

Mapping creativity: A rather global mission

In late March, while gallery owners were preparing their exhibition spaces for Art Basel Hong Kong 2019, a group of twenty experts on the creative economies from Asia, Europe and the US – academics and practitioners, established seniors as well as representatives of the next generation – gathered at Kai Tak on Kowloon side opposite Hong Kong Island to discuss various questions about culture, the arts and the economy.

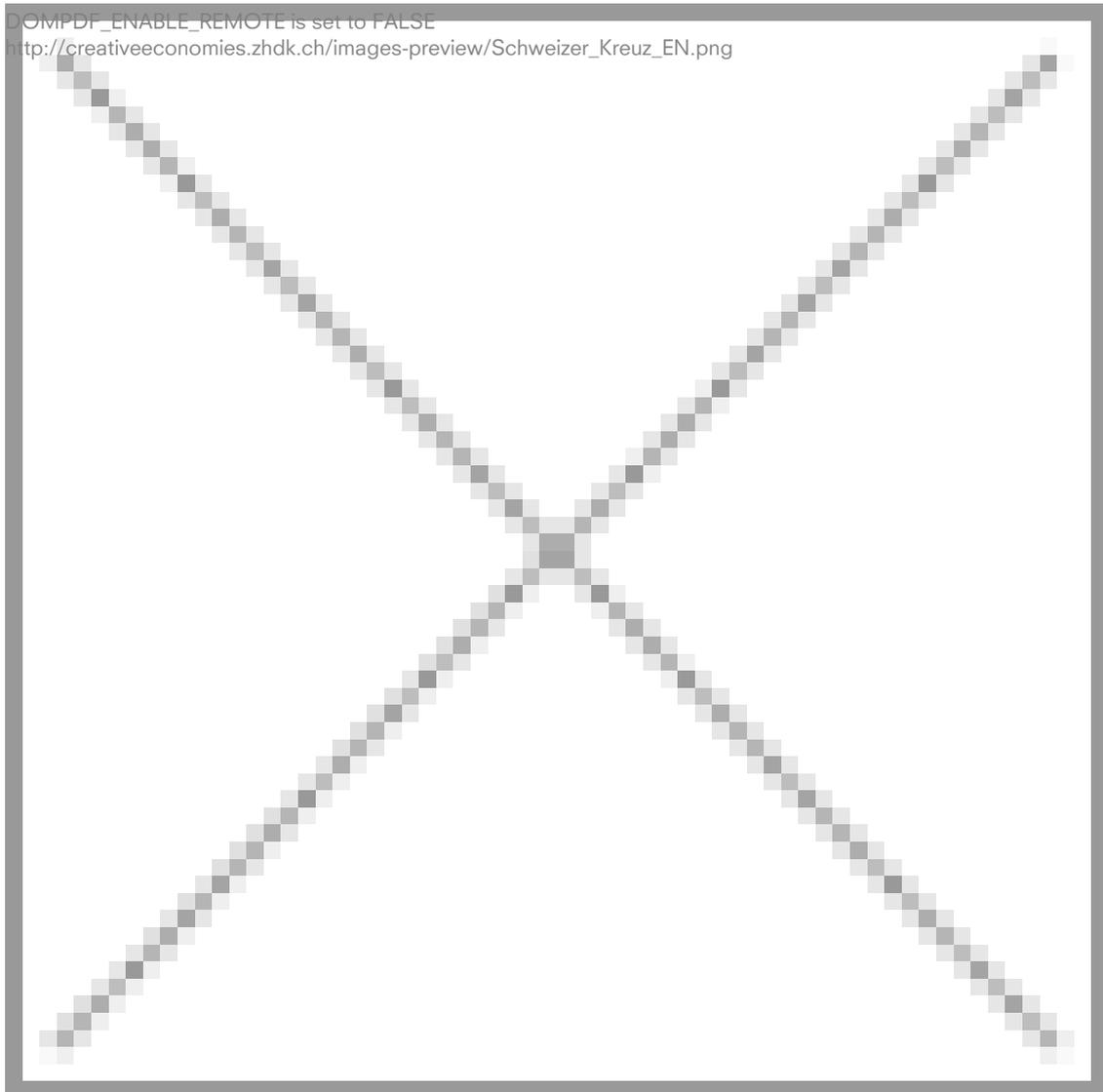
Questions

Aiming to boost the strategic development of the creative economies in Hong Kong and beyond, a workshop entitled Mapping Creativity: Exploring Narrative Strategies for the Advancement of the Creative Ecologies in Hong Kong and at a Global Scale sought to answer several basic questions: Which values are created by the creative economies, and for whom? What is meant by value creation? How can these values be measured? How do stakeholders in politics, public administration and the wider business community encourage or obstruct the processes and practices of the creative industries (i.e. creative economies, creative ecologies), which are known for their rather unconventional, disruptive and innovative approaches? And which (entrepreneurial) strategies are needed to mediate between creative economy actors and those responsible for defining the framework in which the former operate?

