"What we did (& thought) at the seaside."

The Creative Clusters conference brought together over 300 delegates from around the world, to discuss developing the creative industries. The Conference took place in the seaside city of Brighton, England. The Conference was preceded by a one-day 'Sense of Place' Symposium at the University of Brighton, which drew about 120 delegates. Creative Stoke attended with financial support from the Arts Council.

A report on Creative Clusters 04, Brighton, England.

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DISCLAIMER:

The bulk of this text consists of notes made during talks given at the conference.   They are not "verbatim lecture-notes" and represent merely the comments or turns-of-phrase that struck me at the time. As such, the notes are aimed at those who already have a good working knowledge of the Creative Industries. I have purposely not identified each speaker; as it is possible I may have misunderstood, misheard or misquoted them, or added my own elaboration at the time. I'm sure speakers will not welcome students or others using this online document to claim that "*Mr X said such-and-such at Creative Clusters 2004*". Also included are notes on my conversations with some of the speakers after their talk.

Glossary:

CI = Creative Industries.

CID = Creative Industries Development services.

RDA = Regional Development Agencies

IP = Intellectual Property & Copyrights

Hoxton = previously run-down area of London in which artists incontrovertably led gentrification and spurred cultural tourism.

Preface

I was very pleased to be offered a small grant of £950 to attend the international Creative Clusters conference 2004. The grant also enabled me to attend the "Sense of Place" Symposium, a vital add-on to the conference experience.

Attending the conference boosted Creative Stoke's in-house understanding of the current and future directions in UK support for artists & creatives, and provided many international comparisons and inspirations. Ideas which had been "bubbling under" were crystalised and tested, and fresh new ideas were added to the mix.

I was also pleased to seed my ideas into projects as far afield as the Austrailian outback & Cornwall, and as close to home as Wolverhampton Science Park.

One "political breeze" at the conference veered away from arts for social-policy and towards "arts for arts sake". This mood was echoed a few days later by Tessa Jowell's new DCMS discussion pamphlet on the topic.

There was also a general assumption of a need for authentic culture arising organically from a real sense-of-place & regional distinctiveness. Such moves will inevitably be led by those closest to the grassroots.

David Haden.

Director
Creative Stoke
www.creativestoke.org.uk

"Sense of Place"

Brighton & architecture

One in five Brighton businesses are "creative" producers.

Brighton has a population of around 600,000 and is "its own catchment area" [Similar to Stoke-on-Trent in those respects].

New iconic buildings must reflect ordinary people's aspirations and uses - not an architects' desire to win prizes.

We want "demanding" architecture, yes - but with a style & texture that arises organically from a blend of local culture and local materials.

Brighton's architecture gives "permission to misbehave" - but in a convivial way.

Folkstone

"Footfall" [previously known as "passing trade"] is needed to ensure the viability of any live-work-sell studio units for artists and makers. Which means you ideally need at least one visitor attraction nearby, bringing the right sort of people and funnelling them past arts/crafts retail units. But there can be a conflict-of-interest between a visitor-attraction's own shop and local shops. The worst kind of visitor attractions are those

Cultural Tourism

that get only "coach-party" tourists – such parties take a lot of managing (toilets, drunkenness, litter, shoplifting), tend to spend very little per stop, and don't usually stray beyond an attraction's in-house visitor-shop.

Live-work-sell studio units need to consider their opening hours & times carefully and tailor these to their clientele. 10-to-4 Tues-to-Sat morn. may not be the ideal for maximising sales. Good signage is also crucial. Getting marked on tourism maps is crucial.

Milton Keynes

Artists in Milton Keynes are heavily involved in car parks and stations – these may be "uncool", but they offer the vital 'first impression' of a place.

"s106" agreements with property developers should bring Milton Keynes £2.6m of private money for the arts & culture, working from the basis of "0.8 percent for art".

Milton Keynes is working on a building-lighting & projections strategy for the whole city.

Gateshead/Tyneside

There has been a "brain gain" in the area - and the recent census data supports that. There are, of course, vagaries in the official statistics on CI employment.

"Affordability of property is a very very important factor in sustaining a CI sector in the city."

"There is no masterplan. Regeneration works better without one."

"It is worth a city risking accusations of elitism in the arts."

Having a "divided city" like Newcastle-Gateshead can be beneficial - if it can be made to work co-operatively in the right way.

East London

Current artists/creative–led gentrification areas in East London have been identified by the Thames Gateway mapping surveys – these are Barking, Stratford Circus, and Newham/Plumstead.

If artists had a choice, they would not choose to be 'the shock-troops of gentrification' in rough inner-city environments – but it is all they can afford in expensive cities.

