Introduction: Exploring tensions in the creative economy

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Abstract

The restless dynamism of the contemporary creative economy requires ongoing empirical study, theorisation and critical reflection. This introductory chapter outlines how this book contributes to existing studies, debates and knowledge by focusing on three key tensions 1) The tension between individual and collaborative creative practices, 2) The tension between tradition and innovation, and 3) The tension between isolated and interconnected spaces of creativity. It also shares the story of the European Colloquium on Culture, Creativity and Economy (CCE Network), previews the nine empirical chapters and suggests some avenues for further research.

The myriad links between culture, creativity and the economy are key elements of modern life and central topics of intellectual discussion (Caves 2002; Hesmondhalgh 2002; Power

and Scott 2004). Over the past two decades, policy makers and academics around the world have become deeply interested in a range of interconnections between cultural and economic processes: including culturally-driven economic development in the form of 'creative' cities and cultural quarters (Kloosterman 2013; Mould and Comunian 2014; d'Ovidio 2016), the dynamics of creative labour (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010; Bain and McLean 2013; Pasquinelli and Sjöholm 2015; Reimer 2016; McRobbie 2019), the evolution of specific cultural and creative industries such as art, music, fashion and craft (Power and Scott 2004; Hesmondhalgh 2002; Leyshon 2014; Crewe 2017; Jakob and Thomas 2017), competition and value creation within markets (Hracs et al. 2013; Bürkner and Lange, 2017; Ibert et al. 2019) and the role of space and specificity across different locations, scales, industries and time periods (Cooke and Lazzaretti 2007; Edensor et al. 2010; Gibson 2011; Luckman 2012; Flew 2013; Gill et al. 2019; Schmidt 2019). Yet, the restless dynamism of the contemporary creative economy requires ongoing empirical study, theorisation and critical reflection (Hawkins 2016; Banks 2018; Mould 2018, Oakley and Ward, 2018).

This edited volume aims to contribute to and nuance existing studies, debates and knowledge. However, rather than focusing on a specific process such as production, industry, location or scale from a disciplinary perceptive this book applies a different approach. We seek to acknowledge and engage with the messy and often contradictory nature of the cultural and creative economy. For example, creative labour is said to be both precarious and rewarding (McRobbie, 2015; Brydges and Hracs 2019a). Furthermore, while cultural and creative industries are said to cluster in global hotspots, a growing literature also highlights the presence and uniqueness of cultural and creative activities in peripheral and rural settings and across the Global South (Comunian et al. 2021). At the same time, digital transitions and the

forces of globalisation and competition continue to create, destroy, and restructure the markets and conditions under which cultural creation, production, promotion, intermediation, dissemination and consumption are undertaken and experienced (Hracs 2015).

Based on these observations, we have chosen to organise this book around a set of three key tensions; *1) The tension between individual and collaborative creative practices, 2) The tension between tradition and innovation, and 3) The tension between isolated and interconnected spaces of creativity.* These tensions are at the heart of the connection where culture and creativity meet the contemporary economy and where restless dynamism unfolds. The tensions provide frustration and friction, as well as energy and inspiration. Simultaneously, these tensions are ingenious and vicious. As such, they are similar to the process Schumpeter famously coined "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1934 (1959). The chapters in this book deal with processes, observations, and phenomena that can be located in one or more fields of these tensions.

Collaborative practices: The story of the CCE network

The foundations of this book were laid at the European Colloquium on Culture, Creativity and Economy (CCE). Since the first meeting of creative economy researchers in Uppsala (2012) and through subsequent annual events in Berlin, Amsterdam, Florence, Seville, London, Stockholm and Basel, CCE has become a network of over 100 scholars from 19 countries who work in a range of disciplines including geography, sociology, economics and cultural studies. This book presents a range of chapters from community members who have been working collaboratively – by sharing, extending and co-producing ideas, research

and publications – to develop a deeper understanding of the contemporary creative economy for nearly a decade.

