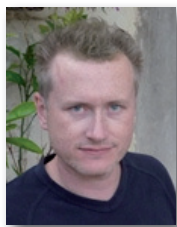


# Creativity, culture and regeneration

By Nicholas Clifton

**Creative growth?** It has recently been claimed that the UK creative and cultural industries sector is now comparable in size with the financial services sector, comprises more than 7% of the UK economy, is growing at twice the rate of any other UK sector; and employs 1.8m people.



*Nicholas Clifton is a reader in economic geography and regional development at Cardiff School of Management. His main research interests lie in the fields of regional economics, business strategy, innovation and creativity.*

Much recent interest has drawn upon the idea that in the new “knowledge economy” cities that display a high quality of place - meaning the presence of artists and musicians, high levels of tolerance and diversity, and other manifestations of a vibrant cultural life - perform better economically than those which do not. Consequently culture has been positioned at the centre of many urban policies, though the efficacy of this remains contested; particularly with regard to the rather “instrumental” usage of culture and simplistic understanding of the various drivers of economic success.

As such, the British government has drawn explicitly on recent research about cultural and creative networks, such as Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Basic Books, 2002). Sometimes seen as a quintessentially New Labour project, this interest has if anything increased following the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition elected in 2010. As a counterbalance, some commentators have sought to temper the view that the concept of “creativity”, and its enhancement, represents either a higher form of development or more of a “policy panacea” than previous prescriptions.

Table 1 shows the top and bottom ten locations in England and Wales for the presence of the “creative core” of knowledge workers. As might be expected, localities in the west-of-London M4 corridor area feature heavily in the top ten. Alongside, a number of less obvious regional centres of creativity emerge - Manchester in the north west (Trafford lying just to the west of the city centre with Manchester itself ranked only 4 places below at 14), Newcastle in the north east, and not least Cardiff. Finally, our rankings confirm the position of Brighton and Hove as a creative centre. Turning attention to the bottom ten UAs, a number of these are places suffering the protracted after-effects of the loss of heavy industry, either as distinct localities (Blaenau Gwent, Stoke on

**Table 1: Creative Core Location by Unitary Authority / County**

Top 10 Localities	(LQ)	Bottom 10 Localities	(LQ)
1. Wokingham	1.46	1. Barnsley	0.63
2. Reading	1.42	2. Tameside	0.62
3. Cardiff	1.39	3. N.E. Lincolnshire	0.61
4. Oxfordshire	1.34	4. Knowsley	0.60
5. London	1.33	5. Kingston upon Hull	0.58
6. Newcastle	1.32	6. Sandwell	0.57
7. Cambridgeshire	1.31	7. Thurrock	0.56
8. Brighton & Hove	1.31	8. Blackpool	0.52
9. Windsor & Maidenhead	1.31	9. Blaenau Gwent	0.51
10. Trafford	1.27	10. Stoke on Trent	0.49

Source: derived from Census of Population 2001

Trent, Barnsley) or the de-industrialised areas of large cities such as Tameside (Manchester), Knowsley (Liverpool) and Sandwell (Birmingham). These localities typically lack internal capacity, facing a long-standing and often deeply embedded mixture of social, economic, and environmental problems such as:

- a tradition of heavy industry and of large firm dominance that gives a narrow economic base and a vulnerability both to short-term employment shocks and long term economic decline;
- a weak local tradition of entrepreneurship and small independent enterprise;
- long-standing, high unemployment, particularly amongst young people and older men;
- the paradox of skill shortages in certain key sectors through an inability to attract and retain the necessary human capital;
- a history of under investment and continuing deterioration in the natural and built environment with special problems in the area of housing;
- mixed multi-ethnic populations as a result of previous waves of immigration before the advent of decline

Overall, the spatial focus of creative industry policy in the UK has centred on the role of cities and city-regions, with



**Bridge to prosperity.** Newcastle has succeeded in constructing a creative and vibrant city from a previous industrial era. Photograph: Rob Bishop.

the core metropolitan arena seen as the key for developing and enhancing “creative clusters”. A distinct advantage of city-regions is considered to be their ability to produce, attract and retain those workers who play the lead role in knowledge-intensive production and innovation. These provide the ideas, creativity and imagination so crucial to economic success.

However, by its very nature such a policy focus begs the question as to what the fate might be of those localities which are not at the mainstream of the creative economy. This is particularly true for the kind of old industrial locations described above which are endowed with lower concentrations of cultural industries and creative workers, and thus lower levels of “cultural opportunity”.

Although the link between the creative class, culture, competitiveness, and growth can, and will, continue to be debated, the crux of the matter from a UK competitiveness perspective is to ensure fair access to economic opportunity across the nation as a whole. In the current economic (and policy) climate, it is increasingly difficult to see how this will happen; although many lagging places do possess a tradition of loyalty to the locality and a strong spirit of community together with well-established traditions of partnership and association, they essentially lack the endogenous capacity to reconnect themselves with the growth poles of the UK economy.

This situation will inevitably be exacerbated by the coming cuts in central government departmental budgets over the next 4 years; the most pertinent being Local Government down by 27%, Communities by 51%, and Culture, Media and Sport 24% (all in excess of the average 19% reduction in revenue spending across all departments). Moreover, at a time when place matters as much if not more than it did before, the disbanding of the regional development agencies (RDAs) in 2010 England and their replacement by Local Enterprise Partnerships adds another level of uncertainty to the picture. Culture and creativity cannot in themselves create employment. Regeneration also requires the mobilisation of more tangible resources to encourage the process. In the current situation, difficult times are ahead for aspiring creative localities.