highly contested process with greater political strife over the displacement of poorer residents than had been seen in the first wave. So called third-wave gentrification, which begins after the recession of the early 1990s, saw governments take a much stronger role in the process, with entire neighbourhoods being made over, with the support of public policy, by private developers. What some call 'new build' gentrification, or in popular parlance the construction of large scale 'yuppie flats,' has since become a feature of cities worldwide, and while some scholars initially resisted the idea that this could be described as 'gentrification' in the classic sense, there is now a general view that such processes feature elements of gentrification, such as class–based displacement and the creation of what Doucet calls, 'affluent space,' in the shape of upmarket retail, cafes, bars and so on (Doucet, 2014).

Although they were not a particular focus of Hackworth and Smith's analysis, the arts and culture have played different roles within these three waves. Mention culture and the city in the same breath and the image that springs to many minds is Frank Gehry's spectacular, design for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Northern Spain. Opening in 1997, the Bilbao Guggenheim was far from the first of such projects, but has come to symbolise a particular and highly influential approach to culturally-led regeneration, bringing together a declining industrial city, huge public investment and a globally famous architect in a formula for urban revitalisation that has been much replicated and much criticised.

Questions have continued to be asked about the sustainability of such high-profile initiatives. In Bilbao's case although the image of the city was permanently altered, there was little evidence of wider economic benefits beyond increased tourism, and while a series of wider urban regeneration projects were also undertaken, the sheer scale of the Guggenheim investment -- estimated as some 144 million Euros -- meant that the contrast between the 'favoured' area and the surrounding neighbourhoods appeared stark. In addition, because such large-scale projects are intended to serve national or international populations, they are often undertaken at the expense of local and regional cultural development, siphoning off funds that could have been used to support local cultural production.

Yet as O'Connor reminds us, even at the smaller scale of 'craetve districts,' the connection between cultural consumption and production and the development of enclaves of upmarket housing and retail, is a real one.

> 'This link was present in discourses around the yuppies in the 1980s, the Bo-Bos in the 1990s and the more recent 'hipsters' – all of which is complexly wrapped up in notions of gentrification,' (O'Connor, 2014:32).

It is not just cultural producers who are involved in processes of gentrification, but the same people in their roles as consumers, not simply going to cinema and music venues, but in so doing, generating the knowledge of trends, styles and tastes that help form localised 'scenes,' and which in turn attract more cultural consumers and eventually more affluent residents and developers. For Zukin & Braslow (2011: 132), the life cycle of creatve districts is a "cautionary tale of spaitalization followed by re-commodification."

Grodach and Silver (2013) argue that the city has become the site for cultural policy formation in the last few decades, as the widespread adoption of 'creative city' policies and the global discourse of the creative economy have focused attention on an urban economy, which in the Global North at least, is now largely given over to finance, retail and the creative industries. As such, gentrification research has widened its remit from a concentration on housing, to consider 'commercial gentrification' the replacements of certain kinds of shops and even pubs by trendy bars and cafes, or what Zukin (2009) calls 'boutiquing;' and the links between cultural tourism and gentrification with the development of global consumer taste for certain sorts of spaces.

The global financial crisis and the subsequent conversion of private into public debt however, have ramped up what has been described as 'state-led' gentrification processes further, particularly in global cities. As Watt has described in the case of London (Watt, 2009), a hard-pressed public sector is forced into an alliance with larger property developers, whereby control of public housing stock passes to private developers, a deal financed by the construction of expensive private homes. While such developments usually feature a few "affordable" homes to be sold or rented at below market rates, the number of such homes continues to shrink relative to demand, while the oversupply of upmarket private residences has left cities like London with large numbers of empty properties.

Throughout this period, Grodach and Silver argue (2013: 5) the majority of cities have been

> "guided by neoliberal deregulation and privatization and a reframing of traditional progressive policy goals such as diversity, inclusion, quality of life and sustainability as facets of urban growth."

This is not to say that deregulation and privatisation have not touched down in different policy contexts and indeed have not met with differing types of resistance; but nonetheless there have been some broad commonalities, particularly across larger cities, in a policy approach that we might reasonably describe as neoliberal (Gibson & Klocker, 2005). In particular, the subordinating of other goals including the traditional goals of cultural policy, to economic growth and the justification of social and cultural policies in economic terms, have characterised urban cultural policy making across the globe.

The 'artistic dividend'

There are of course versions of this urban creative economy 'script' in circulation, with differing roles for culture, differing emphasises on production and consumption and different spatial patterns. Public policy makes a difference. Cameron and Coaffee (2004: 14) in their study of Gateshead argue that there is a distinction between cities where gentrification is driven by commercial capital and where what they call 'positive gentrification,' is driven by public authorities. The latter, they argue, is more relevant in cities in the North East of England, where, "private capital has to be dragged kicking and screaming into de-valourised urban locations through the initiative and investment of the public sector." There are also different interpretations of the same phenomena in the literature. A coffee shop for some scholars is a welcome 'third place,' part of a creative 'ecosystem,' (see Tjora & Scambler, 2013 for example), while for others it is the front line of gentrification (Zukin, 2009).

