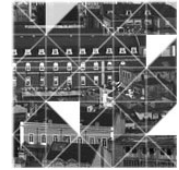

CIDADES, Comunidades e Territórios



The urban milieu and the genesis of creativity in cultural activities:

An introductory framework for the analysis of urban creative dynamics

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Abstract

The increasing interest on the role of cultural activities in territorial development and the related notion of “Creative City” have brought the relation between urban space and creative activities to the centre of academic and policy-making agendas. This paper aims to understand how the urban milieu plays an essential role in the embeddedness of sustainable creative dynamics based on cultural activities. We discuss the notion of creativity, focusing on cultural activities and then we analyse the role of urban milieu in the development of specific creative dynamics which enhance the sustainable production and consumption of cultural activities. Some concluding notes are drawn, in the perspective of assisting policy strategies to encourage sustainable territorial development dynamics based on these activities.

Keywords: Creativity, Cultural Activities, Urban Milieu, Creative Cities

1. Introduction⁴

The increasing interest on the role of cultural activities regarding territorial development and on the notion of “Creative Cities” has brought the relation between urban space and creative activities to the centre of both academic and policy-making agendas all over the world. In this context, the relation between urban milieu and the development of sustainable socio-economic dynamics based on creative and cultural activities is an essential

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point to focus on (e.g. Scott, 2000; Florida, 2002; Landry, 2000; Ebert et al., 1994; Bianchini and Landry, 1994; ERICarts, 2002; Costa, 2003; Camagni et al., 2004; or, regarding international institution approaches, KEA/CE, 2006; OCDE, 2005).

However, despite the huge diversity of theoretical approaches and concepts over these issues, the complex roots of this relation remain rather unexplained. It is therefore important to intensify both conceptually and empirically the reflection upon this relation, doing so in two parallel ways: generic, concerning all creative processes and activities; and specific, focusing on those directly related to cultural goods and services.

This paper aims to understand how important the role of the urban milieu (or some of its characteristics) is in the development of sustainable creative dynamics centred on cultural activities.

The first part of the paper starts by stressing out the growing interest in this theme, followed by a discussion about the creativity concept, identifying relevant issues in its analysis in the specific field of cultural activities. In the second part, we focus our analyses on the role of urban ambience on the development of creative dynamics which enhance both the production and the consumption of cultural activities. Recent research regarding these activities maintains a strong connection to public intervention such as urban revitalization and regeneration processes. However, it is important to question and systematize in a broader perspective the principles that determine the crucial role of the urban milieu (or areas within urban spaces with specific characteristics) in the development of creative dynamics and the sustainable development of these activities. Within this framework, a set of elements has been systematized to explain the close relation between certain characteristics of urban space and the development of creative dynamics on these activities. Amongst others, we can point out features such as the existence of critical thresholds, agglomeration economies, externalities, living ambiances, social practices characteristics, image and city representations, the insertion in external/internal networks, and the proximity to gatekeepers or governance structures. Finally, some conclusions are drawn out from the analysis in order to improve the definition of political strategies concerning the stimulation of sustainable territorial dynamics based on these activities.

Before discussing these issues in the next sections it is important to make two previous observations. The first one relates to the nature of this text which is essentially a conceptual and theoretical approach, based on interdisciplinary research work developed by the authors on this subject. In this way, it must be taken as part of a broader research work with a strong empirical component inherent to the analyses that have been developed by the authors in previous research projects (some with analytical characteristics, others more focused on defining intervention strategies and policy-making). The possibility of working with both theoretical and more pragmatic components represents an evident improvement to this conceptual framework⁵.

The second observation concerns the notions of cultural and creative activities explored in this paper. There will be an opportunity to expose some of these ideas in the next sections, some of which have been previously a subject of our interest (Costa et al., 2006). “Creative cities” and “creative industries” or “activities” (as well as related notions such as cultural “activities” or “industries”) can be rather ambiguous concepts due to their multiple origins (theoretical and disciplinary) and their dubious practical applications worldwide on policy making. Many approaches have been developed around this theme, and several concepts and practical understandings have been forwarded in the last few years, making it difficult to produce a common and widespread analysis on this field. It is then relevant that we clarify our own position in the analysis of these issues.

In effect, it is clear that in recent years there has been an increasing awareness of the issue of creativity in urban and territorial analyses (which has been subject to several approaches: the idea of “creative cities”, the role of the “creative industries or activities”, the importance of the “creative classes”, the promotion of creative urban strategies and the use of creative policy toolkits, ...). There has also been an increasing interest on the analyses of territorial dynamics based on cultural activities (with traditionally ambiguous and uncertain borders, more so

⁵ Particularly, empirical referenced work based on this approach can be found in the form of outputs delivered in the scope of the CreatCity Project (funded by the Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation: PTDC/AUR/65885/2006), most of it in publishing process in academic literature now, but already partially available at the website of the project: <http://creatcity.dinamia.iscte.pt>.

in the contemporary contexts of technological convergence, and with the erosion of the traditional logic of public intervention in the sector).

Although inspired by both these aspects, this paper restricts itself to only a fraction of these activities, more specifically the activities that represent an interception between creative and cultural activities.

On the one hand, there are creative activities and processes with no relation to the universe of “cultural activities” (e.g., software programming, scientific research, ...); whilst, on the other hand, there are activities and processes in the industries that are usually considered as “cultural”, but include only a very small amount of creative work (e.g., most of printing and publishing work in book or music clusters). Our specific interest in this analyses is centred on those activities that combine creativity with cultural production, for example, the “creation” in all types of artistic domains (writing, composing, painting, live performance, drawing, ...), and all related activities.

In spite of the endless debates concerning the notion of culture, it is possible to establish a definition of “cultural activities” combining the three main aspects from the already “classical” definition suggested by David Throsby (2001): (i) involving some kind of creativity in their production; (ii) generating and communicating meaning and symbolic value; (iii) resulting in some kind of intellectual property output.

In the analyses of these cultural goods, the notion of creativity is recurrently applied to different products and processes in the creative industries, configuring business, professional or aesthetic creativity. However, in the particular vision of this paper, creativity is related only to the creation of cultural works (or cultural contents in other goods and services) (Handke, 2004).

Considering this, it can be said that in the cultural and artistic domain creativity is essentially connected to the process of artistic creation – a specific part of its value chain (the 1st stage) – related to the creation of “artistic meaning”, and defined by a high aesthetic and symbolic value, subsequently integrated and distributed in a specific cultural good or service (Costa, 2003).

