

Creative intermediaries in Africa: profiles, networks and challenges

THIS IS AN EARLY DRAFT VERSION OF THE FINAL CHAPTER.

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Authors: Roberta Comunian (King's College London) Lauren England (University of Dundee) and Brian J. Hracis (University of Southampton)

Introduction

This chapter aims to nuance our understanding of the roles that creative intermediaries play in supporting creative and cultural industries (CCIs) within emerging economies in Africa (George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas, & Tihanyi, 2016; Kauppi, Salmi, & You, 2018). We first consider the distinction between cultural intermediaries (Negus, 2002) and creative intermediaries as presented in the existing literature and provide a definition and theoretical framework to explore the work of creative intermediaries. Drawing on data from an online survey and findings from focus groups, interviews and participant observation, as part of a wider project on creative intermediaries in three African countries (Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa), we examine the type of organisations and individuals that define themselves as creative intermediaries and the types of support they provide to the sector. We consider their agenda for the sector as well as how they connect with each other and to the sector more broadly. We suggest that although the work of cultural intermediaries remains central in many sub-sectors of the creative economy, we need to take a wider view in relation to the range of intermediaries operating and interacting in this eco-system. The data was collected as part of a funded research project entitled 'Understanding and Supporting Creative Economies in Africa: Education, Networks & Policy'¹ (2016-2019). This project makes specific reference to the international policy attention towards Africa in relation to the potential of creative economies for economic, social and cultural development (Sternberg, 2017; UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), 2010; UNESCO & UNDP, 2013). For this chapter, we use quantitative analysis of data collected via an online survey amongst creative intermediaries in 3 African cities: Cape Town, Nairobi and Lagos during 2019. Taken together, the findings call for a distinction between cultural and creative intermediaries and a renewed focus on creative intermediaries as people/organisations who enable and support the work of other creatives. By extension, it is important to acknowledge the multiple and dynamic positionalities of these actors who may be creative producers and consumers as well (Jansson and Hracis, 2018). The chapter considers business models being adopted in this sector and the services

¹ We acknowledge the support received by the AHRC (Arts & Humanities Research Council) UK grant number AH/P005950/1 (2016-2019). More information on the project can be found at: www.creative-economy-africa.org.uk

and supports offered. In particular, the chapter explores the role that intermediaries might play in the context of emerging economies in Africa which often feature policy voids alongside explosive growth in creative entrepreneurship. The geographical scales in which intermediaries operate, from locally embedded individuals working in a specific neighbourhood to international aid organisations operating across countries and continents such as the British Council are also investigated. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the challenges creative intermediaries are facing and avenues for further research.

From cultural intermediaries to creative intermediaries

Researchers in the field of CCIs are very familiar with the notion of intermediaries, however, we argue their specific role and value in the context of creative and cultural productions is still contested and evolving. Much of this research is anchored to the seminal work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984; Maguire, 2014) that identifies cultural intermediaries as the bridge between producers, such as artists, and consumers of cultural products. However, more recently others (Foster et al. 2011; Hracs 2015) discuss the broader role of cultural intermediaries (also referred to as gatekeepers) as they assume the function of co-producers, managers and brokers. As Foster, Borgatti and Jones (2011: 247) argue “although they have been discussed in the literature on cultural production, they have rarely been studied systematically. In particular, we know little about how gatekeepers use their social networks to manage search and selection processes.” Jansson and Hracs (2018) reflect on how we tend to use the term ‘cultural intermediaries’ as an “umbrella term” which includes a range of roles and actors such as “co-producers, gatekeepers, brokers, agents, match makers and taste makers” (1604) and how this creates ambiguity. Indeed, we argue that over time the role of intermediaries has expanded even further, and a new framework or definition needs to be considered, to include aspects of their work that go even beyond transitional or narrowly constrained understandings of ‘cultural intermediation.’

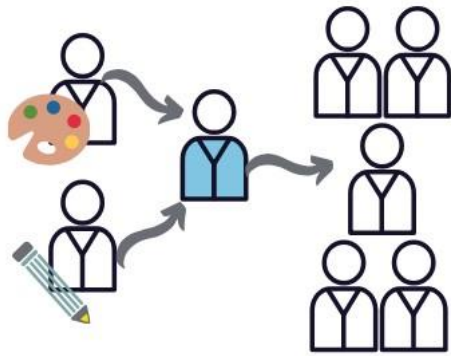
Furthermore, we argue that this more nuanced understanding needs to consider the role of geography and spatial dynamics in relation to creative intermediaries. In so doing, this work can build on and extend existing literature on clusters and regions (Scott, 2000) and urban networks (Comunian, 2017a, 2017b) by, for example, enabling us to more effectively capture the role that intermediaries play in place but also across scales and mobilities (Brydges & Hracs, 2019).

