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Creative Economies of Tomorrow? Limits to Growth and the Uncertain Future

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Abstract

This article contributes to emerging critiques of UK creative economy policy by challenging the unremitting celebration of 'growth' as the primary indicator of economic success. The ecological fallacies of 'exclusive' growth and the social and environmental injustices that 'creative growth' has occasioned are initially discussed – and a range of possible other understandings of growth introduced. The article concludes that under conditions of real economic stagnation and incipient environmental crisis, growth needs to be made limited, but also more fully socialised in a dual sense; made more evenly and equitably redistributed in terms of benefits and rewards, as well as re-conceived in terms that afford greater priority to non-economic values and human prosperity indicators.

Introduction

The 'creative economy'[1] is routinely cast as an antidote to low growth and crisis. The official statistics show that in the decade since the financial crash the creative industries[2] have recovered strongly to become one of the UK's most dynamic industrial sectors, consistently reporting growth in excess of the national average. For example, the DCMS (2016a) stated

[1] The 'creative economy' tends to be defined (in the UK at least) as all the people employed in the officially designated 'creative industries' (whether these people have creative jobs or not) plus all the people working in creative occupations employed in 'non-creative' industries. More generally it's used as shorthand for all those activities now designated as 'DDCMS Sectors' (see below).

[2] The creative industries are the most significant component of the creative economy; the DDCMS is now measuring what are termed 'DDCMS Sectors' which includes both the 'digital sector' and the 'cultural sector' both of which have some significant overlap with the creative industries, as well as their own discrete components.

that the creative industries grew[3] by 7.6% in 2015-2016, compared to a 3.5% rate of growth for the wider economy. Such claims have led Ministers to laud the sector for its essential role in strengthening the national economy and for continuing to provide the UK with 'hope' and a 'positive future' amidst the wider economic gloom-mongering (Bradley, 2017; Hancock, 2018). For its most passionate advocates the creative sector is not only the 'fastest-growing part of the economy' but is now providing other sectors with 'shining examples of ingenuity and entrepreneurship' (Kampfner, 2017) – lighting the path of return to a world where dreams of unfettered economic expansion might once again be dreamt.

It is important that we read growth figures cautiously and with some qualification. Firstly, there are some general (and well-established) questions about whether GDP and GVA serve to offer either accurate measures of growth or appropriate indices of economic progress[4]. Secondly, there are some specific difficulties in capturing data on the creative economy, sufficient to cast doubt on whether recorded levels of growth accurately convey the full pattern of sectoral activity (see DCMS, 2016a; Nesta, 2016). For example, national statistics often find it difficult to account for sub-tax threshold sole traders and creative micro-businesses, or artists and creatives with multiple jobs. Further, standard measures do not account for informal and non-market production activities, both of which are quite crucial to the creative sector and which tend not to be as growth-oriented or as concerned with output

[3]Economic growth is usually measured through Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which calculates the total monetary value of goods and services produced in a country over a given period of time, the GDP growth rate being the percentage increase observed across accounting periods. An alternative measure, Gross Value Added (GVA), is often used to calculate the output and growth rate of specific economic sectors, as in the DCMS figures on the creative industries cited here.

[4] Both GDP and GVA offer fairly crude measures of economic growth, restricted to accounts of the total value of observable market exchanges. While useful for calculating the total (annual) value of production, and thus changes in output over time, such measures do not account for non-market economic transactions (such as in household care work, or voluntary labour), nor do they tell us tell us anything about the social distribution (or social costs) of inequalities in income, the depletion of material or environmental assets, quality of life (beyond using changes in spending and income as markers of 'utility') or the social costs of harmful 'economic' activity such as pollution, fraud, industrial accidents and so on (see Jackson, 2009; Stiglitz, 2016).

and profit-maximising as mainstream economic activity (Banks, 2017). However, the focus of this article is not on whether the statistical base is able to adequately account for creative economy growth *per se.* Instead I want to outline a set of conceptual and practical problems that are raised by using economic growth as the standard measure for indicating the value and benefits of the creative economy. I will argue that not only is the routine use of growth as the headline indicator serving to obscure some of the ingrained problems and limitations of the creative economy, but that the idea of growth, in itself, is becoming increasingly problematic as a measure for understanding the creative economy at all.