2. Creativity in cultural activities: conceptual issues

Considering the assumptions made in the previous section, it is important to deepen the discussion on creativity and on creative processes in cultural activities.

The debate on creativity has always been a motive for big discussions in the most diverse disciplines and theoretical perspectives, multiplying itself in its complexity from the artistic domain to its fundamental relevance in the technological innovation field. One way or another, this theme has assumed a relevant position through history: sometimes being seen as something intrinsically related to religiousness and deity; other times represented as the materialized presence of the social reality in the creator’s mind, who as an individual is exposed to the social, economic and political context of his society and his time.

This debate has recently gained a new strength on urban and territorial analyses due to the raise of awareness concerning the important role that creativity has in urban development and the consequent strategies for promoting cities by encouraging and attracting creativity. Important contributors such as the work of Charles Landry (2000) or Richard Florida (2002), and the development of concepts like Creative Cities, Creative Activities and Industries or Creative Classes, are just a few examples of how this subject has been discussed by the academy, and of how it has become an important issue in contemporary political talk and practices (Costa et al., 2006).

In this way it is essential to find a clear notion of creativity, a challenge intrinsically related to this work’s purpose, given the fact that the urban milieu, in its plenitude, can perfectly assume an important role as an

inducer of creative dynamics, keeping in mind that these dynamics are inherently related to the territories' characteristics. So, considering all the misunderstandings that such a complex concept might arouse, it is crucial to explain what we are referring to when we talk about creativity, or what kind of specificities this concept may assume in the artistic and cultural field.

Since these concepts are extremely ambiguous, and are frequently used and interpreted in common, flexible and many times unclear ways, it is important, first of all, to start with a debate on the notion of creativity itself, and on how it has become part of the rhetoric about creative cities and the role of creative activities in local and urban development. A simple but interesting starting point to this debate is to consult a simple dictionary and the current definitions associated to creativity. We select the following two definitions:

“Creativity: (...) mental process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations between existing ideas or concepts.”

In Wikipedia, available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creativity>

“Creative: (adj.) Having the skill and ability to produce something new, specially a work of art.”

In the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 6th Edition 2000, Oxford

At first these definitions may lead to different aspects about creativity, but the bottom line is that they are both related to novelty (of ideas or concepts), eventually transposed to the artistic field.

Nevertheless, the conceptual research work we have been working on has made us aware of a vast variety of perspectives on the notion of creativity, and the multiple ways to operate and use this concept. Most of the times, analyses and theoretical developments on creativity are simultaneously accompanied with parallel notions such as knowledge or innovation, which are important concepts to understand and to articulate with the first one.

We will now explore some of these approaches, which we have considered the most pertinent to the main objectives of this paper.

A first conceptual perspective which allows us to organize ideas on creativity was curiously first developed by authors from the innovation and regional innovation systems domains, who weren't working specifically on our research questions. It has been developed by Bjorn Asheim et al. (2006), with a starting point on the idea of knowledge society and the importance of knowledge production and diffusion networks. In effect, knowledge creation has an important role on contemporary societies, which is expressed in all social and economic dimensions of life (from most traditional functions to high technologies). These authors suggest a typology, classifying three types of knowledge (and of networks related to its distribution): analytical knowledge – predominately associated to the scientific field, which refers to the knowledge created to understand and explain the natural world; synthetic knowledge – usually related to engineering, referring to the development of practical solutions as a response to human daily obstacles; and, finally, symbolic knowledge – related to the creation of cultural meaning with a transmission which goes through more sensorial and affective processes; it is on this last group that we clearly fit a significant part of the knowledge production that represents the focus of this paper, the knowledge related to cultural goods consumption and production.

The symbolic-knowledge based activities are less related to the material and tangible formation of a certain product, and more related to its symbolical and aesthetic conception, using a much more complex, and thus, less immediate (or further differentiated) language; creativity will therefore be a way to increase the value of those products. The knowledge produced in these activities is mostly transmitted through images, symbols, sounds or narratives intimately associated with the cultural values of specific social groups. Hence the importance of analysing these activities (and the creativity within them) taking into account this social interaction, particularly

the role that intermediation mechanisms (and conventions) play, allowing the (de)codification, legitimization and recognition of their cultural and creative value.

This conception is extremely important, even when considering some of the ancient and insightful ideas and debates across the analysis of cultural activities that many times connect them to the individual dimension, and even to particular aspects rationally not easily explainable. Some of the most widespread perspectives on creativity associate it, for example, with the idea of inspiration, to something mysterious or transcendent to the individual (the idea of the divine origin of creativity, shared by Plato, is still commonly used...); to an individual mood or particular disposition (like romantic or depressive...); or to the idea of natural talent (something linked to intuition or to inspiration).

This represents another essential characteristic of these activities, the capability of creative agents to have creative, imaginative and interpretative abilities, which depend more on personal skills than on formal qualifications acquired in institutional training (college, university...). Ruth Towse (2004), in her debate on creativity and the dichotomy nature/nurture (the traditional debate confronting creativity as something natural – divine, innate talent – or something that is constructed and socially embedded – which implies skills, learning capacity and building abilities), emphasizes the distinctiveness of individuals' innate capabilities in creative processes (in the artistic field) compared to other activities. Although it is extremely important, the investment on formal training represents more an enhancement of such natural abilities, or even a strategy to gain access to informal networks in the artistic world, incorporating creative individuals and giving them access to other artists and professionals. Therefore, the social interaction experience within these networks has a great importance to enhance individual's creativity and their ability to produce more imaginative and innovative products (subsequently, with more value), more than the formal training itself.

This idea is related to a parallel debate (conducted by authors like, e.g., Bruno Frey) according to which we can discuss creativity as a result of intrinsic or extrinsic motivations (that is, leading us to the discussion over the possibility to induce creativity through public incentives) (cf. Towse, 2004).

Regardless of all these issues, the importance given to the notion of creativity has gained particular attention in the last few years, with increasing interest on the debates regarding cities' management and the promotion of urban competitiveness based on creative activities (with marking contributions from authors such as Landry, Bianchini, Ebert et al., Kunzmann, Florida, amongst others – cf. Costa et al., 2006, about this theme). In one of the most paradigmatic works on this theme, Charles Landry (2000) assumed creativity as an element whose role is crucial to stimulate the urban fabric dynamics in its several dimensions: “creativity seemed like a process of discovering and then enabling potential to unfold”. Creativity is assumed as the capacity to formulate imaginative and innovative solutions, resorting to qualities such as intelligence, inventiveness and the ability to reformulate. In this context, Landry considers a creative solution as being intrinsically dependent on the context and moment of its development. Creativity is therefore reliant on a specific moment: a creative solution today may not be suitable in the future. In city's management and planning context, the creativity notion acquires a special meaning in the ability of individuals to continuously develop creative solutions for urban problems through permanent monitoring, revision, and re-adaptation.

