The fragile urban situation of cultural producers in Paris

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ABSTRACT

Cultural activities are being heralded as key factors in the dynamism of cities. In order to analyze the urban dynamics of cultural producers, a precise characterization of the relevant categories has to be used. The article studies the case of cultural producers in Paris using the category that identifies them more specifically in the French system of occupation categories. It shows the strong concentration of the category in Paris, with some downward trend however in the 1990s. It discusses the paradoxical character of a high level of central urban residence for a category who are the professionals with the lowest income levels and the most precarious types of jobs. As a conclusion, the consequences for a possible gentrification of the areas of their relocation in neighborhoods outside the central city of Paris are discussed, and the possible effects on the social profile and demography of cultural producers of the changes in the economic structures of cultural industries and in the related public policies in France.

Introduction

Cultural activities are being heralded as key factors in the dynamism of cities. They are seen as having an increasing contribution to the most competitive, innovative, and profitable part of the economy. They are designated as cultural industries, and seen as innovation factors through their interaction with, and input into other economic sectors. They are also seen as major elements defining the attractiveness of a city for both tourists and the skilled labor force needed for an innovative economy, particularly professionals. Cultural investments, like landmark buildings, museums, or operas, have become a recurrent priority component of urban redevelopment projects, included in planning to promote a change of image that might, like the over-advertised success of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum, change the development path of a city.

Beyond the symbolism of architectural landmarks, for cultural activities to be a significant part of the innovative economy and urban attractiveness, cultural producers are needed to create, operate, transform, and deliver the many different cultural goods. These goods are either expected to be offered to cultural consumers or to influence the other parts of the economy. A growing body of literature, stemming from Florida's idea of a “creative class” and especially of its “super-creative core” (Florida, 2002), focuses on the possible emergence of these social categories as part of a larger group, becoming the leading, most successful, and eventually dominant social actors in cities.

The debate on gentrification and gentrifiers, which prefigures that on “creative cities”, has exposed more ambivalent views about the role of cultural producers. For some, like Zukin (1982) or Ley (1996) cultural producers are not only the urban innovators starting the gentrification process, but they are also the necessary ingredients redefining the profile of gentrifying areas. They act to attract the wider population of urban professionals newly enticed to culturally buoyant central neighborhoods. For others, like Smith (1996), if cultural producers do start the process of gentrification by looking for adequate reasonably-priced spaces for their activities, they are to a large extent the victims of their own success. Most of them are subsequently pushed out of these areas by the rapid price rises of real estate triggered by the growing demand from wealthier households attracted by cultural producers’ presence and activity.

The aim of this article is to discuss, using the case of Paris, the urban situation of cultural producers and changes affecting it. The first part discusses problems of empirical categorization of cultural producers as a social group. The second part examines cultural producers’ degree of urban centrality, at the national and metropolitan level. The third
part analyzes their spatial relation to other social categories and the different types of spaces they have been moving into. The fourth part discusses the paradox of a professional social category which is both the most central and yet the one with the lowest income among all the professional categories. Finally the fifth part, as an open conclusion, states the arguments both in favor for, and counter to the hypothesis that the present situation of cultural producers represents a phase in the succession gentrification model, and discusses the ongoing economic fragilization of cultural producers.

**Characterizing cultural producers**

Some of the difficulties and controversies in the debates about gentrification have to do with the fuzziness in the characterization of social categories of gentrifiers, as has been discussed elsewhere (Préteceille, 2007). The same is true for debates about the “creative class”, and, more generally, about middle and upper-middle classes. The comparisons between cities of different countries are made all the more difficult because the statistical categories in use differ substantially.

In this discussion of the case of Paris, we will focus on one particular occupation category, that of artistic, performing arts and media professions (professions de l'information, des arts et du spectacle, CS35) as defined by the French public statistical system of catégories socioprofessionnelles (CS). This is one of the six categories of upper or upper-middle classes in the two-digit definition of CS, the aggregate one-digit group of cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures being somewhat equivalent to the categories of professionals and managers used elsewhere. The category, CS35, includes occupations such as: librarians, journalists, writers, screenwriters, painters, sculptors, musicians, singers, actors, dancers, art teachers, and all professionals and managers found in the press and publishing business, the movie and audiovisual industries, and in the performing arts.

