



HAL
open science

On the Establishment of Creative Workers' Clubs within Creative Quarters

Basile Michel

► **To cite this version:**

Basile Michel. On the Establishment of Creative Workers' Clubs within Creative Quarters. International Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries, 2022, 6 (1). hal-04042526

HAL Id: hal-04042526

<https://hal.science/hal-04042526v1>

Submitted on 23 Mar 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

On the Establishment of Creative Workers' Clubs within Creative Quarters

Basile MICHEL



Basile MICHEL, Cergy Paris University, France

Prof. Basile MICHEL is Junior Professor at Cergy Paris University and member of the research centers ESO (UMR CNRS 6590) and PLACES (EA 4113). He completed his PhD in geography at the University of Angers in France in 2017. He was also Associate Professor at Ningbo University in 2018, China. His main research focuses on art, culture and creativity in cities. In particular, he analyzes the multiple challenges of cultural and creative quarters, including network dynamics, and has published several articles on this matter. Contact: basile.michel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article is a contribution to the ongoing research and debate on cultural or creative quarters and their role in contemporary cities. It focuses on the organization and working methods of the creative workers based in these quarters, devoting particular attention to the networks they establish at micro level. By drawing upon existing economic and sociological research on clubs, the article aims to further our understanding of the spatial organization of cultural and creative industries. On the basis of qualitative studies conducted in two neighborhoods in the French cities of Nantes (Les Olivettes) and Marseille (Le Panier), the article argues that creative workers organize in the form of clubs rooted within creative quarters. These workers unite around specific goods and services, to which they control access via processes of selection and co-optation, creating exclusive groups of mutual assistance of which they are the members. These results hint at the potentially ambivalent impact of such agglomerations of cultural and creative industries in specific urban areas, where the dynamics of sharing and collaboration run the risk of descending into social exclusion and a clique mentality. These results also raise a potential theoretical contribution regarding the use of clubs in urban studies.

Keywords: Creative quarters, Clubs, Creative workers, Collaborative network, Co-optation

1. INTRODUCTION

Be it spontaneously or with the helping hand of public authorities, cultural and creative activities are undergoing a process of spatial agglomeration or clustering within former industrial districts (Evans, 2009b; Hutton, 2004; Keane, 2011; Pratt, 2009; Zhong, 2011). First rediscovered by artists, followed by various creative industries, these areas come to be known as cultural or creative quarters (Chapain & Sagot-Duvaurox, 2018; Roodhouse, 2006; Van Tuijl et al., 2013). Various researchers have taken an interest in these quarters, seeking to define their governance (public or private), their function (production or consumption), their ordering principles (bottom-up or top-down) and their urban, economic and social impact (gentrification, urban regeneration, place branding etc.) (Bell & Jayne, 2004; Evans, 2015; Mommaas, 2004; Zarlenga et al., 2013). From this research emerges a picture of creative quarters as areas characterized by a spatial concentration of creative workers, defined for this purpose as individuals working for associations, businesses and institutions operating in the cultural and creative sectors (art, design, architecture etc.). There is much to be learned from analyzing the organizational methods of these workers within creative quarters, and particularly the relational networks they build up within these neighborhoods, in order to cast new light on an aspect of this phenomenon not explicitly addressed in the majority of existing research work (Comunian, 2011, 2012).

This article sets out to demonstrate that, within these creative quarters, creative workers form clubs of which they themselves are the members. To put it differently, they form exclusive groups within whose confines they help one another. This form of organization has significant social and urban consequences. These clubs have a collective dimension and spirit of sharing which can be a positive force in the

social life of contemporary cities, but they also carry a risk of social exclusion and clubbisation which may serve to aggravate the fragmentation of modern urban societies.

In order to examine this phenomenon in greater detail, this article is structured as follows. I begin by defining these clubs with reference to the economic theory of clubs (Buchanan, 1965) and previous sociological research into bourgeois clubs (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 2007). This allows us to comprehend clubs as voluntary gatherings of individuals united with the aim of enjoying exclusive access to goods and services. It also enables us to establish three criteria whose presence must be confirmed in order to verify the existence of creative workers' clubs within creative districts: clustering around specific goods and services, selection of new entrants via a process of co-optation, and the definition of membership. Secondly, drawing upon the existing literature, I define creative quarters as urban districts which are home to clusters of cultural and creative industries. Thirdly, I introduce the field studies conducted in the French cities of Nantes (in the Olivettes neighborhood) and Marseille (in the Panier neighborhood), along with the methodology employed (semi-directive interviews and network analysis). These two neighborhoods share several characteristics which make them comparable, most notably a strong concentration of cultural and creative activities (businesses and associations), a central location, a working-class past and a clear spatial delimitation. Fourthly, I confirm the formation of creative workers' clubs in these two districts with reference to the three criteria listed above. Creative workers gather in these districts in order to enjoy privileged access to specific goods and services. They control access to these goods and services via processes of selection and co-optation. They form exclusive groups whose benefits are shared only among members. In my conclusion I look more closely at the operational

workings and implications of these clubs, drawing connections between the case studies and academic theories, and highlighting potential theoretical contributions of this article to urban studies.

2. CLUBS: THREE ANALYTICAL CRITERIA TO EXPLORE

Clubs have been the subject of previous research, primarily in the field of economics. Building on the model first developed by Tiebout (1956), economist Buchanan (1965) constructed a formal economic theory of clubs. Basing his work on the classification of public and private goods proposed by Samuelson (1954), he developed a model for the management of goods and services by a group of individuals. He defined the club as a voluntary group of individuals united around goods and services from which non-members are excluded. Members pay an entrance fee to secure membership status, with this capital used to finance the assets managed by the club.

For Buchanan (1965), clubs allow for efficient management of goods and services by combining collective vision and pooled usage, which keeps costs down, with a cap on the number of permitted members, thus avoiding congestion and ensuring optimal enjoyment of the goods and services. He cites the example of a swimming pool open only to members of a club who have paid an entrance fee. Up to a certain number of swimmers, the running and user experience of the swimming pool are not compromised. The more members there are, the greater the club's financial resources will be, and hence the lower the cost for each individual member. However, it is not possible to admit an unlimited number of individual members without overloading the resource. Once the swimming pool becomes too crowded, the point of equilibrium has been passed. The club will then need to turn down new applicants for membership.

