

Calgary and the 'creative class': The interface between public policy and gentrification

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ABSTRACT

In *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) Richard Florida argues that for cities to compete for economic growth in the 21st century, they must appeal to the interests of the creative class. The creative class is said to be drawn to places that have the 4Ts: tolerance, technology, talent, and territorial assets. In Calgary, Alberta, where the volatility of the oil and gas sectors has caused ongoing economic uncertainty, officials have urged a need for economic diversification. This research illustrates that amid ongoing economic challenges in Calgary, the principles espoused through Florida's creative class model have been adopted and integrated into public policy. However, while the City has focused on providing a rich urban experience with quality amenities to appeal to the creative class, the success in attracting and retaining talent thus far has been limited. Instead, efforts have negative consequences, as this approach reflects a practice referred to as state-led gentrification which has fueled new-build gentrification in Calgary's inner-city.

In the spring of 1914, oil was discovered in Turner Valley, Alberta. This was a monumental moment in the province's history as the oil and gas sectors emerged to become Alberta's primary industry. Across Alberta, oil and gas has fueled population growth, development, and prosperity. Calgary has been at the centre of it all, having long been known as Canada's energy city (Calgary Economic Development, n.d.). While extraction is largely concentrated in the rural and remote regions of the province, Calgary has firmly established itself as Canada's administrative hub for oil and gas. Two-thirds of the 118 head offices based in Calgary are tied to the energy sector. Beyond jobs, energy also plays a recognizable role in the city's brand and identity including in the City's current slogan: *Be Part of the Energy*. (see Fig. 1).

As Canada's fourth most populous metropolitan area (approximately 1.2 million residents), Calgary is a diverse, dynamic, and vibrant city. While Calgary is best-known for its connection with oil and gas, other industries receive less notoriety. In a cross-Canada survey commissioned by Calgary Economic Development (CED), respondents stated that they do not believe Calgary offers a high-quality scene for arts and culture. Despite perceptions, the creative industries do contribute significantly to Calgary's economy. In 2016, the creative industries employed 24,000 people, contributed \$2.1B to the local economy and \$3.85B to the Canadian economy and generated approximately \$71M through tourism. Approximately 40% of employment in Calgary is associated with the creative industries – the fourth largest in Canada. Beyond the economic

impacts, Calgary's creative industries offer a myriad of other benefits including increased quality of life and improved civic engagement (The Conference Board of Canada, 2019, p. 81). Regardless, the oil and gas sector influences much of the political, economic, and casual discourse in the city. However, amid an ongoing downturn, calls for diversification have become more pronounced. Since 2014, Alberta has been impacted by a lengthy and unwavering recession. In June of 2015, the price of Western Canada Select (WCS) was \$51.29 USD per barrel and by April 2020, the price declined to \$3.50 USD per barrel (Government of Alberta). The prolonged decline has resulted in job losses across all industries, slowed population growth, and a higher office vacancy rate – most prevalent in the downtown core (Graham & Dutton, 2021). The oil and gas industry faces further uncertainties with heightened concerns over climate change and calls to expedite the transition towards more sustainable energy sources.

The downturn has led some to draw parallels with Detroit and its automotive industry. Several commentators have argued that if Calgary fails to diversify its economy, like Detroit, it will experience population and job losses, urban decline, and a decreased quality of life (Dhawan, 2013; Fawcett, 2019; Milke, 2016).

Other communities, facing similar circumstances, have attempted to restructure their local economy around knowledge, innovation, and creativity. The creative economy is often promoted as a panacea for economic decline (Lovett & Beesley, 2007). The proliferation of this

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approach can be attributed to Richard Florida (Florida, 2002, 2003, 2014; Florida et al., 2010; Gertler et al., 2002, p. 48). Florida argues that municipalities who foster an environment that appeals to the *Creative Class*, a group that drives growth of the knowledge and innovation economy, are more likely to thrive in the 21st Century.

Given the reception of Florida's work as a blueprint for economic recovery and restructuring, this paper explores the adoption of the model within the context of Calgary. The objective of this research is as follows. First, through a detailed document and text analysis, this research explores whether Calgary has embraced the creative class model as a strategy for economic recovery and diversification. With evidence of the integration of the creative class model into public policy, I then draw upon secondary data to evaluate the successes of this model in attracting and retaining populations of the creative class. Finally, I conclude this paper, by arguing that the efforts of the state to provide an amenity rich urban environment, that suits the needs of the creative class, represents 'state-led gentrification' and has fueled 'new-build gentrification' in Calgary's inner-city. The following section provides an overview of the creative class model, as well as other salient literature.

1. A review of the creative class model

Over the last two decades, Florida's creative class model has been widely popularized. Florida's work, first presented in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), marks as a notable departure from previous theories about the drivers of economic growth. The traditional theories on why places grow emphasizes the critical determinants as proximity to a harbour (for logistic advantages), or near an abundance of raw goods and energy sources (Gertler et al., 2002, p. 48). However, in the modern era, proximity is said to matter less due to decreasing transportation costs (Glaeser, 2004). Instead, Porter (2000) argues that organizations which have mutual interests often cluster within the same geographical context, which leads to further innovation and growth. Glaeser (2003) argues that economic growth comes from attracting human capital, and places that have a highly educated populace tend to breed innovation, produce new ideas, fueling further growth. Florida's argument is rooted in similar thinking; however, the most significant point of differentiation is that Florida emphasizes the importance of specifically attracting bohemians or the *creative class*. Importantly, Florida notes that the creative class are attracted to places that have cool, funky, vibrant neighbourhoods. Florida's thesis begins by identifying that in the modern era, local

economies are less dependent on resource extraction, and instead, are fueled by the creation and dissemination of knowledge and innovation. As Florida argues, the creative class fuels growth as their work leads to the creation of "meaningful new forms" (Florida, 2002, p. 68).

The creative class is comprised of two groups: the *super creatives* and *creative professionals*. The *super creatives* are artists, poets, novelists, actors, and entertainers, and perhaps less obviously, also scientists, engineers, professors, and architects. This group also includes "thought leaders" which include nonfiction writers, editors, cultural figures, researchers, analysts, and other opinion makers. This group is unique in that they are responsible for producing forms or designs that are "readily transferable and broadly useful" such as "designing a product that can be widely made, sold, and used; coming up with a theorem or strategy that can be applied in many cases; or composing music that can be performed again and again" (Florida, 2003, p. 8). Creative professionals are employed in "knowledge-based occupations in high-tech sectors, financial services, the legal and health-care professions and business management" (p. 8). Members of this group are highly educated, and their work produces new ideas and products. Florida estimates that 30% of the US workforce or approximately 38 million Americans are members of the creative class.

Florida argues that the creative class is drawn to places that have the right mix of the 3Ts: *technology*, *talent*, and *tolerance*. Tolerance is defined as openness, inclusiveness, and diversity to different ethnicities, races, or backgrounds. Talent is defined as an abundance of educated individuals (holding a bachelor's degree or more). Lastly, technology is defined as a clustering of companies that are involved in the innovation and tech sector. Thus, a Creative City is a place with a well-educated populace, plenty of artists, a large foreign-born population, a substantial LGBTQIA2S+ population and where tech industries are responsible for a significant share of the total economic output (Rich, 2013).

