

NEGOTIATING CONVENTIONS AND CREATING COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF CARTOON AND EUROPEAN ANIMATION

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Abstract.

This article examines the processes of negotiation and institution building through which transnational networks of learning are fashioned. It does so by examining the case of the European animation industry and the activity of an association, Cartoon, which facilitated the development of common conventions supporting cooperation and learning in this industry. The case draws attention to how issues of institutional context can frustrate collaboration and limit the scope of learning; simultaneously, it illustrates interventions that permitted the negotiation between situated and context-specific understandings on the one hand and the development of shared understandings and common conventions for action within the industry on the other. In sum, the article sheds light on the institutional work required to mobilize situated forms of knowledge and the important bridging functions institutional entrepreneurs can play in this process.

1. Introduction

Every art, as indeed, every collective endeavor, is underpinned by a set of shared rules and conventions that help guide participants' actions, make them mutually intelligible, and suggest common solutions or ways of doing things (Becker, 1982; Storper, 2000; Storper and Salais, 1997). These conventions may emerge organically through the give and take of

daily collective work or they may be created quite consciously and imposed by managerial fiat. Over time, conventions become embedded in routines and practices; they come to define “the way things are done” in a workplace or company, and through the movement of workers and managers, they may spread and become generalized beyond the boundaries of the firm to an entire industry. They form an essential part of the architecture of collective action.

Conventions and their close cousins, institutions, have played an important role in contemporary debates in economic geography. As conventions arise in a given social, economic, and institutional context, they are shaped by unspoken assumptions about power relationships, the regulatory environment, and the market. Conventions that make sense in one place may be hard to adapt in another place and may even seem quite irrational or counter-productive there. Scholars such as Storper and Salais (1997) and Lorenzen and Foss (2003) have argued that the development of localized conventions often facilitates coordination and knowledge development between local actors while frustrating close collaboration and learning between actors from different regions or countries. This is particularly important in entrepreneurial or creative endeavors, where the inherent indeterminacy of the activities and inventive nature of the enterprise means that shared, but usually tacit, understandings and reference points are needed to ground effective communication, coordination, and guidance for collective activity.

During the early 2000s, however, the idea that knowledge mostly circulates in local-networks was being challenged. Allen (2000), Coe and Bunnell (2003), and Amin and

Cohendet (2004) among others pointed out that knowledge creation occurs within knowledge communities that, to an increasing extent, are organized globally. The literature on global networks pointed to the ways that even tacit, highly contextual forms of knowledge can circulate globally within and between ‘communities of practice’, ‘epistemic communities’, or professional communities located in different parts of the world (Amin and Roberts 2008). This literature asserted that in the modern world, people engaged in similar practices – engineers, musicians, or psychologists, for example— will usually share the codes, frameworks, tools and practices of their profession that facilitate their understanding of each other’s work and engagement in productive interactions (Håkanson 2005). While some interpretations of this view seem to suggest simply that geographic context is irrelevant and that knowledge will easily flow within such communities regardless of where the members are located, a more sophisticated version of this approach takes the situated and locally contextual nature of knowledge seriously, yet argues that actors can negotiate and learn to translate and share situated-forms of knowledge across contexts (Duguid, 2008).

This article contributes to contemporary debates on the geography of knowledge and learning by revealing the institutional work through which issues of context are dealt with and global knowledge communities are fashioned. It does so through a case study of the European animation industry and of the industry association, Cartoon. Cartoon has played an instrumental role over the last 25 years in bridging animation communities in different European countries, to facilitate dialogue and develop of common conventions within this industry. In effect, this organization has helped fashion an international “community of

communities” (Brown and Duguid, 1991) around animation out of previously insular, nationally bounded practice communities.

While much of the literature on global knowledge communities has focused on the role of trans-national firms as intermediaries in fostering networks (Hildreth, Kimble and Wright, 2000; Hildreth and Kimble, 2004), the case of Cartoon draws attention to the potential role of industry associations as an organizational tool for institutional entrepreneurs (Howells, 2006; Hardy and Maguire, 2008; Bathelt and Glücker, 2013) catalyzing the emergence of common conventions and connecting knowledge communities. We focus here on the specific means –in the interplay of networking and institution-building -- through which Cartoon encouraged the development of a common repertoire of conventions to underpin continued collaboration across national boundaries, thus encouraging the creation of a ‘European’ animation industry. In doing so, we seek to provide an understanding of the structuration process – the coevolution of concrete relationships and shared relational resources-- through which networks are formed.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the theoretical antecedents of our work and develops a theoretical framework for understanding the development of this trans-national community. Section 3 discusses our methodological approach. Section 4 briefly introduces Cartoon and the historical context of the European animation industry during the late 1980s and 1990s when it was formed and began to shape the industry. Section 5 and 6 describe the modes of intervention used by Cartoon in its goal

to promote shared conventions. Section 7 depicts the community built on those common understandings. Section 8 evaluates the main points of our analysis.

2. Theoretical Considerations: The development of shared conventions in geographically dispersed communities

Much of the theoretical work in economic geography over the past 20-years can be interpreted as an attempt to understand the extent to which economically valuable knowledge is situated and context-bound. The long-running debates about 'tacit' knowledge, as well as the common assertion that tacit knowledge will be locally sticky and shared more easily among actors in a proximate region, can be seen as attempts to deal with the issue of context (Håkanson, 2005). Shared interpretations of context are understood to facilitate the coordination between actors carrying out complementary activities. Furthermore, individuals who share a common understanding of their context should be better able to correctly interpret and learn from each other's successes and failures (Maskell 2001).

