



EP 11: CIVIC CREATIVITY AND CREATIVE BUREAUCRACY

Charles Landry in conversation with Adrian Ellis

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Adrian Ellis: Hello, and welcome to The Three Bells. This podcast is one of a series brought to you by AEA Consulting and The Binnacle Foundation for the Global Cultural Districts Network, in which we explore what's happening around the world on those busy and sometimes congested intersections of cultural and urban life.

The series and supporting materials can be found at www.thethreebells.net and if you like our content, please subscribe and give us a positive review on your podcast listening platform of choice.

I'm Adrian Ellis, Chair of GCDN, and today our guest is Charles Landry. Charles, I think will be known to many of our listeners as somebody who for at least the last 35 years has been at the leading edge of thought about the relationship between cities, culture, and creativity in various roles as an author, as a lecturer, as an advisor to governments at all level, and as a thought leader.

So Charles, I'm thrilled to have you here on the podcast.

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Charles Landry: Well, I'm really pleased to be having this conversation with you, Adrian, because I've also always loved what you done and thought, I wished I had some of your skills (laughs). Anyway, you fire away and ask me some questions.

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Adrian Ellis: So I want to start off at the beginning because as I said in that email I sent you – I know you didn't spring from the womb fully formed as a cultural urbanist or as an urban culturist. And I'd like to talk a bit about how you came to the broad agenda that has sustained your professional intellectual life. So, a bit of intellectual biography.

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Charles Landry: Well, um, my parents were emigres – that, they weren't Jewish, but they lived in Berlin. They worked for a Jewish publisher and all of that. And they left in 35 and I was a sort of afterthought. But anyway, there I was. I arrived. And so the intellectual background of my parents was obviously key.



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Charles Landry: My mother was quite artistic and so on. Uh, family life, you know, we didn't have much money and it was probably all very difficult. And at some point, in order to reengage, um my parents wanted to re-engage with Germany, they left for Germany and moved there and I was the youngest child. So, I moved with them.

Until I was then brought up. Having been born in London uh, in Germany uh, from the age of, uh, 11 till 19, and I suppose that clearly shaped me. I then came back to the UK, did various things, worked for the stockbroking company studied in Keele (University) international relations, economics, politics, and history. And then later on went to Johns Hopkins in Bologna.

And coincidentally, my parents had subsequently moved from Italy, uh from Germany to Italy. So in a sense, those three places, the UK, Germany and Italy are all very important to me. But I always, my main thing, I always felt I wanted to communicate. But I knew, I didn't really want to be a journalist. I felt I needed to know something in depth.

So that was always in back of my mind. And I in Bologna was the assistant to Robert Skidelsky, the big Keynesian author and the you know, academic. And that all shaped me. But when I came back to, to Britain, I was nearly finished uh, someone called Wayland Young, also called Lord Kennet.

He asked me to get involved in a project at the EU called Europe Plus Thirty, which was supposed to speculate on the future of what was happening in all the disciplines in Europe. Whether what we said was true is a completely different matter.

Adrian Ellis: What do you mean by disciplines?

Charles Landry: Uh, disciplines. You know - anything from sociology to economics, to-

Adrian Ellis: Oh academic, right.

Charles Landry: Yeah. I mean, it was for the EU and Ralph Dahrendorf at the time was the Head of the Research Department in the EU before he went to, uh, the LSE. So all of that was, shaped me quite a lot, but then I sort of went into decline. I don't know if that's the right word. (laughs)

Adrian Ellis: I'm sure it's not.

Charles Landry: But I was a bit lost basically. And I thought, I felt sort of politically, somehow committed to doing something.

And I was trying to get various jobs and nothing really particularly succeeded. But then I got involved in something called publications, distribution co-op, which distributed all the sort of radical press at the time. And that was a typical co-op and things like that. And it drove me mad, you know, endless meetings and so on.



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Charles Landry: And the organisation was in some sense dysfunctional, but we were very worthy in many ways, and I left that. And now we're jumping, you know, towards 1978, 79 and 80, I set up something called the Minority Press Group, which was trying to work out – why does our information not to get across? Why do ideas not get across?

And that led to a series of publications. And I changed the name at some point from that to Comedia and people then said things like uh, is this a joke? And I said, well, look, life's serious. This could be commedia dell'arte, but what it was also about was communications media. How do you get your message across?

And we published perhaps 80 books on that. And in the end, and again, I was probably pretty inefficient and stuff like that. I sold the list to Routledge. But in the course of all these periods, moving through the eighties and so on. We did increasingly work on consultancy. We consulted magazines, publications, video companies, and so on.

And that began to be, let's call it cultural in some sense, culture, creativity, and so that led to a long trajectory of doing work in various ways, consultancy typically, but also trying to be a bit of a pioneer, if we could. And trying to be a pioneer is always economically not very self-sustaining (laughs).

So we had a few disruptions in the organisation. Some people say you've got to be more economically focused and I kept on thinking, how can we think about the next thing? So I was incredibly helped by two organisations that you'll know. One was the Gulbenkian Foundation and a particular wonderful man called Peter Brinz.

And then the Rowntree Reform Trust, which made me into a chocolate soldier – a chocolate soldier was a person who got a bit of money and just had to do good things. So I, for five years got money from that. And that really helped launch Comedia. And I, after a while, ran that hub in 9 Poland Street, where many people, friends of the earth were, they'll pay you.

