

Creative Edge: The role of Creative Industries in economic recovery.

The 'Creative Edge' project brings together universities, development agencies and industry bodies from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland and Sweden to identify the current breadth and future scope of the creative economy in peripheral regions. The project seeks to put in place a number of measures that will promote creative industries in peripheral regions. This €1.1 million project is funded by the Northern Periphery Programme under Interreg 4C.

The 2008 financial crisis has brought with it a drop in global demand, which in turn, has resulted in the contraction of international trade that has seen many of the world's economies slip into recession. Across Europe, this has manifested itself in massive public spending cuts, increased company liquidations and increased unemployment rates. However, the creative economy both has had a significantly more positive growth trajectory since 2008. World exports of creative goods and services reached \$650 billion in 2010 nearly two and half times their 2002 level¹. Many recent studies have shown that the cultural and creative industries represent highly innovative companies with a great economic potential and are one of Europe's most dynamic sectors, contributing around 2.6 % to the EU GDP, with a high growth potential, and providing quality jobs to around 5 million people across EU- 27².

The main objective of the Creative Edge project is designed to be an increase in the active participation of local creative organisations and businesses in global markets and equally in their ability to attract and utilise local emerging creative talent in these markets. This is important as the creative economy is increasingly seen to be a major area of growth in the coming decades for rural peripheral regions. Studies continue to show how the creative sector is a leading indicator of global growth e.g. "In economic terms, the cultural and creative sector is globally one of the fastest growing. Estimates value the sector at 7% of the world's GDP and forecast 10% growth per year³". It is also apparent that there are large disparities within the NPP region in the extent to which nations are engaged in the creative economy.

The Creative Edge project is a timely one. The project itself has grown out direct consultations with the Creative Industries across the NPP region. This work complemented other pieces of work on the Creative Economy and pointed to the potential growth of the sector as well as the very positive spillovers to other sectors of the economy⁴. Of particular policy relevance were the constraints faced by new and established creative industries in the NPP region. Consultation with the sector across a variety of disciplines from craft to App development showed that most people working in the creative sector found themselves confined by their inability to access international markets and the inability to share information and learn from contemporaries here and abroad.

¹ UNCTAD (2010) Creative Economy Report, available at: http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ditctab20103_en.pdf

² EU Green Paper 'Unlocking the potential for Cultural and Creative Industries' http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/doc/GreenPaper_creative_industries_en.pdf

³ Department of the Taoiseach. 2008. *Building Ireland's Smart Economy: A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal*. Dublin: Government Publications Office.

⁴ The most recent Indecon report on the Arts sector in Ireland is available at: http://www.arts council.ie/Publications/Indecon%20Update%20Report_fin.pdf. Patrick Collins' Economic Impact Assessment of the West is available here: <http://www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/EIA-report-full.pdf>

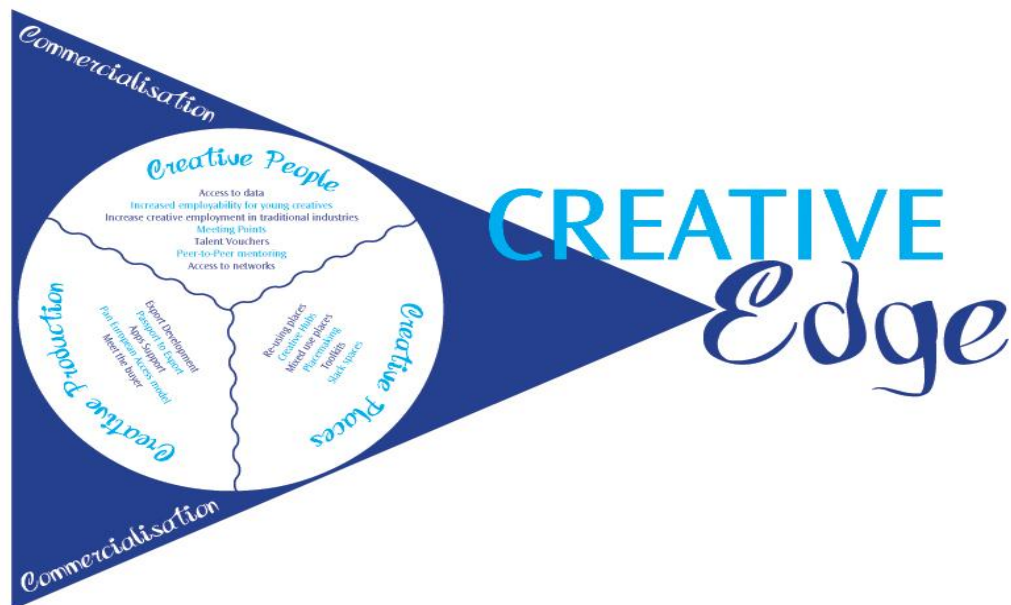
These two shortfalls acted as the initial start point for the Creative Edge project. An initial partnership consisting of the Western Development Commission, SEED in Craigavon and the National University of Ireland, Galway approached the Northern Periphery Programme who immediately recognised the potential of the project. They suggested collaborating with a similar project proposed by Film i Västerbotten (Sweden) and Kemi-Tornio University (Finland). The Scandinavian experience also recognised the massive growth potential but was more concerned with the matching of creative talents to creative industries. An 'Employment Bank' where both talent and established industries could display their wares was the novel solution proposed.

One year later a combined project with the involvement of the University of West Scotland (UK) The Department for Innovative Culture and Travel, Mosfellsbær, Iceland as associate partners, is fully formed and has at its core four main objectives:

- The mapping of the creative sector in peripheral European regions: an extensive exercise that will contribute to the growing academic literature on the impact of creativity on economic well-being.
- The creation of an Export platform: providing creative industries from peripheral areas with the opportunity to access international markets via real and virtual presences.
- An Employment bank: for potential employees and employers in an economy where skills requirement vary at an increased rate. This bank will provide virtual and real meeting places for information and knowledge sharing.
- Creative places: one of the most obvious impacts of the current economic downturn is the rate of vacancy of high-street outlets. This part of the project seeks to match emerging creative talent with available space to create and showcase their work.

By consolidating the export and emerging talent development onto a single pan-regional model combined with meeting points and workshops, both virtual and actual networks will emerge. The Creative Edge project intends to create a practical programme to work on the challenges identified in focus groups and consultation in the peripheral regions as being of key concern to creatives i.e. accessing new markets, job opportunities, scalability, collaboration, information exchange, business development skills and affordable creative spaces. This will enable and empower the currently latent creative abilities of the partner regions to connect and grow in a measurable way, thus sustaining and creating employment opportunities, export opportunities (international markets), improved regional social capital while also enhancing creative human capital

Creative Edge addresses three pillars of the creative economy: People, Production and Place. Creative People generate and develop ideas that evolve into Creative Production of creative goods and services and the interaction of creatives in Creative Places enhances creativity and innovation.



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