Maguire (2014) considers how intermediaries share common characteristics, such as high levels of cultural capital, and key roles within subcultures, scenes, industries and organizations. However, we argue that creative intermediaries also occupy positions that allow them to connect with policy (local, national and international) as well as with key entrepreneurial and educational infrastructures within the local contexts in which they operate. Indeed, Jakob and van Heur (2014: 357) identify various kinds of cultural or creative intermediaries “arts and cultural councils, policy networks, economic development agencies, foundations and unions to artist collectives, cultural centres, creative industries incubators, festivals and tradeshows”.

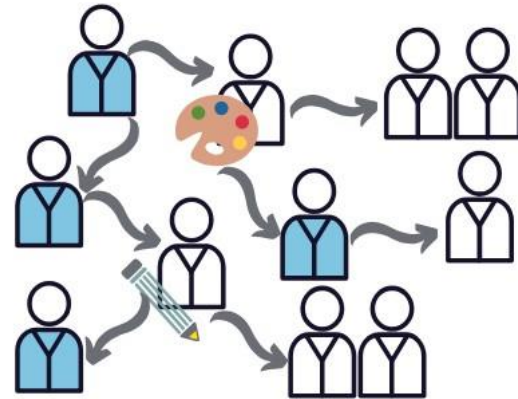
In this chapter, we push the arguments further, suggesting that as with the shift from cultural to creative industries, there has been an expansion of sectors included in the creative economy (Cunningham, 2002). Similarly, with new changes in technology,

frameworks and policies in the sector, we should also consider whether we need to be talking more broadly about creative intermediaries rather than cultural intermediaries.

From cultural intermediaries...



to creative intermediaries...



It is clear that this does not mean that our traditional understanding of cultural intermediaries is no longer valid. In fact, in many sectors of the CCIs, such as the art world, cultural intermediaries play a vital role in defining, mediating and setting trends in relation to cultural content. However, the shift we propose acknowledges that there have been changes (see below) that have implied that alongside traditional and new cultural intermediaries (Hracs, 2015) there is a wider ecosystem of intermediaries that act and interact across the sector, providing support and services to producers without necessarily being concerned with the cultural content of what has been produced. These individuals and organisations are certainly central in supporting the creative economy. However, as illustrated in fig.1 rather than positioning themselves between producers and consumers in relation to translating or curating content or defining the cultural value of specific cultural artefacts, they tend to position themselves 'alongside' producers – acting as co-producers and facilitating access to a range of supports – or 'behind' producers providing finance, advice or other forms of initial training etc.

We suggest that the need to expand our focus from cultural to creative intermediaries is driven by some key changes in the sector in the last two decades:

1. **A redefinition of the creative sector.** From the late 1990s there has been a shift – led by policy – to move from the 'traditional' narrowly defined cultural industries (music, film, publishing) to the broader creative industries (for a critique see Galloway & Dunlop, 2007) encompassing sectors like fashion, architecture, video games and software. This expansion has also corresponded with an expansion of the intermediaries involved and their role, not just as connecting producers and consumers, but providing a complex ecology for these industries (Comunian, 2019).
2. **Increased access to culture.** As level of school attainment and income in developed and developing economies increase, we see a growth in creative and cultural consumption. This access and consumption is also facilitated by new technologies (Nixon & Gay, 2002) and new online platforms (such as Spotify for music or Etsy for craft). While digital

production and distribution is said to close the gap between production and consumption (Foster & Ocejo, 2013), the growing demand and access implies that alongside a curation of cultural content by intermediaries (Hracs, 2015; Jansson and Hracs 2018), we see more creative intermediaries being involved in supporting creative careers through business advice, skills, digital platforms etc.

