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PhD Thesis

**THE ADOPTION OF THE GLOBAL DISCOURSE OF
CREATIVITY-LED PLANNING AND “CREATIVE CITY”
IN URBAN CHINA**

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An overview of the thesis

Introduction

The thesis explores the issue of creativity-led development in China, its connections with global discourses and the reasons and consequences of adopting the “creative city” idea in spatial, economic, and social terms.

The thesis is based on the observation of a worldwide phenomenon that is shaping urban space and on the willingness to empirically ground the idea of the “creative city”, originated in the Western countries and adopted by China at the beginning of the 21st century. In the last decades there has been a burgeoning production of normative literature that predicates how to become a “creative city”, by providing lists of advantages, ingredients and ready recipes for wannabes global cities. Yet, this literature frequently lacks of conceptual clarity and solid empirical basis (Chatterton, 2000; Martin and Sunley, 2003; Simmie, 2004; Evans, 2005; Pawson, 2006; Kong, 2009; Mommaas, 2009). My research tries to fill the gap of weak investigation of material realities (both physical and social) by providing a more expansive understanding of what is happening in the urban sphere in the name of creativity.

Creativity belongs to the vast array of concepts and ideas that has historically shaped theories and practices of planning, urban design, and city management. In a globalizing world, however, the speed and intensity with which these ideas travel appears unparalleled. The research explored from different angles how creativity in urban settings, is formed, circulated and domesticated from the global context to the local dimension of a Chinese city.

The thesis is inspired by the evolution of the conception of urban space and its capabilities. Until a few decades ago, the main issue on city development was the one on physical planning: concepts and ideas of land using and spatial re-ordering underpinned the debate. Within last decades, worldwide, urban visions have changed and cities are increasingly conceived as economic entities operating in a global market and subject to growing competitive pressure. Cities are called to improve their competitiveness in attracting diversified forms of capital and produce outputs that have to satisfy the market. This trend manifests itself in many ways and produces multiple and even more varied

effects, among which the need (in terms of demand and supply) of urban planning models able to support cities in meeting the unfolding market requirements stands out. In the globalizing scenario that repositions cities and their future as centres of interest and engines of economic growth and social development, urban goals and priorities are redefined: new development strategies are required and new models devised on the rearrangement of the notion of “creativity” and the celebration of the interrelated “creative class”.

Research questions and structure of the thesis

On the basis of the research project and the opportunities that have been opening up in the course of my three years of doctoral studies, I opted for the structure of the “three papers” Ph.D. thesis model.

I wrote three papers that are separate and publishable, each free standing but related to the single general topic: the adoption of the global discourse of creativity-led planning and the idea of “creative city” in urban China. The three articles are the body of the thesis and here presented in an integrated manner that keeps them together in this single volume.

I considered the “three papers” as the most appropriate way to write this thesis because it helped me to segment the overall research and thus to be more focused and consistent. It allowed a more accurate revision of both the relevant literature and the empirical results and improved the sharpness of the findings. Furthermore, it allowed me to present each individual paper at national and international research gatherings that resulted in a wider dissemination of my research work and provided me with constant feedbacks and comments.

The first paper is “Creative Cities in a Globalizing World”, already published in the Chinese Journal “Planners”, vol. 28, n. 4, 2012. It describes the characteristics of the idea of the creative city and aims to display its rationalities and motives for its worldwide circulation. It mainly consists in the review of the literature dealing with the global discourse on the creative city, as one of the most advocated models for contemporary urban development.

The second paper is “Planning creativity-led urban development in China: the case of OCT Loft in Shenzhen”. This paper was presented at the 4th Workshop EIASM on “Managing Cultural Organizations”, in Bologna on 25-26 October

2012 and it was submitted to the Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development for a special issue on Planning & Heritage. It explores the adoption of the global discourse of creativity-led development in the Chinese urban context and its spatial manifestations. The research unpacks the Chinese discourse on the creative city and identifies distinctive features, motives and rationales supporting the adoption of the creative economy paradigm. By focusing on the case of OCT Loft - Cultural Creative Park in Shenzhen, it investigates the outcomes of urban regeneration agenda led by creativity. OCT Loft is studied as an apparently successful plan of urban, economic, and social transformation that relies on creativity as lever for upgrading.

The third paper, "Making the Creative City in China: a critical analysis", investigates the components of the apparent success of OCT Loft and focuses on the business strategies implemented by the main actor that can be credited for its fortunes: the developer OCT Group. By a wider analysis of the entrepreneurial vision and plans in which the park is involved, the paper provides a critical interpretation of the intended strategy of building a cultural-creative park as a spatial manifestation of the post-industrial paradigm. The article analyses the fashionable decision of regenerating an industrial zone by culture and creativity as a stage of a longstanding business model based on experience economy that OCT Group has been run in Shenzhen since the beginning of 1980s, namely the first years of the birth of the city.

In this document the three papers are presented in an integrated form to express the consistency of the overall research project. More precisely the correspondence between the three papers and the chapters of the thesis can be traced as follows:

- Paper 1: Chapter 1
- Paper 2: Chapters 2-5
- Paper 3: Chapters 5-6

In the first chapter, the creative approach is analysed as a model that has gained a pivotal position in the new urban entrepreneurialism and is currently advocated as a strategic move in a globalised urban competition. The chapter also discusses the importance assigned to cultural creative industries and their renewed value and function in urban development.

The research questions that led the investigation of the global discourse on creativity-led development are:

- Why has the idea of the creative city become a global idea?
- Where does its power come from?

The thesis proceeds with the second chapter that explores the adoption of the global discourse on creativity-led development in the Chinese urban context. In the last decade, following the global trend, creativity as a driver of urban competitiveness has been introduced in China and established itself as one of the country's challenges for 2030. This part of the research aims at unpacking the Chinese discourse, officially launched by policy makers in 2004, and identifying distinctive motives and rationales supporting it.

The research questions that guided this part of the analysis are:

- What are the connections with the global discourse?
- Who are the proponents in China?
- Could the establishment of the creative city idea in China be studied in the perspective of development growth strategies implemented by hegemonic groups to govern and exert power?

To provide answers to these questions, in the third, fourth and fifth chapter, the thesis analyses the outcomes of the diffusion of the creative city idea in terms of spatial, economic, and social transformations. The study examines both material and immaterial practices enacted since a decade ago following the adoption of creativity-led approach in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, the most influential Economic Special Zone established in China. The research focuses on the urban renewal strategies based on building creative parks and analyses OCT Loft, one of the cultural creative parks seen as a tangible manifestation of the new developmental agenda of the Chinese government that aims to adopt a creative economy growth model. The aim of the study on OCT Loft is to empirically ground the idea of the “creative city”, that often seems vague, blurry, and abused. Thus, three are the research questions that led the inquiry on the case study:

- What is a creative park?
- What is happening inside a creative park after the planning phase and how does it work?

- What are the dynamics that are activated and outcomes that are produced?

The study tells the history of the park (since the original industrial settlement), retraces the planning and design processes, and focuses on the contemporary situation in terms of activities that are taking place in the area. In sum, connections between three research layers are established:

1. Physicality: concept and architectural style.
2. Business: creative industries settled in OCT Loft.
3. Social and professional dynamics of the “creative class”: relational networks, needs, perceptions and beliefs.

The analysis of OCT Loft illustrates how both the spatial and social context have being re-conceptualized in contemporary urban China to respond to the discourse of the global idea of the “creative city”. The planning of the cultural creative park seems to have attained several goals in line with the challenges that policy makers have delineated for contemporary Chinese cities: the park is nowadays generally recognized as a landmark of creative industry and perceived as contributing to economic and cultural revitalization and, at the same time, as consolidating itself as one of the most popular leisure and tourism attractions in Shenzhen. OCT Loft appears like a successful manifestation of a new urbanism that managed to install the idea of creativity as a strategic line in the upgrading process within the transformation in a post-industrial city and to take advantage of the choice to see culture and creativity as drivers of urban competitiveness.

On the basis of the empirical findings emerging from the investigation of the satisfaction of the members of the creative class settled in OCT Loft, the sixth chapter provides an interpretation of the construction of the park as a phenomenon of policy transfer that actually challenges both the normative literature on the cultural and creative turn and the “conventional” interpretation of the advent of the post-industrial era (of which the idea of the creative city can be seen as one of the manifestations). Hence, the research provides a critical analysis of the construction, both physical and symbolic, of OCT Loft. In particular it investigates the:

- Current perceived realities, compared to the ambitions of the plans replicating the global discourses on creative parks.

- Origins of OCT Loft's fame.
- Actors that along the process contributed to the build up of its reputation.

It focuses on the main actor, namely OCT Group, the developer of the property-led regeneration that endowed OCT Loft's success. It examines the purpose and form, in its ambition and consequences, of a place making process that has been using the supply of experiences as business lever. OCT Loft is presented as a paradigmatic illustration of how processes of adoption of Western models are mostly driven by real estate developers strongly connected with state apparatuses. But the analysis of the presence, role and strategy of OCT Group in a rapidly expanding metropolis such as Shenzhen also contributes to the problematization of the conventional view of creativity-led planning as post-industrial occurrence. The planning of OCT Loft can indeed be seen within a trajectory of real estate developments that placed the notions of "culture", "experience", "entertainment" and finally "creativity" at the core of a successful business model that stretches back to the early days of the foundation of the city. Rather than a conventional manifestation of the shift from "made in China" to "created in China", the case of OCT Loft offers a more complex reading of the "creative city" as an object of inquiry within urban studies. The adoption of the creativity-led (re)development model is finally interpreted as a peculiar case of imitation of fashionable western planning ideals that are deliberately manipulated as way to "upgrade" the image of China's urbanity.

Conceptual Framework

In this research, the term "discourse" is key: it refers to the set of contributions from different sources, knowledges, subjects, disciplines that converge on a particular word and animate a debate (Howarth, 2000; Howarth and Torfing, 2005). It concerns the articulate scheme of propositions, theorizations, sortings, and representations in which the most relevant elements are the rules and practices that produce meaningful statements and root shared visions. Consequently, the notion of "discourse" refers to the system of statements and discussions that, expanding and evolving, provide a language to represent knowledge of a particular phenomenon in a certain historical moment (Wetherell et al., 2001).

The discourses that the thesis analyses are essentially two: the global one of the idea of the “creative city” and the related one that supported the adoption of creativity-led development in urban China.

The thesis develops in the conceptual framework that sees creativity as the new key asset for economic, social and urban development and as the source of competitive advantage in the post-industrial era (Porter, 1990; DTI, 1999; Ache, 2000; Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002; Lavanga, 2006; Baycan-Levent, 2010). The distinctive feature of this discourse lies on the conception of the ideal city that is assumed and advocated: urban fortune derives from the ability of attracting the “creative class”, highly skilled and talented workers in the so-called cultural creative industries (Florida, 2002; Scott, 2001, 2006; Santagata, 2007). Therefore, in these narratives, the meaning of culture and creativity has been redefined and it has assumed unprecedented significance that includes new uses to meet social, economic, political, and even spatial use objectives in the city (Yudice, 2003; Miles and Paddison, 2005; Markusen, 2006; Sacco and Blessi, 2006; Cooke and Schwartz, 2007; Cooke and Lazzaretti, 2008). The conception of cities as magnet of creative capital has become one of the new topics in the worldwide agenda of current policies in urban and planning development, especially for the one focused on how urban environment can be (re)designed for being appealing for this new creative class (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1994; Kunzmann, 2004; Jensen, 2005; Miles and Paddison, 2005; Evans, 2009). The establishment of the new urban imperative came along with the encouragement of transformation of urban landscape in the name of creativity: cultural and creative precincts, defined as the settings where cultural and creative resources and activities can concentrate and maximize the advocated benefits, are globally championed (Montgomery, 2003; Mommass, 2004; Evans, 2006; Cooke and Lazzaretti, 2008; Pratt, 2008; O’Connor and Gu, 2011).

This is the type of approach that in this thesis is categorized as the “mainstream view of creativity-led urban development” being mainly constituted of normative literature that offers seemingly practical suggestions on how creativity and its derivatives should be nurtured and exploited. This is indeed the dominant understanding of the “creative city”, the one that has characterized the global discourse. To uncover such a dominance and the underlying discourse, the

thesis also explores other interpretations of the phenomenon. Indeed, creativity can be seen also as an effective tool to govern in the contemporary urban governance. It can be explored as expression of the consolidation of neoliberalism as a globalised regime of flexible accumulation, developed by an elite of scholars, economists, business leaders, and government officials that put their efforts to establish the ideology (Harvey, 2006; Scott; 2006, Rossi and Vanolo, 2010; Neubauer, 2011). One of the concepts that guided the research is that the creative city growth strategy can be analysed as a successful hegemonic project that is working to strengthen the interests of transnational capital (Jessop, 2003), since it is functional to elite-driven priorities in the policy process of the wave of urban renewal projects for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital (Swyngedouw et al., 2002).

In order to investigate the global diffusion, the thesis makes reference to the literature that frames creativity as a politically seductive idea that has generated a hypnotic hold on policy makers all around the world (Peck, 2005; Evans, 2009; Kong, 2009; Eckert et al., 2012). In detail, the thesis investigates the adoption and the diffusion of the “new credo of creativity” (Peck, 2005) in China (Keane, 2009). The Chinese adoption of the already standardized “narrative of creativity-led urban economic development” (Gibson and Klocker, 2004) can be seen as an episode of “policy transfer”, defined as a “process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting” (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996). The adoption of approaches, advocated as means for “upgrading” and cure-all, originated in the Western world and later enacted in China, is analyzed in the perspective of emulation and lesson drawing, whereby knowledge of policy innovations is borrowed from other entities elsewhere (Rose, 1991; Newmark, 2002). According to these views, the Chinese implementation of practices already well-established in Europe and North America and their promotion as solutions can be seen as a manifestation of the “natural tendency to look abroad, to see how other states have responded to similar pressures, to share ideas, to draw lessons and to bring

foreign evidence to bear within domestic policy-making processes” (Bennett, 1991).

Finally, in order to understand the characters, forms, impacts, and consequences of the formation and implementation of culture and creativity-led urban policies, the thesis uses an analytical framework which places key concepts such as culture, creativity, innovation, urban competitiveness, entrepreneurialism within wider networks of public and private actors, coalitions, economics pressures, and professional values. I do so by assuming that, along with the establishment of neoliberal initiatives in urban politics and policies focused on the warm support to growth and the imperative of private sector involvement in regeneration (Peck and Tickell, 2002), urban governance is subjected to changes since new conditions that allow different types of governing coalitions to emerge have risen (Lauria, 1998).

Methodology

The development of the thesis and its conclusions are based on a qualitative, explorative, in-depth study, based on a specific case of creativity-led urban planning. My study shares with all single case design studies the obvious limitations of generalizability of results, but acquires in depth and richness of data. I therefore considered it a suitable design for the purpose of investigating the adoption of the idea of “creative city” in urban China, and for the discourse analytical perspective I adopt.

Methodologically, I combined discourse and qualitative research methods, i.e. I grounded my study on the analysis of both text (academic and professional literature, plans and other written and visual documents) and context (the social and organizational processes in which they are generated), in order to access both the discourses and the cultural understandings of non-discursive processes.

For the purpose of my research, discourse analysis is the study of written or spoken, formal or informal texts as they are produced and reproduced in the adoption of the “creative city” model in urban China. It draws on specific theoretical assumptions on language. Discourse analysis does not exclusively address the study of documents, but it is also performed in settings where

social and discursive interactions occur. However, discourse analysis treats those discourses as texts to be read (Barry et al., 2006).

Qualitative social research is the study of a culture where inferences are drawn from the observation and the analysis of participants' behaviour. Qualitative investigations are grounded on the description of a context. Indeed, one of the goals of qualitative social research is to represent the research context in order to drive "insight" on the actors and their world, beyond what might be referred directly by them. Qualitative research in planning studies involves the effort to enter a context and to understand the participants' point of view. In my research I used participant observation and in-depth interviews in combination to access the "cultural understandings" and the assumptions that inform the particular context of an architecture studio and the urban spaces it designs and inhabits. By adopting a qualitative approach in planning studies I tried to make some of the contextual, tacit knowledge explicit through the description of a specific culture. Qualitative research in planning studies allows making inferences on non-discursive elements, on the actors sense-making processes (Weick, 1995), or on social phenomena more in general. "Discourse is often only a shadow of the phenomenological experience" (Hansen, 2006). I conducted in-depth interviews to gain additional knowledge of the particular context where a discourse is constructed, in that the context can offer empirical evidence on non-discursive material, like on tacit "cultural understandings" or on points of view that are marginalized or silenced in the discursive construction (Hansen, 2006; Barry et al., 2006).

Hence, by integrating discourse analysis and qualitative research, I tried to offer a deeper view of planning as both a text and a context. Indeed, the most recent methodological contributions on discourse analysis maintain the need to combine techniques of discourse analysis (of texts, however produced) with qualitative research methods, in order to contextualize, enrich, and triangulate text analysis. We can thus draw some insights into discourse by exploring the plans, and insights into contextual tacit assumptions by qualitative understandings.

In order to investigate the business and social functioning of OCT Loft Cultural Creative Park, some stories about working and living experiences in the park were collected (see chapter 5). Members of the creative class in OCT Loft were

interviewed to explore professional and community networking relationships, needs, perceptions and beliefs regarding their being settled in a cultural creative park. However, knowledge on community in OCT Loft does not just come from the interviews but it is enriched by participative observation of social and economic dynamics that are taking place in the park and, in particular, by my personal working and living experience in the park. Since June 2011, I have collaborated with Urbanus Architecture & Design Inc.¹, the architecture company in charge of the regeneration project and one of the leader firms and first comers in OCT Loft. Moreover, during the research, I lived both in and at the edge of the park. This professional and living involvement in OCT Loft provided me with a continuous source of acquaintance on its functioning and performing.

¹ Urbanus Architecture & Design Inc. (from now on "Urbanus") was founded in Shenzhen in 1999, under the leadership of partners Xiaodu Liu, Yan Meng and Hui Wang.

Urbanus is recognized as one of the most influential architecture practices in China. More than a design practice, Urbanus is also a think tank. It aims at formulating architectural strategy from the urban environment in general, and the ever-changing urban conditions in specific. Urbanus focuses on urban realities in China and seeks architectural solutions based on its research of the emerging urban problems.

Urbanus has completed a series of design projects featuring various scales and functions, which cover the range from culture projects, residential, urban public space, renovation of old urban industrial zone, government office to large-scale urban complex. Many works of Urbanus have been awarded prestigious architecture prizes, exhibited and publicized worldwide. They have drawn international attention by using their extraordinary sensitivity to urban historical and social structure to not only integrate potential resources of space and society, and to profound strategies accurately and effectively corresponding to the complicated urban environment.

Urbanus is now developing and extending its existing design and research platform, and exploring opportunities of international and multidisciplinary collaborations. In this direction, in 2011 Urbanus Research Bureau (URB) was founded. It focuses on urban research; one of the main issues it is working on is the post-industrial city and the culture and creativity-led urban development.

1. The global discourse of the “creative city”

1.1 Competitive cities in a globalizing world

Since the eighties, the Western world has been overcome by a series of profound changes that have reshaped world scene and are gathered under the name of globalization. Globalization is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that is still transforming the structuring and functioning of the city (Sassen, 2001). Economic globalization, in association with the emergence of a global culture, has profoundly altered the social, economic and political dimensions of entire transnational areas and positioned cities in a global market. Cities are subjected to “new” challenges that rise from the intensification of international competitive pressures for urban centers and the need to strengthen their position within urban global hierarchy. Cities are called to compete on the global scale in attracting diversified forms of capital and produce marketable goods.

Cities struggle to acquire the “new” strategic resources: investments, knowledge and technology. The laws of the market operate simultaneously on multiple levels: competition for public funds and for hallmark events such as sports and cultural festivals or trade fairs that have economic multiplier effects for cities economic development (Lever, 1999). Moreover, cities compete in order to attract crucial sectors as financial, manufacturing, advanced tertiary and tourism ones, and to increase the quality of life and the environmental standards (Jensen-Butler, 1997; Rondinelli, Johnson and Kasarda, 1998; Rogerson, 1999; Wong, 2001; Moulaert et al., 2003; Chu, 2008). Among these, there are two resources that are increasingly conceived as strategic: creativity and related intellectual and cultural capital, i.e. human talent (Florida, 2002; Rullani, 2004; Glaeser, 2011).

The idea of competitive city has being continuously handled and the contemporary frontier of urban competitiveness is such cyclically re-defined (Klaassen, 1987; Kresl, 1995; BGS, 2010; Ni and Kresl, 2010). In the last three decades, diverse issues have been advocated in turns as the crucial one to define how the ideal city should be and act and, consequently, recipes for success in the rapidly changing global marketplace are unfailingly provided (McMahon, 2012).

In this discourse of urban competitiveness, a new political and economic role has been assigned to city: economy is conceived as the motive force for urban transformation and so as engine for the production of urban space (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982; King, 1990; Sassen, 2001; Scott, 2001; UNCHS, 2004). Why can we affirm a “new” role for cities? Cities have always held economic relevance but here the novelty is that cities are conceived as places in a global market environment in which the ideas of the “good” city are expressed in competitive terms.

The perspective of the renewed centrality is enhanced within the diffusion of the idea of “post-national society” (Ó Riain, 2006) as one of the outcomes of globalization that shifted the focus of activities and interventions from nation states to the two extremes of territorial spectrum, the supranational and international dimension and the regional and local dimension (Abrahamson, 2004). In this transcendence of borders (Scholte, 1997), state authority is replaced or otherwise redefined by political, economic, and cultural systems lying at regional and global level (Held and Mc Grew, 2002). From a state-centric configuration of capitalism lasted until the late 1960s, a shift to a city-centred configuration is affirmed (Brenner, 1998) with a consequent change in the characters of market that sees new actors playing major roles (e.g. global business organizations whose networks transcend national borders). “Market” and “global” are the two concepts from which the thesis departs in order to understand contemporary Chinese urbanity.

1.2 Urban competitiveness and neoliberalism

The market driven approach that is affecting urban spaces has been interpreted as one of the effects of the rise of neoliberal ideology (Hackworth, 2006; Rossi and Vanolo, 2010). Since the 1980s, in the Western world, neoliberalism has represented a breaking point in the economic, political and social scenes at multiple geographical scales, by stating these principles: to expand market economy, to reduce State intervention and to stimulate private initiatives, three directions considered as the optimal mechanism for economic development (Hayek, 1948; Friedman, 1962; Nozick, 1974). It is one of the salient features of late 20th and early 21st century economic and social life in the capitalistic world.