The Limits to Growth

Supporting commercial growth is the foundational premise of UK creative economy policy. In government reports and strategy documents (e.g. see DCMS, 2016b; DDCMS, 2017; 2018), in Minister's public pronouncements (Hancock, 2017), and in the complementing work of agencies such as Nesta (2016), the dominant theme is investment in culture and creativity boosts economic activity and national output. Within the new UK Industrial Strategy (HM Government, 2017) the case for a creative industry Sector Deal has been strongly supported by Peter Bazalgette's *Independent Review of the Creative Industries* (2017) and effective lobbying on the part of representative bodies such as the Creative Industries Council (2017). The creative economy growth agenda is also making new inroads into higher education policy and academic research funding; as I write the AHRC'S developing *Creative Industries Cluster Programme* – an £80 million investment in support of the Industrial Strategy – has entirely committed itself to funding 'growth' (narrowly defined), while the joint AHRC/EPSRC *Immersive Experiences* programme dovetails neatly with the

UK Digital Strategy (DDCMS, 2017) by prioritising opportunities to 'grow the commercial and creative opportunities of the future' (AHRC, 2017).

There are at least two good grounds on which we might question the priority given to growth. Firstly, the growth imperative might be unsustainable, even in its own economic terms. The trend growth rate in per capita GDP across the OECD nations has been declining for almost half a century (see Jackson, 2018). For many mainstream economists the most advanced, post-crisis economies now appear to have entered a period of stasis, sclerosis or 'secular stagnation' - sustained flat or zero growth rates over time (e.g. see Krugman 2014, Stiglitz 2016, Summers, 2014). It is a moot point therefore that the creative economy might currently be growing when the wider economy on which its success arguably depends is stagnant and *non*-growing. Secondly, even accepting that *some* kind of economic growth might be regarded as necessary[5] in the advanced economies, the question of what kind (and level) of growth we might want to encourage, and how its benefits might be harnessed for the greatest good, is now an open question. Growth is useful to rich societies – but only up to a point. A growing number of critics have identified that human happiness, well-being and life satisfaction have stalled (or reversed) in the UK (and beyond) even as economic output has grown (Jackson, 2009; Skidelsky and Skidelsky, 2012; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). As Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett so convincingly demonstrated in *The Spirit Level*, in the wealthiest societies economic growth has now 'largely finished its work' (2009, p. 5), since further rises in income have failed to solve a whole range of social and economic problems – even for the rich. The pursuit of what we might term 'exclusive' economic growth - or

[5] As Sternberg (2013, p. 344) notes 'qualitative economic growth first (but not exclusively) requires quantitative economic growth'; true to a point perhaps – and it may be that a (presumably low level) of sustainable growth *is* possible; though part of the point here is to try and help reconceptualise what we mean by growth, and to think about how current (as much as any future) resources might be deployed or allocated.

growth for its own sake - is no longer bringing the general benefits (or 'utilities') that are being claimed for it – and this is as true in the creative economy as it is elsewhere.

More precisely, however, we can also argue that the pursuit of creative growth is generating its *own* specific difficulties. I want to identify three particular problems with the concept of growth in the creative economy (or 'creative growth' as I'll term it). These problems tend to be obscure to the point of invisibility in the current policy discussion.

