



CREATIVITY AND THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY



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INTRODUCTION

We know that prescriptive development has little likelihood of succeeding, and much less of sustainability. This has been a lesson hard learned, and one which fundamentally changed the face of development practices. What we have turned to instead are participative approaches, local autonomy models, and intersectional problem solving. This is to say that development practices have become far, far more complex as of late. This has only been further complicated by the global economy. What is required now is a mediation between reality and what can be imagined as an achievable better future in terms of poverty alleviation and human dignity. This mediating tool can best be described as creative economics.

Creative culture has long been ideologically held as distinct from other parts of culture, but this paper will argue for a folding together of the social, political, economic, and creative. This is the point where solidarity economies are able to grow and to formulate more inclusive societies that are driven by human wellbeing rather than the profit motive singularly. The world which we currently occupy is increasingly complex, and will require new, creative solutions to its issues if it is to be expected to continue on a trajectory of growth and development. Already, we have seen the creativity which is required to respond to crises, as we all have in our transition to a socially distanced world. And it is creativity which drives innovation in business and science. It is reasonable to conclude then that development requires ideations that are no less creative.

If we are to attain the 2030 Agenda or any other set of goals which materialize in

development discourse, it will require creativity to achieve these goals. This paper will proceed by operationalizing the idea of creativity before arguing for its essential role in social economics and development. This argument will then be applied to a brief study of Mangueira, Rio De Janeiro before turning to a conclusion of what creativity might be able to accomplish in development practice.

CREATIVE CULTURE AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Narrowing 'Creativity'

Traditionally, 'creativity' has been understood simply as the arts. For its sake, the arts have the particular power of revealing truths which may otherwise seem too abstract or far-off to carry any real change-making weight when traditionally communicated (Gabrielson, 2019). Further, "...how we envision the world matters. But sight is a complex process, a product of narrative, technology, agency, and matter" (Gabrielson, 2019, p.28). When creativity is employed, however, people are drawn and given a close-up, if imaginative, experience of what may be possible (Gabrielson, 2019). For the purpose of this paper, the default definition of creativity as the arts will be much expanded. Herein, creativity is understood as Cara Tierney recently asserted in an interview: "small acts outside of the ordinary" (Tierney, 2021). However, this definition must be narrowed so that it may be given ontological weight.

Increasingly, there has been recognition of the need for creativity in enterprise and development in order to truly respond to the issues which have failed to improve in the face of the prescribed, 'cookie cutter' recommendations of the past. However,

the term ‘creativity’ becomes ideologically complex when, as many scholars still would attest to, creativity, economics, and citizenship seem such separate concepts (Hartley, 2016). However, creativity is increasingly regarded as a critical component to political communications, management, and education, to name a few. This is in opposition to the statistical trend of intentional disengagement with traditional forms of political dissent, and increasing engagement in non-traditional changemaking like digital art, murals and street art, and creative social enterprise (Hartley, 2016). One need not look far to find examples of creativity flourishing, if not being the direct result of adversity, marginalization, and oppression. As our world becomes increasingly complex, youth especially are finding their own way through changemaking which is new and disruptive to the now well-worn modes of political and developmental engagement.

In an annual assessment of one of the Supreme Court of Canada’s cases, the idea of narrative and creativity within law became a topic of intensive debate. Where, as a society, we have a tendency to accept the law as given and as absolute truth, it is also true that the law has been designed to change and to evolve. This has, often, been done via the creative norm of narrative. The intent of this example is to highlight the fact that creativity reminds us “of the fragility of the ordinary” (Hertz, 2020, p.6). What’s more, as youth become more attuned to the everyday struggles of our world, they are also becoming better at articulating both injustices and their imagination of better futures through creative means (Costelo, 2020). In their plea for a consideration of racial justice in classrooms, Costelo (2020)

argues that the best way to achieve these ends is by fostering the creativity of students, and that this will empower the voices of the marginalized. In Brazil, as in Canada, creative business models are shifting the relationship between people and productivity. As innovation drives economic progress, the creativity behind innovation, when applied to development, becomes the foundation of social and economic change.

Debates over the meaning of creativity seem to stem from the difficulty in narrowing the term to something less ambiguous than the creation of new products. However, creativity should be understood as the process which fills the gaps between seemingly separate phenomena, which is practiced on a daily basis (both by artists and as a means of survival for people living in poverty) and which is intrinsically social in nature (Wilson, 2010).

Creative Culture as Social Creativity

In mainstream rhetoric, understandings of creativity will often default to the ‘creative genius’ and the idea that creative breakthroughs are the work of the individual. This is incorrect. Instead, what is more accurate is an understanding which recognizes innovation and most creative thinking being the result of collective thinking (Wilson, 2010). Works of art, new products and businesses, and social change are all products of the social, economic, and political contexts in which they are created and circulated (Wilson, 2010). All of these forms of creativity, in order to be considered successful, must also be accompanied by some form of social capital. From the networks required for art to end up in galleries and exhibitions, that took Apple

from a start-up in a garage to an international powerhouse, and that force changes in legislature and oppressive regimes, we have learned that one of the most important considerations is a network of reciprocity. We can therefore understand creativity as a social expression.

