Resources of Hope?

Creative Economy and Development in the Global South

Justin O'Connor

ifa Input 02/2019

This paper sets out to challenge the dominant narrative of the creative economy as a new option for developing countries. The much-vaunted growth rates proclaimed by UNCTAD's Creative Economy Programme have slowed, and are seen to apply to a particular kind of manufactured good, as well as being overwhelmingly dominated by Asia, and especially China. This paper tries to unpick the dominant creative economy model of entrepreneurship, creative human capital and open market opportunity and suggests that – other than in East Asia – it is business as usual for the Global North. The creative economy not only fails to deliver its promise of development but has profound consequences for local cultures, caught up in an ever more global web of exploitation driven by the new digital platforms. We need to return to the earlier concerns of 'culture and development' now fully aware of the downsides, as well as the potential, of cultural economies in an uncertain global landscape.

Leapfrogging Development?

In 2016 The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) relaunched its Creative Economy Programme (CEP). Originally set up in 2004, the programme published two highly influential statistical reports on the global trade in cultural goods and services in 2008 and 2010. UNCTAD's revived programme re-asserts the claim that 'the creative industries are among the most dynamic sectors in the world economy' and sets out to make good its promise that they provide 'new opportunities for developing countries to leapfrog into emerging high-growth areas of the world economy'[1].

While European countries and the European Union itself began to adopt the creative industries' terminology from around 2006,[2] East Asian countries – Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and mainland China eagerly seized on the idea in the mid-naughties. This has continued, with South Korea and India, focusing very much on Bollywood. Indonesia launched its 'creative economy' agency BEKRAF in 2015, and Malaysia launched CENDANA (Cultural Economy Development Agency) in 2017.

In Brazil former President Dilma Rousseff moved away from Gilberto Gil's Cultura Viva in 2015 and adopted the idea of the creative economy. This echoed the work of two influential staffers at the Inter-American Development Bank, who branded it (for no obvious reason) 'the Orange Economy'[3]. One of these, Iván Du-

[1] https://unctad.org/en/Pages/DITC/CreativeEconomy/Creative-Economy-Programme.aspx
2008 Report: https://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationArchive.-aspx?publicationid=945
2010 Report: https://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationArchive.-aspx?publicationid=946
Most Recent report 2019: https://unctad.org/en/Publications-Library/ditcted2018d3_en.pdf.

[2] Cf. https://cultureactioneurope.org/knowledge/creatives-industries/1-the-economy-of-culture-in-europe/.
[3] https://publications.iadb.org/en/orange-economy-infinite-opportunity.

que, is now president of Columbia and sees this as a new direction for a Latin America deemed to have broken with its erstwhile state centred Left-ism. Across Africa the creative industries have had less traction as a national policy idea, but the promotion of creative entrepreneurship, central to the creative economy agenda, has been driven by programmes of the British Council and latterly, those of the Goethe-Institut. The British Council has programmes across the globe, promoting mapping methodologies and creative hubs, and establishing creative entrepreneurship as a key dimension of any creative economy strategy[4].

UNCTAD's reports made a robust statistical case for the rise and rise of the creative economy in the Global South. This economy was not only a developed world post-industrial replacement sector but a part of a truly epochal shift across the globe. The reports now read as a Wunderkammer of turn-of-the-millennium thinking on culture, creativity, economy, innovation, entrepreneurship, cities, hubs, sustainability; a kaleidoscopic assemblage of definitions, charts, tables and Venn diagrams. It was the headline narrative that stood out. We were entering a new global era in which ideas and creativity were now the new productive forces, requiring not minerals or giant industrial plant but human talent. The creative economy dealt with intangible products, the ultimate renewable resource that would never be depleted. This new era saw WTO facilitated global trade increasing in leaps and bounds, and nowhere as fast as in the trade in cultural goods and services. These were growing globally at around 14 percent year on year and 13.5 percent in Developing Countries. By 2011 the Global South accounted for almost half of all global trade in cultural goods. Given this rapid increase there seemed little doubt that they would overtake the Global North in a few years – which they did in 2015[5].

