Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity 10 (2024) 100177

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity

journal homepage: www.sciencedirect.com/journal/journal-of-open-innovation-technology-market-and-complexity

The dark side of KIBS agency, the creative economy, and regional sustainability

Philip Cooke

MohnCenter for Innovation & Regional Development, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, 5020 Bergen, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
KIBS (Knowledge intensive business services)
Management consultancies
Prosecution
Fines
Corrupt business practices

ABSTRACT

This contribution develops critique from analysing forms of misconduct by knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) firms, especially the largest, globally located and client-interactive on all five continents. Management consultancy infractions range from supplying spurious advice, to advising clients on fraudulent practice, to acting complicitly in corrupt government practices, including engaging in 'state capture' by channelling internal state revenue into private holding bank accounts. Because the litany of misconduct is too massive for encompassing in a single contribution, and in the spirit of this task, the spotlight is only on a few cases that represent typical 'creative economy' companies contracted to 'Big 3′ P-KIBS (Professional KIBS) corporations. Of importance to open innovation's critical edge, the contribution articulates the puzzle of why academic KIBS research has presented the field without comment on its 'dark' side, questioning 'leadership' and 'agency' 'observer' and 'confirmation bias'. For interpretation of data discovery, we utilise evolutionary 'pattern recognition' methodology set within an evolutionary theoretical framework.

Introduction

In this contribution we aim to profile three key things. First, we seek to disclose aspects of the 'darker' side of the 'creative economy' once touted as the solution to rustbelt cities and regions facing a post-industrial future once the 'Bilbao effect' invoked by the success of architect Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in 1997 was widely acknowledged. Second, we utilise a methodology called 'pattern recognition' that classifies 'agentic' events, processes and personalities on scales differentiating, for example 'altruistic' versus 'egotistic' cultural or personality characteristics or traits to identify serious misconduct or accomplishment in public actors or agencies. This can reveal the 'darker' side of, for example 'entrepreneurship', professional vocations or management consultancy. Third we reveal how a huge growth in the third of the types of practice just listed as post-industrial planning alighted first upon the 'knowledge economy' followed by the 'creative economy' as instruments of urban and regional regeneration. A vast market for management consultancy and advice rapidly grew, boosting the profits of KIBS companies like McKinsey & Co., much of whose advice and guidance have proven mistaken, unethical and, indeed, corrupt. In passing we inquire how knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) research failed to notice this dark side of their academic object of interest. It is not a simple matter to provide time series tables showing the large prosecution and fines incurred by the Big 3 management consultancies. However, recent years have been uncomfortable. Until a decade ago no McKinsey had never been sued for securities-law violations. In 2012 its former managing partner, Rajat Gupta, was convicted of insider-trading committed after he left the firm. Then in 2016 McKinsey was embroiled in a scandal in South Africa after it worked with Trillian, a local consulting firm owned by an associate of the controversial Gupta family, indicated below in Table 1, which refer to only to 2022 violations.

Accordingly, the paper begins with an account in its first section of the idea of the rise of a 'Creative Class' and how its reception was further alighted upon by management consultancies like McKinsey's seeking to profit from selling its message to city and regional administrations worldwide. It also critiques such practices coinciding with advisory work for outlawed companies, notably Purdue Pharma, that manufactured and distributed OxyContin to rustbelt victims of the opioid crisis while simultaneously advising Purdue's owners the Sackler family who were at the same time endowing elite museums, art galleries and universities located in privileged settings in their preferred domiciles of the USA and the UK. There follows a section reviewing the rise and putative demise of the rather unchallenging academic reception of the KIBS phenomenon in urban and regional studies and economic geography more generally, seeing it as a species of both 'observer bias' and 'confirmation bias'. These concepts are closely associated with typical findings of 'pattern recognition' research alluded to in the first section. In the next section, we explain the methodology deployed in the analysis, namely 'pattern recognition'. This is followed by a section reviewing the post-industrial knowledge economy, KIBS and their 'darker' agency biases towards clients including corruption. We then

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2023.100177
Received 19 September 2023; Received in revised form 30 October 2023; Accepted 10 November 2023
Available online 17 November 2023
2199-8531/

Table 1
Management Consultancy Violations, 2022. * Estimated Annual Cost of Tendering Ban.

