7

THRIVING AT THE EDGE

Rewriting the Urban Creativity Canon from the Margins

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Introduction

Cities: From Abyss of the Human Species to Greatest Invention of Mankind

"I view great cities", contemplated Thomas Jefferson in 1803, "as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man" (Oberg 2005). With his verdict, Jefferson set the tone for an entire genre of admonitions of the multiple hazards of toxic urban life. What started off as an anti-urban affect animated by idiographic accounts of singular phenomena like Rome, London or, in the case of Jefferson, unruly Paris, turned into a *leitmotif* of social structural inquiry during industrialization (König 2021: 383): Friedrich Engels (1845/1947) deplored the isolation and alienation in the emerging industrial centers in England; for Ferdinand Tönnies (1887/2005), urbanization marked the transition from close-knit traditional communities (*Gemeinschaft*) to transactional societies (*Gesellschaft*) in which the disruption of social norms, as Émile Durkheim (1893/1992) maintained, culminated in a state of *anomie*. These narratives of "paradise lost" also inspired the reformist programs from Ebenezer Howard's Garden City over the public park movement of Frederick Law Olmsted to the rural communes of the 1970s. Notwithstanding variations in the implementation, these attempts to move from scientific insight to urban praxis shared a common goal: regaining the paradise to which only the rural village once offered access.

Whereas the condemnation of the harsh realities of urban life hardly could be objected,[1] the romantic glorification of rural life as healthy, communitarian and morally superior drew criticism. In fact, foundational contributions to urban scholarship were, at least partially, written *against* an anti-urban mainstream. Without neglecting individual hardship and social deprivation imposed upon the poorer urbanites in particular, this emerging strand of authoritative accounts emphatically stressed the overall positive balance of the new urban condition. Sensory overload and a *blasé* attitude were, as Georg Simmel (1903) asserted, a small price to pay for the intellectual freedom and individual autonomy that only cities afforded; where anti-urbanists only saw isolation and social disarray, Louis Wirth (1938) as well as Jane Jacobs (1961) uncovered powerful sources of cultural vibrancy and creativity; and instead of an arena of normative disruptions and *anomie*, Lewis Mumford (1961) saw cities as centers of civilization where democracy, art and science flourished.[2]

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By striking a similar chord, Richard Florida (2002) praised the unique capacity of cities to cultivate tolerance, openness and inclusivity – which no longer were simply regarded as evidence of metropolitan sophistication but also as catalysts of the chief urban virtue in ever more competitive times: creativity. Echoing his celebration of the *creative class*, Richard Florida (2002) had turned the "creative city" into a new master paradigm of urban development.

The hymns of praise to "man's greatest invention", unremittingly intoned by Edward Glaeser (2011), echoed through the pertinent literature that habitually confirmed that mankind, as a sort of ultimate civilizational achievement, had entered the "urban age". To leave no doubt on the new urban-age *doxa*,[3] the rising share of the world population registered in administrative entities arbitrarily categorized as cities (i.e., > 50%!), was cited as definitive empirical proof (for critical perspectives, see Brenner and Schmid 2014; Peck 2016). In conceptual terms, the urban-age consensus draws on a robust register of theorems on the primary centripetal forces that, underpinned by the scientific authority of key urban thinkers from Georg Simmel to Jane Jacobs and Saskia Sassen to Edward Glaeser, have become synonymous with urbanity.

Most obviously, urbanity is tied to the *socio-material* features of *size* and *density* that allow to reap economies of scale in service provision (Weber 1921/1999; Glaeser 2011) and afford the most favorable preconditions for knowledge spillovers (Marshall 1890/1949; Jacobs 1961); in *socio-cultural* terms, *diversity* and *strangeness* embody preeminent hallmarks of urbanity and act as most effective ferments for breeding novelty (Simmel 1903/2002; Sennett 1970; Florida 2002); and viewed from a *political-economic* angle, cities are uniquely positioned to leverage relational power from *centrality* and *connectivity* within global systems of flows of ideas, things and people (Sassen 1991; Glaeser 2011). And although these preeminent urban thinkers were acutely aware of the cracks and tensions within these conceptual pillars, their crucial role remains largely uncontroversial.

Where does this leave us? Our intention is neither to marshal support for the harsh realities of urban misery nor to side with the champions of urban triumphalism. By engaging with the canonical conjectures on centrality in the urban-age *doxa*, we rather seek to foreground the conceptual void around which key debates on peripherality unfold, first and foremost in the fields of geography and sociology. The deficient conceptualization of peripherality is revealed in a vocabulary that oscillates between the irrelevance of the "places that don't matter" (Rodríguez-Pose 2018), the dullness of the "fly-over country" (Harkins 2016), the backwardness of "left-behind places" (MacKinnon et al. 2021) and the passivity of the "receiving end" (Rodríguez-Pose and Fitjar 2013: 370) that remains at the mercy of decisions made elsewhere. Periphery, then, is construed basically through *othering* the urban-age consensus on centrality (Pugh and Dubois 2021: 270); and the paucity of the understanding periphery is basically a reflex of a persistent "urban bias" (Shearmur 2017) in mainstream thinking of the spatiality of development, growth and innovation.

With this chapter, we neither aspire to heroically (or naïvely) prove the urban-age consensus *wrong* nor to shift the viewfinder of scientific inquiry, in a radical twist, from one territorial category ("center") to another category ("periphery"): "Triumph of the periphery" is definitely not the headline we are after. Rather, we propose to push beyond the reduction of peripheries to that vast and amorphous terrain that extends beyond the city limits: the periphery as the *non*-center. How can peripherality be conceptualized from a positive angle – as an asset rather than as deficiency? This is the key question that guides our exploratory journey through an immensely rich and ramified literature on the spatial organization of society and economy that will take us through an extensive range of: creative fields (fine arts,

jazz music, film and TV production, architecture, spacefaring and engineering, and traditional crafts); locations from sparsely populated Scandinavia (Lapland, Värmland, provincial Norway) over peripheral Ireland (Galway) and the Alpine arc from Austria (Bregenzerwald), Italy (Val Gardena) and Swiss side valleys to provincial Russia and the very fringes of Australia (Tasmania) and New Zealand's North Island (Mahia Peninsula); and distinct social and relational positions like, just to name the emblematic ones, strangers, outsiders, multiple insiders as well as members of the cultural establishment.

We are keenly aware of the pitfalls of such an emphatically eclectic analytical strategy (i.e., to compare the incommensurable and to reproduce attentional biases); and yet, we believe that it is worthwhile to assume the risks associated with such an approach – since it presents the prospect of heuristic surplus. Appreciating the genetic and structural diversity of distinct peripheral constellations, ostensibly, contributes to the desired de-homogenization of the notion of periphery (see, for example, Eder 2018; Pugh and Dubois 2021). More importantly, though, the empirical diversity is brought to bear by systematically framing the individual instances, not as local idiosyncrasies but as exemplary *cases of* the various dimensions of peripheries that catalyze creativity and innovation.

Our journey takes off from a review of the urban-age consensus on the undisputable urban virtues to demonstrate how the dominant perception of creativity and innovation as an urban prerogative has impoverished our imaginative capability to think about creativity in non-urban, peripheral contexts. After foregrounding prevailing assumptions on periphery that, so far, mostly were drowned out by the clamor of urban triumphalism, we present socio-material, socio-cultural and political-economic virtues of peripherality and marginality that ferment creativity.

