"BABEȘ-BOLYAI" UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA
COLLEGE OF POLITICAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC POLICIES

DOCTORAL THESIS

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Magnetic cities: creative workers, economic development and resilience in Romania

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Contents

Summary

Key-words: *Creative Class; creative workers; creative industries; economic development; economic resilience; magnetic cities.*

In the last decades the economy underwent significant structural changes that had a direct impact on urban areas. Phenomena such as deindustrialization, globalization and the emergence of information technologies have greatly changed the way cities function and resulted into a considerable number of challenges for urban areas. These developments have given rise to a new type of economy, one propelled by knowledge. As such, attracting skilled workers is considered to be a strategy urban areas can use to achieve economic growth (Clark et al., 2002; Glaeser and Tobio, 2007; Florida 2002, 2012).

As a consequence of these phenomena urban areas are confronted with two diametrically opposed problems. A small proportion of cities, mostly large urban areas, are overcrowded and are confronted with soaring housing prices and gentrification, while a large proportion of cities are confronted with population loss and, in developing countries, with brain drain. In this context, medium-sized cities have the opportunity to attract skilled workers in order to achieve economic growth. This explains the popularity of the Creative Class Theory (Florida 2002, 2012) among decision-makers and policy-makers, from both developed and developing countries. Indeed, the theory seems to have been adopted and implemented by policy-makers before its usefulness had been empirically tested (Vossen et al., 2019). This is also the case in Romania, where the success of the city of Cluj-Napoca has been attributed by its current mayor to the investments into 3 of the 4Ts' the theory proposes, although no systematic studies have been conducted.

The Creative Class theory (Florida 2002, 2012) argues, similar to other previous theories, that in the knowledge economy skilled individuals are the ultimate force behind economic growth. The theory is different from the previous approaches in that it argues that occupations better reflect the level of skills of individuals compared to the traditional human capital approach of using the level of education attained. Additionally, it argues that skilled individuals, which comprise the Creative Class, have a similar set of preferences when deciding on the place in which they intend to live and work. More specifically, the theory argues that skilled individuals prefer the places that simultaneously present 4 qualities, namely Talent, Tolerance, Technology, and Territorial Assets.

Although a considerable number of studies have tested the Creative Class theory in Western countries (e.g. Florida and Mellander, 2011; Wedemeier, 2015; Clifton et al., 2013), research on Eastern Europe is scarce (one exception is Lengyel and Ságvári, 2011). This represents a considerable limit in the literature, as various authors (Asheim and Hnsen, 2009; Musterd and Gritsai 2009, 2013) have argued that the measures proposed by Florida might not be appropriate for regions outside of the USA and have argued that there is a need to adjust such policy measured it to the various social, economic and historical contexts of different countries. As such, *the aim of the present PhD Thesis is to explore the Creative Class theory in the context of Romania*.

More specifically, the thesis addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. Does the Creative Class have a higher effect on regional development compared to Human Capital in Romania?

Knowledgeable, talented or skilled individuals are anticipated to have a beneficial effect on the communities they reside it. This is because they are expected to be more productive and more innovative. Thus, the concentration of knowledge workers is expected to foster economic growth. However, is still debated which is the most appropriate measure of skills.

The Human Capital approach argues that skills can be measured through educational attainment (Becker, 1993). Nevertheless, this approach has been criticised for disregarding innate abilities of individuals (Comunian et al., 2021) or for disregarding knowledgeable workers who did not graduate, such as Steve Jobs or Bill Gates (Florida, 2002; 2014), thus ignoring a high share of those who support the knowledge-economy.

Florida (2002) proposed a new approach to defining and measuring skill and talent, one based on occupations, as this reflects the individuals who make use of their skill and talent and are paid for it. However, this approach is not without critics. Glaeser (2005) has expressed doubts regarding the novelty of the theory. The major factor that puts under question its originality is, according to Glaeser (2005), the similarity with the classical Human Capital Theory. Thus, the Creative Class theory brings nothing new to the fore; instead it merely proposes an additional measure of human capital.

