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Higher education and the creative economy: creative graduates, knowledge transfer and regional impact debates

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Introduction

With the expansion of the creative industries and their formalisation through the UK Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS, 1998), there has been an increasing awareness in the last fifteen years of the sector's capacities for innovation, economic growth and urban regeneration (DCMS, 2015). While the creative industries mapping document (DCMS, 1998) was the first of its kind to affirm economic growth potential to cultural and creative disciplines in a policy context, it also set clear parameters for the spectrum of sectors included. These are Advertising, Antiques (in a 2001 mapping document referred to as "Art and Antiques Market"), Architecture, Crafts, Design, Fashion, Film, Software, Music, Performing Arts, Publishing,

Software and TV and radio. The definition of the sector expanded with an international policy push articulating the value of interconnection between a range of sectors “dealing with the interface between economics, culture and technology and centred on the predominance of services and creative content” (UNCTAD, 2008: 4; UNESCO/UNDP, 2013) through the concept of ‘creative economy’. Following the UNCTAD/UNESCO approach, the paper will use the term creative economy to include both the creative industries but also the broader (often publically funded or not for profit) cultural sector, but will mainly agree that “at the heart of the creative economy are the creative industries” (ibid). Furthermore, supported by the expanding framework of economic geography, it will place particular attention to the geographical location and connections of these industries within creative clusters and hubs (Mould et al., 2009; Mould and Comunian, 2014) and creative cities (Landry, 2005; Florida, 2005; Comunian 2011). However, the paper will not specifically address the broader concept – by many considered controversial and inconclusive (Markusen et al. 2008) – of the creative class (Florida, 2002) as this engages with a much wider and ill-defined variety of knowledge-intensive occupations such as in science and business¹ which would blur our analysis in relation to creative higher education.

These well-known concepts of urban and economic creativity have recently been reassessed in the face of their changing value and impact in times of austerity, suggesting a shift towards translating creativity into the contexts of social responsibility and civic culture along the lines of “subverting the creative city language and rhetoric” (Harris and Moreno, 2012: 23; O’Connor and Shaw, 2014). This is a necessary critical approach to realign the creative city notion with prevailing economic and geographical contexts in which creativity often emerges through locally embedded talent and entrepreneurial networks (Comunian, 2009), rather than through cultural consumption strategies which to some extent curtail self-seeding productive

¹ For an extensive discussion about the distinctive perspective of the creative class in relation to the UK creative industries occupations see Comunian et al. (2010: 392-393).

capacities (Pratt, 2008). Alongside the growth of the creative economy and a widening access strategy central to the post-1992 university system, UK higher education institutions² (HEIs) started to offer an increasing number of courses in creative industries related subjects (“creative subjects”, as illustrated in Comunian et al., 2010), which were aimed at positioning a cohort of its graduates into a local creative labour market (Comunian and Faggian, 2014). These graduates will be further referred to as “creative graduates”, which suggests their affiliation with the spectrum of creative industries disciplines³.

Historically, universities have long been key cultural players in cities and communities. Many universities have been beacons of cultural production and preservation through the establishment of art collections, museums and onsite galleries. The UK higher education (HE) sector continues its active relationship with arts and culture, for example by hosting performing arts spaces on campus and undertaking academic research on arts and cultural activities (Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton & Goddard, 2000; Comunian & Faggian, 2014; Powell, 2007; Goddard and Vallance, 2013). As well as providing performing arts spaces, universities have been keen supporters of the development of local music scene (Long, 2011). However, more latterly, there has been a growing pressure from policy to understand the impact of HE in relation to the arts sector and the creative and cultural industries (CCIs), and to further facilitate these relationships and add to their potential value (Arts Council England (ACE), 2006; Dawson & Gilmore, 2009; Universities UK, 2010). It can be argued that the new framework of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014 has also put pressure on the sector and the need to articulate impact in an a more encompassing way (Martin, 2011).

² The terms HEIs and universities are used interchangeably in this paper.

