Exploring the role of networks in the creative economy: economic and cultural dynamics

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Introduction

The growing importance of culture within different contexts, and especially the economic ones, has developed a sort of cultural turn in the economy, where the cultural dimension (its demand and implications) is called in to explain new economic processes and dimensions and the development of new convergences between the cultural and economic development (Scott, 1997). Cultural economy can then be defined by those sectors that engage with products and services "whose subjective meaning, or, more narrowly, sign-value to the consumer, is high in comparison with their utilitarian purpose" (Scott, 2000: 462). The rise of this cultural dimension in everyday life and economics has been often explained through the growth of leisure time, education and disposable income, leading to an increased consumption of 'leisure' goods and cultural goods. Indeed, as many authors suggest, culture is no longer a specific field or sphere of social life but can now be found in everything around us, from urban spaces, to communication products, and general commercial goods (Hirsch, 1972; Lash and Urry, 1994; Flew, 2002). O'Connor (1999b) suggests that this growth in demand leads not only to an expansion of the market but also to the proliferation and fragmentation of markets, with products defining individual and group identity.

Within this growing attention to culture and creativity as economic fields, many authors have investigated how creative products (Sunley et al., 2008, Scott, 2004) and creative production systems (Pratt, 1997) come together and grow, in specific geographical context. The role of place (Drake, 2003) has been particularly relevant to all previous research, and even more in relation to concepts like creative clusters (Pratt, 2004, Turok, 2003) and creative cities (Chapain and Comunian, 2009).

Set in this broader literature, this chapter aims to be a critical reflection on the role of networks (and networking) in the context of the creative economy. There is a large literature emerging in the role of networks in general in various economic contexts (Grabher, 2004), and some older theoretical frameworks, such as clusters and industrial district analysis, place considerable importance on networks and interactions. However, the dynamics and interactions which might emerge in the context of the creative economy, seem to provide an interesting setting to test further and explore in more detail how individuals use networks in their creative and cultural practice, often managing not only a business but the progression of their knowledge and artistic practice.

The data and research on which the chapter is based was conducted in 2005-2007 in the region of the North-East of England (UK) and specifically in Newcastle-Gateshead, an old industrial city-region trying to establish itself as centre for the knowledge and creative economy. The research mapped some of the dynamics of individuals working in the creative economy in this context and captured their interactions and engagement as a key element to the local creative development of the city.

The chapter is organized in four sections. Firstly, it provides a brief overview on the networks literature. Networks have been a considerable arena of interaction between economics and cultural studies theorists and therefore provide a key platform of engagement in the analysis of the creative economy. The second section introduces the methodology and the case study of Newcastle-Gateshead and the North-East of England. The nature of the case study and its cultural development also highlight the complex interconnections between local cultures and local economies and their interdependence. Results and issues emerging from the research project are discussed in the third section, while the final section addresses some key findings and conclusions.

1. From clusters to networks: across economy and culture

One of the key approaches in academia to study the role of networks is to take a cluster perspective, therefore considering the value of interaction across a specified group of individuals, often in a confined context (a city, a quarter, a region). This is particularly true in relation to creative and cultural industries.

Most authors looking at creative industries at local and regional levels have used some kind of cluster approach, on the basis that clustering plays an important role in these industries. For example, Scott (2000, 2002, 2005) and Storper (Storper, 1989, Storper and Christopherson, 1987) have specifically developed their studies in the context of cultural clusters, i.e. the development of the film industry in Hollywood. Many other authors have focused on the analysis of clustering in different sectors: film and media (Coe, 2000, Turok, 2003); design; advertising (Grabher, 2001); software and new media (Pratt, 2000, Christopherson, 2004); music (Brown et al., 2000, Gibson, 2005).

The overlap between physical clustering of organizations and companies in the creative industries is explained in a variety of ways: from supply chain relation and product innovations, to access to specific knowledge resources and labor markets. However, it is often the case that these 'cluster'

benefits are not simply delivered by mere co-location of organizations, but more strongly developed through the establishing of collaborative networks. This new focus on connections (across space and time) has been recently presented as a new 'relational turn' in our understanding of economic geography (Sunley, 2008).

In particular, in the investigation of the creative economy, it is important to keep in mind the overlapping connections across economic, social and cultural networks. Crang (1997) suggests that the field of investigation of economic geography "content is being rethought in terms of what social and spatial proportions of life count as economic, what proportions (if any) are therefore non-economic, and how these designated spheres of the economic and non-economic interrelate" (Crang, 1997: 3). Capturing the interconnections between the economic and cultural dimensions and how they interrelate is specifically challenging when we research the cultural and creative economy.

