

Exploring the Characteristics of Cities in the UNESCO *Creative Cities Network* (UCCN)

DIANA M. DOROBANTU⁰

APPLIED STATISTICS AND DATA SCIENCE MS, DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS AND ECONOMETRICS,
FACULTY OF CYBERNETICS, STATISTICS AND INFORMATICS, ACADEMY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES,
BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

Abstract

The living environment in which a person resides is extremely important, influencing both their activities and mental state. With the spread of globalization, technological advancement and increased standard of living, the possibility of choosing where one can live based on their beliefs and cherished values has emerged. Currently, more than half of the population lives in cities, placing considerable pressure on urban planners. They are responsible for creating the stage on which a city's story is conveyed. Existing creative cities create a unique atmosphere that attracts both tourists and immigrant citizens. However, creating a unique ambiance is not the sole attribute of a creative city that influences a person to choose to build their life there. In this paper, I attempted to highlight other essential traits of a creative city through a content analysis conducted on a platform based on the descriptions of *Creative Cities* that are members of the UNESCO *Creative Cities Network* (UCCN). This article commemorates the 20th anniversary of the UCCN and represents a global adaptation of my bachelor's thesis, which was centered on exploring the traits of European cities within this network.

Keywords *creativity; creative economy; creative city; innovation; urban regeneration*

1 Introduction

A defining characteristic of economic life in the past 25 years has been the focus on creativity and its policy. Human creativity facilitates innovation in economic activities and aligns them with current social demands in a sustainable manner. Over time, creativity has gained increasing appreciation, shaping society and implicitly, our lives [Florida \(2012\)](#). Thus, creativity has proven to be the source of economic vitality in general and of a city in particular. Regenerating a city requires creative, interdisciplinary and holistic thinking inspired by the environment created by the infrastructure and spirit of a place. Sustainable urban development through a creative approach does not simply mean creating an artistic district solely focused on art and culture [Simeti \(2006\)](#), but rather involves cooperation among various domains represented by the natural, physical, social, cultural, political and economic environment [Landry and Bianchini \(1995\)](#).

Fundamental socioeconomic changes have occurred in urban environments. With the transition from an industrial to an informational society, urban areas have undergone major transformations. The number of people migrating to cities has significantly increased, reflecting citizens' growing interest in their own quality of life, necessitating significant urban transformations [Caglioni \(2011\)](#).

* Email: diana.m.dorobantu@gmail.com.

1 Before 1998, the academic concept of a *creative city* corresponded to the regenerative potential
2 of a city representing a capital of culture, where culture played the role of driving economic
3 development and preserving the city's image. In essence, the basic idea was that through creative
4 intervention and cultural activities, the city could be improved. After 1998, terms such as *creative*
5 *industry* and *Creative Class* were introduced, shifting the concept of the *creative city* towards
6 that of the *creative economy*, which is based on the production of cultural and creative goods
7 and a skilled workforce in the creative domain [Comunian \(2010\)](#).

8 While in the past, the economy of cities emphasized production and distribution, the present
9 sees a shift towards service industries. The main service industries include banking, finance, insur-
10 ance and management consulting. Consequently, the number of jobs in manufacturing has
11 decreased and transitioned to other locations, leading to a predominance of service industries in
12 cities. With this transition, there is a need to address urban regeneration policies, with other
13 elements such as physical, economic and cultural infrastructure requiring reorientation. Addition-
14 ally, from an economic perspective, creativity is viewed as one of the most important competitive
15 advantages in the market [Florida \(2012\)](#).

17 2 Theory

19 This chapter represents a synthesis of the theoretical part developed so far on the role of
20 creativity in the economy. It conceptualizes and describes the terms of creativity, innovation, cre-
21 ative economy, creative industry, cultural industry, *Creative Class* and creative city. Additionally,
22 the approach highlights the importance of creativity in the economy and the creative industry
23 in urban regeneration and economic growth. Moreover, the theoretical approach considers the
24 constituent landmarks of what should generate the status of a creative city.

26 2.1 Creativity, Culture and Economy

28 The concept of creativity is considered modernist due to its emphasis on novelty, progress and
29 continuous development. It leads to innovative ways of thinking that result in new possibilities
30 across various realms (cultural, technological, urbanistic, etc.). Each historical period has pre-
31 sented a different form of creativity. For example, the industrial society relied on the creativity
32 of engineers and scientists to grow and develop [Landry and Bianchini \(1995\)](#).

33 An important distinction must be made between the concepts of creativity and innovation.
34 According to the Oxford English Dictionary [oed \(2021\)](#), innovation is the outcome of innovating,
35 which involves making changes or introducing novelty in a particular field or system, while
36 creativity entails the quality of being creative, encompassing the act of creating or establishing
37 something, such as a concept. Thus, creativity involves a divergent process that generates new
38 ideas, whereas innovation entails a convergent process that implements these ideas. Additionally,
39 innovation encompasses evaluation and selection processes, which are not inherently creative.
40 In the urban context, promoting a city's potential relies significantly on the innovation process
[Landry and Bianchini \(1995\)](#).

42 In the early 20th century, urban success meant specialization in the manufacturing process,
43 with the economy being represented by the industrial economy and later by services. However,
44 in the 21st century, this paradigm shifted as the economy transitioned towards the informational
45 side, eventually focusing on the *new economy*, known as the *informational and knowledge society*
46 *economy* [Albăstroiu \(2017\)](#). In this evolving framework, emphasis shifted towards different vectors
47 of economic growth, among which creativity gained prominence as a potentially individualized

1 economic branch. Thus, the creative economy is considered a form of urban regeneration, with
2 culture serving as its catalyst.

3 Culture serves as the promoter of the creative economy. In the urban context, through
4 culture, people become more connected to their community and its projections beyond the ev-
5 eryday, enabling them to contribute to participatory projects and involvement in the neighbor-
6 hood/community space, as well as in the city as a whole. In other words, culture articulates the
7 community's needs and can contribute to urban regeneration through participatory development
8 and adoption of specific actions [Evans \(2005\)](#).

9 Just as with culture, to which it is closely related, creativity does not inherently represent
10 economy. However, the combination of the two can lead to the creation of economically valuable
11 creative products. Such products are needed in cities to integrate and support them in the face
12 of increasingly fierce international competition. Cultural goods represent the material basis of
13 the city and a source of substantial profit. Creativity is the technique of imposing these resources
14 and encouraging them to evolve [Landry \(2008\)](#). With the help of creativity, various ways can be
15 created to increase economic prosperity. Cultural activities under the umbrella of innovation and
16 modern technology generate new types of economic activities, which in turn create new jobs.

