

Review

Medium and Small Cities, Culture and the Economy of Culture. A Review of the Approach to the Case of Spain in Light of International Scientific Scholarship

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Abstract: While most published studies on the economy of culture present a clear bias in favor of large cities, a significant international bibliography has emerged in recent years that privileges the perspective of medium and small cities. Unfortunately, the case of Spain has been largely overlooked by these analyses; this text is intended to remedy that oversight. To that end, a bibliographic compilation has been undertaken of studies on the cultural economy and cultural development in small and medium Spanish cities, providing a review of the specific literature as contrasted with the international literature. The main conclusions indicate that the Spanish case is similar to that of other western countries. Thus, clear confirmation is found that the effects of agglomeration economies and the so-called metropolitan bias also prevail in Spain, together with dispersion patterns that, to a certain extent, favor particular small and medium cities. Furthermore, even though the literature on the use of culture for urban renewal is abundant, the same cannot be said for the economics of culture, where considerable research gaps persist, both in the geographical coverage of case studies and in the social or labor impacts of this economic model.

Keywords: cultural industries; creative industries; culture; small and medium-sized cities; Spain

1. Introduction

When at the end of the 20th century the cultural critic F. Jameson valued the current phase of capitalism, he did so by emphasizing the “prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas” [1] (p. 36), and he pointed to culture as one of the territories incorporated into the new economic logic. The result of this process would be strong “expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life (. . .) can be said to have become ‘cultural’ in some original and yet untheorized sense” [1] (p. 48). In counterpoint, this also implied the progressive disappearance of ‘the cultural’ as an autonomous and differentiated sphere of the logic of capital, in such a way that one of the “defining features of contemporary capitalist society is the conspicuous convergence that is occurring between the domain of the economic on the one hand and the domain of the cultural on the other” [2] (p. 11).

This expansion of culture in the socio-economic sphere means that all of the cultural policies undertaken in recent years, whatever their original motivations, can simultaneously be understood as economic policies. Moreover, the cultural aspect has permeated a considerable portion of policies that were once exclusively economic, thereby transforming culture and, in general, all those activities producing goods and services in which the symbolic surpasses the utilitarian [3], these now being included among the main activities of advanced economies.

If we add to the above the fact that a large part of cultural production has traditionally been carried out from urban spaces [4,5], then the production of culture has come to play “a key role in

strategies to deal with urban problems from social exclusion to the rehabilitation of post-industrial sites” [6] (p. 889). These increasingly cultural urban strategies are supported by culture both in its traditional (artistic and intrinsically non-economic) sense [7] and in its more recent and productivist conceptualization, linked to cultural and creative industries. The result is that, following a process of secularization and flexibility, culture and cultural activities have become an area of economic activity with enormous significance for cities in terms of income, jobs, wages, etc. [8].

The consolidation of culture as a strategic activity (which has occurred at different times depending on the context, but which in Spain can be located in the late 1980s and early 1990s [9]) is presented in principle as being ‘progressive’ in character [10], insofar as it advances on the urban democratic agenda new themes and elements for discussion in relation to development, innovation, social cohesion, etc. At the same time, it has been considered one of the spearheads for neoliberal strategies on urban space, with culture and art moving hand-in-hand with the real estate sector and gentrification, fomenting a “cultural industry (. . .) which has converted urban dilapidation into ultra chic” [11] (p. 17).

Furthermore, urban regeneration via culture (which may range from favoring the launch of economic cultural activities to the construction of large cultural facilities) has become a clear example of the sort of copycat tactics that can limit differentiation and consequently the possible success of the strategies developed [12]. Thus, at least implicitly, on many occasions this has been posited as one of the last possibilities for urban revitalization [13] and for competition in the complex urban market around art, innovation, and creativity. In this sense, and recognizing the very different roles that culture can play in public policies, an important tactic would be not to exaggerate its possibilities as a factor for regeneration and development [3,13–15].

In light of the above, the first part of this text is aimed at analyzing the state of the international academic discussion on the economy of culture and the use of culture for development or urban regeneration in medium and small cities. This analysis is then contrasted with a comparable bibliographic review carried out for the case of Spain, seeking to highlight those aspects that can be called similar to or different from the international experience. We believe this analysis to be appropriate for two reasons. First, a significant bias exists, both in theories and in the selection of case studies, in favor of large cities and metropolitan areas, especially those considered global. Second, most of the existing case studies on medium-sized cities and the economy of culture have concentrated on Anglo-Saxon countries [16,17]. Thus, small and medium cities in Spain (as in other countries) have largely been left out of the international bibliography—an omission that this work seeks to remedy in part.

2. Culture, Economic Development, and Urban Space: The Metropolitan and Globalizing Bias

As mentioned above, a privileged historical relationship has existed between the city and culture, and culture has become a common element in strategic planning, today serving as a basis for many urban economic developments [18]. The reality is that the idiosyncratic nature of culture [19,20] assumes that culture and place are “persistently intertwined with one another, for place as it is understood here is always a locus of dense human interrelationships (out of which culture in part grows), and culture is a phenomenon that tends to have intensely place-specific characteristics, thus helping to differentiate places from one another” [21] (p. 324).

But it is one thing that a general connection exists between place and culture (understood both from the anthropological perspective and from that of the results, material and immaterial, of intellectual and artistic production), and another that this relationship can alone explain the processes of local concentration guided by the tendency of producers and firms linked to the cultural economy to group together, particularly in certain urban areas [2,5,21–27]. In effect, the new economy of culture, along with everything that has been called the cultural or creative industry, adheres to certain localization guidelines that favor the concentration of companies. The result is what have been characterized as cultural or creative districts [20,28,29], which we address in the following section.

2.1. Cultural Economy, Agglomeration, and Urban Development: Divergent Interpretations

The spatial concentration of cultural production has been interpreted through the use of concepts employed in the analysis of other processes of location of economic activity, specifically that of clusters. The earliest references from classic works (mainly Marshall at the beginning of the 20th century) around industrial districts have been renewed in recent decades (i.e., [30–32]) following the crisis of the mass-production model, which led to interest in more flexible forms of production, supported by external economies of agglomeration and small businesses [20,33].

If such tendencies toward concentration remain strong in the culture economy, despite the profound social, economic, and technological changes of recent decades, this can only be explained by “powerful reasons for economic agents to congregate and see each other” [27]. There is a close structural connection between this spatial concentration and the organizational model, insofar as the latter is permitted by the former, facilitating the elements essential to explanation of the cultural system: the establishment of direct contacts and confidence networks as central factors in the coordination of the economy [27]; the generation and diffusion of innovation due to relational density and flows of information, as well as the continuous exposure of workers and firms to unexpected events [34]; and the maintenance of a more or less constant flow of offers for small companies or freelance workers, who normally depend on short-term contracts [14].

Also pertinent to our analysis is the significant connection that is established in some activities and contexts between cultural production and place, so that the place sometimes becomes the true brand [26] for the goods and services of a certain territory. In this sense, it is interesting to differentiate between production that generates goods which can be transferred (even when their value, symbolic in nature, does not reside in materiality), and the production of services or experiences that must be consumed on site. The result is that many places of cultural production are also important markets for cultural consumption [2], and this complex cause-and-effect relationship in turn intensifies the tendency toward agglomeration [35]. In any case, a certain symbolic connection with place seems a necessary precondition for cultural consumption [36], at least in its more advanced variants, producing what some authors have described as experience-scapes ([37], quoted in [36]).

This consideration implies the need to broaden the focus on the economic geography of culture, extending analysis from cultural production to also embrace cultural consumption, which requires attention to aspects such as leisure and tourism, as well as specific localities as spaces of cultural experimentation [24]. This would suggest the need for a strategy aimed more at maintaining or improving the urban or regional economy and less at promoting cultural development and artistic production per se [38].

Such an economy of experience has been regarded as an opportunity by many cities, especially those that (due to circumstances related to scale, resources, location, etc.) have lacked the capacity to compete in the most complex knowledge economies, but that nonetheless enjoy the natural or cultural amenities to compete in the tourist and leisure markets [39]. In any case, and aside from more general evaluations linked to the cultural economy as a whole, the problem that an experience economy can generate in terms of cohesion and social justice must not be overlooked. Thus, we can add to the usual criticisms (the demand for low-skilled and low-wage employment, the reduced added-value that is generated, the economic reliance on external markets, etc.) [2,36,39] the particular critique of Harvey on urban commodification processes [40] and their derived effects in relation with gentrification or, more recently, touristification.