The definition proposed by these economists (Buchanan, 1965; Sandler & Tschirhart, 1980) is corroborated by sociological research into bourgeois clubs (Bourdieu & De Saint-Martin, 1976; Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 2007). Through the medium of these clubs, members of the bourgeoisie seek to become part of relational networks (in order to enhance their social capital), to gain access to restricted information and to become 'insiders'. Entry to these clubs is controlled by the members, who impose a series of procedures upon potential candidates (applications, interviews). In order to make the cut, applicants must fulfil two key criteria: they must be rich, and they must be co-opted. Approved candidates are then required to pay an entrance fee and annual membership dues, contributing to the running of the club.

In their more recent incarnation, clubs are no longer restricted to the bourgeoisie. Various studies have shown that certain neighborhoods (Webster, 2003), periurban municipalities (Charmes, 2009) and gated communities (Le Goix & Webster, 2008) can be considered equivalent to spatialized clubs, even though their social composition contains as many (or more) middle class denizens as it does members of the bourgeoisie.

According to the definitions established in the existing economic and sociological literature, clubs are defined by three major characteristics: a gathering centered on certain goods and services, selection and co-optation of new entrants, and a clear distinction between members and non-members.

First and foremost, a club is defined in relation to goods and services of various kinds: outdoor amenities, access to information, facilities, equipment etc. These goods and services are fundamental to the existence of the club, as they are the assets which impel the individual

members to come together. Members join the club to gain access to resources which they would not be able to attain individually.

Secondly, a system of co-optation restricts entry to the club, selecting new members and limiting their number in order to avoid saturation of the goods and services. The latter are shared, but only among those with membership status. The selection of new entrants makes the club an exclusive group, whose sharing of goods and services is defined by a clique mentality.

Thirdly, the restrictions placed on entry constitute physical or non-physical barriers around the club. These barriers establish a de facto division of individuals into two categories: members and non-members. The former are entitled to the club's benefits, the latter are not. Members are integrated into a group of individuals who share certain assets exclusively amongst themselves. They are bound to one another by these bonds of sharing. This connection is reflected in the relational and spatial proximity between members. On the relational level, members are integrated into a system designed for the sharing of materials, information, networks and prestige. In spatial terms, they are temporarily or permanently gathered together in (partially or totally) appropriated and exclusive shared spaces.

These three elements also serve as analytical criteria allowing us to determine whether or not the inner workings of a given social group correspond to the club model. These criteria can be used to determine whether or not creative workers organize in club form within their creative quarters. Identifying the existence of creative workers' clubs within creative quarters would have clear ramifications at urban level, since clubs are defined on the one hand by an inclusive spirit of sharing and exchange, and on

the other hand by an exclusive spirit of select membership.

3. DEFINING CREATIVE QUARTERS

Businesses and associations operating in the cultural and creative sectors tend to cluster together in spatial terms, particularly in urban districts comprising substantial post-industrial space and offering a combination of proximity to the city center and affordable property prices (Evans, 2009a; Ovidio & Ponzini, 2014).¹ In the scientific literature, such spatial agglomerations are known as creative or cultural districts, clusters or quarters, with these terms used largely interchangeably (Bell & Jayne, 2004; Chapain & Sagot-Duvaurox, 2018; Foord, 2008; Saha & Sen, 2016). The term quarter is useful as it explicitly refers to an infra-urban geographical unit (Authier et al., 2007). A creative quarter corresponds to a spatial agglomeration of cultural or creative businesses and organizations within a clearly-identifiable urban area. It is the territorial unit in which creative clusters take root (Roodhouse, 2006).

The existing literature is replete with examples of such creative quarters, from both West (Hoxton in London, Poblenou in Barcelona etc.) and East (M50 in Shanghai, 798 in Beijing etc.). As Mommaas has shown (2004), these districts are formed in various ways. Some are the fruit of town planning by public authorities, designed to stimulate urban and economic development (top-down creation). Others are born of the spontaneous clustering of cultural or creative activities (bottom-up). These districts are also defined by the development of relational networks binding together the cultural and creative organizations based there. These include partnerships of a bureaucratic, commercial and community nature (Zarlenga et al., 2013).

¹ Cultural sectors: visual arts, performing arts, heritage management, publishing, music, video games, television, video and cinema. Creative sectors: design, advertising, digital and architecture (KEA, 2006; UNCTAD, 2010).

The dynamic which drives the spatial and virtual clustering of cultural and creative activities within creative quarters can be partly attributed to certain specificities of the cultural and creative sectors themselves. The small size of most businesses (HKU, 2010), temporary and unstable employment conditions (Menger, 2002), the importance of personal relationships in professional collaborations (Comunian, 2012) and the uncertainty surrounding the future of many projects (Caves, 2000) are characteristics shared by these sectors which compel creative workers to gather together in specific areas and integrate peer networks. The spatial dimension of relational networks is thus stronger in these sectors than it is in other areas of the economy, in some cases contributing to the emergence of a 'village' comprised of creative workers bound together by various exchanges and partnerships: joint projects, technical assistance, information sharing etc. (Grabher, 2001, 2002; Vivant, 2009).

These networks, spatially rooted in creative quarters, are evidence of the collective spirit of sharing which can arise from the spatial clustering of cultural and creative activities. They also reveal a strong tendency towards clique formation, fostering the development of a community of individuals who are geographically, professionally, personally and socially close (Vivant, 2009). Creative quarters may thus emerge as enclaves within the city, isolated islands of creativity adrift in the broader urban environment (Ardenne, 2012).

As they emerge from the existing literature, spatial clustering and network formation in the cultural and creative sectors, concentrated in creative quarters, appear to correspond to the economic and sociological definition of clubs. They are driven by a collective dynamic of sharing, but also by a spirit of exclusiveness. Closer analysis of two creative quarters in France provides a more nuanced portrait of this phenomenon.

4. CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

This article is based upon qualitative studies conducted in the Les Olivettes district of Nantes (western France) and the Le Panier district of Marseille (southern France)². Both districts are urban enclaves within easy reach of their respective city centers. Following the economic crisis of the 1970s and the decline of industry in urban centers, these districts experienced a period of neglect before being rediscovered by artists and other creative workers, in a largely spontaneous fashion (bottom-up) (Michel, 2017).

This process of agglomeration has led to a spatial concentration of cultural and creative businesses and associations (Figures 1 and 2). Le Panier is now home to 128 such structures, primarily concentrated in the art sector (60%) and the design and fashion industries (23%). The 250 cultural and creative activities based in Les Olivettes are more diverse, covering sectors ranging from architecture (19%) and art (17%) to design (17%) and digital services (11%). Creative workers in both quarters are often based in shared work spaces, i.e. offices and workshops used by multiple structures which are in other respects independent of one another. There are 8 such facilities in Le Panier and 22 in Les Olivettes, respectively home to 26% and 75% of the cultural and creative activities of these districts.

The creative geography of these quarters can thus be modelled using two overlapping spatial scales: the quarter as a whole and the shared workspaces it contains.

² Marseille and Nantes are two of France's largest cities (respectively 2nd and 6th in terms of population). Both have their own prominent cultural dynamics, driven by high-profile events and facilities (Marseille was European Capital of Culture in 2013, Nantes has created Le Voyage à Nantes etc.).

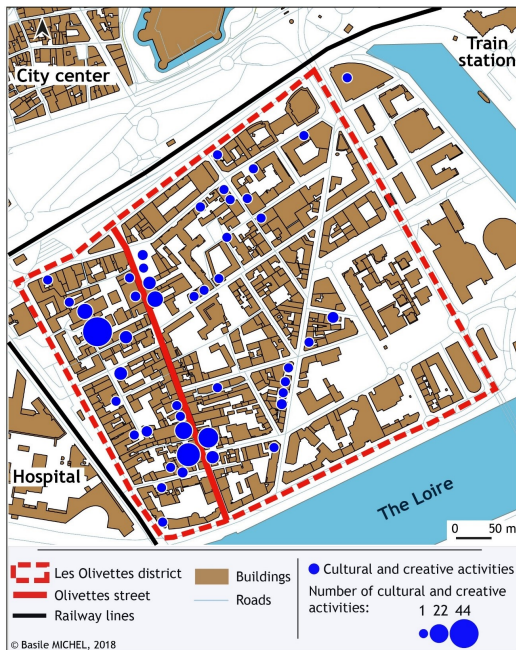


Figure 1. Map showing the location of cultural and creative businesses and associations within Les Olivettes

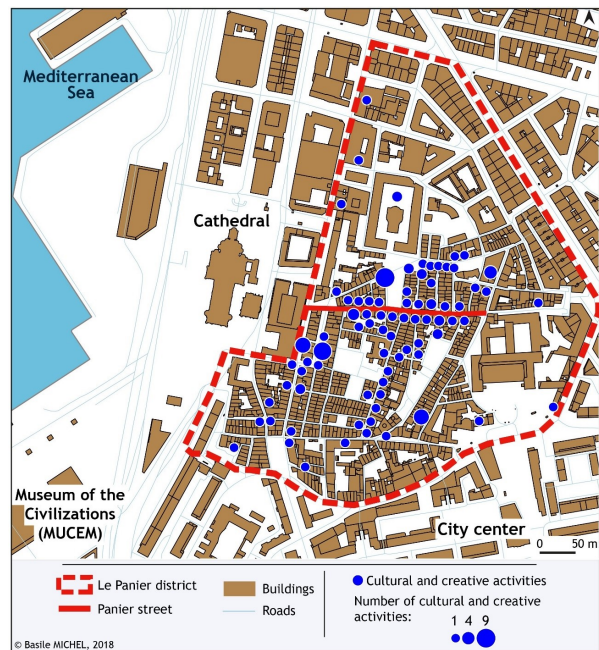


Figure 2. Map showing the location of cultural and creative businesses and associations within Le Panier

Between 2013 and 2017 I conducted 168 semi-directive interviews, predominantly with the creative workers of Les Olivettes and Le Panier (149), but also with local residents, elected officials and development project managers (19). The sample of workers interviewed was representative of each quarter, in terms of the sectors of activity present. The sample contained a majority of men (56%), and was comprised primarily of young men and women (58% aged 20-39) working in the cultural and creative sectors (art, architecture, design etc.) within very small professional structures (companies and associations with an average of 3 employees).

In order to test the hypothesis that the links between creative workers in these quarters constitute a club system, the organization and analysis of these interviews were structured around three key questions: (1) What are the goods and services sought after by creative workers, and which they are able to access by being based in this quarter? (2) Are there any barriers to entry? If so who controls them, how and at what scales do they operate? (3) Is there a group dedicated to mutual assistance and restricted to authorized members? For this third question I analyzed certain social networks (using the Ucinet and Netdraw software programs) in order to identify the type and importance of relationships formed between creative workers within each quarter.

5. CREATIVE WORKERS' CLUBS IN THE CREATIVE QUARTERS OF LES OLIVETTES AND LE PANIER

In order to demonstrate that the organization of creative workers in these quarters constitutes a club system, we will now look at each of the three analytical criteria used to detect the existence of a club, as listed above: clustering around specific goods and services, selection of new entrants via a process of co-optation, and the definition of membership.

5.1 Clustering of Creative Workers Around Goods and Services

The factors which explain the presence of creative workers in Les Olivettes and Le Panier have much to do with the resources they hope to access, within the limits of their financial capacities. Having weighed up various criteria, the decision to base themselves in these areas indicates the presence of those goods and services they expect to see in their immediate professional surroundings.

