

## Book Review

# Cultural Industries and the Environmental Crisis

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Oakley, K. and Banks, M. eds. (2018). *Cultural Industries and the Environmental Crisis*. Berlin: Springer.

This book, including contributions from international academics associated with the Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP) and beyond, seeks to address what is arguably the most pressing issue for humanity—the environmental crisis facing our planet and society—and the role of culture and cultural industries in both perpetuating and responding to the challenge.

The title is somewhat misleading as to the emphasis of the book; chapters address a range of important sustainability issues—economic, social, and environmental—within cultural, creative and media industries (the inclusion of Amazon—Caraway—as a cultural industry was a bit of a stretch). There is also a significant emphasis on creative work (Pitts, Killick and Oakley, and Munro) and issues of social inequality across many chapters. While acknowledging the interconnection of these issues with environmental (or ecological) crisis, there is variability in the extent to which chapters clearly articulated the connection (Pitts does this well). The majority of chapters address Global North contexts, but there are two valuable contributions from Latin America presenting alternative narratives from the Global South, while not claiming to be representative.

The book would serve, usefully, as an introduction to wide ranging ecological and social impacts of creative economy development (industry and policy) internationally, and as a source of critical reflection for students, scholars, policymakers and industry practitioners; chapters clearly situate creative production and consumption within extractive capitalist economic relations and provide useful case studies of industries, cities and community interventions.

The book reflects a growing critical consciousness among cultural and creative industries scholars regarding the impact and implications on society and the environment. In the introduction, the editors state they are 'holding on to a vision of a better future' (Oakley and Banks, 2018: 2) while aiming to challenge dominant discourses and inequalities in the cultural industries. This challenge is certainly made; after reading, there can be no doubt of cultural industries' complicity in crises of inequality and in the environment. There is however a healthy dose of skepticism (and at times pessimism) about whether the radical changes—in policy and in industry—needed to respond to the deepening climate crisis will be delivered in time or at all.

While it could risk sending the reader (further) into an existential crisis, it is not a book of doom and gloom! There are hopeful considerations of culture's communicating capacity and the role of cultural infrastructure (Gross), real world examples of alternative business models, community initiatives and organizational forms (Lavanga and Drosner, Pitts) and reflections on culture in crisis (or exhaustion—Munro) as a context and facilitator of opposition and resistance. Culture here becomes a space in which we *can* drive change when so much feels beyond our control and when imagining alternative futures (Munro) feels almost impossible.

Beyond challenging dominant discourses, the book promises to offer alternatives and new approaches for policy. Contributions made here include calls for reflection on consumer behavior and industry inaction (in music—Brennan), suggestions of green accounting for creative economies (Maxwell), encouraging ‘staying small’ over growth in CCIs funding (Munro), and developing ‘post-extractivist’ models for urban creative economies (Serafini); Gross proposes a Green New Deal approach for cultural policy, in which cultural infrastructure can play a role in developing the trust and hope needed for dramatic change; Lavanga and Drosener offer insights into new collective forms of organization, eco-innovation and urban sustainable community development, although not without its issues—putting creatives in polluted environments, short lived intervention and privileged access/social exclusion. The two Latin American-based chapters appear to offer the most considered presentation of alternative approaches. Both Serafini and Dinardi highlight the value of developing Global South perspectives where formal<sup>1</sup> creative economies and associated policy may be less established and not (yet) wedded to neoliberal ideology, therefore presenting significant opportunities for doing things differently. Dinardi also highlights the importance of context in policy critique—while many Global North-oriented chapters and authors in the book denounce a growth model for CCIs and critique cultural policy for its instrumental social change agenda (UK especially), it is important to note that the potential for job creation is more pertinent in developing economy contexts to address social inequalities. It is therefore important for future research and policy on the creative economy and the environmental crisis to take geographic, socio-economic and political specificity into account.

However, overall, the book feels dominated by repeated lobbying for “rethinking” (capitalism, systems and specific industries) and “radical change”. While valid, these calls are made without nuancing how such radical rethinking and change might be achieved, or what viable alternative systems could feasibly be put in place in the time required to mitigate against ecological destruction. The contribution to new directions for policy therefore remains somewhat rhetorical and in places reductive. The book also would have benefitted from a concluding chapter. Without this, it lacks a clear articulation of the collective contributions made to both scholarly and policy debates.

From the contributions in the book, key questions and research areas that remain to be explored or developed further include: how can the radical changes and rethinking of our political and creative economies that is so desperately needed be brought into reality?; How do we prevent wicked problems occurring where sustainability interventions or creative economy development compounds or creates social inequalities in communities?; What can creative economies in the Global South teach us about context-sensitive responses to intertwined ecological and social crises and sustainable development models? These are challenges that will need to be addressed collectively by academics, policy makers and industry.

## REFERENCES

Oakley, K. and Banks, M. (eds). (2018). *Cultural Industries and the Environmental Crisis*. Berlin: Springer.

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<sup>1</sup> Here it is important to acknowledge the long histories and extensive nature of informal creative and cultural economies.