

Conceptual export and theory mobilities: exploring the reception and development of the “creative city thesis” in the post-socialist urban realm

Thomas Borén & Craig Young

This is the OA version of the Accepted Manuscript (ie after peer review). The Version of Record (ie the published version) is published in *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 2016, vol. 57:4-5, pp. 588-606.

To cite this article:

Thomas Borén & Craig Young (2016) Conceptual export and theory mobilities: exploring the reception and development of the “creative city thesis” in the post-socialist urban realm, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 57:4-5, 588-606, DOI: 10.1080/15387216.2016.1254056

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2016.1254056>

Thomas Borén (*corresponding author*)
Department of Human Geography
Stockholm University
SE-106 91 Stockholm
Sweden

Web: <http://su.se/profiles/boren>
Email: thomas.boren@humangeo.su.se

Craig Young
Manchester Metropolitan University
School of Science and the Environment
Division of Geography and Environmental Management
John Dalton Building, Chester St.,
Manchester M1 5GD
UK.

Web: <http://www.egs.mmu.ac.uk/young.htm>
Email: c.young@mmu.ac.uk

Conceptual export and theory mobilities: exploring the reception and development of the “creative city thesis” in the post-socialist urban realm

Thomas Borén and Craig Young

Abstract:

This paper seeks to advance understanding of the relatively limited contribution of scholarship from within/on the post-socialist urban arena to global urban studies, a phenomenon often attributed to the influence of a hegemonic, predominantly Anglo-American academic complex that has dominated knowledge-production and tended to marginalize consideration of other urban contexts. We seek to present a more nuanced account by considering scholarship on the “creative city” in a post-socialist context. A numerical analysis of English-language publications in this area seems to confirm the continued lack of impact of scholarship from/on post-socialist areas. However, we do identify some literature which may be “theory exporting” rather than importing and suggest that the temporal dimension of the development of scholarship is important. We then consider the interaction of three forms of global mobilities to present a more nuanced account of this pattern – the “creative city” thesis as globally mobile urban policy, the neoliberalization of universities as a globally mobile restructuring of the context in which these inequalities in knowledge-production are produced, and urban studies theorizing itself as a set of globally mobile concepts and practices. By taking this perspective we can explore the dynamic interaction of the development of a particular urban phenomenon (“creative city” policy) with academic knowledge production and how one affects the other. Adopting this perspective allows us to emphasize other factors such as path-dependencies within post-socialist areas (academic traditions and practices) and to give due emphasis to agency *within* the region and how these interact with global processes of neoliberalizing academia.

Keywords: theory mobilities, policy mobilities, post-socialist cities, academic neoliberalization, post-socialist, post-colonialism, creative city/industry policies.

Conceptual export and theory mobilities: exploring the reception and development of the “creative city thesis” in the post-socialist urban realm.

Thomas Borén and Craig Young

Introduction

The previous 20 years have been a time of great debate about ways of thinking about cities (Scott and Storper 2015; Storper and Scott 2016). This period has been typified by the proliferation of theoretical perspectives on the urban – for example, post-colonial, global/world-city, just cities, nested-cities, assemblage thinking, ordinary cities – and the development of new thematic perspectives, such as gendering, urban mobilities, sensing the city, urban soundscapes, and – central to our argument here – notions around the “creative city.” Perhaps, then, we are in a time of increasing diversity characterized by an initial challenge to hegemonic theoretical perspectives originating from a limited (predominantly Anglo-American) experience and perspective. And yet the argument explored in this themed issue relates to the persistence of an unequal production of geographical knowledge about the urban; specifically, the way that Anglo-American-inspired theoretical frameworks continue to dominate at the expense of both knowledge about other contexts and theory generation from within those contexts, in this case the post-socialist urban arena.

In our article we engage with this presumption and explore it through the academic literature, focusing on the creative city in a post-socialist context. As a subject that has generated a vast and ever increasing body of literature at a global scale – and one that has become central to many approaches to urban policy in the last two to three decades – it forms a highly pertinent and contemporary lens through which to examine the arguments at stake. The notion of the creative city is discussed in more detail below, but it refers to a particular set of discourses and policy-making which has placed particular ideas of “culture” and “creativity” as central to urban policy (albeit in highly problematic ways). Soviet and state-socialist cities did exhibit sectoral foci with regard to what we might now term cultural production, and these often had a specific urban basis, such as cities that were famous for opera, music, or film production. However, the notions of “creativity,” the “creative class” and “creative/cultural industries” that are the subject here became more prevalent in the “Western” world from the 1980s and have subsequently been rapidly adopted in post-socialist contexts as particular discourses shaping urban policy and development.

At first glance, it would appear that the literature on this topic confirms the argument of this themed issue, particularly that the concepts utilized have been imported from the West and *applied to* “creativity” in the post-socialist context, with relatively little development or mutation of theory *in situ* and relatively little export of new or refined theory (here we draw on Sjöberg’s (2014) notion of theory import and export). This, again, would therefore seem to be reflective of the unequal power relations inherent in the academic production of knowledge; that is, that such theory development is considered the prerogative of a dominant Anglo-American academic complex and (peripheral) post-socialist urban studies on this topic struggle to “speak back” to that

hegemonic “core.” Certainly the volume of studies on this topic in the post-socialist region is far less than that in various Western contexts.

However, in this paper we seek to problematize this perspective in a number of ways. To do so we trace the interaction of three forms of global mobilities to present a more nuanced argument – the creative city thesis as globally mobile urban policy; the neoliberalization of universities as a globally mobile restructuring of the context in which these inequalities in knowledge production are produced; and urban studies theorizing itself as a set of globally mobile concepts and practices. We argue that it is the complex interaction of these three global mobilities that shapes the nature of urban studies/urban geography focusing on the creative city in the post-socialist context, and this allows a more nuanced view than attributing the situation only to an Anglo-American dominance of these subjects. By taking this perspective we can explore the dynamic interaction of the development of a particular urban phenomenon (“creative city” policy) with academic knowledge production, and how one affects the other.