The movement towards a social network markets approach recently proposed by Potts and Cunningham (2008) is here supported as creative and cultural industries are considered embedded in a production eco-system (Jeffcutt, 2004b) which is not sector or industry bound. In the context of creative industries, there has been a growing interest in the way the social and cultural dimensions are intertwined with the sites of exchange and consumptions but also the value of production systems and supply-chains. This is not a new theme for researchers in the field, but it can be argued that very little attention has been directed towards understanding the nature and dynamics of these networks.

Using the classification of models of clusters developed by Gordon and McCann (2000) it can be argued that much of the research around the creative industries production clusters has been concentrating on the first two models, 'pure agglomeration economies' placing emphasis on the importance of external economies and agglomeration, and the 'industrial complex' model, instead focuses on the role of input-output connections between firms in the cluster (Grabher, 2001, Scott, 2002, Scott, 2005, 2001, Coe, 2000, Lazzeretti, 2003, Pollard, 2004). Although many studies have touched on the 'social network model' only few have explicitly focused on it (Julier, 2005, Kong, 2005, Banks et al., 2000). While the use of industrial data and exchange has been between the main methodologies for the industrial mapping, the social network aspect has been mainly investigated through qualitative interviews with people in the creative sector.

Although not much research has been conducted on the actual structure and organization of these networks, a large part of the literature related to clusters and regional economic development within the creative economy make claims about their importance within particular sector case studies and investigations (Christopherson, 2002, Coe, 2000, Crewe, 1996, Ettlinger, 2003, Grabher, 2002, Johns, 2006, Mossig, 2004, Neff, 2004). These arguments have been, on various occasions, interconnected with the urban cultural infrastructure through terms such as cultural quarters or cultural milieu. Brown et al (2000) suggests, specifically focusing on the role of the 'cultural quarter', how physical linkages are often dependent on social linkage. "The complex networks of activity and exchange are given a context – they take place. This place acquires a series of associations which can be iconic ('Bourbon Street', 'Carnaby Street', 'Kings Road', 'Haight Ashbury') but are also spatially embedded social networks. […] it is these 'scenes', 'milieus', 'happening places' which are the real context for a local music industry rather than 'facilities'"(Brown et al., 2000: 446).

Nevertheless, arguments in favor of prioritizing a network approach over a co-location understanding of the creative industries have emerged recently (Chapain and Comunian, 2010) and a new understanding of the importance of scale also within the creative economy have expanded this framework (Coe, 2000).

The shift from the neoclassical approach to economic geography based on competitive advantage and transactional factors (Porter, 1998) to institutionalism and relational assets: 'institutional thickness' (Amin and Thrift, 1993), 'untraded interdependencies' (Storper, 1997) towards the relational thinking (Yeung, 2003) which have emerged more recently, can also be seen in the literature related to the creative industries. From data and economic impact studies to relational approaches: "creative ecosystem" (Jeffcutt, 2004a) 'sociality of cultural industries' (Kong, 2005).

Emerging from a fuzzy literature which has not been able to pin-point motivation and dynamics behind the interactions across the creative industries, the concept of the creative cluster (Pratt, 2004, Wu, 2005, Turok, 2003) has been used by policy makers and researchers without a clear understanding of the sort of interactions which take place at local level in the creative economy. In fact a gap in the literature in reference to the way the creative industries work and interact at the local level - to which this research aims to contribute - is still present "there is a lack of strategic knowledge about the relationships and networks that enable and sustain the creative process in a knowledge economy" (Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002: 228).

In this chapter, we argue that networks play a specifically important role in the creative economy for some sector-specific reasons, which relate to the broader arguments presented in the economic geography literature but are also context-specific to the sector:

- The creative industries sector is comprised of small and medium size companies, and solo trading is typical. It is therefore easy to think about how networking can have a role and an impact in the development of economic growth and support for the sector (Taylor, 2006);
- Working patterns of the sector are characterized by unstable, temporary working conditions (part-time, freelancing, contract working), therefore networking is important to access work and obtain future contracts (Blair, 2001);
- Social dynamics are a really important part within the economy fabric of the creative economy and they relate to the creation of trends and scenes as well as to the social exchanges which enable cultural intermediaries to set values and trends (Fleming, 2002).