However, restricting cultural producers to this category is a double underestimation. First of all, it leaves out a large number of other occupations who are part of the process of social production and distribution of cultural goods. Who are also necessary components of the art worlds as analyzed by Becker (1983). Academics and researchers for example, are classified in CS34. However, most of their activity is not usually considered as part of the cultural industries. Second, it does not take into account a number of occupations which contribute partly to the production of new forms of cultural goods, particularly those linked to new technologies, such as the internet. So the number of active persons engaged in cultural production is substantially larger than those listed in CS35.

Nevertheless, the members of CS35 are unequivocally the core and most indispensable part of the cultural production process. Understanding their place and changing location in the city is a key element to analyze the dynamic of cultural production within the urban system.

**A strong taste for urban centrality**

Cultural producers as measured by CS35 have been the most rapidly growing category over the last decades of the XXth century in France, doubling their numbers between 1982 and 1999. They have grown faster in that period than all other categories of professionals (CS3x), which as an overall social economic category has had the largest population increase. Cultural producers are also unique because of their extremely high degree of urban concentration. In 1999, a little less than half (46%) lived in the Paris metropolis, and one out of four in the central city of Paris (the municipality of Paris, which has less than one fifth of the inhabitants of the metropolis, and about 1/30th of those in France). No other occupation category has such a degree of centrality, with a location quotient of 224 in the metropolis and of 597 in the city of Paris!

These results, summarized in Table 1, show that cultural producers are, in France, elements of urban centrality par excellence. They confirm a previous analysis by Menger (1993), with some changes regarding trends in distribution and concentration over the 1990s that we will discuss later.

The growth of CS35 in absolute numbers continued to be strong in the city of Paris throughout the 1990s. This is even more remarkable given that, firstly, the population of the city remained more or less stable in this period. Secondly, the concentration of CS35s in the city and its metropolis significantly declined over the same period, after a small increase in the previous one.

Compared to the other categories of professionals, shown in Table 2, only teachers, professors and literary and scientific occupations (CS34) followed a similar trend to CS35. Whereas, the concentration of managers in the civil service remained stable in Paris in the 1990s, and most remarkably the two categories of private firm professionals (CS37 and CS38) increased their concentration in the city.

To sum up these first results, we see that cultural producers are in that period the most rapidly growing, most centrally oriented and concentrated occupational category. Yet their rate of growth has declined in the city center of Paris, becoming higher in the rest of the metropolis, and even higher in the rest of the country, an opposite trend to that of private firm professionals whose rate of growth in Paris is increasing. If the relative de-concentration within the Paris metropolis can be explained by the high costs of residence in the center contrasting with average limited resources of cultural producers, as we shall discuss later, their faster growth in the rest of the country is probably related to the faster growth of cultural activities and related job opportunities in other cities and regions.

**Urban divergence of professional categories**

When we look more in detail at the relations of distance and proximity in the city between the different occupation categories, as measured by the dissimilarity index, we find ...

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2 For a summary presentation and results, see the INSEE website, www.insee.fr, for the methodology and the respective census pages for (aggregate) results for 1999 and 2006. For a detailed historical and sociological analysis of the categorization, see Desrosières and Thévenot (1988).

3 We are using census data from the 1982, 1990 and 1999 censuses. As of this writing, the detailed data from the 2006 census was not available yet.

4 For which we use here the Ile-de-France region which is a reasonable approximation.

5 The index was calculated for the 1990 and 1999 census for small census areas (IRIS) in the Paris metropolis between all catégories socioprofessionnelles.
that between 1990 and 1999 cultural producers have distanced themselves from business owners (CS23), liberal professions (CS31), and managers and private firm executives (CS37) (Oberti & Préteceille, 2003). These categories were, together with CS35, the most centrally located and segregated ones (Préteceille, 2003), and, contrary to CS35, they have increased their segregation and concentration in central areas in the same period.

On the other hand, we find that cultural producers have become closer to engineers in private firms (the category of professionals who are the least central), and to managers in the civil service (CS33) and professors and literary and scientific occupations (CS34), the two categories of essentially public sector professionals that are more middle–middle class than upper-middle or upper class, particularly in terms of income. And cultural producers have become closer to most middle–middle occupation categories (professions intermédiaires, CS4x), as well as closer to almost all categories of precarious occupations and unemployment.6

Therefore we have a more detailed account of the trend already identified in the previous section. Cultural producers living in the Paris metropolis have, during the 1990s, lost both urban social status and centrality. They have distanced themselves spatially from the upper categories by moving closer to the middle ones, becoming more suburban.

