

Creativity at Work:

Creativity, Public Engagement and Political Accountability: The New Measure

By Linda Lees

January 2010



Author

Linda Lees is founder and director of Creative Cities International LLC (CCI), a consultancy based in New York and London, that focuses on the role of the arts and culture to deliver new solutions for sustainable urban regeneration. Her experience is in the worlds of academics, theatre, and public programming. She has served as Director of Humanities, School of Continuing and Professional Studies at NYU and Director of Cultural Affairs, British Council, New York. She has collaborated with the Wilson Center for National Affairs at The New School (New York) on public programs on a wide range of subjects. She produced public programs for the Smithsonian Institution while living in Washington, DC where she founded and was artistic director of The Next Stage, which in its partnerships with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, served as a nexus for the exchange of ideas on culture and foreign policy. The Next Stage produced new American plays and international works. On behalf of CCI, she has presented papers at conferences in London, Berlin, and Copenhagen. Dr. Lees holds a PhD and MA from the University of California at Berkeley, an MA from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and a BA from Boston University. She has taught at the University of California, Berkeley, George Mason University, and Georgetown University. She serves on the American Advisory Board of LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art).

Linda Lees participated in the Government Encounters workshop, organized by Creative Encounters in 2009.

For further information, please contact Birgit Stöber: bs.ikl@cbs.dk

© R E A T I V E E N C O U N T E R S

Creativity, Public Engagement and Political Accountability: The New Measure

Background

What do we mean by a “creative city”? Whose creativity are we talking about? Why is a “creative city” a good thing?

In the introduction to his remarkable analysis of some of the most creative minds of the 20th century, Howard Gardner notes: “By a curious twist, the words *art* and *creativity* have become closely linked in our society...There is no necessary association: people can be creative in any sphere of life; and the arts can be the scene of bathos or boredom, as well as of beauty, beatitude, or bedlam.” (1) This passage calls into question some common assumptions, namely, that art is an unqualified good thing and that creativity is the domain of a privileged few. Both these terms are used in relation to the creative city, but may not help us understand or evaluate what makes one urban environment exciting and another not. Partly, this is because it’s difficult to define creativity. As Gardner says, for some people creativity IS art. So there is confusion at the outset about meaning. We need a word with broader scope both in its definition and the broader range of people to whom it may be applied.

But before we leave the search for the definition of creativity, let’s consider what we think we know about a “creative city” and why we want to live in one. What is it we’re looking for? It may be, to paraphrase Simon Schama, that the “creative city” is just another of the “landscapes of the urban imagination,” which is to say something we conjure up to answer a certain psychic need. For myself, I would say that the vitality of a “creative city” distinguishes it from just any urban environment. The exemplar “creative city” is full of energy, opportunities and interesting people. It must be a bit edgy as well. As someone who prides herself on being non-conformist, this combination of factors is comfortable for me. I feel pleasure when I am working with other creative types, but I also experience it when I am walking down the street, buying a newspaper, even riding the subway. It is not limited to a particular endeavor, but it depends upon a thriving, bustling diversity.

This comfort or sense of pleasure may have less to do with “creating” and more to do with what the psychologist, Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi, calls “flow,” a concept that refers to our ability to find an activity “rewarding in and of itself.” (2) That activity may be anything from mountain climbing to birdwatching to doing an ordinary day’s work. Walking down the street, one of the favorite pastimes in New York, would not be categorized as creative. But it certainly can be a flow experience, which is why street life in New York is so interesting – and restorative. That activities that are not usually considered “creative” can be nevertheless stimulating and pleasurable gives us another way to consider the notion of the “creative city” and how we evaluate it, implement it, or govern it. The broader category of flow forces us to consider factors that we might otherwise overlook if we adhered too closely to creativity in its more restricted sense. It presents the challenge of considering, for example, ALL the people who live in our exemplar city, namely those who would not necessarily consider themselves either non-conformist or creative. I know why I moved to a “creative city.” Why does everyone else live there? Most people don’t choose their city, of course. They grow up there and stay for reasons to do with work, family and friends, all of which imply for them a relative level of comfort and pleasure. More than any “creative class,” whether home-grown or imported, this is the backbone of the city’s ethos and its identity.

Can a term broader and better defined than “creativity” help us understand and tap the greater potential of a community or city? The concept of flow gives value to a wider range of experience and its contribution to the creative milieu of a city: “Flow is a useful concept not so much because it accounts for rare and exotic activities like rock climbing or ocean sailing, but because it helps explain the texture of everyday life, *the rise and fall of motivations that follow one another as normal people respond to the human and inanimate contours of their changing environment.* [Italics mine.]” (3)

Those motivations account for both the creator and the one who appreciates the creation, the actor and the audience. The theatre patron is not the artist who wrote, directed, or acted the play, but without the patron, there is no performance. Acknowledging the transactional aspect of the city is critical to understanding its creative milieu: “...the significance of enjoyment is not trivial. It is vital to the survival of society. An essential quality of any social order is the way opportunities for expressive experience are institutionalized.” (4)

Although there are no guarantees about why or where creativity comes about, we can broaden the field of study, and look at not just the top-tier of creative industries, but also the flow experience of how people live in and enjoy their city. That backbone of the city, the “inner tourist” who goes to the theatre, the

ballpark, the museum, throws Frisbees and picnics in the park with the kids and friends, supports the neighborhood bar or restaurant, takes over and “inhabits” the city, is the crucial energy, the “good messiness” that we need to explore.

Since October 2001, Creative Cities International has been grappling with this challenge, i.e. how to assess hard factors in the context of human experience. Throughout the course of a series of international conferences, public forums, and case studies, we continued to ask difficult questions: What role does culture play in the regeneration and vitality of a city? How can we understand the ways in which people actually live and participate in a city as crucial to its development? What is the interplay between city structures – government, architecture, infrastructure – and how people live in the city? How can we build consensus and goodwill among stakeholders?