Moreover, adopting this perspective also allow us to focus on the role of path dependencies within the post-socialist areas (such as academic traditions and practices) and to give due emphasis to agency *within* the region and how these interact with (but are not determined by) global processes of neoliberalizing academia. At the same time, it is possible to show that scholarship is emerging from such regions which challenges or modifies the unequal knowledge/theory production or that may over time make a contribution that speaks back to Western-dominated perspectives. Throughout our paper, then, we seek to explore the complex interactions of these three major global mobilities to suggest that the cause of this geographically uneven production of knowledge is more complex than just resulting from the dominance of a hegemonic Anglo-American urban studies.

As we develop our argument, it is important for us to keep in mind our own positionality. While both authors have for decades worked on and in post-socialist areas, often in collaboration with scholars from within these areas, neither of us originates from there and we have developed our academic careers in institutions in Western countries (Sweden and the UK respectively). While we have faced challenges in developing our careers (and yes, Western scholars also face a particular set of structural constraints, as we will return to below) we speak from a particular position, one which the basic argument of this theme issue would argue is particularly privileged (and hegemonic?).

Nevertheless, it is important for us to point out that we are not inclined to conduct “armchair geography” and we would generally shy away from “geopolitical remote sensing” (Paasi 2006), but we rather prefer to base our research on empirical work *in situ* and also try to develop perspectives and arguments that are sensitive to the various historical and geographical contexts of these cities and places. In a sense, then, we try to contribute to the “decentering” of urban studies, although our work on post-socialist cities (primarily in Russia, Poland, and Romania) is only cited in relatively limited terms in the Anglo-American “core” of urban studies, whereas our work on Western places is cited more often.

In this paper, we build the arguments from analyzing academic literature and our own experiences in a type of auto-ethnography.¹ The perspective draws upon “Capitalism

as we live it” – a method developed in the art project of the same name by Andrea Creutz, Liv Strand, and Elisabeth Ward (2012) that investigates and highlights the experiences of living within an all-embracing system that one is also, whether one likes it or not, contributing to sustaining – the system, in our case, being academia. Regardless of this, we would of course have to remain open to criticism and debate from scholars working within post-socialist areas about how we represent them, and we do not claim some kind of complete and perfect knowledge of the situation. One major point that must be acknowledged here is that, due to our own limitations, we have in this article only been able to analyze literature published in English, a position which we acknowledge could open up some of our arguments to critique. Therefore, throughout our paper we must maintain a constant reflexivity with respect to our own positionality and role in situated knowledge-production.

Analysis of the post-socialist creative city: globally mobile urban policy, analysis, and theory

The first of our three global mobilities that we explore is the way that notions of the “creative city,” “creative class,” and “cultural industries” have spread around the world. The phenomenon that we explore here is not that cultural production or creative industries are new in themselves – culture has long been a part of urban development, and many cities (including under conditions of Soviet and state-socialist centrally-planned urbanization) have been significant cultural centers. What we analyze here is the globalization of a particular set of discourses around notions of culture and creativity which have impacted on urban imaginings, policy and practice around the world since the 1980s. These notions arose particularly in the context of the UK’s New Labor regime (1997–2010) during which culture and creativity were pushed to the forefront of government thinking on knowledge-economies, urban regeneration and re-branding Britain as “Cool Britannia.” In the US creativity and culture similarly became much more significant in attempts to revitalize decaying ex-industrial urban communities from the 1990s onward, particularly driven by the writings of theorists such as Charles Landry (2000) and Richard Florida (e.g., 2002, 2005). In other words, these particular imaginings and conceptualizations of culture and creativity were initially quite historically and geographically specific, but they have become increasingly globally mobile, or “fluid” (Prince 2012), spreading from an Anglo-American core and impacting urban policy in a number of international contexts (Evans 2009),² but notably for our purposes being adopted across the post-socialist world, from the former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, through Russia, and including China.

What, then, is significant about this adoption of notions of “creativity” and “culture” as key facets of urban policy-making in the post-socialist context for post-socialist urban studies? The first point to make is that conceptualizations of these processes are relatively recent. Arising in the UK and US in the 1980s–1990s, they overlapped with the end of state-socialism in the former Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991. As such, they offered attractive policy solutions to cities searching for new policy solutions to manage post-socialist urban transformation (cf. Buček 2016). Not only had these strategies been developed in post-industrial urban contexts (thus addressing the rapid and catastrophic de-industrialization of ex-socialist cities), they also had important symbolic value – if leading Western cities were using

such strategies, did they not represent the cutting edge of innovative urban policy, that major post-socialist cities wished to be identified with? And what city would not like to be seen as creative? In addition to these policies being relatively recent in the Western context, there was also a time-lag in their adoption in the post-socialist world. So, looking at the post-socialist context, these are quite recent concepts that have only really taken root strongly over the last 15 years. For example, Tallinn had its first creative policy in 2004 (Lassur et al. 2010) and Becuț (2016) writes that the first major reports on creative and/or cultural industries were published in Romania in 2008; Bulgaria, 2001; Hungary, 2002; Lithuania, 2003; and Latvia, 2005.

It would be overstating the case to argue that the result was a straightforward and rapid importation of these policy models, as mobile policy is open to resistance, mutation, and modification (McCann 2011; McCann and Ward 2011; Hirt, Sellar and Young 2013). However, there was a tendency to adopt very similar policy approaches to using creativity and culture as economic resources that had been pioneered in Western contexts such as the UK and the US (Lassur et al. 2010; see also Bontje et al. 2011) and implement them in a top-down fashion (Tafel-Viia et al. 2015). This has been further emphasized through processes such as European Union (EU) expansion, the influence of Western consultants, the rise of European inter-urban competitions focused on the use of culture (e.g., European Capital of Culture) and the growth of trans-European knowledge sharing networks and projects such as the EU-funded Creative Metropoles Project.

Global institutions also play a role in the diffusion of creative city/industries policies, for example, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network founded in 2004 which, among others, Krakow joined in 2013; Sofia and Prague, 2014; and Budapest and L'viv, 2015. This network has several sustainability and knowledge sharing goals but also aims to “to make creativity an essential component of urban development.”³ These processes have tended to spread European and international standard norms and best practices about how culture and creativity should be understood and operationalized in an urban policy context. So this is an important second point – creative city policy in the post-socialist context often looks very similar to and draws upon Anglo-American practices and theories.

