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Understanding Creative Regions: Bridging the Gap between Global Discourses and Regional and National Contexts.

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In the past 15 years, there has been an increasing focus on the importance of creativity in fostering economic development with the emergence of concepts such as creative industries, creative economy and the creative class. This trend, which started in 1994 in Australia, with

the launch of the report *Creative Nation*¹ and then discussed in more details by CUNNINGHAM (2002), was followed by its adoption in the UK (DCMS, 1998) and in North America (FLORIDA, 2002). It has now permeated the whole of Europe (MUSTERD and MURIE, 2010; CREATIVE METROPOLES, 2010), Asia (YUSUF and NABESIMA, 2005; KONG and O’CONNOR, 2009) and other parts of the World (BARROWCLOUGH and ZELJKA KOZUL-WRIGHT, 2008; FONSECA REIS and KAGEYAMA, 2009) as well as supranational policy levels in Europe (CEU, 2007; EC, 2010) and worldwide (UN, 2004; UNESCO, 2006; UNDP/UNCTAD, 2010).

More and more cities and regions around the World have been focusing on the “creative class” and/or on the “creative industries” in their economic development or regeneration strategies as part of this now globally fashionable discourse (see for example EVANS, 2009 discussing an international survey of such strategies). On the one hand, the concept of the creative class from Richard Florida in the USA (FLORIDA, 2005) focuses on how individuals working in a broad range of “creative” occupations in the economy contribute to local economic growth, and can themselves help foster an open and dynamic environment in which to work and live; by doing so, Florida highlights the importance of attracting talent in today’s highly mobile World. On the other hand, the creative industries discourse in Australia and then in the UK focuses upon how firms in these industries can be helped and supported, on the assumption that they are highly innovative and are the new motor of economic growth (see FLEW and CUNNINGHAM, 2010 for a review). Interestingly, these two concepts represent two sides of the same coin: one looking at individuals and the other looking at firms or, as expressed by COMUNIAN et al (2010), one looking at the demand side of the labour market and the other looking at its supply side. This might explain why either one or both

¹ <http://www.nla.gov.au/creative.nation/creative.html>

concepts have been adopted by cities, regions or countries across the World, sometimes interchangeably or in a conflated manner.

There has been a growing debate on how to define creative industries and the creative class in relation to artistic and cultural activities and/or the knowledge economy (see O'CONNOR, 2010 for a review) and the way they develop at local and regional levels (see CHAPAIN and COMUNIAN, 2010 for a review) and to what extent the creative class discourse can be applied outside of North America (see CLIFTON 2008 for a review). However, there is less research trying to identify specifically how different national understandings, economic systems and geographic and institutional contexts influence the way these industries work or the type of policies implemented to support them. Mirroring the increasing policy interest in the creative class and the creative industries to foster local and regional economic development, leading academic journals have published a series of special issues on this topic in the last 3 years. For example, Journal of Economic Geography's Special issue on "*Geography and the Cultural Economy*" by LORENZEN, SCOTT and VANG (2008) offers a collection of papers on cultural production at various geographical levels in different countries. HUTTON's (2009) Urban Studies' special issue on "*Trajectories of the New Economy: Regeneration and Dislocation in the Inner City*" focuses on a specific debate by exploring the way cultural and creative industries have helped regenerate various inner cities across the World. Finally, LERICHE and DAVIET's (2010) Regional Studies Special Issue on "*Cultural economy: an opportunity to boost employment and regional development.*" frames an interesting discussion around the cultural economy and territorial development, looking at individuals and firms in both urban and rural contexts.

While these special issues were extremely useful to explore the dynamic of cultural and creative industries or the creative class at various geographic levels and related policies, one aspect that remains unexplored is the interplay between these global creative discourses and regional and national contexts. This interplay lies in the different national understandings of the links between artistic and cultural activities and economics, the role of the state in defining local and regional governance and supporting or implementing some of the key policies affecting cultural and creative industries' development at the local and regional levels and the structure of urban and regional systems (especially the place of large metropolitan areas) in each country and how these shape local and regional dynamics. Indeed, as demonstrated by Collis, Freebody and Flew in this special issue, there is a need for a reconsideration of the 'imagined geography' of the creative economy to develop a better understanding of its manifestation in different national contexts and spaces. This need has been typically overlooked in the global creative orthodoxy outlined above. Building on a seminar series from the Regional Studies Association Research Network on Creative Regions (2008-2012) discussing recent research on the topic, this special issue aims to address this problem by bringing together contributions looking in details at this interplay in the UK, France, Italy, Sweden and Australia.

