

Creative Hubs as Drivers of Regional Vitality

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Creative hubs have emerged as critical enablers of broad-based welfare and dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly in regional contexts. These hubs serve as platforms where artistic, cultural, and technological pursuits converge, fostering innovation and socioeconomic development. By offering both physical and digital environments for interdisciplinary collaboration, creative hubs catalyse new business formation and reinforce the creative industries (Pratt & Hutton, 2021). Their experimental culture encourages risk taking and knowledge exchange, supports the development of novel business models, and contributes to regional economic resilience (Ashton, 2019). Additionally, creative hubs enhance the cultural fabric of regions and improve their capacity to respond to technological and economic transformations. In the current economic landscape, marked by growing demands for inclusive and adaptive local economies, creative hubs have become an essential infrastructure to foster innovation and societal well-being.

Beyond their contribution to the welfare of the people, creative centres play a vital role in attracting and retaining talent, thus enhancing regional vitality (Qian, 2010). Regional economies often struggle with the outmigration of skilled individuals to larger urban centres, compromising local innovation capacity. Creative hubs offer vibrant, attractive spaces that engage both local residents and international talent, contributing to the formation of a regional creative class. By promoting quality of life, cultural diversity, and entrepreneurial opportunities, these hubs stimulate local economies through cross-sector collaboration and knowledge spillovers (Muro & Katz, 2010). Their emphasis on lifelong learning and community participation further strengthens the regional appeal of skilled professionals (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2019). In connecting culture, technology, and enterprise, creative hubs support emerging industries and extend the reach of economic development beyond metropolitan areas.

This study presents findings from a four-year longitudinal investigation into 38 creative hubs in the Twente region. The research examined commercialisation strategies, revenue models, and management practices. In-depth interviews with central coordinators and regional stakeholders were conducted to identify operational challenges and success factors. This comprehensive approach enabled an analysis of both individual hub trajectories and the wider regional ecosystem. The study highlights how creative hubs interact with their environments to foster talent, generate innovation, and contribute to social and economic objectives. The integration of programme-level data with qualitative insights provides a detailed picture of the sustainability and impact of creative centres on regional development. The following broad findings emerge.

We find that Creative hubs face a key challenge in regional development due to limited cooperation and ecosystem fragmentation. Many operate independently, focusing on niche audiences rather than fostering collaborative structures. This isolation hinders knowledge exchange and cross-disciplinary innovation, while the lack of shared programming and

strategic alliances weakens regional resilience. Enhancing interhub connectivity is crucial for cultural diversity, entrepreneurship, and unlocking economic potential. Hubs also play a vital role in regional innovation by supporting technological experimentation and product development. They offer safe spaces for prototyping, thereby cultivating local innovation cultures and attracting investment. Although their role in retaining talent is modest, hubs significantly advance social inclusion. By creating welcoming spaces for professional growth and cultural interaction, they promote integration of under-represented groups and support broader societal transitions. This inclusive approach strengthens community ties and encourages participation in the creative economy, positioning hubs as essential agents of industrial renewal and social cohesion in creative regions.

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Keywords

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