What emerged in response to these questions is the Vitality Index™, which brings to life a city’s human strengths as it respects its complexities. The Vitality Index (VI) offers a process that is global in its perspective, accountable in its analysis, and creative at its core. It provides the basis for a comparative analysis of “lessons learned” internationally, and yields vital information that helps to reconcile differences among stakeholders thus keeping projects on track and on time. Fully activated, it is divided into three levels:

- Gathering of hard-factor data such as demographics, trends, costs and measures of typical and creative infrastructure modeled to produce a ranking that benchmarks the city against competitor cities;
- field work with residents and other stakeholders that includes surveys, questionnaires, interviews that examine people’s habits, how they actually live their lives, where they go, what they do, their concerns, and their aspirations. This provides additional analysis, refined recommendations, risks and opportunities, and essential indicators of what people want and care about.
- high-level rigorous analysis from a *cultural point of view*.

The VI is not absolute and as people’s outlook changes or desired goals change or merge, it can respond. This is the advantage of incorporating a subjective but living index.

The Opportunity

We cannot rely on the traditional analysis of economics and politics or even culture on its own to give us sufficient guidance. There is no lack of measurement in these areas, but what is missing in these analyses is crucial: the intentions and values of the community. The examples of the Tate Modern (positive) and the World Trade Center site (negative) and CCI's own experience in West Harlem (both) make clear that we need a means to respond to the important indicators of what people want and care about and then communicate those results to leaders and the public alike. How can this be done? The process must be holistic, balancing hard and soft factors, but defining and evaluating these in light of human concerns.

This new approach – the Vitality Index™ - must reveal without prescribing and support people's intentions and aspirations. It must take into account a broader array of factors: assessing historical issues, cultural and artistic; analyzing the present status of a city (what is working right and what would enhance it); measuring hard and soft factors; and establishing benchmarks.

The VI is like a cultural impact study that helps to ensure that the planned design of an area makes a positive contribution to the community and the city by taking into account – and valuing – what isn't usually considered. For we also don't know where and at what point new sparks of creativity may emerge. With this information, a city can pose a question about a goal or project. Maybe a city wishes to attract business by enhancing its business climate or its amenities, by altering its tax and zoning laws, etc. Those values can be reflected in the factors the VI chooses to review and the analysis can point to the city's objectives. Solutions may lie in the creative industries, but not necessarily.

Another city might want to attract cultural tourism as a boon to economic regeneration and sustainability. How art and cultural activities contribute to the current state of the city and how they might be enhanced would certainly be a major priority of the analysis. In both cases, the cultural assessment evaluates the information from the VI on the basis of the project goals and the values the city thinks it has, or wishes to enhance or attain. It is a living subjective analysis and has the ability to change with increasingly complex goals or ones that change radically. Or perhaps the city's goals are less clear or its problems more profound. For cities like Toledo or Detroit, changing zoning laws or building a cultural center will not be enough to make a dramatic difference in their future. Even large infusions of cash won't matter if they still lack that vitality, energy or "good messiness" that are critical to a city's economic and cultural viability. Here, the VI can examine what is already working and why, e.g. its street life, the marketplace, and its complex mix of people. Identifying what is specific

and interesting to the area is a first step in building confidence among residents and attracting commercial investment. Often, the citizens of blighted cities and their leaders assert that their cities offer much more than outsiders can see or understand and that they should not be allowed to die. Finding answers to what seem intractable problems requires an analysis and understanding of a city's culture from the bottom up and a focus for planning, design and economic regeneration rooted in a city's uniqueness.

Which brings us to an interesting question: where do we find this analysis and understanding? As the American sociologist Marc Miringoff commented, "A democratic society must continually seek ways to understand its progress. This is essential if the general public and the makers of policy are to have a clear picture of the state of the nation and its people." He goes on to say that in the U.S. we track the economy better than anyone, but we do not do the same in the social sphere: "Most significantly, social data are not generally thought of, collected or released as *indicators* that chart the performance of a larger condition like the "social state of the nation," nor are they combined into accessible indexes or barometers designed to keep track on a regular basis of what is considered important." (5)

While the residents of struggling cities are screaming for help to hold together the social fabric of their lives, government bodies respond by citing the kind of dire economic numbers and forecasts of failure that rationalize their inability to find solutions. More social and cultural data are needed to counter these doom and gloom assessments. There are no statistics that track what happens to people who live in these communities – how the loss of jobs, social cohesion, and sense of place affects them. And there is no attempt to search out and adapt success stories of cities elsewhere that have faced down their critics and survived.

Dayton, Ohio is currently enduring the worst of the economic slump. A "car" city, dominated by General Motors, it now has an 11% unemployment rate, the highest in the region. It also has an historically vibrant arts scene with some organizations dating from the Depression Era. Dayton long ago connected the dots. The city recognizes how much value the arts add to community life and in attracting new business to Dayton. But unemployed people don't go to the opera. Those who have money are now making hard decisions about where to give it, the food bank or the ballet. There is nevertheless a success story here which needs to be shared. Bureaucrats and arts advocates agree that the arts must survive in Dayton: "I often like to tell people, you know, the Dayton Art Institute, which is a bastion of culture in this region, was built in 1930. How many people must have thought that was crazy? But how much more people must have thought it was crazy in 1933, when the Dayton Philharmonic began?"

