

Cultural and creative districts: A literature review and a taxonomy

Elisabetta Lazzaro

Business School for the Creative Industries, University for the Creative Arts (UK)

elisabetta.lazzaro@uca.ac.uk

Abstract

Cultural and creative districts have become a popular instrument of socio-economic regeneration and governance in many areas of the world. This chapter is a concise overview of main economic research on cultural and creative districts or cultural and creative clusters, their main features and different types that exist, as well as their theoretical background. It also accounts for types of governance and administration models, and discusses various elements of monitoring and indicators that are usually used for the measurement of districts and cluster performance, and relative recent developments. It finally offers a taxonomy based on some examples of case studies of successful districts, where they are located, and their characteristics at start, growth and maturity phases of their life.

Keywords: Cultural and creative industries and clusters; governance; indicators; performance; literature review.

1 Introduction

In the last decades, cultural and creative districts or clusters have become popular governance instruments adopted by policy makers for the sake of socio-economic development or revitalisation of territories in many regions worldwide, from industrialised countries to less developed ones. Cultural and creative districts or clusters refer to the role of cultural and creative industries (CCI) in local development and regeneration (Chapain & Sagot-Duvaouroux, 2018). They encompass at the same time the cultural, economic, social, political, geographical and historical spheres (De Propriis & Lazzeretti, 2009; Scott, 1997), offering an interdisciplinary perspective. The geographical units that are mainly considered are municipalities – even of small size and in rural areas –, cities, metropolitan areas and regions. The economic perspective considers local development, job creation, attraction of investment and tourism and regeneration. The social perspective focuses on local communities, and the level of social cohesion, networking and engagement, and an overall sense of community that characterise them.

Creative districts also relate to urban and regional capital (Brooks & Kushner, 2001), as well as to the types of interventions that are needed in order to leverage such capital for the sake of their socio-economic impact (Le Blanc, 2010). Urban and regional capital bears at least

five dimensions: physical (buildings, infrastructure), natural (ecosystem and landscape), human (residents' skills and capacity), cultural (tangible and intangible cultural goods and their creation) and social (community, identity, engagement and cohesion) (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; Landry & Bianchini, 1997). In this context, governance's types of intervention include the creation of new goods and endowment, the management of the existing ones, and their renovation and reuse. Stakeholders that exercise this governance in different ways and at different levels are both public (e.g., local governments and administrations) and private (e.g., owners, real estate investors, citizens, associations, etc.), following different interests and motives, such as efficacy, efficiency, measurement and accountability, as well as sustainability and quality of life (Goldberg-Miller & Heimlich, 2017).

2 Theoretical background

In the economic literature, former concepts related to cultural and creative districts and clusters are those of 'creative cities', as economic units endowed with individuals' skills that contribute to national wealth (Jacobs, 1984), and (European) 'cities of culture', as coined in 1990 and then implemented, by the European Union, in order to promote a common European cultural identity, together with local regeneration and tourism (Myerscough, 1992). Tourism attraction as such particularly connotes 'art cities' (Costa, 1991), which are characterised by a dense, large, complex and interconnected artistic and cultural capital, which is continuously accumulated and consolidated (Richards, 1999).

Remarkably, the notion of creative city (Pratt, 2010) implies a wider connotation of culture, namely creativity, better allowing for urban planning strategies and intervention (Landry & Bianchini, 1995). The creative city was further associated with the creative class (Florida, 2002), which emerged as a new social class, where creativity replaced raw materials, physical work and financial capital flows. Correspondingly, municipalities and their governance aimed to actively promote the growth of the creative class and hence its economic performance. The creative city is based on a social and cultural infrastructure, and its socio-economic functioning is considered in terms of urban dynamism and cultural activities. As such, the creative city is able to attract a high concentration of creative work and financial investment.¹

The general theoretical reference of 'creative districts' (Gdaniec, 2000) and 'cultural districts' (Brooks & Kushner, 2001) dates back to Marshall's (1890) industrial districts, characterised by internal and external economies of specialised small enterprises that locally compete and cooperate at different stages of production. About one century later, Porter (1990, 1998), among others, developed the concept of cluster, defined as a local agglomeration of

¹ Further to some criticism to Florida's creative city and in particular to the creative class – including a too broad definition of creativity, and the assumption of a strong causality, leading to copy-and-paste recipes –, the concepts of creative class and creative city have been revised by Florida himself.

firms that are economically interconnected and interdependent and characterised by cooperation, exploitation of local human and financial resources and sharing of information and social networks. Being part of a cluster confers a competitive advantage in terms of productivity – generated by economies of scale and of scope or variety – and innovation, which are fostered by knowledge and network spillovers. Moreover, clusters lower information asymmetries and uncertainty. First applications of clusters to the cultural and creative sphere include Russo's (2000) study on sustainable tourism,² and the study on European cities' growth by Van der Berg et al. (2001).