CONSULTANT	PENALTY ($m)	CLIENT
McKinsey	600.0	South African Govt.
McKinsey	574.0	49 US states for OxyContin
EY	216.1	EY Sued by Commerzbank over Wirecard
Bain	150.0	UK Govt. 3 Year Tendering Ban*
Bain	110.0	S. African Govt. 10 year Tendering Ban*

Source: Cooke, P., in R. Boix & L. Lazzeretti (2024) The KIBS Scandal: Destructive Agents of Creative Economies and Regional Sustainability

conduct a second literature review to seek to understand why the massive academic literature on KIBS has yet seriously to pick up the infractions we found in this field. Finally, we zoom back into specifically 'creative economy' concerns with three new and detailed examinations of canonical creative industries; fast fashion; cruise tourism and 'starchitecture' that have bad 'climate change' reputations and the extent to which they ignore good or suffer bad advice from management consultancy 'agents'.

Creativity, KIBS and corruption

In his book 'The New Urban Crisis' (2017) Rich Florida autocritiqued and recanted his earlier 'Creative Class' thesis, listing among the following; negative, unanticipated outcomes of the implementation of urban policies that had unchallengingly ingested the remedy. Obsession with the remedy was based in planner desperation to revive urban shrinkage consequent upon deindustrialisation. After 1997, when the 'Bilbao effect' became observable in the Guggenheim Museum's impact on that city's redundant shipyards, not least in its visitor numbers and new hospitality employment growth, post-industrial planning foresight seemed to have been both vindicated and rewarded. But subsequently, he lamented the urban inequality, class erosion and social segregation ascribing all three to the success of the 'Creative Class'. Covid-19 both exacerbated these outcomes but, ironically, undermined city advantage despite their soaring housing costs. Gentrification is an indivisible urban effect of the 'destructive creativity' (Soete, 2012) of deregulated market capitalism and its gigantic income and wealth polarisation.

Florida goes on to say this new urban crisis gave rise to a 'Patchwork Metropolis'; a spatial form of four different categories: based on the relative concentration of the 'creative class' in comparison to the 'service' and 'working' class 'others'. Hence.

1. Creatives 're-colonized' city centers,
2. Creatives also live in the suburbs,
3. Divided cities, where creative are found disproportionately on one side of a metro area, and
4. The scattered archipelagos of creatives.

Florida said the pattern in each metro was shaped by a combination of the strength of the urban core, the nature of the transit system, the location of universities and the presence of natural amenities. Updating this for post-Covid times, it can be hypothesised that 'creatives' re-sorted city centres by three processes: first exiting them, especially in retail while re-purposing them (e.g. abandoned retail becomes university property, or an urban arts 'factory'); second, consolidating bifurcated city divisions by gentrifying exclusive heirloom locations; and third, moving out to heritage rural locations (e.g. Cotswolds, Hamptons, Riviera etc). New York City and London both registered 300,000 exiting Covid refugees (Cooke, 2021b).

Pattern recognition

The theory we shall be testing in these accounts is known as 'pattern recognition'. This interrogates discourse, narrative content, documentary or 'grey literature' of many kinds, including online text and imagery, where also are found academic journal articles of relevance to the subject under inspection. It involves analysis of antonyms and conceptual tags that define them. Thus of interest might be 'effective altruism' (as in OpenAI, Elon Musk's 'deep learning' business; Cooke, 2021a) versus 'egotism' on a spectrum that consists of structured modifiers. Thus altruism indicates other descriptors like 'commons', 'co-operative', and 'philanthropic' while 'egotism' denotes 'individualism', 'conceit', and 'selfishness'. These frameworks allow positioning of traits on the relevant spectra that describe sub-surface lineaments of organisational or individual motivations. These can be compared across economic sectors or geographies. Accordingly they act as psychological explanations for causal processes. In this essay, we are interested in the motivating processes operating 'under the skin' of the rise of creativity to prominence in post-industrial regional landscapes. Moving closer to our chosen theme we could inquire whether actors or agencies were motivated by 'creative destruction' versus 'destructive creation' (Soete, 2012) the former signifying 'disruption', 'disorder' or 'turmoil' while the latter could denote 'invasion', 'effacement', or 'wrecking'. Candidates for the first might be anyone ranging from Google or Elon Musk to Donald Trump while Meta or Vladimir Putin might be candidates for the latter designation. We shall incline towards a tried and tested framing that counterpoints 'dark' versus 'light' psychological traits that juxtapose narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy on the dark side of the spectrum as against credibility, reliability and trustworthiness, and neo-Kantianism (meaning a cosmopolitan tolerance of human difference or what Kant called the 'crooked timber' of humanity; Paulhus and Williams, 2002; Kaufman et al., 2019).

