

Cultural Politics: From Culture to Cultural Industries

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Long before the rhetoric invention of the “Cultural and Creative Industries” (CCI) the economic value of arts and culture had entered the political discourse. Economic impact studies wanted to prove that public funds that were given to the arts came directly back via externalities such as tourism, urban regeneration etc. Several years later, under the influence of global economic changes, the idea of culture as a driving force of (economic) innovation came up. The following essay wants to sketch the milestones of this development and illustrate it with some examples.

Cultural an Creative Industries: The emergence of a political phenomenon

Everything started in the mid 1990ies: New labour was restructuring political fields. When the party came to power in 1997, the „Department of National Heritage“ was renamed into „Department of Culture, Media and Sports“ (DCMS). With this symbolic shift, contemporary cultural forms were put on a par with heritage culture. In the same year, the Creative Industries Task Force (CITF) was established and financed with financial means coming from the national lottery fund. One year later, in 1998, the CITF published the first “Creative Industries Mapping Document“¹. The document listed the following sectors under the header „Creative Industries“: advertising, antiques, architecture, crafts, design, fashion, film, leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software, TV and radio. This list turned out to be one of the most influential ones in the years to come. The DCMS and the activities and publications around it² contributed in starting a hype about the various potentials of the CCI: job and economic growth, more flexible labour regimes, more autonomy for the creators and – above all – innovation.

The mapping document set in motion an avalanche of empirical studies showing the economic potential in the respective city or region. Most of them were using the British definition as a sort of guideline, modifying it according to the political and/or regional specifics. The result were a broad range of defintory approaches that can not be compared – not across Europe neither – over a certain period of time since the definitions

¹ http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/4740.aspx

² Such as for example the pamphlet „The Independents“ by Charles Leadbeater and Kate Oakley;
<http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/independents>

in one and the same region were changing as well from report to report. The study “The Economy of Culture” realised by KEA (2006) provides a good overview of the definitions in use and their delineation.³

The current definition in use on an European level can be found in the Green Paper “Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries”⁴ (2010; p. 5f):

“Cultural industries” are those industries producing and distributing goods or services which at the time they are developed are considered to have a specific attribute, use or purpose which embodies or conveys cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have. Besides the traditional arts sectors (performing arts, visual arts, cultural heritage - including the public sector), they include film, DVD and video, television and radio, video games, new media, music, books and press. [...] “Creative industries” are those industries which use culture as an input and have a cultural dimension, although their outputs are mainly functional. They include architecture and design, which integrate creative elements into wider processes, as well as subsectors such as graphic design, fashion design or advertising.”

It is left to hope that this approach will entail a European definition of the CCI that can serve as a base for cultural statistics and thus for policy making. A solid and comparable statistic database is the prerequisite for the monitoring of the effectiveness of political measures.

EU politics and the national echoes

The strategic frame for this development was the Lisbon strategy⁵ with its aim to convert Europe into “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion“ (p. 3). Against this background, the “Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world”⁶ (2007) of the European Commission stated three main goal for European cultural politics:

- “(*) promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;
- *) promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs;
- *) promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations” (p. 8).

This lead in 2010 to the afore mentioned Green Paper “Unlocking the potential of

³ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc873_en.htm#bad_nodepdf_word/economy_cult/executive_summary.pdf; chapter II, p.45-58.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/doc/GreenPaper_creative_industries_en.pdf

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs/pdf/COM2005_330_en.pdf

⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0242:FIN:EN:PDF>

cultural and creative industries”, the first official paper issued by the European Commission concerning the CCI. Apart from defining the sector, it specifies the establishment of an European structural funds⁷ for financing the sector as a goal for future EU CCI politics. The high relevance that is given to the sector on the European level is evident in the green paper and it shows the two main problems that have to be solved in order to develop the sector: additional financing models and an equilibrated solution for intellectual property rights.

A national example: Austria

Austria was a first follower in establishing funding agencies for the CCI: In the early 2000s, the city of Vienna founded [departure](#), the federal government set up [impulse/evolve](#). Both were funded by means dedicated to economic development, not to culture. (As we have seen before, the CCI are considered to be part of cultural politics on the European level). Further regional funds followed. The funding tools are similar: they offer projects funds in various sizes, awareness rising measures and training. The target group are creative businesses, mainly start-ups. The project funds are following the de-minimis regulation⁸ that sets the amount of 200.000 EUR as the maximum amount given to a business over a period of three years.

Unfortunately there are until now no systematic evaluations about the effects of the programs. There are no data on the economic development of the businesses that have been supported by these programs. Whilst the working and income conditions of the creators in the Vienna region are well documented via several research projects, there is no public discussion on the efficiency of the CCI funding programs and the methods they use.⁹ Another problem are the rather conventional funding methods: open or thematic call – deadline – jury (sometimes in two stages) – decision – money – report. This system works analogically to the arts funding¹⁰ and reflects a very traditional understanding of the role of the public hand. Innovative tools aiming at the sustainable development of a creative community with a high institutional thickness are still under-explored.

