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The Impact of Culture on Creativity

These days creativity seems to be everywhere. The term has turned into a catch phrase, used in the media, in policy statements and in academic literature. Creativity consequently means different things to different people. You can be a creative accountant or a creative football player. Likewise, management literature has turned creativity into an essential means to stimulate productivity in the work place. As a result, the notion of creativity has become ubiquitous and has lately been used to describe vaguely defined capacities that are attributed to creative people. A more tangible notion of the concept of creativity and an assessment of its relationship with the European cultural sphere is therefore required.

KEA's study on the economy of culture in Europe illustrated the social and economic importance of the cultural and creative sectors (available on www.keanet.eu). The sectors' contribution is arguably even more important in the context of the current collapse of the car manufacturing and the financial sectors, traditional pillars of economic growth and employment.

In the context of a new major study commissioned by the European Commission entitled "the contribution of culture to creativity" KEA has recently set out to examine whether there is any evidence that societies, territories and companies can be more competitive and cohesive if they use culture to promote creativity and social innovation. The objectives of the assignment are to better grasp the notion of creativity and to develop a better understanding of the contribution of culture to creativity. As such, the study is part of a larger process to design a new creativity policy for Europe.

Of course, such endeavour raises important questions: Should culture be part of a wider policy framework that goes beyond protecting cultural heritage, subsidising artists and cultural industries and promoting access to art among the wider population? Are art and culture really a motor of creativity and do they therefore trigger social and economic change, and – if so – do they deserve similar attention from policy makers as the sciences, technology and innovation?

In recent years, researchers and policy makers have increasingly acknowledged that social and economic progress is not only linked to technological innovation but that it also crucially depends on softer – essentially non-technological – ways to innovate. KEA's research shows that creativity is an important driver of such soft innovation. The capacity to generate new ideas, the ability to go beyond

the mere functionality of products, and the skill to manage and implement visions of creative talents is of paramount importance in today's new economy.

Culture-based creativity

What we have labelled "culture-based creativity" is a hitherto underestimated element of innovation that helps to drive marketing, communications, human resources or product development in various businesses and industries. Such creativity is an intrinsic element of progressive business strategies. It helps to take consumers beyond material desire, enables differentiation and delivers thus added value. Culture-based creativity is a way for businesses to stand out and provide a distinctive experience to consumers. It is also a resource to put users at the heart of the business process (design thinking). Companies such as Apple epitomize this new emphasis on culture-based creativity. Creativity is also an integral part of cities' and regions' strategy to develop their economy, promote social cohesion and local identities as well as to give a sense of purpose to local or disadvantaged communities. In fact, Europe's regional and local cultural distinctions equip cities and regions with often untapped resources to fuel local creative processes.

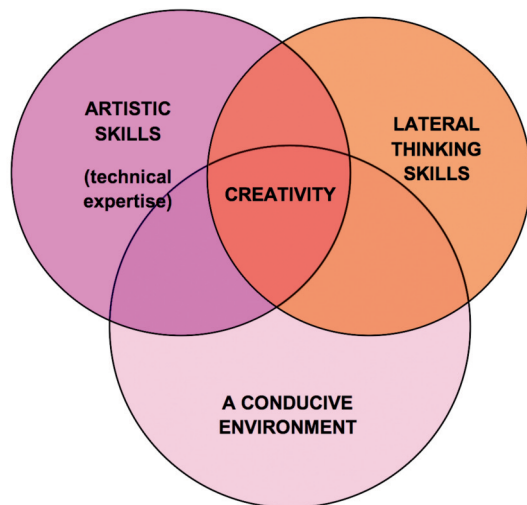
Studies show that contemporary society requires specific creative skills – many of which are closely related to the arts and the creative sectors – in order to generate imagination and intuition which in turn can create value (both monetary and social). Enterprises, EU Member States and regions and cities increasingly invest in culture-based creativity to answer these social and economic challenges. Does the EU live up to this task?

The Lisbon strategy has put innovation at the heart of EU policy. However, innovation is given a rather limited definition as it essentially relates to technological and scientific development (with the ambition to spend 3% of GDP on R&D). The EU has invested 147 billion Euros (2007-2013) to stimulate R&D and support ICT. The general belief being, that growth and employment will be achieved by investing in ICT industries and research and technological development. Such innovation policy largely ignores the above outlined value of culture-based creativity. We estimate that the European Union will spend less than € 3 billion Euro (2007-2013) on culture-based creativity. Is the EU missing something in its quest for a more inclusive and more innovative society?



By closely examining the relation between culture and creativity KEA's study will highlight specific ways in which culture enables individual and collective creativity. It proposes a culture-based creativity theory which illustrates this contribution:

The components of culture-based creativity



What is the purpose of such a culture-based creativity theory?

- To highlight the importance of creators and artistic talents and organisations in stimulating creativity. To give creativity the same place as engineers and scientists in driving innovation policy.
- To recapture the meaning of creativity to the benefit of the people that create or are creative (essentially artists or talents with artistic skills such as designers, architects, craftsmen, advertisers).
- To distinguish between innovation and creativity in order to encourage innovation policy makers to take into account the specifics of culture-based creativity.
- To demystify the complex and close links between culture and creativity.

Implications for policy makers

Without understanding the contribution of culture to creativity, Europe cannot develop a coherent innovation strategy. Moreover, without acknowledging the importance of culture as a stimulator of creativity the premises of current policy thinking cannot be challenged.

KEA's research shows how creativity contributes to bring about new economic paradigms and social transformation and that Europe is ideally positioned to develop the next generation of creative polymaths – imaginative and entrepreneurial talents that straddle both technology as well as the creative professions. For Europe boasts a remarkable cultural heritage, some of the best art and design schools, the most innovative museums, incredible festivals and art galleries, the best luxury brands, some of the most innovative cultural industries (music, cinema, publishing, computer games) and creative professionals (architects, designers, advertisers) in the world. However, these strengths are often insufficiently recognised. As a result the contribution of non technological innovation remains marginalised in EU policy actions.

European nations share a similar notion of creativity. This notion is reflected in our education systems and in the way culture is addressed by various policies. Today the emphasis of policy makers still rests upon nurturing logical and convergent reasoning among European citizens. Our education systems still focus on intelligence testing rather than stimulating imagination, intuitiveness and other creative skills. The new economic paradigms require other forms of divergent thinking that call on emotion, aesthetic, imagination, ideas to generate new visions, values or intangible assets.

European countries and regions therefore need to acknowledge the importance of their cultural assets in this new world in order to create an environment that is conducive to creativity. The European Union has an interest in creating a climate of collaboration and cross-fertilization between local cultures as this cultural diversity is an opportunity to stimulate creativity. Europe has created a single market to exchange goods, services and capital. This market has so far somewhat failed to stimulate cultural exchanges, source of creativity. By 2016 "le Marché intérieur de l'imaginaire" could be a new vision in the same way as "le Marché unique" became an important goal in 1992!

KEA's study on the contribution of culture to creativity will examine the EU's role in fostering creativity through a wide range of policy instruments (regional, education, innovation, trade, culture, competition and enterprise policies). It will call on the branding of Europe as THE place to create in a global creative society. Europe should be the centre of worldwide creation and creative entrepreneurship; a place that nurtures originality and difference.

The study should be made available in the first half of this year.

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