The 'Creative City': Moving from Ideas to Planning Practice

by

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
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Abstract

Economic development and planning practitioners around the world are focusing on the producers and consumers of the creative economy as the basis for growing vibrant and successful cities. This creative movement calls for an interdisciplinary approach to planning where a break in the rules that govern ‘normal’ planning practice contribute to environments that breed creativity, innovation and ultimately, economic growth. While it is still too early to measure the economic impacts of the movement, many cities have begun to engage in a creative city planning approach to urban revitalization. This thesis investigates the translation of the creative city concept into urban revitalization policies and programs in Providence, Boston and Baltimore. These case studies illustrate the range of strategies for putting the ideas of the creative city in place, the new difficulties that arise when the planning community attempts to reframe planning practice, and provides recommendations for overcoming these implementation challenges.

Advisor: Susan Crowl Silberberg, Lecturer in Urban Design and Planning
Reader: David Laws, Principal Research Scientist and Lecturer
Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the devoted and energized professionals who took time from their busy schedules to be a part of this process. Thanks especially to Jason Schupbach for pointing me to the right people, and to Lynne McCormack, Umberto Crenca and Donald Eversely of Providence whose attitudes towards community development, creativity and governance were truly inspiring.

A special thanks to my advisor Susan Silberberg for her valuable insights, and whose patience, diligence and enthusiasm made this a truly positive learning experience. Also, thanks to David Laws, my reader, for his thoughtful contributions and good conversation.

Finally, thanks to my family for supporting me always, and to my friends who gave me the distractions I needed to make it through.
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Introduction

Thanks to the focus of mainstream planning discourse on the actors in the new, knowledge-based economy, the creative city is increasingly regarded as an ideal focus for urban revitalization. In the move to a post-industrial economy where manufacturing and hard industry have left urban centers, the creative city emphasizes the shift from the significance of geography and natural resources for a city’s economic vitality to a focus on the people and places that are both the producers and consumers of creativity - whether in art, culture, technology or other creative sectors. The conversation about the ‘creative class’ highlights a breed of urban dwellers with a high degree of mobility and puts emphasis on the importance of ‘quality of place’ in the competition to attract them. Likewise, creative industries - art, media, dot-com, film, software, biotech - are acknowledged as having a specific set of spatial and infrastructure needs in order to be successful, including the need for flexible and affordable space (live/work space for artists, incubator spaces for startups, etc.), and benefit by the knowledge spillovers and collaboration fostered by industry clusters. Proponents of the creative city call for a holistic approach to planning and governance that is itself creative, where economy, culture, and urban design are addressed simultaneously in the cultivation of a creative environment.

In a creative city, experts recommend that urban planning go beyond the use of traditional economic development tools such as commercial subsidies or tax incentives. A creative approach may replace the provision of typical commercial space or housing with partnerships for the redevelopment of abandoned public-owned property through a self-build program (eg. NDSM Wharf, Amsterdam). A creative initiative may provide business, technical and legal assistance to creative industries (eg. Creative London). Or, it may attempt to transform a city into a “cool” place in order to attract the workers of the creative economy (eg. CoolCities, Michigan).

This thesis on the creative city movement is a response to my search, as a student of urban planning, for new and innovative strategies for economic and urban development in post-industrial cities. The work comes from my own desire to understand whether the creative city movement in mainstream planning is truly a new model for planning practice. The creative city concept is not without critics. Many questions have arisen regarding the broad definition of ‘creative’ to include activities ranging from art to high-tech, the movement’s implications for gentrification and equity, and the balance between meeting the environmental needs of the ‘creative class’ through official planning and the spontaneity and authenticity of creative environments. However, this thesis does not aim to place value on the creative city movement per se, or measure its impacts on urban economic growth, but rather to analyze the changes in planning practice that it may inspire, and to gauge the effectiveness of these strategies through the perspective of planning practitioners.

This analysis rests on the assumption that cities committing to the creative city concept are engaging in a change in planning practice in response to the desire to try something new, or to gain an advantage in inter-city competition. Therefore, an important part of the findings is to determine whether a creative strategy is a departure from each city’s own traditional approach to urban revitalization, or keeps in line with historical (and perhaps unsuccessful) revitalization and redevelopment strategies. A change in planning practice may be reflected in a new way of
writing plans, or a new way in which development is conceived, or new roles for private, public and civic actors in planning efforts. This study will be useful to test whether a creative city approach is an institutionally viable planning and economic development strategy and whether the movement is a real sign of something new.
Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the three prominent ideologies driving the creative city movement, and explores three well-known examples of creative city initiatives in practice, from the international to local levels. Then, the chapter lays out my personal interest in the creative city movement and my methodology for understanding how practitioners are turning the ideologies into planning action, and whether planning practice is changing as a result. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are the stories, as told by the planning community in each place, of creative initiatives in Providence, Baltimore and Boston. In each case, I study the formation and implementation of the initiative and analyze the impacts of the program through the reaction of the initiative organizers, participants, and other relevant practitioners. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the structure and impacts of the creative city initiatives and looks across the common elements in all three efforts to identify the possible sources of the challenges and strengths associated with each, and the impacts on planning practice. In Chapter 6, I discuss my expectations for the study, why practitioners tend to focus on Richard Florida’s creative class theory, and the challenges that arise when cities attempt to put a creative city strategy in place. Finally, I provide practitioners with recommendations for overcoming the implementation challenges of creative city initiatives.
1 | The Creative City Movement and Methodology

History of the ‘creative’ movement

Ideologies

While the term ‘creative’ is used ubiquitously in everyday life, the creative city movement reflects a set of distinct ideologies with specific applications of creativity in urban physical and economic development. For the purposes of this report, creative city will refer to the general movement of an approach to city planning and revitalization that may exemplify any or all of the following ideas:

- Growing the Creative Economy (or industries)
- Attracting and retaining the Creative Class
- Planning the Creative City

A creative city approach for urban revitalization is not merely a focus on arts, nor is it the creation of an arts district. While each of these three ideas recognizes and relies on the importance of arts and cultural resources, they respond to the transition to a post-industrial economy (and the recession of the early 1990’s specifically) and rest in the importance of harnessing individuals’ creativity and producing innovation – in planning, business, governance, and/or leisure. The three perspectives are distinct, but not mutually exclusive. John Howkins’ Creative Economy is the economic building block for the creative city movement, defined by a core set of creative industries. Richard Florida proposes a strategy for supporting this economy based in identifying and harnessing the attractive power of a place to draw the Creative Class, the producers of creativity. Landry and Bianchini explore ways for municipalities to innovate the practice of planning and governance in order to nurture the urban environments that breed creative partnerships and activity, the Creative City.

The Creative Economy

In 2001, British media and business consultant John Howkins published “The Creative Economy: How People Make Money From Ideas” in which he explores the relationship between creativity and economics. For Howkins, the new, post-industrial, Creative Economy represents the transition of ideas and expressions of creativity to products with commercial value. In order for creativity to exist in a market, a system of rules and contracts arises to define ownership in regulate transactions. Thus, the Creative Economy is defined by the set of industries producing and trading intellectual property: copyright industries, patent industries, trademark industries, and design industries. Within these categories, Howkins finds a core set of fifteen creative sectors that in 1999, accounted for 7.3% of the world gross national product. The largest market for the Creative Economy is in the United States, where the economy was worth $960 billion in

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1 Economist Richard Florida credits Business Week with the first use of the term “creative economy.”
1999, or 43% of the total product generated worldwide. The core creative industries include: research and development, publishing, software, TV and radio, design, music, film, toys and games, advertising, architecture, performing arts, crafts, video games, fashion, and art. Howkins proposes that a new way of doing business is necessary to grow the industries of this economy, because unlike the world of modern economic theory with limited resources and price competition, the Creative Economy relies on an unlimited source of ideas where the costs of production lose importance. Howkins’ model for “creative management” responds to this shift with a focus on the human characteristics of ideas, talent, and learning, rather than traditional focus on data and finance for economic success.

The Creative Class
The work of Richard Florida, a regional economist at Carnegie Mellon University, is perhaps most identified with the creative city movement, and has spurred a number of local creative initiatives. It has also generated the greatest amount of criticism.

In “The Rise of the Creative Class,” Florida highlights the dependence of the “knowledge” economy on creativity for sustaining competitive advantage. While creativity has always driven innovation and economic growth in both the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions, it is now a commodity. However, Florida clarifies that, unlike a commodity, creativity cannot be bought. Instead, “a social and economic environment...can nurture its many forms.” Florida insists that while the economy shifts from a reliance on natural resources to human resources, geography still matters. As workers change jobs more frequently they are less tied to corporations and more tied to their place of work and residence. Businesses, therefore, move to locations with the greatest supply of skilled labor. The skilled (creative), highly mobile labor force locates to environments they enjoy, environments that are centers of creative activity.

Florida identifies a group of people driving the creativity-based economy that accounts for 30% of the workforce in the United States. He defines the ‘core’ creative class - workers that create new ideas, technology and creative content - as scientists, engineers, professors, poets, novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers, architects, non-fiction writers, editors, cultural figures, think-tank researchers, analysts, and other opinion-makers. In addition, he outlines a more expansive group of ‘creative professionals’ that includes workers in the fields of business and finance, law, health care and related fields. The difference between the Creative Class and other workforce clusters is the employment of creative professionals to create, with autonomy and flexibility, as opposed to the service and working classes that are compensated to execute actions. Florida emphasizes the importance of this Creative Class that is the smallest of the three classes, but holds the most wealth. While he notes that creative economy activity alone does not solve existing social and economic inequalities, he stresses that regions benefit by investing in environments that fuel such activity. In his subsequent work, “The Flight of the Creative Class,” he points to how the United States is falling behind in terms of this competitive advantage.

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3 Howkins, 86.
Through interviews and focus groups, Florida has explored a Creative Class lifestyle full of 'multidimensional experiences' enhanced by active (versus passive) recreation and an indigenous street-culture where "it is hard to draw the line between participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators." These experiences reinforce the 'power of place' in the life of the Creative Class, and highlight the attractive power of communities abundant with high-quality amenities, open to diversity, and supportive of creative individuals. Florida has developed a set of metrics to understand the places where the Creative Class locates, and therefore, the characteristics that determine the competitive advantage of those regions. He uses the Creative Index, composed of the following indicators, to rank the standing of American regions in the Creative Economy:

- Creative Class - measures the presence of the Creative Class in the workforce
- Innovation - evidenced by the number of patents per capita
- High-tech industry - as measured by the Milken Institute Tech Pole Index
- Diversity - composed of the share of the population that is gay, bohemian (producers of cultural activity), or part of the "melting pot" (illustrated by the relationship between the High-tech index and percent foreign born)

Florida urges planners and local governments to look beyond the traditional incentives (e.g., subsidizing companies, stadiums and retail) to lure economic activity, to instead engage in activity that builds social capital and a sense of community. He identifies the "Three T's of Economic Development", as he suggests than in order to stimulate economic growth a place must have technology, engage talent, and exhibit tolerance. He advocates embracing the trend of the return to living in urban centers and highlights the importance of the New Urbanist movement in urban design that attempts to create more pedestrian-friendly urban environments, and the advantages of universities for contributing to supporting innovative environments.

Finally, he points to the importance of building a 'people climate' by engaging in a strategy aimed at attracting and retaining people (not limited to the Creative Class) by investing in amenities that people want – such as urban parks and bike lanes, and by being open to diversity in that place – accepting gays, immigrants, 'bohemians,' and young people.

The published works of Richard Florida do not spell out a specific strategy for gaining creative economic advantage, or attracting the creative class. In fact Florida notes, "there is no one-size-fits-all model for a successful people climate." Instead, his work is diagnostic, and through his research group, Catalytix, Florida provides data and conducts economic and demographic analysis to help localities and regions to understand their creative capital. In addition, Richard Florida circles the world coaching city leaders, and facilitating discussions on the benefits of this creative capital.

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7 San Francisco, Austin and Boston rank the highest in Florida's Creativity Index for regions with over 1 million people.
8 As explored by Robert Putnam in "Bowling Alone."
11 In 2003, Richard Florida led a congress of 100 “creative” leaders to map a set of principles to encourage action in cities seeking creative talent referred to as the Memphis Manifesto.
The Creative City
In 1995, Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, published "The Creative City"\textsuperscript{12} under the auspices of Demos, a British think tank committed to putting democracy into everyday organizational practice, and in conjunction with Comedia, an organization that now provides cities with assistance in visioning, sectoral and market research, and creating cultural policies. This convergence resulted in the notion of the Creative City as a creative response to urban problems in the face of the international urban crisis arising from the transition to a post-industrialized, global economy. The ideology holds the urban planner responsible for taking action - calling for a move away from traditional planning practice based in physical solutions, to improving the urban environment and fostering a creative atmosphere and 'soft infrastructure' through new partnerships.

"today...we need the creativity of being able to synthesize, to connect, to gauge impacts across different spheres of life, to see holistically, to understand how material changes affect our perceptions, to grasp the subtle ecologies of our systems of life and how to make them sustainable. We need, in other words, the skills of the broker, the person who can think across disciplines, the networker, the connector – a ‘softer’ set of skills."\textsuperscript{13}

The authors encourage a holistic approach to planning and point to a range of characteristics important to successful development strategies, including an approach based both in structured order, and the urban vitality arising from unplanned, slightly chaotic development - recognizing that "opposites can be parts of the whole." Landry and Bianchini reference a set of examples including the balancing of anarchy and rules in Camden Lock and Portobello Road in London where the markets provide a controlled framework for more spontaneous activities like street performances.

In order to become a creative city, Landry and Bianchini advocate for a practice including (but not limited to):

- removing the obstacles to creativity exacerbated by bureaucracies
- laying the foundations for a creative milieu by
  - reflecting on organizational failures/successes
  - recognizing catalysts such as the creative abilities of individuals (eg. immigrants)
  - balancing cosmopolitanism and locality
  - developing space for creative people and projects
  - rethinking urban management\textsuperscript{14}

More specifically, the thinkers narrate a wide-ranging set of instances of creative city planning and governance in over 50 mostly European cities that embody such actions. These examples include greening the city, beating the weather, countering prejudice, and providing venues for community participation.

\textsuperscript{12} Charles Landry & Franco Bianchini, \textit{The Creative City}. London: Demos (www.demos.co.uk), 1995.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 25-30.
In an attempt to provide planning practitioners with a more concrete framework for action, Charles Landry published “The Creative City: A Toolkit For Urban Innovators”\(^{15}\) in 2000. In this work, Landry goes farther to describe the creative milieu, or the physical space in which ideas and invention occur—composed of the hard infrastructure to house the activities, and the soft infrastructure to enable communication networks. While the text is admittedly conceptual, Landry presents a set of approaches to thinking and acting creatively in the urban planning context. Landry calls this a “mental toolkit” composed of a five-step strategy for fostering the Creative City:

1) Preparation and Planning Phase – identify a problem and raise awareness about it, gather precedents for solutions, and forge partnerships across sectors.
2) Assessment of Potential Obstacles – audit local resources to assess the potential for change and the success of a creative approach. The audit should include an overview of inventive projects and their obstacles, in order to devise a plan for action based on overcoming obstacles.
3) Measuring Success and Failure – define a set of metrics to assess success and failure of strategy goals.
4) Execution – carry out and monitor the work. Utilize pilot projects to foster innovation, and determine whether the work should be forming a broader Creative City Initiative or a small-scale project.
5) Communicating, disseminating and reflecting – evaluation of progress and failures should be shared through academic studies and public/community events.

Landry clarifies that this strategy may be applied to any level of planning and development—from a building to the city as a whole—although starting with a small project may better attune practitioners to this new approach for planning. Here he advocates for a change in planning mindset and for adopting a new, creative approach to city planning that is a vision-oriented process rather than technical in nature.

Landry and Bianchini’s approach to planning the Creative City seems to differ from traditional planning practice in their insistence on learning through collaboration and reflection. The theorists advocate that practitioners first step outside of their traditional bureaucratic boundaries of city planning—cities only stand to learn from the experience of the private and non-profit sectors free from regulatory burdens. Secondly, learning also happens through a continuous assessment and reflection on practitioners’ own work, and Overall, Landry and Bianchini seem to be pushing practitioners to work in a mode that more closely resembles a business model, where learning and efficiencies are maximized by work with experts (that may be outside of government), and through a constant assessment of worker effectiveness.

Precedents: Programs for Action

There have been a series of large-scale, broad-brush attempts to implement the ideas of the creative city movement. The following precedents have led the effort to put creative city strategies in place from the international to local levels, and are included here because they are the most commonly referenced cases in the discussion of the creative city movement:

UNESCO Creative City Network
UNESCO’s program was formed in 2005 to support social and economic development by building the capacity for the production of cultural products. Local creative economies are nurtured through learning from the cultural strategies of other cities connected by a global network. The Network accepts applications from cities with “established creative pedigrees” in one of the following fields:

- Literature
- Cinema
- Music
- Folk Art
- Design
- Media Arts
- Gastronomy

Cities are appointed to the Network based on their demonstrated strength in formulating policy, organizing events, or supporting the assets in their particular cultural focus. As members of the Network, cities are obligated to take part in a global learning experience through the exchange of knowledge and information regarding theirs, and the work of other cities in the creative economy.

CoolCities Michigan
The State of Michigan launched CoolCities in 2003 as part of its broader economic vision. The goals of the three-year program are to revitalize communities, build community spirit, and retain "knowledge workers." The program aims to create jobs and attract young people to work, live and shop in the “cool” cities created and supported by the program. The program approach has four stages:

1) **Listening** – understanding what people want in a community, and what strengths and obstacles are associated with strategy implementation in localities
2) **Planning** – shaping initiatives as a result of the “listening” sessions
3) **Acting** – implementing actions that embrace talent, innovation, diversity and enhance quality of life (the TIDE model)
4) **Measuring** – assessing the impact of the initiatives through statistical benchmarks

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Localities have the opportunity to apply for one of a set of grants with varied themes through a request for proposal process. Selection is made based on relevance to the theme of the grant (eg. revitalization of Main Streets), and whether the proposed program illustrates a creative and innovation solution, and has the potential for “tipping” the neighborhood towards success. Selected localities are given a resource toolbox (providing guidance on the opportunities for State technical and funding assistance), and a “Catalyst Grant” to support neighborhood revitalization projects.

