

# Planning a Great City: London and its Creative Attributes



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Planning 700

*London is not a pleasant place; it is not an agreeable place, or a cheerful place or easy or exempt from reproach.*

*It is only magnificent.*

- Henry James

*London is in many ways the world's most cosmopolitan and influential city, as it has become the crossroads for so many cultural references, including contemporary art, architecture, the performing arts, literature, food, music film and fashion.*

- Giorgio Armani

It could be suggested that London's rise to greatness coincides with the increasing recognition of the importance of the arts and creativity within its planning processes and output. While some believe that creative sectors and activities simply evolve where they are needed, there is a school of thought that supports the active development of spaces and resources to encourage creativity and artistic endeavours. This school of thought is evident in London's planning history, which is frequently credited with London's success, both economically, socially, and as part of its international reputation as a 'global city'. By taking a narrow approach to answering the question of what makes a great city and using creativity as the prime attribute for analysis, the connection between creativity and other attributes can be clearly delineated. H. V. Savitch identifies four "C's" as part of his definition of greatness and support for the relevancy of these attributes is shown by the suggestion of similar attributes by Peter Hall. By looking closer at the meanings associated with creativity, linkages can be drawn between these attributes and that of creativity to produce an account of what it means to be a great city in our world today.

In the paper from which the selected quote is taken, Savitch describes greatness as embodying the qualities of 'majesty and prominence.'<sup>1</sup> He suggests that greatness is a status which can be achieved by a city through developing certain attributes that distinguish the city from most other cities in the world.<sup>2</sup> Savitch proposes four key attributes: charisma, concentration, cosmopolitanism, and currency, which accumulate to define urban greatness as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Charisma is said to be the inherent attraction or appeal of the city that is evoked in its inhabitants or visitors. It is often conveyed by icons or spatial forms that are well recognised and are able to typify the image and history behind the city.<sup>4</sup> Concentration refers to the demographic density and productive mass of a city, and also implies the presence of advanced

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<sup>1</sup> H. V. Savitch (2010). "What makes a city great? An American perspective." *Cities* 27(1): p. 42

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 43

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 44

infrastructure that supports these characteristics.<sup>5</sup> Cosmopolitanism describes the presence and flow of multicultural and international elements around the city, and the extent to which the city embraces these and is able to incorporate them into other aspects of urban life.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the attribute of currency conveys that ‘a city shapes the world by the value and forwardness of its actions.’<sup>7</sup>

Sir Peter Hall has composed a historical account of great cities of the past, and from this has teased out his own version of what constitutes urban greatness. He looks at the ‘golden age’ of a city and analyses how that period was achieved and sustained. Hall places particular emphasis on the creativity of cities, as a signifier and factor of its greatness. He identifies how each of the six great cities he examines has in some way placed ‘artistic and philosophical creativity’ at the top pinnacle of their society, and he credits their success and greatness to such an approach.<sup>8</sup> Savitch outlined his four attributes in the hopes of extending the evaluation of urban greatness beyond purely economically based measures of cities.<sup>9</sup> Hall too, sees a need to look further than the wealth of a city to identify the reasons for its success. Through an evaluation of various cities he shows that there is no guarantee that the richest places will axiomatically be the ones who experience a golden age.<sup>10</sup> He argues that a large size, a healthy economy and a high level of cosmopolitanism are factors which can help a city achieve greatness, but only in that such qualities are better able to attract and encourage the talented inhabitants that bolster a city’s level of creativity.<sup>11</sup> Across the cities Hall has examined in his historical survey, he singles out a ‘unique creativity’ that belongs only and especially to great cities. He recognises them as having been ‘the places that ignited the sacred flame of the human

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 43

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Sir Peter Hall (1998) *Cities in Civilization*, New York, Pantheon Books. p. 5

<sup>9</sup> Savitch, op. cit. p. 42

<sup>10</sup> Hall, op. cit. p. 21

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 7

intelligence and the human imagination.<sup>12</sup> It was therefore this quality that caused these cities to be remembered in history for their greatness.

London was chosen as the case study for the evaluation of a great city because it was named as one of the top five cities in the world in a prominent survey of 60 cities called the 'Global Cities Index.'<sup>13</sup> It was recognised in this index as the best place in the world to experience arts and culture in our current times.<sup>14</sup> London experienced a golden age in the 16th century according to Hall,<sup>15</sup> and the index shows that it has managed to return to greatness in modern times. In the creation of recent regional strategies, governance in London has given special credence to the importance of arts, culture and more generally creativity, in maintaining and advancing the growth and prosperity of the city. A 2008 report clearly stated this recognition:<sup>16</sup>

London's cultural environment is thus one of its prime assets. This asset is not unconditionally available. Extending it, sustaining it, maintaining its diversity, and providing the whole of London's population with access to it, are all essential goals of London policy.

