Innovation Pathways in the Maker Movement: Asia and the American Midwest

COLLABORATOR
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Lone Genius or Social Innovation?
How to encourage social innovation?

• What sorts of physical environments support it?
  organizational structures
  disciplinary inputs
  incentives and rewards
  ideological frameworks
  computational systems
  barriers to entry
  consulting/expertise
  opportunities to exhibit
Co-working spaces

Startup accelerators

Maker spaces (e.g., FabLabs)
Creative Industries Policy & Makers

CCI policy: governments should support the industrialization of cultural production, as a means of:

• Developing a national aesthetic/cultural/media industry for internal consumption and export, and reducing foreign imports
• Leveraging a natural monopoly that all nations have: the cultural distinctiveness and creative practices of its own population
• Generating critical mass for the sorts of creative clusters believed to drive innovation
• Creating high-paying jobs that also afford a high quality of life
“Policy-making in this field has tended to follow generic industrial models, despite the fact that the creative economy functions differently. There is still too much of a cookie-cutter approach in this field, which harms regional and local specificity. Hence, there are few current policy frameworks that are well positioned to encourage such an approach.”

-- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Creative Industries Policy & Makers

Our research:

- A multi-year, multi-sited ethnography of dozens of makers in Taipei
- Interviews with
  - Leaders of Taiwan’s maker scene
  - Government officials
  - Artists, designers, and other creatives
  - Leaders of startup support organizations
- Document analysis of
  - Policy documents
  - Important social media threads
Some Results

There is a mismatch in Taiwan between CCI policy and makers

Makers *seem* to be exactly what the government would want to support, and yet some of the most successful groups
- Struggle to win government funding
- Are suspicious of and even hostile to the government and CCI policy

Our analysis suggests that *cultures of* making are distinctive and require support as such—but (as the UN report indicated) this falls into a blind spot
Some Results

The development/transmission of maker “identities” is key—but overlooked in relevant policy and its implementation.

The government seems fixated on the “maker to startup” trajectory, but this is only one of several culture-oriented trajectories that makers see. Others include:

- Fostering democratic participation in IT innovation
- Investigating national and cultural identity through making—what is “Taiwanese” making?
- Feedback back into local and global debates—often embodied in physically realized projects—about what makers should be making and how they should be supported.
THANK YOU

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