

Understanding Creative Cities in V4 Capitals: Is There a Need for a Common Action?

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Abstract

After the mega success of Florida's "The rise of the creative class" and Charles Landry's "The Creative City", urban leaders of Western-Europe, US and Asia now struggle to change their settlements into creative hubs. The anglo-saxon literature on defining, measuring, rethinking the creative city is constantly growing, and the number of Asian contributors is increasing in a rapid tempo, as well. At the same time, Central-Europe seems to lag behind. Strategies, comprehensive operative programmes or action plans on how to exploit the value of culture in the local development are missing. There is no common understanding, how to define creative cities, also the appropriate index is missing, that could serve as a tool to measure development in this field. In my article, I examine how and if the "creative city" is understood in the V4 capitals, namely Bratislava, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw, by analysing official strategies and urban development programmes. I also present a critical analysis on the existing creative indices, in order to prove, that these cannot be applied in our social-economical-cultural context. Therefore, as a conclusion, I call for a common approach and common action regarding V4 countries considering cultural and creative industries, also related to creative cities. I strongly believe that Central-Europe has great potential and rich cultural heritage, a creative future can be built on, but its cities have to recognize the urgent need for holistic, conscious and calculable strategies, and the great opportunity to collaborate with each other.

Key words: creative city, V4, cultural and creative industries, creative index

JEL Classification: R58 Regional Development Planning and Policy

1 Introduction

When Richard Florida first published his book, "The Rise of the Creative Class" in 2000, he might did not know, what kind of an avalanche he started with creating the 3T-theory and a new, fashionable approach on urban development. The same success followed Charles Landry's book, "The Creative City". Decision makers in the US, Western-Europe and Asian metropolises started to follow Florida's and Landry's instructions, just like the patient follows the doctor's orders. At the same time, the academic sphere reacted with doubt and heavy criticism because of the missing scientific evidences on the advances and social-economic effects of being a creative city. But it was not only the results and impacts that raised questions and debates amongst experts on urban planning and management: even defining the creative city became a trend. It is not a miracle, considering the fact that the above mentioned two authors already set up two different visions on creative places and their nature.

As a result of this academic debate, new and newer approaches, more and more definitions, models, theories and indexes emerged. Therefore, those researchers, who deal with creative industries or creative cities, find abundant literature available in the US, China and Western-Europe. Dealing with creativity, innovation, arts and design became fashionable, not just amongst hipsters, but amongst researchers, as well.

It is not the same situation in the Central-European region. While the EU-15 tries to mainstream culture and creativity, our countries seem to lag behind, when it comes to cultural strategies, promoting creative start-ups or trying to measure the value of culture in our economies.

In my study, I try to examine the level of understanding culture, its definition, the recognition of its effects and social-economic impacts in the V4 countries, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia by analysing existing and available documents on cultural policies, development strategies and best practices. I seek answers for the following questions:

- 1) How is culture, the role of culture and the role of cultural and creative industries (hereinafter CCI's) understood in the V4 countries? What kinds of approaches exist on culture, and are they appropriate to the needs of our society and economy?
- 2) How is culture appreciated at local level? Is there an evidence on mainstreaming culture at the V4 capitals?
- 3) What kind of models or indexes exist in order to support policy-making in connection with creative cities and are they applicable for the V4 capitals?
- 4) In general, what can we conclude about the level of recognition of the role of culture and CCI's in urban development in the V4 capitals?
- 5) And to sum up, what can be the reasons to collaborate with each other and what conclusions can be derived and suggested to the stakeholders for further consideration?

2 Role of Culture and CCI's in V4 Capitals

2.1 Understanding culture

Since V4 countries had nearly the same historical, social and economic background in 1989-1990, when the communist regime collapsed, it is quite obvious, that they had very similar problems to solve and they faced very similar challenges to tackle. It is also clearly understandable, that culture and cultural policy was not in the focus point of the newly elected governments. They had to deal with immense state debts, saving wreck-economies, privatisation, introducing pluralism and creating a multi-level, decentralised administration in their countries that just gained back their freedom or even just conceived, as an independent state. However, these big transformations of the society and economy affected culture, as well. Culture, once state-monopolized, ideologically controlled territory, now became part of the liberal economy, but at the same time it kept on being dependent on state-funding. With the creation of new subnational administrative levels, regional and local administration took over the task and responsibility to maintain some of the institutions, while at the same time, the state (central government) still has dominant rule in shaping cultural policy. With the change of the economic regime, new, market-oriented organisations appeared in the field of culture.

