

Local creative and cultural economy intermediaries: Examining place- based workers in the creative and cultural economy

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1. Introduction:

According to Allen Scott (2001, p. 11) '[a] striking characteristic of contemporary capitalism is the increasing importance... of sectors whose outputs are imbued with significant cultural or symbolic content'. These outputs, including their production and consumption patterns as well as their managerial processes, make up the creative and cultural economy (CCE). The notion that the creative and the cultural have become permeated by the economic and that the economic is inherently creative and cultural has become accepted by social scientists, policy makers, industry, government, entrepreneurs, and more.

Evidence to date shows that the CCE is not a stable sector when it comes to job security and work permanence. Yet evidence does suggest that the sector is growing rapidly globally and providing meaningful work for many - where the benefits of autonomy seems to outweigh what many see as the drawbacks of precarity. Evidence – especially from countries like China and South Africa - is also showing that new urban policy aimed at bolstering and supporting the CCE might be able to ameliorate some of the stifling and stubborn after effects of post-industrialisation especially in old districts, run down parts of cities, and parts of cities that might have been manufacturing centres in the past (Gregory, 2016; Gu, 2011; Keane, 2013, Shiach et al. 2018). The importance of the CCE to growth in local, regional and national economies is no longer apparent but real - and global. Moreover new events that might exacerbate the loss of traditional and indeed many service sector jobs seem to be coming just around the corner as artificially intelligent systems and automation continue to permeate our economic and labour realities (ONS, 2019).

This said, the CCE as a sector is vulnerable to a number of threats such as: rising property prices that result in displacement; failed and inaccurate policy that end up being ineffective or at worst damaging to local creative and cultural economies; failed policy that seem to be aimed at bolstering innovation type activities at the expense of cultural activity which is the bedrock of the CCE; uneven policy aimed at small businesses; and finally a misalignment of policy and governmental priorities that are unable to prioritise the need for support at the micro-organisational level (both formal and informal). This last point is especially problematic since it is at this scale that the CCE is at its most vulnerable but also its most vibrant, providing the embryonic activities and micro-infrastructure that make up the creative and cultural ecosystem (no matter how precarious) and which lays the foundations for real economic growth and perceived development.

In order to ameliorate these concerns and indeed provide an effective means to encourage and support the CCE, at the local level especially, a real understanding of the unique and nuanced characteristics of place, and space, is required – this is achieved through an examination of the places and spaces of creative and cultural work and/or production. This is not a new perspective and much work has been conducted in this area in the fields of community studies, cultural economics, organisational studies and more. Importantly however what this work has done is continue to show the importance of scale. This is apparent in policy-oriented work aimed at the CCE as well. For instance the work on 'creative hubs' conducted by the British Council, as well as others, is an acknowledgement of the importance of work space and the hyperlocal scale that make up the CCE (Dovey et al., 2016; Shiach et al., 2016). Learning from these projects has shown that a dynamic ecosystem of creative spaces and communities are guiding and supporting thousands of creative ventures, but are still largely misunderstood and often undervalued (British Council, 2016). They also

show that examining the CCE through the lens of 'clusters' is not as illuminating as it used to be. Indeed the work on creative hubs shows that the analytical and policy-intervening lens need to be re-adjusted to focus on smaller scale creative and cultural organisational activities. This being said, further learning emanating from this work is showing that the analytical lens might have to go further and deeper in order to effect real change; that the lens might need to be re-adjusted further to focus on an even smaller scale - the scale of agent and/or actor.

It is at the scale of agent and/or actor where the work of the local creative and cultural economy intermediary (CCEI) becomes illuminated and elevated. There is a body of work that looks at other larger organisational constructs as intermediaries, however this is not the focus of this paper. For the sake of conceptual clarity and keeping in line with examining work in the spaces and places of the CCE, intermediaries are mainly individuals and/or very small organisations with at most two employees. These individuals act as local conduits between a number of stakeholders, sectors, subsectors and organisational activities that are crucial to the perpetuation of the local CCE. In recent work based in Sao Paulo, Brazil it was found that the CCE in one particular part of the city was inherently made up of a number of overlapping, messy and intertwined informal and formal organisations and individuals (Shiach et al. 2016). These included artist's collectives, local government, local businesses, community leaders, community organisations, security firms, educational institutions, social enterprises, local craft entrepreneurs, NGOs and more. The CCE permeated and connected all of these sectors and subsectors and it was found that the most effective way of engaging with and indeed making sense of the CCE in this context was through one person. This person effectively had an established understanding and network that was able to grant the researchers access to all levels of activity. He was an intermediary that was able to connect and communicate the wants, needs and characteristics of the CCE in one locale and subsequently translate these findings to policy makers at state level who were otherwise unaware of the activities taking place at this hyperlocal scale.