Its diffusion did not give life to a revolution but it can be seen as an intensification of capitalism, an evolution from a mode of production to an ethic, a set of political imperatives, and a cultural logic (Harvey, 2006).

Neoliberalism is increasingly seen as an essential descriptor of the contemporary urban condition (Brenner and Theodore, 2005). The increased centrality of markets and of the interests of financial capital not only affects economic, political, and institutional spheres but also shapes social and spatial relationships, by acting on territorial development and growth dynamics (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

The emphasis on urban competition, or in other terms the market-induced capitalistic imperative to compete, shows to what extent the neoliberal ideology has invested the city and neoliberal initiatives have taken root. The strategy of assigning to cities the role of regional and national engines of economic growth and social development in the global economy can be seen as part of the neoliberal rhetoric. The growth imperative is applied on urban contexts and, hence, the conception of the city as a growth machine (Molotch, 1976; Harding, 1995) begins to spread. It provides a conceptual framework that, by conceptually redefining cities, strengthens business interest and, at the same time, the role of local growth elites. The city as a growth machine could be interpreted as a combination of interests, claims, and initiatives of land use planning (Logan and Molotch, 1987). For the purpose of consolidating the neoliberal creed, hegemonic groups (powerful corporate and government actors) have turned to consultants, propaganda organs, think tanks and universities. Both have sought “to paint the emergence of global neoliberalism as inevitable yet desirable, while simultaneously prescribing the institutional, political, and economic reforms which make this system feasible” (Neubauer, 2011). Within this view, they have played a major role in the diffusion and establishment of a new orthodoxy in urban politics focused on the warm support to growth and the imperative of private sector involvement in regeneration (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

Along with this establishment and the concurrent transcendence of borders, urban governance is subjected to changes, since new conditions that allow different types of governing coalitions to emerge have risen (Lauria, 1998). Urban Regime Theory could provide useful interpretative lenses to investigate

who are the members of emerging coalitions, how they consolidate and become hegemonic. Urban regimes are described as the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions (Stone, 1989). It emphasizes the interdependence of governmental and non-governmental forces in meeting economic and social challenges and in particular it identifies cities as the arena able to accomplish public purposes by assembling coalitions of political, business, and community elites (Stone, 1989).

In the attempt of investigating the outcomes of strategies implemented by such coalitions in the reordering of the global political economy over the past forty years in favour of global capital, another rhetoric can be seen as a relevant part in the establishment of neoliberal discourse: post-fordism and knowledge economy paradigm (Tickell and Peck, 1995; Neubauer, 2011). In sum, post-industrial framework affirms the decline of traditional manufacturing mode of production and the corresponding expansion of the knowledge and service industries. In the post-industrial perspective, the new strategic resources are information and knowledge (Bell, 1973; Castells, 1989; Kumar, 1995; Dyer-Witford, 1999; Foray, 2000; Glaeser and Saiz, 2003). Over the years, the post industrial philosophy has gained more and more approval and nowadays is one of the most powerful ideas of our time, acting as an ideology that structures the way society understands the present and envisions the future (Neubauer, 2011). In the post-industrial economy, the production of added immaterial value (cognitive, social, symbolic, and identity value) is privileged and is seen as an inescapable choice in the increasing competitive environment (McLuhan, 1995; Gilmore and Pine, 1999; Maione, 2001; Rullani, 2004; Sacco and Blessi, 2005). By raising the importance of production of symbolic capital, the post-fordist capitalism elevates cities as ideal places for production of cultures, fashions, and meanings that could be not just seen as a natural evolution in urban history but as outcomes of urban valorisation and renewal strategies and related capital accumulation projects pursued by political-economic elites (Rossi and Vanolo, 2010). In such view, cities play the role of incubators for many of the major political strategies through which the dominance of neoliberalism is being maintained (Brenner, 2002).

1.3 New challenges and development strategies

Fiercer interurban competition on immaterial capitals motivates the need (and the offer) of new development strategies able to deal with the complexity, flexibility, and multidimensionality of the evolving systems that constitute urban market. The roles of urban planning and design are actually seen as crucial in the establishment of frameworks and practices that should constitute the solid base for cities facing new pressures (Bramley and Lambert, 2002; Verwijnen and Lehouvori, 2002; Healey, 2007; Sepe, 2010). Once again, urban planning is invested with the capability of changing and determining urban spatial structure and strategies in a way that promotes urban competitiveness, and, in broad terms, sustainable urban development (Chengri, 2004; Wu and Yu, 2005). Consequently, “innovative” models have been formulated and presented as beacon for city progress; among those, two have become specially famed: the “entrepreneurial city” and the interrelated “creative city”.

1.4 The Entrepreneurial City

Due to the visions of cities as models for the dynamic processes of urban transformation and, secondly, the coming of economy as central force to generate urban change, the idea of the “entrepreneurial city” has been installed as the pattern for urban development strategies.

Likewise business environment, in urban contexts entrepreneurship has emerged as an engine of economic growth, employment creation, and competitiveness in global markets and, consequently, the rhetoric that, in order to perform successfully, cities should act entrepreneurial behaviour has become established (Jessop, 1997). As already introduced, the modes of urban intervention distinctly change: from public intervention, based on “bureaucratic” principles, in order to regulate land use and to supply services, to entrepreneurial models focused on increasing the value of the city as factor of economic growth (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). The discourse highlights the importance of cities’ differential capacities to secure the conditions for economic dynamism (Storper, 1997) and it does not affect only economic space and activities but involves also social issues, as sustainability and social cohesion (Jessop and Sum, 2000). In this vision, cities are defined as new “national

champions” in international competition, by becoming sites of struggle over economic and social restructuring and the political basis for new forms of growth or grant coalition and new forms of social alliance. Here some of the principal fields that are selected as the one in which a city can become entrepreneurial (Jessop, 1997):

- The introduction of new types of urban place or space for living, working, producing, servicing, consuming, etc.
- New methods of space or place production to create location-specific advantages for producing goods/services or other urban activities (e.g. new physical, social, and cybernetic infrastructures, promoting agglomeration economies, technopoles, regulatory undercutting, re-skilling).
- Opening new markets, whether by place-marketing specific cities in new areas and/or modifying the spatial division of consumption through enhancing the quality of life for residents, commuters, or visitors (e.g., culture, entertainment, spectacles, new cityscapes, gay quarters, gentrification).

Three distinctive elements of the discourse emerge and shape the idea of the city. The first one is the advocated need of promoting and positioning. Cities, like commercial firms (or even more than them), are invited to adopt a vision (a brand): a symbolic, communicative, creative, stimulating, and shared set of values that works as guiding principle to reach desirable futures (Ache, 2000). On the basis of the vision, cities must devise an attractive and particular image as part of their positioning (branding) process (Parkenson and Saunders, 2005; Kavartzis and Ashworth, 2005). Some samples of cities cited as role models for the dynamic processes of urban change are Glasgow (“Glasgow’s miles better”), Barcelona (“Barcelona, mes que mai”), Wien (“Gateway Wien”), City of Watsonville, California, (“Growing Opportunities”), Boston, (“Reinventing Boston: 1630–2003”). The second is consumption as a distinctive trait of urban phenomenon (Castells, 1972) that preponderantly intervenes in the production of urban space as a deliberately response to the needs of capital (Harvey, 1978; Zukin, 1980). The third one is the vision of urban space, the land, as a market commodity.

In these new “ways” to manage cities and deal with their manifold problems,

who is acting as the urban entrepreneur? Are just cities in a competitive environment or the rise of these models can be interpreted as a competition led by political-economic elites? In other terms, can this emergent “urban market” be seen as a field in which developers, planners, and other land-based elites, compete with one another over the economic possibility of land, but at the same time are united behind the common goal of economic growth for the city (Cochran, 2012)?

I tried to investigate these issues by analysing the idea of the “creative city” as an evolution of the proactive and entrepreneurial urban approach.

1.5 The Creative City

Around the turn of the century, the city development idea based on creativity as a crucial factor to enhance economic and sustainable development (later called cultural-creative approach) was introduced and nowadays has reached a pivotal position (Miles and Paddison, 2005; Vanolo, 2008). It has risen as an asset that cities should develop and exploit to compete in a globalizing market environment (Porter, 1990; DTI, 1999; Ache, 2000; Lavanga, 2006) and it prizes creativity as a source of competitive advantage, as a basic driver of attractiveness that leads to endogenous growth (Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002).

The distinctive feature of this model lies on the conception of “creative capital” that is assumed and advocated. The definition of creative capital is based on the occupational structure and it means that creativity is considered not so much as human capability in terms of the use of the imagination or original ideas to create something worthwhile (Poincaré 1929; Taylor, 1988; De Bono, 1998; Landry, 2000; Hall, 2000) but in terms of people who do specific jobs in specific sectors that are defined as cultural creative industries (Florida, 2002; Scott, 2001, 2006; Santagata, 2007).

Urban potential of attracting and clustering talented skills and their function in city development path is not new (Jacobs, 1961, 1969). What has changed is the definition of who creative people are and its relationships with business environments, regional industrial systems, and territorial growth. Occupational definitions of skills is connected to the changing nature of the economy, or rather, to the switch from an industrial economy to a post industrial one that is

based upon knowledge, innovation and skills and rests on knowledge workers. In the post-industrial paradigm, creativity is conceived not as much as the development of new ideas but as embodied in productive process and therefore in services and products that are sold in the market (Amabile, 1996; Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002).

The idea of applying occupational frame booms with the introduction of the “*creative class*” theory (Florida, 2002), based on the idea that a new social class, that gathers innovative people with a creative potential, has emerged. Florida divides the workforce into three main occupational classes: the creative class, working class and service class. The creative class is divided into two sub-groups: the super-creative core (computer and math occupations; architecture and engineering; life, physical, and social science; education, training, and library positions; arts and design work; and entertainment, sports, and media occupations), and the creative professionals (management occupations, business and financial operations, legal positions, healthcare practitioners, technical occupations, and high-end sales and sales management). Florida is just one of the most famous urban gurus (his most cited work has just been revisited in May 2012 to celebrate the 10th anniversary) that contribute to diffusion and circulation of the creative city idea. Within few years, the creative class has become a global planning fashion and the cultural creative industries settlements have increasingly been advocated as strategies for urban development. The conception of cities as magnet of creative capital has become one of the new topics in the agenda of current policies in urban and planning development, especially focused on how urban environment can be designed for this new creative class (Jensen, 2005), as it will be described in the following paragraphs. “Successful” cities are nowadays those whose policies aim at nurturing talent, attracting expertise from around the world, and exploiting this capital for the maximization of competitive advantage (Glaeser, 2011). Examples of cities that define themselves as creative are: Manchester (Creative Manchester), London (Creative London), Toronto (Creative City), Brisbane (Creative City Strategy), Shenzhen (City of Design), Hong Kong (Creative City).

1.5.1 Definitions of cultural creative industries

Before deepening the outcomes of the worldwide diffusion of the idea (as the above cited cities confirm), a terminological reflection appears necessary, since the meaning of culture has been redefined and it has assumed unprecedented significance that includes new uses to meet social, economic, political, and even spatial use objectives in the city (Yudice, 2003; Miles and Paddison, 2005). There is no a unique definition of cultural creative industries, sometimes authors refer to only “cultural industries” or “creative industries”, sometimes the two terms are mentioned together and in other cases the notions of “culture” and “creativity” are conceived as interrelated and complementary. For this reason, it is important to try to clarify what are the activities that are advocated as the main force in the reflection on city future development. By analysing researches and policies on the issue, many different ways of conceiving them can be traced: some works focus on the artistic-cultural activity strictly understood, others extend it to the world of advertising, marketing and design, and in still others, the creative sector and the cultural one are used as interchangeable concepts (Santagata, 2007; Sacco, 2004; Hartley, 2005; Henry, 2008).

The first categorization on the theme is “The Creative Industries Mapping Document”, edited by the UK government’s Department of Culture, Media and Sport. In this document, creative industries were defined as “those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS, 2001). They include advertising, architecture, art and antiques market, crafts, design, fashion design, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, television and radio.

Creative industries are divided in three groups:

- Companies that provide creative services to clients such as architecture, design, advertising (companies that do a creative process).
- Retail companies that provide a creative product, such as newspapers and magazines, radio and TV broadcasting, museums, galleries, cinema (the creative media).
- Replicable products, usually protected by copyright (creative products).

A similar perspective is the one endorsed by the United Nations. In “Creative Industries and Development” (2004), the domains of creativity is enlarged from activities having a strong artistic component to “any economic activity producing symbolic products with a heavy reliance on intellectual property and for as wide a market as possible”. The interesting element in this report is the definition of creative industries as lying at the crossroads between arts, business, and technology. Though the UN distinguishes between “upstream” activities (traditional arts, performing arts, visual arts) and “downstream” ones (advertising, design, publishing activities and "media-related" activities, all much closer to the market), the analysis rests on the presence of a strong mutual relationship between the various and economically distinct activities that are included within the macro-class of creative industry.

Other definitional studies taken as references in international debate are represented by documents drafted by Eurostat (2002), OECD (2006), and the European Commission (2006), in which the concepts of “cultural” and “creative” tend to overlap.

Eurostat identifies eight areas of cultural activity: to the industries referred to as creative also in the works cited above (publishing, architecture, dramatic arts and audio, audio-visual/multimedia), it adds the cultural heritage (monuments, museums, archaeological sites), as well as archives and libraries. The report by OECD seems to lump cultural industries and creative industries. Indeed, the identified areas are: advertising, architecture, video, film and photography, music, visual and performing arts, publishing and printing, radio and television, art and antique, design (including fashion), handicrafts, electronic publishing, software and computer games. Also OECD includes libraries, archives, museums and cultural heritage.

Along the lines of OECD’s contribution, but proceeding toward a more marked distinction, the European Commission issued a report in which the broad cultural sector is divided into three subgroups:

- The core, consisting of the traditional arts (visual arts, performing arts and artistic and historical heritage).
- A first ring above the core, which includes activities whose outputs are exclusively cultural (books, movies, music, radio,...).
- A third outer ring which includes the creative industries, i.e. those activities

that incorporate in the production process elements of the two previous levels. These activities therefore include the fields of advertising, fashion, and architecture.

The activities included in the three levels share a characteristic that makes them homogeneous: all products or services incorporate ideas or values that may become economically relevant and marketable once protected by copyright (Throsby, 2001).

This review showed the most relevant contributions that outline the strategic sectors evoked in the debate. Despite some differences, they all include knowledge- and skill-intensive activities in which creativity is the source of added value.

1.5.2 Cities and the “creative class”

In spite of the vast array of labels, the salient concept that has increasingly taken root is that the ideal city is the one that succeeds in attracting the “creative class”, highly skilled and talented workers in the so-called creative industries. To attract these talents is conceived as a competitive advantage under two major views: production and consumption.

Creative industries stand for post-industrial paradigm that puts a higher emphasis on symbolic and cognitive capital and innovation in the value-added chain. In the same vein, creative economy is advocated as the set of knowledge-based economic activities with a development dimension and crosscutting linkages at macro and micro levels to the overall economy (UNCTAD, 2010). By assessing intangible as the most precious resource, creative sector is conceived as the new dynamic sector in world trade (UNCTAD, 2010) as the one that ensures the highest growth potential (Howkins, 2002; Cunningham, 2006; Boschma and Fritsch, 2009; DBR, 2011).

Hence, the creative workforce is invested with the capability of concurring to economic and overall city performance, by strengthening city positioning in the global market. It embodies the proposition that economic and cultural developments are not separated phenomena: creative economy promotes social inclusion, cultural diversity, and human development and so it becomes part of a larger process of sustainable development in which economic and

cultural growth occur simultaneously (Markusen, 2006; Sacco and Blessi, 2006; Scott, 2006; Cooke and Schwartz, 2007; Cooke and Lazzeretti, 2008).

Moreover, the benefits for a city that manages to attract creative minds are ascribed to the so-called “experience economy” (Gilmore and Pine, 1999). The concept builds on the idea that people are increasingly willing to allocate high percentages of their salaries in order to have “amazing life experience” (Jensen, 1999). What kind of people? Creative class is part of the group, so much so that it shapes the experience economy. The presence of creative workers in the city is conceived as fostering urban livability: not just in term of generic well-established cultural facilities or tourism increase to experience attractions but also because members of creative class act not only as producers of high value goods but at the same time they consume them (Mellander and Florida, 2012). Because of their lifestyle and status, they need an enjoyable and stimulating environment, “customized” facilities and commodities, in which aesthetics and fashion play a crucial role. According to upholders of the creative city approach, this demand generates an offer that increases quality of urban life, by generating outcomes on macro-scale. For instance, Glaeser et al. (2001) describe how an increased average incomes based on the re-allocation of labor into more productive sectors (creative industries among them) has changed the role of the regions. As incomes rise, people demand more normal and luxury goods, rather than necessity goods, and those will mainly be provided in bigger cities.

In order to ensure themselves with these benefits, cities are called to create incentives to lead the creative class to locate in, starting from the built environment that in those hypothesizes plays a crucial role since it provides the physical pre-conditions or platform upon which the creative city can develop (Gottdiener, 2000; Landry, 2006). This is why a bunch of “new” strategies and models are offered. One of the most fashionable strategies to achieve the goal is to create places in the city that are appealing for these specific skilled individuals, to generate spaces that facilitate both the production and the consumption of culture and creativity. As it will be described in the following paragraphs, the creative city path gets through the boosting of creative industries settlement and the supply of facilities for creative workers (including entertainment and leisure), generating important effects not only in economic

and sectorial performance but also in spatial ones, in terms of transformations of urban landscape (Kunzmann, 2004; Miles and Paddison, 2005; Evans, 2009).

1.5.3 Creative class and “creative space”

Based on these considerations, it seems possible to state that creativity (and culture) intervened preponderantly in the strategies of cities, so much so that at this point we can talk of a “cultural turn” in urban and regional policies, since cultural strategy is used to assist economic and urban development objectives (Griffiths, 1995). Culture-led policies are designed to give an impulse to the “entrepreneurial urbanism”, urging cities to implement strategies centred on the dynamic combination of non-material and material factors in the revitalization of urban spaces and economies (Ponzini and Rossi, 2010).

Cultural-creative policies have consolidated as strategies for pursuing contemporaneously different goals that can be summarized as follows (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1994):

- Economic development
- City marketing
- Physical regeneration.

Momentarily leaving the city marketing issue aside, the thesis concentrates on the new uses of culture and creativity in the physical and economic revitalization of cities (Mommass, 2004) and their effects: the blossoming of cultural-creative industries and their spatial manifestations in the forms of cultural quarters and creative districts (Cooke and Lazzaretti, 2008).

1.5.4 Urban transformations: cultural quarters and creative districts

The physical expression of cultural-creative approach on urban space takes different forms: we can identify planned interventions closer to the artistic-cultural core and other more strictly focused on “downstream” creative industries, but they all have in common the synergy between the immaterial dimension and material space.

Initially, cultural creative industries were mobilized to tackle the problems of declining and derelict urban areas. Their mobilization was strongly related to the configuration of the city as the post-industrial environment in need for new

economic identity. The main goal was to regenerate former and residual industrial zones (Evans, 2009). Subsequently, they became means to implement broader city expansion and broader strategy to revamp urban identity. Planned interventions on the material fabric of the city are now part of the growing willingness to integrate cultural and economic development and, consequently, cultural and creative industries are used to redevelop selected inner urban area, in which mixed-use urban development is to be encouraged and the public realm is to be reconfigured (Montgomery, 2003).

In sum, there are two main typologies of planning practices that are grounded on the activation, in theory with different forms and functions, of cultural creative industries:

1. Culture Quarters
2. Creative Districts

In practice, the boundaries are blurry and an increasingly mix can be noticed. Nevertheless, they are studied as prototypes of the creative city model.

Culture Quarters

A culture quarter can be intended as an inner city hub for cultural and artistic activities. It can perform such role because of the existence of buildings housing a range of such creative activities, and purpose designed or adapted spaces providing an environment to facilitate and encourage the provision of cultural and artistic services and activities (Montgomery, 2003; O'Connor, 2004; Bell and Jayne, 2004).

According to Montgomery (2003), cultural quarters are quarters to which artists and cultural entrepreneurs are attracted. They do not represent a 21st century novelty (bear in mind 19th century Montmartre in Paris or 1970s Kreuzberg in Berlin) but the innovative element lies in their use. They are deliberately advocated as model for urban regeneration of declining inner urban areas and they are places that tend to combine strategies for greater consumption of the arts and culture with cultural production and urban place making.

Cultural quarters incorporate museums, galleries, convention centres, cultural halls, theatres, cinemas and more. Cultural quarters are typically active at night as well, and attract cafes, pubs, restaurants, discotheques and additional leisure activities. Other businesses can often be found near cultural quarters

and these may include bookstores, galleries, music shops, designer clothing stores, artists' workshops... (Yelinek, 2009).

Montgomery (2003) identified the place characteristics of cultural quarters. An essential pre-requisite for a cultural quarter is quite obviously the presence of cultural activity, and, where possible, this should include cultural production (craftsmanship, goods, products, and provision of services) as well as cultural consumption (people attending shows, visiting venues and galleries) (Comedia, 1991).

Another crucial element is variety. The presence of as many venues as possible is considered as fundamental, preferably at the small and medium scale, in order to encourage a more active street life. As well as performance venues, there should also be rehearsal and practice spaces. The mix with cultural business is also considered crucial: cultural quarters should be characterized by complex diversity, with a large representation of small scale business activity which trades not only with "consumers" but also with other businesses that operate within the creative and cultural industries (Mulgan and Worpole, 1986; Garnham, 1985; Montgomery, 1996). Here the blurry boundaries with the creative districts start to emerge, in planning theory too.

Creative districts

The success (and power) of the creative city idea takes evidence in boosting creative industries settlements planned in the forms of clusters, districts, quarters, hubs or parks. Despite of the variety of names, they are identified as an innovative stage (spatially delimited and agglomerated) for combining hard and soft infrastructures to sustain creative activities (Landry, 2000).