The goals of the CCE meetings were manifold: *Firstly,* we aimed to bring together a small number of scholars, between 20 and 35, from different disciplines, universities and levels of experience to develop new approaches to the creative economy. *Secondly*, our goal was to build networks which encouraged knowledge sharing and collaboration. *Thirdly,* we wanted the events to be informal, open and supportive atmospheres where trust could be built and where people could feel safe to share ideas and work in progress rather than, as is usual at conferences, finished products (see also Pratt, 2010). The events featured a range of 'blocks' including themed panels, small discussion groups, one-on-one peer feedbacks sessions and informal walking tours. Together, these elements produced positive environments and experiences in line with Dorling's (2019) call for a 'new rigour' based on kindness. *Fourthly*, we strived for diversity and inclusiveness. While the majority of our participants came from across Europe they were not necessarily 'European' and we recruited widely and were also able to invite and include scholars from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, North America and South America. Furthermore, we aimed for and achieved equal representation of men and women in the network, and a balance of scholars at different career stages coming from a range of disciplines at each event. Finally, we aimed to merge the community of practice and the community of science. To marry theoretical debates with the 'real' world – and to try and 'dismantle the ivory tower' (Klein et al 2011) – we invited to our meetings, for example, artists, curators and other practitioners working in the cultural and creative industries.

Three key tensions within the creative economy

Over the course of our eight CCE meetings, while there were some processes, concepts or challenges that would be introduced as themed panel topics once or twice, others seemed to re-emerge year after year in a variety of sessions and interactions. By examining and re-examining some of these ideas – such as co-working spaces or curation – from different perspectives, over time our collective understanding deepened and became more nuanced. This iterative process also exposed and encouraged community engagement with a number of the previously mentioned tensions, which not only spurred lively debate during the event but also many other academic works. For this book, we invited network members to submit chapters which address one or more of the three key tensions outlined below.

The tension between individual and collaborative creative practices

In exploring the variety of ways in which work in cultural and creative fields is organised, performed and experienced, we find a diverse range of individual and collaborative practices. While existing literature points to creative teams, project ecologies and networks of actors, including intermediaries, involved with creative production (Becker 1982; Grabher 2002), creative endeavors are also associated with lone geniuses, including artists, and creative entrepreneurs following 'do it yourself' (D.I.Y.) models (Sjöholm and Pasquinelli, 2014; Hracs 2015). Here, we are interested in how entrepreneurs working in precarious, individualised and under-resourced areas of the economy make space for their work and how they collaborate with other creatives and intermediaries to cope with precarity. Indeed, in a marketplace typically characterised by competition, insecurity, alienation, self-realisation, emotional and affective labour, self-exploitation, and uncertainty, creative workers develop strategies and practices based on their individual characteristics, motivations and

circumstances (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010; Brydges and Hracs 2019a; Banks, 2020). Analysing such practices and the role specific spaces play helps us understand how knowledge creation and creativity are affected by relations between individuals, communities and organisations.

Several chapters in this book consider the practices and spatial dynamics associated with co-working and the myriad ways in which traditional and emerging cultural intermediaries, from gatekeepers to curators, can enable, support or constrain creativity and creative businesses in these spaces. In chapter 5, for example, Merkel and Suwala look at technology parks and co-working spaces in Berlin to investigate how interactive atmospheres and communities can be fostered and how such environments contribute to the emergence of new ideas and different forms of working together. Complementing these finding, in chapter 8 Capdevila focusses on how co-working spaces and practices found in urban centers, such as Barcelona, can be translated for and transported to rural settings.

With respect to the vital, yet often hidden, role played by cultural intermediaries Comunian et al. (Chapter 9) demonstrate that many intermediaries continue to perform traditional roles such as 'connecting producers and consumers' and 'taste-making'. However, in the wake of global competition, advances in digital technologies and shifting policy agendas they also highlight how the range of intermediary actors in Africa and functions have expanded to include providing space, finance, training and business advice which are central to enabling and sustaining creative endeavours. In chapter 10 Jansson and Gavanas focus on the specific intermediary function of curation to help understand the evolution of electronic dance music

in Stockholm. By comparing two contrasting eras, they analyse the role that intermediary pioneers, spaces, and processes of resistance play in sorting, filtering and contextualising new (sub)cultural expressions. Finally, by looking at the role that crowdfunding and digital spaces can play in producing symbolic value, Rykkja and Hauge (Chapter 4) identify and explore collective dimensions within cultural and creative industries such as fashion while emphasising the growing centrality of the consumer.

