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## Creative Interventions and Urban Revitalization

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Supervisor: Professor Sarah Bassnett, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in  
Visual Arts

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CREATIVE INTERVENTIONS AND URBAN REVITALIZATION

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Nicole C. Borland

Graduate Program in Visual Art History

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
MA in Art History

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
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London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

My thesis critiques Richard Florida's notion of the creative class and Charles Landry's ideas about the creative city to explore how these formulaic, homogenous approaches fail to adequately advance urban regeneration and community enhancement. In contrast to these approaches I examine the importance of interventionist, vernacular creative practices for urban revitalization. Considered are such vernacular endeavours as public artworks, community gardening, and arts and culture festivals. Specifically, I look to the example of London, Ontario to illustrate the ways in which communities can see, use, and appreciate their city differently. The concepts of placemaking and sense of place factor significantly in delineating alternative ways that independent, community organizations can work in line with initiatives posed by municipal governments to regenerate ailing urban spaces. Drawing on examples from different cities, various theoretical frameworks, and personal engagement through event planning and interviews, I seek to illustrate just how important and influential the everyday can be in engendering a culture of progressive civic betterment.

## Keywords

Urban revitalization, urban planning, urban design, municipal government, Charles Landry, Richard Florida, creative class, creative cities, vernacular creativity, public art, public festival, community gardening, everyday life, community organizations, grassroots organizations, London, Ontario, Hamilton, Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Vancouver, British Columbia, sense of place, placemaking, place attachment, artistic intervention.

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# Chapter 1

## 1 Creativity: The Class, the Concept, and the Vernacular

This chapter introduces the creative cities concept through Richard Florida's notion of the "creative class" and Charles Landry's "toolkit for urban innovators." Further, the concept of vernacular creativity is explored and positioned in such a way as to challenge what appears to be the stringent and overly formulaic creative cities precepts expressed by Florida and Landry. To firmly base my argument within community enhancement initiatives in London, Ontario, I then critique the 2006 Creative Cities Task Force Report, commissioned by the city of London, to gauge the effectiveness of bureaucratic, middle-class agendas in governing urban revitalization attempts. The concepts developed here will be crucial for discussions undertaken in later chapters so a thorough explanation is essential.

### 1.1 Introduction

The creative cities discourse has many facets and components that need to be understood in order to construct an alternative argument. To begin, Richard Florida's concept of the creative class is a central factor. He coined the term in his 2002 book *The Rise of the Creative Class* and expanded his ideas in later publications, *Cities and the Creative Class*, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, and *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited*.<sup>1</sup> In these works, the creative class is defined as "those who create marketable new forms or who work primarily at creative problem solving. They include individuals working in fields as diverse as science, engineering, architecture, software, technology, art and design, fashion, music, and entertainment."<sup>2</sup> The creative class, according to Florida, includes roughly one third of the world's global workers and his creativity thesis focuses on economic growth. He argues that "tapping and stoking the creative furnace of every

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Richard Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent* (New York: Collins, 2007). Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Gord Hume et al., *The Creative City Task Force Report*, (London, Ontario: The City of London, 2006), 4.

human being is the great challenge of our time.”<sup>3</sup> It is prominent throughout his writings that promoting creativity, arts, and culture enhances the livelihoods of individuals and in so doing, benefits the community as a whole. He states, “the role of culture is much more expansive, [it argues] that human beings have limitless potential, and the key to economic growth is to enable and unleash that potential.”<sup>4</sup> Apart from the creative class itself, the essential components to a creative city, he argues, are the three T’s of technology, talent, and tolerance. These make up “people climates” where livelihoods are improved through diversity, culture, and beautification.<sup>5</sup> These environments are the places in which Florida applies his model for urban regeneration referring to specific characteristics of the individuals and the physical spaces.

Another essential figure in the development of the idea of the creative class is Charles Landry who adapted and advanced Florida’s concepts in his 2008 book *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. Landry builds upon, extends and, at times, departs from Florida’s thesis by offering what he calls a ‘conceptual toolkit’ or “a set of concepts, ideas, ways of thinking, and intellectual notions to make understanding, exploring, and acting upon a problem easier.”<sup>6</sup> He likens the set of approaches he develops to actual tools, such as a hammer or a saw, to analogously show how problems in urban spaces can be recognized, analyzed, and rectified through creative concepts. Landry describes the creative city as “a new method of strategic urban planning [that] examines how people can think, plan, and act creatively in the city.”<sup>7</sup> He approaches urban improvement by focusing on imagination and talent that may already exist but requires harnessing, nurturing, and sustaining. One of his key ideas is the notion of an “ideas bank,” which provides “the possibilities from which innovations will emerge.”<sup>8</sup> This surplus of ideas is the platform on which change may manifest. The notion that community members have valuable ideas to productively contribute to their city is at the heart of Landry’s vision and according to him, “we cannot solve 21<sup>st</sup>-century problems

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<sup>3</sup> Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (London: Earthscan, 2008), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Landry, *The Creative City*, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

with 19<sup>th</sup>-century mindsets: the dynamics of cities and the world urban system have changed too dramatically.”<sup>9</sup> Landry offers insight into the ways in which not only decision-makers and city officials must approach urban revitalization, but also how individuals and the community at large can participate. These changes may be gradual, they may be swift, but the point is that with creative contributions, adjustment to change, and open minds, the city can become a place of pleasure and enjoyment for inhabitants, both mentally and physically.

Although the concepts of the creative class and creative cities have been widely embraced, they have also become topics of debate. To begin, the creative cities concept has various positive components, such as enhancing arts and culture in an urban environment through amplification of and exposure to such things as public art, arts organizations, and festivals. Yet, at what cost does the creative cities thesis come when implemented in specific cities? When economic development is the central factor, marginalized or non-elite groups are excluded, thus the city is subjected to a middle-class, neoliberal agenda. Many critiques of both Florida’s and Landry’s concepts concentrate on the economic focus of their model for urban revitalization and many rebuttals have been made. For example, proponents of “vernacular creativity” argue that everyday, ordinary practices of creativity on an individual level undertaken outside of traditional economic values and practices champion the often marginal spaces of everyday life where creativity culminates.<sup>10</sup> The concept removes the geographic specificity implicit in creative cities, shifting the focus from strictly downtown core areas and established institutions to individual experience where creativity may not be the only focus, but where the creative potential of the everyday can engender a culture of multiplication. Such practices as community gardening, personal photography, musical performance, and arts appreciation constitute vernacular creativity.

Placing the focus upon vernacular, everyday creativity, as opposed to the stringent creative cities concept, builds upon existing community resources without a harsh

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<sup>9</sup> Landry, *The Creative City*, xi.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Edensor et al., eds., “Introduction” in *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Re-Thinking the Cultural Economy* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1.

governing agenda that marshals all acts of creativity into a homogenous and formulaic approach to urban regeneration. By considering the roles of arts, culture, and creativity within a community, this chapter considers the consequences of applying the creative cities idea to London, Ontario. While this approach to urban regeneration may benefit the city by infusing the creative environment with accessible artwork and culture, what other effects – for example, the power that will accrue to institutions and city officials or the impact on independent projects and organizations as well as individuals – will it have? Conversely, what might a model based on vernacular creativity offer to bolster community creativity and engagement in more diverse ways than the creative cities model?

## 1.2 Creative Cities

Landry calls the 21<sup>st</sup>-century the “century of cities,” for over half the world’s population now lives in them (75 per cent in Europe and 50 per cent in developing countries). Yet, as he puts it, “most live in cities through need, not desire.”<sup>11</sup> If the city offers opportunities for enjoyment, commerce, socializing and more, why is it some people do not desire to live in cities? There is a plethora of possible answers, but a common concern with urban living is its alienating atmosphere and fast pace of the daily grind. The challenge for city officials and community groups is to improve quality of life so that more people enjoy urban living. The creative city concept outlines changes at various levels of the city, from commercial endeavours, to business and art, aimed at producing a culturally rich urban environment.<sup>12</sup> However, the viability of the suggested changes remains questionable when the primary focus is economic development.

The specific aspects of Landry’s ‘conceptual toolkit’ must be understood in order to grasp the scope of his vision. For him, mindset is important, and it takes various approaches to effectively instigate change and solve the most difficult problems. He defines three main ambitions of this ‘conceptual toolkit’ in *The Creative City*:

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<sup>11</sup> Landry, *The Creative City*, xii.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., xiii.

1. To provide readers with a more integrated and holistic approach to thinking about and analyzing cities. In the longer run this will change the way decision-makers consider the assets and potential of cities as well as how cities might be organized and managed.
2. To offer a ‘mental toolkit’ that provides readers with the cornerstones of a new mindset and so stimulate readers’ own ideas and solutions for their city.
3. To engender a critical debate among decision-makers at different levels and to influence the policy, strategies, and action undertaken in the city.<sup>13</sup>

Each of these aims have very specific and interesting implications for the execution, role, and perception of community building endeavours in a city, and the toolkit provides a way for thinking about how artistic and creative interventions might contribute to a creative city through imaginative solutions to ongoing problems.

In Landry’s third mandate of the creative city concept, he proposes a critical debate amongst those in official decision-making positions so that new strategies can be created for bringing about urban change through creativity. He suggests following the creative city strategy, which should be implemented in four stages that include “an overall five-step strategic planning process; the application of a set of analytical tools, the most important of which is ‘the cycle of urban creativity’ concept; a series of indicators to measure how relatively creative a city or project is; a range of techniques that help creative thinking and planning.”<sup>14</sup> In this concept, creativity culminates in a final step where the city itself is specifically considered, analyzed, measured, and acted upon. This particular form of strategic planning positions creative output within a certain perspective. In so doing it accepts different approaches and sees creative thinking as a serious endeavour. Further, a willingness to think from the viewpoints of different disciplines supplements the idea that resources for planning exist in a much wider variety than is usually considered (for example, the advantage of location, availability of

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<sup>13</sup> Landry, *The Creative City*, xv.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 166.

research, the presence of businesses or skills in the city, civic confidence, perceptions of place, potential taken from a city's history, traditions and values, and imagination within the local community).<sup>15</sup>

Finally, to this end, the cycle of urban creativity, which Landry considers to be the most important element in the strategic process, “attempts to create a form of urban energy that will drive a city like a renewable resource,” and “provides a mechanism to assess the strengths and weaknesses of creative projects in the city at various stages of their development.”<sup>16</sup> The cycle itself consists of five stages: “helping people generate ideas and projects; turning ideas into reality; networking, circulating, and marketing ideas and projects; delivery mechanisms such as cheap spaces for rent, incubator units or exhibition and showcasing opportunities; disseminating results to the city, building markets and audiences and discussing these so that new ideas are generated.”<sup>17</sup> Landry asserts that through this process – the concrete manifestation of creative thinking – analysis and mindset can generate positive change, and thus may become clear to decision-makers such as city council, institutional workers, and finally, the public at large. The mandate of this cycle is for the collective community to make observations regarding its strengths and weaknesses within each of the stages so it may come to new conclusions as to how changes can be made.<sup>18</sup>

Landry notes that much of the strategy in the creative city approach is not entirely different from traditional modes of planning. An accurate example is something along the lines of a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats).<sup>19</sup> Yet, his approach holds different priorities, such as an awareness of “the multiple dimensions of creativity and innovations [which search] out the necessary and varied imaginative angles of any project.”<sup>20</sup> It is apparent here just how different this approach is in terms of urban revitalization. With attention to traditional planning modes but a focus on new and

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<sup>15</sup> Landry, *The Creative City*, 166-167.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

innovative ones, individuals and decision-makers may be more open to the inventive nature of the concept. However, it can be perceived of as vague or overly prescriptive in this sense whereby discouraging community members from applying its particular precepts.

Landry presents an interesting case study regarding a self-help approach to urban revitalization that requires independent community rallying in order to influence city officials to address issues of utmost concern. In Dublin, Ireland in 1998, a group of ten women decided they needed better living conditions in a vandalized, dangerous, and rapidly degenerating travelers community (dwellings for groups of itinerant people in a city such as the homeless, travelers, or squatters).<sup>21</sup> The site was under consideration for redevelopment, but local authorities were reluctant to consult the community and the plan fell by the wayside. The women took matters into their own hands through artistry and creativity using embroidery, quilting, pottery, photography, video, and model-making. The group produced a mixed media manifestation that displayed what they felt the community should become. Through embroidering a quilt with their intricate design of community living, and using photography and video to document the process, they presented the plan to council officials, and this became the starting point for redevelopment.<sup>22</sup> Here one sees how public art, and community ideas can give groups a sense of pride, ownership, and identity. The space allotted to this community continues to be well-maintained, and has become a model for traveler site design.<sup>23</sup> The group is presently a well-established collective called the Clondalkin Travelers Development Group, which consults for youth and children's services, social welfare, housing and health, and literacy development.<sup>24</sup> This case is an excellent example of all three of Landry's aims. First, there was an analysis of a situation in utter need of resolution. Second, there was a shift in mindset that placed creativity at the forefront. Lastly, the creative action influenced redevelopment in a community that had been neglected.

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<sup>21</sup> Landry, *The Creative City*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



Landry states that “the urban problem is made up of personally experienced dilemmas which are part of a larger shared experience where individuality is submerged in civic, public life.”<sup>25</sup> He notes that individuals often feel as though they do not have control over these situations, for it is the financial, economic, and political structures of civic life that seem to govern change. To Landry, re-establishing the links between independent organizations or groups and representational or corporate structures “is perhaps the primary task of creative action.”<sup>26</sup> It is reasonable to infer that, considering such precepts as those outlined by Landry as well as the heightened attention paid to the benefits of independent, creative initiatives, city officials will become increasingly aware of both as necessary for improvement in downtown cores especially, and further, surrounding areas.

Important to note in this discussion of the creative cities concept are the many responses to it, both positive and negative. Economic geographer Dr. Cees Jan Pen at the Nicis Institute extols the work of both Landry and Florida and the concept of the creative city, and he endorses Landry’s vision for imaginative cities that are outlined in his recent publication *The Art of City Making*. He states “Richard Florida and Charles Landry have helped to place the urban and neighbourhood economy and, in particular (innovative) entrepreneurship on a high urban agenda.”<sup>27</sup> He goes on to discuss how their work represents a paradigm shift in urban regeneration and theory suggesting that not since pioneering urbanist Jane Jacobs have cities been regarded in such an animated, positive, and hopeful sense. According to Jan Pen, Florida “regards cities as peaks in an increasingly flat world,” where Landry builds upon this notion “focus[ing] on the (re)development process of cities in becoming imaginative places.”<sup>28</sup> These comments illustrate where Florida and Landry differ, but also how their ideas relate to and build upon one another.

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<sup>25</sup> Landry, *The Creative City*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. Cees Jan Pen, “Review; The Art of City Making,” *Creativity and Innovation Management* 17 (2008): 336, and Charles Landry, *The Art of City Making* (London: Earthscan, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Jan Pen, “Review,” 336.

Further, Jan Pen's sentiments echo others amongst many different fields and account for such developments as the international endeavour, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and, on a smaller scale, the Creative Cities Network of Canada. The former aims to develop international partnering to promote creative hubs, socio-cultural clusters, and creative and sustainable development in urban areas in line with Florida and Landry's established concepts. Representative members include Dublin, Sydney, Santa Fe, Bogota, Berlin, Montreal, and Buenos Aires amongst many others.<sup>29</sup> The Creative Cities Network of Canada is a smaller incarnation that includes representative individuals for various cities throughout the country and has a list of members totalling one hundred and ten. This network connects those employed in what Florida defines as creative industries in order to generate awareness of different ideas, supply information, as well as hold conferences and summits on key topics.<sup>30</sup> Examples such as these communicate the broad, worldwide embrace of Florida and Landry's concepts as well as how the creative cities concept can be largely tailored to the needs of an immense number of cities. Conversely however, this broad application can also suggest the hasty embrace and employment of the principles while making questionable the specificity of the claims that have both become large topics of various critiques.

Amongst these many supporters of creative cities, there are also many critics. Negative criticism includes comments from scholar Jamie Peck who believes that Florida and those rushing to employ his theories "work quietly with the grain of extant neoliberal development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, and middle class consumption, and place marketing."<sup>31</sup> Neoliberalism is defined as a blend of traditionally liberal social concerns with an emphatic focus on economic growth.<sup>32</sup> Peck criticizes Florida's theatrics when presenting his ideas, regarding his approach as a sort of

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<sup>29</sup> UNESCO Creative Cities Network, "Who are the members?," last updated 2014, accessed at <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/creative-cities-network/who-are-the-members/>.

<sup>30</sup> Creative Cities Network of Canada, "About the Network," last updated 2014, accessed at <http://www.creativecity.ca/about-the-network.php>.

<sup>31</sup> Jamie Peck, "Struggling with the Creative Class," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (2005): 740.

