The Hospitable City by Charles Leadbeater

Guimarães, Open City Project

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We are at our best and perhaps at our worst in cities.

Cities are where creativity and culture flourish. They are home to many of our proudest achievements – great libraries and hospitals, schools and parks, art and culture. Cities are synonymous with civilisation, civic governance and progress. The diversity, bustle and trade of civic life makes cities dynamic, surprising and exciting.

But cities are arguably where we are also at our worst. It is in cities that our biggest challenges are to be faced – inequality, poverty, crime, violence, environmental degradation, exploitation, corruption. These all thrive in cities as much as learning and culture. In many modern cities the good and the bad live alongside one another, as neighbours. Cities encourage mass innovation as people learn new habits from one another, observing what their fellow citizens are doing. Everything propagates faster in cities: fashion, ideas, disease.

Partly as a result cities are delicately poised. A city that is genuinely alive is never static, it must always be plotting to escape the planners. Most cities are poised between rapid growth – which stretches the social fabric, pumps up property prices and threatens to overrun older infrastructures for transport and business - and a cycle of decline in which people, businesses and jobs leave, setting off a downward spiral of economic and social disinvestment which is difficult to arrest. Keeping a city on an even keel is virtually impossible without both these cycles of growth and decline being at work at the same time. Cities need creativity both when they are "going up" to drive and cope with growth, *and* when they are going down, to arrest and reverse decline. Cities can do both, as New York has shown over the past three decades. But it requires determination, inventiveness and resilience for a city to navigate its way out of a spiral decline. Most of all perhaps it requires a city to be open in the right way to draw in ideas from the outside and to draw out from within itself new sources of energy. Put it another way: one reason by cities decline is that their leaders – civic, business, social, artistic – become closed and inward looking. The less

interested in the outside world they become, the less interesting the city becomes. The less they have to offer to outsiders as places of interest, the fewer new investments and arrivals they attract.

The challenge for a city such as Guimarães, which seeks a creative response to the decline of traditional industries, and the challenge to its identity that comes from that, is to navigate its way through these dilemmas. Guimarães is not alone. A host of cities around the world are struggling to come to terms with the loss of their industrial identities: for an extreme case look at Detroit's collapse from within. Many of these former industrial cities - a good example is Providence Rhode Island - are like Guimarães: they are of modest size. They are not disconnected from the international flows of trade and ideas but nor are they central to them. They have proud legacies and historic assets, which are great strengths. But they also struggle to find a way to bring the whole city into the future.

At the heart of that challenge is how the city will connect two different approaches to creativity in city life. Guimarães should be open about what its future could be and so what kind of creativity it needs.

The first approach is that creativity is wrapped up with culture and the arts, knowledge and learning. Cities have always been centres of learning, the first home to libraries and universities, museums and galleries, art and sculpture, music and writing. Cities provide some of the key ingredients for cultural creativity: diversity, density and proximity. Large cities have the economies of scale – the audience – to sustain theatres, concert halls, galleries.

This story of the city as a place of culture and learning took on a new life in the last decade with Richard Florida's[1] account of the role of the "creative class" in city renewal. Florida's argument was that the presence of a thriving "creative class" – artists, designers, media folk - was the best signal to other knowledge workers that a city was vibrant, open and tolerant. A city with a thriving creative and cultural sector would then attract other high-end knowledge jobs and set off a spiral of economic and social growth. The road to economic

[1] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, updated and revised edition, Basic Books, 2012.

salvation for a city lay through the cultural quarter of galleries, clubs, restaurants and studios. Cities are increasingly managing how they make people *feel*. Generating a "buzz" about a city is one of the main aims of city leaders.

This is a powerful but narrow account of what it means for a city to be creative: creativity is confined to a narrow group, that works in particular areas of the city, and their creativity is mainly applied to a narrow range of cultural and knowledge intensive business fields. Yet this core creative class can have a huge multiplier effect on the atmosphere and so the economics of the city. Culture projects a city's reputation internationally. It helps to bring in ideas and talent from the outside to add to the mix already available in a city. Through its role as European Capital of Culture 2012 Guimarães[2] has an outstanding opportunity to take forward such an approach.

The recipe for the "narrow" approach to the creative city are well known: investment in cultural institutions; renewal of the city's historic core; Bohemian cultural quarters, as the basis for the wider economic regeneration of a city that will bring investment in new retail and leisure facilities, apartments and knowledge worker jobs, restaurants and clubs. The modern city is where we go to have experiences not to make goods.

Guimarães already has an impressive, growing collection of new cultural institutions: the Centro Cultural Vila Flor, the Centre for Art and Architectural Affairs (CAAA), the Design Institute. The many large former industrial buildings in the city core offer huge opportunities for new cultural, leisure and retail activities, in a city that feels intimate and uncontrived. Yet cities that pursue this strategy face enormous challenges, particularly to connect the suburbs to the city core and to connect people outside the "creative class" to the jobs that it helps to create in the service economy.