I think that was Claire Sho... Clare Short and Frank Field were there, Charles Medoua, all these people. And so that, that shaped me quite a lot. So that gives you a bit of a sense, of where I'm coming from.

[00:07:23]

Adrian Ellis: Absolutely. Can I go back and just sort of ask a bit more about a couple of those? One is Robert Skidelsky who had a profound impact on me almost accidentally, but I was fascinated and began a PhD, which I never completed on the relationship between Keynes and Schumpeter and I very timidly, sent him a chapter of it. And he responded with, you know, enormous intellectual generosity, but I sort of around that became very interested in his whole approach in which the sort of slightly arid mathematical end of economics was cast aside. And he really integrated economics in a broader understanding of culture and history.

And I'm just wondering whether any of that informed your stirring, stirring together of different disciplines because that interdisciplinary perspective seems to me absolutely fundamental to your intellectual worldview. Is that right?



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Charles Landry: Uh, yes. I mean, it certainly did shape that. I mean, in reality uh, Robert, Robert Skidelsky and I tended to play chess all the time, although that's not very intellectual, but he was essentially for me, a political economist. And so therefore he was always seeing these things, not as isolated things. And certainly, that what we now would call integrated view or holistic view, or 360-degree perspective was forming the, just the idea that everything connects.

So, it was important in that way. Yes, I do think that had an effect.

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Adrian Ellis: So, I think this is so important; understanding intellectual antecedents, that I'm going to press you and ask whether there are others who still loom large in terms of your reference points.

[00:09:13]

Charles Landry: Yeah. I mean, clearly many, many people in many ways have influenced me and I've, I've admired them and respect them. But perhaps I just mentioned three, you know, from slightly different directions.

There's Peter Hall, the urbanist, the great urbanist, and I'd never really had any links with academia. I never really had people, have really, connected me to that world. Um, but he, in 1991 or 1990, just approached me at a meeting and said, oh, this Creative City stuff is really interesting. And that led to a whole friendship that lasted many decades and we wrote things together. So Peter Hall, I really respected particularly also because he was such a good writer. You could really understand what he was saying.

The second person was Marc Pachter. I had met him once in Liverpool and then moved to the states for a year to the World Bank. And he lived there and he was the director, one of the Smithsonian institutions. And he was really my saviour in Washington, which can sometimes be quite a lonely place. He sort of quite a provocative and highly intelligent, perhaps too intelligent man, but I'd really love to, but we once wrote a little book together called Culture at the Crossroads.

And the third is a woman – who just unfortunately recently died, from Taipei called Margaret Shiu. And she introduced me in a deep way to the whole of China, in this case, Taiwan but that led, because she got my books published in classical Chinese and that went into China. And my link then to, to that world was strengthened by her, but she was an artist activist and I quite like that little combination of people.

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Adrian Ellis: How fascinating. I, uh, if you could tell me a bit more about um, that whole scene around Rowntree and Poland Street where people were thinking very hard about how different disciplines should be brought to bear in a way that the university and university life sort of militated against.

Um uh, it was a period of sort of deep non interdisciplinarity in the social sciences.



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Charles Landry: Yeah. I mean, that's completely correct. I mean the whole Poland Street experience for me was really very enriching. It really connected me to agendas and people who I might not have normally met. And because I was in theory running the building. Because I was also slightly commercial and the others were not commercial.

That was a sort of quid pro quo - you give us something back. But just meeting all of those types of issues from environmental groups to, you know, groups thinking about social auditing and perhaps developing different concepts. And that was a deep experience for me. Indeed actually, probably shape or reinforce my world view.

I mean, I hadn't, at that moment, and we're talking about the very early eighties, sort of defined it as culture and creativity or anything like that. Because that came from a sort of slightly different trajectory, which I could explain in a minute if you like. But yes, Poland Street was a key moment for me.

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Adrian Ellis: So what was that different trajectory that then brought you to consider the role of culture and urban development, if you'd like?

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Charles Landry: Well, it started probably, I mean, the fact that I was brought up in different countries, I'd often ask myself who the hell am I, who am I, where do I come from? So it was a bit sort of mixed up. So by definition, being very influenced by Italy, Germany and the UK meant that culture was important in the sense, why did people express things differently?

The language was, were different. You know, I was speaking - while I could speak then, I still can, the three languages. And I could just feel that they were very different, that you know, the mindscapes when you're involved in the, in those language cultures. So, so that was sort of embedded. The creativity thing came from a different place, perhaps. Which was really, I kept on meeting people who I thought were very interesting.

But I felt that so many people were not fully expressing themselves. They weren't acknowledged in any way and so on. And so for some reason, I just felt, how can that be unleashed? How can that be unfolded in some way? What are the barriers and obstacles to this, which then led me ultimately, always to talk about what are the preconditions to enable people to think plan and act with imagination.

So, so that's where that came from. Now, I could have focused on individuals. I could have focused on the creative organisations, but somehow, I bumped into the city because I thought - Hey, in the city so much happens. It's an amalgam of lots of cultures, lots of differences, lots of things going on, how can one bring these together? So somehow those elements, the cultural interest, this creativity coming from that space I just described, I then wanted to focus on that complex thing called the city. And so that, that's the trajectory of that.

