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A CRADLE FOR CREATIVITY

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ABSTRACT

The Creative City confronts us with some contextual questions: how is the spark of creativity ignited, how do we invest in stable and durable communities, and how do we incorporate local crafts, skills and traditions? How do we get all the members of the community to collaborate, rich or poor?

This essay explores the preconditions for the Creative City by critically analyzing both the theory and the way this concept is given shape in the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

The books 'Creative City 'by C. Landry and 'Creative Class' by R. Florida, teach us that two conditions must be present, in order to kindle an economic boom: (1) individual genius with no other means of existence than creativity; and (2) some sort of solid structure; organization or community, where a surplus in time or money has been accumulated.

The way The Netherlands adopts these ideas of 'Creative City Development' is criticized from two angles: (A) 'Creative City' is seen as a disguise of a neo-liberal government that retreats from investing in community building. It shows how the city of Rotterdam, is turning these ideas into slogans of 'City-marketing', by only polishing one side of the medal: How to please the white, well-educated, and creative members of a cultural elite and use them as representatives of the city, ignoring the majority of a middle and lower class population. In this way Rotterdam believes it is making the transformation from a 'Working City' into a 'Cultural City'. (B) 'Creative City' is a symptom of a latent fear, stemming from the question: 'What do we actually do for a living?'

We count on 'Innovation'. ...But innovation of what?

Creativity without a cradle to hatch it remains a mere fantasy.

ROTTERDAM: A CRADLE FOR CREATIVITY

Originally Rotterdam was a city of stevedores and even more important: of immigrants. Hard work and sweat gave the city its reputation as 'Labour-City'. The harbour grew to be one of the largest in the world and the city expanded with it. From the Dutch point of view it became a metropolitan city, an important hub in the transfer of goods between East and West. The city had approximately 600,000 inhabitants of which the majority was young and in the low income bracket. It was also a city of which almost half of the population was of foreign descent. The workers lived on the South side of the river Maas, the middle class, the harbour-barons and captains of industry lived on the North side. This strong spatial and social division has only been subjected to change within the last 10 years The second world war had proved to be a disaster for the city and its inhabitants. Heavily bombed,

1- Kop van Zuid   2- Wilhelminapier
3- St Job Harbour   4- AVL- ville (Lieshout)
5- van Nelle factory   6- RDM harbour
7- Afrikaanderwijk

Figure 1. Conceptual Map

the city was in ruins. In rebuilding the city, Rotterdam marked its mentality, one that is still recognizable in the way it is managed today; practical, sober, but mingled with the strong belief that everything is 'makeable'. City governors, planners, architects and even artists saw the opportunity to build the most modern city in Europe. The 'Lijnbaan' in the centre with its mix of housing and shopping became an example at the international congress of the CIAM. The modern division of functions was introduced in a non-dogmatic, efficient way. Architects and city-planners from all over the world visited the city to admire its achievements. Rotterdam earned name and fame; a laboratory in search of the modern city. The new quarters, Pendrecht and Alexanderpolder, were food for thought for the CIAM meetings 7-8-9 and 10.

Modernists believed in the education and elevation of the common people. 'Light, air, and space' were considered key values in the environment of new social housing. Artists contributed to the quality of public space. Although much effort was given to a rational and standardized production of housing, the demand for dwellings was still overwhelming. More and cheaper housing was needed. Gradually, rational became synonymous with minimalist. Art was seen as superfluous and New Realism turned into cheapness. In the 70's the town became a tough place to live. Large numbers of under-educated workmen moved into town. Maintenance was postponed. Quarters became slums.

To cope with all problems, at the end of the decade Rotterdam invented 'City-renewal'. Where other cities had chosen to demolish old buildings and create new ones, Rotterdam decided to renovate, often in cooperation with the inhabitants. In the areas waiting to be rebuilt, deserted barns and factories provided much needed spaces where artists, architects and street-corner workers could work. Rotterdam attracted creative people 'avant la lettre'. There was even a sense of competition with the culturally superior Amsterdam. Rotterdam was the place to be: rough, tough, cheap and real. In the slipstream of Koolhaas' OMA, many architects like MVRDV, West 8 and Neutelings followed. Many internationally known artists and entrepreneurs in fashion, music and IT came to, and stayed in, Rotterdam.