The tension between tradition and innovation

Innovation is central to the competitiveness of cultural, goods, services and experiences (Pine & Gilmore 2011). Indeed, innovation is constantly disrupting the value chains and processes of design, production, promotion, distribution, intermediation and consumption. Despite what appears to be an era of rapid and unprecedented growth and change, many within cultural and creative industries such as music, fashion and art cling to and celebrate roots steeped in local traditions, craft and heritage. For some industries and actors, a competitive edge lies in the decision *not* to change with the times, but instead to rely on storied reputations of quality that are deeply imbued in products and place and are difficult to replicate or upend. Thus, some producers, operating at global and local scales, generate value and distinction by invoking traditional values, techniques and spatial entanglements that cannot be scaled up, digitised or replicated (Jansson and Waxell, 2011; Crewe 2013). This is where we see a tension between the speed of scalable production, often spurred by automation, and the deliberate slowness of traditional craftsmanship and the production of truly unique pieces.

Several chapters in this book engage with this tension by examining how values can be generated, assessed, and communicated. In chapter 6, for example Nyfeler illustrates the tension between preservation and renewal through a study of two Swiss fashion firms with different approaches to creativity, design and production. Treating the creative outcomes of fashion as 'stylistic innovations' Nyfeler asserts that variations of cultural meaning and aesthetic alteration are rarely developed from scratch but rather evolve from existing forms. In chapter 4 Rykkja and Hauge also illustrate how products with long-standing traditions and hand-made production, such as leather handbags and watches, can thrive alongside digital practices in the contemporary marketplace. Indeed, they demonstrate how new developments, such as crowdfunding and consumer co-creation support rather than supplant traditional practices and forms of symbolic value.

Broadening the scope to reflect on a range of developments in the global fashion industry, Brydges et al. (chapter 2) consider the ways in which digital technologies are disrupting the roles, positions and influence of actors, such as traditional fashion magazines and new social media influencers across fashion's fields. They also examine threats to established institutions such as Fashion Weeks and bricks and mortar shops from new innovations and actors disrupting retail, marketing and distribution. Avdikos and Dragouni (chapter 7) study similar mechanisms but focus on the heritage and museum sector. They assert the need to move beyond purely economic valuations of these activities and introduce a novel conceptual framework of cultural heritage value that considers economic impacts as well as the effects on the social and cultural fabric of surrounding places and user communities. They are critical and question the all-encompassing economic logic often underpinning policies and

strategies concerning cultural artefacts, practices, institutions, places and experiences within the creative economy.

The tension between isolated and interconnected spaces of creativity

Traditionally, creative workers and cultural and creative industries have concentrated in a handful of global cities, such as art in New York, music in London and fashion in Paris or Milan (Power and Scott 2004). These global cities are said to dominate other national or regional markets and have long acted as both local and global talent magnets, attracting ambitious creatives from around the world. Recently, however, there has been increased recognition of the crucial role of peripheral and vernacular spaces of creativity and creative work such as in second tier cities and rural and/or remote spaces (Edensor et al. 2009; Gibson 2011). New and evolving digital technologies are increasingly contributing to greater mobility and enable individuals and groups to work in 'third places' or hubs which may be located far away from urban centres (Gill et al. 2019; Merkel 2019; Schmidt, 2019).

Yet, technologies and virtual channels of communication also serve to connect and integrate individuals operating in large, small, suburban, rural and remote locations into global markets and industry-specific ecosystems (Brydges and Hracs 2019b). These developments challenge the notion that there is one 'place to be' and break down the binaries between urban and rural, as well as established and emerging industry locations. Indeed, culturally stimulating, natural and remote landscapes are becoming increasingly attractive to creatives (Haisch et al. 2017) and many find ways to live, work and create in a range of spaces using forms of temporary, mediated and virtual mobility (Brydges and Hracs 2019b).

