

## Creativity: a proposed taxonomy

### 1. Anglo-saxon View versus Italian View

Creativity is at stake in the whole world. Many recent analyses have been carried out in various Countries, being aimed at defining, measuring and evaluating creativity and its impact upon the economy and welfare; they adopt quite different views, draw quite heterogeneous conclusions, and tend to ignore the crucial role played by central and local governments in promoting, strengthening and diffusing creativity. A common feature of these analyses is the shared opinion that creativity counts, representing a relevant proportion of the whole economy, and that it contributes to economic growth. Figures range from 3.80 % to 9.31 % as the proportion of the creative sector within the economy, and from 2.70 % to 11.70 % as the proportion of creative workers within the total workforce of the area considered.

Of course, such figures depend on the specific features of the Countries or areas analysed, although quite a relevant influence upon them is exerted by the approach adopted: the anglo-saxon view tends to focus upon those creative ideas and activities that can be transformed by the manufacturing industry in specific products, pointing at industrial design, fashion design, architecture and publishing as the creative industries.

On the contrary, the interpretation elaborated by the Italian report opts for a much wider scope, where a multiplicity of activities – from the visual and the performing arts to architecture, from design to eno-gastronomy, from handicraft to heritage promotion – are considered creative, and their specific feature is the ability to enhance social quality, consistently to the most recent views of culture as the outcome of social interaction.

### 2. The Debate on Creativity

Creativity is not a spontaneous and occasional phenomenon. Its rise, consolidation, decline and fall depends upon a series of variables whose combination is not at all granted. In the recent European experience relevant flows of creativity have been recorded in areas whose social, cultural and economic profile allowed creative ideas to emerge, attracted new creative talents, generated the needed critical mass.

Fashion design in Paris during the Sixties, as well as industrial design in Milan during the Eighties, must be considered the outcome of quite complex processes; in fact their success is not continuous, and the curve describing their evolution bends after a while leading to a progressive decline. Creativity needs support, but rather than relying on financial grants more complex strategies must be adopted, based upon regulation and governance.

Creativity enjoys a limited citizenship in the European and Italian legislations. Although the EU seems to attach a crucial importance to creativity, its norms and actions devoted to creativity appear to be isolated and limited. Of course, there are many actions related to research, innovation, and culture, all fields where creativity is important. But there is no specific policy aimed at extracting, consolidating and diffusing creativity per se.

Landing in Italy, creativity is at the centre of a wide (and fashionable) debate, but the State legislation clearly appears to be biased towards the physical preservation of built cultural heritage and the visual arts. The protection of the existing products is certainly the main worry of the Italian legislator, who is extremely careful in regulating each cultural sector but also common institutions such as intellectual property. In the last years a rising attention is devoted to creativity on the part of some Regional and Municipal governments.

### 3. Creativity as a dynamic Phenomenon

The Italian report on creativity represents the aware passage from a traditional view of creativity, normally associated with culture in its conventional meaning and including museums, theatres and the visual arts, and a much wider interpretation according to which creativity is a flexible approach rather than a specific language; the report considers three main areas: a) material culture; b) contents, information and communication industry; c) historical and artistic heritage.

This can certainly be considered a first important step towards an effective analysis of creativity and its implications for the economy and for social quality. Nevertheless its tight linkage with specific productive sectors ends up to privilege the 'specialistic' profiles of creativity. The present experience shows a contrary trend of the cultural markets, progressively characterised by convergence on the supply side, and migration among languages and genres on the demand side.

Creativity is an important input in a multiplicity of sectors and activities. Does it show precise features in each of them, and therefore can it be classified according to the taxonomy of such sectors and activities (i.e.: visual arts, performing arts, museums and galleries, architecture, industrial design, fashion design, etc.)? The emerging characteristics of the wide cultural realm seem to indicate a different direction: creative ideas can go through various sectors, and – vice versa – each sector can adopt various forms of creativity.

The analysis of creativity should not limit its scope to the static picture of a series of success stories; the appraisal of such a complex phenomenon must be based upon the dynamic examination of all its stages. Of course, much depends upon the main goal of the analysis itself; in such a respect we can observe that a mere dimensional analysis of creativity within a specific area does not provide us with any useful information, and does not allow us to elaborate any effective strategy for public and private action.

#### **4. A Possible Taxonomy of Creativity**

A possible taxonomy of creativity may be crafted with reference to the degree of influence and diffusion of creative ideas in external markets; this implies that the axis which we can identify the different forms of creativity along is that of functionality, from 'useless' forms of creativity, whose linkage with beauty and decoration is quite evident, to the most 'useful' ones, where the ability to contribute to product or process innovation is relatively more powerful than the aesthetic significance.

Of course, there is a certain degree of correspondence between these types of creativity and the cultural sectors as they are usually identified: when creativity aims at the expression through products or activities then their aesthetic features are strong and relevant (e.g. the arts, architecture); on the contrary, when creativity is absorbed for concrete uses then the exterior profiles appear to be less crucial (e.g. handicrafts, industry, eno-gastronomy).

A new taxonomy of creativity has the merit of widening the field of possible influence for creative ideas, overcoming the need for a binary correspondence between types of creativity and productive sectors. On the contrary, we believe that creativity has a much wider scope, and that its processes and outcomes can usefully exert an influence upon a variety of features of both individual and social life, strongly contributing to the rise of social welfare and quality of life.