This is not to relegate post-socialist cities to the status of mere copycats (Robinson 2011). Obviously, cities have a number of choices to make when implementing policies and they do not always simply adopt existing policy models (eg., see Tafel-Viia et al. 2014). In addition, as Bontje et al. (2011) argue, cities will follow divergent pathways drawing upon their differing strengths and legacies. Some cities will have a diverse cultural scene to start with, others might be technological knowledge-hubs, and the differing local contexts on which creative policies are implemented are likely to influence both the choices made by the cities and the respective outcomes of these policies. Additionally, the background of cultural and development policies in state socialism was different from countries with more mature capitalism (O'Connor 2004; Buček 2016). These variations will in turn give rise to different experiences, producing further diversity as these practices organically mature in context. This is thus a third key point – these variations should provide a good ground for academic analyses to develop new concepts and theory and “export” them back to global urban studies.

Analysis of the literature on the post-socialist creative city

Accompanying this global rise in the creative city in urban policy – Peck (2012) speaks of it as a paradigm – is an associated rise in academic interest. From an early focus on the creative industries, there has been an enormous growth in the literature on urban creativity considering different contexts around the world. In this section we analyze the characteristics of this literature as it has reported on the post-socialist context. It is fair to say that, despite a growing literature on some post-socialist contexts – notably China, this literature displays the characteristics that underlie the criticism of urban studies inherent in this themed issue; that is, that the literature remains predominantly focused on the Anglo-American experience.

In this journal, for example, with its clear post-socialist regional focus, there are five articles during the last ten volumes (47–56, 2006–2015) that focus on the creative city discourse. All were published in vol. 53 (2012) and all concern China or Hong Kong. In another key journal characterized by a strong thematic focus on the discourse at hand – *City, Culture, and Society* – the overall picture is the same. There are two articles on the creativity discourse in cities in former communist countries in Europe: Riga (Rozentale and Lavanga 2014) and Berlin (Jakob 2010) and six articles on Chinese cities out of 167 articles in volumes 1–6 (2010–2015).⁴ *City, Culture, and Society* publishes research from all over the world but relatively little on the former Central and Eastern Europe and Russia during the period. There is, however, one more article in vol. 7, 2016 (on Romanian cities, see Becuț [2016]). *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geographys* – which has a record of publishing research from the region and also has published a number of influential articles on the creativity discourse – has only published one article clearly related to the discourse directly connected to the region (on Berlin, Heebels and van Aalst [2010]), and one more indirectly connected (on St Petersburg, Trumbull [2014]).

Analyzing journals from within the region itself, in the Czech journal *Geografie* there were no articles clearly focused on the creativity discourse in volumes 111–120 (2006–2015), whereas another Czech journal, *Moravian Geographical Reports*, in vol. 14–23 (2006–2015) had two articles (in 2014–2015). Both publish on the region in English, as does the Serbian journal *Geographica Pannonica*, in which there were no articles in vol. 10–19 (2006–2015) concerned with creativity.⁶ In Poland, in a review of specialist literature on “revival”; that is, the revitalizing and restructuring of Polish cities (Rogotka 2011), culture and the new economy are mentioned but not in relation to the creative city/industry discourse, which suggests a lack of research literature on creativity within the country before his article was published (but, see Brown and Męczyński (2009) on Poznań). In support of this conclusion, the English language Polish/Dutch journal *European Spatial Research and Policy* has only one book review directly about the creativity discourse and a couple of loosely related articles in volumes 15–22 (2008–2015). There is, however, one article in vol. 23 (2016) that discusses the Creativity Index in Slovakia (Hudec and Klasová 2016). In the Polish journal *Questiones Geographicae* in vol. 29–34 (2010–2015), however, there is one article (Marková 2014) and two themed issues (2012, 2015) on research clearly focusing on the creativity discourse and a number of articles on related themes.

Thus although there is an emerging literature on post-socialist creative city/industries, research from the region is a small component of overall urban scholarship on this topic. However, this is not solely explained by a marginalization of post-socialist urban scholarship. Following Sjöberg (2014, 301), we recognize that “students of post-socialist urbanism are but a small subset of the universe of urban scholars.” In turn, it is likely that few are engaged with the rather specialized area of urban creativity discourse, a point that is highly influential in terms of what and how much research actually reaches the academic market. Given that everything else is equal (which it is not), it should be emphasized that the sheer number of researchers in a certain research field plays an important role in many ways; for example, for research environments and critical masses, and is part of the production of the globally unequal production of knowledge. In short, size matters for the possibility to be heard when “speaking back.” If, out of 1000 researchers there are perhaps 100 that, considering all possible restraints (such as getting grants), manage to publish regularly and are cited, and ten that are frequently cited,⁷ then in the “small subset” (say 100) of scholars doing research on post-socialist cities, there would be ten that manage to publish regularly and are cited, but only one who is frequently cited. Thus, no matter if the research is framed or conceived as a type of area studies or not, there would not be much to read on the region that could have an impact (even if it was searched for), and of that which would exist, only a tiny portion would be written in such a way (basically addressing in an original way some general feature of a discourse) that it becomes relevant for researchers who are not primarily interested in the empirical and localized experiences but focus on the discussion of the general (not necessarily localized) features that could be concluded. The impact of scholars in the Anglo-American core on urban theory in general could to an extent thus be explained by its proportion of all research being made in urban studies globally. Furthermore, the proportion of funds available for research will create uneven conditions for knowledge production around the world. Money spent on social science in general, and social science urban studies in particular, would in the final count be decisive regarding the number of researchers involved.

This is an obvious point that needs to be brought to the debate, and it might also partly explain why China’s share of publications on the creative city discourse is higher. China has many urban researchers and spends huge amounts of money on developing research. The number of researchers that can sustain themselves will be one of the most crucial factors in explaining the number of research outputs.

