

## **The democratic development potential of a cultural ecosystem approach**

Culture and development are two complex ideas that create a confusing intersection.

Pratt 2015, 512

Culture is increasingly being deployed as a tool to deliver development policy, with 'development' seen as a process rather than as an outcome, in the same way that culture can be seen (and has a long history of such) as a "noun of process" (Williams 1976: 87). This has been usefully summed up by Duxbury, Kangas & De Beukelaer referencing Sen (1999) as the underlying idea that "development should not be considered as a finality (generally expressed in a monetary value derived from work) but the extent to which people are able to participate in political, social and economic life" (2017: 216). Development policy encompasses a broad range of focus from the industrial and economic to sustainable and human development agendas. Cultural policy itself is now predominantly framed within a model of economic growth, which limits opportunities to discuss more inclusive, accessible and participatory aspects that form this paper's approach to democratic development. The following discussion explores the potential for cultural policy activity to develop inclusive and rich relationships from local to international scales, and to broaden the discussion of growth beyond the economic, through the device of the cultural ecosystem.

The reliance on of culture as a tool to deliver on sustainable development goals and on inclusive growth can be seen at European (UNESCO / UNDP 2013, United Cities and Local Governments 2018) and UK policy levels (Core Cities 2019). Indeed, culture has developed an increasingly central position in this agenda, from being outlined as an additional pillar of development (Hawkes 2001), to being placed as "not

just the fourth pillar but the central pillar” around which stand other aspects of transformative development (UNESCO / UNDP 2013). Culture has thus become a key driver and enabler of both human and sustainable development discourse and policy, seen explicitly in the approach to developing and delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Wiktor-Mach 2018, Duxbury, Kangas & De Beukelaer 2017). The introduction of ‘cultural development’ itself is seen as a way of “balancing cultural and economic policy objectives” (Duxbury, Kangas & De Beukelaer 2017: 217).

This history of connection between culture and development is problematic for some (de Beukelaer 2015) particularly given the flexibility of the terms (Wiktor-Mach 2018) and the discrepancies in concepts and frameworks (Duxbury, Kangas & De Beukelaer 2017). This conceptual fluidity has also been seen in discussions of the terminology and definitions of the cultural and creative industries, and furthermore their implicit and explicit value framings (Gross and Wilson 2018, Hewison 2014, Garnham 2005, Flew 2010). Arguments around the instrumental uses of culture notwithstanding (Belfiore and Bennett 2008, Belfiore 2012), the integration of culture within the development agenda pushes the debate beyond cultural policy approaches focused on consistency of trade and economic growth that emerged as an impact of World Trade Organisation free trade agreements and market-led policy approaches (Pratt 2015, Duxbury, Kangas & De Beukelaer 2017). Further, this opens up the possibilities of other impacts and benefits of cultural policy and activity. Within a development context that seeks to broaden opportunity, the broadening of values and impacts is important, because as Pratt points out, the flattening of cultural policy through a consistent trade approach “can serve to reinforce existing or historic inequalities, and to generate new ones” (2015: 511) and poses a risk to development. Counter to this is the view expressed by Wiktor-Mach that “bringing culture into the centre of

development implies also democratisation of all policies and actions” (2018: 10), but this is perhaps to oversimplify issues around cultural reproduction and access that have been explored in detail elsewhere. The discussion below is focused on the view of democratic development described above; considering more inclusive, accessible and participatory aspects than existing economic or industrial development approaches.

This exposition of the debates around culture and development policy identifies four areas of tension explored in this paper. The first of these is around the struggle to move beyond linear approaches to policymaking and development. This linearity is seen in a UK cultural policy context which continues to entertain a struggle between “the twin logics of paternalism (the deficit model) and the market (the creative industries)” (Gross and Wilson 2018: 10). Discussion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals outlines a similar conceptual shift toward a broader vision of “a desirable future that is equitable, inclusive, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable. This bold vision demands creative approaches, *beyond the typical linear and sectoral* ones that most countries have been used to in recent decades” (UNESCO 2017). This connects to the second area of consideration, that of the *values* driving the policy making agenda, which are frequently in tension with the ‘values as outcomes’ of that policy and activity. This is hugely complex and contested but broader value drivers of policy that extend beyond the economic are frequently referenced (Wiktor-Mach 2018, Duxbury, Kangas & De Beukelaer 2017), because “it is the richness of people’s lives, not the richness of economies that ultimately is valuable to people” (UNDP 2016: 25). The concept of value and richness in lived experience highlights the third area of tension explored in this paper, which sits between the national (and indeed international) approaches to policymaking and the locally situated and experienced

