
The creative economy as a versatile policy script: exploring the role of competing intergovernmental organizations

Media, Culture & Society

1–18

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DOI: 10.1177/0163443718810913

journals.sagepub.com/home/mcs**Antonios Vlassis**

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Abstract

Since the early 2000s, several intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have advanced the idea that the creative economy could be a 'feasible development option'. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took the lead by preparing the 2008 and 2010 Creative Economy Reports, whereas the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNDP executed the 2013 report. The article – based on an actor-centred institutionalism – explores the role IGOs have played in the promulgation of the 'creative economy' policy agenda. Through a socio-political analysis, we reveal how IGOs act and interact with each other vis-à-vis 'creative economy' policy agenda making. On one hand, the article seeks to highlight why and how IGOs include the creative economy within their priorities and use the concept, influence or challenge its orientations. On the other hand, it aims to examine their ability to act in common in order to globalize the 'creative economy' policy agenda and create new forms of cultural industries governance.

Keywords

creative economy, creative economy reports, cultural policy, development, intergovernmental organizations, international cultural politics, United Nations

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Intergovernmental organizations and global policy transfer

The recent book *The Synchronization of National Policies* by political scientist Pertti Alasuutari explores the remarkable similarity of policies and practices across a broad range of countries around the world. After all, there is no single government or body forcing any given country to take up particular policies. And yet, several countries end up using similar concepts, ideas and interventions across a wide array of policy domains. Alasuutari's exploration of this situation relies on a range of complex questions that drives the argument of his book as a whole:

How is it that worldwide models emerge and spread? How do nations learn about each other's strategies and how do they enter the agenda of national politics and policymaking? Since nations value uniqueness and independence, how is it possible that they nevertheless seem to follow or imitate each other? What is the role of international organisations in this? (Alasuutari, 2016: 2)

Our aim in this article is to explore the last question, with one policy concept in mind: the *Creative Economy*. We pay particular attention to the ways in which intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) synthesize existing policies at national level and create a global framework for engagement with the term.

The focus on the creative economy as a 'feasible development option' (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2008; 2010) ties in with IGOs' long-standing engagement with the nexus between 'culture and development'. The explicit engagement with the creative economy simultaneously serves as a break and a continuation with this connection, as it builds on the same ideas while making a new series of claims about the role of culture and creativity (De Beukelaer, 2015; Vlassis, 2018). In this respect, the UNCTAD and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took the lead by preparing the 2008 and 2010 Creative Economy Reports (hereafter 'the Reports'), whereas the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNDP executed the 2013 Report. The Reports brought together contributions from UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCO, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Trade Centre (ITC).

The term 'creative industries' emerged as a policy agenda within national contexts. It started being used in Australia with the Labour government's 'Creative Nation' initiative of 1994 (Government of Australia, 1994). It was given wider exposure with the election of 'New Labour' in the United Kingdom in 1997 when the Blair government set up the Creative Industries Task Force as a central activity of its new Department of Culture, Media and Sport (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015). Hence, this policy initiative established the creative industries as 'a plank of the UK's 'post-industrial' economy' (Flew and Cunningham, 2010: 113), strongly linked to policy agendas surrounding technological convergence, innovation policy, the information society and going beyond the traditional ideas of the subsidized arts. As Galloway and Dunlop (2007: 18) argued, the idea of culture as elitist and exclusive was abandoned, whereas 'creativity' was embraced as democratic and inclusive. In the early 2000s, policy consultant and journalist John Howkins (2001) claimed in a widely read book that the 'creative economy' would be a key economic form in the 21st century. In the meantime, the U.S. academic and policy

consultant Richard Florida (2002) popularized the idea that creativity lead to a change in the class system itself, with the rise of a ‘new creative class’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2008: 560–561). The uptake of these ideas by the United Nations (UN) coincided with its broadening to include the ‘creative economy’ in the early 2000s.

The terms ‘creative industries’ and ‘creative economy’ have gained traction and garnered ample interest in both academic and policy circles. The histories and meanings of these terms have been well documented and criticized elsewhere (Cunningham, 2009; Tremblay, 2008). The particular role of IGOs in the popularization and dissemination of these ideas in a wide range of countries remains, however, insufficiently explored. In response to this lacuna, the goal is to open the black box of international policy making regarding the Creative Economy Reports, to identify the key actors and the rationales that drove the introduction of ‘creative economy’ in the policy agenda of several IGOs (Alasuutari, 2016; Avant et al., 2010). In order to examine the role IGOs have played in this regard, we opt for a socio-political analysis, favouring an actor-centred institutionalism (Vlassis, 2015b). The goal thereby is to understand how the IGOs act and interact with each other vis-à-vis the ‘creative economy’, to trace the shifts in how IGOs have engaged with the creative economy agenda since early 2000s and to inquire how they have acted on these discourses (Littoz-Monnet, 2012; Calligaro and Vlassis, 2017).

