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Higher education, human capital and the creative economy

Editorial

Dr Roberta Comunian, King's College London

Dr Alessandra Faggian, Ohio State University

The attention paid by governments and policy-makers towards the role of the creative economy has grown tremendously in the last decade, not only in the UK (DCMS 2001) and Europe (KEA 2006) but also globally (UNCTAD 2008). The creative sector is believed to have a fundamental role and potential for economic growth. However, what is intended by 'creative sector' is open to debate. In the UK, Europe in general and also Australia, the main focus of the academic research on the creative sector has been the so-called creative industries. In North America the focus has been more on the role of creative people, who became known as the 'creative class' (Florida 2002). While the creative industries discourse focuses primarily on how creative firms – key players in the economic growth process - can be helped and supported, the core of the creative class theory is the notion that individuals working in a "creative" occupations contribute to local economic growth by fostering an open and dynamic environment to work and live in. Despite the different focus, the two approaches can be seen as the two sides of the same coin: one looking at firms, the other at individuals.

Whether looking at individuals or firms, many authors have tried to address the role, patterns and scope of the creative sector on the economy. However, the literature has failed to address what role Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play or can potentially play in the development of the creative

sector and consequently on growth. Florida (2002) recognises the central role of HEIs in attracting creative individuals, but this link is not fully developed and relies generically on the association between the creative class and high level of human capital. Other more policy-oriented contributions (Crossick 2006, Taylor 2005, Cunningham 2004) have simply pointed out that universities can play a role in knowledge transfer and development of the creative economy, but without entering into any detail. Overall, while the literature recognises the role of HEIs in local and regional development, very little attention has been devoted to the way HEIs contribute to the creative economy, both locally and nationally. The main aim of this special issue is to fill this gap in the literature, providing good examples of contributions, which tackle specifically the link between the education sector and the creative economy.

In compiling the special issue, we benefitted from contributions presented at an International multidisciplinary conference on the creative economy that took place in Southampton¹ (March 22nd-23rd, 2010) and involved scholars from different fields including economics, geography and policy research. While the conference acknowledged the years of research in the field of regional sciences addressing the role of that HEIs play in shaping local economies, it also highlighted the need to better disentangle how these institutions play a role in the growing creative economy. The papers included in this special issue offer both a focused reflection of the current UK policy framework (Comunian et al. and Abreu and Grinevich) and a broader international view. The research presented is particularly timely in the UK higher education context as recent changes have put a new pressure on HEIs – especially in the arts and social science fields– to account for their impact on the economy and think about their sustainability. Within the broader international context, Daniel Sanchez presents a more European perspective by focusing on the case of France and Mack and Stolarick present a more global view presenting a case study from the USA.

The first paper from Mack and Stolarick considers this first level of engagement of university with the local context and its economic development. It considers the overall impact of the location of higher education institutions (especially in reference to a specific USA policy intervention) and evaluates the potential impacts of land-grant institutions on their local communities. When looking specifically into the dynamics between HEIs and the economy, the main focus has been for a long time knowledge creation. However, more recently new models have been developed to understand the relation between HEIs and their economic environment, including the now famous Triple Helix approach (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 1997). Alongside these models of knowledge exchange and impact of knowledge into the broader economy, there have been models focusing specifically on the role of human capital (Faggian and McCann 2009a, b, Becker 1964). In turn, human capital has been proxied by different typologies of people including, on one side graduates and creative workers and on the other academics, researchers and inventors. The second paper by Sanchez looks at the role played by human capital in the development of creative industries and creative clusters in France. The paper allows for a broader reflection on the value of talent (human capital) in local economies (*a la Florida*) but adds a more focused critical analysis which links to the development of specialisation within the creative industries field. The third and four papers, respectively by Comunian, Faggian and

¹ The key contributions of the conference are available online at <http://www.creative-campus.org.uk/he--the-creative-economy-conference-2010.html>

Jewell and by Abreu and Grinevich focus more specifically on the analysis of “creative human capital”. Comunian, Faggian and Jewell look specifically at the connection between graduates from arts and humanities disciplines and the creative economy. They provide an in-depth reflection on the recent policy changes surrounding the policy and public support to arts and humanities disciplines in UK but also consider discourses of value and opportunities offered to graduates in this field. Abreu and Grinevich consider another side of human capital, focusing on the highly trained individuals that constitute the human resources of universities. They consider how they themselves often directly engage in start-up, patents and other economic activities. However, they also explore how academics in the creative arts follow specific patterns of engagement connected to the practice-based nature of their research and the value of the networks across higher education and the creative economy that they establish and rely on.

Overall, this special issue offers an opportunity to reflect on the various levels of engagement that connect higher education, human capital and the creative economy. While there is a large set of theories and literature that support the current exploration on the role of higher education in local economic development and the knowledge economy, the special issue calls for a more focused reflection on its dynamics in the arts, humanities and creative disciplines. The papers collected here will hopefully open up to further research and debate in this field.

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