

Civic Creativity and Civic Capacity in A Mid-sized City?



MCRI Theme 2: Social Foundations of Talent Attraction and Retention in London Ontario

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Five Themes

1. **Introduction: Talent and Place in a (Mundane) Mid-Sized City**
2. **Theoretical Direction: Landry's Civic Creativity and Stone's Civic Capacity**
3. **Resetting the Urban Agenda: London's Creative City Task Force and Three Case Studies**
4. **Anybody Taking Note? London's Talent speaks**
5. **Conclusion: Challenge and Change in a Mid-Sized City**



Talent and Place in a (Mundane) Mid-Sized City

Creative City Debate (setting aside Peck et al.)

Florida and Place Quality: Cosmopolitan urbanity for the 3Ts (a big city narrative)

Donald and Lewis and Place Quality: Sustainability for livable communities (a small city narrative)

What about the mid-sized London Ontario? Unremarkable urban milieu and natural setting
(no place luck and no place buzz: zero mentions in Florida's 157 city/4 Indicator Rankings "Best 10 Places in Canadian Provinces and Territories"; Ottawa 20; Toronto 15; Kingston 8; Halifax 5;)



Issue arising ...

Is there a creativity narrative for the mundane mid-sized city that seeks change (hollowed out downtown, sprawling suburbanization, talent exporter, old economy anchor firms but with untapped knowledge economy assets?)

Gertler et al. *Competing on Creativity*, p. 13: " London has lower Tech-Pole Index scores than expected ,based on its Talent Index score".



Theoretical Direction: Landry's Civic Creativity and Stone's Civic Capacity

For places like London existing models and rubrics an awkward fit

Two urbanists offer concepts for mid-sized city analysis

1. Landry's Civic Creativity

"imaginative problem solving applied to public good objectives ...
the particular context will determine what this might be."

Landry examines mundane mid sized city transitions ("basket cases can go up"): Huddersfield UK, Emscher Park Germany, Tilburg Netherlands

Agency Toolkit: Urban asset audit and R& D: "capacity to work with local distinctiveness and find strength in apparent weaknesses"



Theoretical Direction ...

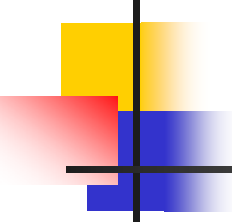
2. Stone's Civic Capacity

“mobilizing various segments of the community to become engaged in considering and acting upon a problem that is out of the ordinary”

Stone unpacks purposeful community-wide change in mid-sized cities (El Paso Texas Collaborative: recognize decline; shared vision; cross-sector mobilization; institutional base)

Community Change: “a marathon not a sprint ... set an ambitious goal, but break down overall course into shorter segments and maintain a sustainable pace”.

Civic Capacity: “The highest levels of civic capacity rest on an ability to engage not just an array of strategic elites but also a broad base of ordinary participants”.



Bringing Landry and Stone to London, Ontario: The Argument

- On Theme 2 challenges related to social foundations of talent attraction and retention London has demonstrated civic capacity around creativity agenda in past five years
- Different process and more progress than on Theme 3 challenges of Inclusive Communities and Civic Engagement (Theme 3 interviewees identify talent/diversity as pivotal multi-sector priority: London's "demographic time bomb")
- Local civic capacity has helped secure federal/provincial investments in London's infrastructure of innovation and creativity



The Argument ...

- But Stone reminds that durable “systemic reform” requires both elite collaboration *and* citizen buy-in
- London’s Civic Creativity thus far: notable elite-level collaboration on “out of the ordinary” projects but less citizen buy-in or resonance with “the talent” (skilled newcomers/young professionals)



Resetting the Agenda: London's Creative City Task Force (CCTF)

London early on the creativity bandwagon 2003-04 task force:

*London is relatively isolated along the Highway 401 corridor, The city for a hundred and fifty years has been rather independent from other communities. It has grown in **isolation, comfortable with itself**. Some would say it has been a **complacent** community. Some might even suggest it's been a bit **smug**. However one defines it, it is increasingly obvious that without significant change in direction, the **city's economic future will decline**.*

***Immigration** is key to growth in London now and in the future. London is simply not getting its fair share of immigration. Fundamental to London's future prosperity is **attracting and retaining younger people** in London.*

*It took the City a number of years to get in this position, and it will take the City a number of years to reverse these trends and regain its leadership in economic growth and impact. To accomplish this will require a commitment to the strong leadership from City Hall and wise investments of time, money and resources. It will be **a battle fought on many fronts, by many different people and organizations**. But it can be won.*



Resetting the Urban Agenda ...

