

# The Creative Ring

Simon Delaere<sup>1</sup>, Ingrid Willems<sup>2</sup>, Valérie-Anne Bleyen<sup>1</sup>, Adriënnne Heynen<sup>3</sup>, Koen Snoeckx<sup>4</sup>, Annemie Detremerie<sup>5</sup> & Alain Heureux<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>IMEC-SMIT, Brussels, Belgium; <sup>2</sup>We Connect Data, Ghent, Belgium; <sup>3</sup>Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; <sup>4</sup>Baltan Laboratories, Eindhoven, The Netherlands; <sup>5</sup>City of Gent, Belgium; <sup>6</sup>YourOwnLab, Brussels, Belgium

**Abstract:** This paper briefly introduces and contextualises the Creative Ring, a European-wide, technology-supported experimental ecosystem for creative talents, professionals and stakeholders working in and with the Creative Industries. It first outlines the importance of the Cultural and Creative Industries for the European economy on the whole, and then demonstrates the importance of linked, local creative ecosystems. It then introduces the Creative Ring, explaining its mission and the value for those who engage in it. The paper also gives a brief history of the initiative, the current opportunities for interaction, and the close relationship to NEM.

**Keywords:** Creative Industries; cluster; ecosystem

## 1 INTRODUCTION

A new generation of entrepreneurs and creative individuals is emerging in our cities. Gathered in a diverse set of urban “tribes” (wikipedians, digital artists, local media producers, fablabbers, arduins, new designers...) they are creating new jobs and opportunities in difficult times. They do this not only by developing and improving products and services on their own but also enriching and revitalising existing economic activities. The digital transition of societies, which is rapidly taking place at a global level, provides these communities with opportunities that can boost this movement even more.

These informal innovative communities are also increasingly being discovered by scientific and cultural institutions such as universities, cultural centres, and also by corporations and local governments that wish to understand and engage with these new forms for innovation.

The Creative Ring facilitates these engagements, by enabling a European-wide, technology-supported experimental ecosystem for creative talents, professionals and stakeholders working in and with the Creative Industries.

This paper briefly will introduce and contextualise the Creative Ring. It first outlines the importance of the Cultural and Creative Industries for the European economy on the whole, and then demonstrates the importance of linked, local creative ecosystems. It then introduces the Creative Ring, explaining its mission and the value for those who engage in it. The paper also gives a brief history of the initiative, the current opportunities for interaction, and the close relationship to NEM.

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Setting the Scene: Cultural and Creative Industries

The Cultural and Creative Industries have steadily acquired relevance in recent years for the competitiveness of the European economy as a whole. CCI is already a leading sector for economic growth and job creation, even when their full potential is far from reached. The CCI boast EUR 558 billion in value added to GDP (4.4% of total EU GDP) and hold 8.3 million full time equivalent jobs (3.8% of total EU workforce).

The role of cultural and creative spillovers as cross-sectoral innovation motors is widely acknowledged as a stimulant in society and the wider economy.

Moreover digital transformation enables a huge new range of opportunities as well as (business model) disruption and might become a pivotal point for the Creative and Cultural Industries to release its untapped potential for boosting economic growth and job creation.

The CCI’s potential as a driver of growth and innovation is provided by the wide diversity of its stakeholders, spanning from the cultural freelance, creative entrepreneurs to public companies or institutions such as libraries or museums.

### 2.2 Local Creative Ecosystems

There is a well-established body of literature demonstrating the positive role of creative hubs. At local level, CCS can have a positive impact on local economic development and on social cohesion [1], and play a significant role in the regeneration of a city, and in urban and regional developments.[2] Thus, regions with high concentrations of creative and cultural industries have Europe’s highest prosperity levels. [3] Creative industries play an important, positive role in the wealth of a region. [4] Overall, strong regions in Creative Industries are substantially richer.

Creative clusters have a beneficial influence on the wealth of a region. For instance, creative clusters have been proved an influential factor for explaining wealth differences in Europe. [4] In addition, creative clusters can have a huge impact on regional development and competitiveness. The cultural sector has become an important soft location factor and a key factor for increasing local and regional attractiveness. Especially, the cultural sector can have a huge impact on tourism while Europe is the most visited destination in the world. [5]

The main reason for a positive impact of creative clusters is that locating related actors in a regional agglomeration brings advantages for cluster members. This includes a supply of specific skills and tacit knowledge; a sufficiently large level of demand to warrant specialisation; access to local expertise (for a full list, see [7]) This, in turn, has led to an increasing number of public authorities at regional, national and international levels developing policies to nurture the development of CCS.

Today, around 80 European regions have identified CCS amongst their smart specialisation priorities.

However it is crucial to go beyond the hub in order to be a successful hub, i.e. external linkages to other hubs are necessary. Currently, particularly in the European Union, hubs are fostering open collaboration between local artists and creative industries with universities, local authorities and ICT companies in each city and region. But they remain isolated from their counterparts in other cities. [6]

Why are open clusters the successful ones? Going beyond a cluster's boundaries notably allows to search for low cost inputs, or highly specialised skills not available locally; to reap the benefits of economies of scale and to integrate more information about markets and technologies (see full list in [7]). Conversely, without these external links and exchanges, the cluster is likely to stagnate.

It is important for clustering activities to put focus on second tier cities in Europe, i.e. those cities outside the capital whose economic and social performance is sufficiently important to affect the potential performance of the national economy. This does not imply that they are less important than the capital cities, or that they are somehow "second class". It certainly does not mean that they are second class. Many of these cities are very large regional capitals, sometimes even are the second largest city of the country with huge national significance – for example Tampere, Barcelona, Munich and Lyon to name a few. But many are much smaller. According to ESPON, a study conducted in 2013, Europe counts 124 second tier cities that constitute almost 80% of Europe's metropolitan urban population. [8]

### 2.3 Creative individuals, teams and SMEs

The Rise of the Creative Class [9] makes a compelling argument for a new way to define the kind of people that increasingly are associated with growing knowledge-based economies.

In reality however "creative professionals" often refers to those companies and entrepreneurs that take their principal competitive advantage from a distinctive appearance, form, content, or sound that they embed or embody in their products or services and those that sell, supply, or contribute to those same products and services.

Unfortunately, these creative enterprises are rarely aggregated into a cluster because so many operate as micro-enterprises and as freelancers and therefore are "unnoticed" and under-represented. Additionally 19.1% of the workforce of Creative Industries is aged under 30, i.e. the creative and cultural industries employ on average younger people than any other sector.

The creative sector is characterised by the predominance of non-standard forms of employment. Careers in the sector develop on a project basis, which has enormous implications in terms of income, skills development, working time organisation, and the employment statuses adopted. These specific features face other broader issues like questions

regarding entrepreneurship, financing, and appropriate social security cover for people who work on a short-term contract basis.

## 3 THE CREATIVE RING

The Creative Ring aims to provide creative individuals, teams and SMEs access to cross-sectoral, cross-country projects, to connect them to trusted parties in connected ecosystems. It is specifically directed at supporting creative entrepreneurs, innovators and other stakeholders in the creative industries in embracing the opportunities of the digital transition that characterises European societies of today.

The Creative Ring is organised as a network of networks, unfolding at the intersection of the local and European level. By igniting relations between local creative actors, open creative ecosystems are encouraged to emerge, which then again are assembled within a European network of creative ecosystems.

The local creative ecosystems can consist of a collaboration between

- Smaller creative hubs, i.e. communities that increase the capacity of creative individuals and businesses to experiment, innovate and succeed;
- Universities and other learning institutions who look for new forms of society engagement, as well as research, innovation and teaching practices;
- Cultural centres and museums that wish to rethink their organisations, engagement models and seek collaborative opportunities;
- Municipalities and regions that aim to further stimulate entrepreneurship within the creative industries, as well as inclusive innovation and citizen participation;
- Corporates that wish to regain the entrepreneurial spirit and rethink their innovation practices and organisational models;
- SME's within the creative sector;
- Technology providers.