realities of both culture and development. The need for a locally sympathetic approach was identified within UNESCO's focus on the creative industries and development, which found that "many of the diverse pathways to development through the culture and creative industries [...] are to be found at subnational level in cities and regions" (UNESCO / UNDP 2013: 10). Wiktor-Mach points out that this is the very aspect that leads to the inclusion of culture in and across the development agenda because the "sensitivity to cultural circumstances is described as a contribution of culture towards sustainability" (2018: 7). However the local-national scale presents particular difficulties. The fourth area of tension is between growth and inclusion, which captures the value debates as well as the spatial scale. This also fits a broader trend toward 'cohesion policy' for structural transformation and inclusive growth.

"The challenge for EU and Member State policymakers is to develop or adapt policy frameworks and strategies that will stimulate growth, but in a manner that also ensures greater inclusiveness"

(Bachtler et al 2019: 7)

Policy specifically related to development has increasingly referenced culture either as an enabler or delivery mechanism; as a further pillar of development in its own right; and as an outcome of the process. The debates that have been generated by this have – 'not just financial' value, process rather than outcome, and the opportunity to more equitably and inclusively address areas of need.

These drivers may explain the relatively recent emergence of ecological metaphors to capture the complex web of connections and actors. This could also be explained in relation to a trend in ecological terminology in discussions of sustainable development, as well as this being a key area of outcomes (Wiktor-Mach 2018). In the past decade

there have been a number of references to 'ecosystem' in relation to culture, rather than in its original environmental context. This paper explores these emerging 'ecosystem' approaches and asks whether they offer a response to this context and a way through the 'confusing intersection' of culture and development identified by Pratt (2015).

### **The emergence of ecosystem in this context**

In 2014, a United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) report focused on rural economies introduced the creative ecosystem as a core approach, developing this from the triple helix model of university – government – industry engagement and the concept of creative clusters to develop economic activity based on creative products and services (Bakalli 2014). However, where the report does attempt a definition, it is extensive and ambitious without being specific:

“A creative ecosystem is a combination of enterprises, training centres, academia and research units engaged in public and private synergies around joint creative projects in a given immaterial space that can be achieved through the links the system’s members maintain between them. This system of partnerships is organized to create a pool from where innovative, creative ideas are extracted that can eventually be used by existing companies.”

(Bakalli 2014: 43)

The UNIDO working paper seeks to use ecosystem as a framework for supporting the (local) development of the (global) creative industries, and outlines its aim to:

“develop a holistic approach to CI that can be tailored to the relevant country, region or city. The approach put forward in this paper consists of measures aimed at developing CIs at the macro, meso and micro levels to facilitate inclusive and sustainable developments relevant to the industry”.

(Bakalli 2014: 11)

The ‘creative ecosystem’ term is used here to describe an approach that develops innovation and creativity, and as a framework for supporting sustainable and inclusive industrial development through entrepreneurship. In introducing a creative ecosystem approach, the working paper considers clusters in relation to the ecosystem and highlights ways in which an ecosystem has spillover effects to other sub-sectors and areas. The use of these allied concepts is worthy of some further scrutiny before considering how the ecosystem model in this context addresses the tensions around linearity, values, locality and inclusivity highlighted above.