The Housing and Urban Planning Department DS+V Rotterdam, in cooperation with Riek Bakkers' Office BVR, acted keenly and vigorously when they had decided that the southern bank of the Maas had to be developed. This forgotten part of town, where half the population lived around the harbours, was ready to be revitalized; now the harbour activity had moved out to larger areas near the sea. Ambitions were high; where a normal bridge would have done, the 'Erasmus Bridge' marked this leap over the Maas by providing an architectural icon.

It became clear that Rotterdam was not merely interested in social problems. Now the focus was on the elite. The well-trained academics, who used to leave Rotterdam after graduating, would stay, if possible on the southern bank. A privileged housing programme, in combination with a new theatre would keep them on that side of the river. The area was called the 'Kop van Zuid'.(1-)

These days, Creative City development has become an official tool for urban planners. The aim is to attract or create cultural elite and to bind them to the city by offering premium housing in renewed neighbourhoods with first class amenities. A peculiar problem arises when it becomes clear that the new amenities endanger the exploitation of the existing amenities in the centre on the north side of the river. You can't simply make an Urban centre everywhere by spreading its amenities. There is insufficient economic means in a city like Rotterdam. Next to this line of

policy, Rotterdam develops business estates and ateliers at a low rental rate for artists and creative entrepreneurs in deserted harbour areas on the north side of the river. In this area, closer to the heart of town, urban management is characterized by patience and a sense of time. On the south side, amenities are being injected with large subsidies, to catalyze urban development. On the north side the development is induced and encouraged. The process is better managed, in phases. Urban government takes initiative but doesn't force its will upon the area. City planners initiated new audio visual industries, but lost the competition in similar processes in Amsterdam in that only regional and local media found employment around the studios. Apart from geographical differences, the North remains the place to be. Here a sense of history remains. The South side continues to be an appendix to the city; historical progress can only be spurred at the Wilhelmina pier (2-), a peninsula where pearls of cultural entertainment are located. In some places, like the area around the St. Jobs harbour (3-), the shaggy character is successfully kept alive through the renewal of old warehouses. The reminder of the previous harbours is in keeping with the romantic longings of a creative class.

At the start of the new Millennium, Dutch society began to grumble. In the 1990's, the old social democratic ideology was replaced by a stronger belief in the market. The population muttered. Under a right-wing mayor and a large group of populist politicians, the city harshened, which in turn meant hard times for people in the margins. Toleration declined sharply. Rotterdam was also the city where the problematic national debate on integration culminated. One of the two public figures who were murdered, Pim Fortuyn, was a local hero. These political murders made Holland realize that innocence is not a Dutch virtue. Subsequently, prejudice triumphed over tolerance. The harshened climate meant less toleration for those who wished to place themselves outside of society, in one way or another. This decline in tolerance can be illustrated by the police invasion of AVL-Ville (4-) in May 2002. Well known artist Joep van Lieshout and his team were given great freedom in the idle harbour area. The artists proclaimed AVL-Ville a Free State, presenting a constitution granting the inhabitants 'the right to wear arms'. When interviewed, van Lieshout stated he would not comply with Dutch law, and he started building things without waiting for official permission. Within seven months 100.000 people had visited his 'State'. The authorities tolerated the whole process for quite a while, sometimes even with pride. Relations became tense when the municipal harbour company wanted to start building on the site. Finally, the police invaded the area and it was reclaimed. It was later revealed that the most important weapon that was confiscated was an old canon, which van Lieshout had mounted on a Mercedes, to be shown at an exhibition. Van Lieshout still 'occupies' the area, but development has stopped in this part of the city.

Several miles from van Lieshout's Free State, a beautiful architectural monument has been renovated and transformed into a centre for creative professionals: graphic designers, architects and city planners have all established studios in the old Van Nelle factory (5-). The renovation is a true success; the building is a landmark and a metaphorical business-card for the companies that hold offices there. One problem, however, is the lack of connection between the building and its environment. It is totally separated from other parts of town by freeways, tracks and a river, making the building somewhat of a fortress. These creative people are completely disconnected from the neighbourhood; there is no spill-over whatsoever. The only residential neighbourhood in the area, on the other side of the tracks, does not profit from the presence of the creative centre. It's strange, to say the least, that a city that puts so much effort into attracting creative talent, should invest so much in a place so totally detached from its environment. A truly beautiful architectural monument, on the other hand has been saved from destruction.