Comparing the spatial distribution of the different upper categories allows to identify the different types of neighborhood favored by each.7 In Map 1 we choose to focus on CS37, managers and private firm executives, who are the largest, most rapidly growing and increasingly segregated upper category. Who concentrate in those neighborhoods where they were already overrepresented. The map shows a high concentration in the center and western part of the city of Paris (arrondissements I–VIII, and XIV–XVII) continued by a strong concentration in the adjacent suburbs in the west, from Levallois (north-west) to Neuilly to Suresnes to Sceaux (south-west); and a symmetrical but more limited west, from Levallois (north-west) to Neuilly to Suresnes to Sceaux, and along the rivers Seine and Marne. All areas which, not surprisingly, have been characterized as the working class suburbs, with a strong immigrant presence.

CS37 has a rather more moderate presence in a north-east third of Paris, and a low presence in both the western half of the Seine-Saint-Denis département, north-east of Paris, and in the western half of the Val-de-Marne département, south-east of Paris. These areas being the largest lower status regions in the central part of the metropolis (Préteceille, 2003).

CS35 exhibits a similar but less widespread and less acute concentration in the center-west of Paris and in the adjacent suburbs in the west. CS35 is significantly less present in the outer part of the first-ring upper status neighborhoods in the west and south-west. In contrast however, CS35 shows a strong concentration in the north-east third of Paris where CS37 is much less prevalent, and in the adjacent suburbs north-east and south-east where CS37 is almost absent.

So there is a clear superposition of these two categories of professionals in the center-west part of the metropolis, but a diverging distribution in the rest. Cultural producers unlike CS37 are very present in the most central working class areas, and relatively absent in the more peripheral upper class suburbs.

### Urban centrality and social fragility of cultural producers

The strong centrality of cultural producers, in a city where the center has always been the most strongly valorized area and therefore the most expensive, plus their relative proximity to private sector professionals, seem paradoxical considering their economic circumstances.

Cultural producers (CS35), on national average, have an income which is less than half that of the liberal professions, and about two thirds of that of professionals in private firms or managers in the civil service. Their average income is even 20% less than that of the second least afflu-

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6 The categories we used to calculate the dissimilarity indexes separated CS with a stable job from those with a precarious one and from those unemployed.

7 In Préteceille (2003) we produced a typology of neighborhoods based on a multivariate analysis of the distribution of all categories, which is more detailed, but for reasons of insufficient space to present the whole typology we chose here to compare only two categories – the results being coherent with the more complex complete picture.

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### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Paris</th>
<th>Ile-de-France</th>
<th>France</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CS35-prof. in the media, arts and entertainment</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS33-managers in the civil service</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS34-professors and literary and scientific occup.</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS35-prof. in the media, arts and entertainment</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS35-managers in the civil service</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS37-managers and private firm executives</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS38-engineers and technical prof. in private firms</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS35-managers and private firm executives</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>728</td>
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</tbody>
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The index divides the percentage of the category in the space considered by the percentage of the total population in the same space, multiplied by 100; the mean value is 100.
ent category of professionals, high school teachers, professors and researchers. Cultural producers have a level of earnings which is around the average of middle–middle categories (professions intermédiaires), such as primary school teachers or nurses (see Fig. 1). It is thus surprising that they are the most centrally located category, and relatively close to the other, much more affluent, categories of professionals.

The explanation of this paradox has to do with the specific double role that the central metropolis and its dense central city play for cultural producers. As discussed by Menger, the two roles come from the very concentrated labor market that is due to history and the importance of specific economies of agglomeration in the “cultural industries”, and the dense social networks that provide both the conditions for a stimulation of innovations, and the relative protection of individuals (1993, pp. 1582–1586). It should be added that, for many cultural producers, access to paid work often takes the form of short term contracts or short projects. Both types of jobs have to be constantly renewed, which means that several projects have to be pushed forward simultaneously. This implies maintaining multiple active contacts in cultural producer’s networks. Therefore the social networks and professional networks are one and the same thing for cultural producers. The intense sociability made possible by residing in dense neighborhoods with many bars, restaurants, clubs, and places for all sorts of cultural events, allows one to constantly meet peers, partners, and informers. With the additional benefit of being also close to many potential employers. Such central residence is thus a professional resource worth paying high housing prices for, particularly for the youngest, the least established part of the population of cultural producers.

