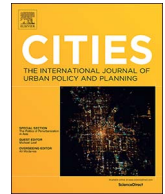


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## Urban amenities for creativity: An analysis of location drivers for photography studios in Nanjing, China

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### ABSTRACT

Urban amenities have been an increasing concern in recent scholarly discussion for their crucial role in promoting local economic development, especially for the rapid rise of the creative class. However, due to the Anglophone dominance in current discourse on this issue, the urban amenities for creativity in the particular context of China remain under-explored. This paper focuses on the location drivers for a specific sector of creative industries, photography studios, based at city level in Nanjing, China. It is suggested that urban amenities for creativity present great power to explain the spatial concentration of photography studios in the old downtown area of Nanjing. In general, photography entrepreneurship is closely associated with landscape amenities, leisure and networking amenities, and accessibility, whereas it is only slightly related to educational amenities. More specifically, the urban amenities for creativity for photography in Nanjing refer in particular to city gardens, cultural heritage, catering places, subway stations, locations which are relatively different from the attractions for creativity that are highlighted by the studies based in West. We therefore propose a contextualized and categorized approach for the urban policy of creative cities.

### 1. Introduction

The location dynamic of creativity has attracted great attention in recent literature on creative cities and creative industries. A large number of studies have examined “where is creativity” by profiling the employment pattern of creative occupations based on a regional or country-level census in post-industrial societies (Argent, Tonts, Jones, & Holmes, 2013; Florida, 2002; Gibson, Murphy, & Freestone, 2002; Wojan, Lambert, & McGranahan, 2007). They highlighted that urban amenities, comprised of natural, cultural and economic attractions, play an important role in establishing the desirable locations for the creative economy, primarily in metropolitan areas (Lazzeretti, Boix, & Capone, 2008; Scott, 1997). More and more empirical studies, including not only contributions on urban areas (Brennan-Horley & Gibson, 2009), but also on rural regions (McGranahan, Wojan, & Lambert, 2010), enhanced the proposition that location amenities are an essential property for attracting creative people, enterprises, and capital. Compared with the traditional concerns of the urban built-environment, suitability and accessibility (Mayhew, 2015; Park, Jeon, Kim, & Choi, 2011; Zhao, 2014), studies on urban amenities are particularly targeting those footloose “know-how” talents and entrepreneurs who are regarded as

the new engine of today's knowledge-based economy. However, theoretically and empirically, there is some dispute with regard to the question “what are the urban amenities for creativity” (see Florida, 2012; Markusen, 2006; Scott, 2010). In addressing this question, there are at least three theoretical ambiguities in current research on place-based creativity that first require clarification, namely, contextualization, categorization and scaling.

First, the origin of the concepts “creative industries”, “the creative economy”, “creative class”, “creative cities” and so on, is deeply modeled by a peculiarity of Anglophone communities, where a “developed” context is the foremost prerequisite. However, it is less frequently mentioned in most studies, including the ultimate thesis on the creative class by Florida (2012). This under-contextualized proposition often leads to a widespread misunderstanding in urban policy and in the real practice of creative city strategy, resulting from differences between diverse socioeconomic contexts (Evans, 2009; Fahmi, Mccann, & Koster, 2015; Pratt, 2008). Second, recent literature on creative industries has assumed too often a common causality between the location features and mobility of the different kinds of occupations termed as the creative class. In fact, an increasing number of scholars have pointed out that it is inappropriate to bundle all creative talents from a

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variety of sectors together to probe into a consolidated location driver for creative industries (Hansen & Nedomysl, 2009; He & Huang, 2016; Markusen, 2006; Sunley, Pinch, Reimer, & Macmillan, 2008). Third, the resolution adopted by most of the recent empirical studies on the location of creativity is rather coarse as they commonly use the data from official census on a macro regional or state level (Brennan-Horley & Gibson, 2009). Inconsistently, however, the conclusions of these studies often fall into a micro scale of urban space or even a neighborhood, stating individual preferences for urban amenities (Florida, 2005). We argue that, to capture the location drivers for footloose creative talents, the research area should be so fine as to discern the subtle differences within urban areas, such as the difference between urban centers and marginal areas.

Therefore, this paper will present a contextualized empirical study on a specific sector of the creative industries, photography studios, located on city level in Nanjing, China. It aims to explore “what are urban amenities” that shape the spatiality of photography entrepreneurship in the particular contexts of Nanjing, China, thus providing a better understanding of the location drivers for creativity, as well as a more convincing proposal for creative city practitioners in China and elsewhere. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: In the second section, we will try to interpret the term urban amenities for creativity (or creative amenities), especially the location drivers for photography entrepreneurship. The third part will first contextualize the study area, and then introduce the methods for this empirical study. The fourth part is an analysis of the main results of the work. The paper will end with a discussion of the potential contribution for the theoretical establishment and practice of a creative city strategy.