In Les Olivettes, the combination of a central location and affordable real estate is the predominant factor attracting most creative workers. 90% of respondents reported that they were keen to be in a central area of Nantes in order to benefit from the connected, accessible urban environment. Their limited financial means led them to seek out affordable business premises. Les Olivettes offered all of the advantages they were seeking. Firstly, proximity to the train station, tram network and city center makes it a well-connected, well-known district. Secondly, the quarter's industrial heritage has bequeathed a substantial architectural heritage of abandoned industrial buildings and workshops, providing creative workers with access to premises fit for renovation or available to rent at prices below those charged in the city center.

The same can be said of Le Panier, although the quarter's geographical location is valued not so much for its centrality as for its proximity to high-profile cultural institutions such as the Museum of the Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean (MUCEM) (74% of respondents). More focused on expanding sales and visibility, the creative workers keen to set up shop in Le Panier perceive this proximity as an opportunity to boost their visibility with new audiences and clients. In one interview, a creative professional explained his presence in the quarter with reference to the strategic location of the district and its potential to attract tourists. Listing the amenities in the vicinity of Le Panier, including MUCEM, he retraced the thought process leading to his decision to move here: *'It's Eldorado around here, one day it's bound to take off!'* (Creative based in Le Panier). The quest for greater visibility also extends to the type of premises sought by creatives: 81% of respondents said they were looking for exhibition space, i.e. somewhere to show and sell their works. In this respect, the availability in Le Panier of many ground floor retail spaces formerly occupied by small shops is perceived as a key resource by creative workers. This configuration provides direct access to the public, allowing them to exhibit their work and creations.

Nonetheless, a desirable location and the availability of suitable real estate are not the only factors which have seen creative workers flock to Les Olivettes and Le Panier. Proximity to other creative workers was also a major factor for 44% of respondents. In the case of Nantes, this proximity with like-minded creatives was sought after for two main reasons. Firstly, because it offers an opportunity to reinforce pre-existing partnerships or develop new collaborations between different cultural and creative activities. For example, an infographics workshop moved to Les Olivettes in 2012 in order to facilitate and reinforce its partnership with an architectural

³ The remaining 8% moved to the creative quarters to benefit from facilities subsidized by the public authorities.

agency already based in the area. This collaboration currently accounts for 50% of the company's annual turnover, and the day-to-day exchanges required by this partnership are greatly facilitated by their geographical proximity. For creative workers, spatial proximity with other workers in their sector is perceived as a desirable resource precisely because this proximity is believed to facilitate professional interactions.

The second major reason is that the spatial concentration on creative workers is considered desirable on account of the image it creates. Being identified with a creative area is a badge of quality which creative workers are keen to acquire. In Nantes, the contours of the 'creative quarter' have been officially delimited by the city authorities. The Ile de Nantes area of the city has been known as the *Quartier de la Création* since May 2009. Meanwhile, the spatial concentration of cultural and creative activities in the Les Olivettes district since the 1990s has seen this district become the city's unofficial creative quarter. This image is considered desirable, particularly for the contrast with the institutionalized *Quartier de la Création*. The director of an artistic association explained his decision to move to Les Olivettes rather than the *Quartier de la Création* on the Ile de Nantes:

'It was also a case of not jumping on the bandwagon. I've got nothing against the Ile de Nantes [...] but the idea that the Ile de Nantes is the officially-designated creative quarter has always made me laugh a little bit. I've always felt that the real creative district is here [in Les Olivettes], and I want to keep that dynamic going.' (Director of an artistic association in Les Olivettes).

In the case of Le Panier, proximity to other creative workers is primarily sought after in order to benefit from a social environment formed of

one's peers and characterized by a certain clique mentality. This reflects a desire to be surrounded by like-minded individuals sharing certain values and offering opportunities for partnership and exchange. One artist interviewed in the study puts it thus:

'I never could have moved here if there weren't other artists, it's so important to have those links [...] Otherwise you're really isolated, so that's the advantage here, there's a sort of artistic emulation too. I think that's why we tend to group together in certain areas, because we have things in common which make communication easier.' (Artist based in Le Panier).

Analyzing the motivations which drive creative workers to set up shop in Les Olivettes and Le Panier reveals a process of clustering around key goods and services, comparable to club membership.

5.2 Co-optation in Creative Quarters and Shared Work Spaces: Selecting Members

Gaining entry to the creative quarters of Les Olivettes and Le Panier is made easier by knowing other creative workers already based in these districts. 48% of respondents in our study reported using networks of contacts already based in the creative districts to help find suitable office space, while 44% seized upon a favorable real estate opportunity.³ One artiste based in Le Panier recounted the difficulties encountered by those attempting to move to the area without being co-opted:

'There were a lot of boarded-up premises in Le Panier, but there weren't any proper estate agents so it was hard to find out who the owners were [...] I didn't know who to talk to [...] You had to know someone in Le Panier to find out who was renting what, so it took me a while to find my workshop.' (Artist based in Le Panier).

The importance of social networks in gaining access to a neighborhood represents a first form of selection. The creative workers of Les Olivettes and Le Panier are keen to facilitate the installation of people they know and appreciate. They filter new arrivals by facilitating the installation of workers with whom they have social connections. A system of co-optation thus emerges.

This system of co-optation is made possible by creative workers' privileged access to information regarding the local property market. Being established in the neighborhood gives them access to unofficial information regarding available property. Walking the same streets day after day allows creative workers to spot premises suitable for renovation, to observe new arrivals and departures, and to find out about sales before they are officially announced. This access to information is greatly facilitated by spatial proximity, by physical presence in the neighborhood and by chance encounters. Our study contains many examples which corroborate the importance of such local relations. For example, an architect based in Les Olivettes was able to acquire new premises for his agency in the same street as his former office, simply because he met the vendor in person. The property was never advertised for sale. The same architect now provides workspaces for other creative workers from within his social network.