3 Governance and performance

Although in their infancy creative clusters tend to present natural or unplanned forms of governance, Scott (2006) highlights how creative clusters are not fully self-organising entities, requiring governance interventions. From a governance perspective, local development designed and implemented through cultural and creative districts and clusters can follow a more traditional culture-centric approach or a rather relatively more recent economic-centric approach, implying different values (diversity, inclusion, etc., for the former, vs. innovation, competition, etc., for the latter) and models of a decentralised governance (civic vs. business and public-private-partnership oriented), whose processes can be more or less collaborative and inclusive (Smith & Warfield, 2008; Andres & Chapain, 2013).

For their geographical connotation, creative districts and clusters have been the object of economic-impact assessments. First examples date to the early 2000s in the United States (e.g., Greater Philadelphia, 2006; Boston Symphony Orchestra, 2008; New York City Waterfalls, 2008). However, this measurement approach was not without criticism. That also offered the chance to expand a sole economic perspective to include also physical and social perspectives (Evans 2005).

Cultural districts, especially when they geographically correspond to metropolitan or regional areas, have made the object of economic measurement in terms of employment, number of firms, turnover, value added, etc. (see e.g., Amez et al., 2017). The purpose of these indicators is to assess the contribution of the cultural and creative industries to the economy of these areas. Noticeably, the application of these rather standard indicators is not obvious in the case of cultural and creative industries (Lazzaro & Lowies, 2015).

More recently, creative clusters, together with learning, creative and experimenting labs, hubs, incubators, universities and science parks can embody innovative bottom-up initiatives of cross-sectoral cooperation at local, national and international levels, generating important cluster externalities. Especially in the case of regional development, such

² Though Russo's general theoretical framework is based on innovative clusters of Audretsch & Feldman (1995) and not on Porter.

contribution of the cultural and creative industries to socio-economic growth is favoured by the support of institutional governance (Gustafsson & Lazzaro, 2021). Creative clusters allow a better flexibility and adaptation can generate key knowledge and innovation spillovers at intra- and inter-sectoral levels, for instance in terms of division of labour, or exchange of input, expertise or information. However, the identification and assessment of these spillovers is not straightforward (Lazzaro, 2017, 2021).

While the literature offers some perspectives and definitions of performance of cultural and creative districts and clusters, quite fewer studies attempt to combine and measure them. Indeed, the assessment of cultural performance in urban planning is relevant to capture and foster cultural activities that contribute to local cultural and socio-economic sustainable development and growth. That is particularly relevant through a benchmarking approach, which allows comparisons. The definition of performance can be articulated into different dimensions that make cultural activities possible, where these dimensions need to be measured through accessible and reliable data, which are synthetised in composite indicators. For instance, Jackson et al. (2006) refer to ‘cultural vitality’ or ‘vibrancy’, and empirically define it on the basis of interviews to arts professionals, encompassing existing arts organisations, arts participation in its multiple ways, and support systems for arts participation. In Montalto et al. (2019), cultural vibrancy, as defined by surveyed experts, corresponds to the presence of and participation to cultural venues and facilities, as distinguished from the more functional dimensions of jobs creation and innovation generation, and the conditions that enable them. Similar contributions focus more or less on arts supply, arts participation and their environmental conditions, and especially on a relatively more available measurable arts supply.

4 A Taxonomy

Table 1 below offers a taxonomy of cultural and creative districts applied to a combination of examples of analysis of case studies of cultural and creative districts and clusters taken from the literature in the last fifteen years or so. References were sampled in order to offer and compare a variety of approaches and case studies. Not surprisingly, given also the considerable support put forward by the European Union in the last decades, examples are concentrated in Europe, although examples from other areas are also present.

