EQUITY-FORWARD CULTURAL DISTRICTS PLANNING

Lessons for Toronto

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Executive Summary

In 2021, the City of Toronto initiated the development of a cultural districts program in response to increasing concerns about cultural displacement. However, cultural districts implemented at the municipal level have often overlooked this issue and, instead, contributed to the cultural displacement of historically marginalized groups. To ensure an equitable approach to implementing a cultural districts plan, this study aims to examine "good practices" that can guide Toronto's cultural districts initiative. Additionally, the study seeks to explore the extent to which cultural districts can effectively address the issue of cultural displacement.

The "Scope and Methodology" (Chapter 1.2), begins by defining cultural districts and subsequently focuses on a specific type of cultural district relevant to the City of Toronto's cultural district program: Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts (NOCDs). This distinction aims to narrow down the study's focus and align it with the city's specific interests. Then, this section will explain how the research questions and objectives will be addressed through two key methods: literature review and case studies.

The "Background and Context" (Chapter 1.3) gives an overview of Toronto's cultural planning landscape, highlighting the use of culture as a means for driving economic development. Building on this background, this section explores the evolution of NOCDs in three identified ways. Specific attention is given to the NOCDs experiencing ongoing gentrification and displacement, as community advocacy from these NOCDs led to the creation of Toronto's cultural districts program.

The "Literature Review" (Chapter 2) identifies four models which affect the development of cultural districts programs and cultural districts. Specifically, key characteristics of each model are identified and examined in terms of their equity impact.

Chapter 3, "Case Studies" analyzes the cultural districts plans of two cities whose cultural landscape and cultural districts plan objectives were similar to Toronto's: Minneapolis, MN and San Francisco, CA. This chapter examines which characteristics of the four models identified are present in each plan to understand their potential equity impacts.

Lastly, Chapter 4 shares key lessons from the case studies, for the City of Toronto in their pursuit of a cultural districts plan. It also discusses the general limits to the effectiveness of cultural districts programs that the City of Toronto should consider.

The study recommends that equity-forward cultural districts plans should aim to be nuanced, prescribing a mix of market and non-market intervention, as well as the promotion of commercially attractive and community-based cultures. Further, equitable plans push the conventions of cultural planning by considering that everyday components of city-building, like housing, transportation, and social services are important aspects of culture as well. Last, mitigating power dynamics, even in "bottom-up" forms of governance is critical to achieving equity for a cultural district.

Résumé Exécutif

En 2021, la Ville de Toronto a entamé le développement d'un programme de districts culturels en réponse aux préoccupations croissantes concernant le déplacement culturel. Cependant, les districts culturels mis en œuvre au niveau municipal ont souvent négligé cette question et ont plutôt contribué au déplacement culturel de groupes historiquement marginalisés. Afin d'assurer une approche équitable pour la mise en œuvre d'un plan de districts culturels, cette étude vise à examiner les "bonnes pratiques" qui peuvent fournir des orientations pour l'initiative des districts culturels de Toronto. De plus, l'étude cherche à explorer dans quelle mesure les districts culturels peuvent efficacement aborder la question du déplacement culturel.

La section "Scope and Methodology" (Chapitre 1.2) commence par définir les districts culturels pour se concentrer ensuite sur un type spécifique de district culturel pertinent pour le programme de districts culturels de la Ville de Toronto : les Districts Culturels Naturellement Occurrents (NOCDs). Cette distinction vise à recentrer la focalisation de l'étude et à l'aligner sur les intérêts spécifiques de la ville. Ensuite, cette section expliquera comment les questions de recherche et les objectifs seront abordés à travers deux méthodes clés : la revue de littérature et l'analyse

d’études de cas.

Le chapitre “Background and Context” (Chapitre 1.3) offre un aperçu du paysage de la planification culturelle de Toronto, mettant en évidence l’utilisation de la culture comme moyen de stimuler le développement économique. S’appuyant sur ce contexte, cette section explore l’évolution des NOCDs à travers trois manières identifiées. Une attention particulière est accordée aux NOCDs faisant l’expérience d’une gentrification et d’un déplacement continus, car la défense communautaire de ces NOCDs a conduit à la création du programme de districts culturels de Toronto.

La “Literature Review” (Chapitre 2) identifie quatre modèles qui influencent le développement de programmes de districts culturels et de districts culturels. Les caractéristiques clés de chaque modèle sont spécifiquement identifiées et examinées en termes de leur impact en termes d’équité.

Le Chapitre 3, “Case Studies” analyse les plans de districts culturels de deux villes dont le paysage culturel et les objectifs de planification culturelle étaient similaires à ceux de Toronto : Minneapolis, MN et San Francisco, CA. Ce chapitre examine quelles caractéristiques des quatre modèles identifiés sont présentes dans chaque plan pour comprendre leurs impacts potentiels en termes d’équité.

Enfin, le Chapitre 4 partage les principales leçons tirées des études de cas, pour la Ville de Toronto dans sa quête d’un plan de districts culturels. Il discute également des limites générales de l’efficacité des programmes de districts culturels que la Ville de Toronto devrait prendre en compte.

L’étude recommande que les plans de districts culturels axés sur l’équité visent à être nuancés, en prescrivant un mélange d’interventions sur le marché et en dehors du marché, ainsi que la promotion de cultures commercialement attractives et ancrées dans la communauté. De plus, les plans équitables bousculent les conventions de la planification culturelle en considérant que les éléments quotidiens de la construction de la ville, tels que le logement, les transports et les services sociaux, sont également des aspects importants de la culture. Enfin, atténuer les dynamiques de pouvoir, même dans les formes de gouvernance “ascendante”, est essentiel pour parvenir à l’équité pour un district culturel.

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Ch. 1: Introduction

In 2006, the federal government deemed the city of Toronto as Canada's cultural capital (Adams, 2005). This recognition took place four years after the publication of Richard Florida's highly influential "The Rise of the Creative Class" (2002), which called for cities to invest in cultural sectors (attracting knowledge workers and creative industries) to generate economic growth (Wainwright, 2017). Toronto was one of the first Canadian cities to embrace this approach and quickly gain global recognition (Pitter, 2022; Godrach & Silver, 2012, p. 399).

Prior to the 'Creative City' concept, cultural policy was largely overseen by federal jurisdictions, with economic development goals primarily achieved through traditional methods such as attractions and institutional anchors to garner tourism (Kabel & Wong, 2021). The "Creative City" proposed new and alluring pathways for municipalities to integrate "culture" into planning and policy (Pitter, 2022; Godrach & Silver, 2012, p. 2).

The direct influence of 'culture' on the built environment within urban planning and policy is evident in the transformation of neighbourhoods and spaces, which are restructured to align with municipal economic development objectives. However, 'top-down' uses of culture have faced criticism in planning academia and the profession due to their inequitable outcomes—such as gentrification and cultural displacement that disproportionately affect marginalized communities— and lack of acknowledgement or consideration for these issues.

Addressing equity in cultural planning and policy poses a significant challenge, particularly in moving away from spatial practices that use 'culture' solely for economic development, as it often leads to gentrification and displacement.

1.1: Research Statement

Beginning in 2021, the City of Toronto proposed exploring "Cultural Districts" as a tool to combat the gentrification and displacement pressures that culturally significant neighbourhoods in Toronto are facing (Pitter, 2022). While the introduction of a 'Cultural Districts Program' is an encouraging response to community demands, it is important to acknowledge that this tool is largely associated with the "top-down" use of culture often leading to inequitable outcomes, as community concerns are not fully integrated, and as City — as opposed to neighbourhood — priorities are emphasized.

Furthermore, the City of Toronto, along with other municipal bodies, lacks references and research on 'good practices' for equitable processes and outcomes in Cultural Districts programs or designations.

This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the following questions:

1. What are key lessons in cultural districts programs that the City of Toronto can learn from prior to implementing cultural districts program?
2. To what extent can cultural districts programs effectively tackle cultural displacement?

1.2 Scope & Methodology

Defining Study Scope: Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts

Cultural districts have many definitions but can generally be defined as "specific geographic area[s] with a concentration of cultural assets" (Kabel & Wong, 2021). While this definition is straightforward, cultural districts are much more complex when their location, history, governance, actors, and resources—amongst other factors—are considered (Lazzeretti et. al., 2013; Sonn & Liu, 2014; Stern, 2014; Godrach & Silver, 2012, p. 13).

Given that there are many factors to take into consideration, it is important to distinguish the type of cultural district this study is referencing and limiting itself to — Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts (NOCD).

Stern and Seifert (2013) define a NOCD as “a neighbo[u]rhood that has spawned a concentration of cultural agents-organizations and businesses, artists and activists, residents and visitors” (p. 1). NOCDs are distinguished by their origins and organization, typically emerging from community-based cultures and identities. They are rooted in a place-based context (i.e., in specific neighbourhoods), forming from the bottom up and building on existing community assets (Frost-Kumpf, 1997; Urban Omnibus, 2010). While often undesignated, ethnic enclaves, art-led neighbourhoods, and gay villages are some examples of NOCDs that contribute to a city’s cultural landscape, vibrancy, and diversity.

This study limits itself to NOCDs because the City of Toronto defines cultural districts in a way that closely aligns with NOCDs. According to the City’s definition, cultural districts are “[...] municipally significant areas that have a historical legacy of clustering cultural resources, businesses, not-for-profits, and residents which, combined, uplifts the cultural identity and cultural heritage of the neighbourhood” (Kabel & Wong, 2021).

The City of Toronto focuses on supporting neighbourhoods that already possess vibrant, locally rooted cultural expressions and a distinct sense of place, thus narrowing the scope of this study to NOCDs. Additionally, cultural policy practitioners and experts Tamara Greenfield and Caron Atlas argue that among various forms of cultural districts, Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts (NOCDs) can be the most effective in promoting a neighbourhood’s culture inclusively and equitably, if planned with such goals (Urban Omnibus, 2010). NOCDs can provide support and resources to cultivate a vision that embraces the diverse cultural expressions within the community.

Stern and Seifert (2013) argue that NOCDs have a “degree of sustainability that a planned cultural district is unlikely to match” because of the complex ecosystems formed through years of community building (p. 5). Specifically, there is a balance of institutional actors and disciplines, as well as self-organized production and consumption that has taken place without heavy planning and massive public investment that planned cultural districts typically require. Given the unrealized value of NOCDs, there is a call for these neighbourhoods to be further nurtured and supported by city planning and policies.

While targeting NOCDs may best align with equity-forward cultural districts models, there is the need to recognize how any cultural districts plan or outside intervention could destabilize the community dynamics that underpin NOCD; these challenges are also explored throughout this document.

Methodology

With the scope of this study limiting itself NOCDs, the following research methods and their rationale are outlined:

1. Literature Review on four models for Cultural District Programs

Unlike conventional types of cultural districts that necessitate formal recognition and specific planning interventions, such as zoning and land-use amendments, NOCDs emerge organically. As a result, they can develop regardless of whether they receive formal recognition from municipal bodies. However, formal recognition, particularly within the context of government interventions, can significantly influence the processes that either preserve or transform NOCDs.

NOCDs can emerge organically, but they can also undergo substantial alterations to achieve different goals, such as enhancing capital circulation, increasing tourism, or enhancing community processes (Hackworth and Reckers, 2005, p. 2). While there are many development paths NOCDs are susceptible to, this literature review examines three dominant models impacting cultural district programs which thus impact the future of NOCDs: the economic development model, the “Creative City” model, and the community development model. A fourth, emerging equity-forward model is also explored.

Fig 1. Flowchart Summary of Scope & Methodology

Scope

Define Naturally Occuring Cultural Districts

Literature Review

Identify 4 cultural district typologies NOCDs can follow

1. Economic Development Model

2. Creative City Model

3. Community Development Model

4. Equity-Forward Model

Case Studies

Analyze aspects of typologies in two cultural district plans

1. San Francisco, CA

2. Minneapolis, MN

Lessons for Toronto

Present key lessons and future considerations

2. Case Study of existing cultural districts programs supporting NOCDs

As part of preliminary research and building the case for a cultural district program, the City of Toronto put together the document "International Review of Cultural Districts Program". This document reviewed "best practices" that can inform Toronto's program in terms of the designation process, eligibility, and policy tools (Kabel & Wong, 2021). It identifies 16 municipalities around the world that seem most relevant to Toronto's context (such as cities that are highly multicultural and diverse).

From analyzing the City of Toronto's overview, this study identifies two municipalities which explicitly look to support culturally rich and marginalized communities vulnerable to gentrification and displacement: Minneapolis, MN and San Francisco, CA. These cities look to support NOCDs in an equitable way that seeks to conserve their cultural heritage.

Given the relevance of Minneapolis's and San Francisco's cultural districts plans to Toronto's, as well as their relevance to this study's main research questions, their respective plans will be analyzed and serve as main case studies. Specifically, this study will look to analyze what aspects of the four identified models from the literature review are present in Minneapolis and San Francisco's respective cultural districts program to understand their potential equity impacts. This analysis looks to provide lessons for the City of Toronto in its pursuit of an equity-forward cultural districts program.

1.3 Background and Context: A Brief History of Cultural Planning and NOCDs in Toronto

The following section gives a brief history of cultural planning and NOCDs in Toronto to understand how the proposed cultural districts plan developed.

Evolution of Toronto as a "World-Class" City

Toronto, a city known for its diversity and culture, was not always like this. In fact, the city was once self-described as "Toronto the Good", reflecting Victorian culture and values of family and homogeneity, with a majority WASP population (Godrach & Silver, 2012, p. 400).

In "Politics of Urban Cultural Policy", Godrach and Silver (2012) describe how the city's transformation into a cultural hub took place over decades of social, economic, and political changes (p. 401).

First, in terms of social change, waves of immigration from Eastern Europe throughout the 50s and 60s, followed by immigration from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean throughout the 80s to 2000s, largely expanded and challenged the homogenous social and cultural landscape (Figure 2).

Fig 2. Collage of different immigrant groups in Toronto. Source(s) (left to right): Myseum[1], Toronto Public Library Archives, Myseum[2]

Second, like many North American cities experiencing post-industrialization, Toronto underwent large economic re-structuring from a decline of blue-collar jobs and an increase of white-collar, "creative occupations".

Last, in the late 1990s, Toronto's amalgamation from six distinct boroughs, governed by two tiers, into one "mega-city" suddenly made it the 5th largest city in North America (Godrach & Silver, 2012, p. 401) (Figure 3).

With all eyes on this new and buzzing "world-class" city and an increase in creative occupations, there was a push to formulate Toronto's cultural identity and share its cultural offerings on the global stage.

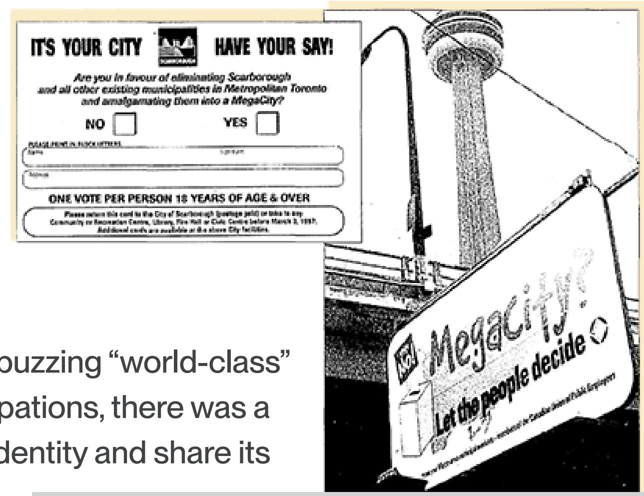


Fig 3. Cut out of newspaper ad, displaying a ballot on voting for or against amalgamation. Source(s): Toronto Star

Evolution of Cultural Planning in Toronto

Within the same timeline as Toronto's amalgamation throughout the late 1990s, the Creative City concept made its appearance in planning discourse and policy. In 2003, one year after Richard Florida's "The Rise of the Creative Class" (2002), the City of Toronto released its first cultural plan, "Cultural Plan for the Creative City" (Pitter, 2022).

