Thinking strategically – Acting creatively: conceputalising creativity in Adelaide

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Abstract

A considerable body of research seeks to map and measure the impact of the creative industries. This is constrained in cities like Adelaide by a narrow conceptualisation of creativity that fails to reveal how diffuse creativity is within the economy and society. A more holistic understanding of the relationship between creativity and the economy is required to inform policy development and intervention.

Key words: Creative capital, creative industries, policy, economic development
Thinking strategically – Acting creatively:
Irrage for fostering the development and sustainability of a creative economy in
Adelaide, South Australia.

Much of the recent interest in creativity among policymakers has been inspired by the
popular work of Richard Florida. In The Rise of the Creative Class, Florida argues that
the ‘creative class’ or knowledge workers are more discerning about the cities in which
they choose to live. He claims the creative class is more likely to settle in cities that are
recognised for their tolerant environments and diverse populations, in preference to
cities that offer the highest paying jobs. In addition Florida suggests that the "most
successful places" are the ones that combine all "three T's" tolerance, talent and
technology. Some policymakers alert to the importance of attracting and retaining highly
skilled and experienced knowledge workers have drawn inspiration from Florida. More
broadly it has generated interest in the role that creativity plays in fostering economic
and social prosperity in cities and regions.

Like attempts to conceptualise creativity in many cities and regions, the approach taken
in Adelaide, South Australia is constrained by short term economic imperatives and a
need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between
creativity and the economy. In practice there is a tendency to focus attention on a small
number of industry sectors that are regarded as having significant export growth
potential. Consequently a great deal of research on creativity fails to view creativity as a
concept with policy implications for wider social and economic development. A more
holistic conception of creativity is required to understand the complex systems of agents
and institutions that underpin creativity and innovation in cities.

This paper challenges narrowly conceived definitions of creativity and the tendency in
cities like Adelaide to confine policy discussions about creative industry development to
the arts, cultural, information & communication technology and digital media sectors. A
broader understanding of the relationship between creativity and the economy is
required. Such an approach has profound implications for policy makers seeking to
foster innovation and regional prosperity.

Knowledge, creativity and innovation?
The debate surrounding creativity seeks to highlight the social and economic importance
of the relationship between knowledge, creativity and innovation in cities and regions.
Robert Reich argues that knowledge and creativity will underpin prosperity and living
standards in the ‘new economy’ (Reich, 1991, 159). He uses the term ‘symbolic analyst’
to describe an increasingly valued group of workers; and suggests that creativity is an
attribute dispersed across a range of occupations rather than confined to those who
work in the arts, craft and cultural industries. Peter Drucker adopts the term ‘knowledge
workers’ and asserts that knowledge and creativity are pivotal resources in the new
Reich argues that Drucker’s term ‘knowledge worker’ is no longer adequate to describe the qualities of those in the contemporary workforce who are of most value. He suggests that knowledge can now be so easily encoded in software; there is no longer anything novel about someone being computer literate and conversant with other information technologies, but that the real value derived from the knowledge workers is their ability to be creative in the application of their knowledge no matter their field. He states that ‘great ideas are the new currency of the realm. Information technology is the bank that circulates the coins ever more efficiently’ (Reich, 2001, 53). However those with the great ideas, Reich’s creative ‘geeks’ or dreamers and visionaries, such as artists, inventors, designers, engineers, financial wizards, scientists, writers or musicians can not drive commercialisation of their ideas in their own right. Essential to the commercialisation of their creative vision is what Reich describes as the ‘shrinks’; the marketer, talent agent, the trend spotter, producers, consultants, in short the entrepreneur. Bilton summarises Reich’s argument by asserting that ‘individual creativity needs to be integrated with organisational resources, capacities and systems if new ideas are ever to bear fruit’ (Bilton, 2007, xv).

Charles Landry supports Reich’s notion of the critical value of the creative individual to the ‘new economy’; however Landry shifts Reich’s term of the ‘creative worker’ one step closer to the language of the business world and the notion of commercialisation of creativity by referring to the creative worker as ‘creative capital’. Landry suggests ‘creative capital’ is an essential asset for the regeneration of cities and economies. How cities and regions support, capture and transform creative capacity or creative capital into economic and social wealth (Bilton’s fruit) will be the defining attribute of successful cities and economies, no matter their scale. Just how cities capture and transfer this creative capital to their benefit is the focus of this paper.

The creativity policy imperative

The importance of creativity and the creative individual in driving innovation in a changing economy has had a catalytic influence on the emergence of the ‘creative industries’ being seen as central to successful regional economic development.

Over the last decade, South Australian organisations including the Capital City Committee, Office for Volunteers, the Thinkers in Residence program, Social Inclusion Unit and Festival of Ideas have all argued that South Australia’s future prosperity is tied in important ways to the extent to which it can sustain and foster creativity and innovation. The South Australian Government’s Economic Development Board states that South Australia (…) has a reputation as a “creative place” and as a centre for the arts (Economic Development Board, 2003, p.17). The EDB led the development of the South Australian Strategic Plan which included as one its major objectives, fostering creativity. The 2007 SASP linked creativity and innovation, stating that:

‘South Australia has a reputation for innovation in science and in the arts. We understand that our prosperity depends on the imagination, courage, talent and energy of our citizens. We want to reaffirm South Australia as a place that thrives...’
on creativity, knowledge and imaginative thinking. This capacity to do things differently will determine whether we can achieve all our goals for the state’s future (S.A. Government, 2007, 7).