But the importance of 'mega events' such as the Olympics and city competitions such as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in leveraging private investment and the development of a global look and feel – the same star architects, the revitalised waterfront development, and the links to global cultural 'brands' such as Guggenheim - have helped to develop a clearly recognisable approach, even if it is one that relatively few cities in the world can afford. As Boren and Young argue (2013) the very narrow understanding of culture that such initiatives display, is a major part of the problem.

> "As a result, other forms of creativity — which might be more mundane or vernacular, suburban or more experimental and less mainstream are either ignored, suppressed, under-valued or explicitly excluded from 'creative city' policies" (Boren and Young, 2013: 1801).

Grodach *et al*, in contrast (2014) argue that while this narrow, neoliberalised version of creativity is associated with processes of gentrification, in fact this will only be the case in certain neighbourhoods (inner city areas, that are likely to be rapidly changing anyway) and that investment in different art forms, and different neighbourhoods, can achieve different outcomes. Their research, in common with work by Stern & Siefert (2002) and Markusen and Gadwa (2010) suggest that while commercial cultural industries may be part of gentrification; arts organisations, particularly a mix of non-profit and publicly funded ones, may instead by part of more positive change –

regeneration without associated gentrification – or what Markusen (2006b) has named the 'artistic dividend.'

Silver & Miller (2012) in their study of Canadian towns and cities, argue that while there is a strong correlation between the presence of artists in the workforce and rising local wages, the opposite is true when 'creative professionals,' managers, technicians and administrators move in. There are various ways of interpreting this finding, but a plausible one is while lively artistic 'scenes' are associated with a relatively healthy, broader-based economic development, by the time an area is regenerated enough for managers to move in, gentrification has already started and polarisation between higher paid workers and lower paid ones is accelerating. One problem with such claims is of course the problem of robust cultural occupational data, 'technicians' for example might find themselves surprised to be lumped in with managers and the pay and status of 'cultural administrators' differs widely depending on the kind of institution in which they work.

Shaw (2013) in her work on 'indie subcultures,' also argues that the non-profit and low profit creative activities may well be associated with more balanced economic development. But examining time-series maps of inner Melbourne to look at where these sub-cultural 'scenes' operate suggests that they are being squeezed into tighter and tighter areas as the relatively cheap rents on which they depend, disappear. As she notes, and other researchers have observed (Zukin, 1995; Lloyd, 2006) cultural workers whether artists, musicians or actors, are rarely marginal in class terms as individuals (and are arguably becoming less likely to be so, see Banks and Oakley, forthcoming). But in terms of work and performance space at least, they are often economically marginal, unable to afford 'market' rents particularly in inner-city neighbourhoods. As Shaw argues, this leaves city councils with a stark choice. They can pursue regeneration strategies that create a more amenable environment for capital investment and high end residential space, risking the loss of sub-cultural and non-profit activities altogether, or they can intervene directly – through provision of publicly-owned or subsidised space or via zoning laws - to prevent housing developments on inner-city land. The parlous state of public finances in the UK (and elsewhere) however suggests that this choice is, in most cases, not real one.

Perhaps the longest-established study of the role of the non-profit and small-scale arts scene in community development is the work of Susan Siefert and Mark Stern at the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP), University of Pennsylvania. For over twenty years they have been studying the role of arts organisations in communities; developing indicators of economic, social and cultural wellbeing. Their work has given much heart to supporters of culturally-led regeneration, as its findings have generally supported an argument that small scale cultural investment and what is sometimes referred to as 'creative placemaking,' can have beneficial effects in neighbourhoods, without the harmful effects of gentrification. Stern and Siefert mobilise Jane Jacobs' distinction between 'cataclysmic money,' often for new developments, and 'gradual money,' and argue that the latter can make all the difference, stimulating regeneration not through direct economic impact, but by building the social connections between people.

In recent years they have been working with the 'capabilities approach', developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Sen, 1989; Nussbaum, 2000), and have endeavoured to empirically investigate the relationship between cultural participation and the development of capabilities, while retaining the geographic focus on neighbourhoods that has characterised all their work. Creative placemaking, where arts initiatives are used to shape the social and physical character of a place, including in non-arts contexts like health or transport, has become popular with arts funders, particularly in the USA. SIAP's work does provide some empirical support to the idea that this is a more equitable version of cultural regeneration, but as their recent work also suggests, it is not a panacea.

