



## COVERING THE CREATIVE ECONOMY – INTRODUCTION

Ideas rule. Creativity rocks.

This is the mantra being repeated by the business press, the Big Five (it's still five, right?) accounting firms, major strategy consulting services, ad agencies and analysts who track America's technological accomplishments.

Recent publications such as "The Rise of the Creative Class" (Richard Florida), "The Creative Economy: How People Make Money From Ideas" (John Howkins), "Creativity in Business" (Michael Ray and Rochelle Myers), and "The Experience Economy: Work is Theater and All Business is a Stage" (Joseph Pines III and James Gilmore), focus a spotlight on the precious resource called creativity.

Essentially, these authors offer a few basic propositions:

- (1) Creativity -> Innovation -> Sustainable advantage/Profits
- (2) People are the source of creativity, so we need policies and resources that will encourage, maximize and celebrate creativity in people.

Put another way, our economy is driven by intangibles, entertainment and design. Value is added to products and services by injecting with or weaving in new creative elements which bemuse us, educate us, inspire us or bewitch us.

"The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business" (Accenture consultants Thomas H. Davenport and John C. Beck) and "The Entertainment Economy: How Mega-Media Forces are Transforming Our Lives" (Michael J. Wolf, a director at McKinsey & Company and the managing partner of their Media & Entertainment Practice) point out the connection between commercial success and the ability to grab and hold attention via a mix of edutainment, retailment, educommerce and other strange buzz words that weld elements of entertainment with persuading and selling.

But we knew this all along. Right?

What's your story? If you're reading this, chances are you fall inside the category of "creative worker." And despite the fact that your father made some kind of comment when you told him what you major in college was going to be – like, "At least get a teaching degree to keep you going" – you persisted and are plying your craft in good times and bad.

I started in Chicago in 1980 as an actor. In short order, I helped found a small Shakespeare company and became its managing director and board president, as well as a member of the ensemble. I appeared in "Romeo & Juliet," "Richard II" and "The Taming of the Shrew," among other productions. At one point I was doing the company's payroll and had to run on stage for rehearsal and could only recall the tax tables and not my lines.

Our little company was part of the theater boom of the early 1980's. I could sense the value of our work in a larger context. I could feel the value of the creative individual to a neighborhood or a nation. I couldn't articulate it very well, though. I recall meeting with a group of bankers when I was seeking financing for a new theater space for Pegasus Players, where I produced some thirty shows from 1985 to 1990. The young women looked over our paperwork and remarked with some exasperation, "You have no real assets – you repeatedly produce shows which lose money." So a requested loan of \$1.5 million didn't fly.

Well, duh. ALL nonprofits produce goods and services whose cost is not born fully by the consumers of those services – including universities, social services and our biggest museums.

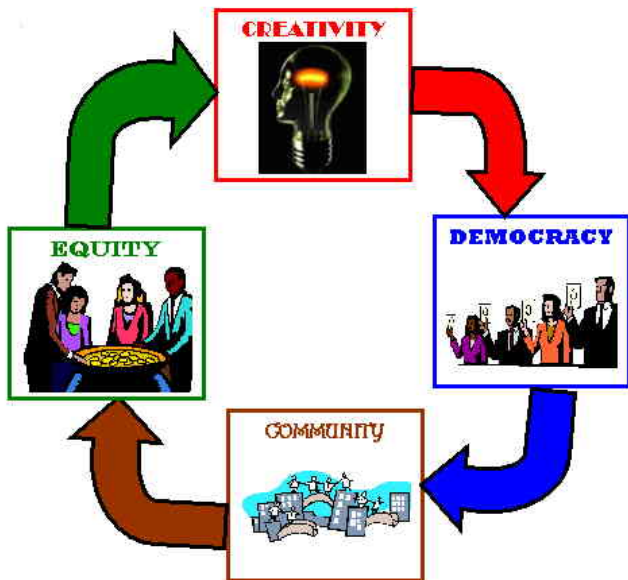
But Pegasus Players did produce something of value. In the late 1980's we were bringing 15,000 people a year into the Uptown neighborhood, producing the Young Playwrights Festival, giving tickets to thousands of disadvantaged people and sending entertainment to senior centers throughout the city. Wasn't there a positive benefit being generated by these activities – above and beyond the award-winning work we were producing?

I've spent the last 15 years, on and off, trying to answer that question.

What, exactly, IS the value of the creative worker and the creative institution to the life of the nation?

Along the way, I've met many artists, cultural workers, creative folks and other bohemians who contribute to what I call the Creative Ecology. They were mostly under-valued and disconnected from one-another.

Heres's my diagram of how this Creative Ecology works:



**INFO DEBRIS ---**

Tom’s Unified Field Theory of Creativity in Civic Life

I see this as a virtuous feedback loop that is an essential dynamic of the American character, body politic and economy. Keeping with the ecology metaphor, I see Creativity as a driver or "natural resource" that is generated by people but which can be hindered, helped or blocked by external conditions, public policy and availability/quality of resources. Each quadrant affects the others - so hindering the expression of Democracy will hinder (but not extinguish Creativity) and also erode the ability to form Community and hence make the accumulation and distribution of Equity more difficult.

I’d like to take some time at later date to elaborate this model for Newtopia readers. For now, let me say that I think I’ve got a finer understanding of the value proposition I was struggling to articulate in the late 1980’s.

The good news is that so do a number of others, and the public policy spotlight is turning toward what I’ve named the Creative Ecology. The term that is being used with some frequency is “Creative Economy,” and it seems to signify a new respect for the contributions of the creative worker to the body politic.

This column will examine issues relating to the Creative Economy and will hopefully raise some useful questions for practitioners and policy-makers. Bias alert: I believe that creativity is a very large part of what makes America unique and worthy of respect. I immodestly call myself a “creativity champion” and that’s the mindset I bring to Newtopia.

I look forward to interacting with my fellow Newtopians creatively in the months to come.

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Global media spending projected to reach \$1.15 trillion in 2003, according to “Global Entertainment and Media Outlook: 2002-2006,” issued by PricewaterhouseCoopers in May, 2002. See the chart below....The executive summary is available online at <http://www.pwcglobal.com/extweb/pwcpublications.nsf/DocID/109074ADC7D84B5F8525691F006E7389>

Tom Tresser is a consultant, producer, educator and trainer who can help individuals, companies and communities leverage and amplify their creative assets in order to solve problems, create economic value and trigger civic engagement. Tom has been a long-time advocate for an increased appreciation for the role of creativity in the life of the community. In 1991 he started an organization that organized artists and cultural workers for political activism and taught "Arts and Public Policy" at Roosevelt University, where he organized a center for the study of cultural policy. Tom was Director Cultural Development at Peoples Housing, a nonprofit community development corporation operating in northeast Chicago, where he organized a community arts program that combined culture and economic development. Tom served as lead organizer for the Chicago Park District for two years in a pilot project that transformed a major regional park into a community cultural center. In April 2004, Tom was elected to a two-year term for the Local School Council for the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School in Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood. He lectures on “The Politics of Creativity” and conducts leadership training sessions for artists and creative professionals. He teaches classes on arts and civic engagement at DePaul University and Loyola University.



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