

The notion of the creative city and its implementation in Shanghai, China: Spatial practices and further implication for design actions

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The notion of the 'creative city' was developed almost thirty years ago, but spread rapidly to many countries at the beginning of the new century, thanks largely to the key contributions by Florida (2002) and Landry (2000) and 'their advocacy of the role of the creative industries in urban regeneration' (Canniffe, 2017). The focus of these two works is indeed different; in the literature, these are usually referred to as different models (Miles, 2013). Florida focused on the 'creative class' as 'people [who] engage in creative problem solving, drawing on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems' (2004: 69). On the other hand Landry, in *The Creative City*, emphasizes arts-based projects rather than the professionals and thus includes individuals, organisations and public bodies: 'Successful cities seemed to have some things in common – visionary individuals, creative organizations and a political culture sharing a clarity of purpose. They seemed to follow a determined, not a deterministic path. Leadership was widespread, permeating public, private and voluntary sectors. It expressed itself in courageous public initiatives and often risky business investments, and in a tissue of interconnected projects whether for profit or the public good' (2000: 3). Several initiatives, such as the Creative Cities movement, grew out of these scholars' work, especially in Europe and in the US; they were often linked to funding agencies and governmental support.

Almost from its beginnings, the notion, meaning and outcomes of the creative city and its implementation have been subject to a range of criticisms (Marcuse, 2003). In terms of local governance, some scholars have criticised how creativity has been adopted as an all-purpose fix it tool for contemporary cities (Pratt, 2015). This critique relates to the supposed relationship between urban development and creativity, which is usually driven by economic impact, including jobs. It is based, for example, on Landry's assumption that arts-based urban regeneration initiatives align the 'public good and private interest' (Miles, 2013).

Many forms of criticism have arisen in response to the instrumental notion of culture and to the focus on consumption rather than on production and on cultural industries rather than on people (Pratt, 2015). For these critics, cities should be seen not just as places of buying and selling, but as places for genuine culture exchange (Pratt, 2011).

Others have cast a critical eye on the various forms of benchmarking attached to the creative city notion, such as the 'creativity index' and various sets of indicators: 'there are a number of issues in expressing that as a metric' (Pratt, 2015) and problems with linking cultural consumption and quality-of-life indicators. For some, the policy dimensions of the creative city concept can be seen as an industry-dedicated tool for promising forms of ostensible urban renewal.

The creative city, urban development and urban transformation

In terms of urban development, Peck (2005) and others have criticised the creative city approach on the basis of its support of neo-liberalism and a consumption-driven society, as 'work[ing] quietly with the grain of extant "neoliberal" development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place-marketing' (Peck, 2005:740).

Looking more specifically at the outcomes of arts-led urban transformations, negative consequences include precariousness, gentrification (Smith, 1996) and a cultural sector that responds to market logic. This last problem is also linked to the notion of place marketing, which has been criticized for being inefficient and expensive (Pratt, 2015). In some cases, local cultures were marginalized; in others, the promised new prosperity did not arrive with 'gentrification through aestheticisation and (often needed) renewal of the built environment' (Miles, 2013).

In most cases, inner city regeneration projects took place but a 'narrow repertoire' of strategies and 'recurrent themes' put these efforts on the trajectory of being quickly 'routinized' (Peck, 2005:752). Even if some other cities approached the matter with 'softer' strategies, rather than 'bricks-and-mortar methods' (Peck, 2005:753), according to 'western cluster theories, CCI [cultural/creative industry] have an intimate connection with their urban infrastructures – an "elective affinity"' (Gu, 2014). This elective affinity (Hutton, 2010) suggests a complementarity between hard and soft infrastructure in creative districts or neighbourhoods.

For the scope of this paper, however, it is important to acknowledge the importance of the urban built environment in creative or arts-led transformations (Jacobs, 1961; Landry, 2000; Mumford, 1938), as that has been integral to the foundational works of urban design: 'Jacobs suggested the built form of old buildings supply the stock of urban spaces for alternative business and cultural activities because of their unique character, low rent and adaptability to new uses' (Gu,, 2014). That view is at least partially replicated in the common understanding of the creative city, where bohemian cultural production and the branding of creative neighbourhoods rely on the re-use of existing spaces and buildings (Gu, 2014).