Creative clusters are discussed as a sub-set of the industrial clusters approach (Pratt 2003) in which related businesses are transactionally or geographically connected, generating positive effects on competition and co-operation (Pratt 2004). This originated with a focus on the competitive advantage of the individual firm (Porter 1990), and the creative clusters agenda specifically brings together the policy aspiration of promoting local competitive advantage with a focus on the creative industries as a high-growth sector. In the UNIDO discussion there is a contradiction between creative clusters being “misleadingly considered a sub-set of industrial clusters” and also “developed as a sub-set of industrial clusters” (2014: 41). Clusters are also seen “as part of or as a sub-sector of a creative ecosystem, where more than one cluster may exist.” (2014: 46). This is discussed as a previous model for innovation

and entrepreneurship support. Ecosystem is seen here as an opportunity for more inclusive approaches to sustainable development.

In a Europe-wide literature review, Fleming defined creative and cultural spillovers as “the process by which activity in the arts, culture and creative industries has a subsequent broader impact on places, society or the economy through the overflow of concepts, ideas, skills, knowledge and different types of capital” (2015: 15). Fleming (2015) went on to categorise three broad types of spillover effects, covering impacts on knowledge, industry and network. In a UK-based arts context, a review for Arts Council England identified four broad spillover ‘impacts’, all linked to additional spending or income generation: tourism spend, developing commercial growth, improving productivity, or contributing to economic regeneration (Centre for Economics and Business Research 2015). This focus on ‘spillover as financial flow’ is criticised by Holden (2015), who considers that spillovers or any kind of intended or unintended consequences of activity have a wider potential benefit.

The varied use of ‘ecosystem’ in the UNIDO working paper typifies the issue of terminological elasticity “becoming a liability to the design and advancement of policy” (Duxbury, Kangas & De Beukelaer 2017: 220). Whilst it is clear that this creative ecosystem approach has the ambition to be “a more comprehensive tool for CI development and governance”, and is not based on geographical concentration, the approach does not fully address the challenges of locality and inclusivity (Bakalli 2014: 46). The proposed ecosystem approach also extends the “traditional binomial structure [of public-private partnerships] to embrace two other dimensions that are intertwined in the creative ecosystem: communities and people and the education sector (universities, knowledge-based and research institutions and vocational training centres)” (2014: 47). However this is not fully explored in the model that is presented.

## **Cultural ecosystem elsewhere**

This brief insight typifies a number of the challenges in the wider context of emerging ecosystem approaches. The connections with clustering and regional innovation draw from, and reflect significant debates within, economic geography; and the discussion of networks, collaborations and interdependencies are frequently seen in both cultural policy and entrepreneurship approaches. Whilst the terms **ecosystem** and **ecology** originate from the natural sciences, the terms are increasingly and interchangeably used in business, cultural policy and economic cluster debates (Gollmitzer and Murray 2008, Gong and Hassink 2016, Hearn et al. 2007, Holden 2015, Mack and Mayer 2015, Markusen et al. 2011, Moore 1996, Spigel 2015). The cultural and creative setting has been conceptualised in a variety of ways in order to understand the “mixed economy of forms” (Jeffcutt 2004: 69) that operate within it, and ecological approaches have increasingly been employed to understand the structure and approaches of the creative industries. The following discussion explores four areas of possibility, related to the wider ecological turn in terminology in the sector:

- the complexity of the sector that extends beyond a ‘production chain’ approach;
- the need for a term that extends beyond financial approaches to value;
- the instrumental application of cultural and creative industries to innovation policy and place-based strategies; and
- the recognition that there is a complex and interconnected matrix of actors within and across the sector.

The following discussion explores these four aspects in more detail, with reference to wider instances of the creative and cultural ecosystem, to explore the possibilities of the approach in relation to the tensions evident in discussions of culture and development.

## **Ecosystem as more than production chain**

There are several approaches to 'ecosystem' in a production and business context which typify a growing shift toward the ecological in this field, as well as in cultural policy (Hearn and Pace 2006). The ecosystem has been discussed as an approach to business strategy (Isenberg 2011, Gossain and Kandiah 1998, Moore 1996), and as a support infrastructure for high growth enterprises. Moore's ecosystem (1996) represented the origin of the ecosystem approaches in a business context and placed the individual organisation at the centre. Hearn and Pace stress the importance, for a business, of knowing the ecosystem in which they operate, and Moore's concept of 'co-evolution' "where for any company to really evolve its capabilities, others must evolve in support" (2006: 61). Whilst Hearn and Pace use 'ecology' rather than 'ecosystem', their component parts have clear parallels, and underpin the importance of value within the concept. Hearn and Pace's (2006) ecology perspective also expands the value creation process beyond the immediate organisation, and beyond the linear value chain approach. Their *value-creating ecology* "encompasses the idea of an environment of factors that engender and create value without necessarily being part of the first order factors of productivity" (Hearn and Pace 2006: 57).

