

Media Village Generates Hype, Few Results in Glasgow

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14-18 minutes

Driven by a desire to redevelop derelict land, attract inward investments, and better exploit the commercial potential of local talent, public authorities in Glasgow are partnering with private developers to transform an abandoned industrial dockland into a riverside business cluster for the creative industries. It's a strategy increasingly common in a number of other peripheral regions and it highlights the new role "creativity" plays in urban rejuvenation, social renewal, and economic development. At its core, the strategy also betrays a troubling policy shift away from certain democratic conceptions of culture to ones that are more attuned to economic considerations shaped by global influences.

In Glasgow, the development is located along the River Clyde at Pacific Quay. Accordingly, it's called "[Creative Clyde](#)," and it represents the latest masterplan for an area that has been eyed for redevelopment ever since its bustling shipyards were shuttered in the early 1970s. Branded by its developers as "a flourishing and vibrant riverside community where great ideas

and creative energy flow,” Creative Clyde nevertheless exposes some of the contradictory economic and cultural dynamics to emerge from using the creative industries as a regional development tool.

Here are four reasons why Glasgow is a place to watch:

1. Glasgow exemplifies an entrepreneurial turn in urban governance in which the city’s creative sector competes against other urban centers for international positioning.
2. Partnering with property developers makes the city’s strategy vulnerable to market conditions and threatens displacing already-marginalized local communities.
3. Framing skills clusters in cultural terms has alienated some members of the local creative sector.
4. Film City Glasgow represents an alternate model of public support.

1. Glasgow exemplifies an entrepreneurial turn in urban governance in which the city’s creative sector competes against other urban centers for international positioning.

Both state and local authorities have embraced the notion that building business-friendly cities is a necessary strategy to move the national economy up the global supply chain in highly specialized economic activities, including the creative industries. Development strategies from the [Scottish Government](#) and the [Glasgow City Council](#) identify the creative sector as an engine for economic growth with the potential to drive innovation, productivity, job creation, and export income at both

state and local levels. They also emphasize place-building, infrastructure investments, and urban redevelopment as strategic priorities for improving not only the quality of life, but also international competitiveness and positioning. Accordingly, both governing bodies perpetuate an entrepreneurial turn in urban governance, a market-driven approach in which city authorities partner with the state to develop local business environments most conducive to global economic gains. In January 2012, for example, the Scottish Government named Creative Clyde as an Enterprise Area. As a [national strategy](#) to boost local development, the incentives scheme explicitly pairs one of four key growth industries with a particular geographic location. Creative Clyde, then, becomes a [designated center](#) for the creative industries with the added benefit of government incentives to attract business and boost job growth at the site.

At the same time, Creative Clyde also is part of a much larger waterfront regeneration project, the *largest* in Scottish history, costing a consortium of public and private investors approximately GBP 5 to 6 billion over the next 15 to 20 years. In that time, the [regeneration effort](#) aims to transform 13 miles of waterfront along the River Clyde into “an internationally competitive ‘central belt’ for business, employment, living, and tourism.” Both projects further underscore the increasingly prominent role cities play in the overall economic health of a nation, a strategy made explicit in the Scottish Government’s 2011 publication “[Scotland’s Cities: Delivering for Scotland.](#)” Written in collaboration with local city councils from Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, and Stirling, the

Agenda for Cities promotes inter-city collaboration in key growth sectors as a necessary endeavor to bolster the scale of the nation's distinctive assets and attract attention from international investors. Recognizing the relatively small size of Scottish cities, the Agenda draws them together in a more collaborative framework to increase global competitive advantage.

A [video](#) pitching the region's creative industries (to an American, no less) offers a clear example.

Ultimately, the entrepreneurial turn in urban governance is a risky strategy in the context of international capital and flexible accumulation. The slightest variation from place to place can offer capitalist enterprises a competitive advantage, but global capital can dissipate as quickly as it appears. Public resources, like [land](#), often are thrust into a frenzied, inter-city competition for inward investment, and the designation of particular business districts [threatens](#) to displace investments from other sectors and locations, especially in a small nation with limited resources.

