

Background guide for
Breakout Session 5:
**Pittsburgh's Creatives: Their
role in p4**

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Authors' Note and Disclaimer

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This report was prepared at the request of the Heinz Endowments to provide additional perspectives to participants attending the p4 Conference, in Pittsburgh, October 18-19, 2016. Opinions or points of view expressed herein represent a consensus of the authors and are presented for informational purposes to expand the space for conversations around equity, justice, and inclusion in the Pittsburgh region. Opinions and recommendations do not necessarily represent or constitute approval, adoption or endorsement by the Heinz Endowments or the facilitators of the respective sessions.

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Pittsburgh's Creatives: Their role in p4

In the early 2000s, then Carnegie Mellon University professor Richard Florida introduced his idea of “the creative class.” They were technology workers, scientists, researchers, computer engineers, media workers, artists, and other knowledge-based workers. He posited that were the key to cities’ post-industrial economic growth. By supporting and encouraging the growth of the “creative class,” their industries, and the lifestyle they prefer (e.g. exciting, open, tolerant, diverse, bike and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods) through policies and investment, cities could lure new “creatives” to the city and stimulate growth. A well-supported and developed “creative class” would spur new inventions and products, leading to spin-off companies and further growth.¹

Over the last decade or so, the City of Pittsburgh, many private institutions, and non-profit organizations have promoted the growth of the creative class. New start-ups have spun off from universities and existing tech companies have opened offices in the city attracting highly-skilled knowledge-based workers. Neighborhoods and communities have been transformed. As such, the promoters have celebrated these “creatives,” “innovators,” and “disruptors” (as they are also called) as keys to recent economic growth and urban transformation—and as keys to future economic development.

As Pittsburgh moves into a next phase of rapid development, what role should these “creatives” and “disruptors” play in designing the future? How can they contribute to the P4 aspirations of

creativity, innovation, and equity? These are two related, but distinct, threads of conversation. The first one relates to arts-based community development, the second conversation is about the role of the creatives and the creative classes.

Creating a Creative Pittsburgh

Long before Richard Florida popularized the notion of the “creative class,” Pittsburgh’s business and philanthropic leaders committed to transforming the regional economy to support and attract creative types at the expense of the steel and manufacturing industries that anchored Pittsburgh’s economy for decades. From the 1940s the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (“Allegheny Conference”) acknowledged the devastating environmental impact of the region’s steel industry and the inevitable decline in manufacturing here in the face of increasing manufacturing in Europe and Asia.² Through a close public-private partnership, the Allegheny Conference sought to promote Pittsburgh as a corporate headquarters by investing in and promoting downtown and the area’s anchor institutions (universities, hospitals, and museums). After an interruption in the public-private partnership during the Flaherty Administration, philanthropic leaders in Pittsburgh committed to an early example of arts based community development: the creation of the Pittsburgh’s Cultural District with funding from a triumvirate of Pittsburgh’s legacy fortunes including those of Heinz, Mellon, and Benedum.³

Consistent with Florida's thesis, the creative classes affiliated with the so-called "anchor institutions" drive current economic development and spur innovation. The institutions themselves, including UPMC, Allegheny Health Network, Pitt, CMU and others are the region's largest employers and land developers. They produce spinoffs and attract ancillary services. The network of creatives has attracted Google, RAND, Disney Research, Microsoft, Intel, and a host of other creative firms to Pittsburgh, including a seemingly favorite of Mayor Peduto, Uber. A champion and supporter of Uber, Mayor Peduto, along with Governor Tom Wolf, has gone to bat to challenge regulators and to remove obstacles for the ride-sharing program and their development of driverless taxis.⁴ Uber is now testing their automated driver vehicles here, and they plan to open a research facility at the Almondo redevelopment site in Hazelwood.

Creatives and Neighborhood Transformation

As Florida argued, promoting the growth of the creative class was a means to redevelop post-industrial cities and their neighborhoods. "Creatives" play a central role in this process. Because the term "creative class" refers to individuals in a broad set of occupations (e.g. from painters to electrical engineers), it is perhaps unfair to lump them and their positions all together when discussing their roles in urban and neighborhood redevelopment. To avoid this, we focus on one subset of the "creative class" that has been central to the transformation of neighborhoods and that may be central to ensuring a Pittsburgh that is both creative and just – artists.

Artists sometimes lead the process of neighborhood transformation. Because their incomes are often low, artists move to areas with spaces big enough to practice their art and cheap enough to afford. Many cannot afford the higher rents in already existing "developed" neighborhoods, so they move to the neighborhoods where they can work and live. How they interact and engage with the residents and the built environment in that neighborhood is dependent upon the individual and may lead to positive, negative, or neutral outcomes. Nonetheless, their presence transforms the dynamic of the community and neighborhood.

Institutions have recognized the potential in artists to bring about neighborhood change. Many civic planners, philanthropy, and community development corporations (planners) have suggested a form of "arts-based community development" as a revitalization strategy or tool. Generally, the strategy entails using some combination of investments in the arts to create attractive programs for artists. This includes, for example, rent rebates, inexpensive studio space, subsidized remodeling assistance, and sponsorship for festivals to incentivize and lure "creatives" to an area. Through arts-based development, planners predict that artists and the arts will move into certain neighborhoods and create artistic and cultural synergies and energies that will attract more people to the neighborhood. People want to be where the action is. Neighborhoods known for vibrant art or music scenes are likely to command higher rents from people and businesses that want to be near the increased movement of people. Consequently, the creative and artsy folks in new communities are often praised as spark plugs for neighborhood revitalization. Ultimately, the institutions'

and planners' goal is to recycle underperforming real estate in areas with high vacancies, to get the properties back on the tax rosters, and to increase rents and property values to activate market-driven interests.

