CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN SMALL CITIES: CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract. The paper addresses the gap in analysing the complex role of creative industry businesses in small towns with regard to sustainable development. It takes a scholarly literature review approach and in the final section proposes a typology of sustainability-oriented actions, which creative industry businesses may or may not take in practice. As a typology of positive contributions, it lays groundwork for an empirical study, which is envisaged as the next step. The paper reinforces the idea of the complexity of the dimensions of sustainability as context-dependent, negotiated and situated, and the ambivalent role of creative industry businesses, stemming from the material realities of creating, distributing and consuming cultural and digital products.

Keywords: creative industries, sustainable development, small cities, trade-offs.

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Introduction

Cities, both large and small, are central nodes of the spatial development of the countries. Often the significant role of large cities is emphasized due to a positive link between the city size and economic growth. A high share of industries that benefit from agglomeration economies and a well-developed urban infrastructure, along with governance effectiveness allow countries to take advantage of agglomeration benefits from larger cities (Frick, Rodriguez-Pose, 2017). The significant role of creative industries in large cities has been frequently discussed in scientific literature, emphasizing the attractiveness of urban environment concentrating in the cities as a critical part of the so called creative class (Florida, 2014) that in return contribute to the overall development of the cities, innovation, science and industrial expansion.

Simultaneously, a debate about increasing significance of small and intermediate cities is taking place. They are attractive places of living for those who migrate from the large cities and at the same time appealing to rural inhabitants who tend to move to urban places (Sietchiping et al., 2014). Culture, and in particular creative industries, which in small cities are often represented by small enterprises or even individual entrepreneurs, make a significant part of local industries, play a crucial role in the city development, regeneration and also contribute to liveable places, improve quality of life of local residents. Creative industries – advertising, architecture, art and crafts, design, fashion, film production, video, photography, music, performing arts, publishing, research and development, software and computer game development, electronic publishing, as well as TV and radio (OECD, 2018) (including both business enterprises and freelancers) are often positioned as important players in local development, if only because of bringing to the scene the resource of creativity. They are considered to provide innovative inputs to diverse areas of activity in local economies, such as agriculture, furniture, textiles, tourism, gastronomy (Collins et al., 2018).

Sustainable development is a central concept for the development of any territorial entity – either on national or city level. Not only countries, but also cities – large and small – compete for all kinds of resources for their development goals. While these goals are context-specific, one of the most important common aspects of pursuing these goals is doing so in a sustainable way (see the United Nations' "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development"). Also, when looking in particular at the development of cultural agendas in the cities, we see that sustainable development is one of the key concepts ('Agenda 21 for Culture' approved by The World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments).

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The authors of the article are in particular interested to have a closer look at interconnections between the development of small cities, the role of creative industries and the way creative industries can contribute to sustainable development of the cities.

However, it is not self-evident that creative industry activities indeed promote and strengthen any of the aspects of sustainability: cultural, economic, environmental, and social. In other words, creative industries are not by default benign with regard to sustainability (Maxwell and Miller 2017 on environmental aspects).

For instance, scholarly literature demonstrates that some models of development (e.g. that of enhanced consumption of which creative industries may be a part) result in exacerbated inequalities in workforce, as well as gentrification, and displacement of local identities and small manufacturing businesses (Oakley and Ward 2018; Scott 2007).

Scholarly literature also notes the possibility of downplaying the potential of creative industries to provide critical reflection on local issues, to generate alternative visions of community life, and redefine what good life is, as well as prioritise the values of egalitarianism and sharing (Banks 2018) - all directly related to ideas and practices of sustainability.

There is a shortage of studies teasing out "the complexity of the role of culture in sustainability" (Oakley and Ward, 2018). In the present paper, the authors contribute to addressing this gap through identifying the ambivalence of the role of creative industries with regard to sustainable development, and through "teasing out" the types of interventions, which may be considered providing positive contributions. These – or indeed, contrary – kinds of contributions would then be identified through an empirical study, for which this paper lays some groundwork.

The research question addressed in the paper is as follows: *What are the types of creative industry businesses' positive contributions to sustainability in the specific context of a small city?*

To address the question, the paper will first briefly outline the concept of sustainability and its four pillars. Second, the paper will analyse the specific traits of small cities, valued in their contexts and hence needing to be engaged with in a sustainable way. Third, the authors will discuss the current scholarly literature on creative industry businesses in small city settings and their possible trade-offs with regard to sustainability. Finally, the paper will propose a scholarly literature-based body of actions that may be taken by creative industry businesses to promote any of the four pillars of sustainability. The latter does not mean that these contributions are indeed always positive; they merely provide some initial guidance in looking for types of contributions, which might be considered positive. Similarly, they point to a possibility of less benign actions.

