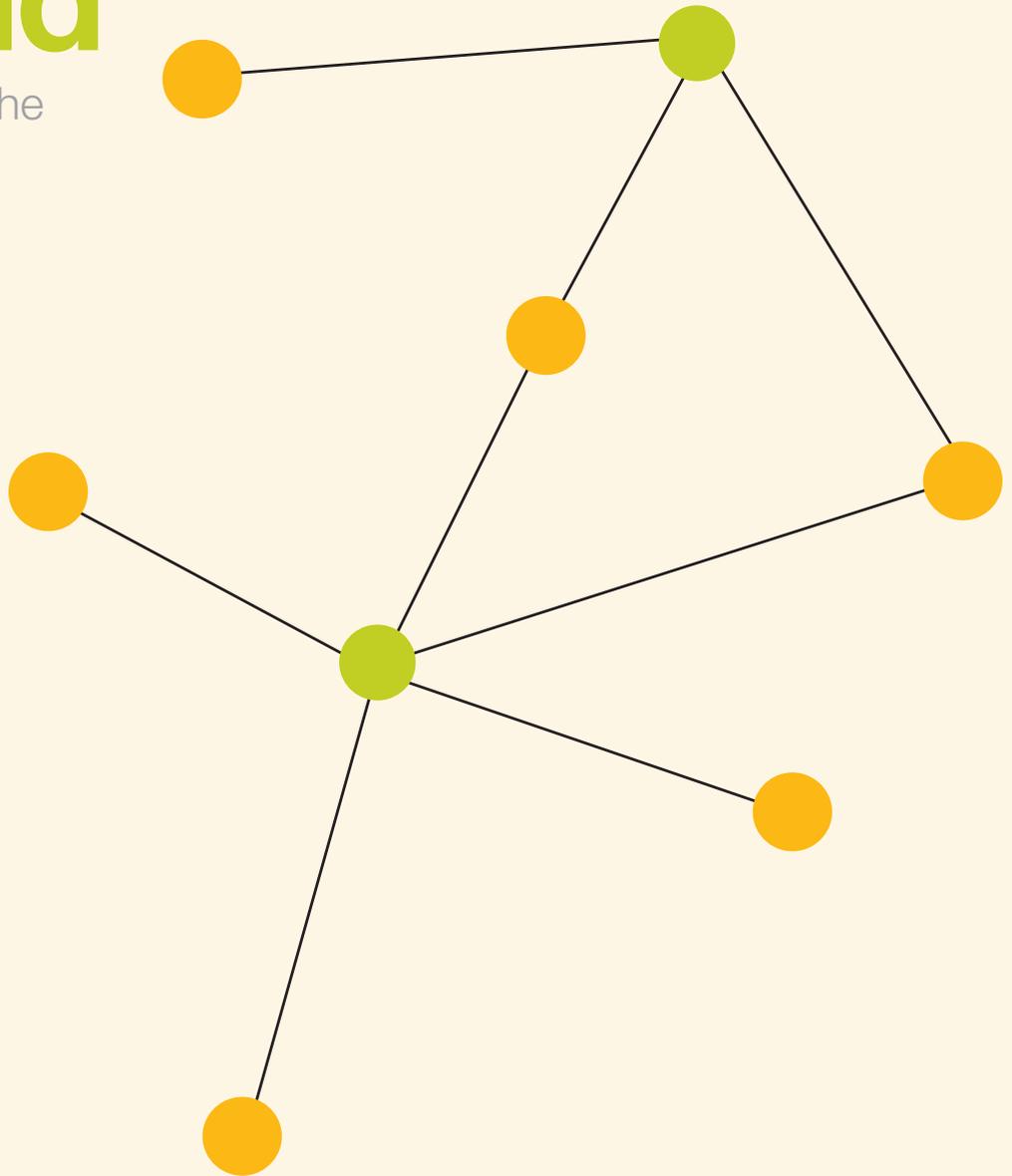


# Breaking New Ground

Spatial Mapping of the  
Creative Economy



Rachel Granger and Christine Hamilton

## BACKGROUND

Throughout the past decade, the emergence and then rapid growth of the creative economy has come to signal a new and distinct phase of capitalism, which has been driven by several processes:

- Post-Fordism and the transition to a knowledge-driven economy, providing the rationale for the economic valorisation of cultural and creative activities;
- Post-Industrialism, which has stimulated new service sectors and new outlets for creative enterprise;
- The increasingly creative and entrepreneurial policy basis for economic growth, manifested in the 'cultural turn' of the 1997 Blair Government;
- The reinvigoration of towns and cities as centres of cultural consumption and the concomitant reimagining of places, spurred by Richard Florida's pronouncements on creative investment and place appeal.