Although we will not delve into these matters, as a conclusion to this section we should point out two main lines of interpretation discussing the spatial processes linked to the economy of culture, insofar as these have also been used to reflect on the economy of culture in small and medium-sized cities. The first, promoted by political scientist and urban planner Richard Florida [41,42], advocates the attraction of what he calls the ‘creative class’ as an essential element in promoting and maintaining growth [43]; this theory has become a somewhat normative model for planning strategies [44] in cities that, like those on which we focus, do not fit the proposed standard. The second line, represented

by academics including the geographers Allan J. Scott and Michael Storper, places emphasis on the complex and recursive interactions between the location of firms and the mobility of labor to attend the complex interrelations required for the emergence of dynamic creative environments, stressing that workers would likely move in accordance with the job opportunities in each place [45–47]. In a very graphic way, these latter two authors summarize the controversy in an article that asks the question, “Do jobs follow people [as in Florida’s thesis], or do people follow jobs [as in Scott’s and Storper’s thesis]?” [45] (p. 147).

2.2. *The Bias toward Large Cities and Metropolitan Areas*

Perhaps most significant to the above discussion is a general agreement among authors investigating cultural economics in small and medium cities that both these interpretations have a clear bias toward large cities (especially global ones) and large metropolitan areas [5,12,17,24,48–52].

In Florida’s approach to the creative city, the possibility of development in small and medium cities is nowhere denied, but neither is much attention paid to it [35]; nor does it seem to take into account the particularities of non-large urban areas. His might be considered an elitist urban interpretation with little to say about ‘hopeless places’ on the periphery [43], seen in a negative light and categorized not as true and complex cities but as ‘would-be cities,’ devoid of those growth-facilitating amenities so attractive to Florida’s creative class [48]. This lack of attention may have its origins in the system of indicators chosen, which are unable to capture the wealth of social relationships that are often valued in small cities [16,53]. The result is that cities that fail to fit into Florida’s scheme face the implementation of urban development policies in an almost normative model similar to that of large cities; consequently, they face unequal competition for markets in urban areas of enormous complexity where they have little chance of success.

For their part, Scott’s analyses appear to leave little doubt that true success in this development model is available only to large cities and metropolises, and indeed these constitute the vast majority of cases offered as examples. In the urban competition for culture, smaller cities would be at a clear competitive disadvantage due to their inability to generate agglomeration economies [35], as they possess fewer overlapping social and economic networks and smaller labor markets. Thus, their role in these segments would seem to be reduced to that of boutique niche market, facilitated by “the pitch of uniqueness built around the past, regionalism and localism” [16] (p. 1409).

Furthermore, given that the planning strategies developed through this approach are based on the analysis and interpretation of large cities, little is said for smaller-scale urban areas [48,54], which are left to create their own models from large metropolitan experiences [12,16], influenced by metropolitan imaginaries [51]. There is a dissociation between the ideals of cultural economic development and the real possibilities for success on a smaller scale, and while this may be partially offset by the attraction of tourism, or by certain levels of involvement from the creative class, the ability of most smaller cities to support a sustainable culture-led development strategy remains in doubt [35].

However, despite the fact that potential specific strategies for small and medium-sized cities have been largely ignored by specialized literature, the reality is that academic and professional interest in the cultural economies of alternative urban models has been increasing, both for small cities (specifically isolated cities) and outside the main nodes of globalization [5]. One good proof of this interest are certain recent additions to the literature, some of which appear in our bibliography, and this has given rise to significant monographic works and joint publications focused more or less expressly on the topic we address here [8,55–58].

The questions that should be asked are whether this renewed academic interest is linked to real possibilities for success in the field of public policy, and whether smaller cities can truly compete (albeit at different scales) with large ones [58]. Some authors point out that, in most cases, the majority of smaller cities would find it impossible to succeed by way of an economic model that presents them with a clear disadvantage compared to large global cities, without any real possibility of generating the sufficient critical mass necessary to compete in national and international markets [12]. However,

others indicate examples of small and medium-sized cities with a large number of companies and workers in the creative industries, with some evident success stories [12,14,59]; and many such cities have achieved possible competitive advantages overlooked by academic discourses, including higher levels of educational resources and greater quality of life, cultural and natural amenities, heritage, cultural vibrancy, etc. [5,17,59]. On the other hand, it has also been noted that the cultural traditionalism of smaller urban places can sometimes hinder this type of development [60].

3. Small and Medium-Sized Cities: The Role of Culture as an Economic Strategy

The forgotten status of small and medium cities in theories on cultural economic development seems a mere reflection of their generally forgotten state in theories on the city and urbanization [48,60]. Moreover, their systematic exclusion from ‘grand’ conceptualizations [61] has not been corrected by theories specific to their smaller scale. In general, they are categorized “would-be cities” [48] (p. 1), without “the kinds of urban unfolding in the big cities” [61] (p. 3), or else as problematic places, due largely to the things they lack and that keep them from being complete cities.

This text does not aim to offer a review, assessment, or criticism of the different contributions on what is or what is not a small or medium city, in terms of demographic, functional, economic, or symbolic thresholds. Only for the case of Spanish cities we will review some approaches to this topic, in order to classify the examples to be analyzed and to establish certain patterns on the characteristics of the most-studied urban models.

Along the same lines, and despite any inherent interest, we do not intend to enter into conceptual debates on how to name the different urban echelons, as was the case in discussions that arose in the 1980s around the suitability of concepts such as the ‘middle’ or ‘intermediate’ city, where demographic size and functionality were taken into account [62,63]. The impossibility of integrating these and other research objectives with our central purpose leads us to content ourselves with reflecting on what special meaning, positive or negative, may be supposed for a cultural economy developing in a city of non-large scale.

3.1. Small and Medium-Sized Cities and Cultural Economy: Strategies and Results

As mention above, an assumption is made in the academic literature that large cities and metropolitan areas have clear advantages when competing for the culture economy. However, recent quantification efforts appear to demonstrate that, in some cases, a series of inherited circumstances and endogenous resources, combined with certain public policies, have been able to “circumvent geographic determinism” [5] (p. 175) and to generate significant poles of cultural economy in differentiated urban models, whether in terms of demographic size, location, or centrality in relation to the processes of globalization.

In this regard, the *Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor*, an instrument developed by the European Commission and the Joint Research Center, analyzes the cultural behavior of 190 cities in 30 European countries in relation to a series of indicators, grouped around the concepts of ‘cultural vibrancy,’ ‘creative economy,’ and ‘enabling environment’ [64]. With significant differences according to each city in question and its context, as well as significant variations in each of the indicators analyzed, this instrument seems to point to certain advantages for small-scale cities in some of the aspects analyzed. Thus, while large metropolitan areas and capital cities present better indicators in terms of ‘creative economy,’ as would seem to correspond to the theories already seen, some small and medium cities obtain comparatively high results in terms of ‘cultural vibrancy’ or ‘enabling factors’ [5], suggesting that the cultural approach to urban renaissance may also be an option for smaller urban areas [12].

The enabling factors most often cited in the international bibliography to explain the potential development of the cultural economy in medium and small cities are listed in Table 1. However, regardless of the level of endowment of these or many other possible resources or qualities, the truth is that the success of a given small or medium-sized city in the culture economy seems to depend largely

on its governance and its capacity to build its own discourse and imaginary, supported by a correct assessment and interpretation of available potential [24].

Table 1. Principal enabling factors to explain the development of the economy of culture in small and medium cities.

Enabling Factors	References
Natural and cultural amenities or (more generally) endogenous resources	[5,14,16,34,50,59,60,65]
The existence of quality educational services and institutions	[5,16,17,56,60]
The potential for habitability and sustainability, and consequently better quality of life	[5,16,17,24,52]
Lower costs in aspects such as housing	[14,24]
Greater social cohesion	[16]
Access to art and cultural institutions	[16]
Transportation	[5]
Decisions by the public sector regarding the location of high-level activities or institutions	[14,43]

Source: Own elaboration from references gathered.

Generally speaking, the best bet for small and medium-sized cities seems to be in line with Scott's [2] approaches to niche markets, targeting selective strategies based on differentiation, along with participation in specialized networks in aspects including tourism, gastronomy, education, etc. [24,35]. The problem here is that in debates and in public policies, the concept of culture with which one works is so broad that its operationalization becomes very complex [24], limiting itself to the development of strategies based on one-dimensional approaches to generic notions of beauty, tolerance, quality of life, heritage, etc. [16,34], or by way of what have been described as mono-causal developmental schemes, such as the 'creative class' [66].