2. Partnering with property developers makes the city's strategy vulnerable to market conditions and threatens displacing already-marginalized local communities.

Scottish Enterprise (SE), the country's national economic development agency, has identified "[skills clusters](#)" as a primary objective for supporting the creative industries. So far, three clusters exist: Creative Clyde in Glasgow as well as [Seabraes Yard](#) and [V&A](#), both in Dundee. In each case, SE has partnered with local city councils and other government agencies, educational institutions, and private enterprises to transform abandoned industrial sites into concentrated business-leisure

districts for the creative sector. In Glasgow, Creative Clyde is the touchstone development for the city's creative industries, anchoring them to a particular place (Pacific Quay) and particular economic activity (digital technologies and media). Yet, the site's development has been slow and uneven, in large part because its success has depended heavily on participation from the private sector.

Pacific Quay Masterplan

Initially, SE planned for a much more ambitious development called the [Digital Media Quarter](#) (DMQ) but the global economic downturn made private developers skittish—only two buildings emerged from the original 2006 masterplan. Accordingly, SE launched Creative Clyde in 2011. The [revised plan](#) is a response to market conditions, a much less ambitious, lower density, and incremental vision for the area. Additional details are scarce but the [principle logic](#) remains the same: Creative Clyde will transform the space along the waterfront into a critical mass of creative activities, along with the requisite cultural-social-residential amenities necessary to attract talent to the site. In the process, the skills cluster aims to drive economic innovation and productivity while simultaneously enlisting the creative industries in a wider agenda of urban gentrification—a role captured in this [white paper](#) from the SE website.

The Hub Interior

Both goals are interconnected but aren't necessarily complimentary. [The Hub](#), a development completed in

2009, [advertises](#) flexible leases, open floor plans, adjustable office space, advanced broadband connectivity, a late-night cafe bar, and 24/7 access. Ideally, this mixture promotes innovation and productivity through spontaneous encounters, unexpected collaborations, and greater interactivity in an urban “community” designed with the creative professional in mind.

More than three years later, however, the building is only half full. Much of the hesitation to relocate has been attributed to Govan, the neighborhood surrounding Pacific Quay. Govan lacks the cafe culture and urban allure found elsewhere in Glasgow, and it has a reputation for crime and violence, a strong deterrent to many companies concerned about their staffs’ safety. As this [report](#) indicates, the area’s waterfront location and abandoned industrial complexes make it an attractive site for redevelopment but gentrification risks displacing an already-marginalized community in favor of tourism and global business. Yet, as market conditions have inhibited progress, they also have diminished the site’s attractiveness to companies. It’s a futile paradox with no clear winners.

3. Framing skills clusters in cultural terms has alienated some members of the local creative sector.

More than a traditional business park, skills clusters are both economic *and* cultural projects, an effort to integrate and manage identities (of places and workers) into and through the construction of urban space. According to this [white paper](#) from the SE website, skills clusters are about creating an “experience-rich environment” to attract and retain key talent who identify the area as a hip place to live, work, and play. More

specifically, Creative Clyde helps shift Glasgow's image and economy away from traditional manufacturing and the working-class grittiness it historically has signified toward a more modern, cosmopolitan, and globally competitive enterprise culture. Accordingly, skills clusters are framed in cultural terms, as places of community and belonging. Yet, balancing economic priorities with a sense of inclusion is a difficult act, especially as enterprise culture risks alienating certain sectors of the local creative economy in favor of fickle global interests.