So when you look now back over 75 years, and all they've brought to our community and the great city that Dayton became, you know, the arts are to some degree an investment in not the here and now necessarily, but the future of who and what will be. " Denise Regh, Culture Works (6)

Many cities might benefit from knowing about Dayton's relationship to the arts. But where is the data that could make that case? Miringoff concludes that "social indicators and the vital aspects of life" can contribute to a more informed dialogue: "What is most important is that this dialogue rest on a foundation of data and analysis that is as strong, durable, rational, and precise as that which supports our discourse about the economy."

Cultural data can never be precise, which is why it is either avoided entirely or reduced to simple statistical samplings, e.g. Richard Florida's "gay index," "bohemian index," etc. The complexity and subjectivity of dealing with culture (both big "C" and little "c") are offputting to urban planners and politicians alike. They want proof that culture counts. The creative industries calculus is very helpful in this way. But it is only one snapshot of creativity in the city. We must go further and look at the transactional aspects of culture and its impact on the present and future sustainability of cities. The Vitality Index™ intends to provide measurements and analysis that can also serve as a persuasive means of moving ideas and vision into the public realm of politics and responsible decision-making.

As the public has become deeply skeptical of anything proposed, they have become skilled at opposing. The VI provides ways of sounding out people about their concerns, accrediting developments to make sure they have met basic indices, and putting on the table the issues that need to be resolved with this in mind: The successful project is one that has understood the history, the situation, and the market, and engenders a good feeling in as many people as possible. The message to all stakeholders is "we have listened to you."

West Harlem, 2008

Creative Cities International was part of a team whose task was to draw up the second phase of a plan for regeneration in West Harlem on the Upper West Side of New York called Take Me to the River (TMTTR). The area encompasses 135th Street to 155th Street, Broadway to the Hudson River. It is bordered on the east by historical sites, including the home of Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury and a signatory of the US Constitution, and the historic area designated as Hamilton Heights. Its long list of cultural assets includes the landmarked Audubon Terrace, the former farm of naturalist John

James Audubon, Trinity Cemetery, and two architecturally notable churches. Audubon Terrace, a complex of Beaux Arts buildings dating from the early 20th century, is now home to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Hispanic Society of America, and Boricua College, a private bi-lingual college. Part of Trinity Church-Wall Street, one of New York's oldest churches, Trinity Cemetery, which marks the final resting place of many notable Americans, also commemorates two fiercely-fought battles of the Revolutionary War as American troops waged their last defense of Manhattan against the British.

This area, so culturally rich and diverse, is nearly unknown both to its own residents and to other New Yorkers. At its request, and with the help of state funding, it was attempting to define its evolving identity, build community, and attract tourism and growth in sustainable ways. Our specific objective was to “brand” the cultural hub as part of a campaign to bring renewed interest in its cultural assets among its residents and other New Yorkers, vitality to its streets, and add appeal for responsible commercial investment. The goal was to identify a single brand and marketing strategy that could channel all the resources towards a more holistic, inclusive, and sustainable future. The project's scope gave us the opportunity to use the assessment portions of the Vitality Index™.

The team pursued a “cultural audit” of hard and soft factors – through cultural and demographic research, community surveys and interviews - to analyze and assess the community's *raison d'être* and those inherent assets that are distinctive and interesting. Rather than focusing on what doesn't work, the cultural audit emphasized what does. We wanted to know what residents liked and felt was “special” about their community. That would become the core of its public image.

The cultural audit was successful. It provided a foundation and framework against which the community surveys and interviews could be calibrated. Working meetings with the community gave us the opportunity to test conclusions as the process evolved. In the end, the community embraced our proposals and today various groups continue meeting and pressing the city to help them implement the plan. Funding for the next phase has now, of course, become a bigger than expected problem.

The institutional obstacles were revealing. Because the state and city authorities had political priorities linked to this study, our ability to move implementation further was frustrated. The state required us on the one hand to consult with the community, which we gladly did, and on the other pressed the team to deliver a product that did not completely reflect the public consultation or its

conclusions. The community was eager to embrace their identity, the political operatives less so.

Lessons Learned

The “objective reality” pictured by demographic factors gave only a hint of the real issues, tensions and aspirations of this community. The census figures, for example, showed that there was a major shift in the ethnicity of the population, from predominantly African-American as recently as the 1980s to Hispanic today. But figures alone could not tell us how deeply felt that shift was. We encountered degrees of resistance among community groups and toward us initially as outsiders, but because of the “cultural audit” process, its respect for community history, attitudes, and opinions, these vanished over the course of the study and we were able to build a strong consensus.

This community, off the beaten path to New Yorkers, still saw itself as definitely New York, definitely Manhattan, and definitely cosmopolitan. West Harlemites expressed the same complaints and desires as most in the city. The sense of place and possibility and pride in the distinctiveness of their neighborhood was as strong for them as it is further south in more “hip” parts of the city.

While demographic information pointed to certain kinds of cultural activity, the surveys, questionnaires, and working group meetings were a direct connection to the nature of this community and what it valued. Whether or not these residents considered themselves “creative”, they certainly had a sense of “flow” with their environment. They knew what mattered to them, what they enjoyed or didn’t. Barbershops and hair salons carry great cultural importance in this community. Would they be listed in most indices as “recreational” or “cultural” activities? The corner gas station that on paper could be turned into an expansion building for the Hispanic Society museum turned out to be a rallying cry for everyone because it has a great juice bar and serves good coffee, both of which make it a neighborhood meeting place. It was immediately off the table.

These are flow experiences that help “explain the texture of everyday life.” (7) Over time, the hair salon, the barbershop, and the gas station have taken on a significance beyond their basic function: “It is the sum of these momentary motivational states that shapes the life of the individual over time, and it is the sum of these individual lifetimes that shapes the evolution of social and cultural forms.” (8)

When this information is added to the demographic numbers, the result is a really comprehensive picture of community concerns and where improvement

in a plan or strategy may be needed for further stages of implementation. Another bonus of a process that is flexible, inclusive and relies on input from both the community and the stakeholders is that the plan's progress - once agreed upon - stays on course and in sync with stated interests.

