



## Culturally creative cities in Japan: Reality and prospects



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### ABSTRACT

The creative city concept was recently introduced in Japan as an urban planning tool with the potential to alleviate social and economic problems related to cities. This differs from previous approaches to urban planning creativity in Japan in that it focuses on culture, the creative arts in particular, rather than science and technology. It has considerable appeal for cities addressing difficulties with on-going globalization, economic stagnation, and depopulation. However, the real volume of the so-called creative industries (which embody the creative city concept) is not large and is not growing, despite high expectations.

This paper examines the case of creative city policy in the city of Kanazawa, which has formally adopted the creative craft city strategy, using advanced design capabilities to revitalize traditional craft industries. Conventional market-based analysis indicates that it is very difficult to halt the decline of such industries, which are steadily losing competitiveness. On the other hand, promotion of traditional craft industries and other capacity-building measures does help to increase the attractiveness of a city, and indirectly supports service oriented industries including cultural tourism. Thus, creative city policy can enhance cultural assets and contribute to a shift from previous growth models, which were largely dependent on manufacturing, to a more service-oriented and sustainable model. This would lead to an increase in visitors and consumption, and would eventually support the maintenance of the urban functions essential for Japanese cities with decreasing populations.

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### 1. Introduction

Considerable research has explored the desirable linkage between culture, the city, and industry. The Arts and Crafts Movement in the UK, which aimed to improve the quality of life through discovery of beauty in daily life, was perhaps the first embodiment of such linkage (Morris, 1879). A similar movement in Japan focused on the functional beauty of daily commodities (Yanagi, 1928). Recently, however, much of the attention to culture has been from the urban planning perspective, reflecting drastic changes in economics, including the decline of once predominant heavy industries. Even in this context, culture is considered central, being one of the most important elements of revitalization of former industrial sites (“brown fields”) in cities and regions (OECD, 2005).

In the 21st century, on-going globalization, digitalization, and the shift to a service-oriented and knowledge-based economy are notable trends in all developed countries. In such an economy, entirely new forms of high-value added industry, which differ from

previous price-competitive commodity-based production, is expected to play a critical role. At the same time, the quality of the workforce for this new form of the economy will greatly differ from the previous system. In accordance, two approaches – supply side and demand side – have been proposed, where creativity<sup>1</sup> is regarded as a core concept.

The supply side approach is represented by the UK Department for Culture, Media & Sport (UK DCMS, 2001). They recognize the importance of creative industries in economic development, and define them as those “which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of economic property.” Their thematic classification for creative industries is as follows: advertising, architecture, art and antiques, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer

<sup>1</sup> There are many different definitions of creativity (Greffé et al., 2015). In this paper, creativity is used as having the general meaning of problem solving capability.

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services, television and radio.

On the other hand, the demand-side approach suggests that the cultural atmosphere of a city, provided mostly by creative industries, can attract creative people, referred to here as the creative class, capable of producing high-value-added goods and services. This creative class – scientific and artistic workers – is expected to play a decisive role in bringing affluence and development to cities (Florida, 2002, (Florida, 2005)).

In addition, fundamental functions which bridge the above two approaches have been discussed (e.g., Törnqvist, 1983; Hall, 2000): interacting processes of creativity and local development. Often referred to as creative milieu or creative atmosphere, this intermediate function is essential for the creative class and creative industries to succeed. Recent network analysis has indicated that the concept of a creative atmosphere can be viewed as a phenomenon, where culture factories, the local system of cultural production, and value-enhancing services are interacting, and the concentration of these talents and the rate of relationships give rise to cultural districts or clusters (Santagata, Bertacchini, & Borrione, 2009; Santagata, 2015).

The above arguments concerning the creative city concept, from different standpoints, can be viewed as a part of the growing attention being paid to the role of culture in development. Culture is regarded in a broad sense as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that (as encompassing), in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2002). The importance of culture as a key resource is increasingly recognized in addressing both the economic and social dimensions of poverty and for sustainable development (e.g., UNDP & UNESCO, 2013). Unlike the conventional model in which economic development is seen as the result of the combination of capital and labor, the endogenous growth model indicates the importance of the quality of human capital and even the social system and governance. In accordance, culture is regarded as a source of ideas for economic sectors (UNCTAD & UNDP, 2010). However, the role of cultural and creative industries has not yet been verified in a comprehensive way, nor has this view gained widespread support (Throsby, 2001; UNDP & UNESCO, 2013).