The plan's mission is as stated: "Toronto's arts, culture and heritage will help to attract the educated, mobile newcomers we want, keep our best and brightest at home and make our economy among the strongest anywhere" (City of Toronto, 2003, p. 1). The plan focuses on using its cultural and heritage assets while expanding the cultural sector to enhance Toronto's economy.

Pitter (2022) critiques the Creative City approach, stating: "[...] like most cultural plans inspired by this [Creative City] scheme, there was an oversight in terms of addressing culture in a holistic and equitable manner" (p. 4). The focus of culture, implemented on a municipal level in Toronto, was primarily around investing in and promoting major arts institutions and creative industries in strategic locations (near downtown or central Toronto), rather than promoting the lived cultural heritage of different communities throughout the whole city.

Thus, the evolution of different NOCDs in Toronto became largely influenced by a cultural plan which targeted strategic locations and sectors, leading some NOCDs to be bolstered while others were ignored.

Evolution of NOCDs in Toronto

Like many cities, the spatial organization of Toronto has been profoundly shaped by various factors such as class, sexual orientation, cultural lifestyle, and diverse ethnicities—largely through the planning and policy practices that either privilege or marginalize these different identities. Over time, areas emerged, formed by their distinct identities and lived cultural heritage, which can be recognized as informal NOCDs.

Due to the absence of a comprehensive, formal plan for NOCDs in Toronto, the development trajectories of various NOCDs have occurred in an individualized and ad-hoc fashion. This study identifies three pathways for NOCDs in Toronto:

1. <u>Cultural Tourism</u>

First, identity-based NOCDs in Toronto, reflective of different cultural groups, have largely become focused on cultural tourism to "outsiders", rather than promoting lived culture for residents. Little Italy (Italian culture), Greektown on the Danforth (Greek culture), and the Gerard India Bazaar (Indian culture) promoting their respective ethnic group's culture, are examples of these neighbourhoods in Toronto (Hackworth and Rekers, 2005).

Hackworth and Rekers (2005) show that business improvement area (BIA) groups dominated in their place-branding and shaping. While cultural amenities became increasingly reflective of different ethnic identities, such as restaurants, food services, and entertainment, the demographic makeup of these ethnic groups actually decreased, as their respective communities moved to the suburbs (Hackworth and Rekers, 2005, p. 13). Within these NOCDs, cultural heritage is primarily experienced through consumption, by visitors and tourists, rather than being actively lived.

While these NOCDs experienced gentrification, there has not been a concern for cultural displacement since there has been cultural conservation through "museumification", a process "which freezes the culture for display" (Xie, 2011, p. 100; Hackworth and Rekers, 2005, p. 24). The evolution of these NOCDs has been purposely oriented toward cultural tourism.

Fig 4. Festival on Gerrard Indian Bazaar (left), Taste of the Danforth in Greektown (top right), and Tast of Little Italy (bottom left). Source(s) (in same order): Peter Lam Photography, Greg's Southern Ontario via Flickr, BlogTO

2. Mainstream Creative Neighbourhood

Second, arts-based NOCDs, such as the West Queen West Triangle (WQW) and Liberty Village, began with a "gritty" reputation and cheap rent, offering cultural workers, artists, and non-profits to participate in cultural production and artistic experimentation in empty storefronts, abandoned factories, and warehouses.

Fig 5. Before and After of Inglis lands and sign near Strachan, looking west to Liberty Village. Source(s): City of Toronto Archives via [Livabl]

Over time, especially following the Creative City concept, these neighbourhoods became strategic locations for redevelopment as "creative clusters" (Catungal et al., 2009; Godrach and Silver, 2012, p. 407). In both cases for WQW and Liberty Village, BIAs, landlords, private actors including developers and tech industries, and municipal actors are argued to have supported "strategies that displace both 'risky' peoples and behaviours and the pioneering creative population of artists and not-for-profit arts organi[z]ations" (Catungal, 2009, p. 1096).

While there is a semblance of culture rooted in arts and creativity that continue in these arts-based NOCDs, residents and actors involved in their emergence experienced gentrification and physical and cultural displacement (Catungal, 2009; Godrach and Silver, 2012; Onstad, 2019). While rooted in an organic emergence of culture through arts, these NOCDs redefined the type of creative expression, industry, and actors which could exist in these spaces; namely replacing grassroots artists and residents for mainstream and corporate creative industries such as tech and media, and "yuppie" residents in this industry (Krneta, 2017).

3. An unknown future, to be determined

Lastly, there are NOCDs which continue to be a battleground for various actors and groups to claim as theirs and with futures to shape. Unlike the previously described NOCDs, culture continues to be produced, consumed, and actively lived by the cultural groups that shaped these neighbourhoods. However, there are concerns about the displacement of cultural groups and their culture due to commercial and residential rent becoming increasingly unaffordable. Indeed, it is possible that these NOCDs are simply at an earlier stage, and may evolve into BIA-driven, cultural tourism destinations or into mainstream creative neighbourhoods.

The future of these NOCDs, namely Little Jamaica, Downtown Chinatown, Church-Wellesley Village (colloquially known as The Gay Village), and Geary Avenue, are thus to be highly influenced by the proposed Cultural Districts Program, Toronto's first comprehensive and formal plan for its NOCDs.

Context for the creation of a Cultural Districts Program

Conversations around the creation of a cultural district program for Toronto started with Little Jamaica (Samuel, 2022a). Little Jamaica is a culturally rich and diverse neighbourhood, which has served as a hub for Jamaican and other Afro-Caribbean communities in Toronto.

In 2020, long-time residents, non-profit groups like Black Urbanism Toronto, and grassroots community groups like the Oakwood Vaughan Community Organization made serious inquiries about the future of Little Jamaica and how its cultural preservation can be supported on a municipal level. Specifically, these stakeholders called for the City of Toronto to consider Little Jamaica to be a heritage conversation district (HDC), to safeguard the neighbourhood against the detrimental effects of gentrification and displacement caused by the development of the new light rail transit system (ie. transit-oriented development) (Samuel, 2021).

Local city counsellors looked to support and respond to their constituents, motioning for Little Jamaica to be an HDC. However, in a community stakeholders meeting, Mary MacDonald, the senior manager of Toronto's heritage preservation services explained that their tools are limited to what an NOCD like Little Jamaica needs support in: HDCs largely focus on conserving the physical form of buildings, whereas Little Jamaica would require a more comprehensive plan that also considers economic support and bolstering its arts and culture sector (Samuel, 2021).

Fig 6. Streetscape of Little Jamaica. Source(s): Hongen Nar via GoogleMaps

Instead, a cultural district designation was proposed as a more appropriate response to supporting Little Jamaica (Samuel, 2021). At the same time, the City of Toronto had yet to define what an official cultural district designation meant.

In addition to the advocacy of residents, grassroots, and non-profit groups in Little Jamaica, other grassroots groups across the city — including grassroots groups from Downtown Chinatown, Church-Wellesley Village (colloquially known as The Gay Village), and Geary Avenue—galvanized their local counsellor to support their communities lived cultural heritage (Pitter, 2022, p. 4). From here, a formal proposal for the creation of a cultural district program was presented to City Council in 2021 and subsequently approved.

The City of Toronto has since been tasked with creating a cultural district program which looks to uplift and protect the lived cultural heritage of historically marginalized, including queer, racialized, and low-income, people. It was specifically expressed that "the Cultural Districts Plan aims not to further stigmatize equity-deserving communities, rather direct intentional investment of resources, services and programs to support creative place-keeping and place-making in partnership with them" (City of Toronto, n.d.).

With an understanding of the context for the City of Toronto's pursuit to create a cultural districts program, the following sections review three popular models and an emerging model for cultural districts programs.

Fig 7. Map of the NOCDs in Toronto mentioned in this study

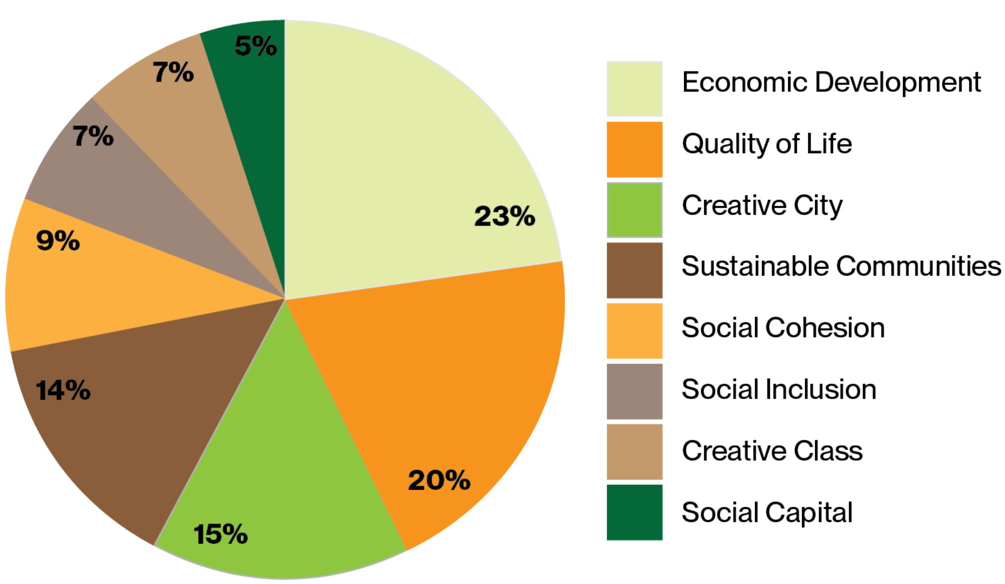
Ch. 2: Literature Review

While there is some literature on cultural districts programs, the findings are rather scattered. To enrich this section, this study also incorporates an examination of the broader literature on cultural planning, which offers a substantial body of work and provides valuable insights that can inform cultural district plans.

This literature review identifies three important models influencing cultural planning and cultural district programs: an economic development model, a creative city model, and a community development model. These models, their characteristics, and the type of cultural district they produce are identified through several studies (Vinodrai et al., 2022; Blakely & Leigh, 2010; Porter, 1989; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Sen, 2009; Atkinson & Easthope, 2009; Catungal et al., 2009; McCann, 2007; Bereitschaft, 2014; Loh et al., 2021; Frost-Kumpf, 1997).

Special attention is given to McVay's (2014) study on influential models in cultural planning in Canada (Figure 8) and Godrach (2013), who identifies and typologizes different "cultural economy" models and their characteristics. As well, a fourth and emerging "equity-forward" model is identified. While four distinct models are identified, it is important to note that no cultural district plan exclusively follows one type of model; most incorporate aspects from a variety of these four archetypes.

Fig 8. Pie chart of models mentioned in Cultural Plans (McVay, 2014)



For each model, the following characteristics are explored:

- the general background on this model and the type of cultural districts they produce;
- the key elements of each model, which include a set of goals, the implementation of these goals through specific focus areas and strategies, and their governance;
- an evaluation of the model's equity impacts;
- a case study to illustrate the transformation of a NOCD through this model.

2.1 Economic Development Model

2.1.1 Background

First, economic development is a widespread process and goal in modern capitalist societies, affecting all aspects of society, including culture. Economic development generally looks to use different assets to improve the economic well-being and quality of life in a region (Seidman, 2005); an economic development model applied to cultural planning thus uses "culture" as a vehicle to improve the economic conditions of a city or place. It is the most influential and prevalent among the three models within cultural planning (Vinodrai et al, 2002; McVay, 2014).

Scholar Carl Godrach (2013) typologizes the economic development model as a "conventional model" that transform NOCDs into "***conventional cultural districts***". Usually, conventional cultural districts invest in large cultural facilities which would generate much cultural consumption from tourism and outside attraction. Figure 9 identifies some facilities typically found in a conventional cultural district.

2.1.2 Key Characteristics

GOALS: The goals of an economic development model are highly measurable or are generally focused on metrics. For example, interventions are positioned to "attract residents and tourists who also support adjacent businesses such as restaurants, lodging, retail and parking" and "a well-educated work force" (Frost-Kumpf, 1997, p. 7). As well, the success of a conventional cultural district would be measured based on "property values, the profitability of surrounding businesses and the tax base of the region" (Frost-Kumpf, 1997, p. 7)

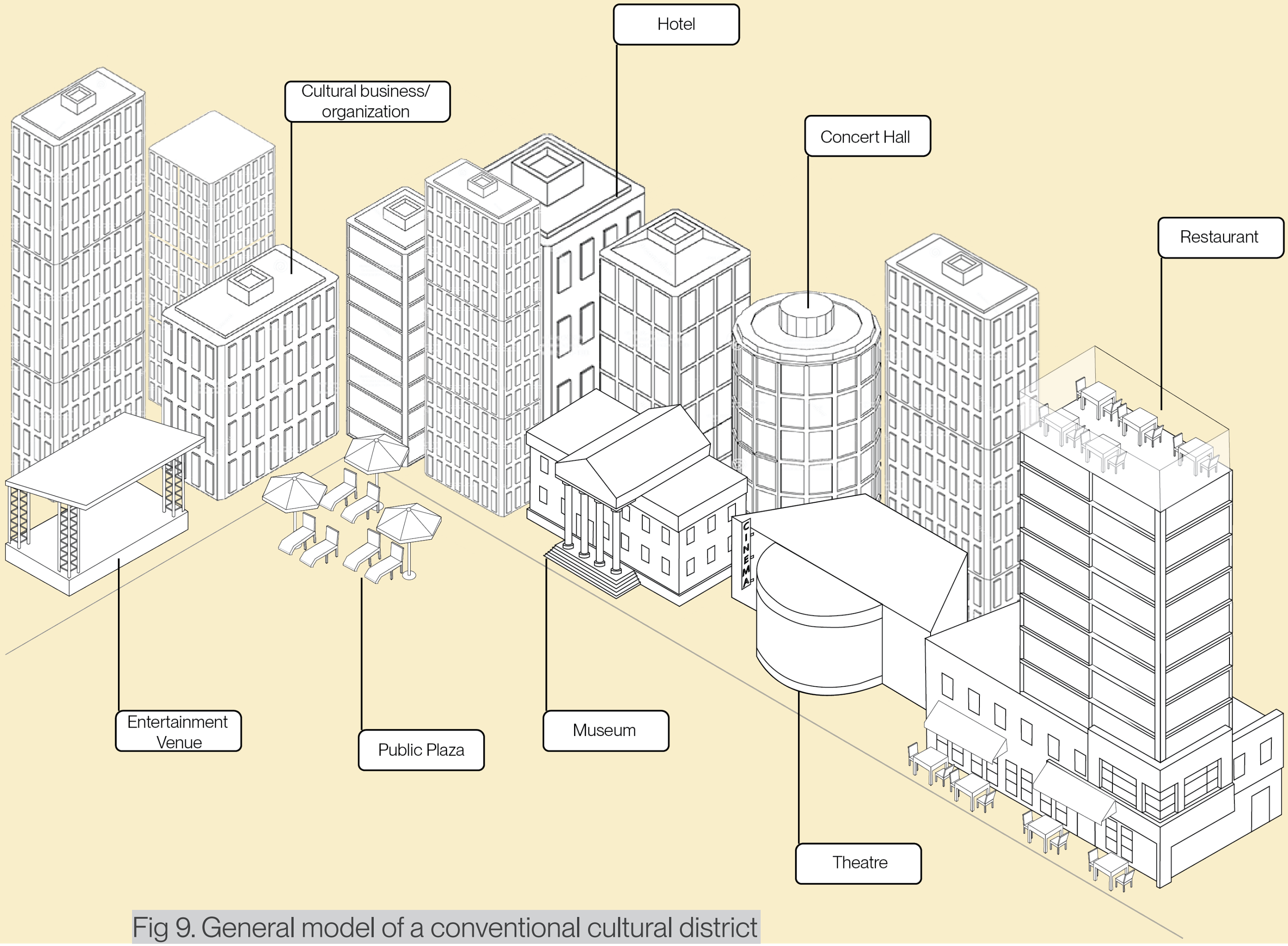


Fig 9. General model of a conventional cultural district

Summary of goals for an economic development model (Frost-Kumpf, 1997 p. 14; Vinodrai et al., 2022; Blakely & Leigh, 2010; Doeser and Kim, 2018):