Mapping cultural assets of various sorts (profit and non-profit), they distinguish between what they call 'market' districts of a city, where a relatively wealthy and educated population means that cultural offerings can find a market, versus 'civic districts' where other forms of cultural facilities may be based – particularly community arts and publicly- supported ones, but in a much more precarious situation. As Stern and Siefert argue (2013), the market will not make poorer neighbourhoods sustainable as cultural hubs. Transport problems, distance from the city centre, and lower income levels of both residents and arts workers means that public or other support is needed to maintain such facilities – even though, as their data demonstrates, such facilities can have beneficial effects in terms of a variety of social indicators.

Yet public policy, as they note, seems to be moving in the wrong direction. The correlation between the wealth of residents and the cultural facilities available has increased over the last decade (a finding spectacularly supported by Stark et al's 2013 work on the UK), while community arts organisations have become more precarious. And the USA's strong philanthropic tradition had made little difference to this; philanthropic money is also going into wealthier neighbourhoods where economic growth is possible, rather than to poorer neighbourhoods where the benefits are less likely to be measured in jobs and growth.

The policy message from this is clear. The evidence of gentrification effects from cultural investments is robust and while smaller scale, more aggregated investments, and particular sorts of arts and cultural activities and businesses can have less polarising effects, the outcomes from these investments are unlikely to fit the requirements for economic gains that public policy has focused upon. The cultural regeneration of poorer neighbourhoods will only be achieved when the notion of what 'regeneration' means is changed.

Beyond the big city

While work on urban regeneration (by definition) continues to focus on cities – wider work on culture and place, including that within a 'cultural economy' approach, has started to challenge the centrality of the urban. The small city or market town, the outer suburbs, 'peripheral' regions and the countryside have all featured in recent accounts of both cultural production and consumption (e.g. Gibson, 2002; Waitt and Gibson 2009;

Lazzeroni et al 2013; Collis et al 2013; Harvey et al, 2012; Thomas et al 2013; Bell and Jayne, 2010).

There is growing evidence that larger cities are associated with greater levels of inequality than smaller ones, particular given pressure on housing costs (Stolarick & Currid-Halkett, 2013). As such, there has been some interest in whether smaller cities can use culture to develop more equitable outcomes, or indeed can change the terms of the debate.

Lewis and Donald (2010) argue that the notion of urban hierarchies and the fetishisation of competition between cities captured in 'league tables' and city comparison studies are part of the problem. This, they contend means that smaller cities are set up to fail. They argue for a different set of criteria by which smaller cities may judge success, such as 'liveability,' access to recreational spaces, good schools and so on. Other work on smaller cities (Denis-Jacob, 2012) suggests that the relative closeness of natural amenities, lower living costs and even older populations, who are more likely to spend money in cultural activities, may support the cultural scene of small cities. Van Heur (2010) also notes this, but point out, crucially that the difficulty of the policymaking process in small cities is the tendency to use the socio-economic imaginaries of larger cities – particularly when it comes to culture. As he notes the policy prescription which small cities seem to adopt are often based on a 'cultural industries' model despite the fact that many lack the critical mass of cultural industries that would make this feasible. But rather than concentrating on what he describes as the role of culture in everyday life and quality of life; the continue to follow an economically-focussed script, which as we have seen is problematic where possible, and for many small cities, not even possible.

In a UK context, even a cursory examination suggests that 'small cities' are a heterogeneous mix and thus the result of any sort of cultural investment is likely to differ depending on whether one is talking about Cambridge or Blackpool. Some small British cities have relatively affluent profiles and lack the drivers that would make them a target for 'regeneration.' The major exception to this had been seaside and coastal towns, where unemployment, poverty, lack of affordable housing and often run down public realms, did make them a focus for regeneration efforts, particularly under the last Labour government (Rickey & Houghton, 2009).

Culture featured heavily in some of these initiatives from Anthony Gormley's life size figures on Crosby beach to the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill and the Turner Contemporary in Margate, but there is as yet very little work in the academic literature that assesses the effectiveness or otherwise of culture-led regeneration in seaside towns. One exception had been the AHRC Cultural Value-funded project on social, health and wellbeing impacts in Margate, Folkestone and Bexhill, three coastal towns undergoing culture-led regeneration (SDHR, 2014).

Outside the inner city, the suburbs are sometimes touted as offering the potential for a counter-narrative to that of traditional urban regeneration (Edensor, et al 2010). This work is particularly developed in an Australian context, where Collis et al (2013) argue that despite having only 'global' one city – Sydney - and a population that overwhelming lives and works in suburbs, the urban bias of much work on culture and

place is still largely unchallenged. Suburbs, which they argue are ignored by both policymakers and researchers, are characterised as 'bland, homogenous and uncreative', in contrast to 'dynamic, edgy and diverse' inner cities. By looking at where cultural workers live and work however, they find significant concentrations in suburban areas, particularly the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast (South East Queensland). The people in this research are not unwilling refugees from high urban house prices; but proffer positive reasons for their location, including better access to the beach or countryside, less stress and, pleasingly, a desire not to be identified with the cliché of the inner city 'creative class.' Bain (2010) finds similar drivers of suburban cultural production in her study of Toronto (see also Hracs, 2010) and argues that in fact the absence of traditional cultural spaces in such areas – theatres, museums and galleries – opens up a variety of improvisational spaces such as community centres which she sees as "a more inclusive alternative to the spectacular spaces of urban creativity" (2010:74).