Creative London
Creative London is a program of the London Development Agency\(^{18}\) aimed at promoting, assisting, and offering practical support for creative industries.\(^{19}\) The initiative formed a commission in 2002 to research London’s creative industries and provide information on the obstacles (eg. limited funding) keeping these industries from realizing their full potential. The industries included in London’s creative economy are:

- Fashion
- Advertising
- Radio and TV
- Music and the performing arts
- Publishing and printing
- Design
- Architecture
- Interactive leisure software
- Crafts
- Film and video

Creative London acts as a mediator, connecting creative industries with other public and private organizations providing business assistance, helping to find workspace, and offering legal and intellectual property advice. Research on London’s creative industries is conducted in an iterative process, with annual statistical updates on the makeup of the creative economy and workforce.

Each of these programs reflects different interpretations (and combinations) of the three creative city ideologies set forth by Howkins, Florida, and Landry and Bianchini, and have served as models for other creative city initiatives. The precedents illustrate an attempt by organizations to move beyond theory, to understand the creative city movement through practice, and the effort to share collective learning experiences with city planners around the world.

\(^{18}\) The London Development Agency is the mayor’s office for economic development.
Methodology

Research Question

The goal of this thesis is not to evaluate the economic justification for the creative city movement but to understand how proponents of the creative city are translating ideology into practice. This thesis recognizes that cities around the world are accepting the creative city approach as a viable planning strategy; this work seeks to understand the resulting actions and practitioners’ responses:

- How are cities responding to the creative city movement, and how are they translating it into policy and programs?
- What are those changes and who are the actors involved?
- Is the creative city ‘buzz’ encouraging innovation in planning practice?
- What are the challenges practitioners face when attempting to change to creative city planning practice?

Case studies

The only way to gain insight on planning practice is to engage in a case study analysis that allows for the examination of real behavior. I chose case studies from the spectrum of cities with creative city programs based on the following criteria:

1) a broad mission for a creative program has been stated by the mayor, planning department, private or non-profit planning organization, AND

2) the city has formed a creative working group or taken steps to putting some other policymaking mechanism in place (eg. advisory group, planning studies) and has implemented some initiatives towards its goals OR private or non-profit interests have instituted changes or implemented strategies addressing creative city goals.

Subsequent preliminary interviews of practitioners with experience in studying creative city activity led me to a subset of cities in the northeastern United States that were looking to utilize a creative city strategy to achieve urban revitalization and/or a competitive edge. The case studies I selected, Providence, Baltimore and Boston, are cities that lie within major metropolitan areas (with a potential creative workforce), once had a strong industrial and manufacturing base, (consequently) have a set of abandoned or reused industrial infrastructure, and house internationally acclaimed research universities. These cities represent a spectrum of economic and planning circumstances, and differ in size and demographics. In addition, preliminary research showed an opportunity to study three disparate approaches to the creative city – strictly through non-profit organizations, a public effort, and an initiative that focused on partnerships between public and private entities. Therefore, the study is not a comparison, per se, but an understanding of how three cities, with varies political and economic contexts, have interpreted and reacted to the creative city movement.
I used a snowball sampling technique in selecting participants for this study, beginning, in all three cases, with effort organizers, and subsequently interviewing program participants. Interviews were conducted by telephone and in person, and interviewees were asked to provide their perspective on the creative initiative, their role, the impacts, and their thoughts on the creative city movement in general.

The organizational structure of each case study chapter is not consistent across cities because their structure echoes the chronology and importance of events as described by, and through the eyes of, practitioners. Each city told its own unique story about how its history, practitioners, leaders, and environment contributed to the implementation of the creative city initiative, the reaction to it, and challenges and successes in that place. This is carefully reflected in the narrative of the case studies, and the conclusions drawn from them.

However, my research did attempt to draw out answers to questions regarding the formation and implementation of each program. The following matrix provides a baseline for analyzing the common implementation challenges faced by each city:

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<td>Creative definition/focus</td>
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*Initiative Formation*

The characteristics important to the formation of the creative city programs include basic information such as the name and year each was initiated. In addition, the program catalyst expressed by interview subjects helps to identify the events, ideologies or research that inspire the formation of creative city initiatives. The goals of the program illustrate the needs in each
city as identified by the program organizers, and are important to understanding the rationale and effectiveness of the projects and actions associated with the programs.

Initiative Implementation

Approach/targets
Each city has their own interpretation of the strategies and ideas put forth by the creative city movement. Identifying the program approach/targets illustrates the avenues through which organizers assume that the goals of the creative city are best met. The creative city initiatives are categorized using the following four types of approaches:20

- Encouraging economic development through the arts - in the United States, this often comes out of the non-profit art and cultural world.
- Supporting creative industries – supporting small, local businesses that are entrepreneurial, and that have a productive capacity. This approach is better defined and more common in Europe.
- Attracting and retaining the creative class - Richard Florida’s model based around the creative class as a focus of urban planning and development initiatives. Florida has a broad definition of creative and focuses on the importance of “knowledge workers”, and their desire for a high quality of life.
- City focuses on attracting creative employers from elsewhere.21

Organizer
Landry and Bianchini’s creative city planning depends on moving outside of the traditional bureaucratic venues for planning practice. Examining the agencies/organizations that initiated and led each effort helps to identify the actors concerned with and taking part in planning action in that city, and whether the initiative is inspiring wider collaborations.

Funding
Funding may serve as a predictor of likelihood of the success of a program, as a proxy for commitment to the creative city initiative, or as an indicator of a city’s fiscal circumstances and priorities. In addition, the source of that funding indicates what agencies and organization support the approach, and whether they lie within the traditional planning and economic development agencies.

Implementing body
Like the organizer, the implementing body helps to identify the members of the planning community participating in the creative effort. The relationship between the organizing and implementing bodies may point to new collaborations or new challenges in carrying out a creative city strategy, and indicates who bears the responsibility for planning action.

Modus operandi

20 These categories were derived from the work of independent economic development consultant Beate Becker.
As the way in which the creative city initiative is carried out day-to-day, the modus operandi illustrates the nature of the creative city effort, whether action-oriented or based in research or meeting facilitation. New tools for planning and economic development practice may be expressed through this activity.

**Research/Outside Consulting Services**
This analysis assumed the use of existing research specific to the local economy in crafting the strategy, or the commissioning or undertaking of a new body of research on the creative economy/activity, to be an indication of preparedness and commitment to the creative initiative. While a lack of research may be an indication of limited program capacity, research may perhaps serve as a predictor of the strategy’s effectiveness in more realistically addressing local economic concerns. The outside consulting services rendered in conducting the research point to partnerships with the community of third-party creative city “experts” that are taking part in creative city initiatives.

**Creative definition/focus**
The way in which each program defines creativity, whether in relation to the creative economy or creative class, should vary across cities. This definition serves as a measure of how far a program has gone in crafting a focus that is unique to the assets of that city.
2 | Providence: Nothing new here, “we’re just lucky”

BACKGROUND

Providence’s economy and population

Rhode Island is the smallest state in the United States in terms of land area, and as a city-state (reflected in the official name “The State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations”) the economy of the Providence metropolitan area drives economic performance of the entire state. True to the economic transitions taking place across the United States, Rhode Island has lost a significant share of its manufacturing economy that has been replaced with service jobs. Unaffected by the high-tech boom and bust that transformed the rest of the Boston metropolitan area, Rhode Island’s job growth rate exceeded that of Massachusetts from 2001-2004.1 While the economy has been chugging along, according to Saul Kaplan at the Business Innovation Factory, a program within the State’s economic development corporation focused on stimulating innovation across the public and private sectors, Rhode Island’s issue is wages, not jobs. Although Rhode Island is starting to regain economic strength, the state still has a smaller share of jobs in high wage industries relative to the Boston metropolitan region.2 As a result, Rhode Island loses 35,000 commuters each day to higher paying jobs in Boston’s outer ring, and loses 15,000 to commuters to Connecticut.3 This pattern is also a result of the housing affordability differential between Rhode Island and Massachusetts (the median house price in Providence is 70% that of Boston)4 and easy access via I-95.

Providence’s net population has stabilized due to significant growth in its diverse immigrant population, including a Dominican immigrant population that is second size to New York City only. However, the city is faced with typical urban issues including the difficulty of getting the immigrant population onto the early rungs of the wage ladder, a struggling education system, and an income tax burden that is the sixth highest in the United States.5,6

Planning and development climate

Despite the controversial fall of Providence’s last mayoral administration, Vincent Buddy Cianci is credited for significantly revitalizing the city’s economy and image.7 Major investment

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2 Ibid.
3 Robert Leaver, CEO, New Commons. Interview by author, Providence, RI, March 14, 2006.
5 Reflects 2002 fiscal year data.
7 Mayor Buddy Cianci was in office from 1974 to 1984, and again from 1991 to 2002 when he was indicted on federal criminal charges including racketeering, extortion and mail fraud.
downtown (Downcity) in the 1980’s and 1990’s, with significant assistance by the state and federal governments for the dismantling of rail lines and uncovering a river, helped transform Providence from a railroad manufacturing center to a 21st century downtown for people and retail.8 Most recently, Downcity has seen another surge in reinvestment and redevelopment, but from the private sector. The development boom has brought $2.8 billion of investment in the construction of residential and commercial properties, including the development of a national headquarters for Gtech Holdings Corporation, the first office building to be built in Downcity in 16 years.9 The Rhode Island historic tax credit put in place in 2002 has been an instrumental incentive for developers to renovate historic industrial buildings in downtown Providence where a large share of the state’s industrial infrastructure is housed.

Since the beginning of his term in 2004, the current mayor David Cicilline seems to be receiving great support from actors in the policy and planning arena. According to Dan Baudouin of the Providence Foundation, the new mayor is trying to create a 21st century government that is more transparent, open, honest and efficient - important factors in moving the city forward in competition with other cities. The mayor’s vision for the city is summarized in the consulting firm Sasaki Associates’ description of the Providence 2020 plan: “Providence is positioning itself for a new economy built around innovation and knowledge.”10 The transition to a new, knowledge economy is also the goal of state economic development agencies aiming to reposition Rhode Island’s economy and to create more jobs. Providence’s location on the “Knowledge Corridor” between Boston and New York, has aided attempts to foster innovation, a strategy recognized by the state to add value to the economy by raising wages at every income level.11

PERCEPTION

What constitutes a creative city?

In Providence, the elements that make a creative city are synonymous with the characteristics of a high quality place and the goals of best practices in planning. The collective vision of a creative city, or the elements that are attractive to creative people, as derived from the interviews of Providence’s planners, policymakers and activists, includes:

- Authentic identity with historic legitimacy - not a cookie-cutter, invented identity (as is increasingly seen throughout the United States)
- Attractive infrastructure/architecture (including a mix of new and historic structures)
- Mixed land use (no office parks)
- Affordable housing
- Efficient public transportation

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- Good education
- Easily accessible recreational opportunities
- Communities with opportunities for residents to create change and impact future development
- Accessible government leaders and peers
- Friendly to arts, culture, and small business

Saul Kaplan of the Business innovation Factory makes a clear distinction between creativity and innovation, however. While the assets of a creative class-oriented city are essential to urban economic health (because they attract creative people), creativity is merely an input. It is important to harness creative workers to produce the output, innovation, and generate new value (especially through new collaborative business models). This leads to the discussion and collective perception of creative economy in Providence.

Is Providence a creative city?

Does Providence fit the creative city rubric described by Landry’s Creative City, Florida’s Creative Class or Howkins’ Creative Economy? Two studies that measure Providence functioning as a creative city show that the city bodes well.

The work of Richard Florida ranks the Providence metropolitan area among the largest 49 metropolitan areas in the United States. Providence ranks in the top 50% in three of the seven metrics used to measure the standing of the creative economy, in those that relate to population diversity, and the presence of arts and cultural “producers”, while falls behind in generation of patents and high-tech activity.

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<td>Melting Pot Index</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Diversity Index</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>17 Bohemian Index</td>
<td>Measures the number of producers of cultural amenities</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Gay Index</td>
<td>Reflects an area's openness to different kinds of people and ideas</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Innovation Rank</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Creative Class Rank</td>
<td>% of Creative Workers, innovation, high-tech industry and the Gay Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>High Tech Rank</td>
<td>Using the Milken Institute's widely accepted TechPole Index</td>
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A study of perceptions of members of the creative class in Providence finds that the city does function as a creative city, with a number of the amenities contributing to a high quality of place.

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12 Ibid.
as referred to by Richard Florida, and an entrepreneurial creative community that values the city’s scale and authenticity, and is committed to its social issues.\textsuperscript{14}

Furthermore, members of the planning community interviewed for this thesis confirms that creativity and innovation have always been important to Providence’s identity and economy, fueled by the presence of educational institutions like the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Johnson and Wales, and Brown University, and supported by pioneering community arts organizations like AS220.

**ACTION**

**Providence’s Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative**

The Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative is just one of many actions that fit the “creative city/economy” rubric, not the epitome of what is happening in Providence. While expecting that one single, centralized initiative fuels the creative economy/city contradicts the idea of the holistic and collaborative planning central to the creative city, this initiative is the most clear and direct example of how one part of the Providence community has addressed the issue of creative economy, methods for measuring this economy, and provided ideas on how to grow it.

The Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative was an effort by thinkers and policy advocates to convene practitioners around attempts to discuss, define, measure and support the creative economy. For the purposes of this research, the process, metrics, language, and responses of the effort’s participants have been examined to understand this deliberate approach to stimulate creative activity. However, it must be noted that the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative is only one of many creative activities in the city.

**Formation**

The Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative was initiated in 2002 by New Commons (a think-tank focused on economic, social, cultural and physical development), the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council (RIEPC) (a non-profit research corporation sponsored by the state of Rhode Island and the private sector), and the Providence Foundation (a non-profit group representing 115 businesses dedicated to the revitalization of downtown Providence). The initiative was built entirely outside of the purview of city government on the premise of growing Providence’s economy based on the “creative aspects of place.” The initiative’s organizers were inspired by Richard Florida’s creative capital theory, and his broadening of the definition of the creative economy to include not only the workers of the creative industry, but those (suburbanites) attracted to creative output at the city center. This expansion of the creative economy to the metro area fit the vision of Providence as a growing important part of a larger regional network.\textsuperscript{15} The effort coincided with a change in mayoral administration with the hope of advocating for a new vision for Providence that focused on the creative economy.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Beth Collins, Director of Research, Rhode Island Economic Policy Council. Interview by author, Providence, RI, March 14, 2006.

28
The team was introduced to the work of Richard Florida through a technology conference organized by the RIEPC. Florida was subsequently invited as a keynote speaker and consultant on the Creative and Innovative Economy effort. Members of the Providence community cite Florida's work as "born" in Providence - the city was even the site of the book-signing launch for "Rise of the Creative Class."

The Creative and Innovative Economy project effort aimed, through a series of conferences and research, to broaden the discussion on creative and innovative economy, and foster "Linux-type" collaborations through networked conversation including members of the arts, cultural, institutional, public, private, non-profit, and entrepreneurial sectors. The focus was first, to understand and define the creative economy:

"We decided there was enough of a trend in terms of what was going on with economy - we needed to understand where the assets were in the creative field and how to take advantage of it. Providence has strengths in design, health, universities, and arts. We had to understand where the creative sectors were going, where non-creative sectors were going, and what assets and liabilities we have."  

Second, the Initiative aimed to collectively identify and understand undervalued, strategic assets - old warehouses and mills, ethnic neighborhoods, universities, immigrants - in order to build upon and market the city's strengths, and to improve the quality and attractiveness of the urban environment for the individuals who support the creative economy. In a departure from Florida's lexicon, a deliberate decision was made not to utilize the term "creative class" (and use creative people instead) in order to avoid the common misinterpretation of a focus on an educated elite that fails to communicate the diversity of the actors in the creative economy.

Projects

The Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative was a process including research and conferences. It began with a focus on learning how to measure the creative economy and the assets that contribute to Providence's "quality of place." The chronology of the process was as follows:

The Creative Hub Proposal
The Creative Hub piece was part of the initial application in 2002 to the Rhode Island Foundation by the Creative and Innovative Economy trio of organizers for funding to move forward on studies measuring the creative economy. The proposal highlighted the need to conduct research specific to the creative economy and was a response to the industry cluster analysis conducted by the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City the previous year. The Creative and Innovative Economy team was dissatisfied with the results of the previously

16 Leaver, interview by author.
17 Baudouin, telephone interview by author.
18 Leaver, interview by author.
conducted “Providence Neighborhood Market Study” due to a disagreement over the ultimate focus on “upward mobility of people that need access to the economy” instead of gaining a better understanding of the conditions and current presence of the “creative and innovative economy.” The Creative Hub proposal was a response to the ICIC study, and called for a new set of actions to study and support Providence’s creative and innovative economy:

1) study creative economic and business development functions
2) market the Creative Hub beyond Providence and Rhode Island
3) send artists and business people out to learn from cities with successful creative infrastructure
4) identify, preserve and expand places to develop informal acquaintances
5) create positive synergy between artists and technological aspects of creative economy

**Providence Creative Benchmarks study**

The Creative and Innovative Economy team hired Catalytix (Richard Florida’s research group) in conjunction with the Richard Florida Creativity Group, to conduct a creative economy benchmarking study. The study assessed Providence’s performance in terms of Florida’s “Three T’s of Economic Development:” technology, talent and technology, in comparison to other American cities. The city was found to be weak (below the national average) only in the area of technology – as measured by number of patents, patent and high-tech growth, and the Tech-Pole index. Overall, the city was lauded for its economic development strategies, having “consistently backed the arts, culture and lifestyle amenities, and higher education, and taking care to weave them all into an authentic urban fabric.” The study laid out recommendations for leveraging the city’s strengths in quality of place and for strengthening the technology sector, and lead to a series of meetings and sessions that influenced Call to Action.