In any case, judging from the empirical analyses so far developed, there seems to be a greater chance of success when, instead of pursuing a development strategy based on cultural production, a commitment is made toward the development of cultural consumption [67]. While the knowledge and cultural production economy is indeed highly concentrated in certain very dynamic areas, the geography of cultural consumption shows greater dispersion and appears to represent a 'window of opportunity' for small and medium-sized cities, even in peripheral regional settings [18,38]. Still, and while it is assumed that this may be a positive strategy for cities with few opportunities, this can be said to represent the least-advanced version of an experience economy [18].

In general, this development model assumes that investment in large infrastructure or cultural events will be a key element for urban regeneration. However, the processes through which such investment is transferred to social improvement are not yet well understood, and even if such processes do occur, they do not occur automatically [68]. Also, it should be recalled that, regardless of greater or lesser successes and repercussions in terms of equipment and cultural services, if a project is proposed and justified based on its contribution to the achievement of social and economic objectives, then its final assessment must be made in consideration of its results in this regard [4]. This is true because its implementation will generate not only direct costs, but also opportunity costs with important social implications.

From a morphological and landscape-oriented point of view, such commodification is usually substantiated by investments in the urban improvement, meant to attract either the creative class or consumers of culture and leisure. The general strategy is to reinforce a distinctiveness, in many cases based on generic imagery about the past, heritage, culture, etc., which paradoxically ends in homogenization [35], the construction of predictably picturesque urban models [69], gaps in content, and a loss of real cultural value and a consequent reduction in true creative potential [70].

3.2. The Social Perspective

One important critique concerns the social perspective, the fundamental axis of which indicates that the processes of creative transformation in small and medium cities, especially in urban centers, lead to an empowerment of gentrification thanks to rising prices and the labor exclusion of prior residents, or else their consignment to unstable and low-income jobs in the new economy of cultural consumption [44]. Apart from differences of scale in geographical and economic terms, there is no apparent difference in this sense between small and medium-sized cities and dominant urban models, as both processes can be framed within the ‘revanchist city’ model [71] developed by Smith [11]. When presenting cities as cultural meccas to attract new residents, tourists, consumers, or investors, it is implied that prior to the ‘trendification’ process these spaces were culturally moribund [11]. And while this may be true in some cases, in others the devitalization of pre-existing cultural and social structures is both cause and effect of the process of purported economic-cultural revitalization [11]. In any case, and in general terms, it seems that the social impacts of cultural regeneration projects have not been highly valued [72].

The possibility of this dissociation between economic and social effects has been perceived in certain relatively successful examples of cultural economic development, such as that of Sheffield in the UK [12]. In a somewhat similar way, analyses carried out for Northern Ontario, Canada, indicate that developments around the cultural economy and local cultural policies have been more directed at the preferences and interests of possible qualified visitors (with the intention of turning them into tourists or consumers of leisure) rather than at the preferences of the resident population [73].

On the other hand, there are also examples in which social objectives do expressly rank among the most important aims of the regeneration process. These would include cases in which, rather than promoting economic activity, the intention is to promote a sense of community via mechanisms for cooperation, to ensure sustainable cultural activities that act as elements of cohesion and toward the reinforcement of social capital [50].

Some empirical analysis has underlined these trends, such as the much-cited case of the Australian city of Wollongong [44], where art was seen not only as an instrument to mitigate the economic effects of deindustrialization but as a key element in achieving goals of social justice, tolerance, and the promotion of the creative capacity of the community as a whole. Something similar can be seen in strategies such as the ‘Small Cities Program,’ developed in Canada, where the true objective is said to be “fostering a sense of community for the purpose of fusing research and education with the public good” [50] (p. 335). Similarly, analysis of the strategic plans of fifty small and medium-sized Polish cities has shown that, although the connection of culture with tourism and urban marketing is evident, the main commitment has been to culture’s role in reinforcing civil society, improving the quality of life and social capital, or connecting residents with local identities [74]. However, from the point of view of strengthening the social fabric, the final results achieved by these and other projects are not necessarily identical to the initial stated goals.

Authentic urban cultural regeneration seems to be linked to some degree to the capacity of a community to maintain and generate its own forms of expression and development strategies; economic regeneration, on the other hand, is more directly related to growth and takes the form of prestigious projects and territorial marketing. As noted, the latter does not necessarily contribute to the former [10]. The successful approach would therefore emphasize a cultural impulse toward the achievement of social objectives around creation, participation, cohesion, etc., in order to reinforce social capital and thereby lay foundations for cultural economic development with strong roots in the community itself [68].

3.3. Size and Location: How Do They Affect Cultural Economic Development?

Beyond the particular qualities of a given city, as a starting point for analysis of its potential in the culture economy, there are two general attributes to consider. The first is clearly size—demographic, functional, and symbolic. The second is its location in relation to large cities or metropolitan areas,

along with networks for physical transport, collaboration, and the transmission of information—in short, the main nodes of connection within each regional area to globalization. In fact, and apart from other considerations, the relationship between the two (size and location) is considered to be among the main explanatory factors in both the perception of potential for development and in the eventual success or failure of certain experiments [14,16,44].

As for size, the first consideration must be demographic. In none of the studies analyzed do we find a strong denial that mere population size (plus other connected aspects such as density) has an explanatory effect on the chances for development of a cultural economy. In fact, Scott's concept of 'agglomeration economies' [2,21,46], by which he explains the greater potential of large cities, carries a clear quantitative component linked to a critical mass of inhabitants, among other aspects.

Nevertheless, behind this assumption we also find the affirmation that 'smallness' is not only (or not primarily) demographic but is essentially linked to aspects such as scope, influence, or position in the urban hierarchy relative to other cities [6,48,60]. As Lorentzen and van Heur [24] point out, small cities are not simply small but present specific features in different agglomeration processes: specializations, prior dependencies, differentiated identities, etc. Consequently, they should be seen not only as structurally constrained by their inclusion in a certain institutional environment, and in a particular urban hierarchy, but also as specific places in which to implement particular strategies that can transform said constraints [24].

However, although smaller demographic size does not imply a decrease in the creative capacity of inhabitants [52], there may be a risk that this translates into cultural smallness, traditionalism, and conservatism [16,60]. What seems clear is that small and medium-sized cities tend to exist in a state of theoretical and practical indefiniteness, where their chances for success may lie precisely in making use of their 'third-tierness' and 'localness' [48]. Weimar in Germany, 'a small city with a great reputation' [75], offers a positive example in this regard. Although examples to the contrary also exist in which images transcend the urban scale in negative ways, as in references linked to industrial decomposition and to an obsolete working past (as with Wollongong) [44] or to discredited cultural expressions (as with Tamworth [76], also in Australia).

The second great geographical factor essential to explaining certain patterns of localization of cultural activity is a city's position, notably its relative isolation from or proximity to major centers of development and demographic concentration. But this distance is not merely calculated in units of mileage (this clearly being qualified by accessibility). Like size, location is not an absolute factor but one mediated by the narratives built around it; indeed, the construction of a successful discourse on proximity may prove more significant here, transforming this from a quantitative factor to a qualitative one [44].

Small and medium-sized cities can benefit from their proximity to (or inclusion in) high-density urban regions, which allows them access to cultural markets based on intra-metropolitan specializations. This has been pointed out, for example, for the case of Canada, where the location guidelines for certain economic activities have been found to have enormous impact, to the extent that reductions in operating costs may be combined with easy access to the functions of metropolitan business [14,77].

In general terms, the possibility of developing successful policies based on location can be explained through the idea of 'borrowed size,' developed from Alonso's theories [78]. This phenomenon occurs when a city has functions associated with higher echelons in the urban hierarchy, due to its interaction in city networks [25]. Although this supposes that small cities connected to a megalopolis can attract firms and workers, and consequently enjoy a culture economy sector that is superior to what might be expected based on rank alone, it is likewise true that this can lead to the opposite effect, where some portion of a city's potential may be absorbed by the most dynamic nearby cities, in what has been termed an 'agglomeration shadow' phenomenon [79].

Aside from the ability to build strong discourses to counteract such effects, it seems clear that remoteness/isolation will be a handicap in the development of successful policies [12,14]. This has been documented in examples such as Inverness (Scotland) and Timmins (Canada), which have proven unable to attract sufficient audiences to their cultural events and activities due to their distance from

large metropolitan centers [14]. And this difficulty vis-à-vis a cultural consumption economy becomes much more evident if (following the Florida paradigm) there is an intention to attract a creative class in order to participate in the economy of cultural production.

In any case, what has been inferred from the most complex (and cited) study on the relationship between urban size and location in relation to a large metropolitan area—that of Wollongong, Australia, in the Sydney area [44]—is that size and proximity to a big city are in the end ambiguous aspects that depend on interrelations with daily life and the needs of very different people.