Given that knowledge is argued to foster development, the strategy employed was to compare these two measures of knowledge in terms of their capacity to predict economic

growth or development. Currently the literature is dominated by studies on Western countries (Florida and Mellander, 2011; Clifton, 2008; Andersen et al., 2010; Hansen et al., 2009), few attempts to study it outside the Western context having been made.

RQ2. Do the Creative Class variables better explain economic growth compared to their traditional equivalent in Romania?

Since it was first proposed, the Creative Class theory has become increasingly popular outside of North America. For example, in Europe investments in creative industries have been encouraged as a means of fostering economic growth. However, authors (Donegan et al., 2008) have drawn attention to the fact that by focusing on attracting the creative class city authorities have ignored the traditional variables responsible for economic growth, such as education attainment or industrial mix. This observation is especially important for countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which are post-communist economies. Given the fact that countries in Central and Eastern Europe were traditionally more coordinated and centralized economies and had different historical paths, it seems plausible that creative variables would play a less prominent role here as compared to more traditional economic variables. Indeed, the limited research that has been conducted on Eastern European countries seems to confirm this assumption (Lengyel and Ságvári 2011; Montalto et al. 2017).

RQ3. Does the Creative Class increase the economic resilience of Romanian municipalities in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis?

Apart from contributing to economic development, the Creative Class has also been argued to influence the economic resilience of regions. More specifically, reductions in household expenditures are expected to primarily affect the creative workers, as they provide products of relatively little immediate need (Pratt 2009). Creative jobs are also argued to be more sensitive to short-term reductions in demand (De Propris, 2013) and less mechanical and resource intensive. Thus, creative workers have a higher flexibility to adapt to changing economic conditions. These arguments support both a negative and a positive effect of the Creative Class the resilience of municipalities. A more nuanced explanation, which covers the diverging arguments presented above, is that the effects might vary based on the subgroups of Creative Class considered. Some authors (Currid-Halkett and Stolarick, 2013) argue that we should expect to see great differences in how different segments of the Creative Class experience economic crises and are affected by it. Although studies have examined the relationship between creative workers and (wide) economic development (Boix et al., 2013;

Wedemeier, 2015; Tiruneh, 2014; Kourtit and Nijkamp, 2018), only a limited number of have investigated the effect of creative workers on regional economic resilience (Currid-Halkett and Stolarick 2013; Mazilu et al., 2020).

RQ4. Are researchers from Eastern and Southern Europe less mobile compared to their Western counterparts?

RQ5. What are the factors that influence the mobility of researchers?

Once the aforementioned questions are addressed, two other questions have to be answered. Even though the Creative Class might have a positive effect on economic growth and resilience, this does not necessarily imply that policy-makers should devote limited resources to implementing policies that aim at making their municipalities more attractive to the Creative Class. Studies put under question the assumptions that (1) creative individuals are more mobile compared to the general population (Borén and Young, 2013; Martin-Brelot et al., 2010; Comunian and Jewell, 2018) and (2) that for creative individuals soft factors are of more importance in making residential decisions compared to other factors (Alfken et al., 2014; Sánchez-Moral et al., 2018; Vossen et al., 2019). Thus, before such policies are recommended, these assumptions have to be investigated. This is especially the case for Eastern and Southern European countries, where the scarce literature that cover such countries (Musterd and Gritsai, 2010; Martin-Brelot et al., 2010) seems to put under question both the mobility of creative workers and the importance of soft conditions in making residential choices.

Moreover, apart from the limited geographical scope, the existent studies present other limitations. A large number of the existent studies (Clifton, 2008; Fritsch and Stuetzer, 2009; Asheim and Hansen, 2009; Alfken et al., 2014; Haisch and Klöpper, 2014) that investigate the residential choices or preferences of creative workers are liable to the 'impregnable circularity' reasoning argued by Scott and Storper (2009). Additionally, they rely on Florida's (2002; 2014) operational definition of the Creative Class, which has been criticized for the heterogeneity of the occupations included and for assuming that individuals with such varied occupations have similar location preferences (Markusen, 2006; Asheim and Hansen, 2009; Lawton et al., 2013; Van Heerden and Bontje, 2014). Although there are studies that focus on more specific and limited categories of occupations, they are still heterogeneous in terms of residential preferences. For example, Borén and Young (2013) focused only on artists. In spite of this more restrictive category of creative workers, they concluded that "it is difficult to

identify homogeneous groups of people to study, beyond their sharing an occupational title" (Borén and Young, 2013, p. 207). As such, the study focuses on one category of creative workers, namely researchers.

