

African Journal of Co-operative Development and Technology
Volume 4, No.1 June, 2019

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Co-operative Principles and the Creative Sector: Musings of a Music Educator

Emily Achieng' AKUNO*

The Co-operative University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya.

Abstract

The creative sector boasts a number of highly-skilled yet versatile players with relatively low levels of academic preparation. Despite the latter, their products find recognition in diverse spaces of human existence, meeting human and socio-economic needs at various levels. As a music educator, the question 'What job will my child do after studying music?' is one I have heard too often for comfort. The fact that education should not be focused on securing jobs is lost on many supporters of learners in higher education institutions. The creative disciplines are a fine example of an area of education that must not be confined to learners 'being employed', but on developing capacity for productivity. The question of credibility and sustainability, in terms of being a legitimate employment of one's time and a source of sustenance, is recognized as being behind the question above. It calls for an understanding of how creatives provide support structures not only for technical development, but also towards self-actualization and social wellbeing. As a music educator, I look at both creative and co-operative concepts and structures to decipher how the (young) creatives can come together in democratic ways towards developing themselves and the industry. The findings should inform a model for co-operative education for the creative disciplines.

Keywords: Creative sector, co-operative concepts, youth, creative industry, creative industry Hub.

AJCDT, Vol. 4 No. 1 (June, 2019), pp. 41 – 47, © 2019 The Co-operative University of Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The Creative Sector: The creative sector comprises individuals, institutions and practices focused on activities that utilize or that are based on individual human creativity, skill and talent. Also referred to as the creative industry (O'Connor, 2011) they are characterized by the 'creation, industrial reproduction and mass distribution of cultural goods' (UNESCO, n.d.). This sector thrives on human beings' capacity to generate innovative ideas, procedures and products, often in response to a challenge or an identified gap. They benefit from individuals' skills and (often raw) talent through which (new) products and services

are availed to the market. Further, they include industries that have the potential to create wealth and jobs. Such industries are distinguished by activities around the development, production or exploitation of intellectual property (UNESCO, 2017). This is where the human talent, innate capacities and natural abilities are explored for economic gain.

In the UK, the sector is generally regarded as being made up of 13 distinct industries - advertising, architecture, art and antiques, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services and TV and radio

*Corresponding author: AKUNO, Emily Achieng',
The Co-operative University of Kenya, Nairobi,
Kenya, Email: eakuno@cuk.ac.ke

(Scottish Government, 2011)

This sector has emerged strongly in the past forty years (O'Connor, 2011) and demands the attention of both academia and policy makers. The Scottish government notes that support to this sector is best given through partnership with organizations whose agenda are aligned to specific activities that characterize the industry. In Europe, the European Union has come up with specific programs to promote the sector, such as Creative Europe (European Commission, 2019), and has been instrumental in supporting the development and articulation of a strategy referred to as the European Agenda for Music (European Music Council, 2019) among others. Through these initiatives, creative Europe thrives.

Creative Hub: According to Printspace Studios Limited GB (2019), a creative hub is a platform that helps artists and art businesses to grow. This definition emphasizes the significant web of interactions and engagements that involve entities in the chain that ensures the successful distribution of the outcome of a creative idea:

creativehub is a multi-purpose arts platform connecting artists, art businesses, art galleries and arts organizations around the globe. Users can create online art stores, discover and sell new artists, swap prints, create or enter competitions, as well as easily ordering prints and safely storing archives

It is important to note the connection between the artist, who is the creator and key actor in the creative activity, and the business where matters of markets, promotion, sales among others are consolidated, and the galleries which are the market-cum-exhibition spaces. The galleries serve as opportunities for introducing products to the market. The final element in the definition above, the arts organizations, are a collective of individuals and institutions who

participate in various activities of the arts process. And so, the four entities in the chain are the artist, the business, the galleries and the arts organisation. Though decidedly dedicated to visual art and artists, the platform above provides the type of information that is common to art collectives, where a community of artists provides and shares information and services. It offers opportunity for engaging with arts processes as well as sale and trade of arts products. It allows for support within the organisation that can be harnessed towards economic strength.

