Consuming culture-led regeneration: the rise and fall of the democratic urban experience

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ABSTRACT

The role of culture in the reinvention of the post-industrial city has long fascinated urban scholars. Ronan Paddison made contributions to this debate at a time when culture had become something of a strategic orthodoxy. This paper reflects upon the emergence of the so-called creative city and its relationship to broader processes of commodification. It contends that this creativity discourse embellished a partial version of the city as a symbolic (and latterly digital) entity and, in this context, reflects upon Paddison's broader contribution to our understanding of the city as a multifaceted arena in which social injustice so often thrives.

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Culture-led regeneration has long been lauded as a panacea for the ills of the contemporary urban condition. In a world of increasing competitiveness and uncertainty, where economic downturns have intensified social divisions, logic came to have it that cities can rely on culture, what it is that makes a city what it is, as a means of surviving and thriving in what was becoming an increasingly global environment and market place. The work of Ronan Paddison has provided a reference point in this regard. In what follows I want to consider some of the implications of this thinking, as a point of departure from which we can reflect upon the set of commodified circumstances in which the so-called creative city finds itself today

Paddison's contribution to debates around urban geography are characterized above all by their diversity, and by his commitment to the notion that a multiplicity of factors coalesce to construct how it is we experience the city as the Special issue of *Urban Studies* on Culture-Led Urban Regeneration published in 2005 clearly demonstrates. The question of diversity is no more relevant than in the context of city cultures and how these cultures are utilized in the name of producing a more economically viable and sustainable city. Around the turn of the century debates around Cultural Policy were at something of a peak and it was to this that the above Special Issue responded. In 2005 Ronan Paddison and I proposed that culture had become what was in effect an, or indeed *the*, urban orthodoxy: that it had almost become accepted that culture wasn not just a contributing factor to the regeneration of a city's good fortune, but perhaps its key ingredient. Such a commitment to a kind of urban cultural orthodoxy appeared to us to be founded on spurious evidential grounds. Our introductory article

(Miles & Paddison, 2005) was thus premised on three key questions that, in combination, constituted a call, at the very least, for caution: (1) How far do we really understand the impact of culture on the city and how far are interventions to this effect based on informed decisions? (2) What do culture-led regeneration initiatives actually mean for city residents? (3) And thus is there a danger that culture-led regeneration is more about rhetoric than it is reality? In reflecting upon the extent of the progress in our understanding of the relationship between the city and culture since 2005, it can certainly be argued the first two of these questions remain unanswered.

The city as rhetoric

Before reflecting on how culture-led regeneration has evolved if at all in the last fifteen years, it is important to take a step back in order to understand the provenance of the city in its rhetorical guise. Evans (2005) points out that culture-led regeneration should be distinguished from other forms of culture and regeneration. There are, of course, many examples of regeneration that are community or artist-led or indeed that involve the thoughtful rehabilitation of pre-existing districts (Shin, 2010; Yung et al., 2014; Zhang & de Roo, 2016). But the more dominant form of culture as rhetoric that I describe here is born of the principle that if regeneration is necessary then the indigenous culture needs to somehow be 'improved' (Evans, 2005). This constitutes what is, in effect, a hijacking of culture that is less about the distinctiveness of that culture and more about how that culture can be best exploited by urban elites. The inherent danger here is that there is a disconnection between the local culture and a branding of place that neglects the role of culture in, for and of that place (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015).

If one person is more responsible than any other for affirming the city as a rhetorical entity then that person is Richard Florida. Florida (2002) constructed a very particular, and arguably damaging, version of what the city could, and apparently should, aspire to be. He argued that cities should focus on promoting creativity. For Florida the clustering of human capital was the critical factor in regional economic growth and the key to the successful regeneration of cities suffering in times of severe economic downturn. His Creative Indices suggested a link between the presence of creative talent and the ability of a city to prosper through higher productivity and innovation. Florida thus argued that the concentration of creative industries and thus of the creative class in cities is a crucial component in underpinning a city's economic performance. Furthermore, if the creative class can be attracted to a city, their very presence would serve to intensify the consumption end of that equation and in doing so help to fuel an economic and cultural revitalization.