3. **Increased emphasis on creative industries for economic growth.** With new policy emphasis on assessing the CCIs for their contribution to countries' economies nationally and internationally, we find the CCIs are now catching the attention of policy makers also in emerging economies for their role in economic development, beyond their contribution to culture. For example, Lai Mohammed, Nigeria's current Minister of Information and Culture, declared in 2017 at a conference on finance for the creative industries "To those who may still be wondering, what is in the Creative Industry? My answer is that it is Nigeria's new oil. Other countries have also taken advantage of the industry to grow their economy" (Lai Mohammed, 2017).
4. **De-funding and marketisation of culture.** In many countries worldwide we see a reduction of the role of public funding and public policy in supporting and defining culture (Čopič, Inkei, Kangas, & Srakar, 2013). In this context, the role of intermediaries becomes even more central. New creative intermediaries here enable financing and allow experimentation with new business models for culture (Monclus, 2015).

These dynamics have allowed a growth and expansion of the role of intermediaries in the CCIs. Therefore, we suggest that using the broader term 'creative intermediaries' allows us to embrace these changes. This acknowledges that creative practitioners and workers engage with traditional cultural intermediaries, when content needs curating or translating to reach specific consumers, but also a broader set of intermediaries that do not necessarily connect them to markets but instead offer a range of other opportunities for growth and support. In the next session, we discuss how this has become even more evident in the context of Africa and three of its countries and emerging economies.

Creative economies in Africa: the key importance of intermediaries

In many African countries the CCIs agenda has become a broader development discourse (Reis et al., 2008). In this chapter, we do not engage with definitional issues – De Beukelaer (2014, 2017) provides an in-depth discussion about the different models of defining and measuring CCIs in the African context pushed forward by global development agencies and international frameworks. Beyond definitional issues, in our fieldwork creative intermediaries emerged as a key infrastructure of national and local creative economies. Therefore, we are interested here in exploring some of the reasons behind this in the context of African emerging economies. Furthermore, we believe there are multiple reasons why African creative economies provide an interesting input to the traditional understanding of cultural and creative intermediaries, specifically in relation to the points made above about contemporary changes that have expanded the role of intermediaries in new areas beyond the tradition cultural intermediation defined in the 1960s. In particular we highlight four key dynamics that make Africa an interesting context to research creative intermediaries. Firstly, creative economies in Africa are **very reliant on the quick expansion of digital (mainly mobile) technologies, with many young people leapfrogging analogue**

and traditional platforms for cultural consumption to move directly to the digital (James, 2009). This centrality of technology and its importance connects with key demographics of many African countries which feature exponential growth of urban youth (Sommers, 2010), corresponding with the rise of youth entrepreneurship around the exploitation of new technologies (Strong & Ossei-Owusu, 2014). Secondly, **African countries often lack formal cultural policy frameworks and institution as well as funding for culture and creative development**. Many of the formal institutions seem to be strongly anchored and focus on traditional sectors of the economy (extraction, agriculture, manufacturing) and less concerned with emerging sectors. Schneider and Gad (2014) talk about a weak role for cultural policy in the context of Africa; for example, Obia et al. (2019) discuss the inability of Nigeria to redraft its cultural policy in 2008 even though the original cultural policy framework of 1988 can be considered inadequate for current times. Thirdly, despite the lack of formal recognition of CCIs as a sector in many countries, **the economic impact of the sector is often staggering and has been considered key to economic development by many international organisations (UNCTAD, 2008; UNESCO & UNDP, 2013)**. IN 2012 UNESCO rated Nigeria's Home video industry as the world's second largest film industry (Acland, 2012), highlighting the role of the sector across Africa and globally. Finally, and most importantly, many authors studying the creative economies in Africa highlight **the role of informality and networks** in the industry structure (Lobato, 2010). With respect to the Tanzanian film industry, Mhando & Kipeja (2010) highlight how local film-makers and producers are often isolated and rely on micro and informal enterprises, without being able to access networks that could enable them to enter the global markets. These issues suggest that intermediaries able to broker relations and support CCIs can play a vital role in the development of the sector.