Elsewhere, creative hubs are basically like culture partnerships. They are developed as 'organizations that use their space or infrastructure for networking, organizational and business development within the cultural and creative industries sector' (Culture and Creativity Association, 2019). Management, improving the services offered, as well as marketing and branding are key processes that creative hubs deal with. The hubs are a source of support and empowerment for individual artists.

Cooperatives: From community savings and credit systems, credit unions, equal exchange and fair-trade structured companies, self-help groups and similarly-structured outfits, the concept of joint responsibility and shared profits epitomize the notion of working together (McLeod, 2006). The units owned and run jointly by members who then share the profits and benefits characterize the operations of collectives. Such co-operative structures are known to benefit members in diverse ways. One of the reported strengths of co-operative businesses is their resilience in times of economic instability. This makes them a route of choice for small-scale entrepreneurs as they start their businesses.

THE PROBLEM – THE CREATIVE SECTOR IN KENYA

March 20th – 24th 2019 marked the dates for the creative economy conference facilitated by the Goethe Institute in Nairobi. The conference purposed to engage with film, broadcasting, music recording and publishing individuals and entities. This is very much in line with the global articulation of the constituent disciplines of the creative sector.

In an earlier research (Akuno, *et al.* 2017), it transpired that higher education is expected to contribute significantly to the creative industry through, among others, governance and management strategies that support teaching, learning and other educational experiences. The creative disciplines, though present in several universities, were not obvious choices of study areas for learners. Besides, most institutions engaged with them as co-curricular activities, preferring to higher freelance trainers to work with clubs for performances and competitions. The limited involvement in the disciplines therefore means that universities do not make the kind of impact that should propel the creative sector to the kind of heights and levels of industrial significance enjoyed by other countries. The creative and cultural industry or sector in Kenya is characterized by informal procedures and/or small-scale entrepreneurial tendencies. The loudest of the components are IT-based activities (*ihubs*) which are easily found in urban locations. The performing arts are probably the oldest activities of the sector in Kenya, dating back to days when artists did not make much money, but performed successfully for entertainment of patrons in diverse venues for recreation.

This is a heavily researched area in both the UK and Europe, such that government initiatives are guided by factual information and trends in the field. In East Africa and

Kenya, however, a 2015 research (Ubunifu East Africa, 2016) unearthed the following challenges for the industry, with specific reference to the literary and performing arts, visual arts and crafts, media arts, cultural heritage and design:

1. There is little or inconsistent engagement between sector players and relevant government institutions, hence apparent unbalanced development of the creative and cultural sector;
2. There are mismanaged, fragmented or non-existent associations and guilds in creative and cultural industries;
3. There are undeveloped artist hubs and communities that are facing sustainability and relevance challenges and
4. There is low artistic entrepreneurship leading to revenue loss as a result of weak business model.

Four years down the line, this is still evident, and the unbalanced development is the more evident within the government ministry that caters for the development of the disciplines listed under this sector.¹ The guilds and associations, where they exist, are weak in governance, economic standing and geographic coverage and representation, with weak if any link to similar international entities. The relevance and sustainability of the communities are factors of strength, buy-in and member commitment, elements that are rare in organizations that have weak internal structures. Besides, there may be no umbrella organizations that may bring together the specialist guilds to harness the strengths of the various members towards the development of the sector at large. At times, the different guilds and associations appear to be engaging in battles against each other instead of working towards a common goal from different perspectives. Yet, the saddest situation is lack of entrepreneurial acumen,

athletes, football and rugby players, but failed to even refer to the creative and performing arts.

¹ As recently as March 10th 2019, the Kenyan President announced that the government through the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Heritage would support Kenyan

where the training of the creatives has not traditionally included business knowledge and skills. To this end, there is very little staying power in artpreneurs, and many of their activities fizzle out after a short time.