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MUSIC TRANSITION



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Adrian Ellis: So, I had the impression that in the early days, the distinction between culture and the cultural industries and creativity and the different roles that they may play, was more blurry. My impression is that, um, your thinking has over the years refined along with the others and that, uh, you draw quite a, quite an important distinction between the contribution of, in shorthand, cultural institutions and the contribution of the creative sector uh, to the sort of urban environment that stimulates, that attracts, that fosters innovation, et cetera. Am I right?

And if so, what are the respective roles of culture and creativity?

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Charles Landry: Yes. I mean, when the agenda, from my perspective about culture and development in general came up, it could have been very broad and we always, and you know, and everybody like you know, of course the broader definition and the narrow definition. But we focused at the time on arts and those sectors, partly because of the radical transformations happening in Europe at the time and the move towards China.

And so, in a sense, what we were then asking, well, what have you got, if you're losing jobs, you're losing everything else? So you have got your culture. That's who you are. Now then, within that, we then began to say, well, one of the most powerful expressions of that are obviously the art forms.

And so therefore when I try to merge these things together in the concept of the creative city, we had a strong focus on those sectors and their contributions to reinvigoration of places. And then a sort of trajectory happened, that you know so well, which was obviously we tended to then get into numbers and so on, which was obviously a danger that it would only be about numbers, and it would forget the other dimensions of both culture in general and specifically these arts sectors and their impacts.

Which is why just before the Labour government came in, again, I think, whenever this was, 1997, we also did that big work around the social impact of the arts in order to sort of bring those two together. But already at the beginning, I kept on thinking, and perhaps I didn't use these words that we use now, that basically, because I was focusing on the city, that the city is of course an ecosystem.

And of course, two things are true when you're developing places. That transformation itself is a cultural project because it's about mindsets, values, hearts and lines, skills and all of that. So, that was quite key. I think what I then began to see is of course that creativity is also social innovations, there's business creativity, there's all these forms of creativity that ultimately led me in 2003, to think about the idea of the creative bureaucracy, which we can discuss in a second.

Because I was trying to say when every element has to have some sort of imagination in it if we're in a world that obviously by definition is changing here and there, and one needs to adapt and rethink. I mean, the one sentence summary of *The Creative City* book is, in times of dramatic change, how do you create the conditions for people, organisations in the city, to think, plan and act with imagination in solving problems and creating opportunities.



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Charles Landry: So I've always felt that wider thing was there. And I always then asked then to myself, and what is so special about the art forms? You know, this, that they contribute that let's say, doing, writing a computer programme doesn't and so on.

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Adrian Ellis: And what's the answer?

Charles Landry: (laughs)

Adrian Ellis: I'll come back to the larger question of the, of the conditions of, of, creativity in the city. But what, what's the answer to that slight, only slightly narrow question, which is uh, what is the distinctive contribution of the arts as traditionally defined, i.e., that narrow definition of culture. Two, creativity.

And the reason I ask is, not because I'm, I'm looking for you to champion it but rather because I often think, well, these, particularly the larger institutions that carry the responsibility for the stewardship of, of those art forms are often not deeply creative. In fact, if you look at their attributes, they're often the antithesis of what we associate with creative organisations. They're hierarchical, they are rule driven. They are they are risk averse, et cetera.

So I'm often, uh, I often see a sort of slight irony in uh, anybody's reliance and I'm not suggesting for a moment you rely cause you've sort of driven this argument, but any reliance on cultural institutions per se, to be fonts of wider creativity. Some of the people working in them, and working around them and working increasingly in contractor relationships with them may have those attributes, and the environments they create might be deeply creative, but those institutions I often fear have become in some ways the antithesis of creative.

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Charles Landry: Well, I think you put that very well. And I agree with you. What I think is helpful about the arts is all the usual arguments we know, but it's legitimate. What I like about art forms, whatever that is, you know, music making or painting or whatever, is this license to be able to just think afresh, just to come from nothing and just open your mind.

So, so that process itself, I think, is wonderful for me personally. I think for the society it's great too, because it obviously allows you to imagine, and it legitimises imagination in various ways. And I think what it does so often, it brings scattered thoughts together in – if I can use the word iconic, in iconic ways that encapsulate something that other forms and other disciplines don't do.

So it both can stretch and focus at the same time, leaving aside all the other things that it can do – it can foster intercultural dialogue and bring diverse things together that don't normally seem that they fit together. So it's all this patterning of things that are sort of an interesting mesh of stuff that then might result in a particular performance, a work of art, a piece of design or something like that, which I find they're particularly inspiring.



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Charles Landry: Now, in relation to the cultural institutions, all I can say is I think they might have got worse because they've got all these demands on them. And clearly they help, you know, individuals and organisations do things they might not have been able to do because they're getting funded or alternatively they're sucking these creatives into their web. Their, their cultural, institutional web.

So I think that relationship between the individual and the institution is absolutely key. The key issue that I think you've addressed in your description of cultural institutions is one of the key features of everything I think I'm talking about, which is culture, innovation, creativity, all of these things together is openness. Being more open than closed. And I've slightly changed my mind. And initially when we had the first thoughts about the creative city at 89 or something that word was used, then subsequently working in a very poor area in Northeast Britain at South Shields, I suddenly realised what's more important is actually to generate a culture of curiosity or allow people to be curious.

