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# From knowledge sharing to co-creation: paths and spaces for engagement between higher education and the creative and cultural industries

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## 1. Introduction

The last decade has seen the emergence and growth of creative industries in policy frameworks and initiatives in many European and international countries. Since its initial definition by the UK's Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) (1998), more attention has been placed on including a broader range of cultural and creative organizations and activities within the definition of the creative economy, from publically funded museums to new digital media companies. Alongside these policy initiatives many countries have also experienced changes in their higher education systems, under the pressure of financial cuts and new patterns of educational and social mobility.

The key objective of this chapter is to chart the changing dynamics of and drivers for the different relationships between universities, the creative and cultural industries (CCIs) and the communities they serve, and to explore the motivations and rationales emerging from policy making and from the sectors themselves which shape and influence these modes of engagement. The reflections and findings in this chapter have emerged during the discussions and events that took place in UK and internationally in the last two years (2012-2024) as part of the research network *Beyond the Campus: Connecting Knowledge and Creative Practice Communities across Higher Education and the Creative Economy*. The chapter is structured in three parts. Firstly, we provide a brief overview of the historical development of these relations and their connections with the UK cultural policy and higher education frameworks. Secondly, we introduce a framework of relations and connections

taking place and reflect on the nature and motivations behind them. Finally, we provide some conclusions on the future scenarios and challenges faced by knowledge institutions and creative and cultural industries wishing to engage in collaboration and cross-sector working.

## **2. Evolving relations between Higher Education and the creative and cultural industries in UK**

Historically, universities have long been key cultural players in cities and communities. Many universities have been beacons of cultural production and preservation through the establishment of art collections, museums and galleries. The UK higher education sector continues this relationship with arts and culture, for example by hosting performing arts spaces on campus and undertaking academic research on arts and cultural activities (Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton & Goddard, 2000; Comunian & Faggian, 2014; Powell, 2007).

As well as performing art spaces, universities have been keen supporters of the development of local music scene through student unions and their venues (Long, 2011). However, more latterly, there has been a growing pressure from policy to understand the impact of higher education in relation to the arts sector and the CCIs, and to further facilitate these relationships and add to their potential value (Arts Council England (ACE), 2006; Dawson & Gilmore, 2009; Universities UK, 2010).

As reported by Benneworth and Jongbloed (2010) from 2005/2006 an increase emphasis was placed on impact by the UK Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to demonstrate the role of its activities and create specific funding programmes to support knowledge transfer. Policy makers have become more interested in this agenda recently in relation to the potential for sector skills and creative industries development and knowledge transfer, whereby the value of academic research might be transferred into external environments to generate further value and impacts. These two dimensions are closely intertwined. Some universities have struggled to find meaningful ways to achieve this other than the established 'injection' of graduates into the CCI, often not all into creative employment (Comunian, Faggian, & Jewell, 2011). There is continuing speculation about whether this is supply side failure - creative graduates leaving without the appropriate skills, attributes or skills levels for creative occupations (Cunningham, Higgs, & Council, 2010) - or simply

