

Creativity 360 Degrees

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Creativity 360 Degrees: Exploring the Dynamics of the Creative Industries in Southeast Europe

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Preface: Overcoming Geographic Discrimination in Research

Martina Topić

The editors of the book on cultural and creative industries in Southeastern Europe, *Creativity 360 Degrees: Exploring the Dynamics of the Creative Industries in Southeast Europe* rightfully say that creative industries are important for cultural, economic and political strategies in the 21st century, and particularly for gig economies, entrepreneurship and fostering creativity. Since many freelancers are historically women, particularly working mothers (IPSE, 2022), understanding these industries is important from the perspective of gender equality too. In addition to that, the COVID-19 pandemic has particularly affected creative and cultural industries due to global lockdowns, which means that the usual benefit of cultural and creative industries as supporters and drivers of innovation, creativity, diversity and social cohesion has taken a backturn during the pandemic.

Since creative and cultural industries are globally acknowledged as contributors to tackling important issues such as social inequality and environmental crisis, it goes without saying that these industries are essential in creating a better world that will work for everyone. I have consistently argued in my work that equal societies are better for everyone, but equal societies cannot be created without tackling social class discrimination and poverty, which is exactly what these industries tackle because many small business owners and entrepreneurs come from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. For example, in the United States, 18% of the population comprises minority businesses, and while this number is low since minorities comprise a total of 32% of the population, the number still shows significance for minorities (U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship, 2023). In addition, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) constitute 99% of businesses in OECD countries, and minority businesses constitute a considerable percentage of new start-ups and SMEs (Farmaki & Altinay, 2015).

Despite lockdowns and the devastating effect the pandemic has had on these industries, they have shown resilience and continue to thrive. However, some regions are more developed than others when it comes to creative and cultural industries, and according to some information, Southeastern Europe lags in the development of these important industries. Therefore, it is essential to tackle this lack of development, and for academic literature, it is essential to tackle this region to help expand these valuable industries that ultimately empower those who historically lacked the support they needed to thrive.

While lots of work has been done on creative industries and the gig economy in the Western world, not much is known about Southeast Europe. This lack of knowledge is a part of a wider trend of Westernisation of research, and due to the competitiveness of academic publications and the proliferation of research driven by various metrics in Western countries, there is simply no room for all. Sadly, this means that some countries get an advantage in publishing their perspectives and developments, whereas others are left behind. In the case of the editors of this book, who are based in Croatia, the Government in Croatia introduced open access policies in 2012 when a Declaration on Open Access was introduced (Srce, 2022), and many other Southeastern European countries analysed in this book did the same. However, due to SEO issues and the paradox of Google algorithm and the way this algorithm classifies information, the most clicked information is on the top of the Google mountain. In academic terms, the more journal is read, the more likely articles from that journal will appear in searches; thus, authors from Southeastern Europe will face less online visibility even if they publish in English (and thus overcome the language barrier) and even if the Government invests in open access. It is a paradox and no-win situation for countries which are smaller and less influential in the global academic scene.

Therefore, this book – presented to an international audience through the Emerald and Emerald Insights platform – provides a valuable contribution to knowledge from a Southeastern European perspective, a perspective much needed but often lacking in research. Authors in the book shed light on the variety of practices in cultural and creative industries in the region and provide a platform for increasing understanding of these industries in Southeastern Europe and finding effective solution to foster further growth.

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