**Call to Action**

Published in 2003, the Call to Action was derived from a series of talks, workshops, and planning sessions with Providence’s key thinkers and practitioners from the fields of planning, economic development, art, culture, biomedical sciences, technology, education, and housing. These efforts had input by Richard Florida. The Call to Action outlined the basis of the resulting vision and economic strategy to position Providence as a creative place. Year 2000 employment statistics were used to define five elements of the creative economy, representing 18% of the jobs in Providence, and anchoring another 40%.

- Bio-medical research
- Knowledge creation (universities)
- Design and business innovation

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20 Leaver, interview by author.
Technology – IT and creative elements
Arts and culture

Art and culture were intentionally placed at the bottom of the list in order to avoid another common misunderstanding of creative city as a focus on the arts community. The Call to Action had the overarching goal of growing the creative and innovative economy and building a high-quality, attractive urban environment to attract and retain creative people. This document created “an open partnership with distributed leadership” where no one entity was responsible for implementation, or could take credit for the initiative. The overarching goal was to influence actions, not create programs. The document did, however, outline a 5-year action plan with recommendations for 52 action projects through which the greater Providence community would implement the strategy. Actions ranged from general suggestions like “support immigrant and neighborhood creative people by establishing neighborhood incubators of creativity”, to more specific prescriptions outlining actions and calling actors such as “increase support for venture formation, doubling funding for the Slater Technology Fund to $5 million to commercialize more research and forging partnerships among city and state economic development officers and the Slater Centers to help locate new and growing firms in the City.” A secondary report that documented the Creative and Innovative economy process of research and conferences, and with a detailed analysis of the lessons learned throughout, was distributed to economic development and planning professionals.

The Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative has ceased to exist in its original form due to exhausted funds, but a number of other projects carried out by New Commons and the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council continue the conversation. Two of these projects, the Young and Restless, and Brain Drain research specifically address retention of the 25-34 year old age group in Providence. The Young and the Restless identified young people’s perceptions of Providence’s strengths and weaknesses and ways to improve access to educational and career opportunities. The Brain Drain project is attempting to develop a comprehensive, citywide university internship program.

A History of Creative Action in Providence

Overall, Providence’s creative city approach appears to be organically imbued in the work of many agencies and initiatives that have taken place over a good deal of time. While the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative has stimulated discussion of creative economy/city across organizations, it is important to also look at the wider range of activities outside of the formal effort that were identified by practitioners in order to understand the city’s innate approach to economic development, and its impact on planning practice. The Call to Action effort, per se, has had limited direct impact on planning practice.

Members of the policy, arts and cultural communities interviewed for this study identified the following formal events as contributing to the creative and entrepreneurial activity in the city over time. The list is by no means exhaustive, but illustrates specific and identifiable tools and

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24 Leaver, interview by author.
25 Collins, interview by author.
actions that are perceived by the community as contributing to, and having tangible impacts on
the city’s creative reputation, and the revitalization of downtown. It is important to note that
none of the practitioners interviewed volunteered the benefits of the Creative and Innovative
Economy Initiative until asked specifically about the effort.

**Providence Arts and Entertainment District**

The City designated the first Arts and Entertainment district in the United States in 1996, with
the goals of keeping artists living and working in Providence, and revitalizing downtown. The
City provided both sales and income tax incentives to artists living and working in the district,
and for developers who converted former industrial and commercial space downtown into
residential spaces. While the district gained national attention, attracted a number of performing
arts organizations, and highlighted the city’s commitment to the arts, the benefit for artists was
tenuous, with only a small number having taken advantage of the credits since its creation. 26 An
additional criticism of the district is that the goal to provide space for artists did not consider the
existing infrastructure, whose architecture was more appropriate for gallery and show spaces
than artist studios. 27

**Rhode Island Historic Tax Credit**

In 2002, the state of Rhode Island adopted an historic tax credit for the rehabilitation of historic
commercial structures. The credit is a dollar-for-dollar refund on state income taxes of 30% of
the cost of the rehabilitation (as long as the cost of the rehabilitation is 50% of the certified value
of the building). The credit may be transferred to another individual or corporation, and
developers have utilized this provision as a way to get up-front cash for development. When
used in combination with the federal historic tax credit, a developer recoups 50 cents on each
dollar spent on preservation. 28,29 The credit has had significant impacts on the redevelopment of
downtown Providence, where much of the state’s historic industrial infrastructure is located, and
189 buildings have taken advantage of the subsidy. 30

**Downcity Partnership**

In 1999, the Downcity Partnership created a $10 million fund that provided revolving, short-
term, just below market rate loans for investment in downtown development. Although the loans
were not enough to make a significant impact downtown, 31 and was subsequently controlled by
the Providence Preservation Society to be a part of the larger Providence Preservation Revolving
Loan Fund, the flexibility of the fund and its compatibility at critical points of development (eg.
providing bridge loans) was unique and an important factor in fueling redevelopment before
there was private interest in Downcity (or Downtown Providence). While the ultimate financial
impact is estimated to be much lower than the private investment now driving the redevelopment

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28 The rehabilitation project must cost at least 50% of the value of the building (adjusted basis).
29 State of Rhode Island Historical and Preservation Commission, “Tax Credits and Loans,”
31 The Rhode Island Foundation, the organization responsible for the Downcity Partnership and fund aided the
rehabilitation of two residential complexes and one boutique hotel.
of downtown Providence, the Downcity Partnership was an important part of the early redevelopment movement.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{AS220}

AS220 is a community arts organization in Downtown Providence that developed and maintains a mixed-use creative center that houses affordable live/work studios, performance space, galleries, darkroom and a café for artists of all experience, backgrounds and ages. The center has been an important part of the movement to revitalize Downtown Providence by being at the forefront of the redevelopment of Downcity. AS220 is an advocate for the artist community in Providence, and has been an important voice in the discussions of maintaining housing affordability and the preserving historic spaces in the face of the rapid redevelopment of Downtown.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Rhode Island Film and Television Tax Credit}

The Film and Television tax credit was enacted in 2005 to contribute to economic development in the state by providing tax credits (of up to 25\% of the investment or production costs) for state-certified motion picture productions. The intent of the legislation is to attract private investment, increase Rhode Island’s competitiveness with other states that provide such incentives, and employ local artists.

\textbf{Providence Office of Arts, Culture and Tourism}

The Office was created in 2003 by Mayor Cicilline and was placed at cabinet-level within his office to “catalyze artistic innovation, and economic and human development across the city,” explicitly linking the role of arts and culture to the economic health of the city.\textsuperscript{34} The Office promotes arts, cultural and tourist activities in the city, and has been lauded by practitioners across city departments for its ability to extend limited funds ($300,000 of general fund money of which $160,000 is granted back out to art organizations) to the implementation of a wide-range of events by leveraging partnerships with a variety of other city agencies and non-profit organizations. The movement of the office to cabinet-level is a significant illustration of the city’s commitment creative activity.

\textbf{Business Innovation Factory (BIF)}

Formed in 2004, the BIF is a state initiative housed within the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation. The initiative extended from the “Innovation @ Scale” strategy for economic development and focuses on bringing together innovators across all sectors – arts, science and business – to create platforms and communities that allow experimentation to occur more naturally. The creator, Saul Kaplan, cites Providence’s already present creative class as critical for innovation in Rhode Island:

“We’re lucky to have the fodder – we just have to take it to the next level.”\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Mike Jenkinson, Chief Financial Officer, Rhode Island Foundation. Telephone interview by author April 3, 2006.
\textsuperscript{33} Umberto Crenca, Artistic Director, AS220. Telephone interview by author, March 24, 2006.
\textsuperscript{34} Providence Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism, “Vision for Arts & Culture in Providence”, Providence Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism, \url{http://www.providenceri.com/ArtCultureTourism/vision.html}.
\textsuperscript{35} Kaplan, telephone interview by author.
The BIF helps to create experimental learning opportunities through methods such as storytelling. Ongoing projects include devising innovative strategies, through public-private partnerships, for the implementation of border-to-border broadband wireless across the state of Rhode Island, a patient health care model, and student centered education.

Center for Design and Business
The Center is a joint venture between RISDI and Bryant University with the goal of fostering economic development by supporting small design firms. The center operates on the premise that these firms would rather practice craft and set their own references for success than simply grow a large business. The Center owns and operates an incubator space with furnished office space leased to firms that are 1-3 years old, want to grow, and are coachable. Tenants pay market rates and are limited to a maximum two-year lease, but become part of a program of mentoring and guidance to help the business move forward. The Center provides services such as business expert roundtable discussions to provide businesses with advice and feedback on business development challenges. The Center is an example of the role of Providence’s universities in local economic development; where the universities subsidize businesses services, and provide space and staffing for entrepreneurs.

REACTION

Impact of the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative
The Creative and Innovative Economy team’s strategy was to influence the incoming mayoral administration. Since many of the goals of the initiative were similar to those of Mayor Cicilline’s and were discussed throughout meetings leading to the Call to Action, as indicated by city employees interviewed for this thesis, it is difficult to trace the direct impacts of the initiative on planning and economic development efforts. In most instances, projects were ongoing and the initiative perhaps garnered the support to help them move forward. Nevertheless, the following actions recommended by the Call to Action have been completed:

- Promotion of city art and cultural activities were consolidated for creation of the Mayor’s Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism.
- The Providence Economic Development Partnership was established by the mayor, transforming the former commercial lending arm of the Planning Department into a more broad-based economic development corporation.
- The mayor negotiated with local colleges and universities for payment in-lieu-of taxes so that the tax-exempt knowledge institutions will contribute $50 million over the next 20 years through some taxes and direct investment in local government and urban development.
- The creative economy has been woven into statewide promotional efforts although no formal marketing campaign specific to the creative economy has been built.

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36 Blue Sky Rhode Island is a campaign launched by the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation in 2004 to attract business investment to Rhode Island by promoting the state as a small-scale, nurturing environment for business innovation.
The team of thinkers and policy advocates feels satisfied that The Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative met the challenge of garnering funds to create a broad community discussion around the creative economy, collectively better understand where Providence stood in relationship to the rest of the world, and infiltrate political actions.37

"Before, the conversation of building an economy on arts and creativity was considered a foolish marginal idea. After this process, everyone from the governor to the mayor to the community thought this was a wise strategy and that’s an amazing transformation."38

Practitioners have witnessed the benefits of reorganizational efforts such as the creation of the Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism in the mayor’s office to combine economic and cultural development and planning practice and formally support ongoing collaborations across those boundaries:

“We have direct connection to the planning department regarding economic development and the arts – it’s still brewing, lots of work to do there, but it’s on the radar screen. The Providence Economic Development Partnership works with us on a series of loans for arts and cultural organizations. It also plays a role in terms of tourism, where we’ve put a lot of money over the past few years. We have a direct relationship with the planning director – and can give input on zoning. They come and ask us about neighborhoods...we are present at the discussions of zoning, (spot zoning and zoning for the city), talking about what is important for neighborhoods. We’re at conversations about nightlife and club problems – we’re always there as a voice. While we’re there representing arts and culture, we’re also representing a vitality that the city needs to have in order to be successful.”39

Stimulating conversation provides benefits, but doesn’t equal action

It is difficult to assess whether the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative directly translated into a tangible change in planning that would not have occurred otherwise. What participants did note, however, was that the broadening of the circle of participants in the discussion no doubt benefited those organizations that are instrumental to the creative effort, but perhaps overlooked by policymakers. Umberto Crenca, Artistic Director of AS220 commented on planners’ and policymakers’ improved understanding of the value of his work as a result of the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative in Providence and the creative city movement more generally:

“I’m pre-sold – people familiar with that stuff is my advance sales team. When I go in the door I don’t have to catch them up to the same degree that I used to. I can say Richard Florida and that covers a lot of ground.”40

37 Baudouin, telephone interview by author.
38 Leaver, interview by author.
39 Lynne McCormack. Director, Providence Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism. Interview by author, Providence, RI, March 14, 2006.
40 Crenca, telephone interview by author.
Conversation is an important method for bringing the issues of creative economy to the attention of policymakers, and a way to better inform policy with the real needs of creative constituents. However, Crenca sees a limit to an initiative based on discussion:

‘I’m not supporting that a bunch of white men planners sitting in a room thinking can make this place the next creative place and lead to policy – it’s not that linear.’

Furthermore, conversation is not beneficial if it does not fully represent all relevant stakeholders. While the conversations can be engaging, Crenca finds participation in efforts such as the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative unsatisfactory due to their inability to have a fully diverse representation of community actors.

“Not because they don’t try, but because the most interesting people at the table don’t spend time doing those things. New immigrants, artists, don’t see any benefit or value. The artists that make it happen in a community at any given moment are focused on making it happen – not theorizing on making it happen.”

Furthermore, he pointed out that participation in such initiatives is simply too time consuming and provides no compensation, making it difficult for certain practitioners, and segments of society to commit to - defeating the attempt to broaden the discussion across traditional boundaries. This was reflected in Lynne McCormack’s experience with the initiative:

“When they brought him [Florida] in, I wasn’t a part of the charrettes, but read the materials. The only reason I wasn’t part was because I was buried in the parks department, and my boss wasn’t really engaged. But Robert Leaver’s stuff came through our office.”

Conversely, Robert Leaver of New Commons saw the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative as a venue for fostering entirely new collaborations for the Providence planning community:

“In my experience in this city, that process was the first time such a motley crew of thinkers got together. You had people from the neighborhood, long-haired wild public artist types like Bert and Barnaby, the suits from the Policy Council, planning types, academic researchers, free range radicals – such an interesting group to come together and identify relevant projects.”

While the initiative may have functioned to bring new partnerships to light, Lynne McCormack argues that collaborations are happening in Providence city government, in creative ways, out of necessity. She described her work with universities and non-profits:

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41 Ibid.
42 McCormack, interview by author.
43 Leaver, interview by author.
"Universities partner with our partners! Brown and RISDI are huge partners in SoundStage. At Riverside Mills project, we’re partnering with CDC’s (Olneyville). The Providence Tourism Council gives our department $100,000, which bumps it up to $400,000 - we work collaboratively with them in terms of granting. We have a lot of partners...this is all new."44

The divide between thinkers and doers

Interviewees repeatedly referred to the difficulty in collectively engaging in action to promote the creative economy/city, and challenge in moving from conversation to practice. In Saul Kaplan’s opinion, the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative, per se, was not the source of action. Action is the work for practitioners, and the “thinkers” are relegated to stimulating an environment for engagement:

“New Commons tried to have a conversation in Providence to get people engaged in Providence...it’s stronger on the teeing up a conversation – a lot of good relationships come from those conversations. Did it change the policy? It’s still early...they keep trying to bring it down to specific action items – midway in the current process... I’m action-results oriented...and build in appropriate amount for talking. OK, but what can we do, what can we influence and do to make progress? I check out of those conversations that we keep having over and over. I don’t have enough time because I have to look for leverage."45

And in the transition from theory to practice, Crenca notes that the planners in Providence have misinterpreted the work of Richard Florida:

“They don’t really get him. They translate him into building some bike paths.”46

He suggests that Florida and Landry do in fact call for the social change, cultural integration, and the nurturing of creativity that is important to ensuring of quality of life for everybody. The failure lies in the translation to planning, simply because of the widespread collaboration and long-term perspective required to support an overhaul in planning practice.

“That work is very complex and never ends. That’s not convenient for policy makers and politicians that have to think about elections – they respond to the immediate, knee-jerk reactions. Long term visioning and planning, and policies associated with it – the best information out there often gets translated into some immediate action that has a kind of visceral appeal, but it’s not linked in a more complex way.”47

44 McCormack, interview by author.
45 Kaplan, telephone interview by author.
46 Crenca, telephone interview by author.
47 Ibid.
Does a creative city/economy initiative have real value in Providence?

Throughout the interviews, the reaction to the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative by participants in the effort was limited. Interviewees, instead, continuously referenced their own creative practice, which they saw as outside and independent of the formal effort, and attributed their efforts to Providence’s indigenous creative environment.

“We have a certain geography, a certain set of characteristics: we didn’t tear down the bulk of our infrastructure, we’re very compact. Although we’re small, we have a cosmopolitan population, we’re near Boston, quality of life is excellent, the cost of living is lower than Boston... I can ride a scooter downtown, see people I recognize, with a diversity of things to eat and do, quality of arts offerings, top gastronomical offerings, beautiful architecture (who, for people who don’t pay attention it creates an ambient atmosphere) and we’re close to beaches. A confluence of things make us lucky.”

Again and again, interviewees expressed the coincidence of characteristics that contribute to a unique, creative environment in Providence more so than any planned intervention to support the creative economy does. The following are the most identifiable assets:

Scale

“Providence is like a real city that someone left in the dryer for too long – everything is here, but miniature.”

All interviewees cited the importance of Providence’s (and Rhode Island’s) small scale to increasing opportunities of innovative collaboration by allowing increased accessibility to government and creating a familial, livable community with “.5 degrees of separation.”

The benefits of a small planning community allow for frequent informal interactions, and a stronger communication between neighborhoods and downtown groups, non-profits, artists, and government.

