CREATIVE HUBS IN QUESTION

PLACE, SPACE AND WORK IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

Edited by
Rosalind Gill, Andy C. Pratt and Tarek E. Virani

Dynamics of Virtual Work

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Series Editors
Ursula Huws
Hertfordshire Business School
Hatfield, UK

Rosalind Gill
Department of Sociology
City, University of London
London, UK

Technological change has transformed where people work, when and how. Digitisation of information has altered labour processes out of all recognition whilst telecommunications have enabled jobs to be relocated globally. ICTs have also enabled the creation of entirely new types of 'digital' or 'virtual' labour, both paid and unpaid, shifting the borderline between 'play' and 'work' and creating new types of unpaid labour connected with the consumption and co-creation of goods and services. This affects private life as well as transforming the nature of work and people experience the impacts differently depending on their gender, their age, where they live and what work they do. Aspects of these changes have been studied separately by many different academic experts however up till now a cohesive overarching analytical framework has been lacking. Drawing on a major, high-profile COST Action (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Dynamics of Virtual Work, this series will bring together leading international experts from a wide range of disciplines including political economy, labour sociology, economic geography, communications studies, technology, gender studies, social psychology, organisation studies, industrial relations and development studies to explore the transformation of work and labour in the Internet Age. The series will allow researchers to speak across disciplinary boundaries, national borders, theoretical and political vocabularies, and different languages to understand and make sense of contemporary transformations in work and social life more broadly. The book series will build on and extend this, offering a new, important and intellectually exciting intervention into debates about work and labour, social theory, digital culture, gender, class, globalisation and economic, social and political change.

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Rosalind Gill · Andy C. Pratt
Tarek E. Virani
Editors

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Editors
Rosalind Gill
City, University of London
London, UK

Andy C. Pratt
City, University of London
London, UK

Tarek E. Virani
Queen Mary University of London
London, UK

This book is dedicated to our beloved colleague and friend Debbie Dickinson, who passed away as it was going to press in March 2019. Debbie's warmth, generosity and commitment to music, the arts and cultural life were an inspiration to many of the contributors to this book, and to numerous others. We will miss her, and cherish her memory.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Daniel Ashton is Associate Professor of Cultural and Creative Industries at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. His research focuses on creative careers, and he is the co-editor of *Cultural Work and Higher Education*. He is currently undertaking research with arts and cultural organizations exploring cultural value.

Vasilis Avdikos is Assistant Professor at the Department of Economic and Regional Development, Panteion University, Athens and a member of the Regional Development Institute. He has published several papers on urban and regional development issues and on creative and cultural industries.

Carolina Bandinelli has conducted research on emerging forms of subjectivities in neoliberal societies, with a focus on entrepreneurship and self-branding in the creative industries. Currently, she is undertaking a research project on the digital culture of love. She is a lecturer in Media at the University of Lincoln.

Boukje Cnossen currently works as a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Sociology and Cultural Organization at Leuphana University of Lüneburg (Germany), where she investigates organizing

practices in the arts, with a specific focus on materiality and discourse. Her work has been published in *Human Relations and European Journal of Cultural Studies*, among other outlets.

Roberta Comunian is Reader in Creative Economy at the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries at King's College London. Her research focuses on the relationship between creative industries, cultural policy and public-supported art institutions. She has also undertaken research on knowledge transfer and creative industries investigating the career opportunities and patterns of creative graduates.

Marianna d'Ovidio at present works as Assistant Professor in economic sociology at the University of Bari, and her research interests include the cultural economy, creativity, and social and cultural innovation, in particular their interactions with local development and urban transformations. d'Ovidio has published extensively on the analysis of creative and cultural industries in the local development of urban regions.

Cecilia Dinardi is Senior Lecturer in Cultural Policy at Goldsmiths, University of London (Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship). Her background is in cultural and urban sociology (Ph.D./M.Sc., LSE) with an expertise in cities and culture-led urban regeneration, cultural policies, grass-roots interventions and the informal creative economy in Latin America.