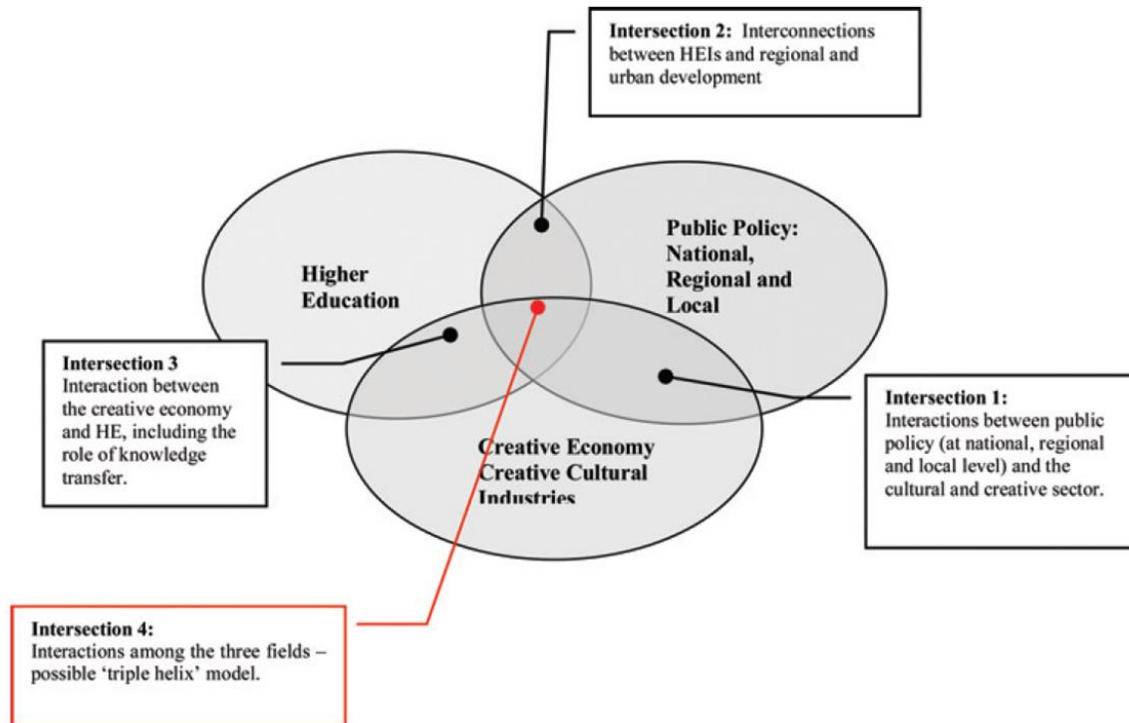
oversupply into a precarious, unregulated and vulnerable economic situation (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Oakley, 2009)

The concept of knowledge transfer (often labelled knowledge exchange or external engagement in this context) has become increasingly important in making the argument that arts and humanities departments have a positive impact on society and provide good value for money. Some authors have seen this new pressure for knowledge transfer and exchange as an imposition of a 'techno-economic' paradigm to arts and humanities in academia (Bullen, Robb, & Kenway, 2004) but most higher education institutions have embraced this new perspective, seeing it as an opportunity to add value to their work (Lindberg, 2008; Powell, 2007). The knowledge connections which universities develop with the CCIs are considered particularly important as measures of impact and engagement, increasingly embedded within research assessment exercises (Comunian, Smith, and Taylor 2013) and, although the evidence gathered is currently mostly anecdotal, there is an increasing pressure within policy circles to show the importance of these dynamics (Bakhshi, Schneider, & Walker, 2008; Hughes, Kitson, Probert, Bullock, & Milner, 2011).

Initially, relationships between higher education and the CCIs have been characterized by the assumption that knowledge sitting within academia can benefit the work and practice of creative practitioners and organisations, with a strong emphasis on entrepreneurship (DCMS, 2006; Taylor, 2007). These values have been framed explicitly in relation to entrepreneurialism and the creative economy and more recently in wider arts and humanities, in relation to social responsibility, community engagement and development - where the injection of academic, specialist knowledge in history, classics, languages, literatures and cultures is seen to provide the basis for improvement and connection with those on the outside.

However, other modes of engagement are emerging to take central stage in this landscape, which question and blur the boundaries and roles of academia, policy and the CCIs sector (Comunian, Taylor, & Smith, 2013, fig.1). They argue that the triple helix model (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000) has a role in promoting a better understanding of how arts and humanities-based disciplines are engaging in knowledge transfer and exploitation activities with the wider CCIs sector: "It can help researchers and academics to appreciate the

dynamics of these relationships alongside those they create for teaching and researching” (Comunian et al., 2013, p.17)



