

THE POINT OF VIEW

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THE POTENTIAL OF CREATIVE CITY SPACES IN THE COMPETITION FOR TALENTED YOUTH (BASED ON SURVEY MATERIALS)



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Abstract. Modern cities develop creative spaces and industries to become more competitive in attracting talented and active youth. This article focuses on the potential and nature of creative spaces in Kazan, their relevance and popularity among young people. The real involvement of the city's youth ranges from passive consumption to active participation and strongly depends on accessibility, relevant offers and the efforts of management teams. In this regard, the development of the city's creative spaces goes hand in hand with implementing effective mechanisms for attracting young people.

Keywords: city; Kazan; student youth; creative space; creative industry; regional development.

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Introduction: the development of creative spaces and industries in modern megacities

The global socio-economic transformations observed today testify to the emergence of a fundamentally new paradigm of development. The creative potential of the population, intellectual resources and the ability to bring about innovations come to the fore, becoming the fundamental factors of economic growth and social well-being. This model is called the «knowledge economy» or «creative economy», in which the focus is shifted from traditional material factors to human capital. In a human-centered economy, ideas, innovations and the quality of the environment determine the sustainability of socio-economic dynamics. The successful development of territories increasingly depends on their ability to attract talent, stimulate creativity, create ecosystems and to generate and implement new ideas.

As a result, modern megacities are becoming centers for the formation of creative spaces and industries, and the presence of a creative cluster is an important factor in the attractiveness and competitiveness of the city. The development of the creative sector is turning into a new industrial policy, and the sector itself is becoming a catalyst that influences other areas of activity and increases their efficiency.

Young people are a special group of city residents, which to some extent can be considered as representatives of the creative class. They are most susceptible to innovations, global and local trends. The high proportion of young people in the population contributes to the transformation of the city into a center of scientific and creative education. The unique social capital created in this way is a resource for the formation and development of the socio-cultural environment. In turn, the city, as a «set of rotation points» [Zimmel', 2002, p. 112], by modernizing existing and creating new spaces, responds to the needs of various communities, integrating modern trends and technologies into urban infrastructure. At the same time, the competition of cities and regions on a global scale for human capital, especially for talented and mobile youth, is increasing.

Research and practical approaches to forming creative spaces

The competitive advantage of a city is determined by a combination of various factors. This can be a unique local identity, and economic specialization, established clusters and competencies, and key actors. Modern research and practice show how the complex and dynamic formation of creative spaces af-

fects the overall development of the city. The theories of the «creative city» by C. Landry and the «creative class» by R. Florida emphasize that the economic prosperity and attractiveness of a city in the post-industrial era are determined by its ability to accumulate and retain creative professionals – highly mobile, self-improvement-oriented and receptive to innovation [Florida, 2007, p. 100–110]. A key resource in this competition of cities is the presence of developed creative spaces, which act as a magnet for talent and a catalyst for innovation in related sectors.

In Russia, creative spaces are understood as «territories (often re-developed industrial facilities or specially created zones) intended for free creative interaction, cooperation, exchange of ideas and implementation of projects by creative industries and active citizens. They create infrastructure for generating and promoting creative products, developing human potential and forming communities» [Federal law ... , 2024]. Since January 2025, creative industries in the country have been recognized as a separate sector of the economy. Employees in this field and companies can receive financial, logistical and information support from the state [Federal law ... , 2024].

In theory, creative spaces can be considered as a kind of «third place». In the life of a city, such institutions as coffee shops, bars, clubs, fitness centers, parks, pedestrian zones and other «hangout» places are beginning to play an increasingly important role. Such institutions are centers of informal communication, recreation and self-realization of citizens, and ensure the formation of social ties between residents [Oldenburg, 2014, p. 225–75]. They provide residents with opportunities for learning and self-expression, are distinguished by freedom of access and space for the implementation of ideas, which allows them to be considered updated «third places» – unique centers of cultural interaction.

Creative spaces, according to M. Storper, can be the personification of the «genius of the place» (Genius Loci). The «genius of the place» is a person, enterprise or other entity that functions now or earlier and influences the overall appearance of a city, its recognition, image and direction of development. The «genius of the place» manifests itself in the features of economic trends, urban innovations, localization and perception of the city [Storper, 2018, p. 120–126].