We shall explore how creativity became aligned with 'dark' forces in the fields of pharmaceuticals, KIBS (knowledge-intensive business services), specifically management consultancy, the 750,000 victims of the opioid crisis in the US, and philanthropy in support of investment in the Creative Arts. The 'agency' in this narrative is supplied by, respectively: Purdue Pharma, manufacturer of painkiller drug OxyContin, geographically established before its demise, in Stamford, Connecticut, USA, and its erstwhile UK subsidiary Mundipharma at Cambridge Science Park; McKinsey's the largest KIBS consultancy in the world, with global presences in fifty cities but headquartered in New York City; places such as Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA where, in 2013 the peak of prescribing in that state was highest for opioid deaths; and the Sackler family that owned Purdue Pharma and were one of the largest sources of Arts philanthropy in the US and UK. Why was Fort Wayne chosen, it might reasonably be inquired? Purdue had asked McKinsey's for profiling of 'important growth pockets' of opioid-related deaths, which were soaring, in combination with heroin and fentanyl, in that jurisdiction. It is a hard-hit Rustbelt city. Insensitively, McKinsey's report found it '.encouraging that.[US-wide}.40% of zips [zip codes] are actually growing their OxyContin prescription volume.' (Bogdanich and Forsythe, 2022, 138).

Moving on to the Sackler family, their distinctive name is displayed in the US at Harvard, the Smithsonian and the Metropolitan Museum, and behind research facilities and professorships at MIT, Caltech, Columbia, Cornell, Yale, Stanford, Tufts, Brown and other universities in the US, as well as the UK, Canada (McGill) and Israel (Tel Aviv). With their partly British, partly Polish Galician antecedents the Sackler name was also familiar on many British cultural institutions such as London's Serpentine Sackler Gallery, the 2022 forecourt of the Victoria & Albert Museum, a bridge at Kew Gardens, the Tate, the National Gallery, Covent Garden's Royal Opera House in London and upon research centres at UK universities, notably, Oxford, Glasgow, Imperial London and Sussex. Many endowed institutions have since removed signs of the Sackler endowments for their reputational toxicity.

The one remaining 'agent' to be featured in this account, which it will be clear, leans towards the darker than the lighter side of the pattern recognition 'Triad' is McKinsey & Co, and to them the narrative now turns. As this writing proceeded, the involvement of McKinsey's with accusations of corruption regarding misconduct in its selection for tenders to governments for Covid-19 advice on the UK's contract for a 'test and trace' service priced at £563,400 which also failed abysmally, spread to France with the following report (Sage, 2002). A criminal investigation was brought by anti-sleaze prosecutors in France claiming the McKinsey consultancy received preferential treatment by President Emmanuel Macron for lucrative French government contracts in exchange for favours in allocating ten McKinsey consultants to help write Macron's 2017 and 2022 election and re-election manifestos. Out of a total of €2.4 billion paid to their consultants during that period, a French senate committee reported that from 2018 to 2022, McKinsey accounted for €17.7 million. While McKinsey had paid no corporation tax since 2011 despite earning €329 million there in 2020, the consultancy denied engagement in tax avoidance.

One of the new fields opened up to the market for advice to public jurisdictions and private agents had been 'The Creative Economy'. Quoting the World Economic Forum (2018) strapline and auto-acknowledging McKinsey & Co's own collaboration in writing the WEF report is as follows in McKinsey (2018):

'The creative economy … encompasses creative endeavours such as music, film and television, gaming, advertising, publishing and literature, as well as architecture, design, arts, and fashion'(Broderson et. al, 2017).