Creative districts usually form from groupings of interconnected and interdependent businesses, institutions, places, and scientific and cultural resources. Creative clusters refer to the geographic concentration of creative businesses, cultural/educational institutions, services, and facilities that have certain level of interdependences and connectiveness (Gu, 2011). They attract various businesses, artists, scientists and entrepreneurs that merge together in the same place, virtually and physically, to produce new ideas, products, services, art and design. They are the manifestations of the idea of clustering as encouraging the exchange of knowledge and skills, the sharing of production

and distribution resources, mutual cooperation as well as taking advantage of cost-savings in the production chain and the co-branding value through the realization of economies of scale (Rossiter, 2008; Evans, 2009; O'Connor and Gu, 2011). Creative districts are often conceived as a distinctive milieu: a place, a locational hub, where density, diversity, authenticity, and connectivity converge to generate both the raw material and the product of creative activity, by acting as a crucible for creative people and enterprises (Landry, 2000; AuthentiCity, 2008).

Although the burgeoning academic production on the issue of creative resources concentration, there are few theoretical attempts to compare the different manifestations of creative spaces and identify the components. Among them, Evans (2009) investigated the different responses to the opportunity of clustering by comparing cultural and creative industry quarters on the basis of three rationales: the economic, social and cultural one. As Table 1 summarises, creative industry hubs are conceived as explicitly connoted to commercial business and thus are more subjected to market and competitive environment: they mainly centre on productive and innovative capacity of knowledge and information and produce wider impacts on urban and regional dynamics (Evans, 2009; Baycan-Levent, 2010).

Rationales	Cultural Quarter	Creative Industry Quarter
<u>Economic</u>	Local economic development Visitor Economy Branding Zoning Culture and regeneration	City-region economic development Knowledge economy Creative tourism Production chain Innovation spillovers
<u>Social</u>	Identity Mono-Use Ethnic quarter	Mixed-used and –tenure Diversity Urban design quality

Rationales	Cultural Quarter	Creative Industry Quarter
<u>Cultural</u>	Historic preservation Conservation, crafts (skills) Festivals Cultural City	Creativity Design and architecture Showcasing/trade fairs Creative City

Table 1 - Rationales for Cultural and Creative Industry Quarters (Evans, 2009)

The determinants of fortunes are another issue that has been explored. By definition, a successful creative cluster is the one that manages to integrate infrastructure, cultural and economic planning and achieves the right mix of assets, investments and organizations. In order to evaluate creative clusters, some indicators are available, based on physical, socio-cultural, and operational level (Gu, 2011).

Based on the vision of creative economy as a platform for developing economy and also the city (Baycan-Levent, 2010), the diffusion of clusters is increasingly endorsed. Starting from the idea that agglomeration is necessary but not a sufficient condition, also mechanisms to nourish creative clusters are traced (Evans, 2006):

- Provision and protection of property and premises workspace for artists and creative production.
- Business development, advice and network building (within and across creative sectors).
- Direct grants and loans to creative business and enterprises.
- Fiscal incentives and local taxes benefiting creative activity - property, BIDs, hotel, % for art.
- Physical infrastructure - including transport, ICT, urban design and the public realm.
- Investment in the soft infrastructure of education, training, standard setting and regulation.

In sum, the review of the most relevant literature on the idea of the creative city and its prototypes (cultural and creative quarters) aimed to demonstrate the

growing interest on post-industrial economy and its effects on urban environment, with a focus on the flourishing of normative approaches to promote cultural and creative settlements. In spite of its origin in the developed countries, the idea is now diffusing globally and the model advocated and implemented all around the world. How did this diffusion happen? Where does the power of the idea of the creative city come from? The following paragraph tries to provide some interpretations to the “global” evolution.

1.6 The hypnotic hold of the idea of the “creative city”

The previous analysis of the creative city model and its spatial manifestations showed that these iconic types of spaces share the use of creativity, in a broad sense, as a source of prosperity and growth for the contemporary city. Both of them are the operational expression of the linkage between culture and production in the new urban development agenda. One the most interesting elements to highlight is the theoretical and empirical shift from a model mainly based on regeneration approach to a model that strives for innovation spillovers and counts on creative industries as a key growth in the post-industrial era. This can be observed as the starting point to display motives for the worldwide circulation of the idea of the creative city (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Kong and O’Connor, 2009; Florida, 2012).

The first reflection sees this idea as an expression of the spread and the consolidation of the late XX century, western conception of capitalism that celebrates the “soft” variables, knowledge and immaterial dimension as the factors of competitiveness (Rullani, 2004; 2011). The discourse of the creative city can be interpreted as an orchestration that gathers together public and private actors, consultants, organs of propaganda, think tanks, universities. In this perspective, the idea of the creative city can appear as the expression of the consolidation of neoliberalism as a globalised regime of flexible accumulation, developed by intellectual and economic elites (scholars, radical economists, business leaders, and government officials) that put their efforts to establish the ideology (Harvey, 2006; Rossi and Vanolo, 2010; Neubauer, 2011). The main idea is that the creative city growth strategy can be analysed as a successful hegemonic project that is working to strengthen the interests of

transnational capital (Jessop, 2003).

Creativity as described in this chapter can be seen as an effective governmental tool within the framework of contemporary urban governance. It is powerful because it is functional to elite-driven priorities in the policy process of the wave of urban renewal projects for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). The idea of the creative city has a salient feature that contributes to its circulation: it is flexible. Elements in this direction have been highlighted both in the global discourse on creative industries and in urban planning theory. The definitions are not fixed; the boundaries are blurry. Vagueness could be interpreted as functional to the multiple structuration of creativity as a governmental device. In the discourses, the creative city is often presented in such a positive and elusive way that potential criticism is automatically prevented. Anyone that stands out against creativity is hick-headed, gloomy, and out-dated. The idea is so politically seductive (Peck, 2005) that consequently who can be an opponent of creativity?

In this perspective, the hypnotic hold generated on policy makers clearly arises (Kong, 2009; Eckert et al., 2012). Creativity applied to urban contexts provides ready-made solutions to the complexities of contemporary urban issues and to promote short-term city development because it can be easily translated into certain modalities of urban management (Peck, 2005): it reduces stress that comes from managing complexity, by avoiding conflicts and by creating consensus.

Elusiveness can be traced also in more empirically oriented studies of creativity-led urban development. Although creative clusters have already become object of international research, there is still a lack not only of conceptual clarity but also of solid empirical basis (Chatterton, 2000; Martin and Sunley, 2003; Simmie, 2004; Evans, 2005; Pawson, 2006; Kong, 2009; Mommaas, 2009). Defining creative clusters is a challenging effort because both the constituent components are complex and its investigation would deserve careful scrutiny and analysis that in turn require different methodologies to capture the variable shapes that the spatial manifestations take in the reality and that barely can be enclosed in a comprehensive classification (Evans et al., 2005; Kong, 2009).

These intellectual gaps have not hindered the diffusion of the idea, on the

contrary they seem to have acted as functional elements. Without fixed definitions or methodologies, researches that do not face in depth the issue and normative one that provide suggestions on how cities should be developed have been eased to the detriment of a more analytical, interpretive and critical approach (Gibson and Klocker, 2004). Along with the strengthening of the fashion effect of the “new credo of creativity”, some peculiar stories have been elevated to myths and undoubtedly subjected to become paradigmatic case studies and best practices to emulate (Peck, 2005) or, in other circumstances, to copy and paste. The use of a comparative analysis more oriented to advocacy rather than an in-depth investigation of realities has directly influenced the international circulation of the new economy and creative space discourses (Solesbury, 2002; Evans, 2009) or, in other words, it has given impulse to an extremely simplified form of policy transfer and unproblematic emulation motivated by the need to “be competitive” (Peck, 2005; Evans, 2009). Creativity-led urban policies travelled with great speed and arrived also in China at the beginning of the 21st century. Grounded on national and international networks of scholars, consultants, politicians and local and city officials, the appealing nature of “how-to-do-it guide to becoming creative” has seduced one of the world’s top manufacturing countries too (Keane, 2009). The arrival and establishment of the idea of creativity as new urban imperative for Chinese cities is analyzed in the following chapters.

2. The Chinese discourse of Creative City

In the last decade, following the global trend investigated in the first chapter, creativity as a driver of urban competitiveness has been introduced in China and established as one of the country's challenges for 2030. The idea of the creative city has been imported and spread in China by some key actors, two among them Liu Shifa, Vice-director of the Market Development section within the Ministry of Culture and Liu Wuwei, a senior policy advisor. In Shifa's article "Implementing the creative century plan; developing the creative China campaign" published in 2004 and Wuwei's book "How creativity is changing China" published in 2009, they set guidelines for Chinese creativity-led development that rapidly became the main references for the Chinese discourse of creativity. They constitute the manifesto of the advocated "great new leap forward" (Keane, 2007) that credits culture and creativity with a new role of engine for economic and social development and directs urban transformations in China. The assertion of creative industry as key sector in the new economic growth model and crucial resource for national competitiveness and progress took root in Shanghai in 2004. The First Shanghai Creative Industries Development Forum 2004 marked the beginning: it was the introduction in China of the concept of post-industrial knowledge-based economy and the practice of creative industries clusters. Political determination to fully explore the potential of creative clusters as development strategy has grown up over the following years and creative industries were recognized by Central Government in 2006 with the formulation of the economic plan "National 11th Five Year Plan for Cultural Development". Diffusion was fast and intense. Many national and municipal policies were issued and plans were formulated in cities across China to foster creative precincts. Creative industries cluster model has been fostered for renewing urban space and it has become a new approach to urban planning and design (Dong and Haruna, 2012).

Since 2005, with the deepening of the reform of China's creative model, a group of Chinese cities began to construct creative industry gathering areas (Huang, Zhang and Liu, 2009). From that moment on, the rise is exponential. In 2009, there were over two hundred clusters under construction all over China (Fu and Xu, 2009). Creativity-led planning is being implemented not just in first tier cities

(Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou) but also in the western extremity (the oasis city of Kashgar) and in Inner Mongolia (Ordos). Pearl River Delta (PRD) is one of most transformed areas, sometimes described as the cradle of creative cities (Wei-Wu, 2012): seventy creative industrial parks are developing rapidly. Among PRD cities, Shenzhen, due to its peculiar history and growth model, is the city that has most extensively embraced the knowledge economy upgrading process and is being redesigned to become a creative city.

2.1 Creativity comes to China

In 1978, China launched the economic reform that led the country to emerge as economic hegemonic actor: transformation was radical and centered about the shift from a centrally planned economy towards a market economy opened to private enterprise and foreign capitals. Capitalism was the logic of the reform that aimed to open up to the outside world and sanctioned the beginning of Chinese integration into global economy, by pursuing the catch-up growth approach (Naughton, 1996; Nolan, 2001; Jiang, 2010). While Western world was consolidating knowledge-based economies, by elevating innovation to the key competitive advantage and enacting the shift from goods to services, China took advantage of its peculiar conditions and resources and factories proliferated (Lin, Cai and Li, 1996). Over twenty years, Chinese economy has been reliant on natural resources and cheap labor within a manufacturing and export based system (over 80% of China's GDP went to exports and fixed investments). The model was labor-intensive, resource-exhausting and low value-added manufacturing power with lack of core technology and balanced ecological system. It is well described by the image of "sweat factories".

Though it enabled China's economic miracle, this growth model began to worry policy makers as soon as the circumstances that would cause growth rate slowdown begun to take shape. As a result, they started to call unwanted consequences into question. For instance, in March 2007 Premier Wen Jiabao mentioned the 4 "uns" affecting China's economy: unbalanced, unstable, uncoordinated and unsustainable. The worries about model sustainability prominently rose over international financial crisis in 2008 and the following recession. Collapse of global financial system was taken as the proof of China's

urgent need of reducing dependence on America and Europe. Even before the 2008 crisis, the idea that has been increasingly spread was that China cannot rely on other countries anymore and so it should develop its own resources. Politicians, policy makers and advisors begin to talk about the need of transition and, consequently, to outline a new model. The elected model is the one focused on creativity and based on the concept of creative industries as having a leading role in economic growth. Upgrading process is advocated: according to Chinese leaders, China should overcome the manufacturing based heavy industrial strategy and implement a knowledge base economy that capitalizes on added immaterial values rather than material ones.

2.2 “From Made in China to Created in China”

The slogan “from Made in China to Created in China”, devised in 2004, by Su Tong, the Executive Director of the Creative China Industrial Alliance, is the emblem of China’s willingness to shift towards the post-industrial system. Policy makers claim their awareness that “made in China” model was an important driver for China’s economic growth but, at the beginning of 21st century, they consider it as a huge loss of profits for Chinese enterprises and they are concerned about problems such exhaustion of natural resources, environmental pollution, lack of innovation and excess dependence on foreign investors. Their thinking can be summarized as follows: relying on Western economies has become extremely risky so, in order to protect the country and ensure growth, China needs to start to count on its own innovative technology, intellectual property and, last but not least, cultural and creative resources.

The championed strategy for China’s future is the one that targets to the creative industries framework: briefly, to strengthen sectors that highlight the role of soft capital as knowledge and culture, ensure repeatable use of resources, are consumer-oriented and have organizational flexibility and a diversity of industry targets.

Elements that mark the global discourse on post-industrial paradigm out can be traced in the Chinese discourse on creativity in knowledge-based economies (Shifa, 2004; Tang and Gu, 2007; Wuwei, 2009; Ye, 2008; Huang et al., 2009; Jiang, 2011; Stolarick and Chen, 2011):

- Creativity as an important force for global change.
- Innovation and technology as determining competitiveness.
- The need of evolving from the focus on manufacturing to a focus on services.
- The importance of symbolic value production.
- The relevance of product-oriented value creation mechanism.

By adopting this framework, also China is called to develop and strengthen creative industries and make them become the economic pillar. In this flow, China takes as reference the international discourse that claims creative industries have played a key role in times of economic crisis and have given fresh impetus with new industries. It recognizes creative industries nowadays assume a very important position within the global economy and creative economy has become a strategic solution for many developed countries. Chinese leaders align the country to what they recognize as being the international developmental trajectory and they want to replicate it. The adoption of this agenda by China can be interpreted as the willingness of not just taking part of the global transformation, but taking a leading part (Howkins, 2008). In order to stay main actor, it acknowledges recommendations for developing countries and follows indications suggested by international policy makers that, in unison, state creative industries are a successful strategy to achieve “leap frog” development as well for transforming economic models (UNCTAD, 2010; World Bank, 2012).

2.3 Creative Industries in China

As already introduced, the concept of “creative industries” has been imported in China at the beginning of last decade and entered into the mainstream discourse in 2006 (Keane, 2007). Regarding to their definition, the flexibility that is delineated in the global framework can be noticed also in the Chinese policy context (Kong, 2009). The term is continuously handled but, in general, the sectors that are evoked are: advertising, architecture, arts, antique market, computer and video games, crafts, design, fashion, film and video, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio.

These are the sectors that China should develop to establish itself in the global market competition. A range of benefits is enunciated as the results of enacting creative economy. They:

- Nurture individual creativity.
- Contribute to historical and cultural heritage preservation.
- Improve cultural capital.
- Foster communities.
- Generate more wealth and employment.
- Give rise to other new industries.
- Stimulate consumption of cultural and creative products while related industries produce unlimited output value.
- Enhance quality of public culture and promote human development by generating long-term prosperity for everyone in society.

According to the promoters, creative industries can foster China's upgrading through:

- Resources transformation: they turn various natural and cultural, tangible and intangible resources (defined as accumulated wealth of human knowledge, cultural heritage, human thoughts, scientific achievement) into capital for economic development. Creative industries redefine the notion of "resource" and extend it: "*historical artifacts, folklore and elements of social life are conceived as factors that can be exploited and developed to promote economic growth*" (Wuwei, 2009). Moreover, creativity can break the resources finiteness limit because it can "*make something out of nothing*" (Wuwei, 2009).
- Value upgrade: by definition, creative industries are high added value and increase cultural values embedded in products. They allow economic objectives align with social one, by promoting prosperity, they stimulate social progress, in terms of quality of life. "*The essence of creativity is to produce satisfaction and happiness through exploitation of the symbolic value, to maximize the products' effectiveness and make the consumer feel happy*" (Wuwei, 2009).
- Structural optimization of traditional cultural industries: renovation of established cultural industries can be reached by re-creating and re-

upgrading the resources of these industries and by introducing custom tailoring orientation.

- Market expansion: cultural features contained in a product can help the product to increase its value, and therefore sales, and to target a more diverse range of consumer demographics. In this direction, for Chinese creative industries, a huge market potential has been outlined.

In order to fulfill the advocated model, policies and strategies for highly intensive knowledge-based market competition have been formulated. They concentrate on protection of intellectual property, brand stimulation, opening of new consumer markets and creation of new hot spots of demand, aiming at increasing interaction between consumers and producers (Kong et al., 2006).

Particular attention is drawn to talent: by making explicit reference to Richard Florida (2002), one of the most promoted policy objectives is to nourish and cultivate skilled human resources. Individual talent and skills are conceived as new highlights in modern development due to their capacity of generating wealth, by fueling both economic and social progress. Consequently, Chinese thinkers stress the relevancy of giving creative class space to express their individual talent. The West-coined creative class in China is initially called “*xinxin renlei*” that literally means “neo neo group or tribe”. The term refers to the new generation that is considered to be self-reliant, with risk-taking behavior, creative attitude and able to positively influence next generations and country’s future. They are the central figures in the Chinese discourse on creativity because their lifestyles and values are seen as elements with the potential to impact on and lead the development of communities and cities. In this view, building creative communities (namely aggregating “*xinxin renlei*”) becomes one of the primary goals. Creative communities are described as interrelated networks of people that are involved in the creative turn and as open communities combining work, life and commercial activities. Establishing such social relationships is advocated as facilitating the convergence of culture, art, business, technology and human development. Creative communities are identified as basic organizational unit and the unique DNA of creative China.

The formulated strategy to flourish creative communities is the construction of creative clusters. In addition to Florida, cluster theory has been adopted by China making reference to Marshall and Porter and wishing to apply the model

to get those outcomes and place-based advantages already well-established in the West (Keane, 2009): agglomerative benefits, overtaking barriers to competition using internal linkages, tacit knowledge transfer, local economic development... Creative clusters are depicted as cells in spatial layout that serve as important bearers of cultural meanings. They assure the ideal concentration level that stimulates business integration, activates cooperation as well competition and induces resources optimization. Creative clusters, as combination of technology, culture, industry and market, are pictured as creativity hotspots and levers to reach high-value-added creative economy. Basic features of creative clusters are drawn: infrastructures, specialized service institutions and public service platforms, a certain industrial scale and independent R&D capacity, residential and consumption environment. Those prerequisites are all urban-based, namely can be found and activated in cities, in particular in international metropolis. Urban context is the rich soil that Chinese thinkers defined as the place where China's creative path can materialize. This explains why policy makers spring into action urban landscape upgrading, by fostering constructions of creative clusters all around the country.

2.4 Planning the Creative City

In line with the global idea, the city is the optimal localization of creative clusters because it can facilitate the concentration of creative resources. Hence, also the Chinese discourse is distinguished by stating indissoluble relationship between creative industries and urban context:

“creative industries and creative cities are like twins growing up together: creative cities are nourished by creative industries while creative industries flourish in the appropriate environment provided by the creative cities” (Wuwei, 2009)

In order to get the appropriate environment, planning creativity in the city becomes imperative: urban transformations are guided to build the suitable “*cultural atmosphere*” (Wuwei, 2009) to attract talent, business and capital (Wang and Zhang, 2006; Liu and Wang, 2009; Zhang, 2009). This has

originated the wave of construction of creative precincts that in China are called in many different ways such as zones, gardens, districts, bases, clusters, parks. The most championed construction approach is urban regeneration by disused industrial space rezoning. This decision emulates contemporary practice in Europe and North America caught on 1970s, now globally enacted, of reconversion of dismissed industrial buildings injecting them with creativity (O'Connor and Gu, 2011). Chinese policy recommendations has followed the Western track of many modern cities so much as old factories and warehouse has been chosen as the ideal location for creative clusters.

“It became apparent that the industrial heritage of receding manufacturing industries was providing development space for economic transformation” (Wuwei, 2009)

This practice of “new ideas in old factories” has been supported by evoking lots of the characteristics and benefits listed for American and European urban renewal interventions. The idea of creativity polarizing and thriving in abandoned factories and warehouses in big cities has being shaped China urban landscape and the new urban planning approach has been adjusting areas that are perceived as no longer fitting for the modern urban life (Dong and Haruna, 2012).

Adaptive reuse is deemed as catalyst for urban (re-)development and feasible through the so-called “shift from materials to people” that means enticing creative talents with the offer of appealing business, social and cultural environment. Merging together creative form of business clustering and industrial spatial layout is seen as the formula to give rise to the new lifestyle that is combining work, life and entertainment.

By making reference to international and Chinese cases of artists’ organic settlements that established their studios and residencies in abandoned industrial buildings, motives underlying the choice of reusing are listed:

- Structural characteristics (availability of large space and architectural value).
- Power of being inspiring (aesthetic and historical feeling that they provide).
- Power of favoring spontaneous aggregations.

On the basis of these benefits, creativity-led planning is advocated because it:

- Avoids waste of precious natural resources and improves cultural assets of cities.
- Helps conservation of historical and cultural heritage.
- Avoids erosion of cultural ecology and history of cities (big issue in China where the practice of demolition and construction for new purposes is a consolidate practice).
- Is a cost-effective way of reviving voids left by manufacturing industries re-displacement.
- Spurs to establish city brands and identity.
- Stimulates urban economy and competitiveness.

Indications for planning and design are issued, as well. Urban renewal should emphasize the characteristics of blocks, combine the development of creative industries with the local industrial and consumption structures, integrating the development of creative industries with the historical and cultural heritage protection, continuing the city's context (Dong and Haruna, 2012). In sum, revitalization by creativity is so conceived: mix of past and future, traditional and modern, Eastern and Western, classic and popular. Space produced by creative clusters should:

- Exude culture.
- Provide users with historical witness, habits and stories of various historical periods.
- Provide them with unique experiences.
- Meet their emotional needs or cultural aspirations.
- Go along with modern fashionable lifestyle.

According to upholders of this approach, success is driven by a joint effort by the government, the market and intermediary institutions and it is guaranteed by increasing consumption of popular culture.

3. The making of Creative Shenzhen

Shenzhen is one of the Chinese cities that is deeply experiencing the creativity-led planning approach. Before entering into details of its urban transformations, it is important to retrace its peculiar history. Shenzhen was founded just thirty years ago but quickly it has become world famous for several reasons.