However, it is important to also highlight that within the creativity research in and on a region, there are a number of studies that have managed to address features of the creativity discourse and subsequently have had an impact in shaping the discipline, or have the potential to do so. In this section we analyze the nature of this literature within Sjöberg’s (2014) framework of import, export, and re-export of theory and concepts, to get beyond a numerical analysis to explore the impact of articles. “Import” refers to theory and concepts used to explain developments in the region that originate elsewhere. An “export” is a theory or concept produced within the region that is picked up and employed outside of the region. A “re-export” is an import that is refined or mutated within the region and is then used in its new form outside the given region.

We will restrict the account here to a few examples – or “crucial cases” (Eckstein 1992) – that aim to nuance the overall conclusion that the experience of creative city/industry policy in the region is not sufficiently considered within the general research discourse on creativity. Novy and Colomb’s (2013) study of Berlin and Hamburg is one of the most influential papers from the region on the creativity discourse. Berlin, of course, is a special case, being post-socialist (the major part of it at least) but situated in the “West” (although not in the “Anglo-American core”) and being a world-leading cultural capital with extensive cultural scenes of various kinds. Nevertheless, Novy and Colomb’s (2013) study of artist protest against creative policies is a contribution that can be regarded as discourse shaping and we therefore count their work as an “export.” The study has 72 citations according to Google Scholar (June 26, 2016), many of which are in very influential journals, and taken together those studies in turn are cited hundreds of times. The article has extensive relevance to all, or most, of the cities world-wide that engage in creative city policies. The study also relates to discourses of urban social movements and to “spaces of hope,” which might contribute to its impact on the international scene. The article could thus also be said to be “theoretically extensive,” as it combines several discourses, meaning that it holds relevance for even more researchers (not only creativity researchers) around the globe.

The second article is by Bontje et al. (2011) and is a comparative study of Amsterdam, Birmingham, and Budapest. The study is cited 16 times according to Google Scholar (June 26, 2016). Ten of the citations are in English language international journals of which a number have long publishing records. The article includes a synthesis of literature into six hypotheses about what conditions are essential for “the development of creative and knowledge-intense city-regions” (2011, 88). They then compare the three cities with these hypotheses and conclude that:

Rather than assuming the movement toward a common type of creative city, policy makers would do best to encourage the development of distinctive and locally embedded, knowledge-intensive, and creative industries that reflect the strengths and assets from the past that can be extended. (2011, 99)

A result they stress is that creative cities will not fall into a “single archetype” or “develop in accordance with a linear and universal model” (2011, 99). The article is therefore intensive in its focus on “pathways” (a quality of development) and extensive, since the objects referred to are creative-knowledge city-regions. The results are thus made significant beyond these three cities as special cases to those with an interest in creativity and knowledge-based urban development, making it relevant for many researchers. Also this article might be said to be theoretically extensive because it synthesizes a number of perspectives on the creative city.

Obviously there are many more articles than the two discussed above, but the point is that the experience of cities from the region is being taken on board on a wider geographical basis. In addition, research is reported on in other ways than in the “leading” international journals; for example, conference proceedings (e.g., Wiktor-Mach and Radwański 2013); project reports (e.g., CM 2010); journals from the region, chapters (e.g. Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek 2015), and books (e.g., Švob-Đokić 2007). Often accessible online, these results are available to a larger audience and many of them are also referred to in the articles on cities in the region published in the

more influential journals. This further strengthens the argument that the experiences of some cities *and* some researchers involved are included and not marginalized in the broader creativity discourse. It could also be emphasized that research often develops over a long time period, and certainly before it reaches leading international journals.

The analysis of this literature reveals a complex picture. There are examples of literature on post-socialist urban creativity that derive novel results and which have the potential for theory export. At the moment, however, the overall characteristics of the literature would appear to confirm the argument at the heart of this theme issue; that is, that the post-socialist urban experience and post-socialist urban studies are marginalized and making less impact on global urban studies theory formation.

However, if we now combine this analysis of the literature with the opening points about understanding creative city policy as a form of globally mobile policy with a particular history and geography, we can begin to problematize this picture. Here we raise two issues. If these particular discourses about creative cities have a relatively recent history in Western urban discourse and planning, and have only recently spread to post-socialist contexts, it follows that we should not necessarily expect to see a massive outpouring of literature on this topic from the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region. In fact, what we do see is that literature on this topic in the post-socialist urban arena is now increasing, suggesting that the timing of these global developments plays a role in defining this production of academic knowledge. Research into creative cities is growing in relation to this boom and is thus also fairly new. Even now, after 10-20 years during which notions of the creative city have become firmly established in academia and policy-making, it would be difficult to state that theories regarding creative cities have matured. Rather, they are rapidly developing. The creative city thesis is still a new theory in the sense that concepts have not been fully tried out, causalities are still being tested, its limits and generalizability not fully known. In short: “the creative city thesis is ‘in the making’” (Romein and Trip 2012, 27).

Even if the basic concepts originate in the West and most research has been and is done in/on the Anglo-American core, experience from various regions around the world is in a rather good position to contribute to this evolving theory since the field for this lies open – it is not yet occupied by mature theory developed (solely) in the West. The experience of cities in the post-socialist arena have good potential to contribute not only “just another case study” but are in fact well positioned to contribute to a more general understanding of the issues at hand.

A second point relates to the majority of this literature not being theory-exporting. Before we proceed on this point however, it would be important to bear in mind that geographic research in general in and on the region has a short history of theorizing. In 1990 Michael Bradshaw wrote that “geographers of the Soviet Union (in both the West and the Soviet Union) are as guilty as anybody for not trying to think theoretically about the nature of Soviet society” (Bradshaw 1990, 318), and it was only at the end of the 1990s that this situation started to change (see Pickles and Smith 1998; Lynn 1999; Dingsdale 1999; Borén 2009).

More generally, as post-socialist societies went through differing processes of transformation, many of them followed paths and models very much derived from

contemporary Western forms of capitalism in terms of economic, social, and urban change, particularly in the context of EU-accession. This is not to argue that there was just a simplistic serial reproduction of such forms of capitalism, but there were important overall similarities. In such a context, then, to what extent would it be expected that there have been major advances in theory-exporting scholarship? This point is further complicated by the fact that academic theory is itself globally mobile, and theoretical analyses have tended to follow urban policy developments, particularly when the analysis is done by academics from Western institutions. This suggests that as creative city policy approaches mature, there may be more scope for academic analyses to develop theory-exporting approaches if urban policy and practice in this area develops in different ways. Certainly there is scope for analyses that focus more on grass-roots, non-state-led forms of creative urban development to develop an original contribution here.