Methodology and data

The chapter presents the results from fieldwork undertaken as part of an AHRC (Arts & Humanities Research Council, UK) funded research network. The project aimed at mapping creative economies across Africa but for time and resource limitations we selected three countries, representing more broadly the context of West Africa, Southern Africa and East Africa. The fieldwork is focused on large cities in these countries, one capital (Nairobi) and two important centres of creative production (Cape Town and Lagos). The fieldwork included focus groups, interviews, participant observation, research visits and an online survey with creative intermediaries working in those cities. For the purpose of this chapter, we mainly focused on the analysis of the data from the online survey, but the discussion benefits from reflection on the broader fieldwork undertaken. The survey was disseminated via social network platforms, mailing lists, policy organisations (such as the British Council) and other cultural agencies for three weeks for each city. The survey aimed to reach as many individuals as possible in the local context and also offered individuals the possibility to get involved further by attending a focus group on this topic. The survey provided a definition of creative intermediaries and asked participants whether they self-identified with that definition. The survey included both closed (nature of the organisation, location, field of work etc.) as well as open-ended questions, allowing participants to reflect on the challenges they faced or their relationship with other intermediaries. The Lagos survey includes 32 respondents; the Cape Town survey includes 25 respondents and the Nairobi

survey includes 28. The respondents belonged to a range of organisations (see next paragraph) and tended to be professional in a range of leadership roles. The survey and data collection had limitations in respect to the self-selective nature of the data. However, it allowed individuals to add activities and reflect on what their role in the sector was.

Who are the creative intermediaries in Africa?

Our data shows that creative intermediaries as a term was accepted by respondents to include a range of organisations. Despite the differences across cities and countries that can be seen in table 1, what emerges clearly from the survey is that creative intermediaries can be individuals or organisations in a range of sectors of the economy with a range of business models, including individual freelancers, large public sector organisations and informal community networks. From the data we can imply that in countries with different cultural policy frameworks – such as Nigeria and South Africa – there might be an emphasis on certain business model or opportunities, for example the higher proportion of NFP/Charities in Cape Town compared to more private companies in Lagos and Nairobi. However, overall the profile of creative intermediaries across Africa highlights the importance to look across a range of sectors.

Table 1: Creative intermediaries and organisational typology.

Organisation/ Company Type	Lagos		Cape Town		Nairobi	
	Number of Intermediaries	%	Number of Intermediaries	%	Number of Intermediaries	%
Individual / Freelancer	1	3%	3	12%	3	11%
Informal / Community network	2	6%	2	8%	2	7%
Not-for-profit / Charitable organisation	4	13%	14	56%	5	18%
Private company	17	53%	4	16%	13	46%
Public sector organisation	8	25%	2	8%	5	18%
Total	32		25		28	

The respondents also covered a range of jobs with a variety of job titles. Overall there was a higher proportion of intermediaries identifying as Founders/Directors/CEOs (51% total Lagos; 41% CT; 43% Nairobi).²

² Intermediaries across the three cities identifying as Founder/CEO or Founder/Director were coded as 'Founder' (12%); 'Academic' code includes 'Lecturer', 'Head of Dept' and 'Researcher' (13%); 'Director' includes artistic director, programme director and executive director (26%).

What do creative intermediaries in Africa do?

We were very interested in exploring the range of activities that creative intermediaries perform. Table 2 articulates the supports they offer under a range of headings.

Table 2: Services and support provide by creative intermediaries services/support offered	Lagos		Cape Town		Nairobi		Total	
	Number of Intermediaries	%	Number of Intermediaries	%	Number of Intermediaries	%	Number of Intermediaries	%
Business advice	14	44 %	9	36 %	9	32 %	32	38 %
Finance and business finance support	8	25 %	6	24 %	1	4%	15	18 %
Guidance and policy advice	11	34 %	10	40 %	8	29 %	29	34 %
Research and consultancy services	21	66 %	10	40 %	9	32 %	40	47 %
Skills and training	26	81 %	18	72 %	20	71 %	64	75 %
Space (includes co-working or rehearsal)	30	94 %	14	56 %	19	68 %	63	74 %
Funding / Commissioning of arts/creative projects	15	47 %	10	40 %	4	14 %	29	34 %
Internationalisation / export advice	10	31 %	9	36 %	3	11 %	22	26 %
Networking	23	72 %	20	80 %	17	61 %	60	71 %
Other (including marketing, product development and manufacturing support)	3	9%	6	24 %	6	21 %	15	18 %

The open questions of the survey allowed us to get a better understanding of this provision and its context and importance. We present this analysis and the provision in 5 categories: space and equipment (n=45, 53%); finance (n=34, 40%); networking and partnership (n=60,

71%); training and skills (n=64, 75%); business guidance and advice (n=61, 72%)³. Most intermediaries acted in at least two of these provisions, confirming that in general actors have multiple roles and positionalities (xxx), only 8% (n=7) offered only one service (Jansson and Hracs, 2018).

