

Creativity and Socio-Economic Development:

Space for the Interests of Publics

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The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension; seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space'

(Calvino, 1972, 164)

1. Introduction

This paper, similarly to previous analysis, suggests links between the development of economies and the stimulation of people's creativity. Both inter- and intra- country variations in development (Henderson *et al*, 2001) are, for example, associated with such links. Over recent years these arguments have often been framed in terms of achieving regional 'competitiveness' in a global market economy (Bristow, 2005), for example through innovation in industries in general (Florida, 2002a) and through the success of creative (or cultural) industries in particular (Caves, 2000). Differently from existing approaches, nonetheless, we place the links between economic development and creativity in the context defined by the governance of economies: the unfolding of creativity, we suggest, is related to the space that is given to people to take part in those decision-making processes which may have a substantive impact on their lives.

At its roots, our concern with creativity is based on the identification of strategic choice as a source of power¹ which, under current globalisation, is unevenly distributed (Hymer, 1972; Cowling and Sugden, 1994, 1998). The basis of this framework is a heterodox economic analysis of the theory of the firm (Cowling and

¹ Zeitlin (1974) argues that the power to govern (in other words, to control) a large corporation equates to the power to make the strategic decisions that determine its broad direction; these include decisions about its relationships with other corporations, with governments and with employees, and about its geographical orientation. More recently, this analysis has been used as a foundation for the so-called strategic choice framework, deploying a governance lens to view the activities of transnational corporations, networks and other forms of economic organisation, and to view regional, national and indeed global economies.

Sugden, 1998a), of the development of economies (Sugden and Wilson, 2002) and of forms of globalisation of production (Sugden and Wilson, 2005). The analysis focuses most especially on the governance of the transnational corporation and its impact on contemporary economies,² contrasting the nature and implications of large corporations with the experiences of successful agglomerations in the likes of the Third Italy. Complementary to a focus on the distribution of strategic decision-making power in the economy, this approach has, then, evolved into the identification of some foundational elements that can nurture multinational networking in the interests of publics.³

In this paper, we analyse and assess creativity as a specific element that may favour the emergence and recognition of publics and their interests. Private interests are observed to occupy centre-stage in economic analysis as well as in the realities that people typically experience. But to focus exclusively on the impact of strategic decision-making on those who take an active part in it, as a result of their private concerns, not only offers an incomplete perspective, but also clouds economic development in fog. In response, we suggest the possibility that the interests of publics might provide an insightful evaluation criterion for the development of localities as well as for economic geography. In line with Dewey (1927), we argue that the marginalisation of publics, by which we mean their exclusion from choices which strategically impact on them, occurs also because publics may not be aware of their own existence. From this we identify the prospect of people in actual and potential publics being brought back in decision-making processes, enabled to express their creativity, kindling their imagination and ideas so as to shape new strategic directions in the economies in which they have an interest.

A focus on publics would not only change decision-making processes, but notably the scope and unit of analysis for a large part of economic geographers, scilicet from agglomeration dynamics within the administrative boundaries of cities and regions, to

² See, *inter alia*, Hymer (1972) on uneven development; Cowling and Sugden (1998b) on strategic international trade; Cowling and Tomlinson (2000) on Japan.

³ See, for example, Cowling and Sugden (1999) on multinational webs; Sacchetti and Sugden (2003) on network forms; Sacchetti (2004) on knowledge; Branston *et al* (2006a) on the public interest.

the space defined by the publics and their locations, carrying their interests and motivations, as well as being rooted in different cultural contexts.⁴

Specifically, we articulate our analysis into particular policy recommendations by advocating the construction and development of public creativity forums. This is suggested as an initial step in a possible alteration in strategic choice processes, perhaps moving current economic development and globalization away from a focus on private exclusive interests, which have been reflected by the Washington consensus approach to economic policy, and identified at the roots of uneven development. Instead, we stir towards alternatives that break the constraints implied by typical approaches to regional competitiveness. Public creativity forums are viewed as spaces defined not yet in physical terms, but according to the embracing of certain types of relations, deemed as ‘enablers’ for otherwise marginalised publics. . . These relations are aimed at free communication about strategic choices on the development of economies and based upon shared values, such as openness; a rejection of private interests dominating the interests of publics; people’s concern, through reasoned and coherent understanding with each other’s ideas and perspectives. Institutionally, forums would recognise such values and promote relationships consistently. Forums are described as having creative atmospheres in multi-dimensional spaces, as they might develop in varied inter-acting and overlapping scales both within and across international and local territories. Echoing the words of Calvino (1972) with which the paper is introduced, they might provide spaces for people to step outside the economic ‘inferno’ that most experience as a consequence of the ignoring of the interest of publics.

The paper identifies two specific catalysts in favour of the creation of new spaces of debate and inclusion: artistic activities and education. We focus especially on the first of these catalysts and point to complementarities between both. Visual and performing arts, music, cinema and indeed artistic activities more generally are seen as a viaticum for the stimulation and expression of people’s creativity, thus a potentially significant influence on the construction and development of public creativity forums. This is an emphasis on artistic activities that differs markedly from the preoccupations of much other literature on creativity, certainly in economics,

⁴ See Scott (2004) for a detailed discussion of different perspectives in economic geography.

where analysis of creative industries tends to concentrate on a competition amongst peoples to produce outcomes that can be transacted on a market (see Currid, 2009, amongst others). In contrast, public creativity forums are concerned with the development and application of each person's creativity, whether or not this can be displayed and realised through goods and services that can be transacted on the market. From this perspective the significance of artistic activities is their stimulating affects on people, hence publics, with interests in any sector ('creative industry' or otherwise).

