Unpacking the Middleground of Creative Cities: Spatiotemporal Dynamics in the Configuration of the Berlin Design Field

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Abstract

This paper sheds light on the middleground of creative cities, highlighted as a crucial intermediary between creative scenes on the underground and formal institutions on the upperground. Tracing the spatiotemporal dynamics in the emergence of the Berlin-based design field over time, our study suggests that a productive middleground is itself historically and spatially conditioned. Elaborating extant knowledge on creative field emergence, we show that middleground structures can emerge bottom-up through space-specific rather than sector-specific creative practices and require active organization and configuration. They can, increasingly, also be of a virtual nature.

Keywords: creative cities; field configuration; intermediaries; design; spatiotemporal analysis

Introduction

'Berlin has very few design stars. The star is the scene itself' (International design expert).

Since the coining of the 'creative industries' concept by the British Department of Culture, Media, and Sports in the late 1990s, creative production and consumption has counted as an important cornerstone of contemporary national and urban economies. Economic exchanges rather than the production of art for art's sake are now expected of a new creative and economically productive workforce (e.g. Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007; Garnham, 2005; Throsby, 2001). As a result, creative industries have become an exemplary subject of study in efforts to understand Post-Fordist production models and organizational forms (e.g. Pratt, 2004; Townley et al., 2009). A common argument holds that creative fields such as pop music, media, or fashion inevitably form in urban concentrations where geographical proximity allows creative actors to cope with the paradoxes, tensions and uncertainties inherent in creative production (e.g. Bathelt, 2005; Grabher, 2001, 2002; Hauge, Malmberg and Power, 2009; Rantisi, 2002; Scott, 2000, 2006; DeFillipi et al., 2007).

Recent studies have started to unpack such spatial arguments to better understand the specific situated dynamics of creativity. In what they call the anatomy of the creative city, Cohendet et al. (2010) argue that a 'middleground' of communities and collectives is necessary to connect exploratory creative scenes on the 'underground' to the 'upperground' of established firms and cultural institutions specialized in bringing creative ideas to the market. Thus, their argument is that place-based externalities do not simply emerge, but rely on places and spaces as well as on organized projects and events that bring underground and upperground actors together to develop a common knowledge base and validate new creative forms (see also Cohendet et al, 2011; Grandadam et al., 2013). This argument ties in with recent debates about temporary (Maskell et al., 2006) and cyclical (Power and Jansson, 2008)

clusters or field-configuring events (Henn and Bathelt, 2015; Lange et al., 2014; Schüßler et al., 2015), discussed as temporary rather than permanent forms of proximity that structure creative fields (see also Torre, 2008; Norcliffe and Rendace, 2003).

While recognized as central to the development of a creative city or field, our understanding of how and by whom these field-configuring places, spaces, projects and events on the middleground are formed, and how they come to mediate between the under- and upperground, is still limited. Our study thus seeks to elaborate on the dynamics of situated creativity by tracing the emergence of a creative field, comprised of ‘sets of industrial activities and related social phenomena forming geographically-differentiated webs of interaction giving rise to diverse entrepreneurial and innovative outcomes’ (Scott, 2006: 3), hereby paying special attention to the formation of a productive middleground. We apply a longitudinal perspective that is sensitive to both spatial and temporal dynamics (Ibert and Hautala, 2015) when conducting a case study of the emergence of the design field in the city of Berlin between 1997 and 2012.

Our theoretical contributions are threefold. First, we shed light on how the collectivities that act as middleground intermediaries (cf. Jakob and van Heur, 2015) in creative fields are themselves historically and spatially conditioned. Second, we show that various places for creative interaction become productive middleground structures only through their active organization and programming, often in the form of informal events that accentuate localized practices and constitute the local buzz. Virtual platforms as well as print and online media can complement these face-to-face interactions on the middleground, as they contribute to translating the local buzz to wider communities. Third, our findings have clear implications for policy makers aiming to ‘govern’ the creative industries (e.g. Lange et al., 2008; Peck, 2011; O’Connor and Gu, 2010) in that they indicate the importance of highly contextualized bottom-up dynamics in a particular urban or regional environment.