If people are curious, they're more likely to be imaginative and then they may have creative ideas, some of which are good. Which may lead to an invention and that leads to let's say innovation, and that then goes, the cycle goes on and on. So that's how I sort of see it at the moment in a sort of cyclical way.

And because I talk about ecosystem, it's precisely true what you say, that those institutions themselves, just like I talk about the creative bureaucracy needing to be agile and interesting. So do those institutions need to be, and unfortunately I think you're completely right. That hasn't happened through all sorts of pressures that you, because you work with them so strongly know, much more detail about than me.

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Adrian Ellis: That's very interesting. So, you give a primary place to curiosity, and to the idea that curiosity is a wellspring for innovation, for uh, social development, et cetera.

So, what in your view, are the wellsprings of curiosity – which I think lies pretty near the heart of your agenda for creative bureaucracy. There are psychological ones, there are organisational ones, there are values that an organisation needs to embrace, presumably, in order to foster a fundamental disposition of curiosity.

So tell us a bit about the way in which the creative bureaucracy agenda is informed by the place of curiosity.

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Charles Landry: Yes, um, so the curiosity implies, as I've just said a minute ago, that there is an openness in general. So when you come to the public administration, they clearly, you know, they have values in theory, equity, transparency, fairness, and all of these things. And what Ang Lee at some point, and I'll just do a tiny detour, uh, wrote about a long time was the notion of civic creativity, because I increasingly was shaped by that notion that creativity is legitimised in various places. For example, the arts form, in science and so on. And the forms of creativity, of course, are very different in those two disciplines.



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Charles Landry: And I just felt, how could one then develop an attitude, a process, a way of being institutionally and other ways, where you could be creative for the public good, in the public interest. So that was my intellectual frame, that phrase, civic creativity.

When one then looks at public administrations' bureaucracy – and of course, the word, creative bureaucracy is a provocation because the word bureaucracy sounds dull, and the creativity sounds interesting. And again, it related to me meeting people in these public administrations who nobody thought were interesting. Of course, not everybody, but many of them will extremely interesting, but were trapped?

They had ideas of various sorts and they couldn't really express them because of the routines, the rules, the hierarchies, all of these things. But in that private life, they express themselves much more widely.

And so I began to do, work out something with the discretionary effort by talking to people and saying, well, if this structure you're operating in were slightly looser, what more work could you do? And my not very scientific investigations led me to summarise that people could do 35% more than they were doing, if the situation had been different.

So instead of saying, at five o'clock, oh yes I'll help you, Adrian, if you ask me a question, they would say, sorry, it's five o'clock, I've got something else to do. So, so that I was thinking about that loss of resource and capacity. And when I sort of had this idea in 2003, and as you can imagine, nothing much happened, but uh, it was, again, a dear friend, Rowntree gave me a tiny bit of money to outline the idea initially.

And then it went nowhere until with a friend of mine Margie Caust in Adelaide, we did a project which was called the Creative City Index, which is a sort of method of just analysing a city. And within that again uh, this issue of the public administration came up, as at the same time in Bilbao. So in those two places, I then did around 2008, 09, 10 sort of extensive studies interviewing everybody from number one to level seven, and really trying to get a sense of the landscape of what was happening in these institutions.

And therefore I just felt, they were underpowered, that, sorry – underpowered in terms of what they could achieve, how could they harness the collective intelligence in their own organisations, how could they create incentives and rules for the period we're in now and how they could relate better to the worlds of the civic business and research worlds.

So that was the platform. And all through these trajectories of my work, I've always been trying to broaden the intellectual architecture. Just trying to give broader insights in terms of how places are shaped and what you could do with them.

[00:28:56]

Adrian Ellis: So, it sounds as if you're in a sense railing against Max Weber's iron law of bureaucracy. Now, you know, Max were arguing that regardless of how demographic they may be at the start, eventually institutions develop oligarchic tendencies. And you're saying, yes, that is true. It's bad. We must do something about it. What?



[00:29:15]

Charles Landry: Well, I mean, that, there probably been various phases in thinking through the bureaucracy. Clearly the classic is, as you say, Max Weber, then there's the new public management, then that develops into sort of, let's get all stakeholders involved. And then, there's a focus more recently on how can you get citizens involved in the participative imperative and perhaps now linked to new digital media?

How can you have open governance? So there is a trajectory going on there. So yes, I am railing against that. What I'm again about is the same question that perhaps I was thinking about a long time ago, is how can you get more with, through the people who are in these institutions and the reason it's called creative bureaucracy.

And it's the last time I'm going to use the word creative, actually, the word is too used, is really to signal to the public administrator, you have something to offer as distinct from saying, oh, all these bureaucracies are just rubbish. They're all because I just felt psychologically it's better to do it that way.

So that was the intention.

[00:30:26]

Adrian Ellis: Uh, understood. And you were speaking to somebody who spent five and a half years in the, as a civil servant. So that appeals to me greatly. But I understand the agenda. It is important. Uh, how do you get traction?

Because my impression is that we are going through, like many people, I call this period late capitalism. And as somebody said to me the other day, well, how do you know it's late? You know, you don't what's ahead but, um, uh, you know, how much worse it gets, but we are, we're clearly living in a period of increasing concentration of everything. In corporations and in private wealth, et cetera, where we're looking, you know, in multiple contexts that the evisceration of democracy through the Republican party in the States, you know, gerrymandering, et cetera, and actually attempting coups uh, we're looking at illiberal democracy on the rise throughout certainly what was Eastern Europe.