17 The force generated by creativity leads some authors to suggest that it will be the engine of
18 social and economic changes throughout this century [Hartley \(2008\)](#). However, to understand the
19 potential of becoming such an engine, it is necessary to explore the contextualization of the con-
20 cept. Firstly, it must be understood that being creative is not limited to the development/display
21 of new elements, merely industrial or material. Creativity presents multiple facets, making it one
22 of the most complex terms [Florida \(2002\)](#). There are dozens of different definitions, but none
23 has been universally accepted. *Creativity involves visualizing old problems in new ways* [Hubbard](#)
24 ([2006](#)). Furthermore, creativity alone does not provide solutions to urban problems, but it does
25 give decision-makers an idea of how innovations can arise, new ways of thinking about the city
26 and how to understand urban dynamics [Landry \(2008\)](#). Additionally, there is no clear definition
27 for the older concept of the cultural industry, nor for the newly emerged notion of the creative
28 industry. The term cultural industry was first introduced in 1947 by Adorno and Horkheimer.
29 They aimed to emphasize the growing difference between culture and traditional artisan arts and
30 the industrialized production of cultural goods.

31 The term *creative industries* was first coined in 1998 by the Department for Culture, Media
32 and Sport (DCMS) in the UK. The creative industries were defined as *those activities that have*
33 *their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and*
34 *job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property* (DCMS, 1998, p. 3).
35 This definition is the most commonly used in the literature. Thus, creative industries are the
36 sum of individuals with creative artistic skills and technology through which the interdepen-
37 dence between components functions like technological gears to generate economic development
38 energy). From this sum arises a commercializable product with economic value [Hartley \(2005\)](#).
39 Therefore, creative industries are promoted as an important component of the new economy,
40 with the potential to drive future economic growth.

41 The Creative Economy is the result of combining economic activity performed by a segment
42 of the workforce with excellent academic training, around a wide variety of creative individuals
43 such as artists, architects, programmers, university professors, writers from various thematic
44 areas, promoting thus a diverse range of industries such as technology, entertainment, journalism,
45 finance, etc. Hence, the idea of extending creativity beyond culture is highlighted [Stern and Seifert](#)
46 ([2008](#)). The creative economy incites the triad of cultural activities - technological development
47 - innovation to generate various businesses [Oliveira \(2011\)](#).

The creative economy is one of the most popular remedies for cities in difficulty Stern and Seifert (2008), as knowledge and innovation development are not just about creating new technologies. Innovation can occur in various fields of activity such as marketing, logistics, organization, etc. Hospers (2003). In the context of the creative economy and creative cities, the term *creativity* refers generally to how innovation can help cities solve their daily problems. Many examples for this term have primarily referred to the interaction between artists and the community Comunian (2010). Currently, city-level competitiveness is extremely strong and creativity plays a vital role as the basic generator of competitive advantages by stimulating the components it manages to connect. For example, the existence of a distinct attraction or even a unique attraction is indispensable for creating a destination promotion strategy. In this case, creativity can also play a role in generating new urban areas Oliveira (2011).

Current literature on economic creativity and creative cities is based on three perspectives. The first of these is led by John Howkins, who in his book titled *The Creative Economy* published in 2001, lays the economic foundation of the creative city movement by defining a core of creative industries. The second perspective belongs to Richard Florida. The first version of his book *The Rise of the Creative Class* published in 2002, proposes a strategy to support the economy by attracting and retaining the Creative Class through increasing the attractiveness of a city. Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, through their book published in 1995, *The Creative City*, present the third perspective in which they explore ways in which municipalities can innovate planning and governance practices to cultivate urban environments that promote partnerships and creative activities Simeti (2006).

According to Howkins (2001), the creative economy is defined by the set of industries that produce and commercialize intellectual property: copyright industries, patent industries, trademark industries and design industries. Thus, the creative industry represents the transition of creative ideas and expressions into products with commercial value Howkins (2001). He asserts that for creativity to exist in the economy, contracts and a system of rules attesting to the ownership of creative goods in trading actions must be introduced. Howkins presents the 15 main industries that contribute to the development of the creative economy (Table 1).

Table 1: Creative Industries identified by Howkins

1	Advertising
2	Architecture
3	Art
4	Crafts
5	Design
6	Fashion
7	Film
8	Music
9	Performing Arts
10	Publishing
11	R&D in Creative Industries
12	Software
13	Toys & Games
14	TV & Radio
15	Video Games

In 2002 Florida emphasizes that human resources represent the most important factor in economic development and introduces the concept of the *Creative Class*. Additionally, he brings a

new perspective on creativity. According to him, creativity is not a commodity that can be bought or sold. Creativity can take multiple forms depending on society and the economic environment. Another valuable suggestion is directed towards how economic growth depends on the spatial interaction between technology, talent engagement and tolerance acceptance, conceptualized as the *Three T Theory* Florida (2002).

On the other hand, creative cities represent a response to the international urban crisis created by the transition to a global economy Landry and Bianchini (1995). In this context, urban planning must transition from traditional to holistic. To improve the urban environment and promote a creative atmosphere, new strategic partnerships are needed, and the soft aspects, which have the capacity to connect and amplify the invisible elements in the economy, need to be accepted/stimulated. Thus, the two authors indicate various characteristics of development strategies based on a holistic approach. Moreover, they argue that unplanned, slightly chaotic developments can bring about urban revitalization Simeti (2006). In their view, creative cities represent a diverse source of innovation that can manifest in cultural, technological and urbanistic aspects Landry and Bianchini (1995).

In 2011, Landry created the so-called *Index of Creative Cities*, which consists of a list of characteristics that a creative place possesses. These can be divided into 10 groups Landry (2011): political and public framework, distinctiveness, diversity, vitality and expression, openness, trust, tolerance and accessibility, entrepreneurship, exploration and innovation, strategic leadership, agility and vision, talent and learning landscapes, communication, connectivity and networking, place and identity creation, livability and well-being, professionalism and effectiveness. Based on this grouping, a creative place is an environment free of constraints, rich in cultural activities, where people can feel free to exercise their talents and share their ideas; it is *vibrant, vital and unique* with a rich and diverse culture Landry (2011). Such a place often hosts various activities and events where people from all social backgrounds come together, facilitating better understanding among citizens and fostering closeness within a community. These activities and events can take the form of festivals, workshops, symposiums, concerts, fairs, exhibitions, sports events and more.

The level of research and development, as well as innovation, in such a place, are extremely high, attracting numerous charismatic and dynamic leaders. Consequently, learning and knowledge are promoted, and the quality of life is exceptionally high. In such an environment, people are usually happy to live and work simultaneously. Speaking multiple foreign languages is, moreover, considered normal Gathen (2016).