Florida's model attracted a lot of attention amongst policy-makers, but gradually came to be discredited as commentators sought to understand what lie beneath the surface of his analysis. As Evans and Foord (2006) indicate, in the U.K. Florida's creativity index was tested in an analysis of regional cluster economics and in this context no link between higher productivity and creativity was actually demonstrated (see Department of Trade and Industry, 2004). But the problem here was that regardless of their empirical validity the spirit that underpinned the basis of Florida's Creativity index had an intuitively seductive appeal. Despite being based on many misplaced assumptions and assertions such claims spoke to the desire of all policy-makers to make a difference to the places and

the communities which they served. Some of Florida's conclusions such as the link he made between a city's gay friendliness and the likelihood of high-performing high-technology knowledge industries were highly questionable (see Florida & Gates, 2003). For many what Florida presented was effectively a utopian whitewashing of the city that was almost entirely oblivious to the negative distributive effects of cultural investment (Long, 2010). This simply helped to invigorate the assumption that virtually any city could be a creative city if it aspired to achieving as much. What emerged on this basis was effectively a culturally-driven form of regeneration that was built on a blind belief in place. What is more the vision of the city that Florida presented was an inherently divisive one. His is a human capital theory of regional development that proposes that creativity can best thrive when quality of place provides the cultural conditions that creatives require. But such an analysis is about more than the potential for creative flexibility. It depends implicitly on a model of the city that is consumption-driven. Creativity may be the narrative upon which Florida built his theory of the city, but it is actually predicated on the ability to reproduce the city through opportunities to consume which are inevitably socially and culturally divisive.

Another key problem with Florida's notion of a culturally driven city, as Peck (2005) points out, is that the imposition of what a city's culture *should* be, in this way, is likely to fail, because of its tendency to aspire to authenticity whilst producing an urban hipster version of what authenticity should actually be. This is another sense in which Florida's model fed a rhetorical notion of the city that is more about the story a city might tell about its future, than what makes it what it is in the present. Florida's thinking, and the urban orthodoxy that emerged from it effectively legitimized a city of surface meanings and representations so that what is the good life for some becomes by proxy what should be the good life for all (Mitchell, 2000). As Di Cicco (2007, p. 56) put it, 'We now seek places that accommodate lifestyles; and lifestyles render places redundant.' In light ofPaddison's longstanding connection to Glasgow, it's particularly interesting to note Mitchell's contention that, despite its spatially specific emphasis, Glasgow's celebrated Miles Better marketing campaign was likely to resonate more with some residents than it did with others.

Glasgow is a particularly powerful case in point given that it can be seen to be a 'dual city', a city that continues to struggle with the effects of post-industrialization. But what's important to note here is that regardless of such a deep-rooted economic challenge, policymakers continue to present the city centre, in particular, in such a way that it constitutes a rhetorical denial of the poverty and decay that exists in the 'real city' (Savitch & Kantor, 2002). The potential danger here then is that investment in the city centre simply intensifies a broader core/periphery effect in which the legitimacy of the centre trumps the needs of the outskirts of the city (Jones & Wilks-Heeg, 2005). A key element of this process is the emphasis on attracting a workforce to the focal point of the regeneration concerned whilst ignoring any kind of development in the surrounding neighbourhood. In their work on Salford Quays, Schulze Baing and Wong (2018, p. 529) describe this as a trade-off between economic growth and socio-environmental costs that can result in the jam doughnut effect whereby, 'There is a lot of jam filling the middle of the dough; while some jam slips out to the surrounding dough, most of the doughnut remains dry, without any jam'.

The above reflects a broader process in which the function of the city had gradually come to be determined by the needs of the market: a transition from managerialism to entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989). The city that emerges from this process is more speculative than it was in the past. The city that Harvey describes is thus one in which the lines between public and private have become increasing blurred and in which it is much more difficult for decision-makers to plan the future of the city. The emphasis on the city as a spatial, image-driven entity with trickle-down effects, so that policies in areas such as housing and education need not be as targeted as previously, is deeply problematic and simply places too much onus on the city as a rhetorical entity. This is a concern that Paddison raised in his own work as early 1993 when he pointed out that the marketing of the city had significant social and political implications.