2. **Researching networks in Newcastle-Gateshead**

The context of Newcastle-Gateshead represents a challenging case study for research into the development of local creative and cultural economies. The growing attention towards this sector is part of a long-term regeneration commitment, although the area lost the European Capital of Culture prize in 2008 (Griffiths, 2006; Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004) and cannot therefore be compared with famous case studies (Balsas, 2004; Herrero *et al.*, 2006; Richards and Wilson, 2004). Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, the city, and in particular the Quayside regeneration project by Gateshead City Council, is considered a successful model of cultural regeneration (Bailey *et al.*, 2004; S. Miles, 2005a; Minton, 2003). Some authors have presented reasons and supporting data for this success (Bailey *et al.*, 2004; S. Miles, 2005a, 2005b), while others have considered the limits of the regeneration (Byrne, 2002; Byrne and Wharton, 2004). Our focus is not on the outcomes of the regeneration, but on the network and collaborative approaches adopted by creative practitioners which characterize this case study.

The region's focus on cultural investment began with the Year of Visual Arts in 1996. In the context of Newcastle-Gateshead and the North East, the new emphasis and attention towards the creative economy can be linked with a long process of cultural regeneration of the region. This process started in the early nineties when the region attracted the Year of Visual Arts in 1996. The ability of some regional actors (led by Northern Arts today the Arts Council North East) to attract large public

investments to the region in order to revitalize the local economy and to develop the local participation in arts activities, are widely acknowledged (Bailey et al., 2004). These investments have enabled the creation of large publicly funded cultural infrastructures, not only in contemporary art (The Baltic) and music (The Sage Gateshead) but also in theatres (refurbishments of the Northern Stage, Theatre Royal and Live Theatre), crafts (National Glass Centre, expansion of the Shipley Gallery), literature (Seven Stories), dance (Dance City) and other important events. The question of whether, and how far, public sector infrastructure benefits the local creative economy is not a simple one to address. Nevertheless, the region and specifically Newcastle-Gateshead have benefited from a new image as a 'creative city'.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the Regional Development Agency (RDA), local authorities and support agencies, started to look at the potential economic impact of the creative economy locally and regionally, with a strong commitment to the idea of 'cultural quarters' (Jayne, 2005). Alongside the cultural regeneration of the region, The Regional Development Agency, ONE North East and local authorities and support agencies have been particularly interested at the potential economic impact of the creative economy locally and regionally (CURDS, 2001, ONE North East, 2007).

One of the emerging patterns of this development is the establishment of often sectorial networks and organizations supporting people in the creative sector. The development of these networks - sometimes formal and institutional, other times artist-led and informal - represents an interesting emerging phenomenon.

The idea of developing a 'cultural quarter' strategy in the city has been quite strong and has involved different actors. In particular, at the marketing and promotional level, a first formulation of the 'cultural quarters' map of the city was developed by Newcastle-Gateshead Initiative (NGI), the city destination agency. In this first presentation, five cultural quarters were included: the Quayside, Grainger Town, the Haymarket, Chinatown and Jesmond. The interpretation of what a 'cultural quarter' is was based mainly on the consumption of culture, either through the presence of big cultural institutions or trendy shops. In this classification, no mention was given to the Ouseburn Valley which was the larger co-location of artists and creative practitioners in the area.

Since 2002-3, a second 'cultural quarter' strategy has been led by the University of Newcastle, which developed a new master plan and major refurbishment initiative for its cultural facilities and also addresses the role of cultural production (specifically through the Culture Lab and the Northern Writer's Centre). More recently, a wider focus has been developed, not based on clusters but on networks.

Specifically, various networks and infrastructures have been put in place to address the needs of the various creative sub-sectors. Agencies like Codeworks (for media industries), Northern Film and Media (for the moving image sector) or New Writing North (for writers) and others, have been in charge of developing schemes and training to boost the local creative economy. Other general schemes such as the Culture Business Venture have been created to provide funding for creative businesses.

