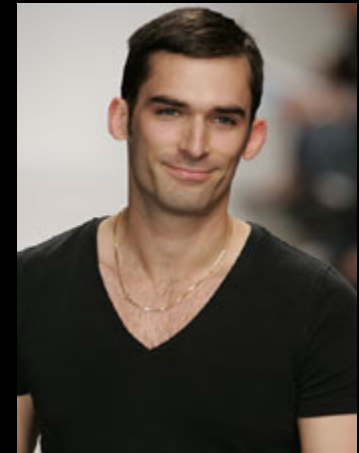


the case of fashion talent in toronto: a reevaluation of amenities based theories



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outline

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1. introduction

- Glaeser (2005), Clark et. Al. (2002), Florida (2002):
 - talented workers are mobile and make decisions about where to live based on quality of life characteristics of city
 - attracted to cities that are tolerant and open
 - over time, the diversity of creative energies fosters innovation, further enhancing attractiveness of city

- others question causality in amenities based theories (Storper and Manville, 2006; Scott, 2007; Storper and Scott, 2009)
 - people move to cities that maximize access to variety of employment opportunities
 - once rooted in place, amenities play role in retaining individuals

- “tolerance and diversity can probably feed a virtuous circle once it begins, but are outgrowths of economic development rather than its initiating causes” (Storper and Manville, 2006)
- economic dynamism of city regions evolves as complex web of specialized production activities, employment opportunities, markets, institutions *and* amenities (Scott, 2007)

- fashion viewed as a “global city” phenomena
- concentration of designers, retailers, magazines, consumers, and cultural capital in New York, Paris, Milan, Tokyo, London
- recent heightened visibility in ‘second-tier’ fashion centers such as Toronto, Stockholm, Auckland (Larner et.al, 2007)

2. attracting talent to a second tier fashion centre

- toronto does not serve as a magnet for international flows of design talent
- immigrant designers come to Canada for other reasons



“If they do come here [from other countries], it’s because they’ve left the design world and are trying to go into something else. I can’t see Parisians or Italians or Japanese moving here to start up a Canadian fashion business. Although we do have much more liberal social policies like health care. I don’t think that’s attractive enough to draw them here. The people who are here, they appreciate that, and that’s why they stay here. Because those who have families, I don’t know how they would ever run their business and maintain the family lifestyle they have here in Canada.” (interview, fashion designer)



- toronto does attract talent from other parts of Canada
- it is the presence of an industry, however, as well as educational institutes and a market that attracts them

“I don’t think [diversity is] what attracts talent. Design talent is attracted by other design talent. They want to be where the action is and this is it, this is the media center and this is where you want to be. If you’re a designer, I mean first of all there are so few cities that have a huge manufacturing base.”
(Interview, fashion designer)

3. retaining design talent: the role of quality of place



cultural diversity as inspiration

“In my country all Polish people look Polish. Here I can walk down the street and see all different nations. [It] lets me think about the possibilities and how everything looks different, not necessarily monochromatic. A different point of view, different angles, colours, different shapes, everything can be different. Everybody speaks different languages. I am amazed by the place. There is no other place like this.” (interview, fashion designer)

cultural diversity of consumer base

- attracts more sophisticated clientele which challenges designers to innovate
- “influences the design-because even though you’re designing for a specific market- you want to be as available to as many people as possible.” (interview, fashion designer)

cultural diversity as skill

“It’s a bit of a UNESCO, my studio, Russian, Chinese, Korean. That’s the beauty of living in Toronto. You really get this whole diversity of people immigrating, bringing their skills. I just hired a pattern maker from Russia. So far he has been really great. I have another pattern maker who is from Toronto- Italian background- graduated from Ryerson. I have another who is from China. It is a lot more international than if you were to live in a city where it is just white.” (interview, fashion designer)

toronto as a tolerant city

“well I haven’t married yet but I’ve been together with my boyfriend for fourteen years now. So in that respect you can express yourself which is so amazing so I definitely think it probably attracts creative people... And it’s not only designers but stylists and hair people. I guess it does create a little den of creativity.” (interview, fashion designer)

economic diversity and cultural dynamism

- toronto not only a large fashion industry but a hub for other creative industries in Canada
- many designers work in film, art, dance and theatre doing costume design which is seen as “more creative”, less commercial
- presence of local job opportunities and learning experiences within and between sectors is significant



- “a lot of modern clothing is drawn from older influences... there are a lot of design elements that carry through. So I think having a knowledge of a lot of periods and just knowing my costume history is a good thing to have in my mind [in my fashion work].” (interview, fashion designer)

“a lot of construction techniques that I use in theatre I’ll apply to [fashion] work because it makes it stronger and sturdier.” (interview, fashion designer)

“we also have a large theatre industry and I benefitted from that because I had a seamstress who learned a lot of her tricks in theatre so that allowed me to do some [...] things that I wouldn’t have been able to do.” (interview, fashion designer)

financial stability through diversity

- “the fashion end of things wasn’t working [and] retailers were going under left, right and centre. So it [costume work] was a way I stayed alive. A lot of designers have come and gone ... because they weren’t flexible and couldn’t morph into something else. I always called that my waitressing job.” (interview, fashion designer)

livability enables risk taking

“having such inexpensive space downtown, we’ve had the luxury to take more risks than we would have been able to if we had larger overheads. And the other thing that’s nice is it’s not cutthroat here, there’s not that same desperation to succeed. If we were in New York City I think people would just expect us to do things. And here in Toronto we don’t have to do anything we don’t want to do because we have the support of a number of people. It just gives us more freedom.” (interview, fashion design team)

4. integrating newcomers: institutions, policies and practices

- positive impacts on economic competitiveness, innovativeness and success of city-regions
- clear role for non-industry specific policies
 - Interviewees derived support from federal and provincial:
 - Immigration policies, EI policies and programs, universal health care, education system, family policies

benefitting from canada's immigration policy

"I migrated with my husband and two children. The political situation is not that great- my husband was in a semi-government place with a lot of harassment and problems. It was mainly for him that we moved- Canada had open immigration so when applied and moved. So we both had applied collectively and then he ended up doing real estate through a number of other professions... Whereas I was very focused because of my passion for textiles, and I wanted to find a niche market here in greater Toronto." (interview, fashion designer)

benefitting from universal health care

“I definitely did notice the difference moving home, feeling [more of] a sense of being cared for by the community than in New York where you don't have health care... and that is reflected in maternity leave. It is three months in New York.” (interview, fashion designer)

fashion specific institutions and policies

- tfi as talent promotion and industry promotion organization
- perceived as highly supportive in terms of services to in house residents and outreach members



tfi welcoming to newcomers

“this was absolutely great place for newcomers who didn't know the way or the path which they have to move around. It was possible to be part of the big events and fashion shows and to get some grants. Even I got some few awards. One of them was an award to allow me to stay in the fashion incubator for a whole year with a studio. This was a very strong push for me to keep going and create something. For me it was like- wow- in a huge country like Canada they are giving away for free all this knowledge.” (interview, fashion designer)

5. conclusions

- concur with Storper and Scott (2009) critique of amenities based theories
 - theories underpinned by masculinist conception of the individual as sovereign subject, unconstrained by economic necessities
- amenities, quality of life and social policies do not attract talent to city, but do play critical role in retaining designers
- synergy between quality of place and production networks in the city