3.1 A city forged by capital

Shenzhen is located in the south of Southern China's Guangdong Province bordering on Hong Kong. It was established in 1980 as Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the early stage of "Opening and Reform" policy. Up to 1978, it was a series of fishing villages with a total population of less than 30.000. Deng Xiaoping chose it as setting for the first free market and export-oriented manufacturing system experiment, which were the pillars of the reform (Cartier, 2002, Yeung et al., 2009). Since the 1980s, Shenzhen has experienced a fast growth in industrialization and urbanization. The pace of development was so intense that "Shenzhen speed" has become a common expression to refer to unique rapidity that has been shaping the city. The term was coined in 1985 after the feat of building one floor a day on the 53-story World Trade Tower (Bach, 2010). In less than thirty years, Shenzhen has become one of the world's most prominent manufacturing cities, with over thirteen million inhabitants (Unesco, 2009). It is the symbol of opening-up course and so successful that, at the end of last century, SEZs experiment was extended to all the country (Jiang, 2007).

"Shenzhen Miracle" in the 1990s rested on export-oriented economy and conspicuous introduction of foreign capitals and technologies. Processing and manufacturing industries rapidly settled up and, until 2000, the economic growth sustained a 31,2% average annual growth that led Shenzhen to become one of the leading "world factories" (Cartier, 2002). Such explosive growth was allowed by the supply of three fundamental elements: massive workforce (made of migrants from rural areas), cheap land and foreign investments (Cartier 2002; Jiang, 2007; Bach, 2010, 2011). Based on its price advantage, Shenzhen has dominated international industrial and trade chain. By championing labor-

intensive industry, in a few years, it has been projected as the vanguard of “made in China” model relying on private enterprises.

Nevertheless, at the end of the last century, crisis has affected also PRD region and it has accelerated when global financial crisis occurred. As a result, over ten thousand OEM enterprises in PRD were let to bankruptcy. By export decreasing, the advantages that guaranteed the glorious economic success were gradually weakened. In order to avoid decline, Shenzhen had to search for a more sustainable development model and, pushed by the need of remaining competitive in the international market, the choice fell on industrial upgrading and the appealing “creativity-oriented city” (Jiang, 2007). What has evolved in other cities over a hundred years or more (the shift from industrial city towards a post-industrial society), Shenzhen has planned to develop in a few decades. At the age of twenty, Shenzhen is urged to transform for re-positioning on global stage.

3.2 Shenzhen’s Creative Path

At the beginning of 21st century, Municipal Government projects the city as global pioneer city of sustainable development (Bach, 2010). The first wave of the willingness to upgrade was championed in the aim of becoming a “world class city” (Cartier, 2002; Mars and Hornsby, 2008). Later, in the same upgrading frame, the aim has been perfected to become a “cultural creative city” (terms always used interchangeably in Shenzhen utterances on the issue).

Due to the willingness of overcoming the “made in China” label and implementing the “created in China” model, Shenzhen intensely promoted the development of creative industries and, in line with the discourse on creative city launched in China in 2004, pushed the settlement of a number of creative industry bases, gardens, parks, clusters...

At “Shenzhen speed”, creative industries and “gathering areas” have flourished and boosted as the proof they are the proper solution to guarantee development. In Shenzhen, cultural and creative industry has rapidly developed at an average annual rate of 25% and in 2010 it added value of 72.6 billion RMB (more than 9 billion Euro), top of the league among China’s large and medium-sized cities. From 2004 to 2010, cultural and creative industries sector

accounted for the proportion of GDP by 4.6% rose to 7.6%, proving to be an important engine in promoting economy (Development Planning on 12th Five Year Plan for Cultural Creative Industry in Shenzhen, 2011-2015).

“Created in Shenzhen” model combines the prominent characteristics that are highlighted in the Chinese discourse on post-industrialism and so it grounds on the importance of relying on “intangible resources” and on creative clusters as bases for urban repositioning as well as economic and cultural development. Still, Shenzhen’s creativity approach is characterized by a strong emphasis on design: the city was expressly pushed to move from selling products to selling design (Wuwei, 2009). The idea of being a design-oriented city came into diffusion in 1999 (Wei-Wu, 2012) and ten years later Shenzhen had 60% of market share in the domestic industrial design market (Ni, 2010). Perhaps because of its history, though short, and legacy of openness and international exchange, a peculiar cultural sensitivity can be traced in Shenzhen. It is one of the cities in which in 2005, for the first time, the expression “*shanzhai*” (literally “cheap copy”) was used to stress how much the practice of copycat was the major limitation to the development of creative economy.

In order to shine a light on changes experienced by Shenzhen and despite difficulties in verifying reliability of sources that sometimes contradict each other, development major points are sought to be traced. Officially, Shenzhen established the strategy for culture based city and creative economy in 2003 (Unesco, 2009; Development Planning on 12th Five Year Plan for Cultural Creative Industry in Shenzhen, 2011). In 2004, Shenzhen Municipal Government provided generous support and established the objective of building the capital of creative design (Wuwei, 2009). In the same year, the First China International Cultural Industries Fair was organized in Shenzhen and in 2012 it hosted the eighth edition. Events have been played a relevant role in constructing the image of Shenzhen as the cradle of creativity. For instance, in 2005, “Creative December” was launched as month long cultural event aimed at boosting Shenzhen’s creativity. Several activities have been organized in “Creative December” editions: fashion shows, dancing and literary competitions, design lectures and festivals and international design competitions, as well. Speed up and modernization of cultural industries, that with high-technology industries, finance and logistics constitute the industrial pillars, were advocated

as city strategy in 2011, by Municipal Government issuing Shenzhen 11th Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development 2006-2010. One of the major projects included in the plan aiming to develop cultural industry was the construction of sixteen creative precincts.

2008 is another crucial year in Shenzhen's creative path, since it was designated as UNESCO City of Design. It was the first Chinese city to be accepted in this network (Shanghai will be accepted two years later). UNESCO defined Shenzhen as birthplace of China's modern design and selected it because of the presence of valuable institutions for training and education, events and international exchanges and creative industry clusters. Reinforcement of cultural creative industries is still a priority for urban development: to optimize, increase and reinforce cultural creative enterprises is one of the missions stated in the Development Planning on 12th Five Year Plan for Cultural Creative Industry in Shenzhen, 2011-2015. In order to achieve it, between 2011 and 2015, the city government will spend 500 million RMB (about 64 euro millions) on distributing special funds for creative industries development and establishing a set of regulations to guide and support the development.

Two are the major directions identified in the plan:

1. To strengthen cultural creative support (in terms of holding on the promotion of high quality cultural products, enhancing originality, building brands, highlighting the image of the city which is "capital of design" and "creative city").
2. To strengthen scientific and technological innovation support (in terms of standing at the forefront of science and technology development, introducing new cultural products integrating science and technology and cultural content, producing more technological innovation relying on intellectual property rights).

The sectors conceived as policy target are creative design industry, animation and game industry, new media and cultural information services, digital publishing industry, cultural software industry, film and television, entertainment industry, high-end press industry, high-end arts and crafts industry, and cultural tourism.

3.3 Creative Parks in Shenzhen

Several are the places in Shenzhen that defines themselves as creative parks. Some of them are mentioned more often than others (UNESCO; 2009), as well as are policy targets for Shenzhen Government (11th and 12th Five Year Plans). They are described as the symbol of post-industrial era atmosphere and development engines where art, creativity and technology are mixed together to enhance city growth, industrial value and spread new culture. They are:

- Bao'an Art Zone 22
- Guanlan Print Original Industry Base
- Nanshan Cyber Cultural Industry Base
- Shenzhen Yijing National Cartoon & Animation Industry Base
- F518 Idea Land
- OCT Loft Cultural Creative Park

These creative precincts were founded in the middle of 2000s and they are mainly cases of industrial building reconversion. By taking my cue from typologies by policy trajectory (Keane, 2009), the first four can be classified as specialist agglomerations, namely spaces dedicated to specific creative activities planned to providing resources and a workspace for people with similar skills. F518 Idea Land and OCT Loft Cultural Creative Park can be rather defined as examples of related variety model: often new settlements in renovated factory space that distinguish themselves from the specialist cluster because they combine artistic activities and enterprises in creative sectors and have an higher commercial and tourist orientation.

Among all of them, the first creative park that was constructed, the most famous and cited (China Architectural Arts Yearbook, 2004; Wu, 2008; Jing, 2009; Wei-Wu, 2012; Architectural Record, 2012) is OCT Loft.

4. OCT Loft Cultural Creative Park

4.1 Location

OCT Loft Cultural Creative Park is located in the eastern industrial zone in Shenzhen OCT (Overseas Chinese Town) area, in Nanshan District, as shown in Figure 1. Here it is studied as participant of the growth of Chinese industrial rise and decline (Urbanus, 2004).

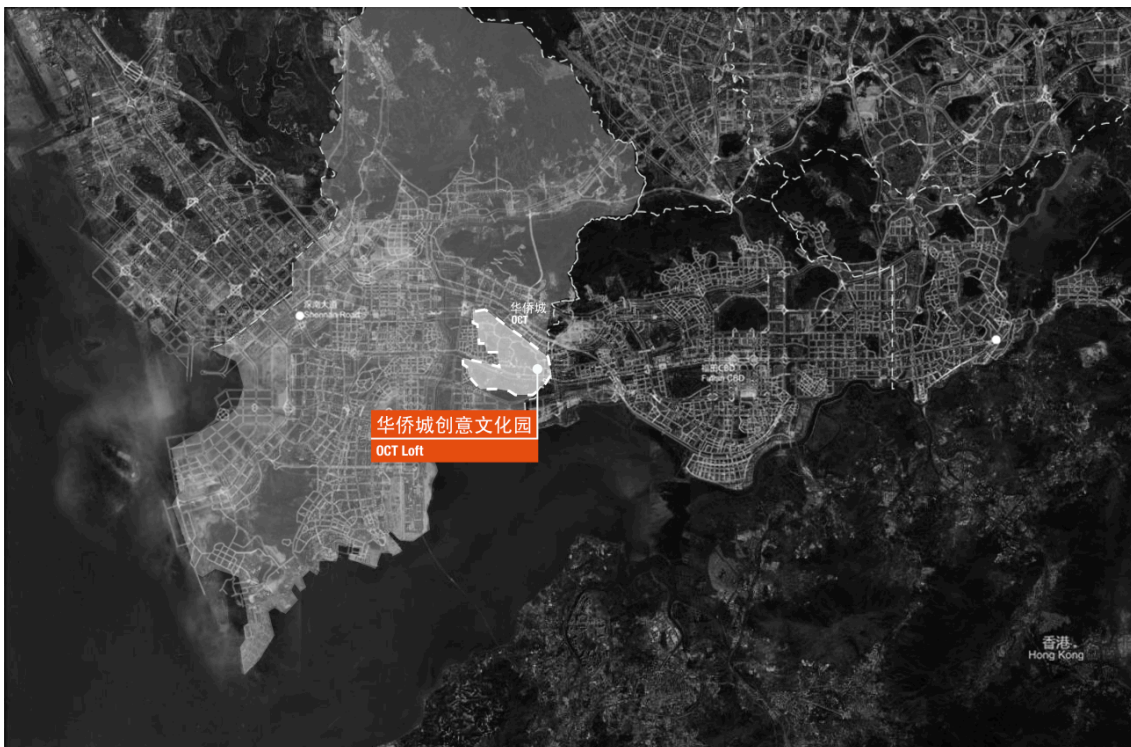


Figure 1. OCT Area and OCT Loft location map (courtesy of URB - Urbanus Research Bureau)

4.2 The origins: industrialization

The original settlement dates back to the 1980s. It is one of the earliest industrial zones in Shenzhen and it was specialized in processing and manufacturing, originally named Shahe Industrial Area. This zone emerged in the industrial growth of Shenzhen, being upon the three major stages of development:

1. Early foreign investment, with free land rental.
2. The 15 year handover.
3. The developer/corporate developed standard factories for lease.

In the early of 1980s, Shenzhen set up two development districts (Nanyou and Shoukou) to develop the “Three-plus-one” trading-mix (custom manufacturing with materials, designs or samples supplied and compensation trade). In that context, the State Council of China and China Travel Service Limited (Hong Kong) decided to develop OCT area on the basis of Shekou model, former industrial zone emerged to exploit oil (1985). The goal of establishing OCT area was to attract overseas Chinese capital and intellectuals. The start-up companies belong to “Three-plus-one” companies, such as Konka Group Co. Ltd., a manufacturer of electronics and telecommunication products based in Shenzhen that still has a settlement in OCT Loft surroundings (Konka is the Holding Group of a branch of OCT Group, the project developer that will be introduced later).

Since 1993, the manufacturing industry has moving out towards peripheral zones in Shenzhen or in other cities officially because of the decision of betting on high-tech industry and tertiary sector as the new goals of industrial policy. In the same year, Konka set up their branch in Dongguan, a city in Guangdong, named “Dongguan Konka Electronic City”. As one of the results of the fast urbanization that characterized the birth and growth of Shenzhen, OCT area had become the new city center and thus it could not host manufacturing anymore because the land value and rental rates were extremely increased. Just a few factories run by OCT Group were still in the area and the percentage of vacancies was estimated about 70% (Urbanus, 2004, 2012). When the factory compound became vacant and the industrial activities declined, OCT Group started to formulate the strategy of converting the abandoned industrial settlement into a cultural creative park.

4.2.1 OCT Group

OCT Group is one of China’s top brand state-owned enterprises (Wei-Wu, 2012) and it is engaged in cross-sector and cross-industry operation. OCT Group has adhered to the “market-oriented” principle and is one of the companies that has incisively affected Shenzhen’s development by fostering three businesses: tourism and related cultural industry operation (its most influential and main business), real estate and hotel development and operation

and manufacture of electronic and set package products. OCT Group investments are not confined in Shenzhen; it has being moved towards the whole country to construct multiple large-scale comprehensive projects. In order to support tourism development and management asset, in 1985, a branch was founded and named OCT Enterprise CO. It is the only central enterprise which focuses on cultural industry and it is among the first bunch of national “cultural industry model gardens”, that is the term used at the beginning to refer to cultural and creative parks.

4.3 Post-industrialization

Let me take a step back to OCT area and OCT Group related strategy. Its vision is to pursue a long-term development and renew the economic fabric, by “putting short-sighted business interests aside”. Officially in 2004, OCT Group decided to convert part of the declining industrial area into a cultural creative park, called OCT Loft.

OCT Group planned the intervention in OCT Loft to attain two objectives:

1. Preservation of an historic place in the city (through the renovation of the old factory buildings).
2. Economic revitalization, by enhancing competitiveness of creative industry and creating more value for all OCT area and Shenzhen.

In line with the governmental agenda, the upgrading process started and in about five years of progressive construction and management, the area has been redesigned and restructuring into one of China’s leading cultural creative parks.

Briefly, the major points in OCT Loft establishment are:

2003: Hexiangning Fine Arts Museum, one of the leading national modern art museums in China based in Shenzhen, decided to set up a non-profit contemporary art center in one of abandoned warehouses and called it OCAT (OCT Contemporary Art Terminal).

2004: OCT Loft upgraded existing industrial landscape into a cultural creative park.

2005: in January, OCAT located in OCT-LOFT’s south part.

2007: on January 28th, OCT Loft (limited to the south part) officially opened to public.

Since 2007, because of the experience of south part was considered successful, OCT Group started the upgrading plan for the north part that was fashioned to house mainly design companies, as a platform for artistic creations trade and showcase.

2011: on May 14th, OCT Loft wholly opened to the public.

4.4 Description of the cultural creative park

The park covers an area of approximately 150,000 square meters; the construction area is of 200,000 square meters, divided into northern and southern zones as shown in Figure 2 that highlights OCT Loft area.



Figure 2. OCT Loft Birds Eye View - Northern and Southern areas (courtesy of URB)

It is a pedestrian precinct, with the main entry located in the middle of the southern edge. From the entry, where a steel gate welcomes and evokes industrial past (see Figure 3), a corridor goes across and joins southern and northern areas that are divided by Xiangshan East Street (dotted red line in Figure 2).



Figure 3. Steel gate at the southern entrance of the park (on 22nd November 2012)

Aside from two 6-floor buildings close to the main entrance, the southern part is characterized by low buildings (2-3 floors) and has a strong commercial vocation (there is a high concentration of restaurants and bars). The northern area maintains the medium height of 6-floor buildings and the industrial character more than the southern, as illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4. OCT Loft – on the left a picture of the southern area and on the right one of the northern (2012)

4.5 Renovation and upgrading process

The renovation process started in 2003 and OCT Group chose Urbanus Architecture & Design Inc. as the practice in charge of the project. Urbanus designed the master plan (Figure 5), it started working on the southern part and on the axis that later connected it to the northern area. From a planning perspective, it was a culture-driven project, since OCAT in the south and B10 in the north (two exhibition spaces) were used as catalyst to give birth to the area, conceived by the developer as a trendy mixed-use district (Urbanus, 2007).



Figure 5. OCT Loft Master Plan (courtesy of URB)

Regarding the concept, the master planning team's intentions were to hinge, replace and fill up the buildings by applying the new spatial form with small-scale operations and improvements on the infrastructure. Starting from adding programs to the existing structures to adapt to the function of the art center, the empty lots between them were intended to be filled up with galleries, bookshops, cafes, bars, artist ateliers and design shops, along with lofts and dormitories. Constantly adding new elements during the factory renovations was a major turning point towards the design. The development of the area over time allowed the area itself to accumulate social context and awareness (Time+Architecture, 2006).

From the architectural side, the challenges were the upgrade of the industrial architectural heritage and the regeneration of new, highly specialized industrial buildings. Urbanus saw the value of the "incomparable regularity" within the East Industrial Zone, as a slice of urban memory spontaneously preserved among urbanization awaiting demolition, being buried and forgotten amongst history (Urbanus, 2004).

Overall, the design was to treat the existing factories as temporary places; the renovations were conceived not as permanent but as fitting for going along with future development. One of the main emphases was on interactive development: the uses of the buildings would be adapted to the needs of the contextual climate. Consequently, it has a certain level of flexibility thus self-adopt to the trends and allows industries to grow with the Loft. The design utilized the spaces in-between the existing buildings, by filling the gaps and developing these common grounds to extend like "vines in gaps", to avoid dead space and to connect spaces for social interaction, which will reinvigorate other factory buildings (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Intervention to readapt in-between spaces, by filling the gaps (on 21st November 2012)

Temporality and adaptability are the concepts that characterize the renovation: the idea was to not create a fixed environment for the creative industries, but a park that maintains constant temporality. As stated by the partners, *“the factory is not constant, it was temporary, it will be temporary, after our renovations, it still is temporary. How will it look like ten years from now? That depends on the sustained development of the city.”* The concept of change was helped by the regularity and flexibility of the existing factory buildings that Urbanus noted: any changes made to the exterior would be highlighted and give it “personality”. This peculiarity gave designers a chance to express themselves, to take control of the interior and exterior form as long as they were in harmony with the existing built environment. The main tool in the South Master Plan was the Axis running through central circulation path (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Axis in the southern area and, on the right, OCAT building (on 27th March 2012)

Along with the idea of constantly adding new elements during the factory renovations (Community Design, 2007), multiple nodes were designed to perform different functions but with a similar aim: to promote OCT Loft as a district accessible to the general public, with OCAT acting as a major anchor in the initial stage. All designs in the south related to this central axis and branched off to the other factory buildings, through filling the voids, which should in turn activate the old factory buildings, attracting other businesses to start up in the area. The axis played a crucial role also in designing the northern area (Urbanus, 2009). Compared to the south, the north district factory buildings are multi leveled with a stronger architectural basis and longer life span. The overall area consisted of rigid planning and lacked the strong “social quality” of the south. Hence, Urbanus decided to extend the south axis into the north, to give a sense of continuous expansion of space, contributing to a smooth flow between the two areas (connection is shown in Figure 8, and the entire area is shown in Figure 9).



Figure 8. Axis connecting southern and northern areas - Xiangshan East Street (on September 2012)

The main commercial areas were planned to face the axis to promote movement along it and, at the same time, increase their exposure to the public. With a similar system to the south, Urbanus projects lie along this path to promote the branching out of circulation, thus, allowing the public to permeate from the core through to the edges. Along the access, nodes, public spaces for rest and gathering are placed to encourage social interaction.

4.6 Specific interventions

Several interventions were conducted in OCT Loft to adapt the space to accommodate the creative and cultural park. Figure 9 points projects designed by Urbanus Architecture & Design Inc. since 2003.



- | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 OCT Loft South Entrance | 4 E6 Pavillion | 7 OCAT | 10 Car Park Landscape | 13 A3 Gallery | 16 A5 Spiral | 19 A4-A5 Slope Plaza |
| 2 E5 Link | 5 E5 Renovation | 8 OCAT Artists Studio | 11 OCT Loft North Entrance | 14 OCT North Skywalk | 17 A4 1st Floor Shops | |
| 3 E6 Entrance | 6 OCT Loft South Walkway | 9 OCT Youth Hostel Renovation | 12 A3 Exhibition Space | 15 B2 Facade Renovation | 18 OCT North Walkway | |

Figure 9. Urbanus Architecture & Design Inc.'s projects with specification of buildings' names (courtesy of URB)

2003: OCAT in F2 building (construction in 2005)

The OCAT was designed as the starting zone in the planning process. With this in mind, Urbanus designed two phases of “input”, to accomplish activation. The first phase relied heavily on the OCAT, inputting a series of artistic activities to change, through architectural and non-architectural means, the public perception and usage of the OCT Loft area. The second one simulated the natural development of the city, placed leisure spaces, studios, shops into the in-between spaces, to compact the area in terms of social activity. This phase hoped to build an interactive social framework with high flexibility. The overall aim was to create a plan that accommodated spontaneous development, a plan that would not confine the growth of the area, with the OCAT at its heart.

Regarding the concept, recovery was the guideline. The exterior skin was left untouched, all but an iron mesh skin was placed on the exterior, preserving the original façade but also simplifying the elevation, giving it an abstract quality with layers of history. This helped neutralize the industrial quality of the building and at the same time rendered it a monumental reading.

Before and after renovation project pictures are shown in Figure 10.



Figure 10. OCAT and E6 building – on the left, picture before the renovation (courtesy of URB, July 2003), on the right, picture after the renovation (September 2012) – points 3 and 7 in Figure 9

Since 2004, Urbanus worked on buildings surroundings OCAT, e.g. on OCAT Artists Studio in F1 (see Figure 22), and on E6. The E6 renovations and extensions helped reinforce the main axis of the walkway. The E6 building before renovations retreated away from the axis. A concrete exhibition space was conceived to help emphasize the profile of the axis as well as link E6 and OCAT, bringing the E6 pocket into the circulation system (Figure 11). The monumental scale of the entry addition helps signify the importance of E6 as the entrance building and also helps define the entry plaza, setting the tone for the rest of the journey in the OCT Loft. As soon as the construction phase completed in 2006, Urbanus settled in E6. It was one of the first companies to move in the new park.