**Figure 1.** A new Triple Helix? The creative economy, public policy and higher education.

There has also been a long conversation between academics and arts policy bodies about their shared interests in the commissioning and production of research and evidence which concerns the CCIs, their management, value and impact. Although a potentially rich area for collaboration, in the UK this has never really moved from a general misunderstanding of the core reasons for knowledge production in either sector, confusion over disciplinary boundaries and epistemological characteristics and a sense of oblique frustration with the different timescales attached to these activities from both parties (Gilmore, 2014 ). So whilst there are many examples of the involvement of academics in consultancy and applied research which maps and defines the creative economy, or evaluates specific arts programmes and initiatives, there are few examples whereby academic outputs and policy outputs take the same form. Policy makers are not primary audiences for peer-reviewed publications, and the acknowledged difficulties of capturing the value applied and practice-

based outputs under the terms of academic research quality assessment frameworks remain (Scullion & Garcia, 2005).

New models for research and other collaborations are however emerging, which attempt to demonstrate how academic research can be useful in other ways to the arts and CCI, establish principles for the ways in which these sectors come together, the shared and separate outputs and outcomes and the potential for genuine co-production and collaboration. This is in part due to the increased pressure on research funding councils to demonstrate the social and economic returns on investment, leveraging new programmes of funding which are deliberately targeting opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration with creative practitioners and communities. However, it is also partially engaging with broader issues in higher education policy, responding to new financial barriers for access to knowledge and education with the increasing interest in the civic university and in achieving ways of taking down the walls of the institution, reconfiguring the ways knowledge and knowledge practices move in and out.

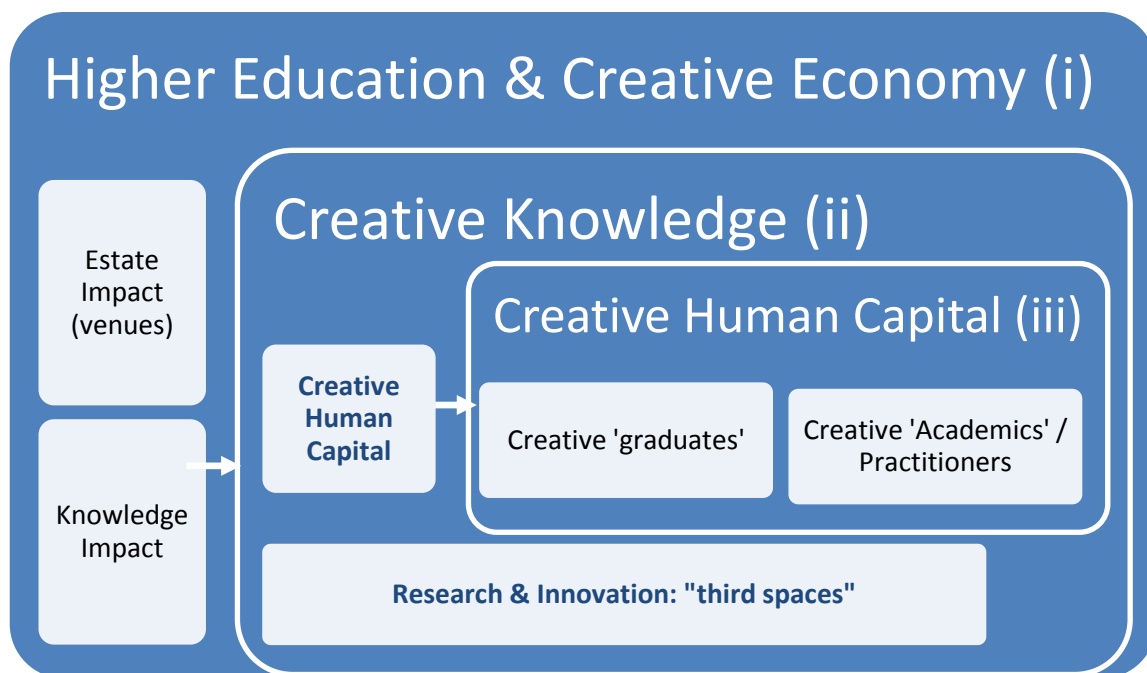
### **3. Understanding new and old patterns of engagement: a research framework**

This framework (Fig. 2) aims to clarify some of the key dynamics and concepts within the growing literature surrounding the creative economy to better understand the multiplicity and complexity of the interactions that connect the sector to the higher education.