The Urban-Age Orthodoxy: The City in Six Superlatives

A range of powerful conceptual arguments have been advanced to explain the spatially uneven distribution of innovative agency and creative achievement between centers and peripheries. These lines of reasoning conceive urban spaces as specific socio-material settings, socio-cultural milieus and political-economic constellations that afford unique conditions that catalyze collaborative learning and innovation. Our review of this extensive and diversified bodies of work takes off from Louis Wirth's (1938: 1) sociological framing of a city as a "relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of heterogeneous individuals".

Socio-Material Virtues: Size and Density

The benchmark that separates cities from non-urban settlements is not affixed to a specific *size* of the population; and yet, intuition associates cities with a relatively larger size than villages as a general rule (with all the familiar exceptions that are seen as confirmation of the rule),[4] and larger size is associated with a specific *forte* of cities: specialization. "The more numerous the population", Émile Durkheim (1893/1984: 181) asserted in *The Division of Labor in Society*, "the more it will be divided into different special functions". Georg Simmel (1903/2002) further elaborated on the interdependence of city size and specialization in his foundational essay on *The Metropolis and Mental Life* by characterizing cities as "a unit which, because of its large size is receptive to a highly diversified plurality of achievements" (1903/2004: 108). The city provides such a wide spectrum of customer tastes that even the most exotic offers find a critical mass of demand.[5] Moreover, the fiercely competitive

environment of large cities forces individuals in "their struggle for customers […] to a type of specialized accomplishment in which [they] cannot be so easily exterminated by others" (Simmel 1903/2002: 108).

Size takes on greater significance as a distinctive quality of cities in conjunction with a second, less ambiguous feature of the socio-material fabric of cities: *density*. While Durkheim and Simmel emphatically articulated sociological perspectives on urbanity, Alfred Marshall (1890/1949) laid the groundwork for an economic appreciation of dense spatial agglomerations, in a tome tellingly titled *Principles of Economics*. While Simmel took his inspiration primarily from his hometown Berlin, Marshall derived his propositions from his "*Wanderjahre* among factories" in the cutlery districts of Sheffield and Solingen. Conceptualizing these local concentrations of specific trades as *industrial districts*, Marshall (1890) traced their ingenuity back to a locally situated, thriving culture of professional expertise that continuously galvanizes improvements, that are immediately shared across local space and time: "So great are the advantages which people following the same skilled trade get from near neighbourhood to one another. The mysteries of the trade are no longer mysteries, but are as it were in the air […] if one man starts a new idea, it is taken up and combined with suggestions of their own; and thus it becomes the source of further new ideas" (Marshall 1890: 225).

Despite being furnished toward the end of the 19th century, Marshall's vivid depiction of knowledge refinement and transfer proved remarkably robust and relevant across epochs and geographies. As *Marshall-Arrow-Romer* (*MAR*) externalities, catalyzed by the spatial proximity of firms and workers within the same industry, his ideas of knowledge spillovers continue to provide a central pillar of urban economic frameworks: Learning-by-doing (Arrow) and the continuous exchange of non-rival knowledge (Romer) boost agglomeration economies that drive urban growth and specialization. By empirically corroborating the centripetal dynamic of knowledge spillovers (Glaeser et al. 1992), Edward Glaeser (2011: 8) elevated the "absence of physical space between people" to the quintessential attribute of cities.

Unlike Marshall who derived agglomeration economies from the co-location of skilled practitioners of the same trade, Glaeser (2011: 21), however, attributes the more recent triumph of the city to more broadly defined "human capital externalities". Moreover, Marshall's notion of the industrial district experienced a staggering revival as a conceptual template for framing the rise of the highly localized small-firm networks in the *Third Italy* to global stature and, subsequently, inspired an entire family of *territorial innovation models* (Moulaert and Sekia 2003), alternately discussed as clusters (Michael Porter), learning regions (Kevin Morgan, Richard Florida) and, in its most recent incarnation, as entrepreneurial ecosystems (Alvedalen and Boschma 2017).

Socio-Cultural Virtues: Diversity and Strangeness

Again, Simmel's conscientious observations of everyday city life that set the tone for the appreciation of diversity as a socio-cultural hallmark of urbanity.[6] For Simmel (1903/2002: 409), diversity, rather than a plain statistical artifact, is at the very core of the unique civilizational achievement of cities: "The metropolis grants the individual a kind and an amount of personal freedom which has no analogy whatsoever under other conditions". The city, in fact, provided the social arena in which key principles of enlightenment were cultivated since, as Louis Wirth (1938: 10) alluded to, the "juxtaposition of divergent personalities, interests, and ways of life tends to produce a relatively tolerant, rational, and impersonal individual". In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, another classic that enjoys renewed popularity,

Jane Jacobs (1961) foregrounds a more instrumental upshot of urban diversity. Although the urban fabric resembles a complex mosaic of diverse demographics, ethnic, social and professional backgrounds and practices, such diversity does not petrify into rigid socio-spatial patterns. Rather, urban density and public street-life permanently yield opportunities for serendipitous encounters and endless occasions for "mingling" and "twirling": the "sidewalk ballet" (Jacobs 1961: 50) as the pairing of forces that engender creativity and innovation.

This line of reasoning was taken even further by Richard Florida whose controversial account on *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002: 249) very much is built around the nexus between diversity and creativity: "The places that thrive today are places that bring together diverse talent and turn that diversity into creative energy". By pronouncing the ability to participate in creative processes as competitive asset and driver of social stratification, Florida (2002: 241) advances a novel perspective on socio-spatial segregation processes since the "working population is re-sorting itself geographically along class lines". By reversing traditional assumptions on labor mobility, the new elite of the creative class no longer follows jobs, but jobs will follow wherever they decide to settle. In their locational choices they value in particular what Simmel, Wirth and Jacobs have praised as quintessential urban virtues: diversity, tolerance, interaction. These urban traits, then, are no longer "moral imperatives" alone, but turn into "economic necessities" (Florida 2014 xi). Combining Jacob's urban thinking with Joseph Schumpeter's notion of innovation, Florida recently asserted that cities are assuming an even greater importance in the current phase of disruptive innovations: "Cities are not just containers for smart people; they are the enabling infrastructure where connections take place, networks are built, and innovative combinations are consummated" (Florida, Adler, and Mellander 2017: 92).

The socio-cultural diversity in the European metropoles at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, intensified by recurrent waves of migration of ethnic minorities, provided the background against which Simmel (1908/1971) contrived the emblematic urbanite in the figure of the *stranger*. Resonating in particular with the paradoxical identity of Jews, as legally emancipated but socially marginalized group, the stranger embodies both the insider (who remains detached) and the outsider (who is partially integrated), forever remaining a potential wanderer, since: "although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going" (Simmel 1908/1971: 143). It is exactly the precarious positioning at the fringes of the field that, by liberating judgments of the "marginal man" (Park 1928) from in-group loyalties and preconceptions, affords an "attitude of objectivity" (Simmel 1908/1971: 145). Freed from the in-group pressures to "worship the idols of the tribe", as Alfred Schütz (1944: 502) further advances this train of thought, the stranger assesses those rules that insiders implicitly apply in their daily practice from the intellectual and emotional distance of the outsider. The cultural patterns of the insiders, then, are to the stranger "not a shelter but a field of adventure, not a matter of course but a questionable topic of investigation" (Schütz 1944: 506): detachment as a cultural asset,[7] otherness as a source of inspiration.[8]

Political-Economic Virtues: Centrality and Connectivity

A first systematic, spatially stratified conception of urban centrality was proposed by Walter Christaller (1933) who, in his dissertation *Central Places in South Germany* (1933), hierarchically ranked cities according to the reach of the goods and services they provided. Cities with the highest level of *centrality*, according to Christaller's spatial logic, owe their rank

to the provision of services with the farthest reach: by hosting universities and elite cultural institutions for example, top-tier cities, then, also have at their command the institutional infrastructure that supports creativity and innovation. Despite the captivating elegance of the fractal pattern of layered octagonal catchment areas, the explanatory power of Christaller's model seems limited to traditional agrarian city-*hinterland* configurations. Central place theory, in other words, ignores, that the "history of capitalism has been the history of successive hegemonies of major urban centers, which control *vast* economic spaces" (Braudel 1992: 39; emphasis added). In Braudel's (1992) concept of urban hegemony, a single city dominates global trade and finance, transitioning (global) centrality from Venice (15th century) over Antwerp (16th century) and Amsterdam (17th century) to London (18th–19th century) and New York (20th century).

