

CREATIVE ECONOMY: SUPPORT OF CREATIVE HUBS BY THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Markéta CHALOUPKOVÁ ^{1*}, Josef KUNC ²,
Jaroslav KOUTSKÝ ³

¹*Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies, Mendel University in Brno,
Brno, Czech Republic*

²*Faculty of Economics and Administration, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic*

³*Faculty of Social and Economic Studies, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem,
Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic*

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Abstract. Creative hubs are institutional organization of newly emerging creative industries. Economic activities associated with creative industries are very often business-oriented and strongly independent. However, there are often needs for public sector. The aim of paper is to analyze the situation in the Czech Republic and assess the involvement and benefits of the public sector towards the support of these business activities. Methodologically, the work is based on several approaches. Primarily, a database of Czech creative hubs was created as part of desk research. This was followed by quantitative questionnaire survey with representatives of creative hubs and qualitative research in the form of structured interviews with representatives of hubs and the public sector. It was found that without public finances and interest, Czech creative hubs cannot function in the long term. Financial support is therefore the most common form of public support. The main strength of hubs lies in the built community of members, offered services and networking. Conversely, the main weakness is the inability to secure sufficient funds and sponsors. Although public sector cooperation in the Czech Republic is still limited, many public representatives are beginning to realize the benefits of the creative economy and gradually implement it into policies.

Keywords: creative hubs, creative economics, urban environment, public sector, regional and local development, Czech Republic.

JEL Classification: R12, R58.

Introduction

The new millennium has become an ideal period for the development of the creative scene and creative environment not only in the Czech Republic, but also in other post-socialist countries. It is part of a wider trend of the increasing importance of cultural and creative

*Corresponding author. E-mail: marketa.chaloupkova@mendelu.cz

industries (CCI) in the economies of the developed countries of the world. In principle, we follow the profiling of sectors based on the creation of high added value and the production of intangible goods and their economic evaluation (Oakley, 2004; Boschma & Fritsch, 2009; Slach et al., 2013). The definition of CCI first appeared in 1998 in the Creative Industries Mapping Document and reads: “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (British Council, 2013).

Creative hubs represent one of the possible forms of organizational and spatial arrangement of CCI. The main players are now the young creative hubs established or re-opened in the last ten years. Creative hubs or “*a physical or virtual place that brings together enterprising people working in creative and cultural industries*” (British Council, 2014a) contribute significantly to the economic and social development of a state, region or city and inspire millions of people. Similar to Boswinkel and van Meerkerk (2022), the authors of the paper see creative hubs both as a bottom-up initiative by artists and other creators, and as a goal of policymakers who see in creative hubs an opportunity for urban renewal and an impetus for the local economy. Compared to their predecessors, hubs have become much more independent in terms of self-sufficiency, able to connect with the wider community due to economic development, globalization and the benefits of the Internet (Potts, 2009; Wedemeier, 2010; Branzanti, 2015; Ferrili et al., 2017).

To underline the international context of the research, it is important to note that the Czech Republic is not the only country where the public sector supports creative centres. Public sector involvement is increasingly understood to be crucial for promoting the growth and sustainability of the creative industries throughout the world. In many national economies including the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Canada, governments and public institutions have put measures into place to actively support creative hubs and foster the creative economy. Positive impacts from these activities have been debated, including the creation of jobs, economic growth, cultural development, and urban renewal.

Creative hubs in the Czech Republic are inexperienced in the field of business and securing a long-term future (Kloudová, 2009). It is therefore important to create a suitable environment for them to grow and develop their activities. A stronger and more welcoming society needs to be built around them, where local authorities (i.e., the public sector) are welcoming and understanding, and where there is more support for the cultural and creative industries in terms of funding, investment, skills training or collaboration with the public sector (Cooke & Lazzeretti, 2008; Evans, 2009; Gill et al., 2019). Our research is particularly important for a better understanding of the issue of creative hubs in the Czech environment. In contrast to other foreign and domestic research, it focuses specifically on creative hubs, not only on creative urban environment in general. The text tries to fill the gap in the absence of data on both national level and non-existence of a database of concrete hubs as economic and cultural subjects (local level). Another difference is the focus on a qualitative research method, which consists in the implementation of an extensive questionnaire survey and interviews with interested parties.

The Czech Republic is only just discovering the potential and benefits of supporting the development of a creative environment. It is therefore not surprising that in the field of creative hubs one can encounter problems such as inconsistencies in terminology, typology, and approaches to public support, the non-existence of a database of creative hubs, an inflexible grant system or unsystematic support from the national level or short-term and low-quality collection of statistical data. As is evident from the latest research in Western Europe (Pratt, 2005; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005; Boswinkel & van Meerkerk, 2023), even there “not everything is solved” and local governments have been trying to define exactly what a creative hub is for 20 years.

A great deficiency is also seen in the field of research. Some research has already taken place in the Czech Republic, but it was devoted to the mapping of cultural and creative industries in selected Czech cities (Bednář et al., 2016; Palaščík & Bilík, 2017; Ministerstvo kultury České republiky, 2019) not creative hubs. There is a lack of approaches that address the role of the public sector in supporting emerging hubs or in supporting their long-term existence. They also abstain from works that evaluate the benefits of public money realized in this way. The authors of the article presented would like to fill this gap and thus contribute not only to raising awareness of the benefits of the existence of creative hubs for the city, its residents and entrepreneurs, but also to further follow-up research.

The main goal of the contribution is to describe and evaluate the forms, sources, and benefits of public sector support in the Czech Republic for the functioning and financing of creative hubs, to analyze the most significant barriers to development and to point out the possibilities for their elimination. Both extensive data and information analysis on creative hubs, as well as questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews with representatives of hubs (top management) and representatives of the public sphere in selected cities became supports for the set goals. Although the functioning of creative hubs cannot be identified only with the public sector, this sector in the Czech Republic is a key sector for the real existence of hubs, without whose support the hubs cannot survive. In addition, city representatives are often decisive actors who decide on the allocation of public support.