However, the subjective, almost ethereal character of such a human specificity makes the creative notion quite a slippery ground, not only concerning the definition itself but also its assessment, measurement and valuation. When reflecting on this concept, some doubts easily emerge: what makes a piece of art (for instance) more or less creative? What kind of criteria should be used to value (in terms of artistic or cultural value) more or less a creative piece of work?

In a work of reference, Margaret Boden's (1990) *The creative mind* (from the field of psychology, but with specific influence on computational sciences and artificial intelligence), opens the debate with a quite simple question: “What is creativity?” Although this specific work easily sets off controversy because of her deterministic vision on the functioning process of the human brain, Boden gives us an important contribution to the definition of creativity, and develops elements for the evaluation of specific creative work: creativity is the ability to generate ideas or artefacts which represent novelty, surprise and value. In a broad sense, being creative

is not confined to any elite and, similarly to Landry's (2000) argument, everyday creativity is commonly applied in a large diversity of situations: every one of us is creative, to a degree. The focus of Boden's discussion has to do exactly with the fact that creativity can be evaluated resorting to three distinctive measurement elements: novelty, surprise and value.

An idea can be creative and can represent novelty. Although it may seem obvious, in a broader conception of creativity, the element of novelty must be treated with more accuracy. Boden gives special attention to the fact that the novelty component in a specific creative work must be evaluated according to its context, establishing a distinction between "Psychological Creativity" and "Historical Creativity". The first type of creativity is associated to the fact that an individual can produce several ideas and actions according to his influences and background. It can be attributed, for instance, to the type of creativity developed by children, which has no relevant value (in an artistic or professional way since others have done the same before), but considering their psychological framework and knowledge amount, can result in quite inventive and creative ideas. The second type, Historical Creativity, is related to an idea which represents something new considering the human History context, and thus, represents an absolute novelty.

Considering that a creative idea may be surprising (or innovative) Boden also works on the distinction of different types of surprise: it can be surprising because it's not familiar, and goes against all statistics; it can be surprising because it represents a new point of view over the same object; it can be surprising because it brings something that apparently would be impossible to conceive. With this in mind, according to the author, it is possible to distinguish three types of creativity:

- a) Non-familiar creativity – referring to the type of creativity which involves an unlikely process of combination of ideas (values, frameworks), emerging from artist's imagination;
- b) Exploratory creativity – referring to the type of creativity that explores diverse conceptual spaces (structured styles of thought). We can exemplify conceptual spaces as the diverse artistic or creative thought areas/perspectives/domains. In brief, this type of creativity can be the combination of pre-existing conceptual spaces in order to create a new one;
- c) Transformational creativity – referring to the restructuring of mental maps and cognitive logics that change the ways through which creativity is expressed and materialized. In practical terms, an artist has the chance to change or subvert the limits of his own artistic style.

For purposes of this paper's discussion, the focus of interest will be on exploratory creativity (e-creativity), that is to say, creativity as an exploration of new conceptual spaces, or on transformational creativity (t-creativity), referring to the transformation and exploration of those conceptual spaces, as these are the most legitimated sorts (of "fundamental innovation") in an artistic and cultural field. Combining this with the fact that creativity's assessment and valuation could be made considering both the previous psychological (more individual) and historical (more social) creativity levels, it is possible to understand the role of crucial aspects such as mediation, legitimization and construction of conventions, as being particularly relevant in the cultural activities domain.

Keeping in mind that the concept of creativity encompasses several creative activities, nonexclusive from the domain in which we focus our analysis (culture and the arts), and taking into account all these assorted conceptual tools to analyse the creativity complex issue, it might be interesting to make an in-depth observation of two other important issues related to fundamental aspects of creative outputs (and to associate them with cultural activities' specificities): on the one hand, the innovation and novelty factor; on the other hand, its value and its social legitimization.

Concerning the first case, since creation is assumed as a novelty or an innovation, it is important to note that notions such as novelty, innovation and invention can be easily found as referring to similar processes. Although it is not our purpose to be exhaustive on this issue, it should be noted that, considering Towse's (2001) or Handke's (2004) research, creativity itself should be acknowledged as a process much closer to creative industries than to other economic sectors.

In effect, as Handke points out, creativity and innovation are closely related concepts in creative industries literature: innovation and invention are referred to express the creation of novelty. In this context, we may assume (as usually has been) that creativity represents to creative and cultural industries, the same that innovation means to other economic sectors (Towse, 2001). Actually, creativity can be innovative, in several ways: a creation can represent a breakthrough or just a contextual improvement in a specific artistic field. Nevertheless, creativity is associated only to a part of the innovation registered in the artistic and cultural field: think of all the incremental or fundamental innovations in these sectors that are related to technological innovation in products, processes or even at an organizational level, still far from artistic creation and cultural contents (for example, in supports, equipment, conditions of distribution, and so on).

Although we agree that they represent different ideas, it seems that it wouldn't be logic to completely separate the notions of creativity, innovation and novelty, even in the artistic field. Taking into account Boden's arguments, we can risk saying that creativity, on the one hand, can exist without absolute innovation or novelty, locating these forms of creations in the type which Boden refers to as Psychological Creativity; but, on the other hand, it can effectively represent novelty and/or innovation (the most relevant to our analysis), which would be classified in the Historical Creativity type.

In other words, creativity might represent pure novelty, or, "fundamental" innovation, making a parallel line of thought with the paradigmatic distinction between fundamental/incremental innovation (from economical innovation studies), having the possibility to become "historical creativity" – "H-Creativity" –, that is to say, being clearly surprising in Boden's approach.

However, there is a fundamental distinction between creation of novelty in the cultural industries and other types of activities and sectors: the creation of novelty in cultural and artistic activities (and specifically in cultural and artistic contents) is something that is closely related to artistic, aesthetic and symbolic attributes, which involve different legitimating capacities and frameworks associated to different stocks of cultural capital, very diverse decoding capacities, and most different levels of access and bonding to socially built conventions.