An important part of the context that binds a community or networks are the conventions that define common ways of doing things. By conventions, we refer to the commonly held knowledge and shared understandings, routinized practices, recipes for action and other forms of commonly held practical knowledge that are shared by a network community (Storper and Salais, 1997). These conventions represent practical solutions to common problems within a field of endeavor; to the extent that they are shared within a group, they

provide a framework of shared understandings around which to organize collective activity (Gómez and Jones, 2000). Often, in everyday practice, assumptions about context and the environment remain unarticulated. These unarticulated assumptions about context may differ, and when they do, they potentially undermine attempts at cooperation and frustrate attempts to make sense of, and draw the correct lessons, from potentially successful innovations. Conventions embody available knowledge about context and environment and thus allow coordination in that specific context. Another key idea of what Storper (2000) has called the “social science of conventions” is that by providing common-held ‘solutions’ that are shared within a community, conventions, “eliminate a situation of uncertainty where the result of a decision or an action for an agent would be indeterminate by individual calculation alone (Gomez and Jones, 2000:701).” That is, the value of conventions lies not only in their actual content, but in the fact that one can assume with relative certainty that others in the community are behaving according to the same set of conventions. They thus serve both to co-ordinate activity within the community and to make the actions of others more intelligible. While the concepts 'conventions' and 'institutions' are often used interchangeably, we prefer to use the term 'conventions' as we are less interested in focusing on formal institutions and macro-level social arrangements. Rather, we want to draw attention to the shared understandings and common frameworks for action that are generated out of repeated interactions in everyday practice (Lundvall and Maskell,2000).

The development of common conventions that are appropriate across different institutional contexts, combined with the ability to negotiate differences and translate knowledge

between contexts, is a major challenge to the development of trans-national knowledge communities. One standard way of dealing with this issue is through standardization and codification – that is, by trying to abstract those aspects of a practice that are not context dependent or force standardization across contexts (Takteyev, 2009). Yet, such strategies are not always appropriate or practical, particularly in more artisanal pursuits, where practices are highly embodied or skill-based; even less so in creative work, which often requires a highly reflexive and playful engagement with existing conventions (Amin and Roberts, 2008).

Our investigation of Cartoon and European animation aims to understand the means by which animation professionals in different European countries have negotiated between different contexts and built a repertoire of shared conventions upon which to underpin collaboration and frame common endeavors. We draw particular attention to the role of Cartoon in facilitating and encouraging this process. Within this framework, Faulconbridge's (2006, 2010) studies of knowledge circulation and creation among architects, advertising executives, and legal professionals in global service firms are exemplary. Faulconbridge emphasizes the ways that knowledge circulation happens through 'conversation' with foreign colleagues and foreign artifacts such as texts, photographs and architectural plans that stimulate the production of new knowledge as the different parties grapple with issues of context. Context, of course, appears not as an absolute, but relationally, as a more or less shared and mutually understood background against which the foreground of focal knowledge is interpreted and acted upon. These conversations help established the shared context upon which all successful communication

rests (Bateson 1972; Duranti and Goodwin, 1992). As a consequence of exploring and gaining a deeper understanding of context, participants in these conversations are better able to articulate broader theories and gain deeper understandings of their practice (Krogh and Ross, 1995, Brown and Duguid, 1991; Håkanson, 2010).

Faulconbridge (2007) also draws our attention to the crucial role that can be played by intermediate or meso-level actors that act as collective institutional entrepreneurs facilitating the emergence of shared conventions.¹ He documents the role of a professional association dedicated to advertising law in 'seeding' a community of practice that mediated collective learning processes between lawyers and advertising professionals. As Amin (1999:370-371) puts it, such organizations achieve this by “encourag(ing) dialogue and learning based on sharing knowledge and information exchange,” and thus nurtures the development of shared understandings.

The case we examine, Cartoon, shows that industry associations are also capable of playing a central role in bridging institutional environments, thereby stimulating the creation of learning networks across geographic context. The challenge faced by Cartoon and the European Animation Industry is more complex than the case illustrated by Faulconbridge (2007), because several international occupational communities forming the value chain were involved (producers, animators, distributors and financiers, mainly), creating what Brown and Duguid (1991) called a 'community of communities'. By fostering interaction between distant actors, the association essentially acts as an 'institutional entrepreneur'

¹ The role of associational entrepreneurs has also been explored within the regional innovation literature. For example, see Cooke and Morgan, 1999; Ahedo, 2006; Lopez-Estornell, Barberá-Tomás, Mas-Verdú and García-Reche, 2014; Grandadam, Cohendet and Simon, 2013.

(Hardy and Maguire, 2008; Battilana, Leca and Boxenbaum, 2009) capable of reshaping geographical relationships through their role in accelerating and supporting the development and adoption of coherent conventions across a transnational community (Bathelt and Glückler, 2013).

Unlike multinational corporations, associations generally lack the centralized, hierarchical power to enforce common rules across a network of practice (Hildreth, Kimble and Wright, 2000; Hildreth and Kimble, 2004)². Therefore they use other modes of intervention to foster the emergence of shared conventions. For example, institutional entrepreneurs working within an associational framework often seek to promulgate common practices through the creation of common codebooks (Cowan, Foray and David, 2000; Grandadam et al., 2013). The promotion of a common codebook is a potentially effective strategy because, to the extent access to the network and other participants in the network represent a valuable resource, network externalities associated with adopting common codes operate in the absence of hierarchical power. Recent examples of this strategy can be seen in the creation of international voluntary standards for quality control, accountability of sustainable performance, and standards for socially responsible investment (see Slager, Gond and Moon, 2012 for a recent review). Yet, it has to be noted that the contextualized differences in practice that standardization is supposed to address may make it unlikely that they will ever be adopted, as adoption not only depends on the will of the stakeholders, but

² In the case of trans-organizational environments, such as the one in the case at hand, geographically distributed knowledge communities are usually termed ‘networks of practice’ (Teigland, 2003). Literature on networks of practice has focused on online electronic communities and has generally dealt with the issue of conventions and norms either as a problem of “pure” collective action, where no specific actor has a unique role in fostering emergent arrangements (Wasko, Faraj and Teigland, 2004; Wasko and Teigland, 2004) or as a matter of compliance with written guidelines about appropriate participation and interaction in the network (Faraj and Wasko, 2001), which excludes the relational aspect of convention *building* and institutional entrepreneurship we are interested in. We thank one reviewer for signaling this distinction.

also on the capacity of actors to integrate the codes with different existing vocabularies, cultures and practices (Maguire and Hardy, 2006; Etzion and Ferraro, 2010; Slager et al., 2012).