Limited Social Sharing

While existing levels of creative growth might appear to bring general benefits (Bradley, 2017) it is quite clear that the opportunities and rewards of such growth are not being equally or equitably shared. In the UK (as elsewhere) we have also become accustomed to a consistent failure to socialise the gains of the creative economy through fairly remunerated, sustained and distributed work. We can cite here lowering, unequal and inequitable pay, the proliferation of short-term and unstable work and employment contracts, and the woeful (and in many cases worsening) statistics on workforce diversity and inclusion (e.g. see Banks, 2017; Creative Skillset, 2014; Oakley and O'Brien, 2015; Saha, 2018). In so far as it might be occurring, growth therefore tends - perhaps not surprisingly – to benefit capitalist firms, larger and more established organisations, and the already socially-advantaged. Outside of the commercial sector we can also point to some significant inequalities in public investment and in allocation of the rewards of growth, including regional and geographical differences in state funding of arts and cultural activity (Dorling and Hennig, 2015). The first challenge we might therefore want to make to creative growth is that it is not *inclusive* in its current form, or, rather, the opportunities to take part and reap the benefits of creative growth are not being sufficiently socialised in the ways that its proponents would like to claim. Relatedly, I'd argue that the growth agenda too easily overlooks the substrate of economic relations that actually allow such growth to happen in the first place – such as the stripping-out of employee protections, intensified exploitation of more 'flexibly'-deployed labour, and the accelerated growth and gains for owners, managers and shareholders that rely on the suppression of wages for ordinary workers[6]. Such savings might well facilitate short-term growth – but the inequalities they engender tend to be detrimental to long-term economic performance (Stiglitz, 2016). Yet as long as growth remains the key objective (and the primary metric) for measuring success then these relations are likely to remain obscured.

Limited Environmental Concern

When it comes to environmental issues, creative economy policy has had almost nothing to say. Partly, this comes from the widespread (and politically convenient) assumption that the creative industries are intrinsically 'clean' or ecologically benign. This is a fallacy. Creative, cultural and digital industries and technologies are highly energy-intensive and often egregiously polluting; this includes many of the world's leading digital technology and communications companies, the global film and television industries, publishing, music and the transport, circulation and logistical systems that sustain them (e.g. see Caraway, 2017; Maxwell and Miller, 2017; Murdock, 2018). Furthermore, the idea of absolute 'decoupling' - that creative technological innovations and efficiency-savings in production will be sufficient to ensure that creative economic growth can continue without fatally damaging ecological capacity[7] – now looks increasingly unrealistic and far-fetched (Caraway, 2017; Jackson,

[6] See Banks (2017, Chapter 6)

[7] It's important to draw a distinction between *relative* and *absolute* decoupling. The former – which is happening all the time - refers to the ways in which production is becoming ever more energy and resource efficient over time, across all areas of economic activity. The smartphone, the computer, the film studio, the

2009). That most of its policy-makers have not yet seriously engaged with even the most basic and conventional ideas on sustainability - let alone considered the need for other kinds of radical alternative - demonstrates just how far away the creative economy is from developing the political consciousness and will that is required to address the environmental costs of a freely expanding creative economy, and its real ecological limits.

Limited Cultural Ontology

The third problem with the notion of creative growth is its (by now familiar) tendency to reduce culture[8] to the status of economic resource. Here, culture (long since rebadged as 'creativity') is understood as both pacific and abundant; a reservoir of good ideas foremost amenable to commercial exploitation. For government, the creative economy is imagined to be led by a dynamic coterie of professional entrepreneurs, innovators and highly-skilled workers whose paramount motivation is not *art gratia artis*, or the pursuit of cultural democracy, but to grow and thrive commercially by serving the demands of consumers whose desires for new commodities and experiences appear inexhaustible. A dominant cultural imaginary – that culture is plentiful, benign and good for growth, and that it provides only benefits for both producers and consumers – is thereby promulgated and contained (Schlesinger, 2016).

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design team – are now all able to do more with less. Yet in absolute terms decoupling is not happening at all; technology and efficiency savings have a tendency to lead to increased availability and ease of use and therefore increase the overall rate of consumption over time (the so-called 'Jevons Paradox', see Jackson, 2009). The ongoing exponential rise in demand for creative industry goods and technologies is therefore likely to exert *total* ecological stresses that the sum of individual or local efficiency savings will be unable to adequately offset.