For WEF/McKinsey facing the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' (Schwab, 2017), the concern was that platform technologies (i.e. Google and Facebook) had the power to change how content is produced and consumed in a dynamic environment. Publishers wanted to enlarge the market for their content, but did not control content-discovery processes. Accordingly, technology platforms were the main referral sources for digital publishers, with Facebook and Google responsible for about 70% of their online referral sources. This control relationship constrained editorial content and monetisation potential, favouring platforms over publishers for information and entertainment content. In sum, cultural creativity is reduced to 'dollars and sense'. They are not alone in their reductivism but usually there is the accompanying *caveat* against the ethical status of both (see, for example, on 'Responsible Research and Innovation', Cooke, 2019).

Instead, a McKinsey & Co. (Kirkland, 2013) interview with Richard Florida appears next on their website. Given this is early Rich Florida a little before his above-mentioned auto-critique of the 'Creative Class' thesis, it is nevertheless instructive regarding what McKinsey was interested in, namely where the rich lived. An edited transcript of part of the interviewee's contrasting remarks follows:

> '.[in] this Patchwork, [as] I call it; the fractured, the fragmented city, the divided city. Concentrated advantage right beside concentrated disadvantage. But then moving out into the suburbs, concentrated advantage next to concentrated disadvantage, and this is a self-perpetuating cycle, which is terrifying. If you're stuck in one of these neighbourhoods, right next door to the affluence, you're cooked. You don't have access to good schools, you don't have access to cultural pathways, you don't have access to mentors, you don't have access to jobs.' (Kirkland, 2013)

Some of these observations are prescient about urban processes that have evolved into a far worse condition post-Covid, post-Putin and post-Cop 27, which nowadays may be seen as exploited and exacerbated by the advice and consultancy interest. Like many other KIBS consultants and their municipal clients, they sought expert opinion on where the new money was hidden and how to unlock it, but were not much interested in translating consultancy bias informed by 'creative' expertise into any remedy for the Patchwork's losers. Target the rich cities, 'gentrifying' neighbourhoods (Sackler territory) and forget 'Nerdistan' suburbs that are no longer 'cool' in a post-Fordist era. So those seeds of Florida's critique were visible in plain sight but never of interest to the KIBS crowd.

The knowledge economy, creativity and the dark side of KIBS

To show that our KIBS review is not simply meant to be a critique of McKinsey's we now turn to a tale of narcissism, hubris and non-clinical psychopathy (as the psychological Dark Triad is defined) as befell a former employee of Michael Porter's Monitor Group and subsequently of Bain & Co. both once-celebrated US management consultants with 'creative economy' credentials, albeit not in McKinsey's 'World's Most Powerful Consulting Firm' class (Bogdanich and Forsythe, 2022). The figure in question is Hayden Wood, CEO and co-founder with his Cambridge University alumnus Amit Gudka, of the UK's now seriously bankrupted, though once Europe's fastest growing company, Bulb. The new energy supply entrant was one of as many as 29 such energy start-ups stimulated by the UK Conservative government's neoliberal policy of 'creating competition' in a moribund energy supply market. Clearly this policy was as useless as 'Trussonomics' as promoted by the right-wing Institute of Economic Affairs, self-described as 'the UK's original free-market think-tank'. The IEA's considered opinion of a report to the EU by McKinsey's on raising to 40% the share of women on corporate boards is as follows:

> '.ubiquitous management consultancy McKinsey, which in 2007 published a study – in collaboration with a feminist pressure group – which is claimed to support the view that companies with women in the boardroom perform better than those without. However, a look at this piece of work reveals that it is methodologically crude, with inadequate statistical controls and taking correlation for causation. Even McKinsey admits that the evidence is suggestive rather than definitive (Shackleton, 2012).

This could perhaps be considered 'churlish' more for its dismissal of the consultant being 'in collaboration with 'a feminist pressure group' (cf. Leanin.org) than its dismissal of McKinsey's econometrics, later improved upon by new data from Deloitte (Konigsberg and Thorne, 2021).