Pratt, in seeking to describe how the creative industries generate clusters, concludes that production chains present an over-simplified approach and that:

"the metaphor of a **web** rather than a chain is perhaps a more appropriate one. The project of gaining an overview of the whole process or web is more challenging than simply acknowledging inputs and outputs; here we need to investigate the quality as well as the quantity of these linkages. Lest we become confused by the usage of the term 'mapping' here, we should be

clear that creative industry mapping documents have thus far simply measured quantities at the nodes such as employment and output (see DCMS, 2001); **investigating the characteristics of the flows and relationships is a far more challenging task.**”

(Pratt 2003: 60)

This early presentation of “the creative industries ecosystem” (Pratt 2003: 61), sought to plot the relationships between different points in the creative production chain. This relationship plotting principle is intended to highlight the places and functions where the creative industries form clusters, to make the point that any approach to system governance needs to acknowledge that clusters are self-generating. Flew (2010) points out that the general concept of clusters has become more flexible over time, and the distinction between different types of cluster (whether vertical as a result of supply chain integration, or horizontal as a result of co-location) has been diluted, resulting in a potentially less meaningful term that nonetheless remains focused on economic value.

“While clusters are part of the creative ecosystem, development practitioners will benefit from a more holistic approach that incorporates clusters and takes into account the bigger picture.”

(Bakalli 2014: 41)

The discussion above highlights how ecosystem and other ecological approaches to the sector have emerged, and are developing, to reflect the web of relationships that exist beyond the ‘simplicity’ of a production chain. This is also an important reflection in relation to the place-based approaches discussed below around ecosystems and urban regeneration. The term is also being deployed in the UK

context to reflect “complex networks operating within and across a range of scales, including home, school, the borough, the region, and the nation”, which develops from a capabilities (and development) approach with a particular focus on cultural learning for young people (Wilson and Gross 2017: 3). In this sense we can see how the term is beginning to be used to not only explore the non-linear nature of connections, but also to capture the range of values and motivations that drive these connections.

### **Ecosystem as more than economics**

In the UK context, policies supporting the creative and cultural industries have been shaped by an economic growth perspective, using an approach to the ‘creative economy’ centred on the exploitation of intellectual property (Howkins 2001), and explored in more detailed work on cultural economics (Bakhshi and Throsby 2010, Throsby 2008). This political economy perspective inevitably stems from the generation of the creative industries as a product of the economic growth agenda, but this is not to deny the significance of the cultural studies viewpoint that encompasses wider concepts of the public value (Holden, 2006) and the “social potential” (Reid et al. 2010: 11) of the arts and culture. Holden identifies the emergence of the ‘cultural ecology’ as having emerged in the mid-2000s, which he aligns with this desire to articulate the wider non-financial values of cultural production and participation (2015). The terminology of arts ecology describes a system of organisations “driven by intrinsic arts and cultural activities; expressive of a social relationship between producers and audiences; strongly linked to public investment and not-for-profit activities” (Fleming and Erskine 2011: 6). Whilst this description does seem to recognise wider approaches to value, this definition of ecology is also clearly located

within an economic perspective, as set out by Fleming and Erskine (2011) who, on behalf of the Arts Council, suggested that the arts ecology provided:

“the bedrock for (or is it lifeblood to?) a dynamic, growing and increasingly competitive creative economy, which in turn delivers value for the wider national interest”

(Fleming and Erskine 2011: 11)

Building on this ‘arts ecology’ approach focused on the inter-relationships between publicly-funded arts and the creative economy, Neelands et al. (2015) went on to use ‘ecosystem’ as a metaphor to “stress the interdependence of the economically successful parts of the creative industries with [...] publicly supported sub-sectors” (2015: 20). However, as Holden has highlighted, and as explored in more detail below, these links and interdependencies are more frequently assumed than evidenced (2015).