Alessandro Gandini is a sociologist and a senior researcher at the Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milan. Previously, he was a lecturer in the Department of Digital Humanities, King's College, London. His research interests include the transformation of work, social relations and research methods in the digital society. He is the author of *The Reputation Economy* (Palgrave, 2016), the co-author of *Qualitative Research in Digital Environments* (Routledge, 2017) and a co-editor of *Unboxing the Sharing Economy*, part of *The Sociological Review Monograph Series* (2018).

Rosalind Gill is Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis at City, University of London. She is author or editor of ten books including *Gender and Creative Labour* (with Bridget Conor and Stephanie Taylor, 2015), *Aesthetic Labour: Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism* (with Ana Elias and Christina Scharff, 2016) and *Mediated Intimacy: Sex Advice in Media Culture* (with Meg-John Barker and Laura Harvey, 2018). Her work is animated by questions about power and social justice and the relationship between subjectivity and culture. She has worked extensively on the topic of inequalities in the creative economy.

Tom Gill is a policy analyst working in London regional government, with a background in social research. His research interests are broad and include the night time economy, affordable housing and sexualities.

Eirini Iliopoulou is an Architect–Urbanist and holds a Doctor of Engineering degree, awarded by the Technical University of Berlin. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Regional Development Institute, Panteion University, and a freelance urban planning consultant. Her interests focus on community engagement and civic participation practices, urban co-production, socio-spatial conflicts, cultural/creative industries.

David Lee is an Associate Professor in Media and Communication, University of Leeds, UK. His books include *Independent Television Production in the UK: From Cottage Industry to Big Business* (2018), and as co-author, *Culture, Economy and Politics: The Case of New Labour* (2015). He has published widely on cultural work, media industries and cultural policy.

Jo Littler is a Reader in the Department of Sociology at City, University of London. Her books include *Radical Consumption? Shopping for Change in Contemporary Culture; The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'*, co-edited with Roshi Naidoo, and most recently *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility*.

Paul Long is Professor of Media and Cultural History in the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University. He researches popular music history, heritage and archives as well as histories of creative industries. He is currently writing

Memorialising Popular Music Culture: History, Heritage and the Archive (Rowman and Littlefield) for publication in 2020.

Janet Merkel is an urban sociologist (Ph.D., Humboldt University Berlin). She works as a senior researcher at the Institute of Urban and Regional Planning at Technical University Berlin. Her research interests include creative industries, cultural policy and new forms of work organization in cities.

Ceren Mert is a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Özyeğin University in Istanbul, Turkey. Having completed her undergraduate and master's degrees in the Sociology Department of Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, she has gained her Ph.D. in the field of Sociology from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul. She works on interdisciplinary fields, which crosscuts the subject areas of popular music and culture, creative and cultural industries, urban studies, digital sociology and media studies.

George Morgan is Associate Professor at the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. His recent research deals with creative skills, and in particular, the obstacles encountered by young people from disadvantaged/minority backgrounds in building creative careers. His book *The Creativity Hoax: Precarious Work and the New Economy* (Anthem Press), co-authored with Pariece Nelligan was published in 2018.

Annette Naudin is Senior Lecturer in media and cultural entrepreneurship. Naudin's current research is concerned with gender and BAME cultural workers as a focus for an interrogation of cultural policy. Naudin recently published *Cultural Entrepreneurship: The Cultural Worker's Experience of Entrepreneurship* (2018) exploring entrepreneurship studies, cultural policy and cultural work.

Øyvind Økland is an Associate Professor in Intercultural Studies at NLA University College in Norway. He teaches intercultural communication and media studies. His research focuses on communication in a global and cultural perspective, as well as health issues. He has worked especially with youth in different cultures, in Norway, Ghana and

Kenya. He has written several chapters in books and edited a book and young Somali immigrants and their media usage.

Valentina Pacetti currently works as Associate Professor in economic sociology at the University of Milano-Bicocca. Pacetti's field of research includes local governance, regulation and economic development. Pacetti has published extensively on organizations and their socio-economic embeddedness.

