

Testing the Concept of the 'Creative City': Urban Development Theory and Practice in the South Pacific

Michael Volkerling

Head, Centre for the Creative Industries, Wellington Institute of Technology

Michael Volkerling is Head of the Centre for Creative Industries at Wellington Institute of Technology. Prior to taking up this appointment in 2003, he was Director of the Leisure and Heritage Studies Programme at Victoria University; Executive Director of the National Art Gallery and Museum and Director of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. His work on cultural industries and policy has been widely recognised internationally. In January 2002, he was convenor of Cultural Sites, Cultural Theory, Cultural Policy, the Second International Conference on Cultural Policy Research. He was Visiting Fellow at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University in 2000 and George Fairfax Fellow at Deakin University, Melbourne in 1999. He has been a member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Cultural Policy since 1997. He was also a member of the drafting team of All Our Legacies, All our Futures (1995), a white paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage prepared for the government of South Africa.

Abstract

The economic role of creative industries has been increasingly recognised within cultural policy discourse over the past 15 years (Cornford and Charles, 1999; Gates 2000). Its manifestation at local or city government level is expressed through the concept of the 'creative city'. This construct asserts the significance of the city as a source of *innovation*, defined as the commercial exploitation of cultural and technological product and process.

The potential of 'creative cities' to contribute to economic growth has been analysed by a wide number of commentators (Florida, 2002; Lovatt, 1996; Pratt, 1999). In many cases, these commentaries are based on the *ex post facto* theorisation of accomplished or compromised development scenarios (Moss, 2000; O'Connor, and Wynne, 1996). It is less common to find case studies where prospective development strategies have been driven by the textbook application of theoretical constructs.

Such a case is offered by Wellington, New Zealand. Here the interest of central government in cluster development (Porter, 1998) has intersected with a commitment by city government to driving economic regeneration employing models based explicitly on theories concerning the rise of the 'creative class' (Florida, 2002). The results produced by this mix of policy initiatives provide evidence of the efficacy and the limitations of these development theories.

Keywords

Creative cities, urban development, cultural policy, policy diffusion