



Call for Papers

Controversies around creativity in cities

Workshop

23-24 October 2014, Berlin, WZB

In the past decade, the “Creative City” idea has become the possibly most important urban development strategy. Since then, urban governments have been trying to influence the creative capacities of cities. Yet, little is known about how creativity is locally constructed, framed, interpreted and contested, how creativity policies influence the emergence of newness, and which cultural resources are identified as relevant in particular cities. While there is an abundance of critique of creativity-based urban development, we lack an understanding of how creative city ideas are locally translated, performed and implemented in actual policy-making and contested by different social groups in different institutional contexts. Our workshop intends to address these local contingent interpretations of creativity and contribute to an in-depth understanding of the different notions of culture and creativity that are mobilized in creative cities.

The aim of the workshop is twofold: First, we want to bring together scholars in order to unpack the cultural dimension of creativity. We will use controversies around creativity in cities — in academic debates, in urban policy and among creative practitioners — as an empirical lens to investigate the different, locally contingent interpretative frameworks that help construct shared meanings about creative capacities of certain places, culture’s role in cities, and the valuation of creative results. They point to differences in interpretations, meanings, discourses, and practices. Controversies and disputes offer valuable insights into the working of cultural structures because they provide a context in which various actors or social groups are urged to expose their hidden interpretive frameworks. Moreover, there are competing interests between stakeholder groups that inevitably lead to conflicts.

Second, we want to investigate cultural sources of urban change, encompassing practices, meanings, and narratives. While economic and political factors are considered to be the main forces shaping urban development, the cultural dimension has gotten little attention even though the debate on creative cities emphasizes cultural complexities as a driver of urban change. How does culture, in its plural manifestations such as the arts, heritage, identity, cultural and creative industries, ways of life or knowledge and technologies, effect or stimulate the emergence of newness in cities? How creativity and innovation emerges in cities, and culture’s possible role in it, is a crucial question for the academic debate on creative cities. In applying a cultural sociological perspective, we contribute to a more nuanced understanding of creativity and culture in

academic debates on creative cities and expect to advance existing theories concerning their role in urban development.

For our workshop, we welcome empirical, theoretical and/or methodological contributions from a variety of geographical contexts that explore (but are not limited to) one or more of the following topics:

1 Challenging predominant notions of creativity in cities

Richard Florida's "Creative Class" and Charles Landry's "Creative City" have become the predominant interpretations of creativity in cities by urban policymakers. What controversies around these predominant notions of creativity in cities can be identified inside and outside academia?

2 Constructing counter-narratives: Non-economic, alternative or mundane interpretations of creativity

Besides the dominant economic notion of productive creativity in city policies, a growing research literature examines alternative interpretations of creativity and highlights, often intangible, social and cultural impacts of creative labour and cultural expressions in cities. What counter-narratives of creativity can we identify?

3 Spatially constructed interpretations of creativity

Creative practitioners tend to highly concentrate and co-locate in particular areas of cities. What narratives of creativity emerge from the co-location of creative practitioners? How have some places become attached to symbolic values as "creative places", while others are seen as "non-creative"? How do creative practitioners turn specific areas into sites of possibilities and see cities as resources for their work and lifestyle by constructing shared meanings around the specific place and which, in turn, become relevant for their actions? Furthermore, we want to address the strong inner city bias in academic research. A growing body of literature emphasizes "margins", "voids", and "interstitials" for creative practice and is concerned with openness and adaptability in peripheries rather than with the density and diversity of inner city areas.

4 Different perspectives on the city as a cultural configuration

Even though, there is a "cultural turn" in several academic disciplines, cultural perspectives on urban development are rare or suffer from scant attention. For example, in German scholarly debates, a new cultural theory on urbanism has recently emerged. The *Eigenlogikperspektive* (intrinsic logic of cities) regards cities as a genuinely distinct form of sociation and analyses them as locally specific symbolic sub-worlds that influence common forms of practice.

Urban Anthropology and Michael Borer's *urban culturalist perspective* have also provided a rich body of work on urban culture(s) and urban social systems that may foster new ideas, knowledge, and practices. What can these perspectives add to our understanding of the city's cultural complexities and creative capacities in the emergence of newness? What other cultural approaches can we identify to conceptualize cities as cultural sources of newness?

The workshop is limited to 30 scholars, with no more than 20 presentations. Please send your abstracts (up to 250 words), or your intention to participate, and contact details to Chris Reinelt: chris@wzb.eu no later than Friday 28 March 2014.

Conference Organizers:

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