As a result cultural and creative activities have become the cornerstone of contemporary society and the economy and a legitimate focus of policy and research in its own right. The role of the creative sector, specifically the arts, in the economy of Britain was first widely discussed as a result of the Policy Studies publications in the 1980s including John Myerscough's influential report on the economic importance of the arts in Glasgow (Myerscough, 1988), the publication of which coincided with Glasgow's bid to be European City of Culture 1990. In 1995 the Arts Council of England and Scottish Arts Council published an analysis of employment in the creative sector based on Census information from 1991 and identified the size and structure of the sector in terms of occupations and industries (Feist et al, 1995). Both approaches, the former based on the use of survey methods, the latter on standard classification of census data, built a picture of the way in which culture could be recognised and valued in economic terms in the context of different cities, regions and nations across the UK. This has paved the way for more comprehensive debate, discussion and policy development around the creative industries over the last 15 years. It has also produced intense debate about the precise meaning of the creative economy: its definition; measurement; and analysis.

In this paper we explore some of the limitations of current analysis of the creative economy and suggest a more nuanced approach, based on the mapping of creative interactions and activities. This type of relational approach provides a more empirical basis for policy makers to determine who and how best to support the creative economy. It therefore has considerable scope for mainstream policy application.

## CHALLENGING THE ORTHODOXY

At the heart of several academic and policy approaches, is the identification of creative enterprises and jobs, which has emerged from the designation of sector-based creative industries as part of the Government's so-called 'mapping documents' exercise (DCMS, 1998, 2001). Within these, creative industries were identified in terms of 13 sub-sectors, positioned centrally as key drivers in the UK economy. By 2007, the UK Government had commissioned a more detailed analysis of the sector from the Work Foundation (DCMS, 2007) which led to a new policy document 'Creative Britain' (DCMS, 2008).

While it has been less than 15 years since the UK Government first championed the creative industries, there has been heightened recognition of their contribution to society and the economy. This is as a result of their continued and accelerated growth during a time of stagnation elsewhere in the economy. Their economic value lies in their potential for wealth creation, taxation, employment, and business start-up; a contribution estimated to be in excess of £65bn per annum or 6.4 per cent of the UK's Gross Value added (TSB, 2009). As the UK Government recognises, the creative industries have had an integral role to play in leading the economy out of the structural decline of the recent recession:

The bottom line for the Government is that the creative industries are and must remain central to a balanced, knowledge economy. They are one of the keys to the recovery now underway and our whole economic future. There is no economy on earth in which the creative industries play such an important part in overall growth and job creation, and that is an immense asset to the UK that we are determined to preserve and strengthen.

BIS, 2009

In this fevered atmosphere there are voices of dissent and questions about definitions and measurement. There are those who work in the field who argue that this form of analysis fails to capture what they do and that economic value is not an appropriate measure of the value of their work. This view is strengthened by an analysis of the definition and the way it is argued, that 'creative industries' has become de-coupled from the arts or cultural sector. As Dunlop and Galloway (2007) argue, the role of public policy in culture is to support different forms of expression and create the space for a range of cultural voices:

Placing cultural activities within the existing creative industries/knowledge economy framework buries this vital cultural policy objective, and misses the point about the important public benefits provided by culture. Public support for culture simply recognises that it provides public benefits that cannot be captured through markets, and the currently fashionable way of viewing the cultural sector as part of the wider creative economy simply subsumes it within an economic agenda to which it is ill-suited.

Dunlop and Galloway, 2007, p29

One area of concern is that through unclear definitions, cultural activity is being subsumed into a broader policy definition around the vaguely termed 'creative economy'. This discomfort over definitions is shared by Crossick who makes the link between sloppy policy definitions of creativity and the actual process of mobilising creativity and knowledge.

