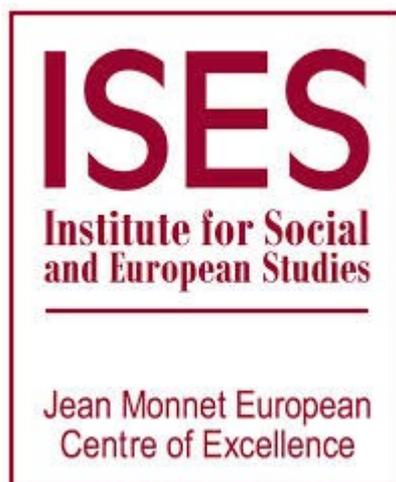


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Creative Cities.

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KÖZIGAZGATÁSI ÉS IGAZSÁGÜGYI HIVATA



Nemzeti
Kiválóság
Program



Creative cities

Elemér Hankiss

Experts have described creative cities in many ways. They have argued that creative cities are those which

- care about themselves;
- are able to continually renew themselves;
- keep experimenting and try to find new solutions without denying their valuable traditions;
- strengthen the creativity of their citizens;
- radiate light and energy into the world.

In more poetic wording: Creative cities are where ideas float freely; where windows open to new, unknown landscapes, where work is teeming, where it is good to live and hang out; where there is more and more joy and less and less suffering.

In this chapter I am going to explore the traits which, in the course of European history, have characterised cities that may be considered as “creative”. I shall mainly focus on cities which were the centres of intellectual life, of the renewal of thinking, science, scholarship and the arts and where, significantly, life was effervescent, people worked hard and there was a strong spirit of community and citizenship. I shall only list a few significant factors.

I have to make it clear that a city may be experienced as creative “from the inside” and be seen as creative “from the outside”. I mean by this that a city may be full with new ideas and innovations “within its walls”, experienced by its citizens. Think of the “golden ages” of Florence, Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna, Prague, Palo Alto, and others. And, on the other side, they may be just average cities from which the new ideas of a university, a laboratory, a great scientist or scholar radiate into the world (Frauenburg, Saint-Michel-de-Montaigne, Königsberg, etc.). In what follows I shall give examples of both types of cities.

City Size

Several of the historically creative European cities have been small or medium sized. The population of Athens (including Attica) in the 5th century B.C. exceeded 200,000, but no more than 30,000 of these were free citizens with all the relevant rights, and in all likelihood, only 5,000 took part fully in the political and intellectual life of the city. Florence around 1450 had a population of some 60,000, but a mere 10-15,000 were affluent and active citizens. What is really surprising, is that a mere 3,500 people lived in Oxford in the 16th century; and neither Heidelberg nor Göttingen were much larger.



Oxford

There have been and still are times when the role of the intellectual hub is played not by the city itself but by the university which functions in it, or in its neighbourhood. It is enough to think of Stanford with its 20,000 students, 2,000 lecturers and 22 living Nobel Laureates.¹

There are, of course, outstanding examples to the contrary. Copernicus lived and worked in solitude for decades in the tower of the Cathedral of Frombork (Frauenburg), on the coast of the Baltic Sea; Montaigne wrote his essays in the solitude of a study in his castle; Kant used to take lonely daily walks in the remote city of Königsberg.

Affluence

The majority of creative cities throughout European history have been relatively well-to-do. Athens was rich due to its successful Mediterranean trade and the multitude of goods flooding in from the colonies. Florence was also an industrial and commercial centre and the large aristocratic and clerical estates increased its wealth further. Bologna and Heidelberg were affluent bourgeois cities with enough money to spend on palaces and also on the university. Oxford and Cambridge have been prosperous to this day, constantly adding to their wealth acquired in the 16th century. Today, the wealth of the cities in Silicon Valley and the entrepreneurial capital flowing into the region are outstanding even in a worldwide comparison.

Critical mass

More important than size is the fact that to become a creative city, there needs to be a high concentration of economic, social and intellectual capital to the point where it reaches a critical mass. One good example was Athens at the apex of its history, comprising economic and military power, a vast commercial fleet which cobwebbed the entire Mediterranean, a bourgeois lifestyle and a community of the intellectual and artistic celebrities of the age.

¹ At ELTE, one of the major universities in Hungary, 30,000 students are taught by a mere 1,000 lecturers.

Critical mass



Florence also boasted a concentrated presence of economic potential, ducal courts with their splendour and their influence, a bourgeois lifestyle, the church with its rich traditions, a whole system of schools and a community of great scholars and artists of the age.