Research shows that successful innovation depends on the high level of commitment and proactive stance of its purveyors [Genius loci..., 2024, p. 20–23]. Local elites and «genius loci»—authoritative leaders and influencers capable of setting the direction of development—play a special role in this regard. Innovative communities—networks of active actors who act as agents of innovation, capable of generating and implementing innovations—are also a significant factor determining a city's competitiveness. Sustainable city development and its claims to «smart» status are impossible without the active involvement of residents in shaping the environment and creating conditions for self-expression and cooperation [Ishkineeva, 2021, p. 143–157].

In turn, new ideas prove most viable when they organically transform, rather than destroy, existing local identities. Each city is unique in the combination of its local characteristics («genius loci») and the

influence of global trends («zeitgeist»). As economist L.E. Limonov notes, the «spirit of the times» generates a demand for new values and a wave of innovation [Genius loci..., 2024, p. 221], but only «where the 'genius loci' possesses the ability to mobilize. That is, where global trends can be used to unite the local community, understood not simply as a collection of residents, but as an 'imagined community' united by shared aspirations and identity» [Zhikharevich, 2024, p. 248]. As a result, a symbiosis of economy and culture emerges: sustainable innovation is ensured by the alignment of economic mechanisms and the cultural context of the territory. At the same time, the nature of the organization of creative spaces and their interaction with local communities is unique for each region.

According to A.A. Zhelnina, creative spaces are a kind of tool for the implementation and defense of the «right to the city» (a term coined by A. Lefebvre). The latter can be achieved through the use of space as a showcase for goods and services or by modifying the urban space itself. Creative spaces are divided by their origins into «initiative» spaces—a strategy pursued by enthusiasts—and «investment» spaces—business projects [Zhelnina, 2015, p. 45–59]. S.I. Prokhorov believes that creative spaces are formed for different purposes, but over time, they all function as business models for attracting resources. The researcher notes the special role of creative spaces in attracting tourists and investors to the city, as well as in shaping its positive image. Both full-fledged creative clusters and highly specialized creative spaces and event spaces are distinguished [Prokhorov, 2021, p. 107–109]. However, despite the specifics of their creation and operation, all types of creative spaces, in one way or another, become a significant resource for attracting creative youth and activating their participation in realizing the city's potential.

Creative spaces and industries in Kazan

Kazan is the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan (RT) and a major university hub, attracting thousands of young people. Here conditions are being created for the emergence and growth of creative industries, which are becoming part of the region's creative economy [The Republic of Tatarstan plans ..., 2024]. The unique local environment – its specific social structures, local interaction networks and established collective action practices, and the ability of local actors (representatives of republican and city governments, urban communities, and entrepreneurs) to effectively adapt a variety of innovations—are increasingly important in the city's development. This shapes the institutional landscape, which directly influences the quality of decision-making, as well as the region's receptivity to new ideas and its ability to implement innovations [Kazan on the rise..., 2025].

In this context, creative spaces (coworking spaces, art clusters, innovation centers, etc.) extend beyond simple cultural facilities. They are becoming a crucial tool in shaping Kazan's modern image, complementing and enlivening its traditional cultural and historical landmarks. These spaces are positioned not simply as «points on the map», but as the infrastructure of the future – places for brainstorming,

growth points for the new economy (especially creative industries and startups), platforms for developing contemporary culture and fostering social connections [Mobile and non-family ..., 2022].

Today's Kazan demonstrates a unique balance: a combination of respect for historical heritage with active creative exploration and openness to innovation. This synthesis creates a unique image of the city. The development of creative industries and targeted support for creative communities allow Kazan to establish itself not only as a custodian of centuries-old traditions but also as a dynamic center of innovation, contemporary culture, and advanced social practices, strengthening its position in the global competition for human capital and investment.

Another distinctive feature in the development of creative spaces in Kazan is the combination of proactive and investment strategies. The «initiative» strategy, formed from below, includes informal art clusters that have emerged in abandoned or unused buildings (often without initial government approval), as well as community clusters such as contemporary art galleries (Zaman, Okno), independent theater studios, literary clubs, artisan workshops, and coworking spaces for freelancers. This also includes festivals and temporary projects: initiatives such as street festivals, public art, and tactical urban projects (yard improvements by residents) can serve as a focal point for a community and attract the attention of authorities. At the same time, an «investment» strategy is being actively implemented, which includes projects initiated and supported by government bodies (national and municipal) as part of plans for regional development, tourism, and improving the city's image. Thus, the Center for the Development of Creative Industries in the Republic of Tatarstan among Youth, RE'ACTOR, plays a key role in supporting creative individuals, projects, and communities, as well as organizing educational programs and events that facilitate their promotion. At the same time, there is an active search for markers of local identity in unique, authentic forms that will be attractive for investment [Tatarstan will create..., 2025]. Business, in turn, participates in both strategies – as an investor in large-scale projects and as a partner in grassroots initiatives.

