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## Close to the 'local cool': creative place reputation in Dutch 'ordinary cities'

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### ABSTRACT

Creative workers have a tendency to co-locate in creative places, and their locational decision-making processes have been the topic of numerous studies. Yet, the vast majority of research has traditionally focused on the quintessential creative cities and metropolises. Much less is known about locational decision-making practices of creative workers in the 'ordinary' second and third tier cities. This paper aims to explore the mechanisms behind co-location in these smaller cities by looking at the influence and importance of place reputation on the attraction and retention of creative workers. Based upon 43 interviews with co-located Dutch creative entrepreneurs in such cities, we argue that in the absence of the metropolitan appeal, place reputation serves a multifaceted, yet essential role. First, tapping into the global creative city narrative provided creative and/or professional legitimisation, as well as personal inspiration. Second, respondents commodified this reputation in their branding practices, which subsequently functioned as a pull-factor for other creative workers. Therefore, even though we observed many creatives do not utilise their local networks in their daily professional or creative work, place reputation afforded the development and sustainability of local buzz and knowledge exchange in cities where these networks did not organically occur.

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## Introduction: place, reputation and the creative industries

Why do creative entrepreneurs, businesses and artists have the tendency to flock together? This question has inspired a large number of research initiatives from numerous academic disciplines. Clustering literature, for instance, pointed at the

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importance of improved access to supply side externalities such as infrastructures (Gordon and McCann 2005) and social resources (Baptista and Swann 1998) like knowledge spillovers or social networks (e.g. Comunian 2011; Grabher 2004). The notions of 'buzz' (Asheim, Coenen, and Vang 2007; Storper and Venables 2004) and noise (Grabher 2002b) expand this social aspect of clustering by seeing co-location not only in terms of direct collaboration, but also as a matter of simply 'being there' (Gertler 1995) and absorbing the 'psychological motivation' or 'localised passion' (Storper and Venables 2004; Bhansing, Hitters, and Wijngaarden 2018) of indirect in-group contact. However, clusters are also approached in terms of production, where the locality functions as a 'seal of quality' (Molotch 1996; Molotch 2002), authentic neo-bohemia (Lloyd 2002), or provides 'artistic dividend' (Markusen and Schrock 2006).

We propose that the common denominator in these approaches is the cluster's reputation, and that this (multifaceted) reputation plays an important role in the locational decision-making practices of creative entrepreneurs. Yet, Montanari, Scapolan and Mizzau (2018) recently argued that the activation of these decision-making processes lacked investigation and that there is a 'call for a more nuanced understanding of the factors associated with both the attraction and retention' of creative workers (Brown 2015, 2352, in Montanari, Scapolan, and Mizzau 2018). This paper addresses this issue by looking in-depth at the locational decision-making practices and experiences of co-located creative workers in The Netherlands, concentrating especially on second and third tier cities.

## Reputation and the creative industries beyond the metropolises

Much of the aforementioned debate has focused on the urban context (Collins and Cunningham 2017), and especially on the first tier cities and prominent metropolitan or creative cities (White 2010) such as Amsterdam (Kloosterman 2004; Peck 2012), Beijing and Shanghai (Liu 2009), London (Lee and Drever 2013), Vancouver (Hutton 2004), New York (Currid 2007), San Francisco (Pratt 2002), Paris (Aubry, Blein, and Vivant 2015) and Berlin (Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Lange 2009). These global cities are believed to inhabit the diversity and tolerance pursued by creative workers (Florida 2002; Jacobs 1962; Lawton, Murphy, and Redmond 2013), as well as the creative milieu (Hall 2000), the 'cool jobs' (David and Rosenbloom 1990; Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005; Scott 2005; Storper and Scott 2009), the neo-bohemian vibrancy (Lloyd 2002), and the relevant networks, clusters, infrastructures and embedded knowledge (Banks et al. 2000) that allegedly would foster creative and professional success.

Yet, some authors (e.g. Petridou and Ioannides 2012) argue that current research on the creative industries has a certain 'urban bias', with a distinct gap in the literature on the link between culture and creativity and more peripheral areas. In a similar vein, Amin and Graham (1997) state that the focus in much of the literature has too often been on what they call single cities, the famous metropolises such as Los Angeles, which are conveniently thought to encompass all global urban trends. Even within such 'extraordinary' cities, they argue, only certain places, such as creative or industrial areas, are emphasised in most literature. This partial representation tends to overlook the context that does not fit the authors' argumentation. Moreover, overgeneralisation

from only a few examples to ‘unexceptional’, ‘ordinary’ cities, these cities that are not among the top creative cities or world financial centres, calls for research on such places in order to counter this bias.

