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THE ROLE OF CREATIVE ECONOMY IN THE REALIZATION OF A CREATIVE CITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE CITY OF MEYBOD IN YAZD PROVINCE, IRAN

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Abstract

In a society, cities are the centers of human interactions, creativity, knowledge, diversity, culture, commerce and economic creativity. Owing to the importance of innovation, knowledge acquisition, and the increased recognition by the government in Iran, many cities have developed strategies and implemented programs to improve their 'innovative milieus' and to attract 'creative people' in creative industries in order to aid the restructuring and growth of their economy. This paper is a case study serving as a contribution to the current research in the field of small cities, with a focus on the city of Meybod, Yazd. The research examines the factors affecting the attraction and retention of creative people and creative businesses in Meybod, based on the data collected from the Statistical Center of Iran, the management and planning organization of Yazd province, government reports, and key informant interviews. The findings reveal that the attraction of creative people and creative businesses is a complex process. Affordability and livability turned out as the primary drivers of attraction, supported by specific qualities of community and place. Small regional cities exhibit unique inherent characteristics that can attract creative people. It is a key task for governments to leverage such characteristics in their policy making.

Key words

economic components • creative industries • creative city • small cities • Meybod • Yazd Province • Iran

Introduction

Creativity, knowledge and innovation have become the main driving forces of economic development. In this context, several concepts have emerged, such as 'creative industries', 'creative cities', 'creative clusters' and 'creative classes' (Selada et al. 2011). Creativity and knowledge are recognized as key infrastructures in the social and economic life of a city (O'Hare 2011). This is especially the case in post-industrial societies where creativity has emerged as the basis for competitive advantages (Bishop & Han 2013). In Meybod and elsewhere, there have been increasing efforts made by municipal, regional governments, non-governmental organizations and private sectors to attract creative people and businesses (Zarabi et al. 2014). In this case, concepts such as 'urban entrepreneurship' (Acs et al. 2008) and 'creative class' (Markusen 2006) have been used. Despite the theoretical fundamentals of Florida's creative class, there is practically no empirical evidence to support that approach. For example, the availability of jobs rather than amenities appears to have attracted creative people in some circumstances (Bishop & Han 2013).

While large metropolitan cities have typically been a focus of research, there is now an emerging body of literature that examines the growth of creative economies in small cities. More recently, some authors have started to study small territories and creative economies (Selada et al. 2011). Research to date suggests that, in some circumstances, the environment for business is more important than the people climate (Andersen et al. 2010). It also appears that creative people seeking to reside in small cities find different amenities and qualities of the place attractive, as compared to those who reside in the inner suburbs of large metropolitan cities. According to Lorenzen & Andersen (2011), governments need to pay closer attention to local contexts rather than adopting a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, as has been done in the past. Several studies have been conducted

to examine small cities in Yazd. For example, Zarabi and Mousavi (2009) investigated the function of small towns in urban and regional development, and Nori et al. (2009) studied the city of Meybod. However, there is still a large gap in the knowledge regarding the factors and processes that affect the growth of creative economies in small cities.

This paper adds some insight to the literature on the growth of creative economies in small regional cities. It aims to explore how and why a creative economy may grow and prosper in a small regional city and lead to the realization of a creative city. In this respect, Meybod was selected as the subject of a case study. It is a city whose urban management identifies the importance of creative industries in its economic development strategy. The city has invested significantly in its arts and cultural infrastructures, which provide vivid evidence for its creative industries.

It is expected that the findings of this study will be of help to researchers and policymakers. For researchers, the study provides interesting insights into the current literature on the assessment of creative cities and sustainable development to measure efficiency in urban contexts. The study also provides policymakers with useful information with which to adopt more effective policies for realization of creative cities, such that development is balanced with sustainable performance.

The article is organized as follows. The next section reviews theoretical discussions on the concept of 'creative city', with particular emphasis on the role of creative industries. It is followed by a section focusing on the creative industries in Meybod. Finally, the paper ends in a conclusion including a summary of the most important results.

Theoretical issues and the literature

Among the issues discussed in the literature, the Creative Economy stands out as a shining light (Bakhshi & Windsor 2015). Creative

economy leverages creativity, technology, culture and innovation in fostering inclusive and sustained economic growth and development. Its sectors include arts and crafts, books, films, paintings, festivals, songs, designs, digital animation and video games. They generate income through trade (exports) and intellectual property rights and create new jobs with high occupational skills, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (United Nations 2015).