Additionally, the existent research disregards the work related factors that can influence the residential preferences of creative workers. Given the fact that each occupation requires different conditions in order for a worker to change locations, work-related factors have to be considered and controlled for. Indeed, studies highlight the importance of work related factors for professionals in the dental field (Hall et al., 2007), which are included in the list of creative occupations proposed by Florida (2002; 2014).

The five research questions were explored in four distinct studies, which together contribute to the aim of the thesis. Given the fact that the studies have been designed as stand-alone journal articles, which are currently in different stages of publication, they cover additional research questions which are outside of the main research questions that the thesis addresses.

The first study aimed to answer the first research question, namely: *'Does the Creative Class have a higher effect on regional development compared to Human Capital in Romania?'*. To do so a secondary data analysis was employed, which included two steps. In the first step, the study compared the effect of the two measures of skill (the Creative Class classification and educational attainment) on regional development, measured through proxies for income and labor productivity. In the second step, the study focused on the effect of the concentration of creative workers on economic development by including control variables that have the potential to influence development (i.e. hachman index, business density, path dependency).

Given that the first study highlighted the role played by path-dependency in explaining the present level of economic development, the following study aimed at comparing the classical/ traditional variables and the Creative Class variables in terms of the extent to which they predict economic growth. As such, the second study investigated the following research question: '*Do the Creative Class variables better explain economic growth compared to their traditional equivalent in Romania?*'. Moreover, given the fact that the cross-sectional nature of the first study represented a limitation, the second study employed a panel data analysis for the period 2008-2018. Additionally, the paper also explored the influence these variables have in explaining economic resilience, as arguments (Pratt, 2009; De Propris, 2013; Currid-Halkett

and Stolarick, 2013; Stolarick and Currid-Halkett, 2013) suggest a connection between the concentration of creative workers and economic resilience. However, this study presented a major limitation, namely the fact that economic resilience was measured through employment, which may not reflect the real growth paths of a municipality (Cuadrado and Maroto, 2016; Cellini et al., 2017; Rizzi et al., 2018; Fratesi and Pereucca, 2018).

The third study further investigated the connection between the concentration of creative workers and economic resilience. More specifically, the study investigated the following research question: '*Does the Creative Class influence the economic resilience of Romanian municipalities in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis?*'. As one limitation of previous studies is that they measure resilience through changes in employment (e.g. Fingleton et al., 2012; Brakman et al., 2015; Eriksson and Hane-Weijman 2017), which might not adequately reflect economic performance. As such, the study contributes to the literature by evaluating resilience through a composite index developed in order to reflect multiple appropriate dimensions of creativity-based economic development and growth (e.g., productivity, entrepreneurial capacity, density of economic activity).

The first three studies conducted seem to suggest that the Creative Class does have an impact on economic performance and economic resilience, although the results are contingent on the measurements used for performance and resilience. However, this does not necessarily imply that policy-makers should devote limited resources to implementing policies that aim at making their municipalities more attractive to the Creative Class. First, research should investigate whether creative workers are attracted by amenities, as proposed by the Creative Class theory (Florida 2002; 2014). As such, the fourth study investigates the following research questions: '*Are researchers from Eastern and Southern Europe less mobile compared to their Western counterparts?*' and '*What are the factors that influence the mobility of researchers?*'. In order to study the mobility of researchers in Europe the study makes use of the Mobility Survey of the Higher Education Sector, which is argued to be one of the most comprehensive surveys that focus on the mobility of researchers.

The results of the **first study** largely confirm Florida's arguments (Florida, 2002; 2014), although they also raise a new series of questions. More specifically, the results show that the Creative Class outperforms the human capital approach in predicting economic development. In should be noted that this is only the case when economic development is measured through productivity and only when the sample is restricted to county seats, the

largest urban areas in Romania. Nevertheless, when controlling for other variables that have the potential to influence economic development, the results show that path-dependency (i.e. the level of economic development registered in the past) has the higher effect on the present level of economic development. As such, the results seem to confirm the importance of historic pathways, as argued by Storper and Scott (2009) and Musterd and Kovács (2013), which play a role in urban and economic development. However, one major limitation of the first study is its cross-sectional nature.