At the same time, however, there is a growing interest in the amenities and pull-factors of the rural based creative industries, on rural cultural production and on fairs and festivals. Often trying to escape the fast-paced urban life, many creatives are attracted by the beautiful and inspirational landscapes, the (relative) remoteness, quietness (White 2010), quality of life and a strong, close-knit community (Collins and Cunningham 2017). In such places, nature is ‘right on your doorstep’ (Gibson, Luckman, and Willoughby-Smith 2010, 31) and serves as a driver of creativity and authenticity.

The area ‘in between’ the metropolitan and rural worlds, conversely, has received little attention so far, and much less is known about how reputation works in second tier cities, and how these ‘ordinary’ cities attract and retain their creative workers (Collins and Cunningham 2017). Noticeably, many creatives work outside of the world’s metropolises, and many of these places are competing to attract creatives (Brown 2015). Creative places in these second or third tier cities can have advantages compared to their metropolitan counterparts, for example in providing affordable studios (Champion 2010). Yet, empirical research also demonstrates that they are sometimes considered just a step towards ‘graduating’ towards a more appealing area in order to obtain more high-profile clients or develop a more attractive brand (Champion 2010). Similarly, the research of Brown (2015) on Birmingham’s creative workers’ locational decision-making indicates that the primary factor leading to migration was mostly serendipitous, not so much the appeal of urban amenities or the ‘quality of place’. Again, her respondents cited their residence in Birmingham being contested by others, as it was considered ‘second rate’. Many of them expressed a (speculative) desire to move to the creative global cities, such as Berlin, Paris and Chicago.

This paper therefore focuses on the attraction and retention of creatives in creative clusters in the ‘ordinary’ second and third tier cities by looking at the places’ soft infra-structures: the networks or a specific images that are meaningful factors in the attractiveness of certain places for creatives (Cardoso and Meijers 2016). What is it that attracts creatives to these places and which roles do networks, buzz and knowledge exchange play in this regard? We are interested in the reputation of clusters that lack the appeal of a world city or the rural amenities, and how such reputation economies play out in the day-to-day working practices of creative workers (Conor, Gill, and Taylor 2015) outside of the world’s creative metropolises.

To answer these questions, this paper presents a qualitative analysis of 43 interviews with Dutch co-located creative entrepreneurs and artists that provide an in-depth insight in their historical and current decision-making processes as well as their experiences of working in co-working spaces and clusters. It examines how networks influence a place’s reputation and, subsequently, how this reputation can affect creative work, the place’s sustainability, and the value it adds to places and products.

This paper is structured as follows: the next two sections address some important theoretical concepts and their relation with locational decision-making processes and

co-location in the creative industries. This is followed by the data-collection and methodological choices and demarcations. The results are structured in three sections, discussing the global network of clusters, the affordances of reputation, and image and reputation as pull-factors. The paper ends with a conclusion, discussion and limitations.

## Co-location, networking and buzz

From the early 1990s, the co-location of industries, workers and entrepreneurs has risen to the attention of both academics and urban policy makers by the emerging concept of clustering (e.g. Porter 2000). Clustering tendencies have been particularly visible in the field of cultural production and in creative entrepreneurship (Pratt 2008). The emergence of countless industrial and particularly creative clusters indicate that, even in a globally connected era (c.f. Cairncross 1997), place is still important because local networks are grounded in particular places where culture is produced and consumed (Currid 2007; Markusen 1996).

The importance of networks is often associated with the increase in face-to-face, project-based working, which is especially prevalent in the creative industries (Currid 2007; Grabher 2002a; Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005; Grabher 2002b). This project-based working often takes place in 'Third Places' (Oldenburg 1989), such as lunch-rooms and pubs located in the vicinity of offices and studios. In these places, creative entrepreneurs are exposed to their peers, ideas and the appropriate norms and practices within a creative community (Brown and Duguid 1991; Grabher 2002a, 209).