To return to Hayden Wood, Bulb was set up in 2014 and by 2018 had become a £350 million firm. But it became bankrupt in 2022 owing £6.5 billion to the government, a spectacular collapse. The psychology of the owners was described as 'hubristic' and neglectful of the huge risks to which the company was exposed. By offering renewable energy more cheaply than the major energy corporates, Bulb had adopted a strategy of not hedging wholesale supplies when the global energy price was low. Accordingly, the firm had little protection against market volatility. This was further exacerbated when the energy regulator, Ofgem, placed an energy price-cap based on what price they were hedged at, to prevent customers being charged unsustainable amounts of finance. So the firm had to pay the full unhedged spot-market prices. This, in large part accounted for the astronomical amount of debt the company incurred by the time of its bankruptcy. Subsequently, it emerged Bulb was massively in hock to US venture capitalist Sequoia Capital, creditor of Bulb's core distribution algorithms (Cahill, 2022). Such costs have continued to be incurred by the nature of the non-hedging that continued after bankruptcy was declared. Wood had become increasingly narcissistic as he lost control, forsaking his green vision in favour of maximising Bulb's profits. These turned into losses to be picked up by the taxpayer.

In a chapter article published a decade ago on the demise of the Monitor Group, its bankruptcy, with its shell absorbed into the Deloitte Consulting brand, the following was written:

> 'This chapter takes the bankruptcy in 2012 of the leading cluster-building consultancy firm *Monitor*, founded by academic business guru Michael Porter, as a significant inflection point in the trajectory of 'clusters' as a panacea for local and regional economic development policy. The origins of the 'cluster craze' are shown to lie in the marketing of a kind of discourse or narrative by *Monitor* and numerous smaller outfits to the effect that cluster-building was easy

because they actually existed and in studying them academics and consultants had found their secret ingredients' (Cooke, 2013).

It is unsurprising that McKinsey's were also evangelists for clusters, selling the 'craze' widely in German cities and regions, much evaluated as 'absolutely voodoo' by municipalities on the receiving end of their advice (Kiese, 2019). What lay behind the Monitor bankruptcy was a further tale of hubris, narcissism, corruption and disgrace for numerous leading management consultants and even their institutions. Among Monitor's alumni were: Chris Argyris - Professor Emeritus at Harvard Business School, known for his work on 'Learning Organizations'; Stewart Brand – Futurist; author of the 'Whole Earth Catalog' and co-founder of Global Business Network; Richard Dearlove – Head of the British Secret Intelligence Service (1999–2004); Roger Martin – Dean, Rotman School of Management, Toronto University and Director, Research in Motion (Blackberry); Michael Porter, Academic, Harvard Business School; and (Dame) Kate Bingham - former head of the UK Vaccine Taskforce during the Covid-19 pandemic and venture capital manager.

Returning to the fate of Monitor (Fig. 1), with cluster customers deserting it, the company made its final play, which turned out to be a fatal error. Using questionable and dubious ethics it made a clustering contract with the late Libyan Dictator Muammar Gaddafi. In addition, as part of that engagement, Monitor helped one of his sons write a dissertation for his PhD from the London School of Economics (Cooke and Kitagawa, 2013). The rehabilitation of the oil-rich, former investor in global anti-western terrorism was a project of the UK's New Labour government led by Tony Blair, assisted by his 'Third Way' guru and LSE Director, 'structuration' sociologist (now Lord) Anthony Giddens. As an exercise in narcissism, Giddens' description of his tryst with Gaddafi is hard to beat:

> 'You usually get about half an hour when meeting a political leader. My conversation with Gaddafi lasts for more than three. Gaddafi is relaxed and he clearly enjoys intellectual conversation. We sit close together and occasionally sip mint tea. During our talk, we discuss the fact that there is a major revival of thinking in modern political philosophy about participatory and discursive democracy.I point out that Libya, as a small country with a great deal of oil wealth, might look to Norway as something of a model to aim for in the future. It has adjusted very effectively to the new global environment.' (Giddens, 2006)

According to a 2007 memo from Monitor to Libya's intelligence chief which was subsequently posted on the internet in 2009, Monitor entered into further contracts with the Libyan regime in 2006 which were worth at least \$3 m (£1.8 m) per year plus expenses.