The system of co-optation is also made possible by the form of control exerted over the property market by creative workers collectively

purchasing and renting business premises. Faced with rising prices, as well as their own financial constraints, creative workers collectively organize to ensure that they are able to remain in these districts in the long term. Some have contributed to the refurbishment of abandoned buildings, which they were able to purchase by grouping together to form collective ownership syndicates (we observed 10 such schemes, primarily in Les Olivettes). Others have established collective organizations to rent shared professional premises (20 projects across both quarters). These creative-run property rental or ownership collectives are then able to manage their own property resources, selecting new entrants to shared offices. They thus extend the system of co-optation to the shared workspaces available in creative quarters. These spaces are managed by property investment syndicates, associations or private owners who own or rent properties in Les Olivettes and Le Panier. Apartments, workshops and offices managed in this way will be home to many creative workers belonging to different companies or organizations. In order to gain access to these facilities creative workers must get past the selection process operated by the members who manage them, who have the power to decide who gets in and who does not.⁴

This selection process is repeated every time a worker leaves and needs to be replaced. It generally involves an informal interview between candidates and members. This is followed by a tour and presentation of the space. A formal application, including examples of the candidate's work and an overview of their professional plans, is required in certain cases (20% of shared spaces). New entrants are selected on the basis of three criteria.

Firstly, only workers operating within the cultural and creative sectors are permitted to join these workspaces. This rule is made clear in the promotional materials of some workspaces,

⁴ Management of these spaces, and thus selection of new entrants, is sometimes handled by dedicated bodies (office managers) and sometimes by all or some of the existing members in the form of a residents' collective.

such as Atelier 9 in Les Olivettes: *'Cultural and creative workers in communication, architecture, culture, design, journalism... Join Atelier 9, a 200m² coworking space in the heart of Nantes.'* (Website of the agency in charge of this workspace).⁵ In all such collective workspaces, activities deemed 'non-creative' are excluded.

Secondly, candidates are selected based on the compatibility of their values with those professed by the existing members. Compatibility in terms of personal values is considered every bit as important as the applicant's field of activity: *'When I choose somebody it's because of what they do [...] and obviously because of who they are.'* (Artist and founder of a shared workshop in Le Panier).

Thirdly, the recruitment of new workers operates primarily and preferentially via a process of co-optation. The opening up of a place within a collective workspace is first advertised via the respective networks of the existing members. This explains the difficulties encountered by creative workers in gaining access to collective workspaces if they do not know any of the existing members. In 45% of cases, creative workers without contacts capable of co-opting them succeeded in joining a collective workspace only after months of searching, and thanks to a friend of a friend. The purpose of the co-optation system is to ensure that new entrants share the same values upheld by the existing members. This is based on the hypothesis that the contacts of existing members will be broadly similar, and will thus integrate the collective dynamic easily. Ultimately, being co-opted is the surest way to gain rapid access to all shared offices spaces: *'This place is really in demand. To get in you need to know the right people, to get a leg up, or you need to apply 6 months in advance!'* (Artist and manager of a shared workshop in Les Olivettes).

The selection of new entrants by co-optation, as practiced by creative workers within creative districts and within their shared workspaces, corresponds to the procedures observed in the bourgeois clubs studied by sociologists (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 2007). This system allows for approval of new arrivals, and creates a clique mentality with a concentration of workers from the cultural and creative sectors belonging to the same relational networks.

5.3 Definition of Creative Workers as Members of an Exclusive Group Dedicated to Mutual Assistance

Once they have made it through the selection process for new entrants, creative workers based in Les Olivettes and Le Panier gain access to the goods and services they seek. Being based in these quarters provides them with a central urban location, property and rent prices lower than those in the city center, a social environment dominated by their peers and an image boost. Above all, they are able to integrate the local collaborative network. (Figures 3 and 4)

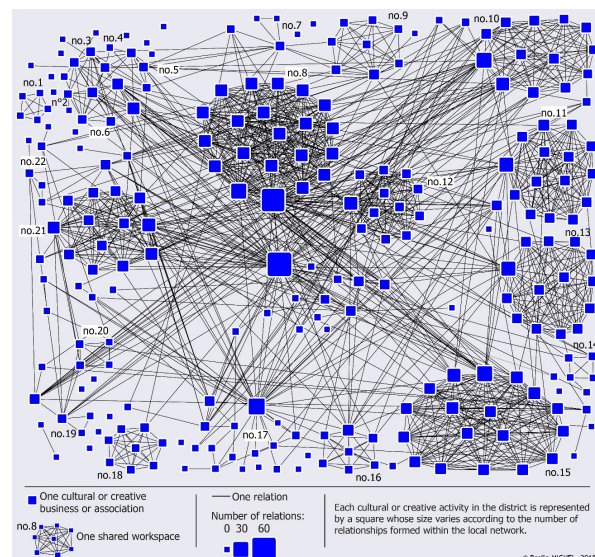


Figure 3. Collaborative network of cultural and creative activities in Les Olivettes

⁵ <http://www.scopic.eu/latelier-9-espace-a-louer/> (accessed 10 June 2015).