Approach

Thus, the two-day workshop was carefully structured by its curators [Peter Benz](#) and [Christoph Weckerle](#). In line with the Zurich Creative Economies Model (see below), they believed that the workshop participants could take an organized and closer look at the ecosystem of the creative economies. The plan was to approach the creative economies from two perspectives: that of governance and that of the actors. Participants, so the plan, would talk about their resources (those used or those needed) and about the values they believed their businesses were creating. The workshop also included many experts in statistics and the visualization of complex systems, who had been invited to share their practices and approaches. The overall plan was to establish a comprehensive overview of the current situation «on the ground» by the end of

the two days.



Findings

In the end, the workshop produced more open questions than clear cut answers, as the insights gained transcended the linear structures of the workshop and did not apply solely to Hong Kong. What became clear instead was just how dynamic, unsteady, flexible, sensitive — and global — the different phenomena characterizing the creative economies — governance and actors, resources and values, creation and strategies — are. What follows tries to illustrate the intertwined aspects of the ongoing discussion about the creative economies.

Governments want to profit from the sexiness of creativity. Be it Berlin, London, Zurich or Hong Kong: Governments seem to be attracted by the significance and sexiness of keywords like “creative,” “arts,” and “culture.” Or as a Hong Kong-based museum communications expert puts it: “The government likes the fame that comes with these terms — especially since Shanghai is threatening. Shanghai has just demonstrated how to very

successfully put design at the core of its sustainable economic growth and development plan.” While governments seem willing to push the creative industries, they seem to lack an understanding of how to do so.

Governments need funding orientation. Terms like “creative economy,” “creative industries,” “creative cluster” or “creative ecologies” turn out to be helpful to grasp, structure and measure “creativity” as a key concept. And yet none of the governments of the countries represented at the Mapping Creativity workshop seem to know how to spend their budget within the sector. Should budgets be spent on activities in culture, in society, in art or in technologies? Commenting on his insights from running a workshop with the city of Zurich, during which some new tendencies in funding strategies became apparent, Christoph Weckerle observes: “First, the common four-year plans could be complemented by short-term plans in order to offer some variation. Second, money and studios as resources could be extended to infrastructure and network-based structures like mentoring or coaching. Third, government experts will be less needed in the future, since we are all becoming our own experts through using tools like algorithms or rankings. Finally, artists are unlikely to accept narrow and strict funding applications any longer, since they are less and less willing to depend on or to subject themselves to governmental restrictions.”

“Economic value” needs to be translated and diversified for governments. In most countries, the only government assessment criteria for determining the importance of the creative industries still seems to be economic success. This is measured in terms of economic or technological value and represented in employment and turnover figures. Governments want and need to be included in sector development — not only the Hong Kong government but presumably also any other government. Therefore, the “economic value” of the creative economies and of creativity needs to be translated into a different language to promote understanding among politicians and policy makers. One possible approach might be “zooming in,” i.e. to illustrate the ecosystem of the creative economies with role models and case studies.

Unzip core values with “lighthouse projects” and “risky projects.”

Demonstrating the significance of processes and practices within the creative economies requires highlighting field-specific needs (e.g. funding). Both “lighthouses” and “submarines” need to be identified. As Christoph Weckerle explains: “Lighthouses, i.e. success stories, are sexy projects. Submarines are risky projects based on experiments, trial and error, uncertainty and open-ended outcomes.”

As a player, use a mixed strategy for (not) dealing with government. One possible focus would be to change the current system from outside politics,

e.g. by promoting education and co-creation among young people ([Ada Wong](#) in Hong Kong) or by activating social change through social movements like protest marches ([Michael Leung](#) in Hong Kong). Another would be to reinvent the governmental brief for pushing the creative economies. This has happened in Germany, as [Christoph Backes](#) reports: “When the government asked me to promote the eleven submarkets, I realized that the action takes place between these submarkets. So I changed the brief and framed eleven experimental settings to demonstrate that a market-based conception of the creative industries no longer fits.”

