'Civic Gold' Rush: Cultural Planning and the Politics of the Third Way

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Abstract
In many Western democracies, most notably the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and Canada, city-based cultural planning has emerged to be one of the most significant local cultural policy initiatives of the last two decades. The cultural development priorities of the Council of Europe and the parliaments of Scotland and Wales also highlight the importance that is being placed on fostering strategically the cultures of cities and regions (for instance, see Scottish Executive, 2002), while the rhetoric of the 'creative city' (Landry, 2000; Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Greenhalgh, 1998), 'creative capacity', the 'creative economy' and, most recently, the 'creative class' (Florida, 2002), have entered the vocabularies of local cultural policy makers and city boosters alike. As it is currently conceptualised cultural planning is considerably more than a policy framework for the arts. It is being marketed, in part, as a way of fostering local cultural diversity, community development, and partnerships between the public and private sectors, as well as of positioning the arts as an 'industry' (Griffiths, 1993). In addition, it is increasingly being imagined as a stratagem for achieving social inclusion and nurturing local citizenship. Culture and creativity have become currencies, forms of 'capital' (Florida, 2002) that supposedly can be measured, developed, and then traded in an international marketplace comprised of cities eager to compete with each other on the basis of image, amenity, liveability and visitability (Avery, 2000). In short, cultural planning is said to be a way of achieving a range of social, economic, and urban, as well as creative, outcomes (O'Regan, 2002). Cultural planning writ large is, simultaneously, social planning, urban planning, arts planning, and economic planning (Evans, 2001). For instance, in its draft guidelines for local authorities, the Scottish Executive (2002: 14) asserts that 'cultural provision [is] a successful means of pursuing a number of 'cross-cutting' policies and goals, including 'social justice/social inclusion', 'economic regeneration', 'active citizenship', and 'environmental improvements'.

Given the extent to which cultural planning has assumed such an expansive brief – at least rhetorically – it is surprising that scant academic attention has been given to the factors which have framed it and to the reasons why cultural planning has moved so far from being a strategic approach to local arts development. In order to interrogate some of these issues it is necessary to unpack the contradictory and uneven conceptual and political underpinnings of cultural planning. Such an investigation will also go some way towards explaining why, as it is currently imagined, cultural planning, inevitably, must fail in its own terms. As the first step in this process, this paper investigates the background to cultural planning, its founding objectives, and their key legitimating discourses. I argue that the wide-ranging agenda that cultural planning has come to assume has been framed and legitimated, in part, by an underpinning conceptualisation of culture (as the

entire way of life of a group or collective), which has both subsumed other understandings of culture (setting up a series of destabilizing tensions) and not been scrutinized as the basis for local government strategic planning. In addition, this hegemonic understanding of culture has melded with the political discourses and pragmatism associated (at least initially) with the 'Third Way' schema of the British Labour Party. Two areas within cultural planning where this melding and definitional hegemony are most problematic involve the unresolved tensions between 'art' and 'culture', and the assumptions and values underpinning the goal of 'social inclusion' which, increasingly, is legitimating a host of cultural planning initiatives.