Creative Ruralities

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Abstract

The deep-rooted association of creativity with the city has been consolidated over the last two decades by the influence of the 'creative city' thesis and its translation into policies for the development of the creative industries sector. Recent research has started to critique the assumptions of the creative city model, documenting evidence of creative industries in rural and regional settings. This article argues that to fully recognize the vitality of rural creativity, the critique needs to be taken further, moving beyond the urban paradigm to redefine understandings of creativity. It highlights an alternative tradition of rural creativity and contends that creativity is intrinsic to rural communities and can be observed as a strategy for economic adaptation, an alternative to out-migration, and a tool for narrating and negotiating local identity in the context of change. These dimensions of rural creativity, and their significance for rural societies and economies, are illustrated through examples from rural Wales.

Keywords

Introduction

The notion of 'creative ruralities' will seem to some to be a contradiction in terms. There is a deeply engrained association in western culture of creativity with the city, suggesting by implication that rural areas are somehow lacking in creativity, at least when it comes to industry and economic innovation. This assumption has been reinforced by the development in economic geography and sociology of concepts such as the 'creative city' and the 'creative class', which in turn have been translated into policy with programmes to use creativity as a stimulus for economic development and to support creative industries exhibiting a distinct urban bias. However, there is another story, which this article aims to tell. An increasing number of studies in recent years have critiqued the concept of the creative city and have empirically described the vitality of creativity and creative industries in rural and peripheral regional settings. This article reviews this literature, highlighting its key arguments and findings, but also advancing a critique that it remains trapped within an urban-centric understanding of creativity. Instead, the article argues for recognition of the intrinsic creativity of rural societies, evoking an equally historical but neglected alternative tradition of rural creativity.

Creativity, the City and the Neglect of the Rural

> "On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation." (Williams, 1973: 9)

The engrained cultural distinction between urban and rural life was captured by the literary theorist Raymond Williams in his classic study, *The City and the Country*. Among the contrasting associations noted by Williams is that highlighted in the above extract, of the city as an achieved centre of learning and communication, and the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance and limitation. In this formulation, creativity – the field of technological innovation and cultural experimentation – is clearly an urban pursuit. Yet, this discourse has never been entirely hegemonic. There is also within western culture a second, alternative tradition that positions creativity as something found in the country. The critical difference is that whilst urban creativity is collective, rural creativity is individual.

Thus, urban creativity is perceived to stem from encounters between strangers, the mixing of different cultures and the fusion of ideas. It is about performance, discussion, debate, dissemination and diffusion – whether in scientific salons and learned societies, or in underground clubs and artists' garrets. Rural creativity, by contrast, is associated in popular culture with solitude and isolation – think of Wordsworth wandering lonely as a cloud, Coleridge scribbling alone until his concentration is broken by the person from Porlock. The countryside is where one escapes or retreats to in order to focus, concentration, find one's muse – a practice repeated pursued by writers, poets and musicians. Rural creativity is about the skill of the individual craftsperson, passed on to apprentices, not the foundation of a great industry with assembly-line production.

Western culture therefore has historically found space for creativity in both the city and the country, but it has made a crucial distinction about utility. Individual rural creativity may produce great works of art, but its contribution to wealth creation or economic development is limited.

It is perhaps this difference that explains the neglect of rural creativity in the recent profusion of work in economic geography and sociology that has latched on to creative industries and the so-called 'creative class' as catalysts for economic development. This literature, associated with writers such as Charles Landry (2000), Sharon Zukin (1995) and above all, Richard Florida (2002, 2005, 2007), is unreservedly urban in its focus, presenting an historical lineage for its thesis by evoking the same kind of cultural associations noted by Raymond Williams:

> "Cities are cauldrons of creativity. They have long been the vehicles for mobilizing, concentrating, and channeling human creative energy. They turn that energy into technical and artistic innovations, new forms of commerce and new industries, and evolving paradigms of community and civilization. Little is revolutionary in this idea. We have known it intuitively for ages, and its manifestations can be just as easily seen in Athens, Rome, Venice and Florence, or London, Paris and Berlin, as in New York, San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, Toronto, Dublin, Helsinki or Sydney. The argument of this book is not that the role of creativity in city formation and growth is new, but that, with the decline of physical constraints on cities and communities in recent decades,

creativity has become the principal driving force in the growth and development of cities, regions and nations." (Florida, 2005: 1).