It is interesting that this statement acknowledges the need for policy and planning in creating an environment which fosters both creativity and by extension, London's world city status. The evidence that places London at the top of the cultural index, in the top five economically and second overall, shows that London is without a doubt a world city.<sup>17</sup> Further examination of London's plans and policies will show that London is a creative city and therefore a great city. For the purposes of evaluation,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> A. T. Kearney and The Chicago Council on Global Affairs (2008). "The 2008 Global Cities Index." *Foreign Policy* **169**. ¶ 7

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Hall, op. cit p. 4

<sup>16</sup> A. Freeman (2008) London: a Cultural Audit. London: Munich Personal RePEc Archive. p. 4

<sup>17</sup> Savitch, op. cit. p. 43

these plans were selected from the Greater London area which encompasses both the city of London and the surrounding boroughs and defines the boundary for the Greater London Authority.<sup>18</sup>

Creativity as a concept is broad and often contested. In a planning report for the Cultural Development Network of Victoria, Australia, Jon Hawkes defines culture as 'the social production and transmission of values and meaning.'<sup>19</sup> He suggests that the arts are the principal symbolic language through which these shifting social meanings are communicated.<sup>20</sup> Charles Landry, an English urban theorist, covers a broad range of elements in his attempt to define culture, but suggests that the arts amounts to the significant core of the concept and sees artistic creativity as being the 'quintessence' of the notion of the arts.<sup>21</sup> Within English planning documents arts and culture have been assigned the collective term and meaning of 'Arts, Culture and Entertainment' (ACE).<sup>22</sup> The term takes account of spatial concepts of arts and culture whilst also including linkages between cultural process and flows.<sup>23</sup> This refers to the connection between arts practice and consumption, as well as range of forms these entities might take.<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this essay, the creativity of a city will be considered to be the combined effects and products of creative people in all areas of arts and culture. This is more specific than the concept of culture as the expression of all meaning and value systems in a society, but broad enough to include both industry and public organisations as well as individuals and groups within its spectrum.

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Newman (2005) London: From Fragmentation to World City Promotion. *Planning World Cities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 136

<sup>19</sup> Jon Hawkes and Cultural Development Network (Vic) (2001) *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's essential role in public planning*, Melbourne, Vic., Common Ground Publishing. p. 1

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 30

<sup>21</sup> Charles Landry (2006) *The Art of City-making*, London, Earthscan. p. 249

<sup>22</sup> Graeme Evans (2001) *Cultural Planning, an Urban Renaissance?*, London, Routledge. p. 129

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 129

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Attached to arguments for incorporating support for creativity and the arts into regional planning are the theories about what positive impact that inclusion will produce. Many of these arguments are economically-based, outlining the role that the arts have to play in increasing employment, and attracting mobile capital and talented workers into the area.<sup>25</sup> In an increasingly globalised world, these kinds of arguments become even more relevant, as cities and regions enter a highly competitive international environment for a limited amount of the best of global resources.<sup>26</sup> The arts can be useful in this context in a more intangible way, by helping to create a culture within the city which is open-minded and more resilient and adaptable to the changes brought about by globalisation.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the arts are argued to encourage reflection and original thought, producing societies of self-motivated and engaged individuals.<sup>28</sup> This can expand to influence the identity of the city as a whole and develop its sense of distinctiveness, which can in turn bolster efforts to become more competitive.<sup>29</sup> Creativity is said to stretch beyond purely cultural industries and bring added value to other industries within a city, driving the development of new products and services.<sup>30</sup> Finally, creativity has a role to play in developing greater engagement in citizens with the local democratic process.<sup>31</sup> Research has shown that despite a society being materially prosperous, its members can still feel excluded, powerless and unhappy.<sup>32</sup> The arts have the potential to facilitate civic engagement and improve quality of life within the city to ensure it prospers on all levels.<sup>33</sup> It is useful to look at such arguments for the importance of

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<sup>25</sup> Hall, op. cit. p. 8

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>27</sup> Landry, op. cit. p. 252

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 250

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 275

<sup>30</sup> Landry, op. cit. p. 253

<sup>31</sup> Hawkes, op. cit. p. 24

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 24

the arts in urban life to understand the influences on policy development in London that led the city to incorporate greater cultural planning into its strategies.

Creativity can be seen to be an aspect of the attributes of a great city as described by both Savitch and Hall. One key attribute that both theorists refer to is the level of cosmopolitanism in a city. Hall characterises this as an ability to draw talented and creative people from all around the world and benefit from their involvement and output in the city.<sup>34</sup> He sees this 'continued renewal of the creative bloodstream'<sup>35</sup> as integral to the making of a great and creative city.<sup>36</sup> This idea has had a resurgence in modern urban theory, championed by academic and urban consultant, Richard Florida. Florida sees the success of cities as being dependent on their ability to attract the 'creative classes' from around the world.<sup>37</sup> He argues that developing a bohemian environment (one which has a concentration of arts practitioners and an artistic built environment), encourages the development of innovative economic activity from across a variety of industries.<sup>38</sup> In this way, the presence of creativity can also be considered to have an impact on the concentration of a city, as creative people are drawn to each other and find areas to cluster in, further people are attracted from across all sectors and productivity stands to be enhanced through the development of new creative processes. Savitch also includes this Bohemian factor as an element of the attribute of charisma, creating a cultural appeal that impacts on the identity of the city and pulls people to it.<sup>39</sup> The fourth and final attribute, currency, can be the quality most closely linked to the notion of creativity. A strong presence of creativity in a city is intimately connected to the ability of a city to reinvent the status