As Bell (forthcoming) states, research on cultural production in rural areas is often fused with a new wave of interest in forms of cultural production that have been sidelined in the dominant economically-focussed script, such as crafts, festivals, process-based and collaborative arts practice. 'Regeneration' as such has not figured consistently in these debates, and there is perhaps a less clear idea about what it means in a rural context (though see Harvey et al, 2012, for an account of a regeneration project in Krowji, Cornwall), despite the fact that poverty levels are often high, traditional industries have collapsed and there is a need to diversity the economic base. In addition gentrification and displacement effects, particularly driven by incomers and second home-owners are a core feature of rural life (see Gibson 2002 for an account of such processes in Byron Bay, New South Wales). Thus many of the 'problems' of urban life at which regeneration is aimed also exist in a rural setting though, like the suburbs, they are perhaps less easily 'seen' by policymakers.

Instead research on the rural cultural economy tends to look at economic diversification and lifestyle migration. As Bell & Jayne (2010) note, economic diversification has often featured elements of cultural production, from handcrafts and tourism to speciality food and drink. Indeed, as Luckman points out the idea of creative labour as adding value to traditional rural industries from farming to textile production has a history dating back to Victorian times (Luckman, 2012).

It would be mistake to see the cultural economy of rural area purely in terms of these cultural forms however. Some year ago the UK's South West Development Agency used an image of Wallace and Grommit superimposed on a rural hillside to emphasise the fact that their region (a 'rural' one in terms of land, if not population) was home to a concentration of animation studios led by Aardman. More recently Ward and O 'Regan's account of the media industries of the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales (Ward and O'Regan, 2014) stresses the factors that have attracted creative workers to towns such as Byron Bay and Mullumbimby, which offer both the chance to tap into a counter-cultural heritage and the ability to re-create some elements of the 'cosmopolitan urban lifestyle,' in terms of everything from fast broadband to coffee shops and films screenings (for an account of the popular music industry in the same area, see Gibson, 2002) .

Lifestyle migration and the motivations of cultural workers who choose either to stay in or migrate to rural areas and small towns may give us some clues to what a less economically-focused or narrow version of 'regeneration' might look like, and this is vital in developing new policy narratives. But it is worth pointing that, just as in urban areas, such processes are often ones of exclusion. If the characterisation of the 'creative city,' in general is 'bohemian' or 'edgy', suggesting an ethnic and social diversity that often does not exist, stereotypes of rural dwellers suggest the opposite. Luckman (2012) notes the exclusion of people of colour from rural creative labour markets, both in Australia and the UK, not only in fact, but also in presentation, where the 'normative whiteness' of the countryside blends with class and ethnicity-based exclusions from employment. And Gibson et al (2010) point out that while music and film production in the Northern Rivers attracts middle-class migrants, other aspects of Australian rural cultural production, such as country music festivals, have been ignored or patronised by policymakers because they are associated with rural working class culture.

It's clear that the focus of regeneration policy on the inner city has obscured evidence about how everyday cultural practices fit into the narrative of regeneration. The spectacular, the newly built and high art have been seen as the drivers of regeneration; a perception which is usefully challenged as soon as we look to a greater variety of places. But the challenges of inequality and exclusion remain. The next section considers whether the global literature offers any responses to this challenge.

Cultural regeneration – experiences beyond the UK

As argued above, while broad patterns of neoliberal deregulation and privatisation have characterised approaches to urban policy across the globe; these policies touch down in different political and social contexts, with varying outcomes. Much of the research on cultural regeneration has been conducted in the UK and the USA, both countries with very high levels of social inequality and it was an aim of this critical review to see if approaches taken elsewhere, in Continental Europe, Latin America or Australasia, for example suggested radically different outcomes (eg. Bayliss, 2004; Kanai & Ortega-Alcazar, 2009; Gibson et al, 2010; Sasaki, 2010).

It is difficult to generalise about such a huge topic and while it remains safe to say that context does matter and outcomes do vary, what is notable in the literature is the growing consensus that policy in most parts of the world is moving in the same direction, and many of the problems of culturally-led regeneration encountered in a UK or US context are mirrored elsewhere. The following section will highlight a few useful case studies of cities, while indicating the large and growing international literature in this field.