Our analysis begins at the policy level because the ‘creative economy’ is basically a political construct and its historical trajectory is as much tied to political struggles in seeking ‘new rationales’ for stakeholders and ‘to an evolution in economic development strategies’ (Coles, 2016: 459). We conceive of IGOs as meaningful interlocutors, working within political conditions of dependence and autonomy vis-à-vis their member states and aiming to influence international cultural politics (Oestreich, 2012; Psychogiopoulou, 2015).

The article is rooted in document analysis and in semi-structured interviews with 10 high-ranking officials from UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNDP, WIPO and ILO, who were closely involved in the international policy making towards the Reports. The interviews were carried out between March and July 2016.¹ The remainder of this article is structured in four parts. First, we provide an overview regarding the different institutional perspectives of the creative economy at international level. Second, we highlight the policy process through which UNCTAD sought to build an international agenda on ‘creative economy’, analysing the strategies and motivations of UNCTAD’s administration, as well as the interests of other IGOs. Third, the article discusses the promulgation of the 2008 and 2010 Reports and finally it emphasizes UNESCO’s strategies to integrate the concept of ‘creative economy’ within the agenda of the organization.

The creative economy: institutional perspectives

UNCTAD was founded in 1964, in response to the realization that ‘developing’ countries encountered great difficulties in exporting manufactured goods to ‘developed’ countries. Most ‘developing’ countries strongly relied on the export of primary goods to ‘developed’ countries, while importing manufactured goods from the latter. This created trade imbalances, but also skewed employment opportunities, as manufactured goods required greater labour input and yielded higher value-added. In this context, UNCTAD proposed

Table 1. Creative economy reports: a historical and organizational overview.

Year	Organization	Report focus
2008	UNCTAD and UNDP	The challenge of assessing the creative economy: towards informed policy making
2010	UNCTAD and UNDP	Creative economy: a feasible development option
2013	UNESCO and UNDP	Special edition: widening development pathways

Source: The Authors.

UNCTAD: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; UNDP: United Nations Development Programme; UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

and implemented the Generalized System of Preferences, which aimed to facilitate export diversification, increase trade and ultimately drive development. The organization's name derives from this aim: supporting trade (as opposed to aid) to foster development. This underlying idea continues to influence UNCTAD, as it focuses on the 'creative economy' to further strengthen 'developing' countries' export diversification to drive their economic development.

UNESCO was founded two decades earlier (in 1946), with a different objective in mind. It was built on the premise that 'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed' (Preamble to the 1946 UNESCO Constitution). This notion gave way to the humanist ideal that education, science and culture be placed at the core of UN efforts to maintain and foster peace. This led UNESCO to develop a range of 'norm-setting' interventions in the field of culture and development (Saouma and Isar, 2015; Singh, 2011a).

While some economists argue that getting people to trade with each other decreases their propensity for conflict, the objectives of UNCTAD (fostering development through trade) and UNESCO (connecting countries' societies through education, science and culture) require distinct approaches. It is therefore crucial to understand that the ways in which UNCTAD and UNESCO have addressed the 'creative economy' differ significantly. This is manifested most clearly in the three versions of the Reports (see Table 1).

Building an international policy agenda on the 'creative economy'

In this article, we focus on the role IGOs play in the formation, articulation and spread of the 'creative economy' as a global policy script. The discourse that emerges as the central tenet of this script is by definition prescriptive. Pertti Alasuutari argues that the role of IGOs lies in the 'epistemic capital' they amass in order to voluntarily synchronize policy approaches between different countries. As IGOs have no coercive power, they need to be loud in order to make themselves heard:

The power of those organizations is primarily based on the noise they make, but if through that noise an organization succeeds in becoming an authoritative entity that influences the way the

general public and the decision-makers conceive of the facts and what needs to be done, a belief in that organization's power has become real in its consequences. (Alasutari, 2016: 118)

IGOs derive power from their ability to claim authority through expertise, rather than from the more traditional trappings of state power. UNCTAD's authority thus largely resides in the realm of ideas (Oestreich, 2012: 8). UNCTAD officials argue that technological convergence and informational society prompted the engagement with the creative economy at UN level. But in order to allocate the precious time of UN staff to advance this agenda, UNCTAD needed to show that creative economy would solve a problem relevant to the UN agenda. For UNCTAD, the issue to be solved was trade diversification in general and developing countries' export diversification in particular. The specific appeal was that the creative economy required less infrastructural investment than other industries:

All the countries want to be industrialized. They need infrastructure, investment, energy and transportation. For the majority of countries, it is complicated. In this view, the idea of creative economy was a serious alternative, insofar as the creative industries are not so dependent on infrastructures and commodities. So, the creative economy was a new idea for development and a new direction for developing countries. (Interview with a high-ranking official, UNCTAD, 11 April 2016)

While this IGO official stresses how the 'creative economy' chimes with UNCTAD's general focus on import diversification as a development strategy, the claim that the creative economy is less dependent on infrastructure is only partly true. While there may be less need for heavy industry, major road or rail networks (as required for, say, car manufacturing), the claim significantly downplays the reliance of the 'creative economy' on electricity and the Internet, two things that need significant (investment in) infrastructure whose reliability remains limited throughout several 'developing' countries (Larkin, 2008).

The active involvement of UNCTAD in the discussions on the creative industries was one of the main goals of Brazilian Rubens Ricupero (UNCTAD Secretary General 1995–2004) and the leadership of the latter became a substantial factor. At this stage, UNCTAD's aim was to strengthen its image as a key 'development' institution within the UN system, by actively promoting the issue within the organization. During the UNCTAD (2004) XI Conference held in São Paulo, Brazil, Ricupero introduced the creative industries into the international economic and development agenda (Isar, 2008). The *São Paulo Consensus*, adopted by 153 member states, stressed, 'The international community should support national efforts of developing countries to increase their participation in and benefit from dynamic sectors and to foster, protect and promote their creative industries' (UNCTAD, 2004: 19).

More concretely, UNCTAD's secretariat decided to devote one of three cross-cutting informal 'high-level panels' to the topic of creative industries and development in order to 'circumvent the likely unwillingness of the most influential member States to endorse an engagement in this area' (Isar, 2008: 116). For the first time, several ministers of culture were invited to a UNCTAD general conference, which gather, in principle, ministers

of trade, economy or technology. Among the participants on the high-level panel, we identified Gilberto Gil – then minister of culture in Brazil (2003–2008) in Lula da Silva’s government – and John Howkins (2001) – key speaker of the panel and author of the book *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas*. It is worth noting that one UNCTAD official mentioned how the proliferation of publications on the ‘creative economy’ helped the organization garner support for its engagement with the sector.

At the Conference UNCTAD invited both John Howkins and the minister of Brazil. It was a good momentum to bring something concrete to the discussions. We tried to see the cultural industries as an economic activity with a broader scope. (Interview with a high-level official, UNCTAD, 11 April 2016)

Participants of the high-level panel further included representatives of national governments (Canada, India, Brazil, Finland), IGOs such as ILO, WIPO, ITC and UNESCO. The panel also drew the participation of private sector representatives, associations and foundations such as the Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, the London Design Festival, the German Consortium of Public Broadcasters as well as the Smithsonian Institution.

In 2004, immediately after the UNCTAD XI Conference in Brazil, its Secretary General set up the UN multi-agency informal group on creative industries in an effort to build upon complementarities and to work in synergy with other relevant UN agencies. The group brought together: UNCTAD, UNESCO, WIPO, ILO and ITC and in 2005 UNDP also joined. Within this informal group, the UN representatives – and especially the UNCTAD and UNDP officials – converged on the idea that the preparation of a creative economy report could be an appropriate way to deal with the issue.

Creating a common UN perspective?

UNCTAD’s primary objective was to frame the creative economy ‘as an important and to date underexploited opportunity for further development in developing countries’ (Sternberg, 2017: 338). The 2008 and 2010 Reports rest on two principles: advocating for the development dimension of the creative economy through trade diversification and emphasizing a macroeconomic approach through the elaboration of a statistical database. Interestingly, UNESCO had engaged with ‘cultural industries’ (as distinct from, but linked to the ‘creative economy’) in relation to development since the early 1980s in a variety of ways (OAU and UNESCO, 1992; UNESCO, 1982). But UNCTAD brought the concept of ‘creative economy’ into the mainstream economic development agenda in the early 2000s.

The UNCTAD mandate is how to help developing countries to diversify their economies. So, the creative economy was a potential export tool. (Interview with a high-ranking official, UNCTAD, 10 March 2016)

UNCTAD’s goal was to drive a more entrepreneurial perspective based on innovation and to question the traditional approach of the cultural sector being dependent on

government support – not because UNCTAD ideologically opposes public funding, but because of the realization that in several countries public funding was diminishing or practically absent.