Andy C. Pratt is Professor of Cultural Economy at City, University of London, and Director of the Centre for Culture and the Creative Industries. He has previously taught at UCL, LSE, KCL and City University in London. He has been researching and teaching all aspects of the cultural economy, in London and globally for the last 25 years. He has both published extensively on the topic and advised public agencies worldwide.

Marisol Sandoval is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at City, University of London. Her research critically deals with questions of power, ideology and resistance in the global culture industries. Currently, she is working on a project that explores the politics of worker co-operatives in the cultural sector.

Michael Seman is the Director of Creative Industries Research and Policy at the University of Colorado Denver's College of Arts & Media. He holds a doctorate in urban planning and public policy, and his work primarily examines how the creative economy, entrepreneurship and economic development intersect on the urban landscape.

Nicola J. Thomas is Associate Professor in Cultural and Historical Geography at the University of Exeter. She has developed a body of work around craft geographies, situating contemporary and twentieth-century craft practice within the broader creative economy. Her approach addresses the intersection of material, historical, cultural, social, political and economic contexts through an exploration of craft makers' livelihoods and the spatial dimension of their labour. Her research always attends to the historicity of cultural production and consumption, bringing a historical sensitivity to critical understandings

of the cultural and creative economy. She has a particular interest in co-creating practice led routes within her research working with practitioners to develop collaborative practice project which support makers' well-being and livelihoods.

Tarek E. Virani is Lecturer of Creative Industries at the School of Business and Management at Queen Mary University of London, UK. He is also Deputy Director of Network: Queen Mary's Centre for the Creative and Cultural Economy. His research interests include: the role of knowledge in the cultural economy, urban policy and local creative economies, new workspaces in the creative and cultural economy, and the role of higher education in regional creative clusters.

James Woodriff is a research assistant at the Institute for Culture and Society, School of Humanities and Communication Arts Western Sydney University, and the principal of the Ponderance Collective, a research and design agency.

List of Figures

List of Tables

1

Introduction

Andy C. Pratt, Tarek E. Virani and Rosalind Gill

Over the last fifteen years, the term 'hub' has captured the imagination of policy makers, urban planners and politicians. Tied to a broader hyperbole about creativity, creative hubs have come to be presented as unquestionably a 'Good Thing', a panacea for all economic ills. No longer do urban areas simply want to rebrand themselves as 'creative cities', now, in a seemingly unstoppable global trend, they want to become—or to host—creative hubs—districts, clusters or spaces that

A. C. Pratt (✉) · R. Gill
Department of Sociology, City, University of London,
London, UK
e-mail: andy.pratt.1@city.ac.uk

R. Gill
e-mail: Rosalind.gill.2@city.ac.uk

T. E. Virani
School of Business and Management,
Queen Mary University of London, London, UK
e-mail: t.virani@qmul.ac.uk

will concentrate the kismet of 'creatives', as well as offering attractive, buzzy locales.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the growth and proliferation of these types of largely urban industrial agglomeration have been exponential. From San Francisco to Moscow and from Durban to Hanoi, creative hubs have really taken off. Yet they have done so with very little scrutiny or research and with hardly any shared understanding of what hubs are, what they do and how—or indeed if—they work. Academic work on creative hubs is surprisingly scarce. Instead, there exists a kind of unquestioned faith in hubs—despite—or more tellingly perhaps *because*—their meaning is not always clear.

Hubs have variously been understood as co-working spaces, as studios, as incubators, as accelerators, as districts, quarters or zones and/or a mix of all of the above. The lack of clarity—let alone consensus—is particularly troubling given that policy makers, research councils, consultants and governments have been so quick to promote and endorse the value of creative hubs as a catalyst for innovation and growth in local creative and cultural economies, as well as for producing urban regeneration.

