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**Enabling Sustainable Economies in Marginal Areas: the Problem
of Measuring Culture and Creativity**

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2nd UNESCO Creative Cities Beijing Summit

Session: Monitoring Cultural Policies and measures for sustainable urban economies and societies

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Enabling sustainable economies in marginal areas: the problem of measuring culture and creativity.

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This presentation is mainly focused on understanding the question of measuring and, therefore, monitoring cultural policies from a theoretical point of view. The main aim is to outline what are the main limitations to enable sustainable economies based on culture and creativity, when it comes to deal with non-urban areas. I refer to rural (or predominantly rural) regions and marginal, peri-urban or peripheral areas within complex city-regional agglomerations. The main underlying argument is that it would be hard to capture the specificity of these areas in the creative cities discourse, without a meaningful reconceptualization of the analytical tools we have employed so far in the field of urban and regional studies. I will relate my assumptions to the evidence coming from a series of case studies analysed.

During 2015 I was involved in the coordination of an international research focused on small settlements and their creative potentials, in preparation of the UNESCO International Conference on 'Culture for Sustainable Cities' (Hangzhou, 10th-12th December). The motivation for embarking in this research was explained as follows:

'Culture can play a fundamental role in fostering sustainable patterns of urban and regional development. The Global Report, which UNESCO is coordinating for the 2016 UN-HABITAT III Conference, shows that a promising culture-based vision of urban development is flourishing in different forms in several cities across the world. Even small and medium settlements located at the periphery of large cities or within their metropolitan areas, and normally associated with marginalization or deprivation, have the potential to fully utilize their cultural resources, in both tangible (urban and architectural heritage, cultural infrastructure, etc.) and intangible form (skills, knowledge, competencies). However these minor settlements, and their respective communities, require different analytical instruments in order to understand their complexity and ad hoc policies to manage their assets in sustainable forms'.

Twelve research units located in Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, France, India, Italy, Namibia, Portugal, Venezuela have worked to implement a comparative

survey from May 2015 and May 2016 and 14 cases have been selected. The preliminary research report has supported the writing of the Chapter 9 'Culture as a tool for harmonious territorial development. Strengthening the role of small settlements to enhance urban-rural linkages' of the UNESCO Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development (UN-HABITAT III – Quito 2016). The full report will be instead published in the UK by the end of 2016.

The result of this research shows that culture can be a powerful engine of place-based sustainable economic strategies. The selected cases are examples of the local capability to invent, create and develop innovative and creative activities based on local scarce resources, as a result of local creativity and innovation capability. It shows also the risk of dissipating such resources if not properly acknowledged and preserved. Normally innovation and creativity are associated with agglomeration economies. However, distinctions between the urban and rural realm are vanishing. Cities are merged into large city-regions and urban agglomerations co-exist with a variety of small settlements. Even remote (rural) or marginalized (peri-urban) areas can be positively affected by the globalization if they can find a niche opportunity providing distinct goods or services, especially considering the key role of ICT and digital accessibility. So the question is: how to capture this distinctiveness?

I will briefly present two cases: the case of Shuang Wan Cun, in the Wujiang District of Suzhou (China) and the case of Gagliato in Calabria (Italy). Shuang Wang cun is an area traditionally important for silk production and agriculture. In recent years a massive urbanization process in the Yangtze River Delta have threatened local agricultural and productive identities. However, the village has successfully developed home-based textile workshops and on-line selling (Shuang Wan Cun is the top village in the Wujiang District for TaoBao on-line selling (the Chinese E-bay) to enhance its livelihood.

Quite different is instead the case in Italy. Gagliato belongs to an area of ancient civilization (Magna Grecia), affected by a long-lasting decline and characterised by a history of underdevelopment within Europe. The setting up of an Annual International Conference in Nanotechnology in 2008 and, later on, of a programme of informal STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) learning for local schools (youth 4-18 years old) has generated the spreading of this highly specialized knowledge across the area. On-line courses in collaboration with the Houston Methodist Research Institute in the USA are successfully implemented. The International Conference raises the visibility of the village, bringing beneficial economic benefit and a related education NGO is engaged with the local community to generate more durable outcomes, beyond the event itself.

In summary: Culture and creativity can assume different and unusual form in marginal/rural settings, especially with provision of basic infrastructures than can ensure greater accessibility to knowledge and on-line resources. Moreover, by looking at current documents, such as the UNDP/UNESCO Creative Economy Report (2013) and the UNESCO framework for cultural statistics domains' (UNESCO, 2009), rural/marginal areas are acknowledged but the main cultural domains and the indicators identified are still primarily related to cities or consolidated cultural sectors (art and crafts, museums, cultural tourism, design and creative services and so on).

In conclusion, I advocate for implementing a more comprehensive approach to monitoring cultural policies for sustainable development. Learning from Shuang Wan: we need to further understand how local productive processes (not necessarily related to creative industry) can function as a 'supportive domain' for potential creative patterns of development. Learning from Gagliato: we need to further understand how training and advanced informal learning settings can function as enabling factors for the spreading of knowledge in marginal areas and therefore for its long-term capitalization into sustainable forms of economic development. In both cases there is an urgency to stimulate longitudinal studies to monitor potential local benefits of these unusual patterns of development related to culture. Thanks for your attention and allow me to thank also Ms Jane Zhang, the Former Party Secretary of Shuang Wan Cun in Wujiang and Ms Paola Ferrari, President of the Association NanoGagliato at Houston, Texas. Two very diverse women, with very diverse roles, actively involved, with their passion, in shaping sustainable patterns of local development based on culture and creativity.