Critical Mass



To offer also a contemporary example, let us consider Palo Alto, California. This is a city which grew up in the shadow of Stanford University over the past half a century – so much so that today, along with the university itself, it is an incredibly rich pool of the energies of scientific thought, the information revolution and technical knowledge, all concentrated on a few square miles.



Stanford

If, for instance, a student or a lecturer at this university happens to come up with a brilliant idea, and she/he has developed the idea to a certain degree, all she/he needs to do (of course, I exaggerate since reality is quite a bit more complicated) is to walk along the famous alley of palm trees into Palo Alto and sit down in any of the myriad cafés, tea houses or restaurants flanking the main street (it is no accident that this main street is called University Avenue). If the idea is indeed promising, soon this person will be joined at the table by patent attorneys, software gurus, financiers investing in start-up companies and a few representatives of venture capital – and the project may start rolling. There are few places in the world where we could find such a high concentration of pioneering ideas, abilities, expertise, experience, enterprising spirit and money.

Islands of Excellence

Even without reaching a critical mass of various assets, cities may excel in something unique. They may have discovered some new techniques, solutions, artefacts, commodities, ideas and may have developed them to perfection and into a tradition which has become their trademark that has generated a rich, creative communal life for decades or centuries.



Think for instance of the lace industry which flourished not only in France (Chantilly), Belgium (Bruges) or Italy (Venice) but also in various townships and cities of Europe (Spain, Russia, Germany, Bohemia, Hungary).

Or think of Heidelberg, which, due to the ‘Heidelberg Catechism’ published there in 1563 became one of the international centres of the Calvinist faith.

Or think of the Swiss watchmaking industry, which started with the immigration of Huguenots in 1541 and, in a few decades, transformed small cities and towns throughout the Jura Valley and elsewhere into thriving, innovative communities (Biel, Basle, Schaffhausen,

Neuchâtel, Bern). And what is more, this small archipelago of watchmaker communities became one of the sources of the image of Switzerland as a land of technical precision and creativity.



Or think of Cambridge which became one of the global centres of knowledge and new ideas due to its university. The list of Cambridge professors and students who played a major role in the scientific and cultural history of the world is astounding. Mathematicians, physicists, biologists, philosophers, writers like Francis Bacon, John Milton, Isaac Newton, Bertrand Russell, James Clerk Maxwell, Francis Crick, James Watson, J. Robert Oppenheimer, John Dirac, Sir Arthur Eddington, Alfred North Whitehead, Lord Kelvin, Lord Byron, Thackeray, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Nabokov and others are among them.

Network

Often it is not a single town or city but a whole network of cities that becomes a radiant centre of creative energies. Athens, for instance, was not the lonely site of classical Greek civilization. A whole network of islands and cities radiated its ideas into the Mediterranean world. Think of the importance of Alexandria, Rhodes, Antioch, Pergamon – their intellectual and spiritual interaction multiplied the creative cultural influence of Athens.



Athens, The Platonic Academy

The network of monasteries inspired by the Cluny reform covered the whole of Europe. The web of university towns in 16th century Germany and the Netherlands (Heidelberg, Göttingen, Leiden etc.) was another outstanding example.

Crossroads

The spirit of creativity may also flare up at the meeting points of different cultures. This is what happened when Arab and Christian culture met/clashed in Granada, Seville or Bologna in the 12th-14th centuries. Venice was a crossroads and meeting point of Mediterranean civilizations for several centuries. A similarly productive clash took place in the 14th-16th centuries between Aristotelian ‘doctors’ and Platonist ‘humanists’. It is also possible that the ‘science war’ which started in the second half of the 20th century will also unfold into a great debate over the coming decades between physicists/cosmologists/biologists, on the one hand, and philosophers, philosophical anthropologists, theologians, on the other, dedicated to the study of the ultimate questions of human existence.

Rich Traditions



The future Venice began to emerge from the lagoons already in the 6th century and by the 13th century it had already become the leading commercial power in the Mediterranean, with its commercial fleet of 3,300 ships and about 40,000 sailors, controlling Dalmatia, Istria, and a number of islands, including Cyprus and Crete, and extending its power over the mainland up to the Alps and the Lake Garda. By this time it was already the richest city in Europe, full of architectural wonders and with a teeming economic, social, and artistic life (Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, Canaletto, Tiepolo and others). The traces of its cultural radiation can be seen even today on the cityscapes throughout Istria, Dalmatia and the Mediterranean archipelago.



