

Creativity and innovation, or: What have the arts ever done for us?

Doris Ruth Eikhof, University of Leicester, School of Management

Journal of Business Anthropology, Autumn 2015

My typical reaction to the words ‘creativity’ and ‘innovation’ in close proximity is exasperation mixed with pessimism. Like probably no other phrase, creativity and innovation stand for a ‘creative industries-turn’ in cultural policy that occurred from the late 1990s onwards (Menger 2013, Oakley 2009, Oakley et al. 2014). In the UK, the complementing visual of this creative industries-turn is the image of Oasis guitarist Noel Gallagher attending the then newly elected Prime Minister Tony Blair’s media party at 10 Downing Street in 1997: a new era with arts and culture at the heart of policy. Nearly two decades and much critical discussion later, the ‘creativity and innovation’-mantra seems to have lost none of its power and promise. As a researcher of cultural work I ‘naturally’ get asked to write about creativity and innovation or to apply for research money from innovation-focused funding schemes. I say arts and culture, you say creativity and innovation. My heart sinks every single time. And here is why.

Just before the millennium Tony Blair’s New Labour government in the UK set up a Creative Industries Task Force, whose seminal mapping document defined the creative industries as a key target of public policy (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt 2005, see Menger 2013 for European cultural/creative industries policy more broadly). At the heart of this policy shift was the belief that those industries that ‘have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent’ (DCMS, 2001: 5) make two socio-economic contributions. Firstly, they turn creativity into marketable innovation, thereby generating economic growth and high skill/high wage employment (e.g. Clifton et al. 2009, Chapain et al. 2010). Secondly, they attract the so-called creative class (read: educated, high spending, tolerant and community-oriented people) which helps transform tired urbanities into diverse, multi-cultural breeding grounds for sustainable livelihoods and makes them attractive for investors (Florida 2004). Consequently, money was made available to develop creative clusters, business incubators and re-branding initiatives (Landry 2000). Berlin’s ‘poor but sexy’ campaign is a poignant example of a whole metropolis successfully trading on the image of the authentically impoverished creative to attract global investment (Neate 2014). In Britain, pretty much every small town now has its share of creativity-branded small business spaces flanked by independent coffee shops.

What at first glance might have looked like welcome attention for the arts and culture soon turned out to be a take-over of cultural policy by economic policy in search of a palatable, even hip or cool attempt at economic and social engineering (Oakley 2004, Peck 2005). The visually most notable consequence of creative industries policy has been accelerated gentrification. The less well-off have been priced out of face-lifted neighbourhoods in which the creative class now sips fair-trade flat whites and craft beers, ‘burnt-out beautiful people’ (Rainnie 2005: 9) recovering from their daily slog of advancing the knowledge economy. The creative class’ urbanities do not house a new society with ‘full opportunity and unfettered social mobility for all’ (Florida 2004: 321) but merely provide an anti-bourgeois, anti-corporatist ambience that helps educated workers reconcile their humanist career ambitions with the realities of a capitalist system that remains money-focused, under contemporary austerity more than ever. There is also considerable debate over whether the creative industries have delivered and can ever deliver on the first set of expectations, those concerning their more direct contributions to the economy, i.e. GDP growth or high skill/high wage employment (e.g. Comunian 2009, Warhurst 2010). Reviewing pre-financial crisis data, Comunian (2009) shows ambiguous evidence of which of the newly labelled creative industries deliver employment and GDP growth. New jobs mainly seem to be opening up in IT-related industries rather than traditional arts and culture organisations or SME craft production. IT

giants such as Google or Facebook may look like creative new worlds of work (Walker 2013) but whether their informal working cultures are the source of their product market success or a perk they can afford because of it remains open to debate. Once the internet economy's supporting infrastructure is factored in, the picture certainly turns much darker, with market leaders such as Amazon providing innovation based on exploitative working cultures and low wage/low skill jobs (Kantor and Streitfeld 2015).

This ambiguous evidence of the benefits of creative industries policy is why the 'creativity and innovation'-mantra exasperates me, especially in its glossy policy report guise. For the umpteenth time: It does not work that easily, the creative industries do not immediately deliver a stylish, diverse brave new world for all, and no number of new creative clusters is going to change that. Fortunately, my exasperation may well have a short(ish) shelf life. After nearly two decades, the next policy paradigm du jour can't be far away (hipsters and the sharing economy, anyone?). Surely the band waggons will move on and leave the arts and culture to breathe freely once again. I say arts and culture, you say you're busy elsewhere. Unfortunately, it is at this point that pessimism creeps in. Creative industries policy looks to me to have changed arts and culture substantively and in ways that may well undermine their vitality and sustainability long after the policy band waggons will have disappeared over the next silver lined horizon. My concerns arise from observations of practices of cultural production over the last decade. I will briefly sketch the underlying concepts before turning to two illustrative cases from my research in the UK.

In his 1983 article 'The field of cultural production', Pierre Bourdieu outlines that cultural production essentially comprises of three main practices: artistic practice, position-taking and economic engagement. As artistic practice Bourdieu understands instances of original creation that are driven by artistic or creative motivations, e.g. the production of a play or the curating of an exhibition. Practices of position-taking aim to place individuals or organisations within the cultural sector, e.g. by establishing reputation in a particular genre or by collaborating with certain artist or organisations. Economic engagement comprises practices focused on markets within and outside the cultural sector, e.g. for selling/exhibiting cultural outputs, securing financial capital or recruiting artists. The field's *raison d'être* is the artistic practice, in which individuals follow an intrinsic drive to create and express and find themselves in a flow-like state where 'ordinary human capacities are transcended to produce excellence beyond convention' (Banks 2014: 242). Position-taking and economic engagement are undeniably essential for cultural production: position-taking makes artistic practice recognisable as such and positions it for assessment, e.g. by its artistic genre or quality; economic engagement secures financial and coordinates human resources. In themselves, however, neither position-taking nor economic engagement *produce* art, culture or creative activity. They do not constitute, in the language of economic production, the core business of the sector. It is artistic or creative practice in its various guises, especially when experienced as 'perfect synthesis between the worker and the work' (Banks 2014: 242), that marks cultural production as a field and attracts and retains cultural workers (Eikhof and York 2016).

However, a marked disjuncture is becoming apparent between, on the one hand, the importance that cultural workers attributed to artistic practice and, on the other hand, the space given to artistic practice in cultural production, cultural workers' ability to present and advocate for it and the influence it is allowed on other practice, in particular economic engagement. I recently analysed documents with which cultural organisations had applied for funding. In those documents, the applying organisations competently outlined their contribution to the economy and local communities, i.e. the wider benefits of their cultural production. When questioned about their artistic practice, answers were markedly more general, hollow and much shorter. Asked to list their strengths, the majority of organisations forgot to mention anything relating to art or culture at all and listed their efficient use of resources or local connections instead. Indicatively, only a very small share of the funder's questions actually required the organisations to talk about their artistic practice, or their core business, itself. The vast majority of the documents concerned either the organisation's position within their respective field or, overwhelmingly, practices of economic engagement – typically contributions to communities or what role the organisation saw itself

playing within the cultural economy. In short: artistic practice was barely part of the conversation and where it was, the cultural organisations themselves were remarkably poor at talking about and making a case for it.

The gist of these sector-level conversations I saw mirrored at the micro-level of cultural production. An indicative example was that of a gallery, small in numbers of staff but a medium to large player in their field in terms of reputation and positioning, who had contacted me to help them develop new ways of attracting income. Reviewing the gallery's activities it emerged that a preoccupation with practices of economic engagement, in particular funding applications and developing new business opportunities, had to a substantial extent crowded out artistic practice. Gallery staff were still motivated by the artistic practice as such and described discussions about art works, artists, techniques and curating as their reason for getting out of bed in the morning. However, many of these discussions were no longer taking place in the gallery itself. In the most illustrative case they had physically relocated to the kitchen table of a flat shared by two key staff. One of the two flatmates indicatively described how they would while away time in meetings with gallery colleagues while discussing art at home for hours on end without giving the clock as much as a glance. Similarly, the gallery's director had gone part-time to engage in freelance curating and artistic work – the same type of work she was contracted to do for the gallery but could not make enough time and creative headspace for, given the position-taking and economic engagement practices her directoral position increasingly required. Once in the gallery, most conversations and activities focused on where money might come from, which income streams could best be developed and how existing activities could be organised more efficiently. Similar to the funding applications described earlier, the conversations within the gallery were replete with eloquent articulations of its contributions to communities, the city and the cultural sector more broadly. But while staff recognised these discussions as necessary, they also described them as wearying, soul destroying or, at best, simply boring. The increasing prevalence of economic engagement zapped staffs' motivation to work in and for the gallery and especially to work overtime or put in additional effort. The artistic practices undertaken offsite, on the contrary, were what fed their desires and energy for working in cultural production. It became clear that reclaiming a more prominent and protected position for artistic practice in the gallery was even more important for the gallery's sustainability than developing new funding and business opportunities.

These two examples are illustrative of how artistic practice can be 'crowded out' (Eikhof and Haunschild 2007) of its central position in cultural production while position-taking and in particular economic engagement take up an increasing amount of space, or even start to dominate. In particular the problematic situation the gallery found itself in evidenced how dangerous such crowding out of artistic practice can be. When economic engagement grows, cultural production loses its *raison d'être*, it loses that which constitutes it as a field in itself and for itself. Crucially, it also loses its vital distinction from the economic field, the essence that allows Bourdieu (1983) to describe arts and culture as an 'economic world reversed'. In short, imbalances between artistic practice, position-taking and economic engagement endanger the vitality and sustainability of cultural production.