## 2. Urban amenities of creativity for photography entrepreneurship

### 2.1. What are urban amenities for creativity?

Location amenity has long been a concern in scholarly discussion. According to the dictionary definition, amenity refers to the *pleasantness* of a place that makes people feel comfortable and pleasant (Manser, 2004, 42). Academically, it is regarded as the quality of a place or the general environment of a locale (Argent et al., 2013), and a location-specific good (Diamond & Tolley, 2013). That is to say, an amenity is a subjective and relative perception that may vary from case to case, place to place. For example, a good location for sunbathing is definitely an amenity in the West but Chinese people tend to avoid exposure to the sun due to a fear of being tanned. Moreover, as Argent and others pointed out, an amenity is also a concept with a time-scale, ranging from a short stroll on a waterfront to permanent residence in a city, hence the term amenity complex (Argent et al., 2013). To sum up, an amenity is essentially a contextualized term that requires a localized and situational understanding.

In the post-industrial world, amenities have drawn much attention from urban economists since 1990s, with regard to their important role in regional economic development, entrepreneurship in high-technology industries, and residential choice (Felsenstein, 1996; Frenkel, 2001; Glaeser, Kolko, & Saiz, 2001; Gottlieb, 1995; Lee, Florida, & Acs, 2004). Gottlieb, for example, found that urban amenities such as schools, environment, traffic congestion, are powerful explanatory variables for urban prosperity (Gottlieb, 1995, 2014). With even greater enthusiasm, Florida advocated the significance of urban amenities in today's urban economy, while redefining the basic components of amenities, termed here as, in short, creative amenities (Florida, 2002, 2005). According to Florida, creative amenities encompass a broad range of attractions in a place, say, job opportunities, people, climate, social interactions, landscape, and most importantly, the quality of life. Quality of life encompasses lifestyle amenities such as thriving nightlife milieus, cafés, open spaces, homosexual openness, etc., and cultural amenities, e.g., galleries, museums, street-level music venues (Florida,

2005). Therefore, creative amenities are different from amenities in general because the creative class is relatively unique in lifestyle, seeming to be anti-establishment, bohemian, footloose and sexually liberal.

The idea of creative amenities is consistent with the class viewpoint of urbanism, well-known as Jacobs' (1961) proposition on place-based innovation and diversity of urban communities. Similarly, creative activities are highly embedded in urban society and everyday life experience, which make frequent human-scale interactions a substantial factor for raising creative entrepreneurship and creative milieus for “know-how” individuals arriving from other regions. The traditional location drivers for agglomeration economies, such as the cost reduction and increasing return of scale effect, are now replaced by creative amenities that support a high density of social networking and a dynamic location for a constant influx of talent, as well as market and job opportunities (Wenting, Atzema, & Frenken, 2011). However, suspicion is raised around the elitism of the creative class, a group of workers who might not essentially differ from other human capital with high education attainment. The footloose attribute of creative talents is the more or less untrustworthy assertion by Florida and his colleagues (Borén & Young, 2013; Storper & Scott, 2009). Additionally, urbanists also noticed that there are some unexpected social consequences, such as gentrification and displacement, caused by the concentration of artists and cultural workers in the old city area (He, 2007; Ley, 2003; Ren & Sun, 2012; Verdich & Gibson, 2010). This argument, however, does not necessarily define the significance of creative amenities but delivers a message calling for more contextualized studies on the very nature of the geography of creativity.

In addition to the urbanists, the other group of authors whose focus is on rural studies has also noticed the important role of creative amenities (Argent et al., 2013; Deller, Tsai, Marcouiller, & English, 2001; McGranahan et al., 2010; Sorensen, 2009). Nevertheless, the components of creative amenities in rural regions are obviously different from the urban creativity amenities, as the former is more about natural assets such as countryside landscape, pleasant environment, and high quality of air etc., compared with the latter, lifestyle and culture-based properties. Besides, in the rural area, creative talents are more likely decentralized and are of limited benefit to local economic development (Argent et al., 2013).

However, in the rest of the world, outside of the western context, creative amenities are rarely discussed in recent literature. This is largely due to a developing or under-developed economy characterized by a smokestack industry rather than a knowledge-based one. In the developing context, in Indonesia, for instance, the production system of creative industries is more a traditional handicraft and heritage exploration than the economy based on innovation and entrepreneurship in the West (Fahmi, Koster, & van Dijk, 2016), though they may share in the spread of the global rise of the creative economy (Barrowclough & Kozul-Wright, 2008). By contrast, emerging countries like China are highly involved in the global division of creative production. There is the case of the film production and IT entrepreneurship in India, and the rapid rise of ICT industries in China. In fact, China has been the largest exporter of creative goods since 2005 (UNCTAD, 2008). However, the studies of “creative China” at present are substantially concentrated on the discussion of political or institutional implications and interplay in the process of creativity-led urban redevelopment, focusing commonly on these government-led projects like the creative clusters or parks in big cities like Shanghai and Beijing (e.g., Gu, 2014; He, 2017; Keane, 2013; Kong & O'Connor, 2009; Liu, Han, & O'Connor, 2013; O'Connor & Gu, 2014; Ren & Sun, 2012; Zhang, 2017; Zheng, 2011). These and other authors contributed to an impressive research landscape of creativity-related place making and urban regeneration that differs from the West-based paradigm that tends to ignore the important role of the state. However, on the other hand, it produces a gap in the international discourse on creative amenities. This raises the question as to whether or not the creative talents and enterprises like

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