The first paper by BERTACCHINI and BORRIONE analyses the structure of the Italian creative economy and its patterns of localisation. The authors emphasise that the creative discourse only appeared in Italian national policies in 2007 and built on the Australian and UK approach i.e. focusing on the economic contribution that the creative industries can provide. However, in contrast to other developed countries, Italy displays a strong specialisation in craft-based and low technology products such as fashion and furniture. While the authors find that Italian core creative arts and heritage activities tend to concentrate

in large metropolitan areas as in many developed countries, Italian design and craft-based industries tend to locate in non-metropolitan areas. As such, the authors characterise the Italian creative economy landscape as a ‘highly interconnected conglomerate of creative activities, where the boundaries between metropolitan and non-metropolitan spaces tend to disappear.’

As mentioned above, the necessity to reconsider the traditional ‘imagined geography’ of the creative economy is at the heart of the paper by COLLIS, FREEBODY and FLEW looking at the location of the creative economy in Australia. The authors challenged the axiom in contemporary geography that ‘it is the inner urban areas of major cities that are *the* geographical hubs of creative industries.’ Demonstrating the inherent urban bias of existing location quotients mapping exercises, they develop a ‘density sensitive index’ to reassess the geography of the creative industries in Australia. Their findings demonstrate the importance of some outer suburban areas as loci of the Australian creative economy. Their interviews with Australian outer suburban creative workers support these findings with respondents highlighting that their outer suburban locations offer them a better quality of life in terms of access to the natural environment but also to a freer work atmosphere compared with ‘homogeneous and creatively stifling’ inner city environments. The authors conclude by highlighting the need to revisit the ‘imagined geography’ of the creative outer suburbs notably by better understanding the social processes that shape these so-called ‘non-global’ creative places.

Shifting the focus of analysis from geography to policy, the paper by ANDRES and CHAPAIN presents an original analytical framework by which to explore the governance arrangements associated with the implementation of cultural and creative policies at the local

and regional levels. Their framework combines the model of ANSELL and GASH (2007) on collaborative governance with the culture-centric and economic-centric approaches to cultural and creative policies defined by SMITH and WARFIELD (2008). Comparing Birmingham (UK) and Marseille (France), the authors show that the types of policies implemented in the two cities have followed national trends. While UK policies have displayed both the influence of culture-centric and econo-centric approaches in the last 30 years, the econo-centric approach has only reached France in the last few years. Contrary to what SMITH and WARFIELD (2008) suggest, the authors demonstrate that the culture-centric policy approach tends to result in a less collaborative governance than the econo-centric approach. This is partly explained by the types of leadership displayed by local and regional public and private actors, their financial resources and the local and regional institutional settings within which they navigate; the latter being strongly influenced by national policies.

Moving from the creative industries to the creative class, the last two papers offer a different take on Richard Florida's theory in different national European contexts. The paper by FAGGIAN, COMUNIAN, JEWELL and KELLY studies the location determinants of creative graduates in the UK. Reflecting the economic geography of the UK, their work emphasises the importance of London and the South East as hubs for studying and providing creative graduates with more labour market opportunities. Nevertheless, disaggregating creative graduates into sub-groups (creative arts & design, creative media and other creative), they show that the quality of these opportunities vary depending on the disciplines that they have studied, as well as the regional labour markets they moved into. The paper discusses the potential implications of the range of specialised opportunities offered by different regional labour markets, specifically from the perspective of graduates looking into entering a creative

occupation. Furthermore, it alludes to the influence that the UK Higher Education division between 'new' and 'old' universities has on the type of work that graduates occupy after university. This bears particular consequences for the new policies and interventions aimed at expanding the UK provision of creative courses in the next few years. Based on these findings, the authors argue for a better understanding of the relationship between national higher education policies and the development of the creative economy in the UK, reflecting on their consequences on local and regional labour markets.

Closing this special issue, the paper by CLIFTON, COOKE and HANSEN confront the 'context-less' theory of the creative class with the 'space-less' theory of the varieties of capitalism in order to reveal new insights into how socioeconomic and spatial systems vary in combination, using the examples of Sweden as 'a coordinated market economy' (CME) and the UK as 'a liberal market economy' (LME). Correlating indicators for the creative class and for varieties of capitalism, the authors demonstrate the existence of differences in the location of creative individuals across these two models of capitalism. Nevertheless, these differences seem to depend on the types of creative individuals considered, i.e. creative core or creative professionals. In addition, the authors point out that the relative urban and regional hierarchies have a substantial effect on the way the creative class impacts upon regional development. This is why, the authors conclude, that to be able to support the development of a creative region, there is a need to be context-specific and to recognise the 'complex interweaving of the relations of production, work and social life' associated with that region.

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