

Cultural change in the city: Are the cultural interactions taking place between citizens?

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I. Introduction

Growing transnational flows of people, information, machinery, money, images and ideas (Appadurai, 1990) have been arguably transformed the world. Despite the benefits, researchers have been concerned with the homogenisation of cultures, where local, or national cultures can be undermined by more powerful, such as globally more dominant cultures. Indeed, this topic has been extensively treated by the academic literature, notably described by such theories as McDonaldization theory (Ritzer, 1983), and Americanisation (Jaja, 2010). In contrast, other researchers argue that such a heterogenisation of cultures are not taking place in the world, suggesting heterogenisation of cultures and hybridisation of cultures (Pieterse, 1996). Despite the intensive investigations, researchers provide very different answers to each scenarios (Guillén, 2001), and the question about the implications of global interconnectedness for cultures invariably remains. As such, the purpose of this paper is to synthesise the relevant literature of three scenarios of cultural change, namely, homogenisation, heterogenisation and hybridisation with the aim to add to the discussion by placing its focus on the current

shift in the governmental mode from managerialism to entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989). In particular, this paper examines the impact of place marketing on the cultural change. Section II introduces the three scenarios of cultural change. In addition, to illustrate the cultural change in the world clearly, Axelrod's model of cultural dissemination is explained in detail (Axelrod, 1997). In section III, the entrepreneurial mode of the city is introduced. Using the case study of cultural festivals in Toronto and Korea, the implication of place marketing for cultural change is discussed. Finally, the concluding remark is provided in section IV.

II. Globalisation and culture

As the long history of the discussion of culture in academia has shown, a general consensus on the definition of "culture" is not completed, with more than 150 alternative definitions identified by researchers and scholars (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952). The elements composing cultures are generally intractable: beliefs, patterns of behaviour, meaning and art can be notoriously difficult to pin down, let alone be defined. Along the same line, various types of difference in cultures are discussed, namely, "identity politics, gender, minorities rights, indigenous

peoples, and ethnic and religious movements” (Pieterse, 1996, p.1389). Despite the difference in the definition of cultures and the focus of different aspects of cultural changes, the major notions of the cultural changing process are comprised of three scenarios: homogenisation, heterogenisation, and hybridisation (Pieterse, 1996; Hassi and Storti, 2012).

Homogenisation scenario

Homogenisation scenario argues that, as the frequency and possibility to interact with other cultures increases, local or national cultures in the city tend to become absorbed or at least converged to more standardised culture. In its view, each culture is not equally disseminated, but rather, more powerful cultures in America and the Western countries are spreading their cultures, often under the mask of “globalisation”. Jaja (2011) suggests that the world is experiencing Americanisation, instead of globalisation, through the domination of the media and the penetration of American company in the world. The hegemony of American cultures is illustrated in the retail sectors of the city, where American franchise stores such as McDonalds and Starbucks can be found in every neighbourhood of the city (Ritzer, 1983; Thompson and Arsel, 2004). In his famous McDonaldization thesis, Ritzer (1983) argued that the world is increasingly inclined to the Western notion of

rationalisation through the dissemination of fast-food chains.

Heterogenisation scenario

In contrast, heterogenisation scenario contends that, even when technological advancement eliminated the traditional barriers in the communication and the transportation, the difference in cultures are persistent. By employing empirical dataset, Matei (2006) demonstrated that with the invent of telecommunication technology, world culture is experiencing the heterogenisation, or fragmentation, instead of homogenisation. In addition, Guillén (2001) summarised the researchers’ debates regarding globalisation and illustrated that fewer researchers acknowledge the convergence of cultures through globalisation. Furthermore, Smith (1990) completely denies the idea of global culture, arguing that “the differences between segments of humanity in terms of lifestyle and belief-repertoire are too great, and the common elements too generalized, to permit us to even conceive of a globalised culture”.