<sup>32</sup> Online Dictionary, "Neoliberalism," Last updated 2013, accessed August 2013, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/neoliberalism?s=t>.

sales pitch. He resents the idea that the ‘creative age’ is an inevitable, unstoppable social revolution.<sup>33</sup> In “Struggling with the Creative Class,” Peck notes that *The Rise of the Creative Class* has been described by some as “the most popular book on regional economies in the past decade” procuring acclaim from the likes of *Washington Monthly*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Entrepreneur.com*, *Money Magazine* and others. Yet, it has also suffered blatant and harsh attacks from the political right, economically conservative Manhattan Institute, which regards Florida’s thesis as an attack “on (big) business oriented development strategies and suburban lifestyles...a frontal assault on ‘family values’.”<sup>34</sup>

Simultaneously, however, criticism from the left, although to a lesser degree, has come in the form of snide remarks and scepticism from the Democratic Leadership Council’s *Blueprint Magazine* to a cutting critique in *The Baffler*.<sup>35</sup> In *The American Prospect*, for example, Alec MacGillis interrogates Florida’s status as an “economic-development troubadour” stating that he has “now taken [his] closed loop argument to another level by declaring that henceforth, the winners’ club is closed to new entrants.”<sup>36</sup> Florida has responded to these critiques by saying “such heated rhetoric puzzles me; I harbour no hidden agenda. I am a political independent, fiscal conservative, social liberal, and believer in vigorous international competition and free trade...I work closely with mayors, governors, business, political, and civic leaders...a good deal of the time, I cannot even tell who is Republican and who is Democrat.”<sup>37</sup> Evidence suggests a growing distaste for the creative cities concept and, although believers still bolster it with support, it is apparent that new, inclusive approaches must be brought to the forefront.

Florida’s remark does well to defend his position, but does not fully erase the other side of the argument. In critiques such as Peck’s or MacGillis’, it is apparent why the potential negative effects of fervently employing the creative cities model must be considered. Florida’s 3 T’s (technology, talent, and tolerance) come under heavy scrutiny

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<sup>33</sup> Peck, “Struggling with the Creative Class,” 741.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Alec MacGillis, “The Ruse of the Creative Class,” *The American Prospect*, December 2008, n.p.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

in this regard for it is not only minority groups who are excluded from the implementation of creative cities, but certain cities all together. Florida's 3 T's filter into and make up his "creativity indexes" which are the tools used to measure the creativity of a given city.<sup>38</sup> Thus it is through this mechanism that Florida determines the feasibility of applying the creative cities model to particular places. This is heavily scrutinized as with, for example, MacGillis who quotes Florida's 2009 article in *The Atlantic*, "How the Crash Will Reshape America" regarding the economic recession stating:

We can't stop the decline of some places and that would be foolish to try...different eras favour different places, along with the industries and lifestyles those places embody...we need to let the demand for key products and lifestyles of the old order fall, and begin building a new economy, based on a new geography.<sup>39</sup>

Is Florida suggesting particular cities without specific groups, specific talent, or technological potential are simply not conducive to the creative cities model? Or are they simply confined to their current lot, unable to escape the urban entropy inflicted by economic hardship? London, for example, is a largely middle class, relatively conservative city that has been slow to embrace the creative cities model. It is also a city with a variety of minority status groups ranging from new Canadians to lower income families and individuals. How does the creative cities model for economic development benefit them or their city when it suggests an emphatic neoliberal agenda that excludes particular groups? Would it not be more beneficial to infer that each city, in its own unique situation, should harness the resources and creative potential it has in order to instigate more swiftly sustainable change? In this regard, I believe individual creativity of the vernacular, everyday sort will infuse the urban space with the necessary appreciation for community driven projects specific to a municipality. Thus, the concept of vernacular creativity offers something the creative cities model does not. It provides a platform from

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Florida, "Canada's Most Creative Cities," Exert from *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited*, in *The Huffington Post*, December 2012, Accessed at [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/richard-florida/canadas-most-creative-cit\\_b\\_1608460.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/richard-florida/canadas-most-creative-cit_b_1608460.html).

<sup>39</sup> Richard Florida, "How the Crash Will Reshape America," *The Atlantic*, March 1, 2009, n.p.

which individuals, and by extension, collective creativity may manifest, producing a creative culture that will radiate outwards resulting in an appreciative, engaged, and contributing community.

### 1.3 Vernacular Creativity

Jean Burgess, a Creative Industries professor at Queensland University, suggests that “each example of vernacular creativity is a representation of a specific life, a specific time, a specific place.”<sup>40</sup> The practices and subsequent artefacts of the vernacular are socially contextualized by their dissemination, and her main point is that “culture doesn’t have to be sublime or spectacular to be useful to someone, somewhere.”<sup>41</sup> Burgess looks primarily at vernacular creativity in the context of new media and the Internet and its potential to enliven “social connectivity, and conversation, to individualistic expression.”<sup>42</sup> It is an attention to and appreciation for individualistic expression that combats the homogenous, corporate concept of the creative city. Here, this potential engages and connects, creating a climate where creativity is the central focus, and challenges rigid dictums that decide who, what, and where constitutes community and cultural creativity.

A group of urban studies scholars – Tim Edensor, Steve Millington, Norma Rantisi, and Deborah Leslie – in their book *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy*, argue that “the discourses of the creative city privilege particular notions of creativity, producing a hierarchical ordering which champions specific forms of urban development.” In particular, they examine “how notions of a creative class construct restrictions of who, what, and where is considered ‘creative’ and argue that an understanding of vernacular and everyday landscapes of creativity honours the non-economic values and outcomes produced by alternative, marginal and quotidian creative practices and has the potential to move us to more holistic, diverse, and socially inclusive

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Vernacular Creativity: An Interview with Jean Burgess”, October 8, 2007, n.p., accessed October 5, 2014, [http://henryjenkins.org/2007/10/vernacular\\_creativity\\_an\\_inter.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2007/10/vernacular_creativity_an_inter.html).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

creative city strategies.”<sup>43</sup> Such practices include those of personal photography, volunteer run organizations or events, community gardening, arts and culture festivals, artistic and musical interventions and performance, and other practices of, perhaps, a more avant-garde, innovative nature. Vernacular creativity makes an incision into traditional or bureaucratically convened creativity. The concept goes as far as to codify such things as holiday lights or retail window displays as creativity of the vernacular. With the broad range of media that constitute vernacular creativity, that already or unintentionally ensue on a daily basis, it is plain to see that each community has the necessary resources to bolster individual and collective input without the complete guiding hand of official forces. In so doing, the community can bring the urban environment, and city at large, closer to a regenerated, reinvigorated, creative city status.

Take Hamilton, Ontario’s Art Crawl as an example of the way another mid-sized city used existing vernacular creativity in order to rejuvenate the community. Started in 2006, the Art Crawl takes place once a month during the summer in the old inner-city neighbourhood of Jamesville (James Street North). A variety of galleries and studios open their doors to the public and in one evening, more than 250 people visit each of these locations.<sup>44</sup> Now in its seventh year, the Crawl (now entitled the Supercrawl) has grown exponentially and has received national acclaim. It has become one of the most positive indicators of the city’s identity.<sup>45</sup> It now includes live, outdoor music and has become a two-day event that aims to “...showcas[e] the intrinsic charm and cultural character of [ James Street North] and to host music, art, dance, and theatre from Hamilton and around the world.”<sup>46</sup> Another interesting aspect to this event is that, as much as it is about the art, artists, and community, it is quite literally about the street itself. The Crawl is acutely focused on what the street and area represent, why they were in such dire need of revitalization, and what they bring to the cultural identity of Hamilton: this is the all-encompassing purpose of the festival. Bruce Farley Mowat

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<sup>43</sup> Edensor et al., “Introduction,” 1.

<sup>44</sup> Bruce Farley Mowat, “Go West Young Artist,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 7, 2006, n.p.

<sup>45</sup> “All About Supercrawl”, last updated June 2013, n.p., accessed May 21, 2014, <http://www.supercrawl.ca/supercrawl/about/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

quotes Toronto's Museum of Contemporary Art's David Liss stating that the fervour with which people visit the Crawl shows that Hamilton is finally "culturally maturing," meaning it is now capable of approaching urban problems creatively and effectively.<sup>47</sup> Although the Crawl could be understood in relation to both Landry's and Florida's concepts, it was wholly organized and executed by one of the very communities (specific independent artists, community members and organizations individually concerned with regenerating the urban environment) the two theories ignore. The Crawl is a testament to the idea that each day there are individuals engaged in practices that, with the proper promotion and dedication to a mandate for civic betterment, can change a city, and that that change can and will happen without the governing force of homogenous concepts conceived of within the gaze of municipal officials and ultimately, bureaucrats.



**Figure 1 Hamilton Art Crawl, James Street North, 2010,**  
<http://www.raisethehammer.org/>

Although a larger city, Hamilton (with a population of 504 550 people as of the 2006 census) is comparable to London as a case study in urban revitalization.<sup>48</sup> Having a population of 352 395, London has grown considerably in recent years with new subdivisions, diverse job opportunities, and increased awareness of its role as a

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<sup>47</sup> Farley Mowat, "Go West young Artist," n.p.

<sup>48</sup> "City of Hamilton Facts and Figures", last updated 2013, accessed May 24, 2014, <http://www.hamilton.ca/CityDepartments/PlanningEcDev/Divisions/Planning/CommunityPlanning/FactsAndFigures.htm>.



competing mid-sized city.<sup>49</sup> As the population increases, so too will the number of creative workers. There is evidence of this in terms of the arts with increasingly prevalent public art on display in the downtown. Much like the Art Crawl, ongoing festivals like Our Street Day, Nuit Blanche, and Sun Fest suggest the need and desire to enliven the downtown core. These festivals are brought to the streets so as to give the community at large the opportunity to enjoy their city in a new light, thereby implementing imperative revitalization through community involvement. For these reasons, if promotion is adequate and enough people are reached, London could see similar growth and rejuvenation of ailing areas. Creative city precepts such as imagination, talent, dedication, and innovation can indeed elicit community rejuvenation, yet it is through individuals, their perceptions, and ultimate use of space on an everyday level that vernacular creativity can dominate via unlimited cultural and creative potential.



**Figure 2 Hamilton Art Crawl, James Street North, 2010,**  
<http://www.raisethehammer.org/>

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<sup>49</sup> “City of London Population and Housing Characteristics”, last updated 2012, needs an access date because the page seems to be gone,  
[http://www.london.ca/About\\_London/PDFs/1\\_PopulationHousing\\_JP\\_Final.pdf](http://www.london.ca/About_London/PDFs/1_PopulationHousing_JP_Final.pdf).



## 1.4 London as a Creative City

Having discussed both Florida's notion of the creative class and Landry's conceptual toolkit, as well as the overarching creative cities concept, and the concept of vernacular creativity, I will now look specifically at the case of London, Ontario. This city has enormous potential to implement creative change for urban revitalization in the downtown core and radiating neighbourhoods. Through an analysis of gaps and problems in the artistic and cultural makeup of the city, an openness to shifts in mindset through communication with decision-makers, and the execution of appreciation-generating endeavours, this city could garner the needed momentum to improve its image and overall community well-being. In this section, I discuss some positive aspects of applying the creative cities concept to London, and I consider the potentially negative effects through an examination of the 2006 Creative Cities Task Force (CCTF) Report.



**Figure 3 Mike Harris, Downtown London, Ontario, 2010, [www.itcwebdesigns.ca](http://www.itcwebdesigns.ca)**

The CCTF Report is a document produced by the City of London which offers recommendations regarding the implementation of Florida's and Landry's precepts in the Forest City. I look at different aspects of it and focus largely on its approach to the benefits of public art towards improving public space and the overall urban environment. Although the different sections of the CCTF Report offer many potentially positive

proposals for bettering the city's cultural and artistic atmospheres, they are steeped in a bureaucratic model that does not account for non-middle-class creative contributions and exclude marginalized communities, especially those who are situated outside of the downtown core (for example, the report focuses on Museum London, the Grand Theatre, etc.). The directional focus in these chapters speaks largely to an economic agenda, which, although important, delays the completion of steps towards a creative city status through a focus on financials and not on creativity itself. Also, the report recommends transferring authority for the creative cities agenda to Tourism London and The Arts Council, which largely relegates input from independent projects and differing communities. Similarly, criticism towards the task force's focus comes in the form of a skewed vision, which appears to be too heavily centered on the idea of economic prosperity propelling London to the cultural forefront of South-Western Ontario. The report states:

Each municipality must define culture in a way that will suit their own needs and to invest in their needs for the purpose of achieving their overall goal. For London, this means contributing the needed investment to make us a top-ranked mid-sized municipality in North America, and the Regional Centre for South-Western Ontario.<sup>50</sup>

Although ambitious and respectable, this should not be the prime focus in engendering a culture of creativity (both collective and individual) and fostering a stronger, more appreciative, and participative community. In fact, that stronger, more appreciative, and participative community should be the initial goal in order to build upon and make London a cultural competitor with other mid-sized cities. Thus, the importance of individual acts of creativity and the spaces that garner a culture and community of appreciation take on a central role in which diverse groupings of individuals can creatively flourish.

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<sup>50</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 31.

I will begin with a thorough discussion of the Report itself in order to provide necessary context. The report was put together by a group of sixteen prominent Londoners who work in a spectrum of fields from politics, to entertainment, to the arts. It is a fifty-eight page document that outlines the creative city mandate in eight chapters under such headings as “Economic Development,” “Arts and Culture,” “Public Art,” “Capital Projects,” and “Heritage and Planning.” The mix of topics exemplify how broadly the creative cities concept can be applied, yet it also shows the exclusion of certain sectors from revitalization plans such as independent or grassroots projects and organizations. Although the report makes some well-rounded and cohesive recommendations for and solutions to current issues in London, the document has some gaps. It is important to consider the potential effectiveness of the report’s recommendations, yet it is also essential to consider which interests in the city, from the smallest to the largest organizations, it disregards.

The report’s recommendations are based on creative cities concepts and are applied to diverse topics recognizable in the ideas of Florida and Landry. One of the main recommendations regarding arts and culture states that “the City of London should...broaden public access to the excellence and diversity of the local arts sector, and aggressively promote policies to attract and retain the creative class.”<sup>51</sup> Important here is the idea of broadening access to the local arts sector, its organizations, and its products. In other words, the report suggests making displays of public art available to Londoners as a means of enlivening the atmosphere and improving the city’s image. Similarly, this statement emphasizes attracting and retaining members of the creative class. This is crucial in terms of the creative cities concept because it suggests that broadening access to the arts will develop a culture that is desirable and unique, one that places London amongst leading creative cities. Yet, how will this broadening occur without first addressing community involvement in general?

In the above-mentioned recommendation, one sees strong similarities with the work of Florida and Landry, especially an attempt to garner the shifts in mindset that will

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<sup>51</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 7.

bring about recognition for the groups of people engaged in creative initiatives and endeavours. The visual arts are important in this Report as well as in promoting solutions to community problems. Thus it is crucial to first consider the Report's suggestion to restructure and enhance the arts and culture sector so as to increase London's competitiveness with other mid-sized North American cities through alternatively outlined approaches.<sup>52</sup> This issue will be specifically taken up in Chapter 2 with emphasis placed upon community enhancement and urban revitalization through alternative uses of everyday, public space. Pairing vernacular creative practices with independent, grassroots creative endeavours will illustrate ways in which these organizations can instigate change without specifically institutional or municipal guidance.

Each section of the CCTF Report depends wholly on municipally-run programs and management with emphasis on the City of London Culture Division as the main delegator. In the arts and culture section specifically, the suggested emphases include: promoting and marketing, space (as in use of public space, reasonable public access to municipal space, facilities, properties for artists, organizations, and the community), the London Arts Council, education, community events, and the culture division.<sup>53</sup> Although these sections are necessary to note and good starting points for what encompasses the arts and culture scene in London, this is where certain criticisms of the creative cities concept are easily made. It is certainly imperative for city officials to be heavily involved with the overall image of the city and its propensity for economic growth. However, here a criticism like Peck's regarding neoliberal agendas and the hypocritical financial focus of the creative cities mandate is applicable. The initial vision, which endeavoured to make London the leading municipality in South-Western Ontario, communicated a sense of backwards thinking that does not address the most important issues. By backwards I mean economic prosperity holding primary importance in order to promote London's reputation as a leading municipality. At issue here are the many changes to the artistic and cultural environment required first that will then engender improvement within London's financial climate in which the Report addresses on a secondary basis.

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<sup>52</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 33.

In the Report's fourth chapter on public art, the recommendations continue, but here they are less concerned with structure and more with action and execution. This chapter is far more inclusive and suggests making reference to a variety of community members and attempts to ensure exposure to public art is accessible. The proposed Public Art Policy states:

The city of London supports art in public places that strengthens the natural assets of the city, provides unique attractions and acts as a constant delight to residents and visitors to London. Public art celebrates and honours our culture, history, people, events, and places and enhances economic vibrancy. Public art impacts many aspects of community living. Public art enriches daily life through visual experiences and attracts people to art-enriched places.<sup>54</sup>

This is a concrete starting point for recognizing the importance of public art in this city. Following the policy's implementation, the report suggests action upon a full inventory of existing public art, working with community organizations across the city, temporary curated displays in public spaces, and lastly, hiring young artists each summer to create works for public enjoyment.<sup>55</sup> These plans are promising but do largely reflect a specific attention to the creative class, which may negate progress through formulaically trying to attract specific people to specific places.