The resulting synergy allows Kazan to develop an attractive creative environment, attracting talented youth and strengthening the region's competitiveness. The city successfully positions itself as the «Third capital of Russia» and «Kazan – a city where cultures merge». These characteristics, combined with effective marketing and active infrastructure development, enhance the city's attractiveness as a destination for study, work, tourism, and investment.

Demand for creativity: results of a survey of Kazan students

Kazan students are a key consumer group and potential content creators for creative spaces. Therefore, this study focused on students as a group interacting or potentially interacting with creative spaces. The study was conducted from November 2024 to April 2025. The goal was to determine (through an online survey) the demand for creative spaces in Kazan among Kazan students (n=386). The survey in-

cluded 27 questions. The survey was distributed via Telegram, WhatsApp, and VKontakte. It focused on assessing the city's attractiveness, how often students visit creative spaces, and the reasons for choosing locations. The sample was formed using a quota method based on age (18–30), occupation (student), and place of residence prior to entering university (Kazan and out-of-town students). Respondents included students from various Kazan universities: Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazan Innovative University named after V.G. Timiryasov, and Kazan State Conservatory named after N.G. Zhiganov. Participant observation was used during the qualitative data collection stage, focusing on the most significant creative spaces for students (identified through a questionnaire).

The overwhelming majority of respondents (85%) rate Kazan positively, describing it as «comfortable», «offering a wide range of opportunities», «cozy», and «developed». Importantly, 67% of respondents plan to remain in the city after graduation.

The study identified five types of creative spaces in Kazan, based on their activities, goals, and operating format:

1. Multifunctional creative hubs adapted for a wide range of purposes (work, study, communication, creative activity). Examples of this type include the National Library of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Bashir Rameyev IT Park, and the «Baklazhan» anti-cafe.

2. Art clusters emerged as a result of the revitalization of industrial buildings. The reimagined spaces of the Smena Contemporary Art Center, the Alafuzov Factory, the Shtab Center, and the Bizon Gallery shift the focus to contemporary art, creative collaborations, and cultural projects.

3. Niche creative spaces offering specialized formats for individual interests: the Ugol Theatre Laboratory, the Uram Extreme Park, and the Minegames playground (for fans of board games and role-playing systems). This category also includes the eSports movement, represented by the «Godji Game» computer club chain and the «Artcore» cybercafe, which host tournaments and training sessions. All of these spaces are characterized by a focus on specific (unique) activities and interests.

4. Social and educational spaces: museums, universities, and lecture halls that offer master classes, lectures, and other educational events serve as creative spaces. Currently, such spaces not only facilitate the self-development of city residents but are increasingly creating conditions for community formation and networking.

5. Open-air urban spaces: parks, embankments, and squares. They become the stage for a variety of events: from city festivals (Gastrofestival, NUR, COMBOnation) and sports marathons to major international forums (Universiade, Future Games, sports championships, «New Wave»). These spaces (and the events held there) attract residents to participate in the city's cultural life, create an open urban environment, and promote the development of creative industries and investment potential.

The diversity of spaces (multifunctional, art clusters, specialized, educational, and outdoor) offers a wide range of opportunities – from recreation and networking to professional self-realization and creative

experimentation. Success cases (IT Park, Smena, Shtab, and Uram) demonstrate that creative spaces, especially those created through the revitalization of industrial zones, not only enliven the urban environment but also become powerful talent magnets. They are attractive to out-of-town students and have also become a factor in curbing the region's «brain drain» by providing diverse opportunities for young people to realize their potential.

Each type of space meets the specific needs of different youth groups. Young people's attitudes toward urban creative spaces and their actual participation are key to the success of individual locations and initiatives. However, this also lies at the core of the problem: existing spaces are still failing to deeply engage this demographic. According to a survey of student youth, the main criteria for choosing creative spaces are: the opportunity to spend time with friends (76%), an attractive interior and atmosphere (55.5%), and a convenient location (55%). Opportunities for work (24.4%) and hobbies (14%) were less important to respondents. The overwhelming majority of students (80%) come to such spaces for relaxation and entertainment. More than half (55%) seek inspiration, 35.4% value them for the opportunity to socialize and network, and only 30% of respondents are motivated by study and self-development.