The analysis proceeds as follows. Section 2 lays the foundations for our appreciation of creativity by considering in detail the strategic choice approach to economic development, competitiveness and globalisation, rooting analysis in understanding of the transnational corporation. This leads to an examination of the distinction between private and public interests, hence the possibility of the latter as a criterion for economic geography to assess realities. It concludes that public interests tend to be marginalised in people's typical experiences and, with that in mind, Section 3 focuses on the kindling of people's creativity so that they might shape new strategic directions in the economies in which they have an interest. We develop the notion of 'public creativity forums' and explore implications. Section 3.1 discusses a notion of 'creative atmosphere', related to but distinct from Marshall's (1920) concept of industrial atmosphere. Section 3.2 considers visual and performing arts, music, cinema and indeed artistic activities more generally as a viaticum for the stimulation and expression of people's creativity, thus a potentially significant influence on strategic direction across all sectors. Section 4 illustrates the notion of creative space through the experience of self-styled 'Mutoids', sets of people in various parts of the world who are engaged in creative arts and who appear to live by values and norms that suggest the presence of particular shared values and rules of behaviour (Sacchetti 2006). Section 5 offers concluding remarks: a suggestion for new action research in economic geography.

2. Power and uneven development

The concentration of power and uneven development are in many respects well recognised. For example, Henderson *et al* (2001) review analysis of uneven development across and within countries, and its relation to issues such as trade, investment, technology, urbanisation and income. For them, ‘the most striking fact about the economic geography of the world is the uneven distribution of activity’ (81), reflected in 54% of world GDP being produced by countries occupying 10% of the land mass. Similarly Coe and Yeung (2001), assert that not only is ‘uneven development ... the single most visible structural outcome of globalisation processes’ (370), it has been studied by radical geographers since well before globalisation became a key word in the social sciences in the 1990s. Moreover, they identify two constituents to the unevenness: a structural element, which is defined by different impacts across sectors in a given territory, and a geographical element, which refers to variations across territories. The latter factor is coupled with ‘uneven power relations underlying most global production chains such that some segments of these chains have disproportionately greater power and control over other segments’ (371). It is notable that this recognition of concentrated power applies not only to the power associated with particular regions, but also to that of particular firms. Fold (2001), for example, considers large producers in the chocolate industry in Europe, highlighting the impact of their activities on cocoa production in West Africa, and linking those with the influences of the structural adjustment programmes stimulated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

What has tended to be ignored in these analyses, however, is a consideration of strategic choice as the source of power, hence as a root cause of uneven development. The potential significance of this perspective was indicated in the heterodox economics literature by Hymer’s (1972) seminal contribution – also well before globalisation became a popular concern in the social sciences. He recognised transnational corporations as likely to be especially influential organisations in the world economy, and contemplated what this would imply by extrapolating from an appreciation of their place in the historical development of US capitalism. Hymer argued (*ibid*, 50):

‘One would expect to find the highest offices of the [transnational] corporations concentrated in the world’s major cities ... These ... will be ... major centres of high-level strategic planning. Lesser cities throughout the world will deal with the day-to-day operations of specific local problems. These in turn will be arranged in a hierarchical fashion: the larger and more important ones will contain regional corporate headquarters, while the smaller ones will be confined to lower level activities. Since business is usually the core of the city, geographical specialisation will come to reflect the hierarchy of corporate decision making, and the occupational distribution of labour in a city or region will depend upon its function in the international economic system.’

Hymer’s analysis has been criticized in its details, yet it has also been argued on the basis of the empirical evidence that if it is accepted for the characterisation of a complex reality that it purports to be, then it offers insight (Dicken, 1992; Cowling and Sugden, 1994). Indeed, his analysis has received increased theoretical and empirical attention over the last decade.

2.1 The strategic choice framework

The focus on corporations and strategy is taken up in Cowling and Sugden (1998a), grounding analysis in Coase (1937, 1991) but critiquing mainstream economic theories, including the transactions cost approach that rests on Williamson (1975). The strategic-choice framework accommodates debates about differences across corporations with their ‘homes’ in different countries, not least the idea of distinctions between Anglo-US and Japanese firms (Aoki, 1990), as well as debates about flexible specialisation, such as the reorganisation by large corporations along lines implied by successful agglomerations of small firms in, for instance, the Third Italy (Sabel, 1988). The strategy perspective reasons that large corporations are characterised by an essential asymmetry: a concentration in the power to make strategic decisions over the direction of production. Drawing on Zeitlin (1974), the basic idea is as follows (see also Branston *et al*, 2006a; Bailey *et al*, 2006):

- A transnational corporation can be shown to have an explicit and/or implicit strategy that is more or less coherent;
- This strategy encompasses the aims of the corporation, both what those aims are and the broad terms for their pursuit;
- The strategy is especially (albeit not all) important in determining the activity that the corporation undertakes;
- The strategy has determinants, including choices that can be conscious and/or unconscious;⁵
- The power to choose its strategy equates to the power to govern the corporation: to govern is to have the ability to choose – subject to constraints – both the aims of the corporation, and the broad terms for their pursuit;
- The power to govern typically lies with a subset of those with an interest in the corporation's activities, despite the objections and perhaps resistance of other interested parties.⁶

Sugden and Wilson (2002) apply this perspective to a consideration of the development of economies. They position Hymer's (1972) analysis of uneven development in the context of the agenda supplied by the 'Washington consensus' (Williamson, 1990; Rodrik, 1996). The consensus is argued to place transnational corporations at its heart and a version has been a strong prevailing influence throughout most countries of the world since the early 1980s.⁷ Illustrating from South Africa and Nicaragua, and as with transnational corporations, they reason that insofar as the aims of economic development for a particular region are chosen, the process is typically characterised by a concentration of power, with the institutions at the core of the Washington consensus being especially influential – for example through the

⁵ This perspective has strong ties with Penrose (1952, 818): 'there is considerable evidence that ... many decisions are reached after a conscious consideration of alternatives, and that men have a wide range of genuine choices.'

⁶ The applicability of this perspective across countries and legal jurisdictions is implicitly addressed in a growing literature on convergence in corporate governance. See for example Wojcik (2006), examining practice across Europe and finding evidence of convergence to an Anglo-US model.

⁷ For an illustration, see Fold's (2001) aforementioned analysis of the World Bank and IMF backed structural adjustment programmes in West Africa.

World Bank's (1999) emphasis on GNP *per capita*, or the UNDP's (1997) broader approach based upon its Human Development Index. This conclusion accords with Nelson Mandela's perception that 'people living in poverty have the least access to power to shape policies – to shape their future' (Mandela, 2006, 1).

The strategic choice framework recognises that, for any region, there are many people with an interest in its economic development, and many who might have a view on development aims (Branston *et al*, 2006b). In current practice these people (e.g. those who currently live in the region, as well as those who might live there in the future, not least potential immigrants) tend to have little or no effective voice. Moreover, the development in and around the region would likely impact on, and be impacted by, development elsewhere – in other places in the same country, continent and indeed the world. People in those places might have interests that are relevant, and possibly experiences which they could exchange with others, so that together people and regions might all find more desirable development aims than those currently being highlighted.

Analogous arguments to those about economic development are also made by Sugden and Wilson (2005) when analysing the conceptualisation of globalisation. They suggest that models of development correspond to models of globalisation. For example, the Washington consensus development agenda is associated with a Washington consensus form of globalisation; the aims of both are identical, and each implies a parallel set of strategic choices to the other. This reasoning overlaps with that in Coe and Yeung (2001), who stress that 'economic globalisation is not some kind of immutable inevitability, but a set of processes that is socially constructed, and therefore can be encouraged or resisted by actors/institutions at various scales' (368). In other words, we might view strategic decisions to pursue a Washington consensus development agenda as paralleled by strategic decisions to pursue a Washington consensus form of globalisation.

This perspective can also be extended to a consideration of competitiveness, a flexible and loosely used concept; as Poerksen (1995) said of ‘development’, and as we might observe of ‘globalisation’, ‘competitiveness’ is a plastic word. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note Bristow’s (2005) observation that ‘the regional competitiveness discourse ignores the possibility that regional prosperity might be achieved ... by the development of community or social enterprises which meet broader social and environmental ... objectives. As a consequence, policies tend to prioritise rather narrow, private sector originated agendas at the expense of broader regeneration initiatives’ (295). That is to say, the aims of regional competitiveness are confined, provided by the private sector agendas that inform, and are therefore in line with, the Washington consensus development agenda which seeks, for example, to enable private enterprise and in particular transnational corporations freely to move goods, services and capital across economies.⁸

2.2 *The interests of publics*

Bristow’s (2005) recognition that private agendas occupy centre-stage in competitiveness discourse can be re-interpreted as public interests being confined to the margins, causing us to raise the possibility that the interests of publics might provide a suitable evaluation criterion for economic geography. This follows Long (1990), who proposes the public interest as a criterion for research and policy in public administration and political science, and Branston *et al* (2006a), who suggest it for much of economics.

According to Dewey’s (1927) seminal work in political and social philosophy, an action – such as making a strategic choice – might have significant consequences for two categories of people: private interests, those who are directly engaged in the action; public interests, those not directly engaged (see also Young, 2002). An action

⁸ Compare Branston *et al* (2006b), offering the prospect of a conceptualisation of competitiveness that is much broader, albeit not arguing that such a broad approach is currently pursued in practice.

might be associated with multiple private interests and multiple publics. Each public is seen to have shared concerns.

Drawing on Dewey (1927), Long (1990) views a public interest as an evolving consensus, a criterion agreed upon by a public and against which private actions can be assessed. For him, therefore, the ‘consequences of private parties’ actions create a public as that public discovers its shared concern with their effects and the need for their control. The public’s shared concern with consequences is a public interest’ (171). Referring to this, Branston *et al* (2006a, 195) identify ‘the public interest in a corporation’s activities in general and in its strategies in particular as the agreed upon, evolving concerns amongst all of those indirectly and significantly affected by those activities and strategies (wherever they live, whatever their nationality).’

To illustrate, according to the strategic choice framework, to the extent that the aims of the typical transnational corporation, and the broad terms for their pursuit, are chosen, the decision is made by a subset of those with an interest in the corporation’s activities. That choice by private interests impacts on others, on publics. Positive outcomes discussed in the literature include effects on technological transfer and contingent employment growth, commonly argued as potentially desirable consequences of incoming foreign direct investment with respect to the development of localities (see, for instance, the appraisal of transnationals’ impacts in Dicken (2007)). However, even in these cases we would argue that an exclusion issue remains, and that technological transfer and employment growth induced by transnationals have their shortcomings (Blomström, 1986; Blomström and Kokko, 2002).

Consider also, for example, the implications for international trade. Cowling and Sugden (1998b) suggest that ‘free international trade’ implies the freedom of the private interests governing transnational corporations to manage trade in pursuit of

their own interests, despite the possibly adverse impacts on others. This includes, for example, managing trade in pursuit of a divide and rule approach to labour. The idea is that the strategic decision-makers of a transnational corporation might be concerned to improve their bargaining power with respect to employees, so as to improve profits. Accordingly, a corporation supplying markets across Europe might deliberately opt to produce the same goods in various countries, so that if employee industrial action in one country interrupts supply, that might be compensated by an increase in supply from elsewhere (on the basis that collective action tends to be more problematic for employees across rather than within countries). Such strategies clearly have consequences beyond the private interests making the choice; not least, the affected employees are a public with an interest in the action.

Similar arguments could be made in the analysis of uneven development, globalisation and regional competitiveness. Following Hymer (1972), concentrations in the power to govern corporations have significant effects on levels of development, wealth and poverty; those in poverty in so-called less developed countries have public interests in the strategic choices of transnationals. Sacchetti (2004), for instance, applies Hymer's divide and rule strategy (Hymer 1972) to knowledge production and diffusion across countries. Referring to the international division of labour, and critical towards current faith in technological transfer, she argues – building on Marglin (1974) – that the geographical scattering of different activities, which follows strategic decisions taken by restricted groups organising activities transnationally, may jeopardise peoples' knowledge in those localities where concentration of operational and repetitive tasks occurs. Vicious cycles, as path dependence theories would explain (Nelson, 1994), might then start to build up, affecting institutions, for instance in the education system, by shaping strategies in ways that suit the transnational production system, possibly disregarding the interests of different publics.

Likewise the analysis of globalisation, concentration of strategic decision-making power in a Washington consensus stimulated reality implying publics with interests

that are not being met, as reflected in the frustrations and actions of so-called anti-globalisation movements. These are made up of diverse people and groups, most of whom are probably not against globalisation in the sense of using new technologies and opportunities to decrease the territorial barriers between people (Sugden and Wilson, 2005). They form interested publics, expressing their interests in protests against the outcomes of current forms of globalisation, and against the ways in which those outcomes are being pursued.

In principle a fundamental issue might be that public interests are being deliberately flouted. But even 80 years ago Dewey (1927, 314) identified another possibility, one that technological changes and the so-called new economy might make even more pertinent today (evidence of vociferous portions of anti-globalisation movements notwithstanding):

‘Indirect, extensive, enduring and serious consequences of conjoint and interacting behaviour call a public into existence having a common interest in controlling ... consequences. But the machine age has so enormously expanded, multiplied, intensified and complicated the scope of the indirect consequences ... that the resultant public cannot identify and distinguish itself.’

He sees a special problem with ‘the eclipse of the public’ (304), which ‘seems to be lost’ (308), ‘amorphous and unarticulated’ (317). For Dewey (*ibid*, 327), ‘the prime difficulty’ for acting in the public interest is discovery of ‘the means by which a scattered, mobile and manifold public may so recognise itself as to define and express its interests.’

3. Creativity, communication and public space

An implication of our analysis of power, uneven development and strategic choice is that confining the interests of publics to the margins raises fundamental queries about the exercise of creativity in economic development. More specifically, excluding actual and potential publics from strategic choice processes would seem to deny the people who make up those publics the opportunity to develop and use their imagination and ideas (their creativity) in the shaping and determination of economic strategy. For example, echoing the words of Bristow (2005), prioritising narrow, private inputs in the regional competitiveness discourse ignores the possibility that regional economic prosperity might be achieved by the development of innovative economic strategies that are stimulated by the imagination and ideas of currently excluded people, who might also catalyse the targeting of broader and even currently unimagined aims. This would have no import if the currently excluded people have no inherent creativity to bring to bear, but that seems most unlikely. Consider, for instance, the thoughts of Chomsky (1975) on the education of children. He argues that each person has an intrinsic, unique creativity and that this needs to be nurtured, hence he advocates education aimed ‘to provide the soil and the freedom required for the growth of this creative impulse’ (164).

Moreover, an exclusion of publics might be associated with a downward spiral: people’s creativity is not being exercised, thus not stimulated, explored and enhanced; therefore their capabilities to exercise imagination are truncated and even lost; therefore their creativity is not exercised ... This might lead to, and be fed by, perceptions of ‘not counting’. Dewey’s (1927) focus on publics being eclipsed is also a relevant factor: perhaps a reason for the eclipse is an exclusion which, over time, becomes self reinforcing, resulting in a public losing sight of itself, of not even being aware of its own existence.