The next three recommendations for the chapter, however, cover financial suggestions. The language becomes highly technical, private sector focused, and municipally controlled.<sup>56</sup> Balance is critical yet criticism of the report comes from its often one-sided approach to innovation. It professes to speak for those who are ignored, but then reverts back to a traditional, purely economic, middle-class focused agenda. Recommendation forty-five states, "the City will establish a new London Public Art Reserve Fund. Contributions to this fund are to come from cash in lieu from private developers, tax deductible gifts and contributions to implement the public Art Master

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<sup>54</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 35.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Plan.”<sup>57</sup> Such a concept is necessary in the sense that much of the arts sector is regulated in this way, yet the suggested system for funding arts initiatives (meaning the private sector decides what it wants to fund) places more independent, grassroots organizations, endeavours, and individuals at the mercy of a highly structured, policy ridden mandate. Such a regimented and all encompassing policy can hinder creativity and innovation through overly stringent and systematic regulation.

Drawing on this public art policy, the Task Force recommended that the City establish a system to increase attention on public art. They explained, “the City must establish guidelines which encourage the architects, builders, and designers in London to include public art as a part of the design and construction of buildings and projects.... The City should be the leader in this field.”<sup>58</sup> This policy appears progressive and a good step towards supporting public art, but there is also a range of other ways individuals and independent groups can contribute creative projects to public spaces. There are various areas and potential media to be considered in this regard. As noted in the Report, public space is defined as areas frequented by the general public, including “parks, easements, tunnels, boulevards, streets, courtyards, squares, bridges...building exteriors, foyers...concourses...and significant public areas of municipal buildings.”<sup>59</sup> With such diverse space available to be populated by community creativity, it is the amalgamation of different people with different talents and different backgrounds who need to remain dedicated to beautifying the downtown core via inventive ideas and creative determination. Such a process would illustrate the keen, stable community members and groups who value an enhanced identity through visual manifestations of eclectic talent.

Returning to Landry’s cycle of urban creativity in comparison with the recommendations presented in the CCTF Report, one sees how the creative cities concept might be applied to London. It may help people generate new ideas, turn them into reality, market and circulate ideas and projects, obtain usable space that is financially feasible, and finally disseminate the results to the city. Through a process like this, with

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<sup>57</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 36.

the cooperation of the city and the community, an enhanced infusion of public art could aid in urban revitalization while fostering a climate where such solutions can continue and grow. Yet, this is not the only process and problems with the CCFT Report persist. It is a good step that the City recognizes the need to address what is lacking in London with new, innovative approaches to collaboration and to improving the creative atmosphere in London. However, the CCTF Report deals too largely with an overarching agenda focused on economic prosperity that does not directly equate to the existing creative potential within the city. Vernacular creativity on the other hand promotes the everyday, existing modes of creativity present in the community at large. This method champions that which individuals and organizations possess and are more avidly capable of harnessing and making useful. Such everyday creativities will be explored further in the following chapters but remain here an example of alternative approaches to creative intervention that challenge the creative cities thesis.

It is necessary to consider both the positives and negatives of Landry's concept as applied to London. Since the CCFT recommendations were inspired by both Florida's and Landry's work on creative cities, many of the criticisms have already been discussed. Yet, there are other aspects that need to be examined. First, almost all of the city's arts, culture, and heritage output falls under the jurisdiction of city officials and leading public and private institutions (e.g. those granted authority in the CCFT Report). For example, arts funding is awarded through the city's Community Services Department, which is the same case for special events. Planning, preservation, coordination and design are governed by the Planning and Development Department, while various other important facets such as capital grants and art museum funding falls under the Finance and Corporate Services Department. This covers local institutional giants like Museum London, Tourism London, and the London Public Library.<sup>60</sup> Although these divisions are well equipped and their focus is fairly evenly dispersed throughout the city, their governance leans towards arts and culture in institutionalized environments that take precedence over smaller, growing organizations.

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<sup>60</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 13.

Considering many of the CCTF Report recommendations have not been implemented, it is time to look beyond these agencies of institutional and municipal control. Evidence suggests it is time to see the city as a tool to serve the inhabitants and to bring culture to residents by means of their everyday life, in an atmosphere that does not mention the arts as a side note, but as a quintessential part of a thriving community. The creative cities concept offers a possible starting point for initiating further change in London, change that includes a focus on public and interventionist art, a genre that is often the most controversial within a city of any size. However, the notion of vernacular creativity offers a critique that suggests that the seemingly new and innovative creative cities concept can be limiting and skewed in its essential vision. Landry's process provides a framework from which organizations and projects can work, and it offers a comforting and concrete set of innovative tools the community can embrace. Yet, at large, it tends to ignore everyday social groups and approaches to creativity through which community growth will actually occur. The process will be gradual but, by examining and critiquing Landry's conceptual tools and Florida's theoretical backing while proposing the benefits of enacting aspects of vernacular creativity, creativity in this city can be navigated in a beneficial, progressive, and sustainable way.

## 1.5 Conclusion

Through this introduction to the creative cities concept, I have argued that instances of its success demonstrate how a shift to an imaginative, solution-based mindset offers a platform for revitalizing London's downtown core and community at large. Yet, vernacular creativity posits interesting challenges to the business-oriented model of the creative cities concept because it works to encompass the community as a whole through representation and regeneration. While the creative cities model risks eliminating non-middle/creative class individuals from the process of revitalization, a vernacular creativity model suggests that creative changes in London's downtown will become increasingly possible through community involvement and inclusivity, breathing new life into areas that have been consistently neglected. Public space will become more than the main arteries of the bustling population, it will become galleries, museums, and art works that exude personality and create enjoyment for all who experience them. Even Landry



himself states, “city-making is a complex art; it is not a formula. There is no simplistic, ten-point plan that can be mechanically applied to guarantee success in any eventuality.”<sup>61</sup> Thus diverse, creative thinking is the core indicator of vitality and improvement in the city that can govern any and all transformations to the urban space with imagination, excitement, and consistency.

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<sup>61</sup> Landry, *The Art of City Making*, 1.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Community Space/Sense of Place: Vernacular Creativity and Improving Community Mindset

This chapter specifically examines the concepts of placemaking and sense of place, and the role each plays in vernacular creative approaches to improving community mindset through individually inclusive efforts. Through a series of case studies, I outline different ways that individuals and the community at large may engage with space differently. Attachment to place factors significantly in illustrating how physical space can alter the collective community mindset. By building upon ideas of imaginative, creative thinking, I will discuss ways in which a variety of public space usages can improve a city's mindset and thus identity, positively and progressively.

#### 2.1 Introduction

Diversity in outlook is an essential aspect of community building and urban revitalization. Yet, in Florida's creative class discourse and Landry's conceptual toolkit, homogeneity and formulaic ideas prevail. Enacting a wide variety of unmediated approaches to creativity is crucial to necessary and legitimate changes in a city's mindset; a process neglected by the creative cities concept. In this chapter, I explore uses of public space and potential place attachment to delineate how vernacular creative practices can strengthen a community. Through a series of case studies I discuss how the individual's, and subsequent community's, perception of place is imperative to implementing and augmenting a collective, positive mindset that strengthens community make-up and its image at large. These practices are diverse in nature and inclusive in purpose.

In this chapter, I consider a range of daily activities as creative outputs that strengthen attachment to place and work to build a strong community. To begin, I define and examine both placemaking and sense of place as conceptual frameworks for the subsequent case studies and first, in terms of public art. Then I explore the local issue of a new performing arts centre to illustrate potentially ineffective approaches to spatial use for urban and community improvement in the city. To follow, I outline three key case

studies as creative uses of space that promote placemaking and improved community sense of place. First, I look at community gardening, which has become popular in London. This activity is not restricted to the downtown core and promotes healthy living, environmental awareness, diversity and inclusion, and repurposes urban space. Second, I consider ‘street level’ festivals and events that turn sidewalks, roads, and parks into arts and cultural hubs that change the urban atmosphere. Festivals that occur on the street offer the potential for interaction between community members on an everyday basis (as opposed to ‘city level’, which relates to the collective focus on a municipality at large).<sup>62</sup> Third, with regards to notions of *place* and vernacular creativity, I consider how institutions, such as the art museum, can make changes to encourage individual productivity and appreciation of resources available in their city. Specifically, I look at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History because recent developments in programming parallel potential endeavours applicable to London, due to similarities in population, tourism, and size of the institution. With these case studies, I draw on disciplines such as urban sociology and the social psychology of urban life to critique both Florida’s and Landry’s concepts as applied to London, Ontario. These analyses outline the shortcomings of the creative cities thesis and suggest alternative methods for regenerating a municipal, urban environment. In order to build strong communities, I argue that people must first have access to creative opportunities and resources on an everyday, vernacular basis.

## 2.2 Making of Place—Sense of Place

A key aspect in both Florida’s and Landry’s theses is the idea that in order to improve the economic, cultural, and creative facets of a city, the collective mindset and general perception of the city must progressively change. Similarly, one of the primary aims of London’s Creative Cities Task Force Report was to change Londoners’ perceptions of their city, because “until Londoners change it’s impossible to get the rest of the world to change how they think about London.”<sup>63</sup> The report states that this change is important

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<sup>62</sup> Melinda J. Milligan, “The Individual and City Life: A Commentary on Richard Florida’s “Cities and the Creative Class,”” *City and Community* 2 (2003): 21.

<sup>63</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 8.

for the economic future and prosperity of the city because improvement hinges upon the way Londoners “think, act, and do business.”<sup>64</sup> The key factors that the Task Force considered for improving this common sense of place were increased collaboration, effective marketing, audience development, and, ultimately, changing the face of London.<sup>65</sup> Recommendations emphasized input from the Arts Council, Tourism London, and the City’s Culture Division and included, for example, continuous municipal funding to cultural organizations so ticket prices or admission fees can remain affordable as well as creating new partnerships between arts institutions for funding opportunities and leverage of grants.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, such measures are important and necessary, but once again divulge the bureaucratic, overtly economic focus of the creative cities model. The report notes that many organizations must reinvent themselves in order to remain relevant, yet would it not be more beneficial to focus on who in the city right now can partake in cultural activities and creative endeavours? It is not simply about changing how London thinks; it is about the way Londoners see their city, how they can engage with it, and essentially live their everyday lives in a way that engenders creativity, welcomes it, requires it. It is important that people develop personal attachments to particular places in the city. These attachments influence how community members see their city and, eventually, how the world sees it.

Recent urban planning and development scholarship has legitimated particular ‘buzz words’ that have come to define certain recommendations for regional revitalization. In particular, “placemaking” and “sense of place” have become common terminology to denote potential shortcomings or assets in a given city. The *Encyclopedia of Urban Studies* defines placemaking as:

The processes by which a space is made useful and meaningful. This may include manipulations of the physical landscape, including land development and building construction, or the attachment of meanings or sentiments to places through shared understandings. These more or less tangible processes usually occur in

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<sup>64</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

tandem, as dimensions of the landscape come to be understood by residents and others who interact with a place. Placemaking may reflect the work of elites who steer the interpretations and uses of a place to support their own financial interests. Placemaking may also occur more routinely, as individuals live, work, and interact in a given locale, shaping its uses and associations through everyday activity. The degree to which these meanings persist over time reflects another element of placemaking, the struggle to associate particular memories or identities with a place.<sup>67</sup>

This definition indicates how perceptions of a city can be defined and potentially begin to shift through alterations. Placemaking can occur on the level of official decision makers or institutions, but it can also be the product of everyday lived experience as amplified by artistic or creative interventions within the realm of the public vernacular. The regeneration or alternative use of an urban space brings about the necessary “sense of place” required to complete the potential repositioning of a city’s image. A “sense of place” is defined from a sociological perspective as:

People’s subjective perceptions of their environments and their more or less conscious feelings about those environments. Sense of place is inevitably dual in nature, involving both an interpretive perspective on the environment and an emotional reaction to the environment.... Sense of place involves a personal orientation toward place, in which ones’ understanding of place and one’s feelings about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning.<sup>68</sup>

A person’s sense of place is a more solidified notion of what the city means to them. Garnering positive attachments to particular places through creative and innovative endeavours, offers a far better chance of effectively generating the necessary mindset to initiate positive change in a city.

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<sup>67</sup> Ray Hutchison, “Placemaking,” *The Encyclopedia of Urban Studies*, published Dec. 2009, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://knowledge.sagepub.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/view/urbanstudies/n214.xml>.

<sup>68</sup> David Hummon, *Community Attachment: Local Sentiment and Sense of Place* (Netherlands: Plenum Press: 1992), quoted in Jennifer E. Cross “What is Sense of Place,” *12<sup>th</sup> Headwaters Conference* (Place: Colorado State University: 2004), 2.

Melinda J. Milligan, a sociology professor at Sonoma State University, offers a thorough overview of the potential for public space in a city in relation to Florida's claim that individual experience has the ability to bolster identities within the creative class.<sup>69</sup> She follows Florida in asking such questions as "why do people move to certain cities? What attracts them and makes them stay? What sorts of communities appeal to people?"<sup>70</sup> These are simple but necessary questions, which provide a basis for analyzing how individuals can contribute to the creative atmosphere in a city. She looks specifically at the relevance of Florida's work on the creative class to the social psychology of urban life. Key aspects of this analysis include civility and tolerance, community, place with regards to perceptions of urban living, and the actual amount of openness to diversity possessed by the creative class.<sup>71</sup> According to Florida, the creative class no longer desires the "traditional" community with strong bonds and "parochial tendencies."<sup>72</sup> Instead, these people hope to belong to a community with "weak ties" (as opposed to narrowly defined notions of community such as traditional religious bonds), diverse options for personal belief, and the sort of community that allows an option for individuals to remain "quasi-anonymous."<sup>73</sup> Yet, what implications does this quasi-anonymity have on building community engagement both with other citizens and with place in general? Does the notion of a cultural hub not include regular attendance at particular events, organizations, shops and the like? Florida concludes 'place' is encompassed by a large young population, a variety of things to do, an abundant and thriving music scene, cultural and ethnic diversity, outdoor recreation, and great nightlife, amongst other factors.<sup>74</sup> To him, it is this variety that attracts people to cities, not traditional amenities like a symphony, opera, or ballet (what Florida abbreviates as a city's "SOB").<sup>75</sup> Although these claims are valid, and in most cases true, quasi-anonymity contradicts placemaking and sense of place because it negates place attachment by generalizing community and creative desire.

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<sup>69</sup> Milligan, "The Individual and City Life," 21.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid..

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 217.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 182.

Milligan explains that urban sociology does not typically view what Florida considers a traditional community as such. Rather, communities are defined by civility or “urbanity,” which is a “trait related to the need of the city-dweller to negotiate a diverse and complex environment.”<sup>76</sup> While this notion of the city purports that the community can offer anonymity through the dense, heterogeneity of urban life and the freedom to pursue individual engagement and interest, it differs from Florida’s view because it includes the idea that both association and anonymity are possible and can be free from the judgments of others.<sup>77</sup> Essential to this assumption is the ability of the individual to negotiate a balance between the two poles: anonymity and community.

Florida asserts that communities are changing and that creative people quite simply want to live in cities with traits that do not traditionally define ‘community’ but ones that historically define urban life: civility, diversity, tolerance, and anonymity. It is within this form of urban community that attention to the making of place can instigate “place attachment.”<sup>78</sup> Place attachment and ultimately, sense of place, however, are areas where Florida’s conception of the creative class falters because he focuses formulaically on collective desires that do not necessarily account for individual preferences. Milligan defines *community* as “a set of relationships between individuals” while *place* “typically refers to a physical location that has a specific and unique meaning.”<sup>79</sup> In addition, “place attachment occurs when an individual forms a psychological bond to a specific site due to experience with it.”<sup>80</sup> The important factor here is that individuals give specific meaning to particular locations, which can be weak or strong, positive or negative. This factor implies another key term, “substitutability”, which is a measurement of place attachment. This refers to the degree to which an individual feels one site can be substituted for another. Or, according to Milligan, “the less another site is seen as substitutable for the one in question, the stronger the attachment to the original site.”<sup>81</sup> These attachments formed by people create a city that contains “site based experiences,” which is what, in

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<sup>76</sup> Milligan, “The Individual and City Life,” 22.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

turn, changes someone's perception of a city. When such experiential feelings are pervasive, they affect the collective community.<sup>82</sup> By moving from individual experience through site specific opportunities for enjoyment, urban revitalization endeavours can effectively enhance personal engagement (rather than something as nebulous as the creative class) in order to promote the importance of a positive collective, community mindset.

As Florida notes, sense of place is an important factor in attracting the creative class to certain cities, and low levels of substitutability are key to keeping them there. Later in the chapter I examine the legitimacy of this claim both in terms of London and other cities. Here, however, consider public artworks in relation to place. Specifically, Bill Hodgson's installation of over fifty metal trees in London's downtown between 2007 and 2009. Entitled "Trees of the Carolinian Forest", this project speaks to the ways creativity can be harnessed in order to produce new ways of seeing the city that create a positive sense of place and, potentially, increased place attachment. The unveiling, however, was met with much controversy, and many people did and still do largely despise the artworks. It was a common misconception that the trees were funded by taxpayers' dollars, which seems to have increased the displeasure with Hodgson's work. In actuality, however, the London Downtown Business Association (LDBA) enthusiastically funded the project.<sup>83</sup> Responding to the negative comments, Kathy McLaughlin, program coordinator for the LDBA, stated, "the tree is a symbol of London—being the Forest City—so it was only natural that we use the tree to reanimate the street landscape."<sup>84</sup> To recall the CCFT Report, it explains that public art is important to our community because it "opens minds to thoughts, ideas, and emotions...it provokes, upsets, titillates, and inspires."<sup>85</sup> The metal trees perfectly illustrate the potential responses public art can illicit from the community while enlivening the city streets, placing creativity at the forefront and promoting visual art amongst the broad community.