The transition to the concept of a creative city does not represent a quick fix leading to immediate economic growth but requires real and long-term collaborations for this purpose. Additionally, it should be emphasized that a strategy for a creative city does not bring an entirely new set of planning and economic development tools but rather a completely different perspective on a city and its economy Simeti (2006).

2.2 Creative Cities

Cities play an extremely important role in the economic development of countries. As cities represent the image and primary strength of a nation, competition among cities can lead to increased attractiveness of a country Oliveira (2011). However, discussions in the academic sphere regarding the relationship between city size and the accentuation of creativity complicate how policies and actions aimed at urban creativity generate creative cities. In this regard, we will delve into the evolution of the concept to gain a better understanding of what is actually meant

1 by creative cities.

2 A problem in defining the creative city lies in defining the term creativity, which is not
3 a tangible resource and is difficult to quantify. The term creativity is commonly encountered
4 nowadays, often evoking notions of nonconformism and art in the first instance. However, the
5 concept of the creative city is based on a set of distinct ideologies with specific applications of
6 creativity in urban physical and economic development, such as the growth of creative industries,
7 attracting and retaining the creative class, and planning and revitalizing creative cities [Simeti \(2006\)](#). In fact, cities are responsible for concentrating and mobilizing human creative energy,
8 resulting in technical and cultural innovations, which they transform into new industries and
9 forms of commerce [Oliveira \(2011\)](#).

10 The concept of the creative city was first introduced in 1998 by David Yencken in an article
11 titled *The Creative City*, published in the Australian literary magazine Meanjin. In this article,
12 the author argued that in addition to a city's responsibility to bring financial prosperity and
13 social equity, it is also responsible for the emotional well-being of the community. He emphasized
14 that the city has a role in creating a conducive creative environment through which citizens can
15 fulfill their emotional needs. Thus, the concept of the creative city became a model for generating
16 new urban planning policies globally. In the 1990s, the idea of the creative city became central
17 to urban regeneration, and in practice, many cities began initiatives to adopt the attribute of a
18 creative city [Peng and Yang \(2013\)](#).

19 Creative cities are entities that can develop under the influence of a policy with a good
20 creative strategy, in an economic environment where creative industries make their presence
21 felt, and in a social environment represented by a creative community [Oliveira \(2011\)](#). Policies
22 regarding creative cities can take various forms, and among these, the promotion of heritage
23 stands out.

24 The city cannot be treated as an ordinary product; therefore, traditional marketing tools
25 and strategies cannot be directly applied. Planners of heritage promotion strategies must adopt a
26 holistic approach that includes the cultural specificities of each city [Caglioni \(2011\)](#). This holistic
27 approach requires creative thinking, capable of overcoming rigid preconceptions and opening up
28 to phenomena that are not always logically explained. It is about the ability to create and build
29 new perspectives and solutions [Landry and Bianchini \(1995\)](#). For example, there are various types
30 of creativity, some of which may be contradictory, such as aggressive intervention creativity and
31 retention creativity, or innocence creativity and experience creativity. The challenge of holistic
32 thinking is to recognize that opposites can be parts of the same whole [Landry and Bianchini
\(1995\)](#).

33 From Landry's perspective (2011), cities can adopt the attribute of being creative only if
34 they have a culture, an attitude, and a mindset oriented towards open, imaginative thinking.
35 Thus, the structure of a creative city is formed by culture, communication, and cooperation. He
36 considers that the creative city is not a fixed model but rather a process. The culture or identity
37 of a creative city must be rooted in its history but at the same time must be able to project itself
38 into the future. A city is the product of its history; thus, culture represents the fundamental
39 distinguishing element in the competition between cities. Communication consists of an efficient
40 information system that operates both within and outside the city. Thus, technology becomes a
41 key instrument for success for both the city itself and its citizens, with its wise use supporting
42 a simpler way of life and, in some cases, a healthier one, considering the benefits of pollution
43 control, for example. Cooperation requires diversity, which must not only be accepted but also
44 integrated into urban life. Local governments play an essential role in this process. They must be
45 able to promote constructive dialogue within the community. For a successful future plan, creative
46

1 cities must be able to mobilize all their resources. Creativity is a way of thinking and visualizing
2 the city. Many cities have adopted various innovative strategies, but this does not necessarily
3 make them creative cities. Each city's strategies must be based on lessons from the past, present
4 information, and its own resources. Thus, a successful city's strategy is not necessarily suitable
5 for another. Implementation of a personalized strategy can even have negative effects, such as
6 urban degradation Landry (2011).

7 In the process of transforming a city into a creative one, various factors must be taken into
8 consideration, such as civilization, environment, ecosystem, cultural and social environment, and
9 changes in these aspects. The planning efforts of urban development strategies must align with
10 the desires of the citizens, who represent the fundamental element and the driving force of the
11 development of the respective place. Through their efforts, the development of a city is promoted.
12 City leaders and planners must work from the citizens' perspective to ensure that these plans
13 resonate with the aspirations and desires of a broader population Peng and Yang (2013).

14 Thus, in the competition between cities, public space plays an important role. It represents an
15 emblem of the metropolis and reflects its status. Public space creates the city's image and serves as
16 a place for social interaction and self-expression, while also representing an area for entertainment
17 Frey (2009). The focus is on the city's public administration service. Through policies and citizen
18 participation, it is responsible for the welfare and efficient sustainable development of the city
19 Caglioni (2011). By organizing festivals and cultural events, the public administration service can
20 support the regeneration of disadvantaged neighborhoods with a poor reputation Volpp (2012).

21 Urban planning should prioritize the promotion of everyday life and cultural habits. Sophis-
22 ticated culture should not be promoted. Everyday culture represents the basic element of urban
23 marketing. Through urban planning, all cultural resources of the area should be activated to
24 mobilize them in the process of economic rehabilitation. Associating with terms such as *creative*
25 *city* or *cultural capital* could help increase international awareness, which could lead to the devel-
26 opment of urban tourism. Developing emblematic projects could enhance the charisma of cities
27 and emphasize the distinctive character of the area Frey (2009).

28 The economic competitiveness of creative cities has developed and continues to grow. In-
29 vestments made by these cities in creative economies and cultural infrastructure have increased
30 significantly in the last three decades. According to Florida's idea (2002) that attracting creative
31 human capital is the key factor for economic growth, the competition among creative cities is
32 not for attracting tourists, but for attracting this part of the population called the *Creative Class*
33 Caglioni (2011).

