

Social capital in fostering the creativity of a city

Assessment of the role of social networking sites in the diffusion of knowledge in a city

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Abstract - Potentially, each city can create conditions for creative actions. Assuming that city creativity is determined by its social capital, we need to consider, whether and to what extent, investment in social capital determines the value of creative capital. The aim of this paper is to assess the importance of social networking sites as a modern ICT tool in establishing relations and open networks, in knowledge diffusion and in developing creative communities.

Key words - creative cities, social capital, social networking sites

I. Introduction

The idea of creative cities has become one among possible development strategies of contemporary cities. Creativity, similarly to human capital, is a potential asset which may be used to determine social and economic development of a city. Potentially, each city can create conditions for creative actions. Assuming that city creativity is determined by its social capital, we need to consider, whether and to what extent, investment in social capital determines the value of creative capital. The objective of the study presented in this paper is to assess the importance of social networking sites as a modern ICT tool in establishing relations and open networks, in knowledge diffusion and in developing creative communities.

II. Enhancing creativity of cities

Creativity identifies creative capabilities of mind, which determine the development of new ideas and concepts leading to original solutions. The feature is characteristic of people with a lot of imagination, artistic or intellectual resourcefulness. Innovativeness, contemporary paradigm of the development, is often identified with creativity. In this case, however, despite strong link between the two, we need to remember the differences, which, when understood, help us more effectively impact the final outcome, the building of innovation capacity. Creativity is a divergent process of thinking, which generates ideas. The process is hard to measure or evaluate or even immeasurable. Innovativeness is a convergent process, focused on selecting and implementing certain new ideas

into economy. Creativity can be identified with producing ideas, while innovativeness means the ability to implement them [1]. Simplifying, we may say that creativity is a process, in which new ideas are created, while innovativeness is the process of their implementation. Creativity is the precondition for innovativeness but it is innovativeness which maximises the human potential of cities and regions [2]. In this perspective, both creativity and innovativeness have their economic value [3].

Creativity is an inherent feature of each and every human being, which serves to identify „the ability to create new things, new ways of problem-solving” [4]. The above does not mean, however, that everybody is creative. Nevertheless, the characteristics can be shaped by investing in elements which mobilise, stimulate or even provoke creativity.

Considering appropriate areas to invest in creativity, we can use the idea of a creative city.¹ Its foundations were worked out by Ch. Landry, who argued that people are the key resource of a city. Human capital replaces location, natural resources, access to markets with creativity, which becomes the key to urban development dynamics. [2] Creativity becomes a city resource. [5] The central element of the idea of a creative city is culture, which generates specific climate, highly appreciated by creative individuals. It is often decisive for the brand of a city. [6] Culture is now seen as the magic substitute for all the lost factories and warehouses, and as a device that will create a new urban image, making the city more attractive to mobile capital and mobile professional workers [7] Creativity and specific forms of expression are provoked by social and spatial relationships shaped in a creative environment of a city. “The creative milieu is like a river which runs through a stylised economic and social landscape.”[7] Properties of the local milieu so defined determine the dynamics of production and employment on the local market. The core of a creative city includes basic sectors of local culture, the importance of which is reinforced with the presence of complementary activities performed by, e.g., designers, interior decorators, artists, software engineers. Relationships accompanied by the exchange of knowledge, information and experiences among these spheres generate the dissemination of positive effects of their operations. Local labour market is another determinant of creativity of a city. Its structure and processes embrace various creative stimuli reflected in human relations within the employment system.