It is not only the administrative level or the circle of actors in the cultural field, which is fragmented, but also the approaches. As the study on the cultural policy of the Slovak Republic (Smatlák, 2007) describes it, the “hybrid model” of cultural policy still exist. I would add: not only in Slovakia, but in all of the V4 countries. It means, that cultural policy combines

- the state administrative approach, i.e. the dominant role of the central government in shaping cultural policy, maintaining institutions and providing grants and financial support for the cultural field;
- the decentralised model, i.e. the co-existing of local actors, local administration;
- and the liberal model, i.e. the market actors and their impact on the whole cultural branch.

This appearance of different actors, levels and approaches did not left the definition of culture intact, however, currently¹ it is only the Czech Republic, that has expressed it in a legal document, namely in the National Cultural Policy of the Czech Republic 2009-2014 (Petrová, 2013). In this, we can read a quite a long list on the different roles of culture, basically mentioning the following functions:

- 1) culture integrates, but also separates, it gives identity;
- 2) culture plays a key role in raising awareness for tolerance, against discrimination, racism, xenophobia;
- 3) culture has a healing, therapeutic role, especially for those with disabilities;
- 4) culture also contributes to social participation, expression of views, democracy and social responsibility;
- 5) culture and cultural heritage plays role in the economy, via cultural tourism and CCI's.

Basically, we are going to find similar (maybe less articulated) definitions in the other countries, other strategies. The most important phenomenon is that the definition of culture enriches over time, first it only had to do with aesthetics, later, the social functions became more expressed and currently, there are more and more references on the economic role of culture.

When analysing the existing available documents on cultural policies of the V4 countries, something is striking: state level cultural policies still seem to follow “traditional” administrative approaches, while struggling to integrate somehow the liberal approach, the market orientation. The subnational, local level's role doesn't seem to be too strong, not even for the capitals. At the same time, every approach is missing a brand new social phenomenon: Culture 3.0, as Professor Pierre Luigi Sacco defines it.

What is Culture 3.0?

According to Prof. Sacco, Culture 1.0 was the concept of patronage. *“In this context, culture is neither a proper economic sector of the economy nor it is accessible to the majority of potential audiences”* (Sacco, 2011). It started in the pre-industrial Europe, but still, the concept of treating culture as public good, and financing it from public resources roots in this approach.

“Culture 2.0 is a new form of the relationship between cultural production and the generation of economic value, that is dominated by the expansion of the cultural and creative industries.” (Sacco, 2011).

¹ As for Slovakia: the study, that I could use for this analysis is from 2007. (Smatlák,2007)

This is the stage, our cultural policies struggle to deal with. We still search for best methods, to integrate market actors, producers, artists, and find proper ways to coordinate actions between national, regional and local level and different ministries, responsible for economy, tourism, regional development, culture and education, while the world has already moved a step forward. We are now in the era of Culture 3.0.

„The hallmark of the Culture 3.0 phase is thus the transformation of audiences (who are still the reference of the ‘classical’ phase of cultural industry) into practitioners (thereby defining a new, fuzzy and increasingly manifold notion of authorship and intellectual property) – accessing cultural experiences increasingly challenges individuals to develop their own capabilities to assimilate and manipulate in personal ways the cultural contents they are being exposed to.” (Sacco, 2011).

Culture 3.0 is strongly connected to the emerging “share economy”, to the digital world and to user-created content. It means, that while national and local decision makers and experts are trying to formulate new cultural policies on how to deal with the economic aspects of culture, their children and grandchildren have already created a new world of culture, by taking their own photos, making their own videos, creating their own music, writing their own stories without taking into consideration any economic aspects and already outdated legal provisions.