³ Comunian et al. (2010) introduces the concept of ‘bohemian graduates’ to define graduates engaged in core creative arts based disciplines. However Comunian et al. (2012) highlight the importance to distinguish between a broader range of courses and careers and articulated that ‘creative graduates’ are ‘creative arts and design graduates’, ‘creative media graduates’ and also ‘creative others’.

With these broad trajectories in mind, this paper will establish an overview of an niche yet highly complex issue, allowing us to see the undeniable link between creative HE provision (higher education in CCIs related subjects), the creative economy and its wider regional and economic impact. Acknowledging that this is a rather underexplored area where more empirical research is needed, this paper provides insight into existing theories around HEIs' role in embedding creative human capital into a region and providing a platform for knowledge transfer through "third spaces". This will give new structure to existing knowledge in this area of research, connecting the dots between creative HE provision and the emergence of creative cities and regions. Whilst the literature used in the paper focuses mainly on UK data and policy context, it is hoped that this remains a useful exploration to consider further international comparisons and international case studies.

The changing cultural role of the university and art schools in UK

This section will firstly discuss the historic importance of universities for the formation of public culture, before turning to more recent discussions on the cultural role of the university in the contexts of globalisation, localisation and economicisation of HEIs. While focusing on HEIs generally, we will further address the changing character of art schools as providers for creative HE (Banks and Oakley, 2015 – forthcoming).

The UK HE system has an acknowledged historical divide between research-intensive traditional universities and those emergent from former local authority controlled polytechnics that were established in the 1960s as part of a steady HE expansion strategy (Chatterton, 2000; Goddard and Vallance, 2013). This binary divide, however, was abolished in 1992 with reforms that gave polytechnics formal university status, which accelerated the process of HE sector expansion and underlined the sector's need for improving global competitiveness. Whereas traditional universities such as those represented by the 'Russell Group' (a network of the UK's

most distinguished HEIs) offer a canon of degree programmes generally focusing on research-intensive subjects, post-1992 universities tend to offer practice-based and applied research subjects including arts and design courses that reflect the need for skill-based practical and technical learning. This, according to Mould et al. (2009: 139) illustrates the demand for more vocational training and the development of employable and transferable skills. Whereas Goddard and Vallance (2013: 70) argue that post-1992 universities had stronger local engagement potential “through their relative priority of vocational training, applied research and recruitment of students from surrounding areas”, Chatterton (2000) illustrates that pre-1992 universities were regarded as separate from their surrounding communities. He asserts that the role of the old university was —and to some extent still is— the reproduction of a high cultural elite with an associated canon of particularised knowledge which it served to reproduce.

With the emergence of the so-called ‘mass university’ as part of HE sector expansions starting in the 1960s and accelerating rapidly since the 1980s (Goddard and Vallance, 2013), HEIs took on an expanding range of cultural roles for an increasingly globalised society and regional economies. This developed hand in hand with the mainstreaming of popular culture into HEIs as juxtaposition to traditional “ivory-tower” universities (Mould et al., 2009: 139). However, the new character of the university has also implied novel tensions and contractions (Pinheiro et al, 2012) such as faced by the university’s involvement as stakeholder in urban and socio-cultural change (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2010). This also reflects on the type of physical infrastructure universities had to develop to provide the basis for the provision of creative subjects for example, which required the development of exhibition, rehearsal, technical workshop and creative production space. It can be argued that these new creative and cultural spaces not only served the programmatic needs for student and staff practice but also led to greater access to non-academic audiences as they became venues in their own right, opening up the university for a wider engagement with local communities (Chatterton, 2000; Arts Council England, 2006). Furthermore, the development of university assets such as

museums and galleries through research council investment and other public funding, twinned with the continuing role of students union facilities for music concerts and other live performances, meant that university assets and venues have also become important parts of local cultural infrastructures (Dawson and Gilmore, 2009; Goddard and Vallance, 2013).