We're looking at, we're looking at a technology sector, which is desperately in need of breaking up in some way, all of these seem to militate against democratic opening of structures. And I wonder how your agenda gets traction in these extraordinarily undemocratic chapter in the evolution of human society.

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Charles Landry: Yeah, no, that's a good point. I mean, of course an individual can only do their little speck in trying to sort of, highlight the needs perhaps and so on. So for me, there was an interesting moment having written the little book with Margie Caust to help. The reason I needed her is that she herself was a senior civil servant.

And so I needed to write the thing from an inside and outside perspective that I couldn't have done as an outsider. But then I had a little mini breakthrough simply because I met the publisher of the main Berlin paper Tagesspiegel. And I was trying to do an event around this, I was a fellow in Berlin for a few months for the Bosh academy people.



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Charles Landry: And he said, something has never been said to me before I said, can we do an event Sebastian, and all that that, will you publicise it? And he said, this is the project I'd been waiting for. And what he meant by that, he said, every day in my paper, I slag people off my administration. And secondly, ask them to pay for the paper at the same time.

Isn't that stupid? Can't we, can't we look at it from a glass half-full approach. I mean, that's my phrasing. Because that in general, that's my attitude. Of course, we know the crisis is deep and so on. But I've just in order to maintain my own internal motivation and energy, I feel I have to look at it from that glass half full perspective.

Now that led to an event that's now run four times and thank you for being part of it this year. Twice it was live, and then the first time 1,500 people came. So that was an indication that something was happening. Then the virtual events happened last year, about 18,000 visitors and so on.

And then people began from different countries, South Africa, Belgium, Norway and so on, begin to say, can we also do an event like this? And all it's trying to do is in a sense to give confidence that one can change things. Now, the COVID pandemic has to some extent been quite helpful because we've suddenly realised, you know, that the public realm, the public interest, the common good is all very important.

And so what all I can do as a tiny speck, as I said, is try to develop that and try to link with many others. But try also – because there are so many fragments, when you take a helicopter view of the world, there are so many solutions already there. And our aim now, let's try and see if we can make it work, is to bring some of these fragments together well beyond the creative bureaucracy initiative/festival. Because what we're trying to do is, any entity that's a bit involved in this field, like apolitical states of chain – these are just some OECD and so on. We're trying to be their partners and promoters of what they do as well, in an order to sort of generate more energy or, or I suppose, publicity for these types of ideas.

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MUSIC TRANSITION

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Adrian Ellis: Somebody said to me the other day, it's true that hope is not a strategy, but it is a moral obligation. And I think that what you're saying is there are sort of sub-strategies, but they have to be informed by a basic determination/hope that we don't simply fold into um, passivity in the face of these profoundly threatening trends. And I think you're saying the same thing that we are moving into a, sort of moving into a new period in, certainly in Western societies of rapid, discontinuous change.

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Charles Landry: Yeah. I mean, I agree with you. I think we will recognise, not all, not everybody agrees, but that a business-as-usual approach will not get us to where we want to be in terms of the sort of issues we're just discussing because, uh, economic order and way of life is materially expansive, socially divisive et cetera, et cetera.



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Charles Landry: So we know that. So I keep on thinking, how can you create a picture that people can grasp? And you might call it this picture of a planet B if you want, although we need to get Planet A right. And that's why I think you do get back to this sort of storytelling thing. And the answer of course is very good at storytelling because in the confusion and the overload and fragmentation that we experience, somehow sort of iconic communicating is really important. What I mean by the iconic communication is: you grasp between one and then, narratively, you sort of understand what that logic is behind it. And so therefore I'm also thinking in terms of how I try to communicate.

Now, I keep on thinking, is it more poetry or prose one should write, should it go more to these encapsulations, crisp encapsulations that we associate with some good poetry? So that's one dimension. I mean, in terms of these larger forces in our tiny little contribution is also to give prizes and awards.

I mean, we gave an award at the festival to the Finnish government and Demos Helsinki for implementing this humble government approach, which is a very learning loop type way of working rather than I have a policy, three years later I look at it, that whilst, you're, you change and adapt as you're doing.

And that embodies to me some of this agility we're talking about. That's just an example. Now, however, that of course doesn't deal with the fact that China might suddenly, you know, decide to attack Taiwan. So I'm back to this point about finding somehow entities or projects or movements, that somehow bring these fragments together.

Because again, back to that point, if we look at all the things that are going on, there are so many people who got, in a sense, what I might, what we might say, the right sense of what should be and could be. But then of course, there's been a massive divide uh, divide and rule. But again, you know, in terms of, let's say that the tech companies, the whole, my data movement is obviously very important.

Is there a third way or European way in contrast to the Chinese way or the American way of thinking about all this data landscape and what that leads me to think, picking out the best of what might be happening, you know, ideas of the circular economy, all of these sorts of things, acknowledging diversity in a bigger way, whether one can frame that.

And I'm using a slightly big word now with caution. Which, if we see it collectively – all of this, could there be some form of Renaissance if we pick that up, where we can bring these people all coming from different directions – and this is back to your interdisciplinary point, who actually have core principles that seem the same, although they're doing completely different things, whether it's an environmentalist or someone who's into the various forms of empowerment.

So, so that's where my mind is going at the moment.

