

Chapter 5

The Arts and Cities

When the city ceases to be a symbol of art and order, it acts in a negative fashion: it expresses and helps to make more universal the fact of disintegration.

—Lewis Mumford¹¹

Suddenly cities are all the rage. After several decades of preoccupation with globalization and international trade, attention is shifting to cities as the new spawning grounds for innovative, dynamic, and creative activity.

In Canada, bank presidents are speaking out about the importance of cities, newspapers are calling for a new financial deal for cities, and governments are producing major reports and convening conferences on the development of cities. In United States, concerted attempts are being made to revitalize American cities after decades of decline and neglect. In Europe, competition is keen to create “cities of culture” and become “European cultural capitals.” And in Africa, Asia, South America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East, cities are growing rapidly in size and stature and the arts and culture are playing a very important role in this.

Why all the sudden interest in cities? There are many reasons. More than 55 percent of the world’s total population of 7.8 billion in 2020 is now living in cities and this number is expected to increase to 68 percent by 2050. Moreover, more and more people are looking to cities to solve their economic, environmental, medical, health, educational, social, and spiritual problems, as well as recognizing that it is the quality

of life in cities that is the decisive factor. If cities lack the prerequisites for people to live a happy, healthy, sustained, and secure existence, no amount of national or international development will make up the difference.

Added to this is the dialectical reaction to globalization. This is manifesting itself in countervailing measures aimed at restoring people's sense of identity, belonging, solidarity, and control over the planning systems and decision-making processes affecting their lives. Finally, there is concern over the present state and future prospects for cities. Many feel cities lack the constitutional powers, fiscal arrangements, taxation capabilities, and institutional mechanisms that are required to deal with a whole host of complex urban problems, such as poverty, pollution, unemployment, homelessness, lack of low-cost housing, pressure on public facilities, over-burdened health care services and hospitals, transportation gridlock, soaring maintenance costs, environmental deterioration, and the need for more security, safety, and protection from dangerous diseases.

With this rapidly escalating interest in cities have come attempts to determine what it is that makes cities "livable." Why is living in one city debilitating and degrading whereas living in another city is exhilarating and exciting?

There are many reasons for this. One is stimulating employment opportunities and job prospects. Another is excellent educational institutions. Still others are superb medical facilities and health care services, effective transportation systems, numerous possibilities for accommodation, attractive parks, zoos, and recreational areas, a diversity of sports, recreational, and entertainment activities, superb restaurants, inspiring architectural features and historical sites, fascinating

neighbourhoods, favourite haunts and hideaways, pride of place, and captivating ways to idle away the time of day. People take all these factors, and others, into account when deciding where to live, work, and settle down.

The arts make a major contribution to the development of cities that are livable in this sense. For one thing, they bring happiness to millions of people every year through concerts, plays, poetry readings, operas, art exhibits, films, festivals, and so forth. Many people will not locate in cities that lack high-quality artistic organizations and activities, especially art galleries, museums, theatre and dance companies, symphony orchestras, and arts and cultural centres.

The arts also contribute to the cohesion and social fabric of cities. They do so through their ability to engage large number of people in the artistic process, both as audience members and participants. In Sélestat, France at the turn of the century, for instance, the whole community came together and was actively involved in an exciting artistic undertaking called *Two Thousand Sounds for the Year 2000*. It was organized by skilled animators, the Maison de la Culture, and initiated by the mayor. It involved many artistic activities in different locations throughout the city and culminated with a huge artistic celebration in the central square.

Added to this is the valuable contribution the arts make to the economic development of cities. This happens through their ability to generate billions of dollars of investment and expenditure on facilities, equipment, hotels, restaurants, admissions, clothing, transportation, tourism, and the like. And this is not all. The arts also attract businesses, industries, and skilled labour forces. The most obvious examples of this in Canada are the Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario

and the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on the-Lake, Ontario. The contributions the arts have made to the economies of these cities over a long period of time are well-documented and readily apparent, due largely to the fact that the arts have helped immensely to transform both these places into thriving centres. And what is true for Stratford and Niagara-on-the Lake is also true for many other cities across Canada as well as in many other countries, which is why corporations and industries often refuse to locate in cities that lack stimulating artistic experiences and numerous artistic resources.

The arts also contribute to the beautification and aesthetic features and ambiance of cities. They do this through many different activities, not just the activities of large professional arts organizations. Community arts councils and art centres, neighbourhood arts festivals, murals on the sides of buildings as well as on walls, buskers on city streets, the environmental, architectural, landscaping, and horticultural arts, as well as the material arts or crafts add richness, vitality, variety, and originality to urban settings and their surroundings. So do the works of children and young people. Is there anything more enjoyable than a children's art exhibition at the local community centre, a high school play, a choir performing at the town hall, or an annual music night?

The arts also contribute a great deal to harmony and cross-cultural communication, understanding, and exchange in cities. They bring people together in peaceful rather than violent ways and make it possible to communicate across ethnic, racial, and linguistic divides in profound, moving, memorable, and human ways. This will be increasingly important in a world where racial, ethnic, and religious tensions are mounting daily and at a rapid rate.

Then there is the contribution the arts make to the uniqueness, distinctive nature, and personalities of cities. As Amos Rapoport puts it, “Cities look, smell, sound and *feel* different; they have a different character or *ambience*.”¹² Seen from this perspective, what would Paris be without the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre, New York without Broadway, off-Broadway theatre, and the New York Philharmonic, Beijing without the Forbidden City, and Bilbao without the Guggenheim Museum? Talk about uplifting city residents, tourists, and appreciating the uniqueness of cities!

While the arts make significant contributions to cities in all these different areas, their contributions do not end here. Recent research is revealing that the arts contribute to the development and livability of cities in other vitally important ways.

One of these ways is through the creative energy and synergy they inject into all aspects of urban life. By creating many of the concepts, contents, contexts, styles, methods, and techniques that are needed to institute change, artists and arts organizations pave the way for many other types of developments. It is not surprising in this regard that increasing numbers of civic planners and policy-makers are focusing their attention on the role that the “creative industries” play in urban development—creative industries such as the arts, education, the mass media, communications, and micro-enterprises that produce “clustering effects” and “convergent capabilities” that link different sectors and segments of cities together.¹³ While there is a great deal of talk these days about “creative cities” and “creative economies,” this is not possible without the arts. The arts make it possible for cities to be diverse, balanced, and integrated wholes rather than fragmented, disconnected, and unrelated parts.

Equally important is the contribution the arts make to the revitalization, renewal, and revival of cities. This has been realized in many cities in North America and Europe in recent years, largely through the creation of cultural hubs, districts, and capitals that have injected new life into cities after decades of disintegration, decay, and decline. These hubs, districts, and capitals involve constellations of artistic, athletic, heritage, media, entertainment, and commercial activities in strategic locations in cities, not only in downtown cores but also in other areas as well. Inspired by arts animators, administrators, entrepreneurs, corporate executives, educators, politicians, and citizens, these hubs, districts, and capitals have done a great deal to rejuvenate cities that have been dying from the inside out.

Canada provides an interesting and informative example of the artistic and cultural transformations that are occurring and required at the neighbourhood, community, and municipal level in virtually all parts of the world today. In Toronto, for instance, this transformation is being driven by a broad array of artists and arts organizations and is stimulating a great deal of innovative commercial, industrial, residential, tourist, and entrepreneurial activity. This includes recent developments and renovations to the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the Ontario College of Art and Design; the creation of the Distillery District and Liberty Village in former (and long neglected) industrial areas; creation of a major “cultural corridor” along Bloor Street that is linking together the Royal Ontario Museum, Bata Shoe Museum, Gardiner Museum, University of Toronto, Royal Conservatory of Music, Koerner Hall, and other institutions; as well as captivating developments in and around Ryerson University that include

a remarkable make-over of Maple Leaf Gardens and a host of other innovative accomplishments in the Yonge and Dundas area. These developments are producing numerous social, commercial, academic, and aesthetic benefits and opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

One organization in Toronto that is playing an active, dynamic, and exemplary role in all this is Artscape. This remarkable organization has become well-known in arts communities throughout the world for the pioneering work it is doing in urban renewal and revitalization, as well as the creation of captivating and exciting cultural hubs in different locations in the city. This results from bringing artists, animators, and other creative people together with developers, planners, and citizens to create places and spaces that engage citizens fully and actively in the planning and development process and are designed to meet the needs and interests of people and community groups and not just developers, planners, and corporations.

Commencing with its inventive initiative with Artscape Wychwood Barns, this valuable institution has been instrumental in creating and contributing to the development of several other key cultural hubs in strategic parts of this city, such as Artscape West Queen West, Artscape Youngplace, Gibraltar Point, Weston Commons, and Parkdale Arts and Cultural Centre. These hubs are building bridges and creating links and connections among many different artistic, social, industrial, developers,' and citizens' coalitions and constituencies. This work is being enhanced and reinforced by major collaborations between Artscape and the Daniels Corporation, which has also been extremely active in Toronto for many years in creating and building condominiums intimately connected to the arts and culture, including the redevelopment of Regent

Park in conjunction with Toronto Community Housing and the extremely popular and innovative Artscape and Daniels Spectrum and Launchpad initiatives.

These and other developments have put Toronto on the international map as one of the most interesting, stimulating, and enjoyable cities in the world in which to live and work. Over the last several decades and especially over the last few years, Toronto has been recognized as one of the most livable cities in the world—if not *the* most livable—by the United Nations, *The Economist* Intelligence Unit, *Metropolis* magazine, Mercer’s Quality of Life Ranking, and others. These rankings are based on a variety of criteria, such as safety, security, education, health care, the environment, the arts, recreation, political stability, walkability, preservation of heritage sites, and others.

Toronto was also ranked as “the best city in the world for youth” in a recent survey commissioned by the New York-based Citi Foundation. This survey delved deeply into employment and growth statistics in addition to the strength of government programs, educational institutions, and entrepreneurial opportunities for people in the 18-to-25 age category. It revealed that Toronto was the most effective city in the world in terms of providing jobs, business opportunities, and entrepreneurial possibilities for young people. This is one of the most pressing requirements in Canada and the world today, due primarily to the high rate of occupational turnover and unemployment, as well as underemployment and precarious and contract employment among youth.

Similar developments to those taking place in Toronto are also occurring in other Canadian cities, such as Montreal, Vancouver, and Calgary, which also rank high on international ratings and rankings. Montreal, for instance, is quickly acquiring

a reputation as one of the most attractive and enjoyable cities in the world in which to live and work as well as to visit, due largely to the development of the Quartier des Spectacles that includes La Vitrine, Place des Arts, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, as well as equally important developments in Old Montreal such as the well-known Notre Dame Basilica, Montreal Museum of Archaeology and History, Centre d'histoire de Montréal, Arsenal Contemporary Arts, and, more recently, the Cité Mémoire, which enables residents and tourists alike to journey through time by means of the project's after-dark tableaux. This complements such cherished institutions and landmarks in Montreal as the McCord Museum, the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Sainte Catherine Street, Galeria MX, and the Montreal Arts Council, which is one of the oldest and most successful and dynamic municipal arts councils in Canada and the world.

In recent years, these developments have been enhanced by the creation of a great deal of street art and numerous murals, thereby contributing to the aesthetic appeal, character, and charm of Montreal. Particularly important in this regard are developments by such organizations as Être Avec Toi (Ê.A.T), which is composed of a "who's who" of famous graffiti and street artists from Montreal and many other parts of the world, as well as MASSIVart Mural Festival, which is concerned largely with painting murals on the sides of buildings and other notable structures. Due to developments like these, and others, Montreal was the first Canadian city to be added to Google's street-art gallery with more than 150 major murals in place, thus contributing to Montreal's rapidly evolving reputation as an "artistic city" of major importance and considerable stature in the world.

And this is not all. Many developments like these in Toronto, Montreal, and in other Canadian cities such as Vancouver and Calgary have been and are being activated and assisted by the Creative Cities Network of Canada (CCNC). This not-for-profit, non-governmental service organization was created in 2002 and has become well known internationally for its work as a “national network to facilitate innovation and creativity in municipal structures.” It was designed from the outset “to support cultural development by sharing knowledge between municipalities through cultural summits and other means,” as well as “to enhance social, economic, and environmental sustainability through collaboration, creativity, innovation, advocacy, inclusiveness, respect, and excellence.”

What is true for Canada and Canadian cities is also true for the United States and Europe and for American and European cities. In United States, for example, most of the largest cities are known for their outstanding artistic accomplishments and developments, including Los Angeles, New York, Boston, Chicago, and many others. Developments in these large cities have been joined by fascinating initiatives in other large cities over the last few decades. An excellent example of this is Philadelphia, which created its Avenue of the Arts on South Broad Street in the 1990s. This development was initiated by a group of local businesspeople, overseen by a dynamic and innovative mayor, and linked together the Academy of Music, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and other important theatrical and musical venues and institutions in the area. As the mayor of Philadelphia at the time, Ed Rendell, stated, “We couldn’t have done this without our Avenue of the Arts. It was the first big project, the catalyst for everything.... If we could do this, it would be brilliant. It would revitalize downtown, bring

investment downtown and, most importantly, bring *people* downtown—first to visit, and eventually to live.”¹⁴ In the years since, this has become true not only of Philadelphia but also of many other cities in the United States, such as Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Tucson, Fort Worth, Santa Fe, Asheville, and others; more than ninety cities have planned, created, or implemented “hubs and districts” in key locations that have stimulated an incredible amount of artistic, commercial, entrepreneurial, and tourist activity.