¹ The idea of a creative city emerged at the end of the 1980s as a sort of response to the crisis of the then cities, which had to undergo restructuring as a result of global changes in trade on Eastern markets. The idea gained in popularity in the 1990s. It was based on a basic assumption stating that each locality has got a potential much bigger than just the assets that we can see at the first glance. Each city may provide conditions for the development of creative activities. The idea assumes that each city should create the circumstances attractive enough for its inhabitants to contribute to planning, thinking and stimulating imagination. Ordinary people can do unusual and creative things so assuming that everybody could improve her/his creativity by at least 5%, economic development of the city would change dramatically. [2]

These three elements of a creative economy of a city should be discussed in a broader context of conditions identified as [8]:

- local system of traditions, norms and heritage; this is the way, in which tacit knowledge is transferred, knowledge preserved in the identity and traditions of local community, which determines the main directions of creative activities;
- the image of a city, which reflects and supports creative ambitions by a specific image preserved among internal and external recipients of the offer of a city;
- a space for leisure, an important element of city attractiveness for creative inhabitants;
- neighbourhood adjusted to the needs of a creative community, which offers appropriate accommodation and infrastructure;
- educational activities, which play an important role in supplying specialists to the local labour market;
- extended social networks, which complement interpersonal contacts at work, which enrich workers' *know-how* and other useful specialist knowledge.

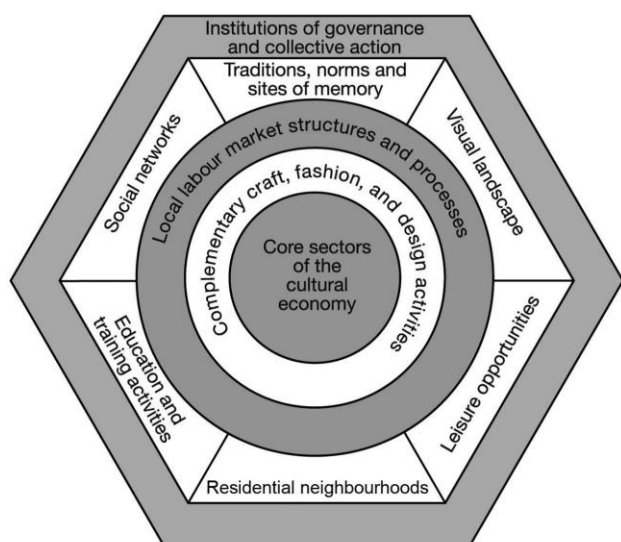


Fig. 1. Creative space of a city, source: [8]

The most outer sphere decisive for the sustainability of a creative city comprises: institutional platform of a local community, social contracts, the system of shared norms, scope of governance and public-social-private partnership [8].

Thus, we may note that social capital is of primary importance for the development of creative cities, as it directly impacts the rate and dynamics of growth in a given location. Resources of social capital directly depend on the quality of human capital and cultural capital as described by J. Coleman. Determinants of the growth dynamics of creative cities are space-specific and depend on unique properties of local entrepreneurship milieus and on the type of a creative city. There are various types of creative cities: technological-innovative, cultural-intellectual, cultural-technological and technological-organisational cities.[10] Creative cities utilise their

creative potential in a different way and at various levels [2]. They also adopt various investment strategies. Some cities pay most of the attention to improve and extend infrastructure, which will support arts, artists and their activities. Other cities directly support the potential of creative urban economy by investing mostly in three the main fields: arts and cultural heritage, media and industrial entertainment, and creative services for business. *Design*, advertising and entertainment are often perceived as drivers for innovation for the entire city economy, which may effectively shape the so called „*experience economy*”². Moreover, the creativity of a city is reinforced with investments designed to develop a strong creative class. The idea indicates that contemporary economies shift from the system based on corporations to the system focused on individuals, meaning we should strive to develop conditions attractive mainly for people, not only for business. Specific climate of a location attracts creative class, which, in turn, becomes a stimulus for the economic development of a given area. There is also a strategy of a holistic approach, which accumulates all earlier motivations for activity. In this approach, a creative city is considered an integrated system of different organisations and cultures operating around the public and private sectors and NGOs. In this context, the competitiveness of a creative city is demonstrated not only in the development of the creative sector and its specific potential but also differentiation and operational dynamics. [11] Ch. Landry stressed in his writings that networks are indispensable to develop a system capable of reflexive learning and generating innovation. However, it is also remarkable that many traditional networks do not importantly contribute to the development of urban creativity as they do not meet the requirements of contemporary urban communities.³ They are used only for the communication among narrow groups of inhabitants, often closed to the external world. In this context R. Florida very categorically concluded that the theory of „social capital” should be replaced with the theory of a „creative capital” – derivative of the theory of „human capital”. He argued that strong interpersonal relations weaken the ability of a local community to internationalise, that they pose barrier to the newcomers, to mobile, creative individuals. Locations with human capital representing weak ties [12]⁴ are more friendly to newcomers and, as such, more effectively determine innovation processes.[13] However, it is hard to uncritically accept this viewpoint, especially in the light of such a narrow definition of social capital adopted by