34 2.3 Creative Class

35 The growth of the creative economy has brought about a change in social norms and value
36 systems, resulting in the emergence or even the creation of new social groups and classes. In
37 1983, Paul Fussell developed a theory that shows how a certain group *X* represents a constant
38 variable in defining these classes and groups. People in this group must adopt certain qualities
39 such as an open mind, independence and a fervent passion for what they do. A person from the
40 *X* category is not *someone's man*, but their own boss. The term *retirement* is insignificant for
41 them. This term holds meaning for employees or, in a term with a greater emotional impact,
42 *wage slaves* who despise their work Florida (2002).

43 Following the model of this group, Florida introduces the controversial notion of the *Cre-
44 ative Class*. This was defined based on people's occupations and was initially divided into two
45

components, and then, in the revised edition of the work in 2012, another component was added [Florida \(2012\)](#). Before the first work, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) assigned the domains related to these components (Table 2).

Table 2: Components of the Creative Class

SUPER-CREATIVE CORE	CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS
Computer Science & Mathematics	Management
Architecture & Engineering	Business & Finance
Physical & Social Science	Legal
Education, Training & Library	Health-Care & Technical Occupations
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports & Media	Sales

Thus, the first component is represented by the *Super-Creative Core*. This category is mainly composed of occupations that are responsible for creating models and forms that can be easily transferred and widely used, or are responsible for identifying problems and developing theorems or strategies to solve them. For this, the members of this component are well compensated, distinguishing them from members of the second component called *Creative Professionals*, whose job description does not include this creative part, it can only result from certain tasks of the position. The third component, called *Others*, includes members whose activity consists to a considerable extent of a creative element, involving the creation of new significant forms. Included in this category are: merchants, cooks, creative factory workers.

With the development of the Creative Class, the values along with the norms and attitudes of its members have become either stronger, improved, or entirely changed. There are three major categories of values attributed to the Creative Class [Florida \(2012\)](#). The first of these is individuality. Members of this class are eager to express their own personalities, their own style, their personal ideas, etc., which combined define their unique identity and reflect their creative side. They are often reluctant when it comes to organizational or institutional norms, finding it more difficult to conform to traditional and boring rules from their perspective.

Meritocracy represents the second category of values and is highly esteemed among its members. Competition at this level is very high, with hard work, continuous challenge, and stimulation being extremely necessary for achieving high objectives. A commonly encountered virtue is especially respect for colleagues.

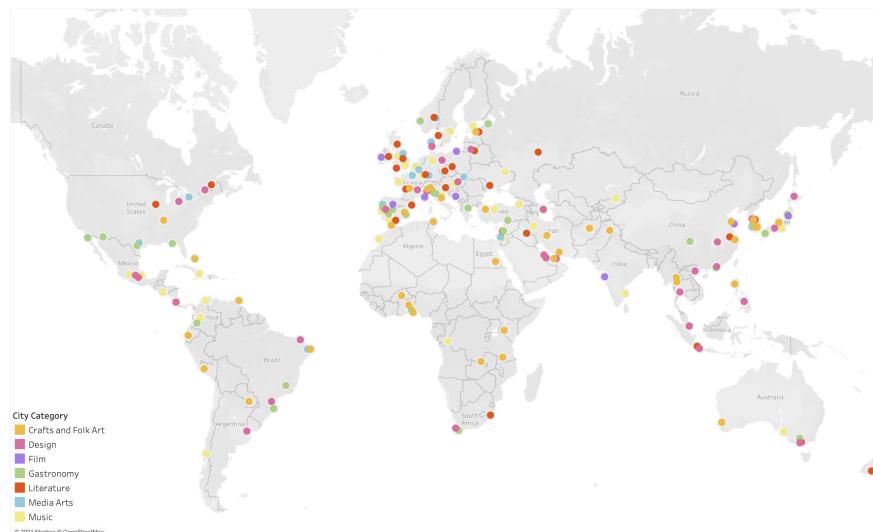
Diversity represents the third category of values. This concept refers to an environment open to nonconformity, to various differences such as gender, race, religion, sexual preferences, and so on. The Creative Class itself represents an elite diversity composed of creative members with exceptional/high education.

Members of the Creative Class, especially those belonging to the first category, tend to prefer cities with an open system that develops advanced technological infrastructure, which stimulates creativity. These regions utilize, exploit and invest in technology while also managing to attract, retain, and fully utilize the talent of the Creative Class. Talent is not a stock; it is a flow, meaning it is highly mobile. To retain it and to foster the growth and development of a region, there is a need to create a place where people want to spend their lives and can express themselves freely. Such a place presents cultural facilities that stimulate creative expression, creative conversations, and provide opportunities for social networking, such as cafes, galleries, art shops, modern nightclubs, and restaurants. Moreover, these places tend to be constituted by neighborhoods with structural characteristics that stimulate creativity, consisting of mixes of residential and commercial spaces that offer ample opportunities for social interaction. Creative

1 individuals tend to seek out all sorts of *gaps* in the urban environment to redesign them in a way
 2 that creates new utility for the space. As a result, neighborhoods benefit from a rejuvenation
 3 process, thanks to the settlement of creative individuals in the area. Additionally, creative cities
 4 act as catalysts for regional development.

6 2.4 UCCN Network

7 The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) is a program initiated in 2004. Its main
 8 objective is the sustainable urban development of cities with creativity as a strategic factor. To
 9 achieve this goal, the network promotes cooperation with and among cities. Currently, this net-
 10 work consists of **182 member cities** from **73 countries** (Figure 1). These cities work together
 11 to achieve a common goal: *placing creativity and cultural industries at the center of*
 12 *local development plans and actively cooperating internationally* UCCN (2016a). This
 13 program covers seven creative fields: **Arts and Folk Crafts** - 38 members, **Design** - 32 mem-
 14 bers, **Film** - 9 members, **Gastronomy** - 25 members, **Literature** - 28 members, **Music** - 36
 15 members and **Media Arts** - 14 members. Of the seven creative fields, only one can be chosen
 16 by a city around which it must develop an action plan to achieve its objectives. This plan must
 17 be realistic and include specific projects, initiatives and policies that can be implemented in the
 18 years to come. To join the network, a city must bring together all its resources, experiences and
 19 knowledge. Joining this program is a long-term commitment and involves a participatory process
 20 and a forward-looking approach UCCN (2016b).



37 Figure 1: Categories of Creativity in UCCN

38 (Source: Generated using *Tableau* Software)

41 Urban areas represent the primary location where cultural and creative industries develop
 42 their activities. Through this program, it is demonstrated how by strengthening the value chain of
 43 local creative economies, cities can enrich, support and learn from each other, collaborating for the
 44 sustainable urban development of all involved members. These cities unite their efforts to make
 45 creativity the engine of this development. They seek to enhance cultural offerings and support
 46 the creation of new jobs. In this regard, the network promotes sectors based on diversity and
 47 social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and citizen well-being. It aims to maximize the utilization

1 of cities' creative assets. By joining this program, cities gain a significant competitive advantage,
2 with the network facilitating various initiatives to support collaboration with and among cities
3 and the dissemination of know-how.

