Creative Cities as places for knowledge-intensive economies: The cases of Dublin and Gothenburg

A.-L. Müller

abstract:
In recent city planning, references to the concepts of the so-called creative class and the creative city are often to be found. How do those references affect the actual planning? My research on the cities of Dublin (Ireland) and Gothenburg (Sweden) shows that Richard Florida's concept of the creative class serves as a point of reference in both cases. Although the cities have specific ways of integrating the concept in their planning, they have one thing in common: the promotion of knowledge-intensive economies. That comes along with a specific understanding of creativity: it is understood as innovation. Two examples show that knowledge-intensive economies are decidedly used to enhance and/or convert certain neighborhoods. In that sense, promoting the creative economy affects both urban space(s) and the perception of the inhabitants. Therefore, governing a city by use of specific ideas has an impact, not least on the built environment.

Keywords: cluster, creative class, creative city, knowledge-intensive economies, regeneration

1. Theoretical background
The discussion of the so-called creative cities has by now reached the city planning institutions of most of the Western European cities. Often, especially in bigger cities, the concepts creative city and creative class serve as programmatic elements of city development strategies. But so far, in sociological research, one question remained mainly unanswered: What impacts do these strategies have on the (built) environment? Meaning, what expressions does the focus on the creative class find, what places and spaces emerge and disappear in the course of this transformation? And obviously: What kind of places emerge through the work done by and for the creative class – and who are the actors?

My paper presents modes of governance and the impacts that such development strategies have on cities. Empirical research in the cities of Dublin (Ireland) and Gothenburg (Sweden) shows: In both cases, it is explicitly referred to Richard Florida's concept of the creative class and his analyses on the relationship between cities and this class. Additionally, an orientation as creative city is present, but with different emphases. I will only briefly summarize Florida's main ideas before turning towards my case

---

1 Anna-Lisa Müller, Research Assistant/PhD candidate, Department of Sociology, Center of Excellence 16 “Cultural Foundations of Integration”/University of Constance, Germany.
studies. The US-american scientist Richard Florida is known for his work on the *creative class* and the *creative city* (e.g. Florida 2004, 2005). He has not been the first to work with those concepts, but he is the one who has become most popular and who coined the terms. By now, almost everyone who deals with urban development in one way or another knows his ideas – at least roughly. Other prominent scholars working in that field are Charles Landry, Sako Musterd (who also attends this conference), Allen J. Scott, Martina Heßler, and countless others who have not (yet) gained such prominence both in the fields of academia, politics, and feuilleton.

The concept of the *creative class* states a change in the social structure of societies, especially in Europe and North America. According to Florida et al., the ability to be 'creative' has gained such importance in today's work and social life that it can be called a key competence. Following that line of argument, a social class of people emerges who all have that competence and apply it in their daily work and life. That can mean different things: Either new ideas are developed, e.g. in the fields of science or arts, or those ideas are applied, e.g. in engineering (cf. e.g. Florida 2004, chapters 2; 3).

My two case studies Dublin and Gothenburg have in common that the cities' developmental strategies imply a focus on the so-called knowledge-intensive economies. The aim is to foster these economies. In Dublin, establishing a place for companies of the digital media sector is a major part of the city's development. In Gothenburg, a science park is developed in cooperation with universities, schools, companies, and the city. In both cases, the core creative industries (Howkins 2004) are in focus. Additionally, the examples have one interesting detail in common: They are being located in special localities of the respective city. They are used as means to regenerate and/or convert certain quarters. Locating the clusters is done in a specific way: Not only the provision of new working space is the aim, rather the establishment of (small) quarters with mixed-use, either by creating new spaces (Gothenburg-Lindholmen) or by integrating them in existing city quarters (Dublin-The Liberties).

Focussing on knowledge-intensive economies implies, as the analyses of my material show, a specific understanding of 'creativity'. One central research question, which serves as background for this paper, asks for the different understandings of 'creativity' in the context of the planning of a *creative city*. One understanding, affecting the examples presented, is that of creativity as innovation. Creating and (technically) converting or applying new ideas come to the foreground. Less important than in other cases is the aesthetic-cultural dimension. Such analytical differentiation between creativity as innovation and creativity as arts provides advantages for analyzing the modes of governance and their impacts.