Cultural Tourism is not the same as "niche tourism". Niche tourism is where you have a set of unique factors that can be combined to make a unique attraction that no other city can replicate, and the ability to put those factor together in a way that works. Eg: the world's biggest collection of model boats, with the world's top lecturers in Maritime Studies, with oral-history given by old fishermen, wharfmen and Royal Navy personnel - all set on a waterfront offering seafood bars & boat trips etc.

Brighton – pubs

A city's 'evening economy' needs to work every night of the week. Not everything in a commercial venture needs to make money. Cross-subsidy is perfectly possible for the more risky ventures - and may even have advantageous tax implications.

Pubs are not just for getting drunk in. Pub chains; trust your landlords, don't impose "chain" values. Everyone (except first-year students) is now fed up with chain theme pubs - we want authenticity & quirkyness.

Cut deals with other local movers & shakers – invite the local gallery to curate the art in your pubs, offer a "first drink is free" private-view bar to galleries.

Brighton – new-media production

Staff bring their "knowledge networks" with them. Tap into these, don't let them wither.

What staff you get affects which direction your businesses can go/grow in.

Only about a quarter of people in the moving-image industry got their job as a result of an advert. The proportion is probably even less in new-media.

There are no really large multinational companies in Brighton. We either get creative or we work in tourism. Sometimes we can do both at the same time.

There are two universities in Brighton; we need to push them into developing current (& anticipatory) intellectual-property knowledges - which can than be offered for free to local creative businesses in exchange for a percentage of their future IP licensing income.

The sort of employees that are needed for creative business are "non-linear thinkers", with "fuzzy boundaries". Don't expect them to become businessmen (the talented ones never will be), partner them with a business manager who knows how to work with creatives.

Cluster mapping

Clusters need to be made aware that they are clusters - frequently they don't realise it themselves.

Mapping a region's CI's can *create* informal networks and even "supply chains" (i.e.: businesses depending on each other to make what they make) - but only if the map's a good one that's made public, transparent, and then kept fresh.

Planning

Brighton - planning

There is the UK-wide risk of a backlash against the more nebulous of the "one-size-fits-all" CI/cluster claims. We need a return to authenticity and local distinctiveness and the creativity that arises naturally from that. We need 'planned meanings' that are embedded in urban space [my translation: 'break creativity out of a city's cluster and bring it into public-art in multiple forms - not just as a sculpture on the ring road']. We do not need another cultural quarter that ghetto-ises creatives and excludes the other creativities present in a city. We don't need planners to divide up a city into neat little "heritage zones" and "cultural zones" and "business parks".

Business can get a regulation-free 'development zone' in UDC areas. Why can't creatives be similarly freed from restrictions; we who are equally encumbered with red-tape and petty regulations?

Arts people with building-based projects *must* make it their aim to cultivate sympathetic planners in the local Council.

CI's need to be seen also as adding "intangibles" to an area, rather than CID projects just seeing job-outputs as the be-all and end-all.

'Percent for art' funding from developers must come also from a rise in land-values and from residential developments - not just from large inward-investment companies putting up big sheds on the fringe of a city.

Regeneration that doesn't attract talented incomers can cause damage to communities. Native talent often leaves shortly after property prices rise but before the "dereliction-of-regeneration" sets in. Often, no-one of talent comes in to replace them.

Rising house values can allow creatives to unlock capital for projects. This is true of the South East's flood of "downshifters"; moving house from London to the North Midlands/North, to the South West, or to England's coastal towns.

Retain existing clusters of small craft workspaces by declaring a heritage zone (ie: Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham).

"If a council has just noticed that they have a creative hotspot in the borough, that probably means the area died a few years ago."

"Please do not protect us [creatives] - you [ie: badly implemented CID schemes] often do more harm than good".

*"We **want** to get out [of a gentrifying area which was pioneered by artists & creatives]. Hold us in Hoxton and we'll die."*

Brighton beach

Evidence

UK - the evidence base for culture-led area regeneration

Why we need evidence:

> Because calls for it won't go away.

> Because it influences policy.

> Because it can be humbling.

> Because we need to build on the research work previously done.

How do we use evidence:

> To "make a case" for short-term projects.

> To bolster rhetorical advocacy – which is not the same as research, but anecdotal evidence *can* be important.

Problems with the evidence:

> There is an inherent bias in research, which arises out of a desire to "please the researcher".

This is especially the case in researching relatively small regional CI networks that intersect with the public-sector - where maintaining funding & collaboration are essential to each member's future livelihood.

There are big problems with the CI data when we get down to city and sub-regional levels in the UK.