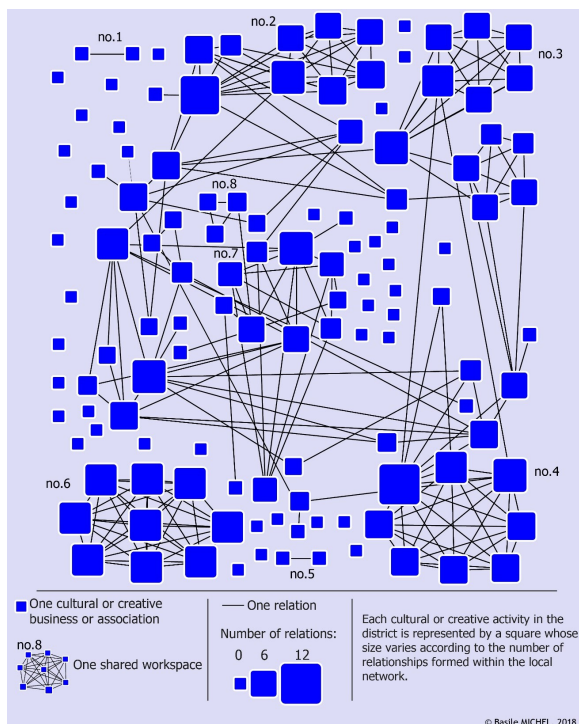


Figure 4. Collaborative network of cultural and creative activities in Le Panier

In both Les Olivettes and Le Panier, creative workers form personal and professional relationships across the district and within their shared workspaces. Although creative workers have clients, audiences and partners on a regional, national and even international scale, the quarter remains a key spatial unit in the exercise of their professional activities. In Le Panier, creative workers form an average of 4 relationships with other workers from the cultural and creative sectors based in the district. In Les Olivettes the figure is 11, indicating a denser network of contacts. Some of these relationships are of a commercial nature, and involve contractual exchanges between partners. For example, architectural firms and landscapers from the quarter may form ad hoc partnerships to respond to calls for tender. There are also less commercial and more informal relationships. These may include loaning equipment, providing technical support or sharing contacts with other creative

companies in the quarter. The collaborative network is structured around several leading cultural institutions and creative businesses, as can be seen in Figures 3 and 4, with organizations that have many relations and link together many of the creative workers of Les Olivettes and Le Panier. They are the leaders and gatekeepers of the network embedded in each district.

This collaborative network is the result of the widespread sharing of information, assistance, contacts, equipment and contracts among creative workers, united around collective projects or simply via informal exchanges. This network binds them together in a relational sense, and when added to their geographical proximity serves to further cement their status as members of a group defined by a spirit of mutual assistance. For creative workers, belonging to a mutual assistance group is a conscious choice which gives rise to a form of shared recognition: *'It's almost like the mafia. Not like that...I mean there's no... There's no intimidation, it's just a sort of "You help me and I'll help you."'* (Manager of a shared workspace in Les Olivettes).

Membership of these groups is restricted to creative workers based in the quarters in question. In Les Olivettes, a Facebook group christened the Democratic Republic of Les Olivettes (RDO) was created in 2014 by a few creative workers based in the district. The aim was to establish a digital space for collaboration and the sharing of information, equipment and skills among local creative worker, facilitating pre-existing exchanges. This network is open only to creative workers from the quarter, a fact explicitly stated in the group description: *'The aim of this group is facilitate interactions, helping hands and useful info among members living or working in Les Olivettes. Any member of this group can invite others to join, but they must have a clear connection to Les Olivettes.'* (Official page of the group).⁶ This creates invisible barriers around the sharing group.

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/republiquedemocratiquedesolivettes/?fref=ts> (accessed 25 October 2018).

A similar sense of exclusivity can be found in Le Panier, rooted in the sense of belonging which the quarter's creative workers feel. They define themselves as members of a group of individuals united by a shared territorial attachment which sets them aside from others: *'People from Le Panier consider themselves to be from Le Panier: they're not from anywhere else, they're from Le Panier. They're not even from Marseille, they're from Le Panier.'* (Manager of a theatre in Le Panier).

In both Le Panier and Les Olivettes, the physical frontiers which delimit the contours of the quarter are conducive to the emergence of this sense of exclusive territorial identity. For example, the director of an artistic association expressed the opinion that the self-contained nature of Les Olivettes helped give its creative workers a sense of difference and independence, particularly in relation to the officially-sanctioned *Quartier de la Création*. Asked about the concentration of creative workers in the quarter, his answer was:

'Why here? Because there's a certain village feel [...] And because I think creatives in general are rebellious, and this place is an enclave. It's flanked by the railway lines, the hospital and the Loire, which only enhances the sense that it's a Gallic village.' (Director of an artistic association).

By setting up shop in Les Olivettes or Le Panier and integrating the local collaborative networks, creative workers join groups dedicated to mutual assistance between workers in the cultural and creative sectors based in these districts. This is felt particularly keenly within shared workspaces. By definition, these facilities constitute groups dedicated to the pooling and sharing of equipment, for the sole benefit of those workers based in the space. In Les Olivettes and Le Panier, they also provide a

theatre for exchanges. Members of these co-working spaces often join forces on collective projects, sharing information and helping one another. They collaborate informally on a day-to-day basis, reproducing in some respects the synergy found within more traditional companies. Workers based in these spaces are connected to one another in a spatial sense, by sharing office space, and in a relational sense due to their daily interactions. They are members of a shared physical and relational space, reserved for insiders only and represented by numbered circles in Figures 3 and 4.

The exclusive nature of creative workers' groups does not, however, preclude them from forming links with other categories of people in their neighborhoods. Artists and cultural institutions (theatres etc.) have a clear interest in forming connections with the residents of Les Olivettes and Le Panier. They run initiatives specifically designed to create bonds with local people (street parties, open workshops etc.). Furthermore, friendly neighborly relations often develop between creative workers and local residents (sharing meals and discussions, help elderly people with shopping etc.). The invisible barriers which separate the creative workers of Les Olivettes and Le Panier from others are not hermetic, but they are real nonetheless.

Within their creative quarters and shared workspaces, the creative workers of Les Olivettes and Le Panier form exclusive groups dedicated to mutual assistance, i.e. clubs (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the creative workers' clubs in the creative quarters of Les Olivettes and Le Panier

Analytical criteria of clubs	Les Olivettes district	Le Panier district
Clustering around goods and services	Urban centrality Cheap former industrial premises Proximity to cultural and creative partners The image of the city's unofficial creative quarter	Proximity to major cultural institutions Former ground floor retail spaces Artistic emulation Proximity to cultural and creative partners
Selecting new members	Privileged access to premises for rent or sale by co-optation Control of shared work spaces by creative workers: recruitment by co-optation, cultural and creative activities only, people with values compatible with members	Privileged access to premises for rent or sale by co-optation Control of shared work spaces by creative workers: recruitment by co-optation, cultural and creative activities only, people with values compatible with members
Definition of membership	Relational proximity: exclusive and dense network of creative workers of the district with a spirit of mutual assistance Spatial proximity in an urban enclave and in exclusive shared workspaces Common sense of territorial belonging to the 'Democratic Republic of Les Olivettes'	Relational proximity: exclusive and moderately dense network of creative workers of the district with a spirit of mutual assistance Spatial proximity in an urban enclave and in exclusive shared workspaces Common sense of territorial belonging to the urban village of Le Panier