- Increase business activities and enhance tax revenues
- Revitalization through place-branding, and making the area safe and attractive
- Increase in new jobs, specific sectors, and income levels
    - Provide facilities for major attractions, arts activities and organizations
    - Provide employment
- Increase cultural consumption from tourism and outside attraction

Once the goals are identified, there are key focus areas and strategies to create a conventional cultural district:

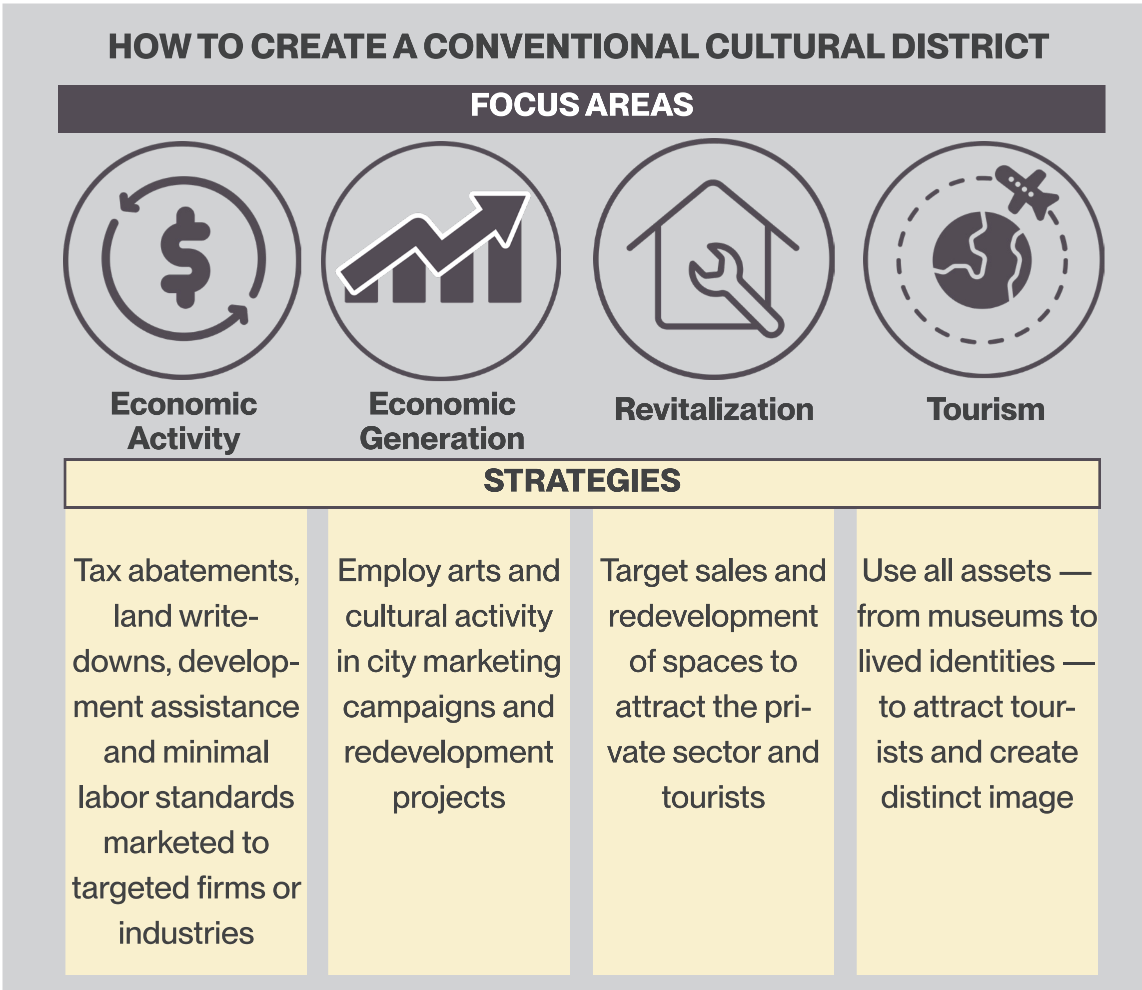


Fig 10. Focus Areas and Strategies identified in creating a conventional cultural district

GOVERNANCE: Doeser and Kim (2018) identify that the governance of any cultural district should be analyzed in its formation and ongoing management — especially since these dynamics can change. For example, a local grassroots group could play a significant role in the formation of a cultural district, but once it is established, a government agency leads in its ongoing management.

In an economic development model, "top-down" actors play a leading role in the creation and management processes of a conventional cultural district (Doeser and Kim, 2018). These actors mainly include municipal economic development and cultural planning divisions and high-performing cultural institutions (ex. a museum) (Doeser and Kim, 2018).

Once a conventional cultural district is established, it is largely overseen by a non-profit governing body that is led by an arts institution or a cultural planning agency, partnering with key stakeholders such as developers and arts organizations (Godrach, 2013). Figure 11 identifies typical stakeholders in the cultural planning process (identified in Doeser and Kim, 2018). The inner ring labelled "core actors" shows who are typically engaged in the governance of a conventional cultural district, while the outer ring, "other stakeholders", show potential actors in governance but are not engaged within the governance of a conventional cultural district.

Fig 11. Main actors governing conventional cultural districts

2.1.3 Equity Impacts

The equity impacts of an economic development model are concerning. NOCDs which transform into conventional cultural districts, through an economic development model, achieve important improvements such as public and private investments, street beautification, support for arts and culture, and increased business activity. At the same time, these improvements are not necessarily for existing community members, including equity-deserving groups. Instead, such improvements can lead to processes that accelerate the displacement of existing community members and draw in and replace them with more affluent demographics.

The equity impacts are as summarized:

- Frequently, the social and environmental costs and the distribution of benefits associated with economic strategies are ignored by economic development officials (Blakely and Leigh, 2010).
- Cities with a conventional cultural district frequently engage in selling places despite criticism that this favours the private sector and tourists over local populations, discounts public participation, and stretches thin municipal budgets with little public benefit (Evans, 2003).
- In the making of conventional cultural districts, Hackworth & Reckers (2005) show that culture, especially in the form of ethnic neighbourhoods and art communities, is strategically produced and often introduced from the outside, following a top-down logic because of the “profit potential of these identities” (p. 24). Conventional cultural districts can be reflective of – and sometimes appropriate – cultural groups in a neighbourhood or be completely removed from specific cultural identities.
- Lastly, in terms of governance, distinct entities with varying tools and resources engage with commercial cultural industries or non-profit arts bodies without acknowledging the potential overlaps and shared challenges they may have. In other words, the governance of cultural activities is often divorced from communities, residents and local (pre-district) businesses.

2.1.4 Case Study: Quartier des Spectacles, Montreal

Fiolka et al. (2022) tell the story of how Montreal’s Red-Light District was transformed into Quartier des Spectacles, the city’s major cultural district. Located downtown, the former Red-Light District was a center for commercial sex activity for over a century. Generally, a ‘Red-Light District’ can be seen as a NOCD, as a certain identity and culture (or sub-culture) is formed in these spaces over time. Montreal’s Red-Light District has disappeared through planning tools and policies, such as zoning regulations making erotic establishments a “non-conforming use”. However, the most powerful, cohesive, and effective way this district has changed is through its re-branding as a cultural district.

In 2002, the idea of "Quartier des Spectacles", which translates to "Entertainment District", was conceived at the Montreal Summit, where cultural policy and planning were beginning to take shape at a municipal level. A key goal was the revitalization of this district achieved through building a unique identity. While the presence of sex work was clearly unwanted, the imagery and idea of this district's exotic past offered a strong visual reference and selling point to tourists. This was expressed by a community advocate for sex workers, sharing:

> People go there because they have this aura of exotic or mystique. It's this idea of 'Oh I don't want sex workers, but I want to know that this was a place where all these things were happening' (p. 20).

The red-light imagery and red dot motif can be seen throughout the district, but the culture of the Red-Light District has been displaced. Establishments for sex work have been slowly displaced and replaced by facilities for large-scale festivals of various types, such as the annual International Jazz Festival. Today, the Quartier des Spectacles offers year-round, open-air cultural programming and entertainment drawing in visitors across the city as well as people all over the world. The scale of this district's transformation has been significantly altered to become a metropolitan-level 'facility' rather than a neighbourhood.

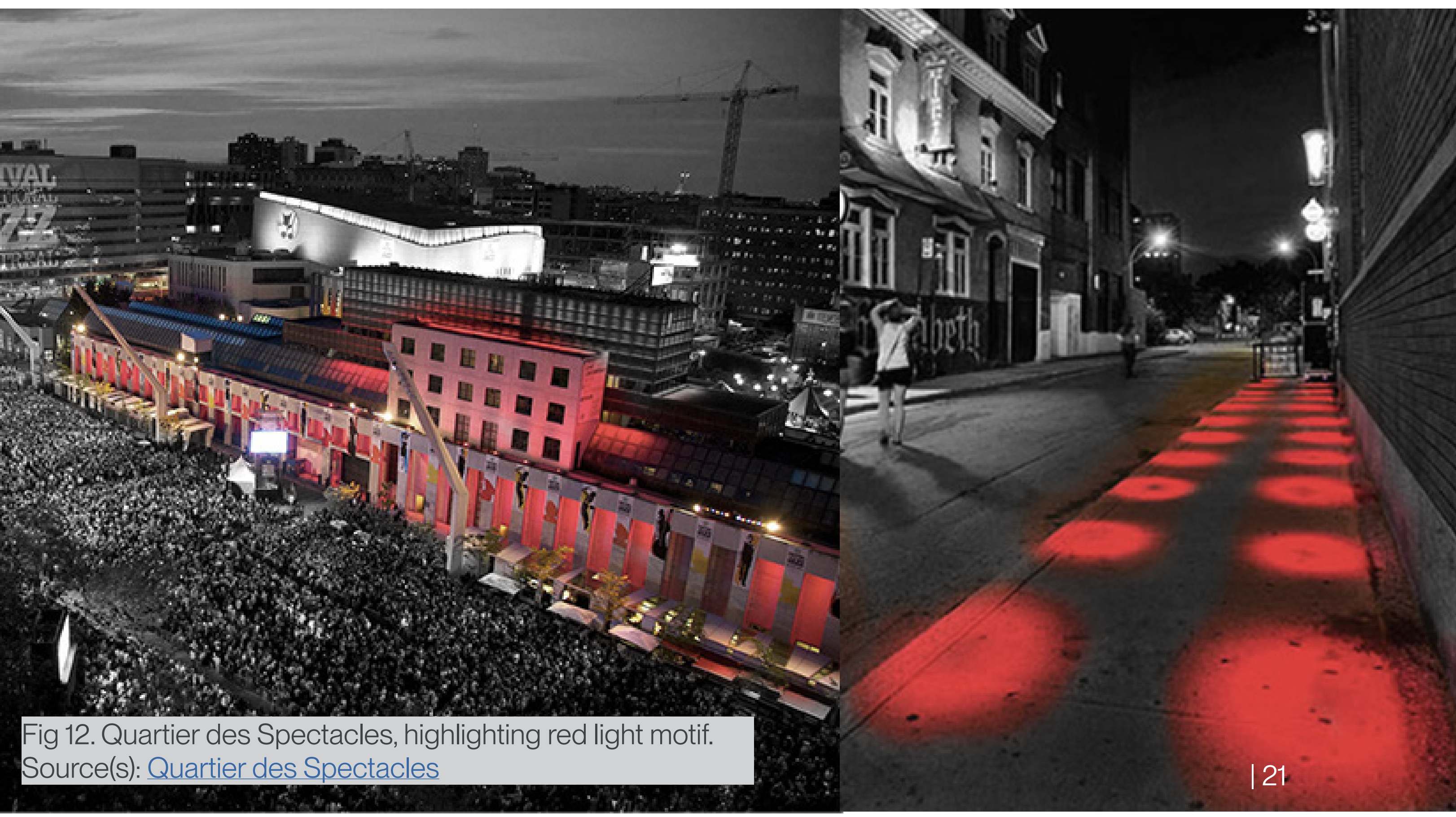


Fig 12. Quartier des Spectacles, highlighting red light motif.
Source(s): [Quartier des Spectacles]

2.2 Creative City Model

2.2.1 Background

The creative city model has many theorists who have contributed to its development (Landry, 2000; Howkins, 2002; Clark, 2004). The most known is Richard Florida's (2002) creative class theory which asserts that the creative class, highly educated and mobile workers, are a key driver of economic development and innovation in cities and regions. Thus, a creative city model generally uses "culture" to attract and retain talent in a city.

This model prioritizes attracting the creative class to what can be identified as "***creative cultural districts***" by "redeveloping historic mixed-use neighborhoods, investing in vibrant arts scenes and outdoor activities, and promoting their cultural diversity to appeal to the consumption preferences of the creative class" (Grodrach, 2013; Bereitschaft, 2014). NOCDs with "a unique historic heritage and distinct personality" (Bereitschaft, 2014, p. 160) provide as cultural assets which can be leveraged to attract the creative class to live in this area.

2.2.2 Key Characteristics

GOALS: Much like the goals identified from the economic development model, the goals of a creative city model are also measurable on a large scale. Specifically, the goals of a creative city model are measured through an increase in certain job sectors, demographic changes such as income and educational attainment, and cultural activities and offerings.