The concept of the 'creative city' does not, however, just rest on historical example. Its key underlying principle is that cities foster creativity, because the density of urban networks and interactions facilitates the 'spillover' of knowledge and ideas. As Knudsen et al (2012) have put it, "High densities of creative capital lead to frequent face-to-face interactions among individuals, thus facilitating 'creative' spillovers and subsequent innovations" (p 464). Creativity is hence a social process, reliant on social relationships and depending, as Spencer (2012) observes, on not only 'who you know' but also 'where you are'. Cities engender creativity better than rural areas because they bring together more people, but some cities are also more creative than others because they stand out as agglomerations of *creative* people.

Florida (2002) labels this pivotal cohort the 'creative class', defined as individuals whose work involves creating 'meaningful new forms'. Members of the creative class include scientists, engineers, professors, poets, novelists, journalists, artists, film-makers, actors, entertainers, designers, architects, think-tank researchers and editors, among others. The geography of the creative class is in part determined by the geography of the industries in which they work. As such, concentrations of the creative class are found in university towns, political capitals and metropolitan centres with large media sectors. However, a tenet of the creative class thesis is that its members are more footloose than most workers – many are self-employed, or work over the internet from home, or in industries that are not tied to any particular resource bases or a need for market proximity. The geography of the creative class is thus also seen as driven by the residential preferences of its members: for cities that host major cultural institutions, boast lively music and entertainment scenes, have good schools and attractive residential neighbourhoods. Together these components comprise the 'creative field' of a city (Scott, 2010).

Furthermore, this relative mobility of the creative class means that its geography is not fixed. Cities can turn themselves into 'creative cities' by producing the kinds of urban environments that attract the creative class. As such, the creative cities thesis is normative as well as analytical. As Lewis and Donald (2009) observe, according to the creative city model, cities that wish to thrive economically must invest in hi-tech industry, engineering and the so-called 'creative industries' as well as in amenities that are attractive to the creative class. Cities that fail to do so risk decline, poverty and out-migration. Creativity is hence driving a new polarisation of the economy, which Florida (2002) perceives explicitly as an urban-rural divide:

> "I fear we may well be splitting into two distinct societies with different institutions, different economies, different incomes, ethnic and racial make-ups, social organizations, religious orientations and politics. One is *creative* and diverse – a cosmopolitan admixture of high-tech people, bohemians, scientists and engineers, the media and the professions. The other is a more close-knit, church-based, older civic society of working people and *rural-dwellers*." (Florida, 2002: 281).

The potential for this prophecy to become self-fulfilling is magnified by the eagerness with which the ideas promoted by the creative cities thesis have been translated into policy. Richard Florida has become a much sought-after speaker and consultant, especially in North America, advising cities on urban development strategies aimed at attracting the creative class. In countries such as Britain,

meanwhile, the creative industries have been identified as a key sector for expansion and investment, but with planning focused on development in urban centres. The 2008 UK government report, *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy*, for example, articulated a vision of "a creative engine in the heart of our biggest cities as a driver for regional economic growth" (p 5), such that Huggins and Clifton (2011) observe that, "the spatial focus of creative industry policy in the UK has centred on the role of cities and city-regions, with the metropolitan area seen as key for developing and enhancing 'creative clusters" (p 1345).

Yet, even as the creative cities model becomes entrenched in policy, the rhetoric is not always matched by the evidence. One map in the *Creative Britain* report, for instance, showed that whilst districts in the UK with the lowest density of creative industry firms tend to be rural, there are a number of rural areas with high densities of creative industries well away from metropolitan centres and city-regions: in the Scottish highlands, south Devon, mid Wales, southern Cumbria, Herefordshire and parts of East Anglia. These places are not directly mentioned in the report, but they suggest that creativity is alive and thriving in at least some parts of rural Britain.