Two European cities that figures in most discussions of urban regeneration are Barcelona and Berlin. Berlin is a city that is often cited as a 'creative hotspot' alternative to London – with cheaper rents, active arts policies and a lively cultural and nightclub scene (Jakob, 2011; McRobbie, 2013). Yet Jakob (2011) is sceptical that it offers a substantially different paradigm from cities such as London. Citing the example of Kolonie Wedding, an arts initiative set up with the goal of reimaging and revitalising an

area of the city, Jakob argues that its real goal was boosting the appeal of the neighbourhood for inwards investment, rather than interacting with local artists or communities. McRobbie on the other hand argues that in fashion, small businesses generally female run and often offering opportunities for migrants, are working together with NGOs and social projects to establish a more socially conscious and economically balanced form of development. What's striking in these two examples is that while not-for profit 'arts' projects such as Kolonie Wedding may be expected to produce better social outcomes (and indeed Grodach etc. argue that they do), instead McRobbie suggests that even an industry like fashion – with its obvious environmental and labour issues – can in the right circumstances point to sustainable economic development.

In their analysis of the case of Barcelona, Degen and García (2012) acknowledge the difficulty of combining a commitment to social justice with a desire to pursue economic competiveness. They see three phases of the city's urban transformation since 1979, beginning with the democratisation phase that swept Spain after Franco's death. In this period the restoration of civic pride and wider Catalonian identity was seen as a driver, reaching a peak at around the time of the Olympic Games in 1992. The idea of social cohesion was core to this phase, with a doubling of the welfare budget between 1970 and 1996. Improving the public realm went alongside investment in housing and public services. This was not a 'trickle down' employment model on the lines of that pursued in the UK, but a comprehensive public plan. Equally importantly, the governance model developed in the post-Franco years featured a strong role for neighbourhood councils, ensuring a wide base for decision-making and potentially putting up barriers to gentrification.

From 1995 onwards however, political changes at the Mayoral level, a stronger emphasis on public-private partnerships, and the growth of the private sector service economy, including tourism and the cultural industries, began to see this comprehensive public-sector led cultural planning approach break down. Greater emphasis was given to the promotional and economic aspects of culture, both in terms of city marketing and the growth of the cultural industries. In 1996 the Spanish general election was won by the conservative Popular Party and a new Land Act allowing further liberalization of land, gave a clear signal to developers.

Across Spain, Janoschka et al (2013) argue that cultural urban regeneration has been led by institutionalised cultural production facilities (most famously in the case of Bilbao), but also by the privatisation of former public spaces with a consequent reduction in the diversity of 'publics' encouraged to occupy these spaces. While the 'Barcelona model' had held the line for some time and involved more of the city's communities in its decision making, it still tended to exclude groups such as squatters, homeless people or indeed artists opposing 'creative city' developments.

The case of Latin America presents a somewhat different set of challenges, with very high levels of existing inequality combined with a contemporary policy context which has essentially sought to 'reconquer' city centres for the very wealthiest, particularly via slum clearance and 'pacification' programmes (Yates and Bakker, 2013). This focus on the symbolic redevelopment of inner city areas has echoes of the approach in Spain, particularly in the use of formal cultural institutions to drive the process, as well as the

exclusion of traditional inner-city residents, in this case street-vendors, who were seen as presenting an undesirable image for international tourists. In addition to the global tourist market, a key audience for and driver of cultural regeneration in Latin America is wealthy migrants; retirees from North America, for example who often head for coastal destinations and historical city centres (Nelle, 2009).

Kanai and Ortega-Alcázar (2009) consider the evidence for a more progressive cultural regeneration with a comparison of Mexico City (DF) and Buenos Aires (BA). They argue that while processes of neoliberal urban restructuring are happening, the democratization of recent decades has also lead to greater urban autonomy and political decentralisation, allowing cities to open up new institutional spaces and enact progressive policies. While both cities have invested more in culture in recent years, in BA, they argue, the cultural strategy has been articulated to a wider coalition of cultural agencies and been able to achieve longer-term stability in spending, with a ten-year strategic plan drafted in 2001. While, as in many cities, the largest single cultural client remains the opera house, there has been some shift towards neighbourhood-level facilities and extended support for young artists. Overall, Kanai and Ortega-Alcázar argue that the sense of a comprehensive cultural plan to link cultural investment to regeneration and social goals, makes BA policies more robust, compared to the more fragmented approach of DF.

O'Connor and Kong's (2009) book on the 'creative city' in Europe and Asia noted then the widespread influence of European policy nostrums about the relationship between culture and the city on Asian cites from Hong Kong and Seoul to Wuhan and Chonqing. This enthusiasm seems not to have diminished (O'Connor 2012; Edney, forthcoming). Yeoh (2005) argued that the deployment of urban mega-projects and iconic architecture was even more spatially concentrated in Asian cities that in Europe, widening the gap within cities and between those cities that see themselves as global players and those,

"at the bottom of the hierarchy which are perceived to be structurally irrelevant to the current round of global capital accumulation (Yeoh 2005: 955).