Whilst the overall purpose behind this particular use of the ecosystem metaphor - the generation of cultural wellbeing as well as economic growth and opportunity – is evident, there is less clarity on the specific make-up or framework of this view of a “cultural and creative industries ecosystem” (Neelands et al. 2015). The report also suggests that the ecosystem describes a flow between the commercial and cultural ‘ends’ of the overall system, which reflects a more linear perspective than the other system references that are used. As with the earlier approach of Jeffcutt (2004) and in the UNIDO example (Bakalli 2014), the descriptions of the ecosystem here are multiple and overlapping. In one instance the ecosystem is described as being made up of ‘sectors’, and in diagram form it is shown as being made up of the existing creative industries sub-sectors (Neelands et al. 2015). The ecosystem as a whole is

noted as being vulnerable to “a lack of sustainable infrastructure” and education and skills are critical to its foundations (Neelands et al. 2015: 44).

In relation to the challenges that frame this paper, these shifts toward ecological terminology begin to push beyond the linear understandings of the system, and suggest that there are wider values both driving and emerging from the approach. However, these examples do not fully encompass the discussions around these wider values, nor the potential for inclusivity, despite suggesting a more holistic approach.

### **Ecosystems of urban regeneration**

Policy interest in boosting economic and regional growth from the creative sector's production and organisational approaches has been seen in a range of approaches, from creative clusters (Bakalli 2014, Boix et al. 2015, BOP Consulting 2013, Chapain and Comunian 2010, Pratt 2003), the creative city (Evans 2009, Landry and Bianchini 1995, Pratt 2008), creative hubs (Dovey and Pratt 2016, Dovey et al. 2016, Lampel and Germain 2016) and, more latterly, spillovers (Chapain et al. 2010, Fleming 2015). These approaches have garnered significant policy traction despite the academic critique of some of the models (Wiktor-Mach 2018). Rather than rehearse the arguments well covered elsewhere in relation to these approaches, this section covers key points in an attempt to outline how they limit the opportunity to discuss more inclusive, accessible and participatory – that is to say, democratic - approaches to development.

The creative cities concept featured as a local regeneration approach in the work of Landry and Bianchini (1995), who set out an array of areas in which policy and change makers can develop a creative city. However, they did not explore the definition of a creative city, nor the reasons why this should be desirable. Despite this,

it became a popular policy goal, but was later criticised by Evans (2009) for the frequency of ‘transfer and emulation’ approaches whereby creative city schemes were (often unsuccessfully) templated rather than generated from the existing creative and city milieu. Creative hubs represent a related concept, being “a universal but slippery term to label centres of creative enterprise, representing many different shapes, sizes and agendas” (Dovey and Pratt 2016: 2). In contradiction to the criticism of creative city initiatives, Dovey and Pratt (2016) note that the term has been applied to a wide range of very different approaches and has also been “unhelpfully conflated with other types of industrial agglomeration that are closely aligned to the cluster concept” (2016: 10). There is a suggestion that despite their popularity with policy-makers, sector-based approaches such as creative cities or hubs are antithetical to the entrepreneurial attitudes that they seek to generate and foster:

“One of the unrecognised problems in sectoral cluster strategies is that picking sectors for preferable attention, by a top-down analysis of comparative advantage, actually dulls the entrepreneurial spirit.”

(Isenberg 2011: 4)

Creative ecosystem approaches are not ‘restricted’ by geography in the same way as creative cities and hubs, as well as allowing recognition of a wider value framing than the creative cluster’s economic approach. This was noted by Fleming et al. who point out that “taking an ecosystem approach to analysing the interplay of complex factors also supports our understanding of the role that culture plays in place attractiveness” (2015:8). Pratt also identifies that in this sector context, the “literature on industrial districts and localization [highlights] a complex *ecosystem* of creative industries that embed them in place” (2015: 509). Creative ecosystems, then, are innately locally

embedded, but are also an opportunity to map the multiple interdependencies that characterise the sector, as discussed below.