Artists

Providence has more artists per capita than any other city in the country. Aside from the legislative and organizational efforts to support revitalization through the arts and culture, artists themselves have long been an integral part of community, politics and development in Providence. Long before the real estate trend of loft conversion and development, artists in the city were squatting in abandoned industrial buildings that provided the spatial and economic benefits important for creative activities. In the early 1990’s, the city tried to demolish an abandoned mill in the Olneyville district that artists who occupied it called Fort Thunder, due to

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48 Wood, interview by author.
49 Donald Eversley, President, Providence Economic Development Partnership. Telephone interview by author, April 1, 2006.
50 Leaver, interview by author.
safety concerns around the deteriorating infrastructure. In response to the debate between artists and the city during this time, Umberto Crenca of AS220 describes his discussion with city officials regarding the direct impact of artists on building preservation and the development of affordable housing:

“Artists are noisy...that’s a good thing. All you have to do is flip your mindset. This dialogue about preserving building, affordability - feed it and fuel it...A whole educational process happened around the dialogue and war that happened at Eagle Square - a consciousness and awareness that is now a community knowledge around the issues. When you try to pinpoint the efforts of policymakers around this, the unpredictable reactions at Eagle Square probably had more impacts that down the line resulted in a sensibility that allowed the legislation to pass tax credit for movies - those real policy things that really do have impact.”

**Universities and Colleges**

The presence of institutions like RISDI, Johnson and Wales, and Brown University has provided Providence with a supply of well-educated young people. More importantly, institutions like RISDI and Johnson Wales export entrepreneurial students who have contributed to the set of home-grown creative businesses, and who provide assistance through programs like the Center for Design and Business.

**An innate understanding**

Providence’s creativity is a self-fulfilling prophecy, as described by Cliff Wood, where

“The city is full of creative people who succeed because they bring other creative people around them...a simple calculus.”

Many of the stakeholders interviewed referred to an innate understanding in Providence of the importance of arts, culture and innovation, and the organic occurrence of creative collaborations to support revitalization.

**Authenticity**

“Our strength is that we still have it here. We have to build on it, not destroy it. It’s hard to create, but we already have it. We need to restore and rebuild and not lose it.”

Ironically, many study participants attributed Providence’s ability to maintain an authenticity of architecture, place and history to the lack of investment in the city. Because of disinterest in the city during the major post-World War II urban redevelopment, Providence escaped the massive

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52 Crenca, telephone interview by author.  
53 Wood, telephone interview by author.  
54 Baudouin, telephone interview by author.
modernist interventions that are now perceived as disruptive to the historic scale of urban downtowns.

NEW PLANNING PRACTICE?

What has changed?

The Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative did not have a direct impact on planning practice in Providence. Instead, it helped to outline and share the ongoing creative actions that practitioners attribute to a coincidence of environmental and social factors. The effort didn’t provide anything new to the planning community. In fact, practitioners have expressed the precise inability of programming or policy to capture or prescribe the characteristics that contribute to the creative city.

"There are policies in place – the historic tax credit, the focus on arts and culture as an economic development tool – there are a list of 50 things that if I looked at them – they’ve been important. But it’s not a magic leprechaun. It’s a series of things and people building on each other – people creating opportunities. There is a certain understanding, and luck of place that we capitalize on." 55

Challenges

All practitioners interviewed in Providence supported the broader conversation surrounding the place of the creative economy in economic development and planning practice. Arts groups were especially cognizant of the benefits to their efforts of the wider recognition of creativity as an important factor in growing Providence’s economy. However, practitioners in Providence want more than just a venue to discuss and share. The Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative did not provide a coordinated plan for action, and Providence’s practitioners are looking precisely for opportunities for creative action. Most practitioners interviewed feel that they are already supporting creativity in the city without the help of theory, programs or policies. Providence’s greatest challenge is determining whether engaging in an organized approach to planning the creative city is valuable, and how to do it.

Opportunities

Providence has a set of characteristics that make the environment ripe for creative activity: small scale, authenticity of place and architecture, a prolific creative class, and new and accessible mayoral administration that is open to change. However, despite the creative approach to planning already in place, the city still has great room to grow economically, and a host of socioeconomic issues that must be addressed. Providence’s future economic success depends on its ability to navigate the influx of investment and increasing real estate development while preserving the elements that currently make it an attractive place for the creative class and creative economic activity.

55 Wood, telephone interview by author.
Providence's Creative and Innovative Economy Summary Matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formation</th>
<th>Providence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>Year initiated</td>
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<td>Catalyst</td>
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<td>Goals</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside consulting services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative definition/focus</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3 | Boston: A practical strategy...in theory

BACKGROUND

Boston’s innovative economy

Boston is the center of economic activity in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and New England, and is one of the leading cities in the country in terms of generating high-skilled, knowledge-based employment.\(^1\) Knowledge-based jobs accounted for 58% of jobs in the city in 2000, seeing 29% growth from 1992 to 2000 (faster than the national rate).\(^2\) The high-tech crash and recession in 2000 of course affected an economy so reliant on the tech sector, and the Boston metropolitan area lost over 24,000 information technology jobs from 2001 to 2004.\(^3\)

Innovative industries based in high-tech and biotech are both borne from and attracted to the more than 50 universities and research institutions in the Boston area. Boston’s history of innovation has been instrumental to the region’s economic development, and spurred the rapid suburbanization and commercial development around Route 128, home for many of these industries. Richard Florida’s rankings of creativity in the largest regions in the United States capture the importance of such innovative activity, placing Boston in the third spot for overall creativity, and second in the presence of high tech activity.\(^4\)

Planning climate

The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) is charged with the mission of guiding Boston’s physical and economic development. Boston has a strict public review process for planning and development, which a BRA staffperson interviewed for this study claims contributes to the already relatively high cost of developing in the Boston compared to other U.S. cities.\(^5\) The public review process reflects the city’s commitment to public benefit and participation, and provides ample opportunity for neighborhood involvement in the development process through neighborhood visioning meetings and resident Impact Advisory Groups. Incidentally, the costs of this review process make it more difficult for small developers to work in Boston than larger development firms with more financial resources. As a result, Boston ranks as the eighth least affordable city in the United States.\(^6\)

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1 Knowledge-based industries include publishing, communications, computer-related services, finance and insurance, real estate, legal services, health services, education, engineering and management.
5 Heidi Burbidge, Artist Space Initiative, Boston Redevelopment Authority. Email correspondence March 21, 2006.
A new focus for economic development and planning in Boston

Boston has a strong tradition of cooperation between arts and cultural organizations and the business sector. Most recently, in the face of the high cost of living and doing business in Boston, the role of arts, culture and creativity has been given a new role in economic development programs. Organizations such as the Massachusetts Cultural Council have been instrumental in funding seed grants for cultural activities that boost economic development, such as the development of studios for artists displaced from the increasingly expensive Fort Point Channel District. In response to the city’s affordability issues, an “at risk” lofts public relations strategy was launched to bring affordability at the Fort Point Channel to the attention of Boston’s mayor. This conversation between the arts and cultural communities and municipal agencies was epitomized by the appointment of Susan Hartnett, a consultant on the city’s artist housing initiative, to the director of economic development at the BRA in 2001. The city’s recent attention to the role of creativity in the local economy set the stage for the formation of Create Boston.

ACTION

Create Boston

Formation

From its inception, the Create Boston effort has been based in research - an attempt to gain a clearer definition of the creative economy in the city, and a better understanding of the workings and needs of the creative industries that define this economy in order to keep Boston competitive. Housed within the Boston Redevelopment Authority’s (BRA) Economic Development Division, the program was inspired by New England Council’s Creative Economy Initiative to define and measure the impact of the region’s creative economy, and understand how to support, keep, and create more of those jobs.

In response to the initiative, the BRA conducted research to identify local creative industries showing growth potential, and selected performance, music, film, design, media, and crafts, accounting for 30,000 jobs, on which to focus. A collection of employment and earnings data on these six industries continues to be an important function of the initiative (conducted by the BRA Research Division), and important to assessing the impacts of the program.

Create Boston was officially launched in 2005, and its actions thus far certainly reflect its youthful existence. With one designated staff person, the program is still in a stage of research.

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7 Meri Jenkins, Program Manager, Massachusetts Cultural Council. Telephone interview by author, March 17, 2006.
9 The New England Council is a regional economy and quality of life advocacy group.
and discovery. Create Boston doesn’t have its own budget, but is one of the seven BRA Economic Development Division’s initiatives:

- Backstreets (focused on supporting small-medium sized commercial and industrial businesses)\(^{12}\)
- Boston Retail Market
- LifeTech (to provide development support for biotech firms)
- Mainstreets (supports the 22 Boston National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Streets Districts)
- Onein3 (facilitates communication between the 20 to 34 age group and the city)
- Artist Space
- Create Boston

There is often overlap across the seven initiatives, as noted by Carol Walton of Create Boston, who cites that her work with furniture companies has also involved getting support from the Backstreets program.

Create Boston focuses on retaining and growing existing small to mid-size (manageable) commercial and non-profit enterprises rooted in creativity within the six industries outlined by BRA research. Most recently, Create Boston has pursued the development of digital media, including video gaming, and is amidst an effort to understand (with input from academics and financiers) on how to better support the industry.

*Modus operandi*

Create Boston relies on indigenous industry knowledge from both the input of an Advisory Board, and solicited through community outreach. The 20-person Advisory Board includes academics and practitioners that represent a cross-section of all city agencies, from the Department of Neighborhood Development to the Mayor’s Office of the Arts, Tourism and Special Events. The Board gives guidance on the program’s provision of services and target industries. Carol Walton described this interplay in the current work with digital media. Per the recommendation of the Board, Create Boston has conducted industry-specific focus groups including representatives of the Boston Cyber Arts Festival, the Dean of Berklee School of Music’s music division, and digital game developers to understand what the industry’s specific needs are. Focus groups helped Create Boston to understand the industry’s difficulty in artist and engineer recruitment, and Create Boston responded by helping to link companies to an academic institution.\(^{13}\)

Although there is collaboration with other economic development initiatives, Create Boston is a centralized source of a number of business development services. The website boasts one dedicated staff-person accessible to industries seeking assistance, and advertises access to the

\(^{11}\) Carol Walton, Manager, Create Boston. Interview by author, Boston, MA, March 15, 2006.

\(^{12}\) According to Carol Walton, Backstreets was the BRA’s first economic development initiative after which all others were modeled.

\(^{13}\) Walton, interview by author.
following services in Real Estate, Financing, Business, Workforce development, and Research as described further:

**Real estate**
- Create Boston provides assistance in business relocation (including navigating permitting processes), and access to the BRA’s real estate portfolio.

**Financing**
- In order to aid small companies lacking financing and traditional capital in the jump from artist to entrepreneur, Create Boston is forming a creative business fund. The BRA has already set aside money for this program, but the funding mechanism is in the early stages. Create Boston is looking to Accion International’s program for nurturing startups as a model.
- Create Boston provides access to a variety of local funding opportunities, including Boston Local Development Corporation low-interest loans.

**Business**
- Create Boston provides start-up companies business plan preparation and marketing assistance. It also refers new companies to the Department of Neighborhood Development for technical assistance for business development.

**Workforce development**
- Create Boston helps companies to access workforce sources.

**Research**
- As it develops data on creative industries, Create Boston provides access to this information.

Create Boston is a flexible, growing program and its services are expected to expand as experience brings a greater understanding of what services are most useful to creative industries.¹⁴

Create Boston’s most significant (and tangible) work to date is the ongoing development of the Ropewalk incubator space in the Charlestown Navy Yard. This adaptive reuse was modeled after the Torpedo Factory in Arlington, Virginia, and involves the redevelopment of an historic building to address the need for workspace for creative industries. Incubators are hardly a new idea, but the Ropewalk allows Create Boston to, for a 2-5 year leasing period, provide a nurturing environment for fragile companies. This includes the provision of networking opportunities, and access to non-profit technical support. The success of the Ropewalk depends on new partnerships with non-profits (for technical assistance), and the development of a temporary incubator space at the Marine Industrial Park (to house companies waiting to transfer to the Ropewalk). The Ropewalk is an example of collaboration across BRA initiatives, straddling both Create Boston and the Artist Space Initiative. According to Carol Walton, if programmed properly with the right mix of businesses and academic involvement, and if a truly

¹⁴ Ibid.
collaborative effort, the Ropewalk will be a great success that can help to brand Boston as a friendly environment for creative businesses.”

**Other Creative Activities**

There are other initiatives and activities that complement the work of Create Boston in supporting the creative economy:

**BRA’s Artist Space Initiative**
The Artist Space initiative is older than Create Boston, and is focused on contributing to livability in Boston by creating permanent space (including live/work, work-only, rehearsal spaces and performance venues) for artists in Boston. The initiative used a survey of spatial needs of artists in order to develop a set of design guidelines for commercial and non-profit development of artist space. An artist certification process was created where artists, proving that they have body of creative work, may apply for space.15

**Adams Arts Grants**
The Massachusetts Cultural Council gives grants to a wide range of programs that use cultural assets to boost economic activity. These grants are a standard mechanism for creating revenue, jobs and entrepreneurial activity, but by building the capacity of cultural businesses. Grants might support activity such as helping artists to encourage businesses to think creatively about the role of artists in corporations, and employing them in corporations. On the other end of the spectrum, the grant may support a group such as the Fenway Alliance, a consortium of arts, cultural and educational organizations looking to improve the community’s access to jobs in those organizations. The goal of the Adams Arts Grants program is to support a wide variety of interests with a broad agenda and to help forge partnerships, not to define how the city should approach economic development.16

**REACTION**

**Staying Competitive**

Throughout the interviews, practitioners repeatedly referred not to the importance of Boston’s ability to build its creative economy and attract the creative class, but to the value of capitalizing on the city’s existing creative assets and reputation in order to remain a global creative competitor. For practitioners, the means to achieving these goals seem to lie in the city’s ability to:

1. market and identify itself as a creative place
2. take action and illustrate the commitment to creativity, and
3. learn from its own actions and those of its competitors

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15 Burbidge, email correspondence.
16 Jenkins, interview by author.
The following discussion illustrates Create Boston’s role in undertaking these three actions.

**Marketing/identity**

Boston practitioners emphasize the importance of recognizing the city’s existing assets and identity in order to successfully move forward economically. Boston has long been recognized as an academic center, and the BRA’s focus on creative economy utilizes the city’s academic activity to transition to a creative/innovative identity. For example, Carol Walton points to how the conferences that take place in Boston as a result of the presence of so many academic institutions provide many opportunities to market the city’s creative potential. She claims that an event like the 2006 Saggraph conference for computer graphics and interactive technology strengthens the Create Boston commitment to digital media. Similarly, festivals are an important way to brand the city. Again, Walton points to the festivals in other competing cities, such as Austin’s South by Southwest music and film festival, and their ability to market local talent. While the city has a number of neighborhood festivals that celebrate Boston’s diverse neighborhoods, one large festival celebrating that diversity in neighborhood character and demographics would create a stronger image for the city. She advises that Boston must learn what its true assets are, decide how the city wants to be identified, and act on it.\(^7\)

**Taking action and illustrating a commitment to creativity**

Create Boston has attempted to illustrate the city’s commitment to this creative action through the redevelopment of the Ropewalk. In fact, city staff expressed that until now, the greatest strength of the Ropewalk has been to give visibility to the Create Boston program.

"We can always do more. But it’s a good start, and the program has become well known. Ropewalk is how city is contributing to accomplishing goals of Create Boston – putting our money where our mouth is."\(^8\)

The importance of this tangible output is twofold: to provide a real benefit to the community of creative industries and to legitimize the Create Boston effort.

**A learning process**

Create Boston is a young initiative, still in the exploratory stage of program development. Therefore, until now, most action has been a focus on learning about the creative assets identified through research, understanding industry needs, and how to keep Boston competitive. The goal of staying competitive with other cities permeates the discussion about the creative movement in Boston, and Carol Walton has even identified a specific list of cities with which Boston is contending: Austin, Toronto, Seattle, Providence, and the United Kingdom generally.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Walton, interview by author.

\(^8\) Sonal Gandhi, Senior Project Manager, Boston Redevelopment Authority. Telephone interview by author, March 23, 2006.

\(^9\) Carol Walton sees the United Kingdom as far more advanced than the United State in supporting creative industries.
In addition, recent focus on the film industry in Boston has pushed Create Boston to look towards another group of cities in an attempt to learn about models for providing incentives to filmmakers. With the realization that in order to keep Boston a competitive venue for filmmaking it would also have to provide a tax incentive, the Massachusetts Production Coalition asked Create Boston to act as advocate during its effort to push for the state tax incentive legislation ultimately enacted in late 2005.²⁰ Create Boston provided letters of support, as well as assisting with research on Boston’s film industry.

The practitioners interviewed for this study see Create Boston as part of a larger effort to urge cities to talk to each other and learn. While the learning process is slow, by sharing, cities can develop a unified definition of creative economy and creative city, and develop a language to clearly express these ideas. Carol Walton notes the increasing number of creative city/economy conferences happening around the world as evidence that this collective learning and understanding is on the rise.²¹

However, Ms. Walton finds that the conversation specific to creative economic development tools and models and planning practice remains limited. She attributes the lack of willingness to share information on the evolution of creative initiatives to:

- not enough opportunities to come together and share
- the view that sharing is a threat to the differentiation that makes a city competitive
- the creative city lexicon is underdeveloped and confusing

As a result, Boston has looked inward, across offices and to the community, to learn from its own planning practice and proactively differentiate itself from other cities by incorporating best practices. Create Boston consistently works with other BRA offices, especially the Research Division. It looks to the prolific Boston academic community for advice, it envisions partnerships with non-profits to serve as managers or providers of technical assistance, and engages the community in focus groups.

While the collaborative learning process is, at best, a vision for the future of the Create Boston effort, there has been some opportunity for practice around the development of the Ropewalk. In collaboration with the Artist Space Initiative, focus groups made up of a cross section of Boston’s creative producers, from the Boston Foundation (a philanthropic organization to support Boston as a community) to woodworkers to musicians, took part in a Ropewalk site visit and discussion of their respective expectations for the site.

“This was a great use of time because we got to hear from them, first hand, about what they’d like to see. We learned that they wanted low cost space, that parking was not as important as we thought it would be, and learned that the North Bennett Street School would rethink their move to the Navy Yard so that graduates of the school could use it.”²²

²⁰ The legislation provides sales and use tax credits to the producers of movies, videos, television programs and commercials working in Massachusetts.
²¹ Walton, interview by author.
²² Gandhi, interview by author.
The focus groups were a successful way for practitioners to gain real insight on future use of the site, and for the potential users of the space to communicate their needs. The process helped to bring to light the challenges of developing space for a mix of creative industries including consideration of structural elements that yield both the office space required by a videogaming company and ideal live/work space for artists.