At least, this is something Central-European countries don’t have to feel guilty about. It is not only us, who do not really react on the changing world: Western-Europe also seem to treat this tendency with less care, than it deserves.

2.2 Cultural capitals?

The subtitle is maybe a bit confusing. Of course, when talking about V4 capitals as cultural capitals, I do not speak about the EU-programme on Cultural Capital of Europe, aiming to benefit rather smaller towns. However, capitals are not excluded and their intention to become a European cultural capital can lead to positive impacts on cultural urban planning.

First of all, when we are searching for well-articulated culture-led urban development plans, we mainly going to find the tender-documents for the European Cultural Capital competitions. This award, the envisaged development funds devoted to the winner, as well as the expected impacts in the number of tourists and cultural spending are the main reason for a city to put efforts to develop an own cultural strategy. Therefore, local-level cultural strategies are rare in Central-Europe, even if a city creates one for the competition, the aims and prospected developments will be mainly forgotten, if the city doesn’t wins the title.

Secondly, cities are now focusing on establishing complex and comprehensive development strategies in order to be eligible for different EU-grants, basically coming from the ESI funds. For example, between 2007-13 Hungarian towns had to plan integrated urban development plans, where template and structure had been given by the ministry responsible for territorial development. Currently those cities are in busy work creating their (their region’s) RIS3 strategies, again, template and expectations are prescribed.

Thirdly, the new adjective, what kind of a city we should become, is not “creative”. It is: “smart”. Regional innovation strategies, urban development concepts are going to focus on how to become smart and smarter.

So, is the concept of creative city forgotten? Has it been forgotten before even we have started to understand it and formulate our own definition on it?

One has to take into consideration, that smart and creative are not controversial approaches. As I mentioned it in one of my former studies (Szilágyi, 2013), I am convinced that the smart city concept is a local-level expression of the Europe 2020 strategy. Focusing on the same aims (i.e. intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth), the goal of the smart city is to serve as an engine for reaching the Europe 2020 goals. Capitals play a key role in this process. The smart city, with its digital infrastructure, with its well-organised public transportation systems, with its investments on energy-efficiency and waste-management serves as hardware. But the city will still need the software to work properly. And culture is the software.

If we accept this, the concept of the creative city still can become reality. Of course, first we have to find a proper definition on creative city. We can start with the vision of Florida (Florida, 2012), with a place that attracts creative people, or we can use the rather European approach of Landry (Landry, 2008) with a place, that puts culture and arts in the heart of urban development, while dealing with the soft and intangible assets of the city. But if we are going to start this process, it will be inevitable to bump into the problem on delimiting the subject.

It is even a problem, how to define the CCI's. In his study, Bence Ságvári showed the difference between the traditional two definitions of the CCI's. The one that comes from the approach, that culture is an aesthetic phenomenon, and limits the CCI's on branches, dealing with traditional cultural fields, and the other, that comes from the concept, that culture is a social phenomenon, and focuses on novelty and innovation. This later concept includes other branches to the CCI definition, just like R&D and software development. (Ságvári, 2005)

So, how can we evaluate the role of culture on the level of V4 capitals?

There are of course positive steps forward. The Polish capital prepared a “Warsaw until 2020 cultural strategy” (Petrová, 2013). In Prague, creative and cultural industries (especially the film-industry) traditionally play a determinant role. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the CreaClust project provided useful tools and data in measuring the creative potential of the regions (Bednar-Grebenicek, 2012). In Hungary, the state owned agency Design Terminál became an enhanced state organisation for the development of the CCI's, and at the same time, it expanded its activities on different urban development projects, mainly focusing on Budapest.

We must not underestimate the power of civil initiatives in our region. In Budapest, many creative groups² are working on transforming the capital into a liveable, vibrant metropolis, in Slovakia, the portal Culturefighter³ is a good example on how to promote dialog and exchange of ideas between different stakeholders.

² For example the Színes Város (Colorful City) and Neopaint groups are dealing with painting firewalls, Kortárs Építészeti Központ launched a movement of creating community gardens in the city, etc.

