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A Palaver on Scaling Creative Enterprises

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Conceptual Perspective: “Controversial Issues” (Proposal)

(1) Discursive Context

In current debates on the future of the creative economies, we can observe the recurrent claim that the successful transformation of precarious activities, individual-centred businesses and local scenes into cultural, economic, political or societal value creation requires more detailed reflection, exploration and elaboration (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus 2001; Düllo and Liebl 2005; Martel 2010). In parallel, management approaches addressing this issue are often seen as problematic, given the processual, idiosyncratic, context-specific and often non- or anti-economic qualities of many enterprises and initiatives in the creative economies (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999; Reckwitz 2012). As a consequence, research, practice and policy must learn to better understand organizational processes and practices in artistic value creation, which are often characterized by experimentation with alternative economies and related strategies (Toma and Barrientos 2008).

Research that advances our understanding of such economies develops in different directions: (1) it explores the relationship between informal and formal modes of organizing; (2) it discusses the interplay and contradiction between singularity (Karpik 2010) and mainstream (Martel 2010); (3) it studies the formation of distributed communities and collective movements (Hess and Ostrom 2007); (4) it analyses creative organizing and alternative

institutionalizations (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus 2001); (5) it studies critical companies as a way of reconsidering the concept of enterprise for art and culture (Toma and Barrientos 2008). These approaches have in common an interest in developing alternative modes of organizing and strategizing, which we develop further in our performative exploration by critically revisiting and reframing current, predominant views, as well as speculating about novel perspectives and practices.

(2) Research Focus

We discuss these processes through the perspective of *scaling*. Analogies typical for discussions on scaling in management with reference to physical artefacts and hardware more generally are of limited relevance here (Sutton and Rao 2014). Instead, we discuss scaling from the perspective of analogies from the digital realm, characterized by scaling strategies including reuse (Shifman 2014), copying (von Gehlen 2011), hacking (Düllo and Liebl 2005), open source (Lessing 1999), and automation (Maeda 2004). It is evident that these perspectives on scaling share an interest in the processuality of scaling as it unfolds over time (Langley 1999). In our performative exploration, we speculate how such patterns could be translated into a description or reframing of entrepreneurial organizational processes in the creative economies (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus 2001).

This has implications for research, as we have learnt from various contributions to the symposium. Scaling processes often cannot be approached as well-defined, generalizable sequences of actions, steps or phases in a linearized causal contingency model, but must be understood as a dynamic mapping of highly situated and context-specific, idiosyncratic potentialities (Langley 1999), which might emerge into and shape larger-scale outcomes in terms of spatial, temporal or societal impact (see also the other contributions and concluding discussions to the symposium). By identifying, discussing and mapping potentially relevant patterns, our contribution explores the possibilities for developing alternative research approaches to scaling (Grand and Jonas 2012). In doing so, we

suggest complementing the careful description of scaling processes as they are by experimenting with alternative scaling possibilities as they could be.

This is also what we explore in our research collaboration with heterogeneous groups of actors in the creative economies, including researchers, policy makers, executives, and entrepreneurs (for further information, see www.creativeeconomies.com). In our performative exploration, we retell some stories of this collaboration, in particular about working with different moments of zooming in and zooming out that have allowed us to reframe current perspectives on the creative economies and enterprises as well as experiment with our own views.

Performative Exploration:
“From the Other Side of the Wall” (Presentation)

(0) Setting for the presentation

We present our performative exploration in the exhibition zone of the two separated spaces of the ‘palaver’ constellation developed by the symposium organizers. In this presentational format, the audience follows the presentation while sitting in the discussion zone, which is separated from the exhibition zone by a wall, or paravent. What the audience sees is a series of graphics on a TV screen; what they hear are our voices.

(1) Opening



Video still 1 (the former EU Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou in a video promoting the Creative Europe Programme 2014–2020: © European Commission)

(2) First Part: Macro Perspectives on the Creative Industries
“This is how the European Commission describes the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI): as an ordinary industrial sector with first and foremost a huge potential for growth and scaling. The standard vocabulary of economic development agencies is used. The discussion is about an increasing number of jobs, about turnover getting more and more important; it is a discussion about how a small company can become a big company.

The time that the European Commission launched this video in 2011 was also the moment when Simon and I decided to join forces and start a research initiative on the CCI, because the reality of the students from the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), their work and thought processes and practices, and their visions all had very little to do with the content of this video. Our research links micro and macro perspectives. We observe countries and institutions on the one hand and creative actors and their practices and processes on the other.