Overall, the paper will contribute to knowledge of the complex roles that creative industry businesses might play in small cities.

The paper is based on the research project "Creative Industries in Small Towns: Potential and Contributions (CRISP)" which is implemented as a case study in the small town of Cesis, Latvia.

1. Sustainability and its pillars

The introductory statement of the report Our Common Future, popularly called the Brundtland Report (1987) defines sustainable development as that which "*..meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (section 27, p. 16).

The definition implies that the goal of achieving development should attach equal and balanced attention to economic growth, protection of natural environment and social equity, which jointly function as three pillars of sustainability (Hojnik 2019). It is essential to note that sustainable development is an unfolding,

dynamic process, including the realisation of individuals' potential and improvement of their quality of life, while simultaneously safeguarding the systems that make the above possible (Hojnik 2019).

While the traditional view of sustainability includes three pillars, in later years there have been proposals of a fourth pillar, of which the most relevant in our opinion is the pillar of culture. A recent overview of literature on the relationships of culture and sustainability (Dessein et al., 2015) notes that already in the Brundtland report which does not emphasise culture as a separate pillar, Chapter One accentuates the need for new moral and value criteria, and new patterns of behaviour. These can be said to mark a "cultural turn" in thinking about development, as they refer to culture in a broader sense (Dessein et al., 2015).

The same broader definition of culture (as distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize social group or a society) is proposed as the fourth pillar - a fundamental missing dimension of a healthy society in the sense of wellbeing, creativity and diversity, by Jon Hawkes (Hawkes, 2001).

While the conceptual practice of compartmentalising sustainability has been widely criticised (Gibson 2006; Griggs et al., 2013; Duxbury et al., 2017), for instance for reduction of reality and leading to sectoral rather than cross-sectoral thinking, the pillar model is also valuable as a metaphor and as a means to explore the role of its constituent parts (Dessein et al., 2015), for instance, the analysis of three possible relationships between culture and sustainability (Duxbury et al., 2017).

Importantly, the pillars may be seen as contradictory, proposing the need to make value judgements between different dimensions – one of them may be considered primary, followed by others (Duxbury et al., 2017: 220; Oakley and Ward, 2018). This is a particularly pertinent note when analysing actual practices of actors who may have to engage in complex trade-offs between values of economic and environmental or any other dimensions.

It must be noted that culture may not only be a positive result of development, but also a hindrance – if entrenched traditions or ways of thinking discourage adaptation to new ways of life (Dessein et al., 2015).

The context-dependence of sustainable development is the reason why the diversity of actual meanings has to be acknowledged. "Meanings are shaped by diversity of human life-modes and by adaptations to living conditions, even more so by aspirations and needs or wants"(Dessein et al., 2015); all forms of capital negotiated in the face of changes (ibid).

Sustainable development is best examined in specific locations, as all human activity happens in societies, neighbourhoods and cities. These contexts reveal the links between creative and cultural activities and sustainable development (Hojnik, 2019). The authors of this paper view cultural and creative aspects as forming linkages between economic, social and environmental sustainability.

As already noted, the specific meaning of sustainability has to be negotiated in the face of developmental changes; it is dynamic. This underscores the value of creativity in addressing the various challenges and trade-offs that small cities may face in their sustainable development. Thus, sustainable development is not about preserving everything as it is currently, since changes are ever-present; the issue is about balancing the values in concrete solutions to challenges and doing so creatively.

Scholars note that the best approach is by "trial and error"; it is iterative, bottom-up and inter-generational, with processes more important than products (Kirchberg, 2013).

Thus, sustainable development entails a dynamic, context-specific, iterative approach to all four capitals or pillars – cultural vitality, economic growth, environmental protection and social equity. These are in practice interlinked but kept separate in this paper for analytic purposes.

2. Small cities and traits to be sustained

This sub-section of the paper poses the following question: What are the specific positive traits that scholarly research associates with small cities and which are valuable enough to safeguard and develop in a sustainable way?

