

## BOOK REVIEW

**Sai Loo, *Creative Working in the Knowledge Economy*,**  
New York: Routledge, 2017, 168 pages, ISBN: 978-1-138-21139-1

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The positive effects of the cultural and creative industries (CCI) on development worldwide, including in the European Union, are broadly acknowledged. *Cultural Times - The First Global Map of Cultural and Creative Industries* (CISAC & UNESCO, 2015) nominates Europe as the second largest CCI market (accounting to around 32% of the global total), while the sector's contribution to the European GDP is approximately 4.4% (TERA, 2014) and it employs 7.5% of the European workforce (Austrian Institute for SME Research & VVA Europe, 2016). Despite CCI's economic importance, there is a lack of studies in the scientific literature that analyse the particularities of *creative workers*, which is much needed in order to develop adequate policies for sustaining and promoting these industries.

Therein, Sai Loo's book, *Creative Working in the Knowledge Economy*, represents a pertinent contribution to the field, highlighting the complexity of the creative knowledge work, by investigating advertising and software development industries in Europe, Singapore and Japan. Providing critical insights on how knowledge workers manage their creative capabilities in the process of producing innovative goods and services in the new economy, the author analyses the connection between knowledge and the creative dimensions to provide new frameworks for learning and working.

The book is well structured, being divided into 11 chapters. The first part introduces the research topic - *Creative application of knowledge in the knowledge economy*, detailing the research questions and describing the general approach and the design of the scientific demarche. The second chapter investigates the various acceptations of knowledge in the knowledge economy, concluding that there is no single wide accepted definition and identifying the usage of a variety of terms in order to describe it (e.g. post-industrial society, new economy). Sai Loo argues that the transitional process shaping the knowledge economy from the old industrial-based economy suggests the existence of connective dimensions, including the increasing digitalization of knowledge goods, the enhancing of the global network of business and of cultural perspectives and the diminishing of the distance between producers and consumers/ users of products or services. Furthermore, the study

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continues by completing the theoretical base for the next chapters, providing a synthesis definition of knowledge (by considering the areas which develop it, its means of transfer and its nature). Based on a comprehensive literature review, four perspectives of knowledge work are identified. As the author concludes, the common nominator of these approaches is “the creative use of knowledge to produce innovative knowledge goods” (p. 35). Concerning the types of individuals involved in knowledge work, Loo nominates: independent workers, individuals who work in collaboration, those with a leadership role and producers who collaborate with consumers to develop innovative products. Using these findings, the author establishes a two-dimensional theoretical framework of knowledge work, consisting in individual and collaborative styles of working, applicable in single or multi-contexts (p. 49).

The next chapters of the book are empirically oriented, the study focusing on analysing the advertising and IT software sectors. The research is based on 31 interviews conducted with various professionals (copywriters, creative directors, advertisers, development and software managers, academics, researchers, etc.), examining, through comparative analyses, various forms of the creative application of knowledge. By investigating the Micro and Macro dimensions of the analysed sectors, the author explores three main perspectives on the creative knowledge work: intra and inter-sectorial, and changes in cultural practices.

Referring to advertising (to which chapters 6 and 7 are dedicated to), Sai Loo aims to reveal elements of “global social forms” among the common practices of the specific roles considered (copyrighter and creative director). Interesting insights are provided, underlining the complexity and multi-dimensional nature which occur in applying creative knowledge. For example, readers find out that, along with certain abilities and skills which can be learnt in formal education, on the job or informally, one involved in the copywrite field should have the capacity “to be a general sponge”, “in tune with the current zeitgeist” (regarding acquisition of knowledge) or “to be a social chameleon”, being able to relate to all levels within society and to increase the chances of expanding the limits of the medium.

The chapters about the Information Technology Software industries (8 and 9) provide details about creative knowledge working in this field (considering systems developer and programme manager job positions), stating that, in this case, technical knowledge drives creative approaches. Highlighted current trends affecting the sector are also presented, such as firms withdrawal from blue sky research (5-10 years lifespan) and their focusing on the creation and the commercialization of knowledge into market products (p.116), the need to acquire knowledge derived from an interdisciplinary educational background (marketing, engineering, business etc.) necessary for technologies development or the global/local bivalence in the IT sector.

The empirical analyses reveal the diverse spectrum of the creative applications required in the creative knowledge work: anticipatory imagination, problem solving, problem identification, generating ideas and aesthetic sensibilities, as well as the

changes the creative knowledge workers need to adapt to, as they switch between individual or collaborative modes to perform their duties within various projects. Also, Sai Loo underlines the importance of the environment in supporting complex creative knowledge work, which has to regard training, the work environment, and education. A special emphasis is placed on the way in which electronic technologies (ICETs) can be used to dynamize and intensify the creative applications. In the final part of the book, the author inventories the main contributions of the research and states several implications considering some educational perspectives (lifelong learning, formal and informal education, the need to provide tacit knowledge learning opportunities) as well as work-related ones (stating the role of work environments and continuous practice in providing opportunities of knowledge development or fostering creativity).

Although the book provides a meaningful set of ideas and it aims to describe some of the creative knowledge work particularities of two specific creative industries (advertising and IT software), the possibility of a wider applicability of the identified creative abilities in other various types of activities or economic sectors (not necessarily strictly referred to as creative or cultural) is not excluded. Therefore, more comprehensive comparative studies across other creative industries (as the author also suggests it), as well as including some traditional sectors, may offer additional arguments and clarify if there are specific transformations concerning the applicability of creativity in knowledge work, or there is a wider wave of change, derived from scientific and technological progress, which is permeating various sectors of the contemporary economy (and thus enforcing creative skills in order to assure performance and enhance the firms' competitiveness on the market).

The methodological approaches of the research (co-configuration, epistemic cultures, micro-sociology) enrich the study with interesting insights, however there is the risk of some degree of bias occurring. For example, while the interviews offer attractive and even inspiring information, the book could offer in its appendices more methodological details, for a better understanding of how the responses relate to the research questions or whether the opinions expressed by professional are representative/ common for their fields. Further analysis might take into consideration not only user/consumer perception study (as the author proposes), but also broader in-depth studies on professionals' perceptions, as well.

Nonetheless, Sai Loo's work represents a step toward a better understanding of the transformative changes affecting the *new economy* and the place held by *creativity* in the *knowledge society*, offering perspectives and further directions of investigation which can be put to use by researchers, academics, policy makers, professionals, entrepreneurs or educational institutions.

As the findings presented in the research reveal, from an educational perspective, it is important that life-long learning programmes, as well as the ones provided by the universities, should include multi-disciplinary modules which, considering the particularities of the work field, could gather, along with basic

technical knowledge, complementary subjects such as the humanities, creative arts, law (intellectual property), business, etc. Similar aspects can be found, in part, in the European Union strategy for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2018) and in other initiatives, which encourage educational strategies having an inter and trans-disciplinary approach.

The book presents suggestions with implications concerning policy makers and resource allocation, advocating that “softer areas” of the creative arts and humanities occupy an important role in creative knowledge work and therefore should be encouraged by specific financial instruments.

From the organizational point of view, the author reminds entrepreneurs that firms and work-places can support a collaborative type of learning by providing adequate conditions which promotes creativity.

As Sai Loo concludes in his book, “*Human ingenuity in its complex and nuanced creative knowledge application forms a vital part of the knowledge economy and it must be acknowledged, understood, and nurtured*” (p.139).

## References

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