Critiquing the Creative City

The creative city thesis has enjoyed a swift ascendency in social science, but over the last few years its assumptions and assertions have started to be challenged by a plethora of studies that have documented the presence of creative industries and potential for creativity in rural, small town, peripheral city and suburban settings in North America (Lewis and Donald, 2010; McGranahan and Wojan, 2007; Petrov, 2008), Britain (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Harvey et al., 2012; Phelps, 2012) and Australia (Andersen, 2010; Bennett, 2010; Curtis, 2010; Felton et al., 2010; Flew, 2012; Gibson et al., 2010, 2012; Mayes, 2010; McHenry, 2011; Verdich, 2010; Waitt and Gibson, 2009, 2013). The critique presented in these articles is empirical rather than conceptual, and tends to follow one of three approaches.

Firstly, some of the articles report on studies commissioned by rural local authorities keen to engage with the creative industries policy agenda, and thus eager to establish a case for the significance of creative industries in their area. In England, for example, reports on the social and economic importance of creative industries and the arts in rural areas were commissioned by the Arts Council in 2005 and the Littoral Arts Trust in 2006, feeding into a Rural Cultural Summit in 2006. Bell and Jayne (2010) note that creative industries development strategies had been adopted by a number of rural councils including Cornwall, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire Moorlands, whilst their own article reported on research commissioned by Shropshire county council which identified 2280 creative industry businesses operating in the county.

Secondly, several studies have set out to critique or modify the quantitative measures of creativity developed by Florida and others, and particularly employed in league tables of 'creative cities' that have been popularised in North America. The essential argument of these studies is the ways of measuring creativity used have an inherent bias towards large cities, as Lewis and Donald outline:

> "The choice of indicators in the creative capital model ultimately prevents smaller cities from becoming 'success stories'. The tech-pole index, for example, reflects both the degree to which the city specialises in high-technology industry and the 'sheer scale of employment' in that industry, meaning that the few biggest cities will automatically be

favoured … Similarly, bohemian-ness is defined as employment in 'creative jobs', which are most common in large cities with major design, communication and software firms. The variable does not measure the prevalence of doing artwork, being in a band or writing poetry outside work, nor does it capture the residents of small cities who 'busily being creative every day' in non-occupational activities." (Lewis and Donald, 2010: 34)

Examples of alternative models proposed include McGranahan and Wojan's (2007) revised formula for calculating the share of creative class employment in a local labour market, which places rural counties including Jefferson (Iowa), Pitkin (Colorado) and Tompkins (New York) in the top 5% for creative class employment in the United States; and Petrov's (2008) 'talent index' that includes non-salaried cultural activity in identifying 'creative hotspots' in northern Canada including Fort Smith, Inuvik, Whitehorse and Yellowknife.

Thirdly, a few of the studies more innocently present descriptions of creative industries in rural locations as accounts of unexpected discoveries that counter the received wisdom of urban centres as sites of creativity. This approach is exemplified by Mayes's (2010) account of creativity in the rural West Australian shire of Ravensthorpe, in which she describes her 'surprise' and 'fascination' at finding locally produced crafts in the museum, sculptures and murals by local artists and community groups, and a lively roster of shows, festivals and concerts. As she reflects,

> "My surprise at finding this rich and vibrant cultural life, this abundance and range of cultural enterprise and production, is not only a somewhat embarrassing manifestation of my (urban) ignorance if not arrogance; it can also be read as a symptom of culturally widespread assumptions which privilege urban Australia as a normative site of and place for creativity and cultural industry." (Mayes, 2010: 12).

Whilst these studies have assembled copious evidence for the presence of creative industries and cultural activities in rural and non-metropolitan localities, the way in which this evidence is presented betrays a failure to escape the creative cities paradigm. Both research and the policy responses of rural and non-metropolitan local authorities and development agencies have continued to fall into a number of traps that restrict them to an urban perspective of creativity.

