

Call for Papers: Association of American Geographers (AAG), Chicago, April 21-25, 2015

From Kreuzberg to Williamsburg: Exploring the trans-local nature of cultural scenes and the creation and diffusion of knowledge, practices and value(s) across space, scale and industry

Organizers:

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A central focus in economic geography concerns the ways in which specific spatial dynamics, such as face-to-face interaction or clusters, facilitate and shape the creation of knowledge, practices and value(s). By extension, geographers are interested in the mechanisms, including local buzz and global pipelines, through which ideas and activities diffuse across space, scale and industry (Bathelt et al. 2004; Hracz et al. 2013). Although the existing body of literature on these themes is well-developed, few studies have analyzed the effect of 'global buzz' on local cultural scenes and neighborhoods. Moreover, there is a need to build on Bathelt and Henn's (2014) useful exploration of knowledge transfers over distance and trans-local networks by considering the role of individuals, including entrepreneurs, consumers and curators, who operate 'beyond the firm.' More broadly, the restless dynamism of the contemporary global economy and continuous introduction of new technologies provide opportunities to test, challenge and nuance theory.

One way to address these questions is to consider the ways in which individuals, practices and scenes intersect, influence each other and evolve over time. For example, despite their purported uniqueness and 'authenticity,' cultural scenes in cities such as Berlin, New York, Madrid, Los Angeles, Stockholm and Toronto appear to feature rather homogenous aesthetics. Indeed, the neighborhoods where these scenes coalesce contain a remarkably similar mix of shops (art galleries, record stores, vintage fashion boutiques), spaces (graffiti alleys, co-work offices), styles (Swedish jeans, indie rock), activities (cooking schools, craft collectives) and actors (artists, designers, baristas, bloggers, sophisticated consumers). As vital sites for the production, curation and consumption of cultural goods, services and experiences these scenes and neighborhoods are empirically interesting on many levels. Yet, as key drivers and indicators of trends they are particularly ideal places to study the creation and diffusion of knowledge, practices and value(s) across space, scale and industry as well as the tensions between local authenticity and global uniformity.

To explore these themes in greater detail, this session welcomes papers from diverse conceptual, empirical and geographical perspectives. In particular, it aims to address four broad questions:

1) To what extent are these scenes and neighborhoods actually homogenous?

- 2) What are the mechanisms, such as temporary clusters, new social media, low-cost travel and increased mobility that enable or encourage trans-local uniformity?
- 3) What are the implications of homogeneity and these mechanisms for actors, products, scenes, neighborhoods, the cities they are located within, policy agendas and broader social/political movements?
- 4) How can academic research on these phenomena inform, test, challenge and nuance geographical knowledge and theory?

Additional topics may include:

- What is the life cycle of these scenes and do they have an expiration date? In what ways must a scene remain secretive - and thus exclusive - in order to retain its cultural capital (Blum 2003)? Similarly, are some niche businesses, such as vinyl record shops or vintage clothing stores, only viable in certain cultural scenes and neighborhoods? What are the motivations, objectives and decision-making processes of the different actors (indie producers, global firms, city planners, citizens, property developers, artists, curators, consumers, etc.) who participate in and develop these cultural scenes?
- Building on Hodkinson's (2004) study of trans-local Goth scenes in the UK, what is the role of physical, temporary and virtual trans-local networks and communities in spreading identities, rituals, products, practices and value(s)?
- How do new cultural intermediaries or curators disseminate information about products, places and trendsetters through physical and virtual channels including retail shops, blogs, social media and other online communities?
- What is the role of the government as an agent of homogenization? As cities continue to adopt similar creative city-based development agendas how do urban planning policies and planners contribute to the sameness of cities? How does this impact the global competitiveness of these cities and creative industry clusters?
- Given that cultural scenes are often co-opted into dynamics of gentrification and original scene members are often forced to leave, what kinds of resistance, if any, are put into action in response to the social and economic changes occurring in cultural scenes? What tactics and strategies of resistance are developed and practiced by cultural producers? What is their relationship with social mobilizations enacted by other social groups?

Please email abstracts of no more than 250 words (see AAG guidelines: http://www.aag.org/cs/annualmeeting/call_for_papers), or expressions of interest to be on a panel, by Friday October 17th, 2014 to:

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