Rather than being formed and then transmitted to others, knowledge in the creative economy is constituted within the interaction itself and it is from that engagement that value itself is derived. This knowledge is, by its very nature, networked, coming from the encounter of people with different skills, imaginations and often different goals.

Crossick, 2009, p6

What Crossick appears to be acknowledging is 'soft knowledge transfer' and the process of knowledge development itself; acknowledging the role of space in facilitating knowledge transfer between people rather than by the transfer of widgets (i.e. outputs). While there has been no obvious rebuttal of these ideas, it is interesting to note how key stakeholders continue to deploy more traditional approaches, which draw on more conventional accounting methods and sector and occupational classifications to value and delimit creative activities.

## TOOLS OF MEASUREMENT

There are several problems in a structural analysis centred on a traditional model of the creative industries which uses standard occupational and industrial classifications to define the sector. As a foundation for the development of policy and for research in this area, the analysis has some serious limitations:

- It excludes economic activities such as microenterprises and freelance work operating below the £68,000 VAT threshold.
- It aggregates economic activity into large sectors such as manufacturing or disaggregates these into unsuitable sub-sector categories within which economic activities are effectively masked and hidden from view.
- It places a greater emphasis on the possession of creativity and knowledge – e.g. as a skill, product or job – rather than its mobilisation through creative activities per se.

In combination, this has the effect of providing an artificial and incomplete view of the field, while also introducing bias into any subsequent policy analysis and design. Too much of the evidence base for economic value of creative industries is based on indicators which fail to capture the essence of creative enterprise.

Consequently, as a broad area of economic activity, comparatively little is still known about creative industries other than as economic inputs (e.g. tacit knowledge and skills) and outputs (innovation). While these structural issues are well known within the field, they continue to not only prevent new avenues of debate emerging but also lead to further obfuscation. They set precedents for the way the sector is understood, measured and supported. And it is these definitional and measurement concerns coupled with a failure to advance new approaches that makes the creative economy difficult to generalise about let alone to advance in new and meaningful ways.

What we are advocating here is a new and more compelling basis for analysis. Drawing on relational geography, we attempt to gain more meaningful insights into a complex field. Relational geography is important in revealing the processes which involve ‘networks’, ‘spaces’ and ‘conversations’. It is these means through and by which creativity is mobilised within the creative industries.

While it is now widely accepted that socialisation is key to creative activity (the process of creativity itself is proprietary), there is a greater need to understand and locate contact points of socialisation and exploitation; necessitating a change in spatial approaches away from an emphasis on place and location (‘how creative is Coventry?’, say) and organisations (what is a creative organisation?) to an exploration from the perspective of individuals, as the key vectors and actors in the process.

## RELATIONAL MAPPING

Drawing on relational geography as a broad philosophy and research approach, it is possible to develop ‘relational mapping’ as a significant and valuable approach to examining the creative industries within a spatial context. That is, relational mapping seeks to understand and then map creative economic activity through the relations that take place between different people, organisations and networks, and that drive and shape creative economic activity. Understanding how and where this occurs most can be a powerful ingredient in designing the right support to nurture creative enterprise.

This type of approach has obvious benefits in a policy framework in which it has become commonplace to study where people and organisations are located and to make a leap in understanding about the assumed role of proximity in forging interaction. As a result, the idea that proximity in business location will necessarily lead to not only inter-trading but also collaboration on new ideas is axiomatic. Our research, which created relational maps of activity in creative art sectors, reveals that in practice this is not always so. In other words, the extent of proximate collaboration and interaction – elsewhere termed ‘agglomeration economies’ – is not borne out by our own study. While we recognise that this is not representative of all localities and all sectors, we would argue that this type of evidence might challenge prevailing thinking in policy design for the creative economy and the assumed high value added that ensues from cluster policy.

Using Social Network Analysis as a guiding principle and relational geography as an overarching framework, the authors developed a relational map in and around Coventry, West Midlands during 2009, through contact with 133 creative enterprises. At the heart of this were the relations between individuals, which were seen as nodes throughout the sector.

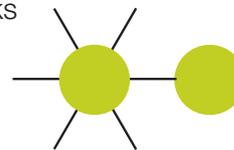
Using a small number of recognised ‘key contacts’ in creative industries in Coventry as a starting point for snowballing, participants were asked about the key people they work with on creative issues, the networks and groups they engage with and which bring them into contact with other creative workers, and the best events and places – or creative spaces – for creativity to occur.

From this, it was possible to begin mapping the incidence and breadth of relations between people, the extent of networks (ego networks) of key people and organisations, as well the significance of key places and events. Formulating relational maps, we are able to show the functional geographies of creative sub-sectors by showing how creativity is mobilised/business is conducted through a series of relations – whether as professional, business, and practice-based links, or as power structures or networks of individuals. Showing these as nodes and ego networks, can improve analysis of creative sectors by offering an understanding of which networks are most important in driving creative activity.

relations as nodes

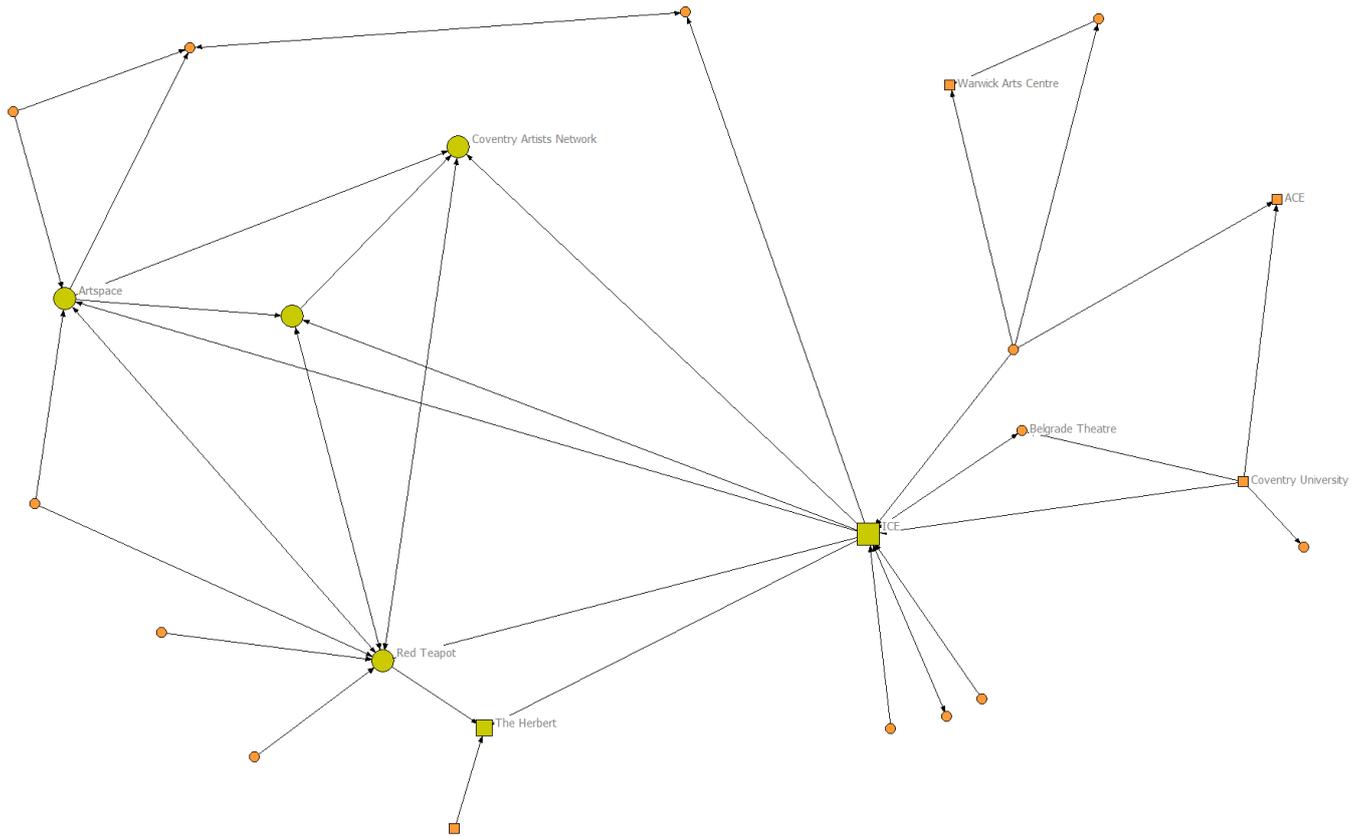


ego networks

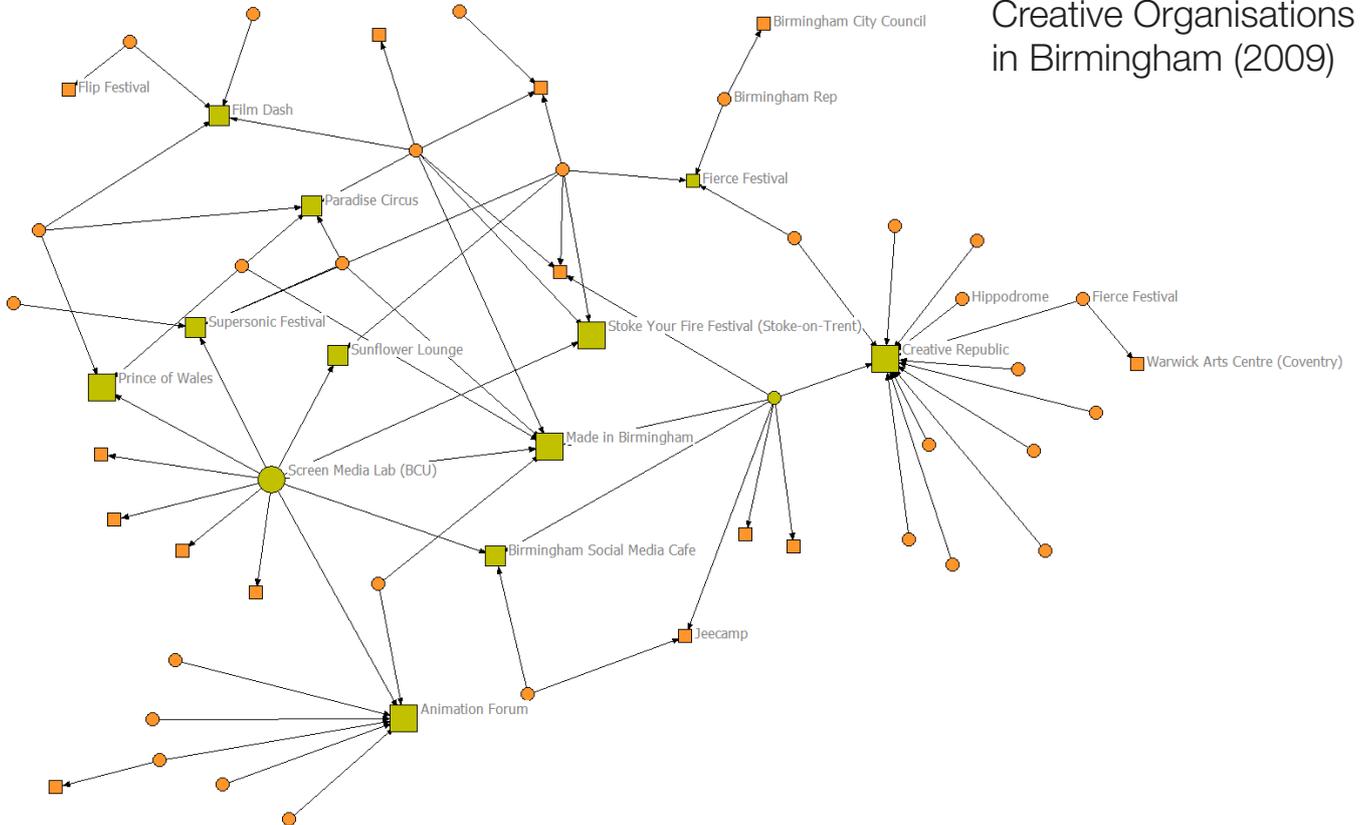


This approach helps researchers to understand how the sectors operate in practice and who and what organisations and sub-sectors are important in bringing people together and cross-fertilising ideas. In other words, it gives a more nuanced account of the sector. With more accurate information, it is hoped that policy makers will be able to make better choices about how to support the sector: which people and what organisations and networks matter most and therefore need supporting.

## A Relational Map of Key Creative Organisations in Coventry (2009)



## A Relational Map of Key Creative Organisations in Birmingham (2009)



The results of a relational mapping study of Coventry and Warwickshire have been invaluable in understanding much more about the practices and characteristics of different parts of a creative economy; an economy still treated amorphously in some policy arenas. The way the constructed relational maps highlighted the degree of separation between some sub-sectors and networks, and the interoperability of others, has been particularly revealing, while the clarification of the multiplex relations within some networks and up and downstream of some products potentially opens up new and exciting avenues of enquiry about the role of the ‘underground’ and prospect of creative ‘lock-in’. For a fuller discussion of the issues in this paper see ‘Re-spatialising the creative industries: a relational examination of underground scenes and professional and organisational lock-in’ (Granger and Hamilton, 2010).

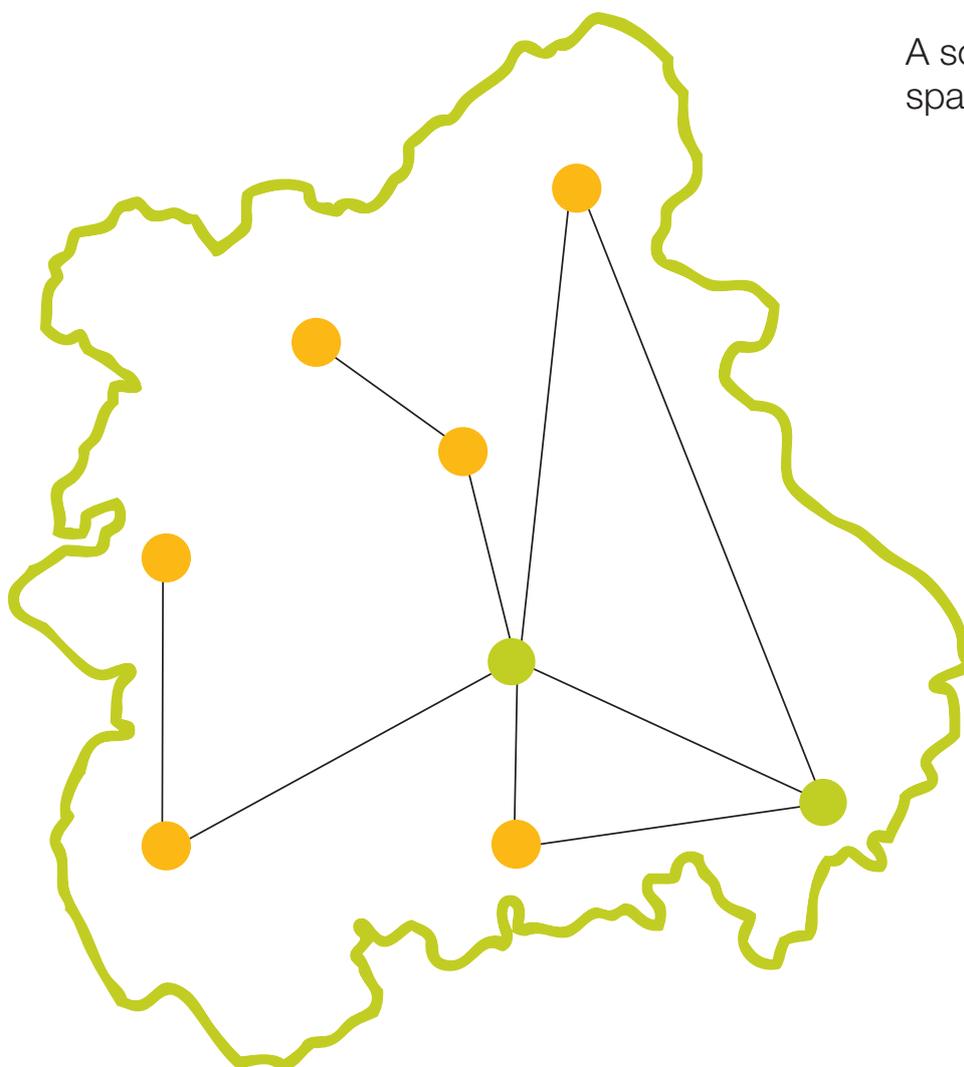
However, this approach is not without its drawbacks:

- Methodology – there are methodological limitations in using snowballing techniques to map relations in an industry. While it has been invaluable here in mapping the extent of some sub-sectors (and the links between these), it could be argued that it presents an artificial view of an industry by excluding from view, significant others. As such, researchers need to reflect on the merits of using snowballing techniques to map a sub-sector as opposed to mapping a pre-determined list of participants, a point raised by Communian (2010).
- Strength of relational ties – while relational mapping offers a more nuanced account of the creative economy and reveals more about the processes of creativity (cf. creative outputs), it tells of the connections and relationships between people and organisations rather than their economic worth. In short without ascribing values, it reveals very little at this stage about the worth of networks and the potential for social capital. The current relational mapping approach is invaluable as a tool for support organisations and for policy makers, in illuminating those champions and networks driving creative activity. Ascribing the value of these same ties potentially, has considerable utility in prioritising areas for public support. Just as NESTA (Anadyke-Danes et al, 2009) has revealed how the “vital 6%” of organisations produce the greatest economic returns, relational mapping provides a mainstream tool for identifying high-growth organisations and actors at a local level.

## NEXT STEPS IN RELATIONAL MAPPING

The next step is to undertake further studies, which ascribe values and categorises relations between nodes through adjustments to the visualisation of lines between nodes. This would be a means of acknowledging the strength of some ties over others, and also acknowledging that some relations and conversations are more propitious than others in mobilising creativity.

In a second area of activity, GPS data will be integrated into the relationship data between nodes. This will permit what is an overtly relational understanding of the creative economy to be fully spatialised: that is, to mark in map form the location and concentration of interactions within sub-sectors and localities. This will provide for the first time a spatial-relational mapping model for the creative economy, which permits an insight into the role of space – as places, local infrastructure, networks of specific actors – in driving creativity and supporting local creative sectors.



A schematic of a spatial-relational map

Rachel Granger  
Christine Hamilton  
February 2010

## REFERENCES

- Anadyke-Danes, M., Bonner, K., Hart, M. and Mason, C. (2009) *Measuring Business Growth. High-growth Firms and Their Contribution to Employment in the UK*. Report for NESTA. London: NESTA
- Communian, R. (2010) Exploring the Potentials of Social Network Analysis: Mapping networks of knowledge and support in the creative economy of the North-East of England, *Journal of Economic Geography* (forthcoming)
- Crossick, G. (2009) 'So Who Now Believes in the Transfer of Widgets?', *Knowledge Futures Conference*, University of London, 16-17 October 2009
- DCMS (1998) *The Creative Industries Mapping Document 1998*. Dept. Culture, Media, and Sports. London: TSO
- DCMS (2001) *The Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001*. Dept. Culture, Media, and Sports. London: TSO
- DCMS (2007) *Staying Ahead: the economic performance of the UK's creative industries*. Report by The Work Foundation, for Dept. Culture, Media, and Sports. London: TSO
- DCMS (2008) *Creative Britain: new talents for a new economy*. Dept. Culture, Media, and Sports. London: TSO
- Feist, A., Galloway, S. and O'Brien, J. (1995) *Employment in the Arts and Cultural Industries in Great Britain: an analysis of 1991 Census*. London: Arts Council England
- Galloway S. and Dunlop, S. (2007) 'A Critique of Definitions of the Cultural and Creative Industries in Public Policy', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 13(1),pp 17-31
- Granger, R.C. and Hamilton, C Re-spatialising the Creative Economy: A relational understanding of underground scene, and professional and organisational lock-in, *Journal of Creative Industries*, 2(3) (forthcoming)
- Myerscough, J. (1988) *The Economic Importance of the Arts In Glasgow*. London: Policy Studies Institute
- TSB (2009) *Creative Industries. Technology Strategy 2009-2012*. UK Technology Strategy Board. Swindon: TSB

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

This paper is intended to create a space for debate on the creative economy among researchers and policy makers. As such we would welcome your views and comments on this paper and the research we are conducting. To discuss this report, please email us at [r.granger@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:r.granger@coventry.ac.uk) or [c.hamilton@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:c.hamilton@coventry.ac.uk), or visit our blog on <http://icecubesnet.wordpress.com>

Institute for Creative Enterprise (ICE)  
Coventry University Enterprises  
Puma Way , Coventry  
CV1 2TT

Tel: +44(0)24 7615 8300

[www.coventry.ac.uk/ice](http://www.coventry.ac.uk/ice)