The cases in Dublin and Gothenburg show that fostering a certain part of the economy – the part
considered 'creative' in a specific sense – has consequences for the urban environment as well as for the self-conception of the inhabitants. Hence, the modes of governance applied have notable impacts, which also find an expression in the built city. But, as I will show later, the actors and planning instruments applied vary.

2. Methodology

To analyze and understand the complex developments that take place in the cities of Dublin and Gothenburg, I decided for a mix of different methodologies. In both cases, it comprises five elements: (1) guideline-oriented interviews with city planners, representatives of city authorities, and members of the creative class located in the respective city, (2) content analysis of city planning and development documents, (3) photographic documentation of the cities and the urban environment, (4) analysis of archive material concerning selected places of the cities, (5) field notes and participant observation.

The city authority representatives interviewed are considered experts in their respective fields. Understanding the interviews as expert interviews has consequences for their design. Topics considered important for the study were chosen beforehand. They influenced the design of the interview guidelines insofar as I pre-formulated batteries of questions or sub-topics that were connected to the main topics. Carrying out the interviews meant to get answers to those main topics by simultaneously being open for other important aspects raised by the interviewees themselves. The interviews with the members of the creative class where designed in a similar way. As I was most interested in the people's perception of the cities as places of work and life, the majority of the questions concerned that topic.

In order to find out how the cities are planned and developed by the experts, I analyzed planning documents. The content analysis method allowed me to extract main themes, planning objectives, and general principles. Doing so, additional information is available next to the findings from the interview. Besides, the findings of both the interviews and the documents can be compared. Such a comparison offers interesting insights – including differences between the representation formulated in the (spoken) interviews and those to be found in the (written) documents.

In order to document the ongoing changes in the built environment, I took pictures of places and buildings considered interesting for the research. Staying several months in the cities made it possible to adopt a perspective similar to that of an inhabitant. Doing so, I differentiated between places of work, leisure, transition, transformation, and so forth. Those places were recorded, not the least for purposes of illustration. In selective cases, archive material was collected. It comprised old pictures and maps. Contrasting the appearance of certain places at various moments of time has also such an illustrative character. It is used to fully understand the transformation of the built environment.
Staying several months in both cities as temporary inhabitant allowed me to carry out participant observation. Perceiving the cities as inhabitant made it possible to get an impression of how people move in the cities and how they use them. This is an important detail if you want to understand a city in all its complexity. Field notes allow the documentation and preservation of the impressions. With that, it is possible to both record subjective impressions as well as ideas and thematic-related aspects. All can be related to the main topics, which were formulated at the beginning of the research or extracted from the interviews and the documents.

3. Focus: the places of the creative class

The research conducted in the two cities showed not least two things that I will develop further in this paper: First, when talking about planning the creative city, one carefully has to differentiate different connotations and understandings of 'creativity'. Second, depending on the specific understanding of creativity, different places can be identified that can be called places of the creative class. In the course of the paper, I will have a closer look at those places, their characteristics, and their role in and for the cities as such.

Starting with the understanding of 'creativity', I want to propose the analytic differentiation of an innovative-technological and an aesthetic-cultural understanding. The interviews showed that, depending on the profession of the interviewee, different things are meant when talking about creativity and creative people – and even when talking about the creative city. Those who are professionally working in the fields of arts and culture consider creativity as a human ability to create aesthetic objects, ideas, or the like. The creative class is a problematic term for them. However, if applied, artists play a major role in the definition. A creative city, then, is a city where the planning has a focus on cultural events, artists, and cultural professionals as professional group, and altogether an understanding of 'city' as a place for aesthetic developments. Additionally, there exists another understanding of creativity. In this case, creativity is understood as the ability to identify (technological) problems and to develop and apply solutions. It is a more technically understanding which implies innovation as key defining element. Obviously, arts and culture also imply innovation – but that's not my point. The important difference I introduce here is technological innovation versus aesthetic-artistic novelty.

Based on that differentiation, specific places for the respective parts of the creative class can be identified in the cities. For Dublin, Temple Bar serves as cultural quarter whereas the Dublin Docklands and especially the emerging digital media cluster The Digital Hub, located in the inner-city quarter The Liberties, are examples for the innovational dimension of creativity. In Gothenburg, cultural events

---

2 Of course, that can be different when talking to other representatives of the cultural sphere. In my cases, it was a common element of the interviews that the interviewees dissociated themselves from the concept.
cannot so easily be located in one quarter. The equivalent for The Digital Hub is Lindholmen Science Park, a cooperation of business companies, universities, and schools.