A key trend is that the economic base of small cities is diversifying with a visible decline of the importance of agriculture and other traditional sectors, accompanied by a growth in other activities, such as services and recreation, as postulated by the "new rural paradigm" (OECD, 2006). Although urbanization rates are still high, there is also an opposite trend – migration from large cities to small urban areas. It can be described as counter-urbanization phenomena, which Selada defines as "lifestyle migration" – when decisions to move are not related mostly to economic motivations, but are mostly due to uniqueness of the territorial capital of small cities in natural, cultural and symbolic terms and quality of life (Selada et al., 2011).

Sustainability in its ecological and social (community-related) aspects is attractive to the potential dwellers of small cities and highly valued among the existing population. Therefore, people who value healthier lifestyles are more likely to choose to move to a small city. Small cities are more privileged in such aspects as community engagement, a culture of cooperation and participation, and social proximity.

Individuals appear to value the human scale, community and quality of life, various amenities, including outdoor ones (McGranahan et al., 2011; Noonan, 2015). This brings to the forefront all four pillars of sustainability: preservation and development of valued and essential local traits of social, cultural, economic and environmental resources.

In particular, creative individuals might choose locations to live and work due to their "soft" infrastructure: networks, the image of the place or its "creative" identity, rich traditions and amenities (Clifton, 2008). In addition, it is worth to emphasize that as information and communication technologies are available, creative people who are highly mobile and flexible (most of them are freelancers, self-employed, owning a small company or work on project-by-project basis), are more open to a lifestyle which includes mobility and opportunity for change.

Creative individuals are looking for alternative lifestyles to those prevalent in big cities, giving priority to wellbeing associated with sports, healthy food, preservation of the environment and sustainable practices, and to the sense of community and local authenticity (Selada et al., 2011: 85). Competitive advantages based on liveability imply the consideration of issues such as well-being (sports, health, food, aesthetic etc.), sustainability (quality environment, low carbon lifestyles, sustainable commuting modes, green spaces, energy efficiency etc.) and social inclusion (community spirit, social proximity, meeting places etc.) (Selada et al, 2011). Possible amenities that may attract creative individuals to small cities may be categorized as follows in Table 1.

Table 1

Amenities that attract creative individuals to small cities

Amenities typology	Description
Natural	Warm climate, distinctive and picturesque countryside with topographical diversity, such as valleys, rivers, lakes, mountains and forests etc.
Cultural	Architectonic and archaeological heritage such as castles, churches, aqueducts and bridges etc., and intangible heritage like memories, testimonies, legends and traditions etc.
Symbolic	Community engagement, trust relationships, culture of participation, neighbourliness and sociability, social capital, presence of civic associations etc.
Built	Health and social services, quality schools, hotels, restaurants, bars, meeting spaces, small studios, live work houses etc.

Source: Adapted from INTELI (2011)

These are valued features of smaller places, based on territorial capital, natural and cultural amenities, rural lifestyles, and quality of life (Gülümser et al., 2011:12).

To sum up, the valuable traits of small cities that should be developed in a sustainable way are natural amenities and landscapes, community life and high levels of mutual trust, a distinctive lifestyle, and high levels of symbolic capital, which can be converted into economic one.

3. Creative businesses: are they sustainability-promoting by default?

Creative industries are often positioned as important players in local development, being a resource of creativity contributed to the scene and providing innovative inputs to other areas of activity in local economies, such as agriculture, furniture, textiles, tourism, gastronomy (Collins et Sand act as a catalyst for innovations that are taking place in other sectors, such as industries, energy, transport, agriculture, commerce (Streimikiene, Kacerauskas, 2020:1). The effects of knowledge spillovers derived from geographical proximity may induce transfer of information, technologies, innovative business models and organization forms to the overall local economy (Selada et al., 2011:88).

However, creative industries are not by default benign with regard to sustainability. Scholars note threats both to social inclusion and environmental health. Creative industry businesses and freelancers may be part of consumption trends which exacerbate inequalities, gentrification, as well as displace local identities and traditional local skills and businesses (Oakley and Ward 2018; Scott, 2007).

In a different vein, their potential may be underused concerning critical reflection on local issues, alternative visions of community life, redefinitions of what good life is, and prioritising the values of egalitarianism and sharing (Banks, 2018).