Furthermore, many creative economies are steeped in traditions that date back for decades or even centuries (World Economic Forum 2016). Meybod, for example, has a rich cultural heritage by virtue of its history of several thousand years. This history is all through marked with adobe and clay craftsmanship, from the construction of castles and shrines to small-scale artisans. It is the entrenched strengths of the locality, including its long-standing local customs and culture, which make it ripe for creative development. However, a flourishing local creative economy has augmented the handicrafts factor to contribute to the attractiveness of particular places.

A review of the growth of knowledge and creative economy can explain the business climate and the people climate of the city. By using the 'learning region' concept to conceptualize the knowledge economy, Florida (1995) argues that the basis of competitiveness of this economy is its sustainable ability to create knowledge. The business climate which underpins this competitiveness includes the following:

- a manufacturing infrastructure of interconnected vendors and suppliers,
- a human infrastructure that can produce knowledgeable workers and facilitate continuous improvement of human resources, and continuous education and training,
- a physical and communication infrastructure that is globally oriented and facilitates the movement of goods, people and information on a just-in-time basis,
- an industrial governance system that adopts the characteristics of knowledge-intensive firms such as co-dependency,

decentralized decision-making, and customer focus.

On the other hand, the people climate refers to the stimulating environment of opportunity, amenity and openness to diversity, which attracts creative people. As Florida (2002) puts it, there is an emerging 'creative class' which includes a 'core creative class', "whose economic function is to create ideas, new technology and/or new creative content" and a wider group of 'creative professionals' who "engage in complex problem solving". The 'core creative class' has become the catalyst for economic growth, with the people climate as the decisive source of competitive advantage and through its ability to attract and retain creative talents. Indeed, the 'creative class' is characterized by the spirit of autonomy and flexibility in the process of creativity, expression of individuality and openness to the different. Thinking creatively is a 'key skill' that can support individuals and groups in resolving issues related to change or management. It is clear that a creative city pre-requires change of priorities. The next step to take includes three important issues. According to Deffner and Vlachopoulou (2011), these issues are as follows:

- development of a form of social capital where actors would seek to engage in more extended objects,
- deep understanding of the creative process at all levels and involving all stakeholders,
- more inspiring activities to implement a creative city, such as planning, building/housing, traffic management, signaling, giving information, and making cultural manifestations.

'Culture-led regeneration' and 'city marketing' have become the main strategies of cities in order to create a 'good image' and attractive and high-quality places. As also mentioned by Peck (2005), the creative economy is not only about creative people and creative industries but also about marketing, consumption and real-estate development. The new economy pushes cities to search

for new spatial organization through urban restructuring (Sassen 2001), and, in this restructuring process, art and creativity play an important role as the key growth resources (Sharp et al. 2005).

In recent years, there has been a shift from a more traditional concept of culture and cultural industries, as linked to the classical fine arts, towards an understanding of creative industries that centers on the productive and innovative capacity of knowledge and information (Cunningham 2002; UNCTAD 2004; Askerud 2007; Cooke & Lazeretti 2008; Evans 2009). In this sense, creative industries are more open to trade and exchange and are positioned at the crossroads between arts, business and technology (UNCTAD 2004).

Nowadays, creative industries are among the most dynamic sectors in the world economy, providing new opportunities for developing countries to leapfrog into emerging high-growth areas of the world economy. Globally, creative industries are estimated to represent seven per cent of employment, more than seven per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and predicted to grow averagely by 10 per cent annually (UNCTAD 2008). This positive trend is observed in all regions and countries (see Baycan-Levent 2010 for a comprehensive evaluation), and it is expected to continue into the next decade, assuming that the global demand for creative goods and services continues to rise. Creative industries represent a leading sector in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) economies (EESC 2003), constituting one of the leading assets and opportunity areas in the EU and other European countries (Florida & Tinagli 2004; Andersen & Lorenzen 2005; KEA 2006; MEA 2006; Fleming & Norden 2007; UNCTAD 2008), in East Asian countries such as Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong (China) and increasingly mainland China (Chang 2000; HKTDC 2002; Jing & Rong 2007; Xu & Chen 2007; UNCTAD 2004, 2008), and in many developing countries (UNCTAD 2008). The creative economy, in general, and creative industries, in particular, are opening up new opportuni-

ties for developing countries to increase their participation in the global trade. However, the importance of creative industries is more remarkable when examined at a city level (see Baycan-Levent 2010 for a comprehensive evaluation at a city level). Also, for some cities, the stated level of creative employment is higher than the national levels of creative employment.