Even without a concrete theoretical foundation, actual implementations have been ongoing; UNESCO launched the Creative Cities Network Project to connect cities that want to share experiences, ideas and best practices regarding cultural, social and economic development in 2004, and seven creative fields were designated for the project: Crafts & Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Music and Media Arts. In Japan, cities such as Kanazawa (craft), Nagoya (design), Kobe (design), Sapporo (media art) and Tsuruoka (gastronomy) have joined this UNESCO network, explicitly adopting the creative city strategy.

There are various definitions of and arguments concerning the concepts of creativity and creative industries, and the above Japanese cities have different issues and starting points. However, three feature commons to all is that they are seeking to 1) increase wealth and create jobs, 2) upgrade city image and attract talent, 3) promote cultural creativity.

The purposes of this paper are to 1) survey the current creativity arguments and identify the importance of cultural creativity in Japan; 2) determine the actual volume of creative industries; and 3) evaluate, in the case of the city of Kanazawa, the creative city strategy's usefulness in developing local creative industries. In the final section, general prospects for development of cultural creativity are discussed. Although this paper examines the case of Japan, most findings are applicable to other countries.

## 2. Historical overview: the creativity argument in Japan<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1. Creativity for economic growth

Japan has been modernizing for the past 150 years. After World War II (hereafter WW II), Japan's new constitution renounced war and Japan focused intensively on economic development. The first wave of that economic development was in the 1950s and 1960s, with Japan experiencing rapid economic growth, roughly 10% increase of real GDP annually. This growth, sometimes referred to as Japan's economic miracle, was the result of a complex set of factors, primarily resources such as the well-educated workforce and active investment; productivity improvements; efficient corporate management; development of transportation and technology; government policies; and the international political and economic environment (Patrick & Rosovsky, 1976).

Shimomura (1962), a leading economist who laid out the theoretical framework for the economic miracle, pointed to a great surge of creativity in the Japanese people, who had been released from war-time constraints such as the gold standard and *zaibatsu* (financial conglomerates). He observed that every individual has the potential to engage in economic activity, and one of the driving forces of the Japanese economic miracle was the creativity of the general populace. This is one of the earliest statements referring to the importance of creativity for activating innovation and economic development in Japan.

### 2.2. Nurturing creativity through education

After Japan caught up economically with the other industrialized countries, Japanese industry was forced to make its own innovations rather than relying on advanced technology from overseas. The previous educational system, which produced a well-trained workforce for Japanese society and industry, was criticized as too uniform (MEXT, 1971), and the importance of nurturing creativity for innovation through formal and informal education was discussed mainly as a means of accelerating scientific innovation.

Since then, more attention has been paid to the creation of diversified human capital with talent for innovation, though admittedly creativity is difficult to characterize and measure. Until now, the number of patents, the number of Nobel Prize winners, and the number of scientific research papers published in international journals have been used as measures of creativity. The Japanese education system, which has developed remarkably, views creativity as the capacity to adapt to a rapidly changing world (MEXT, 1983) and promotes self-education by inculcating the ability to gain knowledge and information, to think, to create, and to express ideas on one's own initiative.

### 2.3. Creativity for knowledge creation

On the other hand, in the business sphere, the Total Quality Control (TQC) circle and *kaizen* (quality improvement) movements in Japan were prominent domestically and became well known internationally in the 1980s. These movements are based on management techniques for improving performance at every level of a company by promoting small but ongoing adjustments and innovations by all employees, ranging from factory workers to managers. In actual implementation, quality control activities inevitably require the cooperation of all personnel in a company.

These approaches provided a foundation for knowledge

<sup>2</sup> This section is largely based on Kakiuchi et al. (2013).

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