BBC Scotland

SE originally targeted local film and television production companies and imagined the DMQ in a fashion similar to London's Soho District but distinguished by an emphasis on digital content and delivery platforms. Over time, the agency's [vision](#) for the site has adopted a much more diffuse notion of creativity and a much more explicit investment in digital technologies, which means that production companies, post-production firms, and digital content providers [share space](#) with engineering companies, intellectual property consultants, and graphic design firms. [Digital Inspiration](#), a key strategy document calling for a 'step change' in the Scottish digital media industry, makes the investment explicit in its opening pages: "An aspiration we have always harbored as a culture has finally come of age—creativity and technology are now more closely aligned, and that is an opportunity that Scotland cannot fail to exploit." At the same time, BBC Scotland is both a partner in Creative Clyde and an anchor tenant at Pacific Quay. While its

role speaks to the [convergence](#) between digital and broadcast media, the BBC's investment in the local production community is [tenuous](#) at best. Today, [doubts](#) still linger about the broadcaster's commitment in the nations and regions outside of London. A [lobby group](#) formed in 2009 in response to the general lack of employment for film and television freelance workers in Scotland.

Consequently, local film and television producers reportedly feel at odds with the peculiar cultural dynamics at Pacific Quay. On the one hand, they do not want to invest in the overhead costs of moving their staffs to one of the most notoriously impoverished areas of Glasgow. Such an investment represents a [wager](#) on the site's future development, a bet many producers have been unwilling to take. On the other hand, the site's emphasis on digital technologies risks alienating some sectors of the creative industries that don't share the same enthusiasm for emergent platforms and services. It's a [criticism](#) local filmmakers already have lodged at the Government's larger investment in a digital economy—namely, that a “misguided over-concern for delivery systems [...] rather than content” replaces local cultural endeavors with whatever best captures the ebbs and flows of global capital.

4. Film City Glasgow represents an alternate model of public support.

Less than a mile away from the heart of Creative Clyde is [Film City Glasgow](#) (FCG). It's a GBP 3.5 million one-stop-shop for production, post-production, and publicity services located in the former Govan Town Hall. FCG primarily focuses on the film and

television sectors, but Scottish rockers Franz Ferdinand have recorded an album there and the National Theater of Scotland has used it for rehearsal space. The structure offers a combination of permanent and short-term workspaces for production offices, build sites, wardrobe storage, and art workshops. FCG also boasts the country's only Dolby premiere sound-mixing studio and the building's main auditorium has been repurposed as a small sound stage due to its high ceilings and thick, naturally sound proofed walls. At first glance, it's this pastiche between old and new—rooms with high ceilings and dated wallpaper, glass chandeliers, and ornate molding alongside fully-furnished office space, broadband technologies, and a plush sound-mixing studio—that makes the building stand out from its newer, purpose-built neighbors. Yet, FCG's true novelty rests in its origins.

Producer Gillian Berrie, a [leading figure](#) in the Scottish screen industries, is the [driving force](#) behind FCG. She's co-founder of the country's [premiere](#) production company Sigma Films, notable not only for its own slate of productions, but also for its longstanding partnership with Denmark's Zentropa Entertainment. Berrie and Zentropa's Lars von Trier have partnered on a number of films, both in Danish and English, as well as the provocative, if not entirely successful, Advance Party Initiatives ([API](#) and [APII](#)). She openly credits her visits to *filmbyen* ("Film City" in Danish) as inspiration for FCG. A former army barracks outside Copenhagen, *filmbyen* is home to the Danish Film Institute, Zentropa, and nearly 20 other firms. Berrie [says](#) the collectivist ethos at *filmbyen* resonated with her

and she saw an opportunity to galvanize the local production community in Glasgow with a similar corridor culture, especially given the perceived lack of public support for film from the country's funding agencies. With rents at 60 percent the cost of similar spaces

in London's Soho District, the building's low cost model is designed as a resource for local crews seeking a base in the city. Berrie is even working on a foundation that finds work experience for youngsters in the screen industries. Currently, FCG is at full capacity; its success has been leveraged in discussions about a possible [expansion](#) to accommodate larger productions (though demand from local crews is cited as the primary motivation).

With startup funds from Scottish and European development agencies, FCG offers a slightly different model of public support. Rather than rely on real estate firms and property consultants to breathe creative life into its corridor culture, the building leverages the momentum and commitment of one of its strongest native creative firms—and, crucially, it's not an insular endeavor, either. As the building emerged from a highly productive transnational partnership between two similarly situated creative communities, its success navigating the global-local dimensions of contemporary media production deserves notice.