The ‘creative economy’ crosscuts a wide range of policy fields that are not the prerogative of any one IGO, including labour, international trade, culture, gender, infrastructure, development and human rights. Indeed, this multi-dimensional topic requires a high degree of technical expertise, a complex division of labour (that contains many overlaps) as well as shared responsibility and resources among IGOs. UNCTAD took the lead in trying to align disparate interests by reaching out to other agencies of the UN system, thereby searching to create an inter-agency approach. According to interviewed officials, UNCTAD initially aimed to cooperate with four different IGOs in order to deal with multiple aspects of the ‘creative economy’:

- World Trade Organization (WTO) on trade in cultural services;
- UNESCO on cultural diversity and the nexus between culture and development;
- WIPO on intellectual property rights;
- ILO on labour issues.

Yet, UNCTAD did not invite the WTO to contribute to the Reports for two reasons. First, there were tensions between UNESCO and WTO regarding the issue of specificity of cultural goods and services in the context of the international economic integration (Vlassis, 2013). More concretely, the treatment of cultural and audiovisual services within the WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services was a deeply divisive issue during the 1990s (Loisen and Pauwels, 2015; Vlassis, 2015b). As such, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (hereafter CDCE) adopted by UNESCO in 2005 was a response to the threat from the international trade regime pushing for further liberalization of the cultural sector (De Beukelaer et al., 2015; Singh, 2011b; Vlassis, 2016). Second, UNCTAD aimed to have a UN report based on a development-oriented approach, whereas according to the UNCTAD interviewees, the WTO approach was more free-trade oriented, largely favouring the interests of developed countries. Instead, UNCTAD invited the ITC – a joint agency of WTO and UNCTAD – that provides technical assistance on the areas of trade development for developing and transition economies. UNCTAD thus pursued its original mandate of facilitating international trade for development, but without following the idea that free trade would inevitably push global trade towards a fair equilibrium.

In addition, UNCTAD coordinated the Reports and used its human-epistemic resources and economic resources from the UN Office for South–South Cooperation (technically part of UNDP) in order to organize information and rationalize the complex issue of the ‘creative economy’. Rather than seeing the organization as an entity as distinct from its constituent employees, we should in fact look at the key personnel who drove this project. In this context, two Brazilian UN senior officials stand out.

The 2008 and 2010 Reports were prepared under the direct supervision of two high-ranking officials: Edna dos Santos (UNCTAD)² and Francisco Simplicio (UNDP).³ Both

had an important interpretative and coordinative function to clarify the meaning of the creative economy for member states and other IGOs.

Focusing on the individuals behind the offices provides insights into how UNCTAD has performed in practice. Surprisingly, exploring the roles of individuals forms a striking and important lacuna in international cultural policy research. The 2008 and 2010 Reports were part of Dos Santos' attempt to create an intellectual framework to sensitize developing countries about the importance of creative industries. In addition, the objective was to set up a database to get evidence on this area, because UNCTAD recognized that

It is difficult to talk about the impact of creative industries in the global economy if we have no concrete numbers. (Interview with a high-ranking official, UNCTAD, 10 March 2016)

UNCTAD's data align far more closely with the celebratory notion of the creative industries as a driver of growth and development. It is thus more concerned with explaining the economic impact the sector generates than with providing a robust understanding of the sector itself.

In fact, UNCTAD faced a dilemma: as a small bureaucratic organization with neither significant resources nor expertise and authority in the field of cultural industries, relying on the technical expertise of other IGOs was necessary for carrying out the Report. But, taking the lead was also essential for UNCTAD in order to get access to economic resources. Hence, the goal of the organization was to justify its leadership, to leave its mark on the topic and to address it through the development perspective of UNCTAD's mandate.

It is beautiful to talk about synergies and cooperation among agencies. But in practice, it is not easy. (Interview with a high-ranking official, UNCTAD, 11 April 2016)

Furthermore, there was bureaucratic infighting among UN agencies. Efforts for coordination inject 'an element of hierarchy', which often is resisted by autonomous IGOs: 'Everyone wants coordination, but no one wants to be coordinated' (Jonsson, 2012: 163). UNESCO and WIPO, as specialized UN agencies, with their own specific budgets, produced their contributions to the Reports with their own resources. This meant that they somehow hoped to see an element in the Reports that reflected their institutional interests and priorities.

On one hand, WIPO took a traditional legalist approach based on intellectual property legislation and on the degrees of conformity of such legislation with international standards. However, UNCTAD's objective was to take into consideration specific socio-economic circumstances of developing countries. According to UNCTAD officials, WIPO focused on protecting the private sector in developed countries without taking into account the complaints of developing countries that some aspects of the current IP system discriminates against them.

