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Remarks from a postcolonial perspective

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Abstract

It is commonly asserted that the global creative economy has a great potential to foster economic, social and cultural development in developed and developing countries. This article is largely sympathetic to the notion of a fruitful link between social and economic advancement on the one hand, and cultural and creative practices on the other hand. There does however remain a crucial paradox in the claims that are made pertaining to developing countries.

Following the increased attention for culture in development thinking it is argued that the cultural and creative economies (CCIs) foster economic and social development. However, there is a simultaneous call for a greater rationalization of the entrepreneurial aspects of this creative economy, which echoes thinking much in line with Western modernization theory. As such, the cultural complexity of societies and communities is by and large neglected when commoditizing culture and creativity through the CCIs. The way in which the international reports on CCIs largely call for rationalization and further economization of the sector worldwide is challenged. Accordingly, an attempt is made to provide an initial theoretical framework, influenced by postcolonial studies, through which greater understanding of the complexity of 'culture' in both cultural and creative industries might be achieved.

Introduction

It is commonly asserted that the global cultural and creative industries (CCIs) have a great potential to foster economic, social and cultural development in developed and developing countries (e.g. UNCTAD 2008; 2010). While I am largely sympathetic to the notion of a fruitful link between social and economic advancement on the one hand and cultural and creative practices on the other hand, the complex interplay of culture and economy in the relationships between CCIs and development is insufficiently explored in the context of the Global South.

It would seem that the global CCIs entrepreneur should be a homo economicus, acting in a uniform, rational way, while working with culturally rich 'products' in a cosmopolitan sector. This outlook largely echoes an academically obsolete, yet practically longstanding, take on development. In early 1950s development thinking and practice, hegemonic 'economism' (Escobar, 2005: 140) provided a rigorous categorization of culture. Mass consumption was argued to be the epitome of societal order, and accordingly ranked as the highest of the five stages of development (Rostow, 1959). In this modernization theory, other forms of social and cultural organization were argued to be intrinsically backward, yet at some early stage of progress towards the model of Western civilization: modernity. At a later stage in development thinking—from the late 1980s onwards—culture has actively permeated the ways development was perceived and approached. This so-called cultural turn in development called for a thorough consideration of culture as starting point for development initiatives (Nederveen Pieterse, 2010: 72-3; UNESCO, 1982). It was not only argued that 'rational' economics—i.e. modernization thinking—is in itself culturally informed, but also that locally rooted outlooks on life can yield great benefits to the way development is conceptualized and enacted. In short, modernization and westernization were questioned.

As such, the concept of culture, initially alien to mainstream development discourse, slowly made its way into development thinking. In this context, culture signified a way-of-life. Parallel to the shift from the 'culture industry' (critique on mass media and popular culture) to the 'cultural industries' (in the plural, as a more nuanced understanding of CCIs as symbolic texts) in the 1980s (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 16), the concept of culture shifted from a very broad definition towards a narrower one.

It should be noted that intentions, uses and outcomes of the insertion of CCI logic in (development) policy discourse are most diverse (Garnham, 2005; Cunningham, 2009; Poettschacher, 2010) and their logic is, albeit positively put forward by many (e.g. Florida, 2003; Howkins, 2002; Singh, 2007; Barrowclough, and Kozul-Wright, 2008) not uncontested (e.g. Tremblay, 2011; McGuigan, 2009; Oakley, 2006), and neither can it be easily transferred between countries (Pratt, 2009). Yet, the idea that culture can be a whole 'way of life', but also a collection of artistic and symbolic practices which can be traded as commodities, creates an ontological divide between different conceptualizations of culture that are not mutually interchangeable. I will accordingly argue that the cultural complexity of societies and communities is by and large neglected when commoditizing culture through the CCIs.

Cultural & Creative Industries as vector of development

Through the CCIs, culture is—strongly, but not exclusively—seen as a locus of human development. This assertion is substantiated primarily through several reports, initiatives and meetings that established and upheld the central position of culture-as-product in development discourse. The most explicit, recent examples of this insertion of CCI discourse in development thinking are arguably the creative economy reports (CERs), published by UNCTAD in 2008 and 2010. The first report specifically focuses on *The challenge of assessing the creative economy* towards informed policy-making, whereas the second one bears the subtitle *Creative Economy: A Feasible Development Option*. In short, the message these reports convey can be argued to be the following:

Creative products and cultural activities have real potential to generate economic and social gains. The production and distribution of creative products can yield income, employment and trade opportunities, while fostering social cohesion and community interaction. (UNCTAD, 2010, p. 253).

Culture is no longer an obstacle to, but a rather driver of, development. Similarly, Barrowclough and Kozul-Wright (2008) provide an account of how the CCIs are firmly inserted in thinking on development. They argue that the CCIs 'are beginning to be seen as a way of regenerating local communities and catalyzing entire cities; of diversifying and re-positioning traditional or regressing economies; of boosting human capital, skills levels and innovation; and of opening a door to global knowledge economy' (UNCTAD, 2008, 4).