Whilst UNCTAD was rolling out its CEP, UNESCO was busy framing and ratifying its latest Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (CDCE), a process not complete until 2009. The coalition assembled around the CDCE had a more ambivalent, even sceptical view of the creative industries/economy. The CDCE came out of debates around culture and development linked to the anti-colonial, self-determination movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Development had to be rooted in the local cultural context for it to be sustainable, and a thriving local culture was a goal, rather than just a means, of successful development. In the 1990s, UNESCO built a broad coalition looking to reassert the coupling of culture and development in the face of the rapid spread of free trade agreements following on from GATT and the WTO. Cultural goods and services did have economic value, but they also possessed a cultural value which meant they could not be treated as pure commodity. The CDCE set the seal on the rights of states to enact legislation to protect its cultural goods and services – the so called 'cultural exception' now reframed as crucial to global 'diversity'. It did so in alliance with parties from the Global South who insisted on solidarity between North and South in the form of preferential treatment, artist mobility, the cultural diversity fund and so on.

Ratification, however, coincided with the widespread embrace of claims about the economic value of culture and the benefits of trade liberalisation (cultural or otherwise) to Global North and South alike. At the strategic level UNESCO has remained ambivalent and nuanced, affirming

[4] https://creativeconomy.britishcouncil.org
On the Goethe-Institut see: https://cultural-entrepreneurship.org.

[5] See the most recent report:
https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ditcted2018d3_en.pdf.

the priority of cultural value, as in the joint UNDP/UNESCO 2013 Report, which disappointed many looking for a new round of statistical indicators[6] . On the ground however UNESCO has increasingly adopted the terminology of creative economy and entrepreneurship in its operational and promotional literature, with programmes such as that for female creative entrepreneurs in the 'digital creative industries'[7]. Of course, though outside the CDCE, UNESCO's cultural section has promoted the 'Creative Cities Network' since 2004 and has expanded rapidly across the globe.

In this light the Creative Economy is the new normal, an often unquestioned background landscape to the contemporary cultural policy scene. Creativity, knowledge, innovation, disruption; start-ups, co-working spaces, creative hubs, entrepreneurship programmes; these are now a shared policy vernacular. They help articulate a global imaginary by which aspiring young people in the Global South seeking to make a living in culture can grasp an image of transformation, of a viable future – for themselves, for their communities, for their nations even. They look to the kinds of creative economy programmes we sketched above as a sign of hope, and as such these aspirations need to be taken seriously and handled with care. But they also need to be scrutinised, because the creative economy agenda is not all it claims to be. It would be the collapse of this illusion, rather than anything I might say here, that threatens to turn utopian aspiration into anger and frustration.

[6] *Widening Local Development Pathways* http://www.unesco.org/culture/pdf/creative-economy-report-2013.pdf.

[7] https://en.unesco.org/creativity/news/unesco-sabrina-ho-initiative-women-digital-creative.

Beneath the Hype

The claims about the Global South representing nearly half of the global trade in cultural goods looked different when China was taken out of the equation. China accounted for half of this trade, leaving the Global South with just over a fifth of total global trade in creative goods. When the rest of the BRICS were taken out, along with South Korea, we get a depressing picture. The share of the 49 Less Developed Countries in global creative goods exports was 0.11 per cent in 2012, which, relative to its large share of the world's population (880 million or some 12 per cent) is far from a success story (De Beukelaer: 2014). When we look at what is classed as 'cultural goods' we find the vast majority are manufactured goods of the kind China excels in producing – furniture, glassware, ceramics, toys and so on. Not only does this undermine the idea of the creative economy as being about 'intangibles' but it also extends the notion of 'creative industries' into areas of mass manufacture not normally covered by a term designating a new economic epoch. Examining the charts showing China's massive surplus and the US's massive deficit in these areas, we can recognise this less as a story about the rise of the Global South and more about the complex synergies and substitutions between two global economic superpowers, or 'Chimerica' as it was sometimes called[8].