As illustrated in figure 2, from our data and wider research, creative intermediaries' support for CCI's can be grouped under five broader headings: space and equipment; finance; business advice and guidance; training and skills and networking and partnership.

Fig.2: Creative intermediaries support and provision for CCI's



Space and equipment. This broad category includes a range of provisions, such as office space, making space, co-working space, business incubation as well as rehearsal/studio or performing spaces, including access to specialised equipment and IT infrastructure. For the initial development of CCI's space and equipment are very important. Small start-ups or even freelancers cannot cover the costs of office space and making facilities, therefore the opportunity for intermediaries - often creatives themselves - to maximise the use of shared spaces and equipment benefits the sector enormously. However, space and equipment are often associated with further provision such as networking or brokering new opportunities for CCI's. As one respondent from Lagos explained: *“The objective of the exchange is to mobilize talented individuals and creative entrepreneurs form the biggest Creative Hub in the North-Central Region of Nigeria, through cross-disciplinary joint ventures or group enterprises”*. Space and equipment are therefore used as opportunities to create critical mass and maximise limited resources.

Networking and partnerships. Here we include organising events, matching and brokering, partnerships and collaborations, festivals, tradeshow's as well as specialised networking opportunities or brokering. The networking and brokering flows in all directions: it can connect to other producers, to consumers or to other in intermediaries. As one respondent

³ 'finance' includes the categories of finance and business support and funding/commissioning of arts/creative projects; 'business guidance and advice' includes the categories of business advice and guidance, guidance and policy advice, internationalisation/export advice and research and consultancy services

from Lagos puts it: *“We have been involved in creating safe places for intellectual dialogues and networks as well as executing various arts and literature-focused projects across Nigeria”*. In this space there is a broader agenda to create opportunities that stretch from commercial to community-oriented goals.

Training and skills. This is a widespread activity and includes specialised business training or creative training, professional development opportunities and mentoring for CCIs. This occurs both within traditional providers such as higher education institutions as well as in smaller and more informal settings. As one respondent from a Department of English in a Lagos-based institution argued, their department *“nurtured the emergence of several individuals now working in the creative industries. [...] created [...] avenues for interaction between our students and established writers and work to mentor and link aspiring writers to publishing and performance opportunities.”* However, this also happens at a smaller scale for other intermediaries; for example, as the artist-owner of a Cape Town art gallery explains: *“we run art workshops for rural Mpumalanga artists to improve their skills and enhance their techniques”*. Therefore, irrespective of the size and formality of how training is delivered, many intermediaries provide learning opportunities for other creatives within their practices and work.

Business guidance and advice. This can include guidance on start-up, finance and growth as well as export and internationalisation, IP and market access. As one respondent from Cape Town explained: *“we support the development of small creative businesses operating in the craft and design sector - working closely with the entrepreneurs on developing business knowledge, developing their products, and facilitating producers with access to market”*. In many cases there was an emphasis for this business guidance to be supported or provided by the public sectors bodies for the potential it has to benefit the economy more widely. However, due to the lack of policy frameworks and funding, it was often left to not-for-profit or commercial organisations to deliver, limiting the availability or accessibility of these opportunities.

Funding and finance. This includes distribution of public funding or from trusts; repayable and non-repayable loans; finance/investment brokering as well as crowdfunding. There are few organisations providing finance solely to creatives and in most cases finance came within a broader business development and support framework (especially when loans and return on investment are needed). As one respondent from Lagos told us: *“finance is critical to our effectiveness. Hence our training and networking should emphasize public funding, loan acquisitions, crowdfunding etc. part of our role as a creative intermediary is to encourage creative ways of achieving the above, by leveraging social media tools especially crowdfunding tools”*. Therefore, the creative intermediaries might provide funding but also broker or provide skills to access finance for creatives.

All the activities, services and expertise discussed by our participants highlight how the work of creative intermediaries stretch across a wide spectrum of work. While in many of these roles an element of curation (Jansson and Hracs, 2018) or cultural intermediation might still be present, overall we found that the main agenda of many was not to translate or curate the cultural content proposed but to simply allow creatives (from music and film to fashion

and craft) to reach their potential and make a sustainable living from their creative products or practices (Brydges and Hracs, 2019).

