



Challenging Boundaries

The role of ICT in the creation of a European higher Education Area

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Title of paper: The creative knowledge economy: a key to competitiveness? Comparing the creative knowledge experience of 13 European city-regions

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Abstract

Creativity, knowledge and innovation have rapidly become like a universal mantra for European, national, regional and local policy-makers. All over Europe, cities are developing policies to attract creative, knowledge-intensive and innovative companies and institutions, as well as the people working for them. Many policy-makers seem to rely on the 'recipe for success' that people Richard Florida and Charles Landry prescribe. So many cities try either (following Florida's footsteps) to promote their cities as diverse, tolerant places with lively mixed-use neighbourhoods; or (following Landry) to develop more creative and innovative ways of managing and governing cities. So far, the focus of such creativity and innovation programmes are strongly on cities, but meanwhile various examples of city-regional approaches can also be found.

The creativity, knowledge and innovation agenda seems to fit the EU ambition to become a more competitive knowledge economy (the Lisbon agenda, or what is left of it) perfectly. Still, this is not a 'one size fits all' story: in the end, probably only few cities and regions will be truly successful as hubs of creative knowledge. Factors like historical development pathways and classic location determinants such as physical infrastructure should not be forgotten. Moreover, even those cities and regions lucky enough to win this creative knowledge race, problems like increasing social polarisation seem to increase rather than be solved.

A comparative perspective involving city-regions in various corners of Europe might give us more insight in the conditions determining the attractiveness of city-regions for creative knowledge. In October 2006, 13 research institutes started a 4-year research project comparing the conditions for a successful creative knowledge economy in 13 European city-region. The EU-funded project Accommodating Creative Knowledge aims to produce more in-depth knowledge about where creative and knowledge-intensive companies and the people working in them like to settle and why. Questionnaires, interviews, secondary data and literature study should result in policy recommendations that are more appropriate to the specific situation of the city-regions involved than the general 'how to build a creative city'- recipes, but still also relevant to European city-regions in general. In this presentation I will first briefly present the project's setup and goals, and then discuss the preliminary results. I will also pay attention to the way the intended 'added value' of our comparative project has worked out in practice so far.

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