Use mapping. Mapping, as the examples presented by [John Davies](#), [Roman Page](#), [Desmond Hui](#), [Géraldine Borio](#) and [Laurent Gutierrez](#) show, is a useful tool to identify not only the facts about the creative industries, but also their relations, alliances and interactions with other industries. This tool enables visualizing the creativity of neighborhoods, brands, activities, communities and cities. It captures countries, regions, narrow streets or high-risers. And it serves to evaluate or represent any random phenomenon, pattern, content or context, which need neither be accurate nor real, but can follow a particular perspective. Mapping, therefore, is a tool for changing our mindset about any thing, fact or subject and for developing narratives. The examples presented at the Mapping Creativity workshop demonstrated that mapping is a practice that no longer depends on the map as an artifact, but is itself a context that lives and continues to unfold stories. For our needs, mapping might help to understand what creativity really is, how creative activity can be measured, what kind of sector skills are needed as well as how creative activity changes within cities. Mappings can have a central role in handling sector complexity in order to clarify the corresponding debates. Either the content or the context of the map will reflect user-experience.

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☒ Be it innovation in healthcare or digital democracy: Nesta's mappings reveal that some creative activity has moved online, that skills requirements need to be understood from job adverts and that creative activity in cities can be located by geo-coding listing data.

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Géraldine Borio invented new data researching the urban interaction within the small, narrow, unregistered and unmapped lanes and alleys running between Hong Kong's extremely densely built high-risers ...



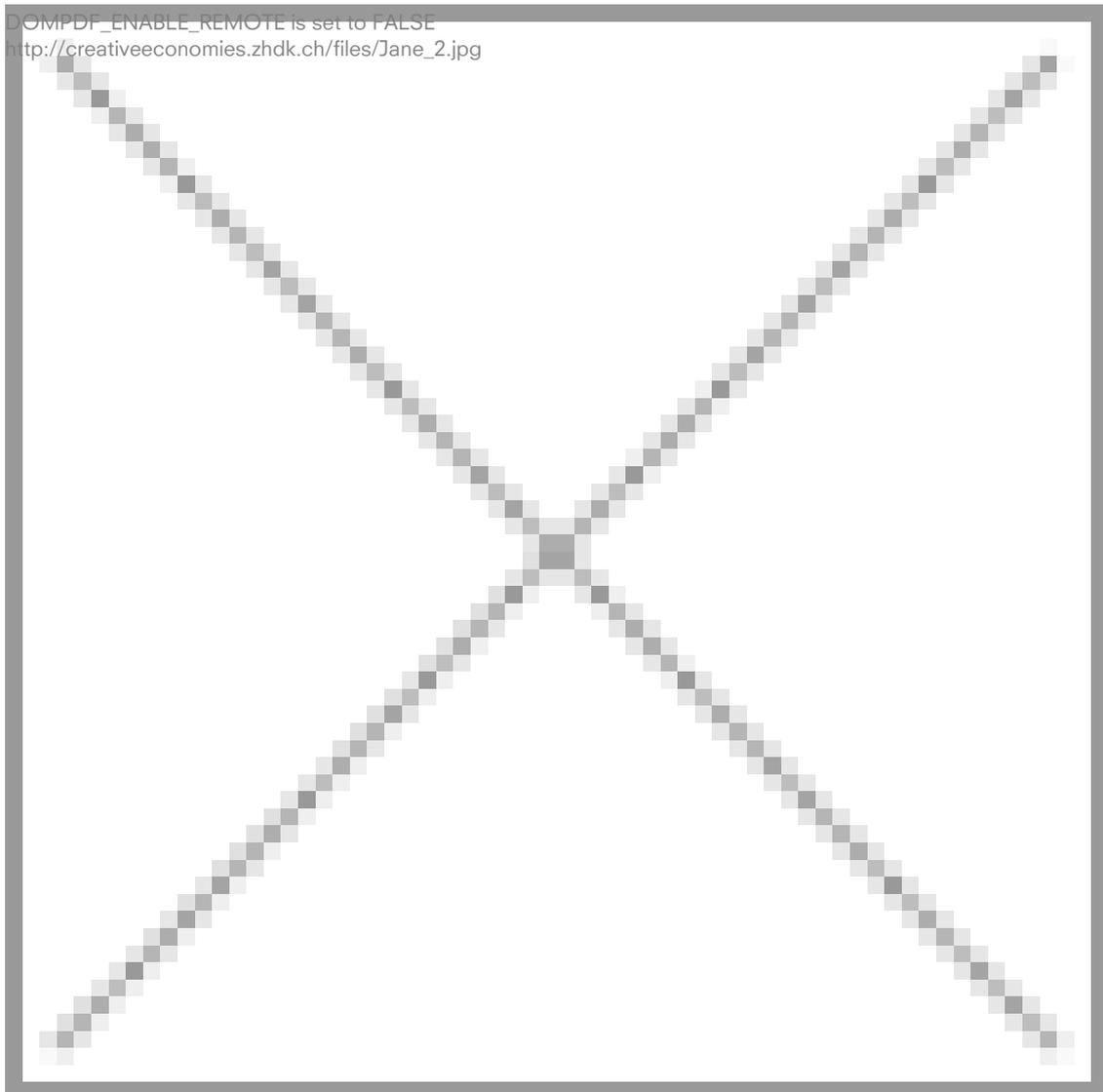
✖... Borio used black-and-white drawings, diagrams and plans, color and black-and-white photographs to visualize the patterns and repetitions of how people in Hong Kong occupy the city's in-between-spaces.

