

Artist as a Knowledge Worker

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Abstract:

The concept of “knowledge workers” was introduced for the first time by Peter Drucker (1969), who described them as people who, when working, use their brain more than their muscles. According to Horibe (1999, p. xi), knowledge workers add value through their ideas, their analyses, their judgments, their syntheses and their designs. However, how can we categorize the work of an artist? Most of the artists use equally their brains and their muscles to accomplish a work of art. As a result, the work of an artist comprises highly specialized skills – often of a physical nature – gained after a period of extensive training and cultivated by personal experience with an artistic profession over time. Moreover, a personal predisposition – talent – is needed in order to successfully perform an artistic profession. Both explicit and implicit knowledge are in play; yet, the implicit one is what makes the difference between an outstanding artist and an “average” artist. From the economic perspective, the artistic work has always been considered as problematic in view of matching with economic theories. Abbing (2002) described it as “the exceptional economy of arts”. On the other hand, the recent birth of a new phenomenon – the creative economy – puts any creative work, including the work of artists, into a new light. Creative work has been recognized as a driver of new economy, together with knowledge and innovation. This new approach suggests a new perspective in judging the role of artists within the knowledge economy and in assessing their importance for the future economic development.

Key words:

Artist, knowledge worker, knowledge economy, creative economy, arts.

Abstrakt:

Pojem "znalostní pracovníci" po prvýkrát predstavil Peter Drucker (1969), definujúc ich ako ľudí, ktorí keď pracujú, používajú viac mozog než svaly. Podľa Horiba (1999, s. xi) znalostní pracovníci pridávajú hodnotu prostredníctvom svojich myšlienok, analýz, rozhodnutí, syntéz a návrhov. Avšak, ako možno kategorizovať prácu umelca? Väčšina umelcov používa rovnako svoj mozog ako aj svaly na vytvorenie umeleckého diela. Práca umelca zahŕňa vysoko špecializované zručnosti – často fyzickej povahy – získané po rozsiahлом období učenia sa a kultivované osobnými skúsenosťami s umeleckou profesiou. Navyše k úspešnému vykonávaniu umeleckej profesie je potrebné mať aj osobnú predispozíciu – talent. Rovnako explicitné ako aj implicitné znalosti sú v hre. No sú to práve tie implicitné, ktoré robia rozdiel medzi výnimočným a "priemerným" umelcom. Z ekonomického hľadiska sa práca umelcov vždy považovala istým spôsobom za problematickú, keďže nekorešpondovala s existujúcimi ekonomickými teóriami. V tejto súvislosti Abbing (2002) označil ekonomiku umenia ako "výnimočnú". Na druhej strane zrod nového fenoménu – kreatívnej ekonomiky – stavia akúkoľvek kreatívnu prácu, vrátane umenia, do nového svetla. Tvorivá práca bola uznaná ako hnacia sila novej ekonomiky, spolu so znalosťami a inováciou. Tento nový prístup naznačuje nový pohľad na posudzovanie úlohy umelcov v znalostnej ekonomike, ako aj na ich význam pre budúci hospodársky rozvoj.

Kľúčové slová:

Umelec, znalostný pracovník, znalostná ekonomika, kreatívna ekonomika, umenie.

Introduction

During the evolution of economic thoughts, the labour of artists has always been seen as problematic in view of matching with economic theories. The founder of classical economic theory Adam Smith (1723 – 1790), in his work *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), described the arts as “an unproductive labour”. He wrote: “...men of letters of all kinds; players, buffoons, musicians, opera-singers, opera-dancers, etc. ...their labour produces nothing for which an equal quantity of service can afterwards be procured. The declamation of the actor, the harangue of the orator, or the tune of the musician, the work of all of them perishes in the very instant of its production” (Smith, 1776, vol. 2, chap. 3, par. 2).

His successor David Ricardo (1772 – 1823), in the book *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), treated questions of value. He claimed that the value of a commodity, or the quantity of any other commodity for which it will exchange, depends on the relative quantity of labour which is necessary for its production. However, he considers the arts to be an exception from this rule: “*There are some commodities, the value of which is determined by their scarcity alone... Some rare statues and pictures, scarce books and coins, ...of which there is a very limited quantity, are all of this description. Their value is wholly independent of the quantity of labour originally necessary to produce them, and varies with the varying wealth and inclinations of those who are desirous to possess them*” (Ricardo, 1817, vol. 32, note 68).