We need more research into how production gets enabled by creatives' wider social networks (family, mentors, side-jobs), not just by those peer-peer & peer-client networks in which creatives are embedded.

" The CI's in London produce 1 in 5 of all new jobs. " -- Creative London.

Is CI-led regeneration socially useful?:

> "*There is no evidence to support the argument that arts-led regeneration is socially advantageous.*" There is some evidence that suggests it may actually be socially divisive and a maintainer of inequality.

> A recent worthy study by Raisen in Toronto used control-areas – found that most of the beneficial social effects occurred only because of gentrification of cheaper housing areas where artists/creatives had been able to colonise.

> The evidence-base suggests that it's only in the early-years that social skills can be really developed through having children engage in arts activity in a school setting.

Can we really expect to divert huge macro-economic forces through the deployment of puny arts-led regeneration? Isn't all that just a "sticking plaster" placed over some rather deeply-festering social wounds?

Slough

"*We need to show the community the real benefits they get from the process and publicity, long before that first iconic building goes up.*"

Australia

"*We have to break organisations & communities out of their path dependency.*" [ie: their vision of how they get to the future is 'stuck in a rut'].

A genuine aura of 'authenticity' gives creative advantage to a location. Authenticity cannot be easily faked, it arises from what is happening on the ground 'here & now'.

An area's creative champions/catalysts need to be rewarded in some way. Voluntary labour (and rewarding it) is a lynchpin of making networks work.

Align your best grassroots community projects with top staff in institutions like museums and city libraries.

KEYNOTE

Many in the public sector have never worked in private industry in their life.

The best time to introduce a talented creative graduate to a company is just after graduation - but only after they have been on an intensive three-month business course.

Hoxton is less than one mile from the financial heart of the City of London.

NESTA are planning a "creative gateway" for gathering together UK data on the CI's.

Syndication is a possible model for funding the CI's (eg: in the USA a group of wealthy professionals will get together to bankroll a made-for-TV feature film or theatre show, and then share any profits).

Place is not a cluster. Network is not a cluster. Clusters only deserve that name when many companies and individuals are closely dependent on each other for producing value.

Lumping together the CI's as a single "job lot" may not be attractive to investors. Sometimes they need to separate, sometimes come together - it's a very subtle sector.

Face-to-face networking might best be done by *personality type*, thus stretching affinities *across* the various CI sectors.

CITIES

Liverpool

The city has no CI targets - very few EU funding-streams are focussed on CI's.

The city has no policy around housing for creatives.

London

Creative London has just launched. Has to deal with the fact that London's external image still rather old fashioned, despite 'Cool Britannia'.

Creative London is looking for regional partners.

Inter-sectoral marketing is needed when publicising new CI projects.

The "Key Worker" housing-subsidy policy for artists in London was recently kicked out because of political fears – ie: the tabloids would scream "lazy artists take houses from nurses & police!".

Amsterdam

There is no "creative city" branding - we *are* a creative city and it is obvious to everyone that this is so.

700,000 population – we have a small city, so we have a small CI policy.

Having no CID agency has doubled the CI sector in 10 years !

Amsterdam is marketed (quietly) as a 'refresher for talent' - come here when you are burned out, we will recharge your batteries.

People see Amsterdam as authentic and down-to-earth - the city recently had an Affordable Fashion Week. Sometimes the external image is *too* down-to-earth - cannabis cafes & the "XXX" trade.

If we marketed a big 'Creative City project' then our creatives would fear being priced out by the rich moving in to their affordable areas and pushing up prices.

"If you want to have strong creative industries in a city - then you have to change your city's housing policy".

Most creatives don't earn a great deal, and their earnings are sporadic. You have to keep housing affordable in a way that enables artists to cluster in certain areas.

Scattering "affordable housing" throughout mixed-tenure regeneration areas can keep creatives far apart from one another. Many creative people feel unsafe in such scattered "affordable housing", because then they are isolated among many poorly-educated people who don't understand them or their lifestyle.

"The Green Man",
The Custard Factory,
Birmingham.

Virtual Tourism

Locales could be promoted with 3D "roamable" computer-game-like environments on a DVD. Such an environment would be a new version of the city map for tourists - get them 'walking' your city streets before they even visit ! Of course, you withhold the best bits ! The DVD shouldn't be as good as going there.

Create tourism replicas of famous places. These can draw as many visitors as the real thing. And they stop fragile sites from being eroded and destroyed. This is already happening in places like Lascaux and Las Vegas.

MAPPING

North East

The way you phrase questions, and who asks them, affects the outcomes of a CI mapping study.