Saskia Sassen (1991) dedicated her classic *The Global City* exactly to those places that exert control far beyond their immediate *hinterland* by providing the socio-economic and socio-spatial fabric for making decisions with global reach. Such decisions, Sassen (1991) maintains, require the collaboration of a wide variety of highly specialized, knowledge-intensive business services such as investment banking, digital, legal and marketing services. Time pressures and confidentiality imperatives put a premium on co-location that, different from Marshall's (1890) single-industry districts, favors the diversity of specialists who recurrently collaborate in client-specific projects (Taylor et al. 2014). With their highly localized project ecologies of business services (Grabher 2004), global cities, in fact, host powerhouses of creativity – not necessarily in the fields of the arts but in the domain of financial instruments, digital applications, legal constructs and marketing strategies (Sassen 1991).

The appraisal of centrality, incidentally, had shifted the epistemological perspective on the city from an absolute spatial entity toward the relative position of *connectivity* in a spatial configuration. This shift reflected nothing less than, as Manuel Castells (1996) pronounced, *The Rise of the Network Society* and the transformation of spatial organization from a "space of places" to a "space of flows", from traditional geographically bounded locations (i.e., the neighborhood) to escalating globalized network relations (i.e., world city networks). A strategic nodal position in the multiple global networks, produced by the "myriad of flows between office towers in different metropolitan centres" (Taylor and Derudder 2004) not only yields the relational power of a global command center (Sassen 1991; Leffel and Acuto 2018). By upscaling the recombinatory logic of innovation by interaction, the connectivity of nodes in global networks leverages creativity: what the "sidewalk ballet" (Jacobs 1961) is to the generation of novelty on the micro-level, is the "synergy between different cultures, different ideas, different forms of knowledge, and different experiences" (Castells 1996: 67) to creativity on the meso-level.

Beyond the Non-Center: Toward a Constructive Understanding of Periphery

The urban orthodoxy, however, owes its taken-for-grantedness as well as its tenacious immunity against empirical counter-evidence less such exercises in anatomizing the vast body of the classics in urban thinking. Rather, the historical record of cities is read as a chronic of epochal breakthroughs and leaps of progress, conceived and pioneered in the urban laboratories of the Classic Greek Polis, Renaissance Florence, Golden Age Amsterdam, Enterprising London, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna, Modern Art Paris or New York's "Warhol Economy"

(Currid-Halkett 2009). Who would seriously take issue with this track record of cities in catalyzing transformations and, at times, revolutions?

Beyond deficiency. And yet, exactly as urban triumphalism rose to a *crescendo*, discords began to mingle with the choir praising the innovative super-power of cities: The fixation with the unique affordances and achievements of urban places, as the critique maintains, has culminated in an "urban bias" (Shearmur 2017; Eder 2018) that systematically impoverished our understanding of creativity and innovation in the periphery. The term periphery routinely amounts to hardly more than a residual category for all those pitiable places that, despite their historical and geographical specificities, share a syndrome, not to say a destiny. They represent the areas that are simply left over by urban centers, the vast realm that is *non*-center, lacking the quintessential urban attributes that fuel creativity and innovation: Simmel-diversity, Jacobs-externalities, Florida-amenities – and all the remaining items in the register of urban virtues.

Rather than the manifestation of a systematically advancing conceptualization, the prevailing understanding of the notion periphery, then, seems an outcome of what cognitive psychology diagnoses as "inattentional blindness" (Simons and Chabris 1999) – the failure to notice objects or events when attention is focused elsewhere. Cognizant of the pitfalls of inattentional blindness, we seek to advance a line of inquiry that foregrounds the creative assets of peripheries (Power and Collins 2021; Sgourev 2021; Viganò, England, and Comunian 2023). Rather than lamenting the lack of urban density that sparks off knowledge spillovers, to name just one example, the socio-material sparseness of the settlement structure and an unspoiled landscape can nurture an atmosphere of contemplative serenity and creative inspiration (Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024: 6), freed from the sensory overload and psychological strain of the city (Simmel 1903/2002).

Beyond homogeneity. Despite being seemingly obvious, there is no such thing as *the* periphery in absolute terms (Eder 2018; Pugh and Dubois 2021; Calignano et al. 2022). As the science of the local and the idiosyncratic, geography persistently has argued against all sorts of spatial "one-size-fits-all" categorizations (Tödtling and Trippl 2005) and, consequently, also invested into meaningful differentiations of peripheries. From earlier, primarily sectoral classifications of old industrial areas, pastoral *hinterlands* and maritime fringes, more recent research has shifted toward the variegated agentic capacities of peripheral regions. Discriminating against specific actor constellations and power dynamics, the spectrum of peripheral regions ranges from "resilient regional service centers" over "locked-in specialized regions" and "locked-in externally controlled regions" to "vulnerable rural regions" (Nilsen, Grillitsch, and Hauge 2023); and even within the ostensibly homogenous economic geography of Norway, for instance, a granular cluster analysis produced a taxonomy of five types of peripheries that systematically differ with regard to socio-economic and socio-demographic factors (Calignano et al. 2022).

Heterogeneity, however, does not only pertain to relations *between* peripheral regions; heterogeneity might also delineate socio-cultural and political-economic constellations *within* regions. Whereas the location at the fringes of a map might, at first glance at least, evidently indicate peripherality, a closer look might reveal eminent centrality in a specific domain. Such field-specific centrality in peripheral locations is the realm of reform movements (Hurley 2019), artistic communities (Houserová and Pospěch 2025); architectural schools (Grabher 2018; Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024) and "hidden [industry] champions" (Schenkenhofer 2022) that, while located at the periphery, occupy a central rank in their respective domain.

And, thinking heterogeneity in a diachronic sense, field-specific centrality might even be limited to short periods of time. Echoing the prophecy that "in the future everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes",[9] peripheral locations might at least for a few weeks or days even attract global attention as hosts of *field-configuring events* (Schüßler, Grabher, and Müller-Seitz 2015). Whereas a few peripheral locations like Davos with the *Annual World Economic Forum* or Venice with the *La Biennale d'Arte* occupy center stage recurrently, most of them are confined to compete for hosting a singular (once-in-a-lifetime) event within a format that is geographically mobile by its very definition, like the *European Capital of Culture*, for example (see also, Capron and Delacour 2024).