Noting the efforts of regional and local development agencies to regenerate the economic base of cities trying to cope with the loss of their traditional industries by attracting inward investment, Paddison notes that this created its own spatially mobile form of global competition. The intensity of place competition constituted what was in effect a recasting in the spatial patterning of economic activity and one that in turn led to an emphasis on city marketing as a means of competitors gaining advantage over each other. Paddison (1993) took a particular interest in this development in the context of Glasgow and argues that it represents a kind of commodification of the city, so that the city becomes a product *to be consumed*. The problem here is that an approach that accentuates the positive through marketing overlooks, and deliberately so, you might argue, the disbenefits arising from the consumption of a particular product. In discussing the playing out of this process in Glasgow, Paddison (1993, p. 348) charts the industrial decline of the city and its need to find an alternative and argues that city marketing is much more than a mere promotional aid and as such constitutes 'an exercise in meaning manufacture and transfer'. The point that Paddison makes here is that cities do not exist in the moment, they are the product of histories and of the reinterpretation of histories, and as such cannot be marketed without fully coming to terms with the ups and downs of an industrial past. Furthermore, the projection of this new Glasgow, according to Paddison, bore little resemblance to some of the truths of life in the city and in particular questions of poverty and social deprivation, and not least those precipitated by long term patterns of unemployment, that in part made the city what it was and what it was becoming.

Commodifying the creative city

The city that Paddison described in his work is perhaps, today, more saturated by its rhetoricism than ever before. Since Paddison's work in the early 2000s the enterprise of place marketing has grown exponentially and culture has, if anything, come to have an increasingly high profile role in this regard. Whether it has done so on solid foundations is another question. One of the cities that has received particular attention as a beacon for place marketing is Barcelona which is often lauded as being one of the most successful models of urban development and place branding. Malcolm Miles (2015) argues that authenticity was the key to Barcelona's cultural reinvention insofar as its development focused on the city as a whole, rather than purely as a touristic entity. On this basis, Barcelona was able to attract cultural tourists seeking out 'real' places. Barcelona's success can be explained by its ability to build upon pre-existing cultural foundations in order to

emphasize the city's design credentials such as in the example of the New Ramblas. For Miles then the danger is that there is an abiding assumption that by adding culture into the mix our cities can benefit from what will be an inevitably more socially cohesive recipe. The reality, however, amounts to an *imposition* of culture rather than its integration. Rius Ulldemolins (2014) similarly discusses the way in which the Raval district of Barcelona was transformed into a brand space of 'authentic Barcelona'. For Rius Ulldermolins such processes are on the one hand multi-dimensional and sophisticated and on the other elitest and constraining. This point is explored further in the work of Luna-Garcia (2008) who describes a process in which cities have become just another commodity for global consumption and in which the corporate prevails. In the case of Barcelona, Luna-Garcia argues that the city has been able to construct a sophisticated Catalan nationalist discourse alongside that of a modern cosmopolitanism. But such processes are, from this point of view, about more than mere marketing, they are identity-forming in their effect. As such, Luna-Garcia considers the particular impact of coffee shops or cafeteria in Barcelona, his argument being that such spaces for consumption act as vehicles by which the sophisticated marketing messages that underpin the Barcelona experience are reinforced. Such spaces serve, in turn, to create a hybrid symbolic economy which maximizes the economic benefits of a particular discourse, in this case demonstrated by the juxtaposition of the choice and variety of the American-Italian coffee shop alongside an idealized colonial past. A reinvention of the city around consumption opportunities constitutes something of a theatrical escape in which the coffee consumer can find his or her ideal authentic self.