Within this geographical research context, our research project focused specifically on the role of networks, adopting a mixed method approach. The sample included a selection of individuals belonging to the creative economy of the North-East and willing to take part in the research. The names of the individuals were selected from the yellow pages, other business directories and listing magazines, as well as individuals involved in public policy activities and initiatives in the sector. Overall, around 400 individuals were contacted via e-mail or telephone and invited to take part in the research. The positive responses allowed a sample of 136 individuals to be interviewed between

September 2005 and April 2006, covering different sub-sectors of the creative and cultural industries and ranging from directors of private companies to sole traders, from policy makers to not-for-profit cultural sector managers. The qualitative interviews covered six main areas: the present role and position of the person and his/her career development; the involvement with public funding and public sector projects and organizations; relations with cultural and arts institutions; relations with place and its importance in their practice; relations with other creative/cultural industries or creative people and role of networks; opinions and interactions with the support and public sector infrastructure. After the interview each individual was also asked to complete a social network analysis (SNA) questionnaire.

In the limited space of this analysis, we focus on the results from the qualitative interviews undertaken and we explore the accounts of creative practitioners and the role that networks play in their work and creative practice.

3. The role of networks in the creative economy

A large part of the literature related to clusters and regional economic development suggest the importance of networks and interactions. In our research many dynamics of network interactions reflect the broad economic geography literature, however, some seem specifically related to the socio-cultural dynamics of the creative economy or have specific relevance in this sector.

In particular, we identified the following key dynamics, **common to the broader economic geography literature**:
- Interaction between networks and labor markets;
- Networks as marketing/branding opportunity (access to market);
- Networks as social/support and professional development;
- Networks as funding structure/opportunity.

Networks and labor markets

Of course, the 'labor pool' dynamic is a traditional argument of economic geographers in relation to industrial clusters. A more recent take on this, and more closely related to the creative economy, is the analysis of dynamics of project based work and freelancing in the knowledge economy (Grabher, 2004, Baines, 1999, Dex et al., 2000). Also in the context of Newcastle-Gateshead and the North East of England, networks were believed to be important to access new job opportunities. This is central, as many of the jobs are project-based or short-term and contracting and freelancing is essential in the ecology of the creative industries in general.

There is not that many jobs in the North East and lots of people goes to people who already know, so it is all about networking, what you are willing to do for free, what you are willing to do for cheap, lots of favors, it is an insular community, so you have to work hard to get any work at all. (Freelance Cartoonist)

Part of the overlapping of activities and collaborations depend also on the interchange in people's career and movements from one organization to another. People tend to remain and work in the region for a long time and they tend to maintain their contacts throughout their diverse activities or diverse career paths, as this person describes:

The same people are doing everything and moving around, for example as people move in their career some people might move from University, than they start their own theatre company then they move to Live then move to Northern Stage, people move in and out from the Arts Council, because you can have a big overview and you want to move on, then they want to get back to more basics, you go to work for the organization you were serving there, you see the same people but they are not doing the same job they were doing last time. (Creative Voluntary Support Manager)

Network as access to the market

Artists and craft makers rely on the network as a market building strategy and as a marketing strategy in itself. In a variety of creative sectors, from Design to Visual art and music, creative practitioners come together to creative a critical mass that facilitates the promotion of their work and the establishment of an image or a brand. One example in the North East is the *DesigNEd and Made* that promotes designers and makers in the region, and helps them build a brand in a way to promote their work and their practice. This enables them to access a wider market and interact with a broader commissioning clientele.

I think it is really important for the North-East to show that this kind of work exists in the region, that there is work here which is pushing the boundaries, and unless you have something like DesigNEd and Made other regions, and the rest of the UK and the world, won't know about the North-East and what is going on here. (Designer and Maker)

Another example is Cohesion, the network for glassmakers, originating in the North of England it is sponsored by the City of Sunderland. The aim of Cohesion is to assist and support glass businesses and practitioners to develop their skills, to create new opportunities and to promote the quality and diversity of their work to wider markets.

Within the glass world the north east is well and truly on the map because of Cohesion and the Glass Centre and everything. Commissions are passed on to me through the network or from other artists because they cannot do the job and it is really about being in the right place at the right time, and the same when I cannot do a job, I try to pass it on to other colleague. (Glass Artist)

Networking is considered vital also towards getting commissions and sales. In a sector where often the product needs to be designed or commissioned before being sold, the importance of networking is even greater as the artist or creative practitioner needs to develop trust towards his work and name before being asked to produce a product

Networking I think it is vital, it depends on how much you throw yourself into it, take somebody like N, all his work and sales are just through word of mouth, through getting himself everywhere, talking to everybody, being involved in everything [...] that's pretty much 100% of his work. (Photographer)

Network as social and business support infrastructure

Another useful dimension of the network is the support that people get out of it. On one side it is possibly moral and psychological support, the kind of support like "do not worry" "I had the same problem"; on the other side it is also a form of business support. Creative industries hardly identify themselves with the mainstream business support (although I think this is very much based on their experience, if they find a person competent and useful they will rely on business support, if they find somebody not familiar with their issue they will dismiss all the business support as being not relevant to their need). On the contrary, they believe that the best people to provide support or

business advice are the people who practice their work and have experience in their field; therefore the peer to peer support through formal and informal networks and advice seem to be a means to create the personal support infrastructure that a creative industry need.