As a matter of fact, the creative milieu, at its different architectural and urban scales, involves a number of key factors, including the notion of architectural heritage, the neighbourhood and its image, the wider urban settings in which the activities take place or to which they refer and the notion of the production of space and spatial appropriation. The physical settings of the creative city show the activities, uses and meaning of urban space; as such, they may also witness the benefits or shortcomings of specific design actions. 'The narrative of the creative city is one where design has a significant role in the marketing of particular urban experiences against competitor cities, through the invention of often elaborate and pervasive myths about a city's lifestyle' (Canniffe, 2017).

Aims and methodology

This paper, through the selection of three case studies, aims to investigate the outcomes of the creative cluster agenda in Shanghai and its links with design actions. By mapping the uses of places rather than focusing on the initial intentions of the projects, the paper highlights both the positive outcomes and shortcomings of these three sites. Moreover, the investigation aims to

provide a better understanding of the role and capacity of design at different scales, from interior to architectural and urban, in influencing the process of urban transformation. The paper is based on a literature review, on-site data collection and qualitative research methods, including mapping, informal interviews and a non-interactive observation.

The implementation of the creative city in Shanghai: Creative clusters and urban policies

Shanghai developed a strategy linked to the notion of the creative city beginning in 2005, when the local government announced its intention to dedicate specific areas called 'creative industry clusters' to develop creative sector further. Creative clusters spread rapidly across the city, reaching 80 in number in 2011; the model evolved so as to include not only art-based re-uses of shuttered industrial factories and warehouses, but also lifestyle-based creative areas and iconic buildings devoted to art and creativity in general (Delsante, 2012). The link between creative clusters and industry is highly relevant, as it provides certain key insights into the specific social-economic and political setting in which these initiatives were developed (O'Connor and Gu, 2014). In this respect, creative activities include art and artistic production and the art trade, fashion, textiles and design; they refer to creative and artistic production in general (Ren and Sun, 2012), but also to trade, industry branding and consumption.

Even if there are analogies through different practices across China, Shanghai demonstrates specific features in terms of cultural and creative districts. First of all, its creative clusters were planned by the local government, which explicitly defined a number of areas in the city for this purpose. Moreover, most Chinese creative clusters have been created 'by real estate developers in partnership with local governments – often directly invested in by these local governments' (Gu, 2014).

These districts are located in both central and semi-central or even peripheral areas, so Shanghainese creative districts are spread across the entire city; geographical factors were not determinative during the planning phase. However, recent studies (e.g., O'Connor and Gu, 2014) show the discrepancy between the placement of the creative clusters and the mapping of actual artistic and creative activities in Shanghai. This may be partially linked to the lack of success of some of the clusters, which are far away from districts featuring major cultural activity.

Following an updated mapping of creative cluster sites and urban transformations in the city (O'Connor and Gu, 2014), three significant case studies have been selected for the present study to show specific features that can help in the process of understanding the spatial implications of these transformations (Bertolino and Delsante, 2015). There are certainly other meaningful examples in Shanghai, but the selection of case studies is a key element of the comparative process, which benefits from a small number of samples to maximise the clarity and understanding of differences.

1933 Slaughterhouse: The consumption-based, iconic form of creative cluster

The recent transformation of the 1933, a former slaughterhouse, is among the most significant samples of a design strategy based on re-use of a heritage building and infilling new functions into existing spaces (Bertolino and Delsante, 2015). A respectful conservation strategy was applied to the entire building, with the interior space entirely recycled and re-used for cultural,

creative and leisure activities: 'It is a typical case of an officially managed creative cluster aimed at providing high-end cultural (mostly office, retail and exhibition) facilities' (Gu, 2014). From the point of view of the creative cluster, however, there is an absolute lack of art production, and the site is entirely dedicated to consumption. Moreover, in terms of urban transformation, there is a notable lack of relationship with the surroundings: the building itself has been refurbished, but its integration with public spaces and the wider neighbourhood remain insufficient. The hypothesis that refurbishment would serve as a starting point of a broader regeneration in the area is thus unconfirmed at best. That would require significant gentrification or a displacement of the local Lilong population to more peripheral and less attractive areas.

The re-use of the architectural heritage, with its artificially managed mixed use and the embellishment of exterior spaces, has become a mere alternative to 'traditional shopping malls – architecture again is facing the risk of becoming the (trending) stage for trade' (Bertolino and Delsante, 2015). Architecture and its image have become the most appropriate and convincing media for trade and consumption: 'The link made by western writers between the generation of creative ideas and their environment was replaced by the link between image and their environment' (Gu, 2014).