However, these places never become successful in isolation (Maskell 2014), and networks are often not limited to one particular local ecosystem. In processes of knowledge creation, Bathelt and Cohendet (2014) suggest that for the creative industries, local and global dimensions are intrinsically interwoven. On the one hand, creative work is shaped by processes internal to local communities and organisations, such as buzz (Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004) or 'creative slack' (Cohendet and Simon 2007). By being exposed to all kinds of informal informative 'noise' and gossip, creative entrepreneurs become aware of tacit knowledge and suitable potential project-members (see also Asheim, Coenen, and Vang 2007). It accustoms them to a place's habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and exposes them to local and global rumours, impressions, recommendations, strategic misinformation and trade folklore (see also Pratt 2002).

On the other hand, these processes are also entangled with linkages to external, often global, knowledge pools that generate inspiration and creativity. Such pipelines are strong or weak ties between firms or people that connect clusters with creative and non-creative places around the world, making them nodes in multiple other production chains (Pratt 2008; Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004). These pipelines, we hypothesise, function as reputational pipelines, as these do not only allow the exchange of knowledge, but also a continuous awareness of – literally – one's place in the world. Therefore, we expect that co-location in a creative place – even in smaller cities – plays an intermediary role in connecting a creative worker's existing

knowledge with the (tacit) knowledge of both the local ecosystem, as well as facilitating the linkages with larger networks of potential clients, customers or project members (e.g. the work on strong and weak ties of Granovetter 1983).

### The affordances of reputation

In the current global economy, urban place branding activities have soared, with cities competing to attract the ever-growing stream of visitors and global companies. Subsequently, many cities or areas have been labelled (by city marketers, policy makers, businesses or residents) as having a creative, innovative or knowledge-based image. Such branding endeavours are aimed at gearing urban local images towards specific audiences (Yigitcanlar et al. 2016). Research of Montanari, Scapolan and Mizzau (2018) confirms that such an image is important, as creative workers base their locational choices (partly) on expectations regarding a place's image. Subsequently, this (socially constructed) image, together with physical and structural aspects such as the historical heritage, look, ruggedness and grittiness (Andres and Golubchikov 2016; Bain 2003; Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Lloyd 2002; Smit 2011), influences the place's reputation: the consistent appreciation of its characteristics and amenities.

According to Scott (2000), creative clusters are idiosyncratic in the sense that each of them focusses on specific goods and services, and develops a distinct culture and reputation. At the same time, the success of a cluster also depends on its ability to transpose the local culture onto the global networks. The cultural and creative industries are thus, Scott (2000) argues, effectively ingrained in different localities that host dense networks of mutually dependent SMEs through for instance networking and pitching events, trade fairs, arts festivals, game conferences and design weeks (see also Pratt 2008). New technologies also allow co-located workers to become more aware of their position in a global network of creative places.

Furthermore, the reputation of a place is expected to attract new creative entrepreneurs, seeking to reap the benefits of these social externalities (Asheim, Coenen, and Vang 2007; Drake 2003). In the words of Maskell (2001, 932–933):

[a]lready existing firms located elsewhere might be tempted to relocate [...] to the cluster because of the real or imagined advantages of getting better access to the local knowledge base or to the suppliers or customers already present. [A] dominant position will also attract entrepreneurs with ambitions to start firms in the particular industry.

Another, yet markedly different, reputation related practice concerns the marketisation of creative goods and services, in which the creative image serves as a marketing tool for locally produced products and services (e.g. Heebels and van Aalst 2010; Scott 1997). Molotch (1996, 2002), for example, states that being located in the proximity of an influential creative network may provide a 'seal of quality', and Currid and William's (2010) research demonstrates that places of cultural production and consumption seek to be associated with branded locations within the city. Similarly, Zukin (1995) argues that creative entrepreneurs deliberately affiliate their brands or their products with their place's heritage or the creative community they are located in. Zarlenga, Ulldemolins and Morató (2016), emphasised that co-located gallery holders make locational decisions based upon consciously creating an image by associating with their

local community. As a result, these gallery holders try to prevent the inflow of art galleries with a lower artistic level that could jeopardise the reputation of the cluster's quality brand. Hence, in the words of Scott (2000, 33): creative clusters are hubs of social reproduction where 'crucial cultural competencies are maintained and circulated', but also are 'magnets for talented individuals from other places who migrate to these centres in search of professional fulfilment and who in turn help to maintain local cultural energies'.