Source: Basile Michel.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article uses the examples of Les Olivettes and Le Panier to demonstrate the existence of de facto clubs of creative workers within creative quarters. In both of these districts, the clubs are composed of creative workers based within the territory and integrated into local collaborative networks. They are the members. As such they enjoy access to the goods and services which prompted them to move to the area in the first place, and which are shared within the club (image, partnerships etc.). Admittance to this club is controlled by the creative workers themselves, who set up immaterial barriers to entry and require potential entrants to acquire

an entry ticket. This ticket involves buying or renting an office in the neighborhood. Entry to the club is also controlled by a system of co-optation, and getting an entry ticket is easier if you already know a member of the club.

Shared workspaces correspond to mini-clubs existing within the overall club ecosystems of Les Olivettes and Le Panier. They are part of the over-arching club because the creative workers based in these spaces are integrated into the local network. But they also constitute sub-units because these workers are connected to one another by a greater physical and relational proximity than they are to the rest of the network. Sharing office space and

resources is a defining feature of these mini-clubs. Access to these resources is restricted to members, with a system of co-optation which sees potential entrants filtered on the basis of certain values and sector-specific criteria. As at district level, the entry ticket corresponds to renting an office or part of a shared workspace, something which is made much easier by knowing an existing member of the mini-club.

Applying the economic theory of clubs (Buchanan, 1965), the arrival of new members is beneficial to the club as a whole because it serves to increase the resources available to all. As such, integrating new creative workers reinforces the specialist reputation and creative image of the quarter. It also brings new contacts and skills to the area, and can help to reduce rental and equipment costs by splitting these charges between more people. Thus, growing the club can allow for economies of scale in external dealings and network externalities. It helps to support the development of cultural and creative businesses in the difficult economic circumstances encountered in these sectors.

Nevertheless, and again in application of the economic theory of clubs, making too many creative workers members of the club is counter-productive and can lead to congestion. The office space and equipment shared by creative workers cannot be shared efficiently if the quantities available are not sufficient to meet the needs of all members. Screening new entrants is a partial solution to this problem. In the case of shared workspaces, creative workers determine the number of work stations available for rent in an attempt to strike the right balance between the total cost of rent and the available surface area. The idea is to recruit enough fellow workers to ensure that the rent price is low for all members. New members are therefore to be welcomed. The upper limit to this welcoming dynamic is the creative workers' desire to have workspaces

which are not clogged up by an excessive amount of members.

These creative workers' clubs do not correspond in all respects to the theoretical model of the club. First and foremost, they differ from bourgeois clubs in terms of their composition. Although creative workers have a high level of social and cultural capital, they come from diverse social backgrounds and do not belong to the economic elite. Secondly, contrary to the economic theory of clubs, networks of creative workers are not closed off from non-members. Dissemination effects are at play, particularly thanks to the involvement of certain creative workers in forging bonds with local residents. The barriers around these creative clubs are thus porous.

Using clubs to analyze creative quarters, this article raises a potential theoretical contribution to create the conversation between urban studies and traditional economic theory of clubs. The discovery of clubs in creative quarters helps to highlight some realities of the social and spatial organization of creative workers, particularly the importance of collaborative networks of peers spatially embedded in specific urban districts. Club theory thus contributes to a better understanding of cultural and creative clustering in creative quarters, illustrating the potential value of using this conceptual framework in urban studies. However, as Heikkila (1996) explains, economic research on clubs does not take into account the spatial and urban dimension, considering space as a simple homogeneous and abstract whole. Similarly, the economic theory of clubs often neglects the social dimensions of groupings of individuals with a conception centered on homo economicus. It is therefore necessary to add a spatial and social dimension to clubs in order to develop research relevant to urban studies, as suggested in this article through the different spatial scales considered (urban district, shared work spaces) and the different factors of creative

workers' clustering identified (human values, social networks etc.). It is on this condition that clubs can be one of the relevant analytical approaches to study the spatial and social dynamics of contemporary cities, in the case of creative quarters as in other research fields.

Ultimately, the existence of these clubs hints at the potentially ambivalent impact of the spatial agglomeration of cultural and creative industries in specific urban areas. The dynamics of sharing, mutual assistance and collaboration which emerge from this process of creative clustering are conducive to business development in an environment which is competitive, unstable and uncertain. As indicated above, some cultural and creative activities are the leaders of the local network and play a key role in these collaborative dynamics. But these desirable dynamics also come with a risk of social exclusion and a clique mentality, offsetting the positive impact of the clustering of cultural and creative activities within designated creative quarters. All over the world, public authorities are lending their support to the development of such creative quarters in order to catalyze the economic and urban development of their cities (Evans, 2009a; Foord, 2008). The conclusions drawn from this article reveal the importance of maintaining a sense of openness among groups of creative workers gathered in such districts, in order to ensure that they are fully integrated with our contemporary cities. Thus, the main finding of this article (i.e. the existence of creative workers' clubs embedded in creative quarters) suggests further research on the tensions between openness and lock-in in cultural and creative clustering. It raises the question of the balance to be struck in order to avoid the risk of creative quarters contributing to the social fragmentation of cities, but on the contrary to make them favorable spaces for creativity and social cohesion via collaborative dynamics and peer networks open to diversity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the research center ESO (UMR CNRS 6590), the University of Angers, and the SCAENA research project on Cultural Scenes, Ambiances and Urban Change funded by the French 'Agence Nationale de la Recherche' (ANR: National Agency for Research).