Our paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on the spatial structuring of the creative economy and highlight the need for a spatiotemporal perspective. Second, we present our methodology by introducing our field of research, the Berlin-based design field, as well as our methods of data collection and analysis. Third, we outline and illustrate our empirical findings, starting with a description of creative practices on the underground and the subsequent supporting institutions on the upperground, before outlining different attempts at organizing new creative practices on the middleground. We then discuss the theoretical insights for understanding the emergence of situated creativity and the structuring of creative fields more broadly as well as policy implications.

The Relevance of spatial Concepts for Understanding the Emergence of Creative Fields

Creative fields such as pop music, media, video games or fashion almost inevitably locate in urban concentrations where geographical, social and cognitive forms of proximity can develop among actors (e.g. Bathelt, 2005; Cooke, 2012; Grabher, 2001; Rantisi, 2002; Scott, 2000; van Heur, 2009). Despite recent appreciations of 'learning at a distance' (Faulconbridge, 2006; Grabher, 2004; Graber and Ibert, 2014) and virtual forms of copresence (Grabher et al., 2018), geographical proximity is often considered an essential means to cope with the uncertainties and fluidity characterising creative fields (e.g. DeFillipi et al., 2007; Hutter, 2011; Gotsi, Andriopoulos, Lewis and Ingram, 2010; Pratt, 2002; Rychen and Zimmermann, 2008). Close spatial proximity, for instance, allows for rapid availability in unforeseeable project cycles (Grabher, 2002) and helps to organize precarious creative labour markets (e.g. Blair, 2001). Co-location in a particular physical space also triggers the development of shared rules, values and meanings (e.g. Currid, 2007; Grabher, 2001; Power and Scott, 2004; Staber 2008), facilitates the formation of relationships (Sedita, 2008), and supports the branding of particular cultural industries (Jansson and Power, 2010).

Such externalities do not develop automatically, however, nor does proximity naturally translate into creativity (e.g. van Heur, 2009). Recent research has therefore highlighted the specific and delicate intermediary role of cultural centres, policy networks, artist collectivities, galleries or bars where various communities can get together and negotiate creativity (Jakob and van Heur, 2015). Such actors, places and spaces constitute the middleground of a creative city (Cohendet et al., 2010; 2011; Grandadam et al., 2013), crucially connecting the informal underground of creative individuals with the formal upperground – established firms and institutions – by facilitating temporary exchanges and interactions. Whereas Cohendet et al. (2011) argue that middleground structures almost always revolve around face-to-face exchanges in a local environment, Jakob and van Heur (2015) point to crowdsourcing websites as important new kinds of intermediaries in creative production.

Cohendet et al. (2010; 2011) as well as Grandadam et al. (2013) distinguish middleground places in the form of galleries, bars or cafes from the cognitive spaces of idea exchange emanating from interactions in these places and from actively organized projects and events. An example of the latter are festivals and tradeshowes, sometimes described as temporary (Maskell et al., 2006; Bathelt and Schuldt, 2008) or cyclical clusters (Power and Jansson, 2008) and field-configuring events (Lampel and Meyer, 2008; Lange et al., 2014). Organization scholars consider these events as a substitute for other forms of market coordination needed especially in creative industries because of the high symbolic content of creative products (Lampel, 2011; Schüßler and Sydow, 2015). Fairs and festivals are seen as mechanisms that attach value to artists and creative products (Moeran and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2011) and identify and order market actors (e.g. Aspers and Darr, 2011).

This research stream hereby elaborates some of the mechanisms by which the middleground connects under- and upperground actors. For instance, temporary events such as trade fairs and festivals can provide the 'global pipelines' necessary to complement a local,

regionally-based 'buzz' (Bathelt et al., 2004; Maskell et al., 2006). From an analytical point of view, such events can also be described as intermediaries that, among other actors, influence and mediate the production and consumption of creative commodities (Jakob and van Heur, 2015). Such intermediaries are typically deeply embedded in local and regional structures, leading to idiosyncratic regional and national ways of structuring creative activities. Vinodrai (2015), for instance, examines how professional associations in Toronto (Canada) and Copenhagen (Denmark) secure the position of designers and identifies different organizational modes as a source of national and regional differences. Rantisi and Leslie (2015) analyse the formation of the National Circus School in Montreal, home town of the Cirque du Soleil, and discuss the importance of this intermediary in creating and maintaining a unique know-how, fostering networks, and creating legitimacy for circus arts.

