

La cultura e le politiche basate sulle industrie creative : connettere produzione e consume

Culture and Creative Industries Policies: Linking Production and Consumption

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“Culture and Creative Industries Policies: Linking Production and Consumption”

or,

‘Why not to build a contemporary art gallery (by a starchitect, in an old power station, next to some water with a bridge)’

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Abstract

Richard Florida’s notion cultural consumption as an anchor for the creative class informs much urban policy at the present time. It is commonly presented as the ‘next new thing’ or, as the appropriate urban policy for the knowledge economy. However, it is simply the latest version of the instrumental uses of culture used as ‘unique selling propositions’ of one city against another in what is a zero-sum game. A proper policy for the creative economy, or the knowledge economy, would have to be formulated in quite different terms.

This paper points to the (overlooked) creative and cultural economy that is generally outstripping rates of growth in all other sectors of the economy: it has intrinsic economic and cultural value both of which can sustain cities.

Such a cultural economy can be sustained and grown by dedicated policies, policies that are different to, and complementary with, cultural industry policies. These policies must be rooted in an appreciation of how the cultural economy operates. Critical is the embedding of the cultural economy in production and consumption networks. This paper calls for more evidence based policy in this field.

In addition, the cultural and creative industries do bring some social benefits. However, this fact should be considered as additional to, and not the primary objective of, cultural industries policies.

Globalization, cities and the cultural industries

Cities are changing; as is their position in the world relative to others. The current phase of globalization has highlighted the role of global cities as conduits of economic development (Sassen, 2001). In the version of globalization that views nations and cities as being in competition for mobile investment (foreign direct investment, FDI) then the 'winners' will be the most 'attractive' locations. In the past an 'attractive' location may have been the cheapest, now there is little to choose between one location and another offering not only cheap, or free, perks; or, 'sweeteners'. In recent years a superior 'quality of life' has been regarded as an attractor for mobile investors and their staff; recently, the emphasis has turned to the quality of cultural attractions. Cultural attractions, especially immobile ones that are unique – built heritage for example – has become a key marketing tool; more generally cities have competed to offer innovative and unique identities. One of the most popular responses to such a 'crisis of identity' is to reinforce an existing identity; to stress a particular aspect of that identity that may be more attractive, or to re-invent a new identity. I am sure that other contributors will have comments about the ways and means of executing such strategies.

My objective is to question why and how a particular identity or unique selling proposition – cultural identity – is chosen; and, what it may mean. Moreover, I want to question why cities are so keen, at this historic moment, to re-examine and promote identity. The answer to this latter question of course impinges on the first.

A key part of answering the question is to examine the category 'culture'/ cultural production itself, and in particular, the uses to which (or whose) culture is inserted in this process. This issue raises what is perhaps the core question that causes so much disagreement: the role of the economy in relation to culture.

I am not here to suggest that this is a disagreement is that characterised by stereotypical French and English policies regarding culture: one where the difference has in recent years been as wide as the English Channel; rather, I want to challenge the very ideas and concepts of culture and its governance.

In short, I want to argue against both orthodoxies of the instrumental uses of culture. Either preserving culture in a hermetically sealed domain; or as a simple lever for economic development and investment. Potentially, once we have settled this question, urban cultural policies can be discussed in a clearer light.

The uses of culture

Let me first begin with the normative views of culture. We can divide them into two. The traditional – idealist – view that brackets off culture to some sacred

realm that a cultural elite have access to, and control over, and are thus able to arbitrate and decide upon which cultural forms and styles are favoured. The logic for state action here is based upon a version of welfare economics, basically, one of market failure. If the state does not intervene, it is argued, then culture will disappear due to lack of demand. Critics may point to the fact that some culture does survive without state help; if so, this is deemed 'commercial culture', which in these terms it is, by definition, inferior.

My observation is that this model, or a version of it, underpins cultural policy in all nations. Critically, it is wrong, or at least it does not reflect the history and nature of cultural development in the last 50 years. In short the rationale, and the policy is in crisis (especially when state funding for culture is cut year on year)(Pratt, 2007).

An alternative position appears to exist – on that is of more concern to planners and architects than cultural policy makers; however, it is one that exists in a strange parallel world (in that it does not speak to the other position). This position is the instrumental view of culture. Of course, the idealist position is instrumental – in terms of promoting a particular 'natural order' of culture, state and society. But, let's put this on one side. In the last 20 years or so we have seen the extended discussion of culture as 'bait' for foreign direct investment. Simply, this is where the model of elite cultural attraction and key FDI decision makers comes in. It is the model that we are familiar with where FDI is competed for on the basis of quality of life or the 'cultural offer' of a city (usually construed as the quality of the opera or art galleries). A variant of this model is the use of heritage as an attractor for tourists. Heritage is an interesting case as it offers what advertisers or brand consultants might call a 'Unique Selling Proposition' (USP)¹.