The declining role of the university in building a national elite and a shift towards HEIs' regional distinctiveness driven by the need to position local universities against an increasing global competition, have led to policy development for greater university-regional engagement (Chatterton, 2000; Chatterton and Goddard, 2000). This regional focus will be discussed twofold to reflect the current thinking around the university's role for communities, cities and regions. The first line of thought concerns the role of the university as a public-societal institution. This, according to Gumpert (2000: 71), serves the cultivation of local citizenship and fosters the preservation of local cultural heritage. Here the university acts as "local public sphere" (Chatterton, 2000: 179) within which public culture can be practiced and recurrently negotiated. With this point it has to be noted that the meaning of 'culture' is more of philosophic character and does not necessarily refer to the economic circuits of cultural production and consumption associated with the CCIs. We argue therefore that this first interpretation can be regarded as the cultural role of the university, associated with its public-societal impact (fig. 1). While Kelly and McNicoll (2011) establish how the sector has been very successful in defining its importance to the economy in financial terms, they argue that HEIs need to find a way "to explain and communicate its social and public value" in more detail (ibid: 48). Zukin (1995) illustrates the importance of universities as places where boundaries of human society are negotiated and critical inquiry is nurtured. Along these lines we believe there is more capacity to strengthen the narrative around public value of creative HE, which requires more in-depth empirical research to prove its relevance within neo-liberal value systems. This critical and analytical function of the university, however, has increasingly been neglected in line with the neo-liberal transformation of HEIs into entrepreneurial hubs and competitive global talent generators (Chatterton, 2000: 178). Here we can observe an unresolved tension between

nurturing economic capacity of universities and maintaining their public-societal impact, which in essence requires the capacity to nurture critical and independent thought.

The second line of thought around universities' regional impact does therefore centre on their local economic potential through the provision of distinct services, knowledge, infrastructure (venues) and a skilled work force (also referred to as creative human capital or creative graduates). These attributes point to universities' new role as creative knowledge hubs within regional economies. Faggian et al. (2013) for example discuss the importance of HEIs as local research and development providers. But universities offer more than knowledge and service provision. Chatterton (2000: 178) argues that the sector needs to focus in more detail on its "third role", which includes fostering regionally embedded, co-created and co-owned knowledge. This is where the discussion of recent policy on "third spaces" comes in, to which will be referred later.

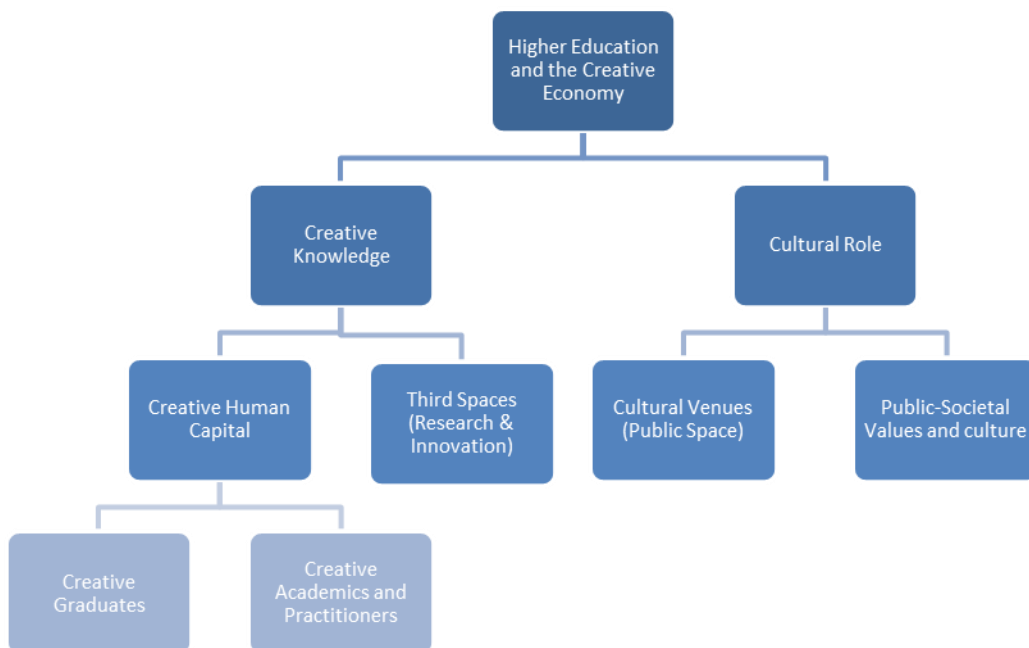


Fig.1 : A framework to explore the relationship between Higher Education and the creative (adapted from Comunian and Gilmore, 2014)