²*Experience economy* – according to the theory, physical value of a product depends not on a price but on experience resulting from its use. The concept assumes that experience is currently a very important product and that to ensure the attractiveness of an offered product or service we need to expand experiences connected with it. For more see: [9]

³ Communities which represent high mobility, cultural, ethnic, religious diversity, different lifestyles.

⁴ The notion of the „strength of weak ties” by M. Granovetter is considered the feature of a contemporary society. The author is of the opinion that unsustainable forms of association and networks of superficial acquaintances are more useful to people than long-lasting ties.

the author. Also observations of various social and economic phenomena indicating that the existence of ties, trust and active participation in networks of relations open to extra-local environment is a precondition for maintaining the competitiveness of creative cities.[14] At present these networks are often virtual (e.g., virtual communities, discussion platforms, social networks) and they lead to informal institutional partnerships between public, private and social institutions. The networks often connect people, who are renowned and respected experts in their respective communities but who do not know one another.[14] Such virtual encounters are not biased with any hierarchy, subordination, not restricted with official, formal behaviour. They are inspiring and motivating also for usually withdrawn and introvert individuals, closed to social relations with a considerable creative potential. It is because of the intimacy they may retain when communicating with others through tools which do not require face to face contacts.

III. Integration and causative role of social capital in urban space

Comprehensive attempts of explaining economic growth also call for paying particular attention to social phenomena as any human activity is embedded in a concrete territory, environment, community with its own culture, norms and values that impact the economy. Social capital, by definition, integrates subjects, activities and actions. It improves the productivity of all resources used for development. It also allows to discount advantages as a result of improved efficiency of actions, of operating in a network covering a concrete territory. Interactivity, mutuality of actions among involved subjects, releases strong synergy effects, such as collective learning by using the so called tacit knowledge and human capital, which directly translates into the entrepreneurship of regional community.[15], [16], [17]

Already P. Bourdieu when defining social capital pointed to the ability to combine actual and potential resources, which is possible because of mutual relations among the participants of a given network. Network is important as it gives individuals access to the resources of other participants. Membership in a network, as points P. Bourdieu, creates the feeling of a „collectively owned capital”. While the vision of achieving benefits creates social ties and makes individuals adopt collective, solidarity-based types of behaviour. The mere participation in a network lets people act in a community, creating the sense of approval.[18] Interestingly, social capital is a series of different collections, where the existence of common social structures facilitates the activities of individuals and organisations. [19]

Social capital is also expressed in trust, which, on the one hand, is a cultural norm but, on the other hand, is a primary characteristics of exchanges between different subjects.[20] Risk socialisation and higher predictability of partners' behaviour importantly determine economic collaboration. In other words, it also enables the development of clusters, which, according to Ch. Landry, is extremely important as „Clusters of talents, skills and

infrastructure provide the basis for „creative economy” and a creative community”. [14] The author also stresses that one of the most important assets of a creative city is the „leadership”, which determines the growth potential of a city. It is a common characteristics of all creative cities that there are visionaries, able to select clearly precise development directions. Their activities are effective when they operate in a political culture capable to effectively deliver identified goals and operate surrounded by creative organisations. Such institutional efficiency requires social trust, advanced forms of cooperation and partnership. Thus we are speaking of social capital which is the driving force in cities. [21]

IV. Using ICT to strengthen social capital for the benefit of a creative city

All the processes, phenomena and activities, which impact a creative city are embedded in the circumstances of information economy and society. Their primary distinguishing factor are Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which modify the way individuals, organisations and communities operate.

In the context of our considerations, we studied the activities of NGOs on social networking sites. The latter were listed as tools to build up informal cooperation networks, valuable from the point of view of investing in the development of a creative city. The objective of the study was to generally assess the importance of social networking sites for the diffusion of knowledge and for building networks of contacts and collaboration. The study included NGOs operating in selected cities in the Lodz Metropolitan Area (LMA).

Since a creative city needs creative organisations, open to cooperation we first verified their inclinations to be active in social networks. That was the starting point for the evaluation of the use of ICT tools in enhancing communication, cooperation, diffusion of knowledge, and building relationships. We studied NGOs⁵ in all towns and cities of the Lodz sub-region with the exception of Lodz. Based on the *quasi*-participant observation and the *desk research* method, in the early stages of the study the inclination was assessed as low (out of 564 studied NGOs in 11 cities of the LMA only 88 were found on Facebook.com – the most popular social networking site). The selection of respondents for in-depth personal interviews was targeted. We included into our study organisations, which within the latest 6 months were active on the site in question, which were not a branch of an organisation based in another city and delivered tasks in various areas of particular importance for social and economic development of a unit. Finally, 11 NGOs qualified to the second stage representing seven cities. Unfortunately also among them the social networking sites were little popular (only 2 organisations declared using other social networking services, such as - Twitter and NK.pl). On the other hand, the analysis of frequency

⁵ List of NGOs is drafted based on the NGO database available on the official site www.ngo.pl (accessed in July 2012)

of using the sites showed that a clear majority of the tested population (73%) log on the site at least once a day. Relatively low interest in the use of other sites as a friendly environment for the exchange of knowledge, information and building relations may result from low awareness of possibilities, which they create.

By analysing the convictions which guided individual NGOs when they signed up to a particular service (Fig. 2), priority was given to their universality, meaning they are universally used by the society and popularity (meaning it is trendy to be active in a network, which improves organisation's image). Other answers focused around the global scope of the service, easy access in any place and time and the promotion of one's operations. Although the answers did not unambiguously draw attention to the possibility of sharing information, knowledge or establishing cooperation, we may conclude that universal presence of such services in the community and in other organisations may indirectly reflect the subconscious wish to establish contacts with the biggest number of units. On top of that, to complement this part of the analysis with current objectives for which a social networking service is used (after at least a year of using it), we can see a clear re-evaluation.