Summary of goals for a creative city model (Grodrach, 2013; Bereitschaft, 2014; Florida, 2002):

- Revitalization by making the urban form of an area an attractive, mixed-use "quality of place"
- Foster a tolerant and diverse social climate
- Attract and increase cultural amenities and cultural activities for creative-cultural production and consumption
- Attract high-skill, high-wage, educated and mobile creative class
- Attract creative businesses and firms

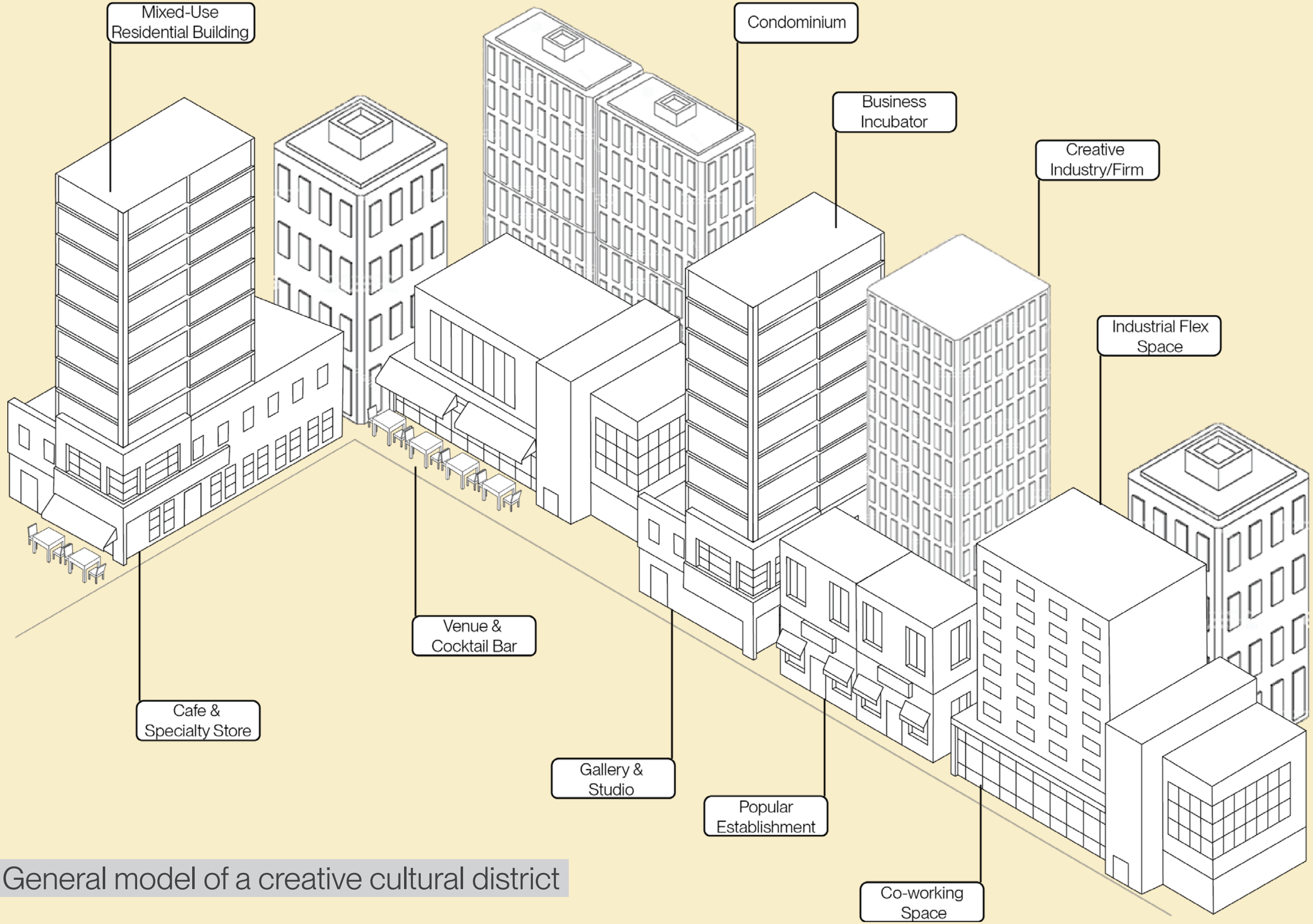


Fig 13. General model of a creative cultural district

Once the goals are identified, there are key focus areas and strategies to create a creative cultural district:

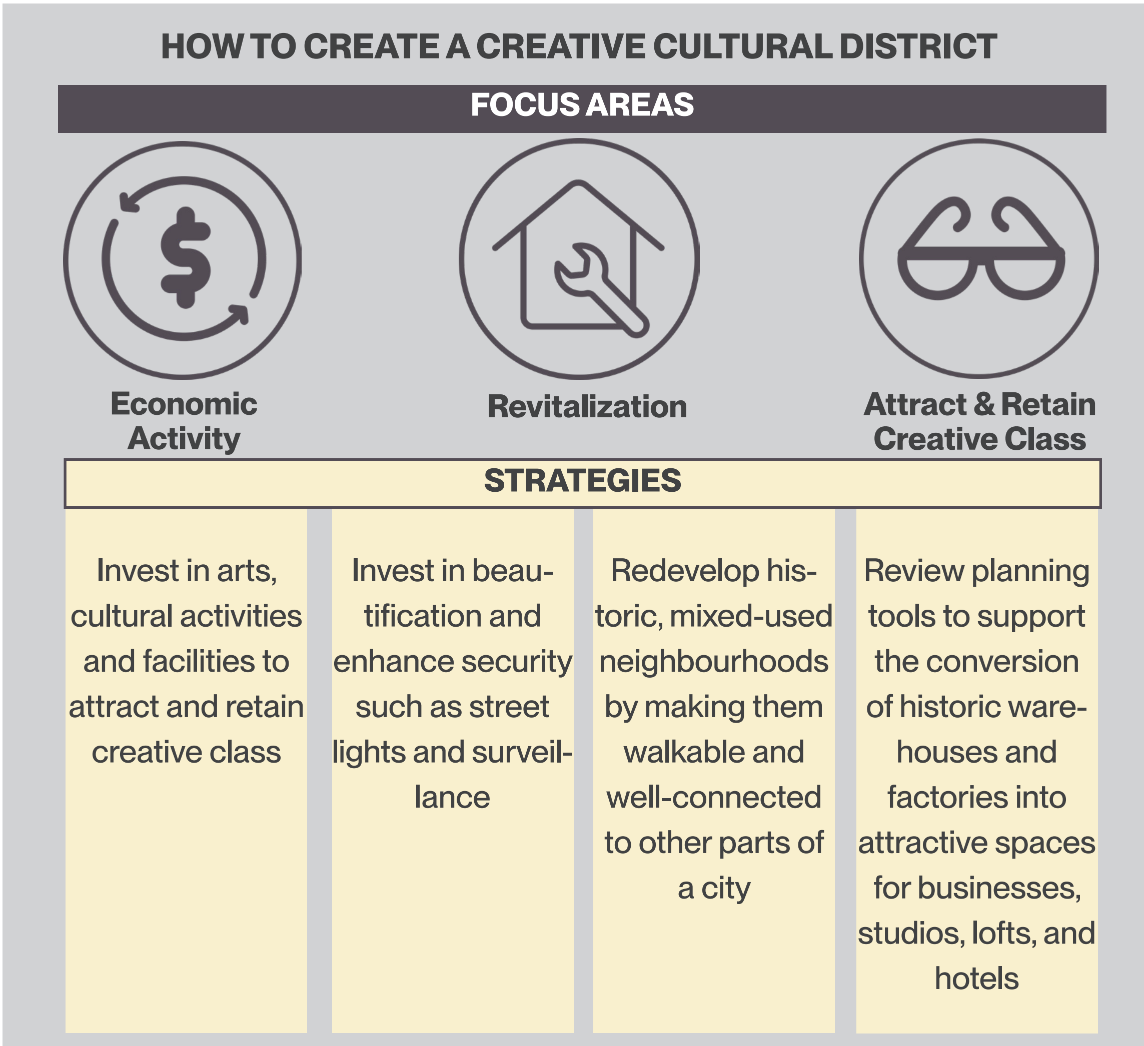


Fig 14. Focus areas and strategies identified in creating a creative cultural district

GOVERNANCE: Typically, NOCDs targeted to revitalize under a creative city model have an active business improvement area (BIA) group or non-profit arts institution (Catungal et al., 2009). A BIA group, or a Business Improvement District group, is an association of commercial property owners and business owners which work with cities to make business areas safe, competitive, and attractive through place-branding (Bereitschaft, 2014).

While not necessarily positioned at the top of “top-down” levels of governance, BIA groups and non-profit institutions are typically powerful in comparison to other governance actors like local resident groups and grassroots organizations. Specifically, BIAs and non-profit arts institutions often receive structural funding at a municipal level and have a savviness to navigate municipal tools, resources, and processes which favour their goals and vision.

An allure of the creative city model is the idea that they are highly funded through private investments and require less government input and public funding, in comparison to other revitalization strategies like the economic development model (while out of the scope of this study, this allure of low public investment is highly disputed; see Shearmur, 2007). Thus, on top of BIA groups and/or non-profit arts institutions, and real estate owners are key stakeholders in the ongoing governance of a creative cultural district. Figure 15 identifies who is typically engaged in the governance of a creative cultural district.

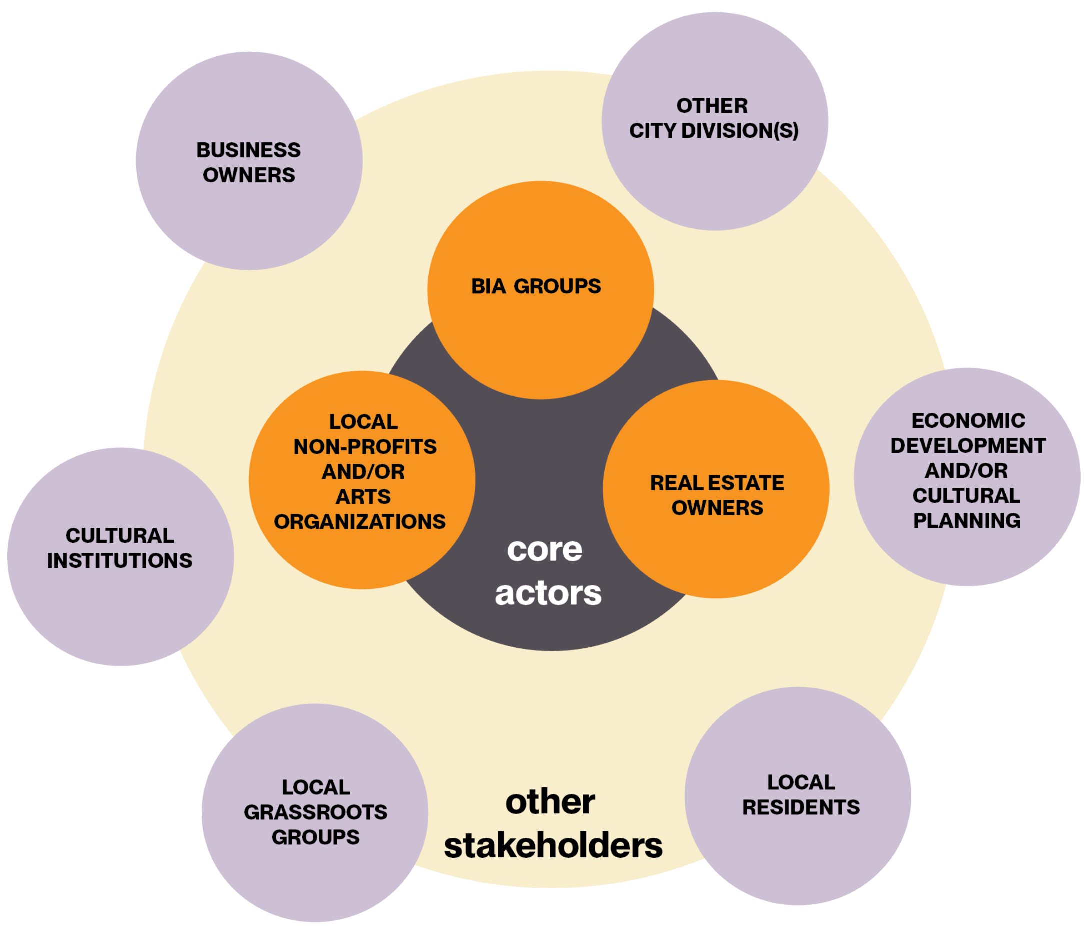


Fig 15. Main actors governing creative cultural districts

2.2.3 – Equity Impacts

The equity impacts of a creative city model are nuanced. On one hand, many social concerns within a community can be addressed through philanthropic, creative, and culturally engaging interventions, such as low-barrier artist programs and even non-market housing schemes (Lagatta, 2020). As well, a culture of civic engagement and celebration of diversity, including or centering equity-deserving groups enhances the quality of life for these residents.

At the same time, as a creative cultural district becomes increasingly attractive, property values increase, which can be threatening to equity-deserving groups. As a highly market-driven model, the curation of cultural programming as well as businesses would primarily cater to the preferences of the demographic groups that generate the most substantial profits or exhibit the highest level of appeal.

The equity impacts are as summarized:

- It has been apparent in many creative cultural districts that there is high economic and social polarization, such as between the creative class and service workers (Donegan and Lowe, 2008: 47). Such polarization undermines the goal of a tolerant and diverse social climate.
- It has been observed that creative cultural districts are still largely influenced by the economic development model which includes employing strategies to generate economic activity which are not always holistic. Specifically, many 'creative' jobs, particularly the numerous precarious ones, such as freelance and contract work, reflect "insecure labo[u]r conditions that have come to characterize neoliberal governance" (Godrach, 2014, p. 1749).
- Creative cultural districts have been criticized as state-sponsored gentrification, pushing out residents that are less-privileged classes of varying identities, including racialized people and low-income artists.
    - For example, Bereitschaft (2014) evaluates neighbourhood change among 102 creative cultural districts in 70 metropolitan mid-sized cities across the United States, between 2000 - 2010. It was found that there were concerns about both gentrification and displacement with changes in demographic makeup (See Figure 16).
- In terms of governance, there is a concern that creative cultural districts dispro-

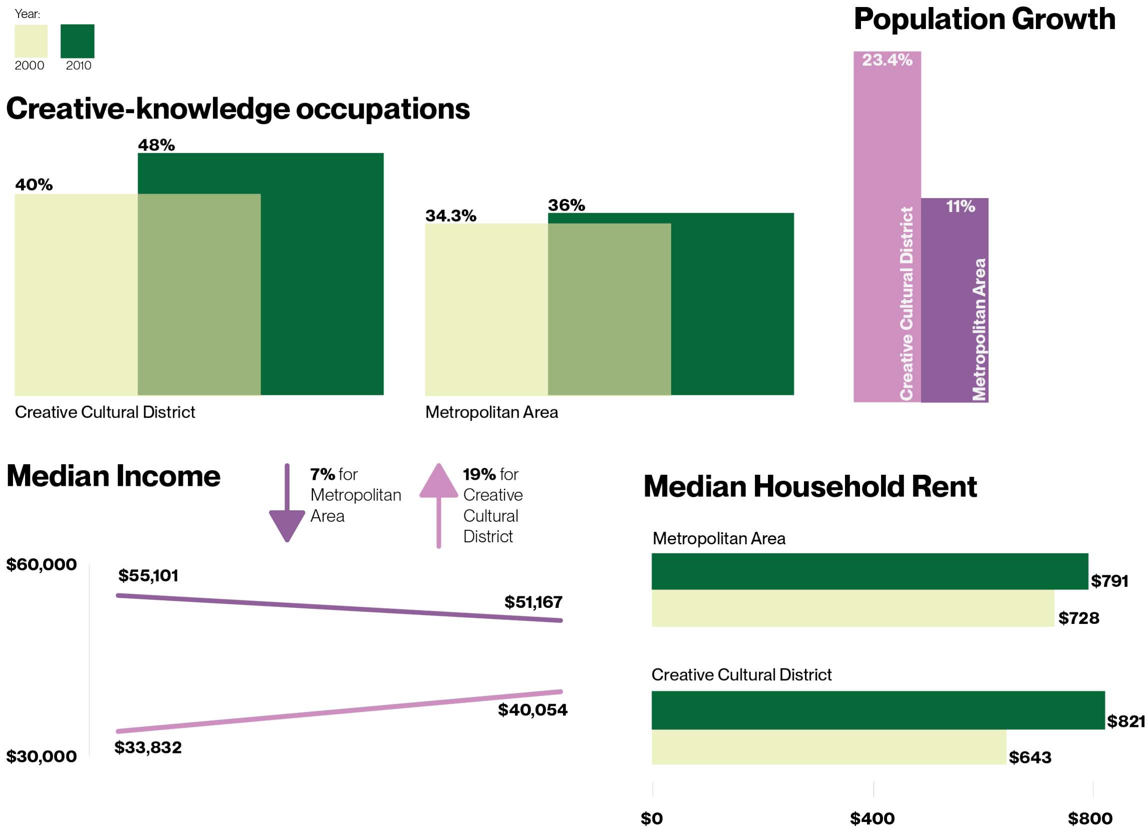


Figure 16. Key statistics from Bereitschaft's (2014) "Neighbourhood change among creative–cultural districts in mid-sized US metropolitan areas, 2000–10" study

portionately favour stakeholder groups of greater social and political capital over the identities that largely shaped the neighbourhood, namely artists and ethnic groups which are "members of Florida's 'creative core" (Ahmed et al, 2020; Bereitschaft, 2014).