The creative economy is a site of socioeconomic inclusion (Palanivel, 2019). Development has a history of neglecting women, but the creative economy has welcomed their economic inclusion. It is also a space where less-educated youth can find a place in the workforce. Through the necessary interactions between suppliers, producers, and consumers, creative economies foster networks of reliance and reciprocity (Palanivel, 2019). Creative economies contribute to economic growth and national GDP and are some of the fastest-growing sites of employment in the Global South. In Brazil, it is estimated that the creative economy contributes over 10% to the national GDP (Palanivel, 2019).

Creative economies and social creativity are inherently tied to local contexts and cultures, and can begin the process of building economies of scale. In these contexts, the knowledge and skills of people are the most important factor in productivity, fostering an environment of sustainability, empowerment, and ethics (UNDP, 2010). As people are drawn into these economies, they are given agency and the power to contribute to social change around them, and are brought into networks of reciprocity and support.

Social and reciprocal economies are the pinnacle of creative economics. The two essentially require a high level of creativity in order to create a market advantage

while also creating social change. Changemaking is the most creative that a society can get – it requires imagination of what is possible, creative problem solving in ways which very likely have not been done before, and communication of ideas and thoughts that is convincing enough that norms erode, and new norms take their place. What is required in this is a reciprocal network of participants who are willing to change. In terms of development, the West has long envisioned the South as being on the brink between nothingness and survival (Enwezor, 2006). But the people living in poverty and in various stages of development have been innovating and participating in creative economies all the while. This is the creativity that, if properly captured, has the power to foster development and social change.

"THE CREATIVITY BEHIND INNOVATION, WHEN APPLIED TO DEVELOPMENT, BECOMES THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE. "

Policy and the Creative Economy

At its core, creativity is defined as the creation of something new (Wilson, 2010). This is, of course, also the most foundational characteristic of enterprise, the product cycle, and growth economies. And yet, the creative economy has found itself singular and apart from 'the economy' in analytical understandings of growth creation (Wilson, 2010). Up to this point, this paper has worked to argue for creativity as a fundamental vector for development, and so it would do well to caution the inclusion of creativity in

policymaking.

The creative economy cannot be sought only for its economic potential. To do so would be to divorce it from its developmental potential (Hartley, 2016). There are too many examples of government policies created with the intention of capturing the economic potential of the creative economy, without recognition for its creative and cultural value, and the subsequent stagnation of that creative economy (Hartley, 2016). Creative economies bring marginalized voices to the table, reinforce the condition of traditional knowledge and cultures, and foster economic inclusion and community reciprocity. Policies which do not recognize this, and which quash creative economies serve only to delay or repress the social and economic development of populations.

"CHANGEMAKING IS THE MOST CREATIVE THAT A SOCIETY CAN GET"

CASE STUDY: MANGUEIRA, RIO DE JANEIRO

Mangueira is a complex of five favelas in the geographic centre of Rio de Janeiro. It is a hub of entrepreneurship and creativity. Mangueira has a high HDI, admittedly because of its location on important transit lines and the access to services that being in the centre of a city grants (Schiray, Carcalho, & Afonso, 2016). The population is increasingly middle class, and most have access to digital technologies (Schiray, Carcalho, & Afonso, 2016). The area is famous for its Samba history, and this brings in tourists and offers a logical point of access for social entrepreneurial projects (Schiray,

Carcalho, & Afonso, 2016).

Within the favelas, there is a fairly even split of creative centers, divided between the arts, functional design, and social services (Schiray, Carcalho, & Afonso, 2016). There is also a strong entrepreneurial spirit, fostered by the culture of creativity which the favelas are located within. In fact, most income to its residents comes from the sale of their own goods or services, and 25% comes from subsidies from the government for creative economics (Schiray, Carcalho, & Afonso, 2016).

Mangueira is privileged with its access to digital media technologies. It has given its residents important tools of creative communication, business, and political engagement. The technology has also been instrumental in disseminating information on creative knowledge accumulation, creative business models, supports for innovative entrepreneurship, and potentially most importantly, cooperation between entrepreneurs in the area (Schiray, Carcalho, & Afonso, 2016). Programs have been put in place which seek to reach youth and their development through arts and creativity-focused programs (Schiray, Carcalho, & Afonso, 2016). Creativity has, again, been a focusing agent in fostering development. Here are policies which have recognized the value of creativity writ large, rather than only the economic value of creative economies.

One practical roadblock to continued growth of these programs is that most of the entrepreneurship in the favelas remains micro- or small-scale, while medium and large-sized organizations maintain their status as ideal anchor points for redistributive programs (Schiray,

Carvalho, & Afonso, 2016). This is one point which seems to come up time and again in considerations of social enterprise and development: the issue of access to capital for smaller-scale operations (Nega(Nega & Schneider, 2014). However, these businesses and entrepreneurial pursuits are working to foster networks of reciprocity, which are protecting the agency or workers and business owners through the relationships in supply chains and between owner and client (Schiray, Carvalho, & Afonso, 2016). These reciprocity chains are allowing business owners to continue selling, and are generating enough revenue that local circulations have begun to show signs of sustainability against the volatile global economy (Schiray, Carvalho, & Afonso, 2016).