Those interviewed generally supported Create Boston’s direct tactic of focusing on creative industries as part of a larger economic development strategy. However, they found that the effort has not been enough to fully integrate creativity into economic development practice.

“[Creative economy] hasn’t been included, and people are trying to figure out how to come at it. Massachusetts Cultural Council is the only agency in the state supporting these efforts in cities, and have held people’s hands.”\textsuperscript{23}

While the Council (a state organization) has not directly funded Create Boston, it has funded other creative efforts in Boston, especially those designed to boost mutual benefit between the cultural life of a community and the re-engagement of residents and the businesses cluster. Ms. Jenkins emphasized the importance of Boston’s reputation as an art city, and the presence of great cross-section of artists:

“We have a lot to work with, it’s both a blessing and a curse…and it necessitates a joint conversation between municipal government and other public sector agencies, the cultural sector and businesses community. If we are all looking to build robust economic future, we must factor in the artistic community in terms of what it can do for place and perception of place.”\textsuperscript{24}

She adds that such projects take time, and that the Create Boston effort is still a work in progress, facing many challenges.

**Program Challenges**

Practitioners see a number of structural challenges limiting the Create Boston’s effectiveness. Create Boston relies heavily on its board of academic and industry experts for direction and organization. Some practitioners who have attempted to work with the initiative find that the board, this most important asset, to be inactive, translating into the effort’s inability to get things done.\textsuperscript{25} Second, as one of many of the BRA’s initiatives, project tasks are distributed across departments. For example, industry research continues to be handled by the BRA Research Division, and financing for the Ropewalk was passed onto another department once the focus groups concluded.

\textsuperscript{23} Jenkins, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} An arts/culture expert.
“Another group is dealing with how to finance the Ropewalk... it’s a collaborative effort passed through departments.”

Ms. Jenkins of the Massachusetts Cultural Council also points to the challenge of limited program funding, which she attributes to the city’s priority of maintaining basic services. She finds that the city cannot be as dynamic as it would like, and is unable to freely invest in new initiatives. She says that the city may perceive a creative city initiative as risky since the approach is not yet fully understood, and perhaps even a relatively prosperous city like Boston does not have the luxury to experiment.

“The notion of [creative] ideas is messy, and people have to be open in order to really make change. Boston may have more of a problem than Baltimore – if you’ve gained ground, you don’t want to lose it. This comes out of a sense of loss, not gain. If you have nothing else to be afraid of, then what the hell?”

However, she does see Create Boston as a definite move towards supporting the creative economy:

“Create Boston is a beginning – its intent support creative economy business is a significant one.”

NEW PLANNING PRACTICE?

What has changed?

While practitioners believe that the Create Boston initiative leaves room for the development of new tools, in practice, the planning and economic development tools are the same - an existing model merely aimed at a new sector. The practitioners did, however, identify significant changes in leadership that illustrate a change in perception of economic development and the city’s interest in the creative economy. The movement of two prominent members of the arts community to head the BRA’s Economic Development Division and to spearhead the Artist Space Initiative illustrates a commitment to the creative city. Furthermore, practitioners see industry and government coming together in a new way, through efforts such as Create Boston and the redevelopment of the Ropewalk, as an altogether new way of approaching the creative economy.

While interviewees report the benefits of increased collaborations, conversation and learning across sectors, and a more cognizant leadership, planning practice has only changed in that tools are applied to a newly defined economic sector.

Challenges

26 Gandhi, interview by author.
27 Jenkins, interview by author.
28 Ibid.
Despite its existing reputation as a place of creativity, the Create Boston initiative itself still relies heavily on learning to understand and support creative activity. It has chosen to do so through the advice of academics and practitioners with economic development and industry experience. With the understanding that the Create Boston effort is young, the results, to date, have been limited. Although there is a clear, centralized website and staff to advertise the services provided, there is no organized tracking of activity in order to be able to assess the effort. Any evidence of action (except for the joint effort around the Ropewalk) is anecdotal. This is a missed opportunity to enrich the experience, especially given the participants’ emphases on the importance of learning and reflection in the process of program development.

Opportunities

Create Boston is certainly a practical approach to bringing visibility to the city’s commitment to the creative economy (albeit, through an explicit “branding” of creativity in the city). The effort (responding to an evolution of thinking about the creative city by non-profits and consultants) has attempted to define Boston’s most active creative industries, and outline ways in which to support them. Rather than focus on the broad, and often ambiguous ideas of the amenities that contribute to urban livability and the nurturing of the creative milieu, the program provides a defined set of services that practically address industry development. Create Boston outlines a definite strategy to support Boston’s continued performance as a creative city, and ultimately keep it competitive with others. The successful translation of this strategy into practice depends on a continued commitment by the City and planning community.
Create Boston Summary Matrix:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formation</th>
<th>Boston</th>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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</table>
4 | Creative Baltimore: What’s in a name? (the repackaging factor)

BACKGROUND

Baltimore’s Economic Climate

The story of Baltimore’s recent economic history is typical of a post-industrial American city, and it is still recovering from the mass exodus of manufacturing firms and a dramatic loss of population since World War II.¹ ² The city saw major crack and heroine epidemics in the 1980’s, and accompanying middle class flight from downtown. A number of urban crises, including the highest syphilis, drug addiction, and crime rates in the country led to decades of disinvestment, economic segregation and decline.

However, the past decade has brought a shift in Baltimore’s economic climate, and practitioners have a positive outlook for the future of the city. Baltimore fares well in comparison to the Midwestern United States “rust belt” cities with which Baltimore is often categorized. Between 2000 and 2004 the greater Baltimore area saw a population growth of .8% while cities like Cleveland and Pittsburgh lost residents.³ Median personal income in Baltimore’s rose 2.6% from 2001 to 2003, faster than the national metropolitan area average growth of 1.5%.

There is positive change happening as people move back to the Baltimore area. The cost of living and demand for housing have risen, with the median home price increasing by 30% from 2002 to 2004.⁴ An improved image of Baltimore as a place to live and visit is illustrated by a number of top media rankings, including third place in Salary.com’s ranking of U.S. city average salaries, a top ten spot in Frommer’s ranking of “up and coming cities”, and first in U.S. News and World Report’s ranking of best hospitals.⁵

Baltimore is well positioned for growth. As an affordable alternative to Washington D.C., Baltimore benefits from the proximity that provides opportunities for its resident population, such as employment. When grouped with Washington D.C., Baltimore ranks sixth in the nation in “entrepreneurial dynamism”, or providing opportunity for starting and growing businesses.⁶ The Baltimore metropolitan area houses a number of acclaimed research institutions like Johns Hopkins, and has the highest expenditures on academic research and development in the United States.⁷ While manufacturing continues to leave the region, Baltimore’s anchor industries – educational and health services – employ 16.2% of the workforce, and continue to grow and attract high skilled labor. In addition, U.S. Federal military base realignment has already begun

¹ Baltimore has lost a third of its population since 1950, and now has under 650,000 people.
⁴ Ibid., 92.
⁵ Ibid., 10.
⁶ Ibid., 63.
⁷ Ibid., 6.
to bring new jobs to the Baltimore area. David Costello, director of the Baltimore Mayor’s Office of Community Investment predicts that growth in the construction and real estate industries is bound to follow.

The role of culture and arts in Baltimore’s revitalization

Over the past six years, Baltimore has begun a rebirth with social and economic issues being at the forefront of this change. But practitioners also noted the cultural and environmental characteristics that create growth potential. Baltimore is a walkable city with sixteen universities, and it is the cultural hub of Maryland, housing most of the State’s major cultural institutions. As part of the new and positive outlook for growth in Baltimore, practitioners reported that the city has taken proactive steps in encouraging the confluence of arts, cultural and economic development. According to Randy Vega, director of Cultural Affairs at the Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts, this shift occurred with the transition to Martin O’Malley’s mayoral administration in 1999. Mayor O’Malley showed an understanding of the importance of the cultural community in building the new Baltimore by making it one of cornerstones of his campaign platform. While the primary focus of revitalization is on “crime and grime”, practitioners perceive a concerted effort by the mayor to support investment in the cultural and heritage resources that are instrumental to Baltimore’s neighborhood development.

ACTION

The Creative Baltimore Initiative

Formation

Baltimore’s Mayor Martin O’Malley spearheaded the Creative Baltimore effort in the spring of 2004. Inspired by Richard Florida’s discussion on the creative class at the Baltimore Conference for Community Foundations 2003, the Mayor took action to push the city to mobilize public and private partners around the idea of attracting creative class residents to Baltimore in a coordinated fashion.  

The Creative Baltimore White Paper was written by a working group of designated city staff in the Office of Community Investment (OCI), and presented to a conference of mayors (including attendees such as Mayor Bloomberg of New York City) at the Peabody Institute. The goal of the initiative, as presented in the White Paper, was to bring municipal offices, organizations and

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8 Justin Fenton, “Base-linked Jobs Begin to Arrive in Maryland,” Baltimore Sun, May 19, 2006.
9 Baltimore currently has one of the highest crime rates in the United States.
12 The Peabody Institute is a music and performing arts institute and conservatory affiliated with Johns Hopkins University. The Creative Baltimore Initiative White Paper was presented at the institute’s symposium “The Role of the Arts in Urban Revitalization” on April 23, 2004.
citizens together to “devise a coordinated and comprehensive strategy that positions and promotes Baltimore as a diverse, creative, and opportunity-rich city in order to attract, engage and retain creative class residents.” Through discussion, this broad-range of participants identified and shared ideas for relevant projects, and the necessary investment to push them forward. In keeping with the spirit of Richard Florida’s theory, the initiative’s focus on the creative class was intended to advance Baltimore’s economic development by attracting producers of creativity and innovation. Baltimore defined their creative class as:

- Artists
- Students
- Young professionals
- Creative entrepreneurs
- Empty nesters

Creative Baltimore is not an officially funded program, and has no formally designated staff person. Instead, it has moved forward as a loose collaborative effort. Mayor O’Malley asked OCI to take charge of the program, and the Office’s role has been to act as a documenter of the private and public players in the effort, a facilitator of partnerships, the middleman between core participants, and a clearinghouse of creative project ideas. OCI is not the city’s traditional planning arm, but focuses on garnering investment in human, economic and community development. The Office has most recently focused much of its energy on public schools, including the “Believe in Our Schools” campaign to organize community and contractor volunteers to donate labor and supplies for school infrastructure improvements.

*Modus operandi*

Charged with leading the Creative Baltimore discussion, OCI first engaged in research on creative city precedents (looking to cities such as Austin and Philadelphia), which included an informal survey of initiative websites and reports. The office found a set of reports documenting and describing creative populations and economic activity, but found no resources outlining specific actions, policy tools or program funding mechanisms. Unable to find prescriptive recommendations for creative city program implementation, OCI relied on ideas from the Baltimore community to push forward.

OCI convened a core group of creative class affiliates around the five targeted creative class groups. Participants were invited to city hall for a series of meetings to discuss projects to promote Baltimore’s strengths that are attractive to the creative class. The group generated a list of recommendations for project goals for inclusion in the Creative Baltimore Action Plan outlined in the White Paper, and provided the structure for the project-based approach. Subsequent meetings resulted in the building of two inventories: existing creative projects and ideas for new creative projects (and their target audiences).

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13 Workforce development is undertaken by the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development, and is not officially a participant in the Creative Baltimore effort.
Projects

Through a set of discussions and focus groups, the formal Creative Baltimore effort has resulted mostly in cataloguing existing and new programs in order to facilitate further discussion of and partnerships for implementation of projects to “attract, engage and retain” the creative class. Ongoing projects were given an ex post creative designation. That is, a wide range of ongoing and planned projects that contributed to the promotion of Baltimore as an attractive, high quality urban environment were included in the Creative Baltimore inventory in order to emphasize their importance to the creative class.

“The city launched Creative Baltimore. When the leader of the city launches an initiative, everyone trying to get the city to respond, responds. They cast a broad net, tried to capture anything that looked like a creative city-type idea – that’s how the Fun Guide got onto the list – which is fine, because at least someone in the mayor’s office knows what we are doing.”

The following subset of the long inventory of “current” and “new” projects represents ongoing or completed actions specifically called out by the interviewees:

Creative Baltimore Fund
The Creative Baltimore Fund is the only new project linked to Creative Baltimore that was a direct outgrowth of the initiative; it is administered by the Baltimore Office of Promotion of the Arts (BOPA). However, the Fund’s goal is limited to the support of organizations such as non-profit culture, arts, history and heritage groups.

“We borrowed the name – but it was geared towards the cultural community.”

The Fund was created with money from the City’s first surplus in twelve years, to encourage and help support programming for children. The $750,000 2006 Fund was distributed in the form of small grants to 44 organizations of varying sizes and operating budgets, to plan a variety of projects like providing curriculum-based study guides for theatre, and the Baltimore Youth Film Festival.

Baltimore Collegetown Network
The Network is a consortium of 16 Baltimore area colleges (including 120,000 students and 30,000 faculty and staff) dedicated to boosting the city’s reputation as an attractive place for students and young professionals. The program works towards three goals:

1) attract students to the region
2) engage students in the community

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15 While the fund was inspired by the Creative Baltimore effort, it remains tied to the program in name only. It is funded by the city’s general fund surplus, and focused on cultural events, independent of the activity of the Creative Baltimore initiative.
16 Vega, telephone interview by author.
3) retain students after graduation

The goals came out of a marketing effort that Collegetown began in 2003 during the period that Creative Baltimore was being conceived. Collegetown staff was directly involved in the formation of Creative Baltimore, was also informed by the work of Richard Florida, and was simultaneously looking to the same cities as precedents for attracting young people (e.g., Boston, Philadelphia). Creative Baltimore and the Collegetown marketing effort came out of the same roots, and the direct influence of Collegetown on Creative Baltimore is evident. The Network's efforts over the past 10 years include the Collegetown Shuttle to improve access to the city (in response to the poor public transit in Baltimore), a joint university marketing campaign, and the development of an online database of citywide internships accessible to all students in Baltimore.17

Baltimore Fun Guide
The Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance used a program in Philadelphia to advertise cultural events, and research by the Pew Institute on cultural event awareness, as the basis for the creation of consolidated online events calendar with an email list for discounts (Baltimore FunSavers). The Fun Guide has 8,000 subscribers and provides information on events at Baltimore area cultural organizations of all sizes. The Alliance is a new model in Baltimore for a collective cultural initiative for growing audiences for cultural events. It represents 128 organizations. Nancy Haragan, director of the Alliance, sees programs such as the Baltimore Fun Guide as crucial to bringing together a range of institutions that would not otherwise collaborate. She believes that disseminating information to the public is a basic democratic responsibility.18

Crabtown Public Art Program
The Crabtown Public Art Program was set up by the Creative Alliance, but administered by the OCI. The event raises funds for city schools by commissioning the design of 170 crab sculptures by local artists, displaying them throughout the city, then auctioning them. OCI continues to engage Crabtown artists by matching interested participants with schools interested in having students take part in the design and decoration of the sculptures for subsequent auctions.

Access Baltimore
The Access Baltimore reward program was coordinated by the Mayor’s Office of Children, Youth and Family per the recommendation of Richard Florida to provide discounted tickets for cultural events to people serving as youth mentors Baltimore. The program functions on the assumption that cultural organizations (including museums, performing arts venues, the zoo, and science centers) have unsold tickets as an event approaches, and that setting aside a few tickets per event/month for the mentors and students would urge higher mentor participation rates while increasing the visibility of cultural events. Unlike the designation of other Creative Baltimore projects, Access Baltimore was proactive in approaching the Creative Baltimore advisory group (which included arts and cultural venues that would donate tickets), in order to gain project approval and funding.

17 Kristen Campbell, Director, Collegetown Network. Telephone interview by author, March 20, 2006.
18 Haragan, telephone interview by author.
Live Baltimore
Live Baltimore is an aggressive marketing campaign undertaken by the Live Baltimore Home Center, an independent non-profit organization created in 1997 to promote Baltimore’s livability. The campaign’s ultimate goal is to increase the residential tax base, stimulate population growth, and promote a positive image of Baltimore. The campaign promotes the affordability of the housing stock in Baltimore, the “small town” character of a city in a major metropolitan area, and provides access to homeownership, rental, and relocation services. Discussions at Creative Baltimore meetings suggested that Live Baltimore is an appropriate campaign to attempt to work out a language to attract the gay/lesbian community.

The Creative Milieu

While the following projects were not specifically designated during the focus groups and discussions that yielded the Creative Baltimore project inventory, the interviewees consistently identified these ongoing actions as important to the goals of the initiative:

Highlandtown and Station North Arts and Entertainment Districts
In 2002, Baltimore was selected for two of the first round of arts and entertainment district designations by the state of Maryland. The districts have contributed to the revitalization of two neighborhoods suffering from blight and disinvestment through tax incentives for individual artists and companies that employ artists, and rebates for arts related renovations. Nancy Haragan finds the districts to be “works in progress” that depend on a real commitment to the spatial needs of artists through a rezoning effort in order to be truly successful.

Baltimore Comprehensive Plan
The Planning Department is currently in the process of rewriting the city’s comprehensive plan. According to Planning Director Otis Rolley, the drafting of the new plan embodies the principles of the creative city. The plan is a diversion from the standard Baltimore master plan format (based on answering regulatory obligations) and is instead, a business plan broken into four themes: live, earn, play and learn. Planners tried to marry regulatory requirements into these themes so that a resident (customer) can understand what the city is doing in terms of planning the creative city. The Planning Department is reaching out to an audience of residents (current customers), and to people who may want to live there, giving them a clear idea of how the city is working to improve quality of life in Baltimore. A major focus of the plan is to update the city’s zoning to remove barriers to creative class activities (eg. live/work spaces, ground floor entertainment). Rolley notes that the plan is a vision for Baltimore for which the audience is the user of services and amenities, not the regulator.