In general, creative industries tend to cluster in large cities and regions that offer a variety of economic opportunities, a stimulating environment and amenities for different lifestyles. Creative industry development is often considered as a part of the inherent dynamic of urban spaces and urban environments that provide ideal conditions, or a creative milieu, for cluster development (Porter 1998; Landry 2000; Porter & Stern 2001). A 'creative milieu' can be defined as "a locational hub combining hard and soft infrastructures, acting as a crucible for creative people and enterprises" (Landry 2000). A creative milieu is similar to what historians have termed as a 'moral temperature' allowing a particular kind of talent to develop in one place at one time (Hall 2000). This milieu, a notion similar to that of the 'innovative milieu', has four key features including information transmitted among people, knowledge or the storage of information, competence in certain activities, and creation of something new out of these three activities (Törnqvist 1983; Hall 2000; Wu 2005). A creative milieu and the characteristics of social and economic networks are considered important in fostering creativity.

Creative industry development requires a creative milieu that is based on highly developed 'hard' and 'soft' infrastructures. A hard infrastructure refers to classic location factors and includes labour force, rent levels, availability of office space, accessibility, local and national tax regimes, and other regulations and laws affecting the functioning of companies. Nearness to global financial centers, major international airports, telecommunication services and other service suppliers and clients, and the availability of an international

labour pool are also important considerations (Sassen 2001; Musterd et al. 2007).

A soft infrastructure, on the other hand, includes a highly skilled and flexible labour force, a culture of entrepreneurship, a high-quality and attractive living environment, cultural richness, tolerance of alternative lifestyles or diversity, a lively cultural scene, creation of meeting places for business and leisure purposes, education and social support systems, research resources and the support of networks and marketing (Musterd et al. 2007; Yip 2007; Foord 2008; UNCTAD 2008; Evans 2009).

It can be said that creative industries serve as a complementary activity, a vehicle for economic diversification (Azevedo & Barbosa 2014). Such industries, as small-scale creative businesses, are in the perspective of entrepreneurship.

Meybod is one of the few places in the province of Yazd where well established creative industries are still being practiced. Pottery, *zilu* (a kind of carpet), tile and ceramic industries are the activities that play an important role in the growth of the creative economy in this city. The cultural and creative industries link the traditional knowledge to the ultimate consumer in their capacity to serve both cultural and economic objectives. In Meybod, "the creative industries link the traditional knowledge to the ultimate consumer in their capacity to serve both cultural and economic objectives" (Yang & Černevičiūtė 2017). In this regard, the creative industries in the city can be viewed as consistent with the sustainable development paradigm.

Method

A single intensive case study of Meybod was chosen for the research design to allow an explanatory investigation of the complex social phenomena at play. Meybod is the second largest urban center in the province of Yazd with an estimated population of 80,712 in 2016 (Statistical Center of Iran 2016). It is a major regional center approximately 60 kilometers to the northwest of Yazd

(Fig. 1). It was chosen as the subject of this study due to certain features as follows:

- a population of approximately 80,712 people, fitting the description of a small city,
- anecdotal evidence (<http://whc.unesco.org>) and quantitative data (Statistical Center of Iran 2016; Management and Planning Organization of Yazd Province data 2016), suggesting the growth of such creative industries as pottery and *zilu* (cotton carpet) therein (Figs. 2 and 3),
- its local government that has been proactive in promoting the city as a 'thinking city', focusing on innovation and creativity in its economic development strategies and on upgrading of public spaces and cultural infrastructures.

The spatial unit of analysis was the Greater Meybod Local Government Area. The temporal unit of analysis for the qualitative component was five years from 2011 to 2016. It was a period in which, as some preliminary research suggested, social, economic, spatial and physical changes occurred. To analyze the data on the employment in industries, the timeframe of 10 years from 2006 to 2016 was selected. This was due to the limitation of access to detailed digital data from the Management and Planning Organization of Yazd Province.

The data were collected from the Statistical Center of Iran and semi-structured interviews. Using CCI's classification of industries (Higgs et al. 2007), ANZIC06 and ANZSIC93 four-digit level industry of employment data were sourced and aggregated from the Statistical

Center of Iran data for 2011 and 2016. The semi-structured interviews included a stratified sample of 91 key informants chosen from creative industries (11), the general business community (32), the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Yazd province (7) and Yazd University (5). Twenty one participants worked in Meybod, six in Ardekan and nine in Yazd. Up to ten questions were asked in each interview. They were on topics ranging from changes in the local creative economy, characteristics