2.2.4 Case Study: Franklinton, Columbus

Franklinton, Columbus's oldest neighbourhood, was once a working-class hub full of industry and blue-collar work. The neighbourhood underwent a decline due to de-industrialization, exacerbated by the construction of Highway Route 315, which effectively split the neighbourhood in half (Lagatta, 2020).

Franklinton residents living on the west side of the highway are largely low-income and renters (Lagatta, 2020). Many people in West Franklinton bear witness to, or directly experience, issues of gun violence, poverty, and other pressing issues that continue to plague the community.

East Franklinton, just across the highway, offers an increasingly different world and experience with its re-brand as the “Franklinton Arts District”: private and public investments have brought in festivals, high-end retail and residential developments, and trendy establishments such as a brewery (Ferenchik, 2012). Along with new businesses and homes, the neighbourhood has also attracted artists and new residents. At the same time, such investments in the community have improved the quality of life for many long-time residents of East Franklinton.

While revitalization efforts within Franklinton took place many times over, the creation of the Franklinton Arts District (FAD) in 2007 captivated long-lasting investments and city-wide attention to the community (Sweeney, 2014). The FDA was formed under the leadership of Jim Sweeney, the executive director of the Franklinton Development Association, an affordable housing association based in Franklinton, and Chris Sherman, a local business owner and artist.

The FAD looked to “promote creative initiatives to enrich the lives of current residents, and to bring in new residents to the area in the hopes of building a strong creative class” (Sweeney, 2014, p. 31). The FAD leveraged its assets, such as local artists and the 400 West Rich, a community arts centre and anchor institution, as part of its re-brand as an art-based NOCD. By 2012, Franklinton was targeted for revitalization in Columbus’s 20-year plan, which included the development of commercial tourist attractions, and retail and residential development (Sweeney, 2014).

Neighbourhood improvements have come with growing concerns of gentrification in east Franklinton — and its spillover effects to west Franklinton. In one case, three public housing complexes in east Franklinton were redeveloped into a high-end mixed-use development. For west Franklinton residents, they look forward to investments addressing decades of neglect, but at the same time fear they cannot reap the benefits of it. Both east and west Franklinton residents grapple with their neighbourhood becoming increasingly divided.

Figure 17. Franklinton Arts District. Source(s): Walker Evans via [Columbus Underground]

2.3 Community Development Model

2.3.1 Background

Community development is a process which engages community members to improve the well-being of their neighbourhood and the quality of life of residents through increasing community assets and individual capabilities (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Sen, 2009). A community development model uses "culture" to improve human and social capital, community cohesion, and social participation (Sacco et al., 2014).

This model tends to be utilized to transform NOCDs facing social and economic challenges into neighbourhood cultural clusters (Godrach, 2013). Specifically, these neighbourhoods have high concentrations of socially and economically vulnerable residents, and a gap in infrastructure, such as parks, amenities, and public transportation.

Zitcer et al. (2016) write that "***neighbourhood cultural clusters***" redress the lack of opportunity for artistic and cultural expression, encourages placekeeping which strengthens local ties over being attractive to outsider investors and the "visitor class", and funds projects based on advancing capabilities. Overall, NOCDs use this model to improve the livelihoods of residents in their neighbourhoods.

2.3.2 Key Characteristics

GOALS: The main goals of a community development model are largely focused on improving community residents' quality of life. However, it does not measure improved quality of life through increased incomes or job sectors. Instead, it mostly focuses on the cultural offerings and resources, as well as participation from residents.

Summary of goals for a community development model (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Sen, 2009; Godrach, 2013; Zitcer et al., 2016):

- Increase community capacity, civic engagement, and participation
- Attract non-profit cultural providers and commercial cultural firms
- Increase cultural production and arts activities while reducing barriers to participation
- Increase community and cultural assets

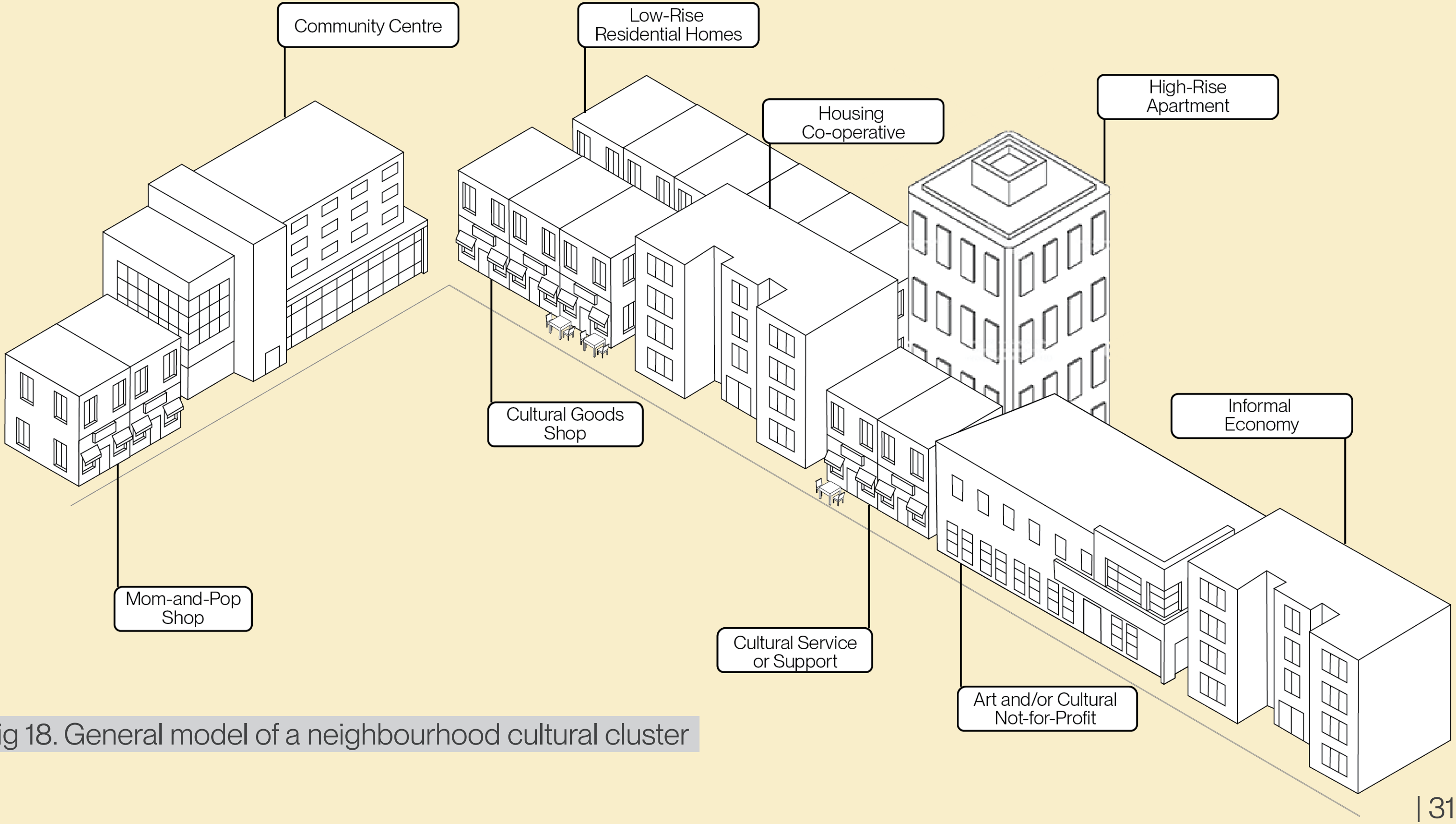


Fig 18. General model of a neighbourhood cultural cluster

Once the goals are identified, there are key focus areas and strategies to create a neighbourhood cultural cluster:

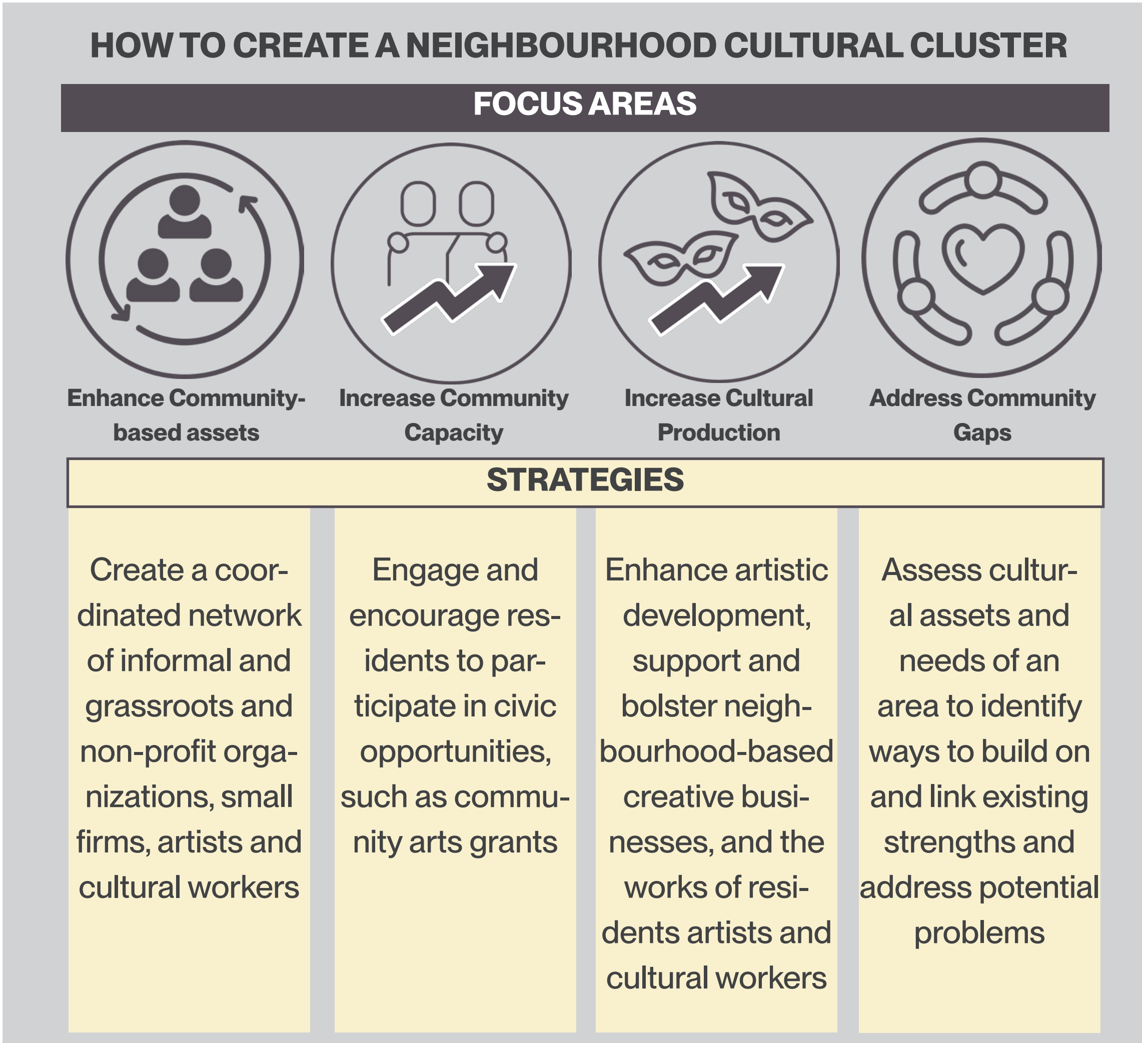


Fig 19. Focus areas and strategies identified in creating a neighbourhood cultural cluster

GOVERNANCE: Since neighbourhood cultural clusters emerge from, and are based in community, they are largely led by grassroots groups made up of residents. Thus, the governance of neighbourhood cultural clusters is "bottom-up" (Doeser and Kim, 2018). Grassroots groups are often supported by local businesses, non-profit and social service agencies, as well as municipal social planning actors (Godrach, 2013). Figure 20 identifies who is typically engaged in the governance of a neighbourhood cultural cluster.

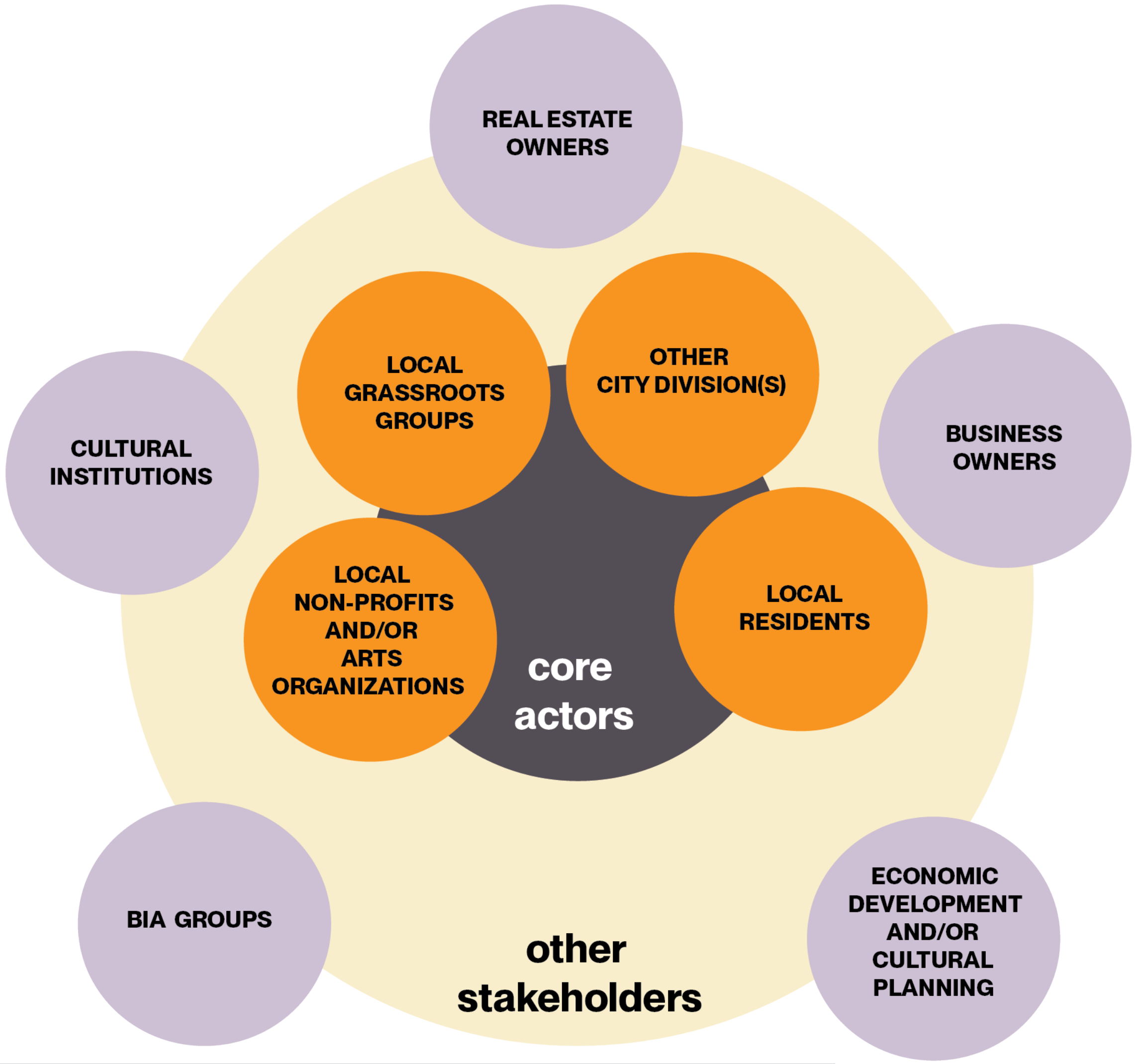


Fig 20. Main actors governing neighbourhood cultural clusters

2.3.3 Equity impacts

While this model has the potential to be empowering and engaging for equity-deserving groups, its equity impacts require a critical analysis. Through a community development model, neighbourhood cultural clusters look to provide equity-deserving groups with more access to cultural resources and assets. At the same time, there is no guarantee of more cultural participation, especially if participants lack the capacity for engagement (such as working more than one job or facing language barriers).