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22 Haragan, telephone interview by author.
REACTION

Practitioners’ Responses to Creative Baltimore

Impact

Many of the programs that came out of Creative Baltimore inventory were ongoing before its conception, making it difficult to assess its real impact on planning practice. Overall, attempts to assess the impacts of the Creative Baltimore effort have been vague, and mostly anecdotal.23

“There have been some small changes since the Creative Baltimore initiative, but the overall impact of the initiative on planning practice is limited.” 24

The general response from participants in the study is that the Creative Baltimore initiative has had little effect on practice by the economic development and planning community. Practitioners did not see any new ideas come out of the meetings, as all of the projects discussed were already underway. David Costello of the OCI questioned the value of collectively brainstorming a set of projects that provide no real opportunity for partnerships with private investors, suggesting that the city would better benefit by collaboratively devising proposals with investors:

“There’s nothing on there that a developer might take part in – it has to do with amenities and city projects and is not necessarily a list to take to investors.”

Costello doubts that developers feel the impact of the initiative, and suggests that developers would, at best, use general creative city principles to better market their own projects. Most participants recognized the difficulty of drawing the creative city/class principles into policy and saw Creative Baltimore as only fuel for discussion.

However, some participants find that simply sharing ideas is very important for practitioners, allowing various agencies throughout the city to step outside of their own framework for practice, and get inspiration from the work of others. Arts and cultural institutions were more expressive of the benefits of this opportunity to not only learn from others, but to bring their own efforts to the attention of those who may not normally be engaged. The Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance claims to have benefited from the increased visibility of their program. The cultural and arts community in Baltimore is becoming increasingly proactive in their interactions across organizations and with city government, seeing the move beyond dependence on federal funding programs by building local partnerships as vital to securing their continued institutional existence. This change was exemplified through the creation of the Alliance, and Creative Baltimore provided the venue to express it not only to city agencies, but to other cultural

23 Friedman, telephone interview by author.
Likewise, Randy Vega of BOPA found value in the Creative Baltimore initiative’s attention to arts and cultural activity:

“Creative Baltimore has been successful in giving arts organizations legitimacy – there’s always the need to do more. The organizations are very needy – have capital and structural needs, and need more and better interesting ways to interact with people. At least things are being discussed now, and city money is being put behind it. When the mayor says this is important, the business community listens, the citizenry listens.”

The Collegetown Network, whose three-pronged approach to attract, engage and retain students is mirrored in the Creative Baltimore initiative also found that the discussion legitimized their effort:

“These ideas were really important to Collegetown – preaching to the choir for us. But to have other people saying it, having nationally recognized people talking about it, people understood our mission better. It’s helpful, and we don’t have to explain everything.”

Kristen Campbell, Collegetown’s director, saw evidence of this increased citywide fluency with the creative city/class concept when developing a new relationship with a funding organization. She found that using the creative class language with a party that “got it” helped to secure a grant more easily.

**In Practice**

Despite this anecdotal evidence of the benefits of the broader conversation around arts, culture and the creative class, there is generally a consensus that the structure of the Creative Baltimore program did not facilitate project implementation, simply because of the lack of commitment of funding for the projects.

“They put projects on a list – but don’t support or fund them.”

Practitioners cite the difficulty of testing new ideas and programs without financial support and note the lack of funding as a sign of a lack of true commitment to the Creative Baltimore initiative - a missed opportunity to transform the conversation into practice. Furthermore, participants cited a lack of leadership that limited effective implementation of the projects and ideas compiled:

“Creative Baltimore is helpful for stepping up and saying ‘we want Baltimore to be this way’ – but they’re not committed to providing a unified umbrella around this idea – they’ve abandoned it.”

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25 Haragan, telephone interview by author.
26 Vega, telephone interview by author.
27 Campbell, telephone interview by author.
28 Ibid.
29 Haragan, telephone interview by author.
The lack of leadership, combined with focus of the mayor's office on the "basics" of community and economic development, including public schools and the crime rate, allowed the initiative to lose momentum. Creative Baltimore clearly failed to urge planners and economic development practitioners to view issues in a holistic way. But simultaneously, there is recognition that the initiative was meant only to be a venue for identifying possible goals and action, and not coordinating implementation and funding initiatives:

"The [mayor's] Office never intended to be a planning agency, but rather to understand, and make a picture of Baltimore as creative city."31

This duality clearly illustrates a lack of clear goals and expectations for the Creative Baltimore effort, and the resulting struggle by both participants and organizers on how to effectively implement a new idea.

The Lack of a Roadmap

Richard Florida's creative capital theory has explicitly driven the thoughts and actions relating to Creative Baltimore's goals and efforts. While interviewees acknowledge the ideas of Richard Florida that inspired the initiative are not new, they do have value because they force practitioners to think about private investment, the real driver of economic growth. Cities like Baltimore do not have a surplus of resources to invest. And while attracting private investment for large-scale interventions is not new practice, thinking in terms of the creative class/city allows them to think concretely about the changes the actions they can take to help attract vital private investment.

"'Eds and meds' are vital to the city's growth, and likely growth, as well as smaller service businesses, large non-profit centers. These industries are considered parts of the knowledge-based economy, and would attract the creative class."32

In this context, the Creative Baltimore effort is, perhaps, a best attempt by a city with limited funds to really encourage a new way of reflecting on ongoing actions in order to understand their relationship to private investment and economic development.

"From a practical standpoint, we didn't have more money to focus on new things - have worked with ongoing projects like Collegetown, and we have an arts district - Creative Baltimore was able to shine more light on these efforts."33

While many practitioners interviewed in Baltimore are supportive of the principles behind the creative city movement as defined by Florida, they emphasized that the creative class theory (which they believe should be just one of one of many strategies a city needs in order to succeed

30 Costello, telephone interview by author.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
economically), falls short of providing practitioners with practical instruction. Practitioners in Baltimore expressed real frustration with the lack of a roadmap provided by Florida – none of the three creative city ideologies clearly lay out a translation into practice. The Creative Baltimore initiative was perceived by most practitioners interviewed as unsuccessful in fostering any new approaches to revitalization. Practitioners expressed the need for more than a general notion of the elements that make a city attractive:

“I’m looking at the [Richard Florida] book – it’s on the floor in the corner.”

The director at the OCI reiterated this frustration in describing the search for precedents during the initial stage of Creative Baltimore’s formation and the importance of learning from other cities.

“The challenge for the movement is, if you had to suggest ten things for a city to do and raise money, that they are not already doing, what are those ten things? Cities have always tried to do things that are new, and emulate each other…I’m still waiting for ten big ideas.”

A Marketing Tactic?

Baltimore’s approach to addressing the creative class and creative economy is based in the repackaging and marketing of ongoing initiatives in order to garner additional support – from the residents and organizations within the city and the people and investors outside. In other words, Creative Baltimore is a new title for the natural evolution of planning and economic development practice there.

“But there’s still value in it because it does give greater weight to those aspects of development. It gives a broader rationale that it is good to attract young professionals and look to empty nesters, that urban amenities play an important role and that environmental policies play an important role.”

Practitioners recognize the value of this marketing, however, not only for those outside the city, but to boost morale from within. The cultural and arts organizations expressed satisfaction with the greater legitimacy given to their causes by Creative Baltimore. For Nancy Haragan, Creative Baltimore helps to address the city’s biggest problem, “its pathological modesty - own inability to believe it’s a good place”. In thinking about how to reposition Baltimore in the new economy, practitioners are forced to discuss how they view the city, what assets are most valuable, and how to communicate them.

There is some debate among the Creative Baltimore participants as to whether the Creative effort should be marketed at all. First, there is a perception by some that there isn’t enough evidence to

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Haragan, telephone interview by author.
prove that Florida’s ideas are enough to make a city attractive, therefore, marketing them could work against the city. Second, concerns over authenticity of place would preclude the adoption of a catchy slogan - having to say the city is cool makes it not cool. Third, abandoned warehouses are currently used by artists. While developing them can provide the benefits of a tax base, leaving them undiscovered secures artists from being displaced by unaffordable conversions. Throughout Creative Baltimore meetings, artists and artist organizations repeatedly expressed opposition to marketing the city for any ends besides conventions and tourism. Artists stand to benefit from incentives, tax breaks, and zoning to allow live-work space - not from a publicity campaign pitching Baltimore as creative place. This scenario in Baltimore illustrates tension between artists and promoters of the creative class.

However, this marketing strategy is especially helpful for the initiator of the effort, the mayor. For many practitioners, the mayor’s office has emerged from Creative Baltimore as open-minded, calling for the support of action to boost the city’s creative potential, a focus that doesn’t leave room for marginalizing populations based on income, class or race.

**A passing trend?**

“I have not looked at the list in one year and a half.”

In less than two years since the start of the initiative, practitioners have seen a stalling in the activity of Creative Baltimore and in the general discussion about attracting the creative class as a growth strategy. Eric Friedman at OCI attributes this change to the discrediting of the creative class theory, and the lack of evidence that investing in nightlife, festivals, parks and greenspace, as suggested by Richard Florida, will guarantee attraction of the creative class. He states, frankly,

“There was more of a buzz a couple of years ago – people would have more readily classified a creative project then, but it seems to be dying down.”

Friedman sees city growth dependent on families with children, requiring more jobs and better schools, as at odds with the Creative Baltimore approach to focus on amenities for the five groups that make up the creative class. Other practitioners, however, see the broader creative city movement as a way to more succinctly talk about quality of life issues that apply to all residents of the city, including the new immigrant communities and academics from local universities.

The latest approach to address the amenities called out by Creative Baltimore initiative is the rewriting of the city’s comprehensive plan. Perhaps the reaction to the city’s latest repackaging effort (that is now in circulation for public comment) can help to identify whether the creative city movement will have lasting power in Baltimore, and whether, with a set of centralized

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38 Friedman, telephone interview by author.
39 Ibid.
40 Haragan, telephone interview by author.
41 Friedman, telephone interview by author.
prescriptions for action (new city ordinances, rezoning, green building), a creative city approach can in fact be implemented and contribute to Baltimore’s revitalization.

NEW PLANNING PRACTICE?

What has changed?

Creative Baltimore has not had a significant impact on planning practice. While two new tools have been used to address the city’s creative environment and creative class – the new Comprehensive Plan and the Creative Baltimore fund – they cannot be attributed to the success of Creative Baltimore, and are more likely a signal of the evolving focus of planning in Baltimore. Practitioners were generally positive about the discussions brought about by Creative Baltimore, and cultural organization in particular felt the benefits of broadening the conversation of economic development to include their work.

Challenges

Practitioners interpreted Creative Baltimore’s lack of funds and staff as a lack of commitment to the program. Furthermore, this commitment to a creative city approach is complicated by the inability of economic development practitioners to view the creative economy as part of a holistic approach to planning. Instead, the creative economy and creative class come second to Baltimore’s need to focus on the “basics” of economic development – crime, poverty and jobs.

Opportunities

There is a group of practitioners in Baltimore that are supportive of the focus on the creative class and creative economy more generally. However, the Creative Baltimore effort, succeeding only in bringing together various groups in a discussion of creativity in Baltimore, had too broad of a focus. The project inventory spuriously branded a very wide range projects as ‘creative’, and provided no roadmap for project implementation. The Creative Baltimore effort must move beyond marketing, and engage the practitioners that are willing and able to invest in supporting the creative class and economy.
Creative Baltimore Summary Matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formation</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
<td>Creative Baltimore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year initiated</strong></td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Catalyst</strong></td>
<td>the work of Richard Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>attract, engage and retain the creative class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Implementation**

| Approach/targets               | creative class                 |
| **Organizer**                  | City                           |
| **sector**                     | City                           |
| **name**                       | Baltimore Mayor's Office of Community Investment (OCI) |
| **Funding**                    | none, no staff position |
| **Implementing body**          | planning community at large - many different municipal departments and arts and cultural organizations |
| **Modus operandi**             | cataloguing of ongoing/new creative projects, meeting facilitation (no capacity for action) |
| **Research**                   | No                             |
| **Outside consulting services**| None                           |
| **Creative definition/focus**  | creative class: artists, students, young professionals, creative entrepreneurs, empty nesters |

1. Support for the Creative Baltimore Fund came out of the city's budget surplus money, but its goals and actions are focused solely on cultural activities.
5 | Analysis

Creative city initiatives in Providence, Boston and Baltimore surely illustrate the influence of the three major creative city schools of thought. In each place, with varying degrees of commitment and success, planners, policymakers, advocates and city officials are attempting to stimulate action to support the creative economy or creative class. This analysis first summarizes the extent of creative city practice in each of the case studies and the impacts of the initiatives on planning practice, as told by practitioners and participants. Second, the analysis attempts to understand the factors contributing to the current results of the initiatives by dissecting their formation and implementation.

Overview of Creative City Practice

Providence

"Providence is a more accurate picture of creative city development in U.S." ¹

Providence most successfully embodies the elements of a creative approach to city planning and economic development as outlined by Landry and Bianchini's "Creative City," but the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative cannot claim full responsibility. The city's creative strengths lie in the arts and design, and the organizations and policies supporting such activity have, in recent history, been instrumental to the redevelopment of downtown, and in shaping city governance. The creative initiative itself was not a single public, programmatic intervention as in the Boston and Baltimore cases; through a series of conferences and research, the organizers of the Creative and Innovative Economy did formalize the discussion about the creative economy in Providence, and they made a deliberate effort to extend the creative focus to activities supporting innovation in industries based in technology and media.

Providence’s creative spirit is reflected in the leaders in government, policy and economic development. Many of the players interviewed have non-traditional planning backgrounds, hailing instead from the arts, music, film, and cultural communities.² These practitioners are confident in their approach to planning (independent of the Creative and Innovative Economy initiative), and were participants, not initiators of the effort. The initiative is, however, another prime example of how planning and economic development activity in Providence moves across the traditional boundaries of planning and governance.

The Creative and Innovative Economy initiative itself, as a plan of action, is not clearly coordinated. It is difficult to capture the real impacts of this effort, although arts and cultural groups reported that the ensuing discussions made their search for funding and support easier. Instead, a confluence of factors - the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative, a planning

¹ Beate Becker, independent consultant, phone interview 2/21/06.
² Lynne McCormack – Director of Arts, Culture And tourism studied film at RISDI, Don Eversly – President of the Providence Economic Development Partnership - lawyer who represented independent musicians, Cliff Wood – presently a private developer and running for city council, former Director of Dept. of Arts, Culture and Tourism.
environment refreshed with the mayoral administration change, a history of investment and attention to the arts, educational institutions providing opportunities for innovation, a series of successful fiscal incentives, and what stakeholders call an “innate spirit” in Providence - contribute to the city’s “creative milieu.”

Despite the city’s success in functioning as a creative place, it is important to note that the creative economy is not a panacea in Providence. Despite a more creative approach to planning and economic development, the city still faces a host of socioeconomic issues.

**Boston**

Boston’s creative economy strengths lie in the presence of distinguished educational institutions and their influence on innovation in the high-tech and biotech industries. While there is an abundance of arts and cultural organizations, the competitive real estate market and associated affordability issues pose a more threatening environment for artists, startups and independent creative businesses. The Create Boston effort addresses this issue by providing support to art-based creative industries (while support for biotech remains a separate BRA initiative).

The Create Boston initiative is the youngest of the three city initiatives studied and is still learning. Yet, its strategy is the most informed by economic data and it has the most proactive approach. This approach follows the creative economy/industry model influenced by the work of Howkins, and implemented by Creative London. Its strength lies in its placement and marketing as a consolidated source of business services. These services have a defined set of industry foci and offer one contact person designated and easily accessible by small creative companies. In reality, the initiative is fragmented, relying on the services of a variety of other organizations and BRA efforts to provide professional guidance, technical services, financing, and research. The feedback from practitioners unveils the initiative’s limited impact, so far having only engaged in digital gaming (by fostering opportunities for collaboration between industry and academia), and partnered in the redevelopment of the Ropewalk (by facilitating focus groups for industry and community feedback).

Create Boston does not point to any new tools for creative economic development and planning. Instead, it tweaks traditional tools (by literally replicating an existing program) to fit a newly defined set of industries. Create Boston is a formalized program that markets services that practitioners in Providence note happens intuitively in economic development planning circles. In Boston, basic business development services are being applied to the creative sector and this has been given a new name and place at the BRA. These services are no doubt beneficial to fragile creative startups but there is significant focus on marketing the effort, and perhaps this emphasis masks a program lacking depth.

Boston’s creative city experience illustrates that having a relative economic advantage does not make the process of devising and implementing a creative city strategy any easier, although research has continuously helped the city gain a richer understanding of local creative strengths and potential. This extensive research is nonexistent in the Baltimore case. While Boston is not
a city facing dramatic economic transition like Baltimore and Providence, Create Boston still must work hard to bring attention to the creative economy, fuel discussions, and alter priorities.

**Baltimore**

"If a city wants to look at cost-effective populations to grow, creative class is the population to attract."\(^3\)

As a city grappling with a host of economic circumstances more severe than Providence and Boston, this observation has real credence in Baltimore. The City of Baltimore, unable (or unwilling) to invest wholeheartedly in a new creative city approach, organized an effort built on a repackaging of ongoing projects to attract a broadly defined population. The city attempted to institutionalize the work of Richard Florida without investing in a real course for action. Ultimately, Creative Baltimore was an attempt to make the creative city fit the city—a retroactive designation and marketing of a set of projects made to fit into the creative class program, rather than an attempt to understand (through research or reflection) what the creative city and economy mean in Baltimore and devising new strategies for urban planning and revitalization accordingly.