4. Research on Culture, Economy, and Medium and Small Cities in Spain

Having examined the international research on the economics of culture in small and medium-sized cities, we now focus on the state of the art of this topic in Spain. However, before offering an in-depth reading of the research conducted in the next epigraph, it seems necessary to point to two prior questions (at least in an exploratory way). Firstly, we must refer briefly to the scientific approach to small or medium-sized cities in Spain, insofar as these are comparative references that differ from country to country. Secondly, we identify the texts to be analyzed from the main lines of work and research groups that have approached this question.

4.1. Urban Approaches to the Small and Medium City in Spain

In recent decades, geographical research and other related science on the ‘medium’ city in Spain has been remarkably profuse, even in terms of published systematizations and states of the art that focus on this subject [80–84]. The same cannot be said of ‘small’ cities, for which the specific bibliographical references are very few, except for certain case studies that expressly use ‘small’ in their titles. This is despite the quantitative importance of small cities in the context of the Spanish urban system, along with a general change of scientific attitude in relation to such cities from the early 21st century, as well as an impulse from European institutions around studies, programs, and initiatives focused on such [85].

This production has evolved chronologically from the first studies on the identification of such settlements to more recent efforts focused on economic characterization (along with functionality and territorial specialization), to still more recent works on the territorial and economic competitiveness of this city typology [82]. Since this section is only intended as a support for the chief purpose of this article, and not as a vehicle for detailed analysis, we have summarized some of the main lines of research in the table below, as a guide for readers who care to pursue this topic (*vid*, Table 2).

Table 2. Research lines on small and medium cities in Spain.

Research Line	Main Ideas, Programs, and References
Conceptualization and definition of small and medium cities in Spain	Definition problems in Spain and Europe [81,82,86,87]; idea of ‘intermediate city’ (as a mainly functional reference) compared to traditional concepts of a small or medium city (which make reference mainly to size) [62,87–92]; attention to functional aspects of small and medium cities [93–95]
Establishing criteria for delimitation	Use of quantitative parameters of a demographic, hierarchical, or urban morphological nature [96,97]; categorization and classification of different types and typologies of medium and small cities [83,84]; establishing quantitative minimum and maximum demographic thresholds of classification [82,90]; establishing qualitative criteria of classification such the human scale, compactness, social relationships, way of life, lower levels of conflict, etc. [81,87,98]; recent transformations [89–91]
Determining and analyzing the dynamics of small and medium-sized cities	Relationship between small and medium cities [86]; the positioning of smaller cities in urban networks and regional restructuring [86,99]; their connection with territorial organization and its insertion in the city system [100]; policies of differentiation and promotion [101]; forms of growth experienced by this urban typology over recent decades [83,90]
Determination and analysis of the basic characteristics of smaller cities	The changing role of such settlements in the context of globalization and the accelerated urbanization of the landscape [102]; innovation, development, knowledge [103,104]; forms of urban expansion and of transformation processes as sponsored by new governance systems and strategic plans for competitiveness [105,106]

Source: Own elaboration from references gathered.

4.2. A Methodology for Approaching the Culture Economy in Small and Medium Spanish Cities

The approach to cultural and creative economy in small and medium cities developed in the following pages has been undertaken using a total of nearly 50 bibliographical references. Initial searches were conducted through engines such as the Web of Science and Scopus. However, it soon became evident that a great many references to Spain were not indexed in these content providers, so further exploration was carried out through Google Scholar, introducing key concepts around the ideas of the culture and creative economy and the small and medium city. Despite this, very few local case studies were detected, precluding the establishment of clear guidelines for their selection or adequate coverage of the national territory as a whole. The main research groups were discovered and their most significant research topics are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Main research groups and topics on the urban economics of culture in Spain.

Principal Author(s)	Other Authors	Main Themes	Scales and Cases Analyzed	Number of References
Méndez, R.	Sánchez, S.; Romeiro, P.; Michelini, J.; Prada-Trigo, J.; Abad, L.; García, I.	Creative economy and innovation. The economy of culture is generally subsumed in the above	National: Spain. Regional and urban distribution.	[7]
Caravaca, I.	González-Romero, G.; Mendoza-Bonet, A.; García-García, A.; Fernández-Salinas, V.	Creative economy, innovation. The economy of culture is generally subsumed in the above	Regional: Andalusia. Distribution in medium and small cities. Other scales sometimes appear.	[7]
Lazzeretti, L. and Boix, R.	Capone, F; Domenech, F; Parrilli, M.	Economy of culture. Clusters.	National: Spain and Italy. Regional and urban approaches.	[6]
Escalona-Orcao, A.	Sáez-Pérez, L; Escolano-Utrilla, S.; Sánchez-Valverde, B; Loscertales, B.	Economy of culture. Clusters.	National: Spain. Urban. Small non-metropolitan cities.	[5]
Navarro, C.	Guerrero, G.	Economy of culture. Cultural industry	National: Spain. Urban.	[3]

Source: Own elaboration from references gathered.

These works permit a very precise approach to the cultural and creative sector at the national level, as well as its distribution at the local level, and they are used very intensively in the first part of our analysis. The main problem here for our purposes is that, in many cases, the objective of the cited research is not strictly culture or the economy of culture, but the creative economy, which includes culture among other sectors. Since problems of delimitation are inherent to this field, we have opted to use all that treat those sectors traditionally seen as cultural, even when not so considered exclusively, seeking always to specify whether they refer to cultural sectors alone or whether these are included in the broader panorama of the creative economy.

The remainder of the references tend to respond to specific and pointed research interests rather than authors who have focused a large part of their production on these aspects. The result is a diversity of works that are difficult to catalogue, and where culture and the economy of culture can range from the main objective of analysis to just one element of an approach to the recent economic, social, and urban transformations observed in a specific city. In fact, there are very few investigations outside the aforementioned groups that focus expressly on the cultural or creative industry of a specific city or group of cities; rather, these economic activities are integrated into a broad and diverse matrix aiming at analysis of the implications of cultural projects for urban renewal, and where the most obvious reference is less the promotion of cultural economic production than the use of culture as a reference for urban renewal.

To conclude this section, it should be noted that all those publications focusing on small and medium urban cases but with ‘tourism’ as their main research interest have been excluded from the analysis. Clearly, this theme appears more or less implicitly in many of the works on culture, and as such references will be made to it in this text. However, the express treatment of the connection

between medium and small cities in Spain and tourism—given the large number of towns with a high heritage content, and the weight of this sector in the country’s economy—would have led to the generation of an unmanageably large number of references.

5. The Economy of Culture and the Spanish Urban System

As mentioned for the specific case of studies at the urban scale, research at the national or regional levels also remains scarce [107,108]. However, some of the research groups that have worked most on the creative economy at an urban scale commonly begin by analyzing the weight of these activities for the national economy as a whole.

Spain comes in slightly below the European Union average in terms of the importance of the creative and cultural economy, even when the importance given to that sector differs depending on research interests, data, or the methodologies used in each work. Thus, according to Méndez et al. [109], the percentage of Spanish employment in creative industries (at 3.8%) is slightly below the European average, and very far below that of the Scandinavian countries (some of which top 6%), but on par with that of other Mediterranean countries such as Italy [28]. In another text, Michelini and Méndez [110], using 2009 data from the General Treasury of Social Security, affirm that the creative sector accounts for 3.7% of companies and 4.1% of overall Spanish employment. More importantly for our purposes, they point out that the majority of this total specifically corresponds to creative services (58.4%), as compared to specifically cultural services (32.2%) or activities related to heritage and the arts (9.4%) [110].

5.1. The Role of Small and Medium Spanish Cities in the Economy of Culture

The first geographic pattern that appears in the studies aimed at analyzing the weight of this economic sector in the Spanish urban system—whether they examine the cultural sector or the broader concept of a creative or innovative sector—is the fact of significant spatial concentration, “evident at different scales and through the use of various spatial units” [109] (p. 18). Thus, at the regional level, Madrid and Catalonia (and more specifically, the province of Barcelona) concentrate the highest percentages in this sector. This specialization is much more accentuated when considering the wider metropolitan scale, where the agglomerations of Madrid and Barcelona clearly stand out, or at the urban scale, which shows a clear predominance by the respective central cities of the two metropolitan areas [107–113]. This effect of economic agglomeration is accentuated still more if other urban agglomerations of demographic and economic importance such as Valencia, Seville, or Bilbao are added to the analysis [28,109,111]. Therefore, it might be concluded that the creative economy in Spain contributes in a very modest way to diffusion tendencies that favor the dispersion of productive activity toward low-density areas, or that configure polycentric metropolises [109].