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Adrian Ellis: It sounds like, a revisiting, but also refreshment of the ideals of social democracy that were very near the centre of the post-war you know, thinking about the European community, et cetera.



[00:39:50]

Adrian Ellis: Which is to say a, some sort of framework where moral values, which are implicitly or explicitly redistributive, which are recognised fundamentally unlike the Chinese model, and unlike the um, American model, the fundamental place of tempered markets and democratic accountability. So it does sound like you are drawing quite heavily on that original intellectual uh, formation or whatever you want to call it, that was available to you as you were in your early formative years. Is that, is that true?

[00:40:26]

Charles Landry: It is true. I mean, I haven't thought particularly about it in that way. But when I hear myself talk, I think that does fit in, I mean, a typical sentence I might say is, how do you bend the market to bigger picture purposes?

You know, the public interest is, I might say, in revisiting the creative city, I've highlighted, they already did it in its original version, the need for there to be an ethical foundation. And of course, you know, some people thought being creative, just about being hip and so on. So those are the sorts of things I'm saying all the time, without a foundation or a purpose, what's the point of all of this. So, yes. I agree with you.

[00:41:12]

MUSIC TRANSITION

[00:41:19]

Adrian Ellis: So, tell us a bit about what are you reading at the moment?

[00:41:24]

Charles Landry: Well, at the moment, I'm reading a book by a new friend who was a professor of literature.

He's got this very fat book called Poetry in Theory, there was also a book called Art in Theory. And what it's got, is 77 poets through time, in the last century describing what they mean by that poetry for them. And so I'm reading people who I'd never read before, you know, ranging from F. R. Leavis or whatever, but, you know, Walt Whitman and so on. And obviously French people Paul Valéry, et cetera, et cetera. So I'm reading these snapshots of that and that's been really, really interesting for me.

The second book I'm reading, is something called The Entangled Life by Merlin Sheldrake, which is all about the interconnections of fungi and things like that, which stretch sometimes for 10 kilometres and link trees, various things underground all together, helping feeding each other and communicating with each other.

Merlin is in fact, the son of Rupert Sheldrake. So those are the two books that I'm reading at the moment. I've been inspired by a couple of books in the past that, which I, one I wanted to mention is a guy who also I really admired, and I met in Rhode Island called James Hillman, who wrote a book called The Soul's Code.

But why he interested me was because he both ran the Jung Institute in Zurich and then completely differently, ran the Dallas Institute, which was about cities. And I just thought that's really interesting and that fed many of my concerns or interests.



[00:43:08]

Adrian Ellis: How fascinating. I don't know James Hillman, I didn't know Poetry in Theory. I had heard of, uh, of Sheldrake's book. Um, and what are you listening to?

[00:43:19]

Charles Landry: Listening to, well, there were the two things I could be listening to. I mean, one is music. My daughter's a performer and my wife loves music all the time. So, whether I actually physically put it on is a different matter, but is usually variations of world music. But I, I really like having a party and then there's a different take, cause then obviously one would dance, and all of that.

But actually, I must tell you, and if you have the day, because ABBA's doing this avatar thing in London. I suddenly said this, Hey, ABBA is amazing! (laughs) So just listening, coincidentally, you know, to four or five songs of ABBA three days ago, it's was amusing.

[00:44:06]

Adrian Ellis: You know that The Guardian had a headline, which I sent to a friend cause it's so funny, which was, um, ABBA, first album in 40 years. Well worth the wait. And I was thinking that's gotta be some album to be worth waiting 40 years for. So I'm looking forward to listening to it.

Charles Landry: Yeah.

Adrian Ellis: Thank you, thank you for a great conversation and thank you for a very, very insightful account of um, your worldview uh, what informed it and, uh, and where, where it's going. I'm really, really grateful.

Charles Landry: Yeah. So am I. I loved the conversation.

[00:44:43]

Adrian Ellis: Listeners, if you want more, check out www.thethreebells.net to find external references and other resources linked to this episode and to the work of Charles Landry, but stick around first, for a conversation between Stephanie Fortunato and myself, as we explore the key takeaways and actionable ideas from this conversation.

[00:45:06]

MUSIC TRANSITION

[00:45:19]

Adrian Ellis: Hi Stephanie.

Stephanie Fortunato: Hi Adrian, it's so great to talk to you.

Adrian Ellis: And you Stephanie, how are you? How's Providence?



[00:45:25]

Stephanie Fortunato: Fabulous. It's a beautiful sunny day and the leaves are red and gold. Quite lovely, actually.

Adrian Ellis: I'm in Wales today, at my family's home. It's the first time I've been here for, 20 months. And it is like all Welsh weather, wet.

Stephanie Fortunato: (Laughs) Something to look forward to ahead, huh?

Adrian Ellis: Yeah. Yeah.

Stephanie Fortunato: Well, your interview with Charles Landry was fascinating. I enjoyed it so much. You guys clearly have a little uh, back and forth. There must be a healthy amount of emails back and forth between the two of you to have that kind of rapport.

[00:45:59]

Adrian Ellis: I don't know. You know, the funny thing is I didn't know Charles that well, but I've known him a bit for a long time. When I started AEA, which was in 1990, he must have started Comedia in the mid to late eighties, as he said. And so they were sort of, you know, they were around and an intellectual presence and specially on the, sort of the thought leadership side. And what Charles did was to introduce a whole lot of topics into the sector um, you know, he and a couple other people, more or less created the idea that cultural policy is an integral part of successful urban policy. He has introduced a whole interesting and important field.