The first trap is attempting to translate urban models of creativity to a rural setting. This includes research that seeks to identify creativity according to urban-based definitions of creative industries, and policy interventions that attempt to stimulate creativity by replicating urban models of creative quarters and clusters. These limitations are recognized by Bell and Jayne (2010), who reflecting on the constraints of their own local-authority-commissioned research on creative industries in Shropshire, call for a more radical approach that would involve "rethinking the questions asked and the places explored, moving from a 'one-size-fits-all' model of understanding creative work. Central to this mission is seeking to understand the lives of rural creative workers, and their particular motivations and aspirations" (Bell and Jayne, 2010: 211).

The second trap is to assume that new technologies have made creative industries 'foot-loose' and thus able to re-locate to rural areas. This is a more directly conceptual challenge to the creative cities thesis, suggesting that its emphasis on the requirement for social interaction is out-dated in an age of broadband, internet shopping and social media. Yet, whilst this thinking has crept into some rural development strategies, it is mistaken on two counts. Face-to-face interactions are still part of

creativity, even in rural areas, as several of the studies of rural creativity have shown (see for example Harvey et al., 2012); and although the internet has eroded some of the advantages of urban location, the technological divide between city and country is repeated reinvented as new communication technologies are rolled out with sporadic rural coverage (e.g. broadband, 4G mobile phone networks).

The third trap is to associate rural creativity with in-migration by the creative class. Bell and Jayne (2010) again observe that policy discussions around creative industries in rural areas tend to focus on the potential of lifestyle migration, and accordingly creative industry strategies in rural areas and smaller cities are frequently aimed at attracting creative class migrants rather than on nurturing endogenous talent, as Verdich (2012) finds in Launceston, Tasmania.

Juxtaposed to this, the fourth trap is to seeks to develop endogenous rural creativity but to do so by representing rural creativity in ways that reproduce stereotypes of rurality. For example, creativity-led economic development in rural areas can often be focused on cultural industries that are more concerned with the 'old' than the 'new', such as heritage tourism, traditional festivals and cultural rituals, or the revival of vernacular crafts. They are 'creative' in a cultural sense, but not especially innovative. Similarly, rural cultural industries celebrated in revisionist studies and promoted in economic development strategies can implicitly reproduce historic notions of rural creativity by emphasizing individualism and escapism, including independent artists and crafters, remote recording studies and isolated writers' retreats, and the ephemeral escapism of music and literary festivals.

Moreover, research on rural creativity has reproduced an urban standpoint by framing discussion of the problems and advantages of rural and non-metropolitan creative industries through concepts such as accessibility and parochialism. Gibson et al.'s (2010) study of creative industries in the peripheral Australian city of Darwin, for example, positions distance and the lack of accessibility to and from metropolitan centres as one of the problems faced, as described by one interviewee:

> "It's not that accessible … we just don't have the population, we just don't have the same working conditions. We have escalated costs in arts delivery; even a tour costs a fortune. Artback told me a very funny story about having to hang artworks on fence posts, because there was nothing else. It's hard for those key players on those national tables, for them to understand what the actual working conditions are for our artists." (Interviewee quoted by Gibson et al., 2010: 29).

Parochialism is similarly identified as a constraining pressure by another artist interviewed by Gibson et al (2010), who complains about the pressure in Darwin to produce art about Darwin, whereas artists in Sydney are not expected to make art about Sydney. In a related vein, Harvey et al. (2012) quote a 'creative skills officer' in Cornwall worrying about whether art produced in a rural peninsular can be consider relevant nationally and not dismissed as parochial.

At the same time, the perceived advantages of working in a remote or rural location are also presented in terms of urban perceptions of distance, isolation and disconnection from 'the arts scene', with one artist interviewed by Gibson et al (2010) in Darwin suggesting that art there was fresher because it's not influenced by fashion, whilst a cartoonist in Shropshire told Bell and Jayne that, "Moving from London has helped me to see the city afresh … Most of my clients are there are

being away from it all helps me to view those relationships in a new light" (Bell and Jayne, 2010: 214).

Rediscovering Rural Creativity

The recent wave of research on creative industries and cultural activities in rural and non-metropolitan areas has countered the urban-centricism of the creative cities and highlighted the advantages and disadvantages faced by those working in creative practices in such settings. It has supported a concurrent engagement by rural and regional authorities and development agencies with strategies to nurture and promote creative and cultural industries. Both of these developments are to be welcomed. However, both continue to operate within a paradigm that is framed by urban conceptions of creativity and urban perceptions of rurality.

In this section, I want to argue for a more radical approach that starts not with adapting models of urban creativity, but with recognizing the inherent creativity of rural society. Creativity is intrinsic to rural communities that have always had to find inventive ways of dealing with the social and environmental challenges that they face, and is especially important to rural communities' adaptation to change. Contrary to the idea of rural communities as sealed, static, timeless places sometimes found in popular culture, rural localities are dynamic and connected. They are buffeted by economic restructuring, environmental change, depopulation and counterurbanisation, and globalization, to which they have responded through the blending of local and non-local resources to produce new hybrid outcomes (Woods, 2007, 2011). This process is creative at multiple levels, and involves many small acts of creativity for both commercial and non-commercial ends, from which three broad applications might be emphasized.

First, creativity can be part of a strategy for economic adaptation in response to the contraction of previously dominant industries such as agriculture, forestry, mining or fishing. This does not necessarily mean developing 'creative industries' in the sense understood by the creative cities model, but rather putting resources together in creative new ways to take advantage of new markets and opportunities. This can involve diversifying into new crops, combining different cultural influences to produce new variations on traditional food products or crafts, finding new uses for land, including from tourism and recreation, as well as harnessing cultural creativity to add value to products through association with art, design, literature, film and local heritage (Woods, 2011).

Second, creativity can be used by rural residents as a strategy for generating income that will enable them to stay in a rural locality. One of the most notable trends in rural societies around the world over recent decades has been the out-migration of young people, even in areas where the population as a whole is growing with counterurbanisation (Woods, 2011). A primary driver for this has been the lack of education and employment opportunities in rural areas, especially in professional occupations include many identified by Florida as part of the 'creative class'. This has reinforced the perception of the city as the locus of creativity, and suggested that individuals aspiring to join the creative class must move to metropolitan centres. At the same time, this logic has also informed analyses that have associated creative work in rural and regional places with

'creative class' migrants from major cities, as in Verdich's (2012) study in Tasmania and to a lesser extent, Bell and Jayne's (2010) research in Shropshire.

Yet, there is increasing evidence of cultural entrepreneurship being used by rural young people as a mechanism to allow them to stay in their home area, or to return home after university or training. Individuals have set-up microenterprises in crafts, design, music and computer software, or work as freelances or as self-employed artists or musicians, sometimes alongside other part-time work, and sometimes dividing their time between their rural home and an urban marketplace. This strategy is particularly evidence in rural areas that offer lifestyle attractions such as surfing or mountain biking, thus suggesting the emergence of a different type of 'creative field' to the urban arts-based environment considered to be a prerequisite for the creative city. Gibson (2008), for example, observed the growing number of young people working as musicians or in music-related jobs in north coastal New South Wales, a region with a traditionally high level of youth out-migration, and noted that such cultural entrepreneurship had the potential to contribute to rural development. However, he also noted that such activities were commonly overlooked by formal economic development strategies, that the jobs created tended to be under-counted in labour force statistics, and that the sector is unstable, in part due to local suspicion of youth culture:

> "push-factors for young musicians have been negative portrayal of young people and their creative activities in the regional media, youth curfews in some towns, reluctance from hotel managers to put on live music or pay adequate wages for musicians, tensions with the tourism industry, and distance from important gatekeepers in the music industry such as radio station playlist managers and record company artist and repertoire (A and R) agents." (Gibson, 2008: 190).