Thus, patterns that favor agglomeration economies and the metropolitan bias [21] in locating the creative and culture economy in Spain are fully confirmed. In fact, not only are these more concentrated in certain urban areas than all other economic activities, the economies of urbanization and agglomeration that produce such concentration are stronger in Spain than in neighboring countries such as France, Italy, or the United Kingdom [107].

In any case, three localization patterns emerge from the analysis of the bibliography: the presence of a significant patrimonial endowment and of public cultural services and institutions; the capital city effect and proximity to political institutions; and the intra-metropolitan dispersion of certain cultural sectors. Without discounting the tendencies already indicated, these favor a certain dispersion toward small and medium cities. Therefore, although urban hierarchy and concentration are clearly basic guidelines for the ecology of cultural industries in Spanish cities [114], some patterns of relative deconcentration have statistically demonstrated their importance, as in the case of the correlation between patrimonial endowment, the effect of regional or provincial capitals, and the endowment of jobs in the creative sector [108].

5.1.1. The Disseminating Role of Heritage and Traditional Cultural Activities

In the first place, it is noteworthy that agglomeration tendencies are less marked when the focus is confined to those sectors that are most clearly cultural in nature (arts, heritage, museums, libraries) [109,114] than when the broader concept of a creative or innovative economy is considered, as was also detected in the international literature [18,24]. For some of these more traditional cultural services, the almost exclusively economic logic at work in the creative economy is complemented by others focused on the public provision of certain goods and services [109] considered essential to favoring ‘cultural democratization.’ In addition, cultural activity linked to heritage and museums plays an important role in areas that might currently be considered ‘off the map’ but which have been historically significant in the past, involving an accumulation of cultural resources which can favor certain small and medium-sized cities [112].

Thus, Guerrero and Navarro [114], in a study expressly focused on cultural industries, analyze the number of cultural establishments in each city with more than 50,000 inhabitants, and they confirm “that the ecology of the cultural industries presents a strong degree of centralization related to the volume of the population” [114] (p. 81). However, when analysis is carried out by calculating the number of establishments in relation to the population (the average per person), the urban hierarchy becomes somewhat blurred; certain big cities remain proportionally outstanding while others lose weight (like Seville or Malaga), and some small and medium cities clearly gain weight, such as autonomous capitals with a strong heritage component (Santiago de Compostela) or intra-metropolitan cities of high income level (Las Rozas de Madrid) [114].

In terms of sectors, a more detailed analysis shows how the relative distribution of cultural industry in the Spanish urban system is far from homogeneous, as significant concentrations are observed in some areas (e.g., audiovisual) and especially in some functions (e.g., production). On the other hand, dispersion is clearly seen in more traditional cultural sectors, where distribution patterns are not defined exclusively by business decisions and where public provision carries more weight (museums, heritage, scenic spaces).

However, it must be taken into account that wider dispersion through the urban system occurs especially in phases of cultural distribution and consumption, and not as much in phases of creation or production [114]. This would show (as indicated by the international experience) that the cultural weight of many small and medium Spanish cities, instead of being based on the production of cultural goods and services, must be understood as part of an economy supported by cultural distribution and consumption, leisure, and tourism, which generate lower added-value and greater job insecurity [18].

5.1.2. The Capital City as a Facilitator in the Dispersion of Cultural Economic Activity

The second factor favoring the presence of a certain level of cultural economy in small and medium cities is when these represent the seat of a regional or provincial urban system. Given that agglomeration economies operate at different scales and always seem to favor the most important cities within each urban system, the main cities of each regional area can benefit (each at its scale) from this diluted centrality.

Among the works found in our bibliographic search are analyses of cultural industries on a regional scale, especially for the large production centers of Madrid and Catalonia [115–117]. Unfortunately, not many regional studies extend to the distribution of activity at the urban scale, which might allow us to perceive other spatial traits of dispersion of the cultural and creative economy and to incorporate urban nuances into quantitative studies confirming the metropolitan bias.

The first outstanding aspect derived from these works is the important role that small and medium cities play as guarantors of a certain balance in regional development, acting as intermediaries between large cities and low-density spaces [80]. They are used by regional authorities in providing the population with access to cultural goods and services, which can partly explain some location-specific patterns. Additionally, the political capitals of autonomous communities (as well as capitals of provinces, these being two orders of political boundary in Spain) enjoy their own enhanced cultural

profiles and are buoyed by the presence of public institutions and companies. In fact, one conclusion would be that implementation of the autonomous community model following Spain's return to democracy and the political decentralization favored by the 1978 Constitution have brought new life to certain small and medium non-metropolitan cities [112].

In this vein, two exceptional instances of small and medium cities that became autonomous capitals are Santiago de Compostela and Mérida. These two cities with under 100,000 inhabitants had no prior political rank, but were for various reasons chosen as the new capitals of Galicia and Extremadura, respectively. From that moment on, they began to gain a visible cultural and symbolic presence within the Spanish urban system—a trend furthered by their outstanding cultural heritage, as both are World Heritage cities under the UNESCO designation [65].

As noted above, few specific studies have been made of the urban distribution of the creative or cultural economy at the autonomous community level. The region that has received the most analysis in this regard (generally centered around creativity, and not exclusively culture) is Andalusia, which the research group headed by geographer I. Caravaca studies in the regional, metropolitan, and urban dimensions [103,118–122]. One of their studies clearly confirms that the metropolitan bias is present at the regional scale in Andalusia, whatever the chosen methodology for analysis. In all cases, the nine Andalusian cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (and especially Seville, Malaga, and Córdoba, which exceed 250,000) rate the highest percentages of creative activity [122].

Other studies of interest on this territorial scale refer to the autonomous communities of Castilla y León and Castilla-La-Mancha, two large interior regions with very low population densities and relatively weak urban systems. As has been pointed out for other cases, the distribution of the culture and creative economy in these two regions responds to a logic that favors concentration into urban nuclei of higher rank and in regional and provincial capitals with greater endowments of heritage and cultural assets.

In the case of Castilla y León, the statistical analysis carried out by Boall and Herrero [123] shows that the location of cultural and creative activities is indeed spatially concentrated, and that the probability that a municipality will obtain higher or lower value is not independent of what occurs in neighboring municipalities, favoring the largest cities of the region (all of them small or medium cities) and their respective environs. Based on these parameters, the main centers of the cultural economy would be the traditional historical capitals, which are usually the largest cities of the region (Valladolid, Burgos, León, Salamanca, Zamora, Segovia, Ávila), as well as medium-sized cities with an industrial profile (Miranda de Ebro, Aranda de Duero) and small county seats. Apart from these relatively important enclaves, most of the territory of Castilla y León exhibits very little or no presence of activities linked to cultural industries [123].

A similar situation is presented by the autonomous community of Castilla-La-Mancha, for which Prada-Trigo and Méndez [124] conduct an analysis of urban dynamism in relation to the broad concept of the knowledge society. The largest stock of knowledge is here again found in the small regional and provincial capitals (which are also the largest demographic centers), with the cities of Toledo and Ciudad Real ranking above Cuenca, Albacete, and Guadalajara, as well as in traditional small and medium-sized industrial centers. In addition to the factors linked to capital cities and demography, the authors note as enabling factors the presence of university centers and (consequently) greater numbers of higher-level graduates [124].

5.1.3. The Borrowed Shadow Effect as a Factor of Deconcentration toward Intra-Metropolitan Cities

Finally, the third of the major patterns that explain the relative presence of cultural and creative activities in small and medium cities (despite strong general tendencies toward agglomeration and urbanization economies) is the aforementioned borrowed size effect [25], which favors a certain dispersion that may occur from the central cities (mainly Madrid and Barcelona) toward others of lesser rank within their metropolitan areas. It should be noted that this metropolitan diffusion is only

relative, since analysis of creative activity in the five main Spanish urban areas reveals a clear resistance to deconcentration, especially in Madrid and Seville [109].

Furthermore, this dispersion presents clear differences according to distinct cultural sectors, some of which are reluctant to metropolitan dispersion while others are more predisposed, according to their spatial needs [109]. Among those least favored to abandoning the central cities are the publishing sector [109] and the artistic creation sector, which (not least in the case of the Seville area) seek centrality and proximity to large institutions and to major concentrations of supply and cultural demand [120]. To the contrary, sectors more favorable to metropolitan dispersion include the graphic arts and the production of recorded media [120], which, due to their eminently industrial nature, intensity in labor, and low added-value, appear to favor peripheral industrial spaces with availability of ad hoc real estate. This is the case in Madrid with the industrial spaces of the metropolitan south or the Henares Corridor to the west, and in Barcelona with the metropolitan regions of Baix Llobregat or Vallés [109].