The taxonomy includes main wordings more specifically used to refer to the general category of cultural and creative districts and clusters, the main perspectives and theoretical background considered, and the underlying governance and administration models of reference. This taxonomy can be applied for sake of analysis, as well as to support design and monitoring of creative clusters through their different life-cycle phases (from Start to Maturity through Growth) and more or less explicit, simple vs. complex performance and monitoring indicators.

Table 1: A taxonomy of cultural and creative clusters based on the literature

Reference	Wording	Main perspective(s)	Governance/administration models	Start	Growth	Maturity (and possible threats)	Performance/monitoring indicators	Case study(ies)
Andres & Chapain (2013)	Networks, CCI in local development strategies, regeneration, rebranding	Institutional design and governance: degree of inclusion and collaboration between different mixes of public and private stakeholders	Culture vs economic-centric models, and the alternation of their relative importance in time	Industrial and social crises, followed by local public policies of regeneration, driven by national government with key EU financial support	Development of different types of institutional collaborations, especially economic-centric (public-private partnerships)	Drop in EU funds, return to more traditional and local culture centric model, less collaboration and/or inclusion	Number, diversity and lasting of partnerships	Birmingham (UK), Marseille (France)
Catungal et al. (2009)	Placemaking, creative city	Discursive and material strategies, and their impacts	Non-profit development agencies for artists, private actors, especially local property management firms, culture of networking and collaboration	Attractiveness of size, aesthetics, availability and affordability of abandoned industrial spaces to artists	Rise of dotcom industry, site redevelopment, influx of creative professionals in new media, advertising, film, television and design, attraction of investors and better access to lifestyle amenities, branding	Gentrification, dominance of economic rationales, lack of diversity and experimentation, inequality, working poverty, racialised exclusion, displacement, sustainability	Rental rates, artists' displacement	Liberty Village, Toronto (Canada)
De Propriis & Lazeretti (2009)	Industrial district, urban creative district, clustering and networking	Firm demography and population ecology, local systems, cross-fertilisation, life cycle	Institutionalisation through creation of professional associations and professional education	Skilled labour, raw materials availability, technological change, small firms' specialisation, localised trade, thick social environment	Industrial Revolution External factors: fashion, input prices and raw-material availability, technological changes, Skilled labour Transportation infrastructure	World wars, recession From manufacturing to direct retailing: from industrial district to urban creative district	Historical, economic, industrial, demographic and ecologic analysis, firms' birth, survival and death	Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham (UK)
Della Lucia & Trunfio (2018)	Creative cities	Heritage and creativity, regeneration, tourism, experience design, community engagement, representation	Formal governance, role of private actors, co-creation, co-design, bottom-up design, local participation, joint public-	Heritage preservation/restauration	Heritage-creativity hybridisation	Community engagement	Social inclusion and sustainability, organisational value	IlCartastorie Museum, Naples and the Farm Cultural Park, Favara, Sicily (Italy)

			community strategy					
Evans (2005)	Culture-led regeneration	Physical, economic and social regeneration, good and bad practices, impact measurement	Integrated and inclusive cultural planning, community consultation, toolkits	Symptoms of local physical, social and/or economic decline that can be mitigated by regenerative effects driven by culture	Culture-led regeneration / cultural regeneration / culture and regeneration	Too much ambition in projections (in terms of audience and income), community ownership not secured	Physical, economic and social regeneration; correspondingly, various tests and measurements of policy imperatives and examples of evidence of impacts	Several, from cited literature
Richards (2020)	Creative placemaking and design principles	Cultural and creative tourism, creative development, experience design, value creation process, dynamics, creativity as a strategy	Clear vision, consideration and mobilising of resources, structure, programming, implementation Different programmes and design strategies depending on the scale (small-rural to cities and regions)	Resources, meaning and creativity	New local meanings to resources, participation, creative expression development of coherent narrative	Gentrification, exclusion and serial reproduction, over-tourism	Tangible and intangible resources, meanings and locally embedded creativities	DASTA (Thailand), Den Bosch (Netherlands), Recife (Brazil), Nordrhein-Westfalen region (Germany)
Sacco & Blessi (2007)	European capitals of culture; cultural districts, cultural clusters	Long-run impact of systematic cultural policies; culture as engine of self-sustaining local socio-economic development; different forms of capital, exogenous and endogenous tangible and intangible assets; “ephemeral”/tourism vs. “structural”/cultural-innovation approaches	Official EU programme selection and funding; City-management boards’ and temporary agency’s capacity building aimed to increase place attractiveness and social capacity building and competitiveness through investment in the CCI and HR; bottom-up design; simple policy making vs. complex polycentric culture-based	Former industrial cities; physical infrastructure, organisation of events; redefinition of city image and massive communication plan at national and international levels; blockbuster exhibitions concentrated in city centre vs. disseminated multicultural and hybridised events in the metropolitan area	Creation of a dense local networking of cultural initiatives and involvement of area residents and associations	Long- vs. short-term cultural impact; attraction of qualified tourists vs. dense local networking of cultural initiatives involving residents	Quality of: cultural supply, local governance, production of knowledge, local entrepreneurship, local talent; Attraction of: external firms, external talent; Management of social criticalities; Capability building and education of the local community; Local community involvement	Genoa (Italy), Lille (France)