Alfred Marshall (1842 - 1924), in his *Principles of Economics* (1890), dealt with questions of pricing. He stated that “*pictures by old masters, rare coins and other things cannot be «graded» at all. The price at which each is sold, will depend much on whether any rich persons with a fancy for it happen to be present at its sale*” (Marshall, 1891, vol. 5, chap. 2, par. V.II.4). Furthermore, he mentioned the arts also in relation with his *Law of Diminishing Marginal Utility* saying that “*There is however an implicit condition in this law which should be made clear. It is that we do not suppose time to be allowed for any alteration in the character or tastes of the man himself. It is therefore no exception to the law that the more good music a man hears, the stronger is his taste for it likely to become*” (Marshall, 1890, vol. 3, chap. 3, par. 6). In this claim, Marshall actually anticipated the current theory of *Arts Appropriation Cycle* (Carù a Cova, 2005, pp. 39 - 54), which explains how a man gradually becomes an arts consumer in a cycle of repeated arts experiences.

In the 20th century, two American economists - W. J. Baumol (*1922) and W.G. Bowen (*1933) - published the first real economic analysis of the arts sector named *The Performing Arts – The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music and Dance* (1966). Their main finding was the existence of an ‘income gap’, i.e., a gap between what the traditional live arts can reasonably earn at the box office and the cost of doing business in an industry with no hope of labour productivity improvement. The authors see the reason for this in the economic growth manifested at the end of the 18th century as a result of labour productivity increase given by mechanization of production processes. Since there are limited possibilities of mechanization of artistic work, they labelled the arts sector as “non-progressive” or “archaic”. They argued that the arts sector was not influenced by the economic growth to the same extent as other sectors in the economy (Baumol a Bowen, 1966). To explain the logic of so-called *Baumol disease*, let us take as an example a violin player who prepares for performance of Mozart's violin concert. Today – similarly to his colleague in the 18th century – the violinist will need more or less the same amount of initial training and more or less the same amount of time for preparing a particular concert piece. Here we can clearly see the archaic nature of the arts sector. On the other hand, given by nowadays’ technological advances, a today’s violinist is able to give much more geographically spread concerts in the same period of time (new transport possibilities) and reach much wider public (mass media). He or she can use new media (social media) to reach new public and take care of his/her own publicity independently of agents. However, no other substantial productivity improvement is feasible.

At the beginning of the new millennium, H. Abbing (2002) published the book entitled *Why Are Artists Poor: The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*. The author focused on economic paradoxes within the arts sector mainly from the micro-economic perspective and from the point of view of individual artists. He pointed out the two-faced character of the economy of arts: On one hand there is a world of splendor, of magnificent opera houses, chic openings, of artists earning very high incomes and of rich donors whose status is enhanced by their association with the arts. On the other hand, there is the large majority of artists earning little or nothing; often they lose money by working in the arts and make up for the losses by working in second jobs or accepting support from their partners (Abbing, 2002, p. 11).

The aim of this paper is to discuss the position of the arts within nowadays’ knowledge economy, with a particular focus on artists as knowledge workers. Further on, the paper addresses new directions of the arts within the economic system in the view of a new phenomenon – the creative economy.

1 The arts within the knowledge economy

Despite rather pessimistic conclusions regarding the position of the arts and artists in the economic system, a new perspective appeared with the emergence of knowledge economy. The knowledge economy was defined as production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence. The key components of the knowledge economy include greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources (Powell and Snellman, 2004). In the knowledge economy, knowledge-based work plays an increasingly important role in economic life (Davenport, 2008). Kelemen et al. (2010, p. 34) point out that in the process of knowledge production and transfer, communication is associated with inventions enabling easier,

quicker and more powerful communication, including devices ranging from the printing press, telephone, television, personal computer to communication platforms like the Internet, sms, Twitter, etc.

Yet, these new technologies, in particular those related to digitalization and new media, significantly influence the world of arts. In the recognized publication by Jozef Kelemen et al. entitled *Invitation to the Knowledge Society* (2007), the whole chapter (2, p. 20 – 38) is dedicated to the roots of knowledge society within culture and the arts. The authors provide numerous examples on how modern technologies have been influencing and inspiring new artistic expressions. The authors point out that the new devices and media catch attention of artists from two perspectives: as tools for creation enabling to explore the living reality or as communication tools connecting an artist and the public (Kelemen et al., 2007).

