Moving the Creative Sector Forward
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The creative sector can be a catalyst for tremendous progress in any nation, yet this sector remains highly underdeveloped within Trinidad and Tobago. Keith Nurse has commented that in the Caribbean the creative sector has not been taken seriously, resulting in undocumented accounts of its potential social and economic value (*Creative Sector in CARICOM* 18; Minto-Coy 121-122).

A number of academics and creative practitioners in Trinidad and Tobago have also lamented the gross oversight of the creative sector for a considerable period of time (Estwick 92-93, 103; De Mater O’Neill 24; Khan 41-42; Pearce), offering a number of practical solutions to aid in providing the needed management and organization for this very critical area.

While the creative sector in the Caribbean has historically not held a place of priority in relation state or private sector budgetary agendas, regional scholars have observed that the creative sector should be seen as a critical resource in economic diversification and sustainable development (Nurse 11). Findings from a study published by Nurse in 2007, noted the lack of institutional structures to support the development of the Caribbean’s creative sector, resulting in short-lived and misdirected initiatives and investments (9).

Similarly, economist Terrence Farrell noted in 2010 that funding was a major constraint to the development of the Caribbean’s creative sector, citing regulatory reforms as a means of
improving employment opportunities for creatives, boosting foreign exchange revenues, and preserving indigenous cultural identity (16).

Former Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism Lincoln Douglas attempted to change the direction of Trinidad and Tobago’s creative industries in 2012, through a refined understanding of the role and function of ‘culture’; in this regard, Douglas highlighted the need for this paradigm shift to begin institutionally, establishing and maintain a sense of order and direction for the creative sector (Luke).

In 2017, a study was published by the Inter-American Development Bank, which regarded the creative industries as the most valuable asset of the Caribbean and Latin America, also underscoring the importance of action plans to aid in fostering greater measures of innovation and creativity on national and regional levels (Luzardo, De Jesús & Pérez 21).

Taking into consideration the variety of ways in which the creative sector can be transformed into a rich source of sustainable development, there is one key idea that has been continually highlighted in local and regional scholarship by academics and creative practitioners: the need for a well-articulated creative sector policy.

Policy in this context can be defined as a means of ensuring best practices, in relation to the organization, operation, and management of various industries within the creative sector, which ultimately determine the quality of processes, regulations, and output that is expected from these entities, for the welfare of those who work within, are connected to and benefit from the creative industries at all levels of local society (Torjman 4). In addition, a policy also involves decision-making and problem-solving processes through public education and professional consultation (Hillier 2-3).
The establishment of an appropriate policy cannot be overemphasized, as this is a vital aspect of developing the Trinidad and Tobago’s creative industries. With shared definitions and meanings that are well-articulated to meet the diverse needs of each area of practice and its respective stakeholders, an appropriate creative sector policy can streamline and systematize local efforts in raising the profile and profitability of the creative sector. This also requires a measure of collective thinking on part of local creative practitioners who function within this specific context.

According to researcher Rachel-Ann Charles, the development of Trinidad and Tobago’s creative industries through the design and implementation of a suitable policy would assist in securing employment for creative practitioners, fostering deeper levels of collaboration within creative communities, better ensuring the sustainability of the many industries within the creative sector (5). Such a policy would aid in addressing local filmmaker Yao Ramesar’s concern regarding the discrimination and unequal power relationships within the local creative sector, defined along the lines of geography and class (Douglas).

A creative sector policy for the Trinidad and Tobago will seek to consolidate the interests and benefits of all key areas of creative practice including fashion, film, dance, design, drama, music, crafts and more. Having a written plan of action serves as a historical record of intention, activity, and destination. It also provides an opportunity for ethical and operational transparency for those who work within the creative industries. A creative sector policy can serve as a rallying point for all national stakeholders - public and private - to engage in best practices that will better ensure the profitability of the creative industries.

Designers, artists, media workers and other persons who currently work within the creative sector and those interested in starting careers in this area should be mindful of the impact that policy (or a lack thereof) may have on all aspects of their professions - from working conditions to wages. As such, creative practitioners need to be able to see beyond their
individual areas of practice and think critically about the context of their work and their relationship to other members of the creative fraternity.

The future of the creative industries in Trinidad and Tobago rely not only on the skills of the individual or collective practitioners but on the way in which the creative sector is organized and managed to ensure equal opportunities for employment, profitability, sustainability and national progress. The kind of creativity needed in the 21st century relies less on individuality and more on collaboration. The creative sector cannot be taken seriously if it does not begin with those who already work within it.
Works Cited


Luzardo, Alejandra, Dyanis De Jesús, and Michelle Pérez. Orange Economy: Innovations you may not know were from Latin America and the Caribbean. Washington: Inter-American Development Bank (2017). Print.