Throughout the study period, the team's efforts were centered on building consensus towards a realistic plan that encompassed issues from streetscape and traffic flow to coordinating efforts among cultural institutions to help them initiate plans for the future. Up and down the line, the community enthusiastically concurred with the recommendations.

Our objective was to find out what the community valued, support it with a plan that could be implemented, and communicate that information to the public and political leaders. Because this approach can and must engage the community directly in the process, this is one logical point where the Vitality Index™ and governance intersect. Strategies that are not self-determined, politically sensitive and unbiased will not succeed.

As it turned out, the failure in the study process ultimately was a political one, which the team could not have foreseen or influenced. Where we rightly interpreted this study to be a "bottom up" process, the political administration exercised a "top down" attitude. Where the connection between the study team and the community could have developed into a real force for change, the political apparatus was not set up for and possibly did not even want that outcome.

Messy Democracy and the Tate Modern

In May 2002, Creative Cities hosted an international conference dedicated to a discussion of the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site. Three panels were invited from London, Berlin, and New York City respectively. The London panelists focused on the Jubilee Line Extension (JLE) underground train that connected the South Bank and points east to Central London and was essential to the construction of the Tate Modern. They emphasized the importance of design in relation to function and how we need not give up one for the other. The JLE is a tribute to a bold design idea which has changed the daily life of millions of working people. The lead architect, Roland Paoletti, and those he hired believed, as the conference report stated, that "Questions of design are not just elite issues. People actually notice what's going on and they notice when these attentive details have been taken to heart."

That beauty was always a part of the original concept and not an afterthought. It resulted in a project that has been embraced by the public and enriched the public purse. It functions efficiently, the major criterion, and continues to be an attraction for the architectural tourist. The eleven stations each stand – under and above ground – as a testament to the architects who created them. The public now has a way to access jobs in Central London, which supports economic development there, along the South Bank and in their own communities. Traveling on it is a delight. (One commuter commented shortly after it opened that the JLE was so beautiful that just riding to work on it made her happy and improved her self-esteem.)

The story of the Tate Modern is a blueprint for successful cultural and economic regeneration. Where it could have been taken as an elitist project that overwhelmed its adjacent community with its money and reputation, the Tate instead entered into the planning process determined to engage with the community and its interests.

Just as “the messy process of democracy” produced in the JLE something that was “profoundly important to the shape and future of London” (9) so it produced in the Tate Modern a project that engendered enormous goodwill among the community in the South Bank. The long process that resulted in broad consensus among all the stakeholders was no accidental affair. The Tate’s goal at the outset was that economic benefit derived from the Tate should filter back to the community and they assured that this would happen.

The degree of public consultation from the very first was impressive. With diligence and determination, the planners and bureaucrats engaged the community about their priorities and how they saw the Tate’s presence benefiting them. They made clear that they wanted to be good neighbors and that they understood their futures as intertwined: economic sustainability for the community would mean the same for them.

Their priorities were clearly stated in the Bankside Urban Study relating to the Tate Modern neighborhood: “In what ways can the strategic proposals for the wider Bankside context inform and strengthen the development of the area around Tate Modern? How can the public realm be enhanced and improved? Is there the opportunity for co-ordinated development and if so what could be the benefits?” (10)

This concern for community values and aspirations has helped everyone. In 2001, one year after its opening, a McKinsey evaluation of the Tate Modern showed that its economic benefit to London was “around £100 million” with at

least half of that going to Southwark, its home borough. Thirty percent of the jobs created by the Tate Modern went to local residents. (Tate Modern press release, May 2001)

The Tate Modern has been a responsible guardian of the public trust. When it opened in 2000, visitor numbers were projected at a maximum of 1.8 million a year. Nearly a decade later, the figure is 4.6 million and growing. An extension to the Tate Modern has just been approved by Southwark, another witness to their ability to get things right.

Lessons Learned and the Vitality Index™

The JLE and the Tate stories are profound lessons in successful regeneration. Yet, we tend to think of these stories as exceptions. Why do cities – developers, politicians, and communities alike -- keep making the same mistakes? Examples of regeneration schemes gone badly wrong abound. The knee jerk response would be to blame the usual corruption, greed, and political ambition we have come to expect and often, sadly, accept.

There is a more complex answer. Currently, governments and communities do not demand studies that show the cultural impact of projects. The efficacy of projects is debated in newspapers and legislatures. But there is little analysis that tries to take up factors beyond the financial, although environmental impact studies are now required. The debate can quickly descend into political posturing on all sides. The general public, who will also gain or lose from these projects, even if they are not motivated to take to the streets or the public forums, is usually left in the dark about what is at stake. Political leaders are not inclined to educate them. A struggle then ensues between the various sides usually leaving the power and money interests who have the most staying power to win the day.

Social, economic, and cultural indicators all need to be considered in determining which projects are good and which are not. This information then needs to be disseminated to all stakeholders and the public alike. Just as the Tate Modern was clear about its intentions to include the community in its decision-making and benefit them over the long term, developers and city government should be required to make their ambitions known and submit to a cultural impact study that can determine what cultural benefit will result from their projects. If city officials embrace the “creative class” concept, for example, and want to put policy into place for this kind of attraction, and allocate funds for it, the public should have a clear understanding of its implications, not only its economic cost and benefit, but the impact on their community and cultural life. Will the city council try to attract artists downtown as a means of

regeneration? If so, will that mean the displacement of current residents, increased real estate taxes, or a radical shift in the look and feel of their community?