This is not to deny global inequalities in academic knowledge-production, but analyzing the actual global mobility of the policy formations that are the subject of study does introduce a new perspective which in part contributes to explaining the relatively small contribution of post-socialist urban scholarship (so far). In the next section we seek to further this complexity by considering a third global mobility.

Globally mobile norms of academic knowledge-production and the neoliberalization of academia

So far we have argued that the literature on the creative city in the post-socialist context is characterized as being relatively limited. However, in the section above we explored why this might be the case with reference to creative city policy as a form of globally mobile urban policy. Since discourses of the creative city have inflected urban policy making only relatively recently, and since many of those policies are “imports” themselves, then this is one explanation for the relatively paucity of literature and theory emanating from within post-socialist regions. If the policy is very similar in terms of timing to that in Western cities, is it so surprising that new theory is not arising from the post-socialist context?

In this section we develop the analysis by introducing a further set of globally mobile concepts and policies by reflecting on the role of norms and expectations in academia and how such norms and practices are impacted by the neoliberalization of the university itself. Again, we would not simply see this as a hegemonic imposition of norms and neoliberalized academic practices, but as the interplay between global neoliberalization and institutional and national responses, and we argue that these processes are powerful in shaping the context of academic knowledge production.

One of the problems with current explanations of the lack of engagement of post-socialist scholarship with global urban studies is that it places too much emphasis on the hegemony of Anglo-American academia at the expense of acknowledging the impact of structural factors and norms within post-socialist academia and the agency of actors within these areas. While we struggle to keep these factors in proportion we are also wary of an argument that involves casting academics within post-socialist regions as being without power and which ascribes the limited post-socialist engagement with global urban studies as underpinned by the “inability” of scholars to

“overcome barriers” to international engagement. The danger that is inherent here is the reproduction of an Othering which portrays academia within post-socialist areas as “lagging” and needing to “catch up” with “Western” norms and expectations, precisely the kind of conceptualization that has been heavily criticized as an inaccurate and power-laden representation of post-socialist areas undergoing a linear, post-socialist “transition to capitalism” (Ferenčuhová 2012). This point is explored below. We then, however, go on to complicate this further by considering the neoliberalization of the university as a third form of global mobility.

We do not deny that the international inequalities that shape knowledge production are important, but we would argue that we must also consider the dynamics of knowledge production operating at different scales and as differently located, and not just the imposition of an all-powerful Anglo-American knowledge-center. Power structures operate *within* post-socialist areas that might deny agency to scholars within the region who act according to multiple institutional/local/national as well as international structures and demands. In addition, academics are often quite individually focused in their professional lives (by necessity and often by personality), even if they engage in collaborative work, and this means that they must also respond to their institutional and national frameworks of what constitutes appropriate academic performance and “success.” And this is not unique to academics within post-socialist areas; most academics world-wide are often quite individualistic and personally driven individuals who may respond to personally held norms and beliefs (e.g., “all knowledge should be shared”) and/or personally held goals (e.g., “to be promoted in my university sector I need to do X, Y, and Z...”).

Here, then, the structures and expectations of institutions – departments, universities, and national higher education sectors – play a role in the engagement of post-socialist urban studies with its global counterpart. A triple hermeneutics may operate, combining an academic’s own understanding and personal goals; the ways in which national and international subject paradigms influences their research; and the ways in which institutional expectations affect their practice. If none of these prioritize international engagement and speaking back to international urban studies or exporting theory, there is little encouragement here for an individual academic to do so. Fulfilling expectations within an institutional or national framework may be the (personal) priority (though as we will return to below, this is now changing with the neoliberalization of academia). Certainly this institutional/national context is also about barriers to international participation, such as the path-dependency of the institutional/national research context, language, costs, access to journals, and also developing the necessary skill-set to be able to publish in English-language journals. And we need to come back to a central point – how much can we expect one person to do to go beyond such expectations and structures?

National strategies in the post-socialist world toward this vary. No doubt more research is needed on the various routes these countries may take – are they striving to get “in” to the international system, or are they “opting out”? In China, internationalization of academia seems to be a general goal pushed by the authorities, whereas in Russia, the picture is more complex. Both countries are large enough to sustain their own academic universes should they wish. The countries in the post-socialist CEE, on the other hand, are in a different position with regard to this and, it

should be noted, have very different conditions depending on if they are part of the EU or not.

We do not wish to discount in any way the undoubted frustration of scholars within post-socialist countries who do wish to engage internationally but have to overcome these barriers. However, what we are arguing here is that we really lack detailed research on how structures and agency *within* the CEE region contribute to the overall picture (but see Ferenčuhová 2016). Again, as two scholars who have not had to develop their careers in this context, we are wary of reaching any grand conclusions about this aspect of academic life, but we do wish to draw attention to it as a potential part of the complex dynamics involved. What do academics within such regions think? What are their goals, motivations, desires, and professional expectations and indicators against which they may be measured in an increasingly competitive and metricized academic environment? Is the expectation to engage internationally and contribute to international urban studies not something that “we” (as in Western scholars) are imagining as the optimum position and imposing as a norm, thus further strengthening the very power structures and attributions of value to scholarship that we seek to critique and break down? Research on these kinds of questions would open up these debates more to the role and importance of institutional and national contexts and individual agency within post-socialist academia. It would allow us to evaluate to what extent these processes may *contribute to* but *not necessarily be the result of* inequalities in knowledge production – in other words, because of these factors this knowledge is not exported from the post-socialist context and does not influence urban studies, but this is not necessarily due entirely to hegemonic relationships.

