



## What next for the creative city?

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### ABSTRACT

Forming the conclusion to the special issue, this paper begins with a critical engagement with a recent robust, informed, nuanced and eloquent claim by two leading scholars in the field that strategies for a cultural economy are central to the notion of the creative city. The paper suggests that seeking to support the 'intrinsic value' of the cultural economy does introduce a crucial aspect to any progressive urban cultural policy – but that this is not sufficient. The paper suggests the idea of the creative city is not no longer available as a progressive urban cultural policy and that a cultural economy approach on its own does not rectify this. The paper suggests that the more recent origins of the creative city discourse were dependent on much older notions of the 'good city' but that these have been progressively reduced to their economic dimensions. The paper concludes by showing how these older discourses went beyond the purely economic in ways the creative city now finds difficult to capture. A new way of talking about the aspirations towards the good city now need to be found.

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The city as a center where, any day in any year, there may be a fresh encounter with a new talent, a keen mind or a gifted specialist – this is essential to the life of a country. To play this role in our lives a city must have a soul – a university, a great art or music school, a cathedral or a great mosque or temple, a great laboratory or scientific center, as well as the libraries and museums and galleries that bring past and present together. A city must be a place where groups of women and men are seeking and developing the highest things they know.

[Margaret Mead 1978]

Cities, which want to be innovative, to flourish and to offer wealth and employment to its inhabitants, feel that they have to adapt to arenas in which knowledge and creativity can develop. Culture is often added to this arena, not just as a condition to attract the creative

knowledge workers, but also as a major economic sector, intricately interwoven with other sectors of the economy.<sup>2</sup>

[Sako Musterd and Wim Ostendorf 2004]

### Introduction: A new approach to the creative city

In this concluding chapter we want to draw together some of the threads of the foregoing papers in order to critically reflect on the interconnection between the creative economy, creative spaces and the creative city. As a way into these reflections we start with a recent paper by Pratt and Hutton (2013) on the creative cities agenda in the wake of the financial crisis. We do not intend a critique of that paper or the wider work of its authors *per se*, rather to use it to test the possibilities and the limits of the notion of the creative (or cultural) economy as a foundation of the creative city. Pratt and Hutton's paper is useful because it makes explicit and robust claims for such a foundation;

<sup>2</sup> Both these quotations come from a recent paper prepared for a UNESCO Creative Cities conference, Beijing 20/23 October 2013 (<http://www.unesco.org/new/index.php?id=117713>). Margaret Mead's quotation comes from Redbook Magazine, August 1978 and Musterd and Ostendorf "Creative Cultural Knowledge Cities: Perspectives and Planning Strategies," *Built Environment*, 30, No. 3, 2004:189.

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we do not wish to completely dismiss these claims but to suggest that other, possibly older, notions of the creative city need to come into play if they are to have any real transformative potential.

Pratt and Hutton outline five 'dominant accounts' of the creative city.

First, is that associated with the 'global cities' literature. Here creative industries, when they are considered at all, are seen as symbiotic with, and dependent on, advanced producer services and usually in the form of media, new media, design, advertising and so on. They may also be associated with cultural consumption facilities associated with agglomerations of creative service providers.

Second, is the 'cultural-historic city' with its 'roots in the cities of the Italian quattrocento' and representing 'the highest expression of the synergy between art, design and urban development' (90). This proto-creative city has direct descendants in the 'city beautiful' movements of the 19th century and

'in the idealist policies of (elite) state led cultural promotion in the early 20th century in Europe and the US, and their colonies. This is the city of museums and grand architecture that seeks to represent the power and legitimacy of the state and protector of cultural values (90).

This, they suggest, articulated with the national cultural policies of the era, in particular the 'traditional cultural policy that seeks to defend from the dislocations of the market a particular local definition of high culture' (91). The main effect of this 'outside of the narrow confines of the humanist informed argument of culture as a civilising factor for all society' (91) is heritage, and this in turn has fed into the growing cultural and 'creative' tourist economies of the last decades. This cultural heritage approach has also taken off most recently in Asian cities, themselves representing long-standing accumulations of power, prestige and cultural institutions.

Third is 'culture as a hook for foreign direct investment'. This has been in the form of building cultural infrastructure – currently 'iconic' art galleries – that will attract investment by 'mobile capital' and as an attempt to make the city more amenable to employees who might be relocated there. This has also been the area where Richard Florida has been most dominant. Here it is

'the relationship, between niche cultural consumption and lifestyle which attracts a particular segment of the labour force (the creative class) to cities, and in turn, as this group is in demand by emergent high-tech companies, they will 'chase' the workers and locate in 'creative cities' (91).

Fourth is culture as social regeneration. This

'overlaps a little with a humanistic cultural improvement notion; but in this case the betterment is not so much through high culture as through participation in cultural activities, commonly defined as 'ordinary culture' (91).

This emphasises community projects and intercultural communication, though it also includes sport and culture projects as used by the UK's DCMS for example. Here 'culture is a means to a better city, not an end in itself' (91).

Fifth – and the main focus of the paper – 'culture as industrial policy', is an approach with an 'intrinsic focus on the cultural and creative industries' (91). That is, in 'treating the cultural sector as a primarily economic sector' it acknowledges the 'intrinsic' value they represent rather than, for example, as a stimulant to the refurbishment of old industrial buildings (as in many urban regeneration initiatives).

The authors clearly give normative endorsement to 'culture as industrial policy' and the word 'intrinsic' underscores this. As both authors will be aware, 'intrinsic' has been set against 'instrumental' value in recent debates about the purpose of culture in contemporary public policy. 'Intrinsic' has been a kind of 'art for art's sake' in the face of the extrinsic, instrumentalist measurement of economic and social 'impact'. Pratt and Hutton seem to be reversing these traditional polarities. Large-scale cultural infrastructure investment and programs of cultural consumption and display are 'instrumental' in that they are aiming to attract visitors, mobile talent, inward investment and so on – or indeed, seek 'to represent the power and legitimacy of the state' (91). On the other hand, an industrial, primarily economic program focuses on the intrinsic values and needs of the sector itself.

The normative work of 'intrinsic' is, then, a call to focus on the specificity of the cultural and creative industries (CCI) – or as these authors prefer to call it, the 'creative economy' – as a policy end in itself. 'Intrinsic' gathers additional normative weight from the contrast between *consumption/display* – backed by large-scale state spending – and *production*, which underpins the real resilience and dynamism of the city post-GFC. The creative economy is a good thing for the city because it is directly productive. As the paper makes clear, the creative economy is not simply parasitic on the consumption effects of the financial sector or state funding; it is not 'good time candy floss' (93) but generates wealth and employment in its own right. In many respects the creative economy is the only viable version of the creative city, one based on a 'real' productive sector not just an inducement for other sectors or high-minded cultural policy ideals.

Nevertheless, the authors refuse alignment with that discourse of the creative economy that positions it as part of an inevitable 'post-industrial' economic future. They are suspicious of the creative economy being lumped into the wider narrative of an all-triumphant knowledge economy, with creativity in the driving seat. This narrative has suited politicians trying to position the creative economy more centrally on the policy stage; indeed this was precisely the use made by the UK New Labour government when it launched 'creative industries' as a neologism in 1998 (Garnham, 2005; Tremblay, 2011). The creative economy is not a sub-set of the knowledge economy but a relatively autonomous field.

The authors' reticence to endorse the celebratory narrative of the post-industrial knowledge economy could be interpreted as realism or 'expectation management', an antidote to the over-blown claims of many creative industry proselytisers. In this sense it could also be seen as part of the caveats against over-simplification made in their conclusion.

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