

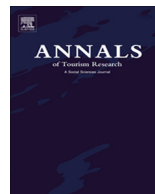


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Prosuming creative urban areas. Evidence from East London

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the role creative clusters play in the development of tourism. It involves an in-depth study of characteristics, motivations and experiences of visitors to creative urban areas using qualitative analysis of 142 interviews in creative, non-central locations in East London. The data show that the concentration of creative industries affords opportunities for consumption and for the accumulation of cultural capital, leveraging the presence of creative producers and other creative visitors, who are themselves perceived as an attraction. These factors, combined with a particular urban morphology and the presence of everyday activities, contribute to the areas' perceived authenticity, bohemian atmosphere and cool image. The paper develops typologies of visitors to creative areas and concludes with a discussion of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital applied to a contemporary urban context.

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Introduction

Creativity is an abstract concept that has inspired much research and theoretical debate in recent years, leading some to suggest the advent of a 'creative turn in society' (Richards, 2011, p. 1227). Its definition is contested, although most scholars emphasise novel combinations or unusual associations of ideas, and the social, theoretical or emotional value of creative processes and outputs (Pope, 2005). In economics and urban geography, work has mainly concentrated on the role of creativity in economic development and urban revitalisation (for example, Scott, 2000). However, whilst the presence of consumptive practices in such areas has been recognised (Zukin, 1995), most research on cultural

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and creative clusters neglects how these areas are experienced and consumed. The present study addresses this deficiency, paying particular attention to the role of spatial clustering of creative production in the development of tourism. To date, this topic has been discussed theoretically in tourism and urban geography literature but empirical studies are lacking (Evans, 2007; Frey, 2009; Richards, 2011).

Our research also contributes to the comparatively under-researched field of city tourism; particularly to the body of knowledge on tourism in peripheral urban areas and in cultural quarters. Ashworth and Page (2011) stress the importance of this research area, noting that the tourism microgeographies of world cities have the potential to challenge traditional views of tourism consumption by blurring the boundaries between tourists, day visitors and residents. According to Edwards, Griffin, and Hayllar (2008) both the tourism industry and academy need more in-depth information on tourist experiences and how tourists use cities. This research explores the relationship between creative production and consumption in developing tourism in non-central urban areas by examining visitors' characteristics, experiences and perceptions. The work adds to knowledge by extending the conventional view of tourists as consumers, through examining their role(s) as producers of, and as embodied attractions within, creative areas. London provides the ideal conditions for the investigation of this topic thanks to its twofold role as a world tourism city (Maitland & Newman, 2009) and as a creative and cultural capital (Evans, 2006).

Creative areas and their appeal for cultural tourism

The demise of Fordist manufacturing production in much of the Western world meant that new modes of wealth creation were required. A new 'elite economy' emerged in some cities (Clark, 2002, p. 497), characterised by the increased significance of aesthetic and symbolic qualities of commodities (Lash & Urry, 1994). A critical mass of informational professionals emerged (Castells, 1989); highly educated workers whose jobs mainly dealt with intangible goods. In the UK, creative industries were officially recognised for the first time as a sector in 1998, when the British Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) defined them as '... those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent ... [with] ... potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (DCMS, 2001, p. 5). As the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) later recognised, 'creative industries are becoming increasingly important components of modern post-industrial knowledge-based economies. Not only are they thought to account for higher than average growth and job creation, they are also vehicles of cultural identity that play an important role in fostering cultural diversity' (UNESCO, 2006, p. 3). Within the context of the new post-Fordist economy (Hutton, 2006)—and helped by controversial yet popular cultural economic theories (Florida, 2002)—creative industries have been used by urban authorities to pursue economic, cultural and social objectives (Richards, 2011).

Research has noted the geographies and socioeconomic organisation of the creative sector (Scott, 2000). These involve the promotion of innovation and experimentation (Sacco & Segre, 2009), high dependency on social networks (Evans, 2005) and a tendency to cluster (Porter, 1998)—privileging inner city locations (Hutton, 2006; Zukin, 1982). There is still no consistent terminology to identify spatial clusters of creative industries. Various terms, including cultural quarters, creative clusters, creative places and cultural districts, are used interchangeably by different authors with overlapping interpretations (Bell & Jayne, 2010; Evans, Foord, & Shaw, 2005; Montgomery, 2003). Scott (2000) uses the term 'industrial atmosphere' (p. 809) to encapsulate the advantages of spatial agglomeration. Face-to-face contacts between creative entrepreneurs produce a particular 'scene' (Silver, Nichols Clark, & Rothfield, 2006), also described as a 'communication ecology' (Bathelt & Graf, 2008, p. 1947) or local buzz (Storper & Venables, 2004), comprising information and new knowledge, as well as gossip and 'trade folklore' (Bathelt & Graf, 2008, p. 1947).

Vibrant urban areas with a creative image and stimulating cultural environment are in a privileged position to attract relevant professionals, businesses and talent (Jacobs, 1970; Zukin, 1995). Such conditions—combined with low rents (Zukin, 1982), the physical qualities of ex-industrial spaces (Hutton, 2006) and supportive public policy—have contributed to the transformation of economically deprived areas into places where creative outputs can be nurtured as well as experienced. Some authors see

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