

Musterd, S. and Murie, A. (eds.): Making Competitive Cities. 2010. Wiley – Blackwell
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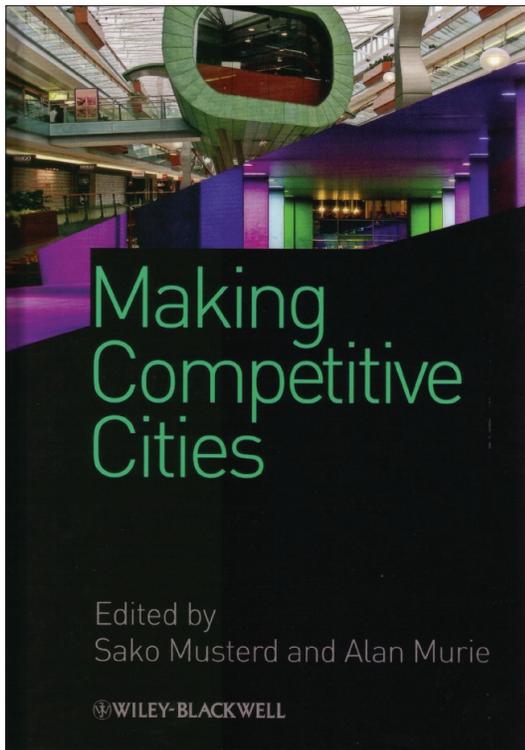
The book investigates how creative industries contribute to the competitiveness of cities. It epitomizes the results of a four year long project called ACRE. In the framework of the project participants from 13 European cities carried out a comprehensive research about the role and possible development of creative and knowledge intensive industries.

The papers of the first section of the book entitled “Pathways” deal with the developing paths of the investigated cities: their socio-economic structure, position in the international urban network in terms of competitiveness, and the role they fulfill in their native country. In most cases, the general description of cities means an overview of the history during the last few hundred years (e.g. Milan from the 15th or Amsterdam from the 16th century) but the focus is put on the relevant events which have been responsible for the present conditions of their economic performance. These chapters show that the economic success and problems are rooted not only in the last decades but sometimes they can be related to the past centuries.

Peripheral European cities like Helsinki and Dublin are good examples for rapid development in recent years because as capital cities they played a central role in the national economic development and modernization and they could rapidly change their economic profile due to massive foreign investments. Toulouse represents another way of development, as it was the beneficiary of the French decentralization policy and especially the national high-tech and R&D strategies.

There is a strong difference between the western and eastern European cities, the latter still lagging behind their western counterparts in many respects. For example, the share of low-paid creative workers is much higher in the post-socialist countries as BURDACK, J., EGEDY, T. and STRYJAKIEWICZ, T. pointed out through the examples of Budapest, Leipzig, Poznań, Riga, and Sofia.

The studies of the next section of the book under the title of “Actors” discuss the most intriguing question concerning the creative class: how the theory of Richard FLORIDA fits to European cities. The results of the international survey carried out in ACRE project reveal that the main difference between the European and the American creative workers lies in their mobility. The lower level of mobility of the European creatives has several reasons e.g. the local embeddedness of creative workers (mostly



those who run a business) due to cultural (e.g. language), family and social factors (e.g. pension funds).

The same survey showed that the role of soft factors in the decisions of creative workers to move to a particular city is much weaker in Europe than in the United States. In Europe the central functions of cities and the personal contacts seem to be more important than the social atmosphere or the level of tolerance. On the other hand, albeit soft factors can not attract new creative workforce to a city they can keep those already working there. The language problems and cultural attractiveness are also important. For instance even culturally attractive cities like Barcelona have the problem that the everyday use of English is not common, which discourages international workers.

The life of creative workers is proved to be partly different from the stereotypes of progressive lifestyle. Gender inequalities exist both in working and in private life despite all expectations. Young employees have many difficulties in their job career; one of them is being the temporary contracts they are often employed on and what they consider as a source of insecurity, and not flexibility. At the same time, some other features fit to the stereotypes: people working in the knowledge intensive and creative industries appreciate professional stimulation and are ready to work overtime.

The last part of the book headed by "Policies" intends to give a direct answer to the major question: how cities can be made competitive? There are examples of policies based on bottom-up approach (e.g. Milan where it has a long tradition), and also of top-down interventionist strategies (e.g. Dublin). While analyzing the development strategies and plans of Toulouse, Milan and Dublin, MUGNANO, S., MURPHY, E. and MARTIN-BRELOT, H. drew different conclusions. In Toulouse, soft factors can be considered as key elements of the development strategy. In Milan, the city should build intense relations with its metropolitan area. In Dublin, where the private actors have played a dominant role for the last decades, they should be involved in the planning process.

The connection between clusters and the creative economy is highlighted by the cases of Helsinki, Birmingham and Poznań. The first has a long experience in the evolution of clusters. According to the authors, it can be explained by the strong tradition of cooperation between these sectors developed during the nation building process in the 19th century. In West-Midlands it is the regional policy that strengthened the formation of clusters, whereas in Poznań the universities and the scientific institutions have strong connections with the clusters, business companies hardly have them.

A major question is analyzed by KOVÁCS, Z., PETHE, H. and MIOSGA, M.: whether the soft or the hard factors are more important in attracting the creative industry and creative workforce. The local and national development plans they have examined reveal the higher importance of hard factors, namely of the infrastructure (e.g. science parks, universities).

One of the main merits of the book is in an innovative approach: its focus on the topic of creative city and creative class in Europe. It identifies the similarities and differences of the creative industries in the European cities and their difference from the American experience. Besides the excellent papers included in the volume, a rich bibliography offers the readers the opportunity to follow up numerous issues: conceptual, theoretical and practical ones. The book can be equally useful for researchers and urban planners.

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