What we can identify here is an intensification of a long-term historical process. Since Paddison's key contributions in 1993 and 2005 the means by which culture is imposed upon the city have been broadened, not least through the combined effects of public and private forces that have sought to ensure that cities can compete on the global marketplace (Luna-Garcia, 2008). But this has not been an entirely rhetorical process, as a focus on the self-image of Barcelona evolving hand-in-hand with actual investment in the cultural infrastructure demonstrates. The promotion of the Raval district of Barcelona as both the space and the subject of artistic creation, served to recreate the city in a revitalized guise. Culture may have become an essential tool in reversing social stigmatization and urban marginality as Rius Ulldemolins (2014) argues, but the price to pay for this is an intense aestheticization that remains in danger of spilling over into gentrification and social conflict (Miles, 2015). Barcelona can perhaps be lauded for the fact that it has managed to avoid impoverishing and standardizing its own image (Rius Ulldemolins, 2014) but in this sense it is arguably nothing more than the exception that proves the rule.

What authors like Paddison identified then was a process by which culture and creativity were providing an avenue by which the city could be commodified. One author who has perhaps explains this process most convincingly is Richard Williams (2004) who talks about the city as being constructed as a visual tableaux to be touristically consumed. Williams describes the English city in particular as being in a permanent state of anxiety, primarily as a result of being in thrall to a process of picturesque aestheticization so that the city becomes a space to be gazed upon by an audience. In this sense, the regeneration of the city through culture is indeed rhetorical. English cities can be identified as regenerated, but very little is done to transform those cities other than via the city centres and symbols that are most easily consumed.

Not only is the so-called creative city founded on rhetorical-cultural notions of what tourists require of it, more far-reaching processes have also had a profound impact since Paddison's (1993) original contribution. As such, Speake (2017) focuses on the role of the panoramic view as a form of urban reimagining, rescripting and redevelopment in Tigné Point, Valletta, Malta and its emphasis on the image of the city as an up-market space of residential and leisure consumption. The author's focus on how the visual intensifies the neoliberal capitalist project is especially telling. For Speake, the visual has effectively been transformed into the material, so that physical space comes to be expressed through the commodification of the aesthetics of the panoramic view. What emerges from this is a commoditized gaze so that, 'As viewing subjects buy into the (re)imagineered, mediatised and commoditised gaze they confirm its capacity to contribute to the transformation of the cityscape' (p. 2929). This is seen by Speake to constitute a further manipulation of the cityscape for economic and political purpose and gain. The city effectively becomes a medium designed to extract value. But, as ever, such processes are divisive given that less affluent sections of the population are excluded from viewing and gazing on the exclusive propertied vistas and panoramas that the neoliberal city provides. Perhaps the most significant conclusion of Speake's (2017) work is that the transformation of urban space, both rhetorically and otherwise, is a clear reflection of how it is that values of society are embedded and how neo-liberal capitalism is thereby reinforced beneath the surface of policy.

Place branding is all about identifying and differentiating a place in such a way that the consumer buys into the narrative on offer so that the destination experience that place offers becomes something they want to buy into over time. Effective place branding is therefore all about 'creating meaning in mind space' (p. 12) but also in social space and through informational space (Govers & Go, 2009). But place branding also perpetuates, as Sharon Zukin (1998) point outs in another Special Issue of Urban Studies also co-edited by myself and Paddison, a state of affairs in which the more policy-makers believe they are making cities more attractive to consumers the more they make those cities end up looking and feeling the same. The point here is that although cities have perhaps become increasingly subject to the process of neo-liberal homogenization, the avenues or means by which they have done so have multiplied. So for example, architecture has become more and closely tied to such versions of the creative city and in doing so, as Spencer (2016) suggests, it has become not only a servant of neoliberalism but an instrument of social control and compliance. Such control is achieved through the architecture of the façade, further alluded to in the work of Speake (2017, p. 162): an architecture of performance that draws the eye to the immediacy of the consumer experience. In this way the model of the world that architecture recreates is uncritically accepted as a common-sensical truth,

> What both neoliberal thought and the architecture of neoliberalism claim in legitimating the acceptance of their truths is, above all, that in their realization the subject is liberated. The market liberates us from the tyranny of planning, the spontaneous order frees us from predetermined outcomes, participation relieves us from isolation, environmental immersion makes us one with the material world, the experience of affect delivers us from the melancholy essence of critical thought … In each case, however, what we actually see is the process of neoliberalization confronting existing technologies of the self and attempting to refashion these for its own operations.