Amsterdam, the Venice of the north, has a shorter history but its global importance in the history of global innovation emulates that of Venice. It rose to the status of a commercial and

financial world power in the 16th century (and became a great colonial power in the 17th and 18th centuries) and it still ranks high on contemporary “global cities” or “alpha cities” lists. It is the 20th on the “Globalization and World Cities” (GaWC) list and, behind London, New York, Paris, Tokyo, Singapore, Seoul, the 6th on the list of the Institute for Urban Strategies at The Mori Memorial Foundation in Tokyo (2014). This latter may be even more important from the point of view of creativity since – beside “Economics”, “Development and Research”, “Livability”, “Environment”, and “Accessibility” – the indicator of “Cultural interaction” plays a more significant role in it than in other rankings. In 2008 the city was ranked 3rd in the global *Innovation Cities Index*.

Beyond its economic power, Amsterdam’s achievements in the field of social and political organization, the rule of law, the lifestyle of free citizens, tolerance, or the arts is also outstanding. Amsterdam, and the Dutch Republic as a whole, became the asylum of refugees coming from all over Europe (the Huguenots, the Jews). It also became one of the main centres of Protestantism, of free thinking, of free press, and later of the ideas of the Enlightenment. The creative energy of the city and the country manifested itself, also in the 17th century in the art of Vermeer, Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Van de Velde, Rubens and other great artists.

In 2014, London was elected the European City of the Future. The city has a vast historical basis on which rests its present importance in the world of innovation and creativity. It was the site of the first “modern parliament” in Europe, of the first stock exchange (1698) in the world (beside an important Dutch initiative), of one of the first national banks (The Bank of England), of the first insurance company (Lloyd’s) in the world. Its merchants (beside the merchants of Antwerp and Amsterdam) founded the first global commercial company, the East India Company (1600). It is still the second most important global financial centre, and also the centre of insurance, shipping and media companies.



East India Company Fleet

Beside Manchester, Birmingham and Northampton, it was one of the hubs of the industrial revolution, inventing the spinning jenny, the steam engine, steam ships, milling machines, the railways, urban gas light, the iron ploughs, macadam roads etc. And, which is at least as important, for centuries it was the testing ground of democracy, the

protection of human rights, and the institutions of social security, starting with the first “Reform” and “Labour acts” already in the early 1830s.

The Royal Society, founded in 1660, has had among its members scientists like Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, Anders Celsius, Niels Bohr, Robert Boyle, Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, Gábor Dénes, Kálmán Tódor, and about 80 Nobel Laureates. Its role in the progress of scientific research cannot be overestimated. Beside Paris, Frankfurt, and Amsterdam, London was the centre of quality book publishing in the 19th and 20th centuries, shaping in this way the intellectual history and literary taste in Europe and the world. And – with its 43 universities, a number of the worlds best theatres, concert houses, museums, and its youth culture, its historic buildings and sites (The Tower, The Tower Bridge, The Westminster Abbey, Picadilly Circus, Fleet Street, Carnaby Street) – it is still one of the most exciting and thriving great cities in the world.

The Radiation of New Ideas

A city may become an important centre of creative spirit if it has the capacity to radiate important new ideas into the world. This was the case of Athens, of Geneva, and Florence in the 16th century, of London (1750-1900), Vienna (1750-1830), Paris (1880-1914), or the cities of the Silicon Valley (1970-2014).

Masters

A town or city may radiate the spirit of creativity even if there is but one single individual among its citizens whose knowledge or spirit attracts from all parts of the world the young and not-so-young students in quest of new visions and ideas. This is what happened in Athens at the time of Plato and Aristotle, in Cordoba and Sevilla when Averroes was teaching there, in Basel at the time of Erasmus, in Freiburg in Breisgau during the time of Heidegger. Today’s Stanford University or Harvard University, The London School of Economics, with their excellent teachers, several Nobel Laureates among them, possess a similar attraction.



Erasmus

Power

Political power can also concentrate a great deal of creative power in a town or city. It is enough to think of ancient Babylon, Damascus of the Middle Ages, Berlin/Potsdam of Frederick the Great, Los Alamos in the 1940s or even the ‘Star City’ in the Soviet Union.

Competition

Competition can also enliven creative energies in an intellectual hub. This is what happened in 13th-14th century Paris as a consequence of the flaring debates between Episcopal and monastic schools or later due to the oppositions between Bologna and Padova, Oxford and Cambridge, Heidelberg and Göttingen.

A Bourgeois Lifestyle

The general social context also plays an important role in fostering creative energies. In most of the examples known to us, the creative centre was surrounded by a relatively orderly environment of a royal, ducal, or Episcopal court or a bourgeois city (Athens, Florence, Heidelberg, Vienna, the Silicon Valley – but even in the Soviet Star City some sort of a ‘bourgeois’ lifestyle managed to emerge).