Similar to the above is the case of the audiovisual industry, although with a clearer commitment to metropolitan cities of lower urban density, higher environmental quality, the highest income levels, and the presence of a creative class. In the Madrid metropolitan area, this is especially concentrated in the central city and in cities of the western arc (with an epicenter in Pozuelo de Alarcón) and the north (Alcobendas and San Sebastián de los Reyes); in Barcelona, concentration occurs to the west (Sant Joan Despí) and northwest (Sant Cugat del Vallés). Still, it should be emphasized that these audiovisual industry concentrations (which form true cultural clusters, and which rely on a high presence of the creative class within the same municipalities) have largely responded to prior decisions around location made by public and private television companies. This would be the case for Pozuelo de Alarcón in Madrid and San Cugat del Vallès in Barcelona, the main offices of Spain's public television; or again Pozuelo in Madrid and Sant Joan Despí in Barcelona, the regional television headquarters for Madrid and Catalonia, respectively. The main private television stations have likewise opted for metropolitan locations in medium-sized cities, with a strong concentration of audiovisual companies in the north of Madrid [109,110] in cities such as San Sebastián de los Reyes, Alcobendas, or Tres Cantos [111]. Beyond these great concentrations of audiovisual production in medium metropolitan cities of Madrid and Barcelona, some authors note less prominent examples such as Burjassot (in the Valencia metropolitan area) and San Juan de Aznalfarache (Seville metropolitan area), respective headquarters of the autonomous television industries of the Valencian Community and Andalusia [111,120].

The importance of the borrowed size effect [25] (as well as its opposite effect, the isolation of cities located in areas of low population density) appears evident in this regard, and this has been the object of a specific study by members of a research team that includes the authors of the present work. Indeed, a duality seems to have prevailed in the specialization in cultural economy of small and medium cities, depending on whether they are located inside or outside of large metropolitan areas. Certain cultural sectors present higher levels of localization in intra-metropolitan cities (production and reproduction of recorded media, audiovisual industry), while others have higher coefficients for localization in extra-metropolitan areas (libraries, archives, museums) [125,126]. From the empirical analysis carried out, cities already mentioned in the metropolitan areas of Madrid and Barcelona stand out among the former, along with others such as Getxo (with a profile very similar to the previous) in the metropolitan area of Bilbao. As for the second large group (that of extra-metropolitan areas), small cities of notable heritage stand out, including autonomous or provincial capitals such as Santiago de Compostela, Mérida, Segovia, or Toledo [125,126]. A somewhat similar perspective, in this case analyzing only those localities outside of metropolitan areas, and therefore outside the effect of borrowed size, has been developed by the working group at the University of Zaragoza led by A. Escalona [127,128].

From what we have seen so far, two obvious conclusions emerge. The first—that in Spain there is a clear positive association between urban size and cultural or creative economy—confirms the agglomeration tendencies observed in the international bibliography [21]. The second, of greater importance to the subject we are dealing with, is that when considering some cities of the second demographic level (like

certain regional capitals or intra-metropolitan cities already mentioned) [109,114], some clearly stand above other cities of similar size (Murcia, Palma de Mallorca, Vigo, Alicante) or even of higher rank (Zaragoza or Malaga) [109].

5.2. *The Cultural and Creative Economy and Urban Categories*

Beyond approaches pointing to the distribution of creative and cultural activities in the Spanish urban system, and possible patterns in their location, some research teams have gone a step further, making an effort to systematize those patterns and then to establish urban categories. Some point to the whole of the Spanish urban system and the broad concept of the creative economy [113,129], giving rise to complex categories in which cities may appear that clearly lack the sort of cultural profile considered in this text. However, other efforts have specifically focused on the cultural sector [114,130] and on the particular scale of small and medium cities [112].

In a cited work by García García et al. that focuses on non-large cities [112], six urban categories are established for small and medium cities depending on their relative weights in terms of inherited heritage and the creative industry, as well as the relationship between those two factors. The first category groups together a small number of cities with a relatively high presence of both heritage and creative industry, composed of capitals of autonomous communities (Santiago de Compostela and Pamplona), World Heritage cities (Santiago de Compostela and Ibiza), and coastal cities with a profile split between the cultural and the touristic (San Sebastián, Sitges, Puerto de la Cruz, Zarauz). The second group is formed by heritage cities with an above-average presence of cultural industry, including autonomous or provincial capitals with less than 100,000 inhabitants, such as Toledo, Gerona, Cuenca, or Huesca. The third group consists of heritage cities with a low presence of cultural industry (i.e., which have been unable to use their cultural resources to promote an associated creative economy), comprising a very large number of cities including municipalities with total or partial declarations of World Heritage (Cáceres, Salamanca, Granada, Burgos, Teruel). The fourth group is made up of cities with a relatively high presence of cultural industries but with scarce patrimonial resources, and this would include all the intra-metropolitan cities mentioned above, along with many others that benefit from relative decentralization from the central nuclei. Finally, two other groups include cities of relatively little heritage, and where cultural and creative industries are residual [112].

Guerrero and Navarro [114], though they refer in their title to cultural industries, carry out an approach wherein clearly cultural sectors are mixed with others that can be termed creative (design, new technologies, advertising); however, instead of analyzing these as a whole, they divide them according to successive phases of creation, material production, and distribution. The final result of their analysis is to establish three main types of cities depending on the sectors in which they are engaged and their positions within the production chain of each.

The first type, they term 'creative cities,' characterized by their importance in the audiovisual and entertainment sectors, specifically in the phases of creation and production. The main examples here are large cities and some mid-metropolitan cities without profiles linked to heritage; also included are some small and medium heritage cities, such as Santiago de Compostela or San Sebastián, that concentrate some of the most complex creative and cultural ecosystems [114]. The second group, they call 'artistic cities,' specialized in purely cultural sectors and especially in the creation and distribution phases. Here are included some small and medium cities with a higher heritage profile, such as Córdoba, Valladolid, Salamanca, or Cáceres [114]. Finally, the third large group are those called 'entertainment cities,' also with an artistic and heritage profile, but in this case clearly specialized in the distribution phase. Among the most significant examples here is the inland heritage city of Mérida, with an important international classical theater festival, along with the major tourist cities on the Mediterranean coast and the Balearic and Canary archipelagoes (Benidorm, Mijas, Fuengirola) [114]. It is noteworthy that this research team [130,131] has assigned a specific category to this group of cities known for coastal tourism, which are routinely left out of research on the cultural industry

although their relevance in these sectors is evident within certain analyses (such as those focused on employment) [125].

From our analysis of the texts that offer categories of cities in relation to the economy of culture [112,114,130], and in consideration of all the cited works, we have derived a reduced list of small and medium Spanish cities systematically cited as examples due to their particular economic and cultural profiles. A final classification (Table 4) is provided in summary, including all those urban profiles that, to a greater or lesser extent, present certain significance within the economy of culture.

Table 4. Main categories of small and medium cities in relation to the culture economy in Spain.

Category	Main Characteristics	Phase of the Production Chain	Urban Model	Cases
Cities with a complex and diversified cultural economy	Important patrimonial endowment; development of true creative clusters or importance of the cultural industry; diversification of cultural sectors, both traditional and recent	Creation, production, and consumption	Autonomous (regional) or provincial capitals with a certain international profile in relation to culture	Santiago de Compostela and San Sebastián
Heritage cities for tourist/cultural consumption	Important patrimonial endowment; specialization in cultural and tourist consumption; low or medium diversification, focused on traditional cultural sectors	Consumption	Cities specialized in cultural tourism, generally with declarations such as World Heritage City, or others	Córdoba, Granada, Cáceres, Mérida, Cuenca, Toledo, Valladolid, Burgos, Teruel, Girona, etc.
Intra-metropolitan cities specialized in cultural production	Cities without heritage resources, but with significant highly specialized cultural clusters (audiovisual, graphic arts, recorded media)	Creation and production	Intra-metropolitan cities, either with a high economic profile (audiovisual) or with adequate industrial space (graphic arts)	Pozuelo de Alarcón, San Sebastián de los Reyes, Sant Joan Despi, Sant Cugat del Valles, Burjasot, San Juan de Alzarfarche, Getxo

Source: Own elaboration from references gathered.

6. Local Trajectories and Cultural Ecosystems: Urban-Scale Analysis of the Cultural and Creative Economy in Spain

As we have seen, the general distribution pattern that favors large metropolises can be at times partially modified by cities located (within the cultural and creative sector) above their expected range, at least according to Scott's theories. Obviously, this can be explained only through attention to specific local trajectories not reflected in the statistical analyses so far cited.