This leads us inevitably to the issue of the mechanisms and institutions responsible for the legitimization of artistic products, and particularly to the role played by cultural mediators or gatekeepers. The relevance of these intermediary agents is particularly linked to two legitimization dimensions: as agents who legitimize what is most creative, most innovative or most new and surprising; and also as a key-element, legitimized and recognized by the society or by a specific group, representing the standard social values and symbolic patterns. In the end, they are the ones responsible for recognising the artistic value of an art piece, evaluating its creative relevance in a historical perspective.

This is particularly pertinent if we assume a strict perspective over our field of interest and centre on the traditionally so-called cultural activities (Throsby, 2001; O'Connor, 1999), focusing our analyses on activities such as writing, music, performing arts, visual arts, theatre, and so on. In other words, all the activities that presuppose creation and artistic expression and that represent aesthetic value, more than their strict economic value (or activities located in the diffuse border of this cultural activities cluster core, but still in the core of creative activities such as design, tourism, publishing, etc.). The importance given to these activities in territory is related to the synergies that might emerge in a culturally dynamic background, and the possibility of stimulating the economic structure on the basis of these creative activities.

Creativity, as an intrinsic human characteristic, has a close relation to the individuals' own social life experiences (social, artistic, etc...), which inevitably express their frameworks of references and values. The human being imputes to a given condition specific forms of thinking, and specific operational schemes. The same problem can be solved by several procedures, considering the social values background and the social group in which the individual lives. The artistic expressiveness capacity represents a quite complex form of creativity, considering the fact that an individual seeks to develop a symbolic language, a symbolic transmission through artistic domains such as music, poetry, theatre, etc. As we previously referred, the recognition of what is more or less creative depends on the gatekeepers, who have the social power to legitimate the symbolic and

economic value of a cultural good, giving relevance to its level of novelty or surprise, in the framework of its social context or of a specific art audience.

This mediation aspect is also an extremely important issue in the second question previously referred, concerning the valorization of creativity and its social recognition. Creativity always has to be seen considering its social recognition and the framework of its valorization by society or by a specific individual. With this in mind, we must not restrict our approach exclusively to the traditional and classical rationales developed according to the “creative genius” ingredients theory (consider, for example, the contribution of W. Duff, cited by Throsby, 2001): the combination between (i) imagination (finding new possible associations, between pre-existing ideas); (ii) judgment (which makes selections, regulates and controls ideas) and (iii) taste (artists’ own sensibility). All these factors are extremely important, but it is also essential to consider the symbolical sphere, and to take into account central notions recently reached through theoretical developments in different fields which alert us to several other aspects: that there is no such thing as a standard definition of “creative genius”; that creativity can only be individually defined; that creativity and its valorisation occur in a specific social and political context; or even that creativity’s value (in several domains) is strongly defined by the elite classes in society.

Creativity’s valorization and recognition is thus intimately dependent on social legitimization, as well as on the artists’/creators’ own self-recognition, which is also strongly embedded both socially and territorially. In particular, the “social hetero-recognition” is something that is strongly dependent on a set of conventions, socially built and unequally shared in the most diverse fields (artistic satisfaction, market achievements, audience recognition, personal fulfilment...) – the role of cultural and artistic mediators (the several gatekeepers in those diverse fields) is therefore crucial.

In a more pragmatic and systematic perspective, three main ideas arise as fundamental in this process:

- a. Creativity’s recognition depends on conventions: sharing symbols, meanings and common social values (not necessarily shared by a mass population, but at least, the sharing of the same values and social recognition amongst a specific or a small “social world”);
- b. Consequently, there is a fundamental importance attributed to the “art worlds” (Becker, 1982) and the communities that are related to each art world and, obviously, to their own gatekeepers;
- c. Finally, also crucial is the importance of the cultural capital factor and of its accumulation processes, both from the consumers perspective (authors recognition and consumption processes of cultural goods) and from the artists/creators perspective (as fundamental in the creation and provision process).

It is important to refer that all these socially diversified elements point to a strong segmentation of the access to cultural practices (both creative and receptive), but also to a strong segmentation of their multiple social valuations (and the common conventions shared about those goods and their value). In the same way, all these factors also point to the need to analyse the authors and creators in their social context (in which they are clearly embedded and related to), where subjects related to urbanity and agglomeration are extremely relevant. We propose a deeper analysis of these dimensions in the next section.

3. Agglomeration, urban milieu and creative dynamics in cultural activities

In order to better understand the role of agglomeration and of urban ambiance in the creative processes of cultural activities, in this section we wish to explore a little further the relations between urban milieu and the development of creative dynamics based on cultural activities.

It is commonly recognized that there is a close proximity to urban space and even to some urban “milieus” in all kinds of cultural activities (e.g., Scott, 2000; Crane, 1992; Becker, 1982; Caves, 2002; Costa, 2003). The role of agglomeration is crucial here and becomes even more important if we focus our attention in the specific field of creativity. That is particularly obvious if we become aware of the superlative importance of this relation between cultural activities (all of which strongly territorialized) and urban milieu in a specific stage of the value chain of the production of these cultural goods: the creation phase, that is to say, the production of a cultural content (characterized by its aesthetic and symbolical attributes and its creative nature), which is then incorporated into a cultural product (a good or service, with more or less aesthetic and semiotic attributes) – see, on this issue Costa, 2003.

As mentioned above, this relation between urban space and cultural and creative activities has received particular attention in recent years. Such interest, on the one hand, has been mostly related to urban revitalization and regeneration strategies or to the idea of attracting creative classes and creative activities in order to enhance urban development and competitiveness. But on the other hand, it has also been frequently linked to the identification and analyses of several other kinds of cultural-led “territorialized production complexes”, where it is possible to find some successful case studies (e.g., innovative milieus or local production systems like Hollywood or Silicon Valley) as considerably documented in academic literature on this subject. Nevertheless, throughout history, it has always been possible to perceive a clear concentration of cultural activities in urban areas and, particularly, of the most creative and innovative activities in the urban cores and main metropolis (Hall, 1998), revealing the importance to the development of these activities of factors such as agglomeration economies, other externalities or even the symbolical value associated with the place of cultural consumption and production. We should therefore focus our analysis on the issue of agglomeration.