This is important as creative and cultural economic activity in cities and regions across the world are becoming increasingly prioritised as engines of local economic stability and growth. As a result of this policymakers are concerned with their respective creative areas and looking for new ways to sustain their activity and contribute to their growth. While a number of ways exists, the aim of this paper is to elevate the role of CCEI whose role it is to ensure that policy does affect change and contribute to the growth and sustainability of local CCEs which are the bedrock of regional growth in countries across the world.

2. What are intermediaries?

Intermediaries in this sector are primarily individuals who act as links between people and / or organisations in order to try and bring about an agreement. The academic literature on intermediaries is somewhat disjointed and varied ranging from business studies to marketing management to finance and other fields. This paper will not engage with the broader concept of the intermediary. There are three strands of work pertaining to the creative and cultural economy: Knowledge intermediaries; cultural intermediaries; and creative intermediaries. This section will show that consolidating characteristics of all three perspectives is central to understanding CCEIs.

2.1 Knowledge intermediaries:

One strand of work examines intermediaries in university – industry collaborations focussing mainly on technology transfer (Yusuf, 2008). According to Yusuf (2008) the transition from the ‘lab’ to the commercial sphere is a tricky one, and developing a new technology can be fraught with risk. At the heart of the process is the diffusion of tacit forms of knowledge and information as well as the ways in which university technology transfer offices (TTOs) work and having the experience and knowledge in how to deal with these entities. This being said, due to a lack of knowledge in this arena many ideas and findings (including patents) remain undeveloped in the university where many researchers lack the know-how to access the business world (Ibid). In 2008 a special issue in the journal *Research Policy* on the role of intermediaries in university – industry collaborations argues that this is the reason that a role for intermediaries of ‘many different stripes’ exists (Yusuf, 2008 p. 1170). These intermediaries are described as ‘knowledge’ intermediaries whose primary role is the facilitation of knowledge exchange in order to bring universities and industry closer, ‘by diagnosing needs and articulating the demand for certain kinds of innovation, by instituting a dynamic framework for change and working to achieve the change through financing and other means’ (Ibid). This way of viewing intermediaries is very much embedded in the language of innovation. Missing from the discourse are the links that tie notions of trust (which are inherently important to university – industry relations) with that of successful collaborative projects in this sphere and perhaps outside of purely technology driven agendas. The human element seems to have been dispensed with in order to frame an understanding of intermediaries assisting with knowledge exchange in terms of, for instance, how to get the most patents from ‘filed’ to ‘pending’. Moreover, this way of articulating the role of intermediaries misses crucial elements of collaborative behaviour and process within university – industry collaborations as they work in the CCE, especially with regards to micro-enterprises (Virani and Pratt, 2015). Nevertheless what is important is the recognition of the need to have these points of contact and joining between sectors which intermediaries seem to occupy and facilitate.

2.2 Cultural intermediaries:

The second strand is embedded within a sociological discourse (influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, 1984) and examines what are termed ‘cultural intermediaries’ (see: Hracs, 2015; Virani and Pratt, 2015). Whereas normative notions of intermediaries in the innovation literature are the passive means of diffusion; in the sociological literature the term includes an active process of transformation and translation. Bourdieu’s (1984) work does not specify the role of cultural intermediaries in collaborations between organisations, he does speak to their role as important in an ‘economy of qualities’ (Callon et al, 2002). In this way these agents are tastemakers and ‘needs merchants’ but

