

Changing our Culture: Wales and the creative economy

Dr Trefor Lewis



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Changing our culture: Wales and the creative economy – Dr Lewis outlines the need to empower a creative economy in Wales in order to overcome its economic difficulties

Along with the rest of the UK, Wales is facing economic difficulty. Initiatives are under way to correct this through plans to improve the infrastructure and generate economic growth through core cities such as Cardiff. Bringing investment into the city is welcome and vitally necessary to spur economic growth through the region. However, there remains another means to create economic prosperity and that is through creativity.

Any dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs requires change. And meaningful and positive change can only be brought about through creativity - there is no other way. Creativity changes everything and has the potential to engender extraordinary wealth and value. Revolutions of the industrial type or that generated through the internet - itself an incredible piece of innovation - have all been powered by creativity. The mantra is simple: no creativity, no change, just stay stuck where you are.

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The notion of a 'creative economy' is a popular one at the moment. Those seeking a creative economy, such as Richard Florida - aided by Bill Clinton - focus on the attraction of the 'creative class' to required areas. Comprising this class are creative professionals and those in the entertainment, sports and media along with educators and others. The purpose of this attraction is to revitalise cities and

allow the economic benefits to spread out to surrounding areas. Seeking a similar aim, John Howkins maintains focus on the individual with the development and patenting of creative products. Something like a Start-Up economy.

Another way of looking at the creative economy is to consider the realisation of creativity in existing organisations: working from the inside out. This would include the manufacturing and service industries which have been generally overlooked as not comprising the creative class. With respect to economic regeneration, the improvement of what already exists - endogenous generation - can be as beneficial as the establishment of new companies. For organisations to become more creative

- acquire better forms of production and distribution, more exciting products, better working conditions, higher wages and so on - it is necessary to fully engage with the talents of the workforce.

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The key feature of creativity is that it is a process. And it is a process that can only be conducted through the medium of teams - constant collaboration. That means people. That means the workforce. And it means that the greatest challenge that we face is how to bring this process of creativity into our organisations.

Steve Jobs - who might have laid claim to building the world's most innovative company - saw Place as being a key factor in the generation of creativity. Before his death, he commissioned Norman Foster to design a new headquarters for Apple. It's in the shape of a 'donut' and has been designed to allow collaboration between all workers at the company. Collaboration is not such a simple concept as it might sound. It does not end in forming a team that meets around the water cooler and shares a table in the cafeteria. Imagination is required to see the desired vision. And deep, dense networks need to be established along with the necessary learning and support mechanisms to arrive at a manifestation of that vision.

A truly creative economy is one powered by the people who inhabit its resources. It's an inside-out job that begins with a dramatic culture change. And one that the people of Wales are capable of achieving.

If you wish to make a comment on Dr Trefor Lewis's short article then you can email him directly at tlewis@gorwel.co