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Cultural Policy 11/23/2015
Notable Quote Assignment #7

Hager, M.A & Sung, H., (2011). Local Arts Agencies as Destination Management Organizations. Journal of Travel Research. 51(4). pp. 400-411.

“We learn from our narrative analysis that local arts agencies do not typically describe their cultural tourism activities and collaborations in terms of transaction efficiencies or economies of scale. Whereas local arts agencies appear relatively unique in their focus on the delivery of products, perhaps the lack of a transaction cost orientation likewise reflects a distinctive trait of this particular brand of destination management organization (Hager & Sung, 2011, p. 405).”

This was an interesting quote that possibly reflects a distinction in the arts and cultural field of being generally more program and mission driven rather than focused on transaction efficiencies. Quality of programming is often the highest concern within the arts industry which makes sense for an industry that is often based on experience and aesthetics. Local arts agencies support and assist arts organizations that are often community based and nonprofit as well as individual artists. These groups are typically mission focused, and diligent about quality as related to mission, likely less focused on transaction efficiencies that align more with the for-profit sector which is fueled by the need to maximize value and profit. Transaction efficiencies are secondary to mission and program quality in the arts, which may contribute and explanation, or at least provide a point of consideration, as to why local arts agencies are seen to focus on delivery of products as a cultural tourism strategy, and not transaction efficiencies.

Shaw, S. (2013) Planned and spontaneous arts development: Notes from Portland. In C. Grodach & D. Silver (Eds.), The Politics of Urban Cultural Policy. pp. 236-248. London & New York: Routledge.

“This document goes on to show that Portland remains well behind the national average in per-capita arts spending, citing Seattle and Denver as dramatically outpacing Portland in that regard, thus revealing a competitive logic in “creative” policymaking (Shaw, 2013, p. 239).”

The “competitive” element of this quote is what struck me, and it is a common theme throughout the article. Policy and discussion around “creative economies” and “creative place-making,” especially now that these are buzz words in the arts sector, are causing cities to compete against each other for recognition as “creative cities.” The identity of being a “creative city” comes along with a reputation for innovation, growth, quality of life, diversity and creative industry, all things that many urban centers want to be identified with. This push to become recognized as arts and culture centers has encouraged cities to implement policy that does not necessarily align with actual cultural assets, community response or expectations, or the on-the-ground work of artists. It can lead to a sort of “cheapening” of what it means to be a creative city, and may result in misalignment and mistrust.