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<sup>82</sup> Milligan, "The Individual and City Life," 23.

<sup>83</sup> Jaclyn Haggarty, "Metal Tree Planting Continues," *The Gazette*, September 30, 2008, n.p.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 35.



Here one sees just how malleable the city streets can be and how unconventional modes of display are crucial to altering and enhancing the image of the city.



**Figure 4 Bill Hodgson, Metal Trees (preparations), 2007, [www.hodgsonoriginals.ca](http://www.hodgsonoriginals.ca)**



**Figure 5 City of London, Bill Hodgson's Metal Trees, King and Talbot Streets, London, Ontario, 2014, [www.london.ca](http://www.london.ca)**

Public art is an important contributor to placemaking and sense of place. Similarly, it is very much a vehicle by which everyday spaces can be altered and, although everyone may not consider the alterations ‘improvements’, drawing attention to

public space and the potential it holds is of utmost importance. The distaste shown towards the trees mentioned above can, of course, be simply due to subjective opinion but there are other factors at play. First, the misunderstanding as to where funding came from for the project and second, the lack of attention to placemaking initiatives in London which causes resistance from the outset. Both of these factors are a testament to the need for increased awareness, promotion, and appreciation of, not only public art, but spatial interventions generally.

The most common argument made by those who dislike the trees is that there should have been real trees planted—we are the Forest City, of course—rather than metal ones.<sup>86</sup> However, another point that is overlooked is the fact that the trees are artworks with specific characteristics, one being each tree was installed in a place, mainly the centre of a sidewalk, crosswalk, or parking lot border, where a real tree could not be planted. London is indeed the Forest City and the tree is an important symbol so why not embrace those representative of the various species native to the larger forest in which London resides? Therefore, the previously mentioned argument does not suffice in challenging the purpose or applicability of the metal trees to this city. Further, the trees represent an approach to creative spatial use that is indicative of necessary progress and recognized potential for the urban spaces in which so many dwell everyday. Misunderstandings aside, it becomes difficult to argue that the metal trees do not, in some way, effectively “reanimate” the downtown streetscape. Through colourful creativity Hodgson’s work prompts the public to consider their purpose, what they do for the city, and why they are important. The trees bring to the fore a sense of immersion in the artistic and creative culture of this community. They inspire debate, advance community vibrancy, and have begun to promote appreciation for diverse potential within the environment of everyday enjoyment.

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<sup>86</sup> Anonymous, “Trees: Letter to the Editor,” *The London Free Press*, April 25, 2008, Accessed April 1, 2014, [http://dev.lfpress.ca/cgi-bin/publish.cgi?p=16879&x=letters&l\\_publish\\_date=&s\\_publish\\_date=&](http://dev.lfpress.ca/cgi-bin/publish.cgi?p=16879&x=letters&l_publish_date=&s_publish_date=&). And Anonymous, “Trees: Letter to the Editor,” *The London Free Press*, August 7, 2011, Accessed April 1, 2014, [http://dev.lfpress.ca/cgi-bin/publish.cgi?p=45350&x=letters&l\\_publish\\_date=&](http://dev.lfpress.ca/cgi-bin/publish.cgi?p=45350&x=letters&l_publish_date=&).

In an interview regarding his book *Who's Your City* (2008), Florida conceded that “public art plays two roles in a community; it helps to create an authentic sense of place and serves as a tool for revitalization. Quality of place is one of the defining issues of the creative economy. Places that are aesthetically pleasing help to attract innovative, creative talent.”<sup>87</sup> He discusses the importance of public art in presenting city officials with viable alternatives to capital investments (such as stadiums, performing arts centres or convention centres), which tend to cost tax payers large amounts of money but do not enhance creative or economic growth in the long run. Florida acknowledges that physical beauty and placemaking are crucial to attracting the creative class.<sup>88</sup> In order to inspire a sense of place, public art must be authentic to the specific city, which explains why the metal trees are effective in London, for they represent a key characteristic of its identity in an animated, creative way. Florida’s concept of public art and subsequently, his sense of place and place attachment in relation to the individual is more inclusive than some of his other ideas about the creative class. I take issue, however, with his view of who the creative class is exactly and who is excluded from this category. Works like Hodgson’s trees were not created with the hopes of attracting a specific type of person to this city but exist to celebrate one of London’s key differentiators, being the Forest City. Similarly, they are widely dispersed, publicly accessible, and have begun a necessary shift towards using public urban space differently, inclusively, and purposefully. In other words, they promote a positive sense of place for the community at large.

### 2.3 Local Controversy: London’s New Performance Art Centre

London’s CCTF Report often refers to the importance of sense of place in order to remain in line with Florida’s concept. In “Chapter 5: Capital Projects”, the CCTF discusses the significant investments that have been made in London’s downtown over the past fifteen years. Amongst the most important are the renovated Covent Garden Market, Budweiser Gardens (then called the John Labatt Centre), and the relocated Central Library.<sup>89</sup> The report states, and many Londoners would concur, that these

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<sup>87</sup> Mason Riddle, “Interview with Richard Florida,” *Public Art Review* 20 (2008): 52.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 39.

investments immediately provided increased opportunities for events, leisure activities, jobs, and business in the downtown core. These improvements are seen as “changing the way downtown operates and thinks about itself.”<sup>90</sup> Without question, these projects contributed significantly to the sense of place Londoners might feel regarding their downtown and invariably drew immense attention to London as a whole. In particular, Budweiser Gardens has attracted international acts and such events as the World Figure Skating Championships in 2013. However, I question who these projects served. What about people who are financially incapable of attending big ticket events, are not interested in weekly hockey or basketball games, or do not frequent the downtown core? What contribution to an improved sense of place are these projects truly making? Both the Market and the Central Library are public places indeed, but do they draw in suburbanites and a wide range of age groups? These projects show the prescriptive nature of creative cities because they cater to a relatively small segment of the population.



**Figure 6 Stantec, London's Performing Arts Centre Projection, 2013, [www.blackburnnews.com](http://www.blackburnnews.com)**

Another important question surrounding these projects is whether or not such investments attract individuals to live in London and, for those who already live in the city, do they keep them there? In addition, what exactly do they contribute to the everyday collective conception of what constitutes this city? Although seemingly simple in nature, these questions actually prompt complex, often bureaucratic answers.

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<sup>90</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 39.

To illustrate the contentious topic of regional capital projects, I investigate the CCTF Report's recommendation number forty-eight: London should have a fully open and functional Performing Arts Centre (PAC) by 2015.<sup>91</sup> The report states that this recommendation, as with the other completed capital projects, are positive steps towards downtown rejuvenation. Yet, how does it benefit a diverse audience of different economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds? As well, it may contribute to a greater sense of place in this city because it would be new and presumably state of the art, but would it truly benefit the economy and change the collective perception of London? Also, is a new performing arts centre imperative when London has a variety of venues that can be used for music and theatre (such as The Arts Project, The Grand Theatre, London Music Hall)? The report states that a new PAC is necessary to replace the existing Centennial Hall. The main argument here is that this venue currently does not have a stage big enough to accommodate a full symphonic orchestra, and such a thing is necessary to become a legitimate creative city.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, the CCTF claims that "if London wishes to be the Regional Capital of South Western Ontario, then it will require a performing arts centre to accommodate an orchestra, ballet, Broadway-type shows and other performances and events."<sup>93</sup> Why? First, London has facilities to accommodate those events as it stands. Even Orchestra London, which has operated out of Centennial Hall for a number of years, still manages to bring in \$100 000 to \$600 000 of annual revenue to the venue.<sup>94</sup> Second, each of those performance types is precisely what even Florida does not recommend and calls an "SOB." The Report here departs from the creative cities model, Florida specifically, but not in any sort of progressive or innovative way. This constitutes an old model of creativity and community building especially since one in three Londoners are considered to be a "millennial" or born between 1980 and 2000 and show less and less interest in programs offered by such venues.<sup>95</sup> Lastly, if we consider the creative class, the concept suggests this is simply not of interest to the

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<sup>91</sup> Hume et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, 41.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Chip Martin, "Centennial Hall Boss Slams Orchestra London," *The London Free Press*, May 29, 2013, n.p.

<sup>95</sup> City of London, *The London Plan* (London, Ontario: City of London, 2014), 7.

‘bright, young’ individuals who are said to drive the economy. Thus, the CCTF is here inconsistent with Florida’s claims and contradicts not only the creative cities model but also the idea that those defined as part of the creative class, will not benefit at all, perhaps not even care.

Will a new PAC attract people to this city? Will it retain them? Will it benefit the individual in general and further, the community at large? Will it benefit those understood as the creative class? Of course, some people will appreciate it, but what about those outside of the middle or upper classes? What about low income families, new Canadians, and youth? The question ultimately is, just what would a new PAC do for London as a creative and culturally progressive city? As stated in London’s most recent Cultural Prosperity Plan (2013), the biggest issue related to economic growth and community enhancement in this city is that London attracts a large number of new residents, primarily for post secondary education, each year, but then loses them to larger cities like Toronto when they graduate.<sup>96</sup> Will a \$164 million downtown proposal, that includes a PAC, a larger Grand Theatre, and two condo towers, help to improve this situation?<sup>97</sup> As it stands, \$50 million will have to be put into the PAC itself with \$16.7 million coming from London taxpayers. The lack of planning (there is no formal business plan) and the inability of both London City Council and residents at large to agree, suggests hasty reasoning regarding actual benefits. It has been purported that over 1200 construction jobs, fifty regular jobs, and an annual economic impact of \$16 million would be created.<sup>98</sup> There are clearly some positive outcomes to passing this proposal but the negatives largely outweigh the projected benefits for London’s future. Lastly, one of the biggest issues surrounding the proposal is the possibility of a 2015 tax increase for Londoners at large. This is controversial and largely responsible for slowing the process towards logical conclusions and potential compromises. The discussions continue and many questions remain but the complexities surrounding solid facts for downtown regeneration suggests the city has many other issues to address, many involving emphatic

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<sup>96</sup> City of London, *London’s Cultural Prosperity Plan* (London, Ontario: City of London, 2013), 4.

<sup>97</sup> Debra Van Brenk, “New \$164 Million Arts Centre Plan Includes Condos,” *The London Free Press*, February 7, 2014, n.p.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

attention to placemaking and sense of place to improve the city's identity, before London should consider the idea of a new PAC.

## 2.4 Vernacular Creativity and Community Building

In contrast to large-scale development projects such as the PAC, vernacular creativity offers an inclusive approach. Bureaucratically-centred approaches to urban renewal that extol the virtues of the creative class, creative cities, and creative clusters, generally fall short when it comes to necessary diversity for “civic boosterism.”<sup>99</sup> Vernacular creativity presents an innovative, and inclusive alternative to the formulas pedaled by Florida, Landry, and city officials quick to solve urban issues through recently popularized, widely circulated potential solutions. Vernacular creativity on the other hand, is concerned with “locally embedded forms of art and creative practice.”<sup>100</sup> The idea of the “locally embedded” is of utmost interest regarding individual experience within public, urban space. Vernacular creativity pairs down the concept of creativity into spaces where one may enact everyday activities while reaping the benefits of creative output. Practices can be largely non-economic in nature, or at least require minimal funding and governance from official decision-makers and larger institutions. However, as the final case study in this chapter shows, larger institutions can also participate in locally embedded practices. This is one of the main issues with the creative cities mentality and, here, the CCTF Report. There is a pervasive indication throughout the report that suggests an influx of new, updated, more often than not expensive, uses of space. Further, these kinds of large-scale projects frequently ignore the propensity for positive change already existing in urban spaces. The vernacular perspective allows individuals to see within their city (and themselves), the possibility for creative, artistic, and positive contributions that occur on a daily basis.

What cities need for community-building and urban regeneration is already present and waiting to be cultivated. Professor Ann Markusen, director of the University of Minnesota's Project on Regional and Industrial Economics Institute, offers an

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<sup>99</sup> Edensor et al., *Creative Cities Task Force Report*, n.p.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

interesting and thorough perspective on the role of space in vernacular creative practices. She states, “vernacular creative practices encompass a wide range of activities that are distinguished by their expression of community values and their inclusion of many participants, in contrast to the individualized and professionalized creation or reproduction of art or culture by experts detached from a community frame of reference.”<sup>101</sup> In other words, people who care about their community are a prime resource for regenerating cities. In her analysis of what constitutes vernacular practices, she considers what they are not; that is, produced or circulated by the commercial mass media or part of an elite canon of fine art. Another important element is that vernacular creative practices “need not be the province of the oppressed only,” although they “often endure or emerge among groups who are marginalized.”<sup>102</sup> As Markusen emphasizes, people across the social spectrum produce cultural expressions of all sorts.

Understanding the difference between individual, everyday creative practices and the creative cities concept is crucial for seeing how new, innovative modes of expression can be considered essential to a community’s fabric. Further, individuals’ roles are highlighted, which strengthens community and instigates collective appreciation that will, in turn, shift a city’s collective mindset and subsequently allow for future prosperity. The following case studies illustrate a variety of vernacular creative practices, some of which may not normally be associated with community arts and cultural production. From community gardening, to public festivals and events, and finally to an analysis of institutional possibilities, these activities illustrate the diverse and inclusive nature of vernacular creativity as well as how people can positively change a city’s identity.

## 2.5 Community Gardening: London’s Community Garden Strategic Plan

In the simplest terms, a community garden is a designated piece of land that is cultivated, planted, maintained, and harvested by a particular group of individuals. This activity is participatory in nature, repurposes and beautifies landscapes, and encourages healthy

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<sup>101</sup> Ann Markusen, “Challenge, Change, and Space in Vernacular Cultural Practice,” in *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy*, ed. Tim Edensor et al. (London: Routledge, 2010), 185.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 185.



living and environmental sustainability. In addition, community garden programs promote affordable food choices for people from a variety of economic backgrounds, which is an important element of its productivity. The community garden model has become increasingly popular since the 1990s, and London developed its first community garden in 1993 under the supervision of the Middlesex London Health Unit.<sup>103</sup> In 2002, the London Community Resource Centre, a non-profit, volunteer-run organization that describes itself as “a community collaborator and facilitator of community events that promote sustainability and self-sufficiency” assumed supervision over the program.<sup>104</sup> In recent years, increased interest in the benefits of such a program has spawned various community meetings, focus groups, and the development of London’s Community Garden Strategic Plan.



**Figure 7 London's Community Garden Strategic Plan, London, Ontario, 2013, [www.london.ca](http://www.london.ca)**

Currently, London is home to twenty-one gardens, and over 600 plots of land with over 600 active gardeners. The gardens are spread throughout the city with annualized

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<sup>103</sup> Ross L. Fair, “London Community Garden Program Review,” Community and Neighbourhoods Committee, City of London, (2011), 44.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 44.

core funding provided by the city of London.<sup>105</sup> Each site is on shared land, and individuals, groups, or families can rent plots to grow vegetables. Due to their popularity, all but five of the newer gardens are at full capacity currently.<sup>106</sup> As of 2014, more focus groups dedicated to promoting and sustaining the program are scheduled to meet.<sup>107</sup> Developing a strategic plan confirms that Londoners passionately believe in the program and are eagerly looking to promote its growth and sustainability, while encouraging community enhancement through sense of place.



**Figure 8 London's Community Garden Strategic Plan, Ann Garden, London, Ontario, 2013, [www.lcrc.on.ca](http://www.lcrc.on.ca)**

Cultural geographer David Crouch examines the creative practice of community gardening in his essay, “Creativity, Space, and Performance: Community Gardening.”<sup>108</sup> He looks at the relationship between individuals and space and argues that people need creative outlets in their lives. Shifting from thinking about gardens as an entity to the act of gardening, he states, “creativity in everyday life is a dynamic through which people live.” He is interested in “the expressive character of creativity in everyday life: expression in materiality and in friendship, thinking and feeling.”<sup>109</sup> Crouch explores the notion of creativity as separate from its common association with the arts. His analysis

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<sup>105</sup> Ross L. Fair, “London Community Garden Program Review,” 44.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> City of London, “London Community Gardens,” last updated 2013, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://www.london.ca/residents/Parks/Community-Projects/Pages/London-Community-Gardens.aspx>.

<sup>108</sup> David Crouch, “Creativity, Space, and Performance: Community Gardening,” in *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy*, ed. Tim Edensor et al. (London: Routledge, 2010), 129.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 129.

coincides with a more “human” approach to creativity and daily life. This approach takes into consideration the possibilities of a “more everyday human engagement in a complex world in terms of capacities, situations, and processes of creativity.”<sup>110</sup> He uses community gardening to present alternatives to prevalent notions of creativity (such as those presented in creative cities discourse) so as to illustrate how “creativity and space commingle and are mutually emergent.”<sup>111</sup>

Community gardening can be viewed as a social encounter that acts as an alternative to the commercial encounters that dominate the creative city model and that make up the ‘cultural economy’. This is not to say that cultural activities do not have value and that public or private funding are not important, but in contrast, community gardening highlights individual creative impulses. As Crouch contends, the benefits of community gardening are straightforward and simplify how people occupy space. In this sense, an individual is given an opportunity to exercise creative potential in an everyday way that appeals to natural human tendencies in comparison to the highly institutionalized proposals of the creative city model.