Hybridisation scenario

Contrary to the above introduced scenarios that view the impact of globalisation on cultures as fundamentally negative, hybridisation scenario favours the mixture of cultures. Pieterse cites American pop culture as an example of hybridisation of cultures: “part of the profound and peculiar appeal of

American popular culture is precisely its mixed and 'traveling' character, its 'foot-loose' lightness, unhinged from the feudal pas" (Pieterse, 1996, p.1393). In addition, the idea peculiar to the hybridisation scenario is that it considers what is generally considered as "superficial" attributes of cultures such as fashion and cuisines to be of equal importance as "deep" attributes of cultures such as beliefs. It argues that historically formed aspects of local cultures, together with newly formed transnational cultures through technological advancement shape the landscapes of cultural difference in each area (Pieterse, 1996)

Cultural dissemination model

To examine if interactions between cultures can lead to homogenisation, heterogenisation, or hybridisation, Axelrod (1997) attempted to model human interaction and cultural dissemination, with the particular focus on the fact that the possibility of the interaction between humans increase when they are culturally similar. This is perhaps the most studied computational model of the cultural changing process (Flache and Macy, 2006; Shibanaï, Yasuno, and Ishiguro, 2001).

In the experiment, culture is assumed to be described as several factors such as religions, languages and the outfit. Thereafter, the individual entity is modelled as an agent that possesses a set of cultural attributes, and the emergent cultural patterns in the fictional geographic environment are observed through

the event of interaction between agents. Agents interact with neighbouring agents based on the similarity of their cultural factors. Each cultural factor is described by a digit. In the experiment, an agent possesses five cultural factors and each of them is described by 10 degrees. Thus, an agent's cultural character is described, for example, [2, 4, 5, 3, 6]. And if the neighbouring agent's cultural property is [2, 7, 5, 4, 2], the similarity of the culture between these two agents are computed as 40% since they share two same properties out of five attributes of the culture. In this case, the interaction occurs for 40 %. And when it does, one attribute out of the three differing property is randomly selected, then changed to the neighbour's trait on this feature. Thereafter, the similarity of the two cultures increases from 40% to 60% as now the agents share three out of five cultural factors.

Through the experiment, Axelrod found that, despite the trend of the convergence, the dissemination of the culture stops before reaching the entire homogenisation. This implies that the difference between the cultures will continue to exist, even after the intense interaction of different cultures. The influence of the other cultures will be observed, but the complete assimilation of the cultures will unlikely happen. Axelrod also commented on the impact of communication technology on the cultural changes. While the agents can only interact with neighbouring agents in the proposed experiment, the advent

of communication technology may enable the agents to interact with a wider range of cultural agents. This is reflective of the current trend, where the boundary between different cities are not based on the geographical proximities, rather on the international relations, or perhaps the resemblance of the cultures. In such a case, one might assume that the possibility of convergence increases as it enables the influential cultural agents to even reach the distanced cultural agents. However, Axelrod argues that as the agents are assumed to interact with similar cultural entities, the access to more options of different cultural agents will most likely make agents more selective about whom to interact with, and consequently not yield a straight convergence of cultures, but instead gives rise to the possibility of less homogenised culture but more diverse patterns of cultures.

III. Entrepreneurial mode of city

The above section, apart from the homogenisation scenario, describes that enhanced interaction between cultures will unlikely lead to the convergence of cultures. Rather, as the hybridisation scenario suggests, it can perhaps bring positive impacts on cultures. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these scenarios and models by and large assumes that the cultural interactions process include all the population, city, or cultural agents in general form. As is often the case with the real world, however, the culture can

be represented by limited, or selected numbers of stakeholders. Axelrod acknowledges this limitation of his model; “Consistent with the agent-based approach is the lack of any central coordinating agent in the model. It is certainly true that important aspects of cultures sometimes come to be standardised, canonised, and disseminated by powerful authorities such as church fathers, Webster, and Napoleon” (Axelrod, 1997, p. 207). As such, this section examine the case where cultures are contested between powerful authorities in order to fulfil their interest.

Entrepreneurial mode of city

As Harvey (1989) has demonstrated, the governmental mode is shifting toward more entrepreneurial. While public sectors used to deal with the managerial provisions such as tax and infrastructures, they are increasingly required to take more initiative and innovative roles. On the one hand, the entrepreneurial governmental mode can promote the economic competitiveness of the city, potentially enabling the realisation of progressive urban cooperation (Harvey, 1989). However, on the other hand, it may enable dominant business groups to control the policies, and the marginal voice can be excluded. Specifically, entrepreneurial mode of governance tends to put excessive focus on “place marketing” of the city, where the local culture of the place can be forgotten, or sometimes used as a tool for the monetary

purpose, thus constructed by limited numbers of stakeholders such as developers and investors.