[8] When I use the term 'culture' and 'cultural value' it is mostly to refer to a general, productive space of meaning-making, dialogue and politics – a potential for the examination of life; not any *particular* culture, object or aesthetic.

A fundamental problem with assuming culture's (real) subsumption into the orthodoxy of growth is the willing neglect of culture's politics and oppositional potential. This potential can do serious damage to the economic imperative – either through questioning foundational assumptions about growth or through offering *different* conceptions of growth. For example, for the cultural worker, to think of how one might help 'grow' or extend the practice of an art-form, a culture, or field of creative practice, is often quite foundational to the value derived from the execution of one's labour and participation in an economy (MacIntyre, 1981). For the profit-satisficing firm, entrepreneur or worker, growth might actually mean an increased capacity to engage in more social or community-oriented activities or objectives, or to promote forms of moral or ethical production (Banks, 2017). Growth, when understood in terms of personal development in work, might relate to enhanced creative capacities, learning, knowledge, or the 'inner' goods of a developed self-worth. Yet to imagine how one might help a community, neighbourhood or a city enhance its cultural potential, or improve or sustain social or environmental quality, is not an uncommon conception of 'growth' in the cultural sector, either. Most of these activities appear inimical to cultural reductionism and may even rest on opposing or limiting economic growth altogether. Critics have accordingly started to enumerate and disseminate models of 'alternative' cultural and creative economies that tend to variously privilege community provisioning, egalitarianism, subsistence and mutual aid over unfettered economic growth (e.g. see de Peuter and Cohen, 2015). Researches on cultural and creative co-ops, non-profits, and different kinds of sharing or social economy have also begun to emerge (McRobbie, 2011; Sandoval, 2017). Such work serves to illustrate how creative production tends to be suffused with cultural values, and concerns for quality of life and well-being that conventional measures of 'growth' are unable to capture - and how growth critique might itself be fomented.

Creative Economy and the Challenge of Growth

Three specific challenges to the idea of 'creative growth' have been proposed:

- growth as non-inclusive and insensitive to social injustices;
- growth as environmentally destructive, as well as naturally limited and constrained;
- growth for its own sake as potentially damaging to the production of socio-economic critiques and cultural imaginaries.

While it might seem unlikely that such concerns can gain any ground in the current policy terrain (Schlesinger, 2016), the problems with 'growth' generally (and with creative growth specifically) have already started to become an object of inquiry in social and cultural policy, government, and in policy-facing academic research. In what follows I discuss some of the most recent thinking that is attempting to grapple with these issues, evaluating them in light of their capacities to address the problems of 'social sharing', 'environmental concern' and 'cultural ontology' that I've outlined above.

a) 'Inclusive Growth'

In recent years the idea of 'inclusive growth' has gained purchase with development economists, and an array of national and international economic and governmental agencies, including the OECD and the World Bank. The OECD has defined inclusive growth as:

> '….economic growth that creates opportunity for all segments of the population and distributes the dividends of increased prosperity, both in monetary and non-monetary terms, fairly across society' (OECD, 2012, no pagination).

While inclusive growth might appear to be motivated by the altruistic concern to lift people out of poverty, the more fundamental premise is to tackle the significant limits to growth that are imposed by the unequal ability of socially-disadvantaged populations to participate fully in economic life. Inclusivity is therefore seen as good for business in two senses. It builds 'human capital' – by expanding the range of sources and commercial stock of ideas, talents and labouring capacities – while addressing the problems that stem from poverty and public non-participation in consumption activity. The OECD'S *Inclusive Growth Initiative* (2012), the IMF's *Fostering Inclusive Growth* (2017) make this 'economic' case explicitly, while, in the UK, and more germane to the creative sectors, the new DDCMS Inclusive Economy Unit, established in 2016, and the *Inclusive Growth Commission,* set up by the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce (RSA) in 2016, similarly foreground the idea that 'reducing inequality and deprivation can itself drive growth' (RSA, 2017, p. 8).