### **Ecosystems as maps of interdependencies**

In discussing all three of the preceding areas of potential, there have been multiple references to connections, networks and systems. As noted, the interdependencies here are often assumed rather than mapped specifically (Holden 2015) but there have been a small number of place-specific approaches to detailing a creative ecosystem. The earliest example of this was Jeffcutt's policy-focused approach which undertook a regional study of the creative industries in Northern Ireland (2004), using surveys to identify creative businesses, their scale and their support needs. Here, the creative ecosystem was coined as a metaphor to capture the key elements of creative business that needed to be supported by policy at regional level. Jeffcutt's approach focused on a sector with "a preponderance of micro-businesses with a complex portfolio of development needs, and [...] not being supported in a coherent and integrated manner." (2004: 76). The creative industries are described as trans-sectoral, trans-professional and trans-governmental in their interconnectivity and breadth, which leans toward a broader ecosystem approach, and whilst Jeffcutt does not develop a full framework for this, he suggests that four key features of this ecosystem include knowledge interfaces, mixtures of expertise, technology and organisation. These are all viewed from the perspective of the enterprise, and we can read into this that the organisation sits at the centre of its own ecosystem, in the same model as Moore's business approach above.

Despite the looseness of the metaphor, and thus the difficulty in applying it to other regions or turning it into a policy approach, Jeffcutt recommended five areas of activity to develop the ecosystem as a whole: learning (to encourage new entrants);

opportunity (contributing to workforce development); business (including new and existing enterprise development); sector infrastructure; and government. On this last aspect Jeffcutt specifically notes the need for joined up sector policy.

The idea of a 'value-creating ecology' approach to capture the complexity and interconnectedness of creative industry value chains (Hearn et al. 2007) has also been used to explore the relationship between publicly funded arts / culture and the creative economy (Holden 2007). Hearn et al (2007) consider the operational aspects of their approach with reference to the critical importance of network theory, because "in a value creating ecology the constellation of firms are (sic) dynamic and value flow is multi-directional and works through clusters of networks" (Hearn et al. 2007: 421).

Exemplifying this perspective, Holden's work on cultural ecology describing this as "the living, evolving network of artists, cultural organisations and venues co-operating in many fruitful partnerships – artistic, structural and financial" (Holden 2015: 6) offers a UK focused approach which discusses the changing and complex relationships between the three 'spheres' of publicly funded, commercial and homemade culture (2015). Holden works with Markusen's definition of the 'arts and cultural ecology' developed in California:

"the complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings."

(Markusen et al. 2011: 10)

Markusen's approach to documenting this Californian state ecology was comprehensive and multi-method, using data from state and national sources to set out the budgets, sub-sectors and impacts of non-profit making arts and cultural organisations. This was followed up by interviews to explore relationships and causal

insights (Markusen et al. 2011). This approach deliberately focused on non-profit making organisations, which is useful as it begins to extend beyond economic value to consider the consumption and production of culture and the values inherent in this. Holden also stressed that the cultural ecology “cannot be understood without taking into account free labour and emotional rewards” (2015: 11). Holden’s ecology of culture investigation also suggests that there is considerable variation across the sector because “despite their many interconnections, cultural sub-sectors operate in very different ways. Each artform has its own micro-ecologies.” (2015: 5). Holden does not follow the same detailed and empirical approach as Markusen but explores the concept through interviews with stakeholders in the cultural sector, and generates perspectives on the concept of ecology from these discussions. By way of conclusion Holden proposed three visual models of the cultural ecology: cultural ecology as a cycle of regeneration (which charts a process); network diagrams (which require nodes in order to map connections); and cultural ecology as interacting roles (which categorises actors within the system).