But what can explain this? A good starting point to answer this question will be the classical contributions from urban sociology, particularly Georg Simmel’s ideas concerning the identification of the main structuring characteristics of social practices in urban space (Simmel, 1902), that is, (i) the dimension, (ii) the density, and (iii) the heterogeneity of those practices, as well as the notion of urbanism as a way of life, later defended by Louis Wirth and other Chicago School authors (Wirth, 1938). Both contributions centre in the notion that the big amount of interactions promoted by the concentration of people in urban areas, as well as their density and their diversity, are crucial elements to improve the quantity and quality of social interactions to a level impossible to take place in other areas, and which is essential for the development of society; this is particularly evident in the case of cultural activities and especially of artistic creation, which are more interesting to us in this paper.

In a similar way, the classical justifications in the fields of economics and geography (from the contributions of A. Marshall, in 1900, to numerous other theoretical approaches developed in the last decades on concepts such as local production systems, industrial districts, innovative milieus, clusters or regional innovation systems, for instance), which focus on issues such as agglomeration economies (enabling shared scale and scope economies), transaction costs reduction or the importance of the most diverse externalities, are also crucial explanations to keep in mind in order to understand this concentration, as well as more recent contributions which have been evidencing other effects linked to the urban “milieu” and “ambience” (and their symbolic meanings) or to the urban lifestyles and urban vibrancy.

Considering the debates about creativity presented on this paper and the classical perspectives about urban space resulting from these contributions, which give special attention to (i) the presence of abundant population, (ii) the high demographic density and the consequent interaction between agents, and (iii) their heterogeneity, enhancing a diversity and multiplicity of combinations and opportunities in social practices, we assume that this milieu has potentially unique characteristics that are responsible for the stimulation and development of creative dynamics, which in turn are probably essential for their own sustainability.

In order to deepen the analysis of this issue, we will proceed in this section to a broader discussion over this relation between agglomeration, urban space and the development of specific conditions responsible for the stimulation of creativity in urban milieu. We will present a brief reflection about Allen Scott’s (2006) approach to the origins of urban development and the relation with the development of creative dynamics. Next, we will discuss the main characteristics of the urban milieu and their relation to the development of creative dynamics,

focusing our attention on artistic creativity. Finally, we will end this section with a reflection on the artist's individual decision, which of course is decisive in his relation with the urban space. Being the central character in the cultural creative production process, we have to directly discuss the artist's location motivations and his relation with the urban milieu.

A good starting point will be, as already referred, the recent contribution of Allen Scott about the creative cities rhetoric (Scott, 2006), according to which this author, in line with his previous work, carries on his analysis of cultural activities' relation with the urban space and their strong territoriality. Scott argues that the origins of urban development have a strict connection with economic production dynamics and labour relations; in this sense, we can assume that creative cities will be the ones which better adapt to the challenges of the "new economy" (represented by the leading sectors on growing and innovation such as high-tech, financial business, cultural industries, etc.). In this context, cities will naturally become more and more complementary and competing with each other.

The constant combination of diverse firm networks and the flexibility of labour markets (both enhanced in those cities) are the basis for a fertile background for production and for information exchange between agents, in which firms and other agents become able to contact with different processes and products (Scott, 2006: 7), which represents a crucial factor for the development of these activities.

This perspective might suggest that in an urban milieu, a setting for fast changes and multiple opportunities, labour flexibility can be seen as motivating and encouraging. The worker, who is "free", is compelled to activate his creativity almost instinctively, and this creativity is conversely enhanced by his multiple affiliations to several labour contexts. As a free individual, the worker can look for the most favourable arrangements, which stimulate him the most; therefore, competitiveness is seen as the capacity of the individual to adapt and his creativity will be (also) a consequence of that need.

Since the concept of creativity used by the author (Scott, 2006) is not totally clear, it has to be said that if we think about cultural creative production and about individual's creative dynamics (in the terms referred to in the first section), we can easily conceive artists who choose stable and relatively non-flexible careers and, in spite of that, often manage to be creative. Considering this profile, public policies which support them on their academic or technical trail, for instance, could be a lot more effective than those based on flexibility.

This issue of flexibility of workers and firms, which is crucial in this kind of activities essentially oriented to project-based collaborative-work, has vital importance in the tendency these activities show for agglomeration, as Scott perfectly points out. But we reckon that this issue has to be treated carefully. For instance, it cannot be used to justify a public intervention reduced to the action towards traditional market failures. The artistic sector, regardless (and also because...) of this functioning "by project" is one of the main examples of the fact that the use of a mere market rationale could produce totally equivocal results, as many have shown (cf. Caves, 2002, Throsby, 2001, Towse, 2003).

Still, even the author himself offers us another good counter-argument. Scott (2000: 12) says that labour relations on cultural industries are typically intermittent and result on a frequent search for employees and employments. When considering a large scale environment, these relations tend to involve less risk for both, as the opportunities tend to multiply and the probabilities of new matches tend to rise. The advantages of agglomeration will thus be evident, as well as the natural pressure on behalf of markets towards geographical concentration.

The influence of the urban milieu, in the agglomeration perspective, can also be seen in other angles. In addition to all the issues traditionally associated with agglomeration economies, fundamentally the several positive externalities, the scale economies and the availability of skilled labour force, Scott (2006: 9) accentuates two fundamental aspects: (a) costs reduction, and (b) the creation of specialized and complementary producer networks. These factors can be synthesized by the agglomeration economies categories presented by Duranton and Puga: (i) sharing (e.g., facilities); (ii) matching (e.g., specialized achievements in skilled labour force or inputs); and (iii) learning (e.g., exchanging information amongst firms).

The formation of a cluster can be so vital to some agents that we may observe in some cases the partition or the externalization of part of the business, in order to better fit in a certain territorial cluster. The agglomeration of small producers and the specialization in certain activities have also been commonly used strategies in urban areas of smaller dimension. Conversely, the matching (and recognition) of production with its location place has also been fundamental to the competitiveness and differentiation of determined regions (Scott, 2006: 9-10).

Local handicraft production sites (as well as in the case of heritage, both tangible and intangible) are one of the main examples of the effects that specialization and artists' identification with the place can produce, enhancing positive differentiation effects: their products, embedded in symbolic values and non-dissociable from those specific regions, gain preponderance in relation to their potential substitutes.

All the above mentioned effects can be strongly boosted by heterogeneity, another determinant feature of urban space. We assume, in line with the previously cited social sciences classical authors, that ambiances which offer a great diversity of experiences and stimuli tend to promote creativity: be it simply for the possibility offered to diverse agents to get in touch with different technical skills, be it for having contact with different approaches and point of views on a variety of subjects, etc. In the cultural activities creative field, heterogeneity tends not only to give artists the possibility to get in contact with different techniques, expression possibilities and a variety of stimuli, but also (when combined with the concentration of a large number of people) to promote a more favourable environment to artists' recognition and legitimization, which, as we have seen, are also fundamental for creativity.

