



## Competing Conceptions of the Creative University

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## EDITORIAL

### Competing Conceptions of the Creative University

‘The Creative University’ was the theme for an international conference held at the University of Waikato on 15–16 August 2012 under the following description:<sup>1</sup>

Education and research have been transformed in the development of knowledge economies. The knowledge, learning and creative economies manifest the changing significance of intellectual capital and the thickening connections between on one hand economic growth, on the other hand knowledge, creativity (especially imagined new knowledge, discovery), the communication of knowledge, and the formation and spreading of creative skills in education. Increasingly economic and social activity is comprised by the ‘symbolic’ or ‘weightless’ economy with its iconic, immaterial and digital goods. This immaterial economy includes new international labour markets that demand analytic skills, global competencies and an understanding of markets in tradeable knowledges. Developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) not only define globalisation[,] they are changing the format, density and nature of the exchange and flows of knowledge, research and scholarship. Delivery modes in education are being reshaped. Global cultures are spreading in the form of knowledge and research networks. Openness and networking, cross-border people movement, flows of capital, portal cities and littoral zones, and new and audacious systems with worldwide reach; all are changing the conditions of imagining and producing and the sharing of creative work in different spheres. The economic aspect of creativity refers to the production of new ideas, aesthetic forms, scholarship, original works of art and cultural products, as well as scientific inventions and technological innovations. It embraces open source communication as well as commercial intellectual property. All of this positions education at the center of the economy/creativity nexus. But are education systems, institutions, assumptions and habits positioned and able so as to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges?

The conference was a venue for exploring all the aspects of education in (and as) the creative economy with the objective of extending the dialogue about the relationship between contemporary higher education and the changing face of contemporary economies provocatively described as ‘cognitive capitalism’, ‘metaphysical capitalism’, ‘intellectual capitalism’ and ‘designer capitalism’. The conference was an attempt to describe the relationship between the arts and sciences and this new form of capitalism, looking at the global reach and international imperatives of aesthetic and scientific modes of production, the conditions and character of acts of the imagination in the range of fields of knowledge and arts in this period, and the role of the research university in the formation of the creative knowledge that has a decisive function in contemporary advanced economies.

The conference follows a host of other initiatives that positions the university critically in relation to the notion of the creative economy. In particular, Richard Florida, Gates, Knudsen, and Stolarick (2006) examined the university's role in the creative economy through the lens of the '3Ts' of economic development: Technology, Talent and Tolerance.<sup>2</sup> Their main message seems to be that the university is the 'new engine of innovation':

The changing role of the university is bound up with the broader shift from an older industrial economy to an emerging Creative Economy. The past few decades have been one of profound economic transformation. In the past, natural resources and physical capital were the predominant drivers of economic growth. Now, human creativity is the driving force of economic growth. Innovation and economic growth accrue to those places that can best mobilize humans' innate creative capabilities from the broadest and most diverse segments of the population, harnessing indigenous talent and attracting it from outside.

Florida and his colleagues examine the three Ts and conclude 'To harness the university's capability to generate innovation and prosperity, it must be integrated into the region's broader creative ecosystem'. While Florida's work has been criticized, the report provides an excellent introduction to the relevant literature and an attempt to measure creativity at the institutional level.

*Creativity in higher education; Report on the EUA creativity project 2006–2007* (European University Association [EUA], 2007) represents another attempt to harness creativity and innovation of the university in the service of economic development:

Creativity has received a high degree of attention from scholars, professionals and policy makers alike in recent years. Yet, despite the significant overall interest in the topic, so far relatively little attention has been paid in Europe on how creativity and innovation can be enhanced within and by academe. This is particularly unexpected given the key role assigned to higher education for the development of a knowledge society and for achieving the Lisbon objectives of the European Union. Progress towards a knowledge-based society and economy will require that European universities, as centres of knowledge creation, and their partners in society and government give creativity their full attention.

Usefully, the report considers creativity in terms of a number of related themes, including: Creative partnerships: HEIs and external stakeholders; Creative learners: Innovation in teaching and learning; Creative cities/regions: HEIs, NGOs and governments; and Creative HEIs: structures and leadership. The EUA report seems to accept uncritically Florida's theoretical work and the current European emphasis on innovation.<sup>3</sup>

Jamie Peck's critique of Florida and human capital construction of the creative class and economy provides a useful benchmark:

Both the script and the nascent practices of urban creativity are peculiarly well suited to entrepreneurialized and neoliberalized urban landscapes. They provide a means to intensify and publicly subsidize urban consumption systems for a circulating class of gentrifiers, whose lack of commitment to place and whose weak community ties are perversely celebrated. In an echo of the Creative Class's reportedly urgent need to 'validate' their identities and lifestyles, this amounts to a process of public validation

for favored forms of consumption and for a privileged class of consumers. (Peck, 2005, p. 764)