According to the memo these contracts were for a campaign to 'enhance international understanding and appreciation of Libya,. emphasize the emergence of the new Libya. [and] introduce Muammar Gaddafi as a thinker and intellectual'. Monitor also funded research support for the doctoral thesis which Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, submitted to the LSE. This occurred and was soon followed by the resignation of Saif's supervisor and then-Director of the LSE, Howard Davies. It will be recalled that Gaddafi was, in Sirte, Libya, assassinated by anti-Gaddafi militias at the end of Libya's civil war. Saif survived, remaining informally involved in Libyan political affairs but in 2021 prosecutors in Tripoli issued an arrest warrant for Saif over suspected links to 'Putin's chef' Yevgeny Prigozhin and his Wagner Group of Russian mercenaries.

Turning to Bain & Co, it both presages a McKinsey-scale scandal in a corruption case affecting different part of the lucrative South African government contracting business, and presents historically the early form of capitalist competition in the once-infant consultancy industry, best characterised as a kaleidoscope of entrepreneurial fission and fusion (Figs. 1 and 2). In the account written by O'Shea and Madigan (1999) Bain's corporate secretiveness earned it the nickname 'the KGB of

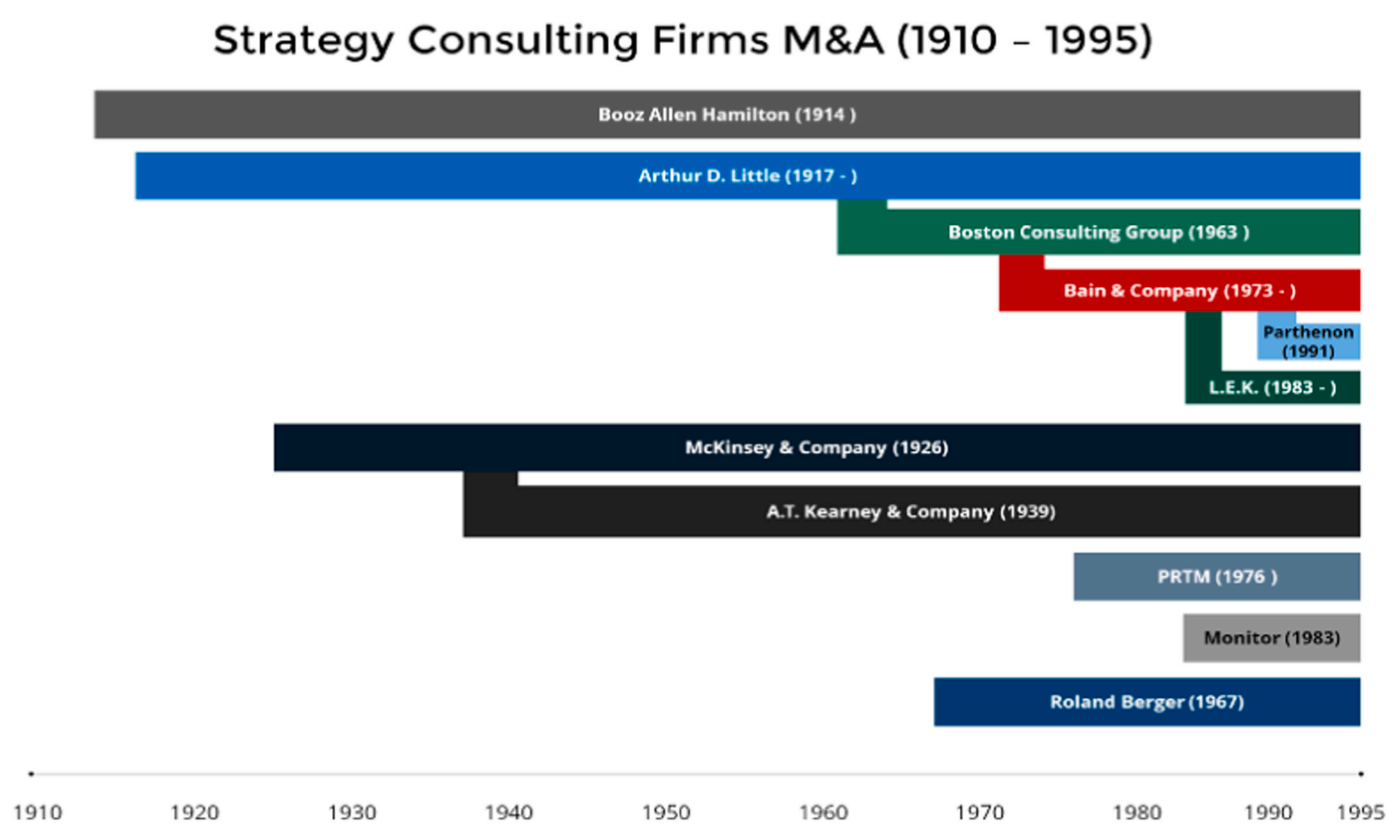

Fig. 1. Longevity of Management Consultancies 1910–1995.
Source: Strategy Consulting.