The case of impact on the environment is particularly pertinent. As noted by Banks, "creative, cultural and digital industries and technologies are highly energy-intensive and often polluting" (Banks, 2018; 370). The "material practices of making, distributing and consuming culture" directly affect the environment (Maxwell and Miller 2017; 177). Book making creates pollution; movies have a carbon footprint, electronic media have a complex collection of problems, as does digitisation (ibid). Still, creative industries due to their small size and responsiveness to customer needs may often offer eco-friendly solutions to sustainable development challenges, for instance such as eco-friendly fashion, and protect biodiversity by marketing natural health and cosmetic products that work in harmony with nature (Sdrali, 2020:3).

Thus, while there is considerable excitement as to positive contributions by creative industry businesses to small city development, equally there is in scholarly literature that evidences trade-offs that are not necessarily benign with regard to sustainability. This requires further exploration.

The first step of that exploration is to propose a set of contributions to all pillars of sustainability, which may be supplied by creative industry businesses and freelancers. The next step, already outside the scope of this paper, would be to examine empirical evidence of either these positive contributions or the lack thereof.

4. Emergent typology of contribution by creative industry businesses for sustainability

To set the background for our proposed typology, the authors will first outline the setting of the proposed empirical study. Second, the concluding part of the paper is a scholarly-literature-based typology of contributions to sustainability, which may be made by creative industry businesses.

The location of the study reflected in this paper is Cesis – a small city not far (90 km) from the capital city of Riga; a recipient of lifestyle mobility of creatives, and home to quite a high level of activity by creative industry businesses and freelancers (CIBFs in further text). The activity was evidenced in a mapping pilot study by the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2018 and media monitoring conducted within the current study.

The authors of the paper aim to develop a scholarly-literature-based typology of activities by creative industry businesses and freelancers. During the next steps of the study, authors will explore the actual practices of creative actors and their interpretations.

As mentioned in this paper, the separation of the sustainability pillars is to a certain extent artificial, although useful for analytical purposes. We will follow this logic and first point out two overarching types of contributions, which can be attributable to any of the pillars of sustainability. The rest of the sub-section will be dealing with types of activities by the pillar.

Firstly, CIBFs may act as creative brokers. These agents function as connectors between arts, technology, and business. They occupy a position in the social space that provides them with access to non-redundant knowledge (Stea and Pedersen, 2017; Sdrali, 2020). It means that creative brokers can create ideas, stimulate transfer of knowledge and ensure cooperation between various groups of people, based on creativity. Thus, on the one hand, creative solutions to any aspect of sustainability may come about through connecting various "bubbles" of locals and newcomers. On the other hand, if there is a shortage of such agents, various groups may remain in their "bubbles", thus under-utilising their creative potential and contribution to sustainability.

Secondly, CIBFs may act as networkers or partnership-builders with like-minded partners and organizations. This is considered essential for the sustainability of small cities (Sdrali, 2020). It fosters cooperation between neighbourhoods, creates "bridges" between local and global spheres. Sdrali also notes that networks, especially local ones, provide opportunities for regular, practical support tailored to local needs. Networking enhances creativity and sustainability; enterprises support and learn from each other (Sdrali, 2020). Again, shortage of networking means that existing resources are under-utilised.

Thus, CIBFs may act as connectors between different worlds or connect similar agents. Both types of activities may enhance the potential of creative contributions of sustainability in a broader sense.

Another way to view the contributions of CIBFs is to examine scholarly literature on each of the pillars and note activities or types of contributions by the pillar. Below the authors present the result of this exercise. Each set of activities is sourced from works of multiple scholars and offers a pilot version of positive contributions to sustainability. When reversed, these identify the actions that are not positive.

Economic pillar: Creating jobs and creating innovation

- Preservation of local knowledge and a focus on high quality;
- Integrating local values, way of life, history and tradition in the design of CIBF products;
- Preservation of natural resources in local manufacturing units (Pesaresi, Laven, Skoglund, 2016). In essence, it means the creation of new versions of traditional foods or crafts, creating added value from local heritage;
- Finding new ways of land use, including tourism and recreation;
- Mobilising local creative resources to add value to tourism and recreation by cultural and creative references to art, literature, design, film, and more.

To sum up, studies point out to specific strategies to adding value to products and services (van Heur, 2010) based on geography and heritage (Collins et al., 2018), achieving new hybrid outcomes of resources (Woods, 2011) which are locally produced, narrative laden and authentic, and an antidote to massification practices (Collins et al., 2018).