Creative services – a term which covers digital content (including film and TV), copywrite, licensing and so on, where the 'high value economy' really resides – shows a familiar picture of the overwhelming domination by the Global North, with little sense that the new era will threaten this dominance any time soon. Certainly, the subsequent growth in these sectors in Ko-

[8] See Chart 12 in the 2019 CEP Report.

rea and China has been impressive – China is by far the biggest exporter of cultural goods – but neither of these two can be considered 'developing countries' in any sensible taxonomy. And as we shall see, the industrial strategies which have been applied in these two countries are very different from that promoted by the creative economy paradigm. As far as it is possible to tell from the existing on-line UNCTAD statistics, whilst the growth rate in exports of creative goods from developing countries was 14 percent between 2003-2015 as mentioned above, between 2012-2015 growth declined to minus 1.92 percent[9]. In the 2019 CEP report the average growth in the export of cultural goods 2003-15 was revised down to 7.34 percent. The charts for cultural goods exports by region show a massive domination by Asia, with Africa, Oceana and South America barely registering[10]. 'Transition' economies barely register on any chart. The claims made by UNCTAD, and reproduced across a myriad consultancy reports, that the creative economy can generate foreign earnings for the Global South requires some serious scrutiny. And whatever the global economic value is generated it is distributed highly unequally between North and South, and between regions of the South – and between rural and urban areas, classes, genders and ethnicity.

Challenges of the Global South

The challenges faced in the Global South in this creative leap-frog are many and would have been all too familiar to all those involved in post-colonial development. The first-mover advantages held by the incumbent powers in the global economy extends to the creative industries too. They control the corporations, the distribution and logistical networks, the intellectual property, the finance, the educational and cultural capital and so on. The hopes for a flattening of global creative industries' hierarchies as the internet 2.0 overturned the traditional gatekeepers underpinned much of the creative economy hype. It did not materialise. The new group of Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google (FAANG), have become globally dominant platforms, ones that now reach into the local and the personal to an extent of which the old cultural industry corporations never dreamed.

The roll-out of the knowledge economy came with a global tightening and extension of IP regimes in ways that are increasingly well documented –and contested. Human creative talent is everywhere, but a career in the cultural industries requires levels of education and skills which challenge the educational resources of the Global South in all the ways we know. Challenging too is access to finance, and the ready availability of relatively wealthy consumers able to spend money on these new industries. The problems of infrastructure – roads, venues, communications etc. – are well known, as is 'governance' and regulation.

These familiar barriers to development were not washed away by the global wave of creative economy. Which is not to say these are insuperable, nor that they should not be challenged, nor that there are many success stories of the kind that appear in case studies boxes in reports and best practice panels at international conferences. But we do need to ask how this creative economy actually works. What kind of carrot is dangling at the end of its stick, and what changes does it require of us in order to keep chasing it?

[9] https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableViewer/tableView.aspx
[10] CER 2019 Report Chart 4. On Asia also see UNESCO and Ernst Young's Cultural Times: The First Global Map of Cultural and Creative Industries.
https://en.unesco.org/creativity/files/culturaltimesthefirstglobalmapofculturalandcreativeindustries.pdf.

Creative Entrepreneurs

This question seems particularly apt for 'creative entrepreneurship', a consistent plank in all creative economy policy documents, as well as central to the activities undertaken by cultural institutes, such as the British Council, the Goethe-Institut or the Institut Français. Mapping documents, creative hubs, and entrepreneurship programmes seem well within the boundaries of feasible interventions. Much of the affective charge of the creative economy was its claim to open up spaces for younger, less established players, not dependent on state funding or a job with a corporate – especially so when neither of these were on offer. Stepping outside these 9-5 jobs required some new business skills but mostly it asked for a new kind of self.