It is true that there are lots of exceptions. As we mentioned earlier, Copernicus lived in a castle tower on the chilly coast of the Baltic Sea and Kepler was fleeing from city to city during the decades of the unfolding religious wars.

Kőszeg

It is not necessary to have all of these factors available for a creative city or community to emerge. However, when we ponder the future of Kőszeg it is useful to ask whether these sources of creative potential are or will be provided in this town. We also need to consider how we could facilitate that kind of unfolding. In what follows, I hazard only a few fleeting observations.

Size

In 2009, Kőszeg had a population of 12,032 persons. For the sake of a joke it must be noted that this could easily populate three Oxfords of the past. This size is ideal – a relatively small, transparent, containable community which, “far from the madding crowd” as it were, can be well suited to become the home of profound thinking and the cradle of new ideas. But for this to happen, it will need to grow way beyond its physical/geographic boundaries as far as its intellectual potentials are concerned.

Economy

Kőszeg does not do well in this respect. Major investment and development is required before it can turn into a prosperous European city within the next decade or two.



Kőszeg

Critical Mass

Kőszeg has no commercial fleet or famous family of bankers (such as e.g. the Fuggers in Augsburg, or the Rothschilds in Frankfurt, London, Paris, Vienna, no army, no ducal or imperial court, no potent industry, nor an Academy of its own – in other words it lacks the kind of critical mass with which Athens or Florence could boast.

However, it is able to create a critical mass of a different kind: the critical mass of the plurality of knowledge. Should it succeed in attracting and assembling a group of outstanding social and natural scientists, historians, anthropologists, physicists and artists, and in triggering a truly intense multi-disciplinary dialogue amongst them, this may lead to the emergence of an intellectual critical mass of international importance.

Network

An important prerequisite for the success of Kőszeg is that the town and its research centre should actively join the international network of creative cities and scholarly workshops. There have already been some valuable initiatives in this respect, but it is still important to redouble efforts and develop strategic planning.

Crossroads

Kőszeg is particularly fortunate in this respect. It lies at the meeting point of Croatian, Austrian and Hungarian cultures or, in a broader sense, of the cultures of the Balkans, Northern Italy, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. Studying these interactions is a priority activity of the nascent academic centre.

Radiation of New Ideas

This is an important opportunity but the exact break-out point is difficult to find. The following are some possible options.

1. Social games: New opportunities for a self-organising society.
2. Black Swans: New methods of social innovation.

3. Information Age: New approaches. Elaborating new programmes in IT focusing on how to solve the fundamental problems of social and individual human life.
4. Global erosion and regeneration of the “life world”.
5. The Golden Triangle: cross-border cultural heritage.
6. Scientific revolution and the meaning of life. A 21st century conflict.
7. Quo vadis homine? Dangers and opportunities of development.
8. ‘Big data’ and ‘small data’. New possibilities for collecting and analysing social data.
9. Human existence. Interdisciplinary co-operation in order to research the fundamental questions of human life.

Masters

The realistic goal in this respect is not to find a single master of the kind of an Erasmus, but to create a congenial group which radiates a specific and new image and spirit about human life, human co-existence, the world and the universe.

Power

This is an area where Kőszeg has no chance. It is not an imperial capital, no duke or archbishop has his court in this town, nor is it an economic capital. Its only chance is to manage its existing modest means and opportunities in an exemplary fashion.

Competition

Inside Hungary, Kőszeg will have plenty of opportunity for competition. As regards the international arena it will take years for it to reach the level where it can compete against currently existing high profile cities and research hubs.



Old Pharmacy in Kőszeg

Bourgeois Lifestyle

From its very outset the programme “Kőszeg – a creative city” has had a twin goal for the academic centre and the city to gain strength, while mutually supporting each other. The aim is for the academic centre to become a part of the life of the city, to invigorate its everyday life and help the rich unfolding of its currently dormant creative potentials. As a result of all

of this, the Kőszeg-experiment may well become an interesting and inspiring example for Europe and the world.

A Creative Country – A Creative Europe

Politically and economically Europe may develop into a federal entity, or into a community of closely cooperating nations. But as far as the creative potential of this continent is concerned, our vision is Europe as an archipelago of innovative, creative centres – villages, towns, townships, cities, regions, schools, universities, research centres, think tanks, theatres, art galleries, social networks, home pages – radiating new ideas into the world.

This archipelago of innovation is already slowly emerging but the bulk of the work is still ahead of us. Could a small country like Hungary – let alone a small city like Kőszeg – play a significant role in this process? Could it awake from its centuries long “sleeping beauty” or rather “sleeping ugliness” torpor? Could it take this radical turn in its history? Let’s hope.