To be fair, local governments often come up with these policies with good intentions and fail to think through to the consequences because they are not required to do so. They struggle to realize some loose concept of a “creative city” -- and make a grab for the shiny object-- without any idea of what that means.

Tony Travers, director of the Greater London Group at the London School of Economics, and moderator of the 2002 New York conference wrote in 2005: “As a result of the economic success of Tate Modern, other cultural projects in Britain and overseas have been able to proceed in the knowledge that, if they are effectively planned, they can create an economic impact that will benefit an area wider than the gallery itself. However, the choice of location and the management of the project were crucial in securing the economic benefits that have flowed locally. A different approach might have failed.” (12)

Travers’ conclusion is certainly on target. But how does he define effective planning and how can the step-by-step process that worked so well for the Tate Modern and its partners be replicated elsewhere? Can it be applied beyond UK shores in different cultural and political settings? Can it help a small city in Upstate New York? Or Dayton, Ohio?

The World Trade Center site: What NOT to do (definitely)

By now, the World Trade Center site is one of the most widely known and discussed construction sites in history. The trials and tribulations of architects, developers, public officials, the victims’ families and the residents of New York City in general have been inscribed in thousands of print inches and television newscasts in the last nearly eight years. Perhaps there has never been a place where so much was expected and so little has been achieved.

In 2005, Frank Rich, a columnist for *The New York Times*, wrote this article: “And so ground zero remains a pit, a hole, a void. As The New York Post has noticed, more time has passed since George Pataki [New York State governor] first unveiled the final design of the Freedom Tower than it took to build the Empire State Building. For New Yorkers this saga is a raucous political narrative whose cast of characters includes a rapacious real-estate developer, a seriously irritating architect with even more irritating designer eyeglasses, a governor with self-delusional presidential ambitions and a mayor obsessed

with bringing New York the only target that may rival the Freedom Tower as terrorist bait, the Olympics.”

Not much has changed since then. Four years after Rich wrote this, the WTC site is still a mess. Rather than a symbol of courage and vitality in the face of death and destruction, it has become a symbol of failed policy, political expediency, and everything that is wrong with the way planning is done in New York City. What it revealed about money and power in the city was an eye-opener for most New Yorkers, but not in a good way. And this is not a story relegated to the past. Yet another depressing headline appeared in *The New York Times* on April 15, 2009: “As Finance Offices Empty, Developers Rethink Ground Zero.”

Ironically, while the international conference Creative Cities held in May 2002 was devoted to sharing knowledge and lessons learned from cities that had rebuilt and brought up the very issues that still plague the site, the city politicians and powerbrokers, many of whom were in attendance, were doing business as usual. The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, originally charged with the planning process for the WTC site, started out on the wrong foot and never regained its balance. While most in the city were too bruised to notice, the LMDC decided not to open the architectural selection process to international competition. After the complete failure of the first round of designs, it was forced into a redo. Gossip circulated that the LMDC had played favorites with the inner circle of New York architects. It held public meetings on the second round of designs, but not so that they mattered. Joyce Purnick, a reporter on the local beat for the *New York Times*, gave us a glimpse into the real thinking that brought us to the point we are today. She wrote in January 2003 that the hoopla around the nine new architectural plans would imply that one of them would be built, but that, according to one developer and planner: “They've created the wrong picture in the minds of the public, aspirations for something that isn't going to happen. The buildings they proposed are not commercially viable. Now they have to go from all those designs to the real issue... Alex Garvin, still head of planning [LMDC], said that it wasn't really a competition after all and that although one plan might be chosen it would be adapted to reality'.”

If you weren't reading the *Times* that day, you might have missed the fact that you, the public, were being duped.

“New York Talks to London and Berlin” May 2002

One clear outcome of the first Creative Cities conference in October 2001, one month after September 11, was the surprising realization that although there are networks of theoreticians talking about cities, there is no network of practitioners sharing knowledge. How much useful information, time and

money are being lost, we asked, because there is no mechanism to gather and disseminate lessons learned?

The obvious value of exchanging international perspectives on regeneration made the format of the next conference clear. Creative Cities addressed the rebuilding challenges of Lower Manhattan by bringing together some of the best minds in London and Berlin to discuss the experience of rebuilding those cities. Creative Cities was alone in this effort. With all the activity on the part of the design and building communities in response to the disaster, to our knowledge no other organization or agency – public or private – invited specialists with this expertise to discuss the future of New York.

What the WTC planning process had always lacked was legitimacy. The “New York Talks to London and Berlin” conference was further evidence why. Even by May 2002 neither the governor nor the mayor had articulated any vision for Ground Zero. Already the public was confused and skeptical about how decisions would be made despite Alex Garvin’s claim that this would be “a listening process” and that “thousands of people would be involved in helping to make decisions.”

The LMDC was populated by appointees of a governor trying to salvage his political career. The few appointments granted the city were made by the outgoing mayor, Rudy Giuliani. Very little of the LMDC’s workings were transparent and there was much backroom negotiating on every aspect of the site development. The public, preoccupied by the tragedy, left it to these politicians to do the right thing.

At the conference, the representative of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, who had responsibility for the site, stated it and the LMDC would work in partnership to provide a development plan by year-end and that the public would be involved every step of the way. The out-of-town experts expressed concern about the New Yorkers’ emphasis on a quick solution, the speed of the process, and its transparency. The day ended with the following questions:

- Will the speed of infrastructure repair segue into a rushed rebuilding?
- Will the architectural challenge be taken up or avoided?
- Will the public be consulted appropriately?
- Will office space distort the redevelopment mix?

The doubts and anxieties expressed in these four questions were more prescient than any of us knew.