At the same time as case studies from Taiwan and Japan suggest (Lin & Hsing, 2009; Sasaki, 2010), there are examples of locally-led cultural regeneration strategies that have proved more successful. Lin and Hsing, describe community involvement in the revitalisation of the Bao-An temple area of Taiwan, which they argue succeeded because it managed to mobilise the local community, including financially, and build on existing assets, asserting the importance of the local. And Sasaki describes how the mid-sized Japanese city of Kanzawa developed a strategy based on celebrating traditional arts and crafts, which he contrasts unfavourably with the efforts of Osaka, which has been through a variety of iterations of the cultural regeneration model, only latterly coming around to one which aims to celebrate diverse and localised cultural scenes.

Despite the general chilling of large architectural projects since the start of the global financial crisis in 2008, the approach to cultural policy known as the 'Bilbao effect,' is not exhausted. The transfer of ideas about cultural regeneration, jostles with urban competitions for capital and civic boosterism in what Pratt (2009) calls a 'Xerox' approach of policy copying. In the case of cultural regeneration, an idea, developed in

the context of a de-industrialising Europe, has sometimes been adopted, shorn of any of its social concerns and turned into a 'recipe' for unbalanced economic development.

A new politics of place

The long economic downturn forces us to reconsider many of these assumptions underlying cultural regeneration and its purported links to economic growth, as the quote from Florida at the beginning of this piece suggests. Social movements such as Occupy have re-focussed attention on the importance of public space, community and conviviality; elements of cultural value and place-making that have often been over-looked in the focus on new, built infrastructure. Much of this revisits older arguments about the 'right to the city,' (Lefebvre 1996; Castells, 1977). And even one of 'regeneration's' most trenchant critics, David Harvey sees the development of these place-based political movements as offering potential for re-appropriation of the symbolic capital of the urban by a new politics (Harvey, 2012).

In this final section, we will turn to the issue of new social movements and what one might call a new politics of place to see if, within the constraints of urban neoliberal policy, new approaches to culture and place are being forged and if so, what they have to offer in terms of more balanced urban development.

In terms of cultural practice, perhaps the most obvious creation of autonomous space in recent decades has been the rise of the festival or rave (Ehrenreich, 2006; Gilbert, 2014), revisiting some might argue a centuries-old tradition of the carnival as counter-culture. In her history of what she calls, "collective joy," Barbara Ehrenreich argues that the what began the decline in festivals and carnivals, from their high point in the Middle Ages, was the rise of a 'Protestant ethic,' stressing work, deferred gratification and, "the new necessity of showing up for work, sober and on time, six days a week (2006: 100)."

As Gilbert points out (2014), while the 1960s saw the 'happening' as a major element of participative art, the less-elite 1980s version of this was the rave or free festival – which combined the growing enthusiasm for dance music and indeed 'dance' drugs, with an often-explicit anti-authoritarian politics. This was not necessarily a leftist movement, as right wing libertarian politics has also been a driver, from the UK rave scene of the 1990s to festivals such as Burning Man. And while many raves were inspired by resistance to their criminalisation under the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, their political demands, beyond the right to party unhindered, where sometimes difficult to determine.

But Gilbert also argues that what such events have in common with political movement such as Occupy or the Indignados, is the idea of a crowd interacting relatively spontaneously, an absence of hierarchy, a commitment to horizontal social relations and a sense of joy. He understands this 'joy' not so much as the satisfaction of pre-existing desires or lacks, as in a more liberal, individualistic tradition, but rather the enhancement of our collective capacities, however temporary, the sense that more is

possible. Does this mean, he asks, that they constitute the invention of 'possible worlds' beyond the logic of contemporary society, as Graeber (2013) suggests the Occupy movement did?

Gilbert sees two problems with this narrative. One is, as in the Middle Ages, that festival and carnival, in allowing space for a temporary re-ordering of society in fact provides a safety-valve that allows hierarchies to remain exactly as they are for the rest of the time. The second is that having carved out its own 'alternative' space, the festival, carnival or even occupation, may pay little attention to its own internal divisions or exclusions, a problem that has plagued environmental movements in the UK for example, which draw largely on middle-class support, or allows 'cool' ravers to express disdain towards those not deemed to have the right image (Thornton, 1995). As he notes in an observation that could be made of many cultural practices, the challenge is to

"invent cultural forms and projects which can be shared both by those who already participate habitually in such alternative formation and those who do not," (Gilbert, 2014: 197).