4 The year 2016 was a milestone for this program. In addition to increasing the diversity of
5 the geographical area by welcoming 47 new cities from 33 countries, the UCCN became a key
6 partner for UNESCO, implementing the program for sustainable development *Transforming our*
7 *world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which guides priorities and strategies for
8 inclusive economic growth, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, security and peace.

9 Thus, the attribute of *creative* associated with a city has become a generator of competitive
10 advantage, benefits and more and more cities are making efforts to obtain it. The creative city
11 not only brings economic prosperity but also presents a huge advantage in a individual's per-
12 sonal life. An open and innovative environment brings many benefits that influence one's mental
13 and emotional state. Therefore, urban planning encompasses both the political and economic
14 environment as well as the social environment. It represents a complex field whose outcomes can
15 positively or negatively impact the lives of millions of people.

16 The objectives of the UCCN [UCCN \(2016a\)](#) are implemented at both local and international
17 levels through various means such as: exchange of experiences, knowledge and best practices;
18 pilot projects, partnerships and initiatives involving both the public and private sectors, as
19 well as civil society; networks and programs of professional and artistic exchanges; research,
20 studies and evaluations regarding creative cities; policies and measures for sustainable urban
21 development; communication activities, awareness-raising and *reality awakening*. The objectives
22 of UCCN include:

- 23 • strengthening international cooperation among cities that have recognized cre-
24 ativity as a strategic factor for sustainable development;
- 25 • stimulating and strengthening members' initiatives to make creativity an essential
26 component of urban development, primarily through partnerships;
- 27 • consolidating the creation, production, distribution, and dissemination of cultural
28 activities, goods, and services;
- 29 • developing environments of creativity and innovation and broader opportunities
30 for creators and professionals in the cultural sector;
- 31 • improving access to and participation in cultural life, as well as the enjoyment of
32 cultural goods and services, especially by marginalized or vulnerable individuals
33 and groups;

38 Thus, joining the UCCN network has become a primary objective for an increasing number
39 of cities worldwide. The attribute of *creative* associated with a city has become a generator of
40 competitive advantage and multiple benefits, prompting more and more cities to strive to attain
41 it. A creative city not only brings economic prosperity but also presents a significant advantage
42 in an individual's personal life. An open and innovative environment brings many benefits that
43 influence a person's emotional and mental well-being. Therefore, urban planning encompasses
44 both the politico-economic and socio-cultural environments. Urbanism represents a complex field
45 whose outcomes can positively or negatively affect the lives of millions of people. In the next
46 section, through descriptions of creative cities in the network, current members of the UCCN,
47

1 we attempted to extract the main characteristics needed for a city to be considered *creative*.
2

3 Methodology

5.1 Content Analysis

7 The current work aims to highlight the main characteristics of creative European cities within
8 the UCCN (UNESCO Creative Cities Network). Using information derived from analyzed data,
9 the exploration of the creative cities' features is intended to understand the potential application
10 of the best attributes for an effective urban regeneration strategy. Improvements brought about
11 by these strategies lead to an enhancement in the quality of life within the city.

12 Consequently, to outline the success markers of a creative city, the methodology of this
13 work consists of conducting a qualitative content analysis combined with quantitative elements
14 highlighted by the frequency of keywords and subsequently represented graphically. Qualitative
15 content analysis is a research technique that can be applied through three different approaches:
16 conventional, directed or summative, with major differences lying in the level of confidence, cod-
17 ing schemes and code origins. In this work, we will focus on the summative approach, which
18 involves counting and comparing keywords or content, followed by an interpretation of the un-
19 derlying context [Hsieh and Shannon \(2005\)](#).

20 According to Laurence Bardin [Moscovici and Buschini \(2007\)](#), the content analysis method
21 is divided into three stages comprising pre-analysis, processing procedures and the last one
22 represented by inference and synthesis of results. Pre-analysis aims to establish the corpus
23 subject to analysis, formulate hypotheses and objectives, and refine the techniques to be ap-
24 plied. In the current context, the corpus represents the database processed from the informa-
25 tion derived from the descriptions of creative cities on the official UNESCO website (<https://en.unesco.org/-creative-cities/>). Hypotheses and objectives are represented by the in-
26 formation gathered from the literature presented in Section 2, and the applied technique will be
27 detailed in the following subsection along with the second stage of content analysis represented
28 by processing procedures. The processing procedure used in this study involves the use of the
29 *VOSviewer* program [Van Eck and Waltman \(2010\)](#). The third stage of the methodology consists
30 of inference and synthesis of results, presented in next section.

32 Content analysis presents both advantages and disadvantages. The major advantages that
33 led to the decision to use this technique in the present study are accessibility, relatively low cost
34 and the rigor of the method, due to favorable factors such as the emergence of the information
35 society, the rise of computer language and the requirements of reliable validation procedures
36 [Cociră \(2012\)](#). Moreover, because it is pragmatic and concrete, it is a highly used method in
37 practice [Moscovici and Buschini \(2007\)](#). The main disadvantage of this method may lie in the
38 subjective interpretation of data.

40.2 Creative Cities Representation in UCCN

41 Within the official UNESCO website, there is a section dedicated to the UCCN network. In
42 this section, all member cities of the network are represented. For each city, an individual web
43 page is created, which includes a description. Each description consists of a brief presentation of
44 the city and a paragraph highlighting the added value to the network by that particular city.

45 The data were collected by web scrapping using Python, Selenium and Beautiful Soup, alongside
46 *ChromeDriver*.. The corpus 182 citites were identified from 72 countries web page at the time of
47

1 access, on May 5, 2017. Subsequently, the official descriptions of each city were entered into a
2 text document, specially created for each creative category. This document is referred to as the
3 corpus in the literature focused on content analysis. Furthermore, to analyze the collected data,
4 the *VOSviewer* program was used. Using this program, we generated an image of the frequency
5 network of the most used words and the relationships between them, focusing on creative terms
6 (Figure 2). This map represents the analytical support, the results of which will be discussed in
7 next section.

8 The data were gathered through web scraping utilizing *Python*, *Selenium* and *Beautiful*
9 *Soup*. A total of 182 cities were identified from the web pages at the time of access, which was
10 on March 5, 2024. Following this, the official descriptions of each city were compiled into a
11 text document. This compilation is commonly referred to as the corpus in literature centered on
12 content analysis. Additionally, the *VOSviewer* program was used in order to analyze the gathered
13 data. Through this program, images depicting the frequency network of the most utilized words
14 and their relationships was generated, with a focus on creative terms (Figure 2). This map serves
15 as the analytical foundation, the findings of which will be elaborated upon in the subsequent
16 section.