In this sense, Florida (2002: 249-266), an ideologist and big promoter of the creative class concept, underlines the fundamental role of tolerance, which he considers one of the three main pillars for the attraction of creative people, in order to stimulate innovation and economic growth. For this author, more tolerant milieus (regarding immigration, alternative lifestyles, etc.), in combination with the domain of the other two "T's" (Technology and Talent), would define the perfect combination for promoting creativity and innovation. However, it is important to stress not only that tolerance and diversity are very different ideas (it is completely different to tolerate someone or to interact with that person), as well as, in accordance with Scott (2006: 8), it will be necessary to find an equilibrium between homogeneity and heterogeneity because, as we have seen, individual identification with the location and the building of an identity are also fundamental aspects of a creative milieu.

Actually, the controversial work of Florida has been mostly discussed in recent years. Markusen (2005: 2-7), based on a review of works that have been dealing with Florida's ideas, argues (as many others) that a significant part of the empirical inferences in his work (particularly, Florida, 2002), lack some methodological accuracy. Although recognising that this work had the merit of identifying and spreading the creativity issue, Markusen (in line with other Florida's critics) points out that one of its big mistakes is the direct association that is made between talent, skills, creativity and educational level.

The explanation for all these arguments, as well as the discussion that took place in the first part of this paper, allows us to try and systematize the fundamental characteristics of the relationship between agglomeration and creative dynamics based on creative activities, assuming that, as we have widely empirically demonstrated, agglomeration strongly fosters cultural supply as well as cultural demand.

As previously mentioned, according to an array of classical social sciences authors, we can define three main structuring discussion lines regarding the relation between agglomeration and urban space – which allow us to search for an answer to our central question regarding how the urban milieu can or cannot influence the development of specific creative dynamics, thus enhancing cultural production and consumption:

- i) Relational densification, based upon the clustering and agglomeration of agents;
- ii) Sizing up and critical mass attainment, which means minimal thresholds for demand and supply;
- iii) Diversity and heterogeneity of means, resources and markets.

All these things enable a context which is characterized by an interdependent network operation, flexible local labour markets and a certain type of competition that is fundamentally based on the qualitative attributes of assets, which are particularly important when work is project-oriented (instead of firm-career-oriented) – as is precisely the case of cultural activities (see Caves, 2002; Greffe, 2002; Towse, 2003).

In this relationship, there is a set of mechanisms that are determinant for the structuring of agglomeration's importance, which concern different matters (usually identified in various analyses, with more or less weight) such as: distance suppression, transaction costs reduction, joint exploitation of scale or scope economies, fostering of positive externalities or the use of image and the symbolic meaning of place.

Adding to these matters closely associated with those three main dimensions, we consider that it is important to stress a few other aspects connected to the more symbolic dimension, which is imperative in the analysis of cultural activities.

One of them is the central role of gatekeepers, or cultural mediators, in the provision and the consumption process of these activities, obviously implying also fundamental impacts in the creation stage. In this context, urban space is even more important for the development of these activities than for most other activities due to the multiple contacts it offers creators and the proximity to mediation circuits – with a significant aesthetic and symbolic content and concomitant decoding needs.

Another aspect is related to the fact that these spaces warrant important hubs and nodes of conviviality (and sociability and socialization), essential for information dissemination, personal contacts and actors' legitimization as well as for their recognition in the different art worlds.

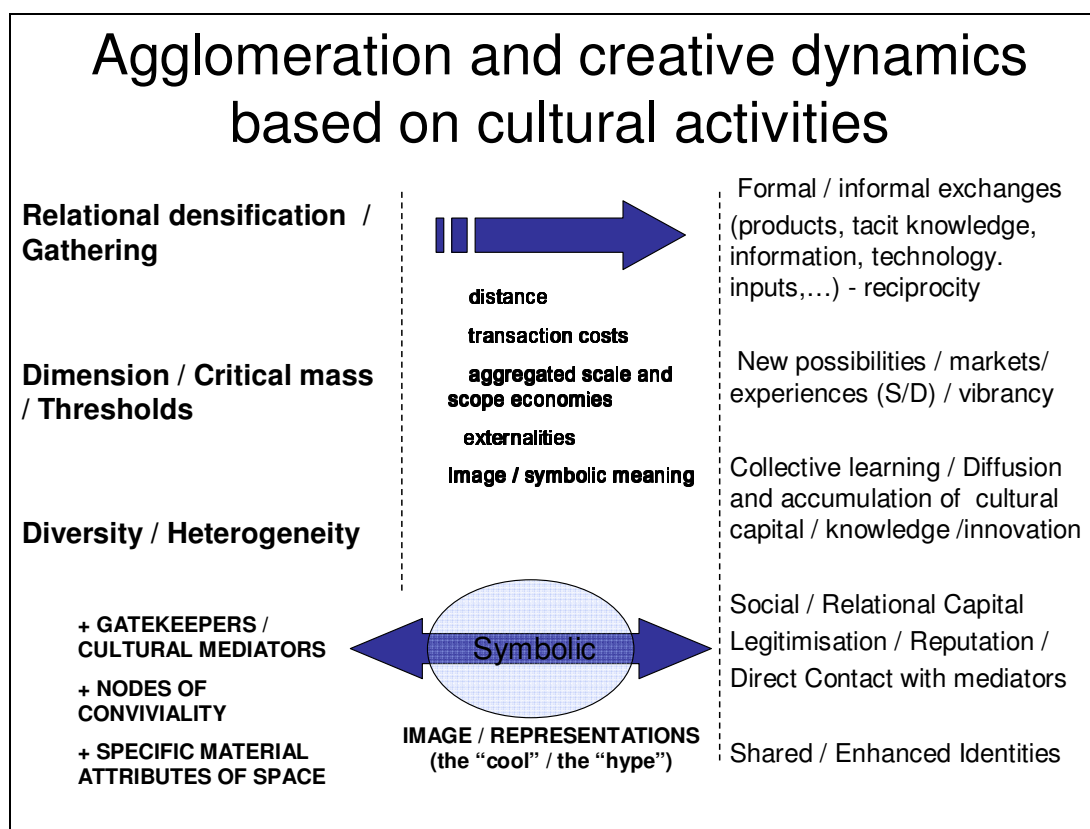
A third and final aspect, empirically demonstrated in different analysis, is related to the fact that these activities and the creative process *per se* can be strongly constrained by certain physical or material features, specific to each space (the built or natural environment, climate, light, etc.), particular competitive factors seen as determinant for inspiration by some creators.

Any of these factors has a very significant symbolic influence, linked to the urban picture and to the actors' (internal and external) representations of the different city spaces – pointing to the concepts of 'cool' or 'hype', which are used by many authors to describe the dynamics of many districts or creative quarters or cities around the world.

All these issues, which are critical in the symbolic reinforcement and legitimization of these activities, combined with the more traditional ones, lead to an absolutely essential role of the urban milieu. This is expressed in matters such as the formal and informal exchanges that take place there (of products, tacit knowledge, information, technology, productive resources, etc.) and the reciprocity relations associated with them; the new possibilities and markets that only the size, diversity and heterogeneity of these places enable (allowing new experiences, greater assumption of risk, new encounters,...); the specific mechanisms of collective learning, of knowledge, innovation and cultural capital accumulation and diffusion; the multiple expressions of relational and social capital, the legitimization and reputation strategies, the possibility of direct contact with cultural gatekeepers; or also the sharing and building up of specific collective identities.

A schematic representation that synthesizes all these issues concerning the relationship between the agglomeration mechanisms of cultural activities and creative dynamics is depicted in figure 1.

Figure 1. Agglomeration and creativity in cultural activities



Source: own elaboration (adapted from Costa and Pires, 2007).

It is also important to point out the utmost importance of other matters connected to the strong territoriality of these activities (regardless of whether they are or are not situated in an urban space) which, simultaneously with those mentioned above, can be essential to explain the territorial pattern of the production and consumption processes of cultural activities (see, for example, Costa, 2003) and in particular for what we are aiming at in this paper, of creativity on these activities. Amongst these we highlight only three fundamental ideas:

- a. The capacity for (internal or external) network insertion, which leads us again to the core role of gatekeepers and mediation circuits, in this specific case, in the connection between local and global (at the concrete scale of diffusion of those goods);
- b. The possibility of occurrence of specific governance mechanisms, and the importance of specific institutional frameworks for the development of these activities, as has been invariably stressed by the multiple case studies of successful territorialized dynamics based on cultural activities throughout the world;
- c. The existence of territorial specificities, local features or endogenous resources which allow the configuration of specific competitive advantages through the valorization of those concrete characteristics (in terms of symbolic meaning, of place's image, of specific assets and resources associated with that space, of its local history and 'culture', of its heritage...).

Finally, it is also important to explore the creative dynamics that are based on cultural activities and their relation with the urban milieu under the view of one of the main actors in this process: the artist.

A good perspective for this analysis is introduced by Ann Markusen in her recent works on this subject. Departing from the critical view of Florida's (2002) work, both relating to difficulties in conceiving a 'creative' class and to the methodological accuracy of his empirical analysis, Markusen (2006) reflects upon the artists' nature as inhabitants of urban milieux and political actors, analysing their locative preferences as essentially determined by the local effort to boost artists' development and their subsistence, as well as the clustering of labour supply. According to Markusen (2006: 12), labour networks, access to exhibition and performing centres, and the attraction to a certain way of life are the main motivators for artists' establishment in more dense and 'central' urban areas. For this author, some creators such as performing artists, for example, do so even more frequently than others, probably deriving from the nature of their occupations.

Nevertheless, this author warns us about the fact that many of the dynamics and synergies created between artists do not come up simply because there is a strong concentration of 'creative individuals', nor do they come up in the usual places, such as museums, theatres, etc.; instead, they come up in a great variety of 'micro-spaces', permanent and temporary, where artistic production is developed and presented, and where the artists can not only meet, but also express a particular and important 'political voice'. Markusen presents three kinds of spaces that contain these characteristics, albeit strongly revealing the North-American context: (i) artists' clubhouses; (ii) studios and buildings used as both residence and workplace by artists; and (iii) smaller scale performing arts venues, while also referring other equally important spaces such as art fairs, schools, etc. (Markusen, 2006: 14-15).

In another work, Markusen and Schrock (2006) seek to explore the subject of what they call the 'artistic dividend', or the additional economic impact that wouldn't exist should the artists not be there. In their chosen strategy, they studied artists' search for urban centres, especially their decision regarding the choice between 'more central' ones and those that are experiencing growth, departing from the hypothesis that a lot of artists chose where they will establish themselves bearing in mind a stimulating community of artists and patrons, instead of a specific potential employer.

They claim that the decision which privileges large urban centres derives from the fact that (i) cities' size matters; (ii) the demand for cultural activities by citizens living in more 'traditional' and 'elitist' cities is greater; (iii) certain kinds of industries, like communications, tend to develop in large cities and, therefore, to constitute an important source of demand and income for artists; (iv) artists and 'artistic spaces' attract tourists, which boosts a 'virtual circle'; (v) synergies between different artistic activities may generate agglomerative trends; (vi) more incentives and amenities are offered by public institutions or the cultural fabric of those cities; (vii) the artists' group itself tends to patronize and foster their 'auto-investment' (Markusen and Schrock, 2006: 6-7).

On the other hand, these authors also point out that a few traits may have the opposite effect, keeping artists away from the large urban centres, due to things such as high costs of living, the preference for certain 'amenities', particularly for artists not linked to the performing arts, the option for 'isolation' and solitude (easier to find in non-urban areas) and, finally, technological evolution due to ICT progresses (e.g., the widening of possibilities connected to trade, as well as communication, through the Internet).

To sum up, it is then important to bear in mind that each artist's or creator's individual decision – as authors like Markusen or others have sustained – depends upon specific features such as their own preferences in terms of living and working places (including features like the offer of amenities or the 'hypes', 'trends' or 'buzzes' connected to them, according to what has been stressed by an array of recent studies on these matters,...), locally developed efforts (by public entities and local institutions) in order to foster artistic development and urban 'vibrancy' or the mere concentration of artistic/cultural employment (and, consequently, potential labour demand), amongst others.