From my observations, creative industries policy with its buzzwords creativity and innovation facilitates such dangerous imbalances. Firstly, by focusing on creativity rather than art or culture, creative industries policy broadens the scope from that of traditional cultural policy to include economic production that is in a broad sense cultural and/or draws on individual talent and imagination but that does not position itself predominantly as art, such as web design, architecture or video games. Visual and performing arts, music and literature suddenly find themselves amongst a much more heterogenic range of activities – a range for which, as researchers have repeatedly emphasised, it is difficult to pinpoint commonalities and shared identities (e.g. Garnham 2005, Hesmondhalgh 2007). Because engagement with any policy, cultural or otherwise, implies advocacy and because successful advocacy relies on a strong sense of identity and shared purpose, such diluting of identities is unlikely to be helpful for making the case for arts and culture, whatever the context or occasion. As illustrated by the above case of the gallery, a strong sense of shared

purpose is essential for protecting or reclaiming the position of artistic practice in cultural production.

Secondly, the term innovation emphasises notions of usefulness, marketability and progress. Its omnipresence has helped embed a utilitarian perspective on the 'wider' (read: socio-economic or just economic) contribution of creative, and therefore artistic or cultural, practice. It has normalised the view that such production leads to tangible and marketable progress (i.e. innovation) and can therefore be presented and assessed in terms of how valuable a (contribution to) progress it delivers. The point here is not that the arts and culture are or should not be innovative – they can be and frequently are, although, as Oakley (2009) points out, it would be misleading to expect innovation to feature in every bit of cultural production. Similarly, artists and creative workers are of course able to propose social and political innovation. artmoney, for instance, is an illustrative example of artists' 'creative 'problem-solving' [...] with a more systematic and globally-oriented political agenda' (Banks 2013: 38). Indeed, an autonomist reading sees cultural work as the potential source of radical societal change and progress (Banks 2014). The problem of linking artistic and creative practice to innovation, progress and marketability lies in the refocusing on, and over-emphasis of, the use value. Creative industries policy with its utilitarian perspective on cultural production draws attention away from the creative activity itself to the use of its product and, importantly, to the competent (read: versed in the policy language de jour) articulation of that use. It has claimed space – in public dialogue, on funding application forms and in the organisation of cultural production itself – for practices of economic engagement, and it has done so to the detriment of artistic practice itself.

It is because of these developments that the words 'creativity and innovation' not only exasperate, but also bring out the pessimist in me. Creative industries policy with its 'creativity and innovation'-mantra has normalised the requirement of arts and culture to make a case for their useful/marketable/progressive contribution to society, and has forced them to do so in economic policy language and from a position of diluted identity. For sure, this requirement has been identified as problematic, it has been met with protest and discussion (e.g. Comunian 2009, O'Connor 2005), and some cultural leaders seem to find viable ways of responding to it (Webb 2014). However, this requirement has also resulted in subtle and less subtle, conscious and unconscious changes to the balance of artistic practice, position-taking and economic engagement in cultural production. Banks (2015) points out that because cultural value is a defining structural feature of cultural production, the commodification of art and culture depends on it as much as artistic practice itself does. While, as he concedes (ibid.: 43), 'the economic order appears eminently capable of overriding cultural concerns', analyses should not accept such a hostile take-over as inevitable but explore how culture is 'counter-posed, managed and arrayed in *relation* to the economic' (ibid.: 41, *emphasis in the original*). Understanding cultural production not as a juxtapositioning of the artistic and the economic but as a ménage à trois of artistic practice, position-taking and economic practice can provide such a more nuanced analysis (Eikhof 2010). It reveals structural homologies between position-taking and economic logic that allow a hollowing out of artistic practice even against good intentions, even by regimes of commodification that recognise the economic value of cultural value. Neither the funder nor the art gallery in the above examples set out to destroy cultural value – most likely they genuinely attempted to preserve it. But embedded in and part of a discourse focused on creativity and innovation rather than arts and culture, their actions affected how artistic practice, position-taking and economic engagement relate to each other, and to the detriment of the first. Such empirical evidence gives little reason to uphold Oakley's (2009: 410) hope that 'for arts organisations [...] it may simply be a case of re-stating their value in another context'. Even her assessment that 'the danger is less to individual arts organisations and more to the ecology as a whole' (ibid.) appears optimistic. The long-term consequences of the creative industries-turn in cultural policy look to be severely problematic in terms of the vitality and sustainability of the arts and culture. Whether a rebalancing of the three main components of cultural production – artistic practice, position-taking and economic engagement – is possible or even likely, especially given contemporary austerity politics and

funding cuts, is difficult to predict. My observations of cultural production combined with Boltanski and Chiapello's (2006) demonstrations of how capitalist, economic or business logics have annihilated other *raison d'être* through integration make me pessimistic. For art's sake, I hope I'm wrong.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Kate Oakley and Mark Banks for their constructive comments and feedback.

