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<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877916614000228>

Correct Reference: Comunian, R., Chapain, C., & Clifton, N. (2014). Creative industries & creative policies: A European perspective? *City, Culture and Society*, 5(2), 51-53. doi:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2014.05.009>

Introduction

Creative industries & creative policies: a European perspective?

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Introduced in the UK in 1998 (DCMS 1998) the creative industries discourse has now become a truly global phenomenon that has left no country immune from the need to take action in defining, measuring or promoting their creative and cultural production (Wang 2004; Cunningham 2009; UN 2013) .

While the global dimension of this phenomenon is currently under scrutiny in a variety of contexts, from East Asia (Yusuf and Nabeshima 2005) to the global south (Barrowclough and

Kozul-Wright 2008, UN 2013), this special issue aims to bring the focus back to Europe, where despite a decade of European policy discourses (EC 1998, 2010; CEU 2007; EP and CEU, 2008), projects and platforms designed to support and develop the creative and cultural industries, including the latest Creative Europe programme (EU, 2013), much can still be questioned in reference to a truly European perspective

It is acknowledged that creative and cultural industries (CCIs), broadly defined, are now considered by many policy makers across Europe at the heart of their national innovation and economic development agenda (Chapain, Clifton and Comunian, 2013). Similarly, many cities and regions in Europe have adopted policies to support and develop creative industries and their local creative production and consumption (Pratt 2009; Musterd and Murie, 2010; Musterd and Kovács, 2013). While there has been a growing debate on the role of these industries in local and regional development, there is still a limited understanding of their actual interconnectedness within different contexts and localities, and the related public and private initiatives and governance arrangements in place to support them (Comunian, Chapain, and Clifton 2010). It is likely that different spatial and institutional forces are at work across the variety of coordinated, federal and transition states within Europe as highlighted by recent contributions (Andres and Chapain, 2013; Clifton, Cooke and Hansen, 2013). In addition, the European Commission is playing an increasing role in supporting the development of these industries as demonstrated by the introduction of the Creative Europe programme mentioned above.

There is therefore a growing need to reconcile the global discourse around the creative industries with European local and regional development dynamics to better take into account the specific economic, geographical and institutional contexts across the diverse spectrum of European countries. For example, local cultures and the development of local creative industries are considered in the literature as one of the assets for fostering regional identity (Chapain and Comunian 2010; Pareja-Eastaway et al., 2013). In particular, culture can enable different places to reinvent their images and empower local citizens. The way cultural and creative products are influenced by specific localities also helps to create a unique point of sale for those places, and to promote specific regional products globally (Clifton 2014). Nevertheless, localities and regions evolve within specific national contexts, and in the case of Europe, within the remit of European policies as well.

The papers collected in this Special Issue aim to present and critically discuss different approaches and national experiences in our understanding of the creative industries and the way they work across different European spatial and institutional contexts – questioning or considering whether there is (or not) a European perspective in this field. Europe is a particularly interesting context in the international landscape as an attempt has been made to emerge with a coherent framework for creative and cultural industries (EC 2010) but at the same time the importance of context-specific policies and a variety of regional and national perspectives is acknowledged (ibid.). This results on one hand in a potentially paradoxical repositioning and promotion of what cultural and creative industries are and can do for economic growth, but also on the other champions the idea that cultural and creative industries are place constructed frameworks and that regional and national differences can also add to the overall value and importance of the sector, despite obvious inconsistencies.

The papers included in this special issue use national European case studies to approach this challenge, but also consider how these case studies (and related policies) fit into the EU understanding of creative industries. While the focus here is on Europe, we suggest that this kind of pan-regional suite of investigations – which could for instance be applied to other global macro-regions – has a value in adding to our understanding of how global discourses get translated and interpreted at the local and national level, taking into account the influence of broader cultural, economic, political and geographical influences.

The papers collected in this special issue highlight how the understanding of CCIs in different European countries is a continuous negotiation between three key dimensions: the definition of CCIs itself; the way CCIs are seen in the economy in relation to public, private and not for profit sectors; and, the complex intersection of European, national but also regional and urban policy frameworks (fig.1).