CCTF: More than just faddish boosterism?

- Acknowledged problematic legacies: the cost of complacency, isolation, insularity
- Diverse membership: not London's usual suspects: artist, high tech, municipal, architect, settlement services, musician
- No outside consultants: Creativity debate contextualized in local history, assets, opportunities (eg. no bohemian chic, yes downtown arena and library)



Resetting the Agenda ...

- Action Plan: Urban vision grounded in specific sectoral priorities with local leadership roles identified
- Focused Priorities: Labour Market Diversity, Knowledge Economy Network, Urban Place-making
- 2008 follow-up: 71 of 87 CCTF recommendations "implemented or underway"

CCTF real value-add?

Organized a coalition of London civic entrepreneurs that contextualized the creativity discourse to energize existing but drifting city priorities



Strategies for Talent-based Economic Development

Municipal CCTF follow-up:

- CAO Cultural Division and Creative City Committee
- “Creative, diverse and innovative City” in Corporate Strategic Priority and Official Plan;
- Public Report Card to monitor progress;
- Immigration Portal;
- Downtown revitalization incentives;
- Charles Landry keynotes Creative City Conference and consults with officials;
- City wins 2008 National EMCY Multiculturalism Award

Municipality seeks to be catalyst for CCTF priority projects ...



Strategies for Talent-based Economic Development

Building Civic Capacity? Vision, Mobilization, Institutionalization around 3 CCTF priorities

1. **Labour Market Diversity:** Welcoming Cultural Diversity Conference and Emerging Leaders Network
2. **Knowledge Economy Network:** London's *Next* Economy and restructured LEDC
3. **Urban Place-Making:** Urban Designer/ Steering Committee and Downtown Master Plan



Labour Market Diversity

Context:

Below national average in immigrant population growth and in employment rate for recent immigrants and in net migration of 25-44 year olds; 60% of firms in IT, Advanced Manufacturing, Life Science reported skill shortages

Challenges:

2007 LEDC Workforce Survey: "Persuading candidates to work in London was rated as a high challenge (by 29%), overshadowing persuading candidates to work for the respondent's company, per se (19%)."

TechAlliance 2007 IT LIVES: lack of external awareness about London tech; talent fear of career disconnection and career ceiling in London; concerns about spousal placement



Labour Market Diversity

Vision:

Multi-Sectoral Welcoming Cultural Diversity Steering Committee
(Five Settlement/Integration Priorities); Closing the Gap Town-
Gown Report.

Mobilization:

LEDC Global Talent, London Immigrant Employment Task Force,
Student –2-Business, Emerging Leaders, Creating Work
Opportunities for Youth, Neighbourhood Resource Centres

Institutionalization:

Local Immigration Partnership, Access Centre for Regulated
Professions, Technology Leadership Council, Libro Skilled
Immigrant Loan Program, UWO Research Center/ CURA on
Immigration in Second Tier Cities



Knowledge Economy Networks

Context:

Strength in traditional economic sectors (manufacturing/finance/food and beverage) face intense restructuring pressures; “too many regional offices not enough head offices”

Challenges:

LEDC development strategy focused on external recruitment (eg, auto parts) not organic growth; lagging knowledge sector investment and no anchor firms; fragmented institutional support for knowledge industries/entrepreneurs; establish London-UWO global brand



Knowledge Economy Networks

Vision:

London's *Next* Economy and LEDC "New Strategy"; UWO WorldDiscoveries

Mobilization:

3 Targeted Sectors: Advanced Manufacturing (lightweight auto materials/bio-fuels/ agri-business); Medical/Health Sciences (imaging and medical devices), IT (digital gaming)

Institutionalization:

New LEDC; UWO Research Park and WorldDiscoveries; TechAlliance/TLC; NRC Automotive Centre; Southwest Ontario Angel Group; SWEA/SODA



Urban Place-making

Context:

Downtown hollowing out and declining property values;
suburbanization of entertainment, commercial, and retail
(malls/big box/business parks); inner city 'food deserts';
concentration of socially marginalized populations

Challenges:

Heritage preservation; attractive urban design; accessible transit;
25 years of fragmented revitalization efforts and 'one off' plans;
business attraction/entertainment and residential development;
services for socially marginalized populations



Urban Place-making

Vision:

2008 MainStreet London and London Business Association “A Blueprint for Action” (“double core population; exciting streetscapes/facade improvement; greenest downtown in Canada”) and Municipal Downtown MasterPlan for 20 year revitalization

Mobilization:

Task Forces to advance Masterplan; Hiring Municipal Urban Designer; Place making demonstration project; Vancouver Planner Larry Beasley consultation; concepts of Tech Alley and Research Row.

Institutionalization:

\$100 million municipal anchor investments: JLC, Covent Garden, Central Library; Downtown Design Concept and Downtown Heritage Conservation District; Dundas Street Targeted Incentive Zone; UWO/Fanshawe downtown campuses; Urban Design Awards and Steering Committee



Also notable civic creativity “failures”

- Ambassador London Initiative (citizens “sell” London to the world)
- London Arts Project (grass roots cultural hub)
- London Performing Arts Center (formal cultural hub)
- “Why Can’t I Get a Doctor” (20,000 Londoners without family physician)

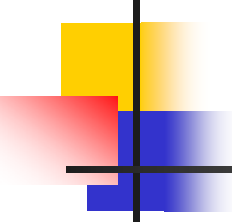
LFP columnist on the performing arts center: “If fine acoustics are top-of-mind concerns, perhaps these folks should focus on life in a big city, with its attendant crime, traffic congestion and high costs”. (Chip Martin, London Free Press, May 17/08)



Anybody Taking Note? London's Talent speaks

Key Interviewee Themes

- Talent in London for employment or family reasons not 'urban experience'; city not an attractor for talent recruiters
- London's 'place assets': cost of living; community safety; commuting times; good place to raise family
- London's 'place deficits': low career ceilings and spousal opportunities; limited cultural offerings and diversity; downtown a 'work in progress'; city still 'an old boy's club'
- Municipal government cited as problem: lacking proactive leadership; insufficient cross-sector collaboration; move from talk to action
- UWO/Fanshawe only recently integrated/leveraged in city building



Anybody Taking Note? London's Talent Speaks

Some Interview Voices

- "London has a tremendous lack of taste. We can't fill orchestra seats but we can sell 10,000 tickets to Monster Trucks"
- "London is a liability for us. It is a cultural wasteland. We cannot keep the talent we recruit from Europe and the United Kingdom. It consists of whitebread homogenous culture"
- "There is an innate suspicion of anyone who is successful in London. The attitude is "if you're so good, why aren't you in Toronto"
- "We use good quality of life to sell London to workers we are trying to recruit who have families. It's a very stable city"
- "If I was in Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver I could not work as I do because they require a PharmaD. The shortage in London creates opportunity for me"
- "If London was to have systems change or cultural shift, it would need to try to get new people involved, breaking down the Old Boys Network group"



Conclusion: Challenge and Change in a Mid-Sized City

Four Summary Observations

1. The Limits of London's Civic Capacity? Gap between 'Elite strategic collaboration' and 'Talent lived experience'?
2. London's Regional Future? SWEA/SODA *and/or* Florida-Martin GTA-centered Ontario Mega Region
3. London's Manufacturing Future? Current crisis can derail creativity/diversity agenda or add urgency
4. Mid-sized Cities and the Creativity Debate? An emerging literature beyond Landry, Stone ...
Canadian research of Sands and Reese, Seasons and Filion ...