References

- Banks, M. 2013, 'Creative cities, counter-finance and the aesthetics of exchange: Copenhagen's artmoney project.' *Cities*, 33: 36-42.
- Banks, M. 2014, 'Being in the Zone' of Cultural Work.' *Culture Unbound*, 6: 241-262.
- Banks, M. 2015 'Valuing cultural industries', in K. Oakley and J. O'Connor (eds), *The Routledge Companion to the Cultural Industries*, London: Routledge, 35-44.
- Bourdieu, P. 1983 'The field of cultural production, or: the economic world revised.' *Poetics*, 12:311-356.
- Carey, J. 2006, *What good are the arts?* London: Faber & Faber.
- Boltanski, L. and Chiapello, E. 2006, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Verso.
- Chapain, C., Cooke, P., De Propriis, L., MacNeill, S. and Mateos-Garcia, J. 2010 *Creative clusters and innovation. Putting creativity on the map*, London: Nesta.
- Comunian, R. 2009, 'Questioning creative work as driver of economic development: the case of Newcastle-Gateshead.' *Creative Industries Journal* 2(1): 57-71.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) 2001, *Creative industries mapping document*, London: DCMS.
- Eikhof, D.R. 2010, 'The logics of art: analysing theatre as a cultural field', in B. Townley and N. Beech (eds), *Managing Creativity: Exploring the Paradox*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 106-124.
- Eikhof, D.R. and Haunschild, A. 2007 'For art's sake! Artistic and economic logics in creative production.' *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28(5): 523-38.
- Eikhof, D.R. and Warhurst, C. 2013, 'The promised land? Why social inequalities are systemic in the creative industries.' *Employee Relations*, 35(5): 495 - 508.
- Eikhof, D.R. and York, C. 2016 "It's a tough drug to kick": A woman's career in broadcasting.' *Work, Employment and Society*, forthcoming.
- Florida, R. 2004, *The rise of the creative class*, New York: Basic Books.
- Garnham, N. 2005, 'From cultural to creative industries: An analysis of the implications of the "creative industries" approach to arts and media policy making in the United Kingdom.' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 11(1):15-29.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. 2007, *The cultural industries*, 2nd ed. London: Sage.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. and Pratt, A.C. 2005 'Cultural industries and cultural policy.' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 11(1): 1-14.
- Kantor, J. and Streitfeld, D. 2015 'Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Bruising Workplace.' *The New York Times Online*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/technology/inside-amazon-wrestling-big-ideas-in-a-bruising-workplace.html?smid=fb-share&r=0> [accessed 20/08/2015]
- Landry, C. 2000, *The Creative City*, London: Earthscan.
- Menger, P.-M. 2013 'European cultural policies and the 'creative industries' turn.' in J. Chan and K. Thomas, *Handbook of Research on Creativity*, London: Edward Elgar.
- Neate, R. 2014, 'Berlin's 'poor but sexy' appeal turning city into European Silicon Valley.', *The Guardian Online*, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/03/berlin-poor-sexy-silicon-valley-microsoft-google> [accessed 20/08/2015]
- Oakley, K. 2004, 'Not so cool Britannia: the role of the creative industries in economic development.' *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(1): 67-77.
- Oakley, K. 2009, 'The disappearing arts: creativity and innovation after the creative industries.' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 15(4): 403-413.
- Oakley, K., Hesmondhalgh, D., Lee, D. and Nisbett, M. 2014, 'The national trust for talent?: NESTA and New Labour's cultural policy.' *British Politics*, 9(3): 297-317.

- O'Connor 2005, 'Creative exports: Taking cultural industries to St Petersburg.' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 11(1): 45-60.
- Peck, J. 2005, 'Struggling with the creative class.' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29(4): 740-770.
- Rainnie, A. 2005, 'Hurricane Florida: the false allure of the creative class.' *Sustaining Regions*, 4(3): 4-9.
- Walker, T. 2013, 'Perks for employees and how Google changed the way we work (while waiting in line).' *The Independent Online*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/perks-for-employees-and-how-google-changed-the-way-we-work-while-waiting-in-line-8830243.html>
- Warhurst, C. 2010, 'The missing middle: management in the creative industries.' In Townley, B. and Beech, N. (eds), *Managing Creativity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 217-236.
- Webb, A. 2014, "'We need arts as much as we need food. Our responsibility is for that to be possible": Insights from Scottish cultural leaders on the changing landscape of their work.' Doctoral thesis, Stirling.