In conclusion, clusters and co-working spaces house important local networks, but also maintain ties with other, global places. Therefore, creative workers seeking a workplace are often familiar with several local and global clusters, and base their locational decisions on the cues about these localities. However, even though it is generally accepted that reputation has an important influence on the success of co-located creative workers and the sustainability of a cluster by recruiting a viable inflow of new creatives, less is known about how creative workers negotiate their knowledge about different localities and how they include the reputation of places (and their 'residents') in their professional and creative decision-making processes.

What makes a specific place interesting, what are the roles of local and global networks, and how does this work in second and third tier cities without a global appeal? Finally, how do creative workers tap into the 'creative slack' and commodify a reputation in their work, and what value does this add to their creative products as well as to particular places? We hypothesise that the social prospects of co-location are a major influence on the decision-making processes in places without a global appeal. Therefore, these micro-processes that are often neglected in current spatial decision-making studies (Montanari, Scapolan, and Mizzau 2018) are the central focus of this paper.

## Data collection and methodology

Between September 2014 and October 2015, 43 co-located creative entrepreneurs were interviewed about their locational decision-making, the expectations and experiences of co-locating with other creative entrepreneurs. Our sample included eight locations in second and third tier cities<sup>1</sup> in The Netherlands: Belcanto in Haarlem, BINK36 in The Hague, Creative Factory in Rotterdam, De Gruyter Fabriek in Den Bosch, De Vasim in Nijmegen, Dutch Game Garden in Utrecht, Klein Haarlem in Haarlem and Strijp-S in Eindhoven. These locations are very diverse in the sense that they range from urban to more peripheral areas within the city, house fifty to five-hundred entrepreneurs, are mono-disciplinary or include a wide variety of sectors – both creative and not so creative. Most, but not all, of these places receive some form of public subsidies, either by direct investments or by being able to rent (far) below market price. A few locations have incubator programmes where start-ups are supported in their development and the expansion of their networks, but the majority provided, apart from an occasional barbecue, drinks or festival, simply 'hard' services such as office space, internet connectivity, a kitchen, a reception and meeting rooms. We therefore adopted an embedded multiple case study design, in order to add to the robustness

of our study (Yin 2009). The diversity in cases assures a more balanced view, including places geared towards networking, and those that do not facilitate these services.

Our primary selection criterion was based on localisation: only co-located creative entrepreneurs were interviewed. Entrepreneurship was operationalised on the basis of self-definition: most respondents were self-employed entrepreneurs and considered themselves as such, others were employed in micro and small sized organisations yet expressed affinity to creative entrepreneurship. The recruitment procedure was based on three approaches. First, key informants such as the location managers functioned as gatekeepers. Second, some respondents connected us to their acquaintances, thus leading to a form of snowball sampling. Third, a number of respondents have been recruited by the occasional small talk in the elevator or when walking around the place.

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, averaging at approximately 55 minutes. The majority took place in the interviewee's office or studio, though some interviews were conducted at lunchrooms, meeting rooms or 'on the go'. The respondents are distributed between the DCMS sectors (DCMS 2011) of the creative industries in the following way: five worked in advertising, one in architecture, six in arts and antiques, three in crafts, seven in design, two in designer fashion, six in digital and entertainment media, four in film, video, photography and seven in music, performing and visual arts and two in software and electronic publishing (none worked in the TV and radio and publishing industries).

The respondents were asked about their 'locational narratives': the stories they tell about the relationship between place and their professional life. Particular attention was paid to the decision-making processes in the early years of their career, the decision to choose for their current locations, as well as their experiences as 'residents' in these places, and (hypothetical) future plans. Moreover, we inquired how they perceive and describe the local atmosphere, how their business contacts comment on their location and how they (aim to) present themselves to these contacts. Finally, the respondents reflected upon their social practices and interactions, as well as the knowledge they exchanged with their co-located peers.

The coding process was primarily semantic and inductive. Some 20 short pilot interviews with respondents from the same population preceded the 43 in-depth interviews, which functioned as the basis for initial theme formation. Recurrent themes in these pilot interviews were explored further through a literature review that resulted in the theoretical framework above. The coding processes consisted of several rounds of open coding and axial coding, and eventually selective coding around the theme of reputation and the most prominent concepts in the literature (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Additionally, themes were refined and tested for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Braun and Clarke 2006).