Beyond destiny. Rather than perceiving peripherality as unavoidable fate sealed by geography and history, actors might deliberately choose a peripheral location or marginal position as outsider. Peripheries, rather than inescapable enclosures, might in fact be attractive destinations for actors who seek to shield their creativity from the isomorphic pressures of the field (Patriotta and Hirsch 2016: 882; Grabher 2018; Sgourev and Aadland 2022). In this perspective, peripherality does not equal the "focused naïvete´" (Merton 1972: 518) resulting from ignorance of the mainstream, but a deliberate dissociation from the orthodoxy. Such a strategic locational choice might be particularly generative in a context of conscious alternation between peripheries and centers in mobile and multi-local forms of collaborative creativity (Ibert and Müller 2015; Hautala and Ibert 2018; Bürgin et al. 2022).

The association of periphery with fate, moreover, has been suspended by recent work that began to systematically uncover leeway for strategic agency (Eder 2018; Power and Collins 2021; Glückler, Shearmur, and Martinus 2023). One potential source for strategic agency, that peripheral regions can tap into, (mostly) lies below the surface of the formal regional governance structure and is concealed in the configuration of networks – in terms of cohesion, centrality and tie strength – as well as in the network composition – in terms of actor roles and types (Cattani and Ferriani 2008; Blanco et al. 2023; Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024). The agentic capacities of peripheral regions might in particular be leveraged from the network topology of *small worlds* (Uzzi and Spiro 2005) that combine short global separation with high local clustering and, thus, effectively balance the benefits of collaboration in cohesive local clusters with the infusion of novel ideas from diverse global connections (Blanco et al. 2023: 102; Nordli, Nilsen, and Lien 2024) – to clients and audiences, for example, that lend novelty the necessary legitimacy (Cattani and Ferriani 2008).

Shifting the focus from network topology to relational practices, a second potential source of agency in peripheral regions comes into view: *place-based leadership* (Gibney, Copeland, and Murie 2009). Whereas classical Schumpeterian entrepreneurship aims at "new combinations" in the corporate realm, place-based leadership seeks to harness local assets and capitalize on unique regional attributes (Beer et al. 2018; Nilsen, Grillitsch, and Hauge 2023). In the absence of a dynamic corporate sector, place-based leadership in the periphery typically resorts to local human capital (including artisans, professionals and academics), cultural capital (local heritage and local craft traditions) and natural assets (unique landscape and environmental features and local resources and materialities) (Beer et al. 2018; Viganò, England, and Comunian 2023). Place-based leadership, then, is about bundling local assets by "launching and guiding interactive development work that crosses the many organizational boundaries and professional cultures" (Grillitsch and Sotarauta 2020: 712) – by, for example, amalgamating a deep-rooted socio-cultural affinity with wood, woodworking craftsmanship, contemporary design, a unique architectural tradition and soft tourism into an innovation ecosystem like in Val Gardena

(Italy) or the Bregenzerwald (Austria) (Grabher 2018; Viganò, England, and Comunian 2023).

Beyond territoriality. Either if the notion of periphery evokes images of a bucolic idyll or, more predictably, of a bleak backwater, irremediably "left behind" (Pike et al. 2023),[10] it is a territorial imagery (colored by sentiments of nostalgia or aversion, respectively) that, in a sort of default reflex, springs to mind (see, for example, Šaradín and Bieleszová 2023): periphery is a concrete spot on a map, a place with a distinct visual identity. And yet, ever since the foundational accounts of Simmel (1903/2002), Park (1928) or Merton (1972), peripherality has not been envisioned exclusively in territorial terms but also conceived in a relational sense: periphery is both, the remote location of places in a territory (as a province) and a distinct position of actors in networks (as stranger, marginal man or outsider) (see also, Cattani and Ferriani 2008; Cattani, Ferriani, and Lanza 2017). Building on the problematizations of the duality of territorial *vs.* relational and, phrased differently, topographical *vs.* topological spatial vocabularies within (economic) geography (going back to Amin 2002), interrelating these dimensions have produced elaborate conceptions of peripherality.

By cross-tabulating the territorial position with the relational position of an actor, the "dual-core-periphery" model (Glückler, Shearmur, and Martinus 2023) differentiates four distinct positions: whereas a P-P position refers to peripheral actors in peripheral places (i.e., outsider in the province), a C-P position denotes a central actor in a peripheral place (i.e., insider in the province); analogously, a P-C position indicates a peripheral actor in a central place (i.e., the outsider in the center) and the C-C position designates the central actor in a central place (i.e., the insider in the center). The employment of a cognate cross-tabular logic onto the field of sciences produces a matrix in which the territorial position of places within a specific domain is either located in the "center" or the "periphery" and the relational position of an actor is either at the "core" or the "edge" (Hautala and Jauhiainen 2019). Both typologies afford imaginative analytical templates to enhance the awareness for paradoxical positions at the intersection of territorial and relational notions of space.

The classification of a territory either as central or peripheral crucially also depends on the choice of a particular scale: a region can at the same time be at the periphery of a nation state, but at the heart of a continent; likewise, a small town in a rural area might be located in the periphery but represents a center within this periphery. Center-periphery relationships, then, follow a fractal logic in which cartographic representations of the same territory at different scales resemble self-similar images. The employment of a scalar perspective not only reveals peripheries in the center as well as centers in the periphery but also brings suburbia as a unique context for creativity into focus (Bain 2016; Hurley 2019), embodying both, features of the center and the periphery in a wide variety of combinations (Phelbs, Maginn, and Keil 2023).

Beyond generativity. Our understanding of creativity is informed by key assumptions of psychological as well as sociological thinking: first, creativity is a social process encompassing both relational and non-relational interaction (i.e., deliberate cooperation as well as imitation or rejection; Csikszentmihalyi 1999); second, creativity is the result of intention (i.e., not the result of chance events; Godart, Seong, and Phillips 2020: 493); third, creativity must contain elements of surprise (i.e., predictability as the anathema of creativity; Hutter 2011); and fourth, creativity must be deemed valuable (i.e., offering some aesthetic, entertaining, scientific or economic value; Amabile 1996).

The differentiation between the first two attributes of creativity that refer to the producers and the generation of novelty and the latter two that pertain to the audience and the

valuation of novelty also designates a boundary in the disciplinary division of labor in the study of creativity: While geographical scholarship primarily has dwelled on the contexts for the generation of novelty and largely neglecting that creativity also has to be recognized as such, pertinent sociological inquiry, while silent on processes of creative production, has primarily zoomed in on the practices of valuating novelty (with important exceptions, such as Jeannerat 2013, 2024; Hussels, Richter, and Schmidt 2024 in the first camp; and Phillips 2011 and Sgourev 2021, in the second).

Suspending this disciplinary division of labor not only reveals the intricate interdependencies between the generation and valuation of novelty (Ammaturo and Schmidt 2024) but also sheds new light onto the relation between center and periphery: rather than as static dualism or a stable state of polarity, center and periphery are dynamically interrelated through different cycles and patterns of mobility (Glückler, Shearmur, and Martinus 2023: 245). Rather than a routine change of location, a deliberate movement from the center to the periphery can leverage the purification and radicalization of ideas at the periphery (Grabher 2018; Power and Collins 2021). Conversely, by migrating from periphery to the center, actors "can benefit from being directly exposed to sources of social legitimacy and support crucial for sustaining creative performance" (Cattani and Ferriani 2008: 838). The "legitimation journey of novelty" (Cattani, Ferriani, and Lanza 2017) invariably is a journey to the center through which peripheral actors and their creations – be it artwork (Perczel and Vedres 2025) or jazz compositions (Phillips 2011) – gain recognition and consecration.