In a way, we are constantly scaling up and down. Referring to the introduction given by Florian [Dombois] yesterday, the models you will see subsequently were models *on* the CCI in the beginning and then became models *for* the CCI, since we have been testing them not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world, mainly in Hong Kong – a global city where we could expose our ideas to a completely different context, which forced us to reframe many of our ideas. Thus our understanding regarding value creation, for example, has undergone serious modifications and the boundaries between well-established areas in the cultural sector, such as public or private, have been blurred through many interviews we conducted.

What are the impacts of the European Commission's arguments? On the one hand, the scaling option makes the CCI very attractive to politicians and decision makers and their agenda; on the other hand, many artists and designers don't

see themselves as part of the CCI because they have a different understanding of scaling that does not fit in with large parts of the economy. This is true, for example, for the size of an enterprise in the CCI, where growth is not always a desirable aim, or for working modes, which very often involve temporary constellations rather than stable structures suitable for long-term development.

Let us take a closer look: the concept of the CCI is modelled and visualized differently for different regions of the world: many circles for federalist countries, one circle with a clear midpoint for centralistic countries, triangles with the CCI at the top for regions where heavy industries are still the foundation of welfare, arrows for regions where CCI are understood as a powerful value chain, overlapping circles for the position between the corporate sector and the cultural sector (see fig. 1).

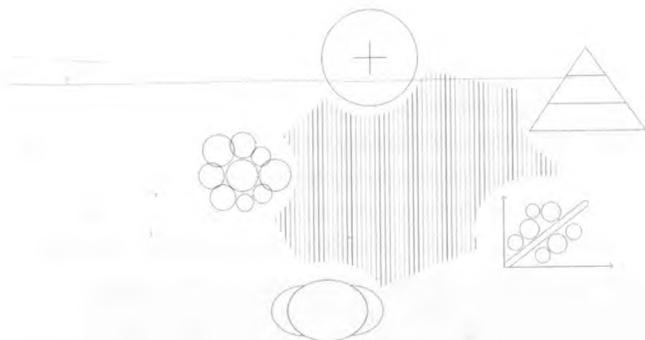


Fig. 1

The main purpose of these models is to reduce complexity. Zooming out means zooming away from the reality of the CCI. The result is a gap between the processes and practices of creative actors and the understanding of politicians. The CCI are far from being a constellation with well-defined sequences of actions in a linear model, since they are

defined by a set of submarkets that sometimes have very little in common. This constitutes a dramatic challenge for traditional (mechanical) politics, governance and management. The CCI are more like a complex landscape that requires accurate mapping.

This means tolerating complexity and zooming in. What we observe through zooming in are force fields. One of the main drivers of CCI is the force field “singularity vs. mainstream”. Every artist, every designer wants to be unique and distinctive; they want to do something no one else has done before. On the other hand, they want to have access to the market and this is where the mainstream element comes in. The audience has to get information about the singularity, wants to buy more than one of a kind, wants to compare it to other products or pieces of art, wants to know how much it costs, and so on.

Other characteristic force fields are: formal – informal, public – private, for profit – not for profit, tradition – innovation. What these force fields have in common is that they don’t follow an either/or logic but more of a both/and logic. It’s not singularity or mainstream. It’s always both. Taking the notion of these force fields seriously means not only expanding – as the European Commission does – but also focusing. For us this means not only zooming out, but also zooming in. This entails a shift away from the questions “What belongs to the CCI? How to measure the impact of the CCI?” towards “Who are the CCI? What are creative actors doing and why?”

And this is the perfect moment to switch voices and give the floor to Simon, who has been doing research by zooming in on selected creative enterprises by using micro approaches.

(3) Second Part: Micro Insights into Artistic Processes and Practices

Thank you, Christoph. First of all, it is important to note that while politicians and statisticians are discussing the CCI as

an important phenomenon, the creative, entrepreneurial actors in the field itself do not see themselves as actors belonging to the CCI: they run design agencies, realize films, engage in artistic performances, develop computer games, and so on. Hence zooming in implies that the broad political, economical and cultural debates about the CCI move into the background, and what we see instead is the multitude and heterogeneity of highly idiosyncratic and specific practices, initiatives and related modes of organizing and managing artistic processes and their outcomes.

We observe a recurrent insistence on the singularity of these practices, initiatives and approaches, which on the one hand requires a detailed, in-depth research approach in order to cover the specificities and context-dependent features of such practices. On the other hand, it is nevertheless interesting, albeit provocative, to generalize and argue that although the approaches observed are very heterogeneous, some patterns can still be discerned.