Creativity-related skills ought to be required. The United Kingdom turns out to be exceptional in many ways and we can learn from its example: Not only — and this is rare compared to governments worldwide — does it maintain a Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), but it has also recently identified the creative industries as a priority area in the national industry strategy. This is largely due to the work of Nesta, the UK's innovation foundation, which operates independently of the government. At the Mapping Creativity workshop, John Davies, an economic research fellow at Nesta, discussed some of the findings gained from mapping web-based and social media data of the sector: The creative industries are diverse and fast-changing; they mirror the central role of human talent; they are spatially concentrated and interact with the existing cultural stock; and they exhibit highly diverse activities and the impacts of the digital revolution (e.g. distribution, creation and supply).

Young practitioners need to be supported with upscaling their businesses.

The career stories of freelancers and founders like Susi Law, Debe Sham or Jane Ng, as well as their insights into their motivations, incentives, obstacles and practices, teach us about their astonishing ability to reinvent themselves, their practices, their careers, their businesses and their products. Jane Ng, for

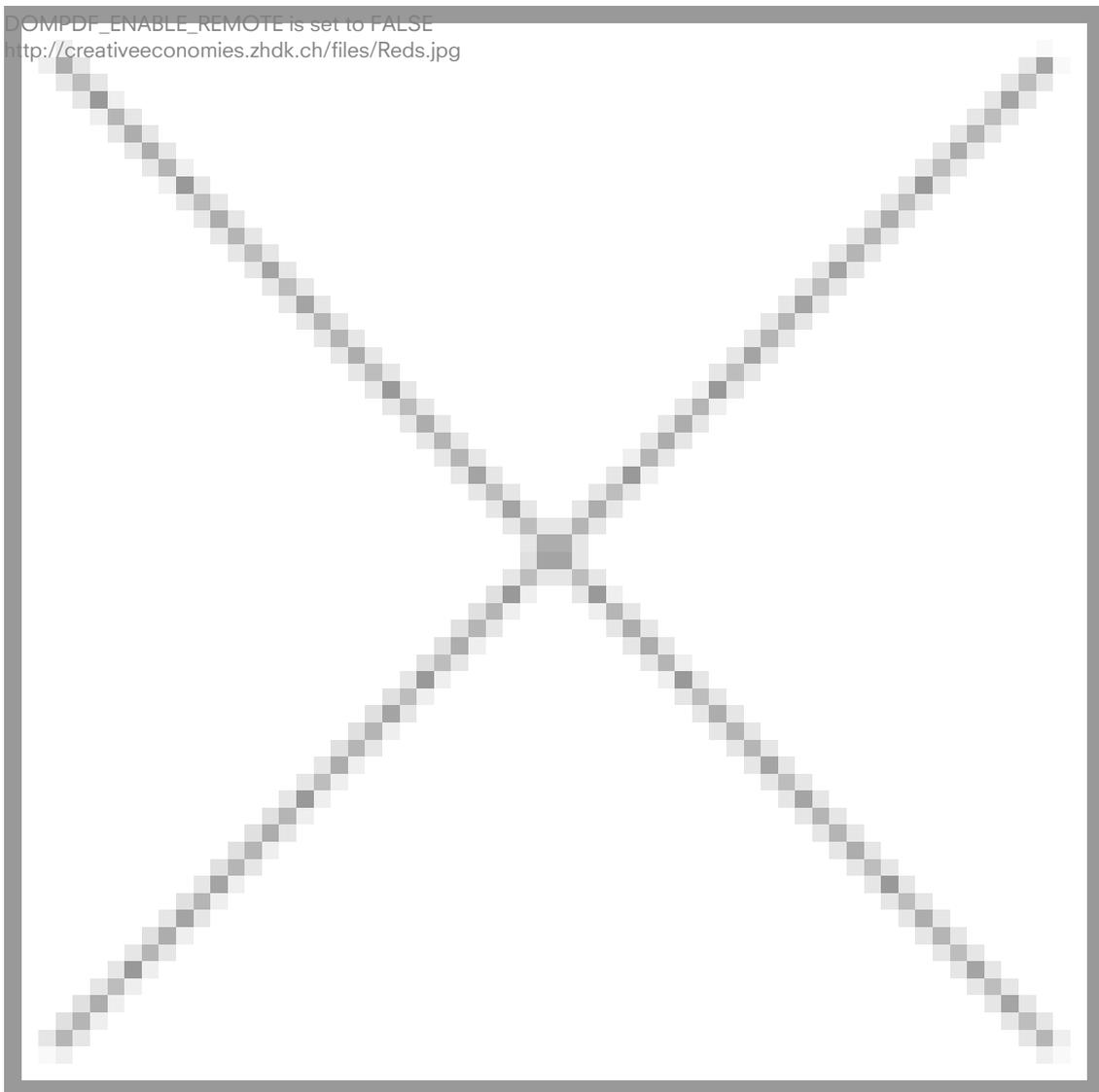
example, arrived late for the workshop because she had spent another morning «trying to save the company». Although she is «more and more getting ready to give up», she “cannot help but experiment with new ideas.” She studied design and launched her own label and shop in 2014. She struggled not only to get her business started, but also to develop it. She scaled up, scaled down, tried locally then globally, had pop-up-stores, a permanent store, many stores and an online store ... Only to realize: “Hong Kong is just not that much of a fashion city as one might think. One has to go to Paris or Milan.” What creative entrepreneurs like Jane need would be funding to build or keep career their pathways alive, but most of all to help them sustain and grow their business.