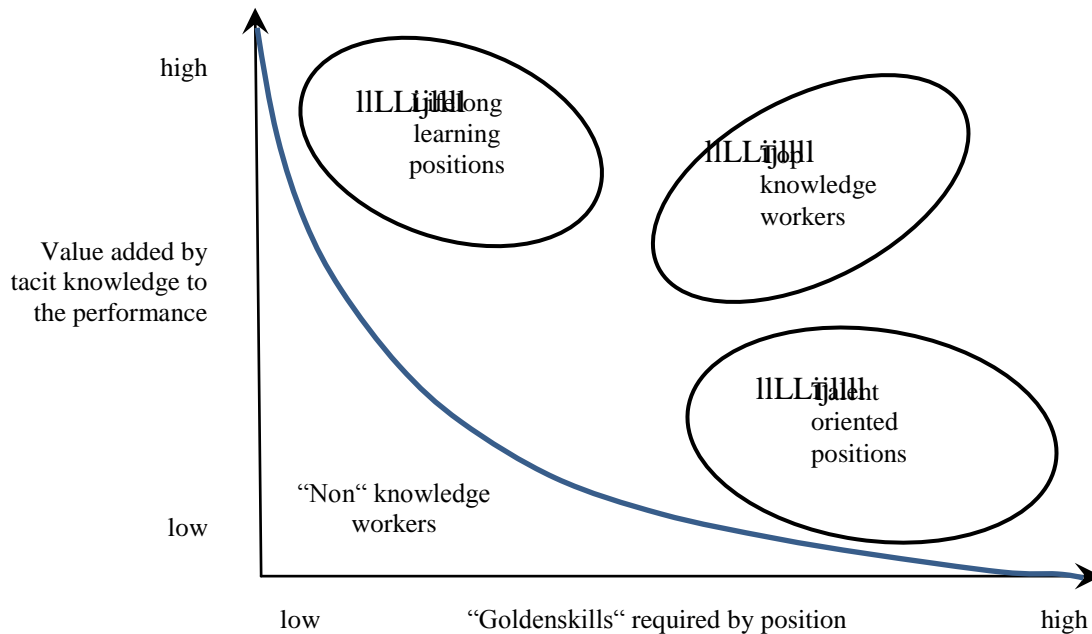
As stated by the European Commission (2004), at the beginning of the new millennium “up until recently, the economic and labour market aspects of the arts and cultural sector were of secondary significance in the welfare state. Culture was seen as a part of social policy and was not considered an area which could or should be subject to 'normal' economic criteria, since these criteria were interpreted as incompatible with culture”. This approach was clearly rooted in the mentioned economic theories forming the exceptional economic image of the arts. Nevertheless, new technologies and the emergence of so called “digital culture” have changed the view of the economic importance of the arts. Digital culture described as a “result of an interaction between traditional culture (content), the TIMES sector (technology) and service/distribution demonstrates enormous employment dynamics, particularly in the area of multimedia and software. Furthermore, completely new job profiles and qualifications content are emerging, which are extremely interesting for cultural workers. From the structural perspective, the cultural sector is characterized by a high share of freelancers and very small companies” (European Commission, 2004).

1.1 Artist as a knowledge worker

However, let us look at the work of an artist from the knowledge perspective. The concept of “knowledge workers” was introduced for the first time by Peter Drucker (1954), who described them as people who, when working, use their brain more than their muscles. According to Horibe (1999, p. xi), knowledge workers add value through their ideas, their analyses, their judgments, their syntheses and their designs. But how can we categorize the work of an artist? Most of the artists use equally their brains and their muscles to accomplish a work of art. The work of an artist comprises highly specialized skills – often of a physical nature – gained after a period of extensive training and cultivated by personal experience with an artistic profession over time. Here we can quote the definition of knowledge workers by Kelemen et al. (2010) who describe them as follows: “The most important part is done in their heads even though the final result of a knowledge worker's work has a manual character”. The authors use the example of a surgeon. In view of the arts, we suggest another example – a violinist.

Moreover, a personal predisposition – talent – is needed in order to successfully perform an artistic profession. Reboul (2006) explicitly mentions talent-oriented professions in his classification of knowledge workers (Figure 1). The scheme applies two criteria: the value added by tacit knowledge to the performance and “golden skills” required by the specific job. The value added reflects how important tacit knowledge is for fulfilling job tasks. The golden skills are autonomy, creativity and problem solving. The autonomy is seen as the ability to act independently, without specific orders or guidelines, taking responsibility for own actions. The creativity is perceived as the ability to come up with original and innovative ideas about “what needs to be done” and especially “how to do it”. The problem solving skills reflect the ability to use analytical power to gather and process information in order to come up with a decision.

Figure 1: Reboul's classification of knowledge workers



Source: Reboul, C. et al. 2006. *Managing Knowledge Workers: The KWP Matrix*. Conference Proceedings MOMAN 06, Prague 2006.