Hence, the importance of considering that, notwithstanding the generic analysis framework presented before – nor contesting its validity –, in the cultural and creative agent's individual point of view, location decision is always, in practical terms, a personal decision constrained by features like income level and purchasing power, land cost, the artists' social recognition expectations, network insertion and access to interaction, market's dimension and diversity, etc.⁶

Actually, there is a constant balancing between a set of factors that tend to favour centralization in certain places – and in specific areas in the urban space, for certain activities – and a set of other factors which enhance decentralising forces. Still, on the whole, as we have noticed, these factors have generally lead to situations where the guaranty of a few first is determinant for the safeguarding of sustainable territorial dynamics based on creativity, in cultural activities.

4. Concluding remarks

Throughout this paper we have sought to reflect, essentially on conceptual terms, upon the role of the urban milieu on the development of sustainable creative rationales in cultural activities. We have discussed the concept of creativity and the way it has been integrated in this debate. Additionally, we have widened the analysis of the factors underlying the clustering of artists and creators in urban areas and the relevance of the urban milieu for the development of their activities and, especially, for their creativity.

This line of research is not only based on a lot of conceptual production concerning these subjects but also on the different types of experiences and success cases that have been repeatedly referred in recent literature on these subjects – from cultural quarters to urban regeneration or qualification strategies (either more integrated actions or the mere building of flagship facilities); from cultural clusters and highly territorialized image and symbol production systems to the realization of marking events or successful festivals; from specific policies to promote some creative industries to local and regional development policies, urban competitiveness policies, or even policies aiming at the promotion of other goals, such as social inclusion, participation or multiculturalism (see, for example, ERICarts, 2002, Costa *et al.*, 2006).

⁶ It is important to highlight that many of the aspects concerning artists' decisions regarding location choices are extremely subjective and can't be easily measured. When we talk about individuals' relation with space, we're not putting aside individuals' relationships with each other. Emotional bonds, for instance, are also a fundamental variable in individual decision...

Nonetheless, the main issue to be noticed when analysing many of these cases is the sustainability and reproducibility of such dynamics. In fact, one of the aspects that have been highlighted in many of the empirical cases that have been studied is the difficulty to replicate the success experiences and solutions, given the specificities of each case (resources, actors, governance models, etc.) that grant them a unique and non-reproducible character.

This issue leads us unequivocally to an extensive empirical work (in progress), in order to understand, in a sustainability and long term perspective, what factors turn such experiences into creative ones.

For now, the above conceptual analysis leads us to think that the importance of the 'traditional' agglomeration factors for creativity fostering seem to be confirmed. However, the importance of more specific factors regarding cultural activities, essentially associated with their symbolic aspect, is also confirmed.

Two specific aspects, usually not so often referred, should be taken into account in the analysis of these features. On the one hand, the distinction between creation and creativity (as results of some empirical studies – e.g., Costa and Pires, 2007), with the possible deterritorialization of the first one's exact moment, but a strong dependency of the second one on the frequency and contact with the urban milieu – which creates different needs, for these two aspects (creation/creativity), regarding agglomeration effects. On the other hand, the unquestionable relevance of the dimension of creativity's recognition and social valuing, which includes a symbolic meanings communication process, from which it cannot be detached. This is a central issue that may never be disconnected from any public action that seeks the creation of or the support to sustainable territorial dynamics based on these creative cultural activities.

One other thing that is related to the debate we have been proposing is a certain concept of cities' insertion and role within the globalization processes and the knowledge society arena, although this cannot be taken for granted. The sustainability of creative dynamics based on cultural activities will, therefore, also depend upon the concept of cities' role in the construction of a sense of collectiveness.

Indeed, the different approaches of the authors mentioned above appear to share very little in terms of the strategies developed to promote creativity. Part of the disturbance in this communication is due to the fact that they depart from quite diverse conceptual standpoints. The discussion about creativity is a good example to illustrate this point. However, it is also possible to identify a few convergence issues. We believe that the thought that transformations in collective organization concerning the city and, furthermore, the interminable quest for what is 'new' is, according to most of these authors (such as Florida, 2002, and Scott, 2006), a given thing in contemporary societies. In this case, the 'natural' search for novelty is thought to be the main motivation for action and, consequently, the main variable determining the success of a certain territory. Such view may grant us a very useful tool when it comes to designing immediate intervention strategies, but they certainly can be limited, in a way, regarding all the (diverse) challenges cities must face, and the sustainability of those dynamics in the long run, responding to a variety of territorial competitiveness demands.⁷

⁷ We can think, for instance, of the risks of increasing cities' socio-economic dualisation, referred by many authors. Scott (2006: 4) clearly states this, highlighting the growth of inequalities in urban areas, which tend to reflect different social types, aggregating, on the one hand, low-wage and low-qualified workers and, on the other hand, high qualified and well-paid individuals.

So what general lines can we define, based on this preliminary reflection, when it comes to the main guidelines for public policy formulation in order to enhance these ‘creative’ spaces? The analysis we have made has confirmed the great importance of the urban milieu and the urbanity characteristics for the development of cultural activities and, even more, for the development of creativity in cultural activities.

Public action should therefore guarantee multidimensionality (and a multi-level rationality) in the efforts to promote creativity in terms of the several types of policy, whether they are urban development policies (or actions toward local and regional development), cultural policies (conducted on a local or central level), or other policies, potentially combinable with these issues (employment, social inclusion, innovation, training, for example). Nonetheless, it will always be crucial to pay particular attention to the forms of governance and self-regulation of these territorial systems (and to the specificities of actors, institutions, relationships, networks, expectations, motivations...). Local contexts specificities, key for the success of many of these experiences, imply the design of case-specific institutional solutions that will not shatter or homogenize existing ‘natural’ dynamics; instead, they should promote them, based on available endogenous (and exogenous) resources to shake this space. Accordingly, it will be important – but not sufficient – to organize events and to build facilities or infra-structures, as public action has typically done to ‘build’ creative cities; more importantly, in order to generate sustainability, they will have to bet on a more intangible action, adapted to each particular case, an action that will benefit from the advantages of the milieus that were created, the creative environment, the networks, the institutions, the experienced regulation approaches; an action that will promote skills, knowledge and innovation accumulation; that will contribute to create new audiences and cultural routines, to influence and put up new mentalities and cultures, to promote tolerance; an action that will be based on the structuring of (an) image(s) and of consistent identity(ies).

The main challenge is thus the ability to cluster – more than just attract – these truly creative activities, classes and institutions, and to bet on the development of specific institutional models and governance solutions (as we are dealing with a non-miracle-transferable-solutions context, even in spaces with similar traits) that will enable an adequate answer for the creation of sustainable creative dynamics based on the endogenous and exogenous resources possible in that specific urban milieu.

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