Specifically, we can identify the following practices and strategies, which seem to characterize many artistic processes and organizations (see fig. 2):

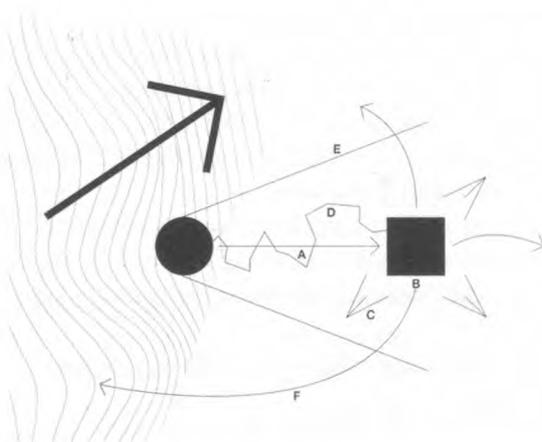


Fig. 2

A: They are about *pro-jecting*, meaning that they do not focus primarily on the world as it is, but rather on the world as it could be: alternative futures, alternative possibilities, alternative modes of organizing, and alternative institutions. At the same time, focusing on alternatives intrinsically implies criticizing, questioning and challenging the world as it is: this explains the inherently critical, subversive and speculative qualities of artistic processes.

B: Since such pro-jections are often fragile and can be very controversial, it is important to materialize them in the form of sketches, models, images, prototypes, and so on, in order to render them tangible, imaginable and thus accessible to further exploration and experimentation. This explains why the material, bodily, media-related aspect is so central to artistic processes: it is through, in and by actually *performing* alternative futures that they are explored and made accessible for negotiation.

C: Thus every artistic pro-jection is contingent: it could be otherwise, and it has to claim and confirm its ambition and quality as an artistic contribution. As a consequence, judgement processes are essential, mobilizing different *valuation devices*, including personal opinions, formal rankings, price mechanisms, curatorial interpretations and many more. The contingency of artistic projections explains the central role and the controversial nature of any such valuation device.

D: In order to advance and further develop artistic projections, multiple ways and *modes of experimentation*, bricolage, improvisation, and so on can be observed, which contribute to testing and advancing initial propositions and ideas. While materializations are understood as hypotheses or propositions, experiments and improvisations more or less systematically explore the potential relevance of these propositions and ideas, at the same time withdrawing, replacing or further sharpening them. In doing so, artistic actors and collectives develop their own and specific repertoire of experimentation arrangements.

E: Over time, such experimentation repertoires and related repertoires of creative practices, artistic tools and speculative strategies emerge into specific *organizational arrangements*, taking the form of artistic collectives, design agencies, creative networks, and subversive movements. In all these different cases, the common pattern is the transition from individual projects to a series of projections, initiatives and outcomes, a series which becomes an artistic position.

F: Accordingly, such an organizational arrangement, as well as the related positioning, has to be seen in a *multitude of economic, cultural and societal contexts*, which are explicitly or implicitly referred to in artistic practice. From the multitude of interactions, connections, translations and references emerging over time, an artistic position, its organizational institutionalization, its valuation and impact evolve. The above implies that artistic practices do not primarily confirm and stabilize the creative field described and identified as CCI from a macro perspective, but rather alter, challenge, change and reinvent this creative field with every new project, initiative and shift. It is thus interesting to explore whether and how this dynamic can become relevant for the further exploration of the CCI from a macro perspective as well.

And this is the perfect moment to switch speakers and hand the microphone over to Christoph, who has been debating these implications with many different institutions, as well as the question of whether and how these insights can become relevant outside the CCI in a narrow sense.

(4) Third Part: From CCI to the Creative Economies and their Spheres

Thank you, Simon. Since we have gone into some detail, let's now zoom out again and ask ourselves whether and how all this relates to other areas of knowledge and production. Are there creative enterprises outside the CCI in the strict sense defined by the British Department for Culture, Media

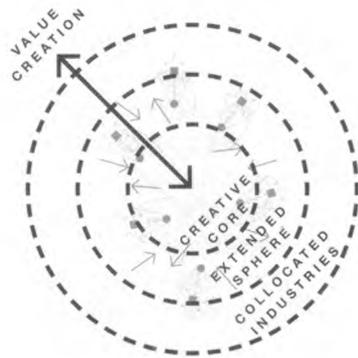


Fig. 3

and Sports (DCMS) with its 11 submarkets? How should we deal with research labs or think tanks, which are not part of this definition? Would it be appropriate to use a broader term that includes them, such as *creative economies*? Let us investigate whether zooming out could mean something apart from zooming away or reducing complexity. Let us see if we can zoom out and increase complexity at the same time.

We might think of a designer working on a gamification strategy for a bank's new customer generation. He works closely with a software developer and the client is the Swiss Banking Association. Or we might think of a pharmaceutical lab doing research on portable x-ray equipment. The lab collaborates intensively with entrepreneurship specialists who are developing an accurate business model for the client, which is a UN agency.