Third, creativity is also important in the form of story-telling, as a means by which rural communities can come to describe and understand the changes that they are experiencing and articulate a sense of local identity. Art, literature, film, poetry, performance and so on can all be used as media to narrate and negotiate local identities in a time of change, providing focal points for community organization and potentially acting as catalysts for regeneration projects. The small town of Chemainus in British Columbia is a well-known example, where responses to the closure of a sawmill that was the town's major employer included a project to paint murals around the town depicting the area's agrarian and pioneer heritage (Barnes and Hayter, 1992). Other small towns and rural communities have adopted similar strategies, not only through painting murals (though the idea has been replicated in communities such as Boissevan, Manitoba and Sheffield, Tasmania (see Walmsley, 2003)), but also through other types of public art, the establishment of music, poetry and story-telling festivals, the collation of local folk-stories, and craft activities.

The products of this creativity can become tourist attractions, helping to boost the local economy – the murals of Chemainus were attracting over a quarter of a million visitors in the early 1990s (Barnes and Hayter, 1992) – but this is not the only, nor even primary, objective. The act of creativity in itself serves a purpose in bringing together the community to discuss and decide shared priorities actions, and the story-telling element provides a means of articulating local identity in the context of globalization. Thus, Mayes (2010), in describing the cottage industry of making home-made postcards that she discovers in the rural shire of Ravensthorpe, Western Australia, observes that,

"Creativity … in the eyes of the postcard producers interviewed, is in the service of 'community', so that creativity has a clear social role in the production of a sense of community and the construction of both physical places and social spaces in which to meet, share ideas and negotiate individual and collective identities" (Mayes, 2010: 20)

Creativity in Rural Wales

The presence and potential of the innate creativity of rural can be illustrated with a brief case study of rural Wales. As one of Britain's least densely populated and least accessible regions, rural Wales is an antipode for the creative city. In spite of the presence of four small university towns (Aberystwyth, Bangor, Carmarthen and Lampeter), the region has no urban agglomeration of more than 20,000 people, and lacks the critical mass of 'creative class' professionals and the urban cultural infrastructure to score highly on a Floridian index of creativity. It was largely ignored in the UK Government's *Creative Britain* report, which presented statistics showing that most of the districts in the region had fewer than 200 'creative industry' firms, towards the bottom of the scale. Even the Welsh Government's review of creative industries, whilst name-checking a few rural-based enterprises and artists, neglects rural Wales in identifying the strengths of the creative sector in Wales as the accessibility of South Wales by rail from London, North Wales from Manchester, and the educational assets of Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, and Newport's Institute of Advanced Broadcasting (Hargreaves, 2009). With its emphasis on digital creativity in film, television and music, the review arguably prioritised creative industries concentrated in urban South Wales over rural creativity.

Yet, rural Wales has a strong and continuing cultural heritage that foster creative enterprise. This heritage to some degree reflects the embedded notions of rural creativity discussed at the start of this paper – rural Wales has been a source of inspiration for artists and writers, including Dylan Thomas and R.S. Thomas, as well as a site of retreat and isolated experimentation for musicians including Led Zeppelin in the Cambrian Mountains and the Incredible String Band in Pembrokeshire (Halfacree, 2011) – but the persistence of Welsh language culture has also been particularly important, preserving traditions of story-telling and performance, whilst also spawning modern creative enterprises based in the rural Welsh language heartland. These include publishing companies such as Gomer in the small town of Llandysul and Y Lolfa in the village of Talybont, Ceredigion, as well as television production companies such as Barcud at Caernarfon and Boomerang and Aberystwyth.

Rural Wales is therefore not devoid of creative industries, but its true creativity is revealed once our perspective on rural creativity is expanded as proposed in this article. Firstly, the use of creativity as a strategy for economic adaptation is evident in the diversification of the rural Wales economy as its historic staple industries of agriculture and mining have declined. This has included finding new ways of commodifying traditional products, with, for example, slate that was once quarried for construction now more commonly sold as craft products, whilst abandoned mines have been converted into tourist attractions. In agriculture, creativity has been demonstrated in the re-branding of produce as premium products, with quality often indicated by a geographical reference:

Welsh Black Beef, Cambrian Mountain Lamb, Llyn Beef and Llyn Rosé Veal. As Kneafsey et al (2003) describe, the branding of these products – and others such as speciality cheese and artisan crafts – are expressions of a 'culture economy' in rural Wales, in which attempts are made to revalorize place and localize economic control through the commodification of cultural resources such as food, language, crafts, folklore and landscape (see also Ray, 1998).