To further complicate the picture, a complex interaction of Europeanization, internationalization, and the global mobility of the neoliberalization of the university is reshaping the nature of these institutional and national frameworks and their expectations about international engagement and theory export. These three interconnected processes involve a complex global rollout of norms, practices, and expectations that are reshaping academic practice at a national and local level, though they themselves are open to local resistance or mutation. The incorporation of a great deal of the former Central and Eastern Europe into the EU, for example, has led to a spread in Europe-wide academic standards and an increasing engagement with the expectations of European funders, such as Horizon2020. Both within and outside of the EU, post-socialist states have become increasingly open to internationalization, including their higher education systems. One outcome of this has been changes in national regulation governing performance within higher education; for example, in linking promotion criteria to publishing internationally in English-language ISI journals, whereas previously institutional and national standards may have accepted publication in national journals and languages (though, again, this is not unique to the post-socialist world).

Linked to this is the so-called neoliberalization of the university and “academic capitalism” (Castree and Sparke 2000; Paasi 2005, 2015), a process that originated in the Anglo-American core but is increasingly impacting universities and academics in other national contexts. Leaving aside the fact that much of this neoliberalization of universities is driven by state policy, which is increasingly intrusive of academic practice and identities (Dowling 2008), rather than the state being rolled-back, universities and individual academics are expected to become more entrepreneurial

and competitive. Universities have to compete for students, they have to become more business oriented – not least to secure industrial funding, and they are expected to engage with an ever-more competitive environment for research funding. Publishing in highly-ranked (largely English-language) academic journals has become a key indicator, with individual performance increasingly benchmarked against such metrics and universities evaluated on European and global league tables.

These globally mobile processes are rolling out divergently across different national and academic contexts, but significantly they are altering the kinds of institutional and national frameworks and expectations considered above (Castree and Sparke 2000; Belina et al. 2013). The question here is what the impact of these processes will be on post-socialist urban studies and its ability to contribute internationally? On the one hand, they push individual scholars to engage internationally and publish in international English-language journals which might boost theory export. Moreover, the requirement for large-scale trans-European networks for European funding might also produce more collaborative knowledge production informed by the post-socialist urban arena.

On the other hand, increased competition is increasingly the outcome. Pressures on the academic journals where the results of post-socialist urban analysis may reach international audiences is now enormous. In the UK, for example, journal metrics such as impacts and citations are fundamental to the evaluation of academic performance and also success in the national Research Excellence Framework (REF), the state-led periodic research evaluation which has impacts on state research funding. The US lacks such a thorough national framework for the evaluation of institutions, but individual academic success is increasingly metrics driven. Countries as diverse as Sweden, Romania, and China are also pushing the trend to publish internationally in English (in the Chinese case through financial incentives for successful authors). The result of this is that some of the barriers for academics within post-socialist areas – such as playing the game of successfully publishing in such journals – become even harder to overcome as journals are swamped with submissions and a decreasing proportion of papers get published. Grant funding is competitive and increasingly hard to obtain, with winners and losers, and knowledge becomes more guarded, particularly with respect to intellectual property and individual academic promotion.

These processes, especially the neoliberalization of the university, represent a third global mobility which is impacting the engagement of post-socialist urban scholarship with global urban studies and making the process of this engagement (or lack of engagement) ever more complex. On the one hand, it could drive increasing international engagement and deliver consortia in which post-socialist research is more prevalent and synergistic, or, on the other hand, the increasingly competitive situation arising could exacerbate existing barriers and power structures, reinforcing the marginalization of scholarship on post-socialist urban areas. Again, the impact of this is unfolding right now, and more research should explore the implications for geographies of knowledge production. The context is highly changeable and leaves individual academics in a variable power dynamic, intersecting with their personal, institutional, and national demands, in which post-socialist urban scholarship may or may not gain more purchase.

Conclusion

In this paper we have focused on one important topic within urban studies – that of debates around the global mobility of notions of the creative city and how they reverberate through post-socialist cities, with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe but also including Russia and China. We have chosen to do this because these discourses and practices have become ever more central to urban policy making and they are a major area of research within urban studies globally. We derived an overview of the characteristics of this literature with a focus on the aforementioned post-socialist areas which suggests that it is rather limited in terms of volume, and it tends to be theory importing rather than exporting. However, we also found examples of publications that were theory defining and could “talk back” to the predominance of Western-centered urban theory production. So, rather than simply placing the region in post-colonial terms – as struggling to speak back – we would argue that because it is a relatively new theory in every context there are particularly fertile grounds for it to be able to contribute on equal terms to the continued formation of theory.

On the face of it, the example of creative city literature seems to provide another example of the patterns that are the concerns of this themed issue – that research from within post-socialist areas struggles to “get out” and make an impact on global theory production, which remains dominated by an Anglo-American core. However, by exploring this situation through the lens of three intersecting global mobilities – creative city urban policy, urban studies scholarship, and the neoliberalization of the university – we sought to introduce a more nuanced argument that also takes into account constraints at institutional and national levels within the regions in question but also allowed for motivation and agency within those regions as part of the explanation. This we feel allows for a more nuanced analysis of the patterns in academic knowledge production which are at stake here. However, we must also acknowledge again the important limitation of our argument that we have only covered research published in English and are thus potentially missing important work in this area which could be influential. We could also be accused of being elitist and exclusionary ourselves through this approach (which we cannot avoid through our own efforts but would need to address through collaborative work) and for perhaps implying that research can only contribute to global urban studies if it is published in English. This issue of the communication of research findings across languages is one in which power firmly remains an issue; that is, the dominance of English as the “required” language, and we are unable to overcome this structure, though perhaps more collaborative working and publishing holds part of the key.

Furthermore, it allows us to link these points with the overall issues at stake in this themed issue because it raises the question of what we desire for post-socialist urban studies (and urban studies in general), keeping in mind again who “we” are. If we are to be critical of the lack of impact of post-socialist urban scholarship, is that not simply a critique from “our” perspective. Most importantly, what do we want, why do we want it, and does this merely represent yet another hegemonic imposition of expectations in knowledge production?