A similar intertwining between social life and professional activities has been analyzed for the upper classes in their highly selective neighborhoods (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 1989). For the upper classes, however, centrality is defined essentially by symbolic status, quality and selectivity of the social urban environment. For private firm professionals, centrality is also a matter of symbolic status, largely defined by the upper categories to which they aspire, and of quality of the environment. But, the urban resources private firm professionals valorize insist more on quality, protection, easy access to their workplace, and do not include the same type of places of unexpected and diverse social interaction in the public or semi-public space that cultural producers valorize (Cousin, 2008). Nor do private firm professionals value the same density of inhabitation as the cultural producers.

From these different social definitions of the qualities of urban space we see that two occupation categories, which share a general valorization of central urban residence, do not necessarily converge in their types of social relations and use of urban central space. Because of their lower income cultural producers are in an unfavorable position in the competition for central residential space. And for some of them, like painters, sculptors and musicians, the need for space makes it even more difficult – it is less the case for writers or journalists. At the same time many cultural enterprises, because of their relatively low profitability, are unable to compete with luxury commercial activities, banks, and financial firms for the valorized central spaces and are pushed out. Just like the bookshops, the affordable bars, restaurants, galleries, and music clubs. In this process, only the better off among cultural producers (the most successful and well established) can afford to maintain their residence in these areas. Areas which become less attractive anyway for cultural producers due to the decreasing support
of social networks, which are particularly needed by newcomers, the less established and more fragile producers. These factors explain the progressive shift of cultural producers to central areas out of the more valorized ones, namely the north-east third of the city of Paris and a number of municipalities adjacent to Paris in the north-east and south-east, as seen on Map 2. At the same time, areas like Saint-Germain-de-Prés, the Marais or the Quartier Latin are less and less affordable for most cultural producers. This has been the fate in the past of formerly “artist” neighborhoods of Paris like Montmartre or Montparnasse.

The general argument has become part of the succession model of the gentrification process (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008; Smith, 1996) where cultural producers are the “pioneers” opening up new areas, but then are subsequently pushed out when their very success has created a symbolic value attracting developers and more affluent residents. In a sense, what happened to Montmartre or Saint-Germain-des-Prés can be analyzed that way, although the process was not built on such dramatic social contrasts as parts of these neighborhoods have traditionally been places of middle class, if not upper class residence. This exhibited a much slower gentrification process than the US experience.

Open conclusion: just another cycle, or a deeper restructuring under way?

The discussion of future developments out of the recent trends observed needs to address two different issues, that of the changes affecting urban social spaces, and that of the changes affecting cultural producers as a social category.

One interpretation of the emerging trend of urban divergence between cultural producers and private firm professionals can be that of a first phase of a new cycle of gentrification. The central urban spaces where cultural producers are newly expanding their presence, the north-east of the city of Paris and a number of adjacent areas in suburban neighborhoods which are well connected with the metro, are seeing rising real estate prices and a double process of housing renovation and changes in the local commercial activities. New bars, restaurants, bookshops, fashion shops, art galleries, and music clubs are opening for these new young educated customers with a strong demand for cultural goods. This is the now classic narrative of the beginning of the gentrification process.

Will this evolve into the next classic phase? That of the entry of private developers and of a larger range of upper-middle class customers who are attracted by the social and cultural life, and the relatively lower housing prices compared to the already established upper-middle class neighborhoods.

There are various arguments sustaining this hypothesis: the scarcity of central urban space in a city where the center is saturated and greater density construction has been ruled out politically; the excellent transport system; the general quality of public facilities and services; and the very moderate crime level differential relative to other areas of the city.