An alternative to top-down or center-out imposition of codification and standardized practice is to encourage the bottom-up creation of common conventions and shared understandings. Bottom up strategies focus on creating opportunities for networking and collaboration where actors can work out modes of interaction pragmatically, based on the situation at hand. As recent research in institutional theory has shown, new scripts for action often emerge from specific collaborations or situations that produce solutions to specific problems (Lawrence, 2002; Scott, Ruef, Mendel and Carona, 2000:93-94). These scripts, when successful, may create a useful reference point for future interactions among the collaborating parties. In short, they become 'proto-conventions'.³ Sometimes these party-specific proto-conventions address a common problem in the field, and subsequently through interactions with new parties or imitation by third parties, begin to diffuse and may eventually become widely accepted conventions within a given industry or community (Bathelt and Glucker, 2013:15).

The forms of sociality prompted by temporary gatherings and periodic meetings have been highlighted as a key mode through which this diffusion occurs. Through multi-sided communications, the 'proto-conventions' developed in specific contexts filter into the larger community. Crucially, temporary gatherings provide the required geographic proximity to

³ We have adapted the term, 'proto-conventions' from Lawrence (2002: 281), who uses the term 'proto-institutions' and defines them as "new practices, rules and technologies" emerging from a specific collaboration.

facilitate the face-to-face interaction needed for both formal and informal exchange. This exchange of information, as well as its rapid filtering through the community as it circulates -- what Bathelt et al (2004) call 'buzz' -- creates the ideal environment for quickly learning and evaluating new ideas and practices, as well as for understanding what ideas are of interest to other people (Bathelt and Schuldt, 2010; Schuldt and Bathelt, 2011). Lampel and Meyer (2008), for example, have highlighted how the collective discussions at such meetings serve to define practices, codify key vocabularies and create coherence within an occupational community (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984). Importantly, temporary gatherings are usually not isolated or one-off events; rather they are repeated encounters (Power and Jansson, 2008; Norcliffe and Rendace, 2003). The repeated nature of many of these gatherings reinforces the process of convergence towards common conventions.

Of course, network formation and the institutionalization of shared conventions and understandings of a given network do not happen independently of each other. Rather, the individual interactions that form the network and the repertoire of shared understandings that these interactions draw upon re-enforce each other. Our research identifies particular modes through which a networking organization such as Cartoon facilitates the development of common conventions. First, in bringing people together, opportunities for collaboration are identified. These opportunities may rest on simple economic calculation; a producer sees the possibility to make up part of his budget by collaborating with a colleague from another country. But also they can just as easily rest on personal affinity ("I enjoy hanging out with you so let's do a project together so that we can hang-out some

more") or artistic considerations ("I like your visual; let me come up with a narrative that can make use of it").

From such collaborations, 'proto-conventions' are developed as ways of dealing with particular issues or situations that come up in the course of the collaboration. These 'solutions' are strictly bounded by the spatial and temporal context of the situation in which they are developed. However, when successful, they may find use beyond the initial situation. In periodic meetings, particular 'solutions' are broadcast through lectures or workshops and discussed in formal and less formal settings, becoming exemplars guiding future action. The context in which they were created and the new contexts within which they may also be useful are explored. Through the iterative process of practical application and discussion in various periodic gatherings, general rules are derived and the knowledge eventually becomes part of the repertoire of the larger community, something that people not only know, but can count on other people knowing as well.

3. Methodology

The research informing this article was conducted as part of a larger research project into the European animation industry and the multi-national 'project ecology' in which firms, artists and entrepreneurs in this industry operated (Cole, 2008). In the course of researching the European animation industry, the fundamental role played by Cartoon, an industry association, in fomenting trans-European collaboration and catalyzing the industry's development became apparent. Between 2003 and 2008, one of the authors formally

interviewed 22 key actors in the European animation industry and attended four events organised by Cartoon. In 2011, he returned to this work, conducting and transcribing an additional 14 interviews with different members of the European animation community. Interviewees were often located through a snowball technique. Initially, key players were picked based on secondary sources from the industry press including published interviews with producers and directors of films and accounts of trends in the industry. Particularly useful were articles from Animation World Network (AWN), which archives all of its articles on line (www.awn.com). At the end of each interview suggestions of other people to talk were asked. Also several informants were directly contacted, particularly when participation in Cartoon events or a previously published interview indicated that they might offer an interesting perspective on the industry.

The interviewees came from a broad range of roles across the industry, as people in different roles were likely to have different experiences and divergent accounts of working within the European animation ecology. For example, it was expected that film producers, who are mostly involved with the business and financing of films, would be less aware of the frictions caused by multi-site productions than directors, who are deeply concerned with the artistic integrity and the execution of their artistic vision. The group included several film producers, directors, studio heads, animators and assistant directors who were in charge of the day-to-day coordination of production between studios. Consultants with a broad experience of working with different studios around Europe were also interviewed. In addition, both heads of Cartoon, the European animation association that lies at the center of the case study, were interviewed.

Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours and started with factual questions aiming to establish areas of expertise and to create a baseline for later discussion. This was followed by specific questions regarding the geographical aspects of the production process. For example, if the interviewee was a producer, this meant understanding how they went about finding funding and distribution for their projects or how they found the talent they needed to execute their ideas. In contrast, interviews with directors and persons engaged in production typically focused on the process of working with studios in other countries, the issues that would arise, and how these were managed. Several interviewees demonstrated a broad knowledge of the history of their industry. Since this knowledge consisted of ‘interpretations’ as well as facts, it was always held in parenthesis until corroborating accounts could be found.

The interview data were checked against, and grounded by observational data collected during events organized by Cartoon and supplemented by extensive program notes, available from the Cartoon website (<http://www.cartoon-media.eu/>). These gatherings also provided the opportunity to talk with dozens of participants about their work, their understandings of the industry they work in, and their goals at the meetings. As Lampel and Meyer have noted, such meetings afford an opportunity to observe the negotiation processes involved in forming conventions in a rather direct manner: “tractable settings bounded by time and space, [temporal gatherings] allow researchers to directly observe the sense-making and sense-giving processes that fuel field formation and transformation. (Lampel and Meyer, 2008:1030)” Further research into the animation industry, and particularly observation of three large industry events in Los Angeles, and discussions with

several leading figures in the American animation industry, provided a benchmark against which to understand the logic of the industry and distinguish practices that are peculiar to Europe from those that are more general.

4. Cartoon and the Creation of an European Animation Industry

Both in Europe and globally, the spread of Cable television and the creation of specialized, 24-hour a day, cartoon channels TV in the 1980s, had profound effects on the animation industry (Yoon and Malecki, 2010). The European industry, which was largely set up for artisanal production and funded by national television stations, was poorly positioned to take advantage of these new opportunities. Industrialized production techniques such as those required to fill a 26-week schedule with 22-minutes of programming were largely beyond their capacity. There was no tradition of trans-European trade in animation, and station programmers tasked with filling new programming slots were more likely to buy content from the U.S. or Japan than from another European country.

Cartoon, the Association for promoting European animation, was formed in 1988 with the idea of remedying this situation and building a “European” industry capable of filling the large demand for programming. Cartoon adopted the form of an international non-profit organization based in Brussels and was funded by the Media Programme of the European Union and governed by a board of directors composed of approximately 15 professionals drawn from across the European animation industry.

One of Cartoon's earliest efforts focused on convincing broadcasters to purchase programming from other European countries as an alternative to imports. Quickly, this developed into efforts to co-finance films, and efforts were undertaken to develop more co-operative relationships between studios involved in production. Starting in 1991, the Cartoon Forum created a co-production market where producers from around Europe could pitch to distributors and other investors for funds for their projects. The Forum contrasted with other existing markets in that it focused exclusively on animation. More importantly, the Forum was a place where projects in their incipient stages could find financing and co-production partners. Another early Cartoon initiative encouraged the formation of studio-groupings between studios in different European countries, who could collectively work on each other's projects, sharing resources and overhead costs. International groupings of this kind were particularly useful because of the existence of laws in many European countries mandating the allocation of broadcasting funds towards local productions.

These early initiatives had a strong impact, which can be seen in the rapid rise of a significant industry focused on producing animation for television. From just 80 hours of programming across all of Europe in 1988, when Cartoon was formed, the industry had expanded to produce over 1200 hours in 2003. As the industry grew, Cartoon began to sponsor new initiatives. Among these were quarterly masters' classes, usually organized as three-day workshops where professionals and industry newcomers could learn about the latest developments and trends in the industry. They covered topics such as film financing, feature production, and the changing technology of animated filmmaking. In late-1997, Cartoon created a new co-production market for animated feature films, similar to the

Cartoon Forum, which it called Cartoon Feature. Cartoon Feature's impact was similar to what the Forum had achieved for television animation: over half of the animated films produced in Europe between 2000 and 2010 were international co-productions, most of which had found their initial funding at Feature. The increased internationalization of production was accompanied by an increased institutionalization of the industry as well, with Cartoon playing an important role as mediator/facilitator. Prominent in this regard has been Cartoon's role in enculturating new participants into common "European ways" of making and financing animation.⁴

Cartoon's effort to support and foster internationalization were supported by a number of inter-related processes, as animation production is a labor-intensive but also highly modular process. Particularly for television, where production most resembles industrial processes, the creative work of envisioning and developing a project are separated from the lower-skilled but labor-intensive work of rendering the thousands of drawings that make up a production. For this reason, already in 1960s, animation studios had begun to outsource routine production overseas (Tschang and Goldstein 2004; Sito, 2006).

⁴ When we talk about the European way of producing animation, we are referring to a model based around much smaller budgets than the typical Hollywood production. These budgets are often assembled by finding co-production partners in different countries and rely to a lesser or greater extent on state financing schemes. It is important to note the limitations of this model; while production and budgets have increased, for the most part Europe has not created the kinds of commercial blockbusters produced by Hollywood. In recent years, however, a different model in which European production studios have created high-budget films for American distribution companies has shown some success. The outstanding example of this has been the *Despicable Me* franchise, animated by the French Studio Mac Guff but financed by the American 'studio' Illumination and distributed by Universal Pictures. This strategy of creating large-budget studio-financed content is something of a departure from the European model initially promoted by Cartoon but has built on the resources accumulated through the original Cartoon model (for a fuller discussion see Cole 2008).

In a previous work, Cole (2008:899-901) already described two specific characteristics of the European internationalization mode. First, European national markets are restricted by cultural and linguistic factors. Besides, key sources of financing are also local -either when they rely directly on local public funding or on mandates that require broadcasters to purchase some part of their programming locally. This has meant that agglomeration economies in Europe have been limited. Second, in many cases, European animation projects have organized projects in ways that shares some creative decision-making and less-routine tasks across different production sites. This contrasts to the more typical pattern of internationalization in the animation industry, where the more creative aspects of project work, such as character ideas, scripts and direction, are mainly carried out in North America and Europe, while the labor-intensive tasks or rendering animation are moved to Asia (Tschang and Goldstien, 2004, Yoon and Malecki, 2010:256).