Florida argues that in order for cities to increase their appeal to the creative class, they must focus on improving the quality of place, or what is often referenced as the fourth T: "Territorial Assets" (Florida, 2014). The creative class are said not to be charmed by the traditional mega-projects of "sports stadiums, freeways, malls and entertainment districts which resemble theme parks," but instead are drawn to places that offer "high quality experiences" (Florida, 2003, p. 36). This includes both the natural and urban environments where there are trendy neighbourhoods that offer a plethora of "third places" like coffee shops, bookstores, and lounges. This is said to provide the right environment



Fig. 1. Displayed across from Amazon's headquarters in Seattle, the banner was intended to sell Calgary as the ideal location for HQ2 (SounderBruce, n.d.).

for the “pursuit of creative lives” (Florida, 2014, p. 204). Florida argues that creative cities like Austin, Minneapolis and San Francisco have been successful because they provide the experiences that suits the needs of the creative class (Zimmerman, 2008). Thus, success does not come by way of cities offering tax breaks or incentives to lure large corporations but instead in satisfying the tangible and intangible interests of the creative class. As Florida argues, companies will ultimately follow the talent.

2. Proliferation of the creative class model

The creative class model has influenced public policy in cities throughout the world. Many communities have adopted the model as a strategy to reverse economic decline (Lovett & Beesley, 2007; Malanga, 2004; Peck, 2005; Ponzini & Rossi, 2010). Its influence is evident in a range of contexts, including in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Zimmerman, 2008), Scranton, Pennsylvania (Rich, 2013), Toronto, Ontario and Austin, Texas (Grodach, 2013), as well as within the rural Canadian context (Lovett & Beesley, 2007). A search of Google Scholar highlights how widely the creative class model has spread - beyond North America and into cities across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and South America. While Florida’s model has been widely embraced by urbanists, politicians, planners, and economic development agencies, others have been far more critical. In their analysis of 276 metropolitan areas, Hoyman and Faricy (2009) found little evidence to suggest that the presence of the creative class generates an increase in income or jobs. Similarly, using a regression analysis, Glaeser (2004) did not find that the concentration of bohemians has a significant impact on economic growth. Kotkin and Siegel (2004) argue that Portland and Seattle, two places that are often celebrated as examples of successful creative cities, have experienced job and population losses. Instead, growth has shifted towards “less fashionable but more liveable locales” like Des Moines and Bismarck (p. 17). Similarly, Malanga (2004) notes that it was in the “uncreative” cities of Las Vegas, Memphis, and Oklahoma City, where significant job growth occurred –bringing a high dose of skepticism about the core principles of the creative class model.

Much of the criticism for the creative class model relates to its role in fueling gentrification and displacement (Grodach, 2013; McCann, 2007; Peck, 2005; Ponzini & Rossi, 2010). As others have identified, gentrification and public policy are interconnected (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Ley and Dobson, 2008). Grodach (2013) argues that cities support their growth as a creative city by catering to the interests of specific groups “typically by encouraging gentrification and displacement in central-city areas” (p. 1748). Florida’s more recent publication, *The New Urban Crisis*, reflects on the shortcomings of an all-out pursuit of the creative class including how it fuels inequality and widens the gap between the haves and have-nots (Wainwright, 2017). Slater (2006) argues that gentrification, viewed as the attraction of “hip, bohemian, cool, artsy tribes” who gather at third places in previously downtrodden areas is now celebrated as both a positive and desirable outcome (p. 738). Several scholars (Slater, 2006; Zimmerman, 2008) note that Peck (2005) offers the most scathing take on the creative class model. Peck argues that Florida’s thesis is anything but new and only reinforces the neoliberal strategies of place marketing, urban development, and gentrification, but is now repackaged under the guise of cultural policy.

3. The knowledge economy in Canada

Florida and Spencer (2015) studied the strength of Canada’s knowledge economy. As they note, the Canadian economy has historically been tied to resource extraction. They argue this is problematic due to the “resource curse” where resource rich countries enjoy the prosperity that comes through extraction, but which also obstructs a shift towards building a more sustainable and resilient economy. They argue that long-term economic success requires a reorientation around knowledge, creativity, and innovation. The authors argue that Canada,

compared to other nations, is lagging on making this shift.

To evaluate the strength of Canada’s knowledge-based economy, the authors introduce an adaptation of the previously discussed 3Ts, presumably adjusting for contextual differences. The *Canadian Talent Index*, *Canadian Technology Index*, and the *Canadian Tolerance Index* are used to determine the *Canadian Creativity Index*. The authors use the latter index to compare and rank 147 jurisdictions to identify Canada’s leaders and laggards. Calgary ranks high across all indicators (see Table 1). Collectively, the combination of talent, technology, and tolerance positions Calgary as Canada’s 7th most creative city.

In this same report, Calgary is presented as an exemplary case and as a model for other municipalities to follow in building an economy that combines the natural resource sectors, with growth in knowledge, innovation, and creativity. The authors note that Calgary is both the administrative hub for the Canadian energy sector but also where nearly 40% of workers fall into the creative class. This blend of sectors they argue has fueled the city’s rapid population growth and household prosperity. As discussed in subsequent sections, growing the creative industries has become a major focal point of the City’s public policy.

4. Methods

This study begins with an analysis of the influence of the creative class model on public policy in Calgary. To do so, this study relies exclusively on the analysis of documents. The documents analyzed for this study were purposefully selected.

The most recent economic recession began in 2014, resulting from rapid changes in global energy prices. As such, this research analyzes the two key initiatives developed since the onset of the recession, to explore whether the creative class model has been identified and adopted as a core strategy to recover and diversify the Calgary economy. Two key plans were analyzed here: the pitch from *Calgary Economic Development* to attract Amazon’s second headquarters (HQ2), and the current economic strategy framework, *Calgary in the New Economy*.

The focus then expands to include the analysis of planning documents relevant to the revitalization of the city’s Rivers District. While one of the primary functions of the City is to regulate development in the public interest, in the Rivers District, the City also functions as the land developer. In this role, they are responsible for leading neighbourhood revitalization. This unique role is only relevant within this context, and thus offers the most suitable area to assess the extent to which the state is reshaping the neighbourhood to provide the territorial assets (i.e., the 4th T) to suit the tastes of the creative class.

Following the purposeful selection of documents, each was analyzed using the keywords associated with the creative class model or the 4Ts: “technology,” “talent,” “tolerance” and “territorial assets.” Policies, phrases, quotes, and other statements that included these keywords were extracted from each of the documents and compiled into a singular document. From there, I was better able to assess, compare and evaluate the extent to which the language of the creative class model has been integrated into public policy. The analysis of these documents using the 4Ts as keywords offers insight as to how closely the language of these plans mirror that of Florida’s creative class model. Where relevant, other secondary data sources (including additional plans, developments, and media stories) are referenced to provide further evidence of the integration of the model into Calgary.