are also positioned in between the production and consumption of culture (Negus, 2002; O'Connor, 1998; Taylor, 2013). This is important because it acknowledges the role of the agent and/or actor (which is missing in the technology oriented discourse about intermediaries) and it also situates it within the cultural economy (Pratt, 2008; Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2009). According to Negus (2002), and relevant here, positioning cultural intermediaries in-between production and consumption is an important aspect to come to terms with because it acknowledges that the cultural economy does not have an assembly line model of cultural production and consumption. Instead, in what Scott (1999) identifies as an economy of 'symbols', the intermediary can occupy three roles at once, the producer, the intermediary and the consumer. Newer articulations of this notion use the term 'curation' as a way to speak to an increasingly fragmented economic landscape, and giving value to cultural products within this landscape (Balzer, 2014). This work also focuses on the role of various types of mediating organisations that range from arts and cultural councils, policy networks, economic development agencies, foundations and unions to artist collectives, cultural centres, creative industries incubators, festivals and tradeshows (Jakob and Van Heur, 2015). This work also explains how new communication technologies have given rise to new types of intermediaries like crowdsourcing websites that mediate between producers and consumers of creative products and connect them in unparalleled ways. All these intermediaries are bound together by their critical involvement in and shaping of the production and consumption of creative goods and services – which is also very much influenced by the theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1984).

2.3 Creative intermediaries:

A third way envisages them as actors embedded within projects and/or communities in specifically the urban cultural and creative economy where their primary role is the facilitation of collaborations and connections within the CCE and often times between sectors outside of the CCE through a process of mediation (Fleming 2004; Virani and Pratt, 2015). In this way they might be better understood with regards to how they connect what are often multi and/or trans - disciplinary as well as cross-sectoral activities in primarily an urban context. For lack of a better term these individuals can be described as 'creative intermediaries' (Fleming, 2004).

Creative intermediaries operate as a number of things such as:

- gatekeepers
- brokers
- an information resource (providing access to knowledge concerning education and training opportunities, employment initiatives and market opportunities)
- initiators (calling for gaps in existing support to be filled and defects in provision to be eradicated)
- providers of business support (offering planning advice and signposting)
- advocates (operating as a voice for the diverse activities, networks and enterprises of the creative sector in the locality and beyond)

Fleming (2004) states that the creative intermediary is part of the sector and crucially part of the community; the community and sector trusts the creative intermediary; and yet the intermediary can look the other way, gain the trust of and seek to influence decision-makers, funders, even consumers. Virani and Pratt (2015) in their examination of knowledge intermediaries in the CCE outline similar characteristics. For them, intermediaries are brokers, translators, and network

builders. These characteristics are important as these agents attempt to work within the spaces and places of creative and cultural economic activity. These spaces and places are more production-oriented however they are also places of consumption.

3. Consolidating perspectives – The creative and cultural economy intermediary (CCEI)

By consolidating recent research and by extrapolating the major findings associated with the above literatures a newer articulation of the intermediary, as it pertains to the CCE, is being developed. A creative and cultural economy intermediary (CCEI) encapsulates many of the characteristics, drives, motivations and activities listed above covering a number of sectors and subsectors within the CCE. Moreover, as CCE policy is now global, leading to what Richard Florida (2017) has called a golden age of new urbanism, existing in a multitude of countries and regions spanning the Global North and South, recognition of the role of CCEIs has become more important than ever. There are many types of CCEIs and they all have specific strengths regarding how best to understand the local creative and cultural economy, however their strength is exactly that – the local creative and cultural economy which is where these ecosystems are born and where they reside. Therefore CCEIs are a newer articulation of the intermediary that speaks to issues that arise in collaboration, connection, and community development as they pertain to the creative and cultural economy. This includes a varied and unique skillset that enables them to quickly balance, make sense of, and jump through multiple sectors and scales while at the same time being able to speak to policymakers and local government as to the needs of the local CCE. Finally they are uniquely adept at dealing with conflict and dissatisfaction which is also an integral part of mediation.



4. Creative and Cultural Economy Intermediary pillars:

The following is purposefully abstracted in order to illustrate and highlight the areas that any policy for CCEIs will need to engage with. It is felt that an understanding of these specific areas (or pillars) would be an integral part of identifying and perhaps training up CCEIs.

4.1 Understanding the role of the CCEI:

The CCEI can be understood as a public-sector employee or a self-employed consultant or a similar position which allows nimble and flexible working arrangements in order to make sense of the local CCE in a specific and manageable area with a responsibility to facilitate and develop opportunities that encourages the growth and resilience of the local CCE sector. The primary role of the CCEI is to make sense of the local CCE.

Usually the local CCE is in the business of making symbolic products (in one way or another). They are semiotic factories that work in an economy of symbols. This is as true for arts and crafts activities as it is for games developers and music producers.