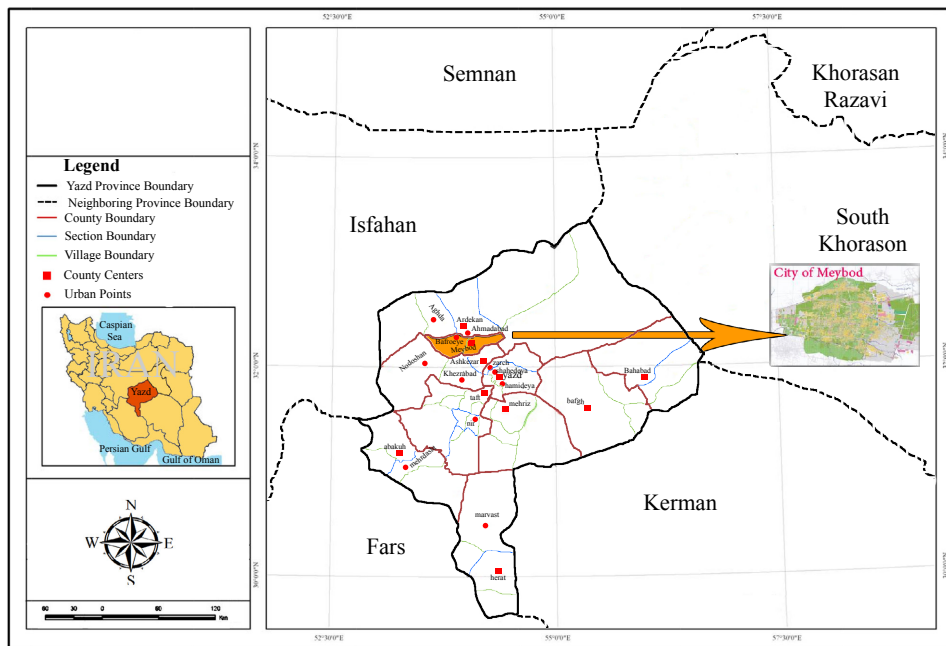


Figure 1. Map of Iran showing the location of Yazd province, and map of the city of Meybod (adapted from the Statistical Center of Iran, 2016)



Figure 2. A pottery workshop in Meybod



Figure 3. Zilu industry in Meybod

of Ardekan as a place, resources available to creative businesses, and the effect of proximity to Yazd. The length of each interview was approximately one hour.

The data analysis involved descriptive statistics and verbal analysis of the transcribed interviews. Memes were written to describe the relationship between the concepts to gradually build up a theory with a plausible explanation.

Changes in the creative economy of Meybod

Statistics of the creative economy of Meybod

An analysis revealed that 4869 persons living in Meybod Local Government Area were employed in creative industries at the time of the 2016 Census (Management and Plan-

ning Organization of Yazd Province, 2016). This was a 10.6% growth over 5 years from 2011 and a 25.4% growth over ten years from 2006 (Tab. 1). Architecture, designing, handicrafts (e.g. zilu and pottery) films, TV and radio, software, and interactive contents were the largest creative industrial fields of employment in 2016, with 4869 persons accounting for 36.2% of employment in the creative industries.

The division of labour in zilu weaving within each unit is based on the level of skill, i.e., unskilled and highly skilled labour. Young boys from the age of 5 or 6 participate in unskilled tasks to help skilled workers or master weavers. They beat the wefts with a beater comb. A weaver begins as a boy working for his master, after several years, progresses to skilled work, and eventually becomes an independent master. This skill seniority plays a crucial role in the spatial dispersion of this industry. The authors divided the development and change of zilu industry in Meybod over the past two decades into three stages. These three stages are as follows:

1. Zilu weaving industries have a long history in Meybod, dating back to the Middle Ages. However, until the beginning of the 1950's, this industry only existed in villages around Bashnighan, which is an area in the center of Meybod region. Zilu production was principally done in household modes, and its labour force mainly consisted of household members with additional apprentices from outside.
2. Since the beginning of the 1950's, when zilu was in heavy demand suddenly, master weavers of Bashnighan have utilized child laborers in the surrounding villages to raise the productive capacity and to increase the number of looms within their workshops. The children are literally wage laborers rather than arduous apprentices. As a result of this change, the production in zilu weaving industry has changed to a manufacture mode.
3. At the end of the 1950's, zilu weaving workshops gradually began to be located in the surrounding villages of Bashnighan.

Practically, there was no constraint for a young weaver who had learned weaving skills in Bashnighan to seek independence. Newly independent weavers could also acquire the necessary capital outlay to establish their own workshops and buy some materials with the contribution of their family members or merchants. Eventually, zilu workshops were distributed all over the region of Meybod.

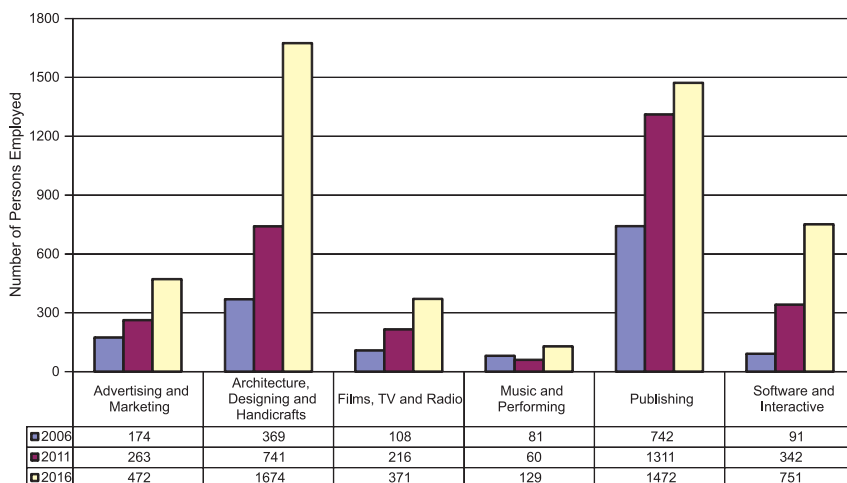
The Zilu Museum of Meybod is located at Shah Abbasi caravanserai, which is a splendid place with a qanat (i.e. subterranean waterway), wind catchers and a restaurant. It is close to an ice house (Yakhchal), a pony express post office (Chaparkhaneh), a water reservoir and some other sites.

Next to the zilu industry, there is the software and interactive content sector with 751 employees (15.4%). It had the largest growth over 10 years from 2006 to 2016, with a 23.4% increase in the number of employees. The architecture, designing and handicrafts sector had a substantial growth, as did advertising and marketing, films, TV and radio, publication, and performing arts (Fig. 4).

Changes through the eyes of informants

Overall, as the key informants stated, there has been a steady growth in the number of people employed in creative industries. It is specifically to be noted that there has been a growth in the number of employees in advertising and marketing, handicrafts, ceramics, and tile industry.

The earliest pottery found in Meybod dates back to 6000 BC. The clay is blended with water, shaped and baked to produce jars, pots and pans, playing an important functional role in daily lives of people. The progress in ceramics also indicates the material and spiritual development of human civilization during this era. Pottery has been a part of the city's culture for thousands of years. Meybod ceramics and earthenware are unique in design. Among the oldest antiq-



Creative Industry Segment

Figure 4. Changes of employment in creative industry sectors for the Greater Meybod Local Government Area in 2006, 2011 and 2016 (based on the Management and Planning Organization of Yazd Province data, 2006, 2011 and 2016)

urities is some Median earthenware. Tile and ceramic arts in Meybod have shown very important developments of application in significant architectural constructions since the beginning of the Islamic era. The evolution from traditional pottery, roof tiles and jars to the tiles produced with stone powder bearing rich floral and animal figures and designs in various hues has led to one of the biggest ceramic industries in Iran. This cannot be considered as an accidental phenomenon.

Meybod, as the hub of the Middle East pottery, is one of the resorts of Yazd Province which attracts numerous tourists every year. Pottery is the city's first exported product. A 29.8% increase in the export of handicrafts, as compared to last year, reveals the impact of crafts in the creative employment. In Meybod, many handicraft workshops are active and recruit a great number of jobless people (Fig. 5).

Changes in the employment in arts

There were mixed views on the amount of growth in the number of people employed in manual arts, or handicrafts, in Meybod.

Several informants stated that there was a well-established professional manual arts community in Meybod. They termed the community "strong" or "vibrant and fresh".

Nowadays, many fine arts graduates hold creative jobs to improve their practice in arts, and there is a formidable commercial demand for manual arts in Meybod. The crafts sector is also often given a high level of importance. In this city, the total crafts production represents a yearly income of approximately US\$ 2 million and brings to the crafts workers a monthly income of US\$ 50 to 100. Exports in crafts (excluding sales to tourists) amount to US\$ 3 million per year. Handicrafts are a part of the culture in the city and represent a key component of socio-economic life and human development. Therefore, it is essential that people's cultural well-being be considered as an integral part of their social and economic well-being.

Recognizing the link between culture and development will be pivotal to the success of future policies, the capacity of policy makers for multisectoral interventions, the development of creative industries, and, consequently, the realization of a creative city.