The discussion around the changing face of HE generally does not address the unique cultural role of art schools in the UK. To understand the relationship between HE and the creative economy, it is important to address the history of British art schools as institutions that originally secured the provision of CCIs related subjects. British art schools were traditionally distinct from the HE system. Closely embedded in local communities and state-funded (Banks and Oakley, 2015 forthcoming), post-war art schools provided the working class with access to fundamental aesthetic and skill-based training. They allowed young people without aspiring class credentials to transform their creative talent into unplanned experimental and radical practices. These evolved around questioning the relevance of artistic skill and attempted to overcome the formal cultural demands of the past (Frith and Horne, 1987).

The social and radical character of art schools peaked in the 1960s and nurtured the emergence of pop-culture movements not just confined to the field of music. However, under the 1990s New Labour government which prompted the vast commercial expansion of the HE sector, art schools became increasingly subject to cost and impact rationalisation, which meant that some schools had to close while others became absorbed by formal HEIs. Alongside these changes to the administration of art schools, there has also been increasing pressure in trying to demonstrate the contribution of creative graduates the innovation agenda of the CCIs and broader knowledge economy (Oakley et al. 2008). However, while it is acknowledged that the current creative HE landscape is defined by standardised curriculum and programmes, rather than a freer creative curriculum seeking to inspire and innovate, this introduces a tension between the need to develop autonomy in emerging creative practitioners and to provide 'employability' training to introduce these practitioners into the creative economy.

Higher education and the creative economy

While the first part of this paper has looked at the UK HE-sector, the university's broader cultural role and the history of British art schools, this section will discuss how education in creative subjects impacts on the development of regional CCIs. Connected to the previous discussion on the broader role of HEIs, two dominant streams of thought can be identified in relation to research and policy making in this area: the role played by creative human capital (see Fig 1) within regional creative economies; the importance of fostering innovation through knowledge exchange through what is referred to as "third spaces" (see Fig 1). Faggian and McCann (2006: 497) argue that "the primary role of the university system is being a conduit for bringing potential high quality undergraduate human capital into a region and having a highly skilled labour pool which far outweighs the benefits generated by knowledge spillovers". Hence we will first discuss the important and underexplored relationship between HEIs and incubating creative human capital, before referring to knowledge exchange policy.

Creative Human Capital: graduates & academic practitioners

There has been a diffuse understanding of the relationship between human capital and the CCIs, which we seek to clarify through discussion of creative human capital and its role in the reproduction of and innovation within the creative economy. Whereas the UK discourse strongly focused on the growth of the CCIs (DCMS, 1998), a comparable debate in the US highlighted the all-too familiar creative class as driver for urban-economic success (Comunian et al., 2010: 391; Florida, 2002). Comunian et al. (2010: 392) therefore note that the "supply and demand side of creative economy are variously defined and do not [necessarily] overlap". Terminology in this field is used interchangeably and often lacks clear definition, for example the CCIs understood to be primarily related to firms and the creative class to employees and occupations¹. To avoid further confusion in understanding the supply and demand processes in the creative economy, we believe that a divergence from the usual frameworks is necessary to highlight the role of

creative human capital for the emergence of regional creative economies. Furthermore within this role, there are two interconnected dimensions within the literature: the creative graduate and the creative academic/ practitioner .