This means that in many cases the first role of the CCEI is to understand - and often times try to legitimise - what makes up the activities of the local CCE. This is primarily a mapping exercise and a type of audit. But it is also about establishing a network, pinpointing points of connection, and subsequently understanding the depth and breadth of creative economic activity.

The creative and cultural sector consists of a wide spectrum of activities however it is not the activities per se that act as identifiers but the processes that underpin the work that people do. The creative process in itself is contingent on a number of things at the local level the most important being access to formal and informal networks of creative and cultural activity and potential routes to market. An understanding of this landscape is crucial.

The CCEI should make sense of these processes, identify opportunities, and offer support in ways that enhance and enable the local CCE.

In this capacity CCEIs become: gatekeepers, brokers, knowledge holders, initiators, business support providers, advocates, network builders and translators.

4.2 Understanding the importance of localities

There is a growing body of theory on the CCE that already acknowledges a relationship between place and creativity (Drake, 2003). The focus is almost entirely on creativity as a collective or social process and largely concentrates on creativity as a product of interactions within place-based clusters of creative firms (Ibid), or other types of creative / cultural organisation including informal. The consensus has been that in the emerging spatial theory concerned with the creative industries the emphasis on collective creativity and clusters of creative enterprises is useful. Moreover the work on creative hubs goes further (Shiach et al. 2017; Dovey et al, 2016)

If it is to be argued that place, in the form of a creative enterprise's locality, plays a role in creativity then some attempt needs to be made to understand 'place' and, more specifically, 'locality' – what are the bodies of knowledge that need to be understood to make a place a place, or a locality a locality. Even in an era of globalisation, with large areas of the globe experiencing international and global flows of increasing intensity, most theorists analysing the concept of place continue to highlight its importance and distinctiveness for socio-economic activity.

Small differences between localities can play a role in achieving competitive advantage (Michael Porter, 1990) in a globalising economy and a locality's specificities draw producers to a place and often times keeps them there. Clearly, the attributes which may allow a locality to attract increasingly mobile capital (financial, social and cultural) may include the 'traditional' factors of lower costs, proximity to infrastructure, the size and nature of local markets, the availability of expertise, and so on. Drake (2003) suggests that in the context of the creative industries an additional place-based resource may be the prompts and stimuli which can be turned to economic advantage by artists and designers and others. As Lippard (1997, p. 9) argues, "our personal relationships to history and place form us, as individuals and groups, and in reciprocal ways we form them."

'So designers and artists and others will have their own highly personalised and constructed perceptions of locality and their own sense of identity related to that locality' (Drake, 2003, 513). 'These subjective, imagined or constructed localities will be a resource of prompts, signs and symbols as important as, if not more important than, the 'real' or objective locality. The same place will be interpreted differently by different individuals and will provide different prompts and aesthetic raw materials' (Ibid). It is important for CCEIs to understand and record this.

Creative and cultural producers may create products whose place- or locality-inspired elements are incorporated into the aesthetic or expressive elements of that product. It is possible to envisage circumstances where these products in their turn contribute to the shaping of 'real' places (the creation of public art or street art is a clear example of this idea). Whether these products are consumed locally, in places elsewhere, or are effectively incorporated into global flows of deterritorialised information, they will carry with them elements of the place in which they were produced and so can potentially shape how others perceive particular places.

4.3 Understanding the importance of networks:

There is an assumption that the 'linking/sustaining/supporting' activities to develop and grow networks in the CCE will 'just happen'; and are somehow in the DNA of how this sector operates. Very clearly, and in many cases, they do not. The purpose of understanding the importance of networks and network building is to help SMEs and other small organisations and individuals in the creative sector build better networks, but also to allow other stakeholders interested in this area to do the same.

It is no secret that we are living in a networked society (Castells, 1996) and that networking is a highly important part of being a small business in the creative industries (Scott, 2008; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). Scholars have long pointed to social networks and network building as the life

blood of many an SME (Banks et al, 2002), especially when it comes to the creative and cultural industries and its reliance on project-based employment (Whitely, 2006). Project-based employment requires the SME (or any size of organization for that matter) to have a strong reputation in order to secure repeat business (Botsman, 2012); and reputation travels within a social network.

Is networking 'organic' to the cultural and creative industries? Are creative entrepreneurs, by their nature, established and proficient networkers? If so, how developed are these networks, are they serving a purpose to help businesses grow? Where are the gaps in the networks and what kinds of organizations could be involved in such networks to mutual benefit? Are networks place or space based or digital and what works?