UNCTAD does not have the same approach as WIPO about intellectual property rights and considers that the big cultural companies receive all the copyrights. UNCTAD had to balance with

the whole vision of the Report. Finally, the Report does not reflect WIPO's vision, it is more the vision of UNCTAD. (Interview with a high-ranking official, UNCTAD, 11 April 2016)

On the other hand, UNESCO saw the 'creative economy' as a market-oriented perspective, which risked calling into question the importance of cultural policies and key principles of the CDCE, such as the specificity of cultural goods and services. In fact, UNCTAD sought to go beyond the traditional cultural approach and the narrow scope of cultural industries, taking into account the phenomenon of technological convergence (Tremblay, 2008: 83). In the words of a former high-ranking UNESCO official, when UNESCO administration talked about 'creative economy' within the organization, the delegations of France, Canada and of other promoters of the CDCE appeared reluctant about the use of the new concept.

Indeed, during the preparation of the Report, the main issue was its scope and the full list of creative industries, which formed the creative economy.

For instance, UNESCO does not consider software as creative industry. In WIPO perception, software is totally linked to copyright protection and the copyright is a mechanism to protect and promote creativity. (Interview with a high-ranking official, WIPO, 19 April 2016)

According to WIPO and UNESCO officials, the goal of UNCTAD was to base the Report on the U.K. perspective, whereas WIPO and UNESCO already had a well-established vision about the cultural sector. Insofar as the IGOs had different perspectives on the creative industries and no consensus existed concerning the definition of the 'creative economy', in the 2008 Report, the first (and conceptual) chapter titled 'Concept and context of the creative economy' was drafted by David Throsby, an Australian cultural economist, and reviewed by Edna Dos Santos. It is revealing that this chapter did not outline a UN approach but it self-referentially focused on the 'UNCTAD classification of the creative industries'. This indicates how the attempt to create a common UN perspective, however laudable, fell flat due to inter-agency differences and disagreements on a common definition.

While any discussion of demarcation used to address the sector may seem like discursive naval-gazing, it is crucial because of its central implication. UNCTAD built an overview of international trade data in the creative economy; whatever is part of their definition would be measured, and whatever isn't, wouldn't. This is why UNESCO and WIPO felt that their respective positions were being weakened and did not endorse the Reports' quantitatively informed conclusions. They only assumed responsibility for the contributions they made. According to our interviewed officials, UNCTAD's attempt at leadership in an area related to cultural industries seemed inappropriate. WIPO and especially UNESCO perceived UNCTAD as a competitor, which sought to encroach upon their terrain and deal with a policy field derived from their mandate. Despite these objections, UNCTAD's Creative Economy Reports did manage to increase the visibility of the cultural and creative industries in development discourses.

These tensions also eliminated certain perspectives from the Reports – and by extension, the ensuing discussions. The ILO, for example, participated in several sessions of the UN multi-agency informal group on creative industries. But the organization did not contribute to the Report due to several administrative issues and movement of staff.

Some UN organizations could contribute to the Report. For instance, the ILO could speak about employment and creative industries. It is a missing element in these Reports. (Interview with a high-ranking official, UNESCO, 31 May 2016)

In sum, the materialization of UNCTAD's Reports was built on institutional path dependence, on the transfer of ideas from the national to the multi-lateral level, on political willingness and leadership of particular people within these UN agencies. However, the differences in institutional priorities and mandates made it impossible to articulate a joint UN perspective on the 'creative economy'.

The diffusion of the 2008 and 2010 Creative Economy Reports

Through the publication of the Reports, the 'creative economy' shifted from being a rather national issue of de-industrialized 'Western' countries (particularly the United Kingdom) into a concern of international politics that both appeals and applies to all countries around the world. UNCTAD was notably instrumental in advancing the global scope of the debate through its publications and activities that (to some extent) merged the agendas of several IGOs involved. In fact, the 2008 and 2010 Reports fuelled a 'creative turn' (Schlesinger, 2017) in several countries, even if UNCTAD has had limited direct influence over the policies adopted and implemented in countries: 'IGOs rely on activists, policymakers and consultants to "translate" concepts and ideas into practicable approaches' (see Alasuutari, 2016: 118). The Reports also were an important avenue for UNCTAD in order to show how creative industries should be used in the context of technological convergence and the information society and they created an emerging role for the organization, acting as norm entrepreneur:

These Reports helped to give more visibility to these sectors as economic sectors and to give more possibility to integrate them to the national strategies on development. Before, the culture was seen as a sector depending on subsidies. We could not see the impact of investment in this sector, it was invisible. (Interview with a high-ranking official, UNCTAD, 11 April 2016)

UNCTAD managed to capture the 'creative economy' at the right time and from the right angle. The goal was to advocate for the combining of the apparent win-win connection between culture and the economy to an audience of politicians, policy makers, artists, entrepreneurs and consultants. The timing was ideal because UNCTAD published its first Report at a moment of great optimism about the 'creative economy', owing to popular (but uncritical) books by Richard Florida and John Howkins. To this, it should be added that the Report's focus on economic development hit a nerve as its spread largely coincided with the onset of the global financial crisis (which made the 'creative economy' more appealing to 'developed' countries). In this view, the Report stressed that the highest growth rates of the sector were in 'developing' countries, even though this finding relied on a questionable classification of countries in which Japan and Israel were the only 'developed' countries in Asia (De Beukelaer, 2014a).