In reference to creative graduates, Comunian and Faggian (2014: 20) note that “existing research overlooks the most important role of universities as conduit for bringing creative practitioners into a region, to educate them and produce high quality creative human capital”. This research gap calls for attention on processes of attraction and retention of creative graduates to a city or region; a key aspect in which HEIs play an important if not determining role. To establish a link between the creative city and locally embedded creative graduates, Comunian and Faggian (2014) have tested Clifton’s (2008) creative city indexes against student’s location choices and determinants. Clifton’s indexes distinguish between a creative city of cultural production, cultural consumption and one that fosters the development of a knowledge economy. This allows for a much clearer structure within which attributes and performance of a local creative sectors are attributable to certain processes and factors. An example is the linkage between HEIs and creative human capital development as part of a contextualised creative production system. This approach reaches beyond the occupation-based value system of the creative class, and gives necessary economic structure to creative economy processes. This provides a framework within which empirical narratives can be based on. Coming back to Comunian and Faggian’s (2014) paper, their research determined a general positive correlation between student’s location choices and the proxies adapted from Clifton’s creative city indexes, however the size and significance of the correlations differed. “The creativity of a city is more highly correlated to the number of creative graduates and graduates in creative occupations than the number of creative students. This suggests two things. Firstly, city creativity is more likely to influence labour market conditions rather than HE provision. Secondly, as seen before, the geographies of HE provision of creative courses and creative jobs are not completely overlapping” (Comunian and Faggian, 2014: 30).

Furthermore their research highlights the central role in the UK of Greater London and the South East in clustering of the CCIs and popular creative graduate locations. The emergence of regional hubs such as Manchester, Leeds, Cardiff, Newcastle and Edinburgh, points to some interesting regional differences and industry dynamics. For example Cardiff has a higher concentration of creative graduates than creative occupations⁴, while the opposite accounts for Edinburgh where creative occupations outweigh the percentage of bohemian graduates. This suggests on the one hand that there are some regions that do not have the capacity to retain the creative workforce they train locally, which may be due to a weak creative economy or other occupational mismatches. On the other hand, there are regions like Edinburgh, with a slight oversupply in creative occupations and not enough graduates to meet the requirements to fill these gaps. There are a diversity of explanations for the mismatch between supply of creative qualifications towards actual creative occupations and creative employment opportunities, including the increasing importance of freelancing, project-based work and portfolio careers which is hard to contextualise with regard to HE provision (Abreu et al, 2012; Ashton, 2014).

One explanation, according to the so-called 'signalling theory', is that employers consider traditional universities more prestigious due to their role in developing research-based skills in students along the lines of business and science. This is also acknowledged by Goddard and Vallance (2013: 70) as they note that significant hierarchical differences remain between pre- and post-1992 universities. Along with the issue of creative subjects not being regarded as hard core academic disciplines (Comunian et al., 2010: 397) this may have a significant 'signalling impact' on prospective employers (Faggian et al. 2013). This is argued to be manifested in the persistent salary gap and discrepancy of access to stable employment between graduates from old universities and those who study at new universities. This puts creative graduates whose subjects are not generally taught at traditional universities at particular disadvantage. A second explanation is that creative HE does not

⁴ The research uses the DCMS definition to map creative occupations (DCMS, 1998)

necessarily equip students with the right skills for the creative (or indeed non-creative) job market; which is referred to as 'human capital theory'. This results in oversupply of creative talent whose skills are not as valued as some of their peers with formal academic training. Inequalities of the creative labour market are enhanced for creative graduates, who have to reconcile their weaker position in the labour market with their role in society. (Comunian, 2010: 3).

As noted above, the recent expansion of creative HE offer has encouraged many young people to study creative subjects, in part due to low entry requirements, no cap in incoming students and the promise of emancipatory and creative careers. This led to an oversupply of creative graduates, which the labour market could not immediately absorb. Comunian and Faggian (2014: 9) argue that the creative economy has not expanded as rapidly as to accommodate the majority of creative graduates leaving university, which puts emerging creative professionals in an often long-term precarious economic position (Oakley, 2009). As tuition fees have risen up to £9,000 in England and Wales in 2011, this has resulted in debates over the continued provision of many creative education degree programmes, as creative graduates struggle to pay back expensive loans forced by long-term precarious careers and low wage employment. This calls for important discussions around the sustainability of this provision against the backdrop of increasing profitability demands that HE is subjected to (Comunian et al., 2014). McGettigan (2013) argues that the current student loan model is not compatible with the somewhat dubious prospect of immediate financial return that is meant to be extracted from creative graduates. Under these circumstances it seems that the public-societal and cultural value of the university and art school has ever decreasing relevance, at the same time as their business models for securing these values becoming increasingly unfeasible.