Unfortunately, as noted, we have found relatively few publications featuring specific case studies devoted to the analysis of urban cultural economics. In general, these are investigations in which (in view of the main objectives of this text) problems of definition around cultural industry and its inclusion in the broader concept of creative economy persist. As for the many works that focus expressly on cultural issues at the urban level in small and medium cities, the most common interests are usually the (more or less critical) analysis of public policies and the promotion or creation of cultural infrastructures aimed at urban regeneration. In addition, it is not possible to discern clear patterns on the reasons why certain cities have been chosen as case studies; although some choices seem obvious (Santiago de Compostela, for example), others appear to privilege opportunity over the representativeness of the case in question. However, certain urban analyses do seem to respond to the criterion of presenting an exemplary case, as in studies on Avilés—a small city in the urban system of Asturias, in northern Spain, which has (unsuccessfully) sought to follow the path of the Bilbao model and its Guggenheim museum, itself the inspiration for abundant literature and controversy [132–135].

Therefore, it may be said the approach to actual trends in the cultural economy of medium and small cities in Spain can only be very partial, whether from the thematic perspective or in terms of geographical coverage.

6.1. Local Trajectories: Enabling Factors and Niche Markets

The main enabling factors to explain why certain small and medium Spanish cities may excel in the culture and creativity economy (above what would be expected for their range) are listed below in Table 5. Despite its significant presence in the international bibliography [24,52], the idea of ‘smallness’ and the attributes derived from it are rarely used to explain the location of cultural economic activity in small and medium cities of Spain. In other words, aspects such as the supposed higher quality of life and habitability of non-large urban models, the lower costs they permit, or the greater social cohesion they present, do not appear (at least systematically) in the national literature. Neither are the supposed negative aspects of ‘smallness’ (as a synonym for traditionalism or conservatism, which might present obstacles to cultural developments) present in these analyses [16,60].

Table 5. Main enabling factors collected in the Spanish bibliography that explain the development of the economy of culture in medium and small cities.

Enabling Factors	References
Heritage or historical legacy	[110,112,123,129,135]
Certain endowments, such as universities	[19,124,136]
A location that makes them attractive to certain sectors, especially within metropolitan environments	[27,28,109,110,120,123]
Political centrality and proximity to key institutions	[65,111,112,123]
Successful urban strategies	[122]
Face-to-face contact and the generation of tacit knowledge	[110,111,136]
Transportation	[122]

Source: Own elaboration from references gathered.

As regards location, especially in relation to the large centers of cultural production and consumption, this is indeed a significant element, as clearly shown by metropolitan cities (mainly around Madrid and Barcelona) specialized in certain cultural sectors, especially the audiovisual. However, no specific studies have been found that analyze the reasons behind the location of certain intra-metropolitan clusters and their internal functioning, beyond that of the aforementioned prior decisions by large companies or public institutions, or the competitive advantages of certain locations that permit face-to-face contact with agents and institutions in the central cities [27,28,111].

Derived from the above explanatory factors and according to the categories of cities mentioned in the previous section, it seems certain that the tendency of medium and small Spanish cities is toward specialization in some particular cultural sector and/or in a specific phase of the production chain, which would confirm Scott’s notion of niche markets as one of the few paths to success in the culture economy at this urban scale. In this sense, perhaps the most outstanding specializations are those in artistic sectors (mainly the audiovisual) concentrated in the metropolitan areas of Madrid and Barcelona; also notable are heritage cities that have become successful referents for leisure and cultural tourism [114], and which in some cases have taken the additional step of becoming truly complex cultural districts, according to the idea advanced by Momaas [29].

Indeed, and according to the analyses of Guerrero and Navarro [114], the most relevant function within the cultural industry appears to be that of distribution, informing the specialization of many cities around cultural consumption rather than production (again, with the exception of intra-metropolitan cases). As mentioned, we have opted not to deal specifically in this research with the connection between culture, heritage, and tourism. However, the truth is that many of the public policies, projects, and programs pursued by small and medium cities around culture have had as their ultimate goal (or obvious result) the attraction of touristic and leisure consumption, as observed specifically in analyses on Teruel [135–137] or Santiago de Compostela [138].

The only non-metropolitan medium city apart from Santiago de Compostela that, according to the literature, seems to contradict Scott's idea of niche markets, and which has escaped an exclusive specialization in cultural distribution via leisure and tourism (which remain admittedly important) is San Sebastián in the Basque Country. With just under 200,000 inhabitants, this city exhibits a combination of very distinct cultural industries that rely on both historical roots and new, advanced creative activities, according to Lazzeretti and Parrilli [108]. Here the cinematic art can be highlighted through the San Sebastián International Film Festival, one of few category-A showcases operating worldwide. Also very important is gastronomy, supported by an interesting local tradition that has helped San Sebastián to earn the global distinction of being the city with the highest density of 'Michelin stars,' along with its Basque Culinary Center specialized in gastronomic innovation [108]. Given the city's cultural importance in these aspects, and in others such as music, San Sebastián was in 2016 declared a 'European Capital City of Culture.'

Santiago de Compostela, capital of the autonomous community of Galicia and home to under 100,000 inhabitants, can be considered (according to statistical analyses at a national scale) an intermediate case between a city with a true ecosystem for cultural production and one focused primarily on cultural consumption via tourism. In addition to its vast heritage, both material and immaterial, which has earned it (among other awards) the distinctions of being both a World Heritage City and the 'European Capital City of Culture' (2000), and also its crucial function as the religious, cultural, and touristic destination of 'El camino de Santiago,' the city has been the recipient of enormous investments in cultural events and facilities [65,139–141] by its city council as well as the autonomous government. As a result, Santiago is now among the cities with the greatest cultural projection in Spain, aspiring even to international status [139].

Assessments of most such investments in the city (which oscillate between the purely cultural and the urban) have been ambivalent, both in terms of their objectives (from the empowerment of a true creative ecosystem to the city's inclusion in a model neoliberal economic strategy) and their results. Near-complete unanimity has emerged in negative evaluations of one of the city's recent large projects, the ultimately paralyzed construction of a City of Culture, envisioned by Peter Eisenman in the late 1990s and promoted by the autonomous government. This was to be a gigantic cultural space that sought to do for Santiago what the Guggenheim museum had done for Bilbao a few years earlier, but all analyses appear to regard it a failure from both the cultural perspective and in urban, economic, and promotional terms [65,139,140].

According to the statistical analyses found, the final result of Santiago's process of promotion (including around its heritage, its cultural ecosystem, and public policies developed over the past three decades) has been to place it among the non-large cities with the most highly developed cultural and creative economy. However, problems have been observed behind these successes: rising housing prices, gentrification, and the expulsion of populations in favor of speculative interests [139,141]; an excessive focus on tourism and urban spectacularization, along the lines of so many similar interventions of a neoliberal nature [138,140–142]; the opportunity costs, leading to neglect of social aspects and a different, more socially based cultural model [140]; the construction of a simplified brand image, aimed exclusively at attracting the tourist [138,141,142]; doubts around the true roles of cultural creators and managers throughout the process, and their ultimate impact on the urban creative ecosystem [141]; and the transformation of the city center into a guarded space [139].

Another urban case that has achieved relevance in the national bibliography is that of Avilés, a small city (around 80,000 inhabitants) in the Asturias metropolitan system of northern Spain, which came to serve as an example of a shrinking city [143] when the crisis of Fordism affected its heavy industry (large iron and steel companies, many of them publicly owned). The legacy of that industrial crisis led to evident urban decline, marked by staggering unemployment rates and a serious environmental crisis [124,144,145], but also a significant element of industrial heritage [124,144] that since the late 1990s has been rehabilitated to attract tourism and to host new economic activities around innovation and culture.

The urban revitalization of Avilés began to be defined at the end of the 20th century based on a conjunction of local, regional, national, and European policies. This project now includes everything from policies for the renewal of the industrial base to others focused on innovation and culture [145], taking advantage of the city's heritage as well as its abandoned industrial spaces. From a cultural point of view, most significant was the construction of the Niemeyer Cultural Center, named after the famous Brazilian architect behind the project. This emblematic building, dedicated to culture and to many cultural and innovative projects around the city's estuary and port, connect Avilés with the model of Bilbao [106] but without the latter's success or capacity for transcendence. To a large degree, this is due to the many functional problems experienced by the Niemeyer Center, which has failed to be endowed in a way that promotes its cultural value while drawing on the city's unique image for purposes of cultural consumption. In any case, despite modest successes in reconversion of the industrial base and in economic diversification around innovation, culture, and tourism, the Avilés model has obtained better results than those seen in its wider environment, where all revitalization objectives have been dedicated to the recovery of an industrial base [146].