One way through this, as Long (2013) argues, is to return to Doreen Massey's (1994) cry for a progressive sense of place, one which remained aware of it own character while recognising and interacting with the global forces shaping it. Long's argument is that cultural activism which is focussed on specific locales can retain a sense of legitimacy even when it runs the risk of appealing to some members of a community more than others. In contrast to (though not opposed to) the sort of mobile cultural activism associated with demonstrations and occupations (eg. Routledge, 2012), Long looks at the 'Keep Austin weird' campaign as an example of localised cultural activism. This grassroots movement, which began in Austin, Texas as form of discursive resistance to chain stores and the loss of independent businesses, has since spread across the USA and elsewhere. Despite its support for a more localised economy, the very success of the campaign has and its uses of mediated images, T-shirts, slogans and the like, has led to it being described as more of a 'bumper sticker than movements', just as the New Economics Foundation's anti-clone town campaigns in the UK has been criticised for its 'toolkit' approach to revisiting local economies. Long recognises that place-based cultural activism often runs the risk of commodification and developing its own forms of conspicuous consumption - independent business are unlikely to be able to offer the discounts that larger ones can for example - and thus are often the preserve of the middle class. But he doesn't want to concede the ground of localism too easily. He argues that 'keeping it weird' retains legitimacy because it is predicated on local solidarity and that such campaigns are more than nostalgia for a local community, but are also indicative of 'social camaraderie, solidarity and economic resilience" (Long, 2013:63).

A similar argument is made by Buser et al (2013), who, drawing on the example of Stokes Croft in Bristol suggest that cultural activism has an important role to play in constituting particular urban neighbourhoods as centres of what they call 'social activism.' This activism uses arts and creative practice to disrupt conventional social understandings and by bringing together a history of radicalism in a particular place, in

this case a neighbourhood of Bristol, not only does the Stokes Croft campaign act as a sort of urban laboratory but its connection to place help sustain that resistance beyond specific campaigns. In this case, the arts were a central part of the anti-corporate campaign, fought most famously (and unsuccessfully) against Tesco, its centrepiece being not a petition, or a social media campaign, but a large mural.

However, Buser et al, admit that in their interviews of activists from two groups, the People's Republic of Stokes Croft and the No Tesco in Stokes Croft campaign, all but one where white and middle-class and that the links between Stokes Croft and the nearby neighborhood of St Pauls with its large Afro-Caribbean and Somali communities are weak.

Such observations sharpen the challenge of Gilbert's challenge above. There is a growing literature which suggest that smaller-scale, place-based and committed arts organisations, together with broad-based local governance can development models of regeneration that are more than, "papering over urban decay, adding a glossy veneer that prepares the city for reinvestment," as Leslie & Rantisi put it (2013: 85). The capital-led projects of recent decades in the UK are unlikely to return in the near future so many cities and towns will be looking to these sort of finer-grained, smaller and more localised approaches, where lifestyle businesses and not-for-profits are not seen as failed business models, as was the case under the 'creative industries' regime, but as ways of sustaining meaningful work in a steady state or low-growth economy. But even the most optimistic of these narratives has to engage with the challenge of inequality that cultural production and consumption still poses. Celebrating the local and the sustainable, even recognising the need for a less consumption-fuelled model of economic development, cannot come at the expense of the traditional question of social justice which is, who benefits?

The cultural value of urban regeneration

Cultural regeneration, as this review has so far discussed it, relates to an understanding of culture as the arts, media industries and other symbolic activities (design, festivals and so on). It was these workers that Zukin first described in Lower Manhattan in the 1970s and these activities that have lain behind regeneration projects from Bilbao to Guangzhao. But the discourse of 'creative industries,' as it has developed since the 1990s in Britain and elsewhere has increasingly focused on a narrow subset of these activities; the high tech and the digital. These days, if you hear a government minister talking about the creative industries, you can safely assume they are referring to Silicon Roundabout, not the National Theatre or to videogames clusters in Dundee, rather than nightclubs in Manchester.

And as the focus of government attention has moved from how new galleries or museums will save urban areas, to how high technology will save them, similar problem have arisen. Even 'Wired' magazine, one-time bible of all things techno-optimistic, has taken to worrying about the current make-over of Las Vegas into an 'entrepreneurial tech nirvana' (Hollis, 2014), joining a chorus of concerns about the tech-led gentrification of East London (Doctorow, 2014) and the even greater problems of social

fragmentation faced by a city like San Francisco (Solnit & Schwartzenberg, 2000; Solnit, 2014).

While there is much to be concerned about in the squeezing out of the arts from the idea of 'creative industries' (see Oakley, 2009 for a discussion), the relative lack of policy interest in the non-high tech aspects of the cultural sector perhaps opens up the chance for a rethink about the role of culture within the life of cities. If some aspects of our cultural life are to be less clearly pressed into service in the cause of economic growth, then perhaps there is an opportunity for them to open up the spaces where we might think about other notions of the good life, where we might indeed start to think about the 'cultural value' of regeneration.