“Sustainable Creativity” November 2002

By November 2002, when Creative Cities hosted a second conference on “Sustainable Creativity,” we had passed the one year anniversary of 9/11 with no progress at the site. The conversation had become fragmented. The LMDC and other public officials were eager to give the impression of transparency to a public that was becoming more critical and less willing to give the benefit of the doubt...but who remained powerless to influence events.

The opportunities that we had envisioned in the spring, along with many New Yorkers, to build something great in Lower Manhattan, to regenerate the area culturally and economically through a reconfigured transport plan, and to build greater public confidence in vision and implementation were not on the LMDC’s radar. Where there was clearly a need for courageous political leadership, no one rose to the occasion. As they started, so they continued. News of the WTC site was in the papers daily, although few New Yorkers could keep up with the intricacies of the mainly political, and mostly hidden, developments.

The goodwill of the conference six months before had clearly dissipated. Participants this time aggressively confronted city officials: Where was the bold ambition of a year or even six months ago? How had this process become so mired? Where was the plan? Who was in charge? The assembled bureaucrats who represented the agencies most directly involved in the WTC site, the Metropolitan Transit Authority, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, could not answer these questions.

The city’s – and the world’s – hope for this site and the brazen disregard for that hope were a radical turning point for CCI. It is safe to say that we would not have thought through the concept and implementation of the VI as systematically had there not been the WTC nor would we have realized the need for it. The genesis of the Vitality Index™ is inextricably intertwined with the story of Ground Zero. We were now actively searching for a new way of assessing the urban environment that was not based on abstract theorizing but on the necessity and complexity of a real-life event.

Lessons Learned

The attack on the World Trade Center left the city reeling and the arts and political communities locked in a debate about what should be done there. How could the site support the regeneration of Lower Manhattan and also be connected symbolically to what happened there? Surely, the arts must be a part of this revitalization and play their role as a mediator of experience? These questions and, admittedly, the profound frustration at the lack of credible solutions at the site, led us to take a step back and examine the issues behind the raging political battles. We sought new approaches to the problems so starkly raised by New York's example but which could be adapted to other cities as well.

More questions followed: When cities are compared one to another the term "creative" is often a marker. At the outset of this paper, we asked if we could name the components of a "creative city." Can public policy play a role in promoting a thriving cultural sector? Cultural industries are undoubtedly fashionable, but can they also play a role in ameliorating class issues that feed on poverty and social exclusion? Can the creative factor reverse the disintegration of community that seems built in to so many current political and civic engagements in the U.S?

These provocative questions, however, could only be useful if there were a way to take the answers out of the anecdotal and put them into something that could be more widely applied. We needed a mechanism that could provide an assessment framework for better decision-making globally. What finally emerged was the notion of an index - something akin to a cultural impact study - that could create criteria with community input, benchmark and assess projects, their successes and failures, and use that information to inform the public and government officials.

The opportunity seized at the power station on the South Bank and the opportunity lost at Ground Zero could not be a more telling story of how to get decision-making right and how to get it desperately wrong. The British architect, Will Alsop, one of the London panelists, said at the May conference: "If New York could stand up at the end of this process and say that this is extraordinary, that this is a model for other cities around the world, then that is its main contribution as a world city."

It often happens that looking back we project a kind of inevitability to rationalize where we've ended up today. Had there been transparency and a process that valued consensus and goodwill, the building at Ground Zero would not be at the mercy of fractious groups who claim special consideration

at a site that is witness to a national tragedy and not “owned” by anyone. The success of the Tate Modern makes laughable the “general wisdom” architecture critic, Paul Goldberger, expressed in the May meeting, that the risk of public consultation is that a “mediocre consensus might force out daring and innovative solutions.” (14)

Where this process could have pointed the city outward, making the WTC site comprehensible as a symbol of the city’s extraordinary position as a home for the world, it failed completely. It has succeeded in reinforcing our cynicism instead.

Could this story have turned out differently? Perhaps not. Perhaps the stakes were always too high. But the extraordinary interplay of money and power was a revelation and a learning moment. Is this how New York always does business?

Brooklyn or Bust

Atlantic Yards, another high stakes development in the heart of Brooklyn, would certainly indicate that it is. After years of the developer and city officials, most prominently the Mayor (who is a friend of the developer), pushing through this project, it has been halted by the downturn in the economy. The star architect, Frank Gehry, appears to have pulled out. In an opinion piece in the March 7, 2009 *Wall Street Journal*, Julia Vitullo-Martin, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, wrote: “In December 2003, Mayor Michael Bloomberg thought he had a slam dunk. He along with Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and developer Bruce Ratner struck a deal for a \$4.3 billion development project that was to remake downtown Brooklyn by building expansive residential and retail space, and a gleaming new \$950 million arena... Now, more than five years later, what's been brought to Brooklyn is a very large hole in the ground and a project that is coming to symbolize why large government projects can be riskier than allowing local residents to fix up their own communities. What we see in Brooklyn is the beginnings of the failure of a massive government plan to revive the economy of a neighborhood.”

I would disagree with Ms. Vitullo-Martin on that last point. Massive government projects can work, but not when they are conducted in this way. This deal was made among powerbrokers with no serious public consultation. Its purpose was to bring economic revitalization to downtown Brooklyn. But along with the hole in the ground five years later, it shares the same hallmarks of failure as the WTC site: political ambition and backroom dealing, lack of transparency and legitimacy. And now, as many have commented, buildings

have been destroyed and the neighborhoods that have been disrupted may never come back.