The following research questions were determined on the basis of theoretical starting points and specific case studies:

RQ1: What are the most common forms and sources of support requested by creative hubs from the public sector, and how do these requirements overlap with actual support?

RQ2: What are the biggest positives and barriers to the development of creative hubs and how does their management deal with them?

The answers to the research questions mentioned led not only to the fulfillment of the overall goal of the research, but also to the creation of realistically applicable recommendations for representatives of Czech cities. Considering the lack of saturation of the Czech market, these recommendations can be applied without major problems and can potentially lead to an increase in awareness of creative hubs and their benefits for city dwellers (i.e., increase in the quality of life) and entrepreneurs (attraction of the creative class, increase in investment, creation of new jobs, etc.).

1. Theoretical background

Cities become creative hubs due to their ability to attract a “creative class” made up of people creating added economic value through their creativity. According to Florida’s (1999, 2002, 2006) theory, cities can then become creative hubs due to the concentration of certain types of creative activities and individuals, which is evidenced, for example, by New York City (Currid & Williams, 2009) or San Francisco (Wu, 2005). From this point of view, for the correct setting of urban policy, it is necessary to primarily focus on the spatial organization of the hub and its location in the urban structure (Scott, 2006; Montgomery, 2007; Sasaki, 2010). On the other hand, in this introductory part, it is worth mentioning an important academic trend that criticizes the emphasis on the role of the CCI and to a large extent contradicts the purpose of the public funds spent on them. These are mainly approaches that do not perceive the onset of CCI as a fundamental or completely new phenomenon and to a large extent the topic of CCI as fashionable or just marketing-packaged long-known knowledge (e.g., Peck, 2005; Goldbard, 2006; Markusen et al., 2008). At the same time, there are also doubts about the possibility of the public sector meaningfully entering into the support of activities in the field of cultural and creative industries, which are inherently based on authenticity and independence (Goldenberg et al., 2009; Sternberg, 2012; Evers et al., 2010).

The second way of thinking, from which we as the authors of the article are based, understands creative hubs differently from geographical (or also infrastructural or physical) groupings, i.e., clusters, districts or zones, and focuses on what creative hubs do internally, or what services they provide and what activities take place there. This view is echoed by the London Development Agency, which sees hubs as places that provide “*space for work, participation and consumption*”, stating: “*Most will have an element of real estate, but rarely will it be a single isolated building. A hub may occupy one space in its neighbourhood, but its supporting activities will involve a range of local institutions and networks.*” (London Development Agency, 2003, p. 34)

The issue of creative hubs is a relatively new phenomenon in the Czech Republic, therefore there is no research on creative hubs, only research dealing with the mapping of cultural and creative industries (in addition to the above mentioned in the Introduction, e.g., Němec, 2013; Chaloupková & Kunc, 2022). Based on the content analysis of the aforementioned research, the current state of development of the selected Czech cities involved in the research was evaluated.

Key foreign research, from which we are based on the theoretical level, was chosen because it primarily deals with the activities of creative hubs and the way to support them. All these studies can be considered inspiring and transferable to the Czech environment. Dovey et al. (2016) ask a very basic question in their study about the activity of creative hubs and the processes taking place in them, on a general level, without territorial differences. The authors state that activities and processes are more than just physical infrastructure created by creative hubs. The primary activity of the hub is to support the exchange, transfer, and facilitation of knowledge. Creative hubs fulfill three main functions: creating and transferring knowledge to the place of application, giving advice to people through education and training, and identifying local innovation systems (creating networks and community meeting places). Virani et al. (2016) or Virani (2015) add a form of support to the question of hub use

in the UK, emphasizing the need for multi-source and diverse support, taking into account the uniqueness of each hub.

Regarding the types and forms of services provided to members of creative hubs, they seem to be similar in Europe and Asia, according to Guerra and Moreira (2015) and Spencer (2008). Although the countries of Europe and Asia differ in their approaches to the functioning of different types of entities, in all types of creative hubs similar activities are carried out supported by the offer of services. These are mainly recruited from opportunities to provide users with a space to work, exchange ideas, create networks, or organize events for networking, coaching and education. Asian space, or the British Council (2014b, 2017), monitors forms of support for creative hubs in Vietnam and Malaysia in its expert studies. In the case of Vietnam, the most common types of support, regardless of the type of creative hub, include support from the city management, skills training, financial and grant support including investment support, consultancy, support for networking and exchange of experiences, and last but not least, communication support. A 2017 study shows that creative hubs in Malaysia are most often supported through financial incentives, grants and contributions for the operation or implementation of cultural events. Furthermore, the public sector provides support for education, because although each hub is different in its approach and has different needs, it faces similar threats in the form of lack of funding. The most common activities taking place in Indonesia's creative spaces include workshops, exhibitions, and art activities. Other frequent activities are meetings, networking, workshops with discussion forums, research presentations or opportunities for support from the business community (Siregar & Sudrajat, 2017).

From the case studies presented above, it is clear that current studies dealing in particular with the activities of creative hubs come most often from the pen of Asian experts. It is due to current trends and the high activity of Asian creatives. All things considered, though some differences from the European environment can be found in the mentioned studies. These include, in particular, a different typology of creative hubs resulting from a slightly different perspective on creative hubs and from the different cultural-historical development of the given country. On the other hand, as authors of studies ask themselves similar questions as authors dealing with the European creative environment, transferability to the Czech Republic is appropriate here.