While the literatures on temporary events and intermediaries complement the anatomy of the creative city framework by elaborating on the mechanisms by which creative fields are structured, extant research mostly takes these middleground structures as given. Yet, as Cohendet et al. (2011, p. 158) argue: 'A rich middleground is not reducible to some significant investments in local amenities such as schools, museums or performance halls'. Instead, middleground actors and structures themselves need to be deeply immersed in a particular creative field in order to gain legitimacy and credibility. Despite some prominent calls (e.g. Scott, 2006), however, only few studies to date pay attention to the development of a creative field over time, not least with regard to the question of how middleground structures emerge and become institutionalized as mediators between the upper- and underground. Likewise, Jakob and van Heur (2015: 358) argue that 'richer, situated analyses of intermediaries' are needed to better understand their exact role in shaping the creative economy.

In sum, while we already understand quite well creative scenes operating on the underground (e.g. Hauge and Hracs, 2010) and the structures making up creative clusters on

the upperground (e.g. Bathelt, 2005), we still know relatively little about the emergence and functioning of a field-configuring middleground. We therefore propose to apply a spatiotemporal perspective (cf. Ibert and Hautala, 2015) that focuses on the processes by which regional creative fields come into being. Empirically, this implies analyzing biographies of people, organizations, communities or clusters and the formation of actors, institutions or conventions over time (Ibert and Hautala, 2015: 324). Our study aims to connect these different conceptual streams of research by tracing how creative entrepreneurs in the city of Berlin developed new creative practices on the underground, how intermediary actors and spaces emerged on the middleground and how, eventually, these dynamics formed into a recognizable creative field tied to a specific place or region and supported by upperground institutions.

Methodology

Research Setting

Since 2005 Berlin has been deemed a rising design metropolis despite lacking the long design manufacturing or design production tradition and design-oriented policies of other cities like Milan, Paris or Copenhagen. Design, including product, graphic and fashion design, is commonly counted as a creative industry (e.g. DCMS, 2015). Going beyond the common understanding of design as a form-shaping discipline, the Berlin-based design field follows an expanded understanding of design as a form of planning and knowledge production (Papanek, 2000). More specialized design sectors such as service design, event design, social design, and interface design have assumed a growing role in recent years.

Starting in 1990, Berlin's unique post-wall environment attracted a strong influx of mostly young, well-educated, and internationally-oriented individuals (Cochrane et al., 1999). In the years to follow, Berlin developed into a city emanating an image of an ideal, experimental space for creative processes, products and practices (Lehrer, 1999). Between

2000 and 2009 the number of companies in the design industry had risen by 47 per cent, revenue by 19 per cent, and the number of employees in creative industries by over 20 per cent (Senatsverwaltung, 2010). Between 2009 and 2013, revenues of Berlin's creative industries generally grew by 28% (3.6 billion euros) (Senatsverwaltung, 2014: 18). In this time period, the design industry was marked by a 100% growth rate (1.1 billion euros), emerging as the creative industry with the highest growth rates (followed by music, arts, and games markets). These growth rates were high compared to the growth rates of the design industry in Germany, where sales in the design industry had risen by 113.52 per cent between 1996 and 2008 (BMW 2014, 19).

In 2014, in absolute terms, the Berlin-based design industry included 5,142 companies with overall annual revenues of 2.23 billion Euros and employing over 16,802 wage earners. Despite this promising sectoral data, it is important to note that the average income of designers is a calculated net-sum of only 1,505.00 Euros per month (Senatsverwaltung, 2014: 82-83). A number of design offices that now claim international fame such as Mykita, e27, Realgestalt, Meta Design, edenspiekermann or Strichpunkt were founded in Berlin in the 1990s (or even earlier). Up until today, open space – in the material, cultural, cognitive, and socio-economic sense – was a decisive factor contributing to the city's high attractiveness.

Data Collection and Analysis

The empirical data used in this paper stem from the long-term involvement of one author in the Berlin-based design field as a researcher. Qualitative interviews collected in the time period between 2002 and 2011 are our primary source of data. Overall, we conducted 49 interviews with designers (38), intermediaries (4), and German (3) as well as international (4) design experts.