The same type of policy can be witnessed on the other side of town. In the RDM area (6-), where submarines and frigates were once built, far away from populated areas, a group of artists now occupies the old hangars. This peninsula was abandoned by the harbour company in anticipation of new developments. This development is entirely in accordance with policy, large spaces and lots of freedom given to artists for practically nothing. As was to be expected, artists came from all over the place to get their hands on a studio. Now the municipal government has decided to turn the area into a cultural and creative centre, with 'proper' studios and a new building for the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture and Urban Design. This is a realistic plan and there is a need for more creative entrepreneurs in Rotterdam. It also means, however, that

the first 'generation' has to be on the lookout for a new place they can afford. Students of the Rotterdam Academy will have to cross the river to the new location is in the middle of nowhere. This might be the final blow for the academy in Rotterdam.

A final example of the stretched expectations of the creative class is the following: Rotterdam is a city of markets, every day of the week there is a market of some sort, somewhere in the city. One of the most important is located in the 'Afrikaanderwijk' (7-). This is a melting pot of people with almost all the different cultural backgrounds imaginable. The government invested heavily in adjacent neighbourhoods such as the 'kop van zuid' mentioned above. The afrikaanderwijk was lagging behind. A good example of the dazzling number of projects that were imposed upon the neighbourhood was the 'market restaurant' project. A well-respected chef was hired to set up a restaurant in the area. All the ingredients for the restaurant were to be bought at the local market. Local teenagers were trained to be professional cooks themselves, someday. For the first few months the restaurant was a huge success. Highly educated people, the local elite, often visited the restaurant, eating all kinds of exotic food. After the first few months, it got quieter every week, until the restaurant finally went bust and the hype was over. And once again, the plagued neighbourhood was in the news in a negative context.

These illustrations occur at different levels, ranging from single buildings to entire neighbourhoods. What all these projects have in common is the fact that they are all imposed on entities within local society, and that they are all directed at the local, pre-dominantly white, elite. These projects have had no spill-over effect on the adjacent neighbourhoods; the idea of the makeable city is often an illusion. Local politicians are either faced with reality when they realize that their 4 year period in office is not sufficient to make a difference, or they lack the boldness to rule beyond the grave. Instant success is necessary, and thus projects are not carefully embedded in local society. The elite mainly create for themselves, preaching gentrification along the way.

ANALYSIS: WHAT DO WE ACTUALLY DO FOR A LIVING?

By the turn of the century both economic and spatial circumstances had changed rapidly. The centre of economic gravity was shifting in the world and harbour activities that were still significant were moved out of town along the river's estuary. A second 'Maasvlakte', artificial land in sea, offered hope for future prosperity. In the city however, the idle harbour basins were metaphoric in the sense that Rotterdam had to seek another source of income, independent from its harbours and industry. The message was clear: we were no longer number one in the world. From this point onwards Rotterdam understood that income and wealth for the town meant people. It wasn't manual labour that counted, there was enough of that, but their knowledge, initiative and the simple fact that they were living in the city would make the difference. Of the three main cities, Rotterdam had to make the most drastic transformation: from Labour-city to Cultural-city. Amsterdam and The Hague, being national and international centres in the services sector were already focused on people and their well-being. They demonstrated the question: how to attract people and how to attract the higher income bracket?

ON YOUR OWN

The shift in economic drive, from production to knowledge and from knowledge to an economy based on innovation and the creativity that is essential for such, is commonly seen as a sound step in evolution; A step forward in which man gets rid off the shackles that bind him to physical labour and earthly dirt. From a personal point of view, this last step towards creativity can also be seen as the last thing you own. It is your last defense line, if selling your labour or skills as a craftsman doesn't work anymore. It reflects on you personally. Even knowledge is something outside of yourself, something that you can obtain by learning a new profession for example, in the event that your labour or expertise is outsourced. With new knowledge based on information that you can access, you can survive. But an economy based on creativity is tricky. Creativity is not something you can grab hold of like a life-line. Creativity is you personally, part of your

personality, the last source you have. You hope that it's there when your life is in danger. You hope and trust in your personal capabilities instead of the certainty you used to have in that old fashioned bureaucratic career. Is it any wonder that this view on economic growth is celebrated in a time of liberal belief in the market? Are there insurances against failure of creativity?