It is very much a social network. It's an attempt, kind of to see each other on a social level, go out for a drink and talk about what we're working on and about things that are coming up, which you know, if it is something that someone is involved in then, we go along to support each other, just do it that way very informally. (Freelance Web Designer)

The fact that most of creative industries are small companies and often sole traders, also creates a need for the creative practitioners to establish a platform of cultural exchange and an opportunity to share ideas.

It's quite an insular business and you can spend days without seeing anybody or talking to anybody. So, it's crucial to have contacts with people who are within the creative industries; because whether it's a painter or a ceramics person or whatever, a lot of the problems you may encounter are very common in…and sometimes just the creative blockages that you go through, it's kind of reassuring sometimes to talk to people who have, you know, and you find that a lot of people go through the same kind of process. (Visual Artist)

However, alongside the personal support, business support and valuable business directions are passed on in informal ways, providing a form of professional development and mentoring across the local practitioners.

The most important thing is mixing with other people, you can make do without all the services provided and business advice but the most valuable information comes from other people doing the same things as you who are a year or two years further down the line and can remember how it is like to be in your position but they worked through those problems and they can advise you on how to do things. (Textile Artist)

The network I have set up working with our designers, have been really invaluable in terms of having other people to discuss ideas with, that's primarily been people that I met through my shop and I am now involved with and also people that I worked with, like the graphic design company I used, I work a lot with them for general advice this is invaluable also because I work freelance, sharing information and ideas and support, it is very important to me. (Freelance Festival Director)

Networks as funding structures

Another important role of networks is related to access to funding. Public sector organizations and funding agencies are closely interlinked with practitioners in the network (Comunian, 2010). Some of the networks based in the North-East are directly funded by the public sector or by other agencies.

For example, the Cohesion glass artists' network was started by the Sunderland City Council, Designed and Made started organically by a group of artists and makers and was then supported by public funding from the Arts Council, the Artists Network supported by Northumberland County, New Writing North and Dance Connect are supported by the Arts Council.

So what we have done through the network, we are employing a contract person we are paying on an annual contract, just to go out and look for funding, rather than just waiting to step across them,

she is actively approaching organizations and researching what is available, that is proving very effective, and attracted more funding that we expected so far. (Photographer)

Considering the general use of local networks of local creative industries, we could argue that supporting different networks and communicating through them could provide an effective structure for support. In fact, if we think about the development of some formal and informal networks regionally it seems clear that the public policy and funding have considered them a strategic way to support and sustain the sector.

Well, I am chair of the North East design association; It promotes best practice in the delivery and use of design. So it helps businesses use design more effectively and tries to help designers deliver designs more effectively and better. That has received funding from Business Link and from One North East. (Designer)

Networks - whether formal or informal - allow the public sector to deliver information and support to different people by simply supporting one organization; it makes public investments look more sustainable: instead of investing in one single person the sector can present its investment as sustaining the whole sector. This is also seen as an efficient and effective way to promote the creative industries of the region outside, presenting strength and potential of their development; but also helps promoting and marketing them. However, there are also limits and difficulties in supporting networks. There is a risk that people who do not want to take part in the network, or simply do not fall into the remit of a specific network, feel withdrawn and feel cut off from the possibility to interact further.

4. Navigating through networks

Alongside these dynamics, there is a recognition both in the literature and among the participants of our research that the **formality or informality** of networks matters. So, it is not just about networking but the nature and structures of networks and how individuals feel about these interactions.