The instrumentalization of culture

The irony of the above process is that its impact is hidden beneath a thin veneer of smooth surfaces, architectural and otherwise (Spencer, 2016). Of course, it is important to acknowledge that there are examples of culture-led regeneration that can plausibly claim not to have been explicitly conceived as iconic, such as Oslo's new Opera House (Smith & von Krogh Strand, 2011) but in such cases domestic tourism is often more of a priority than international tourism. In other words, there is a danger that a self-consciously globally iconic project compromises its more immediate cultural, regenerative and experiential effects (Smith & von Krogh Strand, 2011). The problem here is that the kind of culture-led regeneration that people like Richard Florida became synonymous with is overtly prescriptive. However much such an approach lauds the benefits of creativity it actually presents a very blinkered view of what culture is. Meanwhile, the more creativity is exploited for what cities can gain from it, the more uniform and thus partial such creativity becomes. What Paddison (1993) predicted and what came into being, therefore, was a state of affairs in which culture-led regeneration becomes a collection of publicly funded venues and facilities that turn out to be more important for what they say about culture than for the culture that is taking place within (see Montgomery, 2003).

In many respects then the trends that authors like Paddison identified in the early 2000s were rapidly intensified so that culture effectively served to increase the division that made cities what they were in the first place. The problem with the rise of the creative class in places like New York, San Francisco and quite possibly Glasgow was that they created economic growth for the already rich, displacing the poor and working classes in the process (Wainwright, 2017). The problems that once plagued inner cities had moved to the suburbs. These policy-makers were making socio-geographic problems, not resolving them.

Reimagining the creative city

The notion of the creative city and the cultural policy legacy that was built upon it was underpinned by a relentlessly optimistic and arguably deluded narrative of positive urban change. But as Miles and Paddison (2005) suggest an even more serious concern here is the fact that such optimism was not built upon any kind of evidential base and in particular a neglect for the impact of such developments on local identities and attachments to place. It's in this vein that authors like Yarker (2018) recognize that a sense of place and belonging is inevitably fluid: a process of becoming rather than belonging. For Yarker, the deep and personal connections people have with space, including regenerated space, need to be brought more fully into the planning process, not least as a challenge to the criticism that urban research itself suffers from an 'emotional deficit' (Collins, 2016; Yarker, 2018.).

An emotionally intelligent version of the city is in stark contrast to Florida's narrowly instrumental vision of the city as a place of culturally infused economic vibrancy. Florida celebrated diverse communities not for their own sake but because they allegedly spurred innovation and the end result of all this, as Wetherell (2017) notes, was simply the further stimulation of rampant property speculation, soaring home prices, and mass

displacement. Far from creating a culturally inclusive city, the one that Florida reimagined was deeply divisive. Meanwhile, as Florida (2017) himself acknowledges, the world's 50 largest metropolitan areas house just 7% of the world's population but generate 40% of its growth.

What the myth of the Creative City demonstrated was the overwhelming power of capitalism to divide. The idea that you could build a new gallery or that an influx of hipster cafes and barber shops could solve urban problems was woefully short-sighted and failed to adequately cater for the sheer divisiveness of the economic system on which this way of thinking was reliant. But the signs were already there in 2005. The original introduction to the Special Issue of Urban Studies pointed out that culture was not being used in a flexible dynamic way but rather in a linear way that was hamstrung by political and economic motives. Miles and Paddison (2005) argued then that cultural planning too readily saw cultural activity as a means to an end, as a kind of scaffolding upon which economic policy could be laden and that by doing so the very meaning value of culture was inevitably undermined, 'The key focus here should not be on whether cultural investment works, but on the degree to which it works for diverse social groups' (Miles & Paddison, 2005, p. 837). And this is exactly what cultural investment in the first twenty years of the twentieth century failed to achieve.

What actually happened was that policy-makers sought to impose an economically convenient and all-encompassing version of culture on the city whilst failing to take into proper consideration how this might interact with people's lives. Culture came to be utilized as an orthodoxy defined less by content and more by its symbolic value in the international marketplace. Culture was thus imposed aggressively and any notion of culture that challenged the status quo was disregarded in the process, thereby reinforcing the divisive nature of cultural engagement and participation. This issue is picked up especially effectively by Kate Oakley (2015) in her report *Creating Space* in which she points out that however persuasive academic critiques have been they have failed to wean city governments off the idea of cultural regeneration or its related narratives of the 'creative city'. Oakley goes on to point out that similar mistakes continue to be made but in slightly different guises. In particular, the discourse around the 'creative industries' has in recent years tended to focus on the high tech and the digital and yet retains a single-minded economic saviour discourse. The shift here has been from how it is a new gallery or museum might economically revitalize or save a place or community to a notion that the same can be achieved on the back of digital innovation. In other words, the role of culture in regeneration has effectively moved on to a new generation, and one which in some senses is even more symbolic, and thus arguably divisive, than its predecessor.

Researching culture-led regeneration

The continuum that I have described here is ultimately one of economic instrumentality, a kind of instrumentality that has been mirrored by the research that has sought to understand it. It is of course notoriously difficult to attribute change to specific regeneration initiatives of all kinds as Ploegmakers and Beckers (2015) note. The particular emphasis on establishing the economic veracity of cultural investment has led to a

parallel lack of interest in social impacts and one that most likely reflects an assumption that such effects 'trickle down' (see Evans, 2005). Most of all, economic impact studies have a tendency to overstate the economic benefits that cultural investment can have (Campbell et al., 2017). And as Campbell et al. go on to argue the age old problem with cultural research persists: the inability to establish causality between arts, culture and its broader societal impacts. Research simply hasn't come to grips with any kind of a firm understanding of what it is that people value about culture. The primary problem here then continues to be a neglect for the social justice (a uniting theme at the heart of all Paddison's work) of culture which remains in the shadow of economic priorities that inevitably feed such injustice. A culture-led regeneration that is infatuated with economic outcomes constitutes a model for change that is not based on any kind of a discernible reality. The model of culture-led regeneration that became so prevalent around the turn of the century suffered in the long-term because it sought to impose a version of what consumable culture was and as a result the diversity of people's voices and the potential meanings which they might attach to a cultural venue or experience were diluted. In other words, versions of what a cultured city were being imposed at precisely the same time that consumers experience was becoming more personalized.

I will return to the broader question of the changing ideological power of consumption shortly, but the more specific point to make at this stage is that the conditions under which regeneration schemes operate are not as static as a culture-led regeneration model tends to imply (Miles & Paddison, 2005). Formulas of regeneration simply cannot accounted for the diverse nature of social and economic change and for this reason the success of such projects can never be assumed, even at points in time when such success appears to speak for itself (see Rodrigues & Zarlenga, 2018). As such, since the early 2000s there has been a growing realization that the hyperbole of culture-led regeneration masks the diverse nature of socio-economic realities and geographies that lie beneath (Boland, 2010). The concern here is that local institutions have long been guilty of sanitizing urban ways of life in such a way that incomplete pictures of what makes a city a city are presented to the outside world. For Boland this constitutes a politicization of culture, the end product of which is a rebranded city for the consumption of those with surplus income and cultured tastes, 'whereas for a significant number of local people the city centre is a distant place upon which they gaze rather than experience' (p. 640). Indeed, not enough effort has been made, as Lin and Hsing (2009) have pointed out, to move beyond the instrumentalization of urban cultural strategies in order to understand the subtleties of local cultural activity and mobilization. For Lin and Hsing any approach to culture-led regeneration has to be understood in the context of the cultural-historical meanings of particular localities and must seek to avoid the dangers of dilution inherent in neo-liberal governance and as such *cannot* be treated formulaicly. The key here from this point of view lies in an approach to culture-led regeneration that far from paying lip-service to tlocal needs ensures that social sensitivities are at the heart of the planning process, thereby fuelling a civic energy that will help ensure long-term sustainability. The missing ingredient than and one that was implicit in Paddison's (1993) original analysis is social meaning and the ways in which local communities mobilize it.