In European countries, one can also encounter differences in the form of support for the activities of creative hubs by the public sector (city, region or state), which is probably due to the degree of development of the creative environment in which culture is supported in the long term. For example, in Germany, CCI consists mainly of profit-oriented enterprises that are dedicated to areas such as the creation, production and media dissemination of cultural goods and services. In contrast to other European countries, cultural and creative industries do not include organizations that are financed from public sources, or public administration institutions (Söndermann, 2012; Throsby, 2001). The public and intermediate sector, which includes the activities of public benefit companies, remains separate from market-oriented areas (Enquetekommission, 2007). Our next-door neighbor, Austria, adopted almost the complete definition of CCI from Germany and includes only entities with a predominant share of profit-making activities (Kreativwirtschaft, 2019).

The Czech Republic can also be inspired by the Baltic states, which began to devote themselves diligently to the issue of creative industries at the beginning of the 21st century. Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia (Makselis, 2010), as well as Germany and Austria (Kraus, 2012; Kreativwirtschaft, 2019), were inspired by Great Britain, whose British Council played a significant role in spreading awareness of the CCI concept. Estonia, in particular, is set as a model of a modern digital country, where the CCI sector is also very advanced. According to research from 2011, there were 5,000 companies operating in the CCI sectors, which represented 9.4% of the total number of companies in the state. Almost 28,000 people were employed in the creative industries, which represented 4.3% of the country's working population, and the creative sector made up 3% of the Estonian economy and was still growing (Loov Eesti, 2011). When it comes to the public sector, the partners for various forms of CCI are mainly universities of artistic, technical, and economic orientation.

Apart from Estonia, specific information on the impact of CCIs on GDP can be found, for example, in Andres et al. (2019), who report that in Germany CCIs have accounted for about 3% of GDP for about a decade now. Detailed statistical data on Germany's CCIs can be found in the annual publication "Monitoringbericht Kultur und Kreativwirtschaft", which is published by the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy to raise public awareness, or in Kraus (2012). Another country that is historically and culturally close to the Czech Republic is Austria, which has a rich cultural tradition (Kraus & Žáková, 2014). The report "Achter Österreichischer Kreativwirtschafts-bericht" (Kreativwirtschaft, 2019) showed that Vienna is considered the "creative heart" of Austria, as two thirds of Austrian creative enterprises are located there, which includes creative hubs. A total annual turnover of €22 billion was generated by 42.3 thousand Austrian creative enterprises (of which 17.2 thousand were located in Vienna), which corresponds to 4% of Austria's total economic output. In 2019, the number of employers in Austria amounted to almost 110 thousand people, with more than half located in the capital.

Under the auspices of the UN, regular reports on the status of CCIs are issued by UNCTAD (2010, 2022). The studies are, on the one hand, global or macro-regional in nature, with analysis of emerging trends; on the other hand, they also look at specific economic and social indicators for individual countries for which relevant data exist (GDP, employment, trade, exports, imports, etc.). A number of statistics can be found on the website of the European Commission (2019), which has created the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor. 190 cities were monitored and the database includes, among other things, data from OpenStreetMap, including spatial analyses of places where not only economic prosperity but also social inclusion occurs. Data can also be found here for cities in the Czech Republic (Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Pilsen, Karlovy Vary, Olomouc). Information on the impact of CCIs on the economy (especially GDP) of 10 selected countries in the Americas. Partial information and data from other European countries (Western and Eastern Europe) on the impact of CCs on the economy, health and other factors can be found in studies by Lazzarretti et al. (2008), Emilia et al. (2008) or Boix Domenech et al. (2022).

Selected statistical data (e.g. number of entities and employees in CCs or total turnover of CCs) for the city of Brno can be found in the publication Adamcová et al. (2014) or on the website kreativnibrno.cz, for the city of Olomouc in the study by Palaščík and Bilík (2017)

or for the capital city of Prague in the study by Cikánek (2013). Similar to other countries, in the Czech Republic all types of creative hubs (i.e. creative places, coworking, makerspaces) have been perceived as entities with primarily private economic (commercial) interest. It is necessary, and in recent years it has been successful, to change the perception of these subjects, as creative spaces are increasingly based on community cooperation and ideas in the public sphere, providing space for public cooperation and co-creation (Chaloupková & Kunc, 2022). Not only for these reasons, the public sector in the form of representatives of cities or municipalities must be respected and cooperated with the private sector when supporting and functioning of creative hubs.

As it emerged from the research of the above-mentioned foreign and domestic research studies, in the Czech Republic, in contrast to foreign countries (e.g. Great Britain, Germany, Austria or Estonia), support from public sources is granted on the basis of customary law (specific to the Czech Republic, law based on customs and ordinary). Eva Žáková (2020; head of the IDU Art Institute) also testifies to the aforementioned “differentiation” of policies in interview, stating: *“In Germany and other German-speaking countries, public support for culture is separated from business support. They have a different approach to support strategy. In Germany, there is an agency for the support of creative industries with branches in the federal states, and in addition, there is also traditional support in the form of grants to support non-profit creation and culture. The reason for the separation is the requirement of the cultural community to avoid commercialization associated with business.”*

Furthermore, the support of cultural heritage is a priority in the Czech Republic. Significant differences can also be found in the form of the non-existence of a uniform terminology, a database of creative hubs, approaches to support their activity by the city, the flexibility of grant systems, data collection or systematic support from the national level (Chaloupková & Kunc, 2022). The mentioned shortcomings are due to the fact that the Czech Republic is only just discovering the potential and benefits of creative hubs, which is also evidenced by a number of mapping studies of cultural and creative industries, which only began to be implemented after 2013 (Slach et al., 2013; Kraus & Žáková, 2014; Žáková et al., 2016; Chaloupková & Kunc, 2022).