So now the man in Rotterdam city in a so called highly developed country is looking in the mirror and just sees himself, alone. He can't use his skills, knowledge and smartness/intelligence to control or drill a production process outside himself anymore. That is all gone, sold with the youngsters to other parts of the world. He might be rich, but he is alone with his personal creativity.

Being dependable on the production of ideas, rather than an idea for production, is a shift into great uncertainty. And here lies the true artist.

AN ABSTRACT ECONOMY

If the soil is no longer a source of profit or if the manufacturing of earthly material is no longer a source of income or if the mechanical control over industrial production gives no more ground for certainty and even the juridical and financial services by which production lines are financed, maintained and managed are outsourced, for the simple reason that these services are the most mobile of them all,...What else is there in an economic region, than smartness/intelligence?

But being smart is a non separable quality of the people themselves. So people have to replace soil or material, their personalities to replace their labour. People become capital.

This logic doesn't just end in this urgent quest for an economic region: how do we attract these people and how do we attract those with a higher education?

It is exactly at this point that Landry and Florida make their promise: creativity is a human thing. In order to harvest creativity, you have to hatch the person in whom it grows. That cradle for creativity is the city. But is that the modern city? Or is it in fact the re-invention of that old city as we imagine, way back to the Italian renaissance or even further: the Greek *polis* ?

Here we end up with a strange contradiction, leading to a circular argument:

'City-air makes free' was a much heard slogan in the hay-days of industrial growth and welfare.

The industrial revolution had gradually made man footloose and more and more rootless with all his capabilities and values, independent from the place where he was born. Modernity made him independent from the crops grown in nearby fields. His craftsmanship became detached from local circumstances. Science rendered his knowledge objective and detached from his personality. His know-how in doing or making things became de-personalized in objective procedures. In the modern city he could sell his labour, skills and knowledge anonymously. And he was happy doing so. Being footloose was the price for freedom and Modern city was the place to be free from local backwardness. That strange place freed him from local boundaries and restrictions. Modern-city freed man and woman from the chains of local habits, traditions and choking morals.

And now, coming to a stage where all his capabilities, labour and knowledge is detracted from his personality and sent all over the globe, exchanged on the market of an open and transmissible world, now that he is empty handed, he is thrown back on his final and genuine capacity to be creative; now everything is turned upside down again. According to Florida and Landry his individuality and the place where he lives have become the ultimate preconditions for survival in this post industrial era. On top of this surprising dialectic, a tautology emerges. If creativity in people is our next hope, how can we create creativity? Here the plea of Landry and Florida leads to the necessity to create creativity by means of creativity: a creative city. It is the creativity of the baron of Munchhausen.

Creativity, like personal health, or a sustainable environment, is circumstantial. It is a condition for better quality of work. But the work has to be done. No work no profit. Somehow in every region or city a link between the creative idea and the routine of work is necessary. In the teachings of Landry and Florida we have to understand creativity as added value. A creative economy does not replace an economy based on production. We should not forget that the open and tolerant society of the Greek polis was formed by citizens freed from labour. Their economy was based on slavery. The citizens were freed in order to be creative. The work to which creativity can add so much value, still has to be done somewhere, somehow, within the region itself. Indeed, creativity that is unrelated to local traditions in work, to the way things are made or to how affairs are executed is but fantasy.

Creativity can never replace work or production... it turns it on.

We want to stress this point because it helps us understand the way Rotterdam transformed its character from a 'labour-city' to a 'cultural- city'. In spite of the warnings from both Landry and Florida that the local identity must not be neglected, Rotterdam favoured only a segment of its population in its policy by mistakenly replacing production by creativity. The ambition to attract world talent, indeed a Creative Class: white, well-to-do and educated, has led to an exclusion of the vast majority of minorities, that colourful mix of cultures that really does the work in Rotterdam. They have no face in the newly created cultural identity of the city. Until now Rotterdam misunderstood the potential of this salad bowl of identities.

Local identity is not a decor, a touristic or otherwise romantic milieu, in which we feel comfortable and where we work out our creative ideas pleasantly. Local identity is rooted in the local traditions of work: trades and crafts that can be developed and enriched by a creative input.