## Results

### *Local pipelines, global imagination*

We are living in a globally connected era, in which firms are increasingly (internationally) interconnected, knowledge flows are impossible to contain in a locally

demarcated area, and in which once far-away destinations are now at our fingertips. This 'space of flows' (Castells 1989) points towards a global ecology of cities, in which co-located creative entrepreneurs form an imagined community (Anderson 1983) of creative spaces that compete for (creative) workers and firms (Florida 2002), and local industries reimagining themselves as global players (Sanson 2014).

Though contrary to what the 'death of distance' (Cairncross 1997) inspired literature and the omnipresence of comparable creative clusters in the western world would suggest, our respondents were working and exchanging information in a mostly local (extended) network (comparable to what Castells (2012) considers the 'space of places'). Such a network existed often within their own location, in the neighbourhood or the immediate surrounding area, which is also the most prominent reason for respondents not having ambitions to relocate to more prominent cities like Amsterdam or abroad. A few respondents mentioned networks ranging from the local music scene [Sebastian, Music, Performance and Visual Arts] to a national orientation (the Dutch game designers) [Thomas, Digital and Entertainment Media]. Working in an international network is, as Lucas [Music, Performance and Visual Arts] explained, for his field less prevalent than working locally.

However, global pipelines did exist in a more symbolic form. Surprisingly, a symbolic relationship to other places was used by respondents for consciously connecting to a certain global culture that fitted their own desired image. Here, being part of such a global culture not only served as a means to participate in the relevant networks, but also for inspirational and marketing purposes. Respondents actively and explicitly referred to other, often notable creative places or global cities, particularly Berlin, New York and London. They used this as examples of how the reputation of their location could grow and how the most creative places often appear in certain derelict areas. This provided an appealing perspective: 'If [this cluster] wasn't here, this would have been a neighbourhood for junks only. Because there's more traffic now, and more people, the reputation gets better. East Berlin is the best example of this of course, yes, how you can make a derelict place into a good one' [Daniel, Crafts].

Being part of this 'global imagined community'-like network (Anderson 1983) of creative places provided inspiration and creativity, as well as legitimacy for their creative work in less evocative cities. Others state that these creative metropolises are fashionable, and many customers or clients want to be associated with this, like the clients of Kim [Film, Video and Photography], who argued that '[My clients] want a bit New York, a bit meatpacking. You know. For that, this [place] is trendy.' Therefore, knowledge pipelines served much more often as sources of inspiration than as actual forms of collaboration. Respondents actively engaged in connecting the reputation of their location to that of other, more famous places.

However, we witnessed an almost reversed tendency when discussing other (creative) places in their vicinity. Almost all respondents mentioned such places, most often in the same city. Surprisingly though, the majority of respondents referred to nearby clusters in a negative tone, emphasising the lack of creativity, innovation of professionalism. Kim [Film, Video and Photography] for example, described her relation to a nearby creative place in the following manner: 'I thought about moving [to this other place], but I couldn't afford it. The units they offered were way too small.

And yes eh, all those hipsters... [...] I prefer to belong to the creatives.' We observed a negative relation between how long they have been working in a specific place, and their identification with other places, such as the evaluation of Monique [Arts and Antiques] demonstrates: '[A nearby creative cluster] was nice before, there was always something happening there. [But now] you don't hear anything anymore. At least, I hear nothing about [it]. It is what I said, it has become a bit lethargic. A bit boring.'

This resonates with Scott's (2000) idea that creative clusters are idiosyncratic with a distinct culture and image. The longer the creatives worked at one specific place, the more they aligned their identity to that of their location. At the same time, however, they commodified the 'imagined community' of creative places. Even though these networks mostly appear to be locally oriented, global pipelines, real and imagined, do exist. Our respondents tapped into this global network of creative places for image building, inspiration and imagination, as well as for legitimisation purposes.

### *The image as an asset*

Accordingly, and in line with existing research, the reputation of a place was of importance to the local creative workers, also in second and third tier cities. Comparable to the larger metropolitan areas with well-established creative or entrepreneurial reputations, the places in our research, in these smaller cities, were adding symbolic value to the locally produced creative products and services by providing a legitimate narrative and access to an aura of creativity that would normally be out of their reach, as is explained by the following section on the commodification of place reputation.