He sort of championed the field of, it's legitimate to talk about and important to talk about the contribution of creativity to cities. And he has developed the whole sort of kit of parts and a toolbox, including a suggested metrics for measuring the creativity of cities.

[00:47:02]

Stephanie Fortunato: His work was really influential when we did our first cultural planning process. So around 2008, 2009, we were doing our first cultural plan for the city of Providence.

And we really used Charles Landry's work as a sort of a baseline to help us figure out how to, how to even approach a cultural assessment of the city and really that idea of, the cultural ecosystem and the sort of interdependence of, of all of those strengths and you know, opportunities and whatnot here that were present in the cultural sector.

And so that kind of like was the foundation for the six goal areas and the strategies that we developed and the ways in which they cross reference and reinforce one another um, really was thinking about the cultural ecosystem as a dynamic organism.

And most recently we've done a, an update on our cultural plan and sort of the next generation of this ecosystem thinking, uh, we were looking at Adrienne Maree Brown's Emergent Strategy as the, that was what helped us sort of, you know, organise our facilitation strategies for the cultural assessment.



[00:48:08]

Stephanie Fortunato: So again, and you know, an idea that we're looking at an ecosystem that the dynamism of, this place. Um, but it's an interesting, he was talking a little bit in the interview with you about this inside out strategy. You know, whereas Landry focuses so much, I think, on the people who are in city government and having them help to make the change.

What Brown does is really look at the activists and look at community organising and the principles that have been derived from that work, the movement work over the years. And so it's sort of an outsider's you know, approach to, how do you make change? How do you strengthen the cultural sector right?

When we're thinking about applying it in that way. But it was kind of interesting for me to think about the sort of generational evolution, which is, I think something that we keep talking about on this podcast, right? What have we learned? And where's it going.

[00:48:55]

Adrian Ellis: Yeah. How interesting. Yeah, I was trying to think about what, you know, what Charles and a few other peers created as a paradigm and it's sort of, a set of assumptions that we now take pretty well as read. We now, we have refined conversations within those broad assumptions, but those assumptions weren't there.

And I know in 1970, 1980, they were part of what Charles and his, his colleagues did initially in Britain, but then very quickly internationally was to make those a centre of debate. It's not that everybody agreed with them, but they all knew that they needed to think through whether they agreed with them. And that was a, you know, a remarkable, expansion of what we think of as, some, urban policy.

[00:49:43]

Stephanie Fortunato: Yeah. I mean, ultimately he wants to inspire cultural curiosity, right? He kept coming back to that idea and I really did find it interesting though, to think about his influences and experiences and how that does inform his approach. Because I feel like we, we do know that a lot with academics, right?

They're always very upfront with you know, I've studied so-and-so and this is how that work relates to this, but here's my thought. And so I really appreciated the way that you pulled him through his work experiences to kind of come to a place where we could discuss, you know, his work with cities, but from the perspective that he had always been interested in communicating and telling stories and, you know, using the skills of an artist's practice almost to do that or in service to that. So I really appreciated that.

You know, the other part, I think that's interesting, you guys listed a series of economists and others that were sort of creating the, you know, the theories behind the policy-making work. And I was unfamiliar with many of those names. However, I know the trends and I know the experiences that I've had in city government. So it was really interesting to think about the trajectories as you laid it out because you know, when I started working, I think there was an understanding of the value and contribution of the arts and that of course is mostly put in that economic framework. But I think, you know, what we've seen is, is this expansion to the social impact of the arts and, and whatnot.



[00:51:17]

Stephanie Fortunato: But it does, it is more of a, starting place, right. Rather than the end goal. And I can see where his work was pioneering and even making that part of the conversation. Although again, on this podcast, I feel like we've talked several times about, you know, how much emphasis there still is on the finances of the arts rather than on the fuller picture of what the arts, the role of arts in society.

Adrian Ellis: You mean the arts as an economic generator as opposed to health and wellbeing or um, or self-actualisation or amenity value for our local community.

Stephanie Fortunato: Exactly. I do think that there is an ethical, moral dimension to the art's role uh, that, you know, Landry is leading us to, by allowing us to use our imaginations and to explore the possibilities in some way.

The conversation you two had though about cultural institutions and the ways in which creativity is often subverted to the bottom line and risk and all of that, that was a very depressing conversation. I'm not going to lie.

[00:52:24]

Adrian Ellis: Well, there are honourable exceptions but I do think that this is a fracture line that we see, and it's an unfortunate one. And maybe by calling it out, it increases the attention that's paid to it between an agenda of institutional survival or institutional protection I should say, and an agenda of civic creativity, and, um, I think that dilemma is a really painful one for a lot of cultural leaders. It came out in, in the report, that report that we talked about Emerging from the Cave, very vividly. And I think that was, I was struck by that. And I was also struck by reading Anthony Sargent um, has done a sort of the synopsis of the impact of COVID on the sector internationally. So it's a literature review and it comes through in that as well. So, so yes it's not fun to call out, but I think it is an important issue.

