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Exploring Dynamics of Regional Creative Economy

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Abstract**—**The aim of this paper is to build a vision of the utilization of creative industry competences in industrial and services firms connected to Kymenlaakso region, Finland, smart specialization focus areas. Research indicates that creativity and the use of creative industry's inputs can enhance innovation and competitiveness. Currently creative methods and services are underutilized in regional businesses and the added value they provide is not well grasped. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative exploratory approach. Data is collected in multiple ways including a survey, focus groups, and interviews. Theoretically, the paper contributes to the discussion about the use creative industry competences in regional development, and argues for building regional creative economy ecosystems in close co-operation with regional strategies and traditional industries rather than as treating regional creative industry ecosystem initiatives separate from them. The practical contribution of the paper is the creative vision for the use of regional authorities in updating smart specialization strategy as well as boosting industrial and creative & cultural sectors' competitiveness. The paper also illustrates a research-based model of vision building.

Keywords**—**Business, cooperation, creative economy, regional development, vision.

I. Introduction

THE cultural and creative sectors demonstrate economic growth and competitiveness, which also benefits territorial development. Innovations generated by the cultural and creative sectors merge technological, business model, social and creative innovation [1]. However, the cultural and creative sectors are often overlooked and their full potential remains untapped in most regional and industry development strategies and activities. Even if their potential is recognised in theory, i.e. lack of cross-sectoral networks prohibits creative economies from having a more substantial role in economic development. This situation applies also to the Kymenlaakso region in Finland, which is characterised by its cargo port and railways, several large forest industry integrates and many technical design services. However, there is also a lively community of cultural actors as well as education in i.e. design, business and engineering.

In order to support the emergence of a regional operating environment, a strong strategy is needed to advance the fusing of creative inputs into industrial processes. This research was motivated by the current updating of Kymenlaakso's smart specialisation strategy. The updating process was seen as an opportunity to enhance the utilization of creative industries competences in traditional key sectors, which have dominated the region's smart specialization agenda. As a first step towards that, a study of previous strategies and current state of creative industries in the region was needed. As a result, a vision for regional creative economy is constructed, the creation and role of regional creative industry ecosystems is discussed and the needs are outlined for future research and co-operation.

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II. Creative Economy: Background and Theory

Creativity plays a fundamental role in innovation. The cultural and creative sectors are in a strategic position to trigger innovation in other sectors as they are situated in the interface of arts, business and technology [2]. Innovations create and sustain performance and change in organisations and creativity plays a critical role in innovation processes [3]. According to European commission "the cultural and creative sectors are increasingly becoming a decisive component of almost every product and service" [4].

Creative industries can be perceived by business and public actors as hubs of managerial innovation and experimentation [5]. They are seen to support regional innovation and vitality [6], [7].

To develop regional creative economies, it is necessary to stimulate and strengthen collaboration in networks between social and institutional actors [8]. Although creative industries often concentrate in metropolitan areas, mapping of creative clusters has indicated also contradicting examples where regional development is strengthened by supporting creative industry businesses [9].

The emergence of knowledge economies has sparked extensive interest in creativity, as innovations are considered as imperative for organisational survival. Some studies have suggested that creativity is the key to the greatest global challenges, such as global warming and sustainable development [10].

Individual and team creativity influences the innovation processes as in return, organisational factors influences creativity [11]. The creation of intangible value generates intellectual capital and intangible assets, e.g. customer insight, brand value, innovations capabilities, and creative skills [12].

The digital revolution poses considerable and rapid changes in the creative industries involving challenges as well as great opportunities [13]. Digital technologies facilitate business model innovations in creative industries [14]. Digital transformation of business models provide new revenue streams and possibilities for upscaling supply in creative industries. This means that the products are more accessible for large clienteles.

Total employment in Cultural and Creative sectors in Europe was over 6.7 million employees in 2016 [15]. Cultural and Creative Sectors provide over 4% of EU GDP and represent just under 4% of the total workforce. The growth rate of cultural and creative sectors is around 3.5% per year [16]. Creative activities contribute especially to youth employment [17].

Creative industries are dominated by small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), with micro-SMEs and freelancers representing 85% of all actors [18]. In Finland, the added value of creative industries is 3.6% of GDP [19] and it employs more than 100 000 individuals [20].

Creative industry SMEs often lack sufficient knowledge of innovation management, IT and knowledge work skills. They also tend to lack state-of-the-art ICT and easy access to finance and their markets may be fragmented and localised, which increases market entry costs and reduces their internationalisation potential. [21]

The clustering of creative industries has been examined in numerous studies [22]. There are also recorded examples of how the technology and the creative industries complement each other to create business successes [23]. This paper contributes to this discussion by examining the role of a regional creative economy that could support other business sectors.

III. Creative Industries Classification

"Creative industries" is a concept highlighting the relationship between culture and economy [24]. The cultural and creative sectors include i.e. architecture, archives, libraries and museums, artistic crafts, audio visual (including film, television, video games and multimedia), tangible and intangible cultural heritage, design, festivals, music, literature, performing arts, publishing, radio and visual arts [25]. Diverse determinations for creative industries cause difficulties in statistical analysis and benchmarking between countries with different economic structures [26]. Alongside other definitions exist like creative economy, copyright industries and culture and experience economy. Even though, all of these concepts are somewhat problematic. They help in showcasing the economic benefits and outcomes within and in connection to creative industries.

Due to the link between this study and the desire to influence regional policy development in Kymenlaakso the following categorisation (see Fig. 1) has been selected for this research. Creative economy has been seen to include both creative industries and creative work within traditional industries [27].

For policy development purposes in Finland, creative industries have been divided into the following main categories (see Fig. 1) [28]:

– *Creative and cultural products* including heritage and art, antique and art dealers, visual arts and galleries, crafts, music, dance, theatre and circus
– *Creative content* including media, animation, film, literature, television and publishing
– *Creative services* including functional creations, architecture, marketing communications and design
– *Creative environments and platforms* including software and digital games.

Fig. 1 Creative industries classification

IV. Study Outline and Focus

The first phase of the research included a review of existing regional, national and EU strategies for creative economy (see Fig. 2). The data collection included a mini-survey, focus group discussions and interviews. Background data were collected by a quick survey (n = 6) for representatives from medium/large size industry and services sector firms. The results of the survey were used to outline the agenda for focus group discussions with Southeast Finland creative industries development network.

The survey indicated current use of creative services and methods in regional companies as well as perceptions on how that would develop in the near future. The focus group discussions (2 groups with 6 and 5 participants respectively) provided views about challenges in utilisation of creative industry services in Kymenlaakso region as well as opportunities for development of regional creative economy. Focus group participants were members of the Southeast Finland creative industries development network.

Focus group and interview data were analysed by thematic coding of responses to each creative industry sub-category with respect to challenges and opportunities related to its utilisation in boosting competitiveness [29]. Coding resulted in categories, which were further interpreted by reflective discussion in the research team to form key thematic ideas regarding challenges and opportunities for each sub-category. The dataset was further supplemented with in-depth interviews (n = 3) with creative industry firms/entrepreneurs to tap into ways of supporting the co-operation between creative industries and other businesses operating in the region.

Survey respondents, focus group participants and interviewees represent (a) traditional public, private, and third sector cultural actors, (b) creative industry firms and entrepreneurs, and (c) traditional industrial and services firms. Respondents and participants form a small sample of the total

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population of culture and creative sector actors, creative industry companies and industrial and services companies in the region, which, however, is justified by the exploratory nature of the research and the short timeframe granted for the work.

Fig. 2 Research outline

The results were reported to the Southeast Finland creative industries development network and for the use of Creative industry research unit and research partners of South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. According to Oksanen et al. universities and other agencies are paramount in promoting collaboration within and among creative industries and other sectors in supporting regional development [30].

In the final phase, a vision for regional creative economy was outlined in order to support the implementation of creative methods and inclusion of creative industry into the updated smart specialization platform strategy of Kymenlaakso region.

V. Creative Industry in Kymenlaakso: Ecosystem and Previous Strategies

In recent years, the focus of the creative industries' development has been on multidisciplinary teams and on developing the business skills of the creative actors. Tools for developing business expertise include benchmarking, shadowing, mentoring and for example internships in various businesses [31].

Looking at the existing creative industries in Kymenlaakso, the main focus is on the digital industry and communications, as well as in experience and travel industries. In the digital industry, most companies produce communication content in various forms of marketing, advertising and press publishing, including photography and audio-visual production. So far, the game industry is not directly reflected in business registers, even though an increasing number of companies have joined in for example Playa-network, which is a Southeast Finland game industry hub representing game companies. The expertise generated in the game industry can also be used in other industries, for example, when utilizing gameplay in other interactive media such as applied and educational gaming products, advertising and marketing. The game industry is also a forerunner in user-driven design [32].

Previous strategies include The Creative Industries Southeast Finland Development Strategy Project, funded by the Southeast Finland Center for Economic Development and the Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences, which were carried out between January 2011 and June 2012. The aim of the development strategy project was to increase business in the creative industry by creating an operating model enabling creative professionals, practitioners, entrepreneurs and companies in the Kymenlaakso and South Karelia provinces to gain faster access to profitable business in both the national and international operating environments. Common priorities for provincial regional development include developing ICT business and content production as well as strengthening logistics and infrastructure and co-operation with Russia [33].

Improving business in the creative industry requires better identification of weak signals and stronger regional co-operation and networking, as well as increased branding to increase visibility [34].

VI. Findings Concerning the Intersections of Creative Industries and Other Sectors

The survey respondents represented mostly the large industries, commerce and educational organisations operating in Kymenlaakso area. Creative services used by all organisations included *advertising* and *stakeholder marketing*. *Service design* and *platforms* were used in about half of corresponding organisations, as *augmented reality*, *gamification*, and *creative environments and events* were not used or their use was minimal. The survey responses indicate the growth of potential in all categories, especially in *stakeholder marketing* and *gamification*. Creative methods are utilised in *innovation and development* activities and in developing *customer experience* and employee *wellbeing*, and irregularly in *leadership* and *responsibility* measures. The respondents indicated most growth potential in creative methods connected to *innovation and development* and *responsibility* activities as well as development of *customer experience* and *well-being of staff*.

Multiple weaknesses and strengths in national creative economy have been identified in recent research by analysing stakeholder insights [35]. In order to get a better view of the regional creative economy in the Kymenlaakso region, the same categorisation (see Fig. 1) has been utilised in this study to map the specific challenges and opportunities locally.

Even though regional creative industry hubs and ecosystems are part of national and international networks, support of regional development actions and policies rely on existing regional features and business environment. The results of our analysis regarding challenges are presented in Table I and regarding opportunities in Table II.

TABLE I
CHALLENGES (IN KYMENLAAKSO)

Creative and cultural products	Cultural operators lack business knowledge Difficulty in understanding the added potential of user experience
Creative content	Commercialisation of expertise
Creative services	Lack of collaboration between engineers and designers
Creative environments and platforms	Problems in commercialization of creative expertise hinder multi-disciplinary co-operation, lack of bold business intelligence

According to the regional experts of Southeast Finland creative industries development network, the most important obstacles in creative and cultural products category in Kymenlaakso region are the lack of business knowledge among cultural operators and, on the other hand, the difficulties that their customers have in grasping the added potential of provided creative and cultural products. Problems were identified in creative professionals' salesmanship, as well as unclear distinction between professional and vocational actors.

The operating conditions of the creative content category have undergone major changes due to digitalisation, social media and the creation of new business models and revenue streams. At the same time, many of the traditional business operations have lost some of their competitiveness. On national level, many of the recognised challenges are involved with exports and global markets [38]. However, on regional level one challenge prevailed: the difficulty in commercialisation of expertise.

Regarding creative services, both the national and regional level studies highlight problems in multi-disciplinary co-operation. In Kymenlaakso, it can be concluded that e.g. co-operation between creative professionals and engineers could provide competitive advantage and extended innovation capability for the companies.

According to the regional analysis, multidisciplinary co-operation regarding creative environments and platforms would require a better marketing and commercialisation of creative expertise. In order to get more growth and innovation, also the bold business intelligence is needed.

On a national level, it has been recognised that institutes of Applied Science have strong regional position in facilitating knowledge base and activities. They promote multidisciplinary activities and co-operation within the business community. [36] In Kymenlaakso region the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences provides education and development activities in i.e. design, business and engineering [37].

TABLE II
OPPORTUNITIES (IN KYMENLAAKSO)

Creative and cultural products	Utilising regional specialties and professional creativity skills
Creative content	Collaboration between operators Harnessing technology to support experience industry
Creative services	Refining and commercialization of design services
Creative environments and platforms	Multi-disciplinary collaborations create new problem-solving applied games

Regional opportunities are shown in Table II. They involve utilising regional specialities, professional creativity skills in creative and cultural products businesses and supporting collaboration between operators and utilising new technologies to generate creative content. Creative services would benefit from refining design services and investing in their commercialisation. In connection to creative environments and platforms, the biggest opportunities are in multidisciplinary collaboration, for example, creation of new problem-solving applied games.

Kymenlaakso region is an important logistics hub in Finland, characterised by its cargo port and railways. Some forest industry integrates are located in the area, with business development of fibre packaging and bio refining. There are also many businesses providing different technical and industrial design services. Much of the province is dominated by rural areas and beautiful nature, which in addition to industrial cities has helped to form local specialities of the regional creative economy.

