



# The creative economy in Africa: The focus and scope of the *African Journal of Creative Economy*

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Many countries have recognised the creative economy's potential, encapsulating their intrinsic, social and economic contributions to aspects of wellbeing and sustainable development. These include building a sense of identity through heritage preservation, contributing to social cohesion, cultural diplomacy and intercultural understanding, creating work opportunities and increasing gross domestic product and foreign trade.

Creative economies are essential to innovation, technology and economic development in many cities and regions. They are also cornerstones of sustainable development, community engagement and dialogue across cultures and generations. Africa is at a particularly interesting conjunction globally regarding creative economy issues and dynamics.

The creative industries are among the world's fastest-growing sectors (UNCTAD 2022). Although negatively impacted by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis, as many sectors based on in-person contract work were (Bunketi Buse 2020), it has recovered well, and some of the innovations adopted during the pandemic have improved sector productivity and resilience even further. In 2022, PWC (2022) estimated the global entertainment and media industries (which do not include non-profit arts) to be worth \$2.5 trillion, with an expected compound annual growth rate of 4.6% by 2026.

The potential of the creative economy has been recognised in the African context through the African Union 'Plan of Action on the Cultural and Creative Industries in Africa' and Agenda 2063 as part of Aspiration 5: 'Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics' (AU 2015). There is an excellent opportunity for African countries to build on our rich cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, to strengthen the economy, boost cultural trade and build regional alliances (Kabanda 2018). However, the success of this development depends on a well-designed cultural policy that strikes a balance between protecting African cultural artefacts and intellectual property while allowing for its fair and sustainable utilisation for human wellbeing (Nwauche 2017).

There are many definitions of the creative economy and cultural and creative industries (CCIs). Common elements involve human creativity in production and providing goods or services with symbolic value and meaning that can be protected by copyright and other forms of intellectual property (Throsby 2010; UNCTAD 2022). For this journal, we take a broad view following the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (2009), including both the traditional sectors, which are often produced by non-profit organisations that emphasise public good values (such as literature, music, and performing arts), as well as the more commercial applications (such as fashion, design, and online gaming).

Broad definitions of the creative economy are important because of their implications for cultural policy. While some parts of the sector with a high level of symbolic content are best supported through public subsidy and education, others may need a more industrial or innovation policy approach (Cunningham 2004). New directions and forms of cultural policy are needed as current versions are not always sufficiently adapted to specific national and regional contexts (Martell 2020).

For one, ensuring a balance between spending on public cultural goods and services and investing in the creative economy is more instrumental than in past decades. Secondly, a related concern for progressive cultural policy is to address fully the harsh asymmetry between the increasing power of transnational digital platforms and the creators of much of the content on which the super profits of these structures are based (Buchoud et al. 2021). Regulation and taxation of such digital platforms is necessary, with the revenue appropriately directed.

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Research on the creative economy has tended to be dominated by the Global North, particularly by the US, UK and Australia, although more credit should be given to the innovative analyses of CCI sectors by select institutions in emerging economies such as Argentina. Theories and models from developed-country contexts are then sometimes transferred to other countries without considering the unique local context (De Beukelaer 2015). This is not to say that theories developed in other countries do not apply to the African context, but that there may be crucial differences between how economies and institutions operate. For example, in the 'gig' economy, Africa, with its large informal sector and strong social networks, may have lessons for developed countries (Adegoke & Comunian 2022). The same applies to sustainable production: in many cases, practical resource constraints, as well as indigenous knowledge systems, have mandated a philosophy that minimises waste and promotes the use of natural, local inputs and recycling. The *African Journal of Creative Economy* (AJCE) aims to publish research contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015. The protection and promotion of culture are vital development goals, but they are also an enabler that contributes to the effectiveness of other SDGs.

The study of cultural policy has an inter-disciplinary lineage, which includes the writings of the Frankfurt School on 'cultural industries' during the inter-war years and after (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt 2005; Schuetz 1989; Vitkauskaitė 2015). The 1990s and 2000s saw the increased influence of neo-liberal economic analysis in cultural policy in Northern economies and its transposition to a range of developing and emerging economies (Lee 2020; McGuigan 2005). This approach has seen more emphasis on laissez-faire horizontal policies, such as the provision of infrastructure, general support for innovation and the development of human capital to improve market competitiveness and decide the 'efficient' outcome (Lee 2020). These considerations have been tempered, however, by differences between the Anglo-American and French approaches (Dubois 2016), in the design and development of cultural policy. In addition, the complex interaction between the historic West and post-independence Africa has impacted on the variations regarding policy conception and implementation in the differing economies of the continent. However, with the rising influence and success of cultural industries in China and the so-called 'Korean Wave', there is now also interest in how more hands-on, top-down and planned cultural policy might benefit developing countries (Ryoo & Jin 2020).