Although the idea is progressively diffused that creativity should be considered a positive input for strategies aimed at competition among towns and regions for attracting new residents and tourists (the so-called territorial marketing), the most important contribution of creativity to social quality occurs in the long run, through the ability to positively condition the atmosphere of a place, and to increase its social capital, and its competitiveness. Creativity is a sort of virus, and its success is measured through its diffusion among heterogeneous sectors and activities.

#### **5. Relational Creativity**

At the beginning of our line we find very traditional forms of creativity, those aimed at expression and interpretation; they are the norm in sectors such as the visual and the performing arts, and presently they

suffer from a sort of dilemma between the consolidated success of mature organisations and the frailty of emerging experiences. This form of creativity finds a favourable eco-system when organisations co-operate with each other and tend to independence.

A more complex framework characterises the following type, creativity of vision; it appears to be related to the design and realisation of urban areas or spaces able to combine functional effectiveness and aesthetic consistency. A reasonable and harmonic view of the urban infrastructure is not only related to architecture or traffic management, rather it presupposes a very wide and multi-disciplinary interpretation whereby the public interest and social/individual needs are made consistent. The resident community is the main stakeholder.

Also next type of creativity is strongly linked to the resident community and to its spacial dynamics; it has been labelled relational creativity, since it focuses upon the opportunity to introduce radical innovations in the relationships among individuals and groups. Social life is made of a complex and flexible network of exchanges focused upon information and knowledge, and each individual and group tends to become producer and user of such information and knowledge at the same time. The vocational activities for such type of creativity are broadcasting, advertising, social communication.

The temporal dynamics of the resident community allow us to define a further type of creativity, related to quality of life. It deals with social, cultural and economic sustainability as a multidimensional concept overcoming the traditional meaning of sustainability as transmission of an unchanged material dimensions of something (from cultural heritage to natural environment). Quality of life is made of changes related to urban migrations, multiculturalism, tolerance, reciprocal curiosity.

## 6. From high-quality Handicraft Tradition to Industrial Research

The types of creativity described above show the common feature of intangibility. Going ahead along our imaginary line we find other types of creativity where a common feature is the contribution to create material products. Still linked to the resident community and to its roots is the creativity of the senses, able to innovate within the tight path of territorial identity and environmental vocation. Eno-gastronomy and handicraft production are effective examples of this kind of creativity, still aimed at perception and quality but constrained by the need for a material substratum.

Stylistic creativity follows, combining substance and form in the production of a myriad of objects for every-day life. Under the general label of 'design' we may find industrial design (committed to make environmental worries and the quest for beauty reciprocally compatible), fashion design (progressively careful about recycled materials and multicultural styles), food design (importing the delicate aesthetics of food from the Far East and re-drawing it in the light of local traditions and views).

Approaching the opposite end of our spectrum we find functional creativity, active in the handicraft realm and aimed at providing technical responses to a wide variety of problems in different productive areas. The two pillars of such type are creative invention and high-quality handicraft tradition, whose evolution is supported by the opportunities offered by digital technologies; examples of such creativity can be found in the production of musical instruments, as well as kitchen tools.

Finally, a similar kind of creativity absorbed by the manufacturing industry is that related to industrial research and relevant for a wide variety of productive sectors, from aerospace technology to biotechnologies. In such sectors creativity is subtly and intensively present, and it may suggest solutions that can be eventually transferred from their original field of application to ever wider areas of every-day life (a very simple example is that of aluminium foil, elaborated for the space race and presently used for food preservation).

## 7. The Enhancement of Social Quality through Creativity

To sum up, creativity can potentially play a very important role in building and enhancing social quality

through its ability to influence both the beauty and the utility of various and heterogeneous goods and services. Creative ideas are flexible and can be quite easily transported among economic sectors, being incorporated in their products and hence diffused among a wide proportion of society. Although such a phenomena may have global dimensions, quite often creativity strongly benefits its resident community due to the convergence of talents, abilities and co-operative skills in the same area.

The other side of the coin is represented by policy. So far creativity is present in many principles opening public programs, normally it is protected both materially and financially through the establishment of specific rights of use for its products, sometimes it is the object of calls for proposals often addressed at the young generation, almost never it is subject to a wide and effective action aimed at its growth and diffusion.

Such public action should be based upon interjurisdictional co-ordination, governance of urban districts, tax shelters for creative activities, monitoring and fine tuning of regulation and expenditure in order for the relevant activities to be kept powerful and competitive. This may require ad hoc interventions able to counterbalance specific weaknesses rather than providing everybody with some general form of support. This clearly implies a radical change in the philosophy itself of public action.

Italy has been traditionally considered a creative Country. Certainly the past experience of many Italian areas provides us with strong evidence of such a creative orientation, also through the unique experience of industrial districts. But it has progressively lost its ability to create, concentrating all the institutional, public and private efforts upon the preservation of its beautiful past. Just like a fridge with no kitchen, conservation per se does not grant any processing, and ends up to subtract an enormous potential value to its community. Only a different view, based upon the centrality of present and contemporary creativity, can favour a new start.

## Notes

1. CCPR (2003), IIPA (2006), DEPS (2006), DCMS (2007), KEA (2007), UNCTAD (2008).
2. Santagata (2009).
3. Potts at al. (2008).
4. The described taxonomy has been originally elaborated in a report on creativity in Lombardia, Italy (Trimarchi, 2009).

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