18 4 Characteristics of Creative Cities

20 In order to enhance the analysis of the main characteristics of creative cities, an additional
21 map was generated using the *VOSviewer* software, allowing visualization of the density of individual
22 terms (Figure 3). Consequently, the maps generated reveal the emergence of four clusters
23 centered around terms exhibiting the highest density.

24 **The first cluster** is characterized by a strong focus on the concept of a *creative city*,
25 intertwined with terms such as *history*, *university*, *population* and *capital*. This association centers
26 on the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of cultural identity. The focus is on
27 historical narratives, literary traditions and artistic legacies, which are the fundamental aspects
28 of the collective identity.

29 Universities play a pivotal role in advancing cultural knowledge and research, thereby enriching
30 the creative capital of the urban environment. Serving as cultural epicenters, the creative
31 cities attract a myriad of writers, artists and scholars from across the globe, thereby enhancing
32 their cultural landscape and fostering a vibrant artistic community.

33 The connection between a city and its community lies at the heart of the regeneration
34 strategy embraced by these cities. Residents' profound understanding of their city's history and
35 culture fosters a deep appreciation for its essence and spirit. Moreover, citizen engagement in
36 the city's political and economic spheres further fortifies this bond. Participating cities, such
37 as Kaunas, exemplify these principles through initiatives aimed at preserving collective memory
38 and leveraging technology to showcase their artistic heritage. Kaunas, renowned for its emphasis
39 on cultural identity and collective memory, hosts institutions like the *Research Center for Archi-*
40 *tecture and Urbanism*, which promote the integration of traditional architectural elements into
41 contemporary urban life, thus sustaining the city's rich cultural legacy.

42 **The second cluster** is revolved around terms *festival* and *event*, intertwined with terms
43 such as *music*, *film*, *folk art* and *workshop*. This cluster underscores the significance of arts and
44 cultural events in the fabric of creative cities. Creative cities are renowned for their vibrant
45 hosting of diverse festivals, film screenings, music concerts and other artistic gatherings, which
46 serve to attract visitors and showcase their rich cultural heritage.

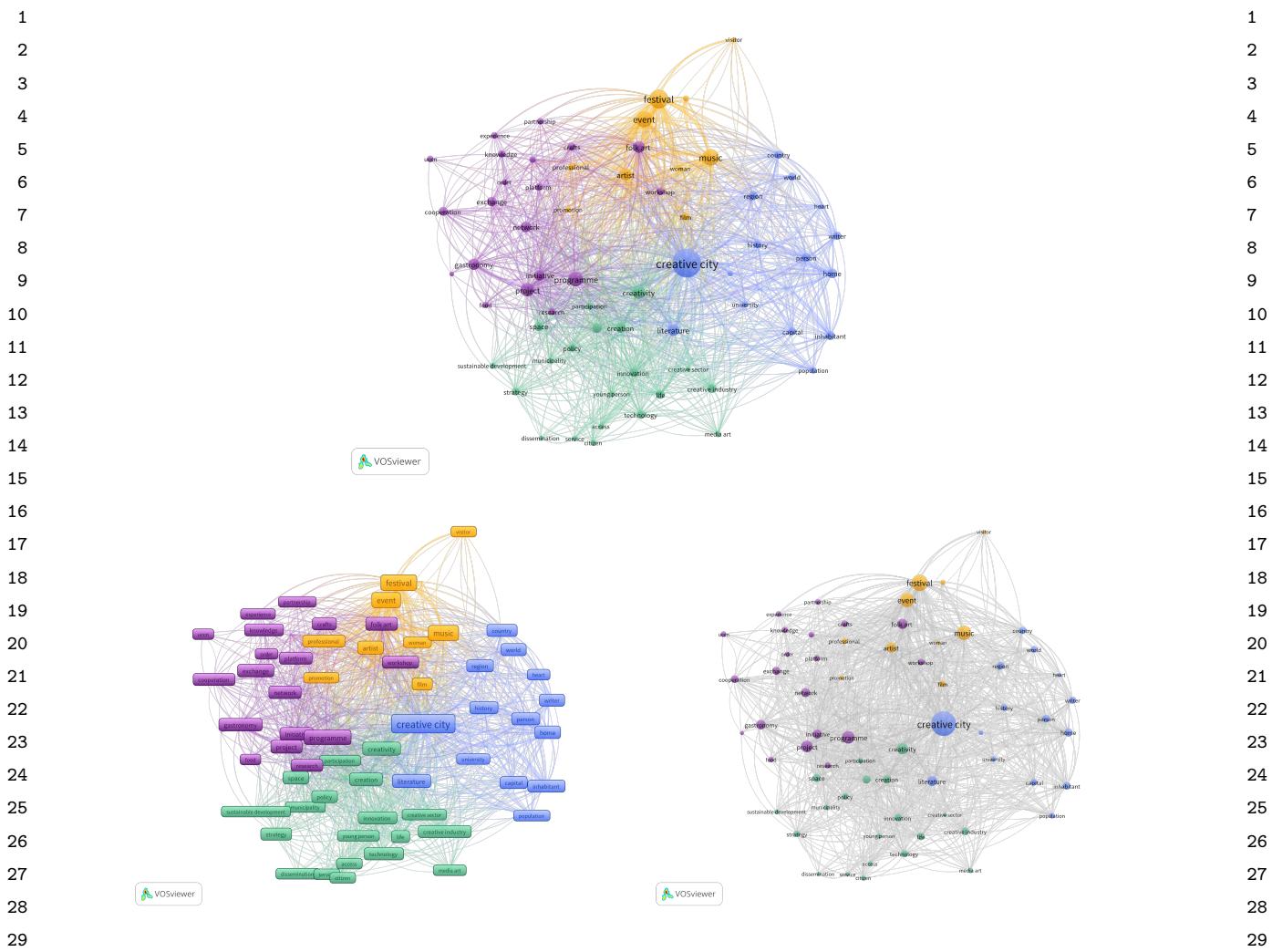


Figure 2: Map of Creative Terms Network
 (Source: Generated using *VOSviewer* Software)

Artists, musicians and filmmakers play pivotal roles in shaping the cultural landscape and enhancing the artistic vitality of these cities. There is a deliberate focus on professionally promoting cultural events to bolster the city's reputation as a premier cultural destination. Moreover, women are actively engaged in the arts and cultural sector, contributing significantly to its diversity and richness.