Following this, I drew upon secondary data, including census data, to

Table 1
Ranking of the 3Ts in the Calgary context.

Index for the Creative Class	Rank of Calgary (n = 147)
Canadian Talent Index	9th
Canadian Technology Index	7th
Canadian Tolerance Index	7th
Canadian Creativity Index	7th

offer an assessment on the effectiveness of the creative class model in attracting and retaining young adults to and in Calgary. While the creative class is not exclusively associated with young adults, they do represent a sizeable share of this population. This analysis offers important insight on impacts to date, however, future research that provides a longitudinal analysis will also be important to assess impacts over time.

Finally, in understanding that the creative class model has been criticized for its role in fueling gentrification, I drew upon existing literature to assess whether the actions undertaken in Calgary are indicative of state-led gentrification. To do so, I recount the actions of the municipality used to facilitate revitalization and draw upon socio-economic and development data to illustrate the evolution of the neighbourhood in a way that reflects the processes and patterns of gentrification.

In using Calgary as a case study, this research offers further evidence of the influence of the creative class model on public policy; and specifically, within the context of an energy city where officials are eager for economic diversification. Furthermore, through an analysis of population trends, we can assess the effectiveness of this strategy in attracting and retaining portions of the creative class. Additionally, this paper provides insight regarding the role of the creative class model in fueling gentrification.

5. Findings: Calgary from energy city to creative city

The following discussion demonstrates how the creative class model has been integrated into the Calgary context. Specifically, the language espoused by Florida including the ideas of tolerance, talent, technology, and territorial assets are integrated throughout the documents that were analyzed. Table 2 offers additional details about each of the documents analyzed and summarizes the evidence on the adoption of the creative class model.

5.1. Calgary's pitch for Amazon HQ2

In 2017, CED entered the Amazon HQ2 sweepstakes. Calgary, along with 237 other jurisdictions throughout Canada and the United States, attempted to lure Amazon's proposed second headquarters. The project promised 50,000 new jobs and five billion dollars (USD) worth of development and construction activity. While Calgary was unsuccessful in its bid to secure HQ2, the proposal pitched to Amazon describes Calgary in a way that mirrors the language of the creative class model. In the pitch to Amazon, Calgary is referenced as a tolerant, talented, and technologically advanced place. Additionally, Calgary is described as having the right mix of territorial assets, said to be necessary in attracting the creative class.

The word "tolerant" is integrated throughout the pitch to Amazon. Here, Calgary is described as Canada's third most multicultural city, with a diverse population of 240 ethnic origins from 150 countries and

who speak 120 languages. Moreover, the document highlights that 26% of the city's population are immigrants and 28% of the population are visible minorities. Here it is stated that in a polarized world, Canada remains open and welcoming to immigration and as a place for the "best global talent" to land (Calgary Economic Development, 2017, p. 21). This is perhaps most evident where the proposal describes that 60% of Calgary's population growth in 2016 originated from international destinations. Further evidence of Calgary being depicted as a tolerant city is where the proposal suggests that the city promotes equality, noting that amongst Canadian cities, Calgary has the highest percentage of women in the workforce (Calgary Economic Development, 2017).

In addition to being described as a tolerant city, there is further consistency with the creative class model in that the city is also described as a place where technology and innovation are nurtured. The pitch notes that there have been strategic investments towards developing a dark fiber network, which would enable Amazon to connect to global markets and further innovate. Evidence that Calgary is suitable for Amazon is supported by the referenced 55% growth in tech companies from 2012 to 2016. The pitch projects that further growth is likely, with public-private partnerships working to fuel innovation in the areas of aerospace, clean energy, AI, big data, and cybersecurity.

Calgary is also described as a city with an abundance of talent where entrepreneurs, innovators, artists, and athletes can thrive. Drawing on the same language as Florida, the pitch notes that businesses follow talent. In describing talent, the pitch proudly notes that Calgary has the highest concentration of corporate headquarters of any city in Canada, meaning that there is a roster of talented executives prepared to fill Amazon's head office positions. The pitch outlines that Calgary, in addition to being a "globally recognized" financial centre, and a centre for energy, has the most 'small businesses' per capita (amongst major Canadian cities). The notion that Calgary is full of talent is supported by the statement that it has the largest concentration of engineers and geoscientists in Canada, touting that "some might even call Calgary a city of Brainiacs" (Calgary Economic Development, 2017, p. 102). Consistent with the creative class model, higher-education credentials are introduced as a metrics for talent. The proposal notes that 66% the population in Calgary has obtained post-secondary education.

Additionally, Calgary is described as a hub for the creative industry, as 80% of the film and television production in Alberta has come out of the city. Proudly, the pitch references that in the last 15 years, films produced in Calgary have won more Oscars, Golden Globes, and Emmys than any other Canadian jurisdiction. This is supported by the presence of 259 businesses in film and television, the talent of 10,000 workers in the industry, 3000 new graduates every year, and a \$20M film centre that opened in 2016 to support the sector's growth. The production, accolades and talent in these creative industries is referenced to support the argument that Calgary is a hub for creativity.

In addition to the tolerance, talent and technology, the proposal also describes in detail the 4th T: Territorial Assets or place-based amenities that makes Calgary unique. Presented in the proposal is that Calgary's

Table 2
Documents analyzed for consistency with the Creative Class theory.

Document	<i>Calgary Amazon HQ2 Proposal</i>	<i>Calgary in the New Economy: The Economic Strategy for Calgary</i>	<i>East Village Master Plan</i>	<i>Rivers District Master Plan</i>
Purpose	To pitch Calgary as the ideal location for Amazon's second North American headquarters.	The Economic Strategy for Calgary is a living document that sets direction and establishes priorities while evolving to adapt to changing times.	To provide a framework to guide redevelopment of the East Village neighbourhood.	To provide a framework to guide redevelopment and transform East Victoria Park into the Cultural and Entertainment District.
Evidence of the adoption of the Creative Class model	Describes Calgary as a place where tolerance, talent, and technology are in place, and with the right mix of amenities to satisfy the lifestyle needs of Amazon's employees	Creative industries are identified as an area of focus to expand the economy. Additional investments into place-based amenities are identified as necessary to attract talent.	The neighbourhood is envisioned as a place that is "tolerant," "creative," with the right amenities to appeal to the Urban Explorers – a group interested in culture, events, restaurants, boutique shopping.	Intended to attract the Event Enthusiasts and Trend Setters who are attracted to places that foster an entertainment-focused lifestyle and which have a plethora of entertainment, sports, and cultural attractions

quality of life, experiences, and amenities (both cultural and recreational) make it easy to attract high quality talent from across the world. This includes urban amenities like its modern downtown and the city's extensive light rail transit system (described as one of the busiest in North America). Additionally, the proposal outlines that, at 580 miles, Calgary has the longest bike path network of any city in North America.