At the Edge: Peripherality and Marginality as Creative Assets

In the subsequent sections we develop an ideal-typical, asset-based view on the periphery in order to more systematically unpack the contributions of peripheries – both in the geographical space and in the sphere of social relations – to creative endeavors. We take the perspective of social actors who are immersed in the generation and valuation of novelty.

Socio-Material Virtues: Smallness and Dispersion

Although size and density, as already alluded to, do not lend themselves to absolute metrics that separate urban form non-urban settlements in an unequivocal fashion, they afford a heuristic for differentiations. In analogy to Wirth's (1938) conception of cities, peripheral places represent relatively small places with a relatively dispersed population (for the latter, see: Glückler, Shearmur, and Martinus 2023). "Relative" has to be taken literally since respective differentiations only make sense against the background of a specific domain.

In contrast to large settlements where anonymity prevails, *small* communities are socially transparent and closely knit collectives in which, for better or worse, members, if not directly related to each other, are aware of (almost) all other community members (Andersen, Ooi, and Schmidt 2025). "Local transparency" (Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024: 7), together with a shared sense of place, can "form a connection, that can be leveraged into trust and 'good-will'" (Andersen, Ooi, and Schmidt 2025: 7) to mutually advance creative endeavors. Smallness and short average path length (of network ties), then, produce an ethos of "collegial mutual support" (Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024) that assumes different forms. In an artist community in the Swedish province of Värmland, for example, this ethos, at a minimum, implied "that they saw it as a responsibility to show up if another happened to exhibit locally both to show support and to gain insight" (Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024: 7).

In a similar sense, entrepreneurs from rural Australia in Tasmania attest that other members of the local community are very open "to help you in some way" and that "the testing, the feedback and willingness to work with you are greater" (Andersen, Ooi, and Schmidt 2025: 7). Whereas the sheer size of domain-specific communities and subcultures in cities might impede mutual awareness and engagement, reciprocal referencing, support and critique in a small and transparent context, as architects in the Austrian province Bregenzerwald iterated, provides for a trustworthy "form of quality control" (Fiel 2014: 34).

Large settlements entertain large markets, and large markets instigate powerful competitive pressures toward segmentation and specialization – just recall Simmel's *quatorzième* (1903/2002) as epitome of utmost metropolitan differentiation. Whereas urban markets favor the ability to cater for exotic tastes (Andersen, Ooi, and Schmidt 2025), the small local markets of peripheral locations, in contrast, reward agile generalists who flexibly respond to a variety of demands. Adaptability is the strong suit of peripheral entrepreneurs when, for example, a web developer in mid-Sweden also offers services such as graphic design, e-learning, photography and filming (Collins and Murtagh 2024: 7). To meet the imperatives of small local markets, firms in peripheral locations tend to operate smaller organizational units with fewer internal sub-divisions and cultivate permeable boundaries instead of specialized silos (Glückler 2014): the absence of a dedicated R&D department (whose continuous support exceed the firm's resource base) is compensated for by network ties to the customer base via social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, for example (Steinerowska-Streb, Peterková, and Steiner 2024: 121). This permeable organizational structure privileges generalists who are accustomed to cover a broad spectrum of responsibilities and to assist other sub-units whenever required (Glückler 2014). By internalizing the very boundaries that demarcate discrete domains of expertise, such generalists augment their capacity to mobilize complementarities across tasks that would otherwise remain institutionally or cognitively compartmentalized.

While peripheral places are typically populated by relatively few inhabitants, their geographical extension can be vast, including the rough terrain of mountainous or swampy territories (see, for example, Blanco et al. 2023; Andersen, Ooi, and Schmidt 2025): *dispersion* is the result of such settlement structures in which only a small subset of all potential contacts are within easy reach and only a minority of all potential connections turn into manifest relations (Glückler, Shearmur, and Martinus 2023: 238). Peripheral actors, as the urban-age narrative has dwelled upon time and again, miss out on the *local buzz* (Storper and Venables 2004) and the multifarious opportunities for inspiration accessible to the urbanite. The celebration of metropolitan buzz, however, has drowned out the drawbacks of the frenzied Jacobian "mingling and twirling": the exuberance of interactions and ephemeral encounters can easily overstimulate the human sensory apparatus and overstrain emotional responsiveness (Simmel 1903/2002).

Moreover, the equally glorified serendipitous encounter might, rather than ignite creative sparks, sabotage the immersion in intensive work processes and disturb phases of concentration (Perlow 1999). Particularly when carefully elaborating an idea or trying to think aesthetic concepts anew, a deliberate move to the tranquility of peripheral places is an effective strategy to "shelter the creative process form buzz" (Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024: 6).[11] "Tranquility" and the "solitude" enabled by the "absence of social interaction" not only counters "attention fatigue" (Gong and Xin 2019: 107) but also creates the room for the incubation of novel ideas (Power and Collins 2021; Bürgin et al. 2022). Disconnection, even if only temporarily, from the urban insider scenes in particular suspends the peer pressures of constantly striving to keep up with the latest trends and conversations and trying to stay relevant through visibility. Breaking away from the "constant access to other art" (Mathisen,

Jansson, and Power 2024: 6) is valued as liberation that furthers the development of a truly authentic artistic voice (Hautala 2015: 358) – shielded from the isomorphic pressures of the field (Patriotta and Hirsch 2016: 882; Grabher 2018; Sgourev and Aadland 2022).

Finally, dispersion might afford more intensive encounters with the material constituents of creative processes. While peripheral locations offer only sparse occasions for social interaction or hardly any at all in the immediate vicinity, they might provide rich opportunities for profound encounters with the landscape, local materialities or traditional tools and instruments (Viganò, England, and Comunian 2023: 5). The deliberate disconnection in the peripheral location in Finish Lapland, for instance, inspired artists to engage with the materials and objects they are working with in a much more substantive fashion as their attention was not diverted by social events (Hautala 2015). And a voice from Swedish Värmland adds, "I think that the resistance that the rural provides … the strivings that … exist in the rural, the intractable … That there is nothing here and that nature is always palpable … has become so important for my artistry" (Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024: 6). Untouched nature, complete darkness, pristine air or permanent frost (Ojala and Hautala 2019), to name other instances, might afford unique experiences that shape distinct artistic expressions or scientific discovery.

Socio-Cultural Virtues: Diverse Diversities and Hostile Conservatism

If there is a single attribute through which the various debates signify urbanity, it is diversity. The profound interrelation between diversity and urbanity has, from Durkheim over Simmel and Jacobs to Florida, been theoretically elaborated from various angles and empirically been corroborated across variegated geographies and multiple epochs. And yet, diversity seems more a *potential* of urbanity rather than the actual reality of everyday life in cities (Meili and Shearmur 2019: 498). The very diversity of larger cities nurtures, in a paradoxical twist, processes of (voluntary) segregation into spatially separated, internally homogenous socio-cultural milieus, transforming urban space into a mosaic of "little boxes" (Chen and Wellman 2009).[12] Since networking of urban dwellers is driven by homophily, ties cut across space but hardly across the societal boundaries between diverse subcultural milieus. In contrast, since networking in the periphery is rooted in proximity (Sørensen 2016), relations have to transcend societal boundaries, since they are spatially limited: the multiplex ties to various subcultures, then, grant access to *diverse diversities* (Meili and Shearmur 2019).