The first of these approaches, cultural ecology as a cycle of regeneration, reflects the dynamic and cyclical nature of cultural and creative production. The model moves through five stages: creation, curation, collection, conservation, and revival (Holden 2015). The consumer or audience side of culture, deemed vital by Holden, is reflected in the ‘collection’ phase, which is considered to incorporate audience engagement. Whilst this approach does categorise aspects of a cultural ecology, it documents the *process* rather than the structure of the system. Holden also discusses the possibility of using network diagrams to visualise the whole of the cultural ecology, but concludes that this is not a useful approach at this level “because the network connections would become so dense, so extensive, and so various in quality as to lose meaning”. (Holden

2015: 27). This raises an important point about the need to clarify the purpose of mapping the ecology (or ecosystem), which then allows decisions to be made about “where to draw the boundaries; the crossover between local and artform or sectoral networks; over-simplification; and capturing the quality of the network” (Holden 2015: 29). Holden’s third approach, which sets out a model of four cultural ecology roles, offers the potential to categorise and map out the entities within and across the creative ecosystem. Holden also points out that many individuals or organisations in the cultural ecology will fulfil more than one of these roles but will “tend to have a dominant activity” (2015: 29). As a whole, the cultural ecology is seen to operate across the public and privately funded cultural and creative sector and needs a balance of all of these roles in order to function.

More recently, Gross and Wilson (2018) have begun to discuss cultural opportunity as an ecological phenomenon, which “needs to be understood not as located within single organizations or spaces, but through the interconnections and interdependencies of cultural resources of many kinds” (2018: 6). This builds thematically on Holden’s approach discussed above, as well as bringing in the capabilities approach more frequently referenced in development discussions.

### **Ecosystem’s democratic potential**

The UNIDO working paper that prompted this discussion identified an ambition for an holistic ecosystem that supported sustainable development. Their debate implied that the creative ecosystem can be ‘created’ through policy incentives and interventions, which sets up a specific epistemological orientation toward the concept itself, but also, critically, perpetuates the economic value framing of the broader trade system. Therefore a wider approach to development is seen as necessary in order to bring participatory and representative perspectives – the democratic development agenda.

The discussion in this paper has explored the ways in which other ecosystem metaphors have been deployed to work against linear and limited framings of the cultural and creative sector. This in turn has sparked consideration of the ways in which the ecosystem approach might offer an even more inclusive, accessible and participatory approach that can be seen as a democratic approach to development. It is not yet sufficiently clear whether and how ecosystem approaches do allow more participation and engagement in the processes of culture and creativity, but this is a direction of investigation within cultural policy in the UK. There is certainly potential in using ecosystem as a more holistic description of the creative and cultural setting to support development discussions, but there is more work required in a number of areas to fully explore this.

An entrepreneurial perspective has been included in the above discussions as it forms part of the framing context for development policy, despite the economic focus criticised above. In describing entrepreneurial ecosystems Spigel and others identify the ways in which inputs and contextual factors are equally as important as outputs (Korhonen et al. 2007, Mason and Brown 2014, Spigel 2015). We can connect this to the debates rehearsed above around creative and cultural spillovers – as distinct from industrial production chain spillovers - and highlight that inputs and context is a missing aspect from the culture / development discussion thus far. Ecosystem approaches then, might offer a way of developing the more holistic picture called for, but not yet developed, in the UNIDO working paper, as well as taking into account the range of shaping factors that create and influence an ecosystem and those within it. A more holistic approach to ecosystem should also encourage consideration of the enabling and supporting factors beyond the entrepreneurial growth mindset that currently acts as a limitation to development.

The creative ecosystem also acknowledges a range of connections that may not be directly connected to the creative product or service, which broadens the scope beyond the cluster approaches discussed above. The geographical aspect to this is also discussed, partly in relation to the ways in which culture has been seen by policy as the catalyst for urban and place-based regeneration. The creative ecosystem approaches discussed above, as well as being broader than the clustering concept of economic geography, are more rooted in the specific place or location which reflects a more 'bottom-up' approach to the inclusion of culture. The cultural or creative ecosystem is noted as being rooted in place, which pushes toward a deeper consideration of the assets and values of a location in a more inclusive and potentially democratic manner. The connections between ecosystem aspects are also critical, in relation to both place specificity, and the untraded interdependencies and spillover effects that ensue. Whilst spillovers in the creative context do extend beyond economic value as discussed in Fleming's review (2015), an ecosystem approach could allow consideration of inputs as well as outputs, the lack of which has been criticised in spillover discussions to date. There also seems to be a developmental focus to the creative ecosystem that recognises the 'feeder' aspects to the system over time. In so doing, an ecosystem approach may also work toward a more sustainable approach rather than being focused on shorter-term economic metrics. The evidence base around spillovers in the creative industry context has not yet been sufficiently advanced as to take into account the complexity of inputs as well as outputs. This offers the possibility for a creative ecosystem approach to consider spillovers, inputs and outputs as valid features within the component parts of the model.