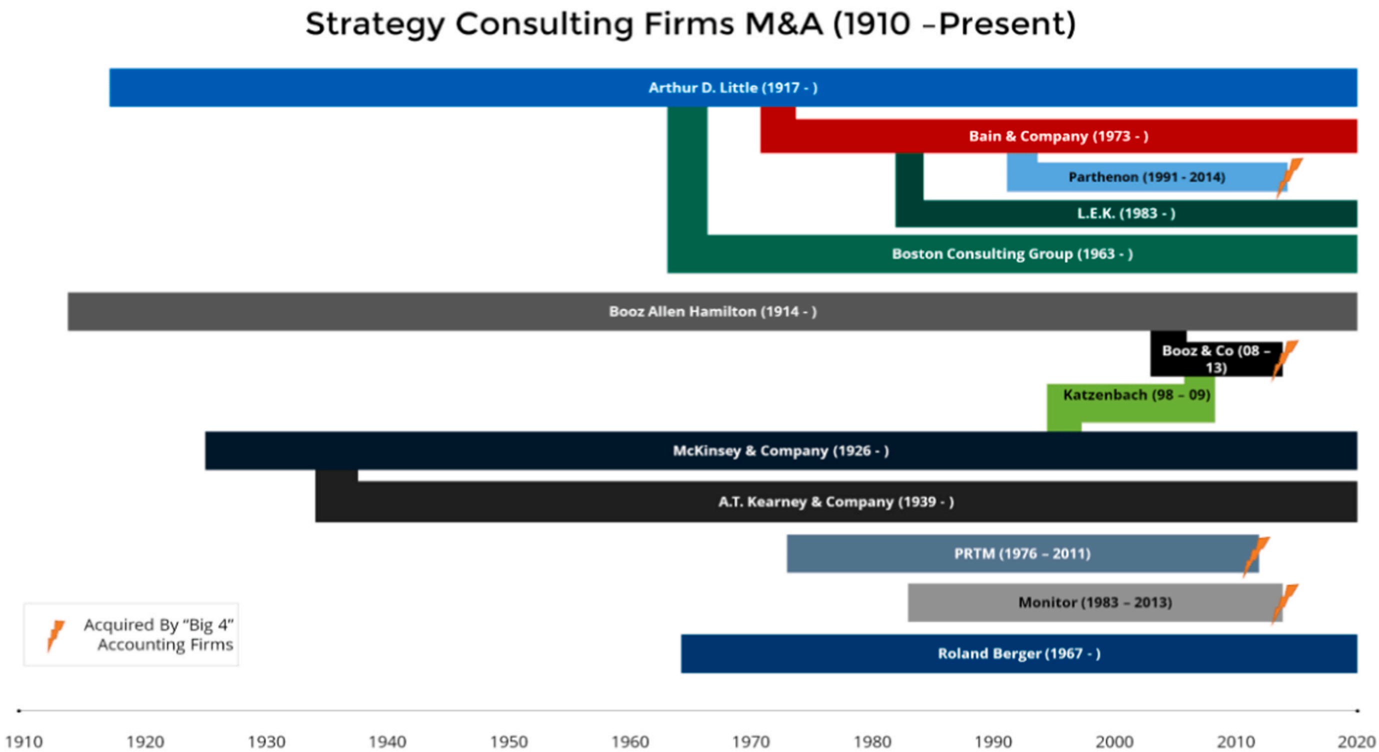

Fig. 2. Evolution of Management Consultancies 1995–2020: Mergers & Acquisitions.
Source: Strategy Consulting.

management consulting'. It meant exchanging privileged CEO-level information on the client firm on the understanding it would be the only firm so serviced in its industry. At the time, this approach was considered unethical practice, having crossed the line between advice and management. But Bain countered it was not unethical in that it empowered managers, