

## **Reflection on the Disposition of Creative Milieu and its Implications for Cultural Clustering Strategies**

### **Introduction**

As part of larger urban strategies, cultural industries clusters have been heralded as a regeneration tool for the rundown areas of many post-industrial cities. Whereas some of these clusters are institutionally developed, others have emerged by accident or through urbanisation process over time. The latter are spatially distinct city areas in the process of transformation, often colonised by artists, designers, entrepreneurs and other cultural producers---all of whom represent urban 'creative communities'. Such spatialisation pattern has given rise to 'organic' clusters which not only provide seedbeds for local cultural production but also embrace alternative lifestyles and variety of aesthetic consumption, generating new forms of sociability and place identities. Nevertheless, the survival of these clusters is constantly subject to threat. Many existing studies indicate that gentrification process and consumption-oriented large-scale redevelopments often squeeze out artists and cultural producers from the areas, leading to gradual disintegration of creative communities and local cultural industries. To encourage robust clusters, attract new creative talents and ensure overall socio-economic benefits for creative communities, there is a need for alternative planning approaches to deal with this challenge. Cultural clustering strategies, if not sensitively formulated, may eventually work against their initial objectives. In order to attain the right ingredients for the strategies, it is necessary to discern the multidimensionality of cultural industries clusters.

This paper starts out with a brief discussion on the significance of cultural industries clusters in urban regeneration and then proposes another reading of the clusters by using the concept of creative milieu as a paradigm or a thinking framework for better understanding of their many faces. Defined as a place in which its preconditions, consisting of hard and soft infrastructures, allow face-to-face contacts, networking and flows of ideas, a 'creative milieu' can be regarded as both product and raw ingredient of cultural industries cluster. Following this idea, the task of planners and relevant authority bodies is to develop strategies not merely to stimulate clustering of cultural activities at particular urban sites but rather to create favourable conditions for a creative milieu to take shape and become embedded in place. The paper argues that the soft infrastructure or the 'soft' side of cultural industries clusters is nonetheless less accounted for and at worst neglected in many planning and policy interventions. By applying the concept of creative milieu into the formulation of cultural clustering strategies, perhaps it is possible to identify the right mix of necessary provisions, helping local authorities and planning bodies to attain more strategic clarity. Towards the end, this paper culminates into a number of implications for cultural clustering strategies.

### **Instrumentalisation of 'Culture', Urban Regeneration and Cultural Industries Cluster**

Cities have been known to provide favourable environments for the pursuit of artistic endeavours and technological innovations (Hall, 1998). In the past decades, this idea has been put into practice through the use of 'culture' as the driver of urban competitiveness and positive externalities and the contributor of the quality of life (cf. Bianchini, 1993a; Scott, 2004). Culture has become "the magic substitute for all the lost factories and warehouses and as a device that will create a new urban image, making the city more attractive to mobile capital and mobile professional workers" (Hall, 2000: 640). Planning and policy interventions in conjunction with cultural strategies are more than ever a common feature of many advanced post-industrial cities, marked in the materialisation of cultural flagship projects, public arts programmes, environmental improvements, and large-scale redevelopment initiatives. As the impact of cultural industries on the economies and identities of cities have been recognised by planners and policy makers, the instrumentalisation of culture in urban

planning and development has yet taken another turn, notably in an increasing attention towards the planning and development of 'cultural quarters' or 'cultural industries clusters' in former industrial areas such as those of rundown inner-city precincts.

It has been acknowledged that a thriving cultural sector in a city indicates innovative capacity in other economic sectors and has a lot of implications for overall urban economy (Landry and Bianchini, 1995). In the past twenty years or so, cultural industries, which may include advertising, architecture, visual and performing arts, crafts, design, film, publishing, new media and other forms of cultural production, have emerged in the vanguard of urban regeneration (cf. Evans, 2004; Miles *et al.*, 2000; Montgomery, 2003, 2004). As the interest in the potential of cultural industries in revitalising urban life has gained momentum, the terms 'cultural quarter', 'cultural industries cluster', 'creative cluster' and 'cultural cluster' are undoubtedly among the buzzwords in planning-and policy-related speeches and reports nowadays. To avoid confusion, the term 'cultural industries cluster' will be used throughout this paper. Although its definition may vary, 'cultural industries cluster' can be broadly defined as a spatially limited and distinct geographical area where, in comparison to other urban areas, cultural industries and facilities are highly concentrated (Wynne, 1992) and where "the stimulus to cultural experimentation and renewal tends to be high" (Scott, 1997: 325). These clusters are usually made up of micro- and small cultural enterprises and creative individuals such as artists and cultural producers who are often self-employed or freelancers. In this sense, city has become regarded not only as a collection of museums, galleries and entertainment venues but also as a constellation of 'creative places' where cultural production take root and flourish.

A significant assortment of studies has suggested the link between cultural production and urban place and demonstrated that cultural industries tend to agglomerate in specialised clusters or districts especially in large cities, where the distinctive characteristics of place are symbiotically interweaved with the image of locally cultural products (Molotch, 1996). To name a few, these studies include the image-producing complexes in Los Angeles (Scott, 2000); the natural history film-making cluster in Bristol (Bassett *et al.*, 2002); new media clusters in London's inner-city areas (Hutton, 2004); the Northern Quarter in Manchester (Brown *et al.*, 2000, Banks *et al.*, 2000; Van Bon, 1999); Lace Market, the fashion quarter of Nottingham (Crewe, 1996; Crewe and Beaverstock, 1998, Shorthose, 2001, 2004); Liverpool's Rope walks area (Gilmore, 2004); Temple Bar area in Dublin (Montgomery, 1995, 2003, 2004); Silicon Alley (Leadbeater, 2001; Neff, 2004; Pratt, 2000); and the classic studies on the transformation of SoHo district in New York (Zukin, 1988, 1995). The list goes on. Other than providing cultivating grounds for cultural activities and adding values to particular urban places, such clusters also embrace artistic/alternative lifestyles, generate new forms of sociability and re-create place identities.

In Britain, the notion of cultural industrial cluster seem to draw upon a marriage of ideas--- from the industrial district model of the 'Third Italy', which looks back to pre-Fordist economies of small and medium sized enterprises clustering around complementary skills, services and institutional supports (cf. Amin and Thrift, 1994; Porter, 1991, 1998, 2000) to the samples in the US which showed that urban 'artist zones' which have emerged in run-down districts could indeed contribute to the revitalisation of urban life (cf. Zukin, 1988). As British cities began to look into this approach (Landry *et al.*, 1996), the cluster model has consequently found an expression in the science or business parks which became popular in the 1980s, and this is what many cultural industries clusters aim to achieve (Castells and Hall, 1994). Some of the examples of cultural clusters in Britain, to name a few, include the Cultural Industries Quarter in Sheffield, the Custard Factory in Birmingham, the Northern Quarter in Manchester, and the Lace Market in Nottingham. In London, some of the clusters that are in the process of development are among others Bricklane, Hoxton, and Clerkenwell.

Up to this point, it is necessary to point out that the typology of cultural industries clusters are often subject to contestation. Although many attempts to categorise these clusters have surfaced in some of the most recent literatures (cf. Costa, 2003; Hutton, 2004; O'Connor, 1998; Mommaas, 2004; Santagata, 2002), what differentiate one cluster from another remains dubious. However, this paper will provisionally categorise the clusters according to their origins and developmental trajectories. The first category is associated with those clusters that have been *institutionally developed* through conscious planning acts (e.g. Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter). They are usually taken in forms of production quarters, consisting of managed workspaces, shared facilities and amenities. Planning bodies or relevant agencies may also involve in the promotion and marketing of the areas as the sites for various cultural activities. On the other hand, there are other urban areas and districts, usually in former industrial sites, that have undergone transition and emerged as hubs of artistic activities and cultural production. These *organically developed* clusters are often geographical concentrations of marginalised groups and activities which also include those artists and cultural producers who search for low-rent alternative working and living spaces, where they can draw ideas and inspirations through networking and developing professional and informal relationships with likeminded others.

Since the rapid decline of the manufacturing sector in the 1970s and 1980s, these urban areas have emerged into spatially and socially distinct places or artist zones occupied by artists, craftsmen, designers, musicians, and cultural producers of all sorts. This legion of 'urban pioneers' (Zukin, 1988) has grown into 'creative communities' whose members tend to collaborate, share resources and cluster in proximity. These communities have essentially transformed the places not only into cultural industries clusters in their own rights but also spaces of cultural consumption where youth culture, nightlife, and alternative scene thrive. Whether they have been planned by local authorities and development agencies or have grown through urbanisation process and general development over years, cultural industries clusters are meant to bring about "buzz of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism" (Bell and Jayne, 2004: 3) to cities. As it will be elaborated later, it is organically developed clusters that require more planning and policy attention. Before delving into this discussion, the next part of this paper will first address its core element---the concept of creative milieu.

### **Creative Milieu: The Concept and Relevance to Cultural Industries Clusters**

It is possible to view cultural industries cluster as one subset of various competing priorities within planning agendas. There is a pressing need for a more co-ordinated strategic planning and thus more investigation on issues and priorities of the development of cultural industries clusters. After all, planning interventions can be implemented only when key issues are identified firsthand. Certainly, it is difficult for planners and local authorities to have their fingers on every little pile at once but we should be reminded that constant learning is an important platform for delivering better public interventions in the future. Cultural clustering strategies could fail if planners have not acquired adequate understanding of cultural industries clusters themselves. Indeed, there is a need to develop subtle insights and more sophisticated understanding of these clusters. In this paper, the core argument revolves around an alternative reading of cultural industries clusters, using the concept of creative milieu as a paradigm for understanding these clusters. What is a creative milieu? To what extent is this concept relevant to cultural industries clusters? How could it then provide a learning framework for developing cultural clustering strategies? Before answering these questions, the origin of this concept must be explored from the outset. The elaboration on the concept of innovative milieu in the following section of the paper is not meant to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the original theoretical groundwork where the concept of creative milieu has been cultivated.

### ***'Innovative Milieu' as Conceptual Origin***

The idea of creative milieu is derived from 'innovative milieu', the concept usually identified with the fields of economic geography and regional science. Originally, the subjects on industrial districts are discussed in reference to Marshallian industrial agglomeration theories which explain that clustering of industrial activity is based on pure economic rationales such as reduction of transaction cost, share of resources and risk minimisation. Nonetheless, the concept of 'innovative milieu' has added another dimension to these existing theories. Notwithstanding different interpretations, the concept is largely associated with the work of *Groupe de Recherche Europeen sur les Milieux Innovateurs* or GREMI (cf. Aydalot, 1986; Aydalot and Keeble 1988; Camagni 1991, 1995). According to Camagni's terminology, an innovative milieu is:

the set, or the complex network of mainly informal social relationships on a limited geographical area, often determining a specific external 'image' and a specific internal 'representation' and sense of belonging, which enhance the local innovative capability through synergetic and collective learning processes (Camagni, 1991).

This is primarily based on the idea that isolated firms and institutions are very seldom innovative and thus interactions and cooperation among different business actors are deemed crucial to growth and economic renewal (Camagni, 1995). Over time, the maturation of this concept has resulted in a large compilation of studies on regional development with a particular interest in the topics of regional innovation and knowledge creation. This is evident in growing branches of research bodies and theories ranging from innovation process of industrial and high-tech districts (Pyke *et al.*, 1990), 'learning regions' (Asheim, 1995), 'institutional thickness' (Amin and Thrift, 1994), 'untraded interdependencies' (Storper, 1997), spatial innovation networks (Camagni, 1991; Cooke and Morgan, 1994; Shefer and Frenkel, 1998) and knowledge transfer (Antonelli, 2000; Capello, 1999; Forsman and Solitander, 2003). These studies are often grounded on case studies with detailed analyses of the forces that shape specific regional industrial clusters. To the effect, a talk of innovative milieu has become remarkably associated with explanations of innovation advantages in knowledge 'spillover' which is enabled by the social networks that surround specific industrial clusters (Cooke and Simmie, 2005). In the midst of these studies, lies the argument that knowledge spillover through informal contacts/social networks is one of the main forces that drives the performance of industrial clusters.

Quite a number of recent research have dedicated to the enquiries on the significance of social networks among small- and medium-sized enterprises within industrial clusters. Social networks, it is argued, facilitate knowledge diffusion through interpersonal face-to-face contacts and cooperation among firms and institutions (Camagni, 1991). Existing studies on Italian industrial clusters, for instance, suggest that innovative activities concentrate in particular place because the knowledge generated by firms and businesses flows more easily within a cluster and This channel of knowledge flow is made possible by the presence of informal networks which emerge between individuals, firms and institutions (cf. Russo, 1985; Brusco,1990; Pyke *et al.*, 1990). In addition, the work of Lawson and Lorenz (1999) suggest that knowledge creation is important for collective learning process. The authors also show some evidence that supports the nexus between social networks and innovation. Overall, because knowledge can be transferred and diffused through face-to-face contacts, and because these contacts are facilitated by social networks, the networks are the key contributor to the innovative capacities of region. This idea echoes Camagni's definition of innovative milieu that a milieu can be regarded not only in terms of economic but also of social relations. In this sense, an innovative milieu should be seen as "social and economic whole" which infuse "productive activity... with the larger life of [business] community" (Piore and Sabel, 1984: 275).

### ***The 'Urban Turn' of Creative Environment and the Concept of Creative Milieu***

Although the concept of creative milieu owes lots of intellectual merit from the field of economic geography, once applied in urban context, it serves as a high point for understanding urban places and more or less cultural industries clusters. The notion of creative milieu has been widely discussed in association with the idea of 'creative city' (cf. Hall, 1998, 2000; Landry, 2000; Florida, 2002, 2005). Relevant to this idea is an attention to the 'urban turn' of creative environments, called upon by the Swedish geographer Björn Asheim. According to Asheim (2005), creative talents are most commonly found in large cities where the diversity of urbanisation economies is abundant. Along with this factor, the emergence of creative urban environments is also driven by labour markets, cultural diversity and tolerance, low entry barriers and high levels of urban services. Two points arise from this argument. Firstly, it supports the argument that place and location matter. Paradoxical to the proclamation of 'placelessness' or 'collapse of spatial barriers' (Harvey, 1993: 293) which argues that place and location have become less important in the era of New Economy because information and communication technologies allow people to interact and exchange knowledge in virtual digitalised spaces (Castells, 1996), places have actually been 'resacralised' (Harvey, 1993: 14) and the importance of local identities held in high regard. According to Gottdiener (2000: 98), the producers of knowledge (i.e. creative workers) "still require specific locations or spaces to work" and the "new economy will function in this respect very much like the old one with persisting need for adequate design of the built environment". Secondly, the attention to the urban turn of creative environment confirms the argument that cities are not only places of creativity and innovation but also as the economic and social centres of marginal activities (Hall, 1998, 2000). Indeed, there is no doubt why some of the centres for creative environments can be found in densely populated metropolitan regions like London, New York, Los Angeles and many other advanced post-industrial cities.

The focus on the historical role and impact of creative milieu on cities has been celebrated in publications such as *City in Civilization*, the seminal text written by the prominent British academic Sir Peter Hall (1998). Later on, this subject has been further expounded by the British urban planning consultant Charles Landry. Landry (2000) has developed a more practical notion of the 'creative city', adopting the concept of creative milieu as a way of thinking about urban places. In his book *The Creative City*, a creative milieu is defined as:

a place – either a cluster of buildings, a part of a city, a city as a whole or a region – that contains the necessary preconditions in terms of 'hard' and 'soft' infrastructure to generate a flow of ideas and inventions. Such a milieu is a physical setting where a critical mass of entrepreneurs, intellectuals social activists, artists, administrators, power brokers or students can operate in an open-minded, cosmopolitan context and where face to face interaction creates new ideas, artefacts, products, services and institutions and as a consequence contributes to economic success (Landry, 2000:133)

The disposition of creative milieu requires the right mix of hard and soft infrastructures. According to Landry (2000), institutions, research centres, cultural facilities, buildings and support services (i.e. transport and amenities), as well as various kinds of social networks serve as basic preconditions for creative urban environments. The former, which Landry has termed 'hard infrastructure', provides the physical environment and continuity for the development of innovations. A creative milieu is partly a physical setting and thus the importance of the tangible attributes of place is emphasised. 'Soft infrastructure', on the other hand, consists of "associative structures and social networks, connections and human interactions that underpins and encourages the flow of ideas between individuals and institutions" (Landry, 2000: 133). These intangible attributes are found in multiple forms of social relation which are manifested in informal groups, cross-sectoral partnerships, collaboration and common interest networks and yet often hidden in forms of trust, kinship

and personal relationship. In this sense, a creative milieu is a place of duality---the 'hard' and the 'soft', the 'tangibles' and the 'intangibles'.

At any rate, planning and cultural strategies often focus more on the development of hard infrastructure over soft infrastructure. They tend to be made in purely functional terms that prioritise the question 'what can the cultural bring to the economic' rather than allowing the delivery of social developments and recognising their intrinsic value for urban regeneration (Garcia, 2004). This sentiment is reflected in vast public funding on the developments of flagship and mega projects such as museums, galleries and cultural facilities which are often aimed to induce cultural consumption in hope to catalyse regeneration process and attract inward business and property investments into particular urban areas, whereas the consideration for overall social issues is often sidelined or less prioritised. Bell and Jayne (2004) contend that this is largely as a result of a mismatch between top-down urban regeneration initiatives and the agenda of local communities, which leads to planning programmes oriented towards property developers, gentrifiers and tourists rather than socially beneficial regulations. To a certain extent, this planning approach is relegated to place-marketing and promotional devices and less as intended in the strategies where the emphasis should touch on issues such as supports for local communities, small businesses, education and training. Such negligence, whether premeditated or unintentional, may produce the overall outcomes that negate the original objectives. This problem seems to correspond to the case of cultural clustering strategies. Both hard and soft infrastructures are critical preconditions of cultural industries clusters because they provide public goods and allow people to share space to exchange and inspire new ideas and yet, as it will be argued, an equal weighting between the 'hard' side and the 'soft' side of the clusters is often neglected.

### **The 'Soft' Side of Cultural Industries Cluster and Social Networks**

Creative environments generally attract competencies and talents of specialized disciplines (Törnqvist, 2004). The nature of cultural industries cluster seems to be as such. It is necessary to recognise that the development of these clusters should not be implemented only in forms of physical development and image-making nor should it be regarded merely in terms of economic impacts (i.e. income, employment, and economic returns). They are not only 'creative spaces' planned and promoted to enhance local economies but also the places which are endowed with particular forms of social relations. Without these relations, "clusters are little more than an arbitrary concentration of economic activity with little value added or comparative advantage to ensure a viable local production system" (Evans, 2004: 91). *Therefore, cultural industries cluster should not be regarded only as a location of cultural production or some sort of industrial park or collective workspace but also as a node of place-specific human interactions and social networks.* Even though these networks represent the core element of the 'soft' side of the cluster, they are often undervalued or not seriously integrated into planning agenda. According to Murray (2004), culture-led urban regeneration programmes in the 1990s did not meet their objectives because they tended to focus on physical and economic regeneration and output evaluation of culture, in lieu of developing integrated approach that accounted for social, political, and cultural factors. In support of this argument, Evans and Foord (2000) suggest that the evidence of sustained local cultural activities is less apparent and so are the benefits of inward investments and cultural tourism to local stakeholders. Albeit the development of cultural industries cluster has been long employed to serve as an extension of production relocation and a catalyst for the revitalisation of particular urban areas, cultural clustering strategies tend to neglect both historic association and the value of place and are often implemented through property and economic development programmes which focus on the enhancement of production zones and the built environments (Evan, 2004), oblivious to the fact that occupants also play in important role in shaping the clusters.

Urban spatialisation of cultural industries is neither in random pattern nor driven by economic force alone (Bell and Jayne, 2004). What makes the field of cultural production special is the way local artists and cultural producers (i.e. creative community) depend on loosely organised, place-based networks of people with similar lifestyles and professional backgrounds (Banks *et al.*, 2000). Essentially, cultural industries clusters depend upon many social attributes of place which concern, above all, human interaction, networks, collective lifestyle, knowledge exchange, common values, trust and kinship. These 'soft', unquantifiable variables serve as the 'magic ingredients' (Evans, 2004) and the connecting tissue that makes cultural industries clusters healthy creative milieux. As a matter of fact, several empirical studies on urban creative environments support this argument. Florida (2002) maintains that creative workforce tends to gravitate towards particular cities and regions characterised by the presence of technology, talent and tolerance. The findings of Florida's research demonstrate that the social attributes of place truly influence the investment and locational decisions of businesses and creative workers. This significant representation of 'bohemian groups' (i.e. the proportion of workers in creative occupations) both directly and indirectly signal a milieu "that is attractive to and supportive of other type of human capital" (Florida, 2002: 63).

Also, what Pratt (2000) comes through quite clearly in his research on the Silicon Alley, the new media cluster in New York City, is that the value of social interaction should not be taken for granted and the practice of 'untraded transactions' is important to day-to-day performance of 'techies' and new media producers. Pratt's notion of 'untraded transaction' is perhaps derived from Storper's idea of 'untraded interdependencies'. Storper (1997) explains the existence of synergy effects within the industrial districts by coining the terms traded and untraded interdependencies. Traded interdependencies emerge from formal economic transactions or local input-output relations that take place among firms in a particular geographical area. While emphasising short-term contacts, these firms maintain long-term relationships which become manifested in collaborative projects (Van der Groep, 2004). Untraded interdependencies, on the other hand, are the intangible assets of accumulated knowledge and localised learning of a geographical area that determines the direction of its development. Clustering of firms facilitates untraded interdependencies because the shorter the physical distance between them, the less costly is their collaborations. Through face-to-face contact, it becomes easier to share and communicate information and knowledge among them (Maskell *et al.*, 1998). Nevertheless, the concept of untraded interdependencies suggests not only in terms of information exchange and knowledge flow among firms; it also embraces various aspects of social ties which underlie interpersonal relationships of trust, conventions and reciprocity---all of which seem to be analogous to the characteristics of urban cultural industries clusters.

In Britain, many comprehensive case studies on cultural industries clusters have been published. Yet only a small number investigates the social dimension or the 'soft' side of the clusters in details. To name a few, some of these studies include the creative community network of Nottingham's Lace Market fashion quarter (cf. Crewe, 1996; Crewe and Beaverstock, 1998; Shorthose, 2001, 2004) and Manchester's Northern Quarter (cf. Brown *et al.*, 2000; Banks *et al.*, 2000; Van Bon, 1999). The work of Jim Shorthose (2001, 2004), in particular, gives a full account of the 'soft' side of cultural industries cluster. Shorthose (2004) uses the terms 'convivial ecology' to describe the interdependent relationships, underpinned by cluster-based creative exchange process and flows of work and information between artists, cultural producers, cultural organisations and businesses. Because this convivial ecology is often about social as well as economic relations, the relationships within a creative community are "qualitatively different from [orthodox] economic relationships and working practices" (Shorthose, 2004: 83). Therefore, the formal economy of official organizations and structured working relationships does not seem to be the case of cultural industries.

Other studies also suggest that cultural industries are constantly subject to high level of risk. “Vulnerable to the vicissitudes of a cultural politics of taste” (Flemming, 2004: 103) and sensitive to the volatile market, cultural producers are under pressure to be innovative, cutting-edge, flexible, entrepreneurial, and responsive to changes in fashion, trend and technology (cf. Lash and Urry, 1994). Cluster-based social networks, it is argued, can help cultural producers mitigating this uncertainty (Banks *et al.*, 2000). The networks generate a “self-reinforcing process” (Van Bon, 1999: 36) and their spatial expressions “provide the local creative industries sector with its infrastructure and filigree; its sense of place and source of inspiration; and the media for expression, exploration and the translation of ideas into economic rewards” (Flemming, 2004: 99-100). Once connected to the networks, artists and cultural producers can benefit from an access to information pool and constant renewal of ideas, draw inspirations from one another and pursue collaborative works on specific projects or cultural products. Yet these networks are not only about exchanging information (e.g. contacts, grants, funding opportunities, jobs, technology) and sharing of personal experience (Brown *et al.*, 2000). They also involve informal and unstructured partnerships and a high degree of trust (Banks *et al.*, 2000). Trust is indispensable because it can “lead to chains of creative ideas and innovations which through their spread and acceptance can generate a further virtuous circle of inventions” (Landry, 2000: 134). Furthermore, through the networks, creative community members can develop confidence, raise their profiles and enhance their visibility (Flemming, 2004: 99). All in all, the findings of the studies mentioned above suggest that the ‘soft’ side, taken in form of cluster-based social networks, is crucial to cultural industries cluster’s success and the survival of its creative community as a whole.

### **‘Organic’ Cultural Clusters and Planning Challenge**

As mentioned earlier, some cultural industries clusters are not developed exclusively through planning acts but rather something grown from urbanisation process over time. The development of these ‘organic’ clusters is usually driven by local creative communities and grass-root groups. Creative communities’ impact on urban spatial transformation is a well known story. In the book *Loft living*, the American sociologist Sharon Zukin (1988) uses the case of New York City’s SoHo district to demonstrate this connection. What happened was that the relatively low rent of SoHo’s former industrial sites attracted artists, craftsmen and other cultural producers to relocate in the area. Their presence created bohemian atmosphere which consequently attracted a great deal of property development into the area. The conversion of industrial loft spaces into residential units led to an increase in property values and subsequent gentrification process.

Even though the book was published 17 years ago, it seems as if the same story has been told over and over again in other parts of the world (cf. O’Connor, 1998; O’Connor and Wynne, 1996). Many existing literatures have indicated that these ‘bohemian districts’ or ‘organic’ cultural clusters are in danger of being undermined by large-scale redevelopments. In spite of creative communities’ effort to build strong foothold in these socially and spatially distinct urban areas, soaring property rents and gentrification process contributed largely to the displacement of local artists and cultural producers (cf. Cameron and Coaffee, 2004; Evan and Shaw, 2004; Hutton, 2004; Lambert and Boddy, 2002; Ley, 1996, 2003; Raimes and Ryan, 2000; Shorthose, 2004). Because this problem poses a great risk on the condition of creative milieux of these clusters, special attention should be directed to the their conditions for success and sustainability which depend tremendously on sensitive planning and policy interventions.

Indeed sufficient provision of necessary infrastructures and ongoing supports are indispensable, especially to those ‘organic’ clusters that have been in existence for decades. There should be a consideration on how well these clusters mature and what kind of management and support mechanisms need to be established to ensure their continuation (Montgomery, 2003). These clusters are great challenge to the planning practice for many



reasons. Firstly, social and economic restructuring which occur in these clusters are highly visible and central to this are the social identities, lifestyle and distinctive production / consumption practices that have been embedded in the clusters (Bell and Jayne, 2004). Therefore cultural industries clusters are not merely production sites which can be programmed for specific functions but rather a type of communities in their own rights. Taking into account the social fabrics of creative communities that have been woven over time is far more complex than building and managing workspaces and production complexes. Secondly, these cultural industries clusters can be discerned in different angles, largely tied into the political, economic, social, spatial and cultural forces (Bell and Jayne, 2004). Whereas organic clusters are bound up in this multidimensionality, institutionally developed clusters are “less well-placed to capture this energy, which limits the viability of municipal or corporate cluster developments” (Evans, 2004: 72). Thirdly, aside from the fact that organic clusters are constantly subject to transformative process, the dynamics of cultural activities are difficult to grasp, considering their sectoral differences and multiple creative processes. Cultural industries are explorative and constantly evolving and thus they “would rather extemporize than follow a narrow path laid down by a prescribed Business Plan” (Fleming, 2004: 96). Therefore, the planning and support for these clusters must account for the complexity of local cultural industries. Finally, creative communities deserve more investigation because they play an instigating role in creating critical infrastructures of cultural production sites as well as forms of sociability for cultural industries clusters. According to Evans (2004: 74), creative communities “create a clustering effect much wider than the practice and eventual economic spin offs from their work---they generate social and what today are referred to as lifestyle movements, which include gentrification and even touristic and heritage processes”. All in all, every planning decision made and strategy formulated has considerable impact on the survival of these fragile communities. Perhaps incremental developments should be encouraged in lieu of ‘big-bang’ large-scale redevelopment schemes. However, before this could happen, planners and relevant authority bodies must acquire better understanding of the clusters under their jurisdictions and should not merely formulate strategies to stimulate clustering at particular sites but rather create favourable conditions for creative milieux to take shape. There is indeed a need for alternative approaches to deal with this challenge.

### **Implications for Cultural Clustering Strategies and Future Research**

Urban planning and cultural strategies nowadays have, at best, involved not only the development of cultural facilities, galleries and other amenities but also the promotion of the network environments where compatible cultural enterprises, artists and creative workers can operate side by side and under specific kind of support systems. The presence of cultural industries clusters in cities has a lot of potentials in creating positive social and economic impacts. In this regard, planners have a crucial role in nurturing cultural industries clusters and seriously integrating them into the overall urban regeneration effort; facilitating opportunities that contribute to the sustainable and inclusive growth of local cultural industries; and making these urban environments conducive to the growth of creative milieux where artists and other cultural producers can work, live and socialise. This means a climate of business and professional support for cultural industries, healthy social networks and affordable quality of life. In addition, any intervention must ensure the retention of the values and distinctiveness of local contexts and activities (Evans, 2004). Yet some studies suggest that the failure of cultural industries clusters may result from unformulated strategies (cf. Newman and Smith, 2000). If too functionally dispersed, clustering strategies may find themselves ineffective and shallow. On the other hand, if too narrowly focused, the overall effects as intended by these strategies may become undermined. It is already difficult for planners to keep on juggling priorities and have their finger on every little pile. Nevertheless, because cultural industries clusters are considered as important urban assets, the conditions for their survival have to be sensitively developed. The discussions in this paper have raised some implications for cultural clustering strategies as the followings.

Firstly, cultural clustering strategies should put equal weighting between the 'soft' side and the 'hard' side of cultural industries cluster. Cultural cluster development is not a panacea. Despite being used as a tool for urban regeneration, the development should account for wider socio-economic agendas. Planning interventions should not only deliver workspace provision, improvement of built environments and wealth creation but also takes into account the social quality and sense of place. The right mix of supports and infrastructures will help the retention and sustainability of local cultural industries in a long run. In order to sustain the clusters, it is necessary to develop infrastructures that enhance not only entrepreneurial climate conducive to cultural production but also social environment and meeting places where artistic and creative talents are unleashed and where face-to-face contacts are facilitated. The 'hard' side and the 'soft' side are complementarities and yet more emphasis on the former often supersedes the latter. This is the case of urban boosterist strategies that are aimed for encouraging people to spend money in an array of consumption spaces while disregarding the impacts on creative communities and other stakeholders. Serving as the enabling factor and the connective tissue that makes creative milieu work, the 'soft' side of cultural industries cluster is often hidden and less likely to be expressed in numerical data (i.e. employment growth, business turnover, and productivity of cultural industries). In any case, a better understanding of this 'soft' side is paramount to the formulation of clustering strategies. The authority bodies which are involved in delivering the alternative futures of cultural industries clusters need to be well-informed and have sufficient knowledge of how these clusters 'live'. Operated in "ecology of creative partnerships and symbiotic links rather than formal economy" (Shorthose, 2001), cultural industries differ from conventional professional relationships: they rely more on the embedded networks of formal and informal social and economic relations. More sophisticated understanding of these networks will allow us to "grasp the complexity and synergy of the social relations of production and consumption at work in the (re)creation of urban space" (Crewe and Beaverstock, 1998: 299). There is thus a need to locate and identify these networks, to understand how they operate and try to find ways of adding value to their existing operations. Overall, the social networks of creative communities are integral to the life of cultural industries clusters and undoubtedly worth for more investigations.