These two specific characteristics and the fact that there were many other forces for globalization present since late 80's -when the new opportunities for animation arose- help to explain the increasing volume of European co-productions in the last three decades. We see Cartoon as a facilitator of this trend, as the association provided a fertile ground to the institutionalization process accompanying these changes.

5. The (Contested) Creation of Standardized Work Practices

Cowan et al. (2000) have highlighted the importance of “codebooks” in the articulation of learning communities. Codebooks serve as “as a storage depository, as a reference point

and possibly as an authority” (Cowan et al., 2000:223). In creative industries, “codebooks, scripts and forms understandable by market forces” are instrumental to stimulate collaborations between actors (Grandadam et al., 2013:1711). In the early 1990s, Cartoon had sponsored the publication of one of these “codebooks”, the European Animation Industry’s Production Handbook (Also called "The Technical Bible"), a 400-page guide to various practices for producing and managing the production process.

The Production Handbook was conceived with the idea of creating uniform standards and working practices in order to facilitate collaboration and work-sharing among animation studios. This project, by seeking to formulate universal standards, represented a “top down” strategy of creating the needed synergisms between locally organized and contextualized animation industries in Europe. This mixing of the global and the local (the standardized and the contextualized) was almost certain to result in a contested process, and it did (Slager et al., 2012). One consequence of this contestation was the emphasis that Cartoon put on the development of an industry-wide convocation of interested players and eventually more specialized workshops and meetings.

To prepare *The Production Handbook*, three experienced European animators were sent around Europe to visit studios over the course of two years to document existing organizational practices. The stated aim of the book was to create “a springboard for the harmonization of standards in search of future European standard (Erneux, 1991)”. The very attempt to create these standards is revealing both of the state of the industry as it existed in the late 1980s and of the kinds of conflicts that a project to unify the industry would entail. According to our interviews, when Cartoon was formed in the late 1980s, European animation studios, which had grown up in different national environments, used

widely different practices to organize production. In addition, many studios in Europe simply lacked the managerial and organizational capabilities to deal with large-scale co-production projects, such as the production of a regular, 22-minute TV series. In contrast, industrial scale animation as practiced by U.S. producers had a well-established set of conventions regarding how things should be organized and managed. Animation in the United States had long been organized using a detailed division of labor first created for the mass production of footage by Joseph Bray, who was directly inspired by Taylorist practices of a fixed and rigid division of tasks (Sito, 2006). As one of the authors of the Handbook recounted,

What was interesting was that the British animation industry seemed to me to be organized very much like a cottage industry. I was appalled at the lack of organization of some quite big-name companies. (interview with film animator December 2011)

In both Britain and in Spain, which was a major site for low-cost service work at that time, “putting out” systems were widely used and workers would only show at the studio to collect assignments or submit approved work. Common tools such as the sign-off sheets to track artwork and make sure that sequences were completed were often not used.

In early 90's ... usually studios would print their own folders and there would be something like a table on the front of it in which each person filled in and you signed your name, so you took some responsibility for what was in that folder. And I

know at a later stage, in Hahn Film, they even added a barcode system as well. He invented a sort of barcode thing so he knew where everything was at any given time. But when you went to British studios, everything was in the folder, but there was no writing on it. And it was just left to someone to remember who got what and what stage it was at (interview with film animator December 2011)

These haphazard organizational practices were typical of European animation except in two countries, Ireland and France. In Ireland, the animation industry had absorbed workers from a handful of large American productions that located there during the 1980s. In France, industrial habits seem to have diffused when the French animation house, DiC, moved to California, exposing many French animation professionals to the American system.

At the time we were putting together The Technical Bible, there was some sort of industrial standard, as practiced by US companies like DIC, and adopted by many French companies. Some French producers would say that they came up with it in the first place. This system was very unpopular in the UK, where it was felt to be rigid, industrial, and anti-creative. Animation in the UK has always clung to its artistic pretensions, and this was reflected in its (not too efficient) production methods. (interview with film animator December 2011).

The Production Handbook went on to describe the various systems of charts, folders, dope sheets, bar sheets and other tools that were standard for coordinating large production in animation at that time. But, according to contemporary accounts (later confirmed in

interviews), there were also disagreements regarding the extent to which standards should be imposed. One author argued that *The Handbook* should describe clear guidelines and choose best practices. A different idea, which ultimately made it into the book, was to describe all of the different practices in use, providing multiple examples of how a given issue might be addressed at different studios, in the hope that professionals could understand their purpose and adopt them in part or whole according to their local needs and preferences. As one author stated at the time, “Attempting to impose standards from the outset is also running the risk that under these circumstances some people may have no use for the Bible. I moreover do not believe that we must necessarily harmonize everything, both techniques and working methods, in order to achieve our aims, namely much more intense cooperation between European production companies” (Erneux, 1991). To compromise between these competing visions, instead of presenting a single standard part of *The Production Handbook* was written as a dialogue, discussing the merits of different systems.

Ultimately, this frontal attack on the issue of standardizing conventions is a minor footnote in Cartoon's history. There is a sense that it may not have changed industry behavior. The book did provide detailed information on the practices in use so that studios did not have to reinvent these every time they entered production. Yet, more than 15 years after the publication of the first and only edition of *The Production Handbook*, according to our interviews no one seems to use it in daily work and few contemporary animators even know of its existence.