Figure 5. Art of pottery in Meybod

Several informants remarked that some artists live outside Meybod (i.e. in rural areas) but come to the city to work or engage with clients. Regarding the changes in crea-

tive businesses and activities, the key informants perceived an increase in the number of creative businesses in Meybod. Also, it was observed that some Yazd and Ardekan archi-

texture firms had opened offices in Meybod. The number of firms has increased because large architectural firms have split into multiple smaller firms. Increasing the number of private art galleries (such as lilit Gallery), investment in public arts infrastructure (such as Yazd Art Gallery), and instigation of music festivals (including traditional music festivals) and crafts and traditional foods festival were noted as signs of growth in the creative economy (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. Festival of handicrafts in Meybod

Regarding the changes in the capability of local creative industries, it was remarked that the quality of architecture and designing has improved substantially over the past ten years. In this respect, Meybod businesses are now utilizing local creative services rather than turning straight to Yazd facilities, as they did in the past (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. Quality of architecture and designing in Meybod

Living conditions

There was a general consensus amongst the key informants that livability and affordability were the key drivers attracting creative people to Meybod. This was expressed in comparison to both the life quality available in the major cities of Yazd province and that available in smaller towns located in the regional areas of the country. The informants identified a number of factors contributing to the livability and affordability of Meybod, as discussed below. Lower housing costs and better affordability of housing in Meybod, as compared to Yazd, were cited as overarching factors attracting creative people to Meybod. The mean house price in the city of Meybod for October 2016 was \$11,000 compared to \$20,000 in metropolitan Yazd (Management and Planning Organization of Yazd Province, 2016). Yet, there has been a shortage of houses for rent recently.

Amenity

As a key informant commented, “Meybod has everything you need to be challenged, to be happy and to be satisfied”. The facilities include good educational institutions, health-care centers, attractive sports facilities, and a variety of places to eat and to get a good cup of coffee especially in the historical texture of the city. It has a good access to natural amenities (e.g. sand dunes), and enjoys

the uniqueness of 'a city in the desert'. A mixture of historical and contemporary modes of architecture has created an interesting place endowed with both aesthetic features and a traditional flavor (Fig. 8). Among the interviewees, however, one was of the opinion that Meybod lacks leisure amenities for young adults, especially night-life resorts.



Figure 8. Heritage buildings

Lifestyle

The overall life quality that Meybod offers was perceived by the key informants as a major attraction for creative people; "people have more time, it's a more relaxed lifestyle, and it's a healthier lifestyle. Less pollution, less noise, less traffic, less congestion; it's just a good lifestyle". To many of the interviewees, "Meybod is my small city". The city offers a range of services and activities, yet on a more familiar scale than other cities; there exists proximity to family and friends indoors and outdoors. The access of creative communities to wider regions (such as the historical texture) and their opportunity for local participations were mentioned as other attractive features. In recent years, the growth of creative industries has led to the return of some people who had migrated from the city.

Place identity of Meybod

The term 'place-identity' was coined in the late 1970s and has been used ever since. It is defined as a potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings,

as well as types of settings. Place identity is a broad concept that should not be equated, as it sometimes is, with place attachment; it is, indeed, more than place attachment. Place identity is the substructure of social identity, like gender and social class. It is composed of observation and interpretation regarding the environment. These elements can be divided into two types. One of them consists of memories, values, thoughts, ideas and settings, and the other involves the relationships among different settings such as home, neighbourhood and school (Qazimi 2014). It is generally acknowledged that creative cities are able to generate economies of innovation, culture, research and artistic production and, hence, strengthen their own identity capital. It is a question not only of boosting the existing culture-based economies but also of producing new economies out of cultural capital, understood as an essential element of both tangible and intangible place identities and creating a system together with other urban capitals (Sepe 2017).

Traditional policies of urban renewal, mainly based on combating social exclusion and building physical constructions, are now changing and realizing that cities are not just buildings and material structures but also people, networks and intangible elements, such as memory, history, social relationships, emotional experiences and cultural identities. In this way, the creative city recognizes the complexity and directs the spatial, physical and land use conditions to help people think and act with their imagination and live in the city as a satisfying experience. Furthermore, culture, communication and cooperation are the resources which the creative city offers to city administrators, planners and designers. These resources constitute the fundamental elements with which to generate innovation and quality (Sepe 2017). Based on the aforementioned interpretations, the role of identity should be understood within the project of transforming the city in a creative manner to assess the potentials of designing and planning tools and to integrate them with regard to urban identity (Sepe 2017).

In addition, the conservation-recreation interface of urban cultural heritage contributes to resilience and prosperity, insofar as it stimulates cultural identity and the sense of place. In turn, enhancing the urban cultural landscape through planning or designing promotes the general milieu that stimulates urban creativity (Girard 2013).