2. Research methodology

The research methodology of this text is inspired by the latest research in the field of spatial aspects of creative industries and hubs. In principle, it can be said that approaches are based on the use of relatively advanced static techniques looking for a relationship between variables associated with agglomeration effects such as density or distance with other aspects important for the functioning of creative industries and hubs in the urban environment (Coll-Martínez & Mendez-Ortega, 2023) to more complex case studies, using exploratory and explanatory approaches, which are able to address the issue and emphasize the local context and in multi-faceted understanding (Miao, 2023).

To fulfill the research objective, it was necessary to remove a number of obstacles arising from the current situation in the Czech Republic, which differs significantly in some respects compared to other countries with a developed creative and cultural environment

(e.g., Great Britain, Germany, Austria or Estonia) (e.g., in the absence of uniform terminology, approaches to support, the absence of a database or relevant statistical data).

First, the authors of the presented article conducted a search for foreign research related to the issue of creative hubs, cities, or cultural and creative industries. The extensive research showed that it is most suitable for the environment of the Czech Republic to use the terminology that is most widespread in practice, namely the terminology and typology of creative hubs used by the British Council (2014a). Based on this typology, it can be concluded that there are three types of creative hubs (i.e. creative spaces, coworking, makerspaces) in the Czech Republic, which are discussed in more detail by the authors in the article “Locality selection matters. Investigating creative hubs in the Czech Republic” (Chaloupková & Kunc, 2022).

After defining individual types of Czech creative hubs, the authors focused on eliminating another gap, which consisted in the lack of a database. Using an extensive desk research method, a database of Czech creative hubs was created. The procedure for verifying that the subject is indeed a creative hub was as follows: 1) consultation with experts from Prague and Brno working in the most renowned domestic institutions: the Institute of Arts – Theatre Institute, South Moravian Innovation Centre and others; 2) the authors’ own database of CHs according to the website, identification of activities; 3) self-identification as CHs according to direct communication with directors/managers of the entities. In parallel, we used the terminology and typology of creative hubs used by the British Council (2014a), which considers creative hubs to be “space for work, participation and consumption”. If an entity did not meet these requirements, it was not included in our database.

The database contains quantitative data on creative hubs located in selected cities of the Czech Republic. The database created contains data on the size and year of establishment of the hub, the number of employees, the number of members and internal spaces, the amount of the membership fee, annual turnover, and legal form. Basic data was obtained from the websites of hubs, cities, cultural initiatives of the given city or online platforms. Additional information about the contact person and address was verified using the register of economic entities of the Czech Republic.

Czech cities were selected for the research where mapping studies of cultural and creative industries have already taken place and where support tools for the development of a creative environment have been created. These cities include especially the capital Prague (1.3 million inhabitants), which in the case of the Czech Republic can be considered a leader in the field of supporting the development of a creative environment, as well as Brno (400 k), Ostrava (290 k), Pilsen (170 k), Olomouc (100 k) and Zlín (75 k).

In our text, we use the methods of ordinary descriptive statistics, which, can provide a very good initial insight into the basic characteristics of the issue of creative industries and hubs and can be a good starting point for more advanced quantitative and qualitative approaches. The text is methodologically very close to other currently published research that addresses the issue of localization of creative hubs. This is mainly the research of Mariotti et al. (2023), who deal with the initial questions of the spatial distribution localization of creative hubs and other relationships associated with geographical aspects. The simple descrip-

tive statistics used in the analyses were supported by calculating mean scores and variance when evaluating some responses. The mean (mean scale score) is the total sum of values in a sample divided by the number of values in a sample. The variance measures how far each number in the set is from the mean (average), and thus from every other number in the set. In our case, variance was used to measure the consistency of the respondents' answers.

The founders, directors or community managers of all identified creative hubs included in the database ($n = 94$) were contacted by email (or subsequently by phone) with a request to fill out a questionnaire. All 94 creative hubs identified by us were contacted according to the procedure described in the previous section. Several rounds of urging were carried out and the return rate finally reached 100%. To answer the first research question (RQ1), the questionnaire dealt with financing, support of hub activity by the city, strengths and weaknesses or potential for development, and possible threats and barriers. The questionnaire could be filled out electronically or sent by email. Data collection took place from February to October 2019. A total of 94 representatives of the management of creative hubs participated in the questionnaire survey (Table 1). To evaluate the questionnaires, the Microsoft Excel environment was used, in which graphs were also created that graphically summarized the key findings.

In order to answer the second research question (RQ2), based on the results of the questionnaire survey, questions for follow-up semi-structured interviews were compiled. All respondents who filled out the questionnaire were asked to give an interview. Due to the uniqueness of each hub, the interview questions were only indicative. Interviews took place in selected cities from February to November 2019. A total of 52 out of 94 representatives of creative hubs gave an interview.

In almost all cases, the interviews took place directly on the premises of the hub, where they were supplemented by a guided tour of the premises. As part of the tour, there was an opportunity to get to know the members of the hub, to find out the members' satisfaction with the operation of the hub, staffing, premises, equipment or services and events taking place in these premises. In order to capture an authentic impression, photo documentation was also taken.

Table 1. Basic information about questionnaire survey and interviews (2019)(source: own processing)

City	Number of respondents who completed the questionnaire	Number of interviews with representatives of creative hubs	Number of interviews with representatives of public administration (i.e. cities)	The number of hubs where a personal visit took place
Prague	45	30	3	17
Brno	22	12	3	6
Ostrava	12	7	2	5
Olomouc	5	5	4	3
Pilsen	7	6	2	3
Zlin	3	2	2	1
Total	94	52	16	35

In order to find out answers on our research questions from the questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews with representatives of creative hubs, Czech actors from the public sphere were also approached for an interview (Table 1). These representatives were selected on the basis of a survey of research related to the mapping of cultural and creative industries in the Czech Republic. Most often, this was the director of the department of culture, business, strategic planning, or smart cities at the municipalities of the given cities.

Initiatives from the management of hubs were analyzed and compared with information from city representatives. Subsequently, there was a wave of further verification and clarification of data through email correspondence and phone calls, which lasted approximately one month.

3. Research results and discussion

Our research showed that the activities of roughly 3/5 of Czech creative hubs are supported by the public sector, which is less than in developed neighboring states, for example Germany or Austria (Kloudová, 2009; Cíkánek, 2013; Žáková et al., 2016). As emerged from the interview with the representative of the city of Olomouc, there is currently a shift from traditional industries to “soft” industries such as culture. The public sector must also react to this trend if it does not want to be left behind.

On the other hand, the creative environment of the Czech Republic is only going through the process of creation and thus cannot be fully compared with the already established environment of Germany or Austria (Adamcová et al., 2016; Slach et al., 2013). As emerged from the interview with the representative of the city of Brno: As emerged from the interview with the representative of the city of Brno, the Czech Republic is only at the beginning. The connection between profit and non-profit activities is essential, as well as the connection between market and non-market (public) activities.

The representative of the City of Prague also commented on the change in thinking, stating that after almost thirty years the Czech Republic is finally beginning to realize that it is necessary to support the domestic art scene and entrepreneurs so that they do not go abroad and pay taxes there. *“The income from visiting foreign creatives is not that great, and in addition, they return to their country.”*

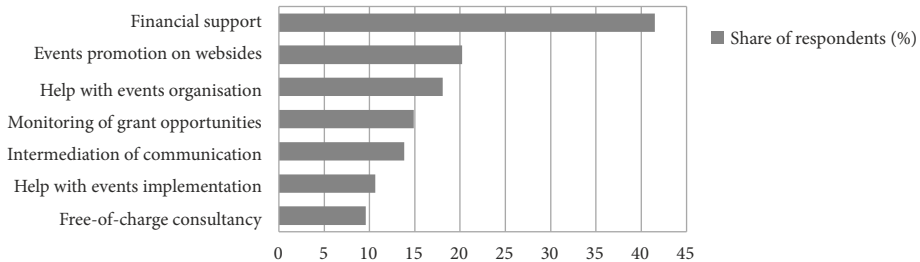
The questionnaire survey revealed a significant preponderance of the form of financial support for creative hubs from the public sector (Figure 1). This fact is not at all surprising, since most of the hubs are in city buildings where they have negotiated preferential rent. Some hubs are even subsidized organizations of the city.

Another important form of public support is the promotion of events on the city’s website and assistance with organizing events. As emerged from the interview with the representative of the city of Brno, at a time when public administration is the main driving force and initiator of development, it is necessary to have a common, unified vision. One of the roles that remains for public administration is to promote the interests of the residents. Public administration would create tools to declare to the public that an event is important for the city, even to business and people who are not cultural actors. *“Awareness is mainly spread by cultural actors, but the role of public administration is the key.”*

Although financial support is the most common way of supporting creative hubs, most hub management representatives would like higher financial contributions for operation from the public sector. Ensuring operation is a fundamental aspect of operation for the monitored entities, similarly to other business or non-profit entities. This answer seems a bit “cheap”, but there is no way around basic financial security. On the other hand, other required forms of support (interest in the operation of the hub, simplification of administration, support for the organization of events, preferential rent, and others) with which the management of the hubs are not satisfied are also very strongly represented in the answers (Figure 2).

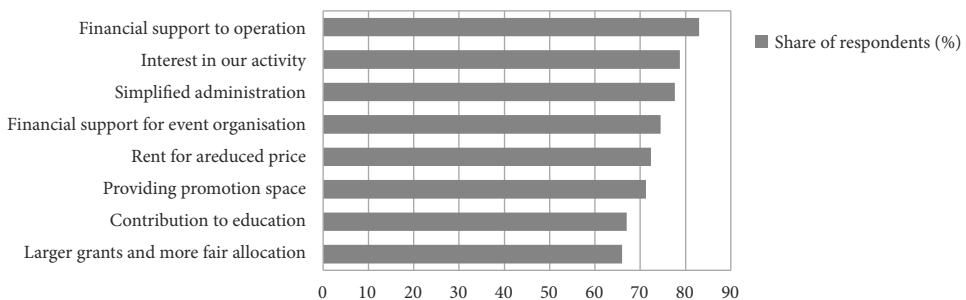
The initial investments put into the project aimed at opening a hub are in most cases rated as very high, therefore some of the hub founders who were approached suggest that the city provide a one-time preferential loan for entrepreneurs in the field of cultural and creative industries. Many said that this loan could be conditional on the requirement, for example, to run free public cultural events. They also often mentioned discounted rent for the first three years, until the creative hub “takes off” and creates a sufficient membership base to further finance the operation.

Another of our findings is related to the negative fact that fully half of the hub representatives interviewed are not satisfied with the amount of support from the city. This is not a surprising finding for us. But we are glad for the confirmation of our presumptions, and the extension of the knowledge that some creative hubs do not rely on financial help from the city at all, and try to find funding themselves, elsewhere. We followed up on this finding by



Note: Respondents could give up to three answers, the number of respondents was 94 (=100%).

Figure 1. The most frequent forms of support provided by city to hub activity (source: own processing)



Note: Respondents could give up to three answers, the number of respondents was 94 (=100%).

Figure 2. Most required forms of support for hub activity provided by city (source: own processing)

asking where they get funding elsewhere. It was interesting to find, for example, that some creative hubs have embarked on crowdfunding campaigns or sought foreign sponsors. This unflattering state for the public sector is also evidenced by the mean score of answers, which is higher for satisfaction with support from the private sector. The lower value of variance (scattering) for support from public sector for hub representatives can be seen in table below (Table 2).