The north-east are currently undertaking a "cultural sector audit".

Hong Kong

CI's are the first to be affected by an economic downturn, and they go down deeper than the rest of the economy. But when the economy rises again, they rise quicker and higher.

Crafts retail benefit strongly from having geographical labels on items [eg: "Made in Staffordshire"].

Qualitative analysis of the CI's is also needed, to track the producers who don't produce a clear "product".

The UK Skills Council is updating the SIC / SOC codes that are used to determine who works in what occupation.

Hong Kong uses the WIPO copyright-based CI classifications, which classify the CI's by who owns what rights at different stages in the production & distribution process.

Cornwall

CI mapping in the UK is largely about "showing the funders what we've got".

Arts marketing is largely focussed on tourists - what other commercially important audiences might there be?

Arts infrastructure in Cornwall and UK grew up without an evidence base to justify it.

Freelancers and many microbusinesses are invisible in the official statistics.

Creative Kernow employed five statistics-gatherers (five key people who each went out and found five others, who were then motivated to share their address books) followed up by phone-based surveys.

Their mapping database is a 'snapshot' and has not been made public [?]

Penwith town has 9 percent employed in the CI's? [my comment: or does this conflate Heritage & Tourism data into the CI jobs figures – unclear?].

Creative Kernow has just done a study on cultural tourism in Penwith town.

"The CI's have a complex ecology; workers move in and out of the sector, and between sub-sectors, and have multiple paid & unpaid jobs." -- Creative Kernow / Creative Cornwall.

From lifestyle to business

Sussex

Wired Sussex has had no core funding for the last three years.

5 other SE counties have "franchised" the Wired Sussex brand.

5 percent of Brighton's GDP is from interactive-media production.

Wired Sussex is doing everything they can to grow SME's out of microbusiness.

Why train creatives in book-keeping? Why not subsidise the training of recent accountancy and legal graduates in how to work with creatives?

Incubators can operate on a "buy-to-let" model, offering space to others after graduation and so getting the rent to pay off the mortgage and pay for management. They can generate future income by taking a share in intellectual-property created & licensing of products by tenants.

Don't locate the artists & creative production companies right on top of a large alcohol-based leisure/ nightlife city-centre. The two need to be separated by at least a mile or two.

Brighton – networking models that work

What people think & imagine matters a great deal to visitor destinations like Brighton.

Arts bureaucrats get caught up in a web of little boxes to tick. Socially *ex*clusive art needs to be funded too. "*I'm fed up with all the boring art that makes dubious claims to increase the rate of breast feeding on a council estate near me.*"

Brighton has a number of successful models to offer:

model 1 - Stomp have created a world-brand without funding, stuck to their creative vision and never sold out, always used their own money and ploughed back income into the business. It's paid off.

model 2 - Hub 100. Companies meet and solve each other's problems in an atmosphere of trust. Membership is selective; it operates almost like an old London gentlemen's club, lodge, guild or golf-club. But the process of gaining membership is totally transparent to outsiders. Meetings involve peer mentoring. Tends to spark intensive collaborations. Works best when work-groups are not made up of people from the same sector – people offer a fresh eye on problems. Doesn't have to be expensive.

model 3 - Made in Brighton. Focussed on boosting theatre production. Has a board to guarantee integrity & three part-time talent scouts / producers – it employs no 'jobsworthy's'. Not yet a refined model. Has championed 'dreamthinkspeak' – a Brighton artist who creates living-picture journeys through old buildings, and who has world-class potential.

Find out who the creatives want to hear/ meet, bring them, then provide networking around that.

Tell **stories** based on a 'sense of place' – everyone makes the "creative place" claim these days, and we can't all be right.

We need to tell the story that creativity is **hard work** - we need to get beyond the "lazy artists" stereotype.

New Zealand

How do we attract & keep footloose creatives - "*if they can move once, they can move again*"? Maps get out of date very quickly because some CI sectors have creatives who are so mobile.

The arts can boost an area's wealth creation and company productivity.

"All this hot air - it's all a load of bollocks. I would rather hear a story about your local river than some stale rhetoric that claims your city is a "creative place". Is it ? Really ? Then please show me."

International comparison

Japan

Japan's CI's have grown strongly - even in the prolonged Japanese recession.

Despite its reputation in the West for exporting "cool culture", Japan's CI's are all net importers – except for the computer games sector.

The Japanese national system has a divide much like that in the UK between the Arts Council and the Department of Trade & Industry.

Austria

"Traditional business support services can actually damage creative businesses."

A range of non-traditional network-meeting formats need to be explored/researched for the CI's.

France

French CI statistics are entirely focussed on consumption, not on production !