Tian Zi Fang: From organic art production to lifestyle-based creative cluster

Tian Zi Fang has seen several phases of development, from a residential area near factories to a creative neighbourhood for micro-businesses to a gentrified, high-end district for trade, fashion and leisure. Since its evolution began, it has been recognised as one of the few organic urban transformations in the city, as it initially attracted a number of creative entrepreneurs looking for small spaces to engage in production and trade. The local community was opposed to a real estate-led urban transformation, and the local authorities ultimately agreed to retain the existing buildings, which are mostly small housing units near factories that are now closed. The neighbourhood showed the potential for creative re-use of existing urban spaces and infrastructure such as public squares and streets with low impact on local communities in terms of gentrification. However, things have changed more recently, as over half of the businesses located there now are owned by foreign interests from over 20 different countries. Given this recent change and the area's inclusion in tourist guides (the *New York Times* describes it as 'a web of back alleys in the French Concession that now house restaurants (too expensive) and artsy boutique gift shops (not always)' (Kugel, 2013)), it is mostly visited by tourists, including wealthy Chinese. International brands have been gradually replacing local independent shops; local production has exited the stage in favour of a more and more sophisticated form of consumption. The transformation into a tourist attraction combined with a significant gentrification process runs the risk of Tian Zi Fang's being transformed into simply another urban space for trade without any form of art and creativity production. The remaining hopes for more interesting and unplanned uses now lie in residual spaces like small courtyards, interiors and rooftops that reflect a spontaneous strategy of "grafting" at the urban scale (Delsante and Bertolino, 2015). New formal and informal relationships with the neighbourhood could be developed to see that visual and spatial relationships are enriched.

50, Mogashan Lu: Production and consumption in former warehouses

50, Mogashan Lu (henceforth M50) represents another significant example of a creative cluster in Shanghai. Again, it was created thanks to community engagement that succeeded in preserving the existing buildings instead of pursuing a real estate development process. Located along Suzhou Creek and surrounded today by tall, high-density residential buildings, 50M is a low-density island in the urban archipelago.

The mixed-use functional program represents the text of urban transformation. Post-industrial spaces have been adapted into workshops and exhibition rooms. Spaces for art production are placed next to showrooms, sometimes in the same ateliers. Fashion and textile workshops neighbour visual artists and photographers or architectural offices. This is well integrated into a morphological strategy and discourse: heritage preservation, re-use and recycling exist together thanks to careful transformations. Other buildings have been refurbished to host different kinds of activities, including offices and small residential spaces. Even if tourism and glamour have affected the original artistic flavour, M50 represents a milestone in urban transformation through art and creativity. Some question the authenticity of its cultural production, between market forces such as international art galleries, 'tight institutional control' (Gu, 2014) and a lack of connection with the adjacent area. Others question the lack of interaction and the poverty of community spaces: 'there is no sense of a communal space. Only recently has there been a teahouse, café and bookshop. They are not the type of quirky places visitors will make the effort to go to. They serve purely as places of necessity' (O'Connor and Gu, 2014).

From critique to the acknowledgment of spatial practices and design actions

Creative clusters in Shanghai have been criticised from several points of view during different stages of their development. In terms of urban policies, they have been considered 'generally unsuccessful' (O'Connor and Gu, 2014), and there are concerns that this may affect future urban policies regarding heritage and conservation.

In terms of use and space, art production has often been replaced by art consumption, which represents a trivialization of artistic or creative contributions: shops for the art trade have superseded productive spaces dedicated to creative activities. In most of these cases, architecture appears to serve merely as a stage through the overexploitation of its image in terms of its relationship with its history and urban setting: 'Today, the pure embellishment of a part of the city is not sufficient' (Bugatti and Zheng, 2015).

In general terms, the most resilient transformations are those linked to local communities: they are more resistant to global markets and real estate speculation. They have progressively achieved transformation thanks to bottom-up initiatives and community empowerment. We can affirm that, further to the success – even if temporary – of a few clusters in terms of urban resilience, some also support a broader idea of social and cultural sustainability, due to their core ability to support the development of indigenous content and local idioms in artistic work (Kong, 2009).