How is inclusive growth attainable? For the DDCMS Inclusive Economy Unit – still somewhat nascent – the goal is to further support public, private and third-sector partnerships that can deliver better civil society development, including more 'inclusive' social enterprises and businesses (see Mannion, 2016). More fully, rather than significant new investment, the RSA's *Inclusive Growth Commission* has proposed a new local 'social contract' whereby public services and enterprise training and education resources, and responsibility for their allocation, are further devolved to more 'empowered' cities and local authorities. The RSA approach to inclusive growth is to be welcomed in so far as it draws attention to issues of low pay and in-work poverty, insecure and poor quality work, and ingrained patterns of economic non-participation and deprivation. However, we should note that 'inclusivity', for both the Inclusive Economy Unit, and the RSA (as well as for other NGOs such as Innovate UK and Nesta) remains strongly premised on an established market-led model of 'social investment' (Smyth and Deeming, 2016) which attempts to bring more people into the ambit of productive economic activity by encouraging entrepreneurial animus, rather than simply providing 'welfare', or resourcing other (less economically-driven) forms of social inclusion, citizenship or participation. This might bring some benefits, but also smacks strongly of a business-as-usual (and often business-led) approach that conjoins an economic model of the individually self-responsible and enterprising subject (though one admittedly now drawn from a wider social constituency) to a traditional formula for economic growth – and how far inclusive growth based on an enterprise model can be truly socially inclusive (without addressing other structural challenges) remains open to question. Further, in these strategies there is almost no discussion of environmental limits to growth, or of the need to devise non-standard approaches that might allow for a wider social and economic participation *and* a more creative and conservational approach to resource management. Indeed, as its name suggests, in inclusive growth the focus remains very much on *growth* – of the conventional and unsustainable kind.

b) 'Urbanism for All'

One area where the issue of growth in the creative economy has become aligned with concerns around ecological sustainability is in the work of recent urban theory on the future of 'creative cities' and the 'creative class'. The role of culture-led regeneration, creative industries and the wider creative class in contributing to environmental damages of community clearance, displacement, gentrification and exclusive consumption has been widely criticised, though critical new efforts are being made to explore the potential for more progressive regenerative approaches that can accommodate creative economy activity (e.g. see McLean, 2014; Oakley, 2015; Shaw, 2017).

It is in response to such critiques that Richard Florida, the doyen of creative class thinking, has recently been moved to develop his own model for 'inclusive' and 'sustainable' economic futures. Growing and nurturing the creative class – highly-educated workers in the cultural and creative industries, technology, finance, legal and professional services – was once heralded by Florida as the solution to the systemic problems faced by deindustrialized cities in need of reanimation and growth, and in *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) he offered us an optimistic vision of the city re-made under the benign energies of a socially liberal but economically dynamic avant-garde. In *The New Urban Crisis* (2017), however, Florida paints a more dystopian picture of (mainly US and UK) cities divided by uneven geographies, failing public infrastructures, and deepening socio-economic inequalities, where both the working class and a rapidly shrinking middle-class struggle to subsist within the degraded environments that surround and service the business and residential enclaves of the '1%' - which includes many elite members of the creative class. Florida's *mea culpa* in TNUC is to tacitly acknowledge the evident ineffectiveness of the creative class thesis, and the policies enacted in its name, in delivering inclusive growth and he does concede early in his book that the creative class may have actually helped exacerbate (rather than alleviate) some of 'the fault lines of class and location that define and divide us today' (2017, p. xxvi).

Florida's presumption now is that a more inclusive economic prosperity for all (at least in the developed world) will require some progressive and enlightened policy-making focussed on green transport, mixed-use urban planning, affordable housing provision, raising the wage floor, investing in schools, health and public infrastructures (mainly for the non-creative class), which will serve to close the gap between rich and poor. There is little to disagree with here, at least from a social and economic justice perspective. The main purpose of these recommendations, however, is to re-ignite the stalled engine of creative *growth*. Here, the principal solution to crisis (contrary to inclusive growth theorists) is not the energies released by those hitherto excluded populations who are now more likely to become economically active as society becomes more equal, but the capacities that more equal (and so more integrated and cohesive) societies will engender for the creative class to be more effectively released to carry on with what they do best – creating the future of 'urbanized knowledge capitalism' (ibid., p. 212). This does raise some questions.