It is worth remembering that even in UK policy parlance 'regeneration' is a broad term, encompassing environmental, social and economic aspects. It should be far more than a 'bricks and mortar' type improvement in the local environment, but should also ensure improved employment opportunities, particularly for poorer communities, increased health and well-being and enhanced quality of life for citizens. Yet, as we have seen, there are very few cases of cultural regeneration that can claim this sort of broad-based success and many examples where 'improvements' have been at the expense of more vulnerable members of the community. This is as true internationally as it is in the UK and is even the case in countries with somewhat more egalitarian political settlements such as Sweden or the Netherlands (Boren & Young, 2013; Doucet, 2014).

In keeping with the overall themes of the AHRC cultural value project, one place to start this rethinking is with a better understanding of what it is that people value about culture and indeed what culture they value. The literature suggests that smaller-scale, more diffuse cultural activities – particularly a mix of profit and non-profit - are linked to better outcomes than the one-off, spectacular investment. What is less clear is the role that specific cultural forms play in this. Grodach et al, (2014) argue that investments in what they call the 'fine arts' produce more balanced outcomes than the commercial cultural industries, but in their research, this appears to be largely because such investments take place in neighbourhoods which are already somewhat affluent and less subject to rapid demographic change.

What offers greater promise is investment is what is sometimes called 'vernacular' culture or the everyday cultural experiences that people seek out, from book groups and knitting circles to community festivals, dance groups, allotments and blogging (Edensor et al, 2010; Gilmore, 2013). This is not to say we should ignore the inequalities in formal, publicly-funded cultural provision and still less that there is no value in large scale cultural venues; but if the aim is area-based regeneration, we need to start with what people value not what they ought to value.

Similarly, Long's argument about sense of place, drawing of course on Doreen Massey (1994) requires us to pay more attention to the cultural specificity of places, the myths, narratives and memories that surround them, and the cultural production that is shaped by them. A clear characteristic of failed regeneration projects seems to be lack of connection with local cultural institutions, artists or communities and in the case of large capital investments, the bypassing of local planning procedures (Yudice, 2009; Ponzini

2013). A result of this, alongside distrust and disengagement is that, rather than reinforcing the distinctiveness of cities, the homogenizing effects of global architectural imprints, along with global retail and consumption offers, tends to weaken any sense of place, ironically reducing their appeal to the 'discerning' tourist, who is the intended market, but more importantly undermining local understandings.

One response to this 'creative policy gap' is to explore how regeneration can be be negotiated to support cultural production and how urban policymaking itself can become a more participate activity. Both Miles (2010) in the UK and Gerin & McLean in Canada (2011) use the example of artistic or performance-based interventions that have been used in planning processes to reveal different conceptions of what citizens might want from regeneration, while Lehtovuori and Havik (2009) detail cases in Amsterdam and Helsinki where local sub-cultural groups participated in the development of new, site-specific cultural scenes.

In a few other cases, active resistance, sometimes led by artists, against regeneration along conventional lines, has been explicitly recognized by public policy. Boren and Young (2013) provide examples from Hamburg, Toronto and Stockholm where artists and activists have worked with city authorities to reframe regeneration. Such examples are often modest in scale and sometimes sit alongside other, more conventional regeneration attempts, within the same city authority. The real clue is to follow the money and see how much of a city's planning activities involved such interaction versus that which takes place using conventional developments, the challenge as ever is to mainstream such promising social experiments.

If Scott (2014) is correct, the growing policy traction of 'cultural value,' offers an opportunity to do just this. In New Zealand for example she argues that location and identity have emerged as key factors within the national cultural value debate, with a particular stress on both bi-cuturalism (Maori and Pakeha) and on common heritage and culture.

Having said that, there remains a clear danger that debates about 'the economy' and 'cultural value' diverge, with culture retuning not to an oppositional role, but to a residual one. Inserting 'cultural value,' into the existing discourse of economic development does little to challenge it and risks reducing culture to a role of social amelioration, at which its success rate is, incidentally, at best mixed. Instead we need to use cultural resources to rethink and reframe what we want from 'the economy,' with a focus on steady state economics and a redefinition of prosperity that includes a much wider understanding of the good life. In his contribution to UNESCO's 2013 Creative Economy Report, Chris Gibson argues that the key to more balanced (if still far from equal) development of the global cultural economy is to recognise path dependency and the need for a pluralistic view of development. The same argument can be made for cultural regeneration. Different cities in different contexts will have divergent paths and there is no single model – or even a few models – that they need to follow. Instead regeneration needs to start from what it that people value and find a way of enhancing – individually and collectively – their ability to pursue it.

References and external links

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The Cultural Value Project seeks to make a major contribution to how we think about the value of arts and culture to individuals and to society. The project will establish a framework that will advance the way in which we talk about the value of cultural engagement and the methods by which we evaluate it. The framework will, on the one hand, be an examination of the cultural experience itself, its impact on individuals and its benefit to society; and on the other, articulate a set of evaluative approaches and methodologies appropriate to the different ways in which cultural value is manifested. This means that qualitative methodologies and case studies will sit alongside qualitative approaches.