³ culturefighter.eu

While it is unquestionable, that V4 capital cities not only play a key role in the cultural life of the whole nation, but also they provide the majority of CCI's economic benefits, it is also obvious, that their ambition to become powerful players amongst Europe's cultural capitals is in its infancy. Lack of clear vision is missing, well-elaborated urban policies on culture are "under construction". Decision makers now start to recognize the potential that lies in the city's tangible and intangible heritage, as well as in its living cultural values. And the academic sphere now has the task to provide well-articulated definitions, comparable data and validated methods in order to use them to create evidence-based cultural policies on urban level. Which will be a very hard task taking into consideration that the already existing methods and indexes are hardly adaptable for V4 countries and cities.

2.3 Measuring the creative city

As mentioned before, the anglo-saxon literature is quite rich in different methods and indexes on how to measure the level of a city's creativity. The Australian Arc Centre collected the existing indexes and came to the conclusion that basically they all are built from the following main components:

1. Culture, Recreation & Tourism
2. Creative Output & Employment
3. Cultural Capital & Participation
4. Venues, Resources & Facilities
5. Liveability & Amenities
6. Transportation & Accessibility
7. Globalisation, Networks & Exchange
8. Openness, Tolerance & Diversity
9. Human Capital, Talent & Education
10. Social Capital, Engagement & Support
11. Government & Regulations
12. Business Activity & Economy
13. Entrepreneurship
14. Innovation & R&D
15. Technology & ICT
16. Environment & Ecology

It also divides the indexes into two groups: stock indexes basically only deal with the role of cultural branches, while flow indexes consider the IT and R&D branches as immanent part of the CCI's. (Hartley&Co., 2012)

The authors presented 22 indexes, amongst them Florida's 3T index, Landry's creative index and the creativity index for the Czech Republic by Jitka Kloudova and Beata Stehlikova (Kloudova-Stehlikova, 2010), which is the only index with Central-European reference.

When trying to apply these above mentioned indexes for the V4 countries/regions/capitals, researchers are going to face the problem that most of the indexes are developed for megacities, like New York or Beijing and simply not fit for smaller towns. Also they sometimes contain elements, which are not relevant for our countries (for example the level of use of an artist platform, that is unknown in Central-Europe), and sometimes their components are very hard to measure in our social environment.

In these cases, researchers tend to

- apply the index with some modification;
- or elaborate a new one.

There are examples for the V4 countries on both solutions. In Hungary, Imola Rittgasszer modified Richard Florida's 3T index in order to measure the creativity on NUTS-4 level (Rittgasszer 2009), while Balázs Lengyel and Bence Ságvári analysed the location of the creative class. But also, the above mentioned Creativity Index for the Czech Republic is also a modified 3T-index (Ságvári-Lengyel, 2008).

In Poland, a study by Ecorys examined the use of structural funds for culture in different regions (Ilczuk-Novak, 2012). In Hungary, Studio Metropolitana prepared an analysis on the situation of the CCI's in Budapest. (Borsi-Viszt, 2010)

The former referred CreaClust interregional project elaborated a common methodology for measuring the creative potential of the Czech and Slovak regions, and some cities. When composing the index, the researcher team also recognized, that „mapping of creative industries faces many difficulties in terms of their definition, methods of collecting information, availability of secondary databases and the way of interpreting the results of the data processing.” (Bednar-Grebenicek, 2012)

To sum up, every V4 country has tried to analyse its own cultural potential on regional/sub-regional level. There were attempts to measure the effects of the creative industries also for the capital cities. But there is not a single accepted method not even within a country. So, it is very hard to compare the performance of this region, to make comparisons between countries and to define the region's position in European or global context.

2.4 Time to collaborate

When trying to identify their position in different global rankings, Central-European countries tend to compare themselves to each other. It is not surprising, since they have similar past, and therefore their chances, possibilities, social and economic environment is similar, too. But we also have to take into consideration, that the competition is not only running between similar countries, what's more, it becomes a global competition, where small and middle-sized countries are invisible, if they stand alone. For a Hollywood film-producer who wants to make his movie here or for a Central-Asian student who wishes to study arts, there is not a big difference between Budapest or Prague. For a tourist, who travels from Japan to Europe, the distance between Bratislava and, for example Krakow is not visible.