Secondly, there is a need to account for local specificities which are essential ingredients for the formulation of cultural cluster strategies. Strategies for cultural industries cluster should reflect on the symbiotic relationship between people, culture, economy and place and recognise that each cluster is unique in terms of historical association, geographical contexts, infrastructural compositions as well as its internal social relations among creative community members. Local specificities are important to cluster development because cultural industries clusters "can only be understood in the local [context]...even if dependent upon influences and structures else where" (Flemming, 2004: 98). Indeed, any public intervention should be "rooted in an understanding of local cultural resource" (Bianchini, 1993b: 212). Because the use of cultural cluster model in cookie-cutting manner may eventually work against its original objectives, success (or failure) of clustering strategies depends on whether they are customised in response to local specificities and special needs of each cluster. These may include the profile and quality of networks, market knowledge, skills and training, business support services, workspace affordability, strengths and weaknesses of clusters. Given a current lack of coherent model for planning and managing urban cultural industries clusters, planners should start to approach cultural clustering strategies more critically. Micro-spatial analysis of cultural industries clusters is probably a good start.

Thirdly, the voice of creative community should be used as the 'intelligence input' for developing cultural clustering strategies. The involvement of stakeholders in cluster development is indispensable. Extracting 'intelligence' from these stakeholders can capture a wide range of value bases and introduce a more reflexive approach to cluster planning and strategy making. The development of cultural industries cluster needs much more than a

standard model for business parks or industrial districts; it must be recognised that the cluster is also a social environment where particular groups of population live, work, and play. Cultural cluster consists of a varied mix of stakeholders and interest groups such as non-profit organisations, private enterprises, cultural institutions, community groups, cultural producers, artists, local residents among others. Local artists and cultural producers (i.e. creative community) are a group of stakeholders which plays an important role in driving forward local regeneration process. According to Murray (2004: 203), these individuals “tend toward flexible, open-minded approaches; innovation; critical and questioning methods; and people-centred solutions”. Where level of interaction between local authorities and stakeholders is essential, cultural cluster development should seriously account for the voice of creative community. One of the challenges is how to make an optimum use of this ‘voice’. An investigation on the social network of creative community can perhaps help vocalise the community’s concerns and produce a set of ramifications useful in planning and policy interventions in the future. Some strategies may include an intermediary agent for the creative communities of specific clusters such as cultural industries development agencies in tandem with existing and emerging community or grass root groups. Whereas blunt top-down approaches focused on direct planning of cultural industries clusters are unlikely to accomplish much, bottom-up measures are probably more suitable. By discerning the voice of creative community, we will be able to reinforce the community’s initiatives and secure the interdependence and the sense of ownership of local artists and cultural producers.

Finally, the topic of cultural industries clusters has the potential to add value by allowing debate across a wide range of overlapping and competing perspectives which make the cross-fertilisation of policy, practice and research possible. At any rate, there is a need for more theoretical and empirical enquiries on the social dimension of cultural industries cluster. Notwithstanding its potential contribution to planning and policy interventions, this ‘soft’ side of the cluster is often relegated to secondary intelligence inputs used in developing cultural clustering strategies. Yet there are still many questions hanging in the air. How can we develop a set of enquiries that help planners to learn and gain a better understanding of the social dimension of cultural industries cluster? To what the extent could the involvement of creative community contribute to the development of cultural industries clusters? What kind of strategies can be adopted at community level to support creative communities and maintain the networks they depend on? How can we make sure that the ‘hard’ and the ‘soft’ sides of cultural industries clusters produce reciprocal enrichment and ensure overall socio-economic benefits for creative communities and other local stakeholders? These are all legitimate and important questions for future research.

## **Conclusion**

The development of cultural industries clusters has raised the agenda for planners and policy makers who seek to connect issues of urban economic competitiveness with sustainability and community empowerment. The centrality of these clusters in urban regeneration means that any effort to support their performances requires more interrogation. To achieve this, it requires different techniques and ways of thinking as well as a combination of skills from those responsible for public interventions. This paper proposes that, by using the concept of creative milieu as a paradigm for understanding cultural industries clusters, an alternative reading can be developed. A creative milieu consists of hard and soft infrastructures that are essential to the survival of cultural industries clusters. However, planning attention has been placed more emphasis on the former over the latter. Throughout the course of this discussion, a key point has emerged: the ‘soft’ side or the social dimension of cultural industries cluster is a connecting tissue that makes a creative milieu work. The investigation on this ‘soft’ side can enable us to gain better insights and construct another set of dialogue revolving around the account of cultural industries clusters and to provide an intelligence input which can help planners identify the right mix of necessary provisions for the clusters and thus attain more strategic clarity. This also leads to further questioning on the capacity

of the environment of cultural industries cluster which could support social network. This does not mean that we should disregard the hard infrastructure of cultural industries cluster but rather find some sort of complementary mechanism that can widen the scope to include all those elements that contribute to the overall social and economic sustainability of the clusters. All in all, I hope that fellow planning practitioners and urban researchers will recognise the link of this subject to their own works and I also hope to see more theoretical and empirical enquiries in future seminars, conferences and publications.

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