But there are also arguments against the possibility of a deeper gentrification much beyond the present stage. Housing stock as a counter argument has two possible effects. First, a large proportion of the present housing stock is made of relatively low quality buildings, a heritage of the working class identity of the neighborhoods, which can hardly be transformed into the kind of large semi-luxury apartments appealing to second phase gentrifiers. It is unlikely that large scale urban renewal processes could replace the present low quality stock with new adequate buildings, as in the “new built gentrification” model, or the “refounded neighborhoods” studied by Cousin (2008) in the west of Paris and in Milano, because the municipalities in all the areas we are discussing are left wing ones which would definitely refuse such projects. Second, there is a substantial proportion of public housing in all these areas, and for the same left wing political reasons it is un-
likely that it would be privatized. Unlike Thatcher's policy in the UK, or the US policy where in many cities like Chicago large public housing estates were destroyed. A third closely related argument is founded on the above mentioned characteristics of the housing stock. There is a substantial proportion of working class residents in these neighborhoods, with a high proportion of immigrants, high in terms relative to Paris (Préteceille, 2009). For the same political reasons again it is unlikely that this will change much. Such a permanently mixed population, socially and ethnically, makes the areas very unattractive to a large proportion of private firm professionals who prefer a much more socially exclusive and protective type of residential space.

Another argument also related to the former ones has to do with schools. Due to the mixed population and the demographic characteristics of these areas, public schools have a significant proportion of pupils who have recent immigrant parents. A proportion higher than that of immigrants themselves, which is definitely not attractive to upper-middle class parents (Oberti, 2007; van Zanten, 2009). Good private schools are limited in these regions, even despite the recent government policy change relaxing the regulation of catchment areas. To move their offspring to more acceptable schools for them would impose a long journey time for children, which is not the social norm in France.

It is clear, at present, that in terms of symbolic quality, the neighborhoods of the north-east of Paris, like La Goutte d’Or, Belleville or Ménilmontant, and municipalities like Montreuil, Aubervilliers, Saint-Denis or Ivry, are out of the scope of socially possible residence for a large part of upper or upper-middle categories in private firms. For whom the choice of an address is a sign of social status to be exhibited.

For all the stated contradictory reasons, deeper gentrification is a possibility, but so is a future of incomplete or frozen gentrification for these neighbourhoods. As Bacqué and Fijalkow (2006) have proposed if for the specific case of La Goutte d’Or. In the first hypothesis, the present cultural qualities and attractiveness of the areas would be progressively dissolved for cultural producers. In the second hypothesis however, social producers would become a more permanent part of the social life and economy of these areas of the city. Producing an updated version of the socially and ethnically mixed neighborhoods which, up to now, have been the predominant modality of social space structure in the Paris metropolis (Préteceille, 2006, 2009).

However, another factor which contributes to uncertainty in these urban trends is the set of changes affecting the economy of cultural productions. Namely, public policies influencing them, and their impact on the numbers, living conditions, and economic and urban strategies of the different kinds of cultural producers. Discussing these changes in detail would lead us beyond the limits of the present article, but let us mention a general trend of fragilization for those various categories of professionals. This is partly due first to the generalization of precarious forms of labor contract even within the larger employers in the sector, such as TV channels, publishers, and newspapers. The fragmentation of jobs has produced an increase of active persons in the category greater than that of the volume of paid work – many cultural producers living part of the time on unemployment benefits or secondary jobs. The reform of the unemployment system (which was a kind of semi-public subsidy and has led to the long mobilizations of "intermittents du spectacle") pushes out those cultural producers with the more limited work opportunities, and may eventually lead to a demographic downturn of the category. Second, this trend of fragilization is due to the instability and reduction of public funding for cultural activities. That has occurred because of the neoliberal orientation of the government and the pressure on public budgets resulting from the present financial crisis.

Cultural producers were the least affluent and the most precarious among the categories of professionals in the 1990s. They also had the highest incidence of unemployment; more than double that of the professional's category. The results of the new census should allow us to analyze in the near future whether this fragilization has continued, and whether the divergence from other professionals, particularly those in the private sector, has been deepening. A divergence which may also be related to a shift in the social origins of cultural producers. They came previously from the upper-middle classes and even upper classes in a large proportion, which contributed to the social proximity despite the income difference. The precariousization of these occupations may lead to lower social origins in the new generations, increasing the social distance with the other professionals. In case the new data confirms such trends, that would seriously put into question the theories about the creative class and the supposedly central role of cultural production in the economy of a large metropolis like Paris.

References