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Urban Design and the Shaping of Creative Clusters: A Case Study in Cardiff

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Summary

In cities worldwide, creative industries are recognised as powerful catalysts for economic growth and culture-led regeneration. In post-industrial cities, these industries have become central to these processes, leading to the rise of a new 'cultural economy'. Despite extensive research on the phenomenon, the role of urban design in fostering and sustaining creative clusters, particularly in the revitalisation of UK high streets, remains underexplored within the context of urban studies. This is significant since the locations of economic activity in cities are never random, and as creative industries often possess and can benefit from distinct spatial characteristics and vibrant public spaces at the neighbourhood scale. Indeed, creative communities often involve novel, often imaginative reuses of existing buildings, offering valuable insights into the adaptability of built environment typologies. This paper addresses this gap.

It does so through a case study of Cardiff in post-industrial South Wales. Here as elsewhere, creative industries have significantly contributed to economic renewal in the twenty-first century, particularly through the media and entertainment sector including television and film production. Cardiff has emerged as one of the UK's largest media centres outside London, showcasing rapid creative growth driven by advancements in digital and media technologies. This growth which has parallel the shrink-back of traditional industries in manufacturing and mining is represented in the Creative Economy Atlas Cymru, developed by the Centre for the Creative Economy at Cardiff University. This study builds on this work and the city's established creative networks, proposing an analytical framework for understanding the role of urban design in shaping place and development in the city, with the aim of enhancing the visibility and future places of creative activities. This will include ways of evaluating neighbourhood morphologies, adaptations, land rents (affordability benchmarks and rental controls), and public space qualities that impact creative production and clustering. We argue that such an understanding can offer valuable insights for policymakers, built-environment professionals involved in developing creative industry clusters or units within regeneration frameworks, and the creative communities themselves.

Keywords

Creative industries; public space; built environment; urbanism; urban design; urban morphology