The country’s political culture, its disintegrated society, people’s passivity and disturbed identity are all bad omens. But there are historical examples of such a turn and this allows us to take into account some of those tasks that should be undertaken for changing the self-destructive course of the country and launch it on the path of innovation.

We are between two worlds: the old one, a bit exhausted and amortized, and an emerging new one which – hopefully – may open an era of innovation and creativity. The question is whether Europe, Hungary and, in our case, Kőszeg, will be able to make the transition, or take the leap.

Making up Our Minds

The most difficult task is to realize that we (here in Hungary and in the world in general) have arrived to a crossroads and have to listen to the warning of Eric Hobsbawm (1995):

We have reached a point of historic crisis. We do not know where we are going... If humanity is to have a recognizable future, it cannot be by prolonging the past or the present.

And the price of failure, that is to say, the alternative to a changed society, is darkness.”

Is this country, its ruling elite, and its citizenship ready to listen to this warning? Not quite but signs of a changing mentality have already appeared on the horizon.

Mental Change -- Atmosphere of Innovation

It will not be easy to create in the country (and in our case, the city of Kőszeg) an atmosphere of innovation and creativity. To achieve this, the country (and the city) would need a ruling elite and a citizenry of high social responsibility, with a positive vision of history and the future of this country, with a reformist zeal and dynamism, with the thirst and joy of doing something for the country (and the city).

Social Consensus

Only a relatively high degree of social consensus could launch a national movement (and a proliferation of local movements), which could nudge, prompt, push the country ahead on the road of innovation and creativity.

Hungary, in its present state of deep social/political/mental conflicts, is far from such a consensus which does not mean that bridge-building could not and should not begin as soon as possible. Most of the cities (including Kőszeg) are in a better shape, they are not as torn apart as the country as a whole. Several of them have already started on the road of important innovations.

The question is how to accelerate this process. There are many ways and means that could help. I mention only a few of them; mainly practical ones.

- *New Laws.*

Old laws should be replaced by new ones, which would prompt and facilitate innovation. Taxes for instance of innovative companies, communities, organizations should be reduced.

- *New Education*

The curricula of schools, colleges, universities should be substantially transformed. They should include more and more courses on innovation. These institutions should radiate, through their whole activity, the spirit of innovation and should reward the creativity of their student as much, or more, than their knowledge. They should encourage their students to venture into new, unknown fields. The words of John Cage could serve as their motto:

I cant understand why people are frightened of new ideas.
I am frightened of the old ones.

- *The Media*

The media (local, national, international) could play a major role in creating and strengthening the spirit and joy of innovation of their audiences. At present most of them waste 80-90% of their time on entertainment (of often dubious quality) and use only the rest in transmitting information, relevant knowledge, and even less on programmes

generating the everyday practice and spirit of creativity and innovation. Channels excelling in this field (with a special focus on local broadcasting) should be richly rewarded.

- *Equal Opportunity*

In Hungary (and unfortunately all around the world) an immense quantity of human skills and talents are wasted. To change this trend seems to be one of the most urgent global, national and local tasks (at least as urgent as the problem of the environment or sustainable development).

- Social mobility should be accelerated with all possible means on the global, national and the local levels.
- Institutions and mechanisms should be created and strongly supported that would stop this wasteful trend and would help human talents and skills freely unfold.

What do you think, how many virtual Mozarts or Beethovens live in Africa? – children and adults who have the genes and the talent of a Mozart or a Beethoven but die of malaria, starve to death, work 15 hours a day in dangerous mines, and live in a social environment which, instead of helping, stifles their talents?



Misery and Mozart

But even in a city like Kőszeg, there is a latent treasure trove of unused energies, skills, talents that could and should be unearthed and developed, making people happier and the city more prosperous.

- *Competitions, Prizes, Awards*

A national and international network of competitions should be developed, in which citizens, communities, companies, organizations would compete for important awards for outstanding achievements in innovation and creativity. For instance in the following fields:

- New ways of living and cooperation
- New political and social institutions
- New forms of a working democracy
- New scientific theories and technological solutions
- New ways of organizing the economy and public administration
- New ways of protecting natural resources
- New forms of active community life and conflict resolution
- A new sense of global social solidarity and public morality
- A radically new media culture
- New forms of cultural life
- New visions of the world...

In this competition small cities like Kőszeg could mobilize their citizens and would have a chance to become, small but important, radiating centres in a world of innovation and creativity; that is, in a better world than the one in which they have to survive at present.

Black Swans

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