The same holds true for Europe and European cities as the principal leaders in this field. Ever since Méлина Mercuri, Minister of Culture in Greece, and Jack Lang, Minister of Culture in France, came up with the idea of “cultural capitals” and “cities of culture” devoted to the development of the arts—first broadly defined in 1985—this idea has spread like wildfire throughout Europe and many other parts of the world. In Europe, this initiative started with the designation of one “cultural capital” or “city of culture” each year (the choice was Athens in the first year), but has been expanded since 2007 as a result of its popularity to the naming of two cultural capitals or cities of culture each year. For instance, Rijeka in Croatia and Galway in Ireland are the two cultural capitals or cities of culture in 2020. As these two examples indicate, this project is no longer confined to large cities as it was in the early years, but now encompasses many smaller cities where outstanding artistic and cultural developments have been achieved, such as Porto, Subiu, Liverpool, Vilnius, Pécs, Umeå, Plovdiv, Košice, Bruges, and many others. These developments have been accelerated and intensified by the creation of the organization United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and its Culture 21 committee, as well as the development of the Intercultural Cities Index

(ICC), an instrument that measures the level of achievement of intercultural policy implementation in a city and its progress over time, and that compares it with other cities in the world. The goal is to strengthen and enhance the role of the arts and culture in sustainable urban developments as well as enhance urban development in societies as a whole.

Given all the multifarious contributions the arts make in all their aspects to cities—many of them located at the heart and soul of what urban development is really all about—the role of the arts in the development of cities must be seen in a totally new light. Rather than viewing the arts and culture as an afterthought or “the icing on the cake”—as has traditionally been the case—the arts must be seen as the *centrepiece* and *spearhead* that is required to propel communities, towns, and cities to higher levels of accomplishment. This is particularly important for governments, corporations, politicians, and corporate leaders to realize, as they tend to see the challenge confronting urban development as one of squeezing all the available economic, commercial, financial, and tourist potential out of the arts while providing little in return.

Consistent with contemporary experiences in urban development around the world and recent research, it is imperative to recognize that there is an interactive and reinforcing—rather than unilateral and parasitical—relationship between the arts and cities. The arts energize and enrich cities. In return, cities broaden, deepen, and intensify developments in the arts. Both the arts and cities reap the profuse benefits and multiplicity of advantages that emanate from this.

Recognition of this fact should open the doors to a dramatic expansion in funding for the arts at the municipal level. This funding should come from all levels of government—federal,

provincial, regional, state, and municipal—as well as from corporations, foundations, and private benefactors. While funding from building programs, infrastructure projects, partnership agreements, and special reserves is important, funding should come primarily from annual appropriations and general revenue. *And it should be used for operating purposes and not only capital projects.* Funding that produces capital infrastructure but does not provide for ongoing artistic performances and activities will never do the job.

A great deal of “strategic rethinking” is necessary here. Rather than viewing funding of the arts as an *expenditure* that has to be endured, it should be seen and treated as an *investment* that has to be embraced. It is an investment that should be designed to produce multiple, cumulative, and long-term benefits and creative outcomes, as well as elicit and induce new opportunities. Funding that produces clustering and integrative effects and ignites other possibilities—such as funding for urban revitalization and renewal, the creation of downtown and suburban cores, hubs, and districts, the stimulation of new experimental and experiential works, the training of skilled personnel—and that provides opportunities for artists and arts organizations to play a major role in urban planning, policy, and decision-making is imperative if the objective is to inject vim, vigor, and vitality into the development of communities, towns, and cities in all parts of the world.

Arts animators and administrators capable of generating new possibilities, initiating change, and engaging large numbers of people in the artistic process have a particularly important role to play in this. There is simply no substitute for well-trained people who are skilled at getting citizens involved in the artistic process and stimulating other opportunities. As

Charles Landry, one of the world's leading authorities on the development of creative cities, contends:

[W]ealth in cities is created less by what we produce and more by how we use our brains and add value through knowledge and imagination. Cities now have one crucial resource—their people. Human cleverness and creativity are replacing location, natural resources and market access as urban assets. We need to provide the conditions to unleash this imagination.¹⁵

This initiative is not limited to colossal cities such as New York, London, Paris, Beijing, Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro, Singapore, or Berlin. It is also true for smaller towns, cities, and other forms of urban agglomeration and concentration. Just as contemporary research is revealing that the arts possess numerous clustering, integrative, and triggering capabilities and effects, so it is confirming that many smaller towns and cities are ideal places to live and work because they possess many more high quality artistic institutions and exciting cultural possibilities than they did in the past. Regardless of where one decides to live, work, and thrive, however, one thing is certain. Without the arts securely fastened to the masthead of urban development, life in towns and cities of all shapes, sizes, and types will fall far short of the mark. Presumably this is why Lewis Mumford said that cities are humanity's "greatest work of art." And what is true for cities will also be true for neighbourhoods, communities, towns, and other forms of urban concentration and development in the future.