REFERENCES

- Ardenne, P. (2012). Une fiction complaisante ? In J-J. Terrin (Eds.), *La ville des créateurs* (pp. 200-215). Marseille: Parenthèses.
- Authier, J-Y., Bacqué, M-H., & Guérin-Pacé, F. (Eds.). (2007). *Le quartier. Enjeux scientifiques, actions politiques et pratiques sociales*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Bell, D., & Jayne, M. (Eds.). (2004). *City of quarters. Urban villages in the contemporary city*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bourdieu, P. & De Saint-Martin, M. (1976). Anatomie du goût. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 2(5), 2-81.
- Buchanan, J. A. (1965). An Economic Theory of Clubs. *Economica*, 32(125), 1-14.
- Caves, R. E. (2000). *Creative Industries. Contracts between Art and Commerce*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press.
- Chapain, C., & Sagot-Duvaurox, D., (2018). Cultural and creative clusters – a systematic literature review and a renewed research agenda. *Urban Research & Practice*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17535069.2018.1545141>.
- Charmes, E. (2009). On the residential "clubbisation" of French periurban municipalities. *Urban Studies*, 46(1), 189-212.
- Comunian, R., (2011). Rethinking the creative city: The role of complexity, networks and interactions in the urban creative economy. *Urban Studies*, 48(6), 1157-1179.
- Comunian, R., (2012). Exploring the role of networks in the creative economy of North East England: Economic and cultural dynamics. In B. Warf (Eds.), *Encounters and engagements between economic and cultural geography* (pp. 143-157). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Evans, G. (2009a). Creative cities, creative spaces and urban policy. *Urban Studies*, 46(5-6), 1003-1040.
- Evans, G. (2009b). From cultural quarters to creative clusters: creative spaces in the new city economy. In M. Legner (Eds.), *The sustainability and development of cultural quarters: international perspectives* (pp. 32-59). Stockholm: Institute of Urban History.

- Evans, G. (2015). Rethinking place branding and place making through creative and cultural quarters. In M. Kavaratzis, G. Warnaby & G.J. Ashworth (Eds.), *Rethinking place branding. comprehensive brand development for cities and regions* (pp. 135-158). Cham: Springer.
- Foord, J. (2008). Strategies for creative industries: an international review. *Creative Industries Journal*, 1(2), 91-113.
- Grabher, G. (2001). Ecologies of creativity: The Village, the Group, and the heterarchic organisation of the British advertising industry. *Environment and Planning A*, 33(2), 351-374.
- Grabher, G. (2002). The project ecology of advertising: Tasks, talents and teams. *Regional Studies*, 36(3), 245-262.
- Heikkilä, E. J. (1996). Are municipalities Tieboutian clubs? *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 26(2), 203-226.
- HKU. (2010). *The entrepreneurial dimension of the cultural and creative industries*. Retrieved from: http://kultur.creative-europe-desk.de/fileadmin/user_upload/The_Entrepreneurial_Dimension_of_the_Cultural_and_Creative_Industries.pdf.
- Hutton, T. A. (2004). The New Economy of the inner city. *Cities*, 21(2), 89-108.
- KEA. (2006). *The Economy of Culture in Europe*. Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/library/studies/cultural-economy_en.pdf.
- Keane, M. (2011). *China's new creative clusters: Governance, human capital and investment*, London: Routledge.
- Le Goix, R., & Webster, C. (2008). Gated communities. *Geography Compass*, 2(4), 1189-1214.
- Menger, P.-M. (2002). *Portrait de l'artiste en travailleur. Métamorphoses du capitalisme*. Paris: Seuil.
- Michel, B. (2017). *Les quartiers créatifs : une dynamique de club. Analyse croisée des quartiers des Olivettes (Nantes), du Panier (Marseille) et Berriat (Grenoble)*. PhD Thesis, University of Angers, France.
- Mommaas, H. (2004). Cultural clusters and the post-industrial city: Towards the remapping of urban cultural policy. *Urban Studies*, 41(3), 507-532.
- Ovidio, M., & Ponzini, D. (2014). Rhetoric and effects of the creative city policy: Evidence and reflections from Milan and beyond. In R. Sternberg & G. Krauss (Eds.), *Handbook of research on entrepreneurship and creativity* (pp. 296-322). Cheltenham & Northampton: Edward Elgar.
- Pinçon, M., & Pinçon-Charlot, M. (2007). *Les ghettos du gotha. Comment la bourgeoisie défend ses espaces*. Paris: Seuil.
- Pratt, A. C. (2009). Urban regeneration: From the arts 'feel good' factor to the cultural economy. A case study of Hoxton, London. *Urban Studies*, 46(5-6), 1041-1061.
- Roodhouse, S. (2006). *Cultural quarters. Principle and practice*. Bristol & Portland: Intellect Books.
- Saha, D., & Sen, J. (2016). The role of place in creative economy: The case of Varanasi. *International Journal of Cultural and Creative Industries*, 4(1), 28-37.
- Samuelson, P. A. (1954). The pure theory of public expenditure. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 36(4), 387-389.
- Sandler, T., & Tschirhart, J. (1980). The economic theory of clubs: An evaluative survey. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 18(4), 1481-1521.
- Tiebout, C. (1956). A pure theory of local expenditures. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 64(5), 416-424.
- UNCTAD. (2010). *Creative Economy Report 2010. Creative Economy: A Feasible Development Option*. Retrieved from: https://unctad.org/en/Docs/ditctab20103_en.pdf.
- Van Tuijl, E., Carvalho, L., & Van Haaren, J. (2013). Developing creative quarters in cities: policy lessons from 'Art and Design City' Arabianranta, Helsinki. *Urban Research & Practice*, 6(2), 211-218.
- Vivant, E. (2009). *Qu'est-ce que la ville créative ?* Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Webster, C. (2003). The nature of the neighbourhood. *Urban Studies*, 40(13), 2591-2612.
- Zarlenga, M. I., Rius-Uldemollins, J., & Rodríguez Morató, A. (2013). Cultural clusters and social interaction dynamics: The case of Barcelona. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 23(3), 422-440.
- Zhong, S. 2011. By nature or by nurture: the formation of new economy spaces in Shanghai. *Asian Geographer*, 28(1), 33-49.