Ecosystem approaches begin to move the discussion toward a broader understanding of value(s) and drivers to activity, whether production or consumption. The issue of

terminological elasticity is still an issue for the ecosystem term itself, which needs further investigation, or maturity of understanding and approach. Wilson and Gross point out that “one of the strengths of ecological language and thought – in its application to the analysis of the cultural sector – is precisely that it provides tools with which to investigate the[se] complexities” (2017: 5). Gross and Wilson also discuss ecological approaches in the context of a capabilities approach (2018), advocating for a cultural opportunity model within the cultural democracy tradition.

What is common across the ecosystem approaches focused on the creative sector is their position that the system needs maintenance or development. Jeffcutt (and also Isenberg) maintains that any development strategy needs to be ecological and that this needs to take “a coherent and integrated approach to the key elements and dynamics of the ecosystem” (Jeffcutt 2004: 77). Recognition of these ecosystem ‘dynamics’ suggests that this approach recognises the complexity of creative production and offers the opportunity to better understand what Lash and Urry describe as the “rich nexus of markets linking small firms” (Lash and Urry 1994: 114) that is characteristic of the cultural and creative sector. However, Jeffcutt warns that there is no “magic bullet” for policy (2004). Leadbeater and Oakley articulated the challenge for policy makers in that they “lack the knowledge, time and tools to help develop a cluster of hundreds of independent micro-businesses” (1999: 18). As shown above there is still relevance in the question of how policy can better understand and support micro-scale businesses. The emerging ecosystem discussion – in the cultural and creative context – seems to offer an opportunity to do that. However, emerging thinking about creative and cultural ecosystems suggests that policy references to this to date have not yet fully explored the opportunities presented by the metaphor and

its ontological orientation, and there is more to learn from the discussion and application of ecosystem models and approaches.

This paper identifies the emergence of an ecosystem approach across European cultural policy, and suggests that to date the use of the metaphor has been limited in relation to the possible development focus that arises. This paper takes the perspective that standard economic growth models of the creative industries limit the opportunity to discuss more inclusive, accessible and participatory approaches to development. Such limitations are likely to be damaging to a cultural policy environment that increasingly features place-based and co-creative approaches at a local level, within an international context of sustainable development. In the context of development policy this paper has discussed the ways in which 'ecosystem', reframed and more purposefully defined, could work toward a democratic approach to development. The discussion has shown that the emerging cultural and creative ecosystem approaches encompass the breadth of the system as well as the range of actors and connections within it. In turn, this approach does not prioritise any single value driver in the way that 'industry' privileges economic value drivers such as profit or output. The range and importance of system connections highlights the more inclusive nature of cultural and creative ecosystem approaches.

To return to this paper's working approach to 'democratic development', the ecosystem has the potential to recognise multiple approaches to value, whether input or output of the wider system. In this systemic approach it also acknowledges the complex realities of business across the cultural and creative sector. Both of these factors are steps toward the ecosystem as a model that recognises a more inclusive and participatory approach to value generation that takes into account capacity building through its location-specific nature. Ecosystem as a structure is potentially

transformative in the range of opportunities it offers to broaden policy understanding beyond linear approaches to the sector and its development. It does this through recognition of the broader approaches to value both as driver and as output, and by way of its locally-focused and place-specific aspects. The 'cohesion policy' trend identified above, focused on inclusive growth, experiences a tension between growth and inclusion that an ecosystem approach goes some way toward addressing. By offering a wider framing of the development context, this discussion also highlights the challenges to the emerging and developing ecosystem debate and suggests areas in which this developing agenda might consider the challenges of equality, access, inclusivity and participation.

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