Data was collected in three subsequent phases. The first phase was based on a series of narrative interviews with budding design entrepreneurs conducted in the context of a project

conducted between 2002 and 2007 aimed at exploring the dimension of space in micro-entrepreneurial ventures from 1997 to 2005. The second phase comprised a research project conducted in 2008 and 2009 commissioned by the city administration of Berlin (hereafter: Berlin Senat¹) to analyze organized spaces and places and the way they were used by designers between 2005 and 2009. The two projects closely built on each other, thus allowing us to identify the importance of spatiotemporal dynamics in field emergence. In order to capture current developments and triangulate our interview and observational data we entered a third phase in 2010 in which we conducted one additional contextual interview as well as a media data analysis for the complete time span of 1997-2012.

The designers interviewed were chosen to represent different degrees of experience in the design market and companies of a different size, ranging from young freelancers (25) to more mature and established firms that have been active on the market for a number of years, some with roughly 3-10 employees (full-time and/or freelance) (10) and some prominent, large or globally active companies with more than 10 full-time employees (3). With the help of a semi-standardized interview protocol we aimed to understand how the particular spatial conditions of Berlin influenced their professional practices.

Additionally, we attended 20 smaller short-term and informal events, parties, gallery openings, 10 stakeholder venues and 3 thematic fairs to both build trust with our interview partners and to observe and experience spatial practices.

Finally, we used archival sources such as entrepreneurial profiles, current public administrative reports, and media reports to complement these data. We searched all newspaper articles in the German press for the following terms in the LexisNexis database: DesignMai, DMY, Create Berlin, City of Design Berlin (see online Appendix for details on

¹ Berlin's Senate Department for Economics, Energy and Public Enterprises has founded the "Projekt Zukunft" in 1998 to support the development of the creative industries in Berlin (www.berlin.de/projektzukunft). It played a key role in funding projects, platforms and events in the Berlin design field.

our database). These data sources bring together different perspectives, thus allowing us to capture underground, middleground and underground structures in the development of the design field over time².

When analysing our data in line with a spatiotemporal approach we first developed a temporal ordering of key events over time (see Table 1). Second, we focused on gaining a better understanding of the formation of collective actors as well as of the creative practices associated with 'design from Berlin'. Here we started with the role of creative entrepreneurs in the late 1990s, identifying a certain playfulness in using and temporarily transforming places to assemble collectivities as a common practice. Third, we focused on understanding the role of key actors on the underground, particularly educational institutions and the city administration, in making sense of and exploiting these emerging, yet not well-established developments. Finally, we identified key actors, spaces, and places on the middleground which played a key role in translating early creative practices into visible intermediary structures, thus organizing what was before a highly unstructured field. While Figure 1 gives an overview of under-, middle- and underground actors, places, spaces and events over time, Figure 2 depicts the spatial location of these elements.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

² Most data sources were in German; we translated quoted passages ourselves into English.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Findings

Playing with Places and the Emergence of new Creative Practices on the Underground

A crucial creative practice in Berlin in the 1990s was the temporary reprogramming of and experimentation with geographical places. Most atmospheric qualities of these places were closely tied to the general spatial conditions in the city of Berlin after the reunification in 1989, when urban places that have been reserved for industrial production or other economic functions have fallen out of their original use (see Figure 2 for a spatial map of key actors and events).

Designing Spaces for Work and Play

Given the absence of both public and private funds, young budding designers had to orchestrate efforts to showcase themselves as well as their prototypes and designs at unique places. These early design ventures involved renting cheap workspaces and working with existing materials from unused places to invent design on the basis of what was available. Displaying improvisational and experimental do-it-yourself attitudes, studios were often temporarily reprogrammed into a fluid socialization hub where design objects were exhibited. Paired with alcohol, drugs and music, these events triggered club-like atmospheres in a non-club spatial environment:

I had a large studio here in the Kunstfabrik, which was typical for the time where it was easy to rent large spaces. I invited 20 people, friends, to exhibit their projects. During the day we exhibited our things, in the evening we had all sorts of workshops,

not just design-related, and then of course we had parties, which is the Berlin style.

(Interview intermediary, 2010)

Thereby, different social meeting formats were tested out in order to extend the range of design and, at the same time, raise the attention of other like-minded designers at a distinct place. New scene-mates from other cultural fields like music, TV, journalism, and video programming were invited and integrated into joint, non-commercial projects:

The idea was that on a Sunday afternoon, the boys could play their set live and people working with video or animation could show their animations together with it.