Working in fluid project teams across networks rather than institutions, entrepreneurs were learning how to re-invent themselves in a more dynamic space 'outside the box' of a formal job, picking up new skills, and carving out new opportunities in a transformed creative field. The new creative subject was charged to combine the self-directed autonomy of the avant-garde artist with the 'creative destruction' of the Schumpeterian entrepreneur. This happened in a 'creative milieu', a semi-autonomous network embedded in particular urban places and through which new ideas emerge, circulate, mutate and accelerate. It fosters an economy of small business or 'start-ups', entities operating in a zone between the hierarchical, exclusive firm and looser social networks, between competition and collaboration, between the market and 'civil society'. This operates as a kind of 'ecosystem' neither amenable to top-down state planning nor corporate control. The creative economy thus demanded new kinds of cities (or at least, zones therein) which encouraged creative milieus, new kinds of industrial organisation (small business ecosystems), and new kinds of subjects able to autonomously create and innovate.

This 'creativity bundle' is rarely spelled out in detail, yet it is a model of development drawn directly from the Global North and promoted as entirely apt for the Global South. Derived from a post-1989 Europe where a third way was sought between state directed and purely corporate economies, the new industrial policy focus on Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) benefitted an emergent cultural industries discourse. The idea of a locally embedded ecosystem of cultural producers networked promised not only economic growth but a benign economy – good growth. Firms and entrepreneurs were rooted in place. They were (implicitly) more socially responsive and resilient, and contributed 'positive externalities' to the city, making it more liveable, more creative, further feeding the cultural economy.

This is precisely why, the argument went, a creative industries strategy was so beneficial to developing economies[11]. These positive externalities provided the entrepreneurial skills and the socially embedded stock of knowledge, establishing the mutual trust and confidence beneficial to endogenous development. This was not only the producers; for in order to properly promote, nurture and expand the creative sector new kinds of policy, new forms of economic and cultural governance would be required. This lay behind much of the zeal of the British Council, bringing economic growth and good government along with the benefits of culture. It forms part of the mission of UNESCO's Expert Facility, who seek to change the cultural governance settings of the target countries (Global South) thus enabling

[11] These arguments have been examined in detail by Andy Pratt (2015).

sustainable and equitable development in the field of culture.

Much of this is laudable, and the reality of how it is on the ground, the transformations these interventions provoke are as many and varied as the people they touch. Most artists and creatives are pragmatic, willing to speak of creative entrepreneurship or whatever it takes, to open up resources to do the stuff they want to do. But I think something more than age-old pragmatic adaption is needed if we are to avoid yet another resource-extractive development model foisted on the Global South. The resources in question are indeed not raw materials and cheap labour, but the energies and aspirations of the youngest and brightest, as well as the lived cultures that have sustained them in the past, but which are now to be mined in the new global creative economy.

The co-working spaces and the hubs, the networking and the start-ups all speak about new entrants and disruption, but the reality is very different. These milieus are in symbiotic relationships with large investors ('angels' or otherwise) and large corporations; they provide the free R&D, the innovation feeder routes for these big players. Business model: create an app, build some presence, sell on to Google. This is not new. The traditional cultural industries already perfected the use of unpaid labour (screen-writing in the garret) in R&D, using scouting and A&R people to coral the talent towards the big players. This now may be more sophisticated than signing some unknown and naïve wannabee with a disastrous contract, but the ecosystem of a myriad of small businesses (in a city like London something like 90 percent of creative businesses are under 50 people) organised around a smaller number of major players is still the norm. This should come as no surprise as the cultural industries are very much organised around a winner-takes-all model. The well-known adage about the one hit financing the other nine misses also means that this one hit takes the profits from competing titles and the firms that produce them. Winner-takes-all. So too with creatives; those at the top are extremely well paid, but the vast majority can find it hard to get by. The dominant companies co-ordinate value chains that now stretch across the globe, with the higher value parts overwhelmingly located in the centre of the successful global cities. Entrepreneurship in the creative economy does not break the domination of the Global North but forms an essential part of it.

A New Epoch?

For UNCTAD, the claims they make concern not just an expanding creative sector. For them this growth is harbinger of an epochal shift to a creative economy. The argumentation is pretty woeful. Reading the reports leaves one no wiser as to what the creative economy actually is and if it is the same or different to the creative industries. The creative economy "is the knowledge-based economic activities upon which the 'creative industries' are based". But the creative industries are also "the lifeblood of the creative economy", the latter also "the sum of all the parts of the creative industries". Inevitably UNCTAD uses the terms interchangeably, as do most of those who adopt it. "The creative economy has no single definition. It is an evolving concept which builds on the interplay between human creativity and ideas and intellectual property, knowledge and technology". Apart from a license to say just about whatever one wants about the concept, this takes an anthropological or civilisational sense of 'culture' – as collective knowledge, or the general capacity of human creative ingenuity – and turns it into an economic resource. Just as 'creativity' becomes an "input" quite distinct from any values traditionally associated with culture, creative economy inverts the traditional idea of economic development as part of a wider cultural or civilisational development. The latter now simply serves as resource for the former. The traditional role of culture of setting limits to, or offsetting the economic sphere, balancing it against wider ethical-political values, is displaced by its utilisation as resource for growth.

This epochal shift to a creative economy was taken to mean that culture might now, finally, be taken seriously by powerful economic development agencies. Yet it rests on a thin platform of historical evidence and a great bubble of overblown claims, generated by management gurus and creative consultants. That the cultural sector was tempted, in its search for ever-dwindling resources, to hitch itself to a wagon very few serious economic historians would countenance, is understandable. But selling the concept of culture for a handful of magic beans has come back to haunt it.

It's certainly bad economic history but it's bad economic policy too. Apart from the definitional confusion, which speaks to a much deeper set of category errors, the creative economy discourse pays little attention to how the cultural industry actually works and what policy settings would be required to develop it. To see this one should look at South Korea or China. Though both have adopted 'creative industries' from time to time, both are concerned with 'culture' as 'content'. Instead of chasing the ineffable enigma that is the creative economy, their policies focus on the cultural industries, defined in a workable manner as those activities which generate economic value through symbolic content. They use the standard list of film, TV and Radio, printing, recorded music, performing arts, video games, visual arts, fashion, crafts and so on – 'content industries'. Both governments use resources evolved from their 'developmental state' repertoire – the state-led model of development which was outlawed by the 'Washington Consensus' in the 1980s and 1990s. Both countries applied their state developmental capacity to the cultural industries – one filtered through a newly minted parliamentary democracy, the other through 'socialism with Chinese characteristic'. They do not use the creativity bundle but seek a real industrial strategy focusing on supply chains, mergers, regulations, targets, high finance, export licenses, infrastructure, trade deals, foreign investment and so on. I am not holding this up as a model of cultural policy. Reverting to the word 'cultural' rather than 'creative' did not stop it being used in a highly instrumental fashion, their goals distributed between generating import revenue and country branding or 'soft power'. But it is an industrial policy, and one significantly at odds with the 'creativity bundle' promoted by the Creative Economy[12].

Here we should recall the failure of the last concerted attempt to challenge the dominance of the Global North, under the frame of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), in which UNESCO, through the McBride Commission, was heavily invested. The defeat of the NWICO (and the decade-long marginalisation of UNESCO) coincided with a massive expansion of the global communications infrastructure – satellites, fibre-optics, telecoms, logistical protocols and so on – and the global deregulation of state-run broadcasting and communications sectors. This allowed telecoms and content providers in the Global North to engage in a process of convergence whilst simultaneously moving into the deregulated communications space of the Global South. The Creative Economy model accepts, rather than challenges, the exist-

[12] On Korea see Lee (2018). Also her comparison with the UK's policy settings Lee (2019). On China see Rong/O'Connor (2018).

ing configuration of infrastructure and ownership stemming from the global 're-regulation' of the 1980s and 1990s. The Creative Economy is not a new epochal shift but a flexible cultural policy app that sits on this global information and communications platform.