That is why cities that aspire to be truly creative, need to combine cultural creativity with a broader agenda for social creativity. Truly creative cities are as creative about transport, housing, energy and waste as they are about culture and the arts.

[2] http://www.guimaraes2012.pt/

The density and scale of cities pose significant innovation challenges, to create mass forms of housing, transport, health, utilities, waste disposal, education. That is why cities created shared institutions – libraries, fire services, maps, parks, postal systems. Cities require continual social and political creativity to address the problems that they throw up as they grow, mutate and decline.

Those challenges are only going to become more intense with migration into growing cities and away from declining ones; the very different demands of an ageing population and young singles in the same city; changing patterns of employment and family life; the need to shift to more environmentally sustainable forms of energy and transport; the extremes in inequality that are increasingly a part of city life in the developed and developing world.

These social challenges have traditionally been tasks for specialists - planners, architects and engineers - to re-imagine the city from on high. Most famously this gave rise to the modernist vision of the city as a machine, a lattice work of roads, factories and high rise apartment blocs. The failure of many of these schemes for planned problem solving in cities means there is a growing emphasis in many cities on more bottom up solutions, that require more distributed, social creativity, which often involves a combination of top down investment in new infrastructures – for example for energy, transport or waste– combined with changes in mass behaviour – using electricity, mass transit, household recycling. Creative cities are too large, open and unruly to be regulated in detail, top down by an all-seeing state or experts. They have to encourage collective, voluntary, self-control. A city that could be planned from the centre would also be dead. There are plenty of examples of cities around the world which are busy and rich in infrastructure and yet dead, socially and creatively, precisely because they allow little or no room for people to come together in unprogrammed ways. Successful cities allow a lot of room for adaptive mutation, encouraging their citizens to invest their ideas in the spaces they inhabit. A prime example is the way the city of Portland, Oregon, which allowed neighbourhoods to create their own street furniture at intersections, a project that kick started a tradition of local innovation in public space. Portland has just published a new city plan, developed through consultation with a vast range of local citizens.

The recipes for generating this "broader" social creativity in cities are far less clear cut than to seek urban renewal through cultural investment. They do not win prizes and attract big architects. Yet in the long run they might be as important to what makes a city creative and liveable.

Though these approaches to make a city creative are different, they should be complementary and overlapping. Both approaches depend on a city being open to attracting outsiders to it, to challenge convention, bring new ideas and invest new energy.

One constant in Peter Hall's magisterial survey of *Cities and Civilisation*[3] is the critical role that outsiders – often immigrants – play in challenging orthodoxy, bringing new ideas, making new connections and providing new recipes for food, culture and social problem solving in cities. Successful cities have to be connected to international flows of people, resources and ideas. Arts and culture are one way to attract these people to a city. The challenge then is whether a city is really open to integrating new people and ideas, taking them to heart. This means more than having good transport connections. It means making the city feel welcoming.

As John McKnight and Peter Brock put it in *The Abundant Community*[4]*,* their impassioned argument for grassroots community development in cities, successful communities must build on their own capabilities, rather than focussing on deficits; they must be associational, allowing people many ways to come together; most important in this context, cities must be hospitable, they must really welcome outsiders. If hospitality were to be Guimarães' leading value it would mean welcoming people, making them feel at home, in a space where they could be themselves. Hospitality is overwhelming when it means forcing upon people gifts they do not want. Hospitality is uplifting when it is attentive, thoughtful and gives people space to be themselves with other people, to draw them out. A good host allows his guest to make a contribution, to feel at home.

[3] Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilisation*, Pantheon Books, 1998

[4] John McKnight and Peter Brock, *The Abundant Community:Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, Berrett-Koehler, 2012

Buildings are almost entirely irrelevant to this process. What really matters is the make up of a city's social networks and how open they are to new people and ideas. A city can be open in the sense that it is easy to get to, has attractive places to stay and eat, interesting exhibitions and entertainments to see, and yet still remain closed and separate culturally and socially.

The diverging stories of Allenstown, Pennsylvania and Youngstown[5] , Ohio, both steel towns that went into steep decline in the 1980s shows that the social structure of cities, how power is shared and connected, matters hugely to how cities respond to shocks and challenges. Or to put it another way their stories show how important hospitality is to successful cities.

Youngstown's inward looking, tightly knit and conservative social networks converged around the old business establishment which gathered at its traditional country club, The Garden Club. Youngstown was strong in the wrong kind of social capital: everyone who was anyone knew one another. When recession hit the old guard gathered round one another, protecting their position but failing to offer leadership to the city as a whole. As a result Youngstown found it difficult to mobilise new ideas and resources to respond to the savage contraction in traditional manufacturing. The Garden Club for all its prestige could not save Youngstown. The Garden Club was inhospitable.

In contrast Allenstown has many more diverse social and business networks. They were loosely coupled and came together around a shared civic agenda for renewal. The most important social institution in Allenstown was the boy scouts, which cut across the city both geographically and in terms of class. Parents who knew one another because their children were in the boys scouts were more likely to collaborate when they bumped into one another at meetings. Only the elite could get into The Garden Club. The Boy Scouts were open to all parents, from all backgrounds. The Boy Scouts were hospitable and so was Allenstown.