6. Periodic meetings and the bottom up development of conventions

An alternative strategy, which is necessarily complementary to top-down codification and standardization, is to create conditions whereby local actors can learn-about, discuss, and negotiate standards as needed (Lampel and Meyer, 2008). A growing literature has documented the role of trade-fairs, conferences and 'temporary meetings' of different types as important aspects of the learning architecture for all kinds of industries and knowledge communities (Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg, 2006; Torre and Rallet, 2005). The key to such meetings is that they make a large cross-section of people within the community physically accessible to each other. Under such conditions of intense face-to-face interaction, participants easily move in and out of conversations and discussions about their daily work, sharing relevant and timely information but also gaining a sense of what others think and what is 'normal' within the community (Bathelt and Schuldt, 2010). Through this filter, practices that have emerged in one part of the community, perhaps in a given collaboration, may become assimilated into the collective repertoire of the community. According to our interviews, Cartoon's most important work in promoting a European animation industry has come through its sponsorship of several different such meetings and encounters throughout the year that bridge between local contexts by drawing together industry professionals from around Europe.

6.1 The Forum and the Masters

The most important events for European animators over the last two decades have been the Cartoon Forum and Cartoon Movie, two co-production markets for television and film. The Cartoon Forum was first held in 1990. It was one of the first major initiatives undertaken by Cartoon at a time when the expansion of European television was creating increased demand for animated programming. But European producers, locked into financing shows in their home territory, were unable to meet the budgets required to compete with American and Japanese programming, which were widely available in syndication. Cartoon Movie, first held in 1998, aimed to replicate the success of the Forum and encourage early investment and co-production agreements in feature films.

Cartoon Forum and Cartoon Movie are both structured around a public pitching process. Distributors, financiers and producers gather in lecture rooms, where producers with projects are allotted a 30-minute time slot to make a pitch. The public nature of pitching provides an opportunity for producers to communicate the essentials of their project to potential partners in the room. They are able to observe other pitches and how those pitches are received within the community. This process is different from how most film markets work, where the meetings are all in private. The public pitch creates the possibility of generating buzz around a project; when a broadcaster stands up in front of others and shows enthusiasm for a project, she immediately signals to others to take note. In so far as they do, the chance of more investors coming on board is increased. The very public discussions of the merits or drawbacks of a given idea also provide important information for everyone in the room, often filtering out to other participants in the industry through subsequent conversations.

In addition to these gatherings, since 1991 Cartoon has also sponsored a series of school-like gatherings, the Cartoon Masters, which bring together professionals from across Europe for three or four day workshops on specific topics. The Masters were first envisioned as a way to educate creative talent about the business side of the industry. This topic was particularly important because of the high number of art-school educated professionals in the industry who did not understand the practices of industrial-scale animation.

Within a few years, the focus of the Master's changed from vocational education to one of supporting general professional development by giving insights and information on current developments within the industry. Currently, several courses are held in most years: Cartoon Future (sometimes called Cartoon Digital), Cartoon Finance, and a Masters for trainers in the industry. These three-day courses, like similar professional development courses in other industries, provide a chance for newcomers to become quickly acquainted with the field, while more experienced professionals can stay abreast of developments or expand their knowledge of aspects of the industry that they knew little about. For example, in the late 1990s the Cartoon Masters was dominated by debates on the merits of traditional hand-drawn animation versus the new, and increasingly popular, computer generated methods of animating. As that debate has faded, others such as the emerging market for mobile platforms have come to the fore. Classes are structured not as complete curricula, but as a menu of topics that are designed to engage professionals in exploring the creative possibilities, along with the resources that are available to them. Often the presentations involve discussions of case studies. For example, accounting conventions might be

discussed in one session; the development, organization and financing of a popular or successful film might be discussed in another; the box office success in various countries in a third.

The structured activities of the meetings and the master provide a potential anchor for interaction — a common context that brings people together. But the less-structured times between formal sessions allow for a looser exploration of the creative field through conversation and meeting new people. Bathelt and Gibson (2013) compare trade fairs to the “Garbage Can model of organization,” (Cohen, March, Olsen, 1972) in which people with a high degree of relational proximity are organized in only the loosest fashion — through co-presence— and are left free to explore new connections according to their own disposition and needs.

6.2 Know-who Begets Know-how: Building Conventions in Temporary Gatherings.

Ultimately, almost everyone involved in European animation points to the networking — the chance to meet other professionals from around Europe— as well as the sense of familiarity and even community that has emerged as Cartoon’s most important accomplishment. The periodic gatherings at different events where many of the same people are encountered creates a feeling of familiarity and generates multiple opportunities to form new relationships, hear the latest rumors and news, and catch up with old acquaintances. For newcomers, such places of buzz are particularly important opportunities to learn about the creative field and make new connections. Typical was a producer, who

started attending Masters courses after moving from video-game production to an animated television project, and described his experience in the following terms:

(I learned) everything! Everything! Who is who; who is doing what; who is on the top; who is down, who is where. Who are the major players; who is not. Whom to avoid; everything! (Interview with film producer, October 2011)

This intense social interaction happens between the “main events” – the classes, the pitches, or the movies – but in fact, this interaction may constitute the main event for many participants.

In animation people are very friendly and very nice to introduce you to other people. Half the success is eating, winning, dinning, going to receptions and going to festivals. Nowadays we don't but to the extent we go to festivals... you will be put at a table with other people. If you have to give a speech you will be sat with other speakers who have come from DreamWorks, Pixar, a French Studio, a German Studio. You have to eat together. So, you're constantly meeting people. Out of that arise relationships. (Interview with film director, November 2005)

Relationships started in the temporary gatherings are sometimes transformed in formal collaborations, which provide a fertile ground for the development of new scripts of action or “proto-conventions” as people collaboratively develop solutions to the problems and issues that arise in the collaborative process. Such proto-conventions may spread by

collaboration as different studios work together and learn both skills and working methods from their production partners.