However, such a model is short sighted as it is not sustainable (it requires constant revamping), nor does it take into account the international cultural industries plying off one region against another. Moreover, it forces each region into a beauty contest against another. The conditions of entry to this competition are investment in massive infrastructure investments that shout the message to the world. The problem is that property maybe necessary, but is not sufficient for cultural production. We have seen too many grand buildings with no activity in them: great buildings and no artists.

A second line of instrumental thought is the social contribution of culture. There is well-founded research that underlines the role that culture can play in social cohesion and social well-being; however, as with capital projects, it does not exhaust the contribution of the arts and culture. Moreover, many of these objectives are mutually contradictory. The most extreme version is great art and social inclusion. This is an overburdening of culture. Moreover, it does not promote good culture.

So, the issue is that culture may produce many 'knock on effects' but these may at worst underline the culture, or at best, not use it to best advantage. Finally,

¹ There is only one Louvre, although one may wonder at the impact of the new Louvre branch opening in Abu Dhabi!

there is the politics of culture – choosing one type of culture expression because it is instrumentally efficacious has some extreme problems for the democracy and autonomy of culture, and of the representation of particular social groups.

A final implication that is critical to the argument that I want to promote is that all of these points of view position culture as dependent or subservient. I want to argue that culture has a relative autonomy, and an economic, social, political power of its own; a position that finds no place in current conceptions of cultural policy, or in the promotion of culture at the latest version of FDI.

The cultural economy

In the last 50 years the role of the cultural economy has changed from a mere side-show to a major player in many advanced economies. In many cities it is 3 or 4th most important economic sector of activity (GLA_Economics, 2004). Moreover, it is not a dependent sector, but on that is important source of income, trade and jobs; as well as innovation and creativity, in its own right; as well as of extended import to the rest of the economy and society. We are at a dramatic disadvantage because we have generally failed to collect information in the cultural economy, or design data collection to capture it. Data recently available shows output and growth rates better than most areas of economic life.

Second, research that has been carried out on the cultural economy has highlighted widely divergent forms by contrast with standard business models (Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002, Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2009). One striking form is the emergence of serial project based enterprise and the freelance worker. In short, 'Firms' are created to produce one product, and then dispersed and new firms re-constituted from a different set of workers. The life of a firm may be as short as 6 months; although it may be very successful; the end of the firm is often an indicator of success not failure. Such a pattern of organization requires a vast pool of highly skilled freelance labour; however, it makes the life experience of workers extremely unstable.

Moreover, the institutional and organizational forms of firms, institutions and markets in this sector are also divergent. This makes generic policy-making very difficult – if not impossible – and opens up the need for specific policy. Moreover, simplistic assumptions about industries compared to value chains and clusters do not help. For example concentrating on attracting companies for film location/shooting can be discredited in favor of concentration of post-production.

Third, the embedded nature of cultural production: cultural production tends to be embedded in specific social and economic networks that constitute a resource of skills, expertise, innovation and creativity (Pratt, 2008). The mix of expertise represents this as does the sharing of skills from cognate industries (for example film, television, and music) needed to create a typical cultural product. Convergence is more than a technological phenomena, it is a mediation of money, know-how, cultural knowledge and innovative ideas. For these reasons cultural production tends to be clustered in particular locales.

Moreover, it also underlines why attempts to create new cultural production clusters de novo fail.

Fourth, related to the embeddedness of cultural production is the convergence of cultural production and cultural consumption. Innovative processes in the cultural field have increasingly interwoven production and consumption such that there tends to be an inter-penetration and co-location in particular products. On one hand, this reflects on the co-construction of production and consumption. On the other hand, it represents the management of the vast uncertainties in new (cultural) product development that is characteristic of the sector.

Fifth, cutting across this need for specific regulatory, business and organizational analysis is the recognition that the cultural economy neither sits wholly or comfortably in either the public or private sector; moreover, in the formal or informal economy.

Finally, is the general issue in the cultural economy that the winner takes all; however, this is only half of the story: the winner is based upon quality not quantity or cost. A small cultural/ quality difference can make the difference between jackpot and poverty.