Could a cultural impact study have made a difference here? There were aspects of the plan that might have worked or worked better. Had Ratner been interested in public opinion, a big qualification, a Vitality Index™ study could have provided a better feel for community concerns and given the community a chance to state its values and aspirations for this area. Comparative case studies that focused on qualitative factors could have pointed out what works and what doesn't in ways that could have benefited both sides, encouraging goodwill and the trade-offs inherent in any project. Instead Ratner became embattled, going to court 18 times with two more cases still unsettled. Where the Tate Modern set out on an inclusive path to engage with the community it wanted to regenerate through its presence and to clearly benefit them, the Atlantic Yards developer went about it the old-fashioned way, top down. A cultural impact study early on might have told the developer what he now knows: that if this project goes forward it will probably do so in a much smaller version. In the meantime, a great deal of damage has been done.

Language and Governance

"Flow is not a luxury; it is a staple of life" (15), according to Csikszentmihalyi. If this is so, then we need to pay much more attention to it. Particularly because the psychologist argues, the "flow model can provide a framework for beginning to talk with greater precision about elusive concepts like the "quality of life." (16)

Building consensus in public life depends on good communication. Whether it is cross-cultural across nations, neighborhoods, or neighbors, finding the right words and the right meanings can be challenging. Crossing disciplines is no different. Transportation experts, urban planners, marketing experts, politicians and government bureaucrats all have their own specialized language – and priorities.

There is no reason not to weigh "soft" factors equally with the "hard." The Tate Modern among other examples indicates that a better understanding of the social and cultural aspects of a project make for a more popular and profitable result. But for many experts and bureaucrats it is easier to talk through statistics, flow charts, and credit and debit columns, thus extracting the human variables from the discussion, than to deal with the complexity of city life as it is lived. Adam Gopnik, writing about the endangered soul of the city in the New Yorker magazine, noted that the mayor of New York has difficulty talking about these things because they are "a little metaphysical" and "resistant to oratory." (16) The barrier to communication, ironically, appears to be language.

Bridging this divide is critical if leaders are to know what citizens are thinking and if government is to be transparent, legitimate, and accountable. The sense that statistics and flow charts tell the truth and words that relate to human experience don't is ridiculous. Yet, this premise, which privileges the technical over the human, dominates our discourse.

With the Vitality Index™, we are attempting to posit a framework that can encompass both the language of the technical specialist and the everyday language of the citizen. Somewhere these two need to meet. The goal of the VI is to interpret quality of life information with the same kind of rigor that is applied to hard statistics. It is flexible and allows for change and growth. It can be revisited over the life of a project or plan to ensure that government and developers are in touch with their interests.

Can this grassroots approach change people's perception of how government works? And can participatory democracy become a flow experience? At the very least, public consultation that asks people real questions about what they want and then reflects those answers honestly in its decision-making, i.e. "we've really listened to you," is the best start to reconciling differences. Politicians who don't respond can then be held accountable. Listening is also critical in a democracy.

The Vitality Index™ and the Age of Obama

The objective of the Obama campaign's mantra, "Yes We Can," was not only to win the White House, but to change the political culture of the country. The concepts of transparency, legitimacy, and accountability in government are merely abstractions if the public has lost faith that these are achievable goals. His optimistic message of rejecting business as usual is also realistic. If we are to engage in real change, all stakeholders must be involved in the process. Leadership is critical, but in a democracy, the quality of the leadership depends on the level of public participation. The Vitality Index™ is based on these principles. The notion of a cultural impact study that can improve projects and yield long term benefits both to developers and communities may seem far fetched, but thirty years ago, skeptics looked at the environmentalists as just a bunch of tree-huggers. Today, environmental impact studies are a requirement.

The Obama campaign, the largest grassroots organization in American history, proved that yes, a grassroots approach can work. There is additional evidence at the Tate Modern and West Harlem, in Des Moines and Dayton, and beyond.

Cultural impact studies at the WTC site and Atlantic Yards, that value serious public consultation, communication, and consensus-building, most certainly would have improved those projects and how they were perceived.

Sir Peter Hall writes in “Cities and Civilization” that “cities have made and remade themselves in the image of political philosophies.” (17) This is the moment for American cities to be remade in a new image. Making government work is not easy. It requires, as Mr. Obama said in his Inaugural Address, “[doing] our business in the light of day, because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government.” Yes, we can.

Endnotes

1. Howard Gardner, *Creating Minds*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993), xii.
2. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Introduction, in *Optimal Experience*, eds. M. Csikszentmihalyi and Isabella Selega Csikszentmihalyi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 8.
3. Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 251.
4. Richard G. Mitchell, Jr., “Sociological implications of the flow experience,” in *Optimal Experience*, eds. Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 57.
5. Marc L. Miringoff, Marque-Luisa Miringoff, Sandra Opdycke, *Social Indicators: What we need to make them count*, Presentation to GAO and National Academies, Washington, DC, February 27, 2003.
6. Denise Regh, interview with Jeffrey Brown in *Dayton Arts Community Struggles to Stay Afloat*, PBS Television, April 10, 2009.
7. Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 251.
8. Csikszentmihalyi, *Optimal Experience*, 251.

9. Creative Cities conference report, New York Talks to London and Berlin, New York City, May 2002.
10. Bankside Urban Study on the Tate Modern Neighborhood, May 2001, published online.
11. Tate Modern press release, May 2001, published online.
12. Tony Travers, *Renewing London in Tate Modern: The First Five Years*, 2005, published online.
13. Will Alsop, quoted in Creative Cities conference report, New York Talks to London and Berlin, New York City, May 2002.
14. Mihalyi Csikszentmihlayi, The future of flow, in *Optimal Experience*, eds. Csikszentmihlayi and Csikszentmihlayi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 366.
15. Csikszentmihlayi, The future of flow, in *Optimal Experience*, 377.
16. Adam Gopnik, Gothamitis, *New Yorker Magazine*, January 8, 2007.
17. Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilization*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), 6.