INDIVIDUALITY

The suggestion that creativity can replace production is the first weakness in which the doctrine of the creative city development can be misused by anti-social politics. The Rotterdam case shows that despite its good will and promising virtues, it becomes part of mechanisms of exclusion in city development. How can we keep the essence of this thinking that combines the blessings of a free flow of mind, the fragrance that was always the attraction of an urban lifestyle, with the identity of the local tradition?

In the eyes of an urban planner it seems a paradox: in order to make a city specific in its local character, it must attract 'creative people', 'world talents' in order to be competitive. These people will only move into town if there is access to the same world culture of music, arts, quality shopping, dining and wining they have in New York, Rome or Amsterdam. In that respect cities become alike.

But the point is, by using the same 'creativity' concept for both the metropolitan lifestyle and the people to be attracted to it, the individuality of this urban condition is underlined, not the collective of which the individual might be part. This is another danger in the notion of creative city development. It coincides with the global experience that the social condition is not as makeable as we thought it was in the 20th Century. The notion is now widely accepted that the market will bring individual creativity to favourable opportunities in a pragmatic and competitive way. The shift is from a community-oriented and economy-stabilizing policy to an individualistic and stimulating policy. The individual is primarily seen as a consumer of culture and producer of 'his' creativity. In this adaptation, the concept of Creative City development easily becomes an ideological tool of neo-liberal and market oriented city planning.

This is happening in Rotterdam. This working city with a long social-democratic tradition, where street corner workers worked in educational, social and cultural programmes for the purpose of upward mobility of the lower classes, is now witnessing a retreating government. An authority hiding behind notes, inquiries, mission statements, regulations, and an optimistic language in which the market is praised with a creative aureole.

The true art of creative city development is not to please or to exploit individuality, but to bring the character of the place to the world and the world back to the place. 'Find a niche in the world', says Landry. Be special and authentic, to make a difference in the world. This localness can be recognized in the individual, but can never be carried by him or her alone. There is always a collective. Whether it is a firm, an institution, a religion, a club or a family, it has to have a tradition that lasts longer than the life span of the individual.

A good example of this kind of creative development is given by the Italians in the way that they industrialized, but never forgot their crafts. Take the region of Treviso, native land of brands like Tecnica, Benetton and Lotto. The production is outsourced, often to China, but the design still born out of craft is kept at home. In the Italian way, this means with mama; located in family driven firms.

The small town Solingen in Germany is another classic example of how a community of 160.000 people is world famous for exporting hand-made knives to an amount of 2.1 billion euro. Knives are made everywhere in the world, but Solingen, being the name of a town and of a registered brand, just makes special knives and they're not cheap.

The point in these examples is that making a town, with all the attractive cultural, or even hedonistic amenities does not make a community and therefore does not lead to local character. Social cohesion, collectiveness, is conditional for such a place. In itself an urban lifestyle does not lead to social cohesion. Professions, the kind of work people do, have always grouped people together in a tradition of making a living. That will remain the base for communities and give them reason to organize themselves in urban environments. Those communities are the soil in which creativity can be sewn. The openness and tolerance of a creative city is just the means to fertilize it.

It would be unfair to state that Rotterdam denies the third T in Florida's triple: Tolerance. The city is not neglecting the issue of social integration. Great effort has been taken to address and calm down the cultural differences between Islam in particular and our native culture. Unable to see that tolerance and indifference is not the same thing, it took us a while to understand the severity of the social clashes in the poor parts of the town. Still it is fair to say that the minorities which make up about half of the population are insufficiently represented in the development of a creative city. The efforts remain restricted to welfare and top down advocacy. Housing programmes are still aimed at injecting middle class people or even high income into poor districts in order 'to obtain a social balance and to force people to move into better housing' as they claim. But it has never worked out this way. The misconception here is that you can create social cohesion by simply building a new town, while it is always the other way round. A true city emerges from social cohesion and the communities that come forth, and strive with each other for territory in the scarcity of space.

CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Here we end up with a third weakness in the teachings of Florida and Landry. By swopping the concepts 'city' and 'community' it masks the fact that the planning strategy of creative city development can easily become part of the struggle between classes in town. Rotterdam clearly shows this phenomenon. It suggests that in the creative idea of development, you can make a city as a spatial organization that is best for all. Here is the swop; by being the best organization for all, it creates community and consensus. But instead of an ideal home for the community, the city is the arena for communities to compete. In the emphasis on the organizational aspect we recognize the language of management consultancy. But a city is not an organization, nor a business. How is this typical approach, based on organizational psychology, being applied to the city?

On top of the false analogy that you can treat a city as an organization, is also the idea that you can change the way a dynamic entity such as a city operates by changing the mindset of its leaders and governors. These blocks for a creative city development programme are seen as

blocks in thinking or mentality. Blocks can be removed by changing the mindset. Rules, bureaucratic restrictions, binds between disciplines, lack of knowledge, ignorance, are all just dust. It can be swept away by a different kind of thinking; by creativity itself! Here we see once more the baron of Munchhausen helping himself. Creativity to emerge needs creativity.

Not much is being said about power structures; vested interests that freeze a status quo. Never the remark that you often need power too, stubborn stiff-necked or compromising, instead of an open mind and good reasoning to break that power base.

In 2004-2005 our office was among the ones commissioned by Shell headquarters in The Hague to help them change there attitude to working and learning. We built a Learning Centre with a dormitory, restaurants, informal meeting spots and shops. One can make an appointment with a hairdresser and meet a colleague in one of the many coffee corners, all within the heart of the main office in The Hague. Shell did so to break open the nine to five work mentality and change it to an almost 24 hour's economy. The boundaries between working, learning, leisure, meeting people were to disappear. The objectives of Shell were to a high degree similar to the concept of a creative city. A mental change to bring out the creativity every employee hides, facilitated by an environment of incentives and hospitality. We actually tried to do the reverse from what Landry advocated in his example of the Dutch town of Tilburg. There the city authorities organized themselves as a private firm; we tried to transform a firm into a city. In carrying out this assignment we experienced that the concepts of 'city' and 'organization' are not interchangeable. Both must house communities, both are supported by communities. But as metaphors of each other, they point to certain aspects they have in common. The comparison might help you to see things differently, as long as you understand that they're not the same. An organization might also be looked upon as a power play between competing fractions, but the difference with the city is that formally it has a common goal. Every member of an organization is always subordinate to that common goal. A city on the contrary, is essentially a public, therefore neutral, place. It is a meeting place between citizens, people with equal rights and a particular goal of their own.

In this respect Landry makes a questionable suggestion to change the old industrial metaphor of the city as a machine into the metaphor of a biological organism. It explains his unbalanced, one-sided focus on the mindset of city planners and urban governance.

The image of an 'organism' means that the organs do not exist in their own right. The right hand does not compete with the left. They wash each other for the benefit of the whole body. In an organism there is always a ruling centre, which steers and manages the processes in the organism. Thinking in cooperation with the nerve system forms an example of such a centre.

A city is something different, quite the opposite actually. At least in countries where there is a democracy, whether in the over developed West or in Indonesia, the city must be conceived as a dynamic structure where no individual, group or government has absolute steering power over the whole entity that we recognize as a city. Apart from separate aspects such as public services, and despite the wishes of some of its inhabitants, this dynamic whole receives no steering from one centre or another. Its city council is a public space where interest groups compete with each other along democratic lines. There certainly is a dynamic equilibrium in this structure that so often looks chaotic. It is constantly shifting, as a result of different drives, strives from different competing groups. The city has to be seen as a sifting brew of often overlapping territories, pacified areas where different groups rule with power following the exclusion of others.

Rather than as 'organism', it may be better to regard the city as being 'organic'. The organic of Darwin's garden, where new forms, designs and inventions emerge, compete, win or loose. Here the creative find niches to exist, conquering ground in order to be different.

CONCLUSIONS

In a criticism of Rotterdam's practice of city planning we have examined some main concepts from the teachings of Florida and Landry. Aside from the tremendous inspiration these writers give with their conviction that creative initiatives can open unforeseen opportunities, some concepts make their thinking too defenceless against abuse and utterly anti- social city planning. We have challenged the picture of the city as an organism with the balance of conflicting communities. We have argued that the focus on the individual and his mindset suggests that decision making in urban planning can be enhanced, while in fact this actually masks a neo-liberal policy that believes in competition between individuals and in fact retreats from its main task: providing the conditions for strong community building.