China has the power to challenge these configurations; South Korea the economic clout to make them work for their content industries. Most countries in the Global South do not have the resources, individually, to engage in such ambitious industry strategies. But by now the very idea of such a strategy has been delegitimised – both individually and collectively – as the only viable path proffered to the Global South is to Be Creative!

Clean, Weightless and Renewable?

The appeal of the Creative Economy stemmed in no large part from its seemingly easy availability to any country willing to change the old ways and seize a creative future. UNCTAD proclaimed the creative economy as one of 'intangibles', endlessly renewable and ubiquitously available. This linked the creative economy to the agenda of sustainability in a double sense. It meant investing in creative talent, making sure the new generations of creative entrepreneurs were coming through; but essentially, human talent was the perfect renewable, abundant and cheap. And it was also clean. Creativity did not scar the landscape or pollute the rivers, quite the contrary; it made the country glitter and shine. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to see the creative industries in this way. They rely on a whole range of sophisticated electronic machines and components, most of which are made in East Asia and the US, and which are heavily extractive. No copper, no digital. The resources used in making and consuming cultural products, including the massive carbon footprint of the global internet and communications systems, and the global transportation system this facilitates is enormous. A recent report shows on-line music streaming to have a bigger carbon footprint than vinyl.[13] The impact of e-waste is only now becoming clear. And we have seen how the increase in the global trade in cultural goods is predominantly about manufacturing, which, as we know with regards to fashion, is highly resource intensive (on this see Maxwell/Miller 2012).

Beyond these real ecological impacts, the very idea of an endlessly renewable resource – human creativity – is also the story of a never satisfied consumer. The symbiosis between the creative economy and the resource intensive consumer economy is both real and symbolic. The resources used up by the creative industry is mirrored in the image of the consumer society it celebrates. The key principle of the cultural industries as a new source of economic growth, coming after the failure of Fordism and mass consumption, was of 'post-material' or 'experience' goods. One could have enough fridges and cars, but the demand for cultural products is infinite. The emphasis on discretionary 'positional' or 'aspirational' consumption as central to growth positioned the middle class as the key driver of development. Whereas in the past it was the industrial working class, or a commercially active peasantry that provided the index of development, now it was the growing 'urban middle class'. The urban creative entrepreneur can be seen as the youthful counterpart of the urban middle-class consumer, driving the carbon footprints in the cities in the south as in those of the north. Are we to see the 'creative class', such as it is, as the avant-garde of the urban middle class, just as lawyers, doctors and journalists

[13] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/mar/12/uk-music-industry-carbon-footprint.

were in the heady days of the 19th century bourgeoisie?

The Creative Economy Imaginary

Of course, most are simply seeking to make a living and contribute to the broader development of the communities in which they work. I do not suggest that all programmes rolled out under the banner of the creative economy are useless or damaging. Whatever is written on the outside of these programmes, on the inside they are frequently about art, culture and community development. Promoting good governance also means promoting gender and ethnic equality, sexual diversity, artistic freedom, and building supportive, safe and inclusive places to do good cultural work. The skills and confidence acquired in creative entrepreneurship programmes can be very useful in building careers, and they can be 'retrofitted' to focus on 'social entrepreneurship' and community 'leadership'.

But none of these benefits, individual or communal, really require a creative economy framework. Established culture and development programmes long sought these kinds of outcomes and continue to do so. These interventions often built on the 'capabilities' framework associated with the economist Amatya Sen and the philosopher Martha Nussbaum. So too does the United Nations' strong push, since 2009, on 'cultural rights', taken directly from the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, Article 27, in which discourses of full participative political, social and economic citizenship are extended directly to culture. UNESCO's CDCE has increasingly focused on artist rights and mobility, gender equality and 'fundamental freedoms'. And more traditional development programmes for education, social welfare and access to housing, or the basic material rights claimed in the Sustainable Development Goals, can all provide a justification for intervention in the cultural sphere. So perhaps the creative entrepreneurship programmes are just one more resource which can be used to 'do culture'.