The place identity of Meybod is considered to be deeply rooted in a kind of conservatism that stems from its history. While there is a 'fear of change' among some residents, Meybod is beginning to accept its newfound identity and the second wave of prosperity as a cultural destination. As an interviewee said, "It's naff to say, but it's a renaissance that Meybod's having". The growth and success of the Art Gallery and traditional festivals are important signs of what is happening in the city. However, with a more cosmopolitan outlook and a strong urban identity, Meybod has retained its charm.

Economic components

Human capital

Schools, science and technology parks, Islamic Azad University of Meybod, and Ayatollah Haeri University have been effective in fostering creativity and setting a base for suitably skilled laborers. It is noted that good education and supplying of skilled creative laborers have been of influence on decisions to establish certain businesses in Meybod.

Local jobs

Meybod's population of approximately 80,712 is considered optimal. The pottery industry has created approximately 2670 jobs in the city over the past 10 years. The city itself has also been a significant consumer of the local creative services. Restoration of 55 old houses in Meybod and a \$3-million project to be completed in 2018 (Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Yazd province – 2016) will create new long-term jobs and stimulate economic and population growth.

Access to external markets

Interurban passenger transport infrastructures have allowed Meybod businesses to connect with and have a presence in the east and west of the country. The Persian Gulf freeway allows journeys to all parts of the country in approximately six hours, and train transportation provides services between Meybod and the other parts of the country in every direction every weekday. The forty-minute proximity of Meybod to Yazd Shahid Sadooghi Airport allows creative people of the city to commute all across the country for business. Moreover, high-quality telecommunication infrastructures allow Meybod to connect nationwide, especially creative industries such as architecture, designing and manual arts sectors, advertising and marketing, film, TV and radio, publication, and performing arts.

Supportive business community

The informants pointed to a supportive environment for creative businesses in Meybod, a strong spirit of partnership and collaboration within and among industrial sectors, a personable approach, and a 'can-do' attitude. The business community, the city council and the general public were considered open to new ideas and supportive of initiatives proposed by creative people. As one of the interviewees said, "We do things differently and passionately, which captures people's imagination. In the case of arts, I think people believe in that environment and they can flourish".

Discussion

Changes in Meybod

The findings suggest that, in Meybod, there has been a gradual growth in the local creative economy over the last decade, both in the number of people employed and the number of creative businesses. However, it appears that the growth in economic activities has mainly occurred in certain creative industries. Those creative industries are the ones more

strongly oriented to offering professional services, such as architecture, design and manual arts, publication and performing arts. Part of this growth seems to have occurred since the local business community increasingly used local companies for its needs. In this case, as opposed to companies based in Yazd and Tehran, local industries in small cities like Meybod have increased their skills and capability. The growth in manual arts seems to be related to the growth in arts and cultural tourism in Meybod. The growth in the visits to historical and natural sites has created an opportunity for small private galleries and boutiques. There are enjoyable things to do in Meybod and the nearby areas, top attractions to visit such as historical monuments and natural attractions, adventurous and entertainment activities to do as well as places to eat and drink (www.tripadvisor.com). However, it appears that the demand for artists is still not high enough so as for them to make a fulltime living; many of them are reported to have temporary day jobs.

Effect of the people climate and business climate on Meybod's creative economy

The affordability of housing, compared to Yazd, appears to have attracted creative people to Meybod, especially young families seeking to own their own homes. This is specially the case in the context of Meybod, which is considered as a very livable city with family-friendly people, high-quality social services (education and healthcare), and good recreational and leisure amenities. Arts and cultural amenities have proved to be a secondary rather than primary element of attraction, contributing to recreation, leisure and education. These findings are in accordance with Lorenzen and Andersen's (2011) findings in that affordability and work-life balance are factors sufficient to attract creative people to smaller cities. It also correlates with Niedomysl and Hansen's (2010) suggestion that what people deem as a favourable 'people climate' varies through life stages.

The finding that life stage is important is further supported by the evidence that Meybod seems to have lost, rather than gained, young creative people, especially those who have recently finished the school or graduated from university. There is a belief that young creative people are eager to explore the world and gain new educational, professional or life experiences outside Meybod, either in the large metropolitan cities of Yazd and Tehran or overseas. It is also suggested that there is not the same amount of recreational and leisure amenities appropriate for and accessible to young adults, as there is for young families or older people in Meybod. Although not explicitly stated, this may be extended to affordable housing for young adults, given the shortage of rental accommodation mentioned earlier. The people climate in Meybod appears not to be the most attractive element for creative young adults, as compared to other places.