The lack of stability and structure in creative employment is also of importance when considering the human capital produced by HEIs. Faggian et al. (2013) have highlighted the importance of distinguishing labour patterns between different subgroups within the creative

economy, which is a diverse field of occupations with very different consumption and production hierarchies. Whereas occupations in the creative arts and design sector proved to be the least stable (part-time employment, freelance or temporary work), media and technology related occupations offered more stability with higher chances of entering full-time permanent employment. This reflects the increasing importance of the media and technology sector which aligns with the 'Digital Britain' (DMCS and DBIS, 2009) agenda, whose aim it was to bring Britain at the forefront of the global digital economy. It can even be argued that creative arts workers sit at the end of the value chain and are reliant on ever decreasing public and/or private funding.

Oakley et al. (2008) provide a striking example from the fine art world, which is a sector with particularly insecure careers and incomes. Their research focuses on fine art students and graduates and their role for innovation in their sector. This has been established by looking at traditional art schools as instruments for the production of networking and informal labour structures. While researching how creative HE education has opened and closed new markets such as illustrated through the YBA's (Young British Artists) as prominent example, this report reaffirms the widespread precarious working patterns in the creative economy. One of the major problems in art and design education has been the concept of studio practice and the self-direction and time that goes along with it. This is argued to have a negative impact on the teaching of technical and academic knowledge/skills. The research further questioned whether the model of undirected studio time and free access to tutors and technicians is sustainable in mass HE, where students expect to get more for their money.

Another important side to the idea of creative human capital in HEIs is the role played by the academic practitioner in this field. This area of research is closely linked with the next section of the paper on knowledge transfer and third spaces. However, it seems important to isolate here some key dynamic in reference to the blurred lines between academics and creative practitioners in HEIs in creative education. Abreu and Grinevich (2014) consider human capital by focusing on the highly trained individuals that constitute the human resources of

universities. They consider how they themselves often directly engage in start-up, patents and other economic activities. However, they also explore how academics in the creative arts follow specific patterns of engagement connected to the practice-based nature of their research and the value of the networks across HE and the creative economy that they establish and rely on. Another important dynamic in the sector is the overlapping role of artists/practitioners and teachers in many creative subject departments (Clews and Clews 2009; Ball 1990). This is also found in the contribution of practitioners to the creative curricula, through introduction of their practice as knowledge transfer back into HEIs from the sector. The role of the practitioners is also directed at maximising the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, embedding entrepreneurship teaching into practice-based modules within the core curriculum in close collaboration with industry (Ashton, 2013; NESTA, 2007; Brown, 2007).

Knowledge transfer and third spaces

Linked to development and exploitation of the creative human capital within and at the boundaries of HEIs are activities which engage the public in the creation of local knowledge and fostering knowledge exchange between academia and the local economy. There is a broader argument for considering knowledge in the CCI through the romantic notion of the artist as “truth teller” (Oakley, 2009: 281). This highlights the importance of creative knowledge for critical engagement with public-societal problems. However, more emphasis has recently been placed on the impact – economic and social – of the direct engagement of creative HE with external partners, through knowledge transfer and exchange. These policies have built on the rhetoric around increasing economic potential of the CCIs (DCMS, 1998). Whereas knowledge transfer (the process of taking knowledge outside academia) in STEM subjects has been explored and extensively supported through relevant HE policy, knowledge exchange in creative subjects has so far been neglected (Crossick, 2006; Comunian et al. 2013). This, as Crossick (2006) points out, is related to the