Festivals represent joyous occasions where individuals from all walks of life come together to create cherished memories and escape the monotony of daily routines. For instance, in the realm of music, Seville, the capital of the Andalusia region and birthplace of Flamenco dance, annually hosts the renowned *Bienal de Flamenco*. Similarly, Nottingham hosts the *European Festival of Multidisciplinary Art Theater*, drawing an impressive gathering of artists and audiences. Bradford boasts esteemed film festivals like the *Bradford International Film Festival* and the *Bradford Animation Festival*. Additionally, Łódź, dubbed the *city of festivals* in Poland, annually organizes hundreds of cultural events, further solidifying its status as a cultural hub.

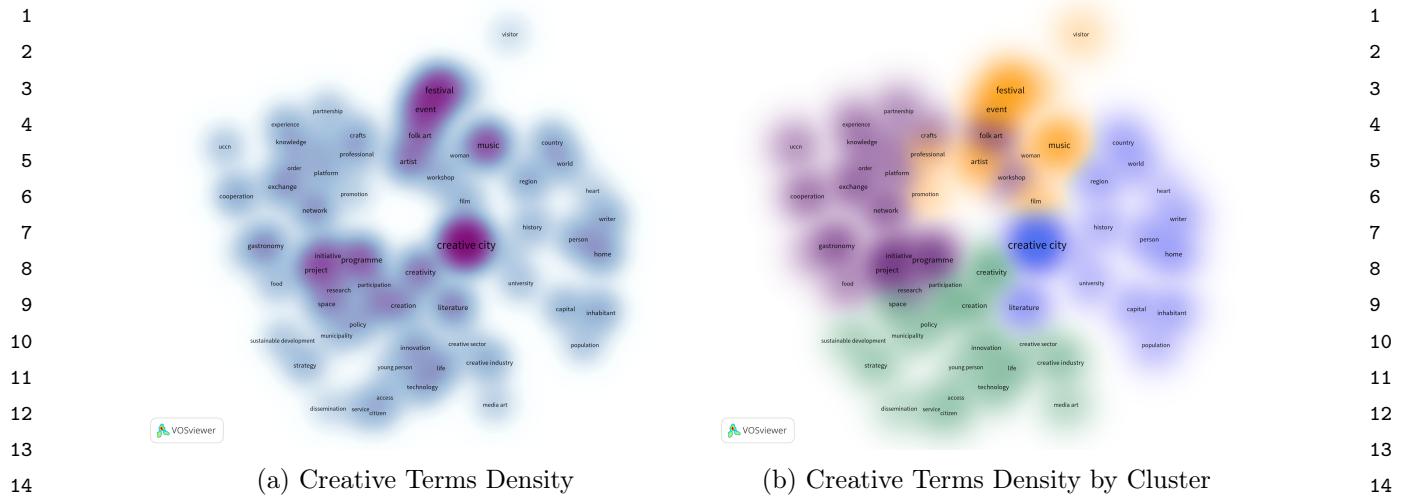


Figure 3: Maps of Creative Terms Density

(Source: Generated using VOSviewer Software)

The third cluster is revolved around terms *exchange* and *network*, intertwined with concepts like *knowledge*, *experience*, *cooperation* and *gastronomy*. This cluster underscores the vital role of collaboration, cooperation and cultural exchange within creative cities. Creative cities actively promote partnerships and initiatives that facilitate the sharing of experiences, expertise and skills among diverse stakeholders. They recognize the significance of traditional crafts, folk art and gastronomy as integral elements of their cultural heritage and identity.

Projects and programs are meticulously crafted to support sustainable urban development while simultaneously preserving local traditions and nurturing creativity. These cities serve as dynamic platforms for networking and research, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration to tackle urban challenges and promote cultural diversity.

The terms within this cluster highlight another characteristic of creative cities: their commitment to facilitating exchanges of experiences. These exchanges, which span across different age groups but are particularly pronounced among young individuals, including students, are facilitated through various educational programs. They bring fresh perspectives from diverse environments and cultures, fostering innovation and problem-solving. The phenomenon of interculturality emerges from these exchanges, fostering the creation of new ideas and innovative solutions that contribute to a city's economic development. Gastronomy is also highlighted as a key aspect. Local cuisine serves as a bridge between culture and food, offering a distinct advantage in city promotion strategies.

An exemplary illustration of this is seen in the city of Dénia, which spearheads the *Xarxa Local Foods Ecosystem* project aimed at promoting healthy eating. This initiative seeks to boost the production of fresh, indigenous and nutritious foods while fostering sustainable cultural and collaborative industries. It encourages gastronomic entrepreneurship and incubates food industries to enhance urban life quality. Additionally, exchange programs between chefs and culinary students from creative cities are established to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, methodologies and best practices, further enriching the gastronomic landscape and promoting cultural exchange.

Additionally, concerning the cooperation among cities to create innovative intercultural ex-

1 periences, the city of Bergen represents a prime example. Bergen boasts the most sustainable
2 food culture in Europe thanks to its maritime biodiversity and hosts the *North Atlantic Seafood*
3 *Forum Conference*, the largest conference organized in this field, which creates a cooperative
4 environment for cities from no less than 40 countries. Its objective is to create innovative and
5 sustainable methods for harvesting oceanic and maritime resources. Bergen also houses the *National
6 Institute of Nutrition and Seafood Research*, a unique center of expertise in seafood, which
7 together with organic food represents the core of the city's cultural identity.

8 **The forth cluster** is revolved around terms *initiative* and *programme*, intertwined with
9 concepts like *creativity*, *research*, *policy*, *sustainable development*, *young person* and *technology*.
10 Creative cities prioritize the implementation of policies and strategies aimed at fostering creativ-
11 ity and innovation across various sectors, including media arts, technology and creative industries.
12 They place significant emphasis on citizen participation and collaboration to cultivate vibrant
13 urban spaces supportive of the creative sector. Recognizing the pivotal role of technology and ac-
14 cess to services, these cities prioritize providing conducive environments for nurturing innovation
15 among young individuals.

16 Furthermore, this association speaks to the regeneration strategy of a city, with its inhab-
17 itants forming the backbone of this approach. A notable characteristic of creative cities is the
18 strong bond between the city and its community. This connection is cultivated through a deep
19 understanding of the city's history and culture, fostering an appreciation for its unique spirit.
20 Citizen engagement in the city's political and economic spheres further solidifies this bond.

21 Regarding the redevelopment of urban areas in decline and their integration into the vitality
22 of the city, the city of Enghien-les-Bains serves as an example for cities in the Media Arts category.
23 Over the years, it has been transformed into a veritable laboratory where specialists in the field
24 of Media Arts from around the globe have contributed to revitalizing urban spaces. Numerous
25 collaborative projects, international competitions and professional meetings have been hosted
26 by this city, which holds the coordinating status in the group of creative cities in the Media
27 Arts category. As a result, throughout the year, numerous highly attractive events are organized,
28 attracting both tourists from around the world and local residents. For example, during festive
29 periods, projections are organized on various significant monuments of the city. These light shows,
30 along with music, dance and food, are attractions for people of all ages. Additionally, various
31 free events with installations, exhibitions, performances and concerts are held throughout the
32 year in squares, cultural venues, streets and transportation stations across the city. Moreover,
33 Enghien-les-Bains boasts the largest floating stage in Europe (450 m²), where free concerts are
34 held, featuring annually reconstructed innovative lighting installations.

