

Unlocking Potential



Creative Cities Network, Meeting Two

Unlocking the creative potential inherent in cities was the subject of lively discussion at our second Creative Cities Network meeting, as participating urban leaders explored what benefit cities could derive by applying Dr. Susanne Justesen's 'Innoversity' ideas.

The following summary captures key threads of our conversation:

CEOs for Cities introduction – Carol Coletta:

In trying to understand how to access or unlock potential in people, some areas that may be fruitful to explore include ways to encourage:

- **Conditions for creativity** – creating the conditions that encourage people to interact, exchange, learn, innovate and take positive risks.
- Connections – **providing people with numerous opportunities to connect**, allowing interactions, ideas, self-generated activities, knowledge exchange and 'studied trust' to emerge.

- **Reinvention** – enabling people to engage in lifelong learning, reinvent themselves and contribute from the multiple knowledge domains, skills and talents they possess.
- Collective aspiration – **developing stories and visions for the future that inspire**, provide hope, and create an opportunity to be part of a positive pathway forward.

These suggestions, along with examples of initiatives that are 'tapping potential', were put forward for discussion and we welcome your comments, changes, suggestions and input on these ideas.

Dr. Susanne Justesen:

Susanne introduced us to her ideas on innovating through diversity:

- Defining **diversity as the variety and use of knowledge domains available**, Susanne stressed the importance of identifying, legitimizing and using diverse knowledge domains to enhance innovation.

- The idea of '**Nexialism**' expresses the building of knowledge across diverse fields that can be drawn together to advance specific ideas. Creative cities are not just about fostering talent in a city but about having diverse talent pools actively engaged.
- **Diverse teams outperform the smartest teams** on achieving innovative solutions because they stick at a problem and keep pushing the possibilities.
- Optimal learning for **innovation occurs when people are open to mutual interaction of knowledge** and combining of knowledge domains.
- Developing networks and connections both for learning through exchange of ideas and communication of ideas is important to building diversity.
- **The dynamic between different types of learning and innovating is not static.** People reach optimal learning for innovation through both crisis and aspiration. It can be sustained only for a short time, so is a constant cycle.

Discussion:

- A few ideas for Innoversity in cities include:
 - New forms of leadership – **leaders as facilitators** to develop and help connect diverse knowledge.
 - Bureaucracies – enhance use of varied knowledge inherent in bureaucracies to build creative potential and counter stifling of talent and disillusionment.
 - **Opportunities for lifelong learning or reinvention of self** - parallels with adult learning theories and cluster development.
 - Community outreach – need emphasis on **mutual learning to facilitate greater co-participation and creation**, rather than one-way teaching.
- To innovate, groups need diversity. To build competencies and ongoing work and implementation of ideas, we need like-minded groups for efficiencies and to build skills in a specific domain.

- **Developing 'bridge-builders' or connectors in the community will be important** for tapping diversity.
- Potentiality (as an inherent capacity for growth and development) may offer an alternative framing of diversity.
- **Greater emphasis is required on investment in people.** Training should emphasize cultivating urban leaders with a broad understanding of structures, issues and principles that can be adapted and applied, rather than formulaic or method specific knowledge.

What does it mean for cities?

- **Diverse groups translate their knowledge into innovation better than homogenous groups, even when they consist of the smartest people.** This makes it vital that cities find ways to enhance, map and tap into the diverse knowledge available to them in their communities and people to enhance creativity. As Susanne put it, it is important to innovation to **know the differences that are available to you.** There is an opportunity to identify and use the knowledge domains already available but not currently being used for innovation and problem solving. Cities also need to map and develop their networks and connections.
- Talent can be amplified not just by fostering and attracting talent, but also by recognizing the diverse knowledge available and **connecting, recombining and offering new ways to contribute those abilities for continual renewal.** This offers opportunities both for cities seeking to develop their creativity and for those cities already attractive for talent to perpetuate a sense of evolution and regeneration.

Given that diversity is an important factor in the creative performance of cities:

How do you assess and make explicit the diverse knowledge available in cities? And then how do you provide the means and opportunity to put it to use?

How can infrastructures and programs **enable connections and re-combination of knowledge** to allow a city to keep evolving and renewing its creativity and itself?

The Creative Cities Network

Through this **forum for mutual exchange, interaction and inspiration**, we too hope to put the power of participants' diverse thinking and experience to work on generating insights and advancing understanding of creative cities. The Network will allow each of us to build the resources and connections available to our cities and our armory of ideas.

Two more meetings will be convened in phase one of the program. The next Creative Cities Network meeting will be held following the National Meeting in Chicago on November 7 from 8 am – 1 pm. The following meeting is planned to align with CEOs for Cities' Spring 2009 National Meeting.

We will then take the opportunity to capture and express the insights generated through these four meetings, conveying how cities can put creative cities opportunities into action.

Phase two of the Creative Cities Network will follow in 2009, and CEOs for Cities will seek to collaborate with cities to test the ideas and enrich the understanding of creative cities practice.

Unleashing the creativity of cities and their citizens is a core part of CEOs for Cities' efforts to make strong cities a reality, and will be integral to our ongoing research and activities.

Thank you to all our contributors at this session:

Ms. Lisa Abuaf, Senior Project Manager, Portland Development Commission
Ms. Colleen Gross Ebinger, Director of Public Innovators, Root Cause
Ms. Julia Gorzka, Founder, Brand Tampa
Dr. Susanne Justesen, Founder, INNOVERSITY
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Mr. Josh McManus, Co-Founder and Creative Strategist, CreateHere
Ms. Jennifer Nolfi, Portland Development Commission
Mr. Bernard Roberston, Financial Advisor, Smith Barney and Economic Development Committee Chair for the N.O. Chapter of the Urban League Young Professionals
Mr. Steven Scruggs, Executive Director, Lakeland Economic Development Council