In particular, creative clusters are intended as spaces where the human need for artistic expression can take place naturally. This paper aims particularly to analyse how the perceived

attributes of a space may provide social inclusion through artistic creation. Current spatial theory on creative industries has emphasised both collective creativity and ways in which clusters of creative enterprises in specific places can promote creativity (Drake, 2003). This position highlights the relevance of understanding the different levels of community interactions taking place: here, they are identified as artist-artist interactions and artist-public interactions, each of which calls for different spatial layouts.

Data gathered from different sources have been collated into a comparative table (Table 1) in order to map the features of the case studies against some key factors belonging to creative cities and the criticisms levelled against them. Table 1 also aims to aid a comparative investigation into the specific uses and spatial practices that are relevant to understanding the implications more fully in terms of space production and the relevance of design actions.

Conclusions

This essay takes a comparative view of three different case studies in a single urban context, the municipality of Shanghai, so as to seek consistency in terms of the economic, political and local governance contexts. However, relevant differences have been acknowledged. Some of these are linked to site-specific features (e.g., an urban village versus monumental heritage) or to the inherited urban setting, such as morphological features, urban densities and natural barriers. Others are due to property conditions such as development opportunities and constraints and explicit choices in terms of management.

Having said that, it is challenging to compare such case studies on the basis of their economic success and in respect to their environmental and urban design qualities. The latter issue would require the use of a set of indicators or equivalent metrics, all of which have been widely criticized (Peck, 2005). Further studies are necessary to investigate more fully the social sustainability and production of space in Shanghainese creative clusters. Spatial appropriation at different scales may be connected to local communities, as in forms of co-production; they may also be trans-local or even international. A better understanding of the various forms and places of space production is intended to serve as a framework for the following design actions.

	Criteria	1933	Tian Zi Fang	M50
M a p p i n g against the notion of the creative city and its shortcomings	Interaction with local community, presence of tourism, resilience to forms of gentrification.	There is no evidence of how broader interaction with local community could be developed. Moreover, forms of gentrification have been reported already in the surrounding area (Gu, 2014).	Initially, the neighbourhood hosted an increasing number of artists, and the local community showed resilience to real estate development. Now, however, it is largely gentrified, to attract a wider public, composed of local people as well as tourists (Bertolino and Delsante, 2015).	The creative cluster developed thanks to a local community that was opposed to a real estate development. It is not clear how much of that spirit remain today: 'The issue of social sustainability in Moganshan Lu centers on questions of the social symbiosis between the artists at Moganshan Lu and the larger community' (Gu, 2014).
	Art Production and/or Consumption	Focused entirely on art, creativity and fashion consumption; strong presence of high-end showrooms and international brands.	Originally home to artists, it hosted art production and small workshops and showrooms. It is now almost entirely dedicated to art and fashion consumption.	Born as a mixed-use area, hosts art production and workshops and exhibition spaces and showrooms, including photography and architecture ateliers. Production and consumption are still quite balanced, even if the latter appears to be prevalent.
	Heritage and re-use of existing spaces: 'Mixed use of space including cultural consumption, production and living spaces' (Gu, 2014).	Re-use of the existing iconic building and the public space in front of it. There is no possibility of dwellings.	Strongly orientated to the re-use of existing buildings, it accommodates some small interventions in public spaces and building refurbishment. There is a residual chance of dwellings and living spaces.	A mix of re-use and new buildings. Large warehouses were converted, while some buildings have been largely refurbished. There is some possibility of temporary living.
M a p p i n g s p a t i a l practices, features and the relevance of design actions	Relationship between studios (artist-artist) and the outside (artist-public).	Not applicable	Increasingly low form of interaction due to the lack of art production. Significant presence of an international community that reconnects to the international agenda.	The public can freely access studios and interact with artists.
	Public spaces design and use, urban neighbourhood, city-wide relationships.	Some urban design on the outside of the building, but no relevant links to the surrounding neighbourhood.	Public spaces have been created along the historical street network. Increasing use of internal courtyards, spaces between buildings and rooftops due to a lack of space in traditional spaces. Effective integration with urban surroundings.	Communal spaces and urban design actions within the edges of the cluster. However, 'many artists choose to socialize elsewhere or in their own studios' (Gu, 2014). Urban separation is partially due to existing morphological conditions.

Table 1: Mapping the creative city and its spatial practices in three different creative clusters

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