The overwhelming majority of visitors to creative spaces in Kazan are passive consumers (64%), using cafes/food courts or relaxing in public areas (walking, concerts, exhibitions, lectures, festivals, and shops). Only a third of respondents (27%) are active participants: they regularly participate in interest clubs (book, language, and gaming), volunteer at events, and participate in discussions and initiatives. Among them, residents/users predominate, using the spaces for their professional or creative activities (hosting their own workshops, rehearsals, and shows), content creators, and organizers: young curators, event managers, musicians, artists, and entrepreneurs who create events and projects and bring life to the space. The potential for the development of creative industries is often associated with this group.

Despite their professed inclusivity, a significant portion of Kazan's creative spaces recreate an elitist image due to expensive formats and a narrow target audience. The high cost of participating in events, renting workspaces, or training places makes them inaccessible to young people from low-income groups. Not all creative spaces provide transparent, understandable, and effective mechanisms to facilitate the transition from mere presence to active collaboration, the implementation of individual projects, and participation in innovative activities. Sustainable, effective mechanisms for supporting youth startups in the form of funding and legal support are lacking. Furthermore, creative industries require skills that students and university graduates entering the workforce do not always possess. For a large portion of young people, this is a significant barrier to participation. Finally, young people in the creative industries often work freelance or informally without social benefits.

As a result, the declared potential of creative spaces often conflicts with the actual skills, cultural background, or access to the necessary technologies of potential participants from various social groups. In fact, the most active participants and beneficiaries of creative urban spaces are those who already pos-

sess a certain social, cultural, or economic capital, forming a kind of «closed club». Those who need support and opportunities most risk being left behind or limited to the role of passive spectators, content consumers, and participants in one-off events. Due to a lack of grant support and media visibility, some youth initiatives remain unfulfilled. The attracted audience does not transform into a sustainable community of active creators capable of generating valuable cultural and economic products.

These limitations result in fragmented exploitation of the potential of creative spaces. Insufficient collaboration with universities and continuing education programs deprives creative spaces of new recruits and hinders the transition of young people from studies to practical work. Furthermore, information about professional development opportunities, internships, grants, or residency programs within the creative ecosystem is often opaque or inaccessible to a wide range of users. Young talent, especially from the periphery or less affluent backgrounds, simply doesn't know how to take advantage of them. Additional efforts are needed to transform creative spaces into functioning social mobility platforms and to establish effective mechanisms for youth engagement in the city's socioeconomic and cultural spheres. Only then will declarations of inclusivity become tangible practices, and creative spaces become the true infrastructure of the future for all city residents.

Conclusion

In the context of the «knowledge economy», creative spaces and industries are a crucial tool for attracting and retaining talented young people, serving as a strategic resource and investment into the future. The effectiveness of this approach is confirmed by the fact that the overwhelming majority of students surveyed (85%) evaluate Kazan positively, citing its comfort and the opportunities it offers.

A key indicator of success in attracting young people is their desire to connect their future with the city. The presence of creative spaces partially curbs the «brain drain». Successful examples (IT Park, Smena, and Uram in Kazan) demonstrate their role in revitalizing the urban environment, shaping a cultural code and an attractive image.

However, the potential of creative spaces as a tool for truly integrating young people into the city's economic and cultural spheres is not fully realized. As the survey showed, the defining form of participation is passive consumption, with the main purposes of visiting being recreation and entertainment. The study identified significant barriers preventing visitors from becoming a sustainable community of content creators and limiting the social function of creative spaces: elitism and financial inaccessibility for some young people, a lack of skills and transparent support mechanisms, weak connections with educational institutions, and a lack of transparency about opportunities within the ecosystem.

The key development trend for Kazan's creative spaces is their evolution from mere attractions for passive consumption into a functioning infrastructure for genuine creativity, ensuring accessibility and support for talented young people from all social groups. Developing a creative cluster for Kazan means

creating not only infrastructure but also the conditions for its use. The success of these strategies will be determined by the integration of global trends («spirit of the times») with a unique local identity («genius loci») and the creation of an environment for generating innovation through dialogue between cultures and communities. A balance must be struck between commercial efficiency, social mission, and the authenticity of creative spaces. This will turn them into catalyst of urban transformation, improving quality of life and the region's competitiveness in the competition for human capital.

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