Calgary is also described as having a range of high-quality recreational amenities including Olympic training venues, premier equestrian facilities, and the opportunity to go skiing and "surfing" within city limits. Calgary is described to have a plethora of natural amenities including fly fishing and rafting along the Bow River, and two of the world's largest urban parks. The quality of life offered within the city is said to be complemented by the proximity to the "Banff and Rocky Mountain Playground" which includes world-class ski resorts, golfing, and the largest concentration of UNESCO world heritage sites.

Calgary is also depicted as a city with a thriving cultural scene with over 200 performing arts venues and more than 100 public art displays. Moreover, the city is said to offer high-quality museums such as the Glenbow, and the National Music Centre, an institution dedicated to celebrating Canada's rich music history. Additionally, Calgary is presented as having a diverse entertainment scene, with 272 festivals and events hosted in 2016 – including the annual Calgary Stampede Festival heralded as "the greatest outdoor show on earth."

The proposal also boasts that the culinary scene includes more than 3000 places to eat and drink with another 100 food trucks cruising the streets. Calgary is described as having a thriving arts and cultural community a result of its young, ethnically diverse, and highly educated population who care about the arts, culture, and sports. These qualities too are reflective of the language of the creative class model, as Florida argues that the territorial assets are an important factor in attracting creative individuals.

In the pitch to Amazon, Calgary is described as a tolerant city. A city that has invested in technology to fuel innovation. A city with an abundance of talent, ready to transition from the oil and gas sector and into the creative industries. Moreover, Calgary is pitched as a place that has the right mix of lifestyle, experiences, and amenities to suit the tastes

of Amazon's employees. The language used in the pitch to Amazon, mirrors that of the creative class model in that it portrays Calgary as a creative city.

5.2. Economic strategy: Calgary in the New Economy

Following the pitch for Amazon HQ2, in 2018, CED released *Calgary in the New Economy* - a new framework to guide economic development. To ensure that Calgary was prepared to capture economic growth, the plan was developed around four critical areas: having the right type of talent; an ecosystem of innovation; an optimal business environment; and evolving into a place where people want to live (see Fig. 2). The framework emphasizes that growth should be focussed on a range of established and emerging clusters – the latter of which includes growing the creative sector.

The ideas of innovation, talent, and place (as describe below) as the core pillars of the plan, as well as intentions to grow the creative sector, is further evidence of the adoption of the creative class model. While the pitch to Amazon describes Calgary in a manner that suggests it has already achieved the status of a creative city, Calgary in the New Economy provides a framework centred around strengthening the key elements to support its progression as a place for the creative class.

Place is identified as a central factor to attract talent, or "the number of educated, experienced and skilled people available to work" (*Calgary Economic Development*, 2018, p. 14) The focus of place embedded within the plan, mirrors the language espoused by Florida – that the city must provide the right territorial assets to be an "attractive place to live" in order to attract and retain talent. In recent years, Calgary has struggled to retain its young professionals. While the population increased by 250,000 people between 2009 and 2019, the cohort of 20 to 24-year-olds declined by 5.5%. This was the lone population group to decrease during what otherwise was a period of rapid growth. The perception is that young professionals are leaving for places that offer richer urban experiences as Calgary is said to lack a vibrant downtown and a rich arts and cultural scene (*Calgary Economic Development*, 2018; Fletcher, 2019).

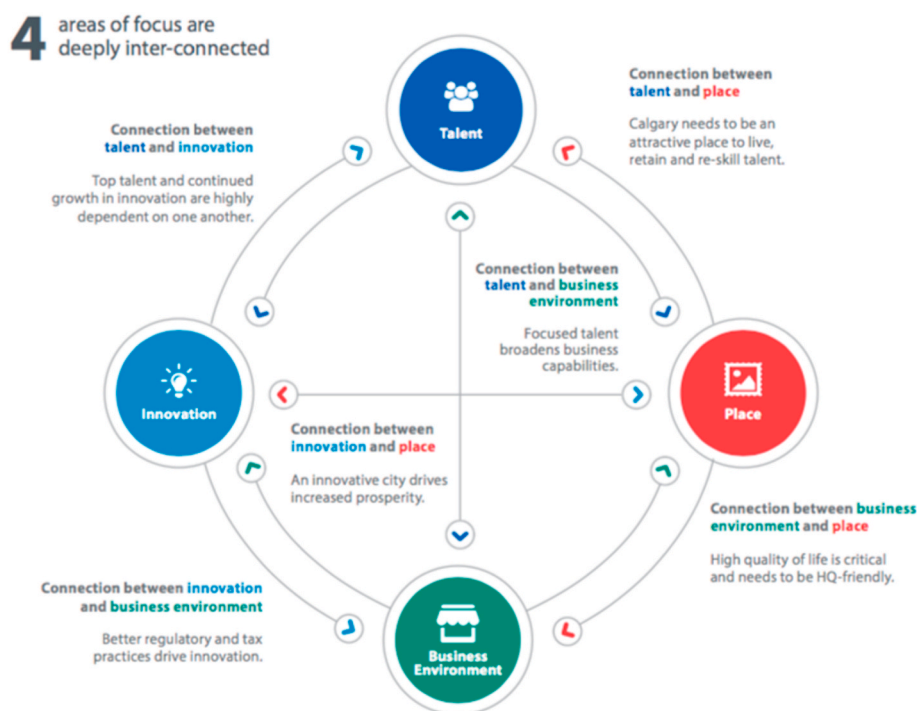


Fig. 2. The four pillars of the 'Calgary in the New Economy' strategy are interconnected, with a clear emphasis on the relationship between Place and Talent as per the Creative Class model (*Calgary Economic Development*, 2018, p. 11).

To ensure that the right kind of place is developed to retain and attract talent, the marquee initiative in the plan is to “accelerate urbanization and connectivity in the core” (Calgary Economic Development, 2018, p. 25). To achieve this, the plan presents an immediate need to focus on developing a mixed-use and vibrant downtown, including better transit, more arts, cultural and recreational events, and to strengthen it as a place that students and young professionals want to live. To achieve this vision, a series of action items are outlined, including building partnerships to fund flagship buildings, developing a bike-share system, expanding the LRT network, and revitalizing inner-city neighbourhoods. These strategies stem from the idea that to be “drivers of growth” cities need to focus their efforts on developing “policies and action plans to attract and retain talent” (p. 25). As the plan notes “adding to the vibrancy in the downtown core is important to ensuring the city is a magnet for talent” (p. 10).

Post-adoption this plan has successfully influenced other initiatives including the newly adopted downtown plan. *Calgary’s Greater Downtown Plan* is grounded in the idea that “... place-making is now recognized as being an integral part of a resilient economy. When a city can attract talent and businesses because of the quality of place, then jobs will move to the talent” (City of Calgary and n.d.-c). This initiative offers further evidence of the narrative that place attracts talent.

5.3. Decline of oil and gas and workforce shifts

The analysis above illustrates how strategies for economic development have closely mirrored that of the creative class model. Initiatives that have followed since further illustrate the ongoing shifts from Calgary as an energy city to creative city.