difficulties associated with materialising experimental and skill-based knowledge creation in the creative sector. Knowledge in the CCI is fundamentally different to STEM disciplines, where knowledge is tangible and more readily transferable to the class room. Knowledge in the CCI, however, is understood as networked phenomena embedded in social interaction and communities of learning rather than grounded on formal educational experiences (Crossick, 2006). This is confirmed by Abreu and Grinevich (2014) who reveal that, contrary to general perception, entrepreneurial activities in the creative arts are considerable. However, they point out that alongside the traditional modes of research commercialisation (academics who generate spin-outs, or form or run their own consultancy business), “it is the less formalised and less easily quantifiable types of activities, such as organising exhibitions, giving public lectures, sitting on advisory boards, and organising student placements, which dominate the pattern of academic entrepreneurship in the creative arts” (ibid: 467).

These exchanges and collaborations are often associated also to the concept of “shared spaces” or “third spaces”. Some shared spaces are physical infrastructures (for example incubation spaces, shared facilities), others are virtual platforms or “third spaces”, where academic knowledge mixes and negotiates with specialist knowledge from the art sector and its communities. Most of these spaces tend to be informal and based on mutual collaborations and exchanges, however, sometimes they are results of larger investments and conscious commitments to developing long-term partnerships across the sectors (Dawson & Gilmore, 2009). Crossick (2006: 14) describes third spaces as a vital component in “embedding people and knowledge, and people with knowledge in a region to the benefit of its industry and its innovative capacity”. However, as previously noted, third spaces have been perceived of lower importance compared to HEIs involvement in attracting and retaining creative human capital. However, policy – both HE and cultural policy – has acquired more importance in shaping the dynamics of collaboration and exchange, with clear drive to fund

knowledge transfer programmes⁵ (e.g. Arts Council England, 2006; Crossick, 2006; Fisher, 2012). Abreu and Grinevich (2014) point towards the importance of the development of networks of external organisations and associates within the modes of engagement of creative arts academics. “These activities often involve non-monetary rewards, and are closely linked to networks built around teaching” and they also point out that these networks “by virtue of their geographical scope are likely to bring long-term benefits to the local and regional economies.” (ibid: 468).

Recent policy has debated several models and modes of fostering third spaces as strategies of knowledge transfer and exchange. One driver for this is the recent cut of public funding for the arts and the HE sector, which makes knowledge transfer a viable instrument for combined and increased impact. Knowledge transfer hence solves two core cultural policy problems in one: to secure the provision of arts and humanities education and to foster cultural production. This adds greater value to both fields and extends previous public investment (Fisher, 2012). This view is shared by Universities UK (2010) who believe that knowledge transfer as creative-academic partnership and collaboration creates prosperity and helps to overcome interdisciplinary and cultural barriers. Fisher (2012) for example argues that “shared/third spaces” increase the capacity of HEIs to develop creative talent through either work-based learning, organisational resilience and public engagement through the university as civic resource. However, this paper contends that the arguments for increasing the value chain through partnership across the creative and HEIs sectors requires more detailed empirical research in a number of areas, including institutional barriers, the types of shared value and outputs, as well as the benefits that both sides can gain. Following the points made above concerning the disparities between different local economies and different university types,

⁵One example of policy intervention in the UK is the initiative of the AHRC (launched in 2011) called ‘Knowledge Exchange Hubs for the Creative Economy’ where over £16m over four years planned to be invested in creating new opportunities and shared platforms for collaborations. According to the AHRC (2011) these hubs ‘will be charged with the task of building new partnerships and entrepreneurial capacity in the Creative Economy and increasing the number of arts and humanities researchers actively engaged in research-based knowledge exchange’.

there should also be further enquiry into the specific regional factors which effect the capacity and capabilities of creative-academic partnerships. Another push towards increased emphasis on collaboration and knowledge exchange activities has been linked to the development of new forms of accountability for impact as part of the recently completed Research Excellence Framework 2014 but this has also been criticised for the predominance of economic discourses in shaping the understanding and articulations of 'value' in the HE policy-making (Belfiore, 2014).