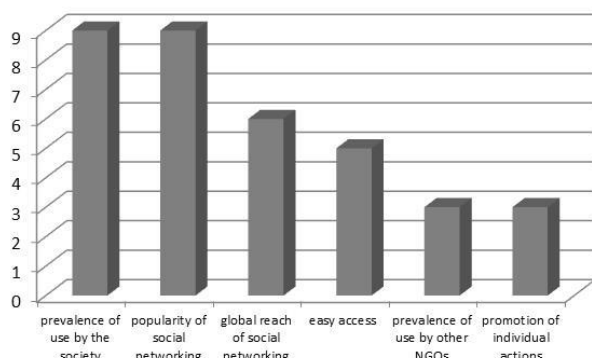


Fig. 2 Reasons for activity on social networking sites

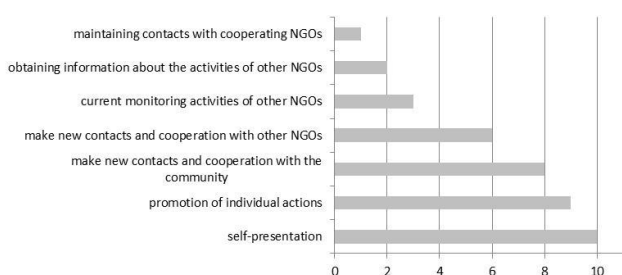


Fig. 3 Objectives for the activity on social networking sites

Self-presentation and promotion of one's individual actions still remain at the top of the list, however, with acquiring better perspective when it comes to the social networking site, its specificity, services and possibilities, more and more organisations pay attention to communication and opportunity to collaborate with the community (8 respondents) and with other NGOs (6 out of 11 NGOs in the study).

Hence, there are some positive tendencies and people have become aware what possibilities open up to them in

social networks with respect to developing social relations (fostering social capital). They encourage to further analyse the scope and nature of ties and cooperation determined by one's activity on the site. All NGOs declare that by using social networking they managed to establish new contacts (they shared information, events, experiences, etc.) and launched cooperation (partnership in delivering common activities, involvement in joint undertakings, voluntary work, etc.) with other organisations and units (in particular with local community – 11 NGOs).

Other NGOs and local authorities ranked second in this classification. Collected data provide evidence for bigger tendency among analysed NGOs to undertake joint actions rather than to simply share information.

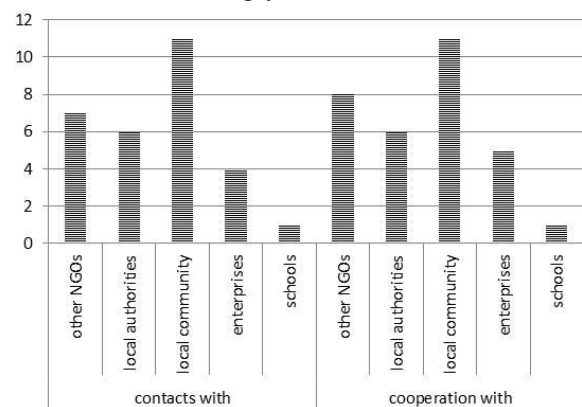


Fig. 4. Relations and cooperation resulting from the activity on social networking sites

The above is very positive in the context of shaping social capital. Joint involvement in actions offers higher probability and chances to mobilise individual creativity, generating their individual value while delivering a common goal.

Importantly enough, people the most engaged in collaboration with NGOs are youngsters, students, energetic and resourceful individuals being the core of creative class, willing to act and share their knowledge. Politicians ranked second, which is also positive if we bear in mind that a creative city needs leadership open to partnerships and to broad collaboration in advanced forms. Relations established through social networking sites are either long-term or incidental (on a single occasion within a concrete project). Theoretically, such a distribution may be positive. On the one hand, the truth is that strong internal ties may create obstacles to building up individual creativity as they are open to the external world. On the other hand, they may generate a more intense development of individuals clustered in a network based on strong ties, which are much more willing to exchange resources. Speaking of short-term, occasional relations it is argued that weak ties are more important for developing broad collaboration and knowledge diffusion as parties to them are more open to the external world. The nature of relations depends, among the others, on the unit, with which ties are established. With respect to representatives of the local community, vast majority of NGOs (8 respondents) declared long-term collaboration

(more than 6 months). Respondents highlighted regular involvement of the community in joint actions, voluntary work, promotion and information campaigns. Occasional collaboration, connected with the delivery of a concrete project is the most typical for activities undertaken in agreement with other NGOs (answer selected by 4 respondents).