"Change in planning? No, but not a big ‘no’."\(^4\)

The Creative Baltimore effort may not have impacted planning practice, per se, but many organizations find it to be a clear signal from the Mayor’s office of support for arts, culture, and the creative economy generally. Furthermore, initiative participants found the collective discussions to be important opportunities to learn about the activities undertaken by various agencies and organizations in Baltimore—although, no new collaborations reportedly occurred as a result. The only real attempt to alter practice seems to be the reformatting of the Comprehensive Plan to a more “user-friendly” document—that is, easier for the creative class to read and understand the city’s commitment to quality of place. This strategy is again rooted in the idea of a new marketing model for the city, and it is difficult to attribute the project entirely to the Creative Baltimore effort.

Creative Baltimore lacks a focused commitment to identifying local creative strengths and identity in the ways the Boston and Providence initiatives do. Practitioners acknowledged the creative city idea as a movement away from traditional economic development measures that are based in the tradeoffs between revenue generation and service expenditures. However, the Creative Baltimore effort provided no guidance for a planning community facing difficulties in moving away from the traditional paradigm, and adapting a new creative city/class approach. Because of its desire, and the economic need to grow its population, Baltimore, like Boston, may need, more than Providence, to advertise an investment in the creative class to the outside world. However, within the planning community, Creative Baltimore has left a set of practitioners who

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3 David Costello, Baltimore Office of Community Investment, phone interview 3/17/06.
4 Ibid.
are optimistic about Baltimore's economic development, but without a clear roadmap or source for support.

Analysis of Creative City Initiatives

The following creative city initiative matrix summarizes the formation and implementation methods of each program. Because of the varying political, economic and demographic profiles in each of the three cities, this examination is not a comparison, per se, but a look across the three approaches in order to understand each attempt at creative city implementation, and what program characteristics can explain any common successes or challenges in three distinct environments for creative city practice.

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<tr>
<th>Formation</th>
<th>Providence</th>
<th>Boston</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Providence's Creative and Innovative Economy</td>
<td>Create Boston</td>
<td>Creative Baltimore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year initiated</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalyst</td>
<td>the work of Richard Florida</td>
<td>creative economy report by independent consultant</td>
<td>the work of Richard Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>grow Providence's economy based on the &quot;creative aspects of place&quot;</td>
<td>retain and grow existing small to mid-size commercial and non-profit enterprises rooted in creativity</td>
<td>attract, engage and retain the creative class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach / targets</strong></td>
<td>creative clusters (industries)</td>
<td>creative industries</td>
<td>creative class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizer</strong></td>
<td>non-profits and quasi-governmental research organization</td>
<td>city</td>
<td>city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>name</strong></td>
<td>New Commons, Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, Providence Foundation</td>
<td>Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA)</td>
<td>Baltimore Mayor's Office of Community Investment (OCI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding</strong></td>
<td>Rhode Island Foundation grant</td>
<td>no funding except for one BRA staff position</td>
<td>none, no staff position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementing body</strong></td>
<td>planning community at large - many different municipal departments and non-profit organizations and foundations</td>
<td>Create Boston</td>
<td>planning community at large - many different municipal departments and arts and cultural organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modus operandi</strong></td>
<td>research, meeting facilitation, reports (no capacity for action)</td>
<td>refers companies to business development services, real estate development, research, other technical assistance</td>
<td>cataloguing of ongoing/new creative projects, meeting facilitation (no capacity for action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside consulting services</strong></td>
<td>private consultant (Richard Florida/Catalytix)</td>
<td>private consultant (Mt. Auburn Associates, Beate Becker)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creative definition/focus</strong></td>
<td>creative clusters: biomedical research, knowledge creation (universities), design and business innovation, technology (IT and creative elements), arts and culture</td>
<td>creative industries: performance, music, film, design, media, crafts</td>
<td>creative class: artists, students, young professionals, creative entrepreneurs, empty nesters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Support for the Creative Baltimore Fund came out of the city's budget surplus money, but its goals and actions are focused solely on cultural activities.
Formation

Name
The name of the Providence initiative used for this study is based on the title of the “Call to Action” paper. Because the initiative is made up of a series of reports and conferences, it is generally referred to as the “Creative Economy” initiative by the organizers and planning community. Both Create Boston and Creative Baltimore seem to have greater marketing power, in that practitioners, whether their response was critical or positive, associated the names with a specific set of staff and activities.

Year Initiated
The Providence initiative is the oldest of the three initiatives, and since ending, a spin-off initiative is focusing on keeping youth and university graduates in the city. While Creative Baltimore has been in existence for just over a year, practitioners report that it has already lost momentum. The Boston initiative, on the other hand, is the youngest, and looking to gain visibility.

Catalyst
The Boston initiative is the only one of the three that was not directly inspired by the work of Richard Florida. While practitioners were well aware of, and commented on his work, Florida’s research group did not play a role in the effort. Instead, local private consultants with long-time experience in studying Boston’s creative economy, along with arts and cultural organizations, have been instrumental in contributing to the City’s understanding of the creative economy, and its impact on the region. Additionally, local housing affordability issues and the BRA’s recognition of the need to step in to support displaced artists (through the Artist Space Initiative) have naturally evolved into the provision of services and space for creative industries.

“In terms of looking at this special group, there has been a more proactive effort starting with Heidi’s live/work, then Carol’s work on creative industry. They need a place to just work – they might need loans and help finding a location, so how do we help them relocate?”

In Providence, the initiative organizers and participants proudly reported their work with Richard Florida even before the release of his first widely distributed work, “The Rise of the Creative Class,” lending to the argument that Providence has perhaps contributed the most of any municipality to the creative city model of thinking.

“We’re a little on the front end of the curve – we had Duany 15 years ago, Florida before he published his book.”

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5 Sonal Gandhi is speaking of the work of Heidi Burbidge and Carol Walton.
7 Umberto Crenca is referring to Andres Duany of Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company, a leading proponent of New Urbanism.
Goals
Create Boston has the most specific goals, reflective of the influence of the BRA “Backstreets” program to grow small to mid-size industrial and manufacturing businesses. The more loosely defined goals of the Providence initiative and Creative Baltimore illustrate the Florida approach rooted in quality of life to attract important economic actors (workforce). All three initiatives clearly share the ultimate goal of economic development, although Create Boston is more concerned with maintaining its competitive edge through differentiation than growing its economy outright.

Implementation

Approach
While the Create Boston and Creative Baltimore efforts clearly embody the creative industries and creative class approaches, respectively, the Providence approach is a hybrid. The strategy laid out in the “Call to Action” reflects both an economic development policy focused on five defined creative clusters and a broader consideration of the planning that contributes to the authenticity and vibrancy of Providence’s urban environment.

Organizer/funding
The creative initiatives in both Boston and Baltimore were orchestrated efforts of city government – the traditional economic/community development bodies in each respective place. No additional funding was allocated for either program other than one staff person in Boston. In Providence a non-traditional group composed of a think tank, semi-governmental economic policy institute, and a business advocacy group sought a grant to carry the initiative forward. The Providence case points to the presence of a broader community of actors concerned with shaping planning and economic development action in the city.

Implementing Body
Creative Baltimore was placed in the hands of the Office of Community Investment (OCI). However, the appointed role of the OCI was as organizer/facilitator, leaving the planning community and initiative participants to implement the projects identified. Without a formally designated staff or budget, Creative Baltimore has no real advocate.

“They put projects on a list and don’t fund them.”

As noted by Eric Friedman of the Office of Community Investment, the OCI has other project priorities and does not want to push for additional creative staff because of a perceived reduction in urgency from the mayor’s office. Perhaps practitioner’s in Baltimore need too see ownership by a single department with a mission better poised to carry out the work of Creative Baltimore would help such a program move forward more effectively. In addition, an identifiable group or agency responsible for implementation may answer questions about expectations for funding and

\[9\] Kristen Campbell, Director, Collegetown Network. Telephone interview by author, March 20, 2006.
action and would be better-placed to set goals and measure results (although this is contradictory to the spirit of a creative city initiative).

Likewise in Providence, the planning community carries out the strategies identified by the “Call to Action” and associated discussions. Create Boston, on the other hand, is a single provider of services. With one designated staff-person and easily accessible contact information, any industry needing assistance may seek it directly, as evidenced by the program’s work with the digital gaming and film production industries.

**Modus Operandi**
Create Boston is the only action-oriented creative effort linking companies to a set of business development services, and engaging in real estate development. Creative Baltimore and the Providence Creative and Innovative Economy initiative are designed to provoke and facilitate discussion about creative class and the creative economy, and foster collaborations across sectors. While both attempt to identify projects to meet the goals of the initiatives, they provide limited direction on structuring and financing new efforts.

**Research/Outside Consulting Services**
The New England Council’s 2000 report “The Creative Economy Initiative” (and subsequent private research on Boston’s local creative economy) provided a reference point for both the Providence and Boston initiatives. Organizers of the Providence effort reported explicitly reacting to the New England Council’s limited definition of creative economy. Create Boston, instead, embraced the four years of research prior to its formation, using it to structure the program and guide subsequent in-depth industry research. Both the Providence and Boston initiatives are rooted in a more analytical, research-oriented approach to understanding creativity. Furthermore, both cities employed the work of outside consultants to help carry out the work.

Baltimore, perhaps due to a lack of resources or lack of sincere commitment to the initiative, set Creative Baltimore in motion without a precise interpretation of the creative economy and creative class in the city. While the OCI conducted some investigation in search of precedents for creative city models and programs, no self-reflection on creative economic activity was pursued. The use of research and consulting services in the three initiatives is reflected in the longevity of the initiatives, where the “better informed” efforts in Boston and Providence exhibit an overall greater momentum and dedication than Creative Baltimore.

**Creative Definition/Focus**
Create Boston and the Providence Creative and Innovative Economy initiative identified a set of industries/clusters important to the creative economy in each locality. In the Providence case, action went no further than the definition of the clusters (no cluster-specific action was prescribed or carried out as a direct result of the initiative), although the effort was important to bringing attention to the programs and facilities to support innovation in those sectors.

Creative Baltimore outlined categories of individuals in lieu of identifying economic clusters or industries. This method was derived directly from the work of Richard Florida. While these populations were identified as the targets of the catalogued projects, the definitions went beyond Florida’s general notion only to include empty nesters. The inability to move beyond the work of
Richard Florida is, again, an indication of the lack of commitment to customize the initiative to address the existing conditions and future needs specific to Baltimore’s economy.

Because of the broad definition of the creative class in Baltimore, and the city’s general approach to identifying existing efforts or new efforts that would appeal to these groups, practitioners found the effort too cumbersome and unrealistic. With so much included in the parameters of the effort, the OCI had the capacity to do no more than catalogue the wide range of projects.

**Did the creative city initiatives inspire a change in planning practice? It depends on how you measure it...**

**New Actions**

In general, the reported impacts of the three creative city efforts are minimal to date. Boston and Baltimore are the only cities in which practitioners see resulting action in the form of the Ropewalk development efforts and Comprehensive Plan formulation, respectively. But while this small set of projects embodies the creative city spirit, it is likely that they would have been put in place in the absence of the creative city efforts and that they reflect the natural progression of planning in those localities. There is no doubt that the creative efforts enhanced each project but the Baltimore Comprehensive Planning effort (although it distinctly changed flavor around the time of the formation of Creative Baltimore) is an ongoing process, nine-years in the making. Likewise, plans for the Ropewalk were in existence before Create Boston, and responded, first, to the city’s recognition of the need for affordable artist housing and work space.

**New Tools**

Very little innovation in planning tools has emerged from the three creative efforts thus far. Create Boston simply reapplies a set of existing technical, financing, business development tools and an existing real estate product to a new sector. In Baltimore and Providence, when I asked practitioners to describe the tools that they, or some other city agency or organization were using to support the creative class/economy, they pointed to documents and financial tools that were outside of the purview of the creative initiatives. Participants in the Creative Baltimore effort consistently referenced the new Comprehensive Plan as a new model for a traditional planning document, for example. It is curious to note that in Providence particularly, a place where practitioners lauded their inherent creative and innovative sensibilities, practitioners identify the most traditional tactics – tax incentives - as contributing to the city’s creative milieu.

**Broader Collaborations**

In all three cities, practitioners and advocates who traditionally did not work together were brought to the same table to discuss planning and economic development issues. Interestingly, however, these players did not give the same credence to venues for discussion and strategizing around the creative economy/class principles as they gave to tangible and quantifiable planning action and tools. While participants recognized new interfaces and interactions at these meetings, the benefits were only referenced as ancillary, and not as major accomplishments of the creative strategies. If collective learning can be categorized as a collaboration, then all three planning...
communities benefit from the new type of discussions and from the sharing that came out of the creative city efforts (meetings and conferences in Providence and Baltimore, and focus groups in Boston) – whether to bring more visibility to the efforts of their own organizations, to get new ideas from others, or simply to be able to briefly step away from everyday duties and learn about the work of other agencies and organizations. Furthermore, in Providence, the stepping up of non-profit organizations to initiate this collaboration on an urban planning/economic development initiative, outside of government, certainly reflects a shift in traditional planning practice.
6 | Conclusions & Recommendations

Expectations for this study

This study’s focus on the creative city came out of a search for new tools for the redevelopment and revitalization of post-industrial cities. Based on preliminary research on creative city initiatives in Europe, I expected that in three American cities the conscious attempt to nurture a creative environment would foster a break from the “normal” rules and regulations of planning and economic development through the use of new planning tools and collaborations, a broadening of the community of planning actors to outside of the traditional planning realm of the public sector, new models for the development and financing of residential and commercial spaces, and new economic incentives. Instead, what emerged from this study as most interesting and valuable was not new solutions for growing a city’s economic vibrancy through a change in planning practice, but evidence of a whole new set of problems facing practitioners attempting a creative city approach to planning and economic development that hinder a change in practice.

Throughout my research, I was struck by the reliance on the work of Richard Florida. His work is the primary catalyst for the Baltimore and Providence initiatives, and practitioners interviewed for this thesis from all three cities referenced his creative class theory. In addition, despite the varied economic, political and demographic profiles in each of the three cities, practitioners in all cases are struggling with similar challenges in their effort to reframe (or resist reframing) their vision of economic development and planning for the creative city. The lessons to be learned from the creative city strategies in Providence, Boston and Baltimore go beyond an analysis of program implementation failures. Instead, any city attempting to engage in such a strategy should be aware of the lure of the simplicity of Richard Florida’s argument, the challenges of implementing a creative city strategy, and the difficulty of identifying actions and tools that can facilitate the reframing of planning practice.

Why a focus on Richard Florida?

Richard Florida’s message comes at a time when American cities, especially those second-tier cities like Baltimore and Providence that are coming out of years of post-industrial decline, are looking for opportunities for revitalization to grow their economies and populations. As cities are forced to rely less and less on state and federal financial support, they must look to their own limited resources and to participation by the private sector (as illustrated by the strides made in the redevelopment of downtown Providence). Furthermore, as globalization increases communication and mobility between cities and nations, cities seek a way to stay competitive and attractive to people and business (as in Boston). These are real concerns expressed by practitioners interviewed for this study.

In response, the creative city movement and the work of Richard Florida in particular, provides an appealing, cosmopolitan, pre-packaged solution for success. The Baltimore initiative is a direct response to Florida’s “The Rise of the Creative Class,” and is geared entirely towards attracting a generically defined creative class. Even in Providence, where practitioners express
opposition to conformity, Richard Florida’s work shows up in many places - driving the Creative and Innovative Economy effort, quoted in the opening of the mayor’s vision for the newly created office of arts, culture and tourism,¹ and, reportedly, on the desk of every staff person in the mayor’s office.² Practitioners are so eager for a quick fix they don’t fully investigate what Florida’s diagnoses really mean and many reference his work without a clear understanding of the principles he advocates. Nancy Haragan at the Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance noted, “90% of the people that like Richard Florida haven’t even read him.”³

Although Landry and Bianchini go farther in their attempt to map the steps of a new planning approach, Richard Florida’s simple creative class argument is more attractive to city leaders. Florida’s ideas are a simplified explanation for the workings of the new, creative economy and how cities stand to benefit from it. By focusing on the creative class, a city with certain urban amenities already in place (eg. research centers, ethnically diverse populations) is well positioned for economic self-reliance. Furthermore, the focus on the creative city gives a small American city access to a global network of urbane, forward-looking thinking and research (as illustrated by the UNESCO Creative City Network program).

The challenges of implementing a creative city initiative

The stories told by practitioners in Providence, Baltimore and Boston reveal a common set of challenges in the implementation of a creative city strategy, especially one that embodies Richard Florida’s creative class theory. These challenges are obscured by the simple and hopeful strategies put forth by the movement. First, it is important to acknowledge that practitioners are generally resistant to change. There are a number of theoretical explanations illuminating situations where practitioners are bound by an inability to reflect on their own practice. Competency traps limit innovation in planning practice; professionals like to do the work that they know and are good at. As Landry and Bianchini note, planners are reluctant to take the risk of reflecting on failures, as failure is not tolerated in political and bureaucratic environments.⁴ Donald Schon explains how a planner’s role is defined by both a professional role and his own way of framing his role. This self-reinforcing role can limit his reflection-in-action (or ability to see and understand his intuitive behavior).⁵ Laws and Rein explain the conflict that arises when practitioners are asked to reflect on their frame (or the knowledge and

2 Lynne McCormack. Director, Providence Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism. Interview by author, Providence, RI, March 2006.

80
schemas that guide their action) and call their intuitive actions into doubt. Any idea requiring a reflection of practice is challenging to implement.