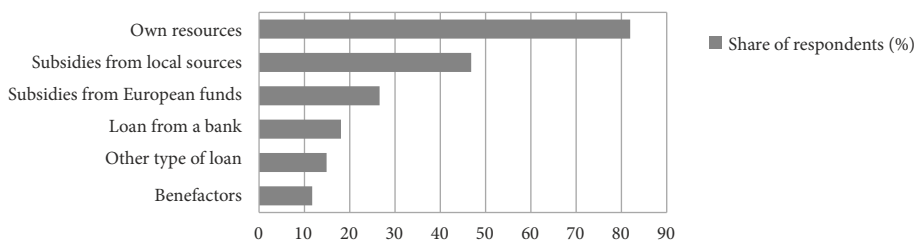
Table 2. Assessment of satisfaction with the current level of support from the public and private sectors (source: own processing)

Question	Mean score	Variance
How satisfied are you with the current level of support from the public sector?	2.70	1.04
How satisfied are you with the current level of support from the private sector?	2.90	1.58

Note: The mean scale score means the average of the answers on a Likert scale from strongly agree (5 points) to strongly disagree (1 point); the variance measures how far each number in the set is from the mean (average), and thus from every other number in the set.; total number of respondents was 94.

The decisive source of funding for creative hubs is their own funds (Figure 3), which are mostly made up of member contributions and profit from renting space. Another important source of income is domestic subsidies. As emerged from an interview with a representative of the city of Pilsen: “Typically today, some cities feel that they need to change the grant system, but no one knows how.” The subsidy system is thus only a strategic tool and if the city does not have a clear strategy, it is difficult to move the system forward. Many cities are now struggling with the fact that grant systems were set up in the 1990s and need updating.

The representative of the city of Brno added that a change in the criteria for selecting projects and a change in the objectives of grant programs could shake up the situation in the Czech Republic. It would also be advisable to change the subsidy and strategic support, also in view of the fact that the situation is rarely discussed with the actors. He also pointed out that the functioning of the contribution organisations is judged according to the management of money instead of whether they apply for a project that fulfils the measures of their development concept.



Note: Respondents could give up to three answers, the number of respondents was 94 (=100%).

Figure 3. The most significant sources of funding operation in creative hubs in the Czech Republic (source: own processing)

With subsidies from EU sources, the preparation of the project is generally more complicated and the chances of obtaining them are lower, which is also reflected in the amount of support. Nevertheless, it was thanks to European subsidies that some hubs were able to start their activities. The director of the creative centre in Brno added that thanks to a subsidy from the Operational Programme Enterprise and Innovation for Competitiveness, the reconstruction of the space for innovative entrepreneurship, which is unique in Europe in terms of its services and dimensions, was completed in 2018. Without the subsidy, the Brno Hub could not have been included in the global network of Impact Hubs.

As emerged from a number of interviews, creative people do not have much experience in drawing subsidies. They usually do not have the capacity to monitor all the support programs and to handle the related administration. As the representative of the City of Ostrava added in the interview, people have a hard time navigating the complex structure of European structural funds. The problem, according to him, is also that in the past period there were no funds really supporting the cultural and creative industries. The least used is sponsorship, which, according to hub directors, is because finding sponsors is time-consuming or they have had a bad experience in the past. According to the representative of the Zlín creative hub, the financial situation is not stable even after four years and it is necessary to constantly look for opportunities. *“I’m not a fan of subsidies, but we can’t do without them. Whoever knows how to “walk” in subsidies wins. But it is completely “opaque arcane” for smaller hubs, so the city should provide subsidy consultancy.”*

The question of financing is a big challenge for all interviewed hubs. The question of where to get financing is solved by most start-ups; but in the case of creative hubs, the situation is more complicated, because we have to explain to everyone that investing in culture makes sense. Despite the ever-increasing portfolio of options and the increased ability of hub management to raise funds to run on their own, there are sustainability questions such as: How long can we continue your business? What business model to use in order to remain self-sufficient?, addressed by all entities.

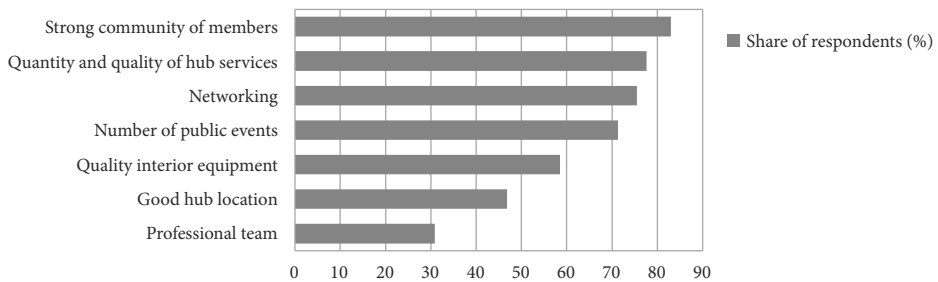
Growing awareness of the hubs’ activities and public interest in the services offered, including an increase in the quality and range of services, were considered to be the categories in which the situation has changed and improved the most over the past five years. As was aptly stated in an interview with a representative of a creative hub in Prague – *everything can be done better than it is happening, but it is always a process; it will not change immediately.* The most common marketing tools include the hub’s own website. Furthermore, according to assumptions, exposed social networks Facebook and Instagram are used significantly, but traditional “tools of the 20th century” such as word of mouth, newsletters, advertisements in the local press, articles in magazines or posters were also rated highly. As emerged from a number of interviews, e.g. with a representative of a creative hub in Prague: *“The organization of events and their promotion is up to our members, who are in the role of organizers, the city does not help us with promotion.”*

According to most representatives of creative hubs, their main strength lies in the built community of members (Figure 4). The team management tries to develop and support this advantage by organizing events that strengthen the relationships between members and encourage the mutual transfer of experience, information and advice about projects or business.