At the same time, we also need to reflect on what “we” – as part of this theme issue – are assuming as the norm to which “we” aspire and question whether this dovetails

with the aspirations and expectations of scholars in other contexts. There is an implicit assumption that there is a problem here which is the external imposition of constraints on the ability of theory and research to “get out” of the post-socialist areas. However, is there also a danger here that “we” (the editors and authors of this theme issue) are imposing our vision and desires around knowledge production onto others; i.e., that universities and researchers in post-socialist areas *should* be aspiring to export knowledge and theory? In fact, as discussed above, those scholars may be operating to a whole different set of (personal, institutional and national) pressures and expectations, albeit pressures which the global neoliberalization of the university sector is modifying. If so, are “we” not simply reproducing the expectations of Anglo-American hegemony and a neoliberalized university sector? Are we not again othering the formerly communist areas as lagging, backward and needing to “catch-up”? In short, are we not in danger of reproducing much discredited notions of expectations of a linear transition toward Western standards and practices, expecting the rest of the world to be like us? This approach has been thoroughly debunked in post-socialist scholarship.

The central position of this themed issue seems to be a tacit argument that there is some ideal which urban studies is failing to reach. We concur with the view that research from within post-socialist areas is not gaining the recognition or having the impact that it should. However, we still believe that there is a problem here, and that is that this ideal is not as clearly articulated as it could be and the argument could be clearer about what the ultimate goal is. Can we really aim for a state of perfection and equality, some academic utopia where everyone is equal and everywhere in the world gets an equal voice? Perhaps we should, but perhaps it is currently fruitless to attempt this in contemporary academia given the constraints on sharing knowledge equally discussed above.

However, striving for a more equitable, non-insular, and cosmopolitan production of knowledge and the ability to contribute to it does not seem to be a fruitless endeavor that should be abandoned. Academic work may be under pressures of neoliberalizing change, but we would still hold the flag of the academic communitarian ideals high and believe in the open discussion these make possible for an enhanced understanding of the urban. The big question that still remains is, how do we get there?

Funding

This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council under Grant number 2015-00910.

References

- Becuț, A. G. 2016. "Dynamics of Creative Industries in a Post-Communist Society. The Development of Creative Sector in Romanian Cities." *City, Culture and Society* 7: 63–68.
- Belina, Bernd, Tino Petzold, Jürgen Schardt, and Sebastian Schipper. 2013. "Neoliberalising the Fordist University: A Tale of Two Campuses in Frankfurt a. M., Germany." *Antipode* 45: 738–759.
- Bontje, Marco, Sako Musterd, Zoltan Kovács, and Alan Murie. 2011. "Pathways toward European Creative-knowledge City-regions." *Urban Geography* 32: 80–104.
- Borén, Thomas. 2009. *Meeting-places of Transformation: Urban Identity, Spatial Representations and Local Politics in post-Soviet St Petersburg*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag.
- Bradshaw, Michael J. 1990. "New Regional Geography, Foreign-Area Studies and Perestroika." *Area* 22: 315–322.
- Brown, Julie, and Michał Męczyński. 2009. "'Complexcities': Locational Choices of Creative Knowledge Workers." *Built Environment* 35: 238–252.
- Buček, Ján. 2016. "Urban Development Policy Challenges in East-Central Europe: Governance, City Regions and Financialisation." *Quaestiones Geographicae* 35: 7–26.
- Castree, Noel, and Matthew Sparke. 2000. "Introduction: Professional Geography and the Corporatization of the University: Experiences, Evaluations and Engagements." *Antipode* 32: 222–229.
- Creutz, Andrea, Liv Strand, and Elisabeth Ward. 2012. "Capitalism as We Live It." Art project (2012– ongoing). <http://livstrand.com/capitalism-as-we-live-it-2/>
- CM. 2010. *Creative Metropolises: Situation Analysis of 11 Cities: Final Report*.
- Dingsdale, Alan. 1999. "New Geographies of Post-Socialist Europe." *The Geographical Journal* 165: 145–153.
- Dowling, Robyn. 2008. "Geographies of Identity: Labouring in the 'Neoliberal' University." *Progress in Human Geography* 32: 812–820.
- Eckstein, Harry. 1992. "Case Study and Theory in Political Science." In *Regarding Politics: Essays on Political Theory, Stability, and Change*, edited by Harry Eckstein. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Evans, Graeme. 2009. "Creative Cities, Creative Spaces and Urban Policy." *Urban Studies* 46: 1003–1040.

Ferenčuhová, Slavomíra. 2012. "Urban Theory beyond the 'East/West' Divide? Cities and Urban Research in Postsocialist Europe." In *Urban Theory beyond the West*, edited by Tim Edensor and Mark Jayne. London: Routledge.

Ferenčuhová, Slavomíra. 2016. "Accounts from Behind the Curtain: History and Geography in the Critical Analyses of Urban Theory." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. doi: 10.1111/1468-2427.12332.

Florida, Richard. 2002. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books.

Florida, Richard. 2005. *Cities and the Creative Class*. London: Routledge.

Heebels, Barbara, and Irina van Aalst. 2010. "Creative Clusters in Berlin: Entrepreneurship and the Quality of Place in Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 92: 347–363.

Hirt, Sonja, Christian Sellar, and Craig Young. 2013. "Neoliberal Doctrine Meets the Eastern Bloc: Resistance, Appropriation and Purification in Post-Socialist Spaces." *Europe-Asia Studies* 65: 1243–1254.

Hudec, Oto, and Slávka Klasová. 2016. "Slovak Creativity Index – A PCA based approach." *European Spatial Research and Policy* 23: 47–64.

Jakob, Doreen. 2010. "Constructing the Creative Neighborhood: Hopes and Limitations of Creative City Policies in Berlin." *City, Culture and Society* 1: 193–198.

Lassur, Silja, Külliki Tafel-Viia, Kärt Summatavet, and Erik Terk. 2010. "Intertwining of Drivers in Formation of New Policy Focus: The Case of Creative Industries in Tallinn." *Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidskrift* 13: 59–86.

Landry, Charles. 2000. *The Creative City*. London: Earthscan.

Lynn, Nicholas J. 1999. "Geography and Transition: Reconceptualizing Systematic Change in the former Soviet Union." *Slavic Review* 58: 824–840.

Marková, Blanka. 2014. "Creative Clusters in the Czech Republic – Strategy for Local Development or Fashionable Concept?" *Moravian Geographical Reports* 22: 44–50.