The second study built on these results, arguing that Central and Eastern European countries were traditionally more coordinated and centralized economies and had different historical paths. Thus, it seems plausible that creative variables would play a less prominent role here as compared to the traditional liberal economies. As such, the second study aimed at comparing the creative input variables and their traditional equivalents in terms of the extent to which they predict economic development in the case of Romanian municipalities for the period 2008-2018.

Overall, the results show that the traditional variables outperform the creative variables in predicting economic performance, although these finding varies based on how performance is measured. When the number of jobs and the income level are considered, the superiority of the traditional variables is evident. However, when productivity is considered, the creative class has the highest effect, but the other creative variables are not significant. Additionally, the results highlight the difference between Western and Eastern European countries, as in all models the concentration of manufacturing has a significant positive effect on economic performance, regardless of the measurements used. This is contrary to similar research conducted on Western countries (Marlet and van Woerkens, 2007). Thus, this result seems to support our proposition that the different historic pathways in terms of industrialization explain the differences between Western and Central and Eastern European countries in terms of whether Florida's theory provides a valid proposition. However, it should be noted that Florida (Florida et al., 2008) warns that the creative class acts on growth through the mechanism of wages rather than through jobs and income, as they do not reflect the level of development. Moreover, the Creative Class is believed to have a strong influence on economic development in other ways than by simply increasing the number of jobs (Florida et al., 2008; Rodrik, 2013; Boschma, 2015; Webber et al., 2018).

The third study addressed the limitation of the previous study in terms of the measurement used for economic resilience. More specifically, the measurement of economic resilience usually relies on changes in employment (e.g. Fingleton et al., 2012; Brakman et al., 2015; Eriksson and Hane-Weijman, 2017). Given the fact that an increase in the number of low paid jobs does not translate into economic growth (Florida, 2012; Florida et al., 2008), the study measured resilience through a composite index which reflects multiple appropriate dimensions of creativity-based economic development and growth (e.g., productivity, entrepreneurial capacity, density of economic activity). The results highlight the fact that the concentration of creative individuals does not influence all stages of resilience in the same way. The concentration of creative workers is not correlated with the impact registered by municipalities after the 2008 economic crisis, but it is positively correlated with the recovery and medium-run performance of communities. Nevertheless, when the broad classification of creative workers is divided into subgroups, the results show a different picture, as these subgroups have different effects on resilience depending on the communities considered and on the resilience capacity investigated.

Thus, the first three studies seem to suggest that the Creative Class does have an impact on economic development and economic resilience, although the results are contingent on the measurements used for economic development and resilience. However, this represents only one components of the Creative Class Theory. The theory also suggests that when making location decisions creative workers primarily prefer soft factors rather than other location factors. As such, **the fourth study** investigated the location preferences of European researchers. The study was guided by two research questions, namely: 'Are researchers from Eastern and Southern Europe less mobile compared to their Western counterparts?' and 'What are the factors that influence the mobility of researchers?'.

The results suggest that the probability of being mobile during the PhD degree is larger for researchers who come from countries in Eastern and Southern Europe, which are contrary to the arguments put forward by Musterd and Gritsai (2010) and Martin-Brelot et al. (2010). On the other hand, when work mobility was considered, the results showed that researchers who are citizens of countries from Eastern Europe do have a lower probability of being long-term mobile. However, when including a an interaction term between the area of the country of residence and the age of researchers the effect of being from an Eastern European country no longer had a significant effect on work mobility. Thus, the study suggests that researchers from Eastern and Southern Europe are not less mobile compared to their Western counterparts.

Regarding the second research question, the results suggest that the factor ‘Personal or family reasons’ has a positive effect on the probability of being mobile, while the factor ‘culture and/or language’ has a negative effect on the probability of being mobile. The hard factors seem to be not as important as the previous studies suggest, while the correlations between mobility and job related factors do not have the expected direction. However, these results have to be interpreted in the light of the limitation of the study.

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