Hence, culture is seen as means to an end: through the cultural and creative industries, the symbolic expressions are argued to contribute to development. Yet, the CERs point at crucial 'obstacles to the expansion of the creative economy: lack of capital, [...] lack of entrepreneurial skills, [and] lack of infrastructure and institutions.' (UNCTAD, 2008, 40). These remarks do, however, echo an outdated view on development:

[So-called] traditional societies... are underdeveloped because of a lack of important propellants of development, including a work ethic, morals, innovative and entrepreneurial capacity, free market mechanisms, a propensity for taking risks and organizational acumen. The absence of these factors, according to the theory, is itself a function of flaws in the culture, customs and social mores of traditional societies (Sorenson, 2003, p. 79 in Njoh, 2006, p. 16).

It could reluctantly be concluded that 'making of the third world' (Escobar, 1995) is as such repeated in UNCTAD's call for the transformation of the existing cultural sector into an exogenous model of cultural and economic conduct. The second CER, however, proclaims the need for this transformation more elusively: 'a salient feature of the common to most developing countries is the need to establish or reinforce institutions, as well as a regulatory framework and a financing mechanism' (UNCTAD, 2010, 257).

The questions that arise in this regard are how the CCIs relate to the cultural turn in thinking on development, and how we can understand the influence this exerts on the complex position of culture in this field.

Cultural turn and the expediency of culture

It is essential to further investigate the complex relation of different conceptualizations of culture to the thinking and practice of development. Thereby, two different notions of culture are employed:

- On the one hand, culture 'indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group or humanity in general' (Williams, 1976, p. 90). This 'anthropological' perspective on the subject may however be interpreted rather easily as unchangeable and steady. In response, 'analysts have begun to combine more open definitions of culture with an understanding of racial formations, political economies and history' (Radcliffe, 2006c, p. 232). Culture does however remain a 'way of life', or as Apthorpe (2005, p. 137) argues: 'a pattern of living.'
- On the other hand, culture is an 'independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity' (Williams 1976, p. 90). In other words, 'culture as product treats culture as a set of material objects [cultural goods] and distinctive behaviors [cultural services]. When this interpretation of culture is inserted into development thinking, it promotes the orientation of culturally distinctive products and services onto the market' (Radcliffe 2006c, p. 242).

This temporary demarcation of culture into two (admittedly tentative) notions facilitates our further elaboration on the subject. This is most apparent when looking at the ways the CCIs are included in policy discourse relevant to development:

Perhaps the greatest impact of the [CCIs] is not only within the traditional [CCIs] but in the way their skills and business models are being used to create value in other areas of life (Howkins, 2007, xvi).

This idea would support our thesis that the commoditization of culture is not a mere neutral application of an economic logic to cultural production. On the contrary; rather than merely increasing the economic viability and socio-cultural significance of the CCIs, they similarly influence the wider realm of social and economic life.

Postcolonial framing of culture and economy

In order not to render the practice of the 'other' merely exotic, it is helpful to turn to a postcolonial framing of the economic realm. As such, the cultural economy could be seen as a diverse and locally defined construct, where the cosmopolitan cultural entrepreneur acts as a hybrid agent, negotiating terms of modernity; both spatially and temporally. Looking at economic conduct, Zaoual argues that the lively, entrepreneurial praxis of the Soussis in Morocco, through their 'neo-tribal enterprise culture,' defies the doxa of 'development packages' (1999, p. 476). Moreover, Escobar argues that:

Capitalism, industrial civilization and the market economy— as well as the whole realm of cultural practices associated with them—are not immanent qualities of all societies, but rather historically contingent productions. Moreover, there has been in the Third World (and there are still today) important forms of resistance to the extension of the practices associated with the dominant Western economic rationality (2005, p. 164).

Challenging modernization thinking and orthodox economics, we have to make a case for cultural economics influenced by postcolonial thinking. Following Zaoula's reading of the prevailing heterodox economic practices, one could say that no matter how similar cultural industries may seem in different places, they are more likely to be the timely result of ongoing dialectics between the economic and the cultural, thereby negotiating internal and external changes, based on the same influences and bases. This thought can be linked to Development as Freedom, the seminal work of Amartya Sen (1999), in which he argues for development interventions and evaluations to widen focus beyond mere income (deprivation) and to include both the intrinsic and instrumental value of 'political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security' (1999, p. 38). Alongside the (economic) outcome, the process and the social and cultural development are also of importance.

As such, it may be observed that the discursive promotion of the CCI's may neglect the subtleties that may prevail in postcolonial economic conduct, as the explicit call for a greater rationalization of the sector does little justice to these very idiosyncrasies. It can be argued that globalizing CCI's discourse builds on a somewhat old-fashioned notion of development, that silently ignores endogenous cultural traits, through its focus on development as a largely economic process. The argument is not that cultural production is located either in the community or in the market; but that it resides in both. Hence it is my contention that the emergent notion of postcolonial economies (Pollard, McEwan and Hughes, 2011; Charusheela and Zein-Elabdin, 2004) may provide theoretical frameworks to rethink the complex interplay of CCI's and development. While practices are often ostensibly similar, they can be thought to be divergent beneath this superficial similarity. As such, CCI's are functional to the extent that cultural goods and services are traded in some way or another. It is precisely at this stage that a heterodox—i.e. postcolonial—reading of economics is of great significance:

Postcolonial readings of the economy emerged first in practice rather than in theory, as economic, juridical and legal structures in various places have struggled to reconcile diverse understandings of land, kinship and use (Larner, 2011, p. 91).