Ethnic festival in Toronto

The excessive place marketing of the city is exemplified in the McClinchey's (2008) case study, in which ethnic neighbourhood Wexford Heights, in the city of Toronto and their ethnic festivals are investigated. The area is designated as Toronto Association Business Improvement Areas (TABIA), which is comprised of non-profit organisation that "represent more than 40,000 business & property owners", with the official approval of the city of Toronto (Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas [TABIA], 2007–2010). TABIA organises ethnical festivals to promote the businesses in the district and to revitalise the local community. Wexford Heights is located in the east end of Toronto, and the area has been well known for frequent incidents relating to violence. To improve the image of the area and attract more visitors, TABIA organised an ethnic festival, Taste of Lawrence Festival in 2007, to introduce the local cuisine to people from abroad. At the same time, TABIA has held First Annual Salad Festival in Wexford Heights. The latter event aimed to be the world largest salad event, and sponsored by multiple politicians and business men. As a result, the First Annual Salad Festival was featured in multiple media and attracted a large number of visitors. McClinchey (2008)

argues that the First Annual Salad Festival "overshadowed" the Taste of Lawrence Festival. This illustrates the case where the local cultures are given up in the face of more lucrative projects. To make things worse, cultures are not only ignored, but sometimes even reimagined to attract more international investments (Hall, 1996)

Kangnung Dano festival in Korea

The case study of Kangnung Dano festival in Korea well illustrates such situation (Jeong and Santos, 2004). Kangnung Dano festival is organised annually to celebrate Dano Korean holiday. The festival expresses the 2300 year history of Kangnung history, and it is celebrated throughout the nation. The religious tradition of the festival has been preserved by the ritual performers of the festival. However, the powerful authorities of the festivals preserved and emphasise a certain aspects of traditions such as the devotion to Taebak Mountains and East Sea over the other parts of the tradition with the aim to enhance its dominant power. As such, the cultural ideology of Korea has been arguably constructed along with this excessively exaggerated aspects of the festivals. While the manipulation of the cultural ideology by the powerful authority led to the marginalisation of other aspects of traditions, the Kangnung Dano festival is experiencing another challenge due to the rise of place marketing. To attract international visitors, the media began to advertise the

festivals through internet and brochures. However, those media do not include the information about rituals, only advertising the tours in the river area. This can give a superficial understanding of the cultural ideology to tourists. Meanwhile, such trends are encouraged by the hitherto marginalised groups who are intended to open the gates of festivals to the wider range of people in order to achieve the inclusive festival that can dispel the dominant manners of rituals. This clearly demonstrates that culture is often used and manipulated by specific stakeholders in the pursuit of its own interests.

IV. Conclusion

This paper attempted to add the continuing discussion of cultural change through globalisation by introducing the increasing trend of the entrepreneurial mode of the government and place marketing. Firstly, three major scenarios and a computational model are introduced to describe the implication of enhanced interaction between different cultural entities. While the Axelrod assumes that the incorporation of advanced communication technology into the model will likely further alleviate the tendency of the cultural convergence, the future step can be to actually model the effect of the communication technology. Next, given that the cultural interactions are sometimes taken place between the limited number of actors, the impact of place marketing on the cultural change is discussed. Two case studies of

cultural festivals revealed that the expected positive scenario of cultural change, namely, cultural hybridisation can perhaps be disturbed when the cultures are used as an instrument to achieve the goals of powerful stakeholders. In order to secure the healthy interactions of cultures, the governance of the city ought to avoid excessive objectification of the city, "Urbanisation should, rather, be regarded as a spatially grounded social process in which a wide range of different actors with quite different objectives and agendas interact through a particular configuration of interlocking spatial practices." (Harvey, 1989, p.5). With the achievement of the governance that properly enables its citizens to contest their cultural identities, one is not required to shut off the interaction with other powerful cultural entities, for fear of the cultural homogenisation. Instead, in support of the hybridisation scenario, each cultural entity needs to admit the difference between the cultures in the other entity, and interpret and learn from them, while carefully maintaining the rooted cultural elements. At the same time, as the shallow understanding of the culture may lead to the fundamentally similar local events, irrelevant to the location of the city, the international investors ought to comprehend the complexity and the importance of the local cultures when sponsoring the events. In summary, the advanced communication technology and the entrepreneurial mode of the governance is expected to produce more refined cultures in

the city by enabling more access to different cultures, not to mention the social and economic competitiveness.

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