Bibliography

Csikszentmihalyi, M., Isabella Selega Csikszentmihalyi (eds) (1988) *Optimal Experience*. Cambridge University Press

Gardner, Howard, (1993) *Creating Minds*. Basic Books, New York,

Hall, Peter, (1998) *Cities in Civilization*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London

Miringoff, M., Miringoff, M-L., & Opdycke, S. (2003a) *Social indicators: What we need to make them count*. Presentation to GAO and National Academies, February, 27, 2003

Linda Lees, Ph.D.

Director

Creative Cities International, LLC

25 April 2009

www.cbs.dk/creativeencounters

Creativity at Work, Creative Encounters Working Papers Series

Working Papers List:

- #1 **Making Scents of Smell: Manufacturing Incense in Japan**
By: Brian Moeran
June 2007
- #2 **From Participant Observation to Observant Participation:
Anthropology, Fieldwork and Organizational Ethnography**
By: Brian Moeran
July 2007
- #3 **Creative Encounters in the Film Industry: Content, Cost, Chance, and
Collection**
By: Mark Lorenzen
August 2007
- #4 **Hvilke kulturtilbud bruger den kreative klasse?**
By: Trine Bille
August 2007
- #5 **Chinese Tourists in Denmark**
By: Can-Seng Ooi
October 2007
- #6 **Authenticity-in-Context: Embedding the Arts and Culture in Branding
Berlin and Singapore**
By: Can-Seng Ooi and Birgit Stöber
January 2008
- #7 **Credibility of a Creative Image: The Singaporean Approach**
By: Can-Seng Ooi
January 2008
- #8 **On the Globalization of the Film Industry**
By: Mark Lorenzen

February 2008

- #9 **A methodology for studying design cognition in the real world**
By: Bo Christensen
February 2008
- #10 **Embedded Structural Tensions in the Organization of Japanese Advertising Production**
By: Brian Moeran
February 2008
- #11 **The simultaneous success and disappearance of Hong Kong martial arts film, analysed through costume and movement in 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon'**
By: Lise Skov
February 2008
- #12 **An Anthropological Analysis of Book Fairs**
By: Brian Moeran
September 2008
- #13 **The Art of Selling Art**
By: Nina Poulsen
March 2008
- #14 **Much Ado about Nothing? Untangling the Impact of European Premier Film Festivals**
By: Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen
September 2008
- #15 **Redefining luxury: A review essay**
By: Fabian Faurholt Csaba
November 2008
- #16 **Who's Last? Challenges and Advantages for Late Adopters in the International Film Festival Field**
By: Carmelo Mazza and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen
November 2008
- #17 **Labor market and education for artists and the creative industries - some descriptive results from Denmark**
By: Trine Bille
November 2008
- #18 **Ethics and the fashion industry in West Europe**
By: Lise Skov

November 2008

- #19 **Research Approaches to the Study of Dress and Fashion**
By: Lise Skov and Marie Riegels Melchior
November 2008
- #20 **Music and Dress in West Europe**
By: Else Skjold 2008
November 2008
- #21 **Dress and Fashion in Denmark**
By: Marie Riegels Melchior
November 2008
- #22 **The apparel industry in West Europe**
By: Jan Hilger
November 2008
- #23 **Fragrance and Perfume in West Europe**
By: Brian Moeran
November 2008
- #24 **Industrialismens Pels**
By: Lise Skov
April 2009
- #25 **Go West: The Growth of Bollywood**
By: Mark Lorenzen
April 2009
- #26 **Advertising and the Technology of Enchantment**
By: Brian Moeran
June 2009
- #27 **What kind of 'market' is the film labor markets a prospective literature review**
By: Chris Mathieu
October 2009
- #28 **City branding and film festivals: the case of Copenhagen**
By: Can-Seng Ooi and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen
October 2009
- #29 **Antecedents and consequences of creativity and beauty judgements in Consumer products**
By: Bo Christensen, Tore Kristensen and Rolf Reber

October 2009

#30 Images of Users and Products Shown During Product Design Increase Users' Willingness-To-Use the Innovation.

By: Bo Christensen

October 2009

#31 Evaluating Ceramic Art in Japan

By: Brian Moeran

October 2009

#32 The Fashion Show as an Art Form

By: Lise Skov, Else Skjold, Brian Moeran, Frederik Larsen and Fabian F. Csaba

October 2009

#33 Fairs and Festivals: Negotiating Values in the Creative Industries

By: Brian Moeran and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen

November 2009

#34 Soft authoritarianism, political pragmatism and cultural policies: Singapore as a City for the Arts

By: Can-Seng Ooi

October 2009

#35 Cultural Production, Creativity and Constraints

By: Brian Moeran

November 2009

36 Familiarity and Uniqueness: Branding Singapore as a Revitalized Destination

By: Can-Seng Ooi

November 2009

#37 Notes for a Theory of Values

By: Brian Moeran

December 2009

#38 Translating Fashion into Danish

By: Marie Riegels Melchior, Lise Skov and Fabian Faurholt Csaba

December 2009

#39 Re-scaling Governance in Berlin's Creative Economy

By: Bastian Lange

December 2009

- #40 **The Banyan and the Birch Tree: Family ties and embeddedness in the Indian film industry in Bollywood**
By: Mark Lorenzen and Florian A. Taeube
January 2010
- #41 **Bangalore vs. Bollywood: Connectivity and Catch-up in Emerging Market Economies**
By: Mark Lorenzen and Ram Mudambi
January 2010
- #42 **Talent retention in Danish film: (meso) industry level factors**
By: Chris Mathieu
January 2010
- #43 **Creativity, Public Engagement and Political Accountability: The New Measure**
By: Linda Lees
January 2010