Clearly the cultural economy is a very complex field of analysis. One that does not fit the characterization of economic theory, or idealist/ normative cultural policy. We are suggesting an inter-dependency and interrelation of culture and economy; in fact an *intéressement* of both (Latour, 2006).

Consequences: rethinking policy

Let me draw some conclusions after this whirlwind tour of culture, the economy and the city. First, let me return to the questions that I posed at the outset of this paper. The strategies of either planning headline cultural attractions (such as modern art museums), or developing consumption attractions, or a mix of the two (see Florida, 2002) are based upon the notion that culture is a side show, it is not intrinsically important, and that it is simply a shiny bauble that will attract FDI (the real source of value).

Whilst superficially such policies seem to point to a cultural renaissance for policy makers; I argue that fundamentally, these strategies serve reinforce the notion that culture is subsidiary.

Second, likewise, the multi-dimensional uses of culture to reinforce community cohesion, social inclusion, etc. although very positive, are an instrumental use of culture.

Third, traditional notions of cultural policy tend to a uni-dimensional and hierarchical notion of culture; often co-opted to a form of state instrumentalism (associated with identity or place promotion). Or, they depend upon a notion of market failure which is partial- at best.

I have proposed that we begin by examining the cultural economy (of course the economy bit recognizes the economic contribution, but should not be read as restrictive to 'economic' value. We seem to be able to do this with fine art for example, which has clear monetary value, and at the same time cultural values. So, the 'value' question, or rather quality/ies, rather than quantities, as I would rather put it.

Related to this is the complex issue of social embedding of cultural production. This is good and bad. Bad for city boosters as it means that you cannot simply rebrand any city a new cultural hub. Good for cities, as it means that they build upon and respect what they already have. It also means that cultural production and consumption, and their interrelationship has a spatial manifestation – one of the things that cities are very good at hosting a complex and serendipitous interplay of cultural producers and audiences; and the spinoff knowledge and skills that may impact the rest of economy and society. But, we have to recognize the inter-relationship between the public and the private sphere: the different and sometimes complimentary, and sometimes contradictory, disciplines. We need to examine ways of brokering their relationships in terms of training, funding and career development.

We need a re-conceptualization of culture. The main points are that culture is not intrinsically state or market, commercial or non-commercial, consumption or production, formal or informal: it is all of these. First, general policy making for culture needs to embrace this, rather than simply focusing on one aspect of what is a multifaceted issue. Second, in relation to cities, we cannot continue with using / wasting culture as 'window dressing': culture is – in various ways – intrinsically important.

What we have failed to do, and what we need to do now, is to examine how 'culture works'; that is the organization and operation of cultural production from conception to making, distribution, reception, and critique. As I have suggested, the 'cultural economy' is a complex and diverse thing (one that does not respect traditional taxonomies of industry, economy or society).

We have some initial economic indicators that point to this being a major player in the urban and national economy. However, to develop thinking, and policy further we will need much more qualitative analysis of the organization and governance of the cultural economy (which overflows into culture, society and politics). There complex issues about the role of finance, the nature of markets, the transfer of skills between and across sectors, the challenges to the nature of work, and of pensions and social welfare systems; let alone the nature of the 'arts' funding systems.

It is clear that we need to re-vision culture that has its own agendas (sometimes in conflict), as well as an agenda different to that economy or society traditionally allocate it. We need to examine what these agendas are –

the economic, the arts, the cultural: and within this the music, film, television, fine arts, museums and galleries.

It is clear that the growth and development of these industries will have impacts on other areas of economy or society – but they are secondary effects. We need to examine the primary ones first. Policy needs to have clarity of its objectives – social or economic.

One of the findings of research done so far is that we will most likely need some new institutions to deliver and develop this policy. Or, most pragmatically, we will need to develop a new cadre of ‘intelligent agents’ , or cultural intermediaries who can speak to the sector, and outside the sector. As challenging will be to develop legitimacy within the sector, so that it is able to mobilize and speak with a voice. Finally, we need to examine new ways of embedding all of these within which the audience and markets upon which the culture economy are rooted.

The perspective that I have sketched here is one that is rooted in the city/region and is about the articulation of its activities, and not the superimposition of a branding campaign upon it. Moreover, it has a greater potential of being sustainable in the longer term.

All of these suggestions are a long way from building a modern art gallery and hoping that the creative class will follow, with their hi-tech employers chasing behind.

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I have expanded on these arguments in the following papers. Detailed evidential support will also be found there; as well as a few other relevant papers cited above.

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