Markusen, Ann. 2006. "Urban Development and the Politics of a Creative Class: Evidence from a Study of Artists." *Environment and Planning A* 38: 1921–1940.

McCann, Eugene. 2011. "Urban Policy Mobilities and Global Circuits of Knowledge: Towards a Research Agenda." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101: 107–130.

McCann, Eugene and Kevin Ward. Eds. 2011. *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

- Murzyn-Kupisz, Monika, and Jarek Działek. 2015. "Libraries and Museums as Breeding Grounds of Social Capital and Creativity: Potential and Challenges in the Post-Socialist Context." In *Creative Economies, Creative Communities: Rethinking Place, Policy & Practice*, edited by S. Warren and P. Jones, 145–170. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Novy, Johannes, and Claire Colomb. 2013. "Struggling for the Right to the (Creative) City in Berlin and Hamburg: New Urban Social Movements, New 'Spaces of Hope.'" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37: 1816–1838.
- O'Connor, Justin. 2004. "Cities, Culture and 'Transitional Economies': Developing Cultural Industries in St Petersburg." In *Cultural Industries and the Production of Culture*, edited by D. Power and A.J. Scott. London: Routledge.
- Paasi, Anssi. 2005. "Globalisation, Academic Capitalism, and the Uneven Geographies of International Journal Publishing Spaces." *Environment and Planning A* 37: 769–789.
- Paasi, Anssi. 2006. "Texts and Contexts in the Globalizing Academic Marketplace: Comments on the Debate on Geopolitical Remote Sensing." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 7: 216–220.
- Paasi, Anssi. 2015. "Academic Capitalism and the Geopolitics of Knowledge." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Geography*, edited by John Agnew, Virginie Mamadouh, Anna J. Secor, and Joanne Sharp, 509–523. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- Peck, Jamie. 2005. "Struggling with the Creative Class." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29: 740–770.
- Peck, Jamie. 2012. "Recreative City: Amsterdam, Vehicular Ideas and the Adaptive Spaces of Creativity Policy." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36: 462–485.
- Pickles, John, and Adrian Smith. (Eds.) 1998. *Theorising Transition: The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformation*. London: Routledge.
- Prince, Russel. 2012. "Metaphors of Policy Mobility: Fluid Spaces of 'Creativity' Policy." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 94: 317–331.
- Robinson, Jennifer. 2011. "The Spaces of Circulating Knowledge: City Strategies and Global Urban Governmentality." In *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*, edited by Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward, 15–40. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Rogotka, Krzysztof. 2011. "Urban Revival in the Polish Specialist Literature." *Moravian Geographical Reports* 19: 51–69.
- Romein, Arie, and Jan Jacob Trip. 2012. "Theory and Practice of the Creative City Thesis: Experiences from Amsterdam and Rotterdam." In *Creative Knowledge Cities:*

- Myths, Visions and Realities*, M. van Geenhuizen and P. Nijkamp, 23–52. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Rosi, Mauro. 2014. “Branding or Sharing? The Dialectics of Labeling and Cooperation in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.” *City, Culture and Society* 5: 107–110.
- Rozentale, Ieva, and Mariangela Lavanga. 2014. “The “Universal” Characteristics of Creative Industries Revisited: The Case of Riga.” *City, Culture and Society* 5: 55–64.
- Scott, Allen J., and Michael Storper. 2015. “The Nature of Cities: The Scope and Limits of Urban Theory.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39: 1–15.
- Sjöberg, Örjan. 2014. “Cases onto Themselves? Theory and Research on Ex-Socialist Urban Environments.” *Geografie* 119: 299–319.
- Storper, Michael, and Allen J. Scott. 2016. “Current Debates in Urban Theory: A Critical Assessment.” *Urban Studies* 53: 1114–1136.
- Švob-Đokić, Nada. Ed. 2007. *Cultural Transitions in Southeastern Europe: The Creative City: Crossing Visions and New Realities in the Region*. Zagreb: Institute for International Relations.
- Tafel-Viia, Külliki, Andres Viia, Erik Terk, and Silja Lassur. 2014. “Urban Policies for the Creative Industries: A European Comparison.” *European Planning Studies* 22: 796–815.
- Tafel-Viia, Külliki, Erik Terk, Silja Lassur, and Andres Viia. 2015. “Creative Industries in the Capital Cities of the Baltic States: Are There Innovations in Urban Policy?” *Moravian Geographical Reports* 23: 47–58.
- Trumbull, Nathaniel S. 2014. “Culture Led Development and Conflict over Urban Space: Reimag(in)ing St Petersburg, Russia.” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 96: 1–22.
- Wiktor-Mach, Dobrosława, and Piotr Radwański. (Eds.) 2013. “Proceedings: The Idea of Creative City: The Urban Policy Debate, Cracow, October 17 – 18, 2013.” Kocani, MK: European Scientific Institute.

Notes:

¹ Auto-ethnography is an established tradition and style of writing in social anthropology. Given that this is a geographic journal and article we are tempted to suggest “auto-geography” as a term that better captures the relational and global interdependencies in knowledge production that we attend to here and that we are part of.

² The very harsh academic critique of these policies by Peck (2005), Markusen (2006), and many others, and also from within the post-socialist region (e.g. Wiktor-Mach and Radwański 2013), seem to have gone unnoticed.

³ On the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and their Mission Statement, see <http://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/>. See also Rosi (2014).

⁴ For this analysis we have made an “informed” selection of journals and chose journals that we believe would be sympathetic to articles either on and from the region, or on the topics at hand, or both, but in the English language. All titles of articles published in the journals were checked and sometimes the abstract. If an article was concerned with the creativity discourse, then it would have been clearly signaled using words like creativity, culture, creative cluster, art, art scene, etc. The last ten volumes (2006–2015) (where available) were analyzed this way.

⁵ This journal was chosen since one of its editors, Örjan Sjöberg, is highly sympathetic to research from and on the region.

⁶ There was one in vol. 19 (2014) about quality of life and theater, but it was not clearly connected to the discourse and it was about Teheran.

⁷ To get cited is not a primary goal in itself for research (although, we would argue, sharing results are) but is nevertheless indicative of contributing to and influencing the general understanding of the issues at hand.