Similar to the idea of idiosyncratic clusters mentioned above, it was not possible to pinpoint one specific 'perfect' image that would yield the optimal value in terms of a positive, attractive reputation. Different creative entrepreneurs and clients appreciated different aspects of a place's potential image. Some respondents stated, for example, that they preferred their location to have a creative image, while others preferred a more professional image, and finally, a few mentioned the importance of being part of a 'cool' network.

We observed that creative image is especially important for the respondents working on the margins of the creative industries, such as in ICT design or those having a more administrative core task. These entrepreneurs used their location in order to promote a creative image; an image they expected (and found) their clients to appreciate. In short, they capitalised on their co-located creative entrepreneurs and especially artists to market their own services and products as more creative. Bjorn [Design] for example, noticed that it's easier to win projects: 'People are more inclined to choose for you. People find you more easily. When you talk about [this location], people say, oh yes, that's creative, you know.'

Next to the creative image, other respondents preferred their location to have a more professional image. Being able to show that you are able to pay for a professional office or studio is an important sign of being a proficient creative entrepreneur. These respondents were, in many cases, more on the artistic side of the creative

industries, such as photographers and those working in the fine arts. In such a situation, they felt that an unprofessional image would harm their own reputation and would jeopardise contact with their potential commercial customers. These creatives often preferred to associate themselves with the more professional networks in order to be able to communicate a more professional image to their clients. Kim [Film, Video and Photography] explained this in the following way: 'There is an organisation that rents offices to artists for only half of the original price. I don't really like that, because they are not as commercial and use taxpayers' money to lie on the ground naked and make some pictures there. [...]. I'm fine with that you do this, but just pay the full price for it, just like I do, [my neighbour] does and everyone else does. I think that is a little eh, bad for our reputation.'

In sum, explicit association with a place to create a professional or creative reputation is strongly related to the networked image other entrepreneurs use to promote their services and products. Being able to show that you are part of a well-regarded in-group impresses peers, clients and business contacts, and adds symbolic value to your work. These places have become a local networked 'institution, everyone knows where the cluster is located' [Alex, Photographer] and what it entails. Consequently, being part of a networked place is being part of a 'cool place' (Pratt 2002), or, in the words of Thomas [Digital and Entertainment Media]: 'The big buildings and visibility and being part of a very large network of people, that has a certain coolness factor.' In the absence of the global metropolitan creative appeal, the network of the 'local cool' thus serves as a distinguishing appeal of creative places in 'ordinary' cities (see also Champion 2010).

### *Image and reputation as pull-factors*

Evidently, the reputation of a creative industry space is primarily influenced by the creative workers it houses and has housed in the preceding years. We observed that the presence of other entrepreneurs as well as the possible positive effects of existing social networks are amongst the most prominent reasons why the respondents made the decision to locate in a particular place. As the vast majority of creative workers are working on a freelance (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010) and often project basis (Grabher 2002a, 2004), the prospect of being part of a network is highly attractive and considered a valuable asset to their creative work. Mark [Software and Electronic Publishing], for example, explicitly mentioned the importance of this network: 'I once went to a lecture here in this building, so I already knew it before I moved here. And there were [...] many people working in the same sector as I do, and they were all located in this building. [...] That's why I liked [this place].' For Mark, and similar to the arguments of Banks et al. (2000), co-location provided access to relevant potential collaborators and networks of knowledge exchange. Many of the interviewees corroborated this expectation in their narratives about their locational decision-making histories, such as Kathryn [Designer Fashion], who wanted to be surrounded by creatives because she '[...] just like[s] being amongst other creatives where you can, possibly, cooperate with. Even if it's just meeting people in the bicycle parking and just have a chat.'

Being able to be part of a creative community is an important motivation: respondents frequently highlighted that they find it incredibly important to be able to 'be yourself' and to surround themselves with likeminded creatives. Here, the access to the buzz was a major factor for (re)locating to a creative cluster. This buzz, evidently ubiquitous in the larger, creative cities, is more difficult to find in second and third tier cities. As creative workers are dependent on this buzz and in many cases, availability of tacit knowledge for their professional and creative success, our respondents explicitly emphasised that, in their locational decision-making processes, they were explicitly focused on the local places that were considered to contain such an environment. Julia [Music and Visual and Performing Arts] mentioned that such a creative reputation was highly important for her locational decision-making process: 'I knew that this was a fun place and a lot of things were happening here [...]. Why I have chosen this place? This is why I came back to the Netherlands [from working abroad]: to be among other creatives, because I was very isolated before. I was the only one doing creative work [...]. Now I am one of the many creatives. It is super inspirational.'

Interestingly, despite this importance of being surrounded by creatives, Julia was located in one of the smaller cities in our sample, a city that was, according to the respondents and even more than some other cities in the sample, not known as particularly creative. The (local) creative reputation of this place within the city was essential here: non-creative companies, shops and especially chain stores were not always welcomed in such locations. Many interviewees emphasised that they certainly would not want chain stores in their vicinity, as this diminished the uniqueness and cultural appearance of the area. They explicitly referred to endeavours to keep a national bagel bakery franchise and major supermarkets away from their creative clusters. Curating and preserving the creative 'local cool', these respondents argued, contributed both to their own inspiration as well as conveying a certain, beneficial image. Sebastian [Music, Performance and Visual Arts] emphasised this by stating: 'Look, everyone who visits us thinks: wow, man, this is really like East Berlin, or eh, that feeling, you know. And that eh, that remains just so cool for me. [...] I think it is a beautiful building. And that feeling, every time I enter this place, I think, yes [in an enthusiastic voice], you know'.

The effect of these networks on reputation and cluster sustainability was clearly visible in one of our cases that witnessed a period of decline before and during conducting the interviews. Here, insecurity about the future prospects of these places led to the departure of several tenants. In the words of Louis [Design]: 'Because the future of this building [as a creative cluster] is insecure, there was no inflow of new people at all. And people that found it difficult, having such an insecure future, they left. So yes, it's only a very small club of people that remained.' This obviously had a very negative effect on the place's reputation, as Rachel [Design] argued: 'For a while we had a community manager, that was fantastic! She just arranged things, people came to this place and she showed the outside world who we were. But since she is gone, this just didn't happen at all. Everything just stays inside. And as long as no one knows that we're here, no new tenants will come, and you won't find the atmosphere that this place should have'.

Hence, the networks evidently have a significant impact on creative entrepreneurs. They provide a place with a matching and attractive reputation that is essential for cluster sustainability. As creative entrepreneurs are often actively pursuing the relevant creative atmospheres, buzz, and vicinity of noteworthy other firms and individuals, the prospect of co-locating in such a place is vital in their choices. This inflow is regulated by the place's networks. Through these networks, contacts with other (local) creatives are established and maintained, spreading and affirming the reputation of the particular place, and invigorating the local buzz. However, when places obtained the reputation of diminishing buzz or creativity, this immediately was reflected in the decreasing contentment of existing, and stagnating attraction of new creative workers. Therefore, in order to survive in the global community of creative places, in which there is a persisting appeal of other – global and local – creative cities and clusters, a positive reputation, and thus a sustained inflow of new creatives, is paramount. Outside of the famous creative and metropolitan cities, being close to the local cool is crucial for both the success of creative entrepreneurs as well as their localities.

## Conclusion

Building upon 43 coded interviews with creative workers in the Netherlands, this paper focused on the reputation of creative places and co-working spaces in second and third tier cities. It is well-known that major metropolises, such as Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin, New York and London, have an enormous attraction on creative entrepreneurs and artists (Boix, Hervás-Oliver, and De Miguel-Molina 2015). Even outside these cities, however, they tend to co-locate; to work in the close vicinity of other creatives. Also in smaller and the traditionally less 'creative' cities, such as Den Bosch and Rotterdam in The Netherlands, places with a specific creative reputation have mushroomed. How does such a reputation arise in places that do not naturally or historically have such a strong attraction, and how does this interact with the existing and developing networks of creative entrepreneurs and artists?

With this paper, we have aimed to explore a field that has so far lacked investigation (Petridou and Ioannides 2012). A rich quantity of work has been published on metropolises, capitals and the quintessential creative cities, but little is known how these aspects play out beyond the global metropolises (Collins and Cunningham 2017). Our research indicates that, despite the often applauded and intensifying influence of the networked information society or the so called 'space of flows' (Cairncross 1997; Castells 1996), most respondents worked and remained in their 'space of places', confined to their local territories, histories and networks. Yet, place reputation is nevertheless strongly tied to both local and global networks. Remarkably, many respondents argued that they felt part of a global community of creative places, not in the form of formal or informal cooperation, but mainly through tapping into the narratives of existing (international) creative clusters. This indicates a form of pipeline that is not dictated by interactions, collaborations, formal networks (Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004; Maskell 2014), or places in production chains (Pratt 2008), but rather an imagined connection to a global web of places. Other local places, however, were often denounced as less inspiring or less creative, which indicates that even within

smaller cities, several place related narratives exist, in which the 'residents' aim to absorb and propagate the specific symbolic values their own cluster offers.

Evidently, and in line with the vast amount of work on locational decision-making practices of creative entrepreneurs (e.g. Currid 2007), creatives appreciated the reputational aspects of working in a cluster: the creative, professional or networked image. Here, co-locating with other creatives is a matter of status. We observed that this held for co-locating with creative SMEs and freelancers in general, and not only for larger prominent firms. As the first step for many creative entrepreneurs and artists is often working from their homes (Similar to the work of e.g. Merkel (2015) and Spinuzzi (2012) on the benefits of co-working spaces) being able to pay the rent for an office, studio or unit in a clustered building is a step up – even if it is in an 'ordinary' city. It provides a seal of quality (Molotch 1996, 2002) that could, depending on the place and the type of work, be creative and/or professional. The findings suggest that workers in the more core creative sectors (in the model of Throsby 2008) are looking for a slightly more professional atmosphere, whereas those doing more traditional work seek the creative edginess to profile their company.

In order to sustain their reputation, the proximity or inflow of less prestigious companies and chain stores was not appreciated; being part of a unique local cultural network, grounded in a specific place, was considered key to being a serious creative entrepreneur or artist. This unique brand is propagated in their presentation, for example, by explicitly using the reputation for their own branding practices in referring to their location in their websites, or in conversations with potential clients or business contacts. This suggests that the notion of 'place in product' (Molotch 2002), which is, like the majority of work on place reputation, confined to the 'single', 'extraordinary' city (Amin and Graham 1997), can be applied to the 'ordinary' city as well. In such places, these efforts took the shape of emphasising the entrepreneurs' place as a node in a global network of renowned places. This subsequently strengthened the location's reputation and attracted new creatives seeking to be part of this network. Reputation, in this sense, contributes to and affects the life cycle of these clusters (cf. Martin and Sunley 2011).

In conclusion, creative entrepreneurs and artists in 'ordinary' or second and third tier cities are, as they lack access to the symbolic capital of world cities and creative cities, probably even more dependent on co-locating. With buzz and the relevant networks localised in particular, sometimes linked, yet often competing places within the city, creative workers commodify these places' affordances in actual networking and absorbing the local buzz, as well as for branding purposes. Through this branding and networking, the reputation was performed and spread throughout the city and further, which facilitated the attraction and retention of creative entrepreneurs, ensuring the cluster's viability and sustainability.

## Discussion and limitations

All cases in this study are situated in second and third tier cities. The Netherlands, however, is rich in creative clusters, with more or less all medium sized (and often small as well) cities housing at least one, but often more, of such endeavours. This

might make locational decision-making more of a deliberate process similar to that what can be expected in the world's metropolises. Nevertheless, such second tier cities have other pull-factors than famous metropolises such as New York or Paris (Brown 2015) and cities in other regions. Cross-national comparative research could reveal whether the findings from this study are also applicable elsewhere in the world, and how the findings from Haarlem and Den Haag relate to practices in for example London, Los Angeles and Berlin.

Additionally, the cases in this study have been limited to what Andres and Golubchikov (2016) call brownfields, or which are addressed as creative hubs (Evans 2009) or breeding places (Peck 2012). Even though the sample in this study is diverse in size, institutionalisation, funding, organisational structure and level of urbanity, all are loosely organised and production oriented. Such places are often less institutionalised than for example museum quarters (Mommaas 2004) and other consumption-oriented places, and cannot be compared to such more centralised efforts.

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No financial interest or benefit has arisen from the direct applications of this research.

### Geolocation information

This research took place in The Netherlands.

### Note

1. We define second tier cities as cities outside of the capital whose economic and social performance affects the national economy (ESPON/SGPTD 2012 in Cardoso and Meijers 2016), often having a population between 500.000 to 1.000.000 (Williams et al. 2015). A third-tier city has a population between 100.000 and 500.000 (Williams et al. 2015). All cases fit in either of the two categories.

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