In view of the nature of the creative sector, in recognition of the scope of interaction inherent in the processes of the sector, and in consideration of the models adopted by, especially, Scotland, the question that arises is 'how and why not' the Kenyan sector can tap into the success story of co-operatives to ensure sustainability and greater economic relevance.

PERTINENT PRINCIPLES & VALUES

Cooperative Principles are the seven guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice, often called the seven Rochdale Principles (McLeod, 2006). These are articulated below with respect to their perceived contribution to the development of teaching for the creative sector in the context of post-secondary school training.

1. Voluntary and open membership

One of the fortes of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is the multiple entry-multiple exit rationale for education and training. This is only tenable when learners have the authority to make decisions on when to hop in and when to hop off. This cooperative principle converts adequately into the framework for technical and vocation education and training for the creative sector. The training of creatives is a matter of choice by the trainees.

2. Democratic member control

Under TVET framework, the development of the content and procedures for teaching is informed by input from a wide spectrum of stakeholders. Their input is crucial in determining what goes on and how it is done with respect to curriculum content and delivery.

3. Economic participation by members

Traditionally, learning in the cultural arts has been learner focused so that their engagement

and involvement in learning yielded visibly positive outcomes. To this end, a participatory teaching/learning model is a valid response to this discussion.

4. Autonomy and independence

It is worth noting that in the arts, the average learner has a specific competence or skill that they wish to acquire when they walk into a teacher's studio. Self-direction in learning is therefore likely to ensure learner commitment to training. This clause also embraces a curriculum that is versatile yet meets requirements of higher education. This demands some serious guidance and monitoring of learners, creating a study program that recognizes prior learning.

5. Education, training and information

In the learning environment, knowledge generation, assimilation and dissemination are the core of what one does. The creative disciplines thrive on the three, with ideation, development and production as components of a cycle.

6. Cooperation among cooperatives

The learning institution is not a desert island, and so educators cannot ignore the interdependence of learning units, networks and linkages with other higher education providers. Co-operation is evident in the creative classroom where learners benefit from others' skills, knowledge and accomplishments.

7. Concern for community

Isolationism does not augur well for players in the creative industry. Besides, the community has ways of articulating concerns. A community of practice may therefore run as a quasi-welfare or any other type of cooperative. The value of the community is in articulating society-focused outcomes of education, problem-based teaching and local relevance of teaching and learning.

SUSTAINABILITY AND RELEVANCE – THE NEED FOR CO-OPERATION

The creative and cultural sector is characterized by the following elements

(Figure 1):

- *Input - creativity and intellectual capital*

Creativity is a basic ingredient that is invested in human beings. It requires individuals to think through, be analytical and to articulate ideas. In the co-operative principles above, this element reiterates the need for education, training and information.

- *Processes – creation, production and distribution*

The three stages—creation, production and distribution—are important for the industry, so that the objects of the sector are relevant and meaningful. The objects are further an outcome of negotiations and evaluation, so that they are placed where they meet identified needs.

- *Output – Goods and services*

The sector deals with tangible articles and activities that are designed to respond to identified needs.