Several chapters in this book interrogate these developments by looking at creative practices, processes and examples at different scales and within different contexts, such as in emerging and/or poorly understood locations like Switzerland and Scandinavia, as well as in rural Spain and creative centres in Africa. In chapter 8, for example, Capdevila shows that through a process of reinterpretation, different aspects of coworking, have become disembedded from their original urban context to be re-embedded in more peripheral environments. Relatedly, Jansson and Gavanas (Chapter 10) highlight interconnected nature of creative economy by using the case of electronic dance music in Stockholm to trace translocal flows of subcultural expression from global cultural nodes to the periphery.

In chapter 3 Granger demonstrates how the trajectories and experiences of specific creative economies, such as Leicester in the UK, are connected to but also distinct from global cities which are often held up as universal examples by researchers and policy makers. Here the importance of specificity and scale is emphasised and this is a theme picked up by Comunian et al. (chapter 9) who highlight similarities and differences between the experiences of cultural intermediaries operating in the global North and global South by looking at the emerging and poorly understood creative economies of Cape Town, Lagos and Nairobi. Finally, through the application of Bourdieu's concept of 'the field', Brydges et al. (chapter 2) examine the evolving spatial hierarchies within the fashion industry and the connections and power dynamics between global and 'not so global' fashion centers. They also highlight the overlaps and tensions between a range of physical, virtual and temporary spaces where specific fashion-related activities occur.

Studying the restless creative economy: Future research paths

Throughout this book, the authors have approached the creative economy from different theoretical, methodological and empirical perspectives. In so doing, the chapters have engaged with and contributed to our understanding of the intersections between culture, creativity and economy as well as three key tensions within the creative economy. However, no collection of studies can be comprehensive and we acknowledge the lack of in-depth discussion around important topics such as gender and diversity. A larger book would have also been able to consider a wider range of creative spaces, contexts, industries and actors.

Moreover, as the research for this book was conducted before COVID 19 emerged, the chapters do not explicitly engage with the important implications of the pandemic for the creative economy or the responses by workers, firms, consumers and policy makers around the world. At a time when many elements within markets, societies and the lives of individuals remain highly uncertain, there is a pressing need for further research related to COVID 19. However, it is important to remember that for a variety of reasons the creative economy has always featured restless dynamism and has often encountered and experienced disruptions and transitions before other sectors (Leyshon 2014). Therefore, in this final section we would like to propose some avenues for further research, while reiterating the need for investigation beyond the current crisis.

New organisation of creative labour

The nature of creative labour has been evolving since the 1990's, brought on by the rise of new technologies, industrial restructuring, globalisation, flexibilisation and individualisation (Ekinsmyth 1999; Hracs 2015). Thus far, the pandemic is accelerating and intensifying these developments (Banks 2020). As the spaces where culture is produced, enacted, performed or exhibited shutter or close, home and remote-based work is becoming more prevalent exacerbating feelings of isolation and the tensions between private and professional spheres. As the role of physical proximity changes research is needed to investigate the structures, spatial dynamics and implications of new formulations and organisations of creative labour. For example, what sorts of spaces are suitable for working individually and collectively? What will 'collaborative' mean in the future and what is the potential for new forms of solidarity in the workplace to mediate risk and combat precarity in the sector? Moreover, it will be important to continue to recognise the role of specificity and intersectionality by examining the ways in which individual workers, in different industries and locations, negotiate the labour market based on their own unique characteristics, contexts, aspirations, strategies and experiences (Brydges and Hracs 2019a).