In this book our aim is to look critically at creative hubs from interdisciplinary perspectives including Sociology, Geography, Economics, Media and Communications, Culture and Creative Industries and Critical Policy studies. We are interested in 'pressing pause' on the celebratory discourses about creative hubs to ask how they are best conceptualised, who they include or exclude, whether they make for 'good' workplaces, and what diverse forms they take across different places and contexts.

From our perspective, one of the most important 'hidden' aspects of hubs that find little expression in the writings about them are the voices of those that work there. This oversight is all the more critical given the transformation of all work, and in particular work in the creative and cultural economy, in recent years which has highlighted, first, the structural and, second, the organisation changes (evidenced by micro-enterprises and freelance work) and, third, the particular affective

conditions of cultural labour. The first two factors in part explain a demand for hubs, but the latter concerns the ways that hubs operate, and the conditions within then: in both senses, these are particular to the cultural economy.

Cultural labour requires the engagement of aesthetics and values, and the unique interplay between the economy and art. Often, cultural workers choose to or are forced to do things in unique ways. This is in part because the risk of failure is great, but also because normal economic and bureaucratic systems assume a reality that is different from that of the cultural economy. These conditions, and the experiences of cultural workers, have generated a substantial debate in academic fields that has slowly found its way into the political sphere largely through concern with 'precarious work'. However, our concern goes further, to address the experiences and aspirations that cultural workers bring to these question: how do they use, and share, knowledges, skills, practices and aspirations; what sort of situated 'solutions' do they achieve; and furthermore do creative hubs help or hinder these actions.

As our contributors argue, creative hubs are seldom amenable to binary divisions between competition and cooperation, the formal and informal, and the for-profit and its alternatives. To accept such binary thinking endangers the creative economy being imprisoned not only in the physical structures of the industrial revolution, but also the thinking of mass manufacture. Debates are not reducible to 'flexible workspaces' that are assumed to accommodate new, or rapidly changing, organisational forms that are associated with project work, collective and individual work. Rather, the concerns of cultural workers include balancing material and cognitive (or immaterial) labour, and the moral economy of work, materials and organisation; they also concern questions about how they can connect with their audiences and markets for both inspiration and social validation. We hope that this collection causes readers to question how, and why, hubs operate as they do, as well as attending to the communities that they are part of, and the workers and their aspirations and motivations.

Creative Hubs in Question: Space, Place and Work in the Creative Economy

Hubs in general and creative hubs in particular have become since the early 2000s a contemporary meme in the policy fields of culture/creativity; urban, regional and national development; industrial and innovation (Pratt and Jeffcutt 2009b). A Google Search on the term 'creative hub' shows peaks in search occurrences in 2005 and 2017; the latest high point being dominated by searches in Asia.[1] Even companies such as Facebook and Ikea are promoting versions of a hub as part of their business activities. Like many ideas before them, hubs have become a 'go to' solution that rests on a common-sense understanding of concentration and intensity of activities (more must be better), and the implicit facility to connect firms and creatives, and to distribute those benefits locally. Whilst notions of the 'death of distance' (Cairncross 1998) were one popular response to the growth of the Internet and digital culture, hubs represent the inverse: an appreciation of proximity and co-location (Pratt 2000).

The generic notion of the hub relies on a number of questionable assumptions. The popularity and general understanding of hubs has led to a political favour. The translation of this general idea into practice has usually taken the form of a designated building or space that is branded a hub. The promoters and supporters of hubs commonly assume that by facilitating co-location (by provision of space that was not previously available) that economies of aggregation and knowledge transfer will inevitably follow. Whilst the idea of hubs (or clusters, or districts) has been a popular topic for industrial strategy and economics, those empirical analyses that have been carried out are characterised in macro-scale studies using secondary data.[2] Little empirical

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[1]See https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&q=creative%20hub (August 20, 2018).