			development process through strictly hierarchical organisation					
Zukin & Braslow (2011)	Cultural or creative districts; gentrified or hipster districts	Real estate development, geography, relocation	Unplanned and natural at start, lack of explicit public support, regulation of artists' house prices (though not able to compensate for gentrification effects on retaining artists)	Concentration of artists, creative and designers in affordable areas, bohemian lifestyle	Public art on streets, neighbourhood reputation, creative entrepreneurs, rise of a small number of celebrity artists, vibe, media, attraction of non-creative cultural consumers	Higher housing prices, more intensive capital investment, artists' displacement, redevelopment gentrification	Housing prices, capital investment, presence vs displacement of artists	New York (USA)

From the different studies or real cases presented in Table 1, we can remark a plurality of wording used for cultural districts and alike, and of main perspectives and aims underlying their analysis. Governance models ranges between an economic and a social orientation, between a hierarchical organisation to pure unplanning, through a bottom-up approach. Emphasis is often placed on the variety and number of public and private stakeholders that are involved or mobilised in cultural districts. Notwithstanding the plurality of approaches, the analysis allows to identify evolving and maturity (and even decline) patterns in the life cycle of districts, their causes, and hence the performance of districts, more or less explicitly assessed by different possible indicators.

5 Conclusions

This chapter dealt with the growing interest cultural and creative districts and clusters have enjoyed in the economic literature, as well as in the practice of local governance in the last decades. After having contextualised cultural districts and the main drivers of their popularity, I have discussed their theoretical background, initially focused on a simple economic paradigm, that has been further developed toward a more social dimension, allowing for a variety of cultural district definitions and features, and, correspondingly, underlying aims and perspectives and corresponding governance models. This increase in multiple diversity has called for the concept and application of a taxonomy, enabling to offer a cross comparison of cultural districts for sake of analysis and policy design and monitoring in different environments and purposes.

References

- Amez, L., Lazzaro, E., Mauri, C., Vlegels, J. & Ysebaert, W. 2017. *The Cultural & Creative Sectors in the Brussels-Capital Region*. Brussels: Government of the Brussels-Capital Region.
- Andres, L. & Chapain, C. 2013 The integration of cultural and creative industries into local and regional development strategies in Birmingham and Marseille: Towards an inclusive and collaborative governance? *Regional Studies*, 47(2): 161–182.
- Audretsch, D.B. & Feldman, M.P. 1995. *Innovative Clusters and the Industry Life Cycle*. CEPR Discussion Paper Series, n. 1161, London.
- Brooks, A. C. & Kushner, R. J. 2001. Cultural districts and urban development. *International Journal of Arts Management* 3:4-14.
- Catungal, J. P., Leslie, D. & Lii, Y. 2009. Geographies of displacement in the creative city: the case of Liberty Village, Toronto. *Urban Studies*, 46, 1095–1114.
- Chapain, C. & D. Sagot-Duvaurox. 2018. Cultural and creative clusters – a systematic literature review and a renewed research agenda. *Urban Research & Practice*, 1–30.
- Cooke, P. & Lazeretti, L. (Eds.) 2008. *Creative Cities, Cultural Clusters and Local Economic Development*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Costa, P. 1991. Managing tourism carrying capacity of art cities". *The Tourist Review*. 46 (4): 8.
- De Propriis, L. & Lazeretti, L. 2009. Measuring the Decline of a Marshallian Industrial District: The Birmingham Jewellery Quarter. *Regional Studies*, 43:9, 1135-1154.
- Evans, G. 2005. Measure for Measure: Evaluating the Evidence of Culture's Contribution to Regeneration. *Urban Studies*, 42(5/6), 959–983.
- Della Lucia, M. & Trunfio, M. 2018. The role of the private actor in cultural regeneration: Hybridizing cultural heritage with creativity in the city. *Cities*, 82, 35-44.
- Florida, R. 2002. *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gdaniec, C. 2000. Cultural industries, information technology and the regeneration of post-industrial urban landscapes. Poblenou in Barcelona—a virtual city? *Geojournal*, 50(4), 379–388.
- Goldberg-Miller, S. B. & Heimlich, J. E. 2017. Creatives' Expectations: The Role of Super Creatives in Cultural District Development." *Cities*, 62:120–30
- Gustafsson, G. & Lazzaro, E. 2021. The Innovative Response of Cultural and Creative Industries to Major European Societal Challenges: Toward a Knowledge and Competence Base. *Sustainability*, 13(23), 13267.
- Heng, T.M., Choo, A. & Ho, T. 2003. *Economic Contributions of Singapore's Creative Industries*. Singapore: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