As indicated in Fig. 3, forecasts suggest that service industries will account for most of the job growth over the next five years. This includes significant growth across the creative sectors including information and cultural industries (12.4%), as well as arts, entertainment, and recreation (30.8%). Comparatively, jobs in Calgary’s traditional industries of agricultural, mining, quarrying and oil and gas (e.g., primary and utilities) are expected to grow by only 7.9%.

Growth of creative industries is intended to be supported by workforce retraining programs. “EDGE UP,” a program facilitated by CED and funded by the federal government, provides educational opportunities for displaced energy workers to be retrained for careers in tech.

Similarly, in 2021, Alberta’s provincial government launched the “Jobs Now” program with funding of \$370M to support retraining of oil and gas workers (Calgary Economic Development, 2021). In 2021, the federal government allocated an additional billion dollars to support job reskilling and upskilling throughout Canada. These programs come amid a report that between half and three-quarters of workers in the energy industry are at risk of being displaced over the next 30 years (Varcoe, 2021).

The integration of the terms “innovation,” “talent,” and “place” into Calgary’s economic strategy and a desire to grow the creative industries offers further evidence of the adoption of the creative class model. Initiatives that have since followed illustrate the extent to which efforts are being expanded to support workforce shifts. While *Calgary in the New Economy* presents strategies to reshape physical spaces to provide the territorial assets that attracts talent, as the subsequent discussion shows, similar efforts have already materialized in the Rivers District – an area long derided for its social issues and economic and urban decline. While this process further exemplifies the integration of the creative class model in the Calgary context, it also presents as an example of how these efforts have fueled “state-led” and “new-build gentrification.”

5.4. The decline and proposed revitalization of the Rivers District

The area now delineated as the River’s District has long served an important economic, cultural, and social function. This area is the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy; the Stoney-Nakoda; and the Tsuut’ina Nation (Fort Calgary, n.d.). It is also where the North West Mounted Police later established Fort Calgary. The area declined dramatically in the post-WWII period. This was a result of Calgary’s rapid suburbanization – a common phenomenon throughout North America at the time. Decades of decline prompted the City of Calgary to act in 2007 when they adopted the *Rivers District: Community Revitalization Plan*. The plan describes the community as an area that is rampant with crime, social issues, environmental contamination, and crumbling infrastructure. These factors were believed to be undermining redevelopment opportunities. The plan was developed with the core objective to rectify these issues and to “eliminate blight while creating opportunities for private sector development and redevelopment” (City of Calgary, 2007, p. 15). The plan promised a range of economic, environmental, and social benefits including an increase in the

Forecast Employment by Industry

Calgary CMA Employment Forecast by Industry	2022F	2026F	Total Change 2022F-2026F (%)
Goods-Producing Industries	188,394	199,547	5.9%
Manufacturing	44,793	44,319	-1.1%
Construction	80,772	87,418	8.2%
Primary and Utilities	62,828	67,809	7.9%
Services-Producing Industries	665,813	726,369	9.1%
Wholesale Trade	28,511	28,653	0.5%
Retail Trade	91,567	93,917	2.6%
Transportation and Warehousing	53,738	59,350	10.4%
Information and Cultural Industries	12,856	14,456	12.4%
Finance and Insurance, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing, and Building, Business and Other Support Services	82,329	83,261	1.1%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	96,033	103,735	8.0%
Educational Services	62,075	65,867	6.1%
Health Care and Social Assistance	112,950	122,924	8.8%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	20,777	27,173	30.8%
Accommodation and Food Services	44,570	59,717	34.0%
Other Services	29,760	38,000	27.7%
Public Administration	30,649	28,182	-8.0%
All Industries	854,207	924,782	8.3%

Source: The Conference Board of Canada, January 2022

Fig. 3. Calgary’s forecast employment by industry (2022–2026) (Calgary Economic Development, n.d.).

non-residential assessment value (\$3.8 billion to \$6.7 billion) and the residential assessment value (\$8.4 billion to \$11.6 billion) over twenty years.

Implementation of the plan began in East Village, a neighbourhood directly east of the downtown core. City Council directed their newly formed development arm, Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC), to solve the area's long-term issues including the "... perceived lawlessness" of the area (City of Calgary, 2007, p. 15). The challenges in East Village had developed over many decades. In 1941, Calgary's Medical Officer declared the neighbourhood as "Skid Row." In the 1960s, reflective of the era's urban renewal schemes, much of the neighbourhood's building stock was demolished. In the decades that followed, little development activity occurred, further entrenching long held perceptions of the area. By the early 2000s, 41% of Calgary's homeless population lived in East Village shelters. Additionally, crime in East Village was notably higher compared to other nearby neighbourhoods. In 2000, the median household income of East Village was \$16,334 – notably less than the City-wide average of \$57,879. Similarly, 62% of East Village residents were classified as low-income households compared to the city average of 14.8%. While Calgary's unemployment rate in 2001 was 4.0%, 12% of residents in East Village were unemployed – the highest amongst any of the inner-city communities. In 2006, the median value of a residential property was \$162,500 – much less than other neighbourhoods in the inner-city, including Eau Claire, where the median value was nearly double (\$323,000). These socio-economic issues were thought to be a hindrance to development activity. Only three development permits were issued between 2000 and 2005 and ongoing building demolitions resulted in 22 acres of completely vacant land. The plan for a revitalized East Village was presented as an opportunity for the neighbourhood to be "influenced in a positive way" through restoration of the "social environment" (City of Calgary, 2007, p. 15).

5.5. Attracting the creative class: A plan for East Village

In 2008, CMLC launched a global search for a consultant to lead the development of a new master plan that would transform East Village into a vibrant mixed-use creative city quarter. *Broadway Malyan* design firm that operates globally, was selected unanimously by the CMLC board of directors because of its "innovative and contemporary approach to the area's regeneration." (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, n.d.-b). The description of East Village in the master plan states:

"For decades, East Village has been shunned by the city centre and known for marginal uses that have tainted public perceptions of the area – despite the fact that the site is located on a desirable stretch of riverfront with strategic road and LRT connections, is adjacent to business, civic and cultural centres, and overlooks one of the city's largest urban open spaces" (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2008, p. 4).

The plan proposes a total transformation of the neighbourhood, from "marginal uses" to: "A place centred on innovation, exemplified by its architecture and streetscape quality. It captures the imagination of creative professionals and attracts small specialist organizations and businesses. It is also a magnet for visitors, who are attracted by its colorful, vibrant small-scale attractions and relaxed atmosphere" (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2008, p. 6).

A theme of "live, work and play" guided the vision to create a unique destination that offered "a long-awaited setting for cultural exuberance, entertainment, activity and adventure." The master plan proposed a mixed-use urban village comprised of music venues, shops, specialty retail, bars/lounges, and high-density residential that would increase the population to 11,500 residents. East Village was designed "to be a diverse and tolerant community" that offered a new experience of urban living in Calgary (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2008, p. 7).

