

Cities as Talent Magnets

Historically, a city’s competitive advantage was anchored to its proximity to scarce natural resources ranging from lumber and iron ore to access to navigable waterways. Today, a city’s prosperity is linked to its ability to attract, retain, develop and mobilize talent. **The future prosperity of Calgary is about people.**

By traditional livability metrics, Calgary is well positioned, including being ranked by the **Economist Intelligence Unit** as North America’s most livable city. However, there are early warning signs suggesting that the socio- economic disruption facing our city is negatively impacting the retention of young talent. For example, over the past decade, while the regional population grew by 250,000, the proportion of those aged 20-24 declined by 5.5 per cent. Similarly, Calgary has a disproportionate migration of people aged 20-40 compared to other Canadian cities. To compete in the new world of talent, we must think differently.

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How Do we Purchase Place?

Research shows that deciding the *place* to live is one of life’s most fundamental decisions. Like other complex purchasing decisions, it involves prioritizing personal values and evaluating these relative to the variety of options available. Though the relative importance of factors is highly contextual, research identifies a series of **stable variables** influencing this “place” purchasing decision. Broadly speaking, these factors can be clustered into seven areas in the figure below.

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Each factor is influential, but the bigger question is which factors do local community leaders actually control? Communities have no influence over their climate or the family

relationships of their citizens. Moreover, economic factors such as cost of living and housing costs are complex variables that are either beyond the direct influence of local leaders or rooted in long-term structural economic factors. However, community leaders do have significant control over four factors: *active, creative and learning experiences*, and the associated factors that enable them. Our capacity to attract, retain, and develop talent is dependent on “experiential capital” – the economic, human or social value accrued by active, creative, and learning experiences.



From Place to Experience

Research shows that 94 per cent of Calgarians engage across active, creative and learning experiences. Calgarians are not just active, creative, or learning people. We are experiential people.

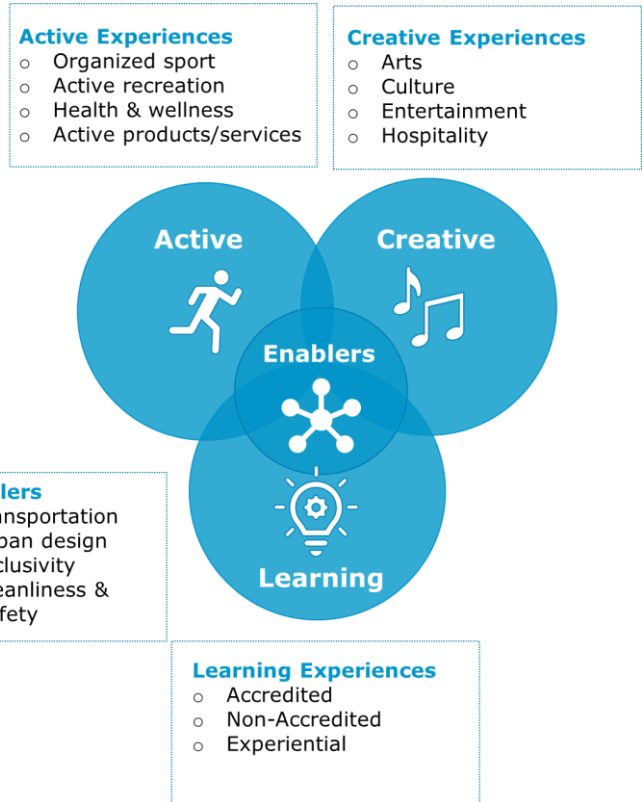
Thinking differently starts with rethinking our city. A city is simply a stage and a stage by itself is of no value. Stages are platforms to produce and share experiences.

To attract, retain, and develop talent, Calgary must transition from a *place* to an experience city - committed to delivering integrated world leading experiences.

Today, Calgary produces world class active, creative and learning experiences. The challenge is they are discrete and isolated, with little or no integration. **In 2020, we are a city of experiences, not an experience city.**

Twenty years ago, companies struggled with a similar challenge. Customers were viewed as a transaction anchored to a series of isolated touchpoints. The result was declining customer loyalty. Leading companies flipped the model and reframed customers as not transactions and touchpoints, but as a holistic relationship journey, labelled the “customer experience.” In other words, leading companies started to put people first.

To transform from a city of experiences to an experience city, Calgary must follow this lead and adopt a people-first view of experience design. To do so, experience designers must have a location to collaborate to identify new and innovative approaches to delivering experiences across all clusters. Most importantly, we must focus on the critical role of enablers in delivering a holistic and integrated experience journey to Calgarians.



A Centre for City Experience Design

The *Institute for Community Prosperity at Mount Royal University* has established the *City Experience Lab* (CityXLab) to support the transformation of Calgary from a city of experiences, to an experience city. In its role, the *CityXLab* will facilitate local commercial, non-profit and public experience designers to envision the experiences they offer as part of an integrated ecosystem. To ensure Calgary generates the maximum return on experiences, the *CityXLab* will study the relationship between experiences, experience capital and community prosperity. The lab will oversee the five integrated research programs to the left.

The *CityXLab* will be institution agnostic and focus on mobilizing the innovation and capacity of all Calgary postsecondary institutions to support the transformation to an experience city. For more information on on the *CityXLab* please contact:

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