Table 1 summarizes my findings concerning the understanding of creativity and its places in the cities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of creativity</th>
<th>arts and culture</th>
<th>technological innovation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part of creative class</td>
<td>cultural professionals, artists, etc.</td>
<td>scientists, creative industry professionals, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City quarter</td>
<td>Temple Bar (Dublin)</td>
<td>The Digital Hub (Dublin) Lindholmen Science Park (Gothenburg)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: dimensions of creativity, their characteristics, and their locations

In order to describe the strategies and planning approaches applied, I use The Digital Hub and Lindholmen Science Park as examples. They serve as examples for a focus on innovation and show interesting similarities and differences. Emphasis is placed on the planning forms, actors, and the impacts on the city's materiality.

The Digital Hub in Dublin

The Digital Hub is the result of an initiative of the Irish government. It is therefore state-controlled. The aim is to establish a digital media cluster in Dublin. What is mainly done is providing an infrastructure for business start-ups and established companies. That shall serve two purposes: (1) fostering the digital media sector in order to enhance Ireland's efforts of becoming a knowledge society, (2) regenerating the inner-city quarter The Liberties where The Digital Hub is located in social and physical terms. On this note, The Digital Hub is used for social and infrastructural regeneration.

The objective is “to create an international centre of excellence for knowledge, innovation and creativity” (URL: www.thedigitalhub.com (7.11.2009)). According to the development plans, that implies an integrated urban development including both the transformation of the quarter's material appearance and the support of the local population. By now, the outward appearance of the quarter has not changed much. But there will be new buildings even if the room for manoeuvre is not too big: Several buildings in the area of The Digital Hub are landmarked. The interior of the buildings of the Hub differs significantly from the outside: With a modern design, it includes a café, office rooms, meeting places, and supply with broadband internet in all places. In how far The Digital Hub has positive effects on the population with its own, traditionally grown identity, still has to be awaited. Likewise, the question remains whether there will be elements of gentrification in that quarter – those traditionally have negative effects on the original inhabitants who often cannot afford to remain living in the quarters once the regeneration process has started. In that case, a migration process would start.

Lindholmen Science Park in Gothenburg

The Science Park in Gothenburg is located in Lindholmen, which is a quarter on the Northern
riverside, called Norra Älvstranden. In the place of the former dockyards, the Science Park emerges as the result of the cooperation of diverse actors such as: the city of Gothenburg, the universities of Gothenburg, especially the Technical University Chalmers, and several companies (such as Volvo, Ericsson, and Saab). Bringing together the academic, the economic, and the community level, the Science Park describes itself as “an internationally [sic!] research and development centre” (URL: www.lindholmen.se (6.11.2009)). The concept behind the idea of the park is the Triple Helix concept (cf. interview with the CEO). Such a concept implies exactly that cooperation of the academic, economic, and community sphere (e.g. Leydesdorff und Etzkowitz 1996a, 1996b). In contrast to Dublin's Digital Hub, it is neither the state nor any community organisation alone that manages the development of the Park. With one reservation: A more integrated form of development in terms of social and physical transformations is done by Älvstranden AB, a company funded and commissioned by the city of Gothenburg. Lindholmen Science Park works together with that company, meaning that the Park can solely focus on the economic and scientific development. Another difference to The Digital Hub is its effect on the city: The Science Park is used to completely convert the quarter and to create a new one with an own, new identity, Lindholmen. The existing space is therefore used in a different way (although it is still used for economic purposes). The effects on the materiality of the quarter are great because most of the area is re-build. Just as in Dublin, the future characteristics of the quarter's social structure have to be awaited. The quarter has indeed not been a living, but a working place before, but it begins to show that living on the Northern riverside can only be afforded by wealthy people. In that sense, the place might turn out to become a posh place with the effect of furthering the city's segregation.