Creative Economies are situated in fields of action involving a *creative core* of original creation, an *extended sphere* of creative and innovative actors, and a multitude of *collocated organizations and industries* (see fig. 3). This creative core only exists if there is an extended sphere and collocated areas – and vice versa. Scaling up and scaling down are interdependent or even simultaneous (as we have seen, there

is no zooming out without zooming in). It is therefore not surprising that the value creation of the creative economies stretches across all three spheres.

Value creation is characterized by process constellations that constantly interlink creation, development, realization, production, dissemination, staging, knowledge development, communication, and archiving in new ways. This is already common knowledge. Due to important influences of digitization or due to the influences of shifts from producer to consumer, there are fewer and fewer linear mechanisms. Moreover, by zooming in further we realize an interesting phenomenon. Important zones of value creation seem to be the areas of transition between creative core, the extended sphere and the collocated industries.

Again, we need a closer look at these areas. On this note, this is the right moment to listen to Simon's voice again.

(5) Fourth Part: From Culture Management to Curatorial Entrepreneurship

Thank you, Christoph. In order to be operative within and across the different spheres of the creative economies, as well as to deal with the inherent uncertainties implied in creative alternatives to the world we know, traditional approaches to management do not really work. As a consequence, we have to explore which organizing practices and processes enable and foster entrepreneurial initiatives in the creative economies. Here we can identify four important patterns (see fig. 4):

A: Organizing and strategizing in the creative economies is about *staging stories*: it is about coordinating, integrating and relating, not through managerial intervention, but through telling and materializing interesting projections through narrating worlds as they could be.

B: The world as it is and as we know it can only be productively challenged and changed if the modes through which we value things can be changed at the same time: we need

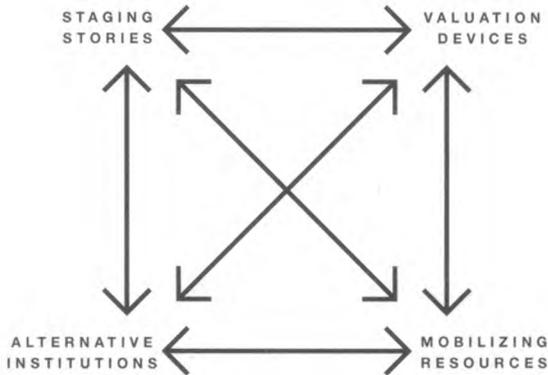


Fig. 4

alternative *valuation devices* that make a difference and render this difference tangible. We are familiar with a series of such devices, including rankings, evaluations, assessments, measurements, exhibitions, and so on: we argue that reinventing them leads to a complete reframing of what is valued, and thus of what is possible.

C: In order to make such reframing happen, *resource mobilization* becomes fundamental to be able to attract, generate and allocate the necessary financial and nonfinancial resources for making things happen and to build and establish alternative judgement devices: what is needed and needs to be mobilized are money and expertise, trust and attention, accomplices and partners, technologies and institutions.

D: In many cases, however, this does not work sustainably within existing institutions (universities, museums, corporations, offices, internet platforms, distribution channels, and so on), but requires the creation of *alternative institutions* that provide the contexts, platforms and formats for exploring such alternatives as well as realizing them in the form of novel formats for exhibitions and performances, unconventional forms of enterprises and experimental projects.

Taken together, these important patterns and practices can be identified as a promising alternative to leadership and management: *curating* – understood in a very specific sense, far removed from the everyday use we observe, for example, in marketing contexts. It is the curatorial approach – working with the dynamics of zooming in and zooming out, of protecting or exposing, of projecting and narrating – that enables scaling in new ways, beyond established institutions and settings.

How far this can go becomes visible (and remains to a large extent invisible) in a very important recent movement, whose long-term impact and relevance we cannot yet understand: the umbrella movement in Hong Kong. This is the end of our exploration, and maybe the beginning of an alternative future.”

(6) Closing



Video still 2 (*Curating can bring about alternative institutionalizations: The umbrella movement occupying the central area of Hong Kong in fall 2014: © Nero Chan*)
Source: Drone Shows Thousands Filling Hong Kong Streets, online at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPvxv0WQJl4 (accessed 26 September 2016)

(7) Reflection on the Setting: Palaver Revisited

Presenting in a palaver setting implies a disconnection of visual presentation, voices, speakers and audiences. As a consequence, the typical close interactive connection between the speaker(s) and the audience achieved through a traditional format

no longer works. This leads to a much more loosely coupled constellation, modularizing the different elements of an academic talk, but eventually opening up new possibilities and connections. At the same time, the visual aspect of the presentation becomes more relevant. The sketches are an experiment in defining a new visual language that allows us to discuss the complex topic of the creative economies with a wider audience.

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More information: www.creativeeconomies.com