

Creativity, culture and regeneration

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Creative growth?

It has recently been claimed that the UK creative and cultural industries sector is now comparable in size with the financial services sector, comprises 7.3% of the UK economy, is growing at twice the rate of any other UK sector; and employs 1.8m people (The Work Foundation, 2007). Much recent interest has drawn upon theory which suggests that in the new 'knowledge economy' cities that display a high quality of place- meaning the presence of artists and musicians, high levels of tolerance and diversity, and other manifestations of a vibrant cultural life, perform better economically than those which do not (Landry, 2000; Florida 2002; 2008; Clifton, 2008; Rosentraub and Joo, 2009). Consequently culture has been positioned at the centre of many urban policies (Wilks-Heeg and North, 2004), though the efficacy of this remains contested- particularly with regard to the rather 'instrumental' usage of culture and simplistic understanding of the multiple drivers involved (Vickery, 2007; Evans, 2009, Pratt, 2009). At the strategic level it is also claimed that culture drives regeneration in many ways, from 'inspiring landmark buildings through to reviving the decaying centres of market towns, to bringing a community together through an arts event' (DCMS, 2004).

As such, The UK government has explicitly drawn on Florida's discourse, stating, 'Richard Florida, a professor of regional economic development, has set out a convincing argument as to why environments with strong cultural facilities and creative networks are key to economic success in modern urban societies' (DCMS, 2004, page 40). Sometimes seen as a quintessentially New Labour project, this interest has if anything increased from the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition elected in 2010 (The Economist, November 2010). Similarly, government sponsored reviews, such as the Cox Review, which have promoted the apparent importance of creativity to improving the competitiveness of UK firms (HM Treasury, 2005). As a counterbalance, some commentators have sought to temper the view that the concept of 'creativity', and its enhancement, represents either a higher form of development or more of a 'policy panacea' than previous 'prescriptions' (Clifton, 2008; Pratt, 2008)

The polarised nature of creativity in the UK

Table 1: Creative Core Location by Unitary Authority / County

Top 10 Localities	(LQ)	Bottom 10 Localities	(LQ)
1.Wokingham	1.46	1.Barnsley	0.63
2.Reading	1.42	2.Tameside	0.62
3.Cardiff	1.39	3.N.E. Lincolnshire	0.61
4.Oxfordshire	1.34	4.Knowsley	0.60
5.London	1.33	5.Kingston upon Hull	0.58
6.Newcastle	1.32	6.Sandwell	0.57
7.Cambridgeshire	1.31	7.Thurrock	0.56
8.Brighton & Hove	1.31	8.Blackpool	0.52
9.Windsor & Maidenhead	1.31	9.Blaenau Gwent	0.51
10.Trafford	1.27	10.Stoke on Trent	0.49

Source: derived from Census of Population 2001

Table 1 shows the top and bottom ten locations in the UK¹ for the presence of the ‘creative core’ of knowledge workers. As might be expected, localities in the west-of-London M4 corridor area (Wokingham, Reading, Oxfordshire, Windsor and Maidenhead) feature heavily in the top ten Creative Core Location Quotients (LQs), along with a number of less obvious regional centres of creativity emerge – Manchester in the north west (Trafford lying just to the west of the city centre with Manchester itself ranked only 4 places below at 14), Newcastle in the north east, and not least Cardiff (Wales). Finally, our rankings confirm the position of Brighton and Hove as a creative centre. However, turning attention to the bottom ten UAs, a number of these are places suffering the protracted after-effects of the loss of heavy industry, either as distinct localities (Blaenau Gwent, Stoke on Trent, Barnsley) or the de- industrialised areas of large cities e.g. Tameside (Manchester), Knowsley (Liverpool) and Sandwell (Birmingham). These localities typically lack internal capacity, facing complex, long standing and often deeply embedded mixture of social, economic, and environmental problems many intractable problems such as:-

- a tradition of heavy industry and of large firm dominance that gives a narrow economic base and a vulnerability both to short-term employment shocks and long term economic decline;

¹ Data excludes Scotland and Northern Ireland

- a weak local tradition of entrepreneurship and small independent enterprise as a product of single sector and large firm dominance and the weight of its influence on occupational and skill structures ;
- long-standing, high unemployment, particularly amongst young people and older men;
- a low overall level of demand for labour but with the paradox of skill shortages in certain key sectors through an inability to attract and retain the necessary human capital;
- a history of under investment and continuing deterioration in the natural and built environment with special problems in the area of housing;
- mixed multi-ethnic populations as a result of previous waves of immigration before the advent of decline, sometimes with associated problems of racial tension

Overall, the spatial focus of creative industry policy in the UK has centred on the role of cities and city-regions, with the core metropolitan arena seen as the key for developing and enhancing ‘creative clusters’ (DCMS, 2000; 2007; 2008). A distinct advantage of city-regions is considered to be their ability to produce, attract and retain those workers who play the lead role in knowledge-intensive production and innovation – who provide the ideas, know-how, creativity and imagination so crucial to economic success. However, by its very nature such a policy focus begs the question as to what the fate might be of those localities which are not at the mainstream of the creative economy. This is particularly true for the kind of old industrial locations described above which are endowed with lower concentrations of cultural industries and creative workers, and thus lower levels of ‘cultural opportunity’.

A regeneration policy for all?

Although the link between the creative class, culture, competitiveness, and growth can, and will, continue to be debated, the crux of the matter from a UK competitiveness perspective is to ensure fair access to economic opportunity across the nation as a whole. In the current economic (and policy) climate, it is increasingly difficult to see how this will happen; although many lagging places do possess a tradition of loyalty to the locality and a strong spirit of community together with well-established traditions of partnership and association, they essentially lack the endogenous capacity to reconnect themselves with the growth poles of the UK economy. This situation will inevitably be exacerbated by the coming cuts in central government departmental budgets over the next 4 years; the most pertinent being Local Government by down 27%, Communities by 51%, and Culture, Media and Sport 24% (all in excess of the average 19% reduction in revenue spending across all departments). Moreover, at a time when place matters as much if not more than it did before, the disbanding

of the regional development agencies (RDAs) in 2010 England and their replacement by 'Local Enterprise Partnerships' adds another level of uncertainty to the picture. Regeneration also requires the mobilisation of more tangible resources to encourage the process. In the current situation, difficult times are ahead for aspiring creative localities.