Viewed from the opposite direction, however, this analysis implies a challenge and a potential opportunity to consider policy that (re)enables people’s creativity in actual and potential publics. As a consequence, policy action can be oriented towards seeking to kindle people’s imagination and ideas, stimulating their creativity, thereby

boosting their capability to seize opportunities to shape and determine strategic choices influencing the development of the economies in which they have an interest. Although the precise consequences that this might have are unclear, we would hypothesise that there would be opportunities to pursue new avenues of economic prosperity, simply because more people would be exercising their creativity and would be doing so in search of new strategies (Sugden and Wilson, 2005).

As for how to enable creative publics, a first step is suggested by Dewey's (1927) consideration of the means by which lost publics might find themselves. For him, 'the essential need ... is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public' (365). The necessary continuous, inclusive discourse is argued to be in part an attitude acquired by nurtured habit, with respect to knowledge, learning and communication:

'An obvious requirement is freedom of social inquiry and of distribution of its conclusions ... There can be no public without full publicity in respect to all consequences which concern it. Whatever obstructs and restricts publicity, limits and distorts public opinion and checks and distorts thinking on social affairs. Without freedom of expression, not even methods of social enquiry can be developed. For tools can be evolved and perfected only in operation; in application to observing, reporting and organizing actual subject-matter; and this application *cannot occur save through free and systematic communication*' (*ibid*, emphasis added, 339-340).

A related stress on communication is also seen in analysis of the competence-based view of the knowledge economy (reviewed in the context of economic geography by Gertler, 2001). For example, Amin and Cohendet (2000, 99) consider effective knowledge circulation in an organisation as associated with 'dialogue, discussion, experience-sharing', and to 'socialising activities'. In issue are cognitive phenomena generated through interaction. There is a particular focus on 'relationships, based on

shared norms and conventions’ and on communities of practice, ‘groups of individuals informally bound together by shared expertise and a common problem’ (Gertler, 2001, 18). The reference to common problem echoes the common interest essential to a public, and suggests that the identification of publics might learn from analysis of communities of practice and the competence-based view of the knowledge economy more generally.

Accordingly, we infer that creative publics might be enabled, in the first instance, by the construction and nurturing of ‘public creativity forums’: spaces where people - the members of actual and potential publics – can freely engage with each other in learning, discussion and debate about the development of the economies in which they have an interest. Complementarily, in public creativity forums, people’s relations are characterised by shared values of openness, of their essence rejecting any significant control of private over public interests, so as to avoid outcomes that are essentially similar to the current realities of concentrated power in economic development, competitiveness and globalisation. Necessarily, the foundations for the interest of each public are anchored in rational argument and analysis, as people recognise and cultivate a concern with each other’s ideas and perspectives through reasoned and coherent understanding.⁹

Based on deliberation, the views expressed in public creativity forums would be used as a criterion to assess private action. Their role therefore is not merely reactive, following the impact of exclusive private decisions. Rather, public creativity forums represent the space for actively debating issues and opportunities that might not yet be recognised or exploited through private action. In other words, these forums are a means for exercising a *collective entrepreneurial function*, with a distinct focus and incentive. Rather than the classic Austrian argument which identifies the entrepreneur as the one who can recognise unprecedented profit opportunities in a world of dispersed knowledge (Hayek, 1945; Kirzner, 1992), we suggest that the individual

⁹ Using the terminology of Scott (2006, 3), a public creativity forum can be viewed as a specific type of ‘creative field’, a notion that ‘can be used to describe any system of social relationships that shapes or influences human ingenuity and inventiveness and that is the site of concomitant innovations.’

incentive to participate in public creativity forums would be defined by the opportunity to discover, through deliberation:

- 1) Belonging to specific publics;
- 2) Objectives and preferences both at the individual and at the public level.

Whilst the entrepreneurial element in human action has been commonly understood as responding ‘to the signals for pure profit that are generated by the errors that arise out of the dispersed knowledge available in society’ (Kirznner, 1992: 161), we hypothesise (consistently with our discussion of competitiveness) that the profit motive might not be the only causal factor for human choice. We thereby highlight the challenge of searching for mechanisms that allow for a variety of objectives and preferences to emerge. We suggest that with public creativity forums as a basis, individuals could start – with respect for each other and hence for publics – to discuss and talk with others, to share arguments and mutually influence ideas by increasing – through communication – the diversity of perspectives and possibilities on the strategic choices that underpin the development of economies.

3.1 Creative atmosphere

It follows from our analysis thus far that public creativity forums would have an atmosphere in some ways similar to the ‘industrial atmosphere’ that Marshall (1920) identified as characteristic of certain places. He refers to people in an agglomerated industry receiving ‘advantages ... from near neighbourhood to one another. The mysteries of the trade become no mysteries; but are as it were in the air, and children learn them unconsciously’ (271). For example, ‘if one man starts a new idea, it is taken up by others and combined with suggestions of their own; and thus it becomes the source of further new ideas’ (*ibid*). Public creativity forums would be similarly spaces where the exercise of imagination and the pursuit of ideas are in the

atmosphere; spaces where ideas flow between people, learning from each other, shaping each other's perspectives.

However, a crucial difference is that when analysing industrial atmosphere Marshall (1920) is not especially concerned with strategic choices in an economy. Furthermore, whilst he considers place, we focus on the more general notion of creative atmosphere conceived in socio-economic space.