(Interview design SME, 2001)

The provisional character of these ad-hoc events was possible in the absence of urban planning state regulations, and driven by a great desire of many designers and design-interested people to expand the range of their professional practices. A central trigger was the opportunity to combine prototypical product showcases with other genres such as a club night. An excerpt from a field report of a gallery opening in 2004 illustrates the atmosphere of such events:

We are sitting in the anteroom as they explain to me some of their current and planned projects. It is not peaceful; the anteroom has to be cleared since a friendly gallery owner and her artist plus some works from Bremen are due to arrive that night. The anteroom facing the street – where work is done at four large desks during daytime – is emptied. The DJ next door is setting up his sound and light equipment in the doorframe (the light gear includes a multi-mirror disco sphere and a video projector), some beer crates are lugged in. There is no formal opening. At some point the whole room is filled with people. At about 11 pm the room is brimmed, smoke and electronic music wavers across the heads of the visitors. Some people are dancing, more people

look in, some stay and others leave. Colleagues, competitors and critics discuss potential orders, past jobs and reliable contacts.

An area where many of these activities took place was the area north of the Humboldt University (Auguststrasse, Münzstrasse and Alte Schönhauser Strasse in the district Mitte). Another dense area in the mid-to-late eighties was the area south of Prenzlauer Berg near Kollwitz Platz, where many abandoned shops were used as temporary locations for showcasing and party activities. The techno scene also located in these newly discovered parts of the city and designers considered membership in spontaneous party scenes as a highly valuable input to creative production. As one young designer explained:

For me, the most important stimuli still come from the club and party scene. It provides inspiration and opportunities for networking and interaction at the same time.

(Interview design SME, 2001)

Activating Abandoned and Unused Spaces

The rather chaotic situation of unexpected political unification in the early 1990s led to many unclear circumstances regarding the ownership and the functional use of houses and other abandoned places in inner city areas. Many of these places had been inaccessible for a long time or reserved for industrial, political, or military use. In the absence of paid orders, most young designers in Berlin gained their first-hand professional expertise by designing these abandoned spaces, decorating interiors of new shops and clubs, or setting up crossover 'art and business'-locations by using the same playful practices they used in their workspaces:

For me the nineties in Berlin were so interesting, because almost everything seemed possible, because you could do so many things. (Interview design SME, 2000)

These spaces were often temporal, their functional necessities cheap to install and quick to

remove. Established forms of designing spaces based on classic aesthetic attributes thereby became enriched with new media formats and digital technologies that created even more opportunities to design spaces anew:

The idea was really that we define the space. Mostly, these are installations where we design the entire space, from the hangings to the way electrical lights are set up in the room. Basically, defining all of this. (Interview design start-up, 1999)

As a result of these playful practices, designers in Berlin developed a systemic view on how goods are developed, invented, formed, and interpersonally processed across contexts and disciplines, resulting in a new understanding of design that moved beyond the usual distinction of anesthetizing product design on the one hand and functional communication design on the other. This broadened understanding was reflected in and further refined by the creation of social spaces that represent organizational models and intermediary platforms for designers.

Framing, Supporting and Commercially Exploiting Field Structures on the Underground

The Berlin Senate that now supports the design industry through infrastructure projects and an annual budget of 1,5 to 2 million Euros (Senatsverwaltung, 2014) began supporting the still rather fragile field structures in 2005 through commissioning official reports, funding and organizing pop-up stores, exhibitions or conferences, and communicating emerging understandings of design in Berlin in connection with the growing tourism industry. Not least through these funds, universities and cultural intermediaries such the Goethe Institute and the British Council began to establish more permanent intermediary platforms for co-production and exchange than the temporary events founded previously among independents freelancing designers. One example is the Berlin Design Reaktor, a multi-disciplinary research project

initiated in 2007 (and ended in 2010) by the University of Fine Arts to foster cooperation between small and medium-sized creative enterprises and designers and to develop innovative prototypes at the interface of different technologies, materials and tools. In addition, new and interdisciplinary educational structures for professional design training developed, for instance the Hybrid Plattform organized by the Technical University Berlin and the University of Fine Arts since 2011 fostering interdisciplinary research collaborations, offering a temporary workplace for researchers and creating an interface to established industry players. These activities contributed to formalizing networks and communities and to symbolically frame the notion of 'Berlin design'. Additional formalized stakeholder networks and match-making platforms such as the International Design Centre (IDZ), an established West Berlin institution to support individual and corporate designers and promote design in the city of Berlin and abroad, have been reoriented and relocated in the reunited Berlin in 1997.

