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CREATIVE SPACES

The reuse of empty urban spaces by the creative industry

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KEYWORDS
Geography, urban design, forms of the territory, forms of the city.

ABSTRACT

The paper shows the result of a research project aimed to identifying the potential of selected quarters in Bratislava and possible reuse of their empty spaces by the creative industry thus generating creative urban clusters. The creative industry, often concentrated in the creative clusters, has grown in importance over the past decades not only from a cultural and social point of view, but also as a concept of economic efficiency of the city or region. To illustrate the variety of approaches to the reactivation of the empty spaces, the paper introduces also few other case studies of creative clusters in the European cities. One of the main impulses for this research was the current situation in Bratislava where is a great potential of the creative industry on one side and lacking spaces for its further development on the other side.

INTRODUCTION

The empty spaces create a constant and inevitable part of the urban development processes. They are the results of the political, social, cultural or economic changes in the society or are related to the changes in industry or production. Nowadays cities, despite the ever-increasing urbanisation and densification tendency, have a large number of unused or underutilized spaces. Therefore, naturally, the need for their use is discussed, especially as a space for supplementing the absent functions in a particular neighbourhood, quarter, or on a whole-city to extra-urban scale. On the other hand, the cities are the triggers of cultural and artistic processes and events that make them attractive in the competition among cities and also promote local and regional development. The creative industry, often concentrated in the creative clusters, has grown in importance over the past decade. By its very nature, it appears to be a potential key player in searching for the solution to the problem of empty urban spaces and areas with the possibility of a positive contribution to the urban development.

CREATIVE INDUSTRY, CREATIVE CLUSTERS AND CREATIVE CITIES

Theoretical background

There are several official definitions of the creative industry. But the most frequently cited definition is the one quoted by DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport): "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS 2001). There are also several categorisations of creative industries. For the purpose of this research, categories defined in the document Správa o stave a potenciáli kreatívneho priemyslu na Slovensku (Jurová et al. 2013) were used.

The cultural and creative industries require a critical mass of citizens, educational institutions, a market that creates cultural and creative products and services. For this reason, the creative industry is characterised by a high spatial concentration in a certain location, especially in cities and metropolitan areas (Lazzeretti et al. 2011). As a result of spatial concentration, creative clusters (Pratt 2004) or, in other words, creative neighbourhoods arise (Evans 2009).

Various studies point to the different ways in which the geographical concentration of creative businesses and professionals creates externalities (a social, economic, cultural and spatial capital) that improve the creative potential of the places where they are located. A distinctive feature of the creative industry is that it is more prosperous in areas with a strong local identity and openness to the public. Location is therefore particularly important for the creative economics.

One of the benefits of clustering creative industries which is difficult to quantify is the expansion of knowledge. Frontier Economics uses the term "network spillovers" (Frontier Economics 2007), where the presence of a group of companies at a particular location (especially visual arts, performance, audio-visual production, music and the design) can offer mutual stimulation of ideas and activities, thereby making the site more attractive to other businesses.

In general, it is proven that the cultural level of the city has a major impact on its competitiveness and the quality of its inhabitants' lives. Economic studies show that for decades spending on culture in the local economy has had a multiplier effect on the incomes and employment of the urban population (Myerscouch 1996). Richard Florida, in his book The Rise of the Creative Class (2002), argues in favour of investing in the culture and the creative industry, because they make cities attractive to the "creative class". A high proportion of the creative class has an impact on the quality of life in the city, which is one of the factors influencing people's decision-making on choice of the locality to work and live in (Rehák 2014).

The development of creative industries in the city is often accompanied by the reclamation of the public space either for the purpose of creating a creative neighbourhood, artistic interventions, organising festivals, cultural events, etc. or as their positive result. The properties of the creative industry are important for shaping the city's identity and supporting its sustainable development. These are the features that distinguish creative industries from other business and industrial sectors, as they often deal with perception of reality, helping to create specific experiences. The potential of the creative industry to transform and shape its surroundings is also useful in peripheral and suburban areas that suffer from a lack of identity and cultural life.

The question of whether spontaneous or planned approach to forming creative clusters is better stirs debate. Historically, creative clusters have developed informally in places where artists could find a cheap space to set up studios (Butt 2008). In the last decade, the clusters have shifted from spontaneous and organic evolution to a planned process, mostly driven by political agendas for economic and cultural prosperity, especially after Florida's The Rise of the Creative Class was published in 2002. However, in many of these "planned creative" quarters, has nothing creative been produced and the result is only an increase of the local property prices (Porter & Barber 2007). Therefore, Butt claims that " manufacturing a successful creative sector from scratch is an almost impossible process - creativity is not generated, it emerges” (Butt 2008). When selecting the localities for the purpose of this research, it was taken into account whether there is a vibrant cultural and creative base with the potential or the ambition of its further development.

Investing in the technical infrastructure also involves the transformation of empty and unused spaces. In addition to the recovery of the existing built environment and the use of the genius loci, transformation also acts as a catalyst for new social interactions in the locality and actively engages the citizens in discovering and building their own environment.

Creative industry in Slovakia

The relationship to the industrial heritage in Central and Eastern Europe is rather ambiguous. In the wave of the privatisation in the 1990s, the state, cities and institutions “got rid of” a large portion of real estate. Thus, the cities have lost the opportunity to regulate their development and to provide space to communities, marginalised population groups, non-profit and cultural activities. The concept of revitalisation of industrial zones and buildings in post-social Europe also lacked the historical and social context and public interest that were often seen in Western Europe. However, the interest in the reuse of industrial buildings, has come to Central and Eastern Europe through an example of Western conversions. (Polyák 2016)

As elsewhere in the world, the creative industries are made up of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or micro-enterprises and self-employed creatives. More than 40% of all creative and cultural industries in Slovakia are based in Bratislava (Jurová et al. 2013). Despite their potential for regional development, they often struggle with problems related to the poor physical infrastructure. Modern cultural and business infrastructure has a significant impact on the regeneration of cities and the development of regions as it often uses and revitalises non-functional buildings or post-industrial areas.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the study of literature and local context, three localities in Bratislava with the potential of creating urban creative clusters were identified (the streets Panenská, Štefánikova, Šancová and their surroundings). Their selection was subsequently verified by the results of an online questionnaire filled in by 50 respondents. People working in the creative industry in Bratislava, as well as in creative clusters in Dresden, Lisbon and Vienna, that are part of the case studies within this research, were addressed. Based on questionnaires, interviews, economic indicators, spatial analysis and real estate analysis, the potential and possibilities of these sites to become creative clusters were evaluated.

Part of the project was also an analysis of one local and five foreign case studies representing different models of the conversions of unused spaces into functional creative clusters. For the purpose of this research, following existing creative clusters were selected: Nová Cvernovka (Bratislava), Das Packhaus (Vienna), Zentralwek (Dresden), Spinnerei (Leipzig), Cable Factory / Kaapeli (Helsinki) and LX Factory (Lisbon). The choice was made with an emphasis on the different size of the sites and spaces, the historical context, the location within the city, the duration, the organisational structure and the economic model. Some indicators were then compared with above mentioned research localities.

CASE STUDIES

Although some creative clusters are apparently similar in their focus and activities, their starting concepts vary. One of the motives was vacancy as an unused resource (Das Packhaus), another finding a space for artistic activities (LX Factory), joining housing with artistic activities (Zentralwerk) or their combination (Spinnerei, Nová Cvernovka). However, In the process of their existence various functions are mixed together, and the basic concept can be expanded thanks to the flexibility of the organisational structure according to its own needs or on the basis of an external demand. All the case studies have, in addition to studios and offices, a large capacity spaces for public events also with the possibility to be rented out.

The project financing can be handled in a number of ways, which also depend on the concept of the project itself, namely its direction towards the public and cooperation with the commercial sector. The financial model is also affected by the form of ownership and organisation. The creative clusters among the case studies can be divided into two groups - those owned by the creative cluster administrator (organisation, firm, NGO) and those rented by the administrator from its owners for a fixed term. Within these groups, there are still specific nuances when the real estate purchase was carried out by a foundation, and the reconstruction was co-financed by public funds (Zentralwerk) or the “Zwischennutzung” form with a short-term lease, as is the case of Das Packhaus.

The advantage of creative clusters is their bipolar organisational and legal structure, which allows them to apply for public resources (grants, subsidies), to raise the money in crowdfunding campaigns and at the same time to support their income through profitable activities (services, events, etc.). The operational project expenses, which often involve a payment for a reconstruction, is obtained mainly from rentals. Some projects are also partially commercially focused, providing a wider range of services and events to visitors outside of the cluster (e.g. LX Factory), or their funding is supported by larger companies (e.g. Spinnerei), so that they can stabilise their revenue or provide lower rents for smaller and less profitable projects.

The distance from the city centre does not play a big role in the success story of the creative cluster, the more important factor is a good transport connection and the accessibility of the locality by the public transport system. Likewise, the initial condition of the neighbourhood may not play an important role too. On the contrary, the creative clusters often try to solve problems such as the state of the environment (the social and environmental impact of the neighbourhood), to contribute to its revitalisation, while providing better financial, organisational and social conditions for artists and start-ups.

The largest representation in the clusters among the creative industries sectors have visual arts and antiques, followed by design, creative industries in the digital environment and architecture.

THE RESEARCHED LOCALITIES

Two of the three selected sites are located close the historical city centre of Bratislava (Panenská and Štefánikova Street) and one (Šancová Street) on the border of a wider city centre connected to two important transport hubs. All of them are well connected to the public transport system. They are located in the mixed urban zones with housing, civic amenities and office buildings. There are historic buildings, empty, unused buildings and spaces, and active cultural and social life takes place directly in the localities or in their wider neighbourhood. The Panenská Street is considered as a multicultural and multi-ethnic neighbourhood. There are many religious organisations, educational or research institutions, and foreign institutes in the area. However, there are several important cultural centres, enterprises, creative industry organisations and several non-profit organisations. Their activities are intertwined and often relate to the development of their environment and local communities.

ANALYSIS

When analysing the creative potential of the streets Panenská, Štefánikova and Šancová, several tools were used - the indicator walkability index, the quality of life statistics, a questionnaire and a field survey.

Walkability index

The Walkability Index is a quantitative tool used to measure the pedestrian environment within a geographic area. It includes four components: land use mix, residential density, retail density, and intersection density. Higher scores represent more walkable areas and indicate better quality of life.

The researched localities as well as almost all case studies have a walkability index greater than or equal to 80%, which means that most daily errands can be accomplished on foot (see figure 1). An exception is only Nová Cvernovka, whose 30% value refers to the dependence of residents on cars or public transport. For the index evaluation, the distance from the city centre does not play any role, as most case studies are located more than 4 kilometres from the centre. On the other side the neighbourhood is very important. Index values for all researched streets are higher than 90%, which means that daily errands do not require a car.

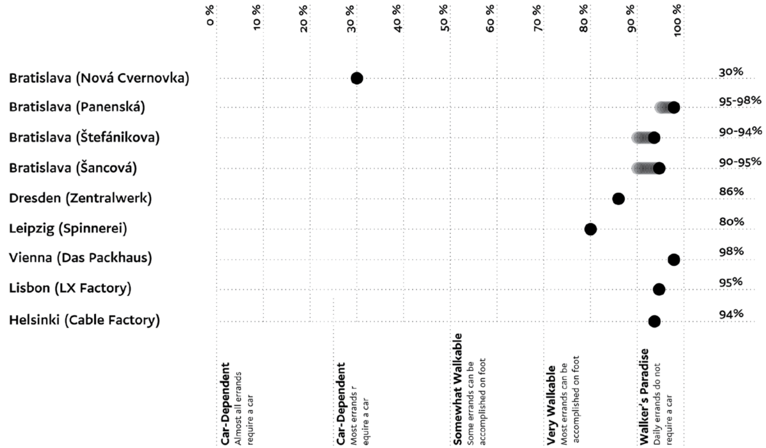
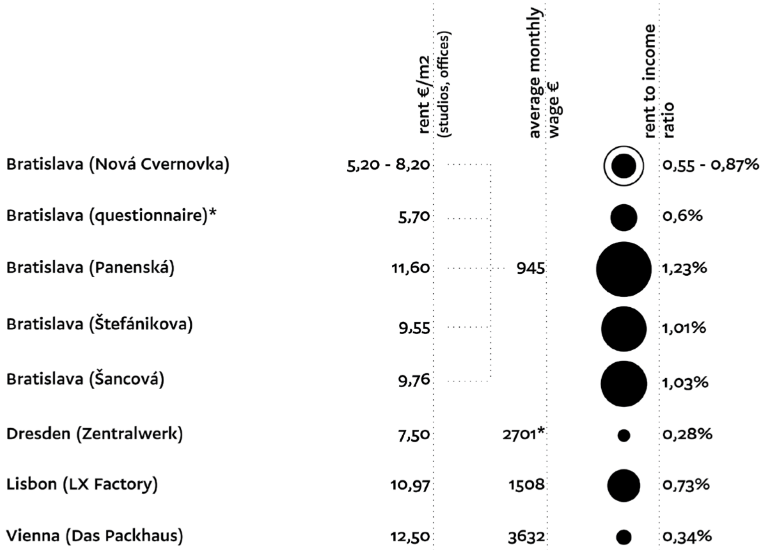


Figure 1: Walkability Index _according to walk score (www.walkscore.com, June 2017).

The problem, however, remains commuting to clients, suppliers and collaborators and vice versa. The survey showed that the availability of public transport is very important for the creatives, but parking is also considered as an important feature of the locality, and the creative industry sector does not play a significant role in this preference. As all the researched sites are located close to the city centre or in an area with limited parking possibilities, the solution could be a car-sharing, which would reduce the number of needed parking spaces.

Real estate prices

Considering that young artists do not create a high-income group, the rent amount is a relatively important factor for creation, development and sustainability of the creative cluster. A comparison of the average monthly wage and rent ratios in individual case studies (see figure 2) showed that it ranges from 0.28% to 0.87%. Here the problem arises, because in the researched localities the rent to income ratio values rise above 1%.



* 25 respondents working in the creative industry in Bratislava
** entry for the federal state Sachsen (national German average represents the average monthly wage in the amount 3911 €)

Figure 2: Comparison of the average monthly wage and rent ratios.

The disadvantage of this finding is also supported by the fact that property price to income ratio (see figure 3) in Bratislava is higher than in Dresden, Leipzig or Helsinki, and despite the fact that in Vienna and Lisbon the ratio is even higher, they can provide their creatives with the spaces for lower rents than Bratislava does. There are several solutions here. One of them is to exploit the potential of city centre proximity and the development of activities towards the public, thereby increasing the income from those activities, which could result in the decrease of the rents. The second solution is to rent properties belonging to the city municipality, that could within its cultural and creative development strategy provide these spaces to creatives for lower than commercial rent. The third option is an agreement on the form of the “Zwischennutzung” (temporary use) with the owners of the unused real estates. There are several such properties in the researched locations.

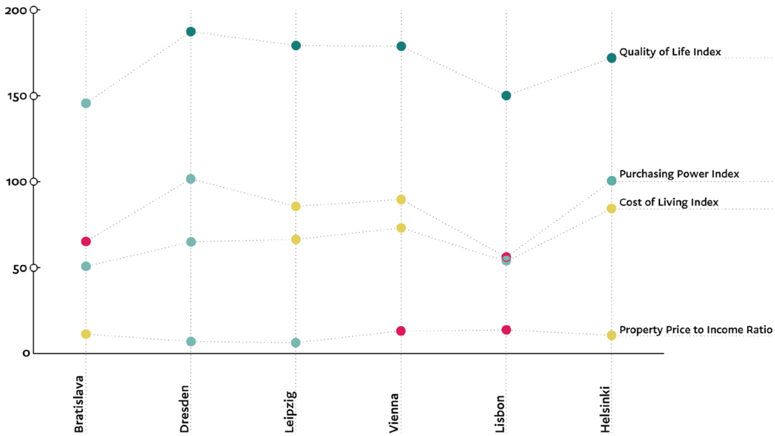


Figure 3: Quality of Life Index _according to Numbeo (www.numbeo.com, June 2017).

In spite of these possibilities, the location close the centre seems to be quite disadvantageous in terms of the rental amounts, although 71% of respondents in the questionnaire considered proximity to the city centre as important and 19% as very important. The fact that the case studies are relatively far from the centre obviously makes sense. The city periphery offers lower rents and thus bigger freedom in the activities of individuals as well as the cluster as a whole.