The first projects, totalling 1.4 million ft² of new development, were

announced in 2012. Evolution (as seen in Fig. 4) was designed to be synonymous with "young" and "hip" "and was to appeal to "a population of young, well-educated working professionals who have a desire to be close to the action of downtown" (*Broadway Malyan*, n.d.). Ultimately, this group was rebranded as "Urban Explorers" and made-up the area's target market. To be an Urban Explorer meant you were "passionate, thrill-seeking, environmentally conscious" and with an affinity "for vibrant urban surroundings over suburban living and an interest in culture, events, restaurants, boutique shopping and the other stimulations of city life" (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2008, p. 16) (see Fig. 5).

This vision for a revitalized East Village was developed to meet the needs of the *Urban Explorer* and the marketing campaign that followed, used events, programming, and advertising to sell this group on the idea of living in East Village (for more on this see *Hiller and Goodbrand, 2016; Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2010*).

5.6. East Village of today and plans for the 'Culture and Entertainment District'

More than a decade into implementation of the master plan, East Village is developing as envisioned – a vibrant and walkable district comprised of a mix of residential and commercial uses. The neighbourhood is also the location of several new prominent cultural institutions, including the National Music Centre (2016) and the New Central Library (2018). The library, designed by renowned Norwegian design firm, Snøhetta, has brought international attention to the area. In 2017, *Architectural Digest* listed it as one of its most anticipated buildings of 2018. In 2019, the library landed Calgary on *New York Times* list of 52 *Places to Travel* and was described as a "gleaming jewel box" and "a stunning oval of snowflake-shaped windows and arching wood." That same year, *Time Magazine* listed the New Central Library on its 100 *Greatest Places of 2019*.

Since 2008, \$375M worth of infrastructure improvements have been completed in East Village. This has attracted an estimated \$3B of private sector development (see Table 3 for a complete list of projects). Despite the ongoing economic downturn, development continues. In 2021, the Platform Innovation Centre opened, bringing 50,000 square feet of dedicated 'maker' space. This space is intended to catalyze the innovation economy with ambitions of making Calgary "a global hub for start-ups and innovation" (Platform Calgary, n.d.).

In partnership with the private sector, the state has dramatically transformed a neighbourhood that has long been disparaged into an area that is now celebrated as:

"... a riverfront destination known for its vibrant events calendar, innovative public arts program, and diverse mix of residential development projects. One of the most dynamic areas within Calgary's downtown core, EV is now home to more than 1,200 new condos and over 3500 residents, a variety of retail options, and restored heritage buildings that add to the character of the district (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, n.d.-a)" and where "creative and tech communities have poured into the area, along with hip cafes, edgy eateries, independent shops and brand-name convenience (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, n.d.-b).

The transformation of East Village has ensured that Calgary has the right type of trendy, vibrant neighbourhoods fit for the Urban Explorer – a group synonymous with the creative class. With the majority of the redevelopment complete, the scope of the project has expanded into East Victoria Park. Directly south of East Village, and within the boundaries of the *Rivers District Community Revitalization Plan*, East Victoria Park is also envisioned as a vibrant, high-density, mixed-use community for 8,000 new residents. As part of the redevelopment, the area has been formally rebranded as the "Culture and Entertainment District" The District is to be anchored by a \$500 million expansion of the city's largest convention centre (see Fig. 6) and a new Event Centre for the



Fig. 4. 'Evolution' was the first project announced as part of the East Village redevelopment and was designed for the 'Urban Explorers' (Male, 2017).

Calgary Flames of the National Hockey League (NHL). Proponents argue that a new facility, of which the City is contributing \$275M, will attract and retain "young talent" in a "a re-energized, entrepreneurial, and socially vibrant city" (City of Calgary, n.d.-b). While intended to be a magnet for talent, this approach is inconsistent with the creative class model which states that stadiums and arenas do not appeal to the creative class (Florida, 2002, 2014). Nonetheless, the language of the creative class model is still adopted as part of the discursive strategy.

Where East Village was designed to suit the tastes of the *Urban Explorers*, East Victoria Park is being planned to welcome a similar population with similar interests: the *Event Enthusiasts* and *Trend Setters*. Event Enthusiasts are described as:

"Thrill seekers who look for an active and action-packed lifestyle. They're not particularly cost conscious and don't mind spending on activities and events. This segment is made up of Single Professionals, Couple Professionals, and Single Retirees." (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2018, p. 242)

Closely related are the *Trend Setters*, who are described as:

"A fun, dynamic and ambitious subset of the population. This younger segment displays higher risk-taking attributes, and its members aim to be the trendiest amongst their social groups by having the latest and most innovative technology. This segment is made up of Single Professionals, Couple Professionals, and Families."

Like the *Urban Explorers*, the *Event Enthusiasts* and *Trend Setters* are also said to value the types of places that offer the experiences Florida argues are important to the creative class. Specifically, the plan outlines that in choosing a place to live both groups seek: "...neighbourhoods that allow them to maximize their entertainment-focused lifestyle with their surroundings that offer an extensive array of entertainment, sports and cultural attractions" (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, 2018, p. 242)

The ongoing transformation of East Village and East Victoria Park into mixed-use and vibrant neighbourhoods to suit the tastes of the creative class is consistent with the place-based strategies of the creative class model. What has transpired here exemplifies a broader trend underway in Calgary. In 2020, construction of Telus Sky was completed, a unique mixed-use tower designed by renowned Danish firm, Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG). The impressive 60-storey tower in downtown Calgary consists of 440,000 ft² of office space, 10,000 ft² of retail space and

326 residential units. The LEED Platinum certified building was designed "to meet and exceed the expectations of the city's growing creative and technology sectors." Tech company, Absorb Software, leased 80,000 square feet of office space. The decision to relocate to Telus Sky was influenced both by the presence of the building's "tech-focused amenities" but as well, a belief that its design will help "attract and retain the best talent" (Real Estate News Exchange, 2020).

Similarly, Calgary's Peace Bridge (see Fig. 7) has become a symbol of the city's transformation. Early on, the bridge was a point of controversy. Critics questioned the need for another river crossing priced at \$24.5 million. Others criticized that it was awarded through a sole-sourced bid, to renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava (Klingbeil, 2017). However, perceptions have since changed, and the bridge is now perceived as "an icon for a new, modern, progressive city on the rise" (Geddes, 2019). Proponents argue that the Peace Bridge, and projects alike, are necessary, with one municipal official stating: "It's all about developing iconic pieces of architecture that will bring people in, make the city unique, and reflect its quality and character" (Geddes, 2019). Similarly, a city councillor argued the importance of the Peace Bridge in that: "We want Calgarians to love where they live and attract new talent to the city, and that comes with building a picturesque town worth living in" (Geddes, 2019). The incorporation of a Calatrava monument into the built form appears as part of the creative class playbook, as Zimmerman (2008) references a similar approach and project in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

5.7. The success of the creative class model in attracting and retaining talent

While efforts have focussed on attracting and retaining the creative class to and in Calgary, population change over recent years offers some evaluation on the effectiveness of this strategy. From 2015 to 2021, Alberta experienced an annual net loss of 1,133 individuals aged 25 to 29 - a decrease of 9% (Lane & Finch, 2022). This represents a significant shift compared to the previous 50 years, where historically there was an average annual gain of 8000 25- to 29-year-olds. Collectively, fewer people are moving to Alberta, and even more are leaving (Markus & Pedersen, 2022). A recent survey of students at the University of Alberta found that one-third are likely to leave Alberta post-graduation (Canada West Foundation, 2022). Young Calgarians indicate similar intentions. The Canada West Foundation found that 69% of Calgarians aged 18–24