Community gardening offers benefits that can be measured, in contrast to the vague projections associated with the possible positive benefits of a PAC. An updated and solidified strategic plan that would make community gardening an essential aspect of London’s culture would have a variety of benefits. These include people growing their own food, individual satisfaction and social interaction, and the beautification of the urban environment (and surrounding areas in some cases). In addition, community gardening could shift people’s thinking about creativity to consider how everyday activities can generate a sense of pride and achievement. Community gardening involves actively cultivating something rather than passively consuming an experience. Creativity that is cultivated through everyday experiences offers an avenue for urban regeneration and community building that differs from the formulaic, institutionally-based recommendations of the creative cities model.

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<sup>110</sup> Crouch, “Creativity, Space, and Performance,” 129.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

## 2.6 Public Focus: Free Festivals and Events

Public festivals and related events are crucial to the vibrancy and community strength in cities of any size. They can engender a sense of celebration, togetherness, and pride; they promote interactions that improve the atmosphere and change how space is used; and, at their best, they promote inclusivity. Public festivals breathe life into the urban landscape while attracting others to attend and enjoy from surrounding areas. Geographer Heather McLean suggests they can be thought of as a “dialogue with urban space” that includes the “artistic and activist potential of urban performance interventions.”<sup>112</sup> Festivals and events are most often run by non-profit organizations and volunteers with some funding from municipal or private sources. Collaboration between organizers is critical and festivals showcase what communities are capable of doing to change the urban streetscape.

A London-based example is the annual Dundas Street Festival (in past years called Car Free Day and later, Our Street Day). This new incarnation of the festival merges the earlier daytime activities that encompassed Our Street Day with the wildly popular public arts and cultural events that constitute Nuit Blanche. This festival will close Dundas Street, one of London’s busiest downtown corridors, from 10am to 1am in order to celebrate artists, artisans, community organizations, local theatre, environmental awareness, downtown businesses, and alternative modes of transportation in the city. Collaboration between the two formerly separate events comes on two levels. Not only does it bring together Our Street Day and Nuit Blanche, it also connects the key organizers, Our Street London and the London Fringe Festival. Without the collective thinking and dedicated work of both organizations, a festival of this calibre would be hard-pressed to succeed for, as a recent press release states, “the Dundas Street Festival aims to be the largest downtown festival in London’s history.”<sup>113</sup> The organizational pairing displays the necessary collaborations required for increased community

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<sup>112</sup> Heather E. McLean, “The Politics of Creative Performance in Public Space: Towards a Critical Geography of Toronto Case Studies,” in *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy*, ed. Tim Edensor et al. (London: Routledge, 2010), 200.

<sup>113</sup> London Fringe Festival, “Press Release: Dundas Street Festival,” January 2014, n.p.

engagement, diverse options, and adequate use of space and time available in the summer months. In previous years, both festivals were immensely successful at creating a space of eclectic cultural demonstration that engaged thousands of people and created a place where Londoners could express pride in their community. This festival will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 in terms of planning processes, logistics, community outreach, and interviews with organizers. The Dundas Street Festival sets up the direction for my research into alternative uses of space in London. For now, however, to flesh out this case study's importance, I will discuss vernacular creativity and positive sense of place in relation to two other street festivals, one in Vancouver and one in Toronto.



**Figure 9 Nicole Borland, Our Street Day, London, Ontario, 2013**

Vancouver, British Columbia's summer street festival "Viva Vancouver," which takes place from May to August each year, harnesses vernacular creativity of the everyday through a variety of outdoor events and activities (and includes the original incarnation of Car Free Day). The festival involves particular events, public installations, and innovative space-making endeavours. Examples include "street parklets," which consist of three or four parking spaces filled in with an original and creative seating area. These spaces are completely free, secured in place, open to the public, and available at all hours. In addition, no commercial endeavours are allowed within the space (such as



advertising or table service if in front of a restaurant or café). There are several of these installed each year, all of which are the products of local artists or designers. This use of space wholly relates to the concept of the creative vernacular. Not only does it subtly transform everyday space into something that mediates community building, it also beautifies the urban environment and allows individuals to see (and use) their city differently. Further, it engages local artists with the community and vice versa.



**Figure 10 City of Vancouver, Street Parklet, Viva Vancouver, Robson Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2010, [www.vancouver.ca](http://www.vancouver.ca)**

According to the city of Vancouver’s website, the festival “enhances the city’s sense of community, encourages active forms of transportation, and benefits local businesses” amongst other things.<sup>114</sup> Other events associated with the festival include art, music, and artisan markets on Granville Street, and public roadway mural painting in the West End, Mount Pleasant, and Marpole Street neighbourhoods. In addition, Viva Vancouver is part of the city’s 2040 Transportation Master Plan, which aims to make the city the greenest in the world which shows the festival’s dedication to advocating for healthier residents and a healthier community.

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<sup>114</sup> City of Vancouver, “Viva Vancouver,” last updated 2014, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://vancouver.ca/streets-transportation/reducing-cars-on-city-streets.aspx>.



**Figure 11 City of Vancouver, Viva Vancouver, Robson and Granville Streets, 2013,**  
**[www.vancouver.ca](http://www.vancouver.ca)**

One scholar, Heather E. McLean, has studied the Toronto street festival “Time Out/Game On,” which took place in the spring of 2006. Activities were spread throughout the streets, in thrift stores, parks, and more in Toronto’s Queen West and Parkdale neighbourhoods. In these spaces people were encouraged to partake in childlike outdoor activities such as tag or hide-and-go-seek mediated by installations and performances by local artists. These interventions “invited participants and viewers to celebrate the spirit of the playground in and outside the park, while challenging our notion of playful space and submission to the rules of the game.”<sup>115</sup> McLean looks specifically at how artists presented what they called “spaces of creation” in areas such as loading docks, waterfronts, and factories, and how people navigated these spaces.<sup>116</sup> McLean highlights how creative interventions change relationships between space and people. Simple, everyday adjustments to city locations turn space into (a sense of) place while highlighting the important role individuals play in enlivening the festival and the city. As is seen with Viva Vancouver or the Dundas Street Festival, vernacular creative

<sup>115</sup> McLean, “The Politics of Creative Performance in Public Space,” 200.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 201.

practices that make even the smallest additions to the streetscape create an atmosphere where anyone is welcome, there is no charge for admission, and one may begin to see their city differently. McLean notes that the politics of ‘creativity’ and urban space intersect in an important and interesting way that, in these cases, combats the prevalent, prescriptive notions of the creative cities concept.<sup>117</sup> This intersection establishes a different way of viewing the public festival, one in which inclusivity is a primary mandate and diversity of people and experiences is a characteristic outcome.

Florida maintains that what the creative class is looking for is a city that includes quality experiences, tolerance, and diversity. Milligan suggests, however, that there is not enough evidence to show how these desires translate into solidified, lived encounters.<sup>118</sup> I am also wary of pairing diversity with tolerance. Florida’s assertion infers that communities must ‘tolerate’ differences present in diverse populations. In such cases as Toronto’s Time Out/Game On, London’s Our Street Day and Nuit Blanche, and Viva Vancouver, one sees how a necessity to tolerate is broken down and diversity is embraced as the very factor that makes these events truly successful. The creative class concept appears overly stringent, limiting the desire for diversity and tolerance only to a group that will improve the economy. In contrast, acceptance is imperative to the broader social fabric of the community, and creating the appropriate atmosphere is key. Milligan notes that the new reality of the city is “one in which social problems are hidden from those with the resources to avoid them.”<sup>119</sup> Festivals and events where the optimum focus is inclusivity and openness to all present alternatives to this view of the current city because diversity is championed, space is democratic, and place becomes definitive of what a city can achieve.

## 2.7 Institutional Roles: Vernacular Creativity at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History

Vernacular creativity is not limited to independent, grassroots organizations or public space but can be enacted as a theoretical concept in itself through such activities as

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<sup>117</sup> McLean, “The Politics of Creative Performance in Public Space,” 201.

<sup>118</sup> Milligan, “The Individual and City Life,” 24.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 25.



programming within arts and culture institutions. This notion presents a wide range of possibilities for multiple spaces and cultural entities and, in this case study, takes place in a location comparable to but different from London. The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History (MAH) has implemented everyday creativity in an arts institution. Santa Cruz, is a small county in California with a population of roughly 62 000 people (as of 2012).<sup>120</sup> Under the direction of Nina Simon, an advocate for participatory and experience-based institutions, the MAH has begun to focus on engaging the community differently. Its mission statement reads:

Our mission is to ignite shared experiences and unexpected connections. We accomplish this mission when we bring people together around art and history through dynamic exhibitions, events, partnerships, and programs.<sup>121</sup>

In this ethnically and economically diverse city, Simon saw an opportunity for increased interaction between individuals and groups as well as the potential for engagement with the culture of the county. To achieve this mission, the MAH presents innovative ways for people to engage in creativity and culture within the space of an art museum. Simon states “one of the first steps we take in creating a welcoming space for diverse people is focusing on social bridging among community partner programmers. This means co-producing events with people from different walks of life; artists, cultural producers, activists, scientists.”<sup>122</sup> Events include the production of artworks by museum visitors, stations in which people may write down and display a story or drawing, community clean-up of heritage sites in which the county’s homeless population is asked to participate, poetry provoked by historical artefacts, or simply comfortable chairs placed in front of art works to welcome contemplation and conversation in a social atmosphere. According to Simon, these activities make museums relevant to people who may not regularly engage in arts and cultural activities. She considers the community a “co-

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<sup>120</sup> Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, “Santa Cruz Demographics,” last updated 2011, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://www.santacruzchamber.org/cwt/external/wcpages/facts/demographics.aspx>.

<sup>121</sup> Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, “About,” last updated 2014, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://www.santacruzmah.org/about/>.

<sup>122</sup> “Nina Simon on Bridging and Beyond at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History,” *The Inluseum*, December 16, 2013, accessed May 21, 2014, at <http://inluseum.com/2013/12/16/nina-simon-on-bridging-and-beyond-at-santa-cruz-museum-of-art-history/>.

creator” because community members produce and contribute content to the museum and in so doing, materialize its mission. She suggests that most museums today are no longer seen as open spaces but elite institutions that serve increasingly small subsets of the population.<sup>123</sup> Thus, her activism and enthusiasm for participatory activities seeks to break down barriers and ingrained mindsets in order to make institutions accessible and meaningful to the population at large.

One of Simon’s primary arguments is that every person has something creative to share, but it is often the way people are invited to contribute that falters.<sup>124</sup> Simon’s goal is to produce inviting, engaging atmospheres where people may participate in simple yet meaningful activities that evoke a sense of pride and connection with one another and the community. To Simon, this is good design, which produces better results. She cites an example from the LA County Museum of Art in which visitors to an exhibition were asked a specific question about art. At random, people were either given a small, white, square piece of paper and a golf pencil or a blue, hexagonal sheet and large pencils. They found that “the percentage of ‘unrelated’ responses to the art-related question decreased from 58 per cent (white paper) to 40 per cent (blue paper), and ‘specific’ responses nearly doubled from 28 per cent (white) to 50 per cent (blue).”<sup>125</sup> This simple exercise aimed to highlight that when, as Simon contends, “if you give someone a special tool, you make them feel valued, you show them that you actually care about what they’re going to do and it transforms what they do in return.”<sup>126</sup> Therefore, it has become the MAH’s mandate to specifically design exhibitions to provide individuals with the necessary tools to feel appreciated with hopes that visitors can have a truly meaningful experience.

Within the first year of implementing the participatory exhibition program (2011-2012), the MAH’s attendance more than doubled from 15,000 to 35,000. Visitor numbers on the museum’s busiest day more than tripled from about 700 to roughly 2500. The museum as a whole went from being in a tenuous financial position to becoming a

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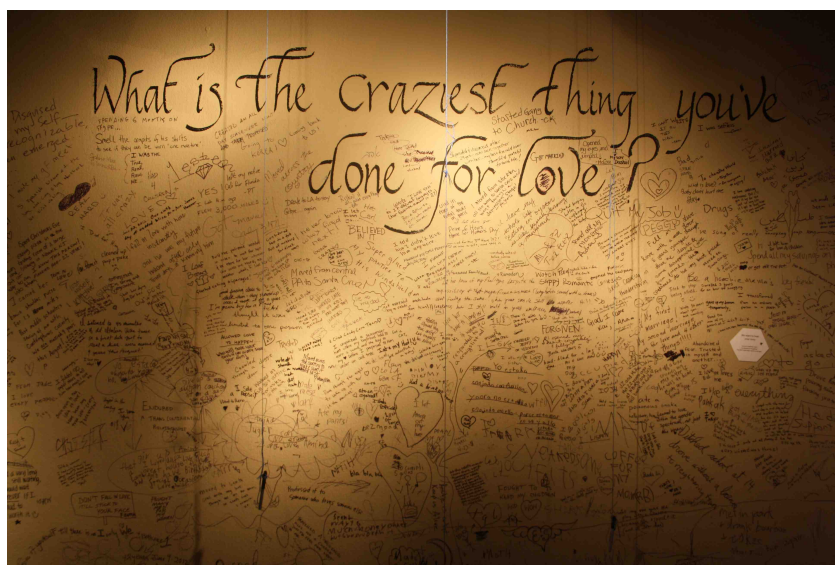
<sup>123</sup> Nina Simon, “Opening Up the Museum: Nina Simon,” TEDxSantaCruz, Cambrillo College Crocker Theatre, Aptos, California: September 15, 2012.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

financially stable institution with roughly \$350,000 profit.<sup>127</sup> These stats show the significance of community practices and the inherent value of creativity in everyday activities. The art museum does not need to be a closed off place catering to elites or those capable of purchasing admission. If people are given the proper tools to communicate and create, institutional spaces can also become places of celebration, while highly-ingrained but outdated mindsets may begin to shift. Although museums still have a responsibility to present what is traditionally considered to be fine art, this is a perfect example of ways in which cultural institutions can fulfill their mission while encouraging diverse groups to participate and engage, thus making more meaningful experiences for both the community and the museum.



**Figure 12 Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Installation of Visitor Participation, 2012, [www.santacruzmah.org](http://www.santacruzmah.org)**

Although there is concrete evidence of the MAH's success, there have been recent criticisms regarding what participatory/experience-based museums do to traditional notions of culture and art. Judith H. Dobrzynski's article "High Culture Goes Hands On"

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<sup>127</sup> Nina Simon, "Opening Up the Museum: Nina Simon."

was published in the *New York Times* in mid 2013.<sup>128</sup> In it, she condemns, and at times also commends, the idea of participatory culture in the museum. Ultimately however, she equates exhibitions and activities such as those at the MAH with a trend sweeping today's society; a need for speed and sensory experience so that memories can be made quickly and documented to 'prove' we have 'done' something. Dobrzynski believes that in our haste to adapt to rapid changes in daily life we are too accepting of such changes in cultural institutions. She states, "in the process of adapting, our cultural treasures are multitasking too much, becoming more alike, and shedding the very characteristics that made them so special — especially art museums."<sup>129</sup>



**Figure 13 Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, Storytelling Station and visitor 2013, [www.santacruzmah.org](http://www.santacruzmah.org)**

Dobrzynski illustrates a very traditional ideal attached to the art museum that does not take into account the societal changes forcing cultural institutions to adapt their programming to diverse needs. Further, she holds that the necessity to change is necessarily negative, denigrating the richness, variety, and eloquently cultured identity of

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<sup>128</sup> Judith H. Dobrzynski, "High Culture Goes Hands On," *New York Times*, August 10, 2013, n.p., accessed May 21, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/11/opinion/sunday/high-culture-goes-hands-on.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/11/opinion/sunday/high-culture-goes-hands-on.html?_r=1&).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

the arts museum. She criticizes the (then) Cleveland Museum of Art curator C. Griffith Mann who noted an experience-based installation by British artist Martin Creed (entitled *Work No. 965: Half the Air in a Given Space*) as an attempt to “activate” the space in the museum’s East Wing.<sup>130</sup> Dobrzynski claims that “in ages past, art museums didn’t need activating. They were treasure houses, filled with masterpieces meant to outlast the moment of their making, to speak to the universal.”<sup>131</sup> While traditional ways of appreciating arts and culture, such as simply going to see an exhibition of paintings or sculpture, are not obsolete, conventional exhibitions do not tend to draw the necessary audience to keep smaller institutions thriving. The statistics for attendance and revenue alone illustrate the dire need for change at the MAH as well as the public enthusiasm for the participatory approach Simon introduced.



**Figure 14 Martin Creed, *Work No. 965: Half the Air in a Given Space*, 1998, Installed at the Cleveland Museum of Art, 2012, [www.mymodernmet.com](http://www.mymodernmet.com)**

Even so, Bruce Bratton, a radio personality and opinion columnist in Santa Cruz overtly criticized the changes Nina Simon made to the MAH on his website *Bratton*

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<sup>130</sup> Dobrzynski, “High Culture Goes Hands On,” n.p.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

*Online*. He claimed that the new direction of the museum is more in line with mundane “humdrum” hobbies concerned with increased attendance over anything else. He went on to state “we’ve lost the “museum,” “the art,” and “the history” concepts of what was once a professional institution with professional standards.”<sup>132</sup> To him, the participatory nature of the MAH has robbed future generations of a place to go and “experience a real museum.”<sup>133</sup> Bratton feels the former MAH offered art viewing in the proper context; “a respectful place that created the sense that what you’re seeing is important, and worthy of your consideration. Not just something you whip through as you’re doing activities.”<sup>134</sup> Bratton’s statements are mired with problems and speak to the reluctance to change traditional notions of what a museum, art, and creativity in general can be. What exactly is a “real museum” today? How can we define that when, as (even) the CCTF Report recognized, museums constantly need to reinvent themselves to (as Simon stresses) remain relevant? Reactions, such as Bratton’s and Dobrzynski’s are not surprising and are also necessary to move forward and consider the positive benefits of new approaches to pressing problems in arts institutions.