Finally, these favelas and the businesses within them are examples of the sustainability through flexibility which is fostered in creative economies (Schiray, Carvalho, & Afonso, 2016). The goal should be to fold together creativity and economies in such a way that the business climate becomes one of creativity, as this is where problem solving becomes its most effective and efficient.

CONCLUSION

Creative cultures have therefore become important environments for change and development. If one of the principal objectives of development is to aid in the creation of social capital for a target population, one should consider the guidance of Westlund, Andersson, & Karlsson (2014): "...creativity brings change, and for social capital this means changes in social networks and their actor composition, and changes in the norms, values and attitudes that are being

distributed in the networks." (p.90). As the authors note, a "...lack of creativity contributes to a stagnated social capital" (Westlund, Andersson, & Karlsson, 2014, p.90.). When this is successful, the potential for reciprocal economies to flourish is created. However, this will take more than simply attracting creative people to entrepreneurship; this will require an intentional creation of an environment in which multiple talents can cooperate to create sustainable social economies (Cerisola, 2016). While this is something which must happen semi-naturally, development practitioners can create the environment for these synergies to come together (Cerisola, 2016).

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We understand now that creativity is an important variable in changemaking, and that the policy around creativity economies must be created with the intention of capturing all of the value associated with creativity, rather than only the economic potential. Creativity shapes and is shaped by the social context of a person and a community. Innovations are born out of adversity and needs.

Thus, the creative economy is one vehicle by which to foster a solidarity economy. If creativity becomes the focus of development projects, it stands to reason that these projects may become better able to serve their goals and

mandates by attaining development on both social and economic, if not also political development. By creating solidarity economies which are focused on more than the economic imperative, these projects may be able to better address the process of changing norms, marginalization, and of alleviating poverty. When the division between the economy and society was created, the process was violent and unnatural, and has created deep-rooted inequalities and injustices (Massicotte, 2014). The solidarity economy reconfigures this to reintegrate the two (Massicotte, 2014), and it does so through the mechanism of creativity. It is the creativity that is happening at the margins and in the gaps which development is attempting to address that is forging new livelihoods, political engagements, and social capital. In this, the tradition of individualism is being disrupted, and solidarity and reciprocity is beginning to flourish (Massicotte, 2014).

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If development practitioners can design programs in such a way that the creative economy becomes a focal point for change, then there is hope for their ability to turn local populations from beneficiaries of development into stakeholders to transform development into something more durable (Cieslik, 2016). This along with the re-linking of social capital to economic capital is where the creative economy lends its change-making power.

As a final nod to the essential inclusion of creativity, we can look to the dialogue of decolonization which is required for an effective assessment of social enterprise. The concept arose out of the economic coloniality of the West, which presumes that the economic development trajectory of the West is the only way (Dos Santos, 2019). The subsequent presumption is that any perspective other than that aligning with the West on how to organize, and especially on poverty, is irrelevant or wholly incorrect (Dos Santos, 2019). But the creative economy offers to the marginalized the space to be heard, and to be seen for the creativity which is being performed on a daily basis in order for the poor to survive. What's more, the collaboration required by creative economics lends itself well to the essential recognition of a multiplicity of actors in the economic sphere in order to decolonize the space. In order to decolonize the idea of social economics, we must first understand that the Western economic model is not the only one, and that any number of economic policies and frameworks can be taken which have the potential for great success, depending on each local context. It is a culture of creativity which will facilitate these alternate models. If we broaden our understanding of innovation and 'the economic', recognize that the contexts of injustice and inequality are highly intersectional, and bear in mind the ways that people and economies have been racialized, there is the potential that we can begin to decolonize the idea of social economics (Dos Santos, 2019). Dos Santos (2019) offers a summary to this argument when they say: "To end up, decolonizing social enterprises implies, more than ever,

being open to creative forms of redistributing, reciprocating, and questioning market logics.”(p.12).

Creativity is one of the most important tools of change which we have access to. We are a world flooded with information and marketing begging for our attention. But change is happening, and it is being done through the innovation of young people. The harnessing of social media to catalyze far-reaching information campaigns and to plan protests and other acts of dissent seemingly overnight is one of our biggest indicators of that. What's more, the ability to remain creative and flexible is the ability to remain resilient and to adapt, which has become the gold standard in this volatile world. It will be through creative pursuits that development is able to achieve its goals, and will fail without it.



Sinead Dunne is a recent graduate of the International Development and Globalization program at the University of Ottawa, and at the time of publication is a settler on the unceded territory of the Mississauga and Anishinaabe peoples. Much of what she has learned for the two essays included in this publication has come from creators she met while acting as the Gallery Coordinator for both Climate Crisis X Design, and Equity X Design, gallery exhibitions hosted as part of the 2020 and 2021 uOttawa International Development Week conferences.

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