But I think it is more problematic than this. Youthful creative energies are now embodied in a role model whose ultimate purpose – whatever the social policy retrofitting – is to succeed in business by becoming an 'entrepreneur of the self'[14]. Learning, contacts and experience becomes capital investment in the self, manifested in a constant process of self-branding. The creative entrepreneur works within collaborative-competitive networks which can just as easily cut against collective solidarity as work for it, as can be seen in low rates of union participation in these industries. The emphasis on the entrepreneurial self puts the risks of success and failure squarely back on the shoulders of the individual, when as we have seen, in large parts this is down to contingent and external factors. Anxiety and competitiveness, 'always on' lifestyles and an enforced career-driven performative narcissism are perils to be set alongside low wages and precarious employment.

The creative economy and its entrepreneurial tropes are part of an 'imaginary' whose impact on everyday language and understanding we should not ignore. Entrepreneurship often presents itself as encouraging people to take responsibility in a way that ignores the histories of social and political activism in the Global South, and the organisational abilities and energies on which this draws. The market, not politics or the state, is the way forward, it seems. Most creatives do not see the world like this, but they can find it

[14] The phrase is Foucault's. See the discussion in Angela McRobbie's (2016) *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*. Polity Press.

very difficult when they have bought into the discourse of the creative economy and the instrumentalisation of culture it entails. Policy makers have embraced this new creative economy and it is increasing hard to assert a contrary view: that the job of culture is not to create jobs, even though it does create jobs; that the job of culture is to commemorate, to entertain, to preserve, to celebrate, to differentiate ourselves and to bring us together. This is all so easily reduced to a new advanced services and high-end consumer economy whose job is to deliver whatever is required to the consumer with maximum efficiency, the actual content of this being a concern solely for her and her credit card provider.

Political Economy of Culture

Somebody once asked me, as I was making this kind of argument: is your rejection of the creative economy not based on privilege? A serious question, to which the answer is 'yes', if such an argument simply reverts to some idealist notion of culture, a pure appearance detached from the labour and the resources that went into its making. We do need a political economy of culture. The increasing emphasis on cultural rights is welcome, but, as the jurist and historian Samuel Moyn warns us, human rights are not enough (Moyn 2018). We need to create the material resources and the equitable access to these that can only be secured by governments. This includes any reversal of the on-going transfer of wealth from the South to the North, and the political coalitions that would be required to affect this.

Conferences on cultural policy makers tend, quite understandably, to focus on art and culture, and what it can do for us. This often leaves the issue of the material nitty-gritty to the creative economy; but this hands over the questions of economy to the economists, a serious mistake. A real political economy of culture challenges classical or neo-liberal economics as scientific or 'natural': economics brings into being that which it purports only to describe, in a highly political process which it constantly disavows. A political economy of culture understands the material basis of the production and consumption of culture, but also how these do, or do not, serve the uses we seek from culture. It does not dismiss the economy, as the efficient allocation of resources, but makes it serve society, not the other way around.

The breakup of the neo-liberal orthodoxy is now commonly recognised, though least of all perhaps in the cultural sector. There has been multiple questioning of the benefits of globalisation and the equity of market-led development – often from their erstwhile defenders such as US economists Paul Krugman and Joseph Steiglitz. This has given rise to a widespread sense of disorientation and anxiety, some of which has manifested as authoritarian and exclusionary nativism. But the 'age of anger' also spread to a range of 'losers' some of who are the cultural workers themselves, feeling cheated by the failure of the promise of cosmopolitan globalisation and its creative futures (see Mishra 2017).