Simon calls her conceptual framework for participatory culture “the museum of ‘and’” for there is no one correct approach to engaging in culture, creativity, community, and art.<sup>135</sup> This is a positive and appropriate way to respond to criticism because it accounts for the benefits of new approaches as well as the continued appreciation for the traditional role of art museums. As the other case studies discussed in this chapter demonstrate, a diverse range of activities, from community gardens to outdoor festivals, have the potential to build community and revitalize cities. Proposals for small-scale, local initiatives as alternatives to creative city planning will no doubt be met with scrutiny and indifference. However, I hope these case studies show the potential benefits of appreciating and celebrating the everyday. The value of individual engagement is summed up with impressive brevity on comment cards available to MAH visitors. One

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<sup>132</sup> Bruce Bratton, “MAH’s Newest Meaning,” *Bratton Online*, September 2013, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://brattononline.com/>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Nina Simon, “The Museum of ‘And’,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, November 2, 2013, n.p. accessed May 21, 2014, [http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/opinion/ci\\_24441572/nina-simon-museum-and](http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/opinion/ci_24441572/nina-simon-museum-and).

reads; “what is this—a museum or a community center?” and beneath it someone simply wrote, “why can’t it be BOTH?”<sup>136</sup>

## 2.8 Conclusion

The concept of vernacular creativity may seem mundane to some. Communities may encounter some reluctance as they try to implement projects of the kinds described here. Perhaps community organizers will be accused of hastily emulating a trend in the same way the rush to embrace the creative cities concept has been challenged. However, it is the simple and accessible nature of vernacular creativity that differentiates these initiatives from the bureaucratic recommendations of the creative cities discourse. Vernacular creative practices are significant because they offer opportunities that benefit the well-being of people and the community at large without narrow definitions. This very factor stands in contrast to the creative cities model and its concern for economic growth. Activities such as community gardening, outdoor festivals, and events, and new approaches in established cultural institutions can offer new opportunities for community building. These activities transform ordinary, urban spaces through creativity to redefine the sense of place and to change the image of a city.

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<sup>136</sup> Nina Simon, “The Museum of ‘And,’” n.p.





## Chapter 3

### 3 Community Organizations and the Municipal Government: Working Together Towards Civic Improvement

In Chapter 3 I explore ways in which independent, community organizations can work in line with larger arts and cultural institutions and the municipal government through vernacular creativity. Using the upcoming Dundas Street Festival (DSF) as a case study, I parallel its impermanent alterations to public space with the permanent changes recommended in the recent urban revitalization initiative ReThink London and subsequent Downtown Master Plan. Referencing issues highlighted in both Chapters 1 and 2, this Chapter asks how independent organizations can work alongside municipal planners to communicate the importance of permanent change in public space to improve the livability, vibrancy, and ultimately the creative atmosphere of a city.

#### 3.1 Introduction

Community organizations promote civic improvement through creative uses of public space in everyday life. However, can these grassroots, independent organizations also work alongside municipal governments to make community revitalization efforts more effective and sustainable? Both entities have valuable contributions to offer in the realms of creativity, innovation, and alternative uses of public space. In this regard, the current creative endeavours in the city of London again provide a useful example to consider different approaches to urban improvement. Based on the planning processes and projected results of the Dundas Street Festival (set to take place June 14, 2014), this chapter will examine how community organizations implement vernacular creativity in everyday life in order to affect, contribute to, and advance municipally sanctioned approaches to urban improvement.

In order to situate the local, creative approaches of community groups in relation to the initiatives of London's municipal government, I begin with a discussion of the recent planning endeavour, ReThink London. Beginning in 2012, the city spearheaded a year-long campaign to gather input from individuals, conferences, focus groups, and

publications aimed towards uncovering what changes Londoners think are required to achieve growth and progress in their community. The engagement process resulted in a Downtown Master Plan that outlines a new vision for the city as well as the tools and actions required to achieve it. The final chapter of the Master Plan looks at ten different “Transformational Projects,” which specifically address changes to public space to improve sense of place and liveability in the city.<sup>137</sup> Here I examine one of those projects entitled “Dundas Place” to equate with and illustrate how the DSF exemplifies temporary changes to public space that, if made permanent, could change the appearance, identity, and ultimately the atmosphere of London in a positive way. ReThink London, the Master Plan, and the DSF show how the city and the community can work together to move beyond such homogenous approaches to urban revitalization as offered by the CCTF Report. The parallel between the DSF and the “Transformational Projects” in the Master Plan shows how vernacular creative practices can be the building blocks for an improved and community friendly city. Similarly, it shows how independent, community organizations can contribute to and work in line with the municipal government’s planning process.

### 3.2 The Dundas Street Festival: History, Organizers, and Goals

It is important to first delineate the organizations involved in planning the Dundas Street Festival (DSF) and the roles each play. First, Our Street London, an organization mentioned briefly above, is a group of urban advocates who work to inspire Londoners to utilize alternative and environmentally friendly modes of transportation through innovative and creative community events.<sup>138</sup> Our Street Day makes up one half of the DSF with arts, cultural, environmental, and creative programming during the daytime hours of 10am to 5pm. The festival is in its fifth year of operation and has had to adapt to the demands of the community over that time, but has seen increasing success with each event it has held. For example, in its second year Our Street Day went from a one-day downtown festival to a series of events throughout the summer in different communities.

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<sup>137</sup> City of London Planning and Environment Committee, “Downtown Master Plan,” October 2013, 39.

<sup>138</sup> Our Street London website, last updated 2013, accessed April 1, 2014, [www.ourstreet.ca](http://www.ourstreet.ca).

As well, during this second year, Our Street Day began to include large main stages that created more of a music festival feel. Though these initiatives expressed growth, neither seemed to engage the community in as positive a way as the everyday, vernacular activities that had constituted the original incarnation's simple, accessible, and welcoming nature. Changes needed to be made in the form of paired down, 'busking' type, acoustic performances as opposed to stages as well as concentrating the event in downtown London. These characteristics appealed largely to attendees and also focused on bringing communities into one area of the city as opposed to dispersing them through different subdivisions. In the following years Our Street Day became an essential component of London's summer festival line up, and this new amalgamation of daytime and night time events as part of the DSF ushers in fresh, interesting possibilities and outcomes.



**Figure 15 Nicole Borland, Our Street Day, Dundas Street looking East, London, Ontario, 2013**

London Fringe encompasses the other half of organizational responsibility for the DSF. Beginning in 1998, a group of people with a passion for theatre and the arts came together to create London Fringe with the belief that such an entity was an imperative and

beneficial addition to the cultural scene in this city.<sup>139</sup> They believed that artists and the community could come together through shared experiences and appreciation for the arts. That same year, festival planning commenced and London Fringe became a member of the Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals (CAFF). In 1999 London Fringe received official not-for-profit and charitable status, and the first London Fringe Theatre Festival took place in 2000.<sup>140</sup> Originally, the organization produced a two-week-long theatre festival annually, but it has since expanded its output to year-round programming, including film and visual arts events in addition to theatre.<sup>141</sup> London Fringe is a unique and important aspect of London's arts and culture scene. Their mission states, "the London Fringe Theatre Festival is dedicated to the promotion, production, and prosperity of independent artists. We create a unique and inclusive environment where the arts will be enjoyed in the present and developed for the future."<sup>142</sup> Further, Fringe producer Alison Challis states, "we provide support to the amazing artists working within this city and create opportunities for them to share their work and connect with audiences. As far as audiences go, the Fringe aims to provide programming that is different, unexpected, and engaging at affordable prices. We want to make the arts as accessible as possible[...]"<sup>143</sup> London Fringe is highly dedicated both to London as a community, and to the creative and innovative potential of the arts. They place particular emphasis on reciprocal benefits for artists and audiences through facilitating a wide variety of programming that is diverse and accessible and appeals to many people.

For the past three years, the Fringe, in conjunction with Museum London, the major public art gallery in the city, has been behind the planning and production of Nuit Blanche London, a very popular, local incarnation of Toronto's festival of the same name. Nuit Blanche, in the past, took place in the evening hours, roughly from 7pm to 1am, and brought to the main thoroughfare of Dundas Street, public art installations, interactive performers, music, and general festivities. Museum London opens its doors

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<sup>139</sup> London Fringe, "About," last updated 2012, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.londonfringe.ca/about>.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> London Fringe, "About."

<sup>143</sup> Nicole Borland, "Interview with Alison Challis, London Fringe Producer," London, Ontario, April 2014.

during this time with a variety of admission-free activities, such as silent film projections, art-making, and live music.<sup>144</sup> In the past, Our Street Day and Nuit Blanche have occurred on different days within the same week. Now, however, the events will be combined, with Nuit Blanche taking over the night time events of the DSF. Considering the only distinctive difference between these two events in the past were the days of operations, the merger was a natural and logical one, bringing arts, culture, and creativity into the everyday life of Londoners through one festival on a larger scale. Also, London Fringe is heavily involved with planning daytime activities that align with their mission, and bring to the original Our Street Day a theatrical flare with an emphasis on children's programming. By appealing to a wide range of age groups, this year's festival will be more diverse and accessible than ever. The overarching goal of the DSF is to animate the street with live music, artists, street performers, interactive activities, local food choices, information booths, and much more, for an extended period of time. The intention is to bring a quality of creativity to the arts and cultural landscape of London so as to promote engagement, appreciation and, ultimately, to celebrate the city in which we live.



**Figure 16 Kyle Hillard, Nuit Blanche, Katamari Installation by Chris McGinnis and Rob LeBlanc, Queen Street, London, Ontario, 2013**

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<sup>144</sup> Museum London, "Nuit Blanche", last updated 2014, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://www.museumlondon.ca/programsevents/nuitblanche/>.

### 3.3 London's Cultural Community: Negotiating Contributions from Independent and Institutional Organizations

To provide potential solutions to urban issues through vernacular creativity, it is important to consider the positive aspects and significance of municipally governed revitalization efforts. This is critical in developing viable ways in which independent entities can work in line with the ever present, larger institutions in a given city. When I say 'institutional organizations' I am referring to the larger, municipally governed entities that are privileged by local, provincial, and federal funding bodies (such as Museum London and The Grand Theatre). Although there are many ways in which the two poles of grassroots and institutional organizations are at odds (such as funding, promotional support, and staff available) it is imperative to see both sides as having unique contributions to offer to the creative and cultural community in a city. Take for example the DSF and its earlier incarnations as Car Free/Our Street Days and Nuit Blanche; all have received funding and programming input from larger institutions. In the past (and again with the DSF), Our Street Day has received operational funds from the City as well as Downtown London, a municipal organization dedicated to attracting businesses and events that will improve the downtown core. Nuit Blanche, meanwhile, is associated with Museum London, which adds to the activities available during the event. These pairings suggest an existing interchange between different organizations in London and demonstrates the ability of grassroots and more institutional organizations to work together towards similar goals.

When organizers were asked whether they perceive a divide between small organizations and larger institutions in this city, London Fringe's Challis stated:

There is definitely a divide. There are organizations within London who have been around for many years, and they are grandfathered into a number of funding streams, which maintains a certain level of funding and support. Although it is understandable why this occurs, the challenge comes from the fact that new/grassroots organizations have a harder time building support because all of the focus goes to the large established groups. It is hard to compete with an organization that receives \$500,000, or is staffed by the

City. However, both types of groups are important in a community and provide audiences with options of where and how to support the arts.<sup>145</sup>

Another DSF organizer (and original organizer of both Car Free and Our Street Days), Ryan Craven, responded:

There is certainly a divide but it's not as big as some might think. Some of the bigger arts organizations have participated in [Car Free/Our Street Days] and even helped it get funding in the past. It takes time to develop a new event into a large and established one.<sup>146</sup>

Despite a perceivable divide, then, it seems support from larger cultural entities in the city can facilitate and potentially provide the necessary platform for smaller endeavours to grow. It is important, however, for independent events to remain true to their original incarnations without taking on too much of the larger institution's mandate. Craven states, "if [the DSF] was overly sponsored or funded, it would feel very different," and "part of the reason this event is as well received as it is relates to the sense of community ownership over it."<sup>147</sup> Community ownership in this context refers to the partnerships, participation, and engagement from Londoners and the ultimate attachment they feel to the event. The above statements help to illustrate how organizations and institutions can work around their differences through collaboration and towards mutual benefits because, as Challis claims, collaborations "are key for building towards greater projects. At the end of the day it's all about working together for the greater good of the community and when two organizations can share in efforts to produce something incredible, everyone wins."<sup>148</sup> Still, smaller or growing organizations do not need to depend wholly upon larger ones, because it is very much their independence that makes them what they are. Regarding the organizational status of the DSF, Craven states, "one day, it would be nice to have more and secure funding for the event but personally, I haven't made this my mission. This type of cultural happening doesn't need to cost a lot and it certainly doesn't

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<sup>145</sup> Borland, Interview with Allison Chaillis, 2014..

<sup>146</sup> Nicole Borland, "Interview with Ryan Craven, Our Street London," London, Ontario, April 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Borland, Interview with Ryan Craven, 2014.



need to be institutionalized.”<sup>149</sup> The institution does not need to become the backbone of a grassroots organization or event, but attention must be paid to ways in which they may aid or augment certain aspects of an event, as well as to how they contribute to the sustainability of the endeavour as a whole. Recent planning initiatives in the City of London validate this claim and show why it is important to consider the possibilities of collaboration between community groups and major arts institutions.



**Figure 17 Nicole Borland, Our Street Day, Dundas Street looking East, 2013**

### 3.4 The City of London Consults the Community: ReThink London

Starting in February of 2012, the City of London’s Planning Department, under the direction of City Council, instigated a year-long “city-building initiative” called ReThink London.<sup>150</sup> It was a conversation between city officials and the community-at-large aimed at establishing goals and priorities for improving London in the years to come. Some of the key areas of discussion included future roads, neighbourhoods, community facilities, workplaces, parks, and transportation. The five main areas of concern identified in the

<sup>149</sup> Borland, Interview with Ryan Craven, 2014.

<sup>150</sup> ReThink London, “Overview”, last updated 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://rethinklondon.ca/overview>.



process were how London will “live, grow, green, move, and prosper” as a city.<sup>151</sup> From this starting point, community input determined the directional focus as well as the goals set during the conversations. The intention was to influence the official decisions made by city-planners and politicians regarding the development of a final master planning initiative. According to the ReThink London team, “by connecting these five themes, we can build a city that provides an urban life that is second to none.”<sup>152</sup> This particular initiative shows how the municipal government and the community can work together for optimal success. As well, this speaks to the ways in which larger powers can better serve, identify, and align with individuals and independent groups in this city.

The entire exercise was broken down into five key phases where the planning process paralleled a community engagement timeline. It took place from February 2012 to May 2013 beginning with an engagement framework and project work plan followed by crowd sourcing, creating a buzz, understanding community values, and building a communication network.<sup>153</sup> Further studies addressed the most viable areas of growth in the city while strengthening connections with the community. This became the working “plan” that confirmed the project’s approach by developing a draft plan and gathering subsequent feedback on it.<sup>154</sup> All of these efforts culminated in the final phase entitled “Confirmation, Approval, Celebration,” which solidified the plan’s overall approach, celebrated its completion, and continued to generate awareness and ongoing support for its implementation.<sup>155</sup> Throughout this process ReThink London held various community discussions, meetings, and symposia such as “Discover Your City” (June 11, 2012) and “Building an Exciting, Exceptional, and Connected City” (December 12, 2012) resulting in publications like “How We Green,” “How We Grow,” “Draft Values, Vision, and Directions,” and the “Current Official Plan.”<sup>156</sup> The city demonstrated an innovative and effective way to, not only include the community, but also get them to care about

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<sup>151</sup> ReThink London, “Overview.”

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

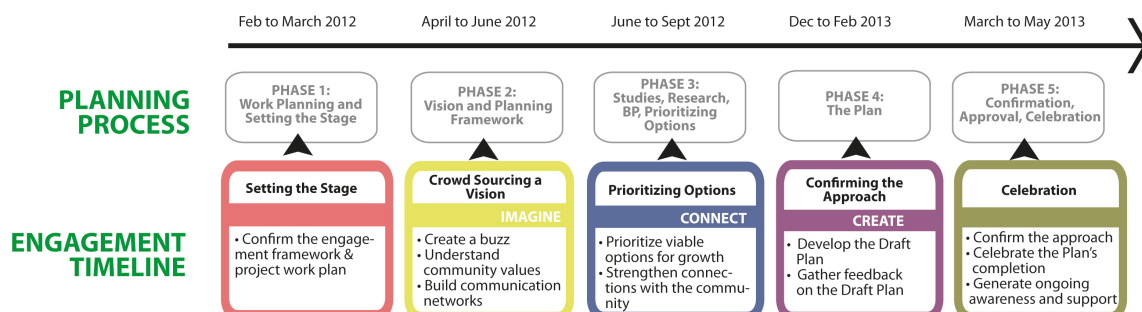
<sup>153</sup> ReThink London, “Process,” last updated 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://rethinklondon.ca/process>.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> ReThink London, “Documents,” last updated 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://rethinklondon.ca/documents>.

necessary changes in the city. ReThink London, thus far, has been largely successful in systematically collecting and analyzing information to effectively develop a plan that specifically addresses the needs of London as a city and its residents.