As emerged from an interview with a representative of the city of Zlín, *thanks to conferences and other events, it was managed to establish contacts and “stir up” the situation.*

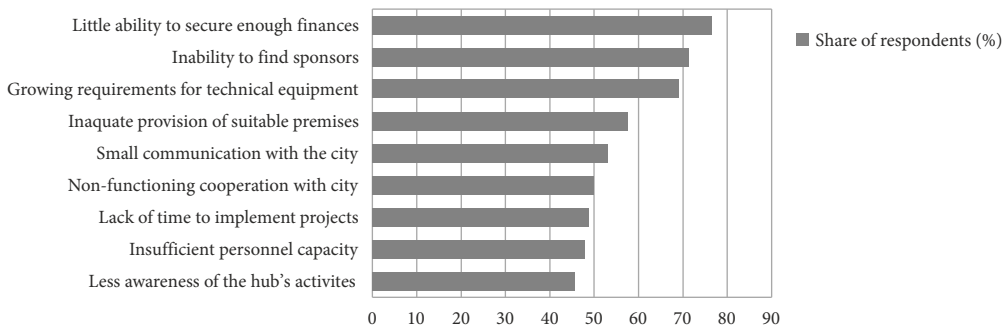
It is therefore not surprising that, according to the management, the number of services offered and amount of networking are also at the forefront of the hubs’ strengths. As emerged from an interview with a representative of the creative hub in Olomouc, *without the initiative of the members, the premises would be just an empty infrastructure.* More than half of the representatives of the hubs also stated that they carry out regular collective monitoring of the needs and satisfaction of the members with the services offered and the way the hub functions using sub-surveys.

At first glance, the most frequently cited weak point and problem is the ever-recurring, but absolutely essential, aspect of financing, or the inability to secure sufficient funds to run the hub. This is also associated with a lower ability to find partners or sponsors. As indicated by one of the previous questions aimed at identifying barriers to the further development of hubs, the problem is still the great inexperience of Czech managers. Nevertheless, it is possible to believe that with increasing management experience, this situation will also improve. Furthermore, it is worth noting the ever-increasing requirements for technical equipment, the insufficient provision of suitable premises and also the alarming non-functioning or insufficient cooperation with the public sector (Figure 5).



Note: Respondents could give up to three answers, the number of respondents was 94 (=100%).

Figure 4. Strengths of Czech creative hubs (source: own processing)



Note: Respondents could give up to three answers, the number of respondents was 94 (=100%).

Figure 5. Weaknesses of Czech creative hubs (source: own processing)

Among the most frequently cited barriers to the development of functioning hubs are the complexity and administrative burden associated with subsidy applications. Many hub representatives are not familiar with this issue, and therefore miss opportunities. In almost all hubs, there is concern about the restriction of freedom that comes with the terms of the subsidies. Administrative burdens, lack of funding, finding skilled people and sponsors and little support from the public sector are the aspects that managers have identified as the most growing in the creative hub environment over the past five years.

As emerged from the questionnaire survey, the biggest threats are considered to be lack of finance, rising rent and operating costs, increasing bureaucracy, an insufficient ability to use subsidies and strong competition in the market. The last point is also mentioned in the study by Adamcová et al. (2016, p. 6), which states: “*Success and the ability to compete in today’s digitized world can come from anywhere, it depends on the prudent management of businesses and companies.*”

In contrast, the greatest potential for the development of creative hubs is seen in the built-up strong membership base, great demand for alternative ways of working, high quality of services offered, suitable premises and the location of the hub and networking. *Closer cooperation with the public sector* was also placed roughly in the middle of the frequency of answers, which is definitely a call for improving relations in the future, this being especially called for by representatives of the hubs. As emerged from an interview with a representative of the city of Pilsen, *if the city is able to create the conditions for the development of creative hubs, it may become a significant driver of the city’s entire economy and an attraction for foreign investors.*

Half of the management of hubs who gave an interview consider cooperation and communication with the public sector to be positive. Only 16% of the interviewed subjects commented negatively on the cooperation. As emerged from the interview with the representative of the city of Olomouc, *cooperation with partners is targeted, various meetings take place, whether public or private. They often take place in person or at conferences organized by the Office of Creative Europe or the Institute of Arts in Prague.*

The research also showed that it is important to support education and the sharing of experiences. This is probably the most frequently aired challenge or request from hub management. Obtaining successful examples from practice could help hub directors to correctly decide what models and business structures to use in the context of a given city (locality). In this regard, they could be helped by properly set support through the public sector, which would connect them with successful foreign creative hubs. A public institution would educate representatives of hubs more not only in the field of subsidies and financing, but in general in all necessary sectors, and would serve as an information and advice center to which they could turn for help at any time free of charge. It would also patronize Czech creative hubs and defend their interests during political negotiations.

The representatives of creative hubs also deal with the challenge of high rents, which is a frequent reason for the collapse of startup hubs. Some hubs had to significantly limit their activities because they failed to negotiate a rental price that they would be able to pay in the long term. Another challenge is the rental period. Respondents most often complained about one- to two-year leases, which are too short to develop the reputation and breadth of clientele necessary to make a hub successful.

A number of creative hubs have tried to get an income from running a cafe or an art gallery. However, the income from sales is not enough to cover the costs of employee salaries. The founders do not want to subsidize the operation of these devices from other sources, most of them offer these accompanying services only if they are profitable or if the income covers at least the majority of the operating costs. Another problem is that many have no experience operating these devices and are learning as they go. According to the directors of creative spaces, this gap in education should already be filled in art schools. Many of them said from their own experience that currently school textbooks have almost no connection with the real market.