This is about joining the dots: how needs are mapped, or identified; practical means of bridging gaps between project based and regular enterprises, between formal and informal activities, between for profit and not for profit activities, and between SMEs and larger organizations. How are micro-enterprise and sole-trader networks sustained, can they be made more resilient? Which activities are of the most value to 'join the dots'?

Specific sub themes should explore: What are the main mechanisms of networks? what kinds of networks help the SME? How do networks help SMEs change or grow? What kinds of organisations are hard to engage in networks and what could help mitigate this?

4.4 Understanding the importance of brokerage:

Virani and Pratt (2015) identified that knowledge brokerage in this context means more than simply the allocation of funds or match-making at events. Brokerage is about bringing together two or more sectors or subsectors in order for them to work together. It requires a specific and sensitive interaction, which might be conceptually similar to that of curation (Balzer, 2014). Brokerage here means that there is a managing of expectations and compatibilities that takes place before a connection is instigated. There are a number of stages of brokerage that can be modified to fit specific interactions and organisations and sectoral engagements. The premise however is the same.

The first phase is where potential partners are introduced and placed in a setting with each other based on intimate knowledge of their wider network, a provision of linkages is hence offered up. It is here where an agreement to work with each other is decided.

The second phase is after a partnership, or willingness to work with each other has been struck. This is the stage in the process when an agreement to work with each other or to work on a specific thing is established. At this stage there might be quite a bit of hand holding which can be particularly necessary for those who have never entered into these types of agreements in the past; especially if there are contractual agreements. Although hand holding might suggest a certain level of naivety and/or anxiety at this stage, it would not be wrong to think of it in this way. Many serious concerns over the prospect of these partnerships are identified and dealt with at this stage. Anxiety levels are high here, but they are mediated and essentially 'demystified' (Virani and Pratt, 2015).

The third phase of brokerage happens within the actual partnership where expectations have to be configured and outputs discussed and managed. For instance it is at this stage where the partners

will iron out the specifics of what it is that they can contribute – hence a need to make sure that the project is actually deliverable and not too ambitious. It is also about which compromise they will mutually agree upon in order to achieve a new ‘collective goal’.

Importantly, as trust and familiarity increase the level of brokering is reduced. It is also important to stress the context that the process of brokering happens in. It is one of mutual respect, trust and understanding which can often be problematic. Much of the broker’s role is about ensuring this.

4.5 Intermediary as translator:

Translation here refers to being able to speak multiple sectoral and sub-sectoral languages in order (again) to make sense of the local CCE. Arts and crafts people speak a different language to musicians etc and these nuances within the CCE are important to recognise. In research conducted by Virani and Pratt (2015) it was found that the notion of the ‘generalist’ is an important one to conceptualise when thinking about the intermediary role, since the translation process requires working knowledge of a number of these ‘constituencies’. Strategically, a generalist approach allows for a nuanced understanding of where to place policy and hence elevates the intermediary’s position through their experience.

5. Conclusion:

As stated earlier, creative and cultural economic activity in cities and regions across the world are becoming increasingly prioritised as engines of local economic stability and growth. In addition the lexicon and language of the ‘value of the creative sector’ is becoming louder and louder as policy and institutions (especially universities) espouse claims of best practice / best training. As a result of this policymakers are concerned with their respective creative areas and looking for new ways to sustain their activity and contribute to their growth. While a number of ways exists, the aim of this paper is to elevate the role of CCEI whose role it is to ensure that policy does affect change and contribute to the growth and sustainability of local CCEs which are the bedrock of regional growth in countries across the world. Just with anything, CCEIs can be of varying quality where the benchmark of success and failure can shift quite quickly. This being said, and just like other fields in the creative industries, CCEIs must accrue their knowledge and experience through some type of process rooted to the real world and the real world working circumstances of the creative sector and creative workers. Elevating their role allows policymakers to have an insight into the effects of their policy but also it legitimises a previously unrecognised form of work - which is becoming a CCEI in the first place. No body sets out to be an intermediary in this sense, they become one over time as they develop an expertise in managing relations between different disciplines and organisational constructs. In this light success and failure are irrelevant as the CCEI embodies a process of learning as the very thing they are trying to learn changes in the front of their eyes. This might be the only way to truly understand such a fluid sector.

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