The 2007 SASP includes a range of targets related to creativity which are:

**T4.1** TARGET – **Creative industries (new):** increase the number of South Australians undertaking work in the creative industries by 20% by 2014.

**T4.2** TARGET – **Film industry (existing – modified):** double the number of feature films produced in South Australia by 2014.

**T4.3** TARGET – **Cultural engagement – institutions (new):** increase the number of attendances at South Australia’s cultural institutions by 20% by 2014.

**T4.4** TARGET – **Cultural engagement – arts activities (new):** increase the number of attendances at selected arts activities by 40% by 2014.

The South Australian Government’s arts agency, Arts SA has been charged with the role of overseeing the creativity targets in the SASP. The targets are well on the way to being achieved. In addition to Arts SA’s relatively modest investments in fostering creativity through arts and cultural support programs; the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST), and the Department of Trade and Economic Development (DTED) together with the Creative Industries Catalyst working within the Department of Premier and Cabinet are all drawing attention to creativity and the ‘creative industries’ in their policy documents. The digital media sectors appear to be the main focus of attention, suggesting that creativity is being conceived of in very narrow and pragmatic terms.

**Defining the creative economy and the creative industries**

Steven Tepper discusses the complexity of understanding the creative economy, suggesting that we move beyond merely measuring it to try and understand it better. Tepper (2002:159) suggests that, ‘rather than spend time calculating the impact or size of the creative economy, we should direct our analytical and policy energies toward better understanding how creative work and institutions are changing and what might be done to foster a more robust, more creative and more diverse [economy] and cultural life’.

In Adelaide, much of the understanding of the creative sector by governments has relied upon the accumulated knowledge of employees working in Arts SA, the government’s arts agency. This tacit knowledge within the agency is further informed by the individuals who comprise the peer assessment panels for Arts SA’s funding programs, as well as the agencies and individuals who seek support from Arts SA. In addition to this, policy makers in the arts and cultural sectors utilise statistical data from grant acquittals, as well as data complied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in partnership with
the Cultural Ministers Council comprising a range of statistical information relevant to arts and cultural heritage.

An Arts SA report sought to define the creative industries in South Australia in 2005. It recommended that nine sectors be included:

- audio-visual, media and digital media,
- advertising,
- craft, visual arts and indigenous arts,
- design (including architecture, fashion, and graphic, urban, industrial and interior design)
- film and television
- music
- publishing
- performing arts
- cultural heritage/institutions

The nine sectors identified as the ‘creative industries’ are ‘linked by the use of similar creative and artistic inputs, and produce products and services that fall into the categories of entertainment, education and art’ (Arts S.A, et al., 2005, p25-6). The report argues that with the inclusion of the new digital creative activities, the above definition was the most ‘pragmatic approach’. Commissioned by a cross government steering committee, the report was seeking to identify which sectors of the creative industries ‘have the potential for wealth and job creation through generation and exploitation of intellectual capital’. Informed by predominantly quantitative data and a relatively small set of qualitative information, the report recommended that the sectors with the greatest potential for growth are those that are based on digital technologies; these are typically companies that are near the definitional borderline between creative industries and information and communications technology (ICT). The Creative Industries in South Australia report defines these as the ‘digital creatives’ and further describes the nature and size of this category in South Australia and concludes that there are probably fewer than 10 ‘significant players’.

The report reveals that the nine sectors employ 15,761 people or 2.5 per cent of total state employment. This compares with a national average of 2.9 per cent. The creative industries generate estimated wages of some $640 million, have a turnover of $2 billion and contribute almost $1 billion towards Gross State Product (GSP) in SA’ (Arts SA, 2005). A more holistic conception of creativity would generate a very different result. Rather then focus on identifying creative industries we need to focus on the sources and sites of creativity throughout the economy and society.

The problem with focusing on the ‘digital creatives’ is that it overlooks the contributions that other creative sectors and individual artists make to ensure the success of the ‘digital creatives’. In this context Reich suggests, ‘new information technologies are important but their effects are indirect. (…) technology increases the value of creativity
by allowing it to spread quickly throughout an organisation's network and ultimately to consumers. Great ideas are the new currency of the realm. Information technology is the bank that circulates the coins ever more efficiently (Reich, 2001, p53). In other words, information and communications technology is part of a system that has enabled more rapid communication of ideas, information, and a community's cultural identity. Digital media products are one of a number of means of expression that can be utilised.

**How have others defined the creative economy and creative industries?**

Following the UK's Creative industries Taskforce lead, there have been a range of attempts by researchers to better conceptualise and define creativity. These are summarised below.