Good evidence?

UK - CI statistical data

There will be an early summer launch for new UK definitions of "culture"[?]

There is an ongoing Treasury review of regional and sub-regional statistics.

There is recognition in UK government of the "lack of comparability" and a lack of "time-based comparison" in the cultural advocacy data; leading to a crisis of credibility in advocacy for cultural funding. [my translation: "Some of the RDA's are squinting closely at your CI mapping figures & output claims".]

There is a transformative effect in monitoring (eg, school league tables). Set targets and outputs - and organisations will often find dubious ways to meet them. CI projects can appear "a success" in terms of their outputs, but be a shambles in reality.

The CI data is very poor at telling you *why* something is happening - how can we distill the data down into actual policy? We still need to talk to the movers & shakers at the grassroots.

CI data can be an organisation's "smokescreen" - especially in the way it is presented.

The "do nothing strategy" (Amsterdam & others) can also be evidenced - it would be useful to *know* that agencies don't need to help creatives in the way they are currently doing.

Given that the CI's are rapidly expanding anyway, it is difficult for the data to sift out any CID-spurred growth from the sector's natural growth rate.

There is a risk that funding-chasing inflation of the CI statistics for both the UK and its regions will lead government to say - "they're so big that we don't need to intervene".

Regionally, CI self-employment appears to average about 32 percent of total CI employment.

Use of outside consultants can lead to big gaps in CI mapping – eg: Minnesota has a huge creative candle-making industry - but because the government classes it in under "animal fat products", the

consultants almost didn't spot it.

Some UK regions are guilty of conflating heritage and tourism businesses with the CI businesses and then labelling the combined total as "CI only".

Research studies in the UK tend to be undertaken only into "trendy" CI sectors. Non-trendy sectors like printing have had no recent studies undertaken. Yet printing is a fast-changing & diversifying industry.   University printing dept's are being dismantled and yet they can't find any hard research data that might help save them.

Brighton

"Ask and they will tell" – strong self-organising industry forums will tell you more than data, in terms of formulating good policy.

Collecting BME data is usually just about box-ticking - and as such it can be a barrier to inclusiveness.   It can allow an organisation to mask its real lack of any honest commitment to equality.

Licensing laws & enforcement, street crime and public transport affect cultural access far more than many internal CI factors.

Creatives should have an influence on 'what & how' data is collected, why and where it is reported.

End-forum:

EU enlargement will bring a new perspective on culture and commerce.

We need to move beyond a simplistic notion of clusters. Maybe we already have since few people at the conference have been talking in terms of clusters.

Historically, interest in 'culture as commerce' only comes about because of rising levels of disposable income, and from the erosion of the manufacturing base.

Success hinges on being able to "grow" creatives locally, and then give them a global reach commensurate with their talents. [This assumes that creativity *can* be taught, and that the number of creatives is not finite in any given population. If creativity *can't* be taught (or if we don't have schools capable of teaching it), then there will be winners & losers in the culture-led city regeneration game.]

The Conference

General "housekeeping" criticisms, heard said of the conference:

That very few artists were present; the conference was too expensive for them and for many small public-sector arts organisations. Apart from two delegates, the conference was "all white". Only about two delegates were from the USA.

Kate Oakley gave a presentation at the Sense of Place symposium but wasn't at the main conference.

That none of the big London future-forecasting agencies gave presentations. What do the near-future consumer trends mean for the way the CIs need to develop by 2010? But - the problem with the big futurist agencies is that their forecasts are available to everyone in an industry. A "pack mentality" develops, and quirky niche markets are not explored.

People were blaming the conference for having too many boring un-insightful "this is my project" Powerpoint presentations – but such presentations simply held up a mirror to the CID sector. The sector *is* too often boring and un-insightful and doing funding-led projects "by-the-numbers".

That the "power of the web" was hardly mentioned, especially its potential use in the CI mapping process. Far too many people said their new web site is "coming soon".

No e-mail mailing list for delegates to discuss matters after the conference.

General "housekeeping" accolades for the conference:

Generally good time-management, good chairing of sessions. Fairly good microphone-management. Efficient gophers. Good free cyber-café from Mistral. Very good bookstall. Great klezmer band in the hotel on Thursday evening.

Good breakfasts & buffets, good hotel (the Old Ship) but air-conditioning would have been welcome - not a hotel to be in in a heatwave. A dynamic and pleasant city.

Creative Stoke

"...an essential portal to the talent & potential

we have in Stoke" - elected Mayor, Mike Wolfe.

Have comments about my report? Please contact me via:

http://*www.creativestoke.org.uk*