[2]The notion of hubs and clusters of economic activities has been promoted by Michael Porter and his consultancy activities. Porter's (1998) work builds on a wide range of work on industrial co-location in economics and geography. It is relevant that Porter's work comes from a business and management studies perspective, and hubs and clusters are viewed as part of the (internal) 'value chain' of the production company: the bottom line is efficiency and cost.

work has either focused on particular industrial sectors, or explored detailed analysis of product or information exchange: that is, what goes on inside or within hubs. The research deficit regarding hubs is most acute in the field of the creative economy.

The lack of detailed research and the understanding of creative hubs is surprising. The term creative hub appears in urban regeneration policies and in creative economy strategies; also it has occurred in a number of public research funding calls. The relatively small body of research that has been carried out on hubs can be broken down into three types: first, perhaps the most popular are pragmatic accounts of 'how to set up a hub'; inevitably, these tend to stress the positive or aspirational agenda of the agency promoting the hub. Implicitly, they highlight that the process is not quite as easily achieved by a supply of 'hubs' based on a logic of 'build it and they will come'; incorrectly assuming that the 'demand' from a nascent creative economy would look after itself. Second, the main body of academic research on creative hubs is of a policy-descriptive variety: whilst much of it is critical, it offers little in the way of evaluation or understanding of either the actual practices, or the gap between the observed and expected outcomes (Evans 2001, 2009; Pratt 2004a; Bagwell 2008). Finally, a strand of work that attempts to offer a robust evaluation of hubs is closely bound by economic assumptions and use of secondary data to test their economic impact on wider regions (Chapain et al. 2010).

There are number of weaknesses in this economic field of research. First, the gap between what was expected or proposed in hubs and what actually occurred. Second, most of the insight is gained from secondary aggregate data such that it is unclear which firms or creatives are included in a spatial unit. Third, there is a lack of explicit statement on testing the objectives for hubs (often because there were not clear for policy makers); in the exceptional cases where they are stated by policy makers (rather than implied by researchers from assumptions based on economy theory), they tend to relate to property management. Fourth, where data is collected on firms and creatives, it focuses on the numbers of workers employed rather than their experiences. Overall, there exists a blind spot in relation to what actually goes on within hubs. This question relates to the management and organisation of the hub, how they are governed, and what the character of the relationships

is between the various users of hubs are (internal and external): are they material, or immaterial; formal, or informal, relationships? Moreover, in the field of culture and creativity, the question of values is an important one; this may be apparent in the set of questions above, or expressed as a moral or ethical position. Aesthetic and political judgements may, for some participants, be more important than profit generation per se.

Arguably, one important forerunner of the idea of a creative hub was that which was developed at St Katherine's Dock in London by SPACE in 1968 (see Harding 2018). The acronym SPACE stands for Space Provision Artistic Cultural and Educational and reflected an ambitious attempt to provide space for artists run by artists,[3] and a new way of working across boundaries: professional, social, political, cultural and philosophically, between artist and audiences, and artist and materials going beyond sites of individualistic expression (Wilson 2018). This innovative initiative was clearly driven by a deep concern for the quality and nature of art that was produced and the practices whereby it was produced, not simply the economic bottom line, although this had to be satisfied too. We present this manifestation of SPACE as a counterpoint to the outlier cases of generic workspaces provision that occasionally carry the label 'creative hub'.

The example of SPACE alerts us to the live questions of ethics and values that underpin all work, but particularly creative and cultural work. It highlights the fact that there is an alternative to the 'isolated studio' that commonly makes up much hub provision (echoing standard workspace provision). Of critical importance to the day-to-day experience of hubs is the social and organisational environment, their governance and representation, individual and collective spaces and services, as well as the opportunities to learn from, and interact with, others. Our collection of essays seeks to open up the scope of enquiry to embrace this position; in so doing, we have sought to create a platform for authors to start with what actually happens, rather than what should, or might, occur. We hope that this strategy will bring us to

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[3]The St Katherine's Dock development ran between 1968 and 1970. However, SPACE as an organisation that is run by artists, for artists, is still going strong providing studio spaces in London: it celebrated 50 years in 2018.

a more satisfactory point of departure from which we may develop a richer understanding of the phenomenon of creative hubs, including what goes on inside them whether it is in spite of, or because of, their organisational form.