In the broader literature, the role played by universities in the local cultural development is clearly acknowledged (Chatterton, 1999). This corresponds to the general level of interactions between universities and the creative economy (I). Interactions can be broadly said to be linked to the impact of the presence of the university as such - and with reference to the CCI – also to the presence of venues, facilities and cultural spaces. Alongside this estate impact, there is a much richer knowledge impact, as ‘Creative Knowledge’ (II) is generated within and at the boundaries between academia and CCI.

Within ‘Creative knowledge’ two important elements can be identified: one is the (creative) human capital involved, the other is the role played by ‘third spaces’ in creating opportunities for shared research and innovation (III). We would like to explore these two elements further in our framework.

Fig.2 : A framework to explore the relationship between Higher Education and the CCIs



- **Creative Human Capital:** This comprises on one side a focus on graduates and creative workers, on the other, academics and researchers within universities. The research on human capital is well developed, specifically focusing on understanding the impact of skills and training on graduates entering the economy every year and their ability to find work (Faggian, 2005). Recent research has also explored the specific impact of 'creative human capital' in specific places (Comunian & Faggian, 2014) , furthermore, the

importance of the creative workforce (and its clustering) has been the centre of attention of much of the recent policy work (NESTA, 2008). Furthermore, students are often encouraged to take part in community cultural activities, which see their 'local citizenship' and 'social responsibility' in connection to the locale where they study and live. Alongside the role played by 'creative graduates' it is important to consider another side of human capital, focusing on the highly trained individuals that constitute the human resources of universities. There is a clear acknowledgement both within academia and the arts world that collaborations and exchanges are based on individuals and their networks and knowledge. Here the arts is a source of knowledge assets for academia, as theoretical knowledge requires the importing of practice-led expertise, for example professionals engaged in teaching as guests and sometimes even in tenured, permanent positions. They themselves often directly engage in start-up, patents and other economic activities, often blurring the lines between the teacher and practitioners, between academics and CCIs. This highlights how academics in the creative arts follow specific patterns of engagement connected to the practice-based nature of their research and the value of the networks across higher education and the creative economy that they establish and rely on (Haft, 2012).

- **Creative research & innovation: "third spaces":** Shared spaces are another key form of engagement which instigates collaborative practice. Some shared spaces are physical infrastructures (for example incubation spaces, shared facilities), others are virtual platforms or 'third spaces', where academic knowledge mixes and negotiates with specialist knowledge from the art sector and its communities. Most of these spaces tend to be informal and based on mutual collaborations and exchanges, however, sometimes they are results of larger investments and conscious commitments to developing long-term partnerships across the sectors (Dawson & Gilmore, 2009). The key issue for 'third spaces' is whether they need to develop organically or if they can be policy driven or engineered to produce research and innovation across academia and CCIs (to mutual and equal benefit). One example of policy intervention in the UK is the initiative of the AHRC (launched in 2011) called 'Knowledge Exchange Hubs for the Creative Economy' where over £16m over four years planned to be invested in creating new opportunities and shared platforms for collaborations. According to the AHRC (2011) these hubs 'will



be charged with the task of building new partnerships and entrepreneurial capacity in the Creative Economy and increasing the number of arts and humanities researchers actively engaged in research-based knowledge exchange’.

While this framework helps researchers and practitioners to understand the practices and dimensions of collaboration, it does not account for the directionality of these connections. There is a long-term belief that knowledge within academia can be simply injected in the outside world and that universities can plan their collaborations at the directorship level. However, the growing role played by creative human capital and shared third spaces highlights the emergence of more organic and bilateral models of engagement, where new knowledge might be co-created and developed across and beyond academia. These findings have particular implications for policy practices to support these connections, not least the development of agreements, such as memoranda of understanding, and contractual arrangements which work to connect up the many different tiers, function areas and interest groups which come together within bilateral engagements.