For example, the fact that a network is organically developed by practitioners (rather than established by an institution) seems to make it more relevant to the sector's activities.

because it is artist-led we are making it what we need, we know what we need and we are making it that, coming from us it is going to be more relevant than if it was coming from people in the public sector, who have the best intention but they do not work in the sector and they do not know exactly what we need. (Textile Artist)

Although networking is often considered part of a business practice, people working in the creative industries do not always perceive the need to network as part of their business development. The formal networking is often boring and implies mixing with people sometimes from very different contexts or business sectors. On the other hand, the social dimension is perceived as very important for the person and his work, so often networking is a matter of social interaction, common space sharing, meeting down at the pub.

networking is not done formally, it's all done you know as you pass somebody in the corridor, have a coffee, you chat in the bar after a gig and that's kind of how I want it to be because if you sit down and formally network, culturally that doesn't fit comfortably with the kind of people that tend to be doing the job. (Director, New Media Company)

Many respondents highlighted the role of public sector institutions and their support in the running of the networks, for example this filmmaker suggests that they can help in establishing further interactions:

it is relevant because they can provide opportunities for people to meet, both formally and informally and they can provide some sort of marriage, kind of marriage bureau. (Filmmaker, film company)

However for others, public sector and institutionally run networks might become too rigid type of structures, which inhibit social interactions in favor of professional only relations.

then Northern Arts decided to have a new full-time officer […] a professional came in, […] everything now is so much more formal rather than informal, it was an old fashioned writers group, people talked about all the processes of writing, they gave advice to one another, that kind of social network that went down and it disbanded, it went on to another level, more professional, to a bigger scale [..] It is a shame because those networks are not there anymore. (Freelance Writer)

Looking at this from a policy perspective, networks seem a key player in the delivery of a better and more sustainable support system which provide answers to the needs of the creative industries, nevertheless it seems important not to limit the support to mainstream and established networks but to support also the more hidden or temporary ones, which can be the first step for people into the sector.

Overall, respondents showed a high degree of awareness in respect of their network strategies and in relation to how grassroots/organic networks might provide different and often complementary opportunities to institutional or structured networks.

Creative practitioners tend to rely on different type of networks, so they would attend events and keep in the network of specific formal organizations whilst having a smaller network of people with which they talk more often or ask for advice. It seems that sometimes formal networks are considered useful but cold and too structured; they are more like professional development organizations than actual networks. One element which seemed central is the social dimension of the network and the type of bond and experience that hold the people together. In this respect, it is often the case that within large formal networks people form smaller and closer social networks.

I suppose previously I was more involved in that infrastructure type networks, but now I am much more in organic networks but within that I do still link in those infrastructure one, you need both [...] there is a lot of people with funding out there and it takes quite a lot of time to get around them all so you need some kind of mechanism to make it easier for you to get in contact with people. (Freelance Festival Director)

5. Conclusions

The role that networks play in the emergent global economic dynamics has become prominent in economic geography in the last ten years (Coe et al., 2004). Furthermore, networks have proven to be valuable forms of support for small and medium size companies as a means to access support, information and knowledge (Fuller-Love, 2009).

Within this general framework, the paper tried to unfold network values and dynamics specific to the creative industries and creative practitioners. Networks seem to play a central role in the development of sustainable creative production systems in the urban economy. Of course, the relevance of networks might depend on the size of companies involved, and different sectors of the creative economy might rely on networking activities for different reasons or with different effects. The chapter aims to provide a first exploration in these specific dynamics which closely connect economic, cultural and social exchanges and interactions.

In particular, the nature of networks in the creative economy seems to highlight the overlapping connections between socio-cultural networks and economic networks. Their interconnectedness means that in order to better understand and support the sector it is important to adopt ethnographic research approaches, which include quantitative analysis but also qualitative accounts.

Another characteristic which also makes the study of this sector particularly challenging for researchers, is the mix of formal and informal networks on which creative practitioners rely.

As O'Connor (2002) suggests, these networks are underpinned by infrastructures of knowledge and expertise which do have formal, institutional dimensions, but equally are embedded in more amorphous social and cultural infrastructures – described as 'soft infrastructure', or 'critical infrastructure', or 'creative infrastructure'. These last terms concern those informal networks, those place specific cultural propensities, those 'structures of feeling' which are very difficult to grasp, let alone strategically direct, but which nonetheless are crucial to the urban regional 'innovative milieu' (O'Connor, 2002: 27).

A challenge which remains open for researchers on networks is how to capture the evolving nature of networks. The current research capture – as a snapshot – the network dynamics in which many creative practitioners were involved, but the unstable nature of the business models and practice – often rely on part-time and temporary contracts/projects – means that the nature of networks and interactions are always changing and creative practitioners are acquiring further awareness of the value of managing and interacting with these changes within and across networks.

Acknowledgements

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