The first theme, at the core of the paper by Rozentale and Lavanga (2014), how to define the CCIs, has been discussed at length from the initial definitions of the sector (O'Connor 1999; Flew 2002) until recently (Potts et al. 2008; Galloway and Dunlop 2007). However, it still remains important to consider how comparable international definitions struggle to fit the agenda of different national and local systems. What constitutes creative and cultural products needs to be grounded in the specificity of a place and its history and development. Differences in historical and economic development trajectories of European countries – especially across Western and former Soviet Union / Eastern bloc states – mean that definitions have to be broad, encompassing sectors that are not necessarily equally meaningful in different nations. It implies both a different understanding of the sector and its workers (Clifton, Cooke, and Hansen 2013) but also their intrinsic (micro-level) motivations (Comunian 2009). The attempt by the EU to encapsulate this in a broader European definition has met with scepticism at local level but also an acknowledgement of the richness and diversity that makes up the broader creative and cultural industries and which can only be framed with some difficulties. The case study of Riga in Latvia therefore adds to our understanding of how recognised characteristics of the creative and cultural industries should be considered and applied carefully in different contexts.

The second key theme, discussed in the paper of Comunian and Mould, considers the diverse range of economic sectors and dynamics surrounding the creative and cultural industries in the case of Newcastle-Gateshead in the UK. In particular, the distinction between what is publicly funded creative and cultural production and what is privately produced or led by the not for profit organisations is discussed. The role of publicly funded creative and cultural production is particularly linked to the issue of definition and results in a range of different activities being supported (or not supported) in different countries. However, it also poses questions in relation to policy as the paper of Comunian and Mould highlights that the investment and impact of public-sector cultural projects, specifically in case of urban regeneration, can sometimes have indeed negative externalities for creative and cultural producers. A complex set of networks and interconnections is key to local cultural development (Comunian 2011) and public sector interventions sometimes can remain peripheral to the growth and development of mainstream creative and cultural production.

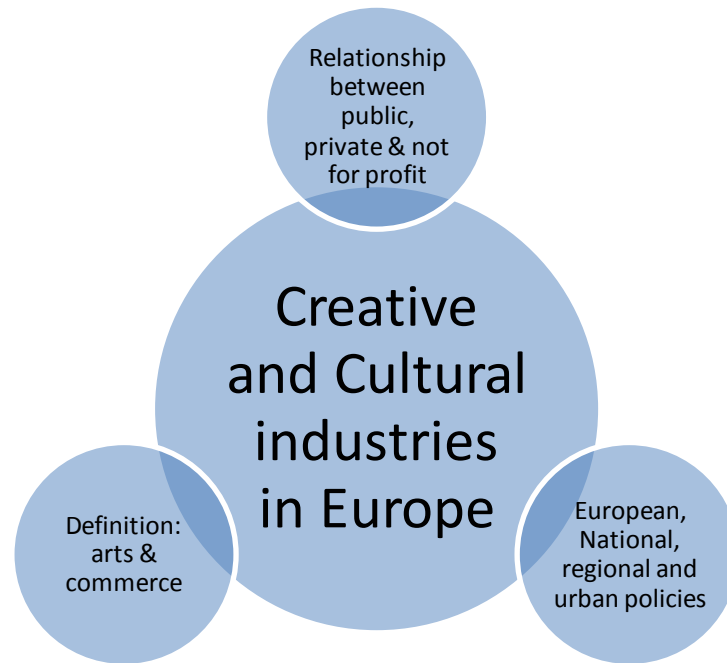


Fig 1: The complexity of creative and cultural industries in Europe

The final key theme, strongly emphasised in the papers of Ponzini, Gugu and Oppio and in the paper of Pinheiro and Hauge, relates to the value of policy in shaping the development and the growth of the sector. Both papers, one focusing on Italy and the other on Norway, highlight that the understanding and development of local creative and cultural industry policies is always a complex negotiation between international frameworks, European initiatives but also national and regional dynamics. The nested but sometimes even contradicting nature of these interventions means that the regional and urban context needs to translate and adapt the broader national and international frameworks. In the case of Norway, Pinheiro and Hauge consider the importance not only of *adopting* specific policies but also of *adapting* them. In the case of Italy, Ponzini, Gugu and Oppio consider the role of local policy bodies (and third-sector organisations) in shaping what a ‘cultural district’ is in Italy, highlighting the way these policy interventions have the power to define and shape the future of local creative and cultural production and its development. Both papers also reflect on the critical importance of bottom-up versus top-down approaches in supporting this development.

To conclude, in attempting to understand the value that a European perspective on creative and cultural industries can bring to the international academic debate, we have identified a series of critical dimensions (see Figure 1) which each country and indeed macro-regional institution can use to interrogate its policy towards, and understanding of, the sector.

Ultimately, if a European perspective can be identified here, it is in the recognition of the value that the idiosyncratic characteristics of different places bring to the debate. In addition, coordinating the understanding of creative and cultural industries at the macro-regional and even global level should not be done through a reductionist approach but one that embraces the value of this diversity and its complexity.

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