[00:53:19]

Stephanie Fortunato: And I suppose, you know, if we were to take this idea of like, we are the creative bureaucrats within those systems and how do we find ways to help support within our own organisations, those individuals, to be able to take risks in whatever they have under their influence. You know, there, there is some opportunities to think about that because I think that same tendency to sort of take a conservative approach because of, you know, the fiduciary responsibilities. That's the same thing that we see within city government. And so being a creative and a non-creative institution I, you know, that's something that I feel all the time when we are trying to hire artists to do anything for our city, like our city is not set up first of all, to buy artistic services, it's really set up to buy things.

And so the procurement process is really challenging. So walking people through that bureaucratic process can be, can be an obstacle to greater creativity and participation in the civic realm. So we spend a lot of time on education and, but you know, with open government and with the freedom of information act and other sort of government watchdog entities over our shoulder, there's a very careful line that we have to walk to make sure that we are allowing both for those artists and creatives and arts organisations to you know, actually be part of the work of the city government. But that we're doing it in a way that is compliant with all the policies and procedures right?



[00:54:58]

Adrian Ellis: It's, I think this is fascinating territory and Charles, although he is still very preoccupied with them – the conditions of creativity in the city, has also championed the idea of creative bureaucracy. And the idea that it's not an oxymoron, that there are conditions of creativity that can be encouraged in bureaucracies and uh, that he uh, programmes a big convening, which, you know, has been virtual recently, but the Creative Bureaucracy Festival and how to um, combine accountability with risk-taking is pretty near the heart of that agenda. And I think it's a, it's a really interesting one for the cultural sector too, because we've created institutions that tend to be risk averse. Um, that's good in some ways, because we want institutions to be responsible as you say, accountable, et cetera.

But uh, on the other, it does impede innovation. Because innovation requires you to be able to take risks, manage those risks and deal with failure intelligently, not as something to be um, honest but there's something to be learned from collectively. But we're not very good at doing that, and that's one of the things that I think that means that we are probably less innovative in terms of the adoption of some, you know, technologies or the adoption of new ways of doing things.

[00:56:19]

Stephanie Fortunato: Um, I was thinking about Landry and, the fact that he started his career in communications um, and thinking about, you know, storytelling and narrative in terms of even making the cultural sector a thing.

Um, and, and I had just read an article about municipalities and cities, more and more hiring PR firms and the article was about, you know, should we be spending the money in this way? Do we need all these communications people? And the communications people were saying, you know, with the 24-hour news cycle, with the, with the requests that come in for information, that's very hard to manage, you know, all of those requests in a way that is sustainable.

And, you know, I think there is a value in having a communication strategy, underlying our cultural institutions' work that also includes the role and obligations to the local community – the community of artists, the community of patrons, et cetera, and the wider community right. Um, so I, I think this is an important part of his own experience that I was glad that you kind of highlighted in your interview.

[00:57:29]

Adrian Ellis: I had forgotten that, but you're absolutely right. And the strategic narrative around different cities and how that is presented – not just cities, but also regions and countries. And has become you know, incredibly important over the last, I don't know, 20, 25 years?

The positioning of a profile that tells a story has become important for, your would investment, it's become quite important for cultural tourism and all sorts of, become important for whether you can attract and retain knowledge workers. And I guess it's related to globalisation too, because the, you know, the more mobile people are, the more mobile money is. Then the more effective competition can draw those.



[00:58:16]

Adrian Ellis: So I think that there's definite correlation between globalisation as a trend and the significance of consciously formulating those narratives. Those narratives, otherwise sort of tell themselves and the not always told to the advantage of the city.

So I guess the question is, I mean, it's a question about a lot of this territory, which is where does it go? Where does it go to next? The narrative now is that globalisation is slowing down, some of it is going into reverse. People are less mobile, capital may be less mobile. Um, it's not clear to me. Tourists are certainly less mobile. Does that mean that the sort of proactive telling of those stories becomes more important or will it go away?

[00:58:57]

Stephanie Fortunato: That's interesting, actually. I mean, you know, I'm talking to you from Providence, the creative capital. Um, and so, you know, that's both a, I think a challenge and an ambition to really realise the promise of that brand and coming up with the cultural infrastructure to be able to back it up you know, what I do every day.

But, you know, I think the opportunity that you're talking about right now, I mean, it would allow us to think about our neighbourhoods and those sort of hyper local places uh, which is where economic prosperity and cultural development are already present.

So how do we, create systems in which we can make investments that will matter at the local level. I'm, I'm hearing, Criena: Ignore your local community at your own peril, right. But I think, you know, again, making investments in local populations and finding ways in which the return and the market is strong enough to support the stability is really important. And I think that's something that we're all going to have to try to meet that challenge over the, you know, as we're sort of on the tail or the long tail here of COVID.

[01:00:11]

Adrian Ellis: Yeah. Stephanie, thank you as ever for a, you know, fascinating um, opportunity to talk to you both about your reactions to the conversation that I had with Charles and beautifully woven in with the, your own active, ongoing work in Providence. And I look forward to talking to you again.

Stephanie Fortunato: Thank you so much, Adrian.

Adrian Ellis: The Three Bells is produced by AEA Consulting and supported by The Binnacle Foundation for the Global Cultural Districts Network. The podcast and supporting materials can be found at www.thethreebells.net. And if you haven't already done so, please subscribe to our feed and rate us on your podcast listening platform of choice. My name's Adrian Ellis. Thank you so much for being with us today. And I look forward to joining you again soon.

[01:00:58]

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