Conclusion and research opportunities

While this paper has only sketched the key dynamics between HE and emerging creative economies, further qualitative research is needed to depict detailed talent attraction and retention processes that allow us to reaffirm the importance of creative HE for nurturing city creativity. Further international comparisons and understanding, especially as the CCIs discourse becomes increasingly globalised, are also needed (Comunian and Ooi, 2015 – forthcoming). In conclusion we highlight three key policy issues and areas for further research to move this debate forward, namely: the importance of communities of practice and the repositioning of practitioners and students at their core; the importance of (local) stakeholder management and engagement within the dispersed bottom-up approach to shared/third spaces and the emergence of a community agenda within the HE and creative economy debate.

Firstly, there needs to be more focus on communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) that span academia and cultural practice, in order to determine the cultural and economic value of creative HE. Since art schools and creative subjects at universities have been burdened by public funding cuts and rising tuition fees (Asquith, 2014; Beech, 2013), it is necessary to challenge the sustainability of creative HE and to demand for new models of delivery. Various small grass-root initiatives have recently formed in the UK to provide free alternatives to formal arts education which are beginning

to stimulate a discussion around how to reform arts education. These groups and projects directly address the artificial monetary value that arts education is currently subjected to, while providing 'safe spaces' within which radical knowledge can be developed relatively independent from neo-liberal value systems. This is an aspect that is increasingly being withdrawn from HEIs, which slowly removes their capacities in being critical public-societal institutions. Independent initiatives show that knowledge and skills in the CCIs can be mediated at low cost within communities of practice, rather than being solely confined within expensive formal institutions. These developments provide new ground for empirical research on how creative HE can be rethought to balance public-societal and cultural value with diminishing neo-liberal demands. This does not mean that alternative arts education initiatives should replace formal HE structures, but rather should they remain crucial as critical think tanks from which institutional change can be performed. The communities of practice perspective, provides opportunities for practitioners to valorise and verbalised their knowledge as acknowledged community members (Clews and Clews,2009). It also supports the need as Bennett (2009: 13) suggests for universities "to look to the research practices of the arts themselves for 'the innovative thinking that employs tacit and explicit knowledge to link artistic, scholarly, industrial and cultural paradigms'".

Following Benneworth and Jongbloed (2010) we argue that a better understanding of importance of (local) stakeholder management and engagement is needed. The informality and creativity of many knowledge exchange projects and the often dispersed bottom-up approach to shared/third spaces can create a confused picture of the real connections which are developed between and within institutions. Although it is clear that HEIs play a key role in the development of regional creative economies, through top-down interventions in the creative economy (Comunian and Mould 2014), this role is often developed on a basis of weak links and interconnections rather than planning and consolidate research. Better understanding is required of the ways to strengthen relationships, in policy and academia, to enable the blossoming of connections and to allow institutions to take ownership and manage long-term

developments rather than simple one-off collaborations. For example, we look at the role that policy initiatives, like the Arts & Humanities Research Council in the UK (launched in 2011) called 'Knowledge Exchange Hubs for the Creative Economy'⁶ to understand long-term dynamics and legacies of collaborative work .

Finally, as funding for the arts is subject to continuous cuts and as universities in UK face increased criticism over higher fees, we point to the emergence of a community agenda within the HE and creative economy debate. There is a need for timely reflection on how culture and creativity could help universities engage with local communities and break barriers to access for segments of the community which are left outside of the campus, and excluded through lack of economic means as well as social and psychological barriers. At the same time, it is important to consider the inherent tension between the core function of universities and the increasingly neoliberal agenda they pursue, and the potential instrumental value of creative arts in a climate of neoliberal business interests. It is clear that as the value of arts and creativity is increasingly understood and recognized, in terms of instrumental policy agendas, so citizenship and social responsibility initiatives of universities are increasingly turning toward new modes of creative engagement which draw on the capacity of academics and CCIs to collaborate and operate in the same civic community spaces.

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