An important international agreement relating to cultural policy is the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). The Convention came at a time of World Trade Organisation (WTO) restructuring when developing countries were concerned about maintaining their cultural diversity and industries at a time of expanded global trade and increasing

transnational digitisation of cultural production, which made ensuring more coherent control of intellectual property rights increasingly important. Under the terms of the Convention, and at the behest of developing countries, an International Fund for Cultural Diversity was established, as such countries did not want the diversity of cultural expressions confined to the diversity of developed country cultural expressions (De Beukelaer, Pyykkönen & Singh 2015). The tension between pronouncement and practice regarding the Convention and the associated Fund and subsequent challenges such as the advent of the mega digital and streaming platforms and their growing predominance in the globalising creative economy are issues that require more extensive scholarly scrutiny.

The digitisation of many parts of the creative industries and the rise of online platforms and artificial intelligence are opening new opportunities and risks for African creative industries. The ability to reach new audiences via online distribution and social media platforms could provide important opportunities for developing countries. The AJCE scope will encompass the implications and applications of the multi-dimensional expansion and popularisation of the creative economy and its representations in physical and 'hyper-real' space. Digital platforms and social media have driven such shifts, as well as the colonisation of new domains of creativity ranging from fantasy and e-sports to cuisine (Haines & Lötter 2024). However, as Nwauche (2017) points out, online cultural content can easily be copied, downloaded and shared, so the sustainable monetisation of the sector depends very much on having strong intellectual property legislation and effective enforcement. And at the socio-political level, there is a growing realisation by artists and creative workers in developed and developing economies that such interventions need to be accompanied by modified and new forms of associations and collective action.

In these spaces, the new opportunities within Africa need to be shaped by creative entrepreneurs to grow and sustain the private sector CCIs, sometimes in a context of rent-seeking by state elites (Haines & Lötter 2023). The emerging African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) seeks to boost intra-African trade via a progressive elimination of tariffs on up to 90% of goods and by shrinking barriers to trade in services. Among the stated objectives of AfCFTA is to provide for the inclusivity of women and youth, especially from rural areas, in the development of SMEs and the overall industrialisation of the continent.

The Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) is a cross-border system upgrading a pilot scheme to a broader system capable of operating within the African continent to facilitate direct payment transactions (Usman & Csanadi 2023). The system is anticipated to reduce dependence on external currencies and associated financial volatilities, enable smoother cross-border transactions and lead to quicker, easier and cheaper exchanges among small businesses, including CCIs. The expansion of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) to include several African countries, with further increases possible, may offer new

options for CCI collaboration and new kinds of business activities.

In addition, special post-colonial cultural ties and institutional linkages will shape CCI sectors throughout Africa, with Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone cultural diplomatic institutions and ventures having continued influence within and outside the continent. New economic and cultural relations and networks will supplement such influences, including from China, Russia and the Middle East. The continued importance of the African diaspora, and new creative and cultural expressions thereof, will also inform such creative and cultural crisscrossing.

The social underpinnings of the creative economy in Africa, as well as the complex relationship between political activism, democracy and creative practice, are important both locally and in the international context. In recent decades, the nature and enhancement of creativity and innovation have become a significant discourse in the social and economic sciences. The related issue of the social contribution of artists and creatives raised in the seminal UNESCO 1980 'Recommendation on the Status of the Artist', and its subsequent quadrennial member nation survey is a key reminder of the societal importance of artistic and creative work and the need to provide a measure of social protection for the nurturing of unique talents and insights. With the intensification of creative work in the 21st century and the higher incidence of precarious work in the CCIs, the social and economic interplay becomes more focused. These developments and the question of associationism and collective action by such groupings are also of interest to the ACJE and its readers.

For a sustainable creative economy, issues of local cultural consumption and its inequalities are also important. In two of the BRICS states, South Africa and Brazil, the question of a high Gini coefficient and reduced levels of consumption of cultural goods and services by low- to middle-income households suggests the importance of social reforms and more structured interventions regarding cultural consumption and participation (Pereira, Vinícius Amaral e Silva & Martins de Brito 2023; Snowball & Gouws 2024). Such developments are likely to be encountered in other African countries as well, and the need to boost consumption and develop internal and regional markets is a distinct challenge. A related structural issue is the inadequate provision of digital infrastructure, especially of a public nature. Such potential debates and prescriptions will enrich the discussions on the making and marketing of the creative economy in Africa and beyond.

These are some of the gaps that the AJCE seeks to fill by offering an interdisciplinary platform for publishing creative economy research that has its roots in Africa. The journal focuses on both theoretical and practical issues pertaining to Africa's cultural and creative economy. Research from outside Africa will also be considered if it is relevant to the African creative economy in terms of policy lessons or comparative analysis. The journal is primarily

aimed at those investigating, evaluating and developing policies and practicing activities that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential to contribute to wellbeing, employment and sustainable economic development. Rather than simply applying theories and models of the creative economy developed mainly in the Global North, the journal aims to publish work based on learning and reflections from the African and Global South and emerging economies contexts, problematising commonly held understandings of concepts like heritage, sustainability and precarious employment. The AJCE is a key part of this vision, offering an open-access platform for sharing research to support developing more equitable, innovative and sustainable creative economies.

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