Figure 11. The concrete exhibition space in front of E6 building (November 2012) - point n. 4 in Figure 9

2006: Design of entrance and landscape and façades renovation, plus renovation of youth hostel (construction in 2007)



Figure 12. E6 building façades renovation – on the left picture before the renovation (courtesy of URB, March 2004), on the right pictures after the renovation (June 2011) – point n. 3 in Figure 9



Figure 13. Hostel and car parking renovation – on the left picture before the renovation (courtesy of URB, March 2004), on the right pictures after the renovation (September 2012) – point n. 10 in Figure 9



Figure 14. Detail of OCT Youth Hostel Renovation – point n. 9 in Figure 9 (on 27th March 2012)

2007: North OCT Loft Concept Master Plan

Northern Extension was conceived as having B10 (see Figure 15) as catalyst for the entire northern area (the construction started in 2008).



Figure 15. B10 renovation – on the left picture before the renovation (courtesy of URB, November 2007), on the right pictures after the renovation (September 2012)

The original planning strategy for the northern area called for a Design Center as the main activator and showcase for a creative campus concept at the right side of the central axis. The design center was defined to be a building with its functional layout to accommodate for the core concept of “design”: a space which could have the flexibility to become museum, gallery, exhibition hall, library, convention hall, and so on, for design related activities, to be opened both to the general public and industry professionals. Its role was to inject energy to its surrounding community and also increase the profile of OCT Loft as a whole. The proposed strategies were the following: keep the height of the 1st floor, create additions on the 2nd floor, light up 1st floor with skylights and interweave old with new.

North Entrance - A3 Extensions (2008)

The east extension is a cylindrical landscape path, acting as an exhibition space open to the public along the axis (Figure 16). Along with the change in materials, from red bricks that characterize the south to concrete and wood, it gives a physical indication to the entry of different space.

The allocated wall surface for graffiti also helps mark the significance of the entry, with its contrast to most other graffiti walls in the park, which have a light toned background. The north façade is on one of the entries for the corridor spaces, designed to provide floor area to commercial activity. It is an experimental built project to link the OCT Loft North factory buildings with the corridor/skywalk concept. The break between the two extensions responds to the entry of A3 and allows for the change of program. The tonal similarity and industrial treatments of the façades help give them a unified reading, and with the change in material weight, solid-transparent, indicates a distinction of program and hierarchy between the two spaces.



Figure 16. A3 building and North Entrance – on the left picture before the renovation (courtesy of URB, July 2007), on the right pictures after the renovation (September 2012) – point n. 11 in Figure 9

Landscaping (2008)

The landscape area directly responds to B10, creating a landscape platform for social activity and gathering, reinforcing the importance of B10 through placement of shops and acting as a central hub. Also the location of many of the entrances and exits located within this area reinforces the importance and increases circulation and usage of the landscape platform.

2008 - 2009: Corridors, Connections and Rooftop Public Space (construction in 2011)

Urbanus first identified anchoring points - buildings in the north, and then connected them with the other buildings to create a webbed corridor system, extending the ground pedestrian circulation paths through the original staircases (see Figure 17).



Figure 17. Section of the webbed corridor system (September 2012) – point n. 13 in Figure 9



Figure 18. A5 building spiral stairs (September 2012) - point n. 16 in Figure 9

It also overlaps with the parking and motorways to utilize them to plug in public access to the circulation system and hence activate the park with an edge to center approach as well as the existing green space. A rooftop public space was added into the corridor system to bring the circulation into section, adding a vertical dimension to the concept (Figure 19). The aim was to activate all the floors of each of the factory buildings, bringing life to the abandoned levels. The corridors would connect the whole of the south in a simple manner, to create a unified system and a dialogue between the currently physically close but socially distant factory buildings.



Figure 19. Rooftop public space (September 2012) – point n. 19 in figure 9

These interventions aimed to foster cross-disciplinary cooperation: to form nodes for gathering and dilute the rigidity of linear axial circulation and to increase spontaneous interaction between circulation, people, and industries. The corridors were also imaged acting as galleries to display art work or creative work of the industries, to increase exposure and interaction between different pieces of work. These multiple layers of interaction should promote the

interaction between the creative industries and at the same time allow for a capacity to contain a diverse range of creative economic activities.

2011: another step of the upgrading process was the “International Invitational Exhibition on OCT Loft Concept Design” to offer thoughts on OCT Loft conceptual plan and the renovation of B10 to the OCT Contemporary Art Museum, exploring the strategy for the active protection of the industrial buildings, as curator Shi Jian stated. This exhibition was conceived as means to help OCT Loft in its turning into the pioneer of cultural and architectural district in Shenzhen and a diversified, harmonious, modern glamorous creative district in Shenzhen and even in the world (Urbanus, 2011^a). Studios invited were Urbanus Architecture & Design, Bernard Tschumi Architects, Dominique Perrault Architecture, MVRDV and Sou Fujimoto Architects.

Urbanus’ project proposed renovating B10 into a professional contemporary art center. First strategy was to preserve as many factories as possible (demolishing those in poor structural condition that are abandoned) and the second one was to add density on the top of the preserved factories. The “new north” was designed to establish a novel business model for existing creative enterprises and incubate new, smaller-scale creative ones, by providing shared resources for creative starters and simulates the interactions among different creative industries. Moreover, Urbanus worked on the challenge of providing affordable working space to avoid existing small-scale creative offices forced out of the area because of the high rent.

5. The “Creative Class” in OCT Loft

The origins of OCT Loft and its planning strategy showed how space has been re-conceptualized and redesigned for attracting people working in cultural creative industries and interested in using related facilities. The park was conceived and realized on the concept of gathering members of the “creative class”, by providing them with an environment able to promote business interactivity, contamination, ideas exchange and cultural needs fulfillment. Thus the “creative class” was a key actor in the developer and designers’ mind in the construction phases of the creative precinct and even now it should be the main character in the functioning and success of the park. In order to get a view of OCT Loft’s economic and social current performances, the creative class was investigated both in terms of presence (element that should be not taken for granted) and perceptions of what the settlement in a creative park means for those who are conceived as the first beneficiaries.

5.1 Creative industries in OCT Loft

All the enterprises settled in OCT Loft were surveyed in spring 2012. The official registration was not used as a reference because it was not so accurate. First of all, and obviously, it was not updated to 2012 and secondly some of the office spaces in the park are sublet, thus some activities do not appear or are not precisely catalogued. A census door by door was done, in order to check the presence in all the buildings that belong to the park.

The result is that 229 companies are settled in OCT Loft in May 2012. They were classified by using as main reference the “Creative Economy Report” edited by UNACT in 2010. Among the vast array of available taxonomies described in paragraph 1.5.1, UNACT classification was chosen because its distinction between “upstream” and “downstream” creative activities allows to better highlight peculiarities of cultural and creative industries settlement in OCT Loft. Results are shown in Figure 20:

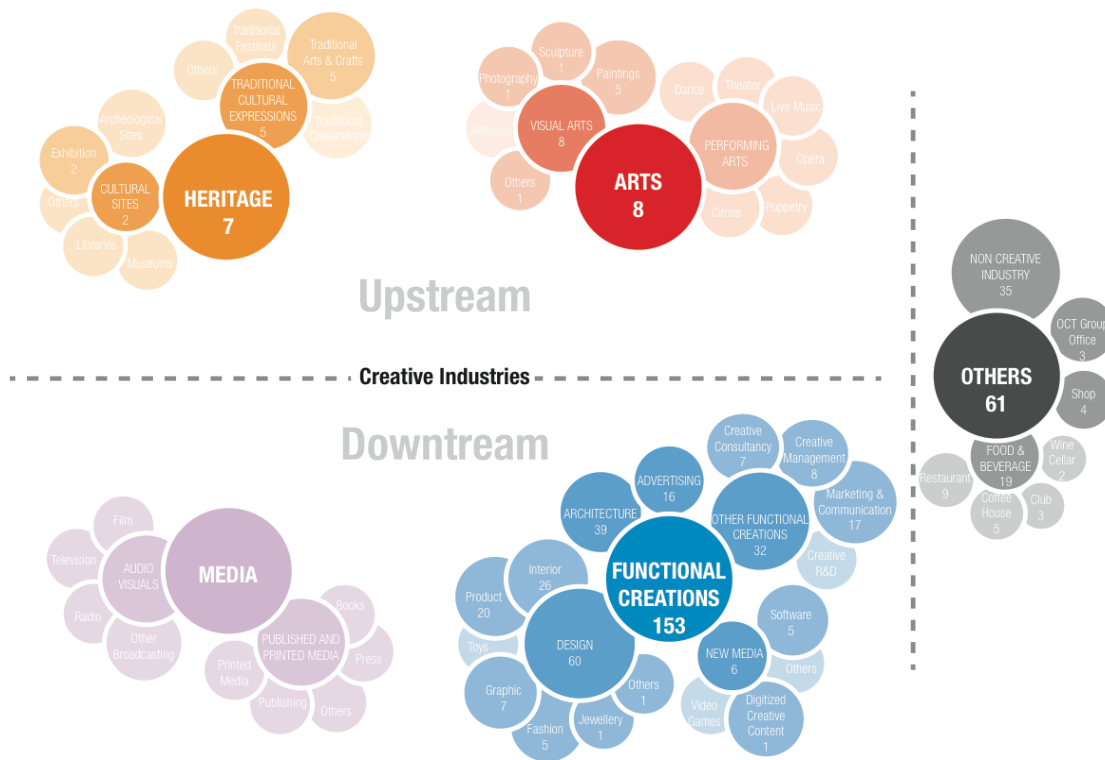


Figure 20. Economic Activities in OCT Loft in May 2012, classified by creative sectors – source UNACT (2010), Creative Economy Report (courtesy of URB)

“Upstream” creative industries are defined as activities with a strong artistic component; this category includes heritage, traditional arts, performing arts and visual arts. In OCT Loft, upstream activities constitute the 6.6% of the total. Most of the companies settled in the park belong to the “downstream” creative industries (66.8%), outlined as “any economic activity producing symbolic products with a heavy reliance on intellectual property and for as wide a market as possible”. Other activities are present at 26,6%: among them, non-creative industries, here conceived as not falling within upstream and downstream creative sectors, are the 15.3%, while facilities as food and beverage represent the 8.3% (most of them are restaurants). On the basis of the survey, a mix between artistic, cultural and creative industries can be traced in OCT Loft with a substantial presence of more demand-driven and services-oriented activities producing goods and services with functional purposes. Following Shenzhen’s vision and planners’ objectives, design is the most represented sector: 39.2% of downstream activities belong to design (with a predominance of interior design).

Architecture studios are high at 25.5%, followed by marketing and communication (classified in “other functional creations” category) that are 11.1%. Going down in percentage, there are advertising firms (10.4%), creative management (5.2%) and consultancy (4.5%). New media are the 4% of the downstream total.

Figure 21 shows how all these activities are distributed in the park. The same mix between upstream and downstream can be noticed in both south and north areas. In the southern, there is a more substantial presence of food and beverage facilities and, as already said, a commercial vocation stronger than the northern part. However, changes in the presence and location of those activities have been already happened. In few months, mainly in the north area, new companies have settled in, most of them are restaurants and bars. This could be interpreted as the north area increasingly coming to life (it was officially opened just a year ago); however, still vacancies remain high, especially if compared with the idea of rapid change and fast development that the city likes to project.

2012

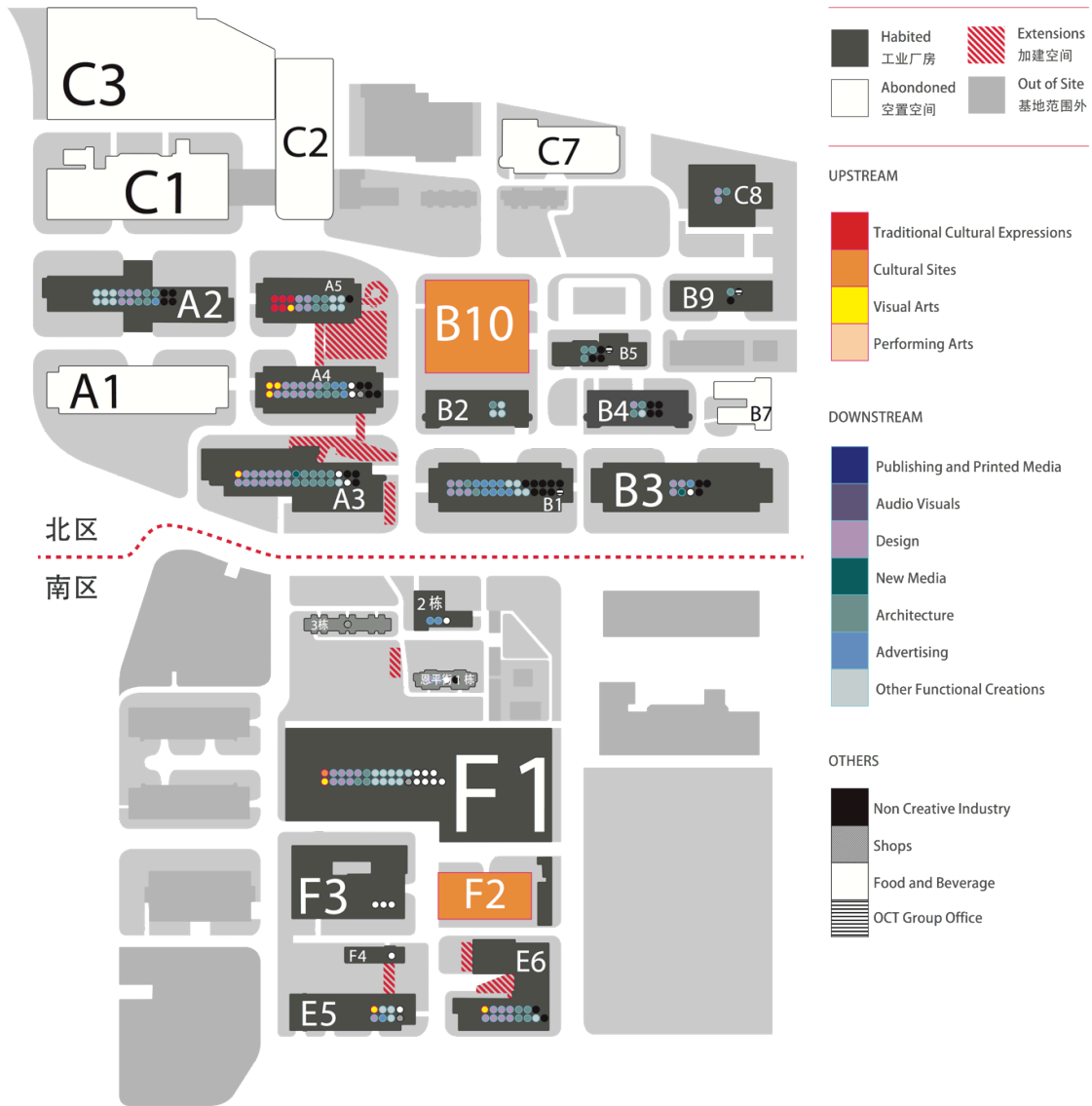


Figure 21. Spatial distribution of economic activities in OCT Loft in May 2012
(Courtesy of URB)

Among upstream activities that are settled in the park, it is to highlight that every year, since 2006, a year before the official opening, OCAT (OCT Contemporary Art Terminal) has been organized international artist residency. It provides both Chinese and foreign artists with an open space where they can work and live (interior spaces are shown in Figure 22). The studios are located in F1 building, point n. 8 of Figure 9. Since the beginning, the program has invited a total of twenty-seven curators, artists and groups representing fifteen countries and areas. In some editions, the selection of artists was done by application, in other years artists were directly invited by OCAT.

The aim of the artist residency is “to create a multi-layer platform for interdisciplinary communication for art practitioners from all over the world, and to promote the development and growth of contemporary Chinese art and mechanism through integrating domestic and foreign cultural resources.” It is a temporary activity, it takes place in OCT Loft just for three months in a year, usually in late summer and fall.



Figure 22. OCAT Art Residency – interiors of the artist Liu Shiyuan’s studio. On the left the exhibition space and on the right the living one (on 9th November 2012) – point n. 8 in Figure 9

5.2 The members of the Creative Class in OCT Loft

In order to investigate the business and social functioning of the creative precinct some stories about working and living experiences in the park were collected. As mentioned in the methodological section, members of the creative class in OCT Loft were interviewed to explore professional and community networking relationships, needs, perceptions and beliefs regarding their being settled in a cultural creative park. The aim was to unveil perceptions of life in the park and, by in-depth research, try to provide a comprehensive vision, as much as possible, of what OCT Loft is, by integrating them with the analysis of regeneration plans and master plans.

I conducted twenty-three semi-structured interviews asking creative workers questions on:

- Personal information (education qualification, job, position, hobbies...).
- Business life (to collect information about the firm and business, the use of the office space and business relationships and networking with other creative professionals in the park).
- Daily life (to collect information about place of living, the use of facilities within and outside the park during the week and the weekends).
- Leisure time.
- Expectations and perceptions on working in OCT Loft.

Interview structure is attached in Appendix 1.

The interviewees were chosen on the basis of the following elements:

- Business activities (both “upstream and downstream” creative industries – see classification edited by UNACT in 2010 - and food & beverage facilities).
- Settlement year (both first and latest comers).
- Business cycle (both leader companies and start-ups).
- Positions (both entrepreneurs and employees, nine and fourteen respectively).

The following paragraphs present the main findings of the research as derived from interviews and aim to provide an in-depth view of people who animate the park and their lives within and outside OCT Loft.

5.2.1 Profiles of the members of the creative class

The creative class in OCT Loft appears as young, highly skilled, with lots of interests, deep passion for their jobs and ambitions. By a large majority, the interviewees are male and young (the average age is thirty-one). They are well educated, all of them have at least a bachelor degree and some of them can be defined as “*haigui*”, Chinese word to identify returnees with study or training experiences abroad. They are all Chinese; the foreigners are just two. Regarding interests and hobbies, people who are married and have children are keen on spending their (little) spare time staying at home with the family while the singles (and younger) creative workers prefer to dedicate their free time (little as well) to a wide range of interests, such as painting, music, movies, photography, reading and sports. Both entrepreneurs and employees, with positions of responsibility in the company, compose the group of interviewees. For them, job is one of the most important aspects of life. It is widely considered as one of the first sources of personal fulfillment and happiness. Enjoying what they are doing is a fundamental element that cannot be renounced, combined with the possibility of continuous learning and advancement. They seek for professional recognition and success, in monetary terms as well. Most of them are aware of the social influence that their jobs potentially have and they aspire to be pervasive in the society, as a graphic designer stated talking about the most important professional values: “*to be recognized and widely accepted by industry and be influential in society are my goals*”. Besides sociality, business (and the related economic success) is the other essence that is considered crucial. Not just as purely accumulation, pursuing of earning money is conceived as a source of social acceptance, also outside professional circles. Another young independent designer claims: “*Most people think I am an artist, but I am a pure businessman. In the city where I was born, culture is business. If my parents knew I am an artist, they would be very disappointed. Actually, business is the most beautiful art*”.

Regarding the business sectors, they work in a wide range of upstream and downstream cultural and creative industries (UNACT, 2010), such as architecture and landscape, product design, interior design, graphic design, advertising, art galleries. In order to provide a significant picture of economic

activities in OCT Loft, some owners and managers of shops and restaurants were involved in the research.

The same variety can be retraced in the settlement year, which is spread over the last seven years. The first companies moved in 2006 and the last ones in 2012. The latest to settle in are mainly based in the northern area that, as already described, has a higher concentration than the southern one and is increasing its commercial vocation with the opening of design studios and shops, restaurants and art galleries. Also the dimensional range is heterogeneous, it varies from firms with just two partners to companies with more than an hundred employees. They are often the first company founded by the entrepreneur, that moved in OCT Loft from another location in the city or opened a new branch office in the park.

5.2.2 Location choices

Regarding motives that support the choice of location, it is necessary to divide entrepreneurs from employees. For the latest, the choice of the company is independent from its being located in the creative park and it focuses on reputation, sharing organizational values or artistic taste, chances of progressing with the company and advancing in the career. Some of them were already employed before the move: they just followed the company.

Obviously, for entrepreneurs, the choice of location is relevant. They preferred OCT Loft because it was perceived as a business district that suits diverse needs and evolves with time. For instance an entrepreneur that, after five years working in a commercial apartment building, wanted *“to change for a more formal environment because it was better for business image”* chose it. Four years later, another entrepreneur selected OCT Loft because it was a unconventional place, more relaxed and informal than other business districts: *“There are more strange people here than in a very serious business type district. Strange people do not feel so strange here. OCT Loft has all kinds of strange creatures all around, so I am not the weirdest one”*. Moreover, other businessmen opted for the park because they liked atmosphere and environment (*“the atmosphere here is great”* is a frequent comment). Mainly people that are running studios with shops and have a direct contact with end

consumers were convinced by the success of the southern area and the related charm of the park that attracts lots of tourists and clients. Very few of them, talking about the motivations behind the settlement, explicitly state the importance of being in a space that should spur creativity and so potentially could be helpful for their businesses. For instance, just an entrepreneur states: *“artistic atmosphere is very important. OCT Group takes much account of public art, there is a slogan “we will not put the best of art in the museum with fee, it will be free to the public”, it moved me”*.

5.2.3 Selection process to settle in the park

Besides the clear willingness to settle in OCT Loft, another way of coming in the park emerged. Some creative professionals, most of them designers, are now working in OCT Loft because they were selected and so the space was offered to them. It is fundamental to describe how the creative firms can take up residence in the park. The common practice is to apply for the office space and submit an application directly to OCT Group that sometimes decides with the support of a group of consultants, some of the leader creative firms settled in OCT Loft. Potential creative entrepreneurs must fill in a registration form, a sort of business plan, and then OCT Group decides which are the activities that fit for OCT Loft.

There is another way to get the space and is dedicated to independent designers and artists. It is called T-market and is a market that is organized and sponsored, since July 2008, by OCT Group in collaboration with a famous design company settled in OCT Loft and “Shenzhen Graphic Design Association”, to improve creative and artistic productions and economy. It takes place on the first weekend of every month; until 2010 stands were collocated in the southern part (the name “T-market” finds its origin in this element: the structure of the southern part is like the letter “T”). Since 2011, the market has being organized in the axis and part of common grounds in the northern area of OCT Loft, as Figure 23 shows, to contribute to the development of that section that was just opened to the public.



Figure 23. T-market (on 5th August 2012) – point n. 18 in Figure 9

According to one of the organizers, T-market was conceived as a “popularization activity, providing a stage for unknown designers to show and sale their works”. The aim was to plug a perceived gap in cultural and creative activities that were taking place within the park: “I think there should be different levels of activities. Museums and galleries, events like architecture biennale, sculpture biennale and other art exhibitions represent the high-end cultural behaviors. We needed some activities which were more popular, and closer to common people”, the organizer stated.

T-market is nowadays well known as a street creative market for young and not famous designers and artists to display and sell their design and work. It is not reserved to designers and artists already settled in OCT Loft, creative vendors come from everywhere in Guangdong Province, mainly from Shenzhen and Guangzhou, and also from Hong Kong. Precisely, according to interviews, T-market is increasing its fame: at the beginning, creative vendors were all from Shenzhen and Guangzhou and gradually people from Hong Kong, Macao, Beijing and Shanghai began to be interested in this activity. Regarding impacts

on OCT Loft, it worked as a showcase and platform for some designers: organizers appreciated their work and so supported the designers that were looking for a place and nowadays they have a studio in the park.

5.2.4 The use and relevance of regenerated industrial space

At the base of the location choice, structural characteristics offered by renovated industrial buildings do not particularly emerge as a priority (Figure 24 shows some interior space in the southern and northern areas).



Figure 24. Interior spaces filled up by creative industries, on the left side in the southern area (on 21st November 2012) and on the right one in the northern zone (on 15th August 2012)

Just a few interviewees, the first comers and among the bigger ones in terms of employees, express that they were looking for big space and found a convenient one in OCT Loft because there was availability of empty spaces that could be adapted according to their needs, interventions usually not allowed in typical commercial and business districts. All the others seem to care about the space just once they got it. Arrangement of leased space is a consolidate practice in OCT Loft “private” working space. Interior design is up to the tenants that, in line with budget and physical and temporal limits, can adapt and adjust inner space as they prefer. Trying to identify how the most suitable working space for creative professionals should be, it emerged that open space is considered the best solution because it increases the sense of freedom and avoids hierarchy. Simple and minimal style is preferred, they look for a functional and flexible space that can be adjusted in diverse situations: “*Firstly,*

office space should be functional, and then inexpensive. (...) Functional means if we can use the simplest way to resolve the problem, we do not think about beautiful and complicate way. The desks of my office are Ping-Pong tables, they are cheap; even the door, we have two offices sharing one sliding door that we open or close according to what we need to do” or another designer stated *“the office must be functional. I prefer Nordic style, it should be simple, neat and tidy”*. Moreover, in order to create a comfortable environment, dedicated spaces are not perceived as important: *“I think the office space should not be stereotype, the environment and atmosphere should be open and free. We do not need a special communication space, we can communicate with each other at anytime anywhere”*. In this flow, also furniture is considered in its functional essence: *“it is just tool for me, to help us finish our job”*, claimed an architect and another one stated that the most important element while he is creating (namely drawing) is just to have an empty table.

The search for cheap solutions is quite common between creative entrepreneurs because it is linked to a peculiar contingency that deeply affects business environment of the park: the feeling of temporariness and the related necessity of being flexible. It is not just an aesthetic or managerial choice but also often an external imposition. The rent is rapidly increasing (about *“more than 10% every year”*) and most of the firms are ready to move out because they know they could not afford to pay the next rent and, at the same time, are aware of the power hold by OCT Group that could change plans for that zone: *“Everything in here is temporary. We are going to be kicked off maybe at the end of next year, because the owner is going to use this building for other purposes, hotels, I do not know, I mean you know OCT (Group) wants to make more and more money.”*

5.2.5 Expectations of working in a cultural creative park

This is one of the signals that reality perceived by creative professionals moves away from their expectations of having the working place settled in a creative park. Even admitting of having been too naive, in the creative class' imagination, OCT Loft would have increased collaboration and connection among firms settled in, also among the one working in the same sectors, and be decisive for

creating a small community. Moreover, it would have been relevant in expanding potential clients and being visible to most prominent and influential people in professional circles, as some entrepreneurs declare: *“in terms of business, when I moved here I expected to bump on someone, I mean to have high chances of bumping on some bosses, who could appreciate my design”* and more *“I wanted people look at my creations. I hoped to meet businessmen in cultural industry that may invest in my ideas and help me in developing my projects”*. In additions, the creative park was envisioned to function as a booster for creativity and a source of inspiration, by creating a virtuous circle: *“I expect that a creative park, beyond capitalizing on my creativity, since I am working here, makes me be more creative”*. Employees imagined a suitable environment combining work and life and, especially after the development of the northern part, having a set of conditions that eases social relationship. In general, the idea of a creative park is connected to the feeling of a vibrant atmosphere characterized by a high mix of art and business, as emerging from statements like this *“there should be multiple formats relate to creativity and culture”*.

5.2.6 Present perceptions

Talking about the present conditions, it looks that some of those expectations have not be met, regardless of time passed since the settlement. Having established a business or found a job in the park is not perceived as effective in incentivizing commercial and social relationships among creative professionals and their firms, and in turn this is not perceived as a critical issue. For instance, the possibility offered by the physical proximity of having more opportunities of encountering and so exchanging ideas dose not seem to be paramount: meetings often happen by chance. By referring to the hope of bumping in some bosses, an entrepreneur affirms *“But in fact, as I moved in, it has been two years and a half, we did not really catch up so much. Why? Because everyone is busy on his or her own stuff. And there is not special purpose to do so, sometimes we just see each other in accident. We feel it’s ok, no need to call for dinner or else.”* Regarding supply chains, horizontal integration seems to happen occasionally within the park. When it occurs, it is because of friendship

relationships, often unrelated (both in terms of time and place) to the settlement. Comments of the following sort *“I often cooperate with some other creative companies and artists in OCT Loft. We are partners but also friends”* and others emerged in investigating relationship networks within the members of the creative class may suggest the feelings of affection or personal regard are more powerful engines in shaping dynamics than the strict economic business one. Vertical integration is more often realized than the horizontal one: it can be traced that there are creative firms that collaborate with other firms in OCT Loft but operating in different business. Sometimes it takes the shape of subcontracting and consulting services, sometimes exchanging favors: *“we collaborate also with some restaurants. They provide us with discount to consume food there and they ask us for advices”*.

Regarding business sphere, another important element emerges: entrepreneurs running companies in downstream creative sectors explicitly state that being located in OCT Loft is not relevant to acquire new clients (*“It is not important to get in new clients”*, *“There is no direct help with company’s profits. We have regular clients”*, *“Location is not influential”*, *“There is no immediate benefit”*). Other aspects, maybe less related to the presence in the creative park, contribute to the performance. For instance, the image that OCT area, entirely, has acquired in years is an aspect that often is mentioned as affecting performance. An independent designer states: *“The reputation of OCT can do some help on business, but it just help, not be the decisive factor”* and also some employed designers think that location impacts on clients: *“it has a certain effect. The whole atmosphere is inclined to design, when clients come to our company, they are satisfied with the environment and atmosphere”*. Environment surrounding OCT Loft is detected as an important factor that, in order to actually have an impact, must be associated with company abilities, as another employed designer suggests: *“It is beneficial to bring new clients. Not being able to attract new clients just shows you (the company) did not make full use of the environment conditions. You (the company) should have your own characteristics if you want to attract passing customers, then you will be successful. But location in creative parks can just make you even better, rather than make your success out of nothing. If you are weak, it is impossible to increase business only because you are locate here.”* Other designers have a

different opinion: *“Creative parks do not really impact on clients. All the creative parks are the same in their (clients) opinion, OCT Loft is not different. So working in OCT basically have no influence in company’s business.”*

If on the one hand the wider environment is commonly appreciated, on the other hand the inner working space dedicated to creative industries is not perceived as suitable at the same extent. Professionals in diverse sectors complain on different aspects: most of the studios with attached shops are found to be too small to combine atelier to create and showcase but, since the rent is high, they cannot afford to rent bigger ones. Moreover, all the creative professionals mentioned the low quality in management services and lack of OCT Group’s willingness to intervene: *“property services are not good”, “estate management, especially maintenance services, is bad, the attitude (OCT group’s one) is not active”,* just for citing some examples. Another source of uneasiness is the high percentage of empty spaces in the buildings in the northern part: they are perceived as impairing the cultural development of the park because cases of property speculation: *“I guess they (the empty spaces) were bought or leased by some agents that want to make money through raising the rent, and it goes against the development of OCT Loft”.* These new voids in the creative park have an even more negative impact on its attractiveness. The park, especially the northern part, is described as too boring and silent, at times, mainly during the working days, creative professionals have a feeling of stagnancy: *“from my point of view, the park should be noisy, full of people. More activities should happen here”.* In addition, most of the independent designers think their activities are not so visible to clients *“the environment is not attractive, there are no many people who know our shops are in the building”.* Thus, a big problem for retail, influencing vitality, is disclosed: promotion. Creative professional affirm they are not allowed to advertise their activities, as they would like. OCT Group is in charge of overall communication in the park and it controls all initiatives: entrepreneurs cannot even stick an arrow.

5.2.7 The story of T-Studio

In order to plug these gaps and revitalize the park by attracting people, a group of artists and designers made an experiment called T-Studio. It was conceived as a space connecting creative professionals to share ideas and organizing events, *“to test how original ideas can be brought to business”*. T-Studio kicked off in mid-2011; a year later about fourteen people are collaborating in it, half of them are located in OCT Loft in the so-called Art Corridor (see Figure 26), the others have their shops or studios in other places in Shenzhen. All of them are picked up from T-market.

One of the designers involved in the project describes T-Studio as *“not a physical space, it is our mind and ideas. T-Studio is a place to inspire people”*. Thus, it is not a brand to market products but an occasion to capitalize on creative resources in the park and to set ideas free. The single brands are going to be kept independent: *“maybe in the future, we will use it to commercialize new creations”*. The promoter is the famous design company that already is supporting T-market.

The first event organized by T-Studio was “Loft bank” during the first two weeks of May 2012. It took place in the corridors in front of designers’ studios and other public spaces. The date was chosen because in May Shenzhen hosted the Cultural Industry Festival, a very important and big event, according to the designer, that attracted many people from all over China. Loft bank was like a carnival; different events were organized, for instance exhibitions and screenings of movies. Some of them were particularly popular, involving a lot of people, both as organizers and public. OCT Loft designers asked some teachers in colleges and their students and other foreigners from Europe and Asia to join in the event. Participation was high; mainly common people (meant as not involved in creative businesses) went to attend the events. Next happening is planned for December 2012, in conjunction with Christmas.

Regarding the effects that this activity produced, designers state that T-Studio is helpful. It was the first phase of a strategy that should support them to overcome some difficulties they are meeting in OCT Loft, especially the one connected to the lack of communication and visibility and of collaboration within creative workers, specially between the startups and the most famous ones, as

the designer's comments quoted below show: *“Joining T-Studio helped us. We needed to find a place to present our creative ideas. Shenzhen is a commercial, busy city. It's hard to find this kind of place and if you get it, it is very expensive... Our shops are not well developed. The whole environment looks raw, there are not many shops here, people are not confident with the business. If people walk around OCT Loft, it is hard for them to come inside to see our shops. That is why we are always asking the manager to decorate the outdoor area, which will be helpful to get people in this building. Now you can see a lot of posters in OCT Loft about T-Studio (Figure 25 and 26). But before events in May the posters were not allowed. They (the managers) do not care about our small businesses, this is why we hold the events, to let them know T-Studio can be a new brand of this creative park. If I were alone with this idea of organizing this event in OCT, it would be very hard for me. We already got so many designers in the park, why do not we use this resource?”*



Figure 25. T-Studio Poster that indicates where the shops are (on 15th August 2012) – This is located on the rooftop (point 19 in Figure 9) close to the central axis that connects the southern and northern areas



Figure 26. T-Studio Art Corridor - where some of the designers participating in T-Studio have their own studios (on 10th November 2012) – it is located in A5 building, second floor

5.2.8 Life beyond working sphere

The place and ways in which creative workers spend their private life has been indicated in the global discourse as one of the key factors in capturing the success of the park as a creative place. The ideal is for the creative class to contribute to the atmosphere and vibrancy by sharing the mixing spaces of life and work. In the attempt of disclosing factors that shape dynamics in the park, creative workers' life beyond their working sphere has revealed itself as incisive. First of all the place of residence. Just few of them, mainly entrepreneurs, live in OCT area, close to OCT Loft. The great majority of the others would like to take up residency in the same area but it is too expensive: *“I really want to live here but the rent is too high, I cannot afford it. My wage is 4.000 RMB per month; I cannot pay more than 1.500 RMB to rent a house. So I just can live far away from work place”* and *“the rent is expensive in OCT. In China, the income of*

people working in art and cultural industry is low, especially for the new graduates". Among them, few professionals prefer to live in other zones because or they want to be close to the most popular hotspot in Shenzhen nightlife or because of family reasons.

5.2.9 The use of facilities in the park

Although creative professionals think OCT area and Loft are beautiful and charming places, all of them state that facilities are not satisfying. An explicative example comes from the comments of a young designer talking about her daily life: *"I live in an urban village². Why? Because the rent is low. Living in there is convenient. I can do very convenient shopping and supporting facilities are complete"*. These words summarize the common opinion that in OCT Loft shopping, and in particular grocery one, is a big issue. It is recognized that there are lots of restaurants but they are described as expensive and offering low quality food (not just in terms of taste but also hygiene). Consequently, creative professionals rarely go there and they found other solutions for meals: lunch at home (obviously just the one that live close to the park), cooking food at home buying it in cheaper markets and bringing it to the office, fast food delivery and "informal" solutions such as *"small family kitchen, because it is healthy"*. Sometimes, entrepreneurs go to restaurants in OCT Loft to have business lunch with clients but, in general, creative professionals are not satisfied with hanging out at restaurants and cafés in the park. Few are the exclusions, among them there is a bookstore (the entrance is shown in Figure 27), which has an attached café, that is commonly mentioned as one the favorite places in the park to spend lunch break or to *"charge batteries on hard working days"*, also with some colleagues or friends. The park is not attended even at night, if some events take place. Reasons have a wide range: professionals often work late, they prefer to go back home and stay with families or the offer does not meet their tastes. In conclusion, they go to OCT Loft just to work; they are not used to spend their leisure time in the park.

² Urban villages are rural villages that have been encompassed or annexed by newly developed urban territory and shaped Shenzhen's land use patterns and residential profiles (Hao, 2012).

Regarding events, exhibitions and cultural events included, accidentalness is an element that reemerges. They walk in front of spaces that hold events and on the spur of the moment they decide to go in and have a look: *“Honestly, I never go on purpose there, just by chance. It is on my way back home. If I am not in hurry, and it is open, I go in”*.



Figure 27. The bookstore, one of the most popular places in OCT Loft (on 24th July 2012)

5.2.10 Satisfaction in working in OCT Loft

In spite of disenchantments and complaints, unpleasant and expensive services and facilities, satisfaction in being settled in OCT Loft is high. All the members of the creative class affirm they like working in OCT Loft and, if they could, they would never relocate. Thus, the park seems to fulfill the creative community's desires with a range of satisfaction that varies from the description, by a young professional, of OCT Loft as *"a oasis in the cultural desert that is Shenzhen"* and would leave the park just with a triplicated salary to a young designer that would like to set up the studio in another place that could meet his needs but keeping a shop in the park: *"I want the atmosphere of my studio to be easy, lively and popular in the future, and I would move out of OCT Loft. But I would like one of my shops could still be open in the creative park."*

This is a crucial element to clarify the strengths of OCT Loft. Although creative workers describe it as a *"tourist attraction"* and a *"place for leisure"*, the park has built its good reputation that is spreading within the city. "Landmark" is the term that is often associated to OCT Loft, as some designers stated: *"OCT Loft is a landmark of creative industry in Shenzhen"* and *"this area (also) became a landmark, a lot of magazines talks about OCT Loft, people from Hong Kong or other cities would come here too"*.

Its fame seems to be stronger than fears and negative expectations that originate from the present perceived conditions, specifically in relation to the managerial side and future developments, issues in charge of OCT Group. A conspicuous group of professionals voiced some worries that anyway seem not to be so influential on their overall appreciation of the park: *"OCT Group should really support firms in order to encourage the development of cultural and creative industries. If it did not happen, it (the park) would be mainly used for tourist visits, not for cultural industry. Moreover, if the creative or art firms are not developed, neither it will be a cultural site"*. Another common thought concerns the higher mix in sectors that is yearned: *"I hope there could be more art institutions, like galleries and bookstores. If there are too many design companies, then it will be a design park and this cannot lead the cultural artistic atmosphere. So, in my opinion, there should be more spaces for exhibiting art works, they can attract cultural people, making the park be more lively."*

Talking about their liking and trying to investigate the motives that originate it, another key concept to understand the park's functioning has emerged: brand. OCT Loft is quite frequently stated as a successful trademark that in some cases has been incorporated in the specific creative firm's one and in others has become even more powerful: *"Now, OCT itself has become a high-end brand, a stage that could provide more opportunities. It is helpful to corporate image and orientation. People think that you are in the creative park, so you are good at doing creative design."*

6. Making the Creative City in China: a critical analysis

The analysis of OCT Loft, that combines the planning process and the current points of view of the creative workers active in the park, in the role of assignees of the project, aimed to display what actually occurs in an urban space in the name of “creativity”. Thanks to participative observation and personal involvement in professional activities and social life of the park, the empirical research has provided significant material that lends itself to interpretation. Among the vast array of possible reflections, three are the factors that I propose to identify as crucial and let me do a critical analysis of the construction, both physical and symbolic, of OCT Loft:

- Current perceived realities, compared to the ambitions of the plans replicating the global discourses on creative parks.
- Origins of OCT Loft’s fame.
- Actors that along the process contribute to build up its reputation.

6.1 Ambitions and achievements

The ambitions of planning in OCT Loft were to create a trendy mixed-use district operating as a catalyst for members of the creative class. By considering the existence of cultural and creative industries settled in the park and the related workforce (as outlined in paragraph 5.1), such mixing has been obtained.

Since the opening of the park in 2007, more and more creative firms, operating in diverse creative sectors, have decided to move in OCT Loft and, by the end of 2012, the companies settled in the park are more than 230. The “creative presence” has been subjected to high turnover, especially in the northern part, where new companies are constantly opening. In spite of variations, the combination between artistic, cultural and creative industries seems to be stable, with a substantial presence of more demand-driven and services-oriented activities producing goods and services with functional purposes (so-called “downstream creative industries”, UNACT, 2010). Specifically, one of the objectives in the master plan for the most recent north section of the park was to realize a center devoted to design and also this purpose seems to be accomplished. Following Shenzhen’s vision of being “City of Design” (UNESCO,

2008) and strategies employed by OCT Group and Urbanus Architecture and Design Inc., design is nowadays the most represented sector in the park. The mix that characterizes OCT Loft was achieved also by the presence of two components that, according to the global (and Chinese) discourses of the creative city, should provide the “proper attractive atmosphere”. The first one is the provision of food and beverage facilities. As previously described in paragraph 5.1, the park is rich in restaurants and bars: the southern part is already characterized by a strong commercial vocation while the northern part is strengthening it. Most of the new businesses recently opened are actually restaurants and cafes. The second one is the organization of cultural events. Since the beginning, throughout businesses settlement, as happened for the facilities that were increasingly added, events and activities have been organized and are increasingly taking place in the area (public lectures, fashion shows, creative market, concerts, art exhibitions and performances). For instance, since 2005 OCT Loft has been chosen as one of the exhibition venues of the Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture and Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale. The latest big event that took place in the park was the second edition of OCT Loft International Jazz Festival held in B10 space from 8th to 23rd October 2012. Organized by Shenzhen OCT Loft Culture Development Co., Ltd., the festival featured about a hundred worldwide top jazz artists of twenty-one excellent bands from sixteen countries, including some of the best young musicians in Europe and several Grammy award winners.



Figure 28. Cultural events posters in the park (August and November 2012)

Nowadays, eating and drinking places and events appear as the most lively businesses within OCT Loft. It can be noticed an emergent tendency towards a mix among food and beverage facilities, cultural event and creative productions. For instance “long standing” and new clubs and cafes are increasingly organizing concerts, lectures, symposiums; some of them even hold artistic and performing exhibitions and become sort of theaters or spaces for public speeches, by actively involving the public (see Figure 29 and 30 - some of these spaces were used by T-Studio in the project “Loft bank”).



Figure 29. Example of a newcomer activity in the northern area that enriches core business with the organization of public events (on 1st April 2012)

Sometimes the mix takes the shape of diversification of the core businesses like the cases of two creative entrepreneurs, already settled in the park and well known, that decided to launch new businesses: one opened a restaurant that fuses catering and design, not just by “designing dishes” but also using the rooms as showcase for design products and another one opened a Western-style pub with piano bar.



Figure 30. Another example of a newcomer in the park – A company that organizes public speeches and, at the same time, sells Swedish design products (on 10th November 2012)

All these happenings, the increasing offering of amenities and activities have contributed to build OCT Loft's reputation as one of the best places in the city, not just for creative business and cultural scene but also for leisure and tourism. Thanks to the presence of the leading creative enterprises (most popular architecture, design and advertising companies have their studios in the park), the activeness of an important museum like Hexiangning Fine Arts Museum (OCAT nowadays is described as the storage factory for art (Community Design, 2007)), the supply of fashionable restaurants and the organization of (small and big) events, OCT Loft is spreading its fame as the best place to enjoy the buzz of Shenzhen.

Thus also the ambition of realizing a “trendy” park seems to be achieved. However, this takes place in a way that somehow challenges the intended nature of the “creative park” as the place that mainly caters for the “creative

class". The fact that the park has developed into a vibrant urban environment is indeed acknowledged by creative workers settled in OCT Loft but they do not seem to act neither as its creators or core users. In other words, reputation does not seem to be generated and enjoyed by those who live and work in the park. Buzz rather appears to come from the outside, as if the fashionable happenings in the park lure a different audience, a crowd of "outsiders" that goes to the park to consume food, drinks and experiences. Actually the "buzz" and glamour power seem to be stronger than the force of clustering creative resources. If it is so, where does the fame of OCT Loft lie?

6.2 Investigating the roots of fame

The answer to this question can be found in the comparison between perceived realities in OCT Loft and the features that the Chinese discourse of the creative city champions as "must have" for planning contemporary urban environment. The salient points taken into account mainly relate to the concept of creative precincts as booster for economic and social development and to the benefits that the aggregation force should exert on overall urban space (see paragraphs 1.5 and 2.4).

6.2.1 Creativity as lever for urban upgrading (and consumption)

As seen in chapter one, the guiding idea of the global discourse of the creative city, transposed to China from the West at the beginning of this century, is the expression of the successful city in terms of capacity of being magnet of creative capital, nurturing talent, attracting expertise from all around the world, and exploiting these resources for maximum competitive advantage (see also chapter 2). Creativity-led urban planning has been put on the agenda of worldwide urban policies aiming to create an urban environment that fits for the creative class. Creativity is thus seen as the lever for accomplishing the post-industrial turn and, at the same time, as solution for revitalizing declining areas. One the most advocated strategies to achieve these goals is the support and promotion of creative and cultural industries settlements. This thesis has presented the evidence of OCT Loft as a concrete episode of such a new urbanism. As encouraged in the utterances, all the activities that are conceived

as crucial for cultural, social and economic upgrading are present in the park. Nevertheless, in OCT Loft the co-existence and co-location of creative industries do not appear as being sufficient to generate the perfect match among consumption of the arts and culture, creative production and urban place making, as the more normative literature would recommend. Despite ambitions of designing a place that fosters social networking, resources sharing and stimulate interaction among different creative industries, the broadly “consumerist” dimensions seems to overcome the strictly “productive” spheres of cultural meanings and values. This may sound at odds with western predicaments on creativity-led urban development but comes at no surprise if compared to the ideas that sustain the “created in China” transformation: the satisfaction of contemporary needs and desires is conceived as grounded on “pleasure-oriented consumption”. By encouraging a “*virtuous circles of consumption – production – consumption*” (Wuwei, 2009), namely by promoting social changes and a market-driven culture, Chinese discourse aligns itself with the vision of the consumer as main actor in urban space construction. Consumers seek out products that express “*their personal philosophy and social status*” (Wuwei, 2009) and creative parks seem to be the places in which they can find what they were looking for. OCT Loft is being increasingly shaped by the effects of the commodification of culture and creativity and, at the same time, it finds its origins and motives in it: by moving away from economic and managerial reasons supporting the creative economy paradigm, it shows up itself as a high-value-added product, ready to be sold and purchased.

6.2.2 Aggregation and inspiration

Theoretically, creative clusters have been portrayed as creativity hotspot because they promise the ideal concentration level that stimulates business integration, activates cooperation as well competition and induces resources optimization. Their ideal location has been identified in dismissed industrial buildings. In the Chinese manifesto, major arguments for reconversion by injection of creativity emphasize as benefits that can be produced:

- The power of favoring spontaneous aggregations

- The power of being inspiring (in terms of aesthetic and historical feelings that they provide)

both generating as outcome the stimulation of urban economy and competitiveness.

How does this power take shape in OCT Loft?

Let's consider the first element. The idea and goal of making a place that functions as catalyst is in the ambition of the master plan but experiences of members of the creative class offer a different picture of aggregation. The park encouraged proximity of creative workers but more as a kind of physical contiguity that has very limited impact on professional and business networking. From collected stories, it has emerged that there is not such a strong integration and interaction in creative productions. By making explicit reference to the rhetoric of the global idea, we can say that creative workers were thrown together in the same place, physically, but the production of new ideas, products, services, art and design seems to happen individually, left outside from park's dynamics. Interconnections, interdependency, knowledge and skills exchanges, concepts that are at the heart of the idea of the creative clustering, are not perceived as happening in OCT Loft. Few are the cases of vertical integrations and the same occurs for cooperation and collaboration.

Another interesting finding is that creative workers never directly mention even competition. Competition emerged only in the selection process and shows the discriminatory effect on firms as barriers to entry, as a designer stated: *"it is not a place that fits for start ups, only the successful firms can stay here. OCT (Group) chose only firms that already have a good reputation"* or another one: *"the weak firms cannot move in"*. Of course it is a spontaneous aggregation process but the creative class appears as a split community: on the one side the leader creative companies, already professionally well-known, that have grown up to afford, both economically and in terms of sound reputation, being settled in the park, because members of an elite professional groups. On the other side, there are the young artists and designers, owners of start-ups that managed to get a space in the park just with the support of the already established and thriving companies. In this way the park does not appear as a place that welcomes young, nameless, potential newcomers in the professional circles, creative people and businesses. It seems to be a strategy less inclined

to risk and this is striking to the pillar concepts of knowledge and creative economy, based on proactive and entrepreneurial behaviour.

Another clash can be seen as taking shape in the park: vacancies are high (an empty corridor in a building in the northern area is shown in Figure 31), especially if compared with the idea of rapid change, fast development and post-industrial turn that Shenzhen likes to project. This could indeed be interpreted as an additional sign of the weakness in creative and cultural scenes within the city, mostly if we take into account also some statements about the decreasing quality (in terms of innovation and originality) of creative products exhibited and sold in T-market that should be the showcase for the best design in Shenzhen. This element is in line with the commercial tendency that the park is putting on: by considering creativity as a stimulating force for urban economy, it could be affirmed that in OCT Loft this force lies more and more on retail and popular consumption than “truly” creative and innovative production that by its very nature tends to be somewhat elitist.



Figure 31. Vacancies in OCT Loft – northern area (on 27th March 2012)

The spur of creativity is not even perceived by the direct “users” of the park, people that should be inspired by atmosphere and convey it in the creation process. Only a creative worker stated that he felt more creative because of

being in OCT Loft, for all the other it seems to go unnoticed constituent of their professional identity. Not even a profound cultural background and “*a balanced art ecology*” seem to be born in the park. The provision of cultural and artistic services is a key component of the discourse of how creativity can benefit to cities and, in OCT Loft, we can affirm that provision is not so used by creative class: the consumption of these facilities happened rarely and, above all, by chance. Additionally, as already emerged from the investigation of the creative class’ experiences, the park is perceived as not influential in business improvements, on the contrary, the locations sometimes is cause of further costs and difficulties: not just in terms of a rent that is higher and higher and services are decreasing, but also, again, on the facilities available in the park. Shortages in catering supply or, better, the supply of fashionable and trendy restaurants and bars, generated at least two negative effects. The first one is directly impacting on managerial dimension and economic trends of firms: entrepreneurs have to pay higher salaries to employees because of the higher prices in OCT Loft than other areas in Shenzhen. The second one has bigger scale impacts, in terms of cultural externalities: high-end restaurants are perceived by art professionals as potentially damaging for the cultural relevance of the park, because they attract mainly tourists and not people genuinely interested in cultural industry, such as people who are passionate about art rather than commercial purposes or cultural broker.

These discoveries represent the loss of the chance for the park of bearing quality and value of cultural and creative production and entrepreneurship. In sum, satisfaction does not arise from inspiration and not even from business support and investment attraction, creative professionals suffer from the centralization of parks’ management, there seem to be an overall low value for money but they are willing to pay a high premium for location in OCT Loft. So, where does the satisfaction originate?

The words of a member of the creative class can be helpful in seeing the point: “*There is not very help on business, it is quite the same as everywhere. But it is a good place to live. Honestly, I do not want to move out, it is quite comfortable here.*”

6.2.3 The power of attraction

The answer to the question could be “quality of life” and it is in this concept that, this thesis suggests, the power of OCT brand could be better understood. The park’s trademark has been already commercialized, as Figure 32 shows. In the northern area, since winter 2011, there is a “Loft shop” that sells OCT Loft-branded products next to the most popular global design products.



Figure 32. Loft Shop (on 10th November 2012)

I intentionally mentioned OCT brand and not just the Loft because satisfaction is associated to a generic “quality of life” that crosses the park and involves all OCT area (see Figure 1). The park is recognized as a “*great place*” because the area in which it is located is considered “*great*” (the features that are cited mainly refer to greenness, nature, low density, quiet). Such vision of the park was investigated and therefore some constituents were identified. First of all, OCT area is repeatedly indicated as the best place to live in Shenzhen and this is connected to another determinant of excellence that emerged: comfortableness. Often this concept is associated, by people that can afford the

high rent in the area, to proximity to homes. By considering creative entrepreneurs, several of them first chose to live in OCT area and later to set up the studio in OCT Loft. It is commonly describe as a benefit because it helps reduce everyday stress and so it works as a relaxing factor.

The attractiveness of OCT Loft rests on motivations that are pretty independent from the business one and evokes reasons dealing with private life and socioeconomic status. In this sense the fame of the park seems to come from outside its creative community. Leaving aside the cultural passion or creative thinking, OCT Loft redefines attributes of lifestyle and, by reconnecting to the advocate benefits in theory, it spurs to establish city brand and identity. Satisfaction, expressed as happiness, originates from the possibility of experiencing a peaceful and beautiful environment, as some designer stated: *“being in OCT Loft is important because it gives me sense of enjoyment, I could hanging out easily, if I feel bored in my work, I can go down and find my favorite coffee shop”, “I like working here, the environment is beautiful and air is clean. Sometimes when I work until midnight I feel great walking in OCT Loft”.*

It is born in the private life sphere. As it happened with the social relationships established within the members of the creative community in the park: social networking, namely friends, emerged as a key determinant for satisfaction even if it is not transferred into business affairs. Friendships seems to play a key role in the establishment of OCT Loft as a charming place. Most of the entrepreneurs with the firm set up in the park were convinced by friends (often belonging to the same professional circles) to settle in. Therefore word-of-mouth is another determinant that showed up in reviewing the construction of OCT Loft as landmark. Living and working in OCT area and Loft seems to act as means to social establishment. It seems there is the proud of having access to this environment: it is felt as a privilege that is socially recognized.

6.3 Conceptualization of the OCT Loft case

Who made the creation of a so powerful brand possible?

The critical analysis of the fame of OCT Loft is enriched by the investigation of the main actor that led to its establishment: OCT Group, the developer of the property-led regeneration. In details, the conclusive analysis examines the

purpose and form, in its ambition and consequences, of the place making process that has been acted by making use of the supply of experiences as business lever.

OCT Loft is here analysed in a framework that, following Keane (2009), “*assigns to clusters important implications for how we understand China going forward into the second decade of the 21st century*”. The agglomeration phenomenon has resulted into a substantive remaking of the social contract between officials, entrepreneurs, local residents, academics and most significantly cultural producers. However, these processes of adoption of Western models are mostly driven by real estate developers working in partnership with local government officials (Rossiter, 2008; Keane, 2009). OCT Loft is a clear illustration of this phenomenon: the developer has acted as the main upholder of the construction and establishment of the creative park. In this perspective, the case of OCT Loft shows interesting elements which in turn unveil a distinctive use of the idea of the creative city in a specific context and background.

6.3.1 The “conventional” coming of post-industrialism

As already discussed in the first chapters, it is nowadays commonly acknowledged that the shift from the industrial to the post-industrial era can be explicated through a “conventional sequence”. Following the consolidated interpretive categories, post-industrialism establishes itself after the crisis of the “fordist” logic of production and accumulation that for decades had assured the economic, social and urban development of the Western countries.

The manufacturing production slowdown did not provoke loss and damages just in the economic sphere but also deeply impacted on urban spaces, by leading the industrial city model to crisis as well. Changes in the value chain and the contemporary opening towards the global dimension generated the search (and offer) for solutions to overcome the recession and, at the same time, revitalize the declining urban areas, emptied because of the closing down of factories.

In the conventional view post-industrialism manifests itself in the advocated turn towards the service economy and, at the beginning for the Western countries, in the advice, stated as a need and more and more vehemently affirmed as the

only possible answer, of converting the production into high-value artifacts, by leaving the mass production to those countries that still benefit from cost advantages. There is thus a progressively support to a combination of non-material and material factors to reposition Western economies in the global market. In the celebration of the intangible nature of products, to deliver consumer unique experiences begins to be seen as the way to provide added value. Therefore new forms of value creation and innovation are championed, by claiming the beginning of an era marked by experience as the new factor to capitalize on.

Among all the recommended solutions, creative economy is the one that has showed up as one of the most appealing, ad debated in paragraph 1.6, not just for overcoming the manufacturing crisis but also for relaunching depressed urban areas. Creativity is thus conceptualized as an asset to exploit to assure economic recovery and, through it, endogenous growth, actually because it displays the necessary characteristics to the fulfillment of post-industrial paradigm.

In the discourse born on the rise of such vision of creativity, a spontaneous nature has been sometimes outlined. I refer not just to the vision of post-industrialism as an inescapable phase of cities evolution but also in particular to the origins of “creativity” hotspots that, at a later stage and also in varied countries, will be called cultural/creative clusters, quarters or parks. Talking about the astonishing benefits that creativity can generate in urban space, it is quite often cited the organic origin of creative settlements, specifically in abandoned industrial sites. “Novice” and poor artists and creative professionals which settle in disused factory buildings because of being attracted by the availability of big spaces and cheap rents has become a sort of myth that, in turn, given rise to the “loft living” fashion (Zukin, 1989).

From the unplanned and spontaneous intervening of creativity into urban dynamics, policies to support concentration of creative resources, capitals and talents have quite rapidly mushroomed all around the world. The willingness of managing creativity and intervening to facilitate the spur of creative production has given origin to several programs dedicated to urban contexts exactly with the purpose of handling culture and creativity as driver of development.

These are, in sum, the models and references that also China is adopting in theory by promulgating the idea of the creative city and in practice by actively championing the construction of creative precincts in more and more Chinese cities, as thoroughly described in the second chapter.

However, this “conventional sequence” which sees creativity, and post-industrialism, as, more or less spontaneous, reaction to the industrial crisis only partially explains the development of OCT Loft. The cultural creative park can be indeed interpreted as part of a wider business project that does not fully correspond to the conventional mechanisms and temporal sequence of post-industrialism but rather displays an unusual evolution and management of urban growth and development in an area in Shenzhen.

6.3.2 Critical interpretation of the case of OCT Loft

OCT Loft is an intended urban development project pursued by the developer, OCT Group, that, thanks to an incisive business strategy, succeeded in creating a strong and distinctive brand that is not just based on the creative park but has progressively acquired power from a wider offer of lifestyle experiences.

What we can advance as one of the key outputs of this research is the interpretation of the case OCT Loft as part of a broader and long-standing strategy in the entertainment sector that OCT Group begun in the 1980s. Therefore, the realization of the cultural creative precinct, the arrival of the “creative class” and its activities is not a spontaneous event that happened as response to the crisis of factories that until 1993 were settled in the industrial zone. The decision of building OCT Loft does not necessarily follow the post-industrial turn as conventionally described: it predates the decline of heavy industries, it shows a more interesting story that originates in the developer’s entrepreneurial strategy and, in a broader historical perspective, in the embracing of the market system by Chinese leaders in the last decades of the XX century. OCT Group is indeed a company that fully reflects, in its history, mission and evolution, the opening up of China to western economic values. Since its foundation in 1985, its core business has been tourism industry and it is specialized in the construction of theme parks. It became the leader in the travel industry in China by establishing the first theme park chain brand in the

country (so-called “Happy Valley”). According to its own description, “depending on rich cultural tourism resources superiority, OCT has constantly increased the strategic investment in the industries related to tourism culture and successively introduced more than forty original quality cultural performance products and accumulated to receive nearly seventy million of people. The OCT culture industry is becoming the model of the industry with its unique charm”. Moreover, OCT Group has acquired fame and reward at national level: it was granted several times for its innovative attitude and entrepreneurial success. For instance, in 2004, it had been granted the title of first batch of “National Culture Industry Demonstration Base” by the State Ministry of Culture and had been granted the title of one of the first two “National Culture Industry Demonstration Park Area” by the State Ministry of Culture in August 2007. In 2010, it has been granted the title of “Top 30 Culture Enterprise” by the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Such a history of business success began in Shenzhen, precisely in OCT area, and in the following years was replicated in other zones in Shenzhen and also in other Chinese cities by becoming an example to follow. Nowadays OCT Group is well known for its successful “tourism plus real estate” business model. Since the beginning, it caught the chance by using tourism to develop both property and urban development (Ding, 2012); the goal in fact pursued by OCT Group at dawn of its plans was to build “a city in the garden, and a garden in the city”. It means that it gained a first mover advantage in foreseeing the potential of theme parks and tourism sector in a city that in 1985 did not have many tourism resources and “Chinese people did not have concept for what was tourism” (Ding, 2012) but was one of the most attractive cities as window of the opening-up reform. It capitalized on culture to achieve other purposes that traditionally stand away and are separated from the provision of entertainment and educational services.

Despite of the initial criticalities in OCT area (peripheral location, traffic, bleakness), OCT Group, little by little, parks after parks, managed to construct one of the most charming area of Shenzhen.

The first park that was built was “Splendid China” and it was very shocking at that time. The theme park is shown in Figure 33; it has scaled down replicas of China’s historical buildings, monuments, and folk customs. The scale models

are in a ratio of 1:15 and the exhibits are positioned to replicate their geographical locations. The picture below shows in the middle the Forbidden City and on the right The Great Wall (in the background there is also OCT Harbour, recognizable by the pebble-like shape building, another OCT Group's intervention that will be analyzed later).



Figure 33. “Splendid China” Theme Park in OCT area and in the background OCT Harbour, recognizable by the pebble-like shape building

After “Splendid China”, a set of ten tourism and culture-led projects were developed by OCT Group in OCT area that, mainly because of these, became one of the top places to visit in Shenzhen. The interventions consist of not just other amusement parks (four themed in varied ways) but also themed plazas and hotels, art museums and... OCT Loft. As displayed in Figure 34, also OCT Loft (point n. 11) is interpreted as a theme park, as another step of the wider strategy to exploit culture and cultural resources in the place making process. The peculiar characteristic of the strategy is the perfect mix of four business areas: urban planning and development, community, scenic spots and parks

(both theme and amusement ones and the cultural creative ones). These four have been organically combined: OCT Group managed to integrate different “industries” and improve their developing potentials. The underlying logic is the following: the theme parks attract massive tourists that are incited to consume within and around the scenic spots that were created actually with a consumptive purpose. This cycle is supported by OCT Group by claiming an effective endorsing function to the local economic and social community development (Ding, 2012). In OCT Group’s entrepreneurial project tourism, property and hotel industry are all linked together: the result is a peculiar industry chain that goes from electronics (there are still factories with production line works within OCT area, close to OCT Loft), to tourism property industry, by going through theme parks, hotels and shopping malls. In three decades, OCT Group has strengthened the ability of being constantly profitable in the integration of tourism industry, commerce, urban construction and real estate industry (Ding, 2012).

We can affirm the strategy has evolved with time and, consequently, with urban, economic and social changes in Shenzhen and China. Just by focussing on OCT area, OCT Group seems to have been able to lead these transformations. It could be seen more clearly with the OCT Loft project. During the process, the area shifted from being urban fringe to a central zone and OCT Group was one of the main makers of this repositioning by continuing to adjust the orientation and the layout of the functioning and the construction, by converting space of production to space of consumption (Bao and Liang, 2012).

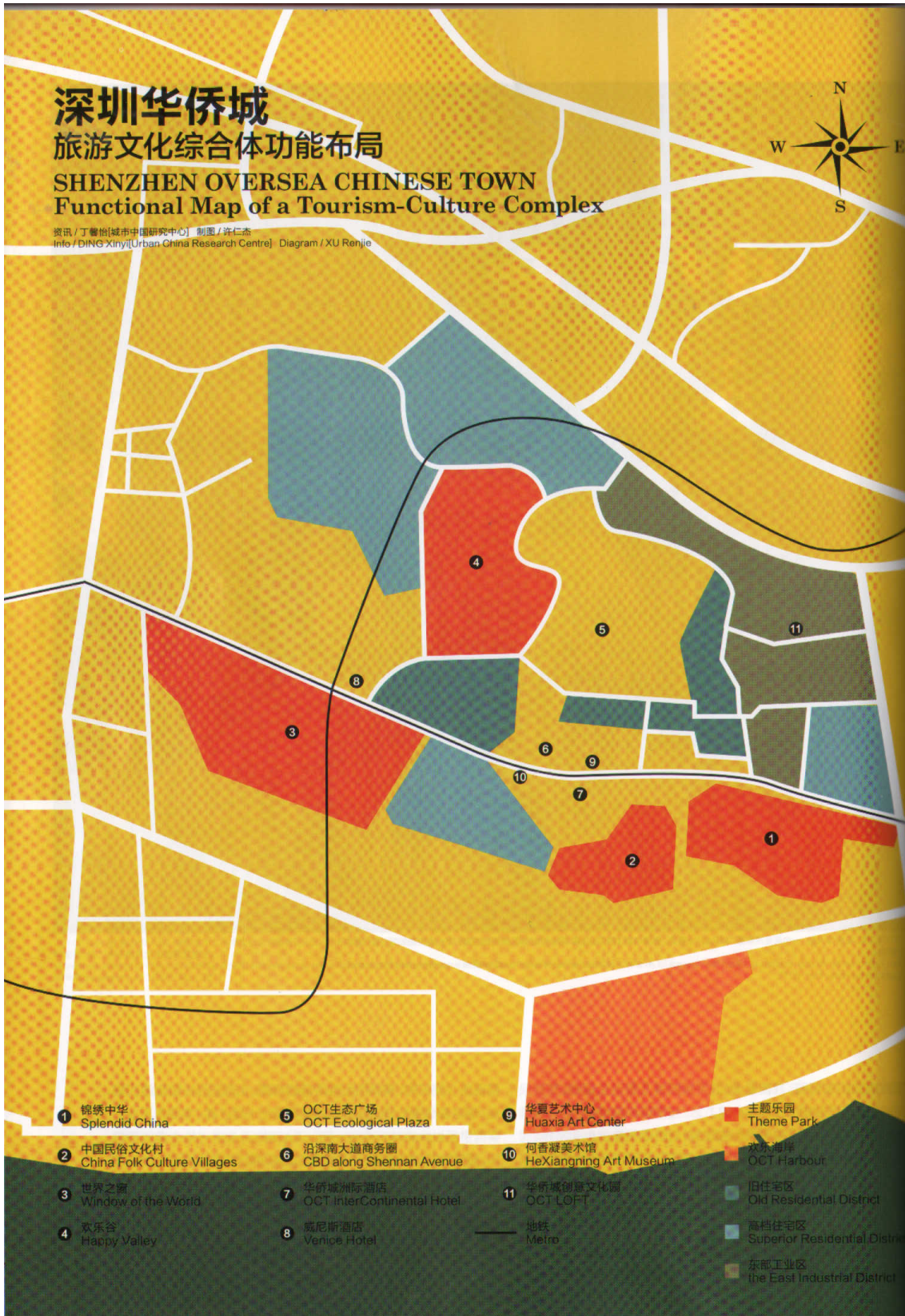


Figure 34. “Shenzhen Oversea Chinese Town – Functional Map of a Tourism Culture Complex”, source “Urban China” Magazine vol. 52, 2012

By summarizing, we can say that the “tourism plus real estate” business model has been run in Shenzhen, and specifically in OCT area, since the beginning of ‘80s, namely in the first years of the birth of the city. This means that the opening of the first theme park in the city happened simultaneously to the industrial growth of Shenzhen as Special Economic Zone. Moreover, OCT Group positioning and mission are clearly formulated in a perspective of experience economy. The company describes itself as “creator of high quality life” that “strives to enhance the quality of living for Chinese people through our uniquely imaginative and creative culture”. Thus the decision of conducting tourism and culture as line of business, and delivering customer unique experiences, is not a novelty of the 21st century; it is not a reaction to the manufacturing crisis that is stated to occur in OCT area around 1993. It could be seen as a more sophisticated strategy that did not simply replicate those rationales catalogued in the “conventional sequence” that globally explains the post-industrial turn.