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<th>Richard Caves</th>
<th>Charles Landry</th>
<th>Richard Florida</th>
<th>David Throsby</th>
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**Creative industries**

- Supplying goods and services that we broadly associate cultural artistic, or simply entertainment value.
  - Book & magazine publishing
  - Visual arts (painting, sculpture)
  - Performing arts (theatre, opera, concerts, dance)
  - Sound recordings
  - Cinema & TV films
  - Fashion
  - Toys & games

**Creative industries**

- The creative industries are those industries that are based on individual creativity, skill and talent. They are also those that have the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing intellectual property.
  - Architecture
  - Music
  - Art and antiques markets
  - Performing arts (theatre, opera, concerts, dance)
  - Sound recordings
  - Communication and video games
  - Craft publishing
  - Design software
  - Designer fashion
  - Film and video television and radio

**Creative Class**

- Computer and mathematical occupations
- Architecture and engineering occupations
- Life, physical, and social science occupations
- Education, training, and library occupations
- Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations
- Management occupations
- Business and financial operations occupations
- Legal occupations
- Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations
- High-end sales and sales management

**Cultural capital**

- Core creative arts
- Location of the primary artistic producers at the centre producing text, sound, image in both old and new art forms
- Wider cultural industries
  - Film, television, publishing, video games, etc

The most influential of these perspectives upon Adelaide policymakers has been that provided by Charles Landry who was appointed a Thinker in Residence by the South Australian Government. Landry's contribution (Landry, 2003) was closely followed by a visit by Richard Florida sponsored by the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Strategic Project Division which was eager to better understand Florida's creativity index. The 2006 edition of South Australian Strategic Plan illustrated the influence of Florida by including a target that South Australia be rated in the top three nationally in Florida's...
Creativity Index within 10 years'. This target was removed from the 2007 version of the South Australian Strategic Plan due to the difficulty of regularly updating it.

It is clear that prevailing definitions of creativity tend to represent generic descriptions of a limited range of creative and cultural professions or end products which fall well short of a holistic conception of creativity. To make progress towards this objective in Adelaide it will be necessary to rethink what is meant by a creative economy.

**Redefining the creative economy in Adelaide**

‘...aggregating might be good for politics, but disaggregating is essential for policy and understanding’.

*(Tepper, 2002, p163)*

In order to better inform policy makers' thinking about how best to foster creativity and creative industries development as part of a wider strategy to promote innovation, it is critical that a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics, role and definition of the creative industries is fostered; including how creativity is applied - from arts and culture to science and technology. There is a need to move beyond 'digital creatives' as the central focus of policy makers attempts to grapple with the concept of the creative economy. As important as ‘digital creatives’ like games developers are in the modern economy the creativity policy challenge requires a much broader vision of the practical implications of an understanding of the relationship between creativity and the economy.

Andy Pratt’s analysis of employment change in Britain highlights the interrelationships that exist within the Cultural [creative] Industries Production System. To illustrate Pratt’s production Systems Theory, imagine the production process of a digital game. Technology driven software companies rely on graphic designers, illustrators, writers and musicians to embellish their codes to produce visually and aurally interactive games. Similarly imagine the production of a feature film; film makers rely on a team of artists and technicians to enable their film to be seen on the big screen. Pratt suggests that even the strongest industries may be dependant upon the viability of weaker industries for vital skills, products and services’ *(Pratt, 1997, p28).*

No matter how the creative industries are defined locally, the creative economy contains numerous sub-sectors (or nodes) that contribute to the production of creative or cultural products, and individuals may work in more than one sub sector at a time. Sub-sectors within the creative economy work together within and outside fields of creative practice in many differing combinations to contribute to our built environment, and produce consumer products and cultural goods. Thus the linear lists of creative disciplines, products or forms of practice do little to assist a greater comprehension of the dynamics of the creative economy by policy makers and other stakeholders.
Cultural economist David Throsby suggests that the creative industries might be best understood as a set of concentric circles with individual artists whose intention is to, express ideas and convey meaning through producing art at the core. Throsby describes the ‘core’ arts industry as predominantly made up of funded not-for-profit entities that are measured via statistics of attendances, employment statistics in cultural institutions and grants awarded to individual artists. As the circles radiate outward the creative intention and resulting product or service becomes increasingly commercially orientated (Throsby, 2000). We suggest that the creative industries do not work as a linear supply chain or network within a single dimensional structure, but are multidimensional with individuals and businesses participating sometimes simultaneously in a variety of commercial and non environments.

The wider challenge for researchers and policymakers is to develop a more holistic conception of creativity. This requires viewing creativity as a quality that underpins innovation throughout an economy and community rather in a few industry sectors or occupations. Rather than focus on a few creative industries we need to pay attention to identifying what the foundations of creativity are in an economy and how we can build and sustain them.
Bibliography


Endnotes:

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www.thinkers.sa.gov.au
www.adelaidefestival.org.au

ii for more information about Charles Landry residency and that of other of Adelaide’s thinkers in Residence visit www.thinkers.sa.gov.au