In this respect our argument follows the likes of Lorentzen (2007) (see also, for example, Agrawal *et al* (2006), who use empirical evidence on patenting to consider the significance of social relationships in altering the impact of geographical proximity on knowledge flows; the discussions of relational proximity in Amin (2000) and Gertler (2001); and Boschma's (2005) consideration of proximity concepts more broadly). Lorentzen refers to an agreement in the literature that knowledge is developed and exchanged in social spaces, but she criticises the tendency in research on regional development policy to degenerate this insight into territorial determinism. Analysis tends to focus on place (industrial districts, milieus ...) rather than space, when it is, however, the latter that is most relevant to knowledge flows and innovation.

The implication we draw from Lorentzen is that creative atmospheres can be generated and renewed through multi-dimensional spaces. In some circumstances these might include a special territorial dimension – a public creativity forum rooted in and developed from a particular region is certainly conceivable - but not necessarily. More generally forums might develop in different, inter-acting and overlapping scales – for example in festivals, conferences, meetings, projects (including university-linked projects), both within and across territories, international and local.¹⁰ These may be promoted through a variety of organisational solutions,

¹⁰ See also Dicken *et al* (2001) on multiple scales in the global economy.

encompassing institutionally the objectives and motivations of the publics involved or to be involved.

3.2 *Artistic activities*

Over recent years the subject of creative industries – hence visual and performing arts, music, cinema and indeed artistic activities more generally – has become topical in large part because of their potential for contributing to wealth creation in a competitive market environment (Caves, 2000; Florida, 2002a; Gordon and McCann, 2005; Neff, 2005; Leslie and Rantisi, 2006). However, an implication of our analysis is another, quite distinct explanation for a telling impact: because artistic activities are a viaticum for the stimulation and expression of people’s creativity,¹¹ they are a potentially significant stimulant in the construction and development of public creativity forums. It can even be hypothesised that people’s openness and access to artistic activities is a crucible for evolving public creativity forums.

This direction of causality accords with Scott (2004, 488). Writing of the recent cultural turn in economic geography, he identifies ‘a growing conviction that not only were certain earlier generations of geographers and other social scientists incorrect to regard culture simply as an outcome of underlying economic realities, but that these realities themselves are in fundamental ways subject to the play of cultural forces.’ This is also a point long before recognised but since lost:

‘Adam Smith, the master builder of models in both economics and ethics, was ... as thoroughly comfortable drawing his lessons from Hamlet as from Hume. Like the creator of a patchwork quilt, he dapples in dramas, dabs in novels, dusts in some

¹¹ Support for this assertion might come from artists themselves: *inter alia*, for Wordsworth (1802; quoted in Knowles, 1999, 832) ‘poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge’; for Cartier-Bresson (1952; quoted in Knowles, 1999, 193) ‘photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organisation of forms which give that event its proper expression’; for de Mille (1975; quoted in Knowles, 1999, 257) ‘the truest expression of a people is in its dances and its music.’

poetry and bellows opera. *It is not simply that Smith likes and employs the arts. Rather ... Smith finds the arts essential for the task at hand – understanding and moulding human conscience* (Wight, 2006, 56, emphasis added).

Moreover, in urging the significance of artistic activities for the construction and nurturing of public creativity forums the intention is not to reduce art to an instrument of economic development, which compares starkly with what Sir John Tulsa (managing director of London's Barbican Centre) saw as the approach of the UK government: 'what they have insisted is that the arts must fulfil a social, political, environmental, educational or economic purpose – in other words they must be an "instrument" for "delivering" other government policies. The impact on some museums and galleries, according to one observer, is that "scholarship, collection and curating are out of the window – the new breed of manager/directors is interested only in cramming into their buildings as many schoolchildren as possible"' (Tulsa, 2007, 11). Such policy approach would not be inconsistent with the association between creativity and innovation suggested by Florida (2002a), according to whom places with 'a high concentration of bohemians ... reflect an underlying set of conditions or milieu which is open and attractive to talented and creative people of all sorts ... and thus create a place-based environment that is conducive to the birth, growth and development of new and high-technology industries' (68). His focus is essentially market orientated, capitalist success, and his analysis could comfortably fit into commonly made arguments about regional competitiveness (see also Gordon and McCann (2005) on the geography of commercial innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship). Likewise could be said of many economic arguments about creative industries, which supply the 'goods and services that we broadly associate with cultural, artistic, or simply entertainment value. They include book and magazine publishing, the visual arts (painting, sculpture), the performing arts (theatre, opera, concerts, dance), sound recordings, cinema and TV films, even fashion, toys and games' (Caves, 2000, 1). The idea is that visual and performing arts, indeed cultural activities more generally, are associated with the production of goods and services

that can be traded on markets to desirable effect for particular localities and for particular sets of people in terms of wealth, employment opportunities and so on.¹²

On the contrary, although recognising that creative activities can have *ex post* consequences, we see neither art nor artists as an *ex ante* instrument for achieving any particular goals, instead hypothesising that the stimulation of people's creativity in the economic sphere is linked in a holistic sense to the freedom of artists to express themselves in whatever directions they see fit. In part the underlying intuition is that the link between economic creativity and artistic expression is simply that the latter, of its essence, without recourse to plans or instruments, provides a direct stimulant for activity in other areas, including in thinking about strategic choices for the development of an economy. In part it is the sense that only in an environment – a creative atmosphere – of artistic freedom can people be emancipated to realise the full potential of their creativity in the economic sphere. Besides, as it has been argued in the case of economic (Hayek, 1945) and educational activities (Chomsky, 1994), also with the arts any attempt to plan *ex ante* functional consequences might limit the achievements of artistic activities, and in the extreme any restraint on artistic freedom risks the constraining of imagination and analytical powers more generally, including in the economy.¹³

4. Recapturing space: an illustration from the Mutoids experience

In 2006 one of the authors¹⁴ conducted ethnographic research in the Mutoids community based in Santarcangelo di Romagna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy. For six months he lived with the Mutoids and shared their everyday life. Their experience illustrates and extends critical aspects of our analysis.