In summary, creative hubs have become a cornerstone of economic and cultural policy with only the barest amount of critical discussion or scrutiny. It is as if we have all unwittingly become caught up in the hyperbole about creative hubs as an unquestioned good. Yet, do hubs fulfil the promises that are claimed for them? Our contributors explore a range of questions, including, but not limited to:

- What makes a hub 'a hub': is it a co-working space, district or cluster by a different name?
- What kinds of different forms or models of hubs exist?
- What is it like to work in a creative hub?
- Do/can hubs address questions of austerity and inequality?
- How are creative hubs materialised differently in various parts of the world and in contrasting environments, e.g. urban versus rural?
- What does the notion of 'creative hub' achieve performatively or ideologically for its sponsors, users and communities?
- Do creative hubs contribute to a variety of social 'goods'—good working environments, successful businesses, more equal and socially just communities?

Contributors to this book use the tools of qualitative research and take an interdisciplinary perspective to engage with the phenomenon of creative hubs including Sociology, Geography, Economics, Media and Communications, Culture and Creative Industries, Critical Policy studies and Urban Studies. We also asked our contributors to provide a combination of empirical studies of actual hubs, as well as theoretical reflections on the concept of creative hubs; moreover, we have sought to provide a wide range of international examples so as to broaden and deepen the debate.

The remainder of this introduction is divided into two parts. The major part sketches out the overlapping discursive realms of creative hubs. Here, we discuss how two perspectives have, in different but

generally complementary ways, framed the creative hubs debate: the economic and the political. We suggest a third approach that has been neglected, the social, which we offer as a routeway into addressing the concerns of our contributors to this collection. Our aim is not to offer a discrete mapping of various conceptions and related functionalities. Instead, we use this framework to illustrate what might be considered as three different lenses on the creative hub phenomenon; each lens frames a type of action and problem, sometimes covering the same issues from a different perspective. On the basis of this meta-framing of the debate in the second section, we pose the question of 'what are creative hubs the answer to?'. Our answer is conditional and related to the particular situated circumstances of the hub, its creatives and the communities in which it is embedded.

Creative Hubs View Through 3 Lenses

We have argued in the previous section that the common, and even specialist, usage of the term creative hub has become unclear: a cloud of meanings and interpretations wrapped around a signifier. The various perspectives that have been deployed to justify or support hubs create specific in/visibilities, invite/dissuade actions and open up or close off possibilities. Classically, political rhetoric and policy choice have such a character; less obvious is the power that economics, or that which social or cultural analyses provide. Normative economics is articulated from a number of assumptions which do not necessarily hold in empirical circumstances (such as 'perfect information'); moreover, they are founded upon the smooth operation of the free market where correct prices are always allocated to objects. In contrast, social accounts focus on people and the social structures that enable or constrain them, and they seek to account for non-economic (non-market) values as well as economic ones. All three discourses offer partial insights. It is the framing and discursive accounts of the world that suggest appropriate actions and the resources necessary to achieve them.

In this section, we review creative hub debates; our objective is to highlight the research gap concerning the social aspects of hubs.

We argue that it is not simply prioritising one perspective above another: that is simply the exercise of power and authority. Rather, we want to point to the different visibilities that each discourse provides, thereby demonstrating the 'silencing' of social/cultural discourses in the creative hubs debate up to this time.

Political Discourse

The political discourse of hubs concerns the object that is 'hubbed': the creative. Of course, the terms 'creative' and 'creative industries' have a particular history that has been mobilised to support political programmes. The usage of creative and creativity has relatively recent usage; Pope (2005: 19) points out that the abstract noun 'creativity' first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary as late as 1933 and did not achieve common usage until the 1950s. Arguably, the turning point for creativity's specific recent usage came in 1997 in the UK with the naming of the 'Creative Industries'. Previously, those economic activities that had as their 'product' culture were referred to as the cultural industries, a term that itself emerged from an economic analysis and a novel taxonomy of the economy (Garnham 2005). The terminology of the 'cultural industries' was used discursively to challenge the pervious terminology—the Culture Industry (the ideologically damming term used by Adorno (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 [1947])). The (new) term cultural industries sought to pluralise, to remove a determinate moral censure and to challenge the binary between culture and economics.