The growth of such creative industries as pottery, ceramics, and zilou weaving in Meybod has attracted creative people to the city. As the statistics indicate, the population growth rate rose to 3.8% within five years from 2011 to 2016. This means that as many as 13,809 people were added to the population of the city in just five years. Out of this number, 1268 were creative people who got employed in creative industries. A combination of factors including a relaxed lifestyle, a residence endowed with various creative crafts, such as producing colorful zilous and half of Iran's tiles and ceramics, and short travel times to the surrounding natural and rural amenities allow people to enjoy the best of both urban and rural modes of living.

The city contains a critical mass of population to attract businesses and services, yet it is still too small to enable great partnerships and personable and collaborative business networks. The participants in this study were of divided opinions as whether Meybod was really a middle-size city or a small city. Some creative people expressed certain qualities with which to prove the former, while the others believed in the latter case. As a matter

of fact, the city is not big enough in terms of large-scale recruitments and extensive partnerships in public and private sectors. However, it can be credited for fostering numerous creative crafts, which has served to attract the creative class to this small town. It is in line with the idea of Lorenzen and Andersen (2011) that the credit of a town in a certain aspect can make that town be considered big.

The proximity of Meybod to the large city of Yazd was said to be an important parameter for creative people. From the perspective of people climate, it provides for the accessibility of family and friends, arts and cultural amenities as well as the recreational and leisure amenities of a large city. This finding parallels Waitt and Gibson's (2009) study in which creative people in a small city were found to have a strong connection to a nearby metropolis. From the perspective of business climate, the proximity of Meybod to Yazd provides an access to an external market of clients and laborers. The road and rail infrastructures that enable a connection within forty minutes are pivotal. Although Meybod is seen at an optimal travel time from Yazd, it has retained a high degree of self-sufficiency and its identity as an important regional hub.

Conclusion

This case study of Meybod supports Lorenzen & Andersen's (2011) assertion that there are different types of creative cities, and that investment in infrastructures and amenities needs to be based on local contexts and circumstances. It also supports Verdich's (2010) realization that different types of amenity can attract creative people to small cities. While the study appears to confirm Florida's (2002) creative class thesis in that it is the people's environment rather than jobs that attracts creative people to a small city, it does not support that arts and cultural amenities are the primary elements of attraction. Rather, it is affordability and livability that are of paramount importance. There is a room for more qualitative studies to examine the 'people cli-

mate' that is deemed attractive by creative people at different life stages.

For appropriate management of a small city, this study suggests that any investment in creative industries should be considered as a part of an integrated strategy to increase the livability of the city, as opposed to an isolated approach. It also suggests that the city council should more carefully consider the differing needs across life stages, particularly young adults without families, in designing and implementing such strategies.

Creative industries which include a wide variety of sub-industries and sub-fields represent a dynamic sector in regional economies, including Meybod economy with a high development rate. Fortunately, the creative sector of Meybod currently has a significant effect on the market, taking into consideration the shares of both GDP and employment. The value of Meybod creative industries in terms of exports and imports indicates that policy making trends deserve careful consideration. In my opinion, one of such trends is the transformation of Meybod into a creative economy. The city possesses talented people, creative potentials, cultural background, growth in demand for creative contents, and technology progress. These advantages can help the city benefit creatively, culturally, economically, and socially. The results of the study show that there is a need for more support of the creative industries to strengthen their involvement in innovations and the value-added system of the economy. As one of the major targets in Meybod economy, the creative sector may serve as a role model.

In this regard, there is an urgent need for a critical understanding of creative labour and the study of its status in the city of Meybod. An awareness-raising campaign should be started with the investigation of development and implementation of new educational programs for professionalization of the new sector and stabilization of career trajectories. In order to make informed decisions, it makes sense to explore the role of the creative class in the regional social system. Due to the increased economic importance of the crea-

tive industries for Meybod, a considerable improvement of regional statistics is necessary in order to refine theoretical aspects and obtain essential empirical information. The current national statistical system (if it can be termed like this) does not offer the required data. For this reason, complications arise and slow down the process of analysis and prognosis in this field. In order to upgrade the national statistical system, there are a number of key aspects to consider, including a coherent system of indicators and collection of data on core creative industries according to international standards. The data on the

latter aspect may be about government and local revenues from the creative sector, level of employment, policy and institutional frameworks, diversity of media contents, etc. A standardized statistical framework of creative industries will help to develop this sector strategically in cooperation between the government, local authorities, private businesses, individuals and foreign partners.

Editors' note: Unless otherwise stated, the sources of tables and figures are the authors', on the basis of their own research.

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