[5] Sean Safford, *Why the Garden Club couldn't save Youngstown. Civic infrastructure and mobilization in economic crises*, March 2004

Allenstown's social networks were more outward looking and welcoming to outsiders than those in Youngstown. As a result Allenstown attracted new businesses and talent, which brought with it new ideas, connections and capital. New companies did arrive in Youngstown as well but were kept very much at arms length, separate from the business establishment. In Allenstown by contrast new companies were welcomed and quickly integrated into existing business networks: Allenstown was not just formally open, it was hospitable.

Institutions played an important role in the renewal of Allenstown, particularly the local university, Lee High, which orchestrated the Lee High Valley partnership to articulate a clear, shared agenda for economic renewal which local organisations – the council, business, trade unions, churches, civic groups, signed up to. Allenstown was open to all sectors of the city playing a role in renewal and that philosophy carried over into its approach to the outside world.

Two decades later Allenstown is still growing. In Youngstown the city's civic leaders became inward looking and sectarian. They started fighting among themselves. They were closed to new people and ideas. As a result Youngstown succumbed to a spiral of decline which it is still struggling to escape.

The differences in the experiences of the two cities did not stem from the buildings they had but the character of their social networks of business and civic leads *and* critically, how they attracted outsiders with ideas and capital. Youngstown has a densely connected network of business and civic leaders who were closed to outsiders and inward looking. This group eventually fell out and collapsed in on itself. The poorest parts of the town became a haven for organised crime.

Allenstown's civic leaders were a much more diverse group from the outset, stretching across class, political and religious divides. This diverse group managed to create a shared agenda for growth. Crucially they welcomed new arrivals, especially entrepreneurial people, who were quickly integrated into established networks.

Allenstown was hospitable; Youngstown was unfriendly. Allenstown succeeded; Youngstown collapsed.

Creative cities need to provide many places where people can join these creative conversations – in council debating chambers, university seminars, coffee shops, community groups and squares. Successful cities – Portland Oregon, Curitiba in Brazil, Barcelona in Catalonia - have many, distributed spaces for civic creativity.

Civic creativity is spurred by a sense of pride, belonging and attachment to a city. They are hospitable places where association is easy. Outsiders cannot just walk in with solutions ready made. They have to be sensitive to context, their ideas pulled and adapted by insiders. It requires clever ways to combine, connect and blend ideas, from outside and inside. Intelligent and thoughtful outsiders have to provide their ideas in ways that are most useful to a city. Most creativity is highly dialogic, it involves batting ideas back and forth. It cannot be delivered in the way that DHL delivers a parcel. Being hospitable is not the same as allowing experts to waltz into a city with ready made solutions. A successful city must be open, inquisitive, curious, keen to learn but with a sense of confidence in its own identity, history and purpose. Being open will not make a city creative if that just means picking and mixing ideas and policies from other cities. People who are hospitable are proud of their home, they want to welcome people to it.

If being open and hospitable were the guiding values for a city to approach its future, there are four questions it needs to ask itself.

First, **who** is the city open and hospitable to or with? Is the city selectively open or open to all?

Second, **how** is hospitality made apparent and real? Is it just a question of people able to visit, attracted by the culture on offer? Being open is a way to attract new collaborators but then what matters is how people collaborate once they come into contact. There is a different between being open and being welcoming. The latter is the real challenge.

Third, **what** does the city want to open up: public space; knowledge; the way the local council works; the future use of buildings?

Fourth, **why** would being open and hospitable make the city attractive to people with talent and energy who will propel it forward? What opportunities would people see in the city that they would not see elsewhere? It is a delicate balance. A successful city needs a confident sense of itself: where it comes from and what its values are. Yet it also needs to be open to the idea – the necessity - that its story is unfinished, that people could take in new, unforeseen directions. Real hospitality is not just welcoming people in on the first night but liking that they come back and stay, fitting into the city, making their own contribution and making the place their own.

Cities are cradles for innovation because they are where knowledge, culture and self-governance come together. That is how the narrow and the broad circuits of creativity connect so that creativity in culture can feed social and public innovation. Cities are experiments in how to live together creatively. To be successful cities need to show that they are open to that question – how should we live together, with one another - and to people who want to devise new answers to it. Plenty of cities around the world want to be, smart, connected, creative.

Guimarães' opportunity is to be different: to be not just the open city but the hospitable city.

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As part of the Open City strand, Watershed has curated a series of artistic interventions as well as commissioned think pieces which will explore the concept of openness in relation to city development. Open City provides the opportunity for Guimarães to establish a leadership role for open city development. It is a knowledge exchange programme that will help to re-draw approaches to city-making and change the ways we plan, deliver services and engage communities.

This work will be both published online and presented in Guimarães, providing the context and the content for a symposium to be held in the city in October 2012.

www.watershed.co.uk/opencity