With its massive interventions, OCT Group has profoundly shaped the urban environment in OCT area. By practicing since the beginning the concept of “building a city in the garden to provide people with quality life enjoyment and cultural experiences”, it has efficiently made use of urban construction and real estate development to create an area that has become “the remarkable green home and the byword of quality life style”. And these are not just the words coming from a self-declaration; on the contrary it is exactly what emerged from the investigation of the perceptions and satisfaction of creative workers in OCT Loft. Thus in here we can find an answer to the question who made the success of OCT brand possible and how.

Starting from the theme parks and then evolving towards the cultural creative park, OCT Group keeps its promise of “creating quality living experiences that meet the needs of China’s communities”. Or maybe it has done something more refined. It has created the needs (and desires) of China’s communities (mainly upper middle class) and shaped consumer preferences by defining what is fashionable by manipulating the idea of what “culture” is. Its role as a trendsetter has become more visible with the idea of building the cultural creative park. It took advantage of fashionable ideas from western world and

carefully adapted them to the Chinese context. It has redefined what is valuable and attractive in the urban fabric by using as tools:

- “Industrial sublime” (see Figure 35), namely the plan to move away from a manufacturing “past” to a new economic paradigm with the decision to convert the “old” industrial buildings rather than demolish them, as it is customary in most Chinese cities.
- Culture as means to give new life to run-down areas by providing users with unique experiences.
- Strategic partnerships with cultural and creative organizations both international and local, as the Hexiangning Fine Arts Museum (that began in 1992) and the involvement in the process of the most popular creative firms in Shenzhen (Urbanus Architecture & Design one among all).



Figure 35. An illustration of what is meant by “industrial sublime”: on the left the original machinery inside a factory building (courtesy of URB – March 2004) and on the right the same machinery that has been renovated and now functions as decoration in the park (September 2012)

In this sense, the cultural-creative urban planning can be interpreted as a sense making process that invests or re-constructs highly specific notions of what is “culture” and “cultural heritage”, establishing a new relationship between the

industrial culture embedded in the place and the built environment. The result indeed is a brand that goes beyond a strict definition of culture as relegated to the artistic spheres and embraces lifestyle and quality of life. Within the promotion of a “creative” society, OCT Loft can be seen as a tactical step in the place making strategy based on lifestyle experiences undertaken by OCT Group more than two decades ago. Places of production and consumption have been made to coincide in space that has been planned to maximize experiences by using specific facilities, sharing of values, creation of specific atmospheres and generation of emotions. Within years, it created diverse catalysts for cognitive, behavioural and relational values that have replaced the functional ones of the places (Klingmann, 2007). OCT area has now the image of a cutting edge destination for inhabitants, business, and tourism. It aims to provide users with emotional satisfaction using as strategic branding technique the power of the idea of creativity as a way of spreading happiness. The created brand is strong and effective, OCT area is now considered as the best place in Shenzhen and OCT Group keeps on exploiting this success.

Two are its latest interventions. The first one is OCT Harbour, a new development exclusively dedicated to consumption (see Figure 33 and the rendering in Figure 36).



Figure 36. OCT Harbour - Rendering, source: <http://www.octbay.com>

OCT Harbour is the apotheosis of the experience economy since it combines the concepts of iconic architecture, culture, ecology, tourism, entertainment, shopping, hotels, dining and nightlife into a single venue of 1.25 million square meters. OCT Harbour advertising slogans suggest the ambitions to provide fantasy-shopping experiences and it is presented as the new creative move for OCT Group into a themed commercial venture that will greatly advance the local cultural (and tourism) industries.

Along these projects and thanks to the rising property values, high-end residential complexes keep being developed (the latest one is under construction on the east borderline of OCT Loft and it is shown in Figure 37). Firstly the amusement parks and at a later stage the creative park added value to the surrounding area and maximized the potential profits of the final phase of development which is high density and mostly luxury housing (Urbanus, 2011^b). This is the business model that has been financially supported OCT Group's investments and let it overcome some criticalities that OCT Loft has been facing. For instance the North Master Plan could not be fully carried out to the vision due to financial concerns and strategies to increase profitability through property sales/rental were devised, such as buildings demolished to increase the FAR of the site. Additionally, the already introduced issue of high vacancies: since more than a year from the official opening, there is still a high percentage of empty office and commercial spaces in the buildings especially in the northern part of OCT Loft.



Figure 37. Brand new luxury residential complex under construction on the east borderline of OCT Loft – on the left a “before” picture of the lawn and on the right a picture of the construction site taken on 21st November 2012

Capitalizing on tourism attraction first and industrial upgrading next, OCT brand is still being exploited for property speculation, giving concreteness to the paradigm shift from needs to desires and taking advantage of economic and

social aspirations of the new rising Chinese middle class by designing and promoting unique and fancy spectacles and consumptive experiences.

Conclusions

The main objective of this thesis was to shed some new light on the global discourse of the “creative city” and, particularly, on the ways in which it is adopted in the Chinese urban context. The aim has been pursued through the investigation of the outcomes of a specific episode of urban regeneration led by creativity and expressed in the reorganization of urban space, upgrading service economy and social changes. By the in-depth analysis conducted on the case of OCT Loft Cultural Creative Park in Shenzhen, I can suggest that the main objective was achieved and a number of remarkable elements emerged during the research.

As described in the paragraph 1.6, the “hypnotic hold” of the idea of the creative city has seduced also China that since the beginning of this century has officially adopted the “new urban imperative model” and promoted the construction of cultural and creative precincts all over the country. The Chinese adoption is characterized by a peculiar emphasis on ready-made models and quick-fixes taken from the Western experiences and by the fascination with the logic of creative clustering that often has been used as a policy panacea for economic development commissions and local governments looking to booster entrepreneurship and wealth (Keane, 2008; Zheng, 2011).

Following the global discourse analyzed in the first chapter, the narratives that are circulating in China reveal a fundamental connection between notions of culture and creativity and a market economy opened to private sectors and foreign capitals (Shifa, 2004; Wuwei, 2009). The idea of the creative city, and in particular the template of “the cluster”, are evidently connected to the rhetoric of post-industrialism and keenly advocated as the only way to assure development. As one of the most prominent scholars theorizing the benefits of creative economy stated: “China’s future jobs and economy growth depend on China becoming more skilful at creativity” (Howkins, 2008).

As illustrated in the second chapter, the new doctrine in China was led by both Chinese and international scholar-consultants and warmly embraced by local and city governments (Keane, 2009). Creativity is promulgated as essential for the renewal of Chinese society and its fortunes in the country can be explained with its adaptability to the market logic introduced in China with the opening-up

reform (Keane, 2009; Zheng, 2011). Since 1978, China has adopted capitalism as the pillar of the reforms that sanctioned the beginning of the Chinese integration into the global economy with the primary aim of pursuing the catch-up growth approach (Naughton, 1996; Nolan, 2001; Jiang, 2010). Within this vision, creative industries framework was recommended also by international organizations like UNACT and World Bank as the strategy to achieve a “leap frog” development and the transformation of economic models. This particular idea of China’s future is seen as relying on the strengthening of those sectors that highlight the role of soft capital as knowledge and culture, ensure repeatable use of resources, are consumer-oriented and have organizational flexibility and a diversity of industry targets (Shifa, 2004; Tang and Gu, 2007; Wuwei, 2009; Ye, 2008; Huang et al., 2009; Jiang, 2011; Stolarick and Chen, 2011).

Thus, also the deployment of culture and creativity in Chinese urban renewal and redevelopment can be seen as an emerging capitalism growth engine that, as in the Western countries, “work quietly with the grain of extant “neoliberal” development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place-marketing” (Peck, 2005). As seen in the post-industrial rhetoric, the encouragement of entrepreneurialism is one of pillars of the Chinese discourse as well. It manifests itself in the creation of “growth coalitions” in which state controlled entrepreneurial activities are embedded and “part about the spatial manifestation of development spaces of globalization and spaces of elitist consumption” (Keane, 2008). The production of iconic types of creative space can actually be studied as hegemonic projects that do intervene in place marketing process but in the Chinese context also preponderantly in place making process, by leading the urbanization in several occasions.

The research on OCT Loft described in the forth and fifth chapters, and in particular the analysis of the entrepreneurial activities undertaken by the developer illustrated in chapter six, has shown how culture and creativity have been administered, become homogenous and subjected to the forces of late capitalism (Lash and Lury, 2007). OCT Group is indeed working to strengthen the values of the market and more specifically of the “experience economy” in contemporary urban China. This is what led me to conclude the thesis by

presenting OCT Group as a key actor in a successful hegemonic project that used the fashionable global idea of creativity as an effective governmental device in the contemporary urban governance. The project is powerful because it is functional to elite-driven priorities in a policy process that ultimately converts the city into an “entertaining machine” for generating future growth and for waging a competitive struggle to attract investment capital (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). The case of OCT Loft can indeed be seen, in a broader perspective, as a step of a successful wider strategy of place making that, echoing global trajectories, exploits the fashionable concepts of culture and creativity. Moreover, the research showed that the decision of building the park was primarily a long-term investment in real estate sector rather than a short-term reinforcement of creative economy as new driver of development or repositioning of the city.

Although the OCT Loft regeneration started in the same years in which the idea of the creative city was spreading all over China, the analysis of the entrepreneurial trajectory of OCT Group unveils a more complex picture. It shows that the peculiar use of culture and creativity as labels and drivers for urban development (fully expressed in OCT Loft) was not a mere reaction of the post-industrial turn after a declining phase of manufacturing. On the contrary, those same ideas of “soft” development were mobilized by OCT Group precisely when Shenzhen was beginning to experience its industrial miracle. Exploitation of culture by the driver of tourism before and after perfected in the supply of “unique” experiences, as OCT Group describes its activities, happened simultaneously to the opening of market economy that, in turn, not only gave rise to the industrial growth of Shenzhen but above all justified its foundation. Shenzhen was founded in 1980 as Special Economic Zone and chosen as setting for the first free market and export-oriented manufacturing system experiment. It was so successful that Shenzhen become one of the leading “world factories” (Cartier, 2002) and, by dominating international industrial and trade chain, the symbol of the “made in China” model. Yet, following the “global trajectory”, at the beginning of the 21st century, a new developmental phase is called for Shenzhen and, as described in paragraph 3.2, Shenzhen began its “creative path” by aiming to become a creative city and in particular the symbol of the “created in China” model. But again, and to

conclude, the story of OCT Loft showed us that the intention of capitalizing on soft resources and value added services was a business that OCT Loft was taking place already in the last decades of the XX century, the first years of Shenzhen's life.

The contextualization of the construction of OCT Loft Cultural Creative Park was extremely helpful in the interpretation of the findings emerged from the analysis of the planning and design process and the investigation of the current perceptions of the addressees of the project, namely the members of the creative class that nowadays are working in the park.

As described in the paragraph 6.1, some of the ambitions of planning in OCT Loft were achieved, other did not or produced unintended outcomes. Based on empirical evidence, I can affirm that OCT Loft nowadays can be seen as a trendy mixed-use district operating as a catalyst for the creative class. The number of cultural creative industries that are settled in the park has been constantly increasing and, thanks to the steady organization of cultural events and performances and an high-end offer of cafés and restaurants, OCT Loft has achieved the fame of being one of the most trendy place in Shenzhen.

However, as emerged from the investigation presented in the fifth chapter, the success seems to not be grounded on the power of creative production that is carried out in the park. Neither the advocated agglomeration benefits generated by the clustering of creative resources, minds and talent (one above all ideas and expertise cross-fertilizing (Rossiter, 2008; Evans, 2009; O'Connor and Gu, 2011)) are perceived as shaping the atmosphere of the parks, as neither the inspiring effects of the regenerated industrial landscape seems to be perceived by people that should be intensely receptive to those stimuli. The fame of OCT Loft possibly finds a more telling interpretation on another level and on other components of the neoliberalized economy: consumption and branding. This practice of planning in the name of creativity can be read as a way of repackaging urban cultural artifacts as competitive assets that are valued literally not for their own sake but in terms of their supposed economic utility (Peck, 2005). Again, following Peck (2005), OCT Loft can be seen as a practice of urban creativity that is well suited to "entrepreneurialized" and "neoliberalized" urban landscapes. It provides a means to intensify and publicly subsidize favored forms of urban consumption systems for a privileged class of

consumers; the outcome, as emerging from the empirical research, is the amplification of selective forms of elite consumption and social interaction. In sum, the research conducted on the economic and social functioning of the park showed that, from a business perspective, locating in OCT Loft is not perceived as effective in incentivizing business and social relationships among creative professionals and their firms. Close to the low impact on businesses, most of them are disappointed with the management of the park, they complain about the rent that is being continuously risen, unsatisfying but expensive facilities, shortages in entrepreneurial and investments attraction aid. Similar discontents can be identified on food and beverage amenities: an overall low value for money is perceived. All this profoundly challenges the theoretical approach that supports creative clustering but there are other elements that add relevance to the case of OCT Loft. As already described in the sixth chapter, also from the developer's point of view, there are signals that the park has been facing some criticalities. Close to the financial concerns, since more than a year from the official opening, there is still a high percentage of empty office and commercial spaces in the buildings in the northern part. This element could be interpreted as one of the signs that the "creative container" has been well planned and built but the content, in terms of creative and cultural activities that should fill the park, is missing or, at least, the supply to lease space is disproportionately higher than the demand.

In spite of all this, OCT Loft is increasingly exhibited and perceived as the landmark, the proof of creativity taking roots in Shenzhen and contributing to city upgrading. This is mainly due to OCT Group's success in creating a strong and distinctive brand that is not just based on the creative park but on a wider set of lifestyle, experiences-led real estate development.

As already stated, OCT Loft can be seen as part of a wider and anticipatory strategy in the configuration of the city as an "entertaining machine" (Lloyd and Clark, 2001; Clark et al., 2002; Gottlieb and Glaeser, 2006). Since the early 1980s, OCT Group has enacted a place making strategy based on the supply of exclusive experiences. By analysing its peculiar business model, it ostensibly emerged that the perspective is to make places of production and consumption coincide in space has been planned to maximize experiences by using specific facilities, sharing of values, creation of specific atmospheres and generation of

emotions (Clark et al., 2002). And in this business strategy, OCT Loft and especially culture and creativity as its drivers can be seen as a transitory tool in the strategy of managing both industry, infrastructure and landscaping in OCT area that let this zone become the role model of its type due to its excellent surroundings, as also stated in unison by the interviewed members of the creative class. OCT Group's business model still relies on the integration of electronics manufacturing, tourism and real estate developments and it is mainly from the last sector that returns originate. In other words, financial difficulties and the nonappearance of excellence in creative production can be overcome thanks to profits generated by high-end developments.

To conclude, the analysis of OCT Loft showed a peculiar case of remaking of the post-industrialism and the conventionally related creativity-led urban regeneration that makes sense in a perspective of entertainment-led urbanization (Lloyd and Clark, 2001; Clark et al., 2002; Evans, 2003; Gottlieb and Glaeser, 2006). OCT Loft, indeed, is an episode of industrial upgrading, both physically and economically, that assists the construction of an elitist brand. Beyond the narrative of the renovation of old industrial ruins, OCT Loft owes much of its fame to the consumption of luxury facilities (and the related atmosphere that they generate) by a crowd of consumers that regularly stand outside the creative business sphere and hang out in the park because it can provide them with literarily exclusive and amazing life experiences since no other place in Shenzhen is perceived as characterized by a similar feeling of "greatness" and charm. Furthermore, as described in the analysis of the power of attraction that OCT Loft exerts (see the paragraph 6.2.3), the brand seemingly improves the social status of those involved in the creative business cycle: being settled in the park seems to generate pride and recognition that are then socially sanctioned. It means that also the rhetoric of the "rediscovery of live-work facilities and the shared workspaces within former industrial zones and buildings" (Evans, 2009) has been rearranged: OCT Group succeeded in making a place of identity by extending lifestyle with fashion and "cultural and creative products" into an experiential and entertainment dimension (Evans, 2009). By considering its entrepreneurial evolution, OCT Group launched in the new market that was Shenzhen new consumption practices that turns from mass production and were increasingly linked to particular kinds of urban

settings and associated with a new notion of urbanism, for Chinese experiences, as a distinct way of life embracing consumption, architecture and leisure skills (Kearns and Philo, 1993).

Along with the peculiarities of the “new” urbanization that China is facing following what is assumed as a global pattern, the investigation of creativity as an urban imperative could open up further studies. As already stated at the beginning of this chapter, a number of remarkable elements emerged during the research. The thesis contains the ones that I considered key. However, especially during the fieldwork and the review of the collected materials, other inspiring issues (and worthwhile of future research) arose. For instance, I concentrated my work on the analysis of the members of the “creative class” settled in OCT Loft as the primary beneficiaries of the regeneration project and I am aware of the exclusion of other social classes within the research of the functioning of the creative precinct and the outcomes generated on other displaced realities that characterize Shenzhen. I chose not to add this line of investigation because it would have brought me away from my main purpose but obviously it does not mean that this analysis could not add value to the understanding of the phenomenon. Another issue that could enrich the research is the analysis of the entire planning process, by investigation of the vertical and horizontal relationships between governmental levels and among actors who have interests and voice on the exploitation of creativity in property-led development. A focus on the sequence of plans (from national to local) and intertwining of planning processes would indeed have been of great interest because of the well-known centrality of the plan in Chinese territorial policy. Such a perspective was intentionally not investigated because it would have demanded additional resources and other tools, primarily a thorough knowledge of the Chinese language and institutions, which I did not have and could not afford. My choice was rather to focus on the investigation of the social and economic life of individuals and organizations in a given setting with the aim of showing how actual practices of planning are involved in the making of the city (Crosta, 2010). The creative one is the kind of city that I studied “in the making”. As openly stated from the outset, I am fully aware of the powerful neo-liberal rhetoric that drives the discourse of the creative city and makes it an extremely attractive and almost hypnotic concept for policy makers around the world, and

in China particularly. The idea of the creative city has been circulating by way of uncritical imitation driven by the force of fashion. The creative city is indeed a fashionable concept and it is precisely because of this that I chose to study it in detail. Rather than disregarding fashions in planning as if they were marginal and uninteresting phenomena in urban studies, I deliberately chose to take one seriously by looking at the concrete implications it has in practice (Czarniawska and Panozzo, 2008). In fact, fashions have very practical consequences: they inspire policy makers who in turn demand certain type of urban designs to planners and architects that then get realized by developers who physically transform the city. Ultimately, and very rapidly as seen in this thesis, what we may consider “just a fashion” like the creative city actually changes the built environment and the uses that are made of it and in doing so also intervenes in the life of people who inhabit it. The travel of planning ideas and the imitations it fosters are key in understanding how contemporary cities are transformed in the age of globalization.

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Appendix 1

Interview Structure – Members of the “Creative Class” in OCT Loft Cultural Creative Park

1. General Information

- a. Name
- b. Sex
- c. Age
- d. Nationality
- e. Educational qualification
- f. Job
- g. Position
- h. Hobbies

2. Office Life (different questions whether partners or employees)

Partners

- a. What is your line of business?
- b. When did you settle in OCT Loft?
- c. Why did you choose this location?
- d. How many people work here?
- e. Is it your first company?

Employees

- a. What is the role in your company?
- b. How long have you been working here?
- c. Why did you choose this company?
- d. How many people work here?
- e. Why did you choose this company?
- f. How many jobs have you changed?
- g. How many cities?

Both of them

- h. Which are the three most important values for you about your job?
- i. What fulfills your working life?
- j. What would you never renounce to about your job?
- k. Which are the most important elements in office space planned and designed for creative workers? (Physical and human relationships)?
Furnishings, space for relaxing, kitchen, balcony, bar, - affinity with colleagues (sharing hobbies and tastes)
- l. What do you expect from a creative park?
- m. How much is important the location of your office?
- n. Do you think location is an influential element for your clients?
- o. Do you know people who work in other companies in OCT Loft?
- p. What kind of relationships do you have with them? Business or friendship?
- q. How and under what circumstances did you meet them?
- r. What are you used to do together and where do you go?

3. Daily Life

- a. Where do you live?
- b. Why did you choose it?
- c. Do you live alone?
- d. Have you ever considered the idea of living close to OCT Loft?
- e. How do you go to work?
- f. Where do you do grocery shopping (food)?
- g. Where do you have breakfast, lunch, and dinner on working days?

4. Leisure

- a. Where do you go to relax?
- b. Where do you go to “charge your batteries”?
- c. Where do you go during the weekend?

5. OCT Loft

- a. Do you come in OCT Loft just for working?
- b. What facilities in OCT Loft do you use? Restaurants, bars, clubs, events, concerts, exhibitions, design shops, bookstores, gym....
- c. If yes, how often?

6. Closing questions

- a. Do you like working in OCT Loft?
- b. Do you find everything in OCT Loft that satisfies your professional & business needs?
- c. And your personal needs (in terms of social and entertainment options)?
- d. Is there anything missing according your needs and tastes?
- e. What would you like to add?