The rise of the new intermediaries

Beyond pure artistic expression, the cultural and creative industries are driven by the need to shape and cater to the ever-changing tastes and aesthetic desires of individual consumers. When studying specific industries and markets there has been a tendency to focus on producers and consumers rather than actors who serve as co-producers, gatekeepers, brokers, taste-makers, curators and more recently 'social media influencers.' Although the concept of cultural intermediaries has been around for decades, it remains an umbrella term for a range of actors and activities. Indeed, the exact nature of the positions that intermediaries hold

within value chains and networks and the functions they perform within the marketplace for cultural and creative products remain ambiguous (Jansson and Hracs 2018; Haisch and Menzel, 2019).

As a result, there is a need for situated case studies that explore and attempt to differentiate the practices of specific actors, including individuals, institutions, spaces, events and platforms, operating in specific spatial contexts and industries. It would also be useful to investigate how and why cultural intermediaries interact, compete and collaborate with other intermediaries across the broader creative economy. By extension, there is a growing need to examine how and why producers work with different intermediaries and the ways in which consumers are being enrolled in intermediary functions, such as curation through, different channels including social media.

The digital and geographical divide in the creative economy

New technologies, including crowdfunding, social media and content streaming platforms stimulate and enable creativity through the co-creation of products and interactions between actors in distant markets. On one hand, ongoing digitalisation enables more widespread and intensive exchanges, which may increase the creative potential for some actors. On the other hand, there is exclusion and disadvantage for those who lack access to digital infrastructure, technical equipment, education, knowledge and training. As a result, there is a growing awareness that we need to address digital divides and understand that digital spaces can be just as socially and inequitably coded as physical spaces. Moreover, while digital technologies and infrastructures tend to cluster in large urban centres, many small, rural and remote areas around

the world lag behind. Thus, as this book has demonstrated geography and context matter, and will continue to matter in the future, but exactly how space, place and scale shape elements of the creative economy is a key area for further and ongoing research. For example, how can inclusivity be increased and access to knowledge and markets be enhanced and equalised? How are links made between actors and communities located in distant places? Future studies on the emergence and acceleration of creativity through building bridges of language, technology and space will contribute to a better understanding of the creative economy.

Towards a sustainable creative economy?

For traditional industries and emerging innovative enterprises, creativity is and will be an important element of strategies to tackle challenges associated with environmental impacts, climate change and sustainability. Indeed, although not all cultural and creative industries produce a tangible output, there is a strong need to consider the environmental impact of processes of production, distribution and consumption. Here, the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can provide a blueprint for creative economy researchers. For example, through our research, how can we contribute to goals of gender equality, decent work and economic growth as well as sustainable cities and communities? Recognising the ability of the creative economy to create and communicate a range of non-economic values, including social and environmental sustainability, is also important (Jansson and Hracs 2018; Brydges and Hracs 2019a). Although art, music and fashion certainly create economic value for some, the intangible values of aesthetics, identity and ways of life are also inherent qualities in the creative economy. In addition, actors in the creative economy, including individuals, firms, brands, organisations and institutions, play significant roles in producing knowledge, information, education and content to educate, inform and disseminate

knowledge on climate change, environmental impacts and solutions to current and future challenges. Thus, research is needed to map the ways in which creatives and specific industries, most notably fashion, are developing, practicing and promoting forms of sustainability.

The creative economy in times of crisis

Finally, amidst the ongoing COVID 19 crisis, it is impossible not to acknowledge and investigate the myriad, and potentially long-lasting, impacts of the pandemic on different aspects of the creative economy. From the shifting conditions of work and shuttering of spaces including cinemas, galleries, theatres and retail shops to the shifts in cultural consumption and policies to support, or abandon, creativity the cultural and creative industries have been walloped. Beyond the bottom line for firms, individuals already negotiating precarious conditions are suffering further from cancelled incomes and a general lack of targeted support. Therefore, it is vital to develop projects which explore how the crisis is affecting creativity, culture, intermediation and consumption in the short term and over time. Concomitantly, ongoing research is needed which seeks to understand the role and importance of culture and creativity at times of crisis and how the cultural and creative industries contribute not only to employment and innovation but greater personal and societal wellbeing. As Banks (2020,1) argues "while culture and arts may not be vital to the preservation of life, they are proving increasingly vital to preserving the sense of life being lived."

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