Conclusion: the changing nature of the relationship between consumption and the city

Perhaps the key transition over the past twenty years or so is the changing way in which the consumer relates to the city. In a sense, the world that Paddison warned against has come to pass: but the significance of such a transition lies in not what it tells us about the relationship between culture and the city but for what it tells us about the process in which culture is commodified. In other words, culture-led regeneration has transmogrified into an intensification of 'consumer citizenship'. Such a notion is in part hinted at in the work of Hayward (2004) who argues that individual subjective emotions are generated by social conditions and cultural codes, and not least at the moment, through consumption codes. Markets place such a fundamental emphasis on how we perceive of cities that they become what is in effect a physical and emotional manifestation of consumerism as an ideology. Cities are to be consumed. We live in a society defined by the rewards on offer and underpinned by a consumerism that includes and excludes, but which above all is spatially varied in its effect. In effect, cities are landscapes of power that create 'a peculiar sort of social equality' (Zukin, 1991, p. 5), the kind of equality that is determined by a competition over access to limited resources. The contemporary city is increasingly physically, socially and experimentally segregated (Bannister & Kearns, 2013). Even if you are able to access the freedoms that the city of consumption can offer, the extent to which capitalist appropriation can deliver the benefits it promises are highly questionable, given the homogenized city that it tends to create (Klingmann, 2007). What I am describing here is a subtle change in the actual ways consumers engage with consumption (Miles, 2020). Consumers have long engaged with consumption as a source of cultural capital and personal advancement which they have in turn effectively equated with individualism and thus to a notion of democratic equality. But this process has intensified as the result of a shift away from the consumption of products and towards the consumption of experiences. The concern here is that an urban world that focuses more and more on a place's symbolic value and on what experiences it can offer puts the individual at the heart of his or her perception so that how he or she engages with the city is increasingly the product of how he or she imagines him or her self through the mirror that those experiences provide. The creative city provided a stage upon which this process could be prolonged. The contemporary city is indeed designed to provide the consumer with an overwhelming experience in which his or her self sits at the core. Klingmann (2007) describes this as an 'intense heterogeneity' in which symbols and themes are set out on a deliberate course of collision so that the potential for the application of meaning is virtually boundless. The problem here is that the spaces and places that the designers of experience create for us are not accidental but are the product of a particular instrumental and disenchanted logic (Pimlott, 2007). What this represents is a shift of liberty from the political to the economic where the market determines who wins and who loses (Brown, 2015). The all-powerful nature of a neoliberal rationality produces an unequal society and a form of citizenship which is defined above all by the access, or otherwise, to consumption, for it is consumption that is deemed to define the experiential 'good life' (Bauman, 2005). It is in the name of culture and creativity that the individual is encouraged to find him or her self in the city. Our experience of the creative city gives us the tools to maximize our personal 'journeys', and to find momentary recompense, but ultimately

leaves us frustrated and on the cusp. Paddison foresaw the dangers of the commodified urbanism, but perhaps not in the experiential form in which it has more recently emerged. Consumers' relationship with the city is nowadays filtered through the everyday mechanisms that they use to self-manage that experience whether it be, for example, Airbnb, themed restaurants, sing-along musicals, all-in holidays, or escape rooms. Such opportunities to consume intensify personalized experience, whilst also maximizing the ideological power of consumer choice and freedom.

