

Creative Industries and Smart Specialisation: Luxury, Resilience and post-recessionary Restructuring and Planning

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Abstract

Creative enterprises have been affected by the 2008 economic downturn, but providers of luxury products have shown considerable resilience. In response to increasing economic uncertainty creative enterprises have developed coping strategies based on sectorial networking, branding, place-based competitiveness and price combined with non-price based competitiveness. This project will explore the relationship between place, creative industries, competitiveness, resilience and planning. The context is the European Commission's new focus on smart specialisation in which existing regional assets play a critical role in local economic development. The focus is on high-value added creative industries that produce products that are inscribed with place-based associations. This special relationship between place and product has important implications for urban and regional planning. Thus, what contribution can planning make in contributing to, undermining or destroying the relationship between place and creative industries?

This project will explore the evolving geographies and planning contexts for high-value added creative industries. Ideally, the project will involve a comparative analysis of such creative activities in the UK and in France. The focus of the analysis will be on the role creative industries play in localised smart specialisation as providers of luxury products. The approach merges planning perspectives with economic geography to develop a new way of conceptualising creative activities. It will make a major contribution to the developing debate on smart specialisation, place-based competitiveness and its relationship with urban and regional planning.

Research Rationale and Objectives

Due to the timely nature of the topic, there has been very limited work on the ongoing restructuring of creative industries and its impact on planning policy and urban development. Now the persistent context of austerity and the uncertainties regarding the outcomes of the *Localism Bill* stress the important connections between economic and planning policies. New frameworks and programmes (*National Policy Framework*, *Local Enterprise Partnerships* for example) are reshaping activities and projects. There is, therefore, a need to better understand how resilient and adaptable high-value added industries have been to better reflect on their future challenges and growth and identify lessons for other creative sectors.

The creative sector and specifically some creative activities (related to art, design or fashion) are known for fostering specific connections with the built environment in other words the place (building and district). The distinctiveness that comes from the production of a special place is therefore an important component in exploring the resilience and future of the creative sector. Such special places are difficult to copy and replicate; they provide a form of distinctive place-based competitive advantage. However can these places be sustained as such? Can they be affected by new spatial planning strategies or policy? What can be the future directions of cultural and creative planning?

This project will aim to:

- Assess how the creative sector and particularly high-value added SMEs have coped with the economic downturns;

- Identify the broader impacts of such restructuring and particularly how businesses have merged, what networks, new managements and marketing strategies have been used and implemented;
- Specifically decrypt the role high-value added creative industries play in localised smart specialisation as providers of luxury products and intermediate inputs;
- Stress the connection between these activities and the places in which they are settled and explore how this relation has been challenged by such coping strategies;
- Explore the positive and negative planning implications and reflect on how such distinctive places for creative businesses can be sustained or created;
- Identify broader lessons for future urban and regional planning strategies.

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