An important milestone in the formalization and branding of the Berlin design field was the 2006 recognition of Berlin as a UNESCO 'City of Design'. A joint initiative led by the Berlin Senate in close coordination with established local design companies and entrepreneurs advertised the recent rise of Berlin's design scene, its trends and design approaches within the UNESCO-led Creative Cities Network. Media articles on the UNESCO award repeatedly stress the role of the 'DesignMai', an international design festival described below, in enabling the branding of Berlin as a 'rough and unfinished (...) work in progress' (Spiegel Online, 18 May 2006) by the city administration.

Field-organizing Practices on the Middleground: the Effects of Bottom-up Initiatives

These upperground activities built on a mediating middleground that began to form itself when in the early 2000s, not least in connection to the dot.com-crisis, many designers and

artists reconsidered their so-far volatile position in a quickly changing economic landscape. In doing so, new attempts to raise the awareness and the relevance of underground activities emerged. Many of these intermediary actors were themselves start-up designers in the decade before and contributed to making Berlin design visible to policy makers and among an international audience.

Creating Collective Intermediary Platforms

Starting in 2003, a peer group of design activists decided to aggregate the rather loose existing design ‘socialities’ under the label DesignMai, a temporary platform to present new experimental designs in a more collective format to a wider audience:

The organizers created the Designmai because there were no structures in the design market in Berlin. In the music and art fields there were different fairs, formats, and events, but not in design, even though there was a high density of designers and creatives. (Interview intermediary, 2006)

The idea was to assemble typical design products from Berlin that ‘were never 100% serious, but of course had a serious core, developed at the interface to the art and party scene, incomplete, just like Berlin’ (Interview intermediary, 2007). The DesignMai itself was highly improvised and clearly based on underground practices transforming unused and unknown spaces on a temporary basis for a different purpose. As one of the organizers explained:

We used to tell people to bring some paint, buy some nails, help to build the podium and paint the wall. The whole thing had no structure and no real organization. (Interview intermediary, 2010)

This experimental character of the DesignMai, its undirected brand, and the fact that it was

novel and, so far, unknown eventually caused many internal tensions among the founders who argued about the direction in which the fair should develop, especially given a growing interest in the event. Some voted for a more commercial platform, others for a non-commercial and transgressive event that captured the provisional do-it-yourself attitude of many young designers in the late 1990s.

After four years, the DesignMai was stopped due to these internal conflicts. A small number of the original founders then established the label 'Design May Youngster' (DMY) which, after a legal conflict related to the former label DesignMai, was dropped and relaunched as 'Daily, Monthly, Yearly' to retain the claim 'DMY', which was by then already well-known. From 2006 onward, the DMY served as a trade fair that hosted designers not only from Berlin, but from all over the world and honoured Berlin's experimental design approach by displaying products that did not yet meet market standards. The DMY sharpened its profile and thematic diversification became a central prerequisite to cope with growing numbers of visitors. As such, other formats such as public discussions on societal questions were integrated into the fair format, representing Berlin's holistic, interdisciplinary understanding of design:

The DesignMai is not a classical trade fair as it connects over 300 designers, urban planners and architects to ask questions about the nature and future of the city. (...) The objects are either concerned with the public or the private space: spacy Ostlichter (street lanterns), playgrounds with changeable and clean sandboxes, movable banks for mothers and babies and pensioners. (Berliner Morgenpost, 18 May 2006)

It is important to note that the DMY, like the transmediale and other bottom-up fairs, was never supported publicly in its first years.

Stimulated by the specific developments of the DMY fair, other event series like the TYPO Berlin or the transmediale also started to communicate a broader understanding of

design within their thematic sections. The creative tinkering approach so prevalent at the DMY further became manifested in the Open Design City, a FabLab located within the coworking space Betahaus and founded in 2010 by a group of design entrepreneurs.

The strong will to 'formulate' a sector and its growing relevance for the city led to additional follow-up activities, such as the forming of Create Berlin e.V., an association dedicated to promoting design founded by a group of spearheading design activists from Berlin in 2005. Create Berlin unites creative professions and design-producing talent from agencies, companies and institutions in fashion design, product/interior design and new media/graphic design and describes itself as 'the ambassador of Berlin design'. The birth of Create Berlin can be seen as a reaction of the designer scene to their exclusion from traditional state-regulated forms of power. It is a form of self-organisation ensuring that young, small and marginal businesses are taken seriously as equal players in economic development and city marketing policies so far dominated by a focus on 'high culture'. As it was commented in a Berlin-based newspaper:

The network (...) aims to give design from the city, no matter whether fashion, product or corporate design, a label – hoping for better international marketing. Not an easy endeavour, because "Berliner Design" – that what the 1,500 design ventures in the cities are doing – is a structural market category at best, it certainly isn't an aesthetic one. (taz, 20 May 2006)

Additionally, private entrepreneurial structures devoted explicitly to showcasing and selling design from Berlin online and offline such as berlindesign.net (2002), Berlinomat (2004) or ausberlin (2005) were founded by underground actors. The online sales and distribution platform DaWanda (2006), a virtual marketplace for self-made/manufactured products and small series items, gave even the smallest entrepreneurs access to international markets and the possibility to develop niche segments at relatively low costs. Additionally, online

crowdsourcing platforms such as Jovoto (2006) emerged as useful intermediaries that provided information about available jobs, encouraged a collective process of idea evaluation and development, and increasingly connected design entrepreneurs to large commercial organizations.

Although having a world-wide reach, these digital platforms regularly return to the social urban structure in the form of temporary barcamps, ad-hoc conferences, or meetings, thereby expanding their studios into semi-public spaces. Jovoto, for instance, itself as a company located in the coworking space Betahaus (opened in 2009) in Kreuzberg, initiated the weekly 'betabreakfast' there, an allegedly informal networking event at which entrepreneurs pitch their project ideas during breakfast among like-minded peers.

Collective Sensemaking in Communicative Spaces

The increasingly visible and formalized interactions among producers and consumers in the city and in online communities were paralleled by several attempts to make sense of the observed developments. In line with the composition of the underground scene, many magazines at the intersection of art, literature, architecture, urbanism, music, and fashion have been founded in Berlin since 2000, benefitting from low production costs and a wide variety of personal expertise in the city. Even though the public administration has supported the formation of a formal representational structure of design in Berlin, the surprising increase of Berlin-based magazines indicates the powerful self-organizing mechanisms at work in the city. In fact, many designers preferred being independently organized on a project basis, e.g. when producing a magazine, to prevent being incorporated into formal policy instruments such as cluster management initiatives.

Not least through these framing and sensemaking activities, Berlin-based fairs such as the DMY increasingly viewed the city of Berlin and its creative scenes as an export product

and started to host events in other European, Asian and South American countries. City partnerships within EU-financed exchange and cooperation programs (such as Interreg Europe programs) have additionally given micro-companies access to international markets, thereby contributing to stabilizing the field.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this study, we applied a spatiotemporal perspective towards understanding the dynamics of situated creativity in an emerging urban creative field. We were able to identify how design entrepreneurs in Berlin playfully used different places to connect people and fields of activity with each other, a practice that was picked up and made sense of by various intermediary actors, thereby providing the grounds for commercial exploitation. We observed how initial ties were formed and new practices were tested out in clubs, unused spaces, or workplaces on what Grandadam et al. (2013) termed the underground, i.e. by actors not directly connected to the commercial and industrial world. We hereby particularly noted the role played by small, organized events such as gallery openings and closings, club nights or parties at which designs were displayed, aesthetics exposed, or prototype projects presented and tested out in front of a loose collective of interested and likeminded people.

First, our study indicates that a productive middleground does not necessarily need to be driven by a major commercial player such as Ubisoft, whose role was crucial for shaping the video games industry in Montreal (Cohendet et al., 2010; 2011; Grandadam et al., 2013), but that it can also emerge from the bottom up, through quite amorphous relational, ideational and experiential spaces that constitute a kind of ‘docking station’ for more established cultural, political and commercial players. In the case of Berlin, these structures were mostly created by individual entrepreneurs that built on already existing relational, symbolic, and institutional density or ‘thickness’ (Amin and Thrift, 1994; 1995) in the field and used their ‘street-like’ competences – gathering audiences, staging a place for the purpose of presenting

symbolic artefacts – to connect underground actors with the upperground of educational, cultural and political institutions. These intermediary structures, until today, have an unfinished, spontaneous character that over time became associated with the Berlin design field.

Second, our findings show that various places for creative interaction do not become productive middleground structures by themselves, but only through their active organization and programming, often in the form of informal events through which localized practices are enacted, thereby constituting the local buzz. These events are not field-configuring events in the strict definition of the term, because they are not big international events that configure entire creative industries. Rather, different and innovative event formats are shaped in specific situated contexts and thereby contribute to local field configuration. In addition, unlike what Cohendet et al. (2011) and Grandadam et al. (2013) argue, our findings indicate that middleground structures can also be of a virtual nature, particularly regarding crowdsourcing platforms as a new form of intermediary actor (Jakob and Van Heur, 2015). This can happen when – as in the case of Jovoto – the actors behind the crowdsourcing platform are themselves part of the face-to-face underground of a city and regularly organize localized events, thereby acting as a powerful bridge between potentially distant, large corporations and local creative scenes.

Third, by taking into account that site-specific locational factors determine the specific formation, governance and articulation of creative fields and its organizational modes (e.g. Lange et. al., 2008; Peck, 2011; O'Connor and Gu, 2010), our research has shown that the regional agglomeration of networks of aesthetic production has its own and quite distinct logic, one that is quite different from the political labelling of 'creative clusters' which are based on an economic logic that may in fact undermine existing aesthetic practices rather than promote them (van Heur, 2009). Our findings thus have implications for creative cluster policy makers in that they suggest looking at concrete places where creative interactions take

place and try to support these underground-based exchanges bottom up, especially with regard to making them visible outside of these localized networks, both nationally and internationally (Faulconbridge, 2007; Turok, 2003), but without imposing a top-down economic logic. In the light of the vanishing of many inner city places due to tighter neighbourhood regulations or increased rental costs due to gentrification processes, our findings suggest that creative cluster policies may focus on actively securing or even creating heterotopic 'spaces for play' (Hjorth, 2004) in a city, a historical situation that has occurred without deliberate preparation in Berlin after the German reunification. In Berlin, political parties and administration has started securing creative and experimental places again deliberately since 2012, providing long-term rental contracts for creative associations and even re-buying plots of land or houses to avoid further investor-driven urban development. Similar to what we observed in the design market, Berlin's recent scene of tech- and fin-tech-start-ups relies heavily on cultural seeds, local embeddedness and inspiring environments. This indicates that policy makers in Berlin and elsewhere should take a more integrated rather than merely sector-oriented urban planning perspective that acknowledges the importance of a lively club and party scene and preserves historical houses and urban places for creative use rather than 'selling out' cities to private investors. As our study indicates, this approach requires taking local creative practices and emerging underground activities into account as having a long-term contribution for urban development.

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Timeline of key events

Founding Year / Name		Field of Design / Format
1988	Founding of the Transmediale	Media design / yearly event
2003	Founding of DMY Festival (as informal platform)	Yearly fair / experimental social, architectural, cross-over design, art oriented design
2004	Opening of Berlinomat (closed in 2008)	Permanent sales shop for independent product, graphic designers
2005	Establishment of CREATE.BERLIN e.V.	Intermediary network structures with permanent office
2005	Recognition as UNESCO City of Design	Covering all spheres of design / Honoration by the UNESCO for the public administration of Berlin
2006	Founding of the DMY as an international fair	Showcasing sustainable and ecological experimental design, yearly event
2006	Founding of DAWANDA	Berlin-based online sales platform for unique design products made in Berlin – now an international platform
2006	Founding of Jovoto	Berlin-based online matchmaking and crowdsourcing platform
2008	Founding of the Hybrid Plattform by the University of Fine Arts and the Technical University Berlin	University driven exchange platform between academic courses matching with SMEs
2007	Founding of the Design Reaktor	Matchmaking platform of the University of Fine Arts
2010	Opening of the Open Design City	FabLab and Open Worklab within the coworking Space Betahaus in Kreuzberg
2011	Opening of Hybrid Plattform	Project by the Technical University Berlin and the University of Fine Arts to link art, science and technology

Figure 1: Under-, middle- and underground actors, places, spaces and events over time

Figure 2: Geographical locations of key designers and events

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