Fig. 5. The front cover of 'Eve Magazine, published by CMLC, that' showcases all the new amenities and experiences coming to East Village in 2015 including the arrival of new residents framed as "The Great Move-In 2015" (Marca Strategy, n.d.).

intended to relocate out of the city in coming years (Canada West Foundation, 2022). Based on recent census data, the lack of enthusiasm amongst young adults to move to or remain in Calgary is evident. From 2015 to 2021 the population of 15- to 34-year-olds increased by only 0.1% (during a period with total city growth of 9.1%) (Canada West Foundation, 2022). From 2009 to 2019, Calgary's population increased by 250,000 people, however during this period, the number of 20–24 year decreased by 4400 people or 5.5%. This was the only age cohort to decline in population (Fletcher, 2020).

Historically, strong economic growth, with the promise of secure and well-paying jobs, has been a major pull factor, drawing young people to Calgary from all across Canada. However, the jobs associated with the oil and gas industry are not expected to return (Legge, 2020). Thus, expectations that youth will flock to Alberta, as they once did, is unlikely. A decline in job prospects, however, is only one factor contributing to challenges in attracting young people to Calgary. A recent report found that youth in Alberta are drawn to places that offer a clean and safe environment, with rich experiences, quality transit, arts, and culture, and that are diverse and inclusive. Conversely, perceptions about Alberta (both from within and out-of-province) is that it lacks vibrancy and diversity; and that Calgary is intolerant, not progressive, and is largely associated with the oil and gas industry, which is

negatively regarded by this group (Canada West Foundation, 2022). Thus, there is a disconnect between the types of places young Calgarians want to live in and what is offered in Alberta.

While adoption of the creative class model was intended to attract and retain young talent, the trends presented above illustrate the shortcomings to date. Moreover, the branding of Calgary as a talented, tolerant, and technological city have not altered the deeply entrenched perceptions about the city and province. Future research is needed to assess the impacts of these strategies over a longer period. However, these findings offer insight that the model should not necessarily be relied on as a solution where the impacts are realized immediately.

5.8. East village: the creative class and state-led, new-build gentrification

While Florida's thesis of attracting the creative class is intended to help cities overcome economic decline, critics argue that it enables gentrification, which exacerbates wealth inequalities and further disadvantages and displaces groups through property speculation.

Gentrification, where it is planned, promoted, and implemented by the state through policy is referred to as third wave or state-led gentrification. As Hackworth and Smith (2001) note, third wave gentrification has several characteristics which differentiates it from previous phases.

Table 3
New developments in East Village since CMLC was formed.

Project Name	Project Type	Project Details	Completion Date
First	Retail/Residential	198 residential units + retail	2015
Evolution - Fuse (Phase 1) - Pulse (Phase 2)	Retail/Residential	474 residential units + retail	Fuse (2015) Pulse (2016)
N3	Retail/Residential (first no parking development)	167 residential units + retail	2016
Verve	Retail/Residential	288 residential units + retail	2019
The Hat	Retail/Residential (Purpose Built Rental)	221 residential units + retail	2019
Hilton Garden Inn and Homewood Suites	Hotel	303 hotel rooms + restaurant	2016
Studio Bell National Music Centre	Museum	160,000 ft ² of exhibition space	2016
Alt Hotel	Hotel	155 rooms + 2 restaurants	2018
New Central Library	Library	236,000 ft ²	2018
M2	Retail/Office/Residential	1 residential unit, 2 floors of office + retail	2019
Ink	Retail/Residential	119 residential units + retail	2018
5th and Third	Retail	400,000 square feet	2020
Arris	Residential (Purpose Built Rental)	500 residential units	2021 (Phase 1)
Platform	Office/Parking	50,000 square feet of office space	2021
EV606	Rental Residential	140 residential units + retail	2024

First, they outline that gentrification expands throughout the inner-city but also in areas beyond the immediate downtown core. Second, large development corporations are the ones heading gentrification efforts. This differs from earlier phases where larger developers often waited

until some degree of neighbourhood stabilization had occurred and risks were mitigated. Lastly, in this wave, the state actively encourages gentrification. As [Bunce \(2009\)](#) summarizes, the third wave is where the state “proactively court globalized investment capital for land development practices” while developing a supportive policy framework (p. 659). [Mösgen et al. \(2019\)](#) identify five dimensions of state-led gentrification: 1) policy instruments enacted through state power; 2) discursive strategies to legitimize the process; 3) outcomes of direct and exclusionary displacement; 4) local opposition; and 5) causal drivers that have altered the role of the state. As the authors further describe, state-led gentrification typically occurs in areas previously identified as “un-gentrifiable.” These are neighbourhoods where market forces alone cannot facilitate social upgrading even in centrally located areas or in rapidly growing cities with high demand for housing. There are a number of factors that lead to an area becoming “un-gentrifiable” including a high share of social housing; fragmented land ownership; a negative perception leading to territorial stigmatization; a lack of infrastructure, services, and cultural institutions; noisy and polluting industries; and limited housing supply due to an urban fabric and architecture that are not distinct.

Gentrification is no longer narrowly defined as the process where the upper middle-class refurbish homes in traditionally working-class districts ([Glass, 1964](#)). Instead, gentrification also occurs through new-build and flagship development ([Doucet et al., 2011](#)). New-build gentrification is produced through new development “that involves the large-scale deployment of economic capital by developers” and built on brownfield sites or vacant land ([Davidson & Lees, 2005, p. 1169](#)). While the absence of a pre-existing group of residents does not lead to direct displacement, it still produces social upgrading. Here, space is restructured for use by higher income earners and causes indirect or exclusionary displacement. In this scenario, lower-income groups are left out of redevelopment plans as they cannot afford the future rents or costs to purchase. [Davidson and Lees \(2005\)](#) argue that including new-build projects in defining gentrification represents a “maturation and mutation” of the term (p. 1165).

There is evidence that the processes used to facilitate revitalization of Calgary’s East village and East Victoria Park follow a pattern indicative of state-led and new-build gentrification. This was done to ensure that Calgary has the right type of territorial assets to suit the needs of the



Fig. 6. A rendering illustrating the expansion of the Convention Centre which is part of the transformation of East Victoria Park into the ‘Cultural and Entertainment District’ ([Calgary Stampede, 2020](#)).



Fig. 7. Calgary's Peace Bridge designed by Santiago Calatrava has become an iconic image of the city and representative of how place based amenities are used to attract talent (Spragg, 2012).

creative class.