The contemporary choice of the term 'creative industries' had no roots (arguably every human activity could be described as 'creative'): its political value was that it was different to the 'cultural industries' which is a terminology that had been used in the Britain by 'Old Labour' municipal authorities; New Labour sought to distance itself from this (Old Labour) legacy, and coining a new term proved an effective way to do it (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt 2005). Additional political traction was gained via the abstract noun—creative—which freights youth, expectation and modernisation: precisely the themes that the New Labour

government sought to promote post-1997. Not surprisingly the term was much copied internationally.

Previously in Britain, the cultural industries had seldom been discussed as a collective 'industry'. The norm had been to discuss the film industry differently from, say, theatre (and those that worked in these art forms reproduced this practice). It was only in the 1990s that a collective label (the cultural or creative industries) was been used in both academic and policy texts and gradually been adopted by practitioners to refer to a sector of the economy. What we now know as 'creative hubs' emerged at this time, when what we now know as hubs were commonly referred to as 'cultural clusters': referring to the co-location of (old industrial) buildings that local authorities sought to reuse to promote the 'new' industries. It was a relatively short step to rebranding them as 'creative' clusters and traducing what had often been happenstance co-location into a cause of the 'cluster'; and, then elevating it to a 'model' that might be copied. Despite the British national government's loud promotion of the creative industries, the policies were in fact those that had predated this national concern with creativity, previously put in place at a municipal level by cities who had sought to establish 'cultural clusters' (Pratt 2004b) or 'cultural quarters' (Bell and Jayne 2004) to sustain and to promote local 'cultural industries'.

The 'creative' label received a further fillip in 2004 when Richard Florida (2004) named insurgent urban entrepreneurs 'the creative class'. Definitions are not critical here, it is the rhetoric of a 'creative class' that conveys the notion of a future, and those will play a dominant in it. Florida's argument to policy makers was—to really simplify it—to create cities and neighbourhoods that the creative class want to live and work in, which, in turn, will generate economic growth: these were called 'creative cities'. Unusually for an academic, Florida's (2008) message hit the 'sweet spot' for City Mayors: who would not support making their city 'the most creative city in the nation/world'?

In the early 2000s, the attachment of the label 'creative' to anything suddenly made it attractive, innovative and successful: from Apple products to management textbooks, to baristas. The creative city message, although a little subtler, was a powerful add-on to existing practices of 'place marketing' or branding (see the critical debates by Mould

2018; Ross 2008). Whereas making cars or mining coal, or even producing biotech can become outdated, creativity (appears to) remain fresh and 'future proof'. Despite the fact that the creative industries per se had no part in Florida's argument, the buzzword of creativity and the eagerness to brand places made the notion of 'creative hub': a label that somewhat overdetermined the outcome and was thus politically very successful.[4] Simply, it was a term that signified much, without being specific about anything: potent political discourse.

The political discourse of the creative hub (and the flexibility of its terminology) demonstrates that politicians and policy makers sought to address contemporary concerns, and those of the future. Their policy aspirations (of more, of better) are represented by the building is illustrative of that concern. However, this framing leaves little space for, or recognition of, either the operation of, or work within, a particular hub; economic and social discourses provide a partial repair to this incomplete picture.

Economic Discourse

Perhaps the most surprising shift in the last 20 years has been the rise of an economic discourse about culture and the creative industries. This has involved a challenge to cultural policy which has generally viewed economics at least inimical to, if not undermining of, cultural values. For their part, mainstream economists have long discounted, or diminished, the role of culture in the economy: from their perspective, culture was consumption, and hence not productive; moreover, it had little direct economic value. It is only since the 1970s that economic discourse has sought to embrace culture.[5] Even then, sympathetic

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[4]Before the obligatory, 'hub' label was applied creative hubs laboured under variants of the 'art factory' (with an obvious reference to Andy Warhol). The early trend was to name the cluster after the previous industrial use of a particular building, examples included: the cable factory, the chocolate factory and the custard factory.