Our studio grouping brought us into close company with studios with quite different ways of working. We adopted several ideas from some studios (the French and Belgian) and tried to put the Germans on a more efficient course.” (interview with film animator September 2011).

The main vehicle for this change has been organic and gradual, rather than a radical shift prompted by the publication of standards. As the volume of animation has increased, those studios that had efficient production methods have prospered at the expense of those that did not. The adoption of these new recipes for collaboration was only guided by a selection process performed by each organization and based only in reducing risks in co-producing activities:

So it’s not that you have to put everything in writing. Many of us would prefer to put things in writing just to be on the safe side. But there is a much more dangerous consequence of not delivering: It is that basically you will not get any more jobs.” (Interview with film producer, June, 2003)

The pitches, classes, workshops, and side-conversations of events like the Forum or Masters are crucial for exploring possible collaborations, but they also provide a fertile terrain in which proto-conventions may diffuse and embed themselves within the

community. For example, the Cartoon Forum is often credited for promoting the emergence of shared standards within the industry around technical issues such as the length of broadcasts. Producers who wanted to export their product in the 1980s faced the issue that different national broadcasters followed different conventions regarding the length of individual broadcasts and number of broadcasts in a series. What worked for one market wouldn't necessarily work for another. The Forum changed this situation.

In the early days of Cartoon ... there was absolutely no coordination among broadcasters in those slots at all. I think one of the results of the Cartoon Forum is for broadcasters to realize that they need to line up with each other to some extent or else everything is going to be far too expensive for them. So, I think with broadcasters being more aware that if they had the same sorts of slots as everyone else they were going to be able to buy their programming. At the same time, production became a bit more organized because you could actually learn from somebody else's production and not kind of reinvent the wheel every time. (interview with film animator December 2011).

This is a case where broadcasters recognized the advantages of harmonizing their time slots so that they could share the investment costs on projects and converged around common standards without any particular mandates.

While these standards provide guidelines to producers, they are also subject to change as the broadcasting industry evolves. For example, short interstitial animation — one, two or

five minutes long- were first shown only on themed channels but have become a place where fresh animation ideas can be tried out and, if successful, be expanded into full-length series. Some conventions are aesthetic: they relate to what audiences in different countries enjoy and expect out of a given film or program. Other conventions are concerned with issues such as complying with formal, legal regulation and how producers can work within the aesthetic confines set up by these rules. For example, at one pitch during a Forum meeting, a discussion took place in which a representative of the BBC, there to purchase content, made it clear to a producer pitching a children's show that the cartoonish but dangerous behavior of the characters (they were sticking their fingers in an electrical outlet to power a toaster) would not pass regulations in the U.K. because it was considered inappropriate for small children. This kind of public discussion provides an arena for broadcasters and producers to come to a better understanding of how to meet the demands of their heterogeneous market. Other ways that the Masters classes have built up the animation community's repertoire of conventions is through the use of case studies, or exemplars. For example, the film, *Kirikou et la Sorcière* (1998), a French-Belgian co-production directed by the French animator Michel Ocelot, was often held up as model of the kind of film that other European animators could aspire to. Through this example, animation professionals could get a sense for the kinds of stories, aesthetic qualities, budgets and production methods they might aspire towards. The use of exemplars like this helps create shared reference points and convergent expectations within the network of collaborators without the rigidity that specifying codes or standards would create.

7. The Animation Village: An Imagined Community

Repeatedly during our research, animation professionals in Europe referred to their industry as a village, highlighting the industry's relatively small size and somewhat quirky nature, but also marking the emotional connection people in the industry feel to each other. This sense of belonging to an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) elicits pro-social behavior among people in the animation world. This sense of belonging is reinforced by the continual circulation of the same faces through different events throughout the calendar year. Power and Jansson (2008) have pointed out that trade fairs in the furniture industry are not simply one-off events; that often the same people meet up over and over at different fairs over the course of the year. Similarly, the yearly calendar for many European animation professionals — especially the producers and distributors who are involved in the ‘deal-making’ side of the business — are filled with meetings, where often the same familiar people meet up and re-acquaint on a regular basis. Several producers who met at the Cartoon Forum mentioned that they would see each other again at MipCom two weeks later. One producer described the European circuit as follows:

February is the Berlinale; March is Cartoon Movie; April is MipTV, May is Cannes Film Festival, June is Annecy, September is Cartoon Forum then October is MipCom. Seven events. Then you have Cartoon Masters. Sometimes I go and sometimes I don't. And some other things might spring up. So basically my work as I see it is traveling around, meeting people, mingling. Once you're in the loop with the proper guys, you can jump from one to another. (Interview with film producer, September 2011)

In this way, meetings at the Cartoon Forum, Cartoon Movie or a Masters class are not isolated events; the networks that are formed at these events may cast long shadows that shift the spatial structure of the industry. But such an intensive circuit of meetings clearly has a cost. During the recession of 2008 and 2009, most companies cut back on their attendance at Cartoon events or sent smaller contingents. The ‘buzz’ or purely social aspects of meeting were notably reduced as companies focused more intently on getting deals done. The exploitation of opportunities became the order of the day; exploration was temporarily pushed to one side.