As well, neighbourhood cultural clusters lack the support from private and public actors to address systemic neglect such as infrastructure gaps and low economic development. Simultaneously, there are concerns that neighbourhood investments, like street beautification, or stimulating employment and cultural sectors, would attract the attention of developers or increase rents.

The equity impacts are as summarized:

- From a market perspective, residents in "neighbourhood cultural clusters" may not experience the economic development associated with improving the cultural landscape of an area. Specifically, there is often a lack of a "cultural consumer base" due to concerns of "poor security, low street traffic, difficulty connecting with potential participants and customers in other parts of the city, and lack of technical expertise on how to grow their businesses" (Stern and Seifert, 2010, p. 275).
- Participants in "neighbourhood cultural clusters" may have a limited interest in the quality of cultural content produced. Instead, they are more inclined to prioritize social rewards and inclusive, easygoing forms of cultural participation. This emphasis on social validation and accessibility may lead to a decline in cultural innovation, originality, and sophistication both in terms of content production and audience demand (Sacco, 2014).
- The redress of many structural issues and gaps in neighbourhood development, such as economic disinvestment and a lack of public amenities and infrastructure, could be bolstered by public and municipal support. However, there is often a lack of this support for neighbourhood cultural clusters, limiting the effectiveness of community efforts. (Stern and Seifert, 2013). Overall, stagnation can also be a threat to fostering and sustaining culture in a NOCD as well.

2.3.4 Case Study: Norris Square, Philadelphia

Throughout the 1970s and on, many neighbourhoods across Philadelphia struggled to maintain their vibrancy due to industrial decline. Urban blight was especially felt in predominantly racialized neighbourhoods like Norris Square, where a large Puerto-Rican community settled in the area since the 1950s (Thompson, 2019).

Economic hardships left residents of Norris Square with little opportunity, and many entered the drug trade or fell victim to addiction and drug use. By the 1980s, the drug epidemic was so severe that the neighbourhood park, Norris Square Park, was known as “Needle Park” (Thompson, 2019).

Trash, needles, and glass flooded the streets as the city continued to neglect the neighbourhood. While city services and support were absent, some passionate residents came together to improve the community’s conditions; in the 1990s, a local Puerto Rican women’s group called “Grupo Motivos”, made up of Norris Square residents, came together to reclaim the neighbourhood and redress the neglect.

Norris Square Park, colloquially known as “Needle Park”, was transformed by Grupo Motivos. Needles were removed from six vacant lots and replaced with flower beds and vegetable gardens (Thompson, 2019). Cultural artifacts displayed throughout the park, the creation of murals, and cultural programming relevant to Puerto Rican and African cultures were also part of community development efforts (Stern and Seifert, 2013).

While the efforts of Grupo Motivos and other community members have made positive impacts on the neighbourhood, their success and the sustainability of their efforts are undermined due to a lack of public and philanthropic support.

Site-specific urban regeneration projects can be a catalyst for strengthening cultural infrastructure in a neighbourhood, but first require to be viewed as legitimate enough (such as being commercially attractive) to be further supported (Dantes, 2022). However, Stern and Seifert (2013) analyze that neighbourhood cultural clusters are often not seen as a “real” cultural district” (p. 20) and are thus ignored in cultural investments.

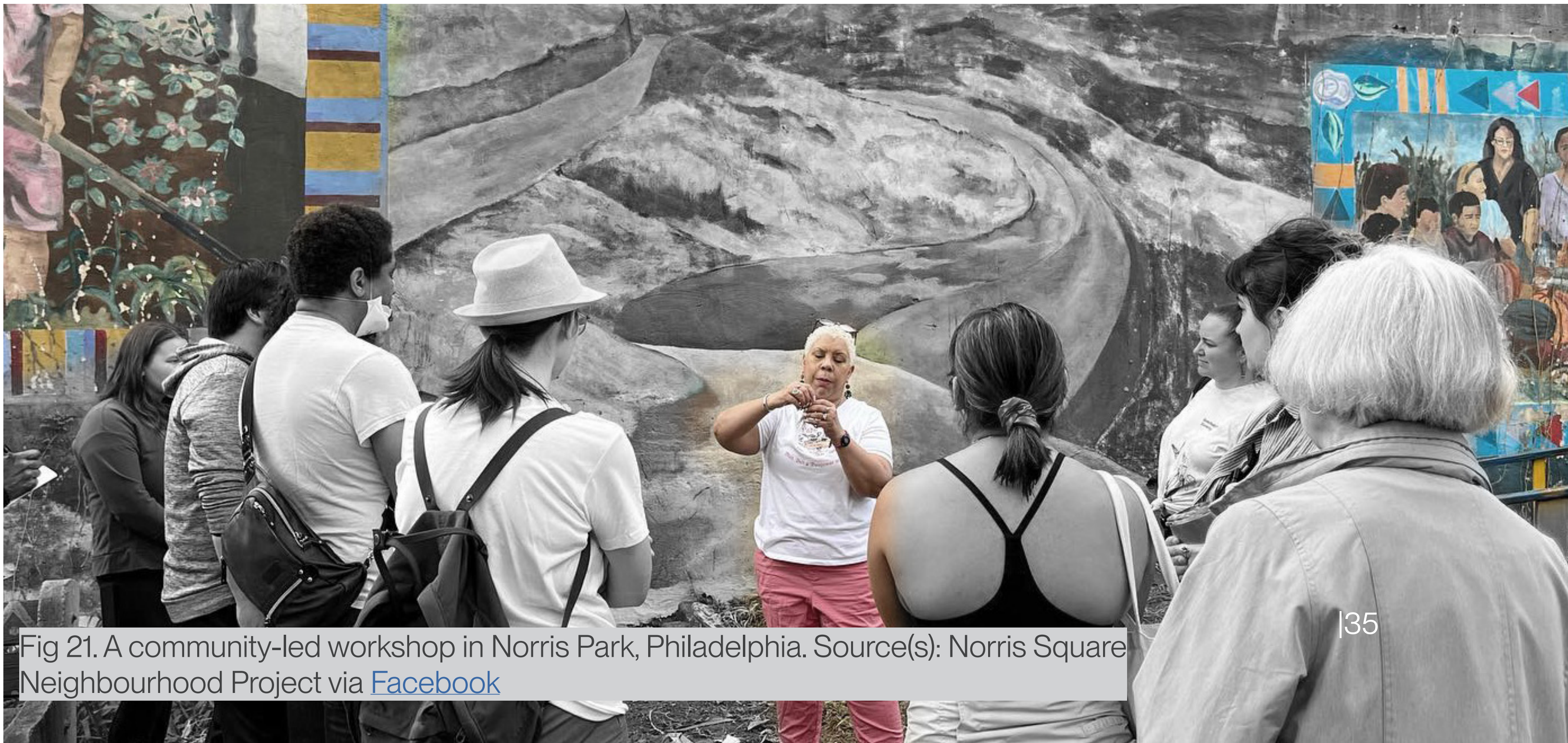


Fig 21. A community-led workshop in Norris Park, Philadelphia. Source(s): Norris Square Neighbourhood Project via Facebook

2.4 Equity-Forward Model

2.4.1 - Background

In more recent years, there has been an emerging equity-forward model for cultural planning and cultural districts programs. PolicyLink (n.d.) refers to this model as "cultural equity", where an equity-forward cultural district "values the unique and collective cultures of diverse communities and supports their existence in physical spaces, in public policies and investment, and expression in civic and spiritual life." An equity-forward model is at the nexus of social planning, economic development, and cultural planning. An idealized cityscape for an equity-forward cultural district is displayed in Fig 22.

2.4.2 Key Characteristics

GOALS: The primary objectives of an equity-forward model are centred around enhancing the quality of life through cultural means. It also recognizes and addresses systemic barriers that impede or jeopardize cultural engagement. As an equity-forward model is fairly new, Lord (2019) identifies that there is a need for future research to clarify what are the measurable ways that progress toward equity in cultural district plans can be assessed.

Summary of goals for an equity-forward model (Policylink, n.d.; City of New Haven, 2022)

- Create conditions under which all people can maintain and express their culture
- Change existing cultures, especially within institutions, that do not recognize and enhance the quality of life for all people
- Reverse economic disinvestment and redistribute resources and decision-making to people systematically under-resourced
- Explicitly addresses legacies of historical marginalization expressed in the built environment and socio-economic landscape

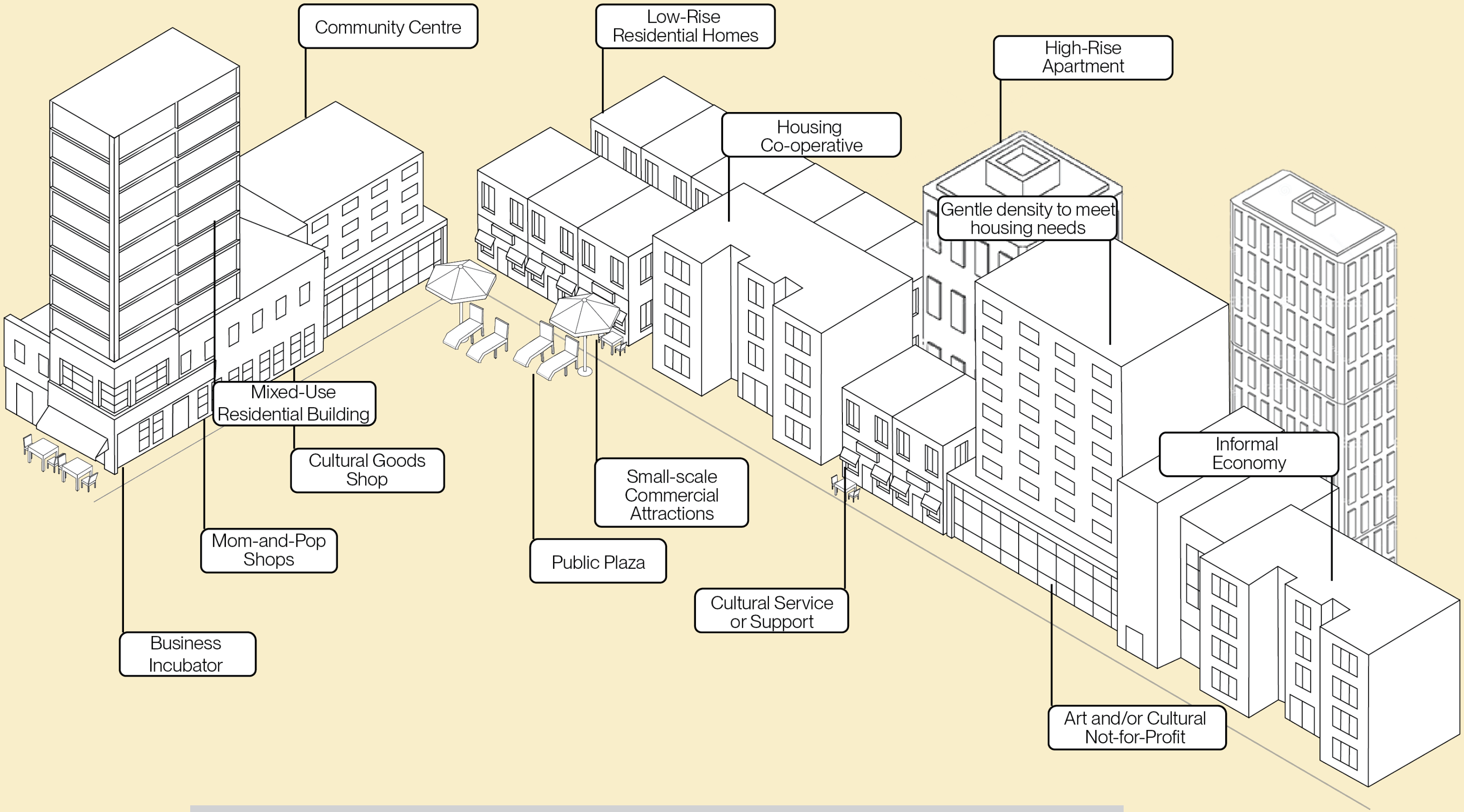


Fig 22. Ideal model for an equity-forward cultural district neighbourhood

Once the goals are identified, there are key focus areas and strategies to create an equity-forward cultural district:

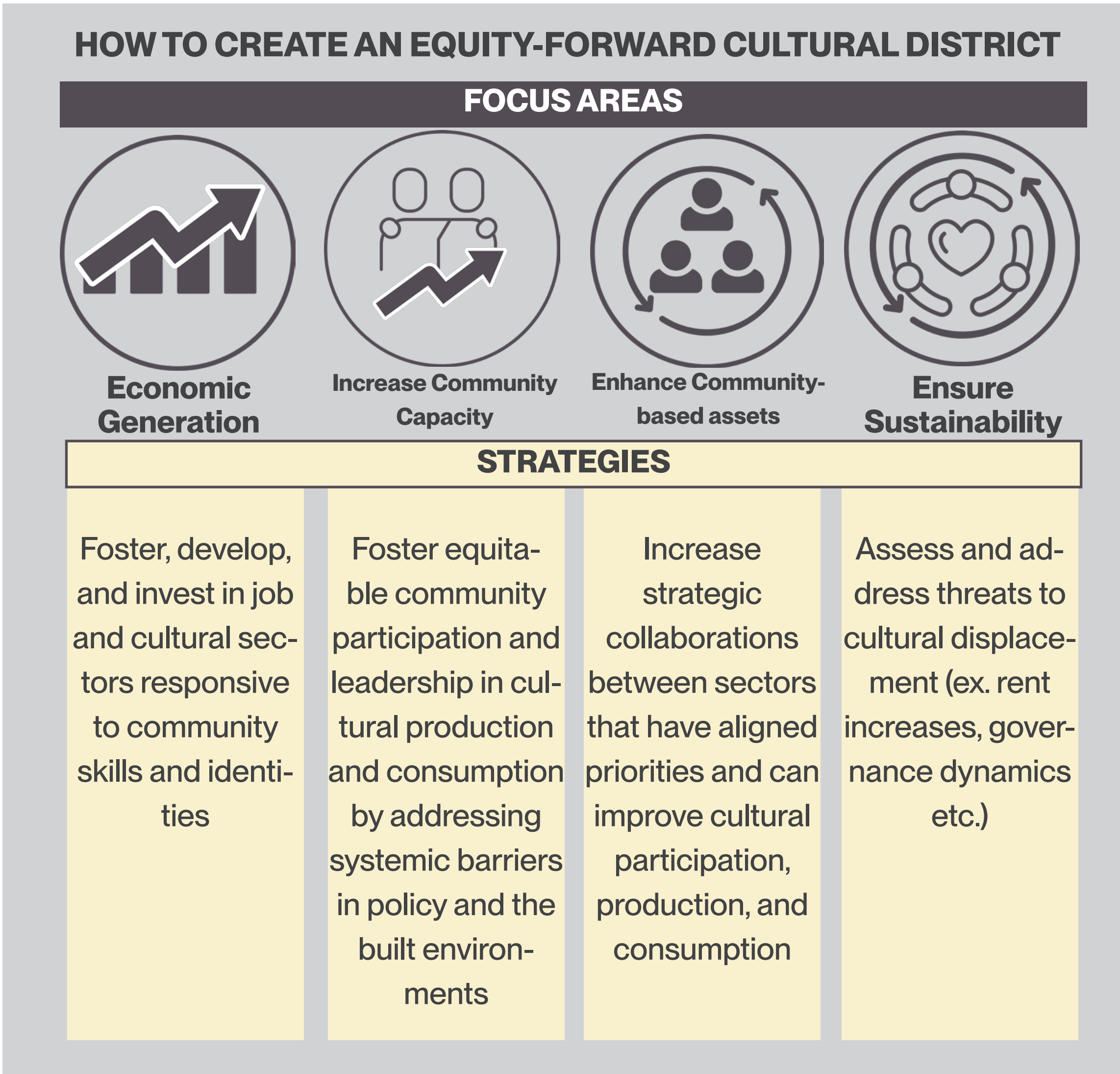


Fig 23. Focus areas and strategies identified in creating an equity-forward cultural district

As expressed in the goals, focus areas, and strategies of an equity-forward model for cultural districts, it is recognized that components outside of conventional cultural planning play a role in facilitating communities in their cultural participation, production, and consumption. Dante's (2023) study on furthering equity, diversity, and inclusion in cultural planning shares the components usually considered in cultural planning (in the purple circles), and compares it with what components need to be considered for cultural planning to be equitable (in the green circles) (Figure 24).

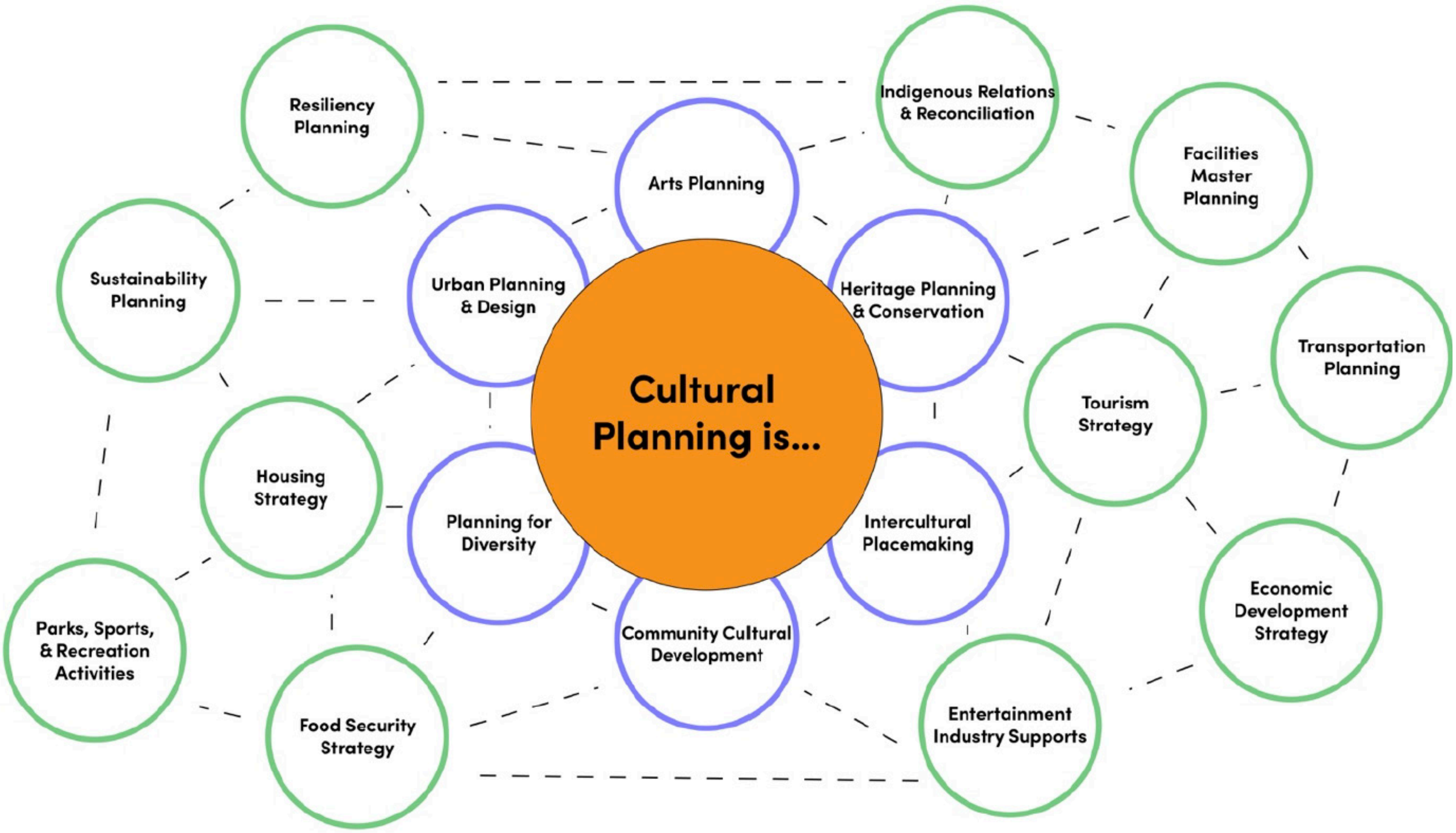


Fig 24. Cultural planning components expanded to consider EDI, from Dante's (2023) "Integrating Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion into Canadian Cultural Planning" study

An equity-forward model and an equity-forward cultural districts plan thus attempt to expand the definition of what is considered a component of culture — where housing, food security, and other basic needs are required to be met in order for culture to thrive.

GOVERNANCE: The governance of an equity-forward cultural districts looks to balance bottom-up and top-down actors. From the top down, a municipality creates a cultural district program to support existing NOCDs facing systemic challenges. This plan should be informed by community stakeholders, including the process of how an equity-forward cultural district should be formed (ex. application-based versus pre-selected from the municipality, or hybrid).

The municipality would have an inter-agent approach to governance; as noted, the usual municipal actors involved in cultural districts are the economic development and cultural planning divisions. However, in an equity-forward cultural district, it is recognized that different departments such as housing, health, transportation, and parks can aid in fostering arts and culture (PolicyLink, n.d.).

From the bottom-up, grassroots organizers, business owners, and other stakeholders would form a steering committee, or a similar governance structure, to have ongoing engagement and dialogue with city divisions to monitor its progress. Figure 25 shows that both bottom-up and top-down actors play a core role in the governance of an equity-forward district.

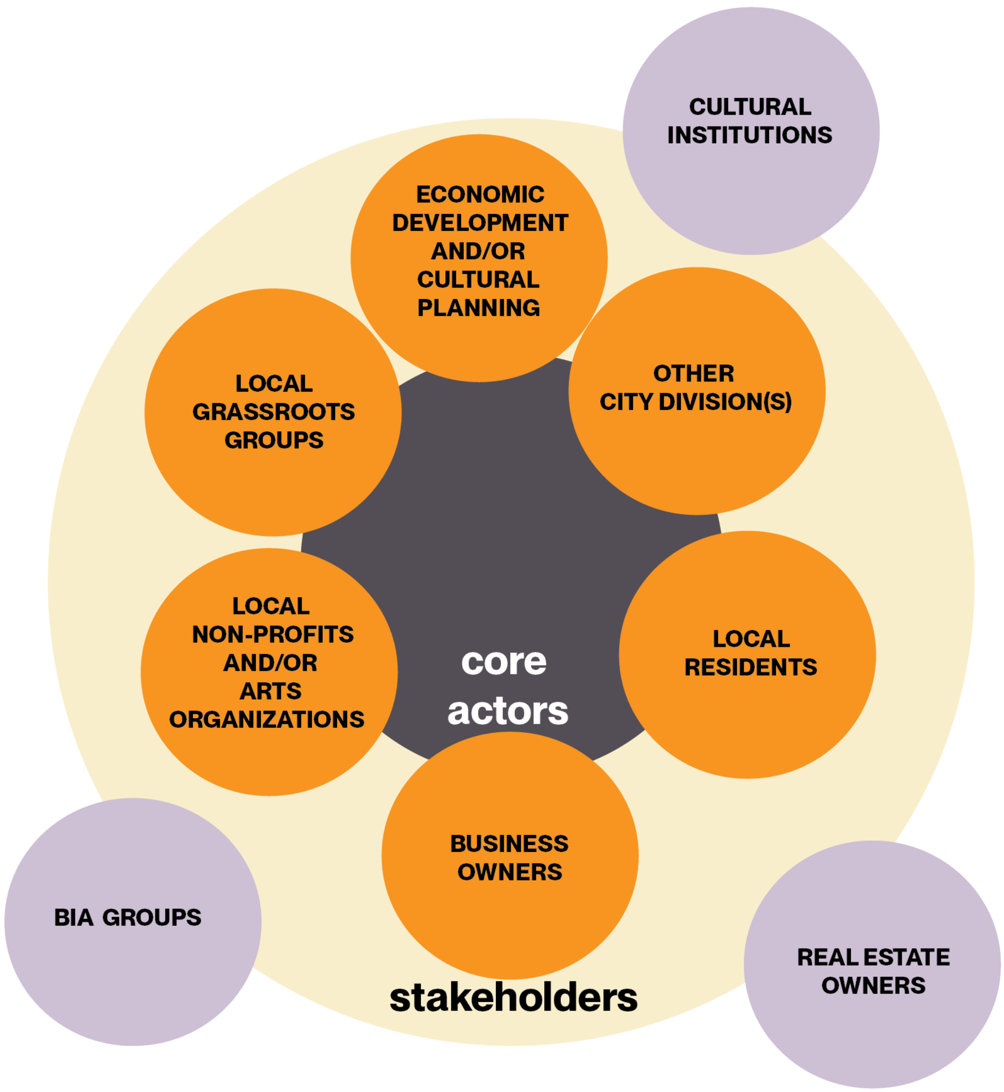


Fig 25. Main actors governing equity-forward cultural districts

2.4.3 Equity-Impact:

While an equity-forward cultural district seeks to precisely avoid negative social impacts, there are still considerations to be discussed:

- No matter how robust an equity-forward cultural district is, there are limits to what city regulations can do to protect it, such as which types of restaurants and the clientele they attract. Civil society, residents, and grassroots workers fill in these governance gaps since there is an existing trust built within the community, but a reliance or assumption in this dynamic can be unsustainable (Veltman, 2018).
- The formalizing of an equity-forward cultural districts plan, and the process of transforming an NOCD into an equity-forward cultural districts causes concerns for a lack of grassroots focus and community inclusion. In particular, civic engagement requires a level of savviness to navigate municipal tools, resources, and processes that cannot be assumed to be accessible to different marginalized groups. How much knowledge and responsibility is expected of community stakeholders to shape a cultural districts plan without city divisions being overly paternalistic or overly assuming people's capacity?
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and other social impacts are being increasingly considered in cultural districts plans and cultural planning. In Loh et al.'s (2022) "Our Diversity Is Our Strength" research, the arts and cultural plans in 64 American cities were analyzed in terms of how they integrated concepts of DEI. It was found that plans were more likely to discuss diversity and inclusion than equity. As well, there was a lack of specific strategies for the equitable distribution of arts and cultural resources. Thus, an equity-forward plan must be clear and fulsome in its strategies to ensure positive equity impacts are translated and tangible.
- Doeser and Kim (2018) find that top-down approaches to cultural district governance are "associated with a healthy boost to finances during the establishment of the district, which then become vulnerable as funding is reduced over time or political priorities shift" (p. 23). A long-term plan for funding in an equity-forward cultural district is especially imperative to ensure it is both sustained and sustainable.

2.4.4. Case Study:

The usual case study section seen in each model is not included since Chapter 3 will serve as an in-depth illustration of what aspiring equity-forward plans are.

Ch. 3: Case Studies

The previous chapter reviewed four different cultural district typologies. It specifically explored their key characteristics and their potential equity impact.

This chapter identifies two cities — San Francisco, CA and Minneapolis, MN — which have put together their respective equity-forward cultural districts plan, relevant to the City of Toronto's mandate. It will identify which elements, if any, of the four reviewed typologies are present in their plans, to give insight on their potential equity impacts. Such an analysis will offer "good practices" for the City of Toronto to learn from and consider in their equity-forward cultural districts plan.

3.1 San Francisco, CA

Background

Prior to the formation of San Francisco's cultural district plan, the city had an official designation for cultural districts in the city. Beginning in 2013, Japantown, one of the oldest ethnic enclaves in San Francisco—and all of the United States—was recognized for its cultural significance and received an official cultural district designation. In the following years, other neighbourhoods and areas contributing to San Francisco's rich cultural landscape also received their designation.

However, an official cultural district designation fell short of responding to these communities' concerns about the growing pressures of gentrification and displacement. After much community organizing and advocacy to create a comprehensive program to support these districts (and future cultural districts), a formal program was created in 2018 (City and County of San Francisco, 2023).

Key Characteristics

GOALS: As part of San Francisco's cultural district plan, the following three goals are outlined (City and County of San Francisco, n.d.):

1. Stabilize: Preserve and promote diverse communities' cultural assets, events, and way of life.
2. Strengthen: Amplify and support the communities' cultural traditions and

improve the quality of life for its members.
3. Streamline: Coordinate City and community information, partnerships, and resources.

With these identified goals, there are key focus areas and strategies to create a cultural district:

HOW TO CREATE A CULTURAL DISTRICT IN SAN FRANCISCO	
Focus Areas	**Strategies**
Historic Preservation	Preserve and develop cultural and historic buildings, businesses, organizations, (traditions, arts, events & district aesthetics.
Tenant Protections	Protect tenants from displacement & promote affordable housing & homeownership.
Arts & Culture	Attract & support artists and cultural enterprises
Economic & Workforce Development	Promote jobs, tourism and economic opportunities that stabilize the district's economy.
Land Use	Create city regulations & programs that support businesses & industries that advance the Cultural District.
Cultural Competency	Promote culturally competent & appropriate City services, policies and narratives.