Firstly, there is the issue of material inequality and limited sharing. While Florida's proposals for social investment are positive, they don't address the need for a more fundamental redistribution of the benefits of growth away from social elites and the wealthy minority (including the most-advantaged members of the creative class), nor how the underlying social arrangements that have enabled such elites to flourish at the *expense* of others[9] will need to be challenged. There is little in Florida's formula that addresses how barriers to social mobility might be addressed to improve the life chances of those who might like to 'move up' in order to occupy creative class professions, for example. Such shifts are unlikely to happen through enlightened benevolence on the part of the creative class, since we know that the idea of 'tolerance', openness and inclusivity that Florida continues to associate with this group has – time and time again – been shown to be bogus, at least when it comes to the sharing of

[9] See Wilson and Keil (2008) on 'The Real Creative Class'.

educational and employment opportunities and other social goods (Banks, 2017; Oakley and O'Brien, 2015).

Secondly, there is the neglected issue of environmental limits. The idea of better utilising urban density and investing in public transport might seem to suggest a greener way of living, but Florida's solution to urban crisis is resolutely 'more, not less, urbanism' (p. 229) coupled with an unyielding commitment to growth. There are no obvious 'decoupling' initiatives located in Florida's theory. This means that in his formulation, the creative class (and the cultural and creative industries within) remain shackled to an expansionist agenda that, while adjusted to accommodate some sense of 'sustainability', doesn't fundamentally challenge the idealised value of continued economic growth, and so underestimates the increasingly limited capacities of societies to deliver on such ambitions. Notwithstanding the issue of limits to urban expansion, questions of environmental conflict over the direction of growth also tend to be elided in TNUC. For instance, to someone living in the UK it might seem somewhat eccentric for Florida to identify the proposed High Speed 2 rail project as an example of diligent public investment in 'urbanism for all' given the huge controversy over the likely environmental destruction the scheme will enact, and the serious and ongoing questions over whether such an investment will reinforce the urban dominance of London, rather than offset it (de Castella, 2013).

Thirdly, while it is not entirely clear in whom or through which agencies Florida places his faith in solving the crisis (we are left to impute some seeming mix of the legislative state but working within established modes of entrepreneurial governance, alongside an appropriately incentivized private sector), what is clear is that the creative class (and wider elites) are not being obliged to change or adapt their own social practices or ambitions in any significant way, or to consider or include the world-views or cultural priorities of others. Indeed, there is little in the way of accommodation for the kinds of non-growth oriented, cultural alternatives and imaginaries that might oppose conventional forms of urban growth. This is because Florida wants to hold onto the idea that it is only the most exceptional members of society – the 'top talent' (ibid., p. 6) that makes up best of the existing creative class – that can lead us to the new economic future. Only by further unleashing those very elites whom have led us to the current crisis will an equitable solution to crisis be found. There seem good historical reasons to doubt that this will occur.

c) *Sustainable Prosperity*

If the ideas of 'inclusive growth' and 'urbanism for all' remain committed to economic expansion, then the idea of 'sustainable prosperity' (e.g. see Jackson, 2018, Levitas, 2017) offers a different approach to theorising creative economy futures. The use of the term prosperity – rather than growth – is deliberate and instructive in that it seeks to disassociate human well-being from purely economistic formulas. A recent strand of work designed to re-imagine creative economy in this conceptual context comes from Kate Oakley and Jon Ward (2018) and Kate Oakley, Mark Ball and Malaika Cunningham (2018) who have helped open up the question of what is meant by growth and prosperity in the cultural industries, and the creative economy which they are imagined to serve. There is some contrast with proponents of inclusive growth, and Richard Florida, both of whom tend to presume the primacy of the economic and then assume an auxiliary or supplementary role for the social, alongside a somewhat 'business as usual' presumption about the guaranteed supply of natural and physical resources, and only a limited notion of the more radical potential of the cultural imagination.