Environmental pillar: "the greening" of operations

- Innovative solutions to minimise raw materials used, as well as energy
- Use of alternative resources (e.g. recycled, re-use of "waste")
- Concern for the provenance/sourcing of materials
- Concern for the amount of "stuff" produced
- Innovative solutions for developing products (rather than relying on natural resources) by imaginative use of design
- Nature conservation; considering issues of biodiversity or landscape

To sum up, actions "greening" the operations of cultural industries (Duxbury et al., 2017), which entails finding new, more sustainable ways for developing products (Luckman, 2018), thus decreasing the environmental impact (Hojnik, 2019) and paying attention to biodiversity (Dessein et al., 2015).

Social pillar: the quality of communities

- Actions promoting diversity
- Actions promoting social inclusion and participation (as opposed to polarization and non-representation)
- Actions promoting a better quality of life and well-being.

To sum up, actions that promote sustainability and community as being about social interaction, diverse networks of reciprocity (Dempsey and Bramley 2011), whose values are dynamic and may need to be re-negotiated (Dessein et al., 2015), overall contributing to well-being (Hojnik, 2019).

Cultural pillar: continuity and diversity

The following actions are borrowed from scholarly literature that does include the cultural pillar in the idea of sustainability:

- Safeguard and sustain cultural practices and rights by promoting continuity and diversity;
- Contribute artistic expression to raise awareness of sustainability and climate change towards transformation of modes of thinking and manners more complementary to sustainable living;
- Negotiation of memories, identities and heritage;
- Negotiation of the relevance of place, landscape and territory.

To sum up, actions to balance continuity and diversity (Duxbury et al., 2017), negotiating meanings of key aspects of place and relationships (Dessein et al., 2015), with artistic activities promoting a broader turn towards more awareness of sustainable living (Duxbury et al., 2017: 224).

Thus, based on the analysis conducted in the paper, the authors propose the following typology of positive contributions to sustainability explained in Table 2.

Table 2

Positive contributions of cultural industries (businesses and individual entrepreneurs) to sustainability in small cities

Key role 1: Creative brokers: connectors between arts, technology, and business.			
Key role 2: Networkers or partnership-builders with like-minded partners and organizations.			
Contribution to economic pillar	Contribution to environmental pillar	Contribution to social pillar	Contribution to cultural pillar
Using local creative knowledge and skills through providing employment.	Decreasing the environmental impact: minimise raw materials and energy used; use of alternative resources (e.g. recycled, re-use of "waste"); concern for the provenance/sourcing of materials; concern for the amount of "stuff" produced.	Actions promoting a better quality of life and well-being.	Balancing continuity and diversity in cultural practices.
Creating jobs for other related sectors	Nature conservation; considering issues of biodiversity or landscape.	Actions promoting social inclusion and participation.	Negotiation of memories, identities and heritage.
Integrating local values and heritage in original products or services of creative businesses.	Innovative solutions for developing products (rather than relying on natural resources) by imaginative use of design.	Actions promoting diversity, networking and reciprocity in community.	Negotiation of the relevance of place, landscape and territory.
Finding new ways of land use, including tourism and recreation.			With artistic activities promoting awareness of sustainable living.

Source: Developed by Kunda, Tjarve, Eglite, 2021

Conclusions

The paper has analysed the interconnections between (a) the development of small cities, which have become an appealing place of living among the population; (b) the role of creative industries (including businesses and individual entrepreneurs or freelancers) and (c) the contributions of creative industries to sustainable development, which has become a key notion in the development of any territorial entity. In this way, the authors contribute to the gap in scholarly literature through identifying the ambivalence of the role of creative industries with regard to sustainable development, and through "teasing out" the types of interventions, which may be considered providing positive contributions.

Small cities as sites of development have specific traits, namely their natural, cultural, and symbolic amenities, the value of human scale, community and quality of life. For that reason (and taking into account the connectivity afforded by the Internet), many creative individuals engage in lifestyle migration to these small cities. As a result, there may be a diverse scene of creative industry activity. Sustainability related

practices are best examined in specific locations, since all human activity has a territorial and community aspect. The paper reinforces the idea of the complexity of the dimensions of sustainability as context-dependent, negotiated and situated, and the ambivalent role of creative industry businesses, stemming from the material realities of creating, distributing and consuming cultural and digital products.

A review of scholarly literature allows proposing a typology of contributions to sustainability, which may be made by creative businesses in the context of a small city. The existence and actors' interpretations of these contributions will be further tested in an empirical study.

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