



## Creatives in the city: Urban contradictions of the creative city

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 3 May 2012

Received in revised form date 14 December 2012

Accepted 28 February 2013

Available online 31 March 2013

#### Keywords:

Creative city  
Creative worker  
Precariousness  
Uncertainty  
Paris  
Housing

### ABSTRACT

The main interpretation of the creative city mantra acknowledges the role of a “creative class” in local economic development and its need for an unconventional urban environment. Its aim is to turn the city into an appealing urban environment for those contributing to the local economic development. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the value, benefits or limitations of this interpretation. Rather, it focuses on another aspect of the creative city mantra: the promotion of a “creative economy” and its corollary, and that of creative industries as future major economic contributors. This paper exposes and discusses the inherent contradictions of such creative city policies. A creative economy and its associated industries are celebrated as a panacea for urban revalorization and economic development; however, the reality of working and producing in these sectors, is marked by precariousness and uncertainty, which reveals the weaknesses of such planning policies. The very features of work in the creative industries produces constraints of location that contradict the effects of such urban strategies. Real estate valorization, as much as new government regulations, are gradually driving creative workers from the city: thus the needs of creative industries and professionals are in conflict with the effect of urban planning strategies. This contribution to the creative city debate proposes a different approach to the research and political agendas, and in turn questions the sustainability of the creative city in regards to the precariousness associated with creative activities. To what extent do valorization strategies hamper the development of a creative economy and its activities? To what extent can the creative city agenda offer the opportunity to reappraise contemporary urban paradigms?

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### Introduction

Globalization, the post-industrial crisis and the rise of a neo-liberal ideology in urban policies have all led many cities to define and implement entrepreneurial development strategies (Harvey, 1989). Cities, redefining their strategic objectives in a competitive market, have become entrepreneurs of their own development. Their aim is to attract capital and investors to develop large-scale urban projects, while knowingly facing the financial liabilities of such uncertain ventures. As Andy Pratt shows, the elusive notion of a creative city is nothing more than a new construct of old-style neo-liberal urban strategies (Pratt, 2011). One step above the culture-led regeneration development strategies, the “creative city” mantra acknowledges the role of a “creative class” in local economic development, and its need for a “cool and funky” urban environment (Florida, 2002, 2003). Looking at consumption-based gentrification theories, the vision of the

“creative city” brand is one that embodies “city-living” style, with a distinct cosmopolitan and arts appeal, in both real estate development and urban regeneration. The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the value, the benefits, nor the limitations of this vision, as researchers have used persuasive arguments for and against it and provided results (to name a few: Atkinson & Easthope, 2009; Keil & Boudreau, 2010; Martin-Brelot, Grossetti, Eckert, Gritsai, & Kovacs, 2010; Peck, 2005; Tremblay & Tremblay, 2010). In this paper, we propose to focus on another aspect of the “creative city” mantra: that of a “creative economy” and the promotion of creative industries as future major economic contributors. We will discuss the “creative city” policies of a creative economy as a panacea for urban revitalization and economic development. An analysis of the reality of working in an economic sector that is characterized by precariousness, uncertainty and entrepreneurship, will reveal inherent contradictions in such policies.

To what extent do strategies of urban revitalization hamper the development of a creative economy? Following A. Pratt, who explores the cultural contradictions of the creative city, here we look at the urban contradictions of the

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creative city. Our discussion is based on a review of the existing research ascertaining to current trends and practices in the Paris Region. Our contribution to the creative city debate questions the sustainability of a creative city agenda, where creative work is precarious, and proposes alternative approaches to research and political policies. How far can the creative city agenda be applied to reappraise contemporary urban paradigms? An alternative understanding of this model is to view the creative city as a city for the creatives. We must then consider a new precariat class, framed by uncertainty, scarcity and entrepreneurial ethos, and look at this group's place and rights within a city.

### The rise of the creative economy concept

The concepts, 'creative economy' and 'creative industries' derive from political agendas and strategies in economic development. The term "creative industries" was first introduced and then popularized in *Creative Industries Mapping Documents*, published by the United Kingdom's Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 1998 and 2001. Since then, this definition of creative industries and its parameters have become widely accepted. Creative industries are "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (Department for Culture Media & Sport, 2001: 3). They include activities traditionally related to cultural industries (architecture, film, music industry, publishing), or at the core of the artistic production (performing art, visual art) fused with other kinds of industries, and those sometimes unrecognizably linked to creativity, such as advertising, video gaming, software development and computer services. A variety of mapping documents have revealed the contributing extent these creative industries have on economic development, especially in regards to the rising software industry. The political production of this statistical category provides the means to develop new economic strategies in sectors of a rising economy. In the early 2000's, the UK was the first country to develop an economy for creative industries. As it was the first and only country to use this vernacular, it brought legitimacy to the *Cool Britania* discourse.

These concepts have since been adopted by other government agencies and international institutions. The European Union Green Paper, "*Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries*", presents creativity as a key element for innovation and the growth engine of the post-industrial economy (European Commission, 2010).<sup>1</sup> This document defines cultural and creative industries as major factors in economic growth and well-being. Thus, official and political discourse attests that contemporary capitalism has staged a successful ideological turn in drawing economic value from the symbolic production of arts and culture. Creating a new economic category has achieved several goals: it meets the need of the companies that demand changes to property rights legislation and, includes industries such as software

companies amongst the creative industries, thereby adding the prestige of Art and Creation, rooted in the social representation of the 19th century artists to these new economic sectors (Tremblay, 2008). Obliterating the image of the 1980's geeks, creative industries have effectively glamorized the New Economy.

At the local level, this new dogma concurs with an economic geographical analysis of 'clustering dynamics', based on studies of organizational change to the production process for cultural industries such as the cinema (Storper & Christopherson, 1987) or the software and computer industries (Saxenian, 1994). Metropolitan areas offer some answers or solutions to the organizational issues of lowering production costs and improving competitiveness and efficiencies. Facilitating contact between the parties involved helps reduce transaction costs, as complex problem-solving requires face-to-face interaction and negotiation.

Metropolitan areas are melting pots for a varied, highly specialized, skilled and available workforce. A metropolitan area, with its large network of suppliers, clients, partners, sub-contractors and laborers, promotes better business exchange. It facilitates information sharing and the implementation, organization and management of project-based activities; a workers' flow and the sharing of skills between companies is made possible. Research into successful innovative clusters (particularly in the Silicon Valley) has spurred the development of similar economic initiatives, as many local and national government bodies have developed economic and urban policies to secure these types of creative activities. In France, for instance, a national economic strategic plan has been developed to build strong relationships between research centers and private companies (*Pôle de Compétitivité*) and to support networking amongst organizations in a locally-based production area (*Systèmes Productifs Locaux*). Other policies rooted in industrial planning have also been developed, such as the rezoning of entire city districts for cultural consumption developments (for example the Bercy district in Paris) or creative production (such as the "*cluster de la création*" under construction in the Paris Northern suburb).

Despite what may appear like a panacea, strategies for the economic development of these sectors are jeopardized by industrial logics. Although highly idiosyncratic, many creative productions are threatened by delocalization. For instance, many governments offer tax incentives to curb runaway productions to preserve the local audio-visual industry. Our intention is to point out that the creative industry's project-based management of production and job creation conflicts with the constraints placed on location and the desire for proximity in the context of the rising valorization of urban land.

### The conditions of creative work

A 'creative economy' and its accompanying 'creative industries' in principle bring together researchers who may be working in different fields. An analysis of these concepts reveals and confirms rising trends, particularly in regards to production and working conditions. According to Menger, the art industry can be seen as a 'flexibility' testing ground, from which casualization, individualization and uncertainty are spreading throughout the work world.

<sup>1</sup> In France, 6% of the Paris Region's workforce are employed in creative industries, mainly the software industry (Camors & Soulard, 2010; Camors, Soulard, & Omont, 2011).

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