Although tools analysed in the study (social networking sites) are non-spatial by their nature and are not „bound” with one territory, the analysis of the location of parties who contact each other the most often shows something different. The issue of getting rid of geographical boundaries, which determine the scope of cooperation is often mentioned as the biggest benefit and success of using ICT. The possibility of unlimited, global collaboration and access to knowledge is the most desirable outcome of the development of ICT tools. They enable the creation of a milieu open to the external environment, where free movement of resources is facilitated, especially intangible ones: knowledge, ideas, information. They generate milieus open to the external world. However, the analysis of collected research data shows that the units that the most often communicate within social networks are units based in the same location. As many as 63% of interviewed organisations stated that most of their „acquaintances” on social networking site come from the same town. The conclusion is that information, knowledge and cooperation networks established as a result of communication and activities in a social network determine the value of local social capital. It shows that social networks can equally well and successfully generate positive outcomes and participate in the diffusion of knowledge within a city (studies territorial unit). Thus, although processes that we analysed are virtual, they are clearly embedded in a given territory, local community and they may impact the real functioning of a city. Benefits may be even greater if relations initiated within a social network are willingly and more often transferred into the real world. For the majority of respondents that was the real course of events. We have not identified any specific conditions which determine such a transfer and which surely must be there but 9 out of 11 NGOs confirmed the transfer of activities into the real world. One organisation rejected the thesis and one observed a reverse tendency, that real-world activities and collaboration are transferred to the virtual world. Then a social network becomes a tool that maintains already existing cooperation and established contacts. Almost 60% of respondents, who confirmed the transfer of contacts established in the network to the real world, concluded that physical engagement is usually cyclical (organisations from time to time get engaged in selected projects).

One important question remains to be answered: what are these social network-based contacts and relations about? Can we distinguish concrete types of knowledge, which may be, to a smaller or bigger extent, transferred through the networking service to easily reach the participants of developed network of contacts and collaboration?

In accordance with functional division of knowledge, the type of knowledge the most frequently exchanged included basic facts about what other entities in the

network do (although the possibility to monitor and control the activities of other NGOs or acquiring updated data about activities of other NGOs were not the most often selected as the main goal of being in the network).

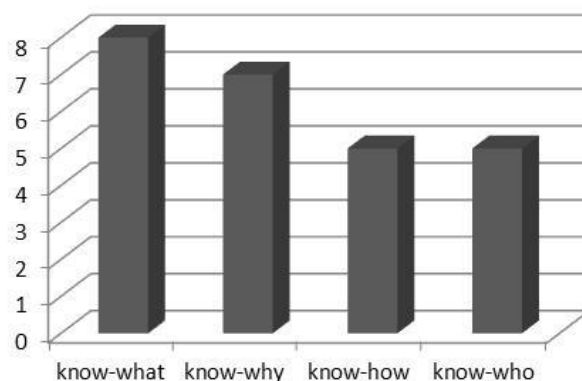


Fig. 5 Types of transferred knowledge

It was followed by knowledge concerning certain rules in a given community. Social networking sites are the least important for the diffusion of expert knowledge and knowledge on relations. While low share of the first one is due to the general specificity (knowledge accumulated by experts, of limited public access), small share of know-who type of knowledge in the transfer is rather worrying. The mere being in the network should facilitate access to information about who has got knowledge useful for the members of the network.

Based on the studies we may suggest some general conclusions in the context of their importance for the development of a creative city. Although social networks are not common tools for NGOs to establish relations and launch cooperation they offer a very big potential. They also mobilise to exchange knowledge and to collaborate (also in real life). The above concerns mostly young people from the same town, which is important for the development of specific resources.

Conclusion

A creative city is a specific development concept, which does not exist by itself but requires a well thought activities, which may be delivered only in a supportive environment. In a knowledge-based economy the environment often takes a new dimension, virtual one. By effective use of this channel, we may influence urban development processes. An opportunity is offered by social networking sites. They are an important tool for the creation of collaboration networks open to the diffusion of knowledge, which operate virtually but also embedded in local specificity of the territory. They importantly shape a creative milieu. In the analysed example we can see that, on the one hand, the networks are still little used to impact urban economies and their stakeholders. On the other hand, the results show huge potential of virtual space, which directly affects the real life of inhabitants.

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