35 The city of Óbidos has implemented the *Creative Houses* project, which restores and trans-
36 forms abandoned houses into a network of creative residencies for artists and incubator spaces for
37 start-ups. The city's initiative to promote heritage conservation and creative innovation has led
38 to the creation of unique cultural spaces. For instance, the *Gothic Church of St. Peter* has been
39 transformed into a library and bookstore. With the help of the city's medieval style, Óbidos seeks
40 to create the perfect ambiance to attract young people to culture, promoting the development
41 of a knowledge-based economy.

42 In terms of creating creative and recreational spaces for citizens, the city of Kolding presents
43 a unique initiative. With the support of the municipality, the campaign *We design for life* has
44 been launched, which consists of creating innovative urban revitalization solutions that beautify
45 the city and create a pleasant atmosphere for citizens. This campaign promotes design as a driver
46 for a better life and is based on the desires and needs of citizens, whose involvement is crucial.

47 Considering all the efforts made by the governing bodies of creative cities, it must be em-

1 phasized that none of these could have been accomplished without the intense involvement of
2 the local community. This involvement stems from the interest, knowledge, and desire to pro-
3 mote their own culture. People have been open to listening, understanding and contributing
4 to urban regeneration and the creation of city identities. They have understood the benefits
5 brought by change and realized that technological innovation represents a major advantage for
6 the sustainable development of the environment in which they live.

7 Thus, following the analysis, several common characteristics can be highlighted, which are
8 specific to the UCCN space and have varied overlap in the group of cities studied:

- 9 • **Cultural Diversity:** Creative cities embrace and celebrate cultural diversity,
10 fostering an inclusive environment where different perspectives, traditions and
11 artistic expressions thrive;
- 12 • **Involvement of the Local Community:** Creative cities actively involve the
13 local community in cultural initiatives, urban development projects, and decision-
14 making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in the city's cultural
15 identity and heritage;
- 16 • **Government and University Involvement:** They recognize the importance
17 of government and university involvement in supporting creative efforts to elevate
18 education levels and foster creativity within the community;
- 19 • **City Cooperation for Intercultural Experiences:** Creative cities collaborate
20 with other cities to create innovative intercultural experiences, fostering cross-
21 cultural understanding and exchange;
- 22 • **Collaborative Networks:** Creative cities foster collaboration and cooperation
23 among various stakeholders, including artists, businesses, educational institu-
24 tions, government agencies, and non-profit organizations;
- 25 • **Cultural Heritage Preservation:** They value and preserve their cultural her-
26 itage, including historic landmarks, traditions, crafts, and folk art, while also
27 embracing contemporary forms of expression;
- 28 • **Quality of Life:** They prioritize the quality of life for residents, offering a high
29 standard of living, access to cultural amenities, green spaces, recreational facil-
30 ties, and a sense of belonging and community;
- 31 • **Gastronomic Heritage:** Creative cities recognize the importance of gastronomy
32 as a cultural asset, promoting local cuisine and culinary traditions as integral
33 parts of their identity and tourism appeal;
- 34 • **Innovation Hub:** They serve as hubs for innovation and creativity, with a strong
35 emphasis on nurturing and supporting creative industries, entrepreneurs, and
36 startups.

44 5 Conclusion

45 As presented in the Introduction, the first section represented a synthesis of the economic
46 literature produced in the last two centuries on the subject of the influence of human creativity

in the economic, social and urban environment. Thus, we showed how creativity has become one of the engines propelling a city into the orbit of development, representing one of the main components of the mechanism that generates energy for economic development. We noted the extension of the modernist concept of creativity beyond culture and made the distinction from the concept of innovation. Additionally, we highlighted the components of the creative economy that generate various business ideas by stimulating the triad of cultural activities - technological development - innovation. Furthermore, we developed the three main perspectives of the economic literature based on economic creativity and creative cities. Thus, we delved into the ideas of John Howkins (2001), who defines the core of creative industries, Richard Florida (2002, 2012 and 2018), who introduces the concept of the Creative Class, and Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini (1995 and 2011), who explain that creative cities represent a response to the international urban crisis created by the transition to a global economy and create the *Creative City Index*. Next, we discussed the context of the emergence of the concept of the creative city and its characteristics highlighted in the reference literature. Then, we defined the controversial notion of the *Creative Class*, represented the domains attributed by the BLS to the two components of the total of the three of the Creative Class, and discussed based on the three categories of values attributed to it, namely: individuality, meritocracy and diversity. Finally, we presented the mission and objectives of the UCCN network and the method of city accession and the facilities provided by the membership status of this network.

In the second section of the article, we explained the methodology used to discover the main characteristics of creative cities in UCCN, which consisted of conducting a content analysis. We presented the three stages of this analysis, which involved pre-analysis, processing procedures and inference and synthesis of the results. Subsequently, we discussed the advantages and disadvantages of using this research method. In this context, we had the opportunity to discover and learn how to use the *VOSviewer* program. Thus, we created the corpus based on which the program generated maps that highlighted the most commonly used creative terms in the descriptions of creative cities on the UCCN website, the networks and clusters formed by these terms, and the densities of each creative term. Based on the maps, we then conducted inference and synthesized the results.

By conducting this analysis, we have understood that creative cities are becoming increasingly important in the global economy, and joining the UCCN network represents the first step in establishing an effective and sustainable urban regeneration strategy due to the multiple benefits provided by the network. The tendency is to shape a new form of creative cities, different from the one in the early discourse of Florida or Landry, which allows freedom of action. Every urban strategy must be based on the city's history, its culture, thus creating its own unique identity, which represents a major competitive advantage. Furthermore, through intense cooperation between cities and through the exchange of experiences leading to the phenomenon of interculturality, innovative ideas will be generated, bringing continuous improvement to urban environments and the quality of life for people worldwide. This is, of course, achieved with the help of involved and willing local communities and governments eager for evolution.

Finally, I appreciate that tackling this topic has taught me what a creative city entails, what community involvement in cultural and urban processes means, how this involvement can be achieved, what exciting and effective initiatives creative cities have undertaken to beautify and enrich the cultural and economic aspects of urban environments and citizens' lives. It has also allowed me to explore creativity in economics theoretically.

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