Fig 26. Focus areas and strategies identified in creating a cultural district in San Francisco

GOVERNANCE: For NOCDs to become cultural districts, there is an open call for community organizations or groups to apply based on meeting San Fransisco's criteria: the neighbourhood must have a unique cultural heritage or history produced by and for the local community. The criteria also specify that these NOCDs formed due to structural institutional forces which factor in why people of certain identities reside or frequent these neighbourhoods (City and County of San Francisco, n.d.). The qualification process is as follows (Mitchell, 2021):

1. A NOCD has a District Supervisor (DS) that acts as a representative for the neighbourhood. A District Supervisor is an active resident or a community worker within a NOCD. A person is appointed as a DS by active community members and grassroots groups.
2. The DS forms a steering committee consisting of business owners, community leaders and property owners to establish geographic boundaries.
3. After a series of meetings to confirm the boundary, legislation is drafted and presented to a Board of Supervisors from the City. This process takes between six months to a year.
4. A Board of Supervisors from the City works with the steering committee to create a Master Plan.

Once a cultural district is formed, it is largely overseen by a non-profit governing body which hires or votes in community members to fill different staff roles in the governance of this new cultural district. For example, Figure 22 highlights the governance of Calle 24, the Latino Cultural District in San Francisco.

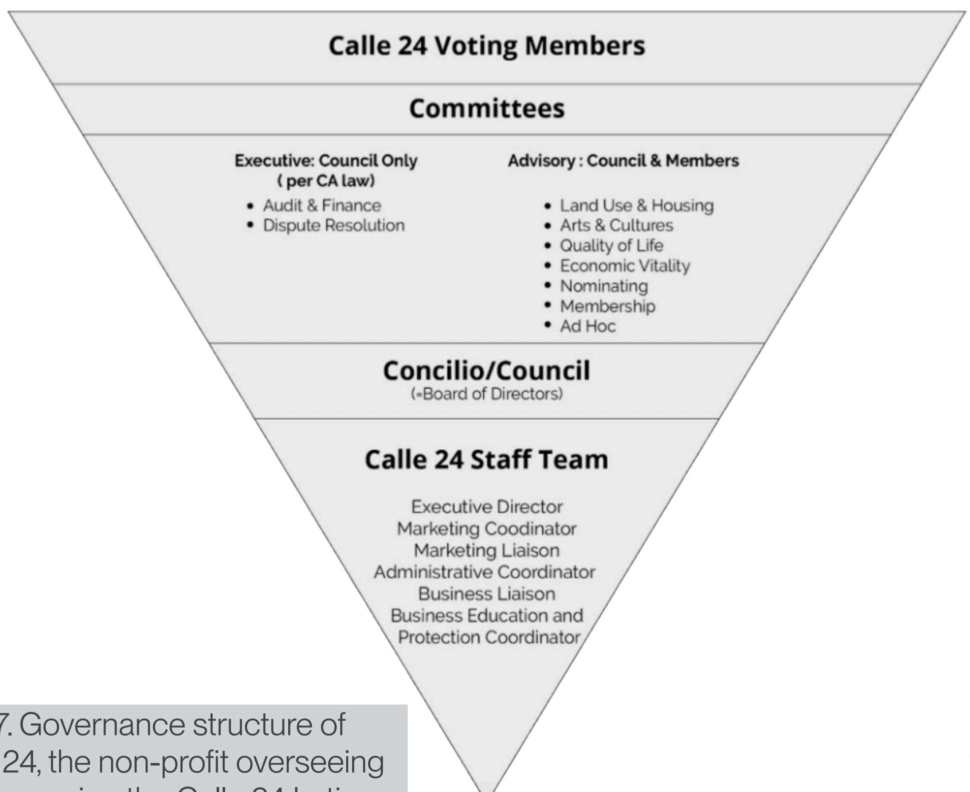


Fig 27. Governance structure of Calle 24, the non-profit overseeing and managing the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District. Source(s): Calle 24

Figure 28 summarizes the general key actors in the governance of an established cultural district (City and County of San Francisco, 2023).

Fig 28. Main actors governing San Francisco's cultural districts

Elements of each cultural district model

The identified goals for San Francisco's cultural districts program echo the goals identified in the Equity-forward model, namely the language around the preservation of culture and cross-sector collaborations.

Interestingly, the strategies and focus areas borrow language and conventions from the components of different models. For example, the focus area of "economic and workforce development" looks at strategies around tourism, which parralel the Economic Development model; at the same time, it contextualizes tourism with the intention of stabilizing the economy, which is a more holistic approach.

Additionally, the City has focus areas and strategies which emphasize cross-sector collaboration outside of economic development and cultural planning, like land use and housing. Having these City divisions involved in the implementation of a cultural district plan allows for a focus on tenant protection and affordable housing.

Last, the formation of a non-profit body to govern a cultural district is the same governance structure observed in the Economic Development model. However, the core actors who fill staff roles are significantly different: “bottom-up” actors like a local resident instead of a “top-down” representative from a large cultural institution fill these roles.

Overall, San Francisco’s cultural districts program reads as comprehensive and promising, although there needs to be further research on the implementation and effectiveness of their plan. While the plan has focus areas and a governing structure that may produce some adverse equity outcomes (ie. evokes aspects of the Economic Development typology) it actively considers “bottom-up” actors in decision-making roles.

3.2 Minneapolis, MN

Background

Prior to the formation of a cultural district program, different neighbourhoods with high concentrations of immigrant and racialized residents worked to improve their community, focusing on inclusive economic development and cultural expression. Beginning in 2011, Native American community leaders, real estate groups, and supportive services collaborated with community members on transforming a dilapidated area, home to many Native American residents, into a vibrant neighbourhood bolstering Native American arts, entrepreneurship, and social services.

This strip became renamed as the American Indian Cultural Corridor as part of its revitalization. The American Indian Cultural Corridor became an important precedent for what other racialized and historically marginalized communities could do to revitalize their own neighbourhoods (Bui, n.d.).

Figure 29. The American Indian Cultural Corridor. Source(s): Cameron Wittig via New York Times

As different community groups mobilized to improve their respective NOCDs throughout Minneapolis, there were growing concerns that their efforts would rather benefit speculators; data showed that over 40% of neighbourhoods in Minneapolis were showing signs of gentrification between 2000 and 2015, becoming whiter and more affluent (Lee, 2019).

As a response to these concerning trends, community groups advocated for the City of Minneapolis to support their efforts. City Council adopted a Cultural Districts Policy as part of the City of Minneapolis's Comprehensive Plan in 2018. A Cultural Districts Program was later finalized in 2020 (City of Minneapolis, 2022a).

Key Characteristics

GOALS: As part of Minneapolis's cultural districts plan, the following four goals are identified (City of Minneapolis, 2022b):

1. Advance racial equity by protecting racial diversity, uplifting BIPOC and immigrant cultural identities, and assisting areas affected by institutionalized racist and discriminatory practices (ex. redlining).
2. Prevent displacement by rehabilitating commercial and residential spaces, as well as increase affordability.
3. Fuel business and job development by supporting inclusive economic development and creating new opportunities and jobs for residents.
4. Foster cultural development by celebrating and highlighting the cultural identity of different communities.
5. Establish destinations to make cultural districts appealing and memorable to local visitors, as well as tourists.

With these identified goals, there are key focus areas and strategies to create a cultural district:

HOW TO CREATE A CULTURAL DISTRICT IN MINNEAPOLIS	
Focus Areas	**Strategies**
Cultivate and supporting cultural assets	Co-create strategies to elevate the district's cultural and linguistic identity
Address community gaps	Reprioritize city policies, resources, and departmental work to accerate racially equitable outcomes
Economic development and activity	Promote ethical tourism by aligning and leveraging funding and programs
Affordable housing	Prioritize the implementation of cooperative-based economic and housing development strategies such as cooperatively-owned housing and commercial land trusts
Community ownership	Partner with POCII entrepreneurs and business owners to create new tools that help them retain and expand commercial activities.

Fig 30. Focus areas and strategies identified in creating a cultural district in Minneapolis

GOVERNANCE: The creation of Minneapolis's cultural districts plan was informed by a steering committee, made up of active community residents (City of Minneapolis, 2022a). From here, it was determined that the City of Minneapolis would pre-select neighbourhoods to become cultural districts, rather than have open applications.

In particular, the City identified geographic areas within a defined "Area of Concentrated Poverty," areas which have a significant demographic of Black, Indigenous, or racialized residents and/or rich cultural and/or linguistic identity, areas that have an existing concentration of community assets, and areas that are accessible by walking and accessible by public transportation (Bui, n.d.).

Once these NOCDs were selected as designated cultural districts, the City's Community Planning and Economic Development division worked with other City Divisions, residents, business owners, and community partners to create a Master Plan.

The ongoing governance of an established cultural district is carried out through the formation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC), a "non-profit organization created to support and revitalize communities." A CDC acts as a unifying community voice and would be responsible for important decision-making concerns. For example, the 38th Street CDC is responsible for representing the neighbourhood in community benefits agreements, managing future developments through community ownership schemes, and collaborating with community partners on projects, events and other governance responsibilities in the district (City of Minneapolis, 2021).

Elements of each cultural district model

Much like San Francisco's plan and the equity-forward model, the identified goals for Minneapolis's cultural districts program prominently include language around advancing culture through improving community members' quality of life.

While their strategies and focus areas consider different economic development components like tourism and expanding commercial activities, this plan rather emphasizes redressing systemic neglect.

As well, their governance structure also reflects the sentiments just observed. Cultural districts in Minneapolis are governed by Community Development Corporations (CDCs). CDCs often form in low-income or struggling neighbourhoods throughout America to legitimize and facilitate community planning (Case Western Reserve University, 2023).

This analysis brings up an important question around whether a cultural districts plan is required for the City of Minneapolis, rather than just building an equity-based master plan to redress legacies of institutional neglect these NOCDs have faced and are facing. The strategies, focus areas, and governance suggest that while culture is perhaps a driving force in the revitalization of different NOCDs, community longevity and well-being are the most important.

Ch. 4: Lessons for Toronto

As the City of Toronto pursues the creation of an equity-forward cultural district plan, it must learn from current models used to promote culture in NOCDs:

The economic development model effectively co-opts a neighbourhood and its culture. It can easily displace businesses and residents who do not conform to the model and mainstream acceptance of culture. As well, it is acknowledged in practice and academic studies that there has been an institutionalized practice of ignoring, or not considering, the social impacts of arts and cultural engagement given the priority of economic development (Crossick, 2019, p. 11).

The creative city model explicitly accelerates gentrification, using culture as 'bait' with little concern for local communities. Certain local businesses and cultural industries can also benefit from a new demographic of greater social capital and wealth, which bring little concern as to the equity impacts of limiting cultural participation.

Lastly, the community development model has the most concern for improving the quality of life for the local community and ensuring cultural participation, but it is not holistic. Specifically, a community development model is unsustainable if it does not consider workforce and economic development, which enhances the cultural participation, production, and consumption of local community members (Stern and Seifert, 2010). As well, a lack of connection and engagement from non-local community members can cause problematic spatial repercussions in the "ghettoization" of a neighbourhood. Equity considerations are required not just within, but also between, neighbourhoods.

Lessons

On a positive note, there is an emerging equity-forward model, and several cities have created cultural district plans for their NOCDs based on this model. While this model is still in its infancy, the two case studies analyzed provide key lessons for the City of Toronto to learn from:

1) Both market and non-market goals, strategies and focus areas should be considered in an equity-forward cultural plan.

The City of San Francisco and the City of Minneapolis employ conventional strategies like economic generation and attracting outside cultural industries, acknowledging that economic development is an important component of city-building. At the same time, non-market and government interventions, like co-operative housing and rent control, are recommended to protect communities from gentrification and displacement threats as their communities become “more valuable” in the eyes of speculators.

This market/non-market hybrid approach is also supported by Stern and Seifert (2013) who assert government and philanthropic interventions can compensate for market failure, like the financialization of housing, rather than reinforce market forces to promote long-term social inclusion (p. 20).

2) Commercial and community-based forms of culture are both valid, however, the latter should be prioritized.

In fact, it is important to note that commercial and community-based forms of culture are not mutually exclusive since community institutions, like mom-and-pop shops, could gain popularity and become a commercial/conventional attraction for “outsiders”.

The City of San Francisco and the City of Minneapolis understand the importance of tourism and place branding in maintaining the vibrancy of a cultural district. Their focus areas and strategies aim to foster culture within the community while inviting cultural exchange and expansion of cultural engagement. In agreement, Stern and Seifert (2013) argue that cultural engagement needs to be defined more broadly in an equity-forward plan to “include conventional notions of high art as well as the popular culture and folk traditions of all groups that inhabit the contemporary city” (p. 20).

3) An equity-forward cultural district plan also requires land-use planning, transportation planning, social planning, housing planning, and so on.

Culture is deeply intertwined with people's livelihoods and quality of life. The City of San Francisco and the City of Minneapolis recognize that the practice and existence of culture in a NOCD is conditional upon the community's ability to stay and have a good quality of life in their neighbourhood, thus considering access to housing and different social services are as important as fostering cultural sectors.

4) A governance structure which ensures that decision-making is given to "bottom-up" actors is critical.

The City of San Francisco's and the City of Minneapolis's cultural districts plans give legitimacy to community leadership by using conventional and institutional governance structures while having community members in these decision-making roles. At the same time, the establihsment of governance in an equity-forward cultural district is the most challenging to approach because "bottom-up" actors are not a monolith.

As an example, Ahmed et al. (2021) discuss the dynamics of Toronto's Downtown Chinatown, stating "various groups have claimed to stand for Chinatown over the years, and this space has always been a constant negotiation of disparate community values" (p. 9) while emphasizing that seniors, street vendors, tenants, and workers have long been excluded from conversations and decision-making in Downtown Chinatown.

Thus, the City of Toronto must be diligent in ensuring that community-based governance engages multiple "bottom-up" voices and includes the most vulnerable groups. It also needs to consider and learn what tools and resources vulnerable groups require in order to have meaningful participation.

Limitations to Equity-Forward Cultural Districts Plans

First, the analysis and lessons drawn from the equity-forward cultural districts case studies are limited to plans, rather than the execution of these plans, since their implementation is fairly new. While they provide important insight and lessons for the City of Toronto to learn from, there is a need for further research to see the effectiveness these plans have in addressing cultural displacement. For example, Bereitschaft's (2014) study on demographic structures over time in a neighbourhood can be reproduced for equity-forward cultural districts.

Additionally, culture is incredibly challenging to plan for and manage at a policy and planning level. Within a neighbourhood, culture develops organically from the communities that live and work within a community, and dynamics can change from both market and non-market forces. This raises the question of whether cultural district plans have enough flexibility to honestly reflect the evolution of culture versus the "museumification" of cultures, leaning towards "inauthentic" attempts to promote culture in a neighbourhood.

As a final consideration, to add to the previous point, the City of Minneapolis's plan puts forward an important question about whether district plans should be "cultural plans" or just "equitable plans". Despite the potential cultural significance and value that a neighbourhood could contribute to a city, it is important to stress that municipalities should also invest in neglected neighbourhoods without the incentive or seduction of "culture"; good cities are places where people can simply live and experience a good quality of life.

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