¹² Consider, for example, Caves (2000) on the geography of creativity; Neff (2005) on the digital media industry in New York; Leslie and Rantisi (2006) on urban economic development and the interplay between 'economic' and 'cultural' factors in Montreal's design economy, Currid (2007) on why artists and the 'creative class' tend to locate big cultural hubs such as New York.

¹³ Having recognised this, however, we would not suggest that it is necessarily desirable to free artistic activities from all and any ethical constraints. In particular, it might be argued that human and other species have inalienable rights.

¹⁴ Francesco Sacchetti

The small community of (at any one point in time) approximately 20 people has been based in an ex gravel pit in the suburbs of Santarcangelo, near Rimini, since 1990. Its initial core was created by people of English and Scottish origins, with others from Italy joining later. They live in caravans or old buses that have been transformed into houses. The “Camp” is about 100 metres of unpaved space where their accommodation is placed, lorries and cars are parked, and where wrecks and other materials that the group recycles are piled.

Members of the community live principally thanks to their recycling art, ‘mutating’ wrecks and other goods discarded by society into sculptures, mutant machines, installations, or doing performances inspired by a post-nuclear future. In the Camp’s main square a great monument rises up. It was constructed by the Mutoids when they arrived in the gravel pit and is made of two lorries knocked vertically into the ground. They are linked together like a dolmen, but in a contemporary – post bombardment – version. Other sculptures are dispersed across the Camp and in front of the houses of their creators:



With reference to their incomes, we can basically distinguish between the collective and individual character of the actions by which it is produced. Most people in the community produce works of art individually using recycled materials and, selling them, benefit at an individual level from the income. Collective incomes come from performances and from the organization of events at the Camp; those activities involve the whole group, and everybody gives a contribution with their work and care. Part of the income for these activities is used to cover the common expenses of the Camp, for example paying for a lawyer, or for the repair of common areas.

There are not only sculptors in this community, some members are musicians, actors, everyone has a specific ambit of competences and personal goals to achieve. The life together is based on individual positive freedom and mutual respect. In this sense this community is not oppressive, rather it proposes a model that considers differences between people and tries to coordinate them to achieve common goals; there is a sense in which the interests of some publics are given especial prominence.

There is no leadership in this group. In the words of one of the Mutoids: “there are no leaders here! When we have to decide something we meet together and then we discuss on it”. Every voice is listened to equally and without hierarchical prerogatives, in a process of deliberative democracy that addresses every strategic choice in the public life of the Camp.

The number of people at the Camp is not stable: for the rules imposed by the municipality of Santarcangelo it cannot exceed 20, but rarely are all of the Mutoids there simultaneously. Their vocation to travel and to experience diverse, stimulating situations often drives them out of the Camp and out of Italy, to express and develop their art. Thus, the spatial proximity of every member of the group is not a necessary condition for the life of this community; Mutoids' philosophy and goals can be pursued when they are far from the Camp.

4.1 From the Backstage to the Board

The Mutoids have a reference and value system inspired by the possibility of a post-apocalyptic scenario in which human beings, destroyers of the planet, are obliged to "mutate to survive". The mutation involves the production of art and a lifestyle that, in the vision of the group, cannot any more be based on a capitalist economy, rather it must be founded on the exploitation of the heaps of rubble of the cities. In part this represents an example of how the rejection of the sort of uneven development, globalisation and economic competitiveness processes that we argued in the earlier Sections of the paper can find its expression. Moreover, in their mutation the Mutoids follow a different moral code, criticizing the legitimisation of the rules that can lead to the apocalyptic future they perform. "The world of representation and of aesthetics is a site of struggle, where identities are created, where subjects are interpellated, where hegemonies can be challenged" (Kondo 1997, 4).

The main representation of the Mutoids' culture is in their artistic performances and outputs. Through these, they criticise the consumerism of mainstream society in a fascinating way: Mutoids take the discards of society and, transforming them, move what are considered to be wrecks from the backstage – where people abandon them – to the boards where those materials become works of art.

This accords with the argument that subverting and rewriting dominant images – and also symbols that the dominant system of production wants to hide – is “an important dimension of self-production” (Myers 1991, 28), it can be “a key means of proclaiming cultural difference” (MacClancy 1997, 2), and it may even play “a pivotal role in the formation and maintenance of social protest” (Fox and Starn 1997, 6).

Following Robert K. Merton this kind of unusual group can also gain access to the “latent reserve of moral indignation” (1957/2000, 673) of people that enter into contact with them. Indeed, art can indicate to people that there is an active opposition to something, and as such the artwork breaks the complicity of silence (Chaffe 1993). According to Edelman “works of art generate the ideas about the leadership, bravery, cowardice, altruism, dangers, authority, and fantasies about the future that people typically assume to be reflections of their own observations and reasoning” (1995, 2).