**Figure 18 City of London, ReThink London Process Map, 2012**

### 3.5 The City Aligns with Residents: Will Council Listen?

During the ReThink London process, over 10 000 residents weighed in on the issues and ideas presented.<sup>157</sup> Although this entire endeavour was orchestrated and executed by the City of London Planning Department, the concern persists as to whether or not City Council will listen and move forward on recommendations made in the master plan. Executive director of Emerging Leaders London, Sean Quigley, states, “[ReThink London is] the largest public engagement of any city planning in history. It’s massive. It’s going to be tough to ignore it, but that hasn’t stopped the planning committee and council to do that in the past.”<sup>158</sup> As with any city, Council often has ongoing problems that tend to take precedence over new ideas, concerns, and efforts. One such problem in London is unemployment and job creation, something Council is consistently working towards improving. However, according to Statistics Canada, unemployment has decreased from 8.7 per cent to 7.6 per cent in London/Middlesex County from March 2013 to March 2014 and proposed plans to make London more desirable and liveable will

<sup>157</sup> Randy Richmond, “ReThink London is the Planning Department’s Attempt to Create a New Growth Blueprint with as Much Public Input as Possible,” *The London Free Press*, August 27, 2013, n.p.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

inevitably continue the trend.<sup>159</sup> While it is critical to be mindful of such issues, this statistic suggests that public momentum towards bettering the City of London, together with the efforts of Council, can be positive in the long run for both parties. Yet, the tension between these groups has not been fully alleviated, and “in a sprawling city often at odds with compact development” the question remains “will 15 politicians listen?”<sup>160</sup>

The community consensus found through ReThink London suggests that, first and foremost, the city needs to build up its existing spaces rather than building out through (sub)urban sprawl. Additional recommendations include better public transit and ways of traveling, enhancing and protecting natural heritage and culture, and following sensible planning guidelines.<sup>161</sup> Each of these issues relates to one another and ultimately springs from the first – preventing urban sprawl and improper approaches to land use. The term “sprawl” in this context is understood as “a tendency toward lower city densities as city footprints expand.”<sup>162</sup> Concerns associated with sprawl are “unproductive congestion on roads, high levels of metropolitan car pollution, the loss of open space amenities, and unequal provision of public goods and services across sprawling metropolitan suburbs that give rise to residential segregation and pockets of poverty.”<sup>163</sup> These concerns affect London in numerous ways considering that in the past forty years the city has expanded to the land area equivalent of Toronto through annexation, with roughly one sixth of the latter’s population.<sup>164</sup> One of many ReThink London reports found that continuing at this rate will cost the City (mainly taxpayers and homeowners) \$6.4 billion in expenses and accommodation of land mass over 50 years (as opposed to the roughly \$2 billion building up would cost over the same timeframe).<sup>165</sup> In this regard, land use planning is essential.

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<sup>159</sup> Statistics Canada, “Unemployment Rate Trend: London/Middlesex County,” last updated 2014, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://www.investinmiddlesex.ca/data-centre/workforce-profile/unemployment-rate-trend>.

<sup>160</sup> Richmond, “Planning Department’s Attempt,” n.p.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Thomas J. Nechyba and Randall P. Walsh, “Urban Sprawl,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18 (2004):178.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Randy Richmond, “ReThink London has Released its First Set of Directions that Could Guide London,” *The London Free Press*, May 2, 2013, n.p.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

ReThink London aimed to provide potential improvements to this very matter by promoting building up instead of out.

The *Citizen's Guide* compiled by the Ontario Municipal Board (an independent administrative tribunal that hears appeals and makes decisions regarding contentious municipal matters) states, "land use planning means managing our land and resources. It helps each community to set goals about how it will grow and develop and to work out ways of reaching those goals while keeping important social, economic and environmental concerns in mind. It balances the interests of individual property owners with the wider interests and objectives of the whole community."<sup>166</sup> These are precisely the issues Rethink London sought to address and present to council through consultation with the public.

Despite recommendations presented through ReThink London, council continues in some instances to focus on other matters. Ward 5 Councilor Joni Baechler states, "I do see a gap between some of the things that have been promoted by a slim majority that don't reflect what the public, in the largest consultation we've ever had, is saying."<sup>167</sup> For example, Council passed the Southwest Area Plan (proposed in November of 2012 and set to begin development in 2014), which opens up new areas of land along Wonderland Road for retail and commercial development.<sup>168</sup> As well, PenEquity Realty Corp has proposed a \$300 million retail complex to be located at Wellington Road and Highway 401.<sup>169</sup> Both of these plans contradict the extensive and thorough research done by city planners, developers, and residents through the ReThink process. Such expansion ignores the impending issues arising from urban sprawl in this city. By consistently building London out instead of up, the City is negating attempts to logically and sustainably handle economic issues in ways proposed by endeavours such as ReThink London. Ward 1 Councilor Bud Polhill claims that sprawl is necessary due to incoming and outgoing

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<sup>166</sup> Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, "Citizen's Guide to the Ontario Municipal Board," Province of Ontario (2010): 2.

<sup>167</sup> Richmond, "Planning Department's Attempt," n.p.

<sup>168</sup> City of London, "The Southwest Area Plan" (London, Ontario: City of London, 2012): 111.

<sup>169</sup> Richmond, "Planning Department's Attempt," n.p.

traffic on the highway. As well, he says council must be cognitive and practical about development and job creation and, although he supports some potential solutions presented by ReThink thus far, Polhill feels that they ultimately offer “a one-size-fits-all” solution.<sup>170</sup> Yet, set against the negative effects of London’s sprawling landmass, Polhill’s claim falls short of delineating how various new, community-informed alternatives to build up existing resources are inadequate methods toward city regeneration. Continued commercial developments skirting the suburbs of London do not ensure job creation. They do not ensure economic benefits or population growth. They do, however, ensure detraction from and depletion of the central, imperative, and definitive aspect of this city: its downtown. Therefore, given Council’s reluctance, how can the issues and alternatives presented through ReThink London be seen as viable for and applicable to growth and sustainability in the city’s future? The remainder of this chapter will examine the ways in which impermanent alternative uses of public space can make way for permanent, positive changes to the everyday lives of Londoners going forward. By looking at changes made to the streetscape during the DSF and the proposed permanent changes made in ReThink London’s final document, the Downtown Master Plan, I addressed how alignments between City officials, larger institutions, smaller organizations, and the community can result in positive change and revitalization.

### 3.6 Vernacular Creativity and Public Space: The Impermanent Festival and Permanent Change

In chapter two, I discussed semi-permanent creative interventions in public space such as public art works, community gardens, and everyday programming in institutions. I also considered public festivals within the context of improving placemaking and, ultimately, sense of place. Here, I turn my attention to the public festival’s potential for inspiring permanent change in urban space. I consider how vernacular creative practices can produce a shift in mindset that can alter a city and its quality of place. At issue is *how* city residents can use and enjoy public space differently so they, as well as Council, may see the potential that different projects hold. Specifically I examine the approach to public

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<sup>170</sup> Richmond, “Planning Department’s Attempt,” n.p.

space, use of public space, and civic improvement through utilizing space differently exemplified in the DSF. These key attributes are intrinsic to the public festival, and also present an alternative to the “one-size-fits-all” attitude of planning initiatives offered, for example, by Landry’s toolkit for urban innovators or Florida’s creative class and subsequent creative city concept. Similarly, this analysis shows how regeneration attempts like ReThink London can, through community input, involve smaller organizations in collaboration with the municipal government to orchestrate change.

A key component to utilizing vernacular creative practices in the planning and execution of cultural events through community organizations is attention to placemaking and sense of place. Recall from Chapter 2 the difference between these terms; the former refers to the actual act of making space “useful and meaningful,” whereas the latter refers to the subjective perceptions people have towards particular locations after some form of attachment has been made.<sup>171</sup> The DSF involves both concepts when approaching public space. First, it makes use of existing space, the street, in an alternate manner, removing its traditional function as a daily, bustling downtown corridor to create a place in which people can engage differently. By seeing and experiencing the space (Dundas Street) differently, one’s perception of and reaction to that place may change through different associations and attachments.

The DSF uses vernacular, everyday approaches to changing public space so as to welcome attendees to physically engage with the environment differently. To be clear, a framework in which public space will be explored is necessary. In the book *The Lucid City: Exploring the Potential of Public Spaces*, architecture and urban planning scholar Quentin Stevens argues that, “one of the fundamental functions of public space is as a setting for informal, non-instrumental social interaction or play.”<sup>172</sup> Stevens goes on to state that “the concept of play highlights the distinctive character of urban experience: the

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<sup>171</sup> Ray Hutchison, “Placemaking,” *The Encyclopedia of Urban Studies*, published Dec. 2009, accessed May 21, 2014, <http://knowledge.sagepub.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/view/urbanstudies/n214.xml>; and Hummon, *Community Attachment*, quoted in Jennifer E. Cross “What is Sense of Place,” *12<sup>th</sup> Headwaters Conference* (City: Colorado State University: 2004), 2.

<sup>172</sup> Quentin Stevens, *The Lucid City: Exploring the Potential of Public Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2007), n.p.

ways people sense urban settings, move through them and act within them.”<sup>173</sup> Although he looks primarily at public space as it is defined by urban planners and designers, he emphasizes how urban space can make positive contributions to everyday life. He posits that the outcomes of everyday life in urban space are never completely defined by “the achievement of predefined, rational objectives,” yet “urban design often pursues such clear-cut instrumental goals as comfort, practicality and order.”<sup>174</sup> Stevens’ analysis can be equated with specific and calculated, but not massively disruptive, changes in urban settings that demonstrate necessary shifts in traditional notions of public space. He continues, “urban spaces and the activities which occur in them constantly generate disorder, spontaneity, risk and change. Urban public spaces offer a richness of experiences and possibilities for action.”<sup>175</sup> As Steven’s shows, the temporary repurposing of public space through festivals can lead to permanent change and positive outcomes.



**Figure 19 Nicole Borland, Our Street Day, Dundas Street Looking West, 2013**

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.



In its use of public space, the DSF exemplifies Stevens' claim for experiential richness and possibilities for action.<sup>176</sup> I will here outline logistical aspects and vernacular creative practices that have encompassed the festival's previous incarnations and will continue to inform and define the DSF. The festival aims to provide a spectrum of ways in which people may engage with and appreciate their city differently. Further, utilizing public space through vernacular creativity illustrates how the urban everyday can become a desirable, appealing, and increasingly liveable place through the making of place and subsequent place attachment, resulting in a positive sense of place.



**Figure 20 Nicole Borland, Our Street Day, Dundas Street, London, Ontario, 2013**

The DSF takes place along Dundas Street from Wellington to Ridout Streets where it animates downtown London with arts, culture, and creativity. By sectioning off this central corridor, the DSF alters usual modes of travel for both pedestrians and vehicles and immediately ask residents to engage differently with public space whether or not they engage directly with the festival itself. Using space in a new way coincides with Stevens' notion of play and disrupts traditional ways of occupying the urban outdoors. In this sense, no longer is the individual confined to the sidewalk or business owners to their

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<sup>176</sup> Stevens, *The Lucid City*, 1.



premises, and organizations from all over the city have the opportunity to congregate and define community engagement through desirable urban spaces that can inspire civic pride and engender a culture of creative progress. The festival involves roughly fifty different organizations, artists, community groups, and artisans, as well as smaller and larger institutions and organizations along Dundas Street such as the London Public Library and the Arts Project, and in the surrounding area, Forest City Gallery and Artfusion. Retail establishments pour out onto the street, restaurants create new outdoor seating areas for service, community groups hold workshops and information sessions, artists display work, temporary public art work is installed, and artisans have goods for sale. These are the simple alterations to public space that are at the root of the festival's purpose. They provide a welcoming, accessible atmosphere in which any community member may engage while experiencing a space in their city differently. All of these activities are of a vernacular variety, and are important for how they change everyday space. Such diverse and accessible opportunities highlight what Ann Markusen considers the main distinction between the vernacular and the institutional. She states that purposely vernacular activities "value most highly the abundant abilities in people rather than the inherently scarce."<sup>177</sup> In other words, vernacular creative practices make available an atmosphere where people can tap into innate creativity and do not require a specified, mastered skill in order to do so (Markusen uses virtuoso violin playing as an example of particular, masterful personal creativity).<sup>178</sup> In this regard, the DSF uses space to promote inclusivity and highlights the many interests and capabilities of those who wish to participate and attend.

Some more calculated activities in the DSF include three different music stages that will be fully programmed for daytime and night time events. These stages will be integrated into the streetscape so they will not become large, imposing and distracting structures, but instead they will be situated on street corners or in alleyway openings with tented coverings and carpeted floors in order to better integrate musicians into the eclecticism of the experience that is the DSF. Further, various street performers will roam

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<sup>177</sup> Ann Markusen, "Challenge, Change, and Space," 185.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

the area offering theatrics of different sorts (such as stilt walking and art making). As well, the DSF will bring food trucks onto London's streets to provide local, quality, dining options for festival attendees.



**Figure 21 Nicole Borland, Buskers at Our Street Day, Dundas Street, London, Ontario 2013**

The presence of food trucks shows how community organizations and festivals can speak to current local controversies between the community and City Council. In May 2014, Council voted on London's bylaw prohibiting food trucks from operating on city streets.<sup>179</sup> Despite immense public support for food trucks, including an online petition that garnered 1116 signatures through BetterLondon.ca, the motion to permit (a tailored version of the bylaw) was defeated 8-6.<sup>180</sup> Councillors voting against the bylaw argued the potentially significant monetary loss for existing downtown restaurants as well as a potential loss of restaurant jobs. This is another case of Council neglecting to listen

<sup>179</sup> Patrick Maloney, "Council Votes Down Plan for Mobile Eateries," *The London Free Press*, May 6, 2014, n.p.; and Chris Montanini, "London Slams the Breaks on Food Trucks," *The Londoner*, May 6, 2014, n.p.

<sup>180</sup> BetterLondon, "Help Bring Food Trucks to London," last updated 2014, accessed May 21, 2014, [http://www.betterlondon.ca/food\\_trucks\\_now?recruiter\\_id=5073](http://www.betterlondon.ca/food_trucks_now?recruiter_id=5073). and Montanini, 2014, n.p.

to residents and resisting building up the core of this city. The DSF, however, provides a possibility for action, as Stevens' suggests, within a public space that is being tailored to better suit the everyday needs of the community. Bringing in food trucks for one day will show residents and Council what possibilities exist for potentially permanent change. This is one of the many ways that vernacular, impermanent alterations to public space can inspire the municipal government to support new ideas for, potentially permanent, spatial changes.

Through its use of existing space, the DSF exemplifies ways in which community organizations can work with one another as well as larger institutions in order to communicate with the municipality at large. Change often starts on a small level because, as Craven notes:

When an institution gets too large and dependent on certain streams of funding, there is a level of change that they inherently resist for that reason. The small and new organizations NEED things to change so they can get established. I'm always amazed at how much of an effect small groups and even individuals can have on everyday life of Londoners.<sup>181</sup>

This festival, an independent endeavour, promotes civic improvement through placemaking and the subsequent sense of place the alterations can create. By using vernacular creative practices to repurpose space, such festivals can contribute to larger initiatives and communicate with Council through the display of public demand and desire. Similarly, these impermanent displays communicate information to the city at large regarding what can be done permanently to improve London's identity and overall community perception of it. By building up centralized areas, the community is strengthened rather than further dispersed. Placing the focus upon public urban spaces leads to a shift in collective thinking while contributing to the amplification of creative alternatives to the status quo and civic pride.

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<sup>181</sup> Borland, Interview with Ryan Craven, 2014.



**Figure 22 Nicole Borland, Dancers at Our Street Day; Artistic Masks and Performance by Laura Acosta, Dundas Street, London, Ontario, 2013**

### 3.7 Municipal Approaches: London's Downtown Master Plan

London's Downtown Master Plan, the end goal of the ReThink London process, is a fifty-page document that provides a vision for prosperity in the city's future. Compiled by the Planning and Environment Committee, the Master Plan is organized into four sections that outline a specific vision for downtown, preliminary actions, and ways of implementation. Finally, the plan presents ten specific "Transformational Projects" that will change urban space and improve the city's liveability and vibrancy. Each section is inextricably attached to the next and culminates in the final chapter where the potential for progress in the downtown urban space is explored.