[5]Baumol and Bowen (1966) are usually regarded as the founding text of modern cultural economics.

economists sought not to attribute an economic value to culture (as this would succumb to Adorno's objection) (Throsby 2001); accordingly, much effort was spent on the calculation of indirect 'economic multipliers' for culture (Myerscough 1988), which was a way of valuing culture without directly putting a price on it: so-called shadow pricing. The ascent of neoliberalism and its castigation of the legitimacy of the state seemed to be the death knell for culture as it was assumed that it generated no direct economic value. However, recuperation was achieved for the 'creative industries' by emphasising their economic value to national economies. The approach was to not seek to value cultural outputs themselves, but the economic effort spent on their production. The creation of measures of the employment, exports, and value added by the sector enabled it to be represented as a net contributor to national well-being (UNCTAD 2008). However, the side effect was that only the parts of the creative economy that 'looked like' economic actors (such as the film industry with a more commercial output) were valued. The efforts to measure and render culture 'visible to' economic analysis had two downsides. First, that by focusing on inputs and outputs, and not meanings it potentially missed the 'heart' of the cultural industries; second, it tended to play down what made the cultural industries different from other industries, their non-normative organisation, and affective labour conditions that once again render them invisible to (economic) analyses.

Normative economic discourse views a good location as a result of monopolistic behaviour, and one that firms will seek to gain, but only one can attain, thereby forcing competitors to be 'sub-optimal', and at a disadvantage. As such, it is a distortion of the market, and resultant 'natural' monopoly confers unfair advantage. Initially, such natural monopolies were measured in terms of proximity to consumers. Such a location is described as one that minimises 'transactions costs', that is all the costs of doing business, like transport, but also including local regulations and customs. From this shallow perspective of human action, the most efficient solution will be co-location, everybody will seek to be as close to the most efficient place as possible. This was the origin of discussion of 'industrial districts' by Marshall (1920), and it has a powerful 'common sense' associated with it. Whilst the co-location or clustering

phenomenon was not visible to mainstream neo-classical economics, it did reappear in the 1980s when Italian scholars discussed the phenomenon of 'new industrial districts' that did not seem adequately explained by neo-classical economic assumptions (Becattini 2004; Santagata 2010); this research pointed to 'extra-economic' factors such as the co-dependences of politics, social forms and economic accounts. From business studies, Porter's (1996) influential ideas of the value chain (again something outwith the neo-classical economic mindset) gave a new twist to the benefits of co-location. It was Porter's notion of the 'concentration' of the value-added elements of a manufacturing system that came to dominate policy in no small part because many nation states employed Porter's consultancy to collect the evidence for, and establish their, 'cluster strategies' of which one such cluster type was the 'creative cluster' (DTI 2001).

Economic discourse is constrained by its adherence to neo-classical theories and assumptions. Generally, economic accounts of co-location or clustering are rational accounts of cost minimisation and the 'potential' of interaction. The actual interaction, the 'what goes on in a cluster', is not something that economic discourse can address beyond the assumption that interaction, and innovation, and creativity 'will happen'. In fact, most of what we might want to call the 'factors' of clustering are formally not factors at all, but 'externalities' (that is, out-with the formal model of economic action). Accordingly, economic ears are deaf to questions of organisation, as well as social, cultural and political factors. Importantly, major contributions to understanding the creative economy by those outside of economics have referenced its 'peculiar' (compared to the 'industrial' norm) organisational and market structures, as well as non-market roles (Caves 2000): hence, the need for more nuanced approaches to the creative economy generally, and to creative hubs in particular.

Social/Cultural Discourse

The main focus of this book relates to the lack of research, and the framing of that research, as it relates to creative hubs. Creative hubs can