In their explorations of the ‘art of the good life’, Oakley and Ward consider the possible role of arts and culture ‘in a [future] society where well-being is increasingly decoupled from a model of economic growth [and] high levels of material consumption’ (2018, p. 5). Taking their cues from some of the complexities revealed in their own empirical investigations of arts and cultural workers in three (very different) UK locations (Hay-on Wye, Stoke-on-Trent and Islington), they first identify that sustainable prosperity has often meant groups or individuals attempting to make a living while ‘downsizing’ or focussing only on ‘local production’ while being sensitive to the ethicality of their practices. However, vital though such strategies might be, Oakley and Ward also reveal an innate set of *structural tensions* within localities that must be addressed for the good advancement of sustainable or inclusive prosperity. Firstly, they note that the prospects for a shared prosperity will remain seriously limited as long as existing inequalities within the opportunity and reward structures of the creative economy go unchallenged; not everyone is equipped or able to benefit even from ‘sustainable’ or ‘ethical’ creative economy activity. Secondly there is the fact that ideas of future prosperity tend to be classed or otherwise socially exclusive or discriminatory, and often indicative of underlying social differences that colour and shape the kinds of future work-worlds one is able to imagine; in short, notions of the good life tend to be different and can often conflict. Thirdly, there are clear contradictions in play in so far as any dedicated pursuit of sustainable prosperity *in situ* might simply come at the expense of others whose means of life may be unreasonably diminished by the apparently well-intentioned actions of a ‘progressive’ minority – here we might cite the familiar tendencies of the creative economy to effect ‘regenerative’ displacements, gentrifications, ‘art-washing’ and so on. Thus, if we are to imagine a world where local creative economies makes contribution to some shared notion of a ‘good life’ of sustainable prosperity, or a common life within limits, then we cannot do so as long as creative labour markets (and the cultural imaginaries that sustain them) remain so imbalanced by inequalities, and those vital social relations that link people into wider (and unequal) systems of education, housing, transport, health and environment remain under-theorized or regarded as only peripheral or insignificant. In Oakley and Ward's work, more so than in Florida, we obtain a developed sense of how prosperity not only relies on dynamic intersections between different social, environmental, cultural and economic processes, but also suspends on active structural tensions and conflicts of interest that must be confronted, negotiated and (somehow) resolved. However, how to do this, and at scales beyond the local, in ways that account for national socio-economic priorities, and the wider role played by the creative economy, remains a challenge for any kind of holistic and grounded approach.

Similarly, for Oakley, Ball and Cunningham (2018), the underlying premise is that what constitutes 'prosperity' cannot be reduced to simple measures of economic growth. Rather, a truly prosperous society is one which takes seriously the various ways in which human beings might be provided with genuine opportunities to 'grow' and develop, socially and culturally, as well as economically. While they rightly reject the idea that there is always a 'positive correlation' between cultural engagement and human well-being, Oakley and colleagues argue strongly for the *potential* for culture to offer such goods (see also Hesmondhalgh, 2017; Keat, 2000), and so one of the potential markers of prosperity might be the extent to which the many and varied resources and opportunities of culture-making are fairly or equitably distributed. That a wide variety of cultural goods (and the opportunities to obtain them) should be more commonly distributed might be a given, yet the contexts for doing so must also be sustainable given the absolute limits to (economic) growth guaranteed by a bounded and increasingly resource-depleted planet. For these theorists, then, 'prosperity' primarily means doing more with less, while seeking to expand the horizons of understanding about what constitutes human ‘goods’ and ‘growth’ – a tricky task. Production is only one area of priority of course – the problem of how to limit growth by decoupling environmentally-damaging consumerism from the core of human well-being remains a further formidable challenge.