The mission of the Creative Ring is

1. to boost the competitiveness of the Creative Industries in Europe;
2. to enable digital transformation of the Creative Industries;
3. to encourage urban innovation towards a more inclusive and smarter society;
4. to enable cross-disciplinary collaboration & knowledge exchange between academia, industry (from start-ups to corporates), creative hubs and governmental agencies;

5. to link local creative ecosystems across the whole of Europe and to share best practices;
6. to support entrepreneurship and transmit the start-up mentality into society;
7. to develop and promote common European frameworks and standards;
8. to provide an open services platform for web developers / entrepreneurs to plug in their application facilitating collaboration / co-creation / co-production / co-performance;
9. to engage in a constant dialogue with politically, economically and socially relevant institutions across Europe;
10. to acquire, analyse and publish relevant information on the actors in the Creative Industries in Europe;
11. to represent the interests, points of view and the concerns of the many micro to small enterprises active in the Creative Industries companies towards industry partners, the EU authorities and other competent authorities and organizations in matters relating innovation and digital transformation;
12. to carry out public relations work, such as organizing and providing campaigns, information and discussion events for education, clarification and information;
13. to organize or take part in meetings such as master classes, conferences, seminars and speeches concerning urban innovation and creative ecosystems.

#### 4 VALUE FOR THOSE WHO ENGAGE

While the ecosystems that are connected in the Creative Ring vary locally in their priorities and organisational form, common to all of them is that – through virtual and physical meetings – they seek to create new business and innovations models and practices, new knowledge, novel organisational forms, as well as services, solutions and products that are able to scale and accelerate through the link to the European umbrella: The Creative Ring.

The Creative Ring will

- Allow members to quickly identify partners for research and innovation projects, co-create digital tools, business solutions, and exploit other collaborative opportunities;
- Provide members with great opportunities for visibility;
- Extend the market for creative industries' services and solutions and make markets accessible also for micro-companies;
- Allow for co-creating high-quality projects, products, services and solutions that are targeted users / the public by greater and quicker access to expertise;

- Allow for a better uptake of solutions and services through a closer proximity to users, customers and the public in general;
- Allow for a great variety of business and innovations models for creative organisations from where best practices can arise;
- Avoid duplication;
- Create a strong collaborative voice of actors in the creative industries towards policy makers.

#### 5 CURRENT STATUS – OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH ICT WEAR

After having been conceived with the EU CIP project SPECIFI [10] (involving successful pilots in three European cities) from 2013 to 2015 and incubated in the EU FIWARE project CreatiFI [11] (offering 4.8 millions EUR to web entrepreneurs, creative individuals and SMEs for the creation of tools and solutions to boost the competitive of the Creative Industries), the Creative Ring will be officially incorporated in November 2016. In fact, after a pre-launch in April 2014, the organization was officially inaugurated one week before the NEM Summit, at the Barcelona Smart City Expo.

The founding hubs are Aarhus in Denmark, Eindhoven in the Netherlands, Ghent in Belgium and Brussels in Belgium. The additional CreatiFI hubs supporting the incubation process are Rovereto in Italy, Helsinki in Finland and Barcelona in Spain.

Within each of its founding and incubating hubs, a local ecosystem of different stakeholders in the Creative Industries are set up, incl. creative spaces incl. fablabs and makerspaces, innovation hubs incl. incubators and accelerators, academic and research institutes, creative and cultural places incl. musea and libraries and municipal authorities. The Creative Ring, through its CREATIFI Creative Challenges and a range of common projects and events, is providing the first bridges between the different hubs, enriching the dynamic which is created at local level.

Moreover, founding member IMEC, which incubates the Creative Ring ahead of its incorporation, will be coordinating the H2020 project WEAR (ICT-36 IA), which will organise several calls for creative solutions involving wearables. In this exciting new project, the Creative Ring will carry out the call management and involve its various hubs in order to attract local talent across its European network.

#### 6 CONCLUSIONS

This paper briefly introduced and contextualised the Creative Ring, a European-wide, technology-supported experimental ecosystem for creative talents, professionals and stakeholders working in and with the Creative Industries. Having been conceptualized and tested in various European projects already since early 2013, the organization is finally being incorporated, starting with four collaborating local ecosystems.

The Creative Ring is “native” to NEM’s renewed structure and objectives. IMEC (formerly iMinds, since the two Flemish research institutes formally merged late 2016), one of the Steering Committee Members of NEM, is determined to subscribe the network to the “cluster of clusters” idea that is promoted by NEM. Through NEM, the Creative Ring aspires to:

- Promote its calls and opportunities to Creative Industries throughout Europe;
- Cooperate with NEM itself and with other clusters that are member of it;
- Foster partnerships with industrial NEM members;
- Advocate the R&D&I priorities of its members.

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