As a result, between 2008 and 2012, UNCTAD became a key interlocutor of national governments and of other IGOs in respect of creative industries and it continued its own advocacy, playing an essential role in disseminating the findings of the Reports. For example, in October 2008, the German Commission for UNESCO invited UNCTAD to present the report at the fifth German annual conference on creative economy held in Berlin. Chinese authorities invited UNCTAD to open the China International Cultural Industries Forum while launching the Chinese edition of the Report. In November 2008, UNCTAD presented the Report at the Creative Clusters Glasgow Conference. At the same time, the Organization of American States (OAS) Committee for Culture included the Report on the official agenda at the fourth Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Culture where Edna dos Santos presented the main findings. In July 2014, the Inter-American Development Bank and the British Council jointly commissioned a report – a first of its kind – about the economic impact of the creative industries in the Americas. In fact, they based their report in large part on UNCTAD's statistical data.

Moreover, in September 2009, UNCTAD participated on several fronts at the Global South Creative Forum in Shanghai, China. In this context, it became a member in the Creative Economy Advisory for the preparations and execution of the UN Creative Economy activities for the World Expo 2010, around the theme 'The creative economy: a driving force for better, more liveable cities with better lifestyles for all'. By that time, the 'creative economy' had become a major component of the agenda of several actors involved in cultural affairs. The Euro-Africa Campus for Cultural Cooperation invited UNCTAD to coordinate and chair two workshops Maputo, Mozambique (22–26 June 2009). The African Arts Institute, the National Arts Council and Arterial network hosted a seminar (in South Africa) on the 'creative economy' in July 2009 and invited UNCTAD to present the findings of the 2008 Report. Between September 2009 and June 2010, UNCTAD also participated in several international seminars on the cultural sector in Latin America:

- 'Creative Cities: The impact of culture in the urban economy', Santiago, Chile;
- 'Culture and Creative Economy: Building an agenda for the Mercocities', Rio de Janeiro, Brazil;
- 'The cultural sector today', Cartagena, Colombia;
- 'International Encounter on the Creative Economy', Buenos Aires, Argentina;
- 'Creative Economy Seminars', Sao Paulo, Brazil.⁴

Through these dissemination and engagement efforts, UNCTAD presented the results of the 2008 and 2010 Reports to a critical mass of actors. It sought to expand its authority in a brand-new policy field for the organization, such as the interface between development and creativity, through its control over information and the deference shown to the organization as expert in this field. Overall, IGOs and governments picked up the creative economy to support, operationalize and implement their own policies and practices, while UNCTAD has drawn on the same to further justify and legitimize its policy agenda.

UNCTAD's Reports were often the first – and in many cases the only – way in which a variety of stakeholders engaged with the 'creative economy'. The classifications and definitions several government initiatives use clearly illustrate their influence. But the

impact is far more than merely discursive, as many countries saw the appeal of UNCTAD's optimistic message. In Thailand for instance, the government identified the creative economy as a key priority of the 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan, by allocating around US\$500 million to a 'Creative Thailand' Strategy (Laaksonen, 2014: 26). UNCTAD was involved in 'translating' the ideas of its Report to the national context. At the invitation of the Thai government, it carried out an official 4-day mission to Bangkok in March 2009 in order to discuss the findings of the Report. UNCTAD also organized a workshop on 'Policy Dialogue on Creative Economy Thailand' and attended the international conference 'Creative Thailand-Facing the Challenges'. As a result, Thailand hosted the first International Creative Economy Forum in November 2010, organized by the Ministry of Commerce, UNCTAD, UNDP and WIPO.

The power UNCTAD wielded over the global spread and uptake of the 'creative economy' as a policy script relied on their authority, as is common in the ways IGOs exert influence (Alasuutari, 2016: 121). This authority does not derive from coercive power, but from the trust consultants and policy makers have in the credibility of both the discourse (as an abstract concept) and the claims it makes about outcomes (through the simultaneously performative, aspirational and analytical language of policy recommendations).