The art of Mutoids in particular, but in general every art and performances providing emotional messages (Jasper 1998) and a renewed feeling that social and political change is possible (Staggenborg *et al.* 1993-1994), are powerful ways to stimulate the critical sense of people, telling them that there is not only one way to behave and to think.

4.2 A small community without boundaries

It is possible to say that this community is not characterized by the dichotomy of inclusion-exclusion that comes from traditional spatial borders: a Mutoid does not cease to be a Mutoid because s/he physically departs the Camp. Those people are always in search of new sources of inspiration and, starting from their headquarters in Santarcangelo, they travel Italy and Europe led by their nomadic nature.

Starting from a common feeling and shared values, Mutoids build up and maintain a network of collaborations and friendships that breaks through the spatial dimension. This is a pro-active action: attention in the selection of potential members of the network is focused on a type of creativity and vision of the world analogous to the one of the Mutoids, besides an interest in collaboration to realize a common project. In other words, the Mutoids' culture is beyond physical space, temporal and status dimensions; rather it is an objective oriented and shared action. This is a distinguishing feature of heterarchical networks based on 'mental proximity' (Sacchetti and Sugden 2009) in which individuals are free to express their creativity through confrontation and communication.

Going beyond the concept of a community based upon geographical aggregation within determined confines, hence beyond the inclusion-exclusion logic linked to spatial limits, there is an openness to the potential for enlarging the network. This concept is well represented in the words of one community member:

“There are people around the world who are *Mutoids* although they never heard this name in their entire life! We are lucky to have such an important name, but there are others who do similar things, and even better things. The name is not important. However they are called, they work in that way. [...] We often invite to the Camp other people and friends who make sculptures or participate in our performances.”

Growth is a characteristic of small groups, not least because human beings have the necessity to survive by relying on scarce resources. For example the Aranda tribe in Australia have a totemic identification with kangaroos. Resources and territorial conditions do not allow for an expansion of the tribe in numeric terms, but the tribe puts into action a “metamorphosis” by which its members become “all the

kangaroos”. Symbolically, this increases the tribe as the number of kangaroos increases (Canetti 1960/1981, 129-149).

For the small group of Mutoids based in Santarcangelo, breaking through the spatial barriers of the on-site community and being permeable to other persons, lays the basis for a process analogous to the one just described for the Aranda. The camp member quoted above suggests that people outside the Camp identify with the Mutoids’ values not by an awareness of being part of the Mutoids group. Rather, it is a *de facto* membership founded on the sharing of a specific vision of life. “Mutoids is only a name”: there are analogous people scattered around the world with whom it is possible to get in touch, to build and maintain a relationship beyond distances and independently from the appellation by which this set of people are identified. Likewise, the kangaroos do not know they are Aranda.

Despite the fixed number of Camp inhabitants, the Mutoids have built a network that enlarges their group beyond its geographical limits, mutating their on-site community into a network-community (Sacchetti and Sugden 2009). The Mutoids are not only those people living at the Camp; they are all those who identify each other and are recognisable as similar through their art, their lifestyle and their objectives

An important aspect of the Mutoid's community is their radical criticism of consumerism and of the production system of mainstream western society. Within the context designated by the dominant socio-economic institutions, where a large part of the population, but also local institutions and NGOs, are excluded from key economic decisions, the Mutoids have created a different way to be a community and to experience a sense of inclusion. Thus, in order to feel themselves included, they receive others that share similar values, in a system that potentially does not exclude.

5. Concluding remarks: new directions for economic geography

This paper opened with a quote from Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. We have indicated a possible way to detect marginalisation and uneven development to then move out of the “inferno”, by way of giving space to the publics. Our analysis points, therefore, to the desirability of new studies in economic geography. For example, we would advocate research to show more precisely what would be entailed in shifting from a focus on places to the interests of publics, not least in the context of particular cases. Likewise we would encourage an analysis of the detailed effects of such a shift; it is one thing to reason that concentrated power in strategic decision-making is associated with uneven development and a constraining of people's creative capacities (as has been done in this paper), it is another to present scientific empirical evidence on the hypothesis that unleashing wider creativity through enabling publics would open widespread opportunities to pursue new avenues of economic prosperity. There is also a pressing need for cooperation across researchers with particular expertise in economic geography and those with particular knowledge about artistic activities, with the objective of better understanding the stimulatory effects of such activities in the economic sphere. We envisage research on, for example, the economy of particular places (urban and non-urban) positioned in their broader spatial context, so as to identify actual and potential publics with interests in the development of the economy; to study those interests - their formation, expression and influence – in their different, interacting and overlapping scales; to examine creativity in those publics and, included in that, consider ways in which that creativity is and might be stimulated through artistic activities so as to impact on the strategic direction of economic activity.

Perhaps most significantly, however, we urge researchers in economic geography to consider engaging in embryonic public creativity spaces, and indeed contributing to their being conceived. Finally, we wish to encourage academics to think about

designing and undertaking their work in active attempts to catalyse the development of such spaces.¹⁵

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¹⁵ On the relation between science and society, and most notably on aspects of what sustained interaction would entail, see the discussion of regional science in Barnes (2004), whose approach has overlaps with the more general analysis of networks in Dicken *et al* (2001).

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