⁷ An overview over the current European structural funds can be found here:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/index_en.cfm

⁸ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_379/l_37920061228en00050010.pdf

⁹ There is, of course, an internal evaluation and monitoring of the effects of the programs, but this is not published. This lack of transparency is – at least – a bad signal for transparent policy making and good governance.

¹⁰ With all its shortcomings such as the strong emphasis on genial or – in this case – creative individuals.

From enthusiasm to pragmatism

Today, the situation has cooled off. The high expectations have been reduced to a more realistic vision of the phenomenon. The CCI have been researched with regard to their economic potential, job quality, impact on economic performance and position in the specific local context.

Working in the CCI

Out of the many empirical work that has been effectuated in the last decade about CCI it can be stated that the creative labour markets share the same characteristics as artistic ones: A high education level, low income rates¹¹, hybrid working contracts, multiple job-holding, the erosion between work and private life, the high relevance of personal, informal networks, poor social security, the necessity of high flexibility in terms of time and space, high work and week-end work, thus a bad work-life-balance. The high volatility of the businesses and their vulnerability facing economic cycles intensify the instability of creative jobs. Another problem is the fact that the hybridity of working contracts causes problems concerning the in-between status of creatives between entrepreneurs and employees. The existing social security schemes are designed either for one or for the other status, but not for mixed situations. Due to non-harmonised systems, people with multiple, different job contracts are often forced to submit to various social security schemes. The freedom to choose from different systems has a dark side of double contributions.

Critics¹² are pointing out the fact that the self-determination and freedom is deceptive. It serves as a tool of a new governmental regime. This approach is right, but it neglects the ongoing deterioration of regular jobs by an increasingly dense regime of overwork, control and punishment. Summing up, it can be stated that the creative labour markets do not differ significantly from the traditional artistic labour markets which have always been an example of bad working conditions. The high informality leads to structural advantages for those who have stronger networks and/or more time to maintain them: generally young white men with. The sociologist Rosalind Gill has researched the increasing homogeneity within new media businesses: The high informality leads to social homogeneity and to declining innovation.¹³ Or, in other words: The high hopes have been

¹¹ Low income rates for the sector as a whole with some exceptions: A winner takes-all market.

¹² Such as for example Isabell Lorey, <http://eicp.net/transversal/1106/lorey/en>

¹³ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/57356513/no-01-Technobohemians-or-the-new-Cybertariat>

deceptive in many – not in all – regards. Creative jobs are not better or worse than artistic or other free-lance knowledge-based jobs.

Creative Cities: Richard Florida and better alternatives

Considering the fact that the CCI are not an appropriate tool to solve labour problems and unemployment, nevertheless they are a good method to renew urban waste land¹⁴. Richard Florida has worked out not as the first one, but certainly as the most influential one a theory about the correlation between urban development and creative work. He is pointing at the relevance of “creative” persons, i.e. the “creative class”, for city competition. Additionally, he is constructing a theory on the correlation between technology, talent and tolerance (the 3 Ts). Although Florida’s theses have been disproved by many scholars¹⁵, his ideas and the hope stimulated by the “Bilbao-effect”¹⁶ were very influential on urban planning processes since 2000. The results were urban renewal programs based on consumption-based cultural quarters (frequently together with a signature building by a celebrated architect) which lead to gentrification with all its negative consequences. In several cases, artists and other creatives were fighting against these politics such as for example in Hamburg/Germany¹⁷ or in 2009, when the Austrian city Linz was elected European Capital of Culture¹⁸.

Other approaches such as the works of the Atelier d’architecture autogerée (based in Paris/France)¹⁹ show that urban development via artistic/creative methods does not automatically lead to gentrification and crowding out processes but to stronger social cohesion and (political) activation of the inhabitants. The participatory methods they use need some time to start, but the result is more sustainable. All they need is a comparably small funding and a little political courage towards creative processes.

¹⁴ „Waste“ as far as the economic fertility is concerned.

¹⁵ Markusen, Ann (2005): Urban Development and the Politics of a Creative Class: Evidence from the Study of Artists. Regional Growth Agendas, http://www.hhh.umn.edu/projects/prie/pdf/266_creativity_class_politics.pdf

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¹⁶ Meaning that a cultural building featuring landmark architecture could attract a creative community as well a tourists, both boosting the local economy.

¹⁷ <http://nionhh.wordpress.com/about/>

¹⁸ <http://www.linz0nein.org/>

¹⁹ <http://www.urbantactics.org/>