Even though Jane Ng’s label is a “lighthouse project”, it nonetheless could use some funding: “The fashion business is based on twice-yearly shows of upcoming collections including 30 to 40 styles. We literally have to reinvent the label twice a year. And Hong Kong, in comparison to Paris, isn’t fashion city enough to break through with a label. Despite the effort and resources we put into it, we don’t see any future.”

Overcoming the state of «being behind» takes time. Peter Benz, Hazel Wong, Reds Cheung or Michael Leung agree: “Hong Kong,” as Ada Wong states, “is

a little behind.” The working conditions within the city’s creative economies “are rather precarious than growing; the view on the arts and culture is rather narrow and traditional than dynamic.” Or: “Important representatives from the government or the artists union are not attending the workshop.” Reds Cheung, an art teacher during the day and an artist during his spare time, observes: “Art teachers are being undervalued — and so, too, therefore is being creative and practicing art within the educational system.” During the workshop the participants learn about political censorship as well as traditional role models in Hong Kong, in which women are allowed to study art, but are not supposed to work, while men are not allowed to study art, but are supposed to go into finance. Even though Peter Benz has some good news about the unproportional increase in the number of creative graduates: “Creative graduates increased by 220 % between 2001 to 2015. At the same time graduates all over Hong Kong increased by 42 %.”



☒ Reds Cheung, an artist and art teacher about Hong Kong art education: “My students are highly limited ... because all they learn from early on is the technique of assembling existing pictures.”

Artist do know a lot. Listening to career paths like Kingsley Ng's or Hartmut Wickert's reveals how artist strategies can lead into managing and directing creative activity rather than being creative oneself. Both examples show that the competencies developed during creative processes — including the iterations of trying out, repeating, adjusting, structuring and re-structuring contents or materials — are closely related to leadership skills. Leadership, like creative activity, is also framed and constrained by resources (funds, labour, time, space or material). Both require the ability to change directions, to present results and to motivate teams.



Hartmut Wickert refers to Frances Whitehead (2006), a civic practice artist who brings the methods, mindsets, and strategies of contemporary art practice to the process of shaping the future city.

About the workshop

Seeking to boost the strategic development of the creative and cultural industries in Hong Kong and beyond, the Academy of Visual Arts of Hong Kong Baptist University (AVA, HKBU) hosted the Mapping Creativity workshop, which was co-curated by AVA's Associate Director Peter Benz and its recent researcher-in-residence Christoph Weckerle from Zurich University of the Arts. The workshop was informed and supported by the CreativeEconomies research

venture of Zurich University of the Arts and by Nesta, the UK's innovation foundation, which are currently prototyping a new European Creative Economies Report, to be presented in Berlin in 2020. "Mapping Creativity" was acknowledged as an associated partner programme of Art Basel Hong Kong 2019.