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<sup>34</sup> Hall, op. cit. p. 285

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Florida (2005) *Cities and the Creative Class*, New York, Routledge. p. 68

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 117

<sup>39</sup> Savitch, op. cit. p. 46

quo and maintain values and practices that are on the cutting edge of change and therefore current.<sup>40</sup>

The recognition of the importance of arts and culture to the region's urban and economic development has been included in London's plans only relatively recently. Despite a type of modern cultural renaissance occurring in London in the 1960's,<sup>41</sup> planning for arts and cultural facilities only began to appear in borough plans in the late 1980's and early 1990's.<sup>42</sup> The first appearances of cultural planning in London were initiated by regional arts bodies as opposed to council planning departments.<sup>43</sup> This is because London's governance went through a variety of transformations and often had limited scope to address such areas.<sup>44</sup> For example, in the late 1970's and early 1980's regional arts agencies acted as a catalyst to encourage districts and boroughs to undertake cultural audits and develop arts policies.<sup>45</sup> A report based on principles put forward by the London Arts Council stated that 'it is clear from the present low level of public investment in the arts at both local and national level that something needs to be done'.<sup>46</sup> These kinds of arguments provided the rationale for development of the arts to move beyond the responsibility of the private sector and into the realm of public urban planning. Once a regional body was put in place in the early 1990's it began to consider such issues. The Greater London Authority (GLA) developed an *Arts Plan for London: 1990-95* that looked at arts provision to community groups and measured population concentration and growth, paying particular attention to the needs of the user/consumer.<sup>47</sup> It developed issue-based strategies that looked at soft-infrastructure of marketing (effectiveness) as well as

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 43

<sup>41</sup> Landry, op. cit. p. 337

<sup>42</sup> Evans, op. cit. p. 131

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 107

<sup>44</sup> Newman, op. cit. p. 137

<sup>45</sup> Evans, op. cit. p. 108

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 107

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 128

economic development and urban regeneration.<sup>48</sup> Beginning in 1992, the 33 local planning authorities in London were required to produce ten-year Unitary Development Plans (UDPs) for their borough. This has provided the opportunity for the interpretation of culture in town planning proper.<sup>49</sup> The inclusion of arts within the strategic vision of the borough was incorporated in nearly 25 per cent of the UDPs.<sup>50</sup>

More recently, the GLA has taken the opportunity to synthesise planning efforts in the arts and culture sector by developing broad strategies for the advancement of the sector. The increased executive powers of the Mayor under the changes to local governance in 1999 has also provided greater resources for arts strategy and advocacy from local government.<sup>51</sup> A report produced by the mayor's office and the GLA was released in 2004, entitled *London's Cultural Capital: Realising the Potential of a World-class City*.<sup>52</sup> The importance of planning in this area was acknowledged within this report, citing statistics on the large size of the sector and its contribution to both economic growth through production and the international status of London as a cultural world city. A further report released in 2008, *Cultural Metropolis: The Mayor's Priorities for Culture 2009 - 2012* stated how the GLA aimed to act as the facilitator for collaboration across a wide range of organisations in the sector to ensure the ongoing promotion of arts and culture in the city.<sup>53</sup> Practical outcomes of planning in this area has led to measures such as those taken by the borough of Lewisham in South London, which made specific zoning for creative business and enterprise and sold sites at below market value to ensure the inclusion of cultural activities in the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 129

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 283

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 285

<sup>51</sup> Newman, op. cit. p. 139

<sup>52</sup> Greater London Authority (2004) *London's Cultural Capital: Realising the potential of a world-class city* (highlights document). London.

<sup>53</sup> Mayor of London (2008) *Cultural Metropolis: The Mayor's Priorities for Culture 2009-2012*. London. p. 8

area.<sup>54</sup> These kinds of strategies have caused London to be internationally known for both its cultural vibrancy and its education in the arts, and have formed its identity as the cultural capital of the world.<sup>55</sup>

The changing context in which cities exist, one that is increasingly more global, has consequences for what attributes will contribute to making a city great. It has been shown that creativity can be the attribute common to a variety of other characteristics, such as cosmopolitanism, charisma, concentration and currency, which produces a great city such as London. Despite London's early neglect of cultural planning, it has since developed a comprehensive range of arts and cultural strategies that recognise the crucial place that creativity plays in the city's economic and social wellbeing. Not only has creativity garnered much recognition and positive reputation internationally for the city, but it has also helped to shape an identity and environment that its inhabitants can be proud of.

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Landry (2001) London as a Creative City. *Cultures of World Cities*. Hong Kong: Central Policy Unit. ¶ 11

<sup>55</sup> Landry (2006), op. cit. p. 337