Experiential forms of consumption have effectively created spaces and places for consumption in which the potential for control, magnified by the access to the personalized information that the world of consumption can now access, is magnified. On the back of this, neoliberalism is able to use the mirage of spontaneity and self-production for its own neoliberal ends (Spencer, 2016). For authors like Dychoff (2017) what he calls the city of spectacle is thus bereft of freedom. On the surface it may provide a prettier more easily digestible city, but it is also an overpriced gentrified city, one that most of us can barely dream of living in. The city has in the end become something to admire from afar, something to consume, rather than a place in which human beings can thrive. This has happened at least partly as a result of a policy-making fixation on the instrumental value of culture. It is the product of a process that perceived of the city not as a geographical assemblage of human beings but as a unit of calculation. Cities are effectively in the business of manufacturing meaning through the infusion of products and experiences that create a market advantage (see Sternberg, 1999). This process allegedly prompts a kind of self-awareness, so, far from being hood-winked consumers can make more discerning decisions through environments that increase the consumer's ability to see. At one level this is as much about designing spaces and places that both entertain and stimulate personal reflection as it is about the contemporary city working in harness with neoliberalism to maximize results. The version of the city that Paddison (1993) critiques is thus one of rose-tinted creativity. It is built upon fundamentally misguided assumptions as to the transformative potential of culture. This mirrors Pratt's (2009) contention that for too long such an approach neglected the complex process of cultural production that underpins the consumption of the so-called post-industrial city. Moreover, it neglects the social networks and policy-making processes that facilitate such a city. The physical spaces that we live through are not neutral, they breathe life into the status quo and they keep breathing. More importantly still, the experiences that define our relationship with the city of consumption and how they help us to imagine ourselves in the process create a dependency that represents the most extreme physical manifestation of consumerist ideology imaginable.

Modern culture is characterized by the room it provides for the individual to make his or her own assessment of the commercial reality that lies behind the cultural experience with which they are provided (McCannell, 1989). The process of cultural production does not simply deposit models or versions of social life to be consumed. Cultural experiences are, in fact, lived expressions of societal values, and perhaps most importantly, of underpinning economic ones. Paddison's (1993) contribution to this debate indicated that although the shift by policy-makers towards a creative or culturally constituted city purported to create a more authentic and pragmatic city and one that aspired to maximize the resources cities had at their disposal, what was actually beginning to transpire was a city that obliged its residents to see themselves through a particular pair of eyes. The world of culture and creativity effectively constructed a status quo in which consumers

were more and more able to see themselves. This was a city full of possibilities and consumerist freedoms. But what it added up to was a city in which the consumer had no choice at all but to consume the culture that they were told defined them. At one level we might describe this as as 'retailization', a camouflaging of retail so that many of the places in which we do shop are registered by consumers not necessarily as shopping spaces but rather as part of a broader cultural experience or escape (de Châtel & Hunt, 2003). The changing nature of the museum visit is a good example of this. Not only do museums provide more opportunities to buy souvenirs and for the consumer to actively participate in the museums offering than they did in the past, but they arguably reinvent the museum experience in a more easily digestible form of 'edutainment' (Podesta & Addis, 2007). But what they do for the museum they do for the city.

What this all reiterates is the need to conceive of the city in a much more multi-faceted and ideologically sophisticated way and one that seeks to interrogate 'the local endowment of intangible resources such as human and social capital, and more specifically, how culture contributes to the achievement of this goal in the context of urban regeneration schemes' (Ferrilli et al., 2017, p. 242) than is currently the case. As things stand an apparent reluctance to do so has left urban researchers apparently no nearer to understanding how it is culture makes an actual difference to communities than they were back in the early 2000s. The contributions that Ronan Paddison has made to debates around contemporary urbanism are testament to fact that the city that we understand through a single perspective, in this case 'culture', is a partial city. In this sense culture became a tool adept at masking a political process in which consumption has emerged as a legitimate, and yet deeply flawed, façade for an inclusive and democratic city. As a specialist in consumption my own work is inevitably limited by my own, albeit critical, predisposition to the city as unit of consumption and hence of ideological intent. Paddision's contribution tells us that such a perspective is important, but it can only be fully comprehended when we bear in mind the complex and diverse ways in which the city impinges upon our everyday lives both inside and outside of the vista that consumption provides. As such, Paddison reminds us that more than anything else the city is effectively a unit of injustice and that it's incumbent upon urban researchers to seek out this injustice and to shame cultures of injustice for what they are.

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