

REVIEW | CREATIVE ECONOMIES, CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

Rethinking Place, Policy, and Practice

**EDITORS | SASKIA WARREN
& PHIL JONES**

Review by Brian Vaughn

The creative economy is studied by a variety of academic disciplines, and with their 2015 publication, English cultural geographers Saskia Warren and Phil Jones have taken an interdisciplinary approach, publishing work out of cultural and human geography, sociology, and public policy. The ten essays in *Creative Economies, Creative Communities* investigate who exactly benefits from public funding directed at growing the creative and cultural sectors.

The editors note that the creative economy has largely evaded attempts at comprehensive evaluation. In their introduction, Warren and Jones cite published criticism of the externalities of the creative economy, such as gentrification, “the commodification of culture”, and ignorance of regional identity and values. The articles respond to these criticisms by offering visions of a more inclusive and beneficial creative economy based on community participation rather than solely on economic benefit.

The introduction also makes a notable claim related to place, a central theme addressed in many of the compilation’s essays: “A simple ‘add culture and stir’ model pays little attention to specific communities in specific places.” A sound economic development policy is predicated on unique places using their identities as assets to their development. But ultimately, Warren and Jones have deliberately selected articles focused more on the social impacts of the creative economy that seek to stand in for or complement the economic arguments.

One article by Antonia Layard and Jane Millin called “Creative Place-making: Where Legal Geography Meets Legal Consciousness” describes the four modes of legal consciousness: conformity, contestation, resistance, and subversion. The essay then employs three examples of

advocacy groups: an Elders Council, a group of youth activists, and a grassroots arts-activist outfit. Each group employed a different mode of legal consciousness to advocate for a louder voice in their community’s creative placemaking efforts. This fascinating chapter is required reading for academics studying the intersections of activism, placemaking, and law.

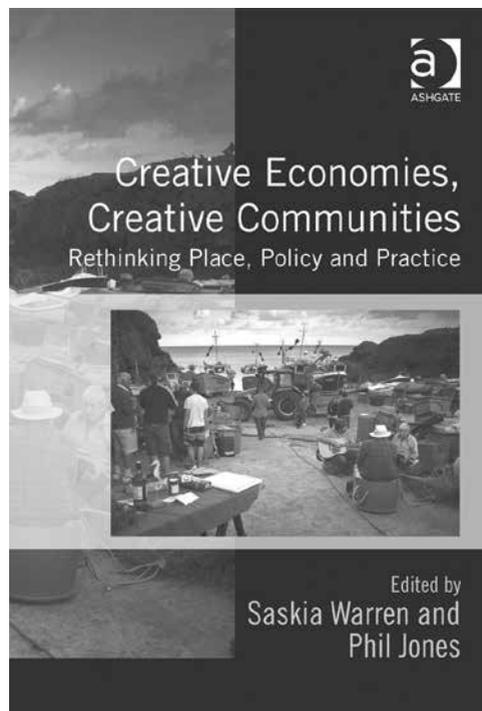
Shari Daya’s “Producing People: The Socio-materialities of African Beadwork” interrogates the social impacts of the creative economy. The author argues that while much academic work in human geography is centered on the exploitation of small-scale economic actors in the global South, the act of producing art meant for tourists, such as beadwork, also foment personal relationships, self-worth, and connection to communities for bead artists. The author, through interviews conducted with multiple beadwork producers in Cape Town, South Africa concluded that every step of beadwork creates personal and social meaning. Daya argues that the impact of beadwork exceeded the economic realm, transcending the arguments usually used to promote creative economies: growing employment and expanding the tax base.

Though most of the collection’s essays focus on Western Europe, “Libraries and Museums as Breeding Grounds of Social Capital and Creativity: Potential and Challenges in the Post-Socialist Context” deals with the issues of social capital and creativity in Poland. Authors Monika Murzyn-Kupisz and Jarosław Dziętek explore how this emerging European country has both struggled to develop its cultural resources in light of its socialist past and developed plans to improve the quality of “third places” for its citizens. The greatest challenges in doing so are not only political-historical but are also rooted in Poland’s rural-urban

divide and the shortsighted decision to concentrate cultural funds in museums and libraries in the country’s most well-established cultural centers. The consequences for Poland’s rural museums and libraries are numerous—lack of public space, diversity of programming, and times of operation severely limit the creative economy and the creation of new social capital.

Though the book’s subjects consider the creative economy from many angles, they disregard others. The twenty-first century United Kingdom trend towards devolving political power and diminishing responsibility for regions and municipalities have had various implications for the way creative programs are administered. Given the significant space allotted to chapters featuring the United Kingdom, an article written expressly on this topic would enrich this compilation.

Warren and Jones’ compilation of essays are helpful to any planner, geographer, or journalist engaged with the question of the creative economy’s social impacts. Ultimately, this work flies in the face of Richard Florida’s supposition that creative cities should be made creative with funds from venture capitalists. It also subverts the assumption that art and creativity are valuable only for economic reasons. In the end, the book’s essays speak to the power of the creative economy when it rests in the hands of the citizens who co-create it. 



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