He suggests that ‘the notion of creative cities extends to the urban domain the principles and practices of creative, flexible autonomy that were so powerfully articulated in the libertarian business ideologies of the 1990s’ (Peck, 2005, p. 764). Peck ties the script of creative cities and creative class to ‘the entrepreneurial efforts of deindustrialized cities’, the ‘creative-capital’ of ‘creative productionism’ that empowers an ‘unstable networks of elite actors’ that ‘reconstitute urban-elitist, “leadership” models of city governance’ and ‘lubricate new channels for rapid “policy learning”’ for fast capitalism and the fast market (p. 767). Others critics seeing Florida’s work as the most widely adopted urban growth strategies in decades have found little theoretical support for the connection between the creative class and economic development (Hoyman & Faricy, 2009).

Clearly, similar critiques could be mounted of the ‘creative university’, although the concept might be given a range of different interpretations that do not rely on neoliberal constructs or theory. By comparison, ‘creative universities’ might embrace a myriad of different descriptions based on user-centred, open-innovation ecosystems that engage in cocreation, coproduction, codesign and coevaluation emphasizing theories of collaboration, collective intelligence, commons-based peer production and mass participation in conceptions of *open development*.<sup>4</sup> This latter view, which is only now beginning to be theorized, seems able to recuperate many of the grass-roots participation, consciousness-raising models and user-oriented action research paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s first invented and developed by feminists and ecosocial movements to marry these political models with new social media and technologically enabled social production infrastructures embodied in crowdsourcing community informatics, and peer learning strategies.

Underlying this alternative is an account of the way in which there has been a paradigm shift in understanding creativity. The model of creativity that has proved so enduring and alluring is that which emerges from German idealism and German and English Romanticism: the paradigm of creativity based on the individual artist of genius. As I have argued (Peters, 2009), this model emerges in the literature from sources in the Romantic Movement emphasizing the creative genius and the way in which creativity emerges from deep subconscious processes, involves the imagination, is anchored in the passions, cannot be directed and is beyond the rational control of the individual. This account has a close fit to business as a form of ‘brainstorming’, ‘mind-mapping’ or ‘strategic planning’, and is closely associated with the figure of the risk-taking entrepreneur. By contrast, I argued for ‘the design principle’ that is both relational and social, and surfaces in related ideas of ‘social capital’, ‘situated learning’ and ‘P2P’ (peer-to-peer) accounts of commons-based peer production. It is seen to be a product of social and networked environments—rich semiotic and intelligent environments in which everything speaks.

Most recently, at the conference ‘Organisation and the New’,<sup>5</sup> organized by Professor Susanne Weber at Marburg University, an international symposium was held on the theme of the creative university with contributions from Peter Murphy

(James Cook, Australia), Ruyu Hung (National Chiayi University, Taiwan), Amanda Bill (Massey University, New Zealand), Ronald Barnett (University of London, UK), Nesta Devine, (Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand), Till Stellmacher (ZEF Bonn, Germany) and Dorji Thinley (Royal University of Bhutan). These contributions promised a new conception of the creative university, nicely summarized and demarcated by Ron Barnett in terms of a multiple conceptualization comprising (1) an intellectual creativity (a creativity in research and in knowledge generation); (2) a pedagogical creativity (a creativity in curriculum design and in the pedagogical process); (3) an environmental creativity, and (4) a learning creativity (a creativity among students, in their learning accomplishments). In addition to these four levels of creativity, he adds (5) a reflexive creativity in which a university demonstrates its creativity in its capacities for understanding itself and its possibilities. The alternative possibilities of the creative university was the ethos that provided both a critique of mainstream accounts of the creation of economic value and an orientation towards universities as creative institutions that have a role to play in forms of global 'creative development', a counter-discourse that takes form as an alternative 'development' agenda that actively employs the 'technologies of openness'.<sup>6</sup>

### Notes

1. See the conference website <http://tcreativeu.blogspot.com/>
2. This is based on the theoretical work of Richard Florida (2002), Florida (2004, Florida (2005).
3. See Godin (2011; a shorter version is available in Sveiby, Gripenberg, & Segercrantz, 2012)
4. Cocreation and coproduction in open development represents a very different political model from the United Nations' neoliberal model of creative capital (UN, 2008; UN, 2010).
5. See the website <http://dasneue2013.blogspot.de/p/venue.html> for Jahrestagung der Kommission Organisationspädagogik der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft.
6. A third creative university conference is to be held at the University of Bhutan in April 2014. Those interested in attending should contact Dr Dorji Thinley, Director of Research and External Relations, [dthinley6789@gmail.com](mailto:dthinley6789@gmail.com)

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