Conclusion: Towards New Creative Economy Imaginaries

While there is much we might take from emerging theories of ‘inclusive growth’ and ‘urbanism for all’, part of the difficulty in accepting such perspectives, either in the creative economy or more generally, is the underlying assumption that it is ‘growth’ *per se* that provides the best solution to tackling our shared economic problems. Those newly emerging approaches that foreground ‘sustainable prosperity’ - and that recognise some of the limits to growth - seem better equipped to help us face the challenges of a socially unequal, environmentally-challenged and culturally-complex future that seems substantially to have already arrived. Three issues will remain important however we choose to proceed:

- *Social Sharing:* we need to challenge the idea that a greater economic equality and inclusion can only be achieved through conventional economic growth, and better explore opportunities for increasing human *prosperity* through primary redistribution and more socially-equalizing structural reforms. Indeed, in the previous half-century of capitalism, the pursuit of growth (whether ‘inclusive’ or ‘exclusive’) has proven to be a poor servant to the provision of common prosperity, not simply because the benefits of growth have tended to accrue as elite and monopoly capital, but because the dis-benefits of growth – all those social inequalities that furnish the conditions of poverty and relative deprivation that inclusive growth aims to alleviate – have been exacerbated the more avidly growth is pursued for its own sake. The (residual and declining) rate of growth has rested on the acceleration and expansion of inequalities, including a ring–fencing of resources by a minority of elites and an entrenchment of poverty at the economic 'bottom' (Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2016).

- *Environmental Concern:* the capacity of the creative economy to create social inequalities and exacerbate competition for resources, and to generate spatial and social conflict should not be underestimated; we might further argue that as long as growth (even that labelled as 'inclusive' or 'sustainable') remains understood as an *expansion* of capitalist economic production, and so presumes further unchecked urbanisation, 'creative destruction', extractions, clearances and displacements, and toxic utilization of the planet's diminishing environmental resources, then it has side-lined the more urgent priority of considering the absolute limits to growth presented by a bounded world becoming inexorably degraded[10].

- *Cultural Ontology:* most creative economy thinking betrays an utter failure of the cultural imagination. It fails first in its cultural reductionism (now combined with a fetishistic technological optimism) and refusal to acknowledge the inequalities that prevent full economic participation and sharing in the mainstream creative economy. Its second failure is the neglect (or denigration) of the complex variety of non-capitalistic economic practices that continue to animate and drive cultural production. Its third failure is an unwillingness to recognise that many of the cultural values that

[10] The recently revived and extended literature on 'degrowth' (e.g. see Kallis, 2018) might be instructive here, and potentially useful to creative economy theorists (e.g. see Banks, 2018).

inspire practitioners derive their energies from spheres of life that have the potential to *directly* conflict with growth imperatives – such as public worlds of politics and social concern, as well as private worlds of love, friendship, conviviality and care.

What grounds are there to be optimistic about change? Perhaps few. But while any new cultural imaginaries and practices might be prone to economic 'recuperation', it is not inevitable that this will occur. We know that the cultural industries represent both the mature form of a capitalist market for symbolic commodities and, simultaneously, the spirit of an impulse that would wish to challenge (or even destroy) the logic of such a market. Properly understood – and socially supported - cultural industries are not *merely* industries, but forms of social practice that can challenge accepted orthodoxies and provide the conceptual resources for creating images of alternative possible worlds – 'dream factories' in the broadest possible sense. In this respect, any motive for working (or engaging) in culture might be related to 'making a living', but it might also be about making a *life.* This is likely to become more, rather than less, important under conditions where even short-term growth in the creative sectors cannot mask what increasingly appears a more generalised economic stasis and decay. We might even dare to imagine that, given the right conditions, culture's rate of recuperability may well diminish as its potential to provide new growth, or compensate for no-growth, falls into decline – and who knows then what dreams might be dreamt?

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Declaration of Interest

There are no declarations of interest.

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