Quality of Life Index

As in the case of the property price to income ratio, Bratislava is behind other cities also in other indicators. It is also significant in the quality of life index values (see figure 3), where, despite the decent state, Bratislava ranked among the cities with the researched case studies in the last place. This is where the question arises whether the development of the creative industry could also partly help to improve the quality of life in this city.

Questionnaire

Although the proximity of services such as restaurants, cafes, shops, leisure activities and sports are more or less a general preference, important for the possible locality of the creative cluster may be how often these services are used by the creatives (see figure 4). Similarly, the apparent frequency of attending events in the neighbourhood supports Florida's idea of a "bohemian creative class" (Florida 2002).

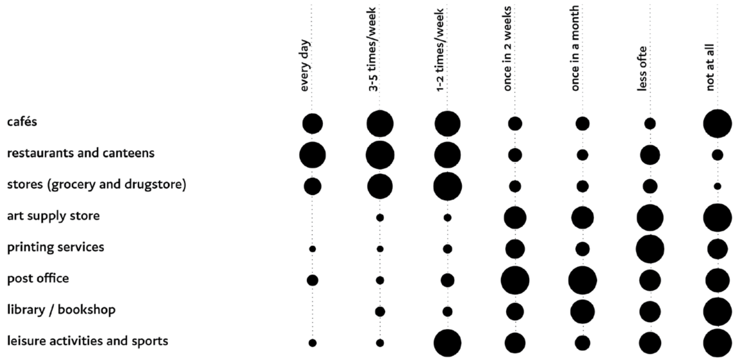


Figure 4: Frequency of using services and amenities by the creatives (survey).

The questionnaire showed the importance of a creative environment, meaning people working in the creative industry. The reason for this are also the frequent and intense collaborations between the different sectors of the creative industry (see figure 5). The importance of the spatial concentration of the subjects working in the creative industry is also proven by importance of the proximity to suppliers and collaborating companies.

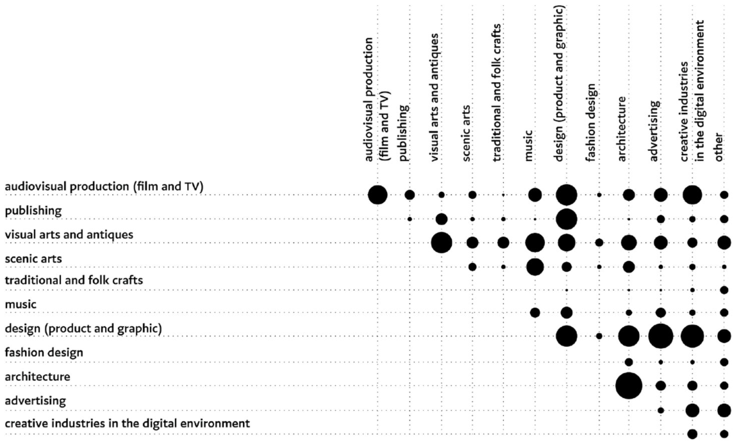


Figure 5: Collaborations between the creative industry sectors (survey).

The most collaborations between the creative industry sectors establishes design (see figure 5). Frequent collaborations are also seen by visual art, architecture, advertising, or creative industries in the digital environment. Within the same industry, architecture is the most collaborative sector.

CONCLUSION

In the researched localities of Panenská, Štefánikova and Šancová Street there are several companies, initiatives and activities that create the basis for the development of a potential creative cluster on the urban level. In addition, there are other entities, operations, and organisations in all three locations that create a supportive structure for the creative industry and have already actively cooperated with this sector.

The sites offer plenty of space, physical infrastructure, amenities, have a strong genius loci and active cultural and social life. Their problem, however, is the relatively high rents. The same emphasis on all categories without looking for priorities (such as proximity to the city centre and the need for parking at the same time) shown in the survey is a rather challenging task. This task becomes even more challenging, if these requirements should meet with the adequate rents, which are to be found rather in the peripheral urban areas with former industrial sites suitable for conversion for a creative or cultural use. In other respects, the researched localities meet the needs of the creatives resulting from the survey and it can be argued that they have the potential to become creative urban clusters.

The research project was supported using public funding by Slovak Arts Council.

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