

Keynote for the Creative Cities Summit, Detroit , Michigan. October, 2008.

It is truly wonderful to be here at this hallmark conference, I trust the next few days will be eye-openers for those already spreading the gospel of creativity and the term "creative" will expand into new horizons, beyond the conventional; we have such luminaries here and sincere people dedicated to the notion of creativity beyond the machinations of knowledge economies and innovation. For creativity is the engine of the cosmos, the only inextinguishable resource--to tap into that is to tap into a perpetual motion of human initiative, delight and vision. Economy only follows suit because of that.

As a poet, I am somewhat versed, pardon the pun, on the principles of creativity for some forty years. I came to urban design and city-building through a latent notion, obvious at that, that gained some popularity and is at the heart of my book, *Municipal Mind*, and the heart of my consultancies. The notion simply is that every man woman and child is creative, whether it be in community building, neighborhood building, nation building--it is impossible to walk out into the world; for that matter, impossible to wake up, without meeting the challenge of inventing the world and being re-invented by the world, in imagination and by the common delight of bringing inventions to a space of shared wonder--for that is the goal of creativity--

it's forum is shared wonder, and that wonder in turn fuels creativity in industry, the arts, education, in the public realm. You see, creativity is not an option, it is that without which we turn to crime, idleness, greed and fear--our cities fall apart for lack of

imagination.

But imagination is released only in a climate of trust, reciprocity and communal joy. Look around and you will see these elements diminished in the world around us. For many reasons. Information technology, the worsening economy, the lack of common cultural denominators, the lack of cohering loyalty to either organization or country. We think in silos only for lack of trust and common belief. A creative city is first of all a city of loyalty to itself, of affection for itself, and the gestures of creativity only serve to make that city fall more deeply in love with itself. A city of fear and self consciousness and self absorbed wealth generation can only be last on the list of prospering towns.

But the word prospering begins to look for ironic given the financial turn of events on the global stage. We had just finished convincing, very well, the philistine thinkers of machine age capitalism, that creativity was impact and economic generator---indeed, that is the case. In all cities, your cities, the agenda of proving to the miscredents that creativity and economy are inseparable, has been spelled out. That done, we must now wonder how to convince a skeptical and anxious public, that risk-taking is essential to creative economies, in a time when risk-taking has taken a plunge with the stock market.. This summit fitting meets at a pivotal time for the creative discussion. What do we do with creativity without risk, in a world that sees risk, now more than ever, as a dangerous word.

Strategies are needed. I am confident that the summit will address this..

My own agenda, rather my philosophy of urbanism, is something I can present to you directly and I think it is as pressing as the economic issues--indeed I see it as inseparable from the economic.

There is no creativity, no innovation without the Eros, the public realm, the dynamo of civil encounter. Do what you will in front of a screen; if you do not bring that delight to another, if the delight of invention is not brought to you, if it is not celebrated, if it is not encouraged if it is not rejoiced in, the motivation for creativity disappears, and you are left with low-level growth.

The public realm is the barometer of a healthy city--the meeting of people and the forums in which we appear, unself-conscious, curious about each other, thinking globally but acting neighborly, with a palpable excitement of demonstrates itself in civic care, compassion and delight---these are the drawing cards for competitive cities; not mere amenities, transportations, architectural gimmicks, galleries and amusements that any capital funding, scant as it will be, can provide. A city comfortable un urban citizenship invents, shares the wonder of invention, is excited by it and is grateful for it, and so citizen is hospitable to citizen, and such hospitality attracts investors, home buyers, corporations and tourists. Successful urban citizenship is the core of knowledge economy.

Using that gauge, that of urban citizenship, look around that our cities are being disinhabited, not in the downtown core but in the suburbs, the peripheries, the larger urban archipelago. Notice that no one is on the streets after 8pm at night, on a summer night. Notice the flow of cars but the absence of civil encounter. Notice the lights on in every house and no children playing in the school yard, or people walking, or sitting on porches. Notice that all our revitalized areas, replete with good landscape, safe lighting, surveillance cameras, pedestrian friendly environments, starbucks....are devoid of the casual encounter among strangers. Notice that there is in the global urban a zeitgeist of

withdrawal, in which the city is redefined not as a place of unexpected intimacies, but a place of negotiated encounter, where connectedness and networking is the acceptable mode of civil encounter.

A creative city is a city in which one first of all supposes that ones discovers ones destiny and meaning in life through other people. What other reason is there for living in density? For the furtherance of lifestyle? And what is lifestyle if a city is merely a place where you can enjoy yourself. The citizen of the creative city knows one thing about a city. That it is a place for enjoying oneself, by enjoying others. That is why, As Richard Florida says, place is important. Because it has been loved in, because people of invested either brown field or neighborhood with the drama of human life. The that drama is impossible without civil encounter. Creativity is impossible without it.

In short, this conference, I hope will address the psychology of cities. If a city is not creative, if it is evident of empty streets and joylessness on peoples faces, and there is no point in addressing digital and design inventories if they do not produce the effect of a vibrant public realm. Nor must we think that just more clever thinking will lever the civic mind into excitement. What we have learned from young people in revitalized areas where the artists bring property values to life is this---street encounter, civil encounter, evident and shared joy and wonder are what revitalizes a city, makes a city worth loving in, worth loving.

Our strategies must be aimed at something more than the economy, aimed at that which vitalizes the economy--the quality of life measured by wonder and delight on peoples

faces, not by conveniences, projects and novelties, nor by planning, funding and incremental gains. Ideas will not come without loyalty between citizens, and the affection that citizens share in the public realm, with a an ambience that instructs is in compassion before passion, where creativity inspires civic care, where creativity is molded by an ethic of hospitality, where life is not confused with lifestyle, where home becomes the next citizen because you have shared that most beautiful of gifts, creativity itself.

Creativity is not a project to merely save the economy. It must, in the next few years, be a reason for people to continue with vigor in their day to day lives, with hope. The strategies we come up with at this conference must be dedicated to the manufacture of hope. For hope is the future and main resource of the creative city.

The schemes for creativity and innovation must now, in the light of global recession, be rooted in the animation of civic imagination, not merely in the notion that clever ideas will attract money. We must be devoted to an ethic of creativity that creates a larger ethic, one that generates civic care by the exercise of imagination. We are not concerned now with revitalizing downtown---we are concerned with the survival of city spirit by programs that address the designer and the plumber, the industrialist and the housewife, the CEO and the courier. Creativity is the demonstration that shows every citizen to be an artist. When that dignity is found and enjoyed, a city will not fail to prosper as an economy, because it is a caring place.

I leave you with a quote from my insightful friend, Charles Landry, who first coined the term “creative cities”. I quote: “The greatest city does not seek to be the most creative city in the world. It seeks to be the most creative city for the world.” Indeed it is that spirit that ennobles our agenda. It is that spirit, as a gift to the cities we come from.

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco
Principal, *Municipal Mind*
Poet Laureate of Toronto
Curator, *The Toronto Museum Project*