East Village, pre-revitalization, had all the indicators of being “un-gentrifiable.” First, it was an area where upgrading stalled despite being adjacent to the city centre and within one of Canada’s consistently fastest growing municipalities, with a high demand for housing. The neighbourhood has a disproportionately high share of the City’s shelter facilities – in 2004, 41% of the city’s houseless population resided in East Village. As discussed previously, this contributed to the stigmatization of the neighbourhood by the broader community. Furthermore, the industrial legacy of the neighbourhood resulted in land contamination throughout the neighbourhood. Over time, neglect and disinvestment created a low-quality urban fabric with crumbling infrastructure and where buildings were either abandoned or in disrepair. At the time when planning for revitalization began, the neighbourhood lacked most amenities and services which meant existing residents had their needs met by housing providers or had to leave the area entirely (City of Calgary, 2007). East Village had all the qualities of being “un-gentrifiable.”

The entrenched nature of these barriers required the City to take on the role of developer. These actions are consistent with the characteristics of state-led gentrification as described by Hackworth and Smith (2001) and Mösgen et al. (2019). First, in forming CMLC, the City of Calgary created an arm of the state, with the purpose of implementing development objectives. As the master planner for East Village, CMLC established the policy framework to guide redevelopment. From there, CMLC assembled, remediated, and disposed of land for private development. Furthermore, CMLC upgraded infrastructure (including underground utilities, streetscapes, new walkways, parks, and plazas), restored heritage buildings, and developed cultural amenities including the New Central Library, to attract private sector investment. The actions of CMLC helped to ‘prime the pump’ for private sector interest and investment. These actions mirror the policy instruments typically used by the state to encourage gentrification. Moreover, a changed role for the state is evident as well, as the municipality embraced an entrepreneurial agenda by taking on the role of developer with a focus on returning profits back to the City. One of the frequently cited benefits of the revitalization of the Rivers District was the anticipated property tax lift: an approximate increase of \$6B over a twenty-year period.

Furthermore, the private developers who partnered on the redevelopment of East Village offers further evidence of state-led gentrification. In 2010, when CMLC launched a search for private-sector partners, developers throughout North America were informed about the opportunity. Relationships were formed with 130 developers culminating in an expression of interest on six land parcels. The first agreement was

reached with Vancouver-based Embassy Development/Bosa Development who committed to delivering 700,000 square feet of mixed-use development, valued at \$300M. A second agreement was then reached with Fram + Slokker, an Ontario-based developer who proposed 800,000 ft² of mixed-use development. This deal was financed by Tricon Capital Inc. “Canada’s leading provider of institutional capital for major residential development projects” (Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, n.d.-c). Male recently, RioCan, Canada’s second-largest real estate investment trust (REIT), constructed 400,000 ft² of commercial development in East Village. Most of the redevelopment has been developed by large, well-resourced, out-of-province development corporations.

There is also evidence that the discursive strategies discussed by Mösgen et al. (2019) were used to justify the plans for revitalization of East Village. The revitalization plan describes the social environment as one of “homelessness and perceived lawlessness” that required immediate action (City of Calgary, 2007, p. 15). Planning documents describe that redevelopment could influence the social environment “in a positive way” and that the addition of new development and amenities would increase social interaction and improve the overall quality of life for prospective and existing residents (City of Calgary, 2007). This, as others have referenced, is justifying change on the basis that “social mixing” is a benefit (Mösgen et al., 2019).

Of the five dimensions Mösgen et al. (2019) use to describe state-led gentrification, local opposition is the lone characteristic absent from the Calgary context. Likely this is because in the period immediately preceding revitalization, the area was comprised primarily of commercial and industrial uses, and surface parking lots. Moreover, through CMLC, the City ensured that the small population of existing residents were not directly displaced from the neighbourhood. However, new development has altered the composition of the neighbourhood. In 2016, 65% of the neighbourhood’s population had some post-secondary education - higher than the citywide average of 61%. Additionally, the unemployment rate of 8% is lower than the overall Calgary average of 10%. In 2016, the median monthly shelter costs of owner-occupied units in East Village was \$1767. Consistent with the above, this exceeded the citywide median of \$1589 (City of Calgary, n.d.-a). However, despite the indication that new condo development has attracted a more-educated populace there is still a population of lower income renters living in older buildings that precede redevelopment plans. Specifically, 35% of residents spend more than 30% of their income on shelter costs (compared to the citywide average of 22%); 40% of residents live in subsidized housing (compared to the citywide average of 10%) and 24% of the population are classified as low-income (compared to the citywide average of 9%). The influx of new development since 2016, targeted

towards higher income, young professionals has likely altered the composition of the neighbourhood even further. A future study that uses more recent census data will be helpful in determining the degree of change.

The transformation of East Village provides an example of new-build gentrification facilitated by the state – with plans for East Victoria Park to develop in a similar way. Redevelopment has facilitated social upgrading by transforming space long occupied by marginalized populations and repurposed it for use by the creative class or as known in Calgary, the *Urban Explorers*, *Trend Setters*, and *Event Enthusiasts*. As a once “un-gentrifiable” area, redevelopment of the Rivers District has relied on state intervention and mirrors a process that has played out in other contexts (López-Morales et al., 2021; Mösgen et al., 2019). This approach to neighbourhood revitalization ignores the many criticisms of the creative class model and ignores how gentrification can be fueled by the actions of the state.

6. Conclusion

Changes in the global energy market has caused significant economic challenges for Calgary. While the oil and gas industry has long fueled prosperity, the cyclical nature of the industry and a prolonged downturn has prompted local officials to pursue economic diversification. Recognizing that Richard Florida’s creative class model has been embraced by many communities facing similar circumstances, this paper explored the adoption and integration of this model into public policy within Calgary.

Through an analysis of documents, this paper found parallels between the language of the creative class model and economic and planning policies in Calgary. First, in an attempt to land Amazon HQ2, the proposal pitched by CED depicts Calgary as a creative city. The language embedded in the proposal suggest Calgary has the right mix of the 4 Ts: talent, tolerance, and technology, with an abundance of territorial assets or placed-based amenities. Following an unsuccessful bid, CED released its new economic growth strategy: *Calgary in the New Economy*. This strategy demonstrates further evidence of the adoption and integration of the creative class model where innovation, talent, and place are presented as the core pillars of the plan.

While the intent of these policies is to attract and retain talent to and in Calgary, to date successes have been limited. Over the last census period, Calgary experienced a decline in the population of 24- to 29-year-olds and nearly no growth of 15- to 34-year-olds. Moreover, negative perceptions about Alberta and Calgary remain deeply entrenched, thus challenging the likelihood of attracting and retaining the creative class.

However, efforts have focussed on reshaping parts of Calgary’s inner-city to provide the right type of urban environment to suit the needs of the Urban Explores, Event Enthusiasts, and Trend Setters (i.e., the creative class). The processes undertaken here are indicative of state-led gentrification, which has resulted in new-build gentrification.

This research illustrates that Calgary, like other cities, has attempted to combine the right ingredients to attract the creative class. However, as illustrated, adoption of this model does not guarantee immediate success in attracting and retaining young talent. Lastly, this research illustrates that reshaping inner-city neighbourhoods to suit the needs of the creative class has ramifications as it relates to gentrification.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Rylan Graham: Conceptualization, design, Data curation, collection, Formal analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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