Creative economies are increasingly championed as a means of economic revitalization and growth across the world. Many of these creative economy policies have been directed to large-scale, industrialized, and profitable creative activities, raising questions about the role of sustainability in culture-as-economic policy. At the same time, we are also experiencing a rising tide of discussions and debates about the challenges and exploitation of creative industries work, including unpaid internships and unpaid creative work that is compensated only by promises of “exposure.” These conditions are often faced by young workers entering the field of creative work, and these realities mitigate the celebration of creative economies as sustainable and equitable employment avenues. Young people are also increasingly seeking out creative careers in small-scale, entrepreneurial, and community-oriented ways, and this form of self-generated employment contains its own barriers and challenges. What role might these other creative directions that youth are undertaking play in developing sustainable creative economies?

This paper highlights the need to position youth as a main actor in discussions of the sustainability of CCIs. By providing an overview of empirical research that demonstrates the differing uses and practices of youth with regards to culture, this paper addresses the divergence of emerging and established creative practices, and suggests that these emerging creative and economic directions that youth are forging lack visibility at the policy level, where established directions are championed. Recognizing the differing needs and trajectories of youth who are entering the CCIs could allow for policies to better match unfolding economic and creative directions. This paper concludes that a sustainable model of the CCIs needs to target the participation of youth, and needs to work across sectors, including infrastructure, employment, and social inclusion and participation, such that that the emerging, small-scale, and community-oriented mode of youth creative work can be supported.

Keywords: youth, creative economies, work, sustainability

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