But there is a burgeoning critique of growth itself, fed by the fear of an impending ecological catastrophe, a wall towards which the global economy is hurtling. Questioning orthodox economic settings finally reaches growth itself – the endless imperative to expand, to increase profits whatever the external costs. Creativity, in its post Renaissance Euro-centric iteration, has been part of this growth imperative. Creation ex nihilo has Faustian overtones resonant with a global capitalism in which endless growth at the expense of nature is a central defining feature of human endeavour. It is for this reason we look to non-western traditions, alternative possibilities for modernity, which look to preservation, custodianship, living with boundaries, balance -- not constant unthinking change. A new political economy of culture would not only foreground the values of culture but how our culture stands in relation to a planet under severe distress.

Here indigenous voices are making themselves felt, and we need to hear more of them. In Latin America around *bem viver*, amongst peasants fighting deforestation in Asia, in indigenous Australia. But also from cultural workers and artists in the cities of the Global South, looking to projects around sustainability, building local supply chains, breaking the cycles of gentrification and urban consumerism. And also preserving the cultural resources, of tradition and community.

The re-launch of the Creative Economy Programme comes in very different circumstances to that of 2004, or the later reports. There is now geo-political uncertainty and a collapse of the post 1989 Washington Consensus, even, perhaps, an unravelling of the post-1945 settlement. But more importantly the imaginaries of the future, where they are not bleak or exclusionary, are of a world that seeks out different ways of living on the planet and with each other. The creative economy no longer speaks to this future, and we need another language.

References

De Beukelaer, Christiaan (2014): Creative industries in "developing" countries: Questioning country classifications in the UNCTAD creative economy reports, Cultural Trends, 23:4, pp. 232-251

Lee, Hye-Kyung (2018): Cultural Policy in South Korea. Making a New Patron State. London: Routledge

Lee, Hye-Kyung (2019): Making creative industries policy in the real world: differing configurations of the culture-market-state nexus in the UK and South Korea, International Journal of Cultural Policy https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2019.1577401

Maxwell, Richard and Toby Miller (2012): Greening the Media. Oxford University Press

McRobbie, Angela (2016): Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries. Polity Press

Mishra, Pankaj (2017): Age of Anger: A History of the Present. London: Penguin

Moyn, Samuel (2018): Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World. Belknap Press

Pratt, Andy (2015): Creative Industries and Development: Culture in Development or the Cultures of Development?, in: Jones, C., Lorenzen, M., Sapsed, J. (eds.) (2015): The Oxford Handbook of Creative Industries, Oxford Handbooks

RONG Yueming and Justin O'Connor (eds.) (2018): Cultural Industries in Shanghai: Policy and Planning inside a Global City. London, Intellect

The author

Justin O'Connor is Professor of Cultural Economy at the University of South Australia, and Visiting Chair at the School of Cultural Management, Shanghai Jiaotong University. Previously he was professor at Monash University, Queensland University of Technology, University of Leeds and Manchester Metropolitan University. Between 2010 and 2018 he was a member of the UNESCO 2005 Convention 'Expert Facility', and is currently engaged in an Australian Research Council research project on the changing role of that convention in the new global landscape. He is currently co-writing a book called Red Creative: Culture and Modernity in China.

About ifa

ifa is Germany's oldest intermediary organisation for international cultural relations. It promotes a peaceful and enriching coexistence between people and cultures worldwide. ifa supports artistic and cultural exchange in exhibition, dialogue and conference programmes, and it acts as a centre of excellence for international cultural relations. It is part of a global network and relies on sustainable, long-term partnerships.

Imprint

The publication exclusively reflects the personal views of the author.

Editor:
ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen):
Charlottenplatz 17, 70173 Stuttgart,
Postfach 10 24 63, D-70020 Stuttgart
www.ifa.de

Author: Justin O'Connor

Copy-editing by: ifa's Research Programme "Culture and Foreign Policy"

ISBN: 978-3-948205-01-0