Without doubt, Central-Europe is rich in cultural and creative potential. But if we cannot show this whole potential to the rest of the world, it will be fritted away without bringing real added value to any of our countries.

Central-European countries have a lot in common. They have long-time historical roots. As for culture, those countries still know, it is in their recent history, that culture is not only an expression of aesthetic values, but plays a leading role, when it comes to fight against totalitarianism and for democracy. As for cultural diversity: ethnic minorities contribute to the richer and more vibrant cultural life. Since a minority nation in one country can be the majority

nation in other country, it is also easier to keep this diversity alive, when collaborating. We have to understand, that we are richer, because of each other.

As from economic aspects, it is not hard to admit that the potential of the macro-region lags behind Western-Europe. Even it is very fashionable to talk about “smart specialisation”, currently it only prevails on country-level. There might will be a smart specialisation between regions of a given country, but what can we achieve with it, if we don’t have smart specialisation between countries? Between neighbouring regions, belonging to two different states?

We also should rely on economies of scale. Instead of establishing parallel capacities, infrastructures, we should find out, how we can exploit our cultural potential the best. For example, instead of investing immense money on promoting film industry in each country, there might be a place for a common, Central-European or V4 strategy for film industry. Instead of promoting our own cultural heritage in global forums, it might would make sense to elaborate common cultural routes that link our countries and make it worth for tourists, not just visit one single city. Instead of creating more and more courses in higher education, and trying to attract foreign students separately (so some of these courses will not reach the minimum number to start), common international courses, semesters held in different countries could help us using already existing educational capacities better, and at the same time, they would add more value and experience to the students, as well.

In order to plan and realise common strategies on culture, first we have to have comparable, reliable data and common understanding on the subject. Therefore it is utmost important, that we use existing possibilities, like the Danube Strategy, Central-Europe Programme, other interregional, trans-border cooperation programmes in order to gain more and more information on the situation of cultural and creative industries in our region.

It is also important, that we have to share existing documents and data, and – although use of national language is in most cases more than desirable- in this case we have to provide English or German translations for the most important resources in order to make them available for researchers.

Since it quite impossible to elaborate one single definition on culture or CCI’s or “creative city”, just like having only one index that measures creative potential. There can be more, there should be more parallel definitions, parallel indexes. The important thing is not to reduce the numbers to one single method, but to provide comparable and reliable data. There should be more indicators living next to each other, measured in the whole area, for all the regions/cities, with the same method for a given index, in a coherent and consistent way, for a longer period. So we can have more sets of data, showing the values of different indexes, and drawing trends.

Since the notion of CCI’s in strategic documents is a new phenomenon, the indexes are also new, it will take time until they can be adjusted, validated, and until they prove their compliance. Also, different indexes can show different trends or, they can contribute to the validation of each other. The also contribute to the understanding of different aspects of this complex field.

3 Conclusions

As presented in this study, understanding culture and measuring the role of cultural and creative industries in the V4 countries is still in its infancy. However, some trends can be observed. The first one is the transition of the role of culture, from an aesthetical category to a more and more important economic factor. Nevertheless, the role and future potential of user created content is still underestimated in all countries.

As for cities, culture is a more complex issue. Cities contribute to the realisation of the goals of national cultural policies, at the same time, they have an own role, when forming own cultural strategies. In V4 countries, capital cities recently started to recognize the potential in culture and CCI's, and currently there are initiatives in all countries to promote cultural development and to measure its impacts. Prague is working on its new cultural strategy, Bratislava opens Smart Points, Budapest's Design Terminál conducts research on the creative industries. The later effort however faces serious difficulties, because of the lack of common definitions, methods and data. As for comparing V4 countries, common indexes should be developed and measured for a period of time in order to gain reliable data and support policy-making.

V4 countries have a lot of possibilities to collaborate with each other in the field of cultural and creative industries. Capitals should play a key role in this, by elaborating common cultural strategy on becoming creative cities. They also should use these possibility in order to exploit the most of their cultural assets and appear as visible actors in the global competition.

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