While this seems like an effective strategy, artists and arts communities have a long history as colonizers of "underperforming" urban neighborhoods.⁵ Classic examples include SoHo in Manhattan, Williamsburg in Brooklyn, and the Mission District in San Francisco. More contemporary examples include Hampden in Baltimore and, of course, Lawrenceville, here in Pittsburgh.

The perspective of the long-term residents of inner-city neighborhoods illustrates this process. Initially, when their numbers are small, the artists and associated newcomers are welcomed additions to the community, although how the newcomers choose to interact with and engage existing residents will determine whether they are seen as agents of revitalization or gentrification.⁶ Next, the creative "urban pioneers" move into affordable neighborhoods, creating lively and thriving spaces with public art and performances. Media outlets begin to take notice and the neighborhoods get favorable press in the local newspapers and realtor guides as "up-and-coming" and "neo-bohemian." Soon afterwards, coffee shops and frozen yogurt vendors move into the vacant storefronts, followed by galleries, performance spaces, brewpubs, and sushi bars. As more outsiders and people who "do not belong" move in to take advantage of the vibrancy, the long-timers sense that they are losing "their community." Community characteristics—loud music, kids playing outside in the late evening, and men sitting on stoops drinking beer—

are all now met with phone calls to the police, and the long-term residents no longer feel they belong. Because of this transformation, artists are often seen as the first wave of invaders – as gentrifiers – who claim neighborhoods and activate real estate markets.

Eventually, the creatives, and most other residents who were part of the community through the previously hard times get priced out as market forces take claim to another hot neighborhood.⁷ Very often, the artists themselves are there as temporary placeholders who will activate or jumpstart the space until the markets are able to attract and sustain wealthier professionals longing to be associated with a bohemian lifestyle and the associated accoutrements. In the amount of time that it will take residents to organize to challenge these processes, it is often too late. Demands for affordable housing in the neighborhood are useless. Spicy tuna rolls, art crawls, café au lait, double-hopped IPAs, and resident-only parking will not coexist with people who cannot afford market rate housing.

The need for ideas

A critical mass of new residents and businesses to any neighborhood means change. Although gentrification (for example, in the form of higher rents and taxes that ultimately lead to displacement) is a common result, it is not the only possible outcome. Every neighborhood and circumstance is different, and while trends emerge, they must be evaluated individually. Much of the research on transitioning cities and neighborhoods points to conditions and policies that make disinvested neighborhoods attractive places for creative types, rather than the creative types being deliberate about

displacing longtime residents.⁸ Additionally, the research on the impact of artists on real estate markets is inconclusive, at best. The arts, including fine, commercial, and performance arts covers such a broad range of variables before even considering the range of different policy, economic, and demographic conditions in a neighborhood that must be accounted for if any study is to be conclusive or generalizable when considering the role that artists plays on gentrification and displacement. This does not mean that we should not expect creatives, including artists, to play a role in producing an equitable, just, and innovative city. The creatives, especially visual and performing artists, designers, and cultural organizations, bring an integrative perspective to the functionality of the user experience of urban spaces and places that make neighborhoods thrive. It does not end there. The benefits of including creatives in urban planning and design processes extend beyond the art world to potentially innovative thinking in improving transportation, housing, education, workforce development programs and a host of other urban challenges. Insights into problem-solving and design can transform spaces into places and stimulate local economies while increasing innovation, cultural diversity, and civic engagement.

The question remains how to do that. How do we maximize the potential benefit of investment in strategies like arts-based community development by including “creatives” in our decision making while being responsible and respectful of the needs and rights of long-term residents with low-wealth? Maximizing revitalization while minimizing gentrification requires a balanced approach and a commitment from investors, policymakers, artists, and

residents from the beginning. Both artists and long-time residents require support systems that lead to establishing and protecting ownership stakes.

Designing for the Future

As we consider the role of creatives and the arts in making Pittsburgh a successful “city of the future,” we must consider several broader questions or topics embedded in our inquiry. These questions are not rhetorical questions; rather they are the core of the challenge. They include:

- Is creative expression, equity, or economic growth the measure of success?
- When we envision our city and the place we would like it to be, how do we conceptualize the politics of belonging? Who belongs where? Who decides?
- How do race, class, gender, orientation, poverty, and citizenship status affect who can be a “creative” or who can “disrupt” without fear of repercussions?
- When we invest in art or the “creative class,” does the process build community? Does it affirm, strengthen, or unite, especially across race, class, gender, orientation, and citizenship status?
- Should creativity, innovation, and disruption be valued, even if all creative, innovative, and disruptive voices are not valued equally?
- Should creativity, innovation, and disruption be valued, even if the ideas and solutions proposed are inequitable?
- Where is power and how does it insert itself in the conversation? Who determines what is creative, innovative, disruptive, or equitable?

Who is empowered to be creatives, innovative and disruptive?

If we are serious about creating a sustainable, just, equitable and prosperous

city, we have to have some serious answers to the above questions.

References for Guide 5

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