- Jacobs, J. 1984. *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life*, New York: Random House.
- Jackson, M. R., Kabwasa-Green, F. & Herranz, J. 2006. Cultural vitality in communities: Interpretation and indicators. Culture, Creativity and Communities Program. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- Landry, C. & Bianchini, F. 1995. *The creative city*. Demos, London.
- Lazzaro, E., 2017. Cultural and creative entrepreneurs. In Doyle J.E. & Mickov B. (eds.), *Culture, Innovation and the Economy*, pp. 33-37. London: Routledge.
- Lazzaro, E. 2021. Linking the creative economy with universities' entrepreneurship in a urban context: A spillover approach. *Sustainability*, 13(3), 1078.
- Lazzaro, E. & Lowies, J.G. 2015. *Le poids économique des industries culturelles et créatives en Wallonie et à Bruxelles*. Namur: Institut wallon de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la statistique (IWEPS).
- Le Blanc, A. 2010. Cultural Districts, a new strategy for regional development? The South-East Cultural District in Sicily. *Regional Studies*, 44, 905-17.
- Markusen, A. & Gadwa, A. 2010. *Creative placemaking*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts.
- Marshall, A. 1890. *Principles of Economics*. London and New York: Macmillan & Co.
- Montalto, V., Moura, C.J.T., Langedijk, S. & Saisana, M. 2019. Culture counts: An empirical approach to measure the cultural and creative vitality of European cities. *Cities*, 89, 167–185.
- Myerscough, J. 1992. Measuring the impact of the arts: the Glasgow 1990 experience. *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 31, pp. 323 –335.
- Porter, M. 1990. *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*. New York: The Free Press.
- Porter, M. 1998. Clusters and the new economics of competition. *Harvard Business Review*, 11 (November–December), 77–90.
- Pratt, A.C., 2010. Creative cities: Tensions within and between social, cultural and economic development: A critical reading of the UK experience. *City, culture and society*, 1(1), pp.13-20.
- Richards, G. 1999. European Cultural Tourism: Patterns and Prospects. In Dodd, D. & van Hemel, A-M. (eds), *Planning cultural tourism in Europe. A presentation of theories and cases*. Amsterdam: Boekman Foundation.
- Richards, G. 2020. Designing creative places: The role of creative tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 85, 102922.
- Russo, A.P. 2000. The sustainable cultural cluster. Notes on agglomeration, tourism policy and information technologies in tourist cities. Paper presented at the 40th Congress of the European Regional Science Association, Barcelona.
- Sacco, P.L. & Blessi, G.T. 2007. European culture capitals and local development strategies: Comparing the Genoa 2004 and Lille 2004 cases. *Homo oeconomicus*, 24(1), 111-143.

- Scott A. 1997. The cultural economy of cities. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2, 323-339.
- Smith R. & Warfield K. 2008. The creative city: a matter of values. In Cooke, P. & Lazzaretti, L. (Eds), *Creative Cities, Cultural Clusters and Local Economic Development*, pp. 287–312. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Van den Berg, L., Braun, E. & van Winden, W. 2001. Growth Clusters in European Cities: An Integral Approach. *Urban Studies*, 38(1), 186-206.
- Zukin, S. & Braslow, L. 2011. The life cycle of New York's creative districts: Reflections on the unanticipated consequences of unplanned cultural zones. *City, Culture and Society*, 2(1), 131-140.