#### **4. Conclusions: challenges and future scenarios**

This chapter offered an opportunity to reflect on the collaborative practices emerging between knowledge institutions and the CCI. It highlighted the need to develop a better understanding of the practices as being at the crossroads between CCIs, academia and public policy as part of complex triple helix of relations and expectations (Comunian et al., 2013). Furthermore, it proposes a new framework to understand these relations that goes beyond the simple cultural impact of the university presence in specific locations to engage with how their presence stimulates both creative human capital and the development of shared third spaces for research and innovation. This framework aims to be a useful tool to understand collaborations and explore challenges and future scenarios of creative engagement across and beyond academia.

Firstly, it is important to consider and acknowledge **power relationships** in these collaborations. While knowledge institutions are large structures, with access to space, knowledge and funding, CCIs are often small organisations with a lack of funding and

infrastructure. The unilateral establishment of collaborations and the traditional 'injection' model - where knowledge more inside academia is fed to outside organisations in hope of broader impact - are a source of contention, where CCI struggle to state their role and importance in cross-boundary collaborations. For knowledge to be relevant and have a real impact there is a need to establish common research goals and objectives rather than simply feed results outside the campus wishing for them to be relevant or meaningful. However, small CCIs often struggle to be able to set or contribute to the initial research agenda because of the impossibility to commit time or funding in long-term collaborations. Where these relationships are between HEIs and large public and third sector institutions – such as museums and galleries – the power relationships may be differently structured, as there is greater 'fit' and recognition of the dynamics and missions of these knowledge institutions. With large commercial organisations the dynamics alter again, so that, for example, in the knowledge exchange and teaching activities, individual degree programmes and student cohorts function as small research and development spaces within the supply chain. However, since they are dependent on the relationships (and must fit with the commercial timescales) to provide relevant student employability and skills development, commercial mechanisms can cause friction with degree structures.

Secondly, a better understanding of the **value** (economic and socio-cultural) **of creative human capital** is needed. While creative arts degrees are growing in numbers and popularity in UK, graduates face unstable working patterns and conditions and often low economic rewards after their training (Comunian, Faggian, & Li, 2010). Similarly, while universities encourage engaged academics and lecturers / practitioners in their courses, the traditional pathways for promotion and recognition can often prove difficult to this new breed of intellectuals across CCIs and academia (Haft, 2012). Furthermore, an increased investment of time in relationship and project management is required when working collaboratively outside the walls of the academy (and similarly for practitioners negotiating higher education institutions) and the competencies and skills required are not always costed into project and research funding sufficiently, or recognized through the established esteem frameworks of universities. This disjuncture is nowhere more apparent than in the financial systems of universities, which find it hard to accommodate the often temporary payment schedules and requirements of freelance practitioners, so that other informal

economies sometimes evolve based on skills exchange and social transactions to avoid the issue of slow requisitioning and payment of services. The terms and conditions for working together require change on both parts, and a shift in the valuation, performance management and appraisal of the capital costs involved is needed, in order to build new pathways for progression for both creative graduates and practitioner-academics.

Finally, as universities in UK face increased criticism over higher fees, there is a need for timely reflection on how culture and creativity could help universities **engage with local communities** and break barriers to access for segments of the community which left outside of the campus, and excluded through lack of economic means as well as social and psychological barriers. As the value of arts and creativity is increasingly understood and recognized, in terms of instrumental policy agendas, so the citizenship and social responsibility initiatives of universities are increasingly turning toward new modes of creative engagement which draw on the capacity of academics and CCIs to collaborate and operate in the same civic spaces.

While this chapter has tried to provide a framework for future research and practice, it also aims to stimulate debate on the challenges ahead. It signposts a number of shared interests, that have arisen in the context of policy drivers for collaboration and engagement across universities and CCIs, but which are also driven by the passions, enthusiasms and specialist expertise of the individuals involved to develop new, more appropriate methods for knowledge exchange and cross-sector working.

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