The work atmosphere at the *Bauhaus*, from 1925 to 1933 located at the outskirts of the provincial small town of Dessau, for instance, has been termed a "networked laboratory" (Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024: 13) to highlight the manifold and frequent opportunities to collaborate and interact across socio-cultural boundaries. These "small, secret and self-contained societies, lodges" (Gropius cited in Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024: 13) crossed hierarchical distances ("friendly relationships between masters and students") and encompassed meetings beyond the classical work environment to also include "theatre, lectures, poetry, music, costume parties" (Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024: 13). In a similar vein, actors in rural Swiss regions developed enduring relationships that not only cut across hierarchical differences but also across professional backgrounds, industrial sectors or age groups (Meili and Shearmur 2019). Resonating with the generalist attitude of peripheral entrepreneurs, actors can assume relational positions of "multiple insiders" (Vedres and Stark 2010), through which they gain "familiar access to diverse resources" (Vedres and Stark 2010: 1156). In fact, by bridging cultural differences between crafts, arts and architecture, for example, networking dynamics at the periphery open up novel pathways

for the recombination of elements that, in other contexts, belonged to separate mindsets and different societal domains (Grabher 2018: 1788).

Whereas tolerance and open-mindedness have been designated as the showcase attributes of urban centers (Florida 2002), peripheral locations are habitually equated with antiquated rusticity and seen as bulwarks of stubborn traditionalism, hostile to any deviations from long-established conventions (Pospěch, Klíma, and Hubatková 2024). The birthplace of the Bauhaus movement, Weimar, to return to our prominent exemplar, has been portrayed as "a conservative town … renowned for opposing new trends and innovation … a place of jealously guarded traditions and reactionary opinions" (Whitford 1993: 30). Not surprisingly, then, the Bauhaus movement at that time was "isolated within Weimar" and it "received little public support" as "its spirit was alien to the town" (Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024: 11). Yet, nevertheless Weimar was deliberately chosen as the location to put the Bauhaus principles into practice for the first time and, paradoxically, this mainstay of traditionalism did promote the emergence of novelty, and profound novelty at that. But how?

Radicalization (Sgourev 2021) offers one compelling solution of this perplexing support of innovation through hostility and rejection by shifting the focus of attention from the generation to the valuation of novelty (see also, Phillips 2011; Grabher 2018: 1786).[13] The evaluative environment of the center gravitates toward "tempering" (Sgourev 2021) radically novel ideas by absorbing them into existing conventions by way of compromise. Tempering allows the established elite audiences to ostensibly gloat over the thrill of embracing the risk of novelty – from a safe position (Hutter 2011), of course – but might, at the same time, grind off the provocative edges of novel ideas. The histories and geographies of the genesis of two breakthrough paintings of modernity, *The Scream* (1893) by Edvard Munch, pioneer of expressionism, and *The Black Square* (1915) by Kazimir Malevich, avantgardist of abstract art, demonstrate how the lack of tempering in the periphery unleashed the radical novelty of their respective masterpieces.

Although both artists were influenced by avantgarde scenes in the contemporary centers of fine art, Berlin, Moscow and above all, Paris, they completed their game-changing works of art not before moving back to their peripheral regions of origin – the predominantly religious and conservative rural Norway at the end of the 19th century in the case of Munch, and the revolution-shaken, conflict-ridden Russia at the early 20th century in the case of Malevich. Their moves back to the periphery fostered radicalization "by generating cultural contradictions, planting new ideas in unhospitable soil" (Sgourev 2021: 32). In the hostile environment, the artists feel thrown back to themselves, and the artistic movements they belong to consolidate around their most radical members, pushing artistic movements straight away toward their "logical end points" (Sgourev 2021: 31). This logic of radicalization also resonates with Park's (1928) notion of cultural marginality in which novelty emerges from the positional ambivalence of actors (Padgett and Ansell 1993; Vedres and Stark 2010).

Political-Economic Virtues: Absence of Power and Isolation

Traditionally seen as a major deficiency of peripheries, distance from the center also affords a major creative asset: freedom of operating beyond the reach of urban power constellations that are furnished "to serve the interests of the dominant class, ensuring control over production, consumption, and movement" (Lefebvre 1974/1991: 285). By defying the all-pervasive creativity imperative, the power that ensues from a central position can be harnessed, as "the ability to afford not to learn" (Deutsch 1963: 21). This is the realm of the hegemonic

elite coalition blocking innovation that could jeopardize the smooth operation of the urban "growth machine" (Molotch 1976) and of the conservative urban establishment delegitimizing novelty in order to defend their premier status in the entrenched societal stratification.

By maneuvering below the radar of these powerful custodians of the mainstream and the valuation regime inscribed in the established canon, distance from the center, then, can benefit the inception and cultivation of novelty because creative activities are harder to monitor and more difficult to sanction. Actors thus enjoy greater degrees of freedom from constraining rules when tinkering with new ideas, they are shielded from premature critique (Shearmur 2015) and instrumental considerations (Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024: 6) and experience more possibilities to mobilize, not to say misappropriate, central resources for the purpose of their projects: "Actors at the fringes of the field are freer to experiment with unconventional ideas because they are less constrained by role expectations or peer pressures and, therefore, more likely to champion dissenting ideas threatening the accepted canons of the field" (Cattani, Ferriani, and Lanza 2017: 127). In the periphery, at places "where nothing much [is] supposed to happen anyway, and where heartland discipline [is] harder to enforce" (Barnes 2018: 1704), it might thus be easier to advance innovative projects that are "controversial" (Glückler 2014) or that, like the Vorarlberg *Baukünstler* (Grabher 2018) or the Galway filmmakers (Power and Collins 2021) challenge the institutionally entrenched power of the cultural establishment.[14]

In a geographically upscaled version, the distance to the established centers of classical music has turned California into an epicenter of avantgarde *new music* and *neoclassical music*: "The East Coast has historically been weighed down by facing the Atlantic and Europe. But here [California], there hasn't been the same glare of the spotlight of everything having this kind of weight of being on the record. So, there's just been a lot more freedom to experiment and move away from any sense of orthodoxy" (Barone 2023: 2). And Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Finnish music director of the San Francisco Symphony, adds, "Many composers come here to find themselves, to find their own language. And, as opposed to the East Coast and Europe, there has never been a sense of mainstream modernism, of what new music *should* be" (cited in Barone 2023: 1).

A central nodal position in the multiple global networks not only yields the relational power of a global command center (Sassen 1991; Leffel and Acuto 2018) but also affords access to knowledge and resources that stands out on two accounts: access is global in spatial, and immediate in temporal terms and, thus, allows to capitalize on the recombinatory logic of innovation by interaction on an unprecedented scale (Cantwell and Zaman 2024). Deprived of opportunities to tap into globally dispersed pools of resources and knowledge, peripheries in their relative *isolation* (have to) resort to strategies and practices of "spatial bricolage" (Korsgaard, Müller, and Welter 2021: 160; see also Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024: 4) that is making do by mobilizing resources, narratives and relations from the immediate local context whenever possible. Rather than counting primarily on a compensation for global connectivity deficits by, for example, investing in digital network infrastructures, spatial bricolage, then, revolves around the exploitation of "what is right nearby" (Eder and Trippl 2019: 4).

