



Risk and trust in the cultural industries

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Abstract

Preliminary claims have been made that working practices within cultural industries such as fashion, music, design and the night time economy may differ from Fordist or modernist arrangements. Cultural firms are often imagined to be more innovative, information-rich, dynamic, flexible, non-hierarchical and dependent on local clusters and networks than their Fordist counterparts (Lash and Urry, 1994). As their impact and significance increase, understanding how creative and cultural industries actually work is of high priority. This paper presents preliminary findings from an on-going ESRC funded study of cultural Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) within Manchester, England. Drawing on one element of the project, this paper considers the significance of risk and the importance of social trust for the cultural entrepreneur. Following a discussion of Beck's development of risk as an analytical concept, and its intersection with Giddens' notion of 'active trust', the paper examines how risk and trust are defined, experienced and negotiated by entrepreneurs in Manchester's cultural industries. It is suggested that senses of risk are constitutive and often pivotal to the whole economic and social basis of cultural entrepreneurship – risk being central to choices made not only in business but in the lifeworld more generally. The paper then investigates the importance of trust for facilitating as well as countering or offsetting risk. Empirical evidence is presented to show how risk and trust co-relate and interact as constitutive elements within a wider set of shifting relationships between work, leisure and lifestyle in the 'creative city'. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

An integral feature of the transformation of cities is the economic and symbolic value brought to them by the cultural industries.¹ In turn, the city, and especially the city centre and city fringe, acts as a complex of resources which cultural entrepreneurs readily utilise in their everyday working lives and in their pursuit of leisure and pleasure. This group demonstrate the consolidation of a new set of urban relationships, deriving opportunities and possibilities from 'risk', individualisation and plurality. Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in the cultural industries are embedded in risk; they need to be innovative, flexible, creative, ideas driven, constantly changing and, in this capacity, they

could provide useful guides and indicators for a wider set of transformations impacting upon post-industrial city economies. This paper will examine how the city contributes to cultural entrepreneurs' business practice and how they use it in their everyday operations. Drawing on the work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens we will look at the emergence of new forms of work and learning associated with more reflexive and risk oriented life and career trajectories. Through analysis of a single case – cultural entrepreneurs in the city of Manchester – we show how cultural entrepreneurs' immersion in risk, and the way they deal with this risk through notions of trust, both draws upon and consolidates recent post-industrial economic and cultural transformations in the city of Manchester. Our intention is that the processes and relationships that we identify may generate hypotheses for similarly interested observers analysing cultural production in other post-industrial cities.

It has frequently been asserted that the cultural industries sector is a harbinger of a new set of subjective rationalities that may be illustrative of new ways of

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¹ Cultural entrepreneurs we understand as those directly involved in the production of cultural goods and services: products whose principal value is symbolic, derived from their function as carriers of meaning – in images, symbols, signs and sounds.

working and living, especially in cities (Crewe, 1996; O'Connor, 1997; Pratt, 1997; Scott 1996, 1997). It is argued that this sector is innovative, entrepreneurial, flexible, creative, ideas driven, mixes the local and the global and, as such, is placed at the leading edge of the new post-industrial, informational economy (Lash and Urry, 1994; Scott, 1997). Furthermore, the ability of such a sector to thrive in a city could be an important indicator of an innovative capacity in other sectors of the city and for the wider regional or national economy (Landry and Bianchini, 1995). The ways in which cultural firms – in multimedia, music, art, fashion, design, clubs and cafes, symbolic specialists of all kinds – impact on the city economy have begun to attract sustained academic, political and popular attention (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993; Brown, 1998; CLES, 1988; Crewe, 1996; Crewe and Beaverstock, 1998; Landry and Bianchini, 1995; O'Connor, 1997; O'Connor and Wynne, 1996a; Pratt, 1997; Scott, 1996, 1997; Smith, 1998; Zukin, 1991, 1995).

Previous research has demonstrated that cultural industries are attracted to the city and in particular the 'alternative' (i.e. cheap) workspaces in and around the city centre; the city fringe.² As such, cultural businesses thrive in the milieu, networks, clusters, embedded knowledge and informal infrastructures of the city, and, we argue, demonstrate new and perhaps important understandings and practices of both risk and trust. We argue that the cultural industries stand in unique relation to aspects of risk and social trust because they exhibit distinctive forms of motivation, organisation and working practice, that are guided by, and constitutive of, characteristic forms of risk management and trust development identified as central to social transformation in the late modern period.

To enable us to do this we first set the scene by examining the theoretical notions of risk and individualisation and their links to the city and cultural industries. This is then followed by an examination of trust within the context of risk and how this, again, can be applied to cultural industries. The substantive part of the paper draws out these arguments in the context of empirical data gathered from interviews

² A city fringe is a transitional zone where MSEs can take advantage of the value of centrality without traditionally high city centre rents. Such areas are by nature ephemeral but include the Northern Quarter in Manchester, Duke Street/Bold Street in Liverpool, the Lace Market in Nottingham and Shoreditch, Hoxton, and Clerkenwell in London. Its marginal status is both its weakness and its strength. These areas are crucial to the local economy because as well as providing a refuge for smaller, marginal businesses they act as incubators for new economic activity. Cheap rents, short contracts, lots of sub-letting are accompanied by dense networks that allow both old and new businesses to survive and grow.

with 50 entrepreneurs in Manchester's cultural industries.³ We conclude by suggesting that these new understandings and relationships offer the opportunity to more fully develop theoretical accounts of both risk and trust in the contemporary city.

2. The problem of risk

The concept of risk has come to fiercely divide the social and the natural sciences (Adams, 1995). Until recently, social and cultural determinants of, and responses to, risk have often been subsumed beneath the hegemonic weight of an 'objective' and scientific/rational approach to risk assessment and management. Lash and Wynne, in their introduction to Beck's *Risk Society* (1992), assert that within this scientific sphere, any accommodation of conceptual pluralism or subjectivity is done under sufferance. Furthermore, the debate which has focused on 'risk compensation and management' of modern technological society, has been constrained by its cultural heritage (that of scientific rationalism) and by its unreflective idiom (Beck, 1992, p. 4). In the social sciences, analyses of the social meanings and management of risk have recently come to the fore, given the emphasis placed on uncertainty, instability and insecurity in explorations of the mooted transition from modernity to post-modernity. Such an approach attempts to account for the ways in which risks impact, or are perceived and handled, on a day to day basis, by different social groups. John Adams (1995) asserts that ordinary people develop systematic ways of dealing with the hazards and insecurities induced or introduced by social modernisation. Employment risks, financial risks, family and relationship risks, health risks, environmental risks are all conceptualised and dealt with in personally and culturally distinctive ways, a fact hitherto overlooked by the 'scientific' approach. Adams asserts that risk is culturally constructed and that:

...where scientific fact falls short of certainty we are guided by assumption, inference and belief. In such circumstances the deterministic rationality of classic physics is replaced by a set of conditional, probabilistic rationalities. (Adams, 1995, p. 9).

The ways in which individuals and groups handle different forms of risk can tell us much about late modern societies. Within the social sciences risk is a concept

³ This research is part of the two year ESRC investigation of the cultural industries in Manchester – Cultural Industries and the City: Innovation, Creativity and Competitiveness – and is part of the ESRC's Cities: Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme.

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