Challenges faced by creative intermediaries in Africa

Our findings highlight the importance of creative intermediaries from a variety of perspectives and the range of services and opportunities they provide to CCIs. However, many respondents also raised key challenges for the sector in the context of Africa. Importantly, while many of these challenges are shared by creative intermediaries around the globe, we want to emphasise the important role of local specificity and context related to politics, infrastructure provision and market dynamics, which can create or exacerbate such challenges.

Many of the creative intermediaries surveyed considered the lack of policy frameworks as a huge barrier to future developments in the sector. As one respondent from Lagos asserted: *“There is a huge divide between government agencies and the creative industry. [...] which has and will continue to make our work harder.”* While most intermediaries considered the lack of funding and investment a problem, they seemed more interested in the promotion of the sector overall. As one respondent in Cape Town argued: *“The lack of cohesive branding and drive to promote the sector and value of local [production] to increase public perception and drive sales” (Cape Town Intermediary).*

Yet, the lack of recognition is not just a policy issue. A general distrust of the possibilities that the creative economy can offer in reference to education and employment was often seen as the main barrier. As another respondent from Lagos explained: *“The main challenge is that parents/sponsors do not believe that the creative industry is good enough as career for their children.”*

Many saw international collaboration and networking with other intermediaries as a very important focus for their work to continue lobbying for the overall role of the creative economies in the potential development of their countries. As one respondent from Nairobi suggested: *“As most people would say, financing. Across the board, from creators to distributors, this sector isn't being funded at the rate that financial inclusion, or green energy, or agriculture are. Which is absurd, given the economic potential latent to creative industries.”*

Finally, many respondents recognised the need for creative intermediaries to work together and lobby together for the importance of the sector as this Cape Town intermediaries articulates: *“Working collaboratively rather than in silos. Promoting an understanding of the enormous contribution the creative economy can and should play.”*

Overall, despite some place-based or sector specific issues, we found that many of the challenges were shared by the respondents from the different cities and had to do with the lack of policy engagement and recognition towards the sector and its importance but also the sector inability to share common goals and come together for a shared agenda.

Conclusions

This chapter explored the issues surrounding emerging communities and spaces of cultural work and creativity. We argued that while a lot of focus is placed on creative workers and entrepreneurs, there is a need to provide a better understanding of the role that intermediaries play in driving and supporting the creative economy.

The findings from the survey highlight that **creative intermediaries include a very broad set of individuals and organisations that aim to facilitate the growth and development of creative individuals, and creative and cultural industries (CCIs)**. We discovered that they play a vital role in supporting the sector by **providing access to information, skills, resources and networks that enable them to fulfil their mission, creative or business goals**, whether this is to stage a play on, arts education for children or advice about how to take a new product to market.

Our findings also revealed that **creative intermediaries come in all shapes and sizes**. From passionate individuals with experience in the creative and cultural sector who provide training and mentorship to large publicly-funded organisations with the remit to distribute funding and provide feedback to artists. They can range from individual freelancers operating in local markets to large international organisations. We also discovered that these intermediary actors operate under a range of business and organisational models including for profit, public-sector organisations, charities or not-for profit organisations, cooperatives and social enterprises or be informal networks.

They **can operate in a range of sectors**, providing a variety of services or specialising in just one of them. They can provide **access to information and networks (soft infrastructure) as well as physical or structural resources (hard infrastructure)**. The five areas of CCI support we have identified are: providing space and equipment; supporting access to finance, facilitating networks and partnerships; offering opportunities for training and development; and providing specialised business guidance.

The survey highlights the challenges but also the opportunities for creative intermediaries to connect with the development of Africa creative economies. In the countries and large cities we researched, where policy is often directed at other priorities instead of the development of CCIs, creative intermediaries can act as catalyst and translate the needs of the sector to policy bodies and others. As one of the respondents from Cape Town highlighted: *“The main challenge is that the work of creative intermediaries is not valued and recognised as important and necessary. [...]. When in fact, particularly in developing economies, intermediaries can play a critical role in facilitating market access and business development.”*

Overall this chapter aimed to underscore the importance of the creative sector and the need for a better understanding of the role that creative intermediaries can play in the development of creative economies in Africa and around the world. However, more research is needed to provide a more detailed picture of how these actors operate in relation to policy and development agendas –especially in relation to access and equality (Booyens, 2012).

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