In this way, it is crucial to draw on the existing praxis in globalized CCI's, to understand the ways in which they can develop further.

We could thus reluctantly conclude that the call for a greater professionalization of the CCI's worldwide may hold water to some extent, but mostly neglects the lack of rational management in the sector as a whole, and greatly underestimates the existing functioning of the sector in the 'South'. Yet the intrinsically cultural traits of production, trading and consumption are often equally underestimated. Economics as a whole, and CCI's in particular should thus be encouraged to develop in their own right, for the dialectics of economic praxis cannot be forcefully modernized.

Conclusions

This chapter attempts to provide an initial theoretical framework, influenced by postcolonial studies, through which greater understanding of the complexity of 'culture' in the CCI's might be achieved. It questioned the extent to which CCI's discourse may be too focused on development in a traditional—i.e. ideologically obsolete—sense. Culture is used in a rather narrow sense (CCI's), while claims are made that largely build on a broader, more encompassing notion of culture (as a way-of-life, cfr. the cultural turn).

Challenging modernization thinking and orthodox economics, this chapter attempts to make a case for cultural economics influenced by postcolonial thinking. As such, parallel to the development of idiosyncratic art-forms, endogenous accounts of economics have emerged over time. As such, even though the cosmopolitan homo economicus may seem universal, I would argue that there is a greater need to actively acknowledge cultural difference—bearing in mind both notions of culture provided here—and see this as central to the discourse of the globalizing cultural industries.

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There is no reason to think that cultural and creative firms have no relationship with this phenomena. Research on the Life Cycle Approaches can be motivated from their suggested function to understand more on the development of sustainable organizations in the context of their growth. When the cultural and creative organizations will contribute to a more sustainable world, it is necessary that creative people themselves show how their organization can grow and develop in these new contexts.

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Be Creative Under-Class!

Myths, Paradoxes and Strategies in the Talent Economy

Maria Ptqk

Abstract

During the last few years, the apparently paradoxical expression ‘*creative economy*’ has emerged with astonishing success. Creative work has achieved recognition in the new labor theory. Artists are identified as individuals or small groups, specialized in intense immaterial production, whose professional practice is associated with high degrees of subjectivity, informality and autonomy. The promotion of creativity is usually identified with personal fulfillment, freedom and empowerment, and thus perceived as an improvement in the working conditions. In reality Creative Workers operate in niche economies, with high levels of precariousness and self-management, self-regulated or non-regulated labor conditions, no precise professional categories, and many concessions to the invisible economy. They combine occasional contracts with periods of inactivity and experiences of self-employment. Their actual survival depends to a large extent on informal collaboration networks - both personal and professional. Often facilitated by family-based support - and on the many ramifications of the Welfare State, such as grants, public funding or social benefits. Overall, their situation is hardly sustainable in the long term.

Introduction

During the last few years, the apparently paradoxical expression ‘*creative economy*’ has emerged with astonishing success. It has burst into public policies, corporate agendas, higher education curricula, economic magazines and cultural events that unanimously celebrate it as the winning paradigm that will lead us out of the current crisis and into a new era of economical and social progress.

These transformations are real and profound. Yet, along with them, a parallel process has taken place, one of a narrative nature, aimed at identifying and explaining such changes in a clear and seductive manner. In order to be effective, the creative economy had to find a name - and is still at it: *talent economy*, *knowledge economy*, *cultural*, *semiotic* or *informational capitalism*, the terminology is wide and inviting - and produces charming and empowering stories itself. Such stories tell us about causes, cycles, opportunities and protagonists, they contribute to a feeling of cohesion around a shared and common project and provide us with a reliable road-map that can help us deal with uncertainty. Creativity and the emerging concept of creative work, in all their multiple variations, are both part of this storytelling.

One pioneer in this process was Tony Blair’s New Labour Government, who coined the term ‘creative industries’ as part of a double maneuver of economizing culture and culturizing economy. The Cool Britannia artifact deployed two co-ordinated actions. On the one hand, it redefined what had hitherto been known as the cultural and service industries: film, TV, radio, publishing, music, art, performing arts, antiques, crafts, computer games, architecture, fashion, software development, IT services and design¹ On the other hand, it implemented ‘a strong public campaign to persuade the world that the country that Napoleon once depicted as a nation of shopkeepers had become a country of artists and designers’ (Ross, 2007).

¹ Sectors included in the list of creative industries in the U.K.: Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Creative Industry Task Force: Mapping Document (London 1998).