Obviously, "right nearby" are first and foremost natural resources and materials such as wood in the Italian province of Val Gardena or the Austrian region of Bregenzerwald. Wood in these regions, however, owes its singular status not simply to its role as preferred building material (whose ubiquitous utilization was dictated by a long-lasting history of regional deprivation) but, in fact, is integral part of the socio-cultural self-conception of the region in

which the "bond with the materiality of wood is an expression of a deep-rooted attachment to the surrounding territory and its landscape, including wooded areas, the wood processing industry, the prevalence of wooden utensils in household, and a focus on sustainable wood consumption" (Viganò, England, and Comunian 2023: 5).[15] This deep-rooted and emphatically affective relation with wood translates into a local skill base of Marshallian qualities that ensure that "the secrets are in the air" and that tacit knowledge on the materialities and vitalities of different types of wood over the entire life-cycle of buildings are meticulously honed and passed on to the next generation. Appreciated by architects and residents alike, the supreme level of woodworking craftsmanship ensures consistent demand for customized high-prize solutions (Reidolf and Graffenberger 2019: 146; Viganò, England, and Comunian 2023: 6).

In contrast to this more traditional mode of developing craft skills and knowledge along the historical trajectory of regional specialization, the local skill base and knowledge pool can also be deployed to open up an entirely novel chapter of regional development (Andriani et al. 2025). At the periphery of the North Island of New Zealand, Rocket Lab within a few years has become a highly competitive aerospace manufacturer (only second to SpaceX) providing launches of smaller payloads that are tailored to customer needs (Vance 2023). Since the country had virtually no history in spacefaring and, consequently, completely lacked the respective skill base, Rocket Lab sought to tap into the deep knowledge pool of New Zealand's renown excellence: high-performance (America's Cup) boatbuilding (Borroz and Korber 2023: 5). In an act of spatial bricolage, the rich expertise in composite materials (e.g., carbon fiber) was repurposed from boatbuilding to the construction of a novel type of small rockets where it turned out to be instrumental in reducing the weight of rockets – and in ensuring a unique market position (Vance 2023: 169).

Enriching, honing, developing further and diversifying a local knowledge pool and excellence in craftsmanship is closely tied to the human resource management at peripheral locations (where the very business-school term HRM, however, hardly has currency). In contrast to the more transactional attitude toward the proverbial current "gig" or temporary "job" in the center, employment in the more traditional firms at the periphery are embedded in robust relations of mutual loyalty: Employers, for one, express their *Wertschätzung* or high esteem toward their employees "above and beyond merely letting them keep their jobs" (De Massis et al. 2017: 133) by continuously investing in further training and the digital upscaling of skills in particular (Reidolf and Graffenberger 2019: 146; Viganò, England, and Comunian 2023: 6); employees, for another, embrace the craft ethos[16] of firms by sharing knowledge and mentoring junior personnel and by embracing challenges of the masterful completion of individual projects as well as of weathering stormy periods of the firm: "They [co-workers] were only employed part-time, but were working full-time for a whole year, the loyalty is enormous. And I know from my partner in [the center], he says that in [the center] that would not work. There, everybody immediately has a new job" (Eder and Trippl 2019: 13).

Such strategies and practices of local bricolage by leveraging the "right nearby" are inventive responses to the relative isolation of peripheries that deprives them of easy access to globally dispersed assets and knowledge. This relative isolation, however, not only pertains to the geography of networks but also to the pace of peripheries: at least partially decoupled from the frenzied pace in centers, the rhythms of peripheries follow a slower beat. *Slowness*, in fact, has turned from a synonym of backwardness to a hallmark of a mode of innovation (Shearmur 2015, 2017) that defies the strain of all-pervasive "acceleration" (Rosa 2013) and

that, in fact, aims at something akin to temporal bricolage: rather than chasing information with short half-life periods (Shearmur 2015: 432), like the latest trend in *fast* (*sic!*) fashion or the incessant stream of market data from stock market tickers, slow innovation takes recourse to more technical information and enduring qualities (Jansson and Waxell 2011; Jeannerat and Kebir 2016) of knowing.

Harnessing the power of "slow thinking" in enhancing self-awareness and reflexivity (Kahnemann 2011), slowness, moreover, can safe a region from hasted attempts of alleged modernization that is driven by mimetic pressures exerted by *structurally equivalent* regions (i.e., that share the same environmental conditions) rather than by self-determined reflections on possible future trajectories. Galway in southern Ireland, for example, initially was reduced to providing a backdrop of a pristine scenery of an untouched past for shooting naturalistic movies. In a subsequent stage, during which Galway morphed into a region producing TV-content in the Gaelic language, the periphery has been "reframed as somewhere blessed with a living cultural tradition and a threatened language that could be used for […] authentic forms of cultural and political expression" (Power and Collins 2021: 1159). The west Austrian province of Bregenzerwald, as another example, did not have the means to follow their Alpine mass touristic role models with their massive installments of winter sport infrastructures and, thus, unintentionally preserved its largely untouched landscape. What initially was lamented as modernization deficit, in a later stage, came to be appreciated as a key asset for a sustainable form of tourism focused on natural integrity and cultural authenticity.

Conclusions: From Spatial Categories to Spatio-Temporal Trajectories

Resonating with Claude Bernard's verdict that "one discovers less with ideas than against them", this chapter was animated by the ambition to counter the urban-age orthodoxy that invariably perceives creativity and innovation as prerogative of the center. In the clamor of urban triumphalism (à la Glaeser 2011), peripheries are either not seen at all or appear in the distorted shape of the *other* of the center, as the vast residual terrain beyond the city limits whose destiny is sealed by the lack of all the urban virtues that fuel creativity and innovation: Simmel-diversity, Jacobs-externalities, Florida-amenities. With our prime intention to overcome the residual understanding of peripheries with a positive conceptualization of their role in catalyzing and nurturing novelty, we neither sought to cast doubt onto the undisputable virtues of urbanity nor did we aspire to join in the (very urban) glorification of *cottagecore* in which peripheries are caricatured as bucolic idyll of untouched craftsmanship and harmonious village life (Weeden, Hardy, and Foster 2022: 736; see also Houserová and Pospěch 2025: 2).

We took off from a review of the undisputable urban virtues to demonstrate how the perception of creativity and innovation as urban prerogative has turned into an orthodoxy that impoverished our imagination to think about creativity in non-urban, peripheral contexts. After critically interrogating prevailing, primarily implicit assumptions on periphery, we revealed *socio-material*, *socio-cultural* and *political-economic* virtues of peripherality and marginality that ferment creativity. We mobilized evidence from a wealth of recent empirical case studies that covered: a broad variety of creative fields and relational positions as well as an extensive range of locations from sparsely populated Scandinavia over peripheral Ireland and the Alpine arc from Austria, Italy and Switzerland to provincial Russia and the very fringes of Australia and New Zealand.

Although the exploration of genetically and structurally different manifestations of peripherality, in rare cases, takes us to remote corners of the globe, our analysis, nonetheless, is firmly focused on Europe and on anglophone territories of the OECD hemisphere (like Canada, Australia or New Zealand). Our empirical bias is a conscious choice: although peripheries in the OECD context also are exposed to external control, they are primarily framed in terms of neglect, abandonment and left-behindedness. Peripheries beyond the OECD realm in Africa, South America or Asia, in contrast, have deliberately been pursued and integrated as peripheries into colonial empires. The conceptualization of this form of peripherality that, rather than neglected, has been purposely reproduced by colonial powers (mostly through violent means) would require a fundamentally different analytical approach and would merit a handbook in its own right.