Moreover, if 'creativity' is defined to include the creative development, blending and packaging of new agri-food products, then 'creative industries' in rural Wales might be argued to include enterprises such as Rachel's Dairy (which pioneered experimentation with organic products and expanded into a transnational business), Halen Môr sea salt, Pemberton's Chocolate Farm, Penderyn whisky, Buffalo Dairy ice cream, and Teifi cheese (which combined Welsh and Dutch cheese-making traditions). Bottled spring water, such as Llanllyr Spring and Ty Nant, are also cultural products that have become notable exports, demonstrating creativity in putting a natural resource to new use, but also rooted in the culture economy with websites that recount stories of the springs' histories, and incorporating creative design – notably in Ty Nant's iconic blue bottles, which has been adopted as a prop in films and television series including *Sex and the City*, *Friends* and *The OC* (Woods, 2010).

Neither is creativity in rural Wales limited to food and crafts. The Centre for Alternative Technology employs technological creativity in promoting sustainable lifestyles and has been the catalyst for the development of nearby Machynlleth as both a hub for eco-economy enterprises and a centre for alternative lifestyles and artistic activity. Creativity has also been harnessed in the economic regeneration or re-orientation of other small towns in the region. Hay-on-Wye, for instance, has developed what is probably the most literature-dependent economy anywhere in the world, over 30 second-hand bookshops and an annual literary festival attracting more than 80,000 visitors to a town of fewer than 2,000 people (Woods, 2010). Similarly, music contributes to local economies in the Llangollen International Festival and the Brecon Jazz Festival and nearby Green Man festival; whilst the small town of Llanwyrtyd Wells exhibits a more quirky creativity with its World Bog-snorkelling Championship and Man versus Horse Race.

Secondly, as part of these creative expressions, opportunities have developed for cultural entrepreneurship that has created employment for young people and others seeking to live in rural Wales. For instance, a report for the Arts Council of Wales in 2012 estimated that there are 1,500 contemporary craft-making businesses in Wales, generating £28 million a year, with a majority of respondents to its phone survey located in rural areas (Arts Council of Wales, 2012). Other anecdotal evidence includes the Ceredigion Art Trail, which involved over 60 artists and crafters in 2013, and the annual North Wales Art Trail which involves nearly 300 artists, including many in rural communities. These artists and crafters include people of all ages and from a range of backgrounds – the Arts Council report found that the average age of a crafter in Wales is 51 and that a third are 'career changers' who have switched from a different occupation – but a sizeable minority are younger people with rural backgrounds (or who have studied at one of the universities in rural Wales and stayed). Infrastructure for cultural entrepreneurship in the region includes the £1.4 million Aberystwyth Arts Centre Creative Studios Project, whose Heathwick Studio-designed units currently house seven artists, two television or film production companies, a web-designer, a jewellery-maker, a designer, an architect, a music preparation business and Honno Welsh Womens' Press.

Thirdly, creativity has been widely deployed in narrating and negotiating rural change in Wales. The eisteddfodau, which are a key part of Welsh language culture, have provided a platform for poetry and story-telling, and Welsh language literature and music has frequently addressed issues and experiences of rural change. These themes are also present in English language writing from Wales, such as the poetry of Ruth Bidgood documenting changes in a rural valley in mid Wales (Jarvis, 2012), and in the work of performance artists such as Simon Whitehead, whose projects have included '2 mph' – walking from west Wales to London on old Drovers trails as a response to the Foot and Mouth epidemic – and 'Dwell' which explores the artist's place in his rural community. The Pembrokeshire-based collective Ointment similarly focuses on rural and environmental change in its work, with projects including a series of performance responses to GM crop testing.