Political reinterpretations of the creative economy: from UNCTAD to UNESCO

In 2013, UNESCO and UNDP published a 'Special Edition' of the Report with the subtitle *Widening Development Pathways*. Their edition of the report focused less on quantitative data on creative goods and services (as UNCTAD's Reports had) than on a qualitative analysis emphasizing the local level and 'developing' countries. In this respect, UNESCO focused on the local dimensions of development through the creative industries. Its approach highlighted three key aspects. First, it addressed the non-economic ways in which creativity and culture contribute to development. Second, it sketched national and local strategies for culture and development. Third, it proposed a range of qualitative and quantitative indicators regarding effectiveness of investment in the 'creative economy'. Path dependence and the organizational culture of UNESCO preordained this type of analysis on the 'creative economy' topic.

In fact, UNESCO's 'special edition' of the Report responded to both criticism which academics (and to some extent creative industries stakeholders) voiced concerning the narrow scope and overly optimistic tone of UNCTAD's Reports. While the 2008 and 2010 Reports aimed to demonstrate the potential of the 'creative economy' in terms of income generation, job creation and export earnings, the UNCTAD data mainly focused on international trade in creative goods and services. Moreover, some argued that the claim that the 'creative economy' benefitted 'developing' countries was misleading, as UNCTAD neither defined what counts as a 'developing' country, nor mentioned that the vast share of growth in creative goods exports from 'developing' countries was the result of China's strong performance. The reason for this is that UNCTAD opted not to challenge the outdated categorization of 'developed' versus 'developing' countries, arguably not to antagonize any members states (De Beukelaer, 2014a).

In this context, an UNDP official recounts how they aimed to shift the focus of the report series by proposing another angle on the field of creative economy and approached UNESCO:

UNDP took the lead to propose something new, to make a special edition. The first data followed the same kind of flows. (Interview with high-ranking official, UNDP, 13 July 2016)

The key question of the Report was ‘how to capture the vibrancy and scale of creative economies beyond economic indicators’ (UNESCO-UNDP, 2013: 16). UNESCO thus connected the creative economy to its own long-standing tradition of dealing with culture and development. In doing so, UNESCO integrated the ‘creative economy’ into existing norms and practices of the organization – this at once legitimized the creative economy as a part of UNESCO’s work and criticized the way in which UNCTAD defined the term. Their embrace of the term was in large part because of its wide global appeal:

UNESCO was surprised by the impact of 2008 and 2010 reports—all the participated organizations in the Reports but especially UNESCO. (Interview with a high-ranking official, UNESCO, 31 May 2016)

While UNESCO would have preferred to use the term ‘cultural economy’ over ‘creative economy’ and ‘cultural industries’ over ‘creative industries’, they maintained UNCTAD’s terminology because of its appeal and the ‘brand value’ of the series. At an institutional level, UNCTAD’s move into the realm of culture (by way of the ‘creative economy’) undermined UNESCO’s position and formal legitimacy as the leading UN agency for international cultural relations (see Hanrieder, 2015). In response, UNESCO needed to ensure its relevance to states and other stakeholders in a more competitive institutional environment. ‘To being in a “vertical” relationship with states, international organizations are also in a “horizontal” relationship with other organizations, and need to respond to both competitive and complementary interaction with other institutions’ (Betts, 2012: 137).

UNESCO’s focus on the ‘creative economy’ did, however, differ significantly from the perspective UNCTAD had advanced previously. First, the 2013 Report was built on UNESCO’s previous work and its normative framework: the report *Our Creative Diversity*, produced by the World Commission on Culture and Development and published in 1995; the 1998 Stockholm Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, titled *The Power of Culture*; and, most importantly, the 2005 *CDCE*, which recognizes both the importance of cultural public policies for the diversity of cultural expressions and the specificity of cultural goods and services and includes concrete provisions for the link between culture and development.

Second, UNESCO aimed to show that the agenda on creative industries had become increasingly institutionalized through several practices of the organization. The new Report devoted ample space for an evidence base drawn from previous experiences of UNESCO and UNDP. This included the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, a multi-donor fund established under Article 18 of the CDCE on one side, and on the other side, the Thematic Window on Culture and Development funded by the UNDP-Spain MDG (Millennium Development Goals) Achievement Fund and implemented by UNESCO and

UNDP. Given this particular focus, the 2013 Report was called a 'special edition'. For some commentators it brought about new expectations and represented a challenge to the statistical and narrowly economic perspective of the previous Reports, with the emphasis on culture rather than the economy, on the social rather than the individual (De Beukelaer, 2014b; O'Connor, 2013).

UNESCO did, however, have a further reason to pursue the particular focus of the 2013 Special Edition of the Report. It tried to use the 'special edition' of the Creative Economy Report as a means to advocate for the inclusion of culture in the post-2015 UN development agenda (Duxbury et al., 2017; Vlassis, 2015a). UNESCO assumed responsibility for the Special Edition because of the UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova's personal interest and ambition for the Organization rather than member-state pressure.

Through the 2013 Report, UNESCO aimed to highlight the importance of the 'creative economy' in development, by illustrating and discussing existing practices in 'developing' countries through concrete examples about what could be done at local level. In this regard, the Report is largely based on UNESCO's policy objective to persuade a critical mass of actors about the major role of culture as a driver of sustainable development and on its desire to promote its policy agenda within the UN system.

The 2013 report should be one of the platforms for justifying the inclusion of culture in the post-2015 agenda. (Interview with a high ranking official, UNESCO, 18 March 2016)

The press release accompanying the publication of the report explicitly stressed that 'the report was launched as a major contribution to shaping a new and bold sustainable development agenda to follow 2015 that recognizes the power of culture as an enabler and a driver' (UNESCO, 2013). In fact, UNESCO's co-opting of UNCTAD's Creative Economy Report series cannot be separated from either UNCTAD's failure to unify a range of UN agencies or from UNESCO's own internal dynamics, its policy agenda and the institutional environment. All these factors had a significant influence over outcomes related to the Special Edition.

Concluding remarks

The aim of these policy-oriented Reports was for UN agencies to contribute to the discussions on 'creative economy' with a view to assisting governments in formulating policies and to reshaping the development agenda with creative industries in mind. By preparing the Reports, both UNCTAD and UNESCO were involved in creating information and knowledge. In this sense, they exerted a considerable influence in the information base from which state and non-state actors in international cultural politics determine their positions.

The article revealed that the 2008 and 2010 Creative Economy Reports largely were the fruit of a collaboration led by UNCTAD and UNDP, paying special attention to the economic contribution of creative industries in development policies. This approach was influenced by UNCTAD, which is a less field-based UN agency and a more economy-driven organization, favouring quantitative international trade data. By contrast, UNESCO and UNDP elaborated the special edition using an approach based on qualitative evidence and the impact of creative and cultural industries at the grassroots level.

We have argued that the integration of the ‘creative economy’ in the IGOs’ policy agenda cannot be understood as a purely state-led process. The article has highlighted IGOs as meaningful and influential actors in international cultural politics. The administrations of IGOs have mobilized substantial resources in order to deal with the ‘creative economy’ and to generate a new normative perspective on cultural policy. The article has revealed that the reasons behind the initiatives of IGOs in favour of creative economy are linked to the particular interests and ambitions of the IGOs’ administrations rather than to external political pressure from member states. These efforts have, however, significantly influenced the extent to which several countries around the world have embraced the synchronization of their cultural policies through the discourse of the creative economy.

On one hand, UNCTAD exercised norm entrepreneurship by framing the creative economy as embedded in the framework of the organization’s core ideas of development. Clearly, it was a bureaucratic institutional process, rather than the request of states, that defined how UNCTAD became involved in ‘creative economy’ issues and it played out in practice. Even though there is no doubt that there was some pressure from member states, it was UNCTAD’s interest, which placed the organization at the forefront of the creative economy and seized the opportunity to become the UN agency responsible for this question. Besides, looking at bureaucratic factors, it is noteworthy that UNCTAD and UNDP staff played a crucial role in shaping the process. However, the tensions in institutional priorities with regard to the definition and scope of the creative economy made it impossible to articulate a unified UN perspective on the topic.

On the other hand, UNESCO’s involvement in the Creative Economy Report series was an attempt to reassert the organization’s legitimacy in an institutional environment where it had lost the cultural prerogative. Second, UNESCO sought to include its own perspective in the Report series and to incorporate the 2013 Report into the organization’s framework in order to strengthen its normative continuity regarding the link between culture and development. Third, promoting the special edition of the Report was an essential pillar of the strategy to ensure that the organization was relevant to claim that culture should be included in UN post-2015 development agenda. However, the fact that the new UN framework – called Sustainable Development Goals – does not incorporate concrete references to culture and to specific sectors – such as cultural heritage or creative industries – also reveals the limits of the 2013 Report’s influence in international cultural politics.

Overall, international ‘creative economy’ making was based on the desire of these IGOs to enhance their policy agenda and their institutional credibility within the UN system and to create the pressure necessary for a better positioning of their policy approach in the multi-lateral discussions regarding cooperation in terms of culture and development.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. The results of the interviews will be presented anonymously for reasons of confidentiality.

2. Development economist and Ricupero's former *chef de cabinet* – working as chief of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Creative Economy and Industries Programme.
3. Chief of the Division for Knowledge Management and Operations of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Special Unit for South–South Cooperation. He received the strong support from Yiping Zhou, former senior trade official for the Chinese government and director of the Unit.
4. This factual information comes from the UNCTAD newsletter on creative economy.

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