Consequently, Reboul (2006) describes talent oriented positions as a combination of a high level of golden skills and a minor value added by tacit knowledge to the performance. As an example, the author suggests arts professions, creative professions in marketing and public relations. He suggests that managers of talent oriented professions should not forget that golden skills are based on inborn talents and cannot be developed if a worker lacks the necessary abilities. This group of employees needs to be treated in a slightly different way from the other employees: talents need to feel free to express their potential in their job duties if we want to keep them motivated and affective. He stresses that talent oriented position knowledge workers must be given freedom to accomplish their tasks in their own ways. With respect to types of knowledge used in artistic professions, both explicit and implicit knowledge are in play. Yet, the implicit one is what makes the difference between an outstanding artist and an “average” artist.

1.2 The arts and creative economy

Recent studies have identified another stage of economic development – the creative economy. Kloudová (2010, p. 117 - 118) highlights the creative economy as a new trend arising from the platform of completed industrialization, high technologies, advanced schooling and information gains in well-developed economies. The sector of creative economy nowadays generates increasingly higher revenue and involves a higher number of employees leading to the emergence of a new labour class, a so-called creative class (Florida, 2002).

Creative economy is formed by creative industries. They are characterized as those areas where a product or service contains a substantial element of artistic or creative endeavour (Caves, 2000). It is a relatively new aggregate established by the Department of Culture, Media nad Sport (DCMS) in UK in 1998 (Blythe, 2001). They are defined as „Advertising, Architecture, Art and Antiques Market, Crafts, Design, Designer Fashion, Film, Interactive and leisure software, Music, Performing Arts, Publishing, Television and Radio“ (DCMS, 1998). In reality, they encompass diverse sectors, however, with a common feature – the concept of creativity. In Europe, the creative industries make a significant contribution to the economy, creating about 3% of European Union GDP – corresponding to an annual market value of €500 billion – and employing about 6 million people (CEMP, 2013). Globally, UNCTAD (2010) estimates the growth in creative services at 7.5%.

However, there is certain antagonism between the advocates of the concepts of knowledge and creative economy. On one hand, there is criticism of the techno-economic orientation of the current knowledge economy,

which is seen as an impediment to the humanities and creative arts (Bullen et al., 2004). On the other hand, Kelemen et al. (2007) points out the unprecedented intersections between culture & the arts, the science & research and information technologies in the knowledge economy, resulting in a new space – so called cyberculture. From the opposite perspective, Kelemen et al. (2007, p. 16) argue that creativity is often overrated, and "the vast majority of professional activities mainly oriented to precision and perfection is not the creativity."

Nevertheless, there is one thing in common for both the knowledge and creative economy – the crucial role attributed to innovation in economic and social development. In that case, innovation, understood as the *transformative* mode of knowledge transmission, could equally well be experienced in, or exemplified by, any field (Edelstein, 2010, p. 17), obviously including culture and the arts. From another perspective, Nivin and Plettner (2009, p. 33) claim that a creative environment drives innovation which drives economic development. Finally, according to Stam et al. (2008, p. 119), creativity may also be particularly useful in knowledge-based economies, where creativity is required to convert scientific and technological knowledge into market value.

Despite the described antagonism, we consider the knowledge and creative economy to be concurrent trends showing a lot of common features and overlaps. These can be observed in particular in the field of arts. Going back to the main focus of this paper – the knowledge worker perspective – we can see these overlaps even in the Reboul's (2006) knowledge workers classification. Yet, one of the golden skills highlighted by the author is creativity.

Conclusion

According to Kelemen et al. (2010, p. 141), knowledge workers represent more than half of the employees in advanced economies. Horibe (1999, p. x, xi) claims that in the New Economy – the economy based on the flood of information coming at lightning speed – the demand at the workplace is almost exclusively for knowledge workers. However, as explained in the paper, the work of artists is difficult to be placed within the given categories. In a significant portion of artistic professions, we see a paradox not comparable with any other sector of the economy. It is the fact that the production process has remained unchanged in comparison to the production process decades or even centuries ago. The reason for this is high proportion of human labour, which cannot be modernized by the use of mechanization. Thus, creative human labour is a fundamental element of the arts production. From the perspective of knowledge workers classification, artistic work can be described as talent oriented profession (Reboul, 2006). In addition, a new phenomenon of nowadays' society was highlighted – the birth of creative economy. According to Kloudová (2010, p. 123), workforce creativity is identified as the main source of economic growth nowadays (Kloudová, 2010, p. 123). As a result of these diverse trends, which emerged in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the arts and culture have got on a more optimistic trek towards their revalorization in our society. Hence, after the period of marginalization of the arts and culture in view of their economic context and impact – which started with Adam Smith – we have finally witnessed changes in perception of the role of culture and the arts in our society, taking into account both knowledge and creative economy perspectives.

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