Representatives from the public sector as well as Czech experts who deal with the issue of creativity in the city, in the course of the interviews, pointed to the pressing fact that it is necessary to raise a generation of art managers who have experience in sales, organizing exhibitions and administration (including submitting various applications and work with public authorities). The representative of the creative hub from Brno adds that *"... an artistic manager must have many different skills in order to change the creative environment in the Czech Republic and keep the art scene on track."* The director of the creative hub in Ostrava is concerned in this area that *"... if there are too few people with professional artistic skills in the long term, the Czech market will be left behind and excluded from the global art scene."*

Conclusions

The international experience emphasises the value of identifying and utilising the creative economy's potential. The public sector may play a critical role in promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, and cultural expression by actively interacting with creative centres and offering the necessary support. Knowledge-sharing and international cooperation can give policymakers and practitioners useful insights and best practises as nations continue to manage the difficulties and opportunities presented by the creative economy.

The research and interviews with the representatives of the hubs revealed that, thanks to the energy and dedication of the founders, Czech creative hubs, similar to many foreign ones, function to some extent independently of support from the public sphere. So should the public sphere support creative hubs? They certainly should, because they have an impact far beyond their membership – they create new economic opportunities, nurture and educate emerging artists and creative entrepreneurs, and engage and educate the public through organizing cultural and educational events. However, all these services and many others are threatened by the risk of creative hubs ceasing to operate due to a lack of funding.

Roughly 3/5 of Czech creative hubs are supported by the public sector, and financial subsidies are a decisive form of support, although according to hub managers, they are still insufficient. The decisive source of funding for creative hubs is their own funds, made up mainly of member contributions and profit from the rental of premises. National and European subsidies are also important, but in this case there is still a lack of greater experience in obtaining them. The main strength of creative hubs lies in the built-up community of members, the number of services offered and networking. Weaknesses can be found primarily in rising rent and operating costs, growing bureaucracy, an insufficient ability to use subsidies and

high competition on the market. Other barriers to development include the above-mentioned complexity and administrative complexity associated with requests for subsidies.

The current threat recruits from several cumulative factors that were not yet relevant at the time of our research. The Covid-19 pandemic, associated with the closure of all community spaces in several waves starting in spring 2020, was followed in early 2022 by the war in Ukraine, absolutely unprecedented rising energy prices and other consumer goods, and an average inflation rate reaching 15% in the same year. While there is hope that these problems will be overcome within a few years and the economy will stabilise, these realities may be existential for some hubs.

Despite the above, Czech creative hubs need support and recognition for their efforts, as they cannot function in the long term without public funding and interest from the public sector. Despite the fact that their impact is often intangible, it is very valuable and has an indisputable economic and social importance. In developed economies, financial support or platforms for creative hubs have been operating for years, so the question is whether the Czech Republic is also able to follow this example. The authors of this study believe that this is realistic because city officials are already beginning to recognize the value of creative hubs in the context of cultural and creative industries. It is important for public sector actors to realize that focusing only on economic values does not reflect the many other contributions of creative hubs.

The developed economy of the country, globalization, openness, the advantages of the Internet and many other factors or modern trends (e.g., the development of social networks and live art) contribute to the development of creative hubs. Czech creative hubs are relatively young and inexperienced when it comes to business development and securing their long-term futures. It is therefore important to create a supportive environment that would allow them to grow. It is essential to build a strong and supportive creative environment in which local authorities partner and support their development through funding, investment, skills training or collaboration.

Investments in culture influence the attractiveness of cities, the spirit and morale of the people, as well as the focus of policies, whether they are on social cohesion, business, quality of life or investment. This influence is largely unknown because initiatives that have become one of the main agents of change in society are rarely labeled as cultural. They are often the result of new individual or collective initiatives emerging from local collaborative ecosystems independent of any public support.

Creative people or workers in the field of culture are at the center of social development and, as key actors of social cohesion, can play an important role in solving issues concerning cities, e.g., in the revitalization of territories or the regeneration of brownfields. Despite this, attention today is rarely focused on the cultural dimension and is more focused on technology (e.g., digital networks or artificial intelligence), climate change, population growth or economic sustainability. This indicates a tendency to attribute historical development mainly to economic, technological, commercial, and demographic factors – as if ideas, creativity, innovation, institutions and culture play only a small role in major global changes.

In general, relatively little attention is paid to culture and its representatives (artists, creative professionals, cultural and creative organizations, or hubs) in the context of global

development, which is reflected in the way culture is considered at the political level. Nevertheless, the situation is constantly improving, and in the Czech Republic many representatives of the public sector are already beginning to realize the benefits of culture and gradually implement it in cultural strategies and policies. A subject of further research, however, must be the solution to the question of the effectiveness of spending public funds, as well as the question connected with clearer empirical evidence of whether there is actually a spillover of positive effects into local economies. The key will be to find out whether on the basis of public support new economic entities are created which are stable in the long term, creating employment and clearly comparable results. It would be also possible to perform a deeper statistical analysis of obtained results via application of appropriate tests, descriptive statistics, etc. Perhaps a cost–benefit analysis and some multi–criteria analyses would enrich the contribution.

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Author contributions

ChM was responsible for data duration, formal analysis, investigation, software, visualization and writing original draft. ChM and Kunc Josef were responsible for funding acquisition, project administration, resources. ChM and Koutský Jaroslav were responsible for conceptualization, supervision. ChM and both KJ were responsible for methodology, validation, writing review and editing.

Disclosure statement

The authors of this paper certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers’ bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent–licensing arrangements), or nonfinancial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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