Unfortunately, we have located no other small or medium Spanish cities that have served as the object of such detailed analysis as those mentioned above. Relatively isolated analyses have been made of the case of A Coruña (in Galicia, with nearly a quarter-million inhabitants), whose reconversion project based on strong ideas of creativity, urban regeneration, a creative class, cultural production, and 'smart city' status has been very critically viewed as an attempt to change the current model committed to spectacularization and urban touristization [147]. The city of Cáceres (in the Extremadura region, with just under 100,000 inhabitants) is another World Heritage City that, in addition to an obvious specialization in cultural tourism consumption, has sought to develop a cluster focused on innovation, knowledge, and culture within the rehabilitated container of abandoned mining infrastructures [19]. Elsewhere, and using the concept of a 'creative neighborhood' [148,149], another city-scale analysis has been made of the Oeste neighborhood of Salamanca (a World Heritage City in the Castilla y León region with some 150,000 inhabitants), where a concentration of creative and cultural initiatives for social innovation (with genuine transformative intent, compared to prior models) would allow its classification as a true alternative urban space [149].

To conclude this brief tour, various works by a research group from the University of Zaragoza directed by geographer A. Escalona have examined a cultural cluster in the city of Teruel, the smallest provincial capital in Spain (around 35,000 inhabitants) located in an area suffering intense depopulation. Working around the intangible heritage of a legend (collected in a multitude of stories, poems, and plays), this municipality developed a project of historical recreation to foster the emergence of a true cultural cluster in which the public sector, actors, recreationists, clothing workshops, researchers, the tourism sector, and civil society all participate. Unfortunately, the weaknesses inherent in a development that lasts only a few days are clear; a true economic dimension must depend on the consumption of leisure and tourism [135–137].

6.2. *Toward an Economic and Social Assessment of Cultural Strategies in Medium Cities*

As Somoza [106] points out, critical analyses of a development model first began to emerge in Spain long ago; under the excuse of innovation and culture, and largely committed to urban renewal but in favor of certain capital and real estate business interests, as well as the sort of spectacularization and touristification associated with the entrepreneurial city model, such development was criticized for decades by Harvey [150]. Criticism began around the cities that offered the two clearest postmodern urban development models in this sense—Barcelona and Bilbao [106,132,151]—but critiques have also transferred to attempts (successful or not) by medium and small cities for following in the footsteps of those examples.

Some of the most common objections are directed toward economic results, ranging from negative evaluations of the model [106] to its actual outcomes, and sparked by a typical failure to meet expectations. In general, it is argued that behind all the rhetoric around culture, in most

cases the only thing achieved is a certain reinforcement of consumption via tourism and leisure, and not a true fostering of grassroots ecosystems that might promote cultural creation and production. To the contrary: many such investments have actually disrupted interventions aimed at promoting cultural democratization and creation [140], generating significant opportunity costs both in the promotion of grassroots culture and in projects and events at the margins of those considered strategic.

Nevertheless, some modest positive examples can also be highlighted, such as the case of the incipient cultural cluster in Teruel. Although analysis has shown that most economic movement derives from the consumption of leisure (as in restaurants), a certain amount of cultural production (as in small artisan workshops) has also emerged, rising from below with reduced economic investment [135–137] behind which other purposes are unlikely to be hidden.

The intended urban model has also been the object of critique. Here clearly negative assessments have been made of investments in showcase architecture and star architects who, except in exceptional cases, rarely achieve the expected objectives of urban makeover, or of putting the city on a map of attractive places in which to invest or consume. In the express case of the cities analyzed, and in view of the success of the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, the total or relative failures of the City of Culture of Santiago de Compostela [139] and of the Niemeyer Center in Avilés [106] stand out.

However, assessments of the processes of urban renewal range beyond architectural projects in and of themselves, given that these are but an indication of attempts at creating new centralities and desirable spaces for markets and for the real estate sector, which can create a new image of the city and likewise favor the attraction of national and international capital flows [106]. Rodríguez Barcón et al. [147], examining the case of A Coruña, pointedly refer to an instrumentalization of the cultural development in order to generate territorial processes that aim at the physical as well as social transformation of certain urban or industrial spaces. The inevitable results of this include processes of gentrification, spectacularization, and touristization of spaces that (in order to justify intervention) had been previously categorized as ‘in decline’ [11]. This is therefore connected with a more general criticism of the model seen in the international bibliography, pointing to the generation of homogeneous spaces suitable for subsequent commodification [35,69], which may also lead to a loss of true creative potential [70].

Finally, from the social point of view, Méndez et al. [122] note that, for the creative economy as a whole, the presence of a greater number of highly qualified workers does not necessarily lead to improvements in general working conditions. Obviously, this is due to the particularities of creative work in general, and of cultural work in particular, already precarious, as well as to the transformation of labor regulation frameworks since the 1980s. Rodríguez González [141], who considers the situation of workers specifically dedicated to the cultural sector in Santiago de Compostela, both as creators and managers, confirms their generally precarious work situation along with their transformation into involuntary collaborators in the urban renewal process, in line with the theories of sociologist Sharon Zukin [152].

7. Conclusions

The Spanish territorial model of the cultural and creative economy confirms some of the most established assumptions found in the international literature, and it expresses the weight that agglomeration economies and the metropolitan bias have on the distribution of activities within the urban system. Beyond the cases of Madrid and Barcelona, which some studies situate at levels similar to other large European agglomerations [108], Spain’s remaining cities, and particularly those that can be considered small and medium-sized, lag far behind.

The theory of growth based on cultural development would suggest a kind of win-win scenario for small cities. Since creativity is not ostensibly limited by finite resources, an adequate institutional, business, and organizational context should allow for successful interventions aimed at attracting or facilitating creative work and subsequently transforming it into innovative services or goods [12]. However, the research analyzed in this review shows that cities which have managed to generate an ecosystem efficient enough to become relative benchmarks for this activity remain very few. Apart from

some concrete examples that present controversial elements, and that have been criticized from the social and urban points of view, the reality is that most medium and small cities in which culture has achieved significant economic weight have specialized in cultural consumption and not production. The enormous urban heritage that many of these cities treasure, together with the importance of tourism in the Spanish economy, have brought possibilities for success in the short and medium term, and yet these factors may have also hampered the development of other, more complex and difficult-to-implement scenarios.

As indicated for the international context, there seems to be no clear empirical evidence to show that aspects like high costs will systematically lead companies and cultural workers away from big cities [14] to the benefit of smaller ones. In the Spanish case, those few that have generated a true cultural economy have done so more by way of images and their own resources (especially heritage resources) than by elements related to ‘smallness,’ such as lower production or quality-of-life costs. Therefore, explanations linked to the construction of (variably powerful) identities that some small and medium-sized cities have been able to generate would seem to be reinforced, along with other very important elements such as the role that certain public policies have had in the distribution of equipment and cultural investments.

The only cases where true diffusion of activity away from the large concentration nodes is evident are the intra-metropolitan cities, but only for very specific sectors and phases of the production chain. The cases found in the research offer clear examples of borrowed size development, to the extent that none of these metropolitan creative clusters can be understood without acknowledging the presence of a large central city nearby, particularly Madrid or Barcelona.

Once a certain node of the creativity and culture economy in Spain was detected, we found that in-depth analyses focused on the operation of such clusters have been very scarce. Consequently, it is difficult to know the real reasons for their successes or weaknesses in relation to such aspects as the role of public policies, governance, or networks, the enabling factors on which their development has been supported, or their weight in the urban economy beyond accounts based on raw data such as employment.

This same lack of knowledge at the local level is projected when talking about social effects: although the particularities of the cultural and creative economy in relation to aspects like forms of hiring or precariousness are well known, nothing can be verified given the insufficient number of analyses focused on specific cases at the local level. For this reason, critiques of the model are usually made from generic approaches that, although perhaps correct, preclude the discovery of nuances between different cities, sectors, phases of the production model, etc.

In fact, most localized studies focus their analysis less on cultural clusters than on public policies as related to the spectacularization of culture and the subsequent commodification of urban space. The weight of tourism in the urban economy for some medium and small cities and the ‘successful’ examples provided by model cases such as Bilbao have made this the chosen path for many local and regional governments hoping to situate their cities on a ‘desired’ map of the places to be visited and consumed, and this has necessarily attracted the critical gaze of many researchers.

What is lacking in the Spanish case are systematic analyses at the local level of the spatial functioning of the cultural economy in small and medium-sized cities, whether generally or by sectors or phases of the production process. Only when a sufficient number of such examples appear can connections be made with other related sectors, such as the creative economy as a whole or tourism, and only then can the question of whether this sector should be understood as a valid option for urban development (depending on the wealth created, as well as its social and urban impacts) be answered truthfully.

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