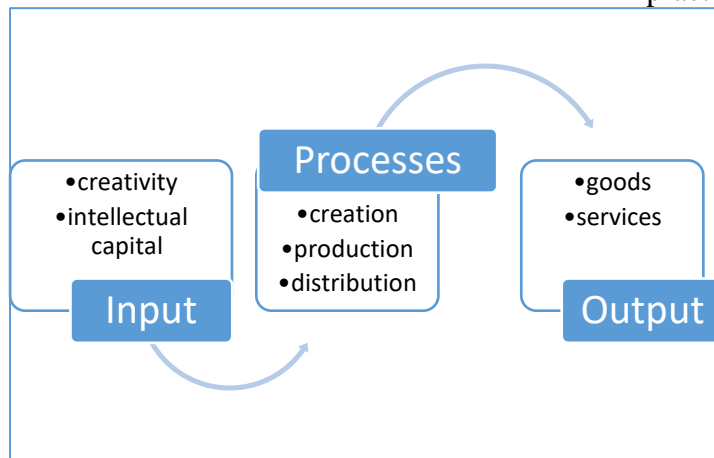


Figure 1: The creative and cultural sector framework

The framework (Figure 1) above articulates the steps and ingredients necessary for sustainability. These will not happen in a vacuum, and hence the need for contextual integration to ensure relevance.

One of the challenges identified in the sector in East Africa, the challenge of sustainability and relevance with respect to business model can be tied to weak associations and guilds. Whereas in Europe,

there is robust government support, Scotland has recognized the need for collaboration with the private sector. In Kenya, one of the celebrated sources of strength is the co-operative movement.

Co-operative principles and values above are models for sustainable enterprises. Yet, co-operatives also provide other models through which creatives can grow and contribute to a thriving sector. There are tools within the co-operative sector that provide direction for strengthening the creative sector. Social Enterprise tools are key contributors to development in a community context. The social element is a pillar to both relevance and sustainability because of involvement of a community. In the creative dialogue, this will be a community of practice, individuals brought together by a common engagement, through a discipline or orientation. They hold shared beliefs and practices and are hence often determiners of what is acceptable within the sector.

Models of social enterprise

The cooperative model of social enterprise provides direct benefit to its target population or "clients." The co-operative members receive the following member services: market information, technical assistance/extension services, collective bargaining power, economies of bulk purchase, access to products and services, access to external markets for member-produced products and services, etc. In terms of relevance and sustainability, this community is well placed to provide the support that an artpreneur may need. Market information will guide relevance while other services contribute to a sustainable business. Cooperatives social enterprises include agricultural marketing cooperatives. They market and sell members' products. Agricultural supply cooperatives provide inputs into the agricultural process. At the

distribution end, fair trade organizations work with agriculture and commodity producer-owned cooperatives—i.e. coffee, cocoa, wine tea. Though that has been a focus in the past, they now also work with non-agricultural products—i.e. handicrafts.

It is in this category that the creative and cultural industry products fall. Cooperation in marketing is crucial for the creative sector. Concepts of fair trade already exist in the sector, where organizations strive to contribute to the socio-economic development of producers, with the aim of supporting them to build sustainable businesses. A Fair Trade Music Foundation exists as do the creative hubs, providing a boost in the fight against artist exploitation. These contribute to a profitable engagement with the creative and cultural activities.

Music educator's musings

The creative mind finds something in unobtrusive spaces. Opportunities that lead to germination of ideas are useful when the environment fosters the development of the ideas into tangible objects and actions. When these are distributed and assimilated by a user community the relevance of the creative enterprise is confirmed. Fair trade principles, which are also a tool of co-operative social enterprise, ensure just remuneration for contributors in each of the activities of the creative and cultural sector. These, in the end, impact on economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection (UNESCO, 2017).

As a music educator, these two give me the answer to the question 'Why should I study music?' for one who either places money above meaning or to whom it is a day job. The three elements of the creative enterprise – that is input, processes and output, each benefit from the collective. Pooled creativity and intellectual capital ensure that there are sufficient human resources to support a multi-perspectival approach to the enterprise. Creation, production and distribution are processes that

gain from collective input. Creative hubs contribute significantly to this element. The output, both products and services, are secured, accessed and patronized by a community whose feedback informs the input towards continued relevance. The whole cycle is heavily participatory, and the consumer contributes to the processes that give rise to the output.

The music educator, in considering the products and services of creative and cultural industries, has one more answer to the question 'why should I study music?' Appropriately positioned, music (creative disciplines) is economically relevant and sustainable. These principles have models that will inform teaching and learning procedures, spaces and content.

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