Whilst artists and writers have primarily articulated individual responses to rural change, other initiatives have engaged local communities in creative responses to change. For example, Creu-ad is a small enterprise that works with local communities in projects including writing interpretative plans and "telling community stories through workshops, interpretive art projects and training" (Creu-ad, 2013, n.p.). Its projects have included *O Dan y Mor a'i Donnau ~ Living Seas, Living Coasts*, which worked with coastal communities to interpret the Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation to produce a photographic project, an interpretative mosaic and a sculpture; a plinth mosaic designed with local school children for the entrance to Cwm Rhaedr forest; and *Dig up the Black Mountain Day*, which engaged residents from Brynaman in the Brecon Beacons in gathering and sharing stories about natural, historical and cultural heritage of Black Mountain, for use in community-driven interpretation projects in the Fforest Fawr Geopark.

Creu-ad was also involved in the *Spirit of the Miners / Ysbryd y Mwynwyr* initiative in northern Ceredigion – a EU-funded community regeneration project using the legacy of metal mining as a theme. The initiative support projects including building restoration work, but also community murals, the creation of heritage walks, a screenplay recounting events in Frogoch lead mine, collecting oral histories and community story-gathering, and *Spoilio*, a performance arts event with local artists and communities exploring the mining heritage of the area. The initiative aimed to stimulate and support tourism, but as Mayes (2010) remarks for postcard production in Australia, its activities have also performed a social role in negotiating and articulating local community identity.

Conclusion

The association of creativity with the city, which has deep historical roots but had been consolidated over the two decades by the influence of the 'creative city' thesis, has started to be critiqued in recent years by research that has documented and demonstrated the thriving presence of creative industries in rural and regional settings. As the development of creative industries has gained increasing prominence in economic policy, this research has provided an important corrective to assumptions that investment in creative economies must inevitably be urban-focused, and that cities and towns will only prosper if they exhibit characteristics that appeal to the 'creative class'. However, fully recognizing the creativity of rural regions requires not only stretching and adapting urban-centric perspectives, but more radically stepping outside this paradigm and redefining the way in which we view creativity.

As this article has argued, rural communities are inherently creative, and always have been. Rural creativity, though, exhibits three characteristics that have led to it being marginalized by the primacy

of urban ideas of creativity. Firstly, rural creativity has historically been individual, in contrast to the collective creativity of the city. This has led rural creativity to be viewed as less productive than urban creativity, but its economic potential has more recently been exploited in tourist attractions and in specialist services such as writers' retreats. Secondly, rural creativity sometimes works with different materials to urban creativity, eluding easy classification. One of the most important aspects of creativity in rural economies in recent years has been experimentation with new agri-food products – the revival of artisan cheese-making and micro-brewing, diversification by farmers into new crops and livestock, and the rebranding of produce with culturally significant geographical references – yet, these activities are rarely regarded as 'creative industries'. Thirdly, the economic benefits of rural creativity may be indirect rather than direct. Rural areas rarely score well in measures of creativity that depend on economic activities – their creative enterprises are commonly small-scale, employ few people and generate relatively limited contributions to regional GVA. However, the value of rural creativity can be more in helping rural communities reflect on and respond to social and economic changing, bringing people together and enabling local strengths and resources to be identified. As such, rural creativity is frequently a facilitator of local economic regeneration rather than an objective of regeneration.

The point here is that whilst the spatial selectivity of the 'creative city' thesis may be critiqued, this does not mean that rural creativity is the same as urban creativity, or that the capacity of rural areas to germinate creative industries is the same as urban centres. As Florida (2005) and others have observed, cities have benefits in terms of critical mass of creative activity that few rural or provincial locations can match. Creative workers in rural places do suffer by comparison from isolation, the lack of support networks and limited markets, as well as sometimes from suspicion and obstruction from conservative rural residents and policy-makers. In order to overcome these challenges, rural creative workers are inevitably integrated into urban networks – they are often dependent on urban suppliers, agents and customers, and there is frequently a flow of individuals back and forth from cities. None of these observations, however, are reasons for neglecting rural areas in strategies for developing the creative sector, but rather point to the need for policies that recognize the distinctive character, potential and challenges of creativity in rural economies.

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