The creative city idea is especially challenging to practice. The creative city asks cities to be modern and to think of a new way of addressing the 21st century and new economy. The challenge is twofold – cities must implement a new idea and this idea is one that is based on a whole new way of working. The difficulty of this transition expressed itself through the experience practitioners from all three cases had in rethinking the role of leaders, addressing social equity, expanding the planning community, and preserving authenticity in practice and place. Planners in cities attempting to engage in a creative city initiative must be aware of the following difficulties that arise when practitioners attempt to act on putting ideas to action:

Decentralizing leadership

A creative city strategy raises questions about expectations for leadership as a sign of commitment to a program. In all three cases, practitioners expressed the importance of a centralized commitment to the creative city initiative through a strong leader and a clear set of goals. In the case of Creative Baltimore, practitioners saw a lack of commitment first and foremost in the lack of the mayor’s support for the program. The mayor designated the Office of Community Investment (OCI) to take charge of the program but did not provide additional staff or funding. OCI staff members, charged with a number of other, perhaps competing responsibilities, were unable to fully invest in the effort. This situation was exacerbated by the OCI’s perception of a lack of interest by the mayor in the effort:

“The mayor hasn’t been ‘knocking on our door’ to see what’s going on.”

Similarly, practitioners in Boston commented on Create Boston’s ineffective Advisory Board, clearly problematic given the effort’s reliance on the board for direction. However, this points to a discrepancy in the intended role of program organizers and the participants’ expectations of the role of that leading organization and of their own duties. In Baltimore and Providence, the organizers were only intended to be facilitators and to aid in “building conversation and mobilizing lots of people in many different places involved in the discussion about what our next economy is going to look like.” The implementation of creative projects was left to practitioners. In Boston, the role of the Create Boston Advisory Board is unclear, and perhaps reliance on the board for taking part in the implementation strategy is excessive given the traditional nature of an advisory board to direct a program’s mission.

In Providence and Baltimore, the creative city initiatives placed implementation and responsibility for action in the hands of planning practitioners. Leaders simply provided opportunities for bringing practitioners together to learn from each other and to form new partnerships and collaborations. However, practitioners, especially in the Baltimore case, were

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8 Robert Leaver, CEO, New Commons. Interview by author, Providence, RI, March 14, 2006.
unable to see this as an opportunity to step outside of the box of normal practice and in the absence of a centrally mandated set of prescriptions for action, looked instead for a source for more funding and were ultimately disappointed.

“Arts districts wanted more money. Groups just showed up and lobbied for more investment for their particular program...their cause fits [Creative Baltimore], but they didn’t necessarily talk about the initiative.”

The Baltimore case, in particular, points to the need for a clear communication of the role of the organizer and implementers in order to establish realistic expectations for practice in the creative initiative.

The interdisciplinary nature and wide-ranging goals of a creative city strategy challenge the traditional role of leadership through commitment, direction and funding. And while practitioners in Baltimore in particular sensed a lack of commitment to the program, perhaps the goals of planning for the creative city by widening of the community that is making decisions about planning and economic development is in fact strengthened by this lack of centralized leadership. In order to move beyond the traditional framework of bureaucratic planning and economic development to support the activities that result in a high quality of place, planning for the creative city requires a decentralization of activities and power. The experience in Baltimore is evidence of practitioners’ inability to move away from the traditional model of municipal governance and leadership while engaging in creative city practice. Likewise, Create Boston is unable to move outside of the purview of Boston’s traditional, centralized planning agency.

**Reflecting on social equity**

A creative city strategy based in attracting and retaining the creative class requires practitioners to rethink the economic role of a city’s various populations. In all three cases, confusion, often resulting in criticism, was derived from the term ‘creative class.’ What initially looked like inconsistent language of the creative city movement ultimately revealed itself as the challenge practitioners face when considering the social equity implications of a creative class strategy. In Providence, for example, organizers of the Creative and Innovative Economy effort explicitly elected not to use the term ‘creative class’ in its discussions and reports in order to avoid perceptions of exclusivity. The “Call to Action” and main principles of the Creative and Innovative Economy initiative focused on growing that economy through the participation of all citizens, and only briefly referred to explicitly supporting creativity among artists, young people and immigrant communities. However, in responding to the support of the creative economy as a strategy for Providence’s economic development, the president of the Providence Economic Development partnership commented,

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9 Ibid.
10 As noted by Robert Leaver, the Call to Action uses the phrase ‘creative people’.
"Seems likes anyone with a degree is creative, I’m not sure that works. There’s an inherent class bias. We can’t just focus on students in grad programs that wear black, smoke cigarettes, and hang out in cafes all day. Many of them, by the way, don’t start businesses either. I went to Brown – it’s the least entrepreneurial place on the planet. It’s people who don’t have other options that start businesses – like immigrants."12,13

The practitioner saw a strategy targeting a narrower definition of the creative population (perhaps influenced by the definition espoused by Richard Florida), than that adopted by initiative organizers. This misunderstanding resulted in part from a lack of communication, but perhaps more from the inability of practitioners to escape their pre-conceived, hyped-up notions of ‘creative class’ and a creative city strategy more generally. Planning practitioners in Providence have an understanding of social equity that appears to immediately be threatened by this general understanding of a creative city initiative.

Likewise in Baltimore, where practitioners were, at best, lukewarm to the benefits of Creative Baltimore, Eric Freidman of the OCI referred to the importance of achieving the basics of economic development in the communities with the greatest need:

“Creative class… is not the most popular thing in Baltimore city – it’s another word for gentrification. Current residents need job training, readiness for jobs – that’s a priority if you’re looking at sheer numbers in the city.”14

Friedman refers to the focus on the creative class as contradictory to the attention on the basics of poverty, crime and jobs needed in Baltimore, and he illustrates the inability and unwillingness of practitioners to fathom a creative city initiative as complementary to ongoing economic development work. Rather than engage in an effort that may force the OCI to rethink and perhaps expand its own strategy, practitioners dismissed Creative Baltimore as fundamentally exclusionary and outdated, completely at odds with the city’s goals for economic development.

This discussion does not aim to disregard the economic development and planning community’s concern for the way in which Richard Florida’s creative class strategy fails to address social equity. Nor does it ignore the number of practitioners who saw the benefits of a broader discussion of these issues. But the resistance to change exhibited by some practitioners surely begs the question of the value that is derived from a creative city initiative in a place where practitioners find the goals and targets of a program to be at odds with the accepted definition of social equity and out of line with the basic economic development and planning needs of the community. Richard Florida’s creative class theory relies heavily on the nurturing of a community tolerant of diversity. While practitioners in the three cases studies were concerned with making sure not to dismiss basic economic development, a serious discussion of how to

12 Donald Eversley, President, Providence Economic Development Partnership. Telephone interview by author, April 1, 2006.
13 The Providence Economic Development Partnership was created under Mayor Cicilline as a broad-based economic development corporation. One of 13 different points of direction in its creation was to consider the concept of creative industries and creative economy, as laid out by the “Creative and Innovative Economy” initiative.
14 Friedman, telephone interview by author, March 3, 2006.
incorporate marginalized populations in a creative city effort was minimal. A creative city strategy relying on populations that are not traditionally targeted by policy and planning actions (eg. LiveBaltimore’s attempt to speak to the gay and lesbian community, Providence’s goal to nurture innovation in immigrant neighborhoods) requires more than just a fleeting conversation on marketing strategy, but instead, a deeper examination of a city’s tradition of social and cultural openness. The experiences in Baltimore and Providence illustrate how difficult reflection on the framing of racial, ethnic, class, and sexual diversity can be for the planning community, even in cities that see themselves as open to diversity and already acting to nurture it.

*Expanding the planning community*

At the start of my research, I assumed that the planning community engaged in the implementation of each creative city program would go outside of the traditional boundaries of municipal city planning and economic development staff. This assumption was based on program goals, in all three cases, of fostering new partnerships and collaborations around the creative class/economy. The Baltimore and Providence cases met my expectations, where approximately 50 and 70 percent of those interviewed\(^{15}\), respectively, were not city planning or economic development staff, but included members of the arts, culture, real estate development, and business innovation communities.

In Boston, on the other hand, of those practitioners who took part in interviews for this thesis, only one was not BRA staff and represented a non-profit organization.\(^{16}\) This result reflects a participation in Create Boston that was dominated by planners in the city’s traditional planning body. The small sample size in the Boston case came out of a lack of response from the many practitioners whom I contacted, and the continual referral by those who did participate back to Carol Walton, Create Boston’s single staff person. It is unclear whether Create Boston has failed to engage non-governmental organizations (aside from the members of its Advisory Board), whether the non-profit and private communities have resisted collaboration with Create Boston, or whether the program is too young yet and not understood by the broader planning community. Perhaps this shortcoming is the result of all three.

Expanding the network of planners for a creative city initiative applies to both the community of planning practitioners and the community of residents who are important actors in the creative economy. Practitioners in all three cities spoke to the difficulty of building a fully participatory planning initiative and of forging new partnerships. While Baltimore’s planning department lauded its success in opening up the Comprehensive Plan writing process and catering to a new audience of residents and creative class members, practitioners in Providence noted the inability of the format of the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative to reach out to valuable community members. Umberto Crenca of AS220 in Providence spoke to the disinterest of certain activist populations, including artists and immigrants, in committing time to round table discussions without compensation.\(^{17}\)

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\(^{15}\) Note that a snowball sampling method was used for this study, so that organizers and participants, themselves, determined those who would be interviewed for this study, or were key players in the creative initiatives.

\(^{16}\) Only four members of the Boston community participated in this study.

\(^{17}\) Umberto Crenca, Artistic Director, AS220. Telephone interview by author, March 24, 2006.
In addition to the complicated logistics of an appropriate program format that meets the time, location and participatory needs of a varied group of actors, a creative city initiative, like any other collaborative process, is complicated by cooperation across groups with a variety of backgrounds and values. Even in Providence, where practitioners claimed to be well-versed in moving across traditional planning boundaries, participants in the initiative were limited by perceptions of traditional occupational and social roles. In addition to the difficulty in bringing such a wide range of parties together, the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative organizer’s reference to the "long-haired wild public artist types" and “suits from the Policy Council” 18 illustrates how these roles and values are reinforced when practitioners move beyond the “usual suspects” of economic development and city planning practice, making a change in practice by participants even more difficult.

**Authenticity of place and practice**

Overall, when faced with questions about changes in planning practice in response to the creative program, practitioners saw little impact. This was especially true in Providence where practitioners continuously referred to the city’s creative identity as a place where people just ‘get it.’ When prodded, those interviewed were unable to articulate the actions that served either as motivations, or as evidence of this creative intuition, and instead critiqued the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative as a rehashing of the implicit knowledge practitioners in Providence already have.

> “People already know that Providence supports this – people get it, people were already doing it before someone told them to.” 19

In Providence, pride in an authenticity of creative practice may be precisely the reason that the initiative was taken up by a set of non-profits and research organizations that exist outside of the everyday public planning framework. These non-profits and organizations have more freedom and ability to reflect. Practitioners expressed concerns about the initiative’s threat to the authenticity of the creative environment in Providence, which may suggest the existence of a host of stakeholders and actors who avoided taking part in the effort in order to protect their own creative integrity. Perhaps David Costello of Baltimore’s OCI expressed this dilemma best when he commented,

> “All cities think they are creative.”20

When posited this way, it seems almost impossible for any creative city initiative to gain support because it would force practitioners to first admit that their current practice is not ‘creative,’ then ask them to take part in a deliberate intervention perceived as undermining the authenticity of that environment.

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18 Leaver, interview by author, March 14, 2006.
19 Eversley, telephone interview by author, April 1, 2006.
Recommendations for addressing the implementation challenges of a creative city initiative:

There are critics and research that refute the creative city movement, especially the predictive power of Richard Florida's creative class theory. Simultaneously, however, creative city initiatives are growing in number. The goal of this thesis is not to argue for the economic merits of focusing urban revitalization on the creative class and creative economy. Instead, with the acknowledgement that cities are continuing to embrace a creative city approach to revitalization, and based on the experience of practitioners in Providence, Boston and Baltimore, I provide the following recommendations for overcoming implementation challenges to urban practitioners who have already decided to engage in a creative city strategy:

A creative city strategy requires that planners reframe their vision of the city, which requires time and the recognition of non-traditional measures of program success.

The creative city is a relatively new focus for planning and economic development practitioners, and most creative city programs in the United States have only been in place for a short period of time. Unlike the more immediate, quantifiable results of traditional economic development interventions such as Providence's historic tax credit, a creative city approach is not a quick fix, but a complex reframing of planning practice and goals that requires time. Although the combination of practitioners’ frustrations, lack of direction and alternative priorities have allowed Creative Baltimore to stall, it is too early to interpret any of the three cases as failures. A creative class strategy is one of indirection where a city’s economy grows not by the direct investment in the traditional sources of economic output (like job-producing corporations), but by investing in the urban amenities that attract the populations that high-value companies seek, the benefits of which will (in theory) trickle-down to serve the entire regional community. As Bert Crenka noted, practitioners must look beyond immediate, highly visible results and instead invest in long term visioning and planning. The benefits of investing in such a strategy of indirection therefore fall outside of the traditional benchmarks for economic growth, and require new measures of success. It is difficult, for example, to assess the benefit felt by practitioners in the arts and cultural sectors in both Providence and Baltimore who claimed that widespread knowledge of Florida’s work legitimized their work and facilitated the search for funding. But practitioners must acknowledge the ancillary benefits of a new attitude towards economic development and planning as successes, even if only through anecdotal evidence.

Practitioners must formulate a clear and unified language for describing their creative economy/class and the goals of their creative city initiative.

Given the rising prevalence of creative city literature and programs, initiative organizers and implementers have the difficult task of working with the planning community to build a consistent creative city lexicon that reflects the economy, demographics and indigenous elements

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21 A discussion paper published by the Centre for Cities in September 2005 finds that the creative class is a poor predictor of urban economic performance in the United Kingdom.

unique to their city. This language must be used to set clear goals for the creative city program that are unique to that locality and separate from the rhetoric. This common language allows for the management of a complex process involving a wide range of backgrounds and values, and helps to ground the initiative in the needs of the local community.

*Cities need a well-informed creative strategy that looks inward and recognizes the assets, strengths and capacity of that place.*

A creative city initiative can provide the opportunity for learning from a self-assessment of strengths and identity, and understanding where a city’s economic potentials lie. Having a firm basis in research is important to a creative city initiative because cities need to understand these assets in order to devise realistic planning strategies. But even without the luxury of research staff and funding a creative city initiative can provide a city the opportunity to understand its own identity and the role of history on economic development and planning practice. In Providence, the Creative and Innovative Economy Initiative helped to outline the assets that strengthen the creative economy and contribute to a sense of place – immigrant populations, small-scale communities, historic industrial infrastructure. Create Boston’s focus on the Ropewalk represents a continuation of the city’s creative tradition, from its historic role as place for ropemaking, to its future as an incubator. And while understanding a city’s assets is certainly not a tenet unique to the creative city movement, a creative city initiative can be the basis or justification (as it was in all three cases) for conducting such reflection.

*Practitioners must market those creative strengths that come out of an honest inventory of assets, and let other cities, residents and investors know that they are rethinking the vision of the city.*

Charles Landry notes,

> “Creativity needs to be communicated to the outside world in order to have an impact, otherwise it is purely self-expression.”

Because the evidence of success of a new set of policies or economic incentives may not be visible in the traditional sense, communicating the city’s new “creative city” approach becomes even more important. Once a city has identified and/or established its identity and strengths, these assets become tools for gaining a competitive edge by attracting new residents and investment. Create Boston is certainly the most successful of the three initiatives in identifying a unique set of creative assets and giving them an identifiable and accessible face at the BRA and on the World Wide Web.

*Cities must refrain from riding the ‘Richard Florida wave’ and think carefully about a model and set of precedents that can inform the design a customized unique strategy for capitalizing on their own creative strengths, but not dictate it.*

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23 Landry & Bianchini, 20.
Given the focus of the creative city movement ideologies on the individual, unique strengths of a place and its economy, it is a mistake for practitioners to look for prescriptive models for building a creative city, as it contradicts the basic premise of the movement. Practitioners in Providence are especially cognizant of the value of recognizing the individual strengths of the locality and resisting generic models for economic development and planning. When asked to talk about learning from precedents, the Director of the Department of Urban Planning stated, "I can get ideas from other communities, but it’s hard to take what they’ve done and make it applicable here."25

This paradox poses a challenge for cities eager to engage in a creative city initiative. But there are certainly lessons to be learned from the ideas put forward by Florida, Landry and Bianchini, and Howkins. Practitioners eager for a roadmap should perhaps look to the work of Charles Landry first, which is a conceptual model, but does call for the sea change that requires cities to reframe their attitude towards economic development and planning practice. Cities in transition have much to lose from implementing an inappropriate or ineffectual economic development and planning agenda. While it is important to look to precedents and theory, and to engage in a learning process by sharing within and across municipalities, practitioners engaged in planning and economic development must look first to their own practice, environment, and economy.

Final words

Creative city initiatives in Providence, Boston and Baltimore are fraught with a set of implementation challenges in the formation of the programs (eg. a lack of funding, a lack of clarity in goals), and in practitioners’ attempts to rethink their vision of planning (eg. how to measure success, overcoming value conflicts related to social equity). However, the creative city movement is young, and practitioners and critics alike must realize that the creative city, as expressed by the movement, is not a quick-fix (nor a catch-all) for economic development and planning, and that it requires real collaborations and time. While the rhetoric of Richard Florida may be controversial, in practice, the three cases are evidence of a new way of viewing relative actors and a new way of viewing the city. Perhaps Create Boston’s application of an old BRA framework to new industries is not creative in Landry’s collaborative sense, but it is a sign of an attempt to rethink local economic growth. The emergence of a planning initiative in the non-profit sector in Providence illustrates a broadening of the city’s community of planning actors. Baltimore’s attempt to reformulate the perception of the city through various marketing attempts signifies an acknowledgement of the importance of imaging and branding of a place.

It is my hope that this thesis provides practitioners with insight into real practice, insight needed by those cities looking to embrace the creative city movement. Everyday actions towards economic development and planning haven’t changed significantly as a result of the movement but planners are learning that a creative city strategy is not merely a new package of economic development and planning tools, but a new way to frame the vision of a city and it’s economy.

25 Thom Deller, Director, Providence Department of Planning and Development. Telephone interview by author March 27, 2006.
This takes time and may require many failed attempts before a new, creative planning practice can emerge.
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