National research indicates that creative methods can support transformation in other sectors through e.g. utilisation of service design [39]. In Kymenlaakso, one of the challenges of creative operators is the seclusion of cultural and creative industries in to their own business communities. This can be a problematic in customer appreciation and understanding of the added value, which creative services and products can provide. However, there is a major opportunity of increasing innovation capacity and competitiveness through development of networks and co-operation between creative industry and other fields of businesses. For instance, regional smart specialisation strategy would gain added momentum from operationalising this opportunity as its key element.

Even though our data set is relatively small, it is well representative of the region. The results are similar than in national research, but the regional view is important in providing specific results, appropriate for regional policy and development interventions. They also provide a starting point for finding good benchmark cases and international partners for Kymenlaakso region. The results may raise interest for making similar studies in other regions as well. As creative industries include many international and cooperation opportunities, the research also indicates possibilities for partnering regions and organizations around some prospects with, and strengths of, the creative economy in Kymenlaakso region. The paper also outlines future research, networking and regional policy development needs.

VII. VISION FOR REGIONAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

To promote the development of regional creative economy, policies need to be based on new paradigms that take into account the importance of territorial capital and that are focused on increasing social capital of human collectives [40]. By promoting cross-sectoral collaboration between creative industries and other sectors, positive outcomes to economy and society can be reached through products and services with higher added value [41].

The research in Kymenlaakso indicates that there is unused potential in collaboration between creative and industry sectors in the region, but each of them would need some shaking and guidance to lower the barriers between them. This could be achieved by constructing some example cases and communicating success stories of mutual projects, achievements and benefits. This cooperation could and should further be developed into an attractive, practical, achievable and comprehensible vision for the regional creative economy. Van der Helm [42] describes seven different types of visions including humanistic, religious, organisational, and personal. He claims that these visions work because they have three common attributes: a claim about the future, a reference to an ideal future, and the desire for deliberate change.

For getting the vision to serve the strategy work, co-creation and participants influence during its generation is crucial. For the strategy, especially if the field of industries and actors do not recognise the possibilities in cooperation or each other's needs, commitment requires participation [43].

As a basis for vision of creative economy in Kymenlaakso region, we suggest CREATIVE ARENA VISION 2025: Kymenlaakso's industrial and services companies have increased their RDI investments the most among Finnish regions by utilising the creative industry knowledge and solutions provided by competitive firms and actors in the region.

Fig. 3 Creative economy interlinkages to business ecosystem and digitalization

National and regional development initiatives have been based on ecosystem thinking for a long time. This has been conducted mainly on an industry basis, creative industries forming a separate industry ecosystem to be developed including relevant knowledge, innovation, and business ecosystem actors. However, our research indicates that the horizontal or cross-industry nature of creative industries is not fully grasped and tapped into in the current regional smart specialisation development. Therefore, this vision invites all industries' actors to rethink the role of creative competences: how to secure their competiveness with the creative economy in rapidly changing business environment challenging all businesses.

VIII. Conclusion

Based on the challenges identified in the research, some further research directions and recommendations can be proposed for actions to overcome them.

Further research and information collection on regional features affecting the development of creative economy is needed as well as fostering and broadening regional and international networks.

Technology road mapping with regards of the characteristics of the regional creative economy could benefit from the implementation and development of state-of-the-art ICT-solutions and technologies as well as facilitate collaborative strategic planning and knowledge creation for all stakeholders.

Without a shared ambition between all participating actors, development and new innovations evolve too slowly.

Based on the survey and focus group discussions, creative industry and other industry sectors together recognise benefits in expanding the co-operation between creative and traditional industry sectors. Still, the industry field is quite moderate in showing interest in implementation of new methods to their own processes and activating novel discussion with unfamiliar creative service providers. Creative services, on the other hand, need more polishing to productise their offerings and communicate their added value to the customer. Both sides would benefit from new experiments with practical cases and enriching of work teams to find efficient ways of working together. Including the CREATIVE ARENA 2025 vision presented in the previous section in the regional smart specialisation strategy would nudge the cooperation into the right direction from both sides.

The research has limitations due to the small sample of the total population of (a) culture and creative sector actors, (b) creative industry companies and (c) industrial and services companies in the Kymenlaakso region. The sample is still representative, in particular, regarding group (a) but also group (b). The group (c) respondents were most difficult to get involved in the tight timeframe allowed and especially due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 situation in February-March 2020. Although the research is exploratory, it still aims to conclude in practical contribution for providing enough basis for building the vision. Later, the vision can be interpreted and modified, if needed, by a wider group of stakeholders related to better utilisation of creative industry competences in the regions key industries. Within its limits, this research also illustrates research-based vision building assisting regional authorities and actors in strategy work. COVID-19 situation also affected the iteration possibilities of the research-based vision building and integration of it with the Kymenlaakso region's ongoing smart specialisation strategy updating process.

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