Nonetheless, over time these meetings have had the effect of creating a shared sense of belonging to a community with defined rules and norms. The repeated or periodic nature of the meeting schedule has re-enforced incentives to behave in a pro-social manner, as one is likely to see the same people fairly regularly. Scholars of industry districts have often focused on the ‘trust’ that is built up through constant interaction and the sense that one is dealing in a community where one’s reputation will catch up. This is also the case in European animation. As one informant said:

There is also a tradition among studios in Europe that when the deadline gets close and people might be running a little bit late they will start looking for companies that they can outsource work to. And then those companies will say “Sure, we can take five seconds of animation and clean it up for you.” And then we will get people in Copenhagen Area. And then those guys in say Italy or Germany will get to know those guys in the Copenhagen area because they will be working on the project

through A-Film. So it's a small family in many ways and we know each other. If you look at the credits for many of the bigger European and International productions there will be names repeating themselves. ...This is a small world. So if you [mess up] once you can be sure that you have jeopardized your own reputation for further possibilities. (Interview with film producer, June, 2003)

Although repeated business is quite normal, according to our interviews the animation industry seems to be characterized by 'fast trust' (Grabher, 2002) as well; people meet each other, feel an affinity for each other's style of work, and decide to collaborate, staking a great deal on the commitment of partners who are barely known. Fast trust rests on a sense of shared values and understandings – membership in an imagined community. It is also born out of conventionalized forms of behavior: default assumptions about how one should behave and how others will behave. In short, this kind of trusting attitude is enculturated. The European animation community fostered by Cartoon has been built up through the constant circulation and interaction of its members over many years. Participation in Cartoon events and the sense of community that one absorbs by participating regularly predisposes people to behave a certain way to each other.

8. Discussion and conclusions

The problem of context and the contextual nature of knowledge and learning has been at the center of economic geography for at least two decades. Håkanson (2010), for example, argues that much of the debate on tacit knowledge that took place during the later part of

the 1990s and early 2000s was in fact an attempt to come to grips with issues of context and the difficulty in transferring practical knowledge from one context to another. For some authors, this difficulty was a primary reason for the spatial stickiness of knowledge-intensive industries and helped explain why economic learning was often localized.

In their seminal account, Amin and Cohendet (2004) questioned the idea that highly “tacit” forms of knowledge generally circulate only locally, arguing that some learning communities spanned local geographies. The literature on 'trans-national' knowledge communities essentially argued that the members of such communities share enough context regarding the codes, tools and the practices of their trade that knowledge circulates between them without too much trouble. This argument seems to remain somewhat unsubstantiated and there have been strong counter-arguments suggesting that knowledge in such communities is – perhaps inevitably - fragmented by the different ways that practices are articulated in different local contexts, making the sharing of knowledge and collaboration in production across distances more difficult (Gertler, 1995; Lam, 1997).

The research presented in this paper has sought to document how a European animation knowledge was able to address issues of social and institutional context. The evidence provided by the Cartoon case in line with a more nuanced view, which depicts the contextual nature of knowledge as potentially problematic, but surmountable provided appropriate bridging practices and motivation (Faulconbridge, 2007, 2010).

Our analysis focused on how Cartoon reshaped the geographies of learning within the European animation sector. Following Faulconbridge's (2007, 2010) inquiries into the modes of learning within transnational learning communities, our analysis set out to discover just what kinds of institutional interventions would be necessary to deal with issues of context within a transnational network. This necessarily brought us to the important role of 'institutional entrepreneurs' (Battilana et al., 2009) in bridging networks and creating common conventions of actions.

We have tried to show that while actors may occasionally gain specific and actionable knowledge through casual interaction, a crucial benefit of such interaction is the chance to develop shared conventions as, in the Cartoon case, the length of individual broadcasts and number of broadcasts in a series, workflow sheets, charts systems, the function of short interstitial animation or acceptable character behavior. Also, the Cartoon story well illustrates the kinds of activities that foster learning across contexts. Cartoon's institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009) attempted several ways to promote shared conventions, such as the Production Handbook and the temporary gatherings happening in Cartoon Forum and Masters. But these modes of intervention proved differentially successful: whereas the Handbook's attempt to formulate general standards has been largely forgotten, the more organic and gradual mode of change stimulated by Cartoon's varied temporary gatherings proved more effective.

A unique advantage of periodic gatherings such as those organized by Cartoon is that they are loosely structured and organizationally permissive. On the one hand, these meetings

pre-select people who share a common interest, and therefore are likely to be of more than usual interest to each other. On the other hand, the meetings provide a variety of settings that allowed for individuals to explore and network in a haphazard matter. In this way, these events generated serendipity, that combination of structure and chance that is essential for any creative pursuit. In this sense, Cartoon has proven to be most successful not as a goal-driven organization, but as an association that has allowed for loosely defined and even emergent goals to be pursued. It was this kind of organic environment that allowed shared conventions through the European Animation Industry to flourish.

The success or failure of these strategies depends to a large extent on which contextual differences can be ignored and which must be negotiated. When knowledge is only being applied in local markets, as is the case of the Java Engineers studied by Takteyev (2009), a strategy of codifying general rules and allowing local actors to work out the contextual issues involved in different operating environments is acceptable. European animation presented a different challenge, in that the organizational model required intensive coordination and inter-dependent decision-making between people in different countries around issues such as story, production, financing and distribution. Because decision-making chains were often stretched across different geographical, cultural, and organizational contexts, there needed to be a more negotiated way for actors to work out conventions around which activity chains could be coordinated.

Institutional entrepreneurs, such as Cartoon, may not know in advance to what degree one strategy or the other is likely to be effective. Thus, instead of pointing to narrow normative

implications, we believe the lessons to be extracted are more related to recent research on institutional work, which highlights the existence of unintended consequences and failures in the various means used by institutional entrepreneurs (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2009). In short, ongoing experimentation around bridging strategies is normal as actors try to negotiate context in a dynamic environment, and experimentation often entails failures. The story of the struggles of Cartoon in finding an effective way to promote shared conventions in the European Animation Industry powerfully resonates with the “muddles, misunderstandings, false starts and loose ends” (Lawrence et al., 2009:11) which characterizes a more realistic and non-linear perspective of the everyday effortful practices of institutional entrepreneurs.

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