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Bullish Creative Industries And The Bear Market

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The creative industries idea is better than even its original perpetrators might have imagined, judging from the original mapping documents. By throwing the heavy duty copyright industries into the same basket as public service broadcasting, the arts and a lot of not-for-profit activity (public goods) and commercial but non-copyright-based sectors (architecture, design, increasingly software), it really messed with the minds of economic and cultural traditionalists. And, perhaps unwittingly, it prepared the way for understanding the dynamics of contemporary cultural 'prosumption' or 'playbour' in an increasingly networked social and economic space.

Because, despite the original 'bullish' launch of the creative industries concept being very much focused on their generation of intellectual property, the heterogeneity of the groups classified has made bedfellows of emergent as well as established sectors, very different business models, and 'pro', 'pro-am', and 'am' cultures.

This is unavoidable, as the creative economy lies across the fault lines of public and private goods. Navaretti and colleagues say it thus:

"The unifying framework is the characteristic of knowledge as a semi-public good, with non easily enforceable property rights. Its diffusion, in principle, is good for social well being, but bad for private returns. No one wants to invest in new knowledge, if the rents generated are not, at least partly, appropriable. Institutions that govern the creation and the diffusion of knowledge have invariably been molded by this tradeoff." *Navaretti et al 1998*

Creative-industries activity is prototypical embodied knowledge. It has never been capable of capturing the full economic value of its productive activity and those who work in it do not work (at least at the production end) with the expectation of capturing the full economic value of its productive activity. This is both the bane of creatives' lives and the source of much meaning in those lives through the justification of such commitment in the face of less-than-optimal market value. Other (sometime complementary, sometimes oppositional) values are continually being embraced in this process.

From the point of view of the policy or decision maker, the creative economy is a very labour-intensive economy and one that engages its participants intensely in the

creation as much of symbolic value as of direct economic value (to them; it is often captured elsewhere in the 'value chain'). As such, it is tailor-made for a recession (it soaks up labour, and produces human capital development outcomes partially independent of wages, fees and salaries).

This is clearer now than it has ever been, with the explosion of user-generated content (UGC): consumer co-creation, games fan bases, intense pro-am engagement outside the pure market-optimising cash nexus. The tensions generated by emergent markets or non-market activity which impact the viability of established markets will accelerate as markets crumble in recessionary times. There have been recent warnings that the implementation of Digital Britain will accentuate UGC at the expense of the copyright industries.

But we should remember that Korea's great surge of digital literacy and growth in both the household and market sectors of the creative economy came on the back of many thousands thrown out of work by the Asian meltdown of the late 1990s creating entrepreneurial start-ups backed by affordable and available broadband capacity.

Navaretti, G. Barba, P. Dasgupta, K.-G. Maler, and D. Siniscalco, eds. 1998. *Creation and Transfer of Knowledge*. Berlin: Springer.

Quiggin, John and Potts, Jason 2008. 'Economics of Non-Market Innovation and Digital Literacy'. *Media International Australia* No 128 August, pp. 144-150.

There has been a lot of effort spent documenting the explosion of UGC, but not a lot on what motivates such activity. There is the argument that the co-creative urge has always been with us, just limited by both technology and business models that don't need or want it. There is also the fascinating debate between the 'altruists' and the 'signallers' (see Quiggin and Potts 2008). Altruists think that we are entering a higher order phase of social evolution where monetary incentive is becoming less important and creativity and community is more important for economic growth. Signallers think

that there is a co-evolution of market and non-market drivers, and the players in the UGC space are signalling their skill and leadership for emergent or future labour markets. But there is space for both sets of motivations.

Equally, it is important that we don't celebrate the end of capitalism-as-we-know-it without attending to the co-evolution of markets in the light (or shadow, if you prefer) of UGC. As Leadbeater comments in *We-Think* (2008, p.128), 'between the pure, open and voluntary models at the one end of the spectrum and the classic closed corporation at the other, an enormous

middle ground is opening up, where new hybrids will appear, mixing open and closed, public and private, community and corporation, collaboration and commerce.'

'This middle ground' he says, 'will be extreme messy, confusing and creative'. ■