The first section of the Plan undertakes a design analysis of existing features of downtown (such as rail lines and pedestrian routes), which filter into the ultimate plan for the city. The Plan includes investment potential from the public and private sectors, and

“looks to identify major pieces that can continue to help the downtown flourish.”<sup>182</sup>

“Rapid Transit” routing is at the core of the Plan, and focuses on improving corridors that move people to, from, and around downtown. By enhancing the means of movement, London’s downtown will become a more accessible and enjoyable place.<sup>183</sup>

In a section entitled “The Actions” the plan identifies six different steps that will build upon the 1999 Downtown Millennium Plan (which saw the construction of The Market, The Central Library, and what was then called the John Labatt Centre, amongst other things). These actions focus on public realm improvement and possible programmatic opportunities in public space to improve quality of life and economic vitality in downtown London.<sup>184</sup> The Actions feed directly into the Transformational Projects with the first point of focus being “making Dundas the most exciting street in London;” a particular focus in the discussion to come.<sup>185</sup> The other five actions include “Reconnect with the Thames River,” “Better Connect Downtown with the City,” “Greening Our Downtown,” “Build a Great Neighbourhood,” and “Create the Buzz.”<sup>186</sup>

The third section of the Master Plan identifies ways in which these actions and the transformational projects that stem from them may be implemented. Three key areas are highlighted: “Business Support and Programming,” “Financial Investment and Revenue Generation,” and “Planning Policies.”<sup>187</sup> The tools focus on assisting with instigating and making sustainable future initiatives to better the downtown and overall identity of London as a city.

The final section, “Transformational Projects,” addresses public space usage and urban design. The recommended projects create a vision of a future downtown with the understanding that some can occur immediately while others will manifest over time and are subject to budget processes. The focus is here placed upon the public realm, public

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<sup>182</sup> City of London Planning and Environment Committee, *Downtown Master Plan* (London, Ontario: City of London, 2013), 8.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 34.

space, and the potential it holds for improving pedestrian experience, amenities for downtown living, business development, and connecting people to the city's core.<sup>188</sup> Essential to these transformations is improving London's identity as an attractive, vibrant, and liveable community that attracts new talent and retains that which exists. Of the ten projects, I focus on the first, "Dundas Place," to consider its relation to the impermanent vernacular creativity embraced by the DSF and illustrate how community organizations can demonstrate the benefits of permanent change in a way that inspires revitalization and positive progress for London's future.

### 3.8 Transformations: Vernacular Creativity in the Impermanent Public Festival Illustrates the Potential for Permanent Change in London's Public Space

The Master Plan opens by stating that downtown is the cultural heart, economic center, and original neighbourhood of this city.<sup>189</sup> The Plan infers that "a strong downtown is one that exemplifies civic pride and showcases the true nature of the city. Downtown must be a people place and investment needs to encourage a public realm that is second to none; one that says, this is a great place to be."<sup>190</sup> The Plan's final section, "Transformational Projects," firmly asserts said notion and exists as a template for the progress and improvement of downtown London's public space in the future. Amongst the ten different projects some include "Richmond Walk," "Market District," "Queen's Station," and establishing a "Performance Venue."<sup>191</sup> These projects are derived from compiled information and the Plan's formal vision: "London's face to the world. A vibrant destination. A unique neighbourhood."<sup>192</sup> Each of these projects address public spatial usage in different ways that can contribute to the livability and progress in this city. Recommendations are further tailored through seven core values held by the project: leadership, prosperity, sustainability, inclusivity, livability, innovation, and partnership.<sup>193</sup> These values influence where and how transformations to public space are

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<sup>188</sup> Planning and Development Committee, 40.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 41-50.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 4.

projected to be made. Some of the projects directly coincide with vernacular creative practices aiming to alter public space into enjoyable, desirable, everyday destinations for the community. In order to situate the DSF as an avid instigator for and proponent of resident-friendly public space, I will focus on Project 1: Dundas Place. The DSF is an impermanent way of showing how attention must be paid to the needs of city residents, their desire for more walkable, enjoyable, and everyday ways to engage with downtown's public space. Reciprocally too, the proposed alterations in Project 1 make way for more frequent uses of the streetscape via different events and activities such as the DSF or, to recall other case studies, public art, installations, and creative outdoor activities amongst many other possibilities. Throughout this discussion, the other projects will be mentioned as critical outcomes from the permanent implementation of a downtown London in line with creative progression and cultural celebration; a place where the everyday is a place for innovation and engagement for independent organizations, the municipal government, and community at large.

The Dundas Place Project parallels the Plan's first action of making Dundas the "most exciting" street in London. Dundas Street, has been a central east/west thoroughfare since London's earliest days, in fact, predating the city itself by 30 years.<sup>194</sup> The action refers to the historical importance of Dundas as well as its potential to be "re-established as London's preeminent street."<sup>195</sup> The Plan asserts that when London is discussed by others, Dundas Street should be one's first mental image and that "this can be achieved through place-based investments such as pedestrian oriented infrastructure and event programming."<sup>196</sup> With this in mind, one may see how vernacular, everyday alterations, as well as a programmatic emphasis can change public space in order to influence further development throughout the downtown core.

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<sup>194</sup> Michael Baker ed., *London Street Names* (Toronto: James Lormier & Company Ltd., 2003): 36.

<sup>195</sup> Planning and Environment Committee, 19.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.





**Figure 23 City of London, The Downtown Master Plan, Dundas Place, 2012**

The Dundas Place Project or “The Dundas Flexible Street Project” aims to harmonize street usage between people and cars by creating a “seamless right-of-way” environment.<sup>197</sup> Features would include no curbs, paving material different than asphalt, and design characteristics that would welcome a variety of space functionalities.<sup>198</sup> Together, these attributes merge the concept of a public square with the city street so as to create an atmosphere of utility, multi-purpose transportation, and aesthetic appeal.

There are many reasons why this project is important for the revitalization and improvement of downtown. Critically, this transformation will aid in reinforcing Dundas as the “preeminent street” in downtown London while referencing its historical context and current potential. As well, the project creates a balance between pedestrian activity, possible programming, and vehicular access on a day-to-day basis.<sup>199</sup> Further, Dundas Place will create the environment in which businesses, retailers, and restaurants can “spill

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<sup>197</sup> Planning and Environment Committee, 41.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.



into the sidewalks and enter into the street” at different times throughout the seasons “creating a buzz that makes streets exciting and attractive.”<sup>200</sup> Finally, this project exemplifies the previously discussed priority of building the city’s existing resources up instead of producing sprawling, unappealing retail complexes and residential developments.

Essential to the Dundas Place Project are two of the Plan’s values: livability and innovation. By introducing such flexibility to this busy downtown street, the necessary public amenities are created for those who already live downtown and those who are visiting. Similarly, the space becomes one of possibility where different events, activities, and creative endeavours may create a further draw to the core as well as add to the positive identity of London. The project is innovative insofar as attention is paid to the potential for public space and an enjoyable, utilitarian urban atmosphere on an everyday basis which is crucial to future prosperity and perception of a city.

Public space, land use, urban design, and transportation should not be at odds in a city.<sup>201</sup> Each aspect should be amalgamated in such a way that welcomes creativity, leisure, activity, and civic pride generally. The Dundas Place project exemplifies this and will set the stage for further space innovation to take place making Downtown London a more welcoming, accessible, and enjoyable place to be. In other words, this project can act as the instigator for the nine other proposed space transformations in the Master Plan. It is not simply a matter of implementing them all in rapid succession but systematically addressing community needs and utilizing space to alleviate problems. Such urban design alterations as Dundas Place or others of the same nature like Richmond Walk and Clarence Street Connector will aid changing the perception of London as a city both internally and externally. Further, these projects will make way for larger endeavours that change space with one specific purpose such as Sports Heroes Way (making Kensington Bridge, a pedestrian only key connector between west London and downtown, while showcasing prominent athletes in London’s history) and Queens Station (A new rapid

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<sup>200</sup> Planning and Environment Committee, 41.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

transit square at the Queen and Richmond Street intersection). Similarly, this shift in perception can (both literally and figuratively) change the identity of this city in such a way that Project 10: Performance Venue (the controversial PAC discussed in Chapter 2) can become a more viably progressive addition to downtown London.

There are many ways in which the DSF relates to the Dundas Place Project with its impermanent implementation of particular vernacular creative practices. These alter everyday space in ways that illustrate how certain public amenities are important and necessary for improving an urban atmosphere. Stevens regards amenity to be an abstract, vague, and potentially ambiguous concept at the heart of urban design theory.<sup>202</sup> His assertion is coupled with the question “what makes a good environment, the desired mix of potentials and challenges which a setting should provide?”<sup>203</sup> He believes that designing the public realm requires addressing needs of diverse groups of people with certain physical and psychological comforts. Furthermore, “if public spaces prioritize one kind of need, then people not motivated by that need will be inclined to stay away.”<sup>204</sup> Yet, Stevens also claims that urban space must be understood within the breadth of its users, its unconventional possibilities, and variety of actions able to take place there. Similarly, spatial characteristics shape people’s behaviours and experiences thus a multi-faceted approach must be taken when deciding just what amenities are appropriate to offer in particular spaces.<sup>205</sup> The DSF offers a diverse range of creative and cultural opportunities that act as potentially permanent amenities with which people may engage. The festival’s goal, outlined activities, and propensity for inspiring permanent change pose an adequate challenge to Stevens claim. By implementing everyday, vernacular creative practices, the DSF does not make a grandiose attempt at being an exclusive or “one-size-fits-all” solution to urban problems. The festival presents temporary amenities such as pedestrian friendly space, open access to shops, restaurants, and businesses,

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<sup>202</sup> Stevens, *The Lucid City*, 2.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Stevens, *The Lucid City*, 2

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

engagement with arts organizations of various kinds, and creativity enhancing initiatives. These offered experiences are of everyday, non-elite nature, which, as previously mentioned, emphasize “abundant abilities” in people rather than the “inherently scarce.”<sup>206</sup>



**Figure 24 Brian Frank, Car Free Day, Dundas Street, London, Ontario, 2010**

Similarities between the DSF and the Dundas Place Project show ways in which community organizations and the City are working in the same direction towards a common goal. Further, it illustrates how smaller, more independent approaches to civic improvement can be analyzed and built upon. Although there exists a literal impermanence in the public festival, the attachments they create between the community and public space can delineate the positive potential inherent in those very locations. In addition, this potential can translate into evidence of the necessity for more concrete, permanent implementation of creative intervention in everyday space. By equating the planning and execution of the DSF with the ReThink London initiative and subsequent

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<sup>206</sup> Markusen, “Challenge, Change, and Space,” 185.

Master Plan, I have shown how community organizations are working in line with larger, institutional powers in this city. Thus, a complete gap between the independent and the municipal need not be perceived. Recognizing the unique contributions of different groups is imperative to future growth and prosperity in the city. To this end, desirable public amenities are critical to the cultural vibrancy and creative potential in London. Therefore it is imperative to encourage and appreciate collaboration between different organizational capacities. The question remains as to whether or not City Council will listen. Yet, ignoring community desire will become increasingly difficult as collaborative efforts diversify and amplify creative initiatives in this city.

### 3.9 Conclusion: Vernacular Creativity as an Essential Aspect to the Growth and Sustainability of Municipally Sanctioned Projects

I have argued that vernacular, everyday creativity in the cultural output of community organizations is an important and critical aspect of the institutional and governmental implementation of urban regeneration initiatives. Public space and its inherent possibilities are in crucial need of exploration and alteration in order to instigate future change and positive improvement in the city of London. Where public festivals encourage a positive sense of place, the municipal government may instigate permanent changes that better the community.

Changes in spatial use present in the DSF can help to show the importance of such initiatives as ReThink London, the Downtown Masterplan, and finally, the Transformational Projects. In the CCTF Report it was clear how the rushed employment of a homogenous and formulaic concept failed to bring about positive change to the urban environment and community at large. The CCTF Report differs from the ReThink London Master Plan because it was based on a stringent thesis too heavily dependent on the ideas of Florida and Landry, which themselves are limited by too rigid a conception of who, what, and where constitute acceptably creative potential. The Master Plan on the other hand, uses community input to highlight specifically tailored concerns and develop solutions to them. In this sense, the ReThink London initiative was by no means a one-size-fits-all solution, but a diverse and inclusive summation of various areas where change will positively benefit the city. The transformational projects it recommends

specifically synthesize community desires and needs in a location of utmost importance to civic improvement: downtown public space. This area of concern will not improve through all-encompassing formulas that limit everyday creative potential while stratifying organizations of different operational sizes. The Master Plan's final section quotes famed English art critic, John Ruskin stating that "the measure of any great civilization is in its cities, and the measure of a city's greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and squares."<sup>207</sup> Such a sentiment suggests the importance of everyday, enjoyable public space. Here, a city's culture can be appreciated through artistic interventions, collaborative and creative initiatives, and enhanced community engagement from different people, organizations, and levels of government working towards a common goal. Creativity itself is a mindset and vernacular approaches showcase the innumerable (and uncomplicated) ways it can be enacted, celebrated, and made permanent.

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<sup>207</sup> Planning and Environment Committee, 40.



## Conclusion

### 4 Conclusion: Vernacular Creative Practices as the Most Viable Approach to Community Enhancement and Urban Revitalization

Throughout this thesis I have highlighted the importance and applicability of vernacular creative practices to the large scope of urban regeneration. Vernacular creativity exists outside of any one stringent formula for urban revitalization and can be broadly applied to a wide range of initiatives. Vernacular, everyday practices express the creative potential inherent in individuals and the community at large. In this sense, it poses an explicit and considerably more effective approach to community enhancement than the creative cities concept. London, Ontario is an exemplary case study for the potential offered by paying increased attention to the possibilities in the everyday and acts as an example for creative change in other cities, regardless of size.

#### 4.1 Shifts in Mindset: Vernacular Creativity and Creative Cities

Chapter 1 introduces the creative cities concept with an emphasis on Charles Landry's toolkit for urban innovators. I examined the challenges of following a specific, all-encompassing approach to urban revitalization as opposed to the more diverse, everyday initiatives that are the focus of the remaining chapters. The CCTF Report and its shortcomings show how following one governing thesis too closely slows the process of community regeneration because different populations, minority groups, or types of individuals are left out of the process. The CCTF was a starting point for considerations but the definitive and homogenous approach meant few recommendations were implemented. Instead, greater success can be achieved when a variety of approaches are taken, a variety of individuals and groups are consulted and, ultimately, those addressed enthusiastically embrace change.

Both Florida's and Landry's theses provide interesting approaches to the re-invigoration of urban space, but it is in the non-elitist, diverse, and inclusive approaches of the vernacular that specific activities and efforts can effectively shift community mindset. This shift encompasses an openness to and appreciation for the creativity and

culture inherent to a city. From here city residents, organizations, and municipal governments can work together to provide a platform on which the city can progressively, sustainably, and positively grow. Although I have focused my efforts on London, the information presented also shows how other municipalities can enact a variety of alternative creative endeavours in order to instigate the necessary change specific to their city.

## **4.2 Vernacular Creativity and Placemaking: Promoting a Positive Sense of Place**

In Chapter 2, the specific case studies examined through the lens of vernacular creativity make visible the opportunities alternative uses of space can offer a community.

Community gardening, public artworks and festivals, and creative programming in cultural institutions all creatively use space to promote an improved sense of place and over all enjoyment within a city. This extends and confirms the issues expressed in Chapter 1, specifically that community mindset needs to shift towards a positive reception of the city in order to implement more calculated regenerative initiatives. City residents must be given a reason to form attachments to different places in order to see the city – and its identity – differently. Here, it is important to consider Florida's creative class and the exclusionary nature of it. Creativity and the activities used to promote it should include all people who wish to participate, not simply cater to a pre-defined class purported to hold the answers to urban improvement and economic prosperity. The above mentioned case studies are starting points for the variety of creative, artistic, and community-building endeavours available through engagement with the everyday. These different approaches are key, and will allow for further interaction with spaces available in a city while, most importantly, promoting an improved sense of place through placemaking.

## **4.3 The Importance of Making Creativity Permanent in the Fabric of Everyday Life**

Chapter 3 offers an incisive look at the work and production of community organizations through engagement with the planning processes of the Dundas Street Festival. Over the course of several months I closely followed the event organizers and was fully immersed in their practices. My research uncovered the importance of collaboration, creativity, and



innovation in public arts festivals. Similarly, it is essential to consider ways in which the independent and the institutional may work together, or, at least find similarities in their cultural outputs that compliment and enhance one another. By exploring the process of ReThink London, one sees how the work of community organizations, in this case the DSF specifically, parallels the proposed placemaking initiatives introduced by the city (the Downtown Master Plan's Transformational Projects). The critical point here is that by seeing how both grassroots and independent initiatives and those of institutions and municipal governments coincide, we may more swiftly and sustainably arrive at the culturally vibrant, creatively diverse, revitalized urban space we seek.

In closing, the third Chapter aimed to synthesize information given in the previous two by providing an experiential case study related to the theories explored and arguments raised. I truly believe that vernacular creative practices are key in beginning a shift in mindset to a more participative, appreciative, and positive community. Of course putting these approaches in place will be no easy feat because, as Landry noted, "city-making is a complex art; it is not a formula. There is no simplistic, ten-point plan that can be mechanically applied to guarantee success in any eventuality."<sup>208</sup> Yet, it is the smaller, more everyday alterations of an expansive variety that will show governing forces and the community at large the potential this city holds, thereby inspiring not only change itself but the ways to achieve it. Potential lies in the everyday, and in the public realm there are innumerable ways to make manifest a revitalized urban space through creativity and cultural appreciation.

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<sup>208</sup> Landry, *The Art of City Making*, 1.



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