The current selection of empirical cases also allows us to benefit from the complementarity of analytical perspectives that either focus on individual or on collective agency. One group of empirical studies is actor-centric (e.g., Sgourev 2021 on Munch and Malevitch or Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024 on the Bauhaus founders): they trace the careers, projects or artistic movements through time and space, elucidating the shifting positions of protagonists throughout the idea journey (Perry-Smith and Mannucci 2017) and their strategies to leverage the creative affordances of peripheral positions in the geographical space and/or in the social space of relations. Another group of empirical studies focuses on individual regions (e.g., Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024 on Värmland or Andersen, Ooi, and Schmidt 2025 on Tasmania): these studies seek to unpack the evolutionary path of regions across time that can lead from simply providing the scenery of an allegedly untouched rural Arcadia to hosting a flourishing internationally renowned creative cluster (e.g., Power and Collins 2021 on the TV and film industry in Galway).

Conceiving creativity as an intentional social process (Csikszentmihalyi 1999; Godart, Seong, and Phillips 2020) pushes individual and collective agency center stage. Sometimes peripheral places are chosen with a strategic intent in order to advance a creative project by, for instance, literally moving away from the institutionally entrenched power of the cultural establishment and the hegemony of the traditional canon in the center (Grabher 2018; Kesidou, Plakoyiannaki, and Tardios 2024). In other cases, however, actors who happen to locate in peripheral places for rather pragmatic reasons or due to limited career choices, over time, learn to appreciate and to capitalize on the specific features of their location in furthering their creative endeavors (Barnes 2018; Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024). Peripheries, then, are not destined to remain inert and passive backdrops but might offer potentialities that only reveal themselves after deeper immersion into the local context. Very much in this spirit, peripheries are not indissolubly tied to specific geographical coordinates and a fixed spot on a map. Paraphrasing the verdict that "periphery is everywhere" (Prigge 1998), we would claim that, with regard to creativity, the periphery *can be found* everywhere: in remote regions, at the center of urban agglomeration, in the wide areas of in-between spaces or in the middle of the suburban sprawl.

Finally, appreciating creativity as a complex and collective journey across various stages and geographies (Ibert and Müller 2015; Perry-Smith and Mannucci 2017), in the final analysis, would require a recalibration of the analytical strategy. Rather than identifying the specific assets and affordances through which a particular geographical location (e.g., center or periphery) or relational position (e.g., insider or outsider) might galvanize creativity in general, future research might take off from specific stages of the creative process and their particular locational and relational requirements. The smallness, dispersion and isolation in a

thinly populated Scandinavian region, for example, might provide an ideal breeding ground for incubating and nurturing a novel idea, but shaping and converting this very idea into a tangible form might need the diversity of inspirations and feedback of the center. Creative actors, "are not making black or white choices between the social city and the isolated rural but attempting to mix the advantages of both together through translocal processes and networks" (Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024: 1). Creative practices, hence, are mobile, translocal, polycentric and multi-nodal (Brinks et al. 2018; Bürgin et al. 2022; Mathisen, Jansson, and Power 2024; Wingström 2024; Wingström, Hautala, and Huopalainen 2025). Core-periphery models of innovation (i.e., novelty is created at the margins but is consecrated at the core; Capponi and Frenken 2021) or notions of radicalization (novel artistic movements emerge in the center but are radicalized in the periphery; Sgourev 2021) are essential first steps in a promising direction: from assessing the creative affordances of different spatial categories to the conceptualization of creativity as spatio-temporal trajectory across stages and geographies.

Notes

1 Urban misery also featured large in the poetry and fiction of that time (and what now counts as key contributions to world literature) that provided most graphic depictions of urban misery with child labor and overcrowded slums in London (*Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, 1839), the ravages of alcoholism in Paris (*Les Rougon-Macquart* by Émile Zola, 1877) or the moral corruption and psychological torment in St. Petersburg (*Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1866).
2 Mumford's (1961) association of urbanity with civilization resonates with the notion of *urbanitas* that, in the rhetoric of the ancient and medieval times, denoted linguistics that stood out with "elegance, subtlety, wit and ingenuity" (Liessmann 2018: 131).
3 We deliberately follow Bourdieu's (1977) reading of *doxa* as the society's taken-for-granted, unquestioned beliefs since key assumptions on urban virtues apparently remain immune against counter-evidence: "[A]gglomeration economies", for instance, "are much less important for innovation activities as is suggested in some popular theories" (Fritsch and Wyrwich 2021: 3; see also Turner and Weil 2025).
4 Even the upper echelons of the global city hierarchy are populated by cities of comparatively small size like, for example, Luxembourg or Geneva (see, for example, Taylor and Derudder 2004).
5 In Paris of the early 20th century, for instance, a most extensive division of labor culminated in the "lucrative vocation" of the *quatorzième*: "Persons who … hold themselves available at the dinner hours in appropriate costumes so they can be called upon … in case thirteen persons find themselves at the table" (Simmel 1903/2002: 108).
6 Although frequently employed as synonyms in the present context, heterogeneity is not equivalent to diversity. Although systematic differentiations between diversity and heterogeneity in urban studies are quite rare, diversity in general seems positively associated with creativity, innovation and social dynamism (Simmel, Jacobs, Florida), whereas heterogeneity appears rather negatively connotated with fragmentation and segregation (Wirth, Sassen, Castells).
7 For Peter Handke (2019: 40), Nobel laureate in literature, "strangeness is the most sustainable force of the artist".
8 Strangeness ≠ Otherness. Whereas the otherness of the other is perceived undiscriminatingly, the stranger is a source of "pragmatic irritation" (Stichweh 2011: 423) since the paradoxical constellation of near *and* far resists smooth dissolution.
9 Misattributed to Andy Warhol.
10 "A *leitmotif* of geographical inequalities since the 2008 crisis" (Pike et al 2023: 1172), the "left behind"-syndrome comprises ever more markers of neglect and underperformance in economic, social, cultural, political, infrastructural and environmental dimensions.
11 For the writer Claudio Magris, reflecting on his home town Trieste, historically at the fringes of *Mitteleuropa*, "the periphery and province could grant the individual the preconditions for his mental

survival, if it only knew how to use … the pauses for changing itself and being borne anew" (Magris and Ara 1999: 269; own translation).

12 The differentiation between specialists and generalists also pertains to social support, since city dwellers are more likely to "shop for support at specialized interpersonal boutiques rather than at general stores" (Wellman and Wortley 1990: 589).

13 Psychology, of course, also has to offer an explanation: "for individuals with an independent self-concept, rejection might amplify feelings of distinctiveness and increase creativity by conferring the willingness … to move beyond existing knowledge structures" (Kim et al. 2012: 606). And to assume that the titanic founders of the Bauhaus embodied an "independent self-concept" appears anything but risky.

14 An independent filmmaker from Galway gets to the heart of the matter: "It seemed like the natural place for people like me to be. We were speaking out against the mainstream; we were providing a radical and provocative voice" (cited in Power and Collins 2021: 1162).

15 The deep-rooted affinity with wood is even conveyed through the geographical denomination of the region – Bregenzer*wald* (literally meaning the forest of the Bregenz district).

16 Key pillars of the craft ethos are as follows: commitment to mastery; attention to detail and quality; passion and personal commitment; respect for materials and process; authenticity and integrity; and community embeddedness (see, for example, Elias et al. 2024).

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