Therefore, despite focussing on the same economy, the instruments used, the actors involved, and the effects on the built environment are different. Asked why the Lindholmen Science Park was located at that particular place, the answer revealed pragmatic reasons: The city of Gothenburg got the ground after the downturn of the shipbuilding industry. The consequence: A lot of space was available, and the need for a new economic orientation was obvious (cf. interview with two senior planners of Gothenburg's planning authority). In that sense, city planning also depends on or works with coincidences.

Table 2 summarizes the aspects described above, including the self-description of the areas, the concept of creativity applied, and potential future problems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Digital Hub, Dublin</th>
<th>Lindholmen Science Park, Gothenburg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>instruments, planning approaches</td>
<td>integrated urban regeneration</td>
<td>Triple Helix concept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6
### Characteristics, Foci, and Effects of City Development Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>actors</th>
<th>state</th>
<th>diverse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>economy in focus</td>
<td>knowledge-intensive economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>form of occupations</td>
<td>digital media, R&amp;D</td>
<td>R&amp;D, engineering, design and media occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part of creative industries</td>
<td>super-creative core (Florida)/core creative industries (Howkins)³</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concept of 'creativity'</td>
<td>(technological) innovation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-description on homepage</td>
<td>“international centre of excellence for knowledge, innovation and creativity”</td>
<td>“internationally research and development centre”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effects on city</td>
<td>regeneration of existing quarter</td>
<td>creation and shaping of new quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potential problems</td>
<td>gentrification and migration</td>
<td>growing segregation in city</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Characteristics, foci, and effects of city development strategies

The areas’ role for the cities

Broadly said, both initiatives are used as means to develop the cities. But when looking closely, they differ. In the case of Dublin, the quarter where The Digital Hub is located, The Liberties, has a long history, it is one of the oldest parts of the city. Additionally, it has a very specific tradition, being the place of the Guinness brewery before the company moved out of the city. The challenge is to integrate the cluster into an existing social and physical surrounding. By using an integrated development concept the attempt is made to integrate the inhabitants in the development project with its economic and physical outcome.

In Gothenburg, the challenge is to generate an identity for the new quarter Lindholmen with its Science Park. The former dockyards have not been “places to be” for Gothenburg’s inhabitants, they are mostly unknown to them. So it is not only a matter of attracting and establishing companies there, but also of attracting people to that particular place. It is thought to be a place for working, education, and even living, but by now it is merely a place for work and education.

In both cases, the effects on the quarters’ social structure have to be awaited. It is likely that elements of gentrification occur, resulting in a growing segregation in the whole city. As the existing segregation is a major topic to address especially in Gothenburg, this aspect is one of the future challenges and a potentially critical consequence of the developments described above.

4. Summary of the findings

The research shows that cities use the creative city concept in different ways. The actors involved and the concepts applied differ: In Dublin, an integrated plan for urban regeneration is used to enhance the

---

³ Richard Florida differentiates between the Super-creative Core and the Creative Professionals (Florida 2004), and John Howkins defines amongst others the core creative industries (Howkins 2004).
physical, social, and economic value of the quarter. In Gothenburg, the use of the Triple Helix concept leads to a cooperation of the academic, the economic, and the political sphere. For the sake of completeness, it has to be added that the development of the Lindholmen Science Park is integrated in the work of Älvstranden AB, the company commissioned by the city of Gothenburg to realize the city's development plans.

Additionally, creativity is understood in two contrasting ways: as technological innovation and as arts & culture. Depending on the understanding, the foci of the development strategies vary. In the case of 'innovation', both case studies show similarities: The focus lies on knowledge-intensive economies, to be precise: on the core creative industries.

In both cases, the actual effects on the cities' social structure cannot be predicted, but the focus on the creative industries can have negative – in terms of segregating – effects. That in turn would be a critical development for both cities, especially as anti-segregation concepts are part of their overall strategies.

In the end, two things can be noted: First, cities which use the concept of creativity for their development strategies integrate a focus on the creative industries in their strategies. Second, the concrete form of realization depends on the actors involved and the instruments applied. And altogether, the decision about the concepts and strategies used also depends on the existing spaces, meaning the built environment, that is thought to be developed.

**Bibliography**


**Websites**

Lindholmen Science Park, URL: www.lindholmen.se (6.11.2009)

The Digital Hub, URL: www.thedigitalhub.com (7.11.2009)