The Cultural Industries. The British Experience in International Perspective

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In Britain, the „cultural industries" have a long tradition, reaching back to early modern times, and they are today among the most successful in the world. Accordingly, they have a central place in the Centre for British Studies' research activities on „Commerce and Culture" which cover both historical and contemporary perspectives. As Christiane Eisenberg, Professor of History at the Centre, reminded the participants in her opening address, researchers in the field face a range of pressing questions with a view to the British example. These include, first, are the cultural industries in Britain still ahead of those elsewhere in Europe? Second, in what respect do they build on these traditions? And third, can the British cultural industries' performance be generalized? The intention was to debate such questions with a view to the broader terminological and methodological challenges entailed by research in this field. The workshop was open to researchers from all disciplines and levels of expertise – from advanced students to professors – and aimed at stimulating mutual exchange of interdisciplinary and international insights.

The first day of the meeting referred to the widely read reports of the British Department for Media, Culture and Sport on the so-called creative industries as a broad definition of the cultural industries. First, Simon Roodhouse (University of Greenwich) managed to spark an intense debate by criticising existent enumerative definitions of creative industries and demonstrating an array of conflicting interpretations of this compound expression. These appear to be problematic with a view to measurement exercises. They might also lead to an overemphasis on the business aspect of cultural production. Roy Boyne (Durham University/ University of Strasbourg) contributed a sociological perspective to the discussion. He specifically pointed to the increasing significance of quantitative evaluation methods for cultural projects, which are an important aspect of British cultural policy, and drew attention to the ideological connotations and possible shortcomings of such exercises.

Susan Galloway (University of Glasgow) and Stewart Dunlop (University of Strathclyde) highlighted a specific ambiguity in British policy on creative industries. On the one hand, this policy promotes creative industries on the basis of their economic significance. On the other, it insists on continued support to such businesses. Both speakers turned the attention to the changing meaning of the terms culture and creativity. They also discussed analytical definitions of cultural industries and suggested that better definitions could recalibrate our perception to reintroduce the educational aspects of cultural production. Lawrence Black (Durham University) added an historical perspective by discussing changing attitudes in British governments from the 1960s to new Labours „Cool Britannia" initiative.

Graeme Evans and Jo Foord (both London Metropolitan University) reported on their large, comparative study of creative industries policies and strategies employed internationally at national and city level (London, Toronto, Barcelona, New York, San Francisco). They also discussed divergence and convergence in definitions, the significance of better tools to analyse the exchange relations between the creative and other industries, and whether British policies can and should be emulated elsewhere.

The second day began with presentations on cultural industries within the context of a specific location. Sean Nixon (University of Essex) surveyed the (male-dominated and 'laddish') „social make-up" of creators in the „persuasion industries" of central London advertising agencies and elaborated on the relationship it has on the advertising they produce. Annika Wingbermühle (University of Passau) presented a study on marketing strategies for Scottish goods and services that take account of socio-cultural differences.

In the next section, entrepreneurial prac-

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tices and their side-effects were discussed. Chris Naylor (City University London) discussed whether the conflated terminology of the creative industries helps on the ground by drawing on his practical experience in the British cultural industries: As founder of the Almeida Theatre, he was more industrious than creative; at Charleston, a rural museum and gallery, entrepreneurial rather than cultural; and with Engage, an association promoting access and education with artists, an „industrious creationist". This report from cultural practice was followed by Bastian Lange's presentation of his PhD research findings as a Geographer at the Humboldt University about Berlin's creative knowledge economies. He demonstrated that „hybrid culturepreneurs" (young, entrepreneurially independent professional agents) have silently paved the way for invisible processes of urban modernization in Berlin: locations are created that are used reflexively and function as social switch points, the „scene" is the trading place of information externally labelled „creative".

The third section started with a Cultural Studies perspective: Gesa Stedman (University of Giessen) compared the Contemporary Literary Field in the UK with France and Germany, and Rita Gerlach (Centre for British Studies) enquired into the possibility of comparing British and German theatre quality. Despite the commercialisation of the British literary field „From Gentlemanly Publishing to Conglomerates", Stedman found „pockets of resistance" in all three phases of a book's life that have wider cultural and social meaning and make the future unpredictable. Gerlach discussed approaches to product and artistic quality, such as economic and cultural value, and stressed the necessity of enquiring into the content side of the cultural industries while proposing a pragmatic solution to a theatre comparison.

A different perspective was taken by Anna Dempster (Birkbeck College) who analysed theatre as a business by presenting a case study of „Jerry Springer the Opera", an innovative musical that went from a small studio experiment to the National Theatre and London's West End but ultimately failed because management did not systematically evaluate the underlying risks of the production at each phase of the life cycle.

Christian Handke (Centre for British Studies) contributed an economics perspective on the record industry by presenting results from his research on copyright and supply in the German and British record industries. He discussed whether the supposition that sales fall due to a surge in unauthorized copying holds true. His empirical research found interestingly that there is no uniform recession, that there is a high degree of market entry and that CD releases grow, so that other significant factors such as, for example cost reductions or amateurisation appear to overlap.

All papers generated lively discussions about the viability of disciplinary propositions and methods in the context of analysing and comparing the cultural industries, about the applicability of their findings on other cultural sectors and about their general impact. The interdisciplinarity of both speakers and audience proved to be of high relevance for active involvement and new insights. One of the main aims of the conference, mutual exchange of differing viewpoints and latest research proposals and findings, was achieved successfully; for the other, building networks for future cooperation, international and interdisciplinary research, the foundation was laid.

Christiane Eisenberg summarized this in her concluding remarks and added that one of the major outcomes of this conference was that this exciting topic needs more development and further research. And she ended with an observation that, between the lines, British participants have continuously commented on the typically German discussion of cultural value, while the distinction between elite and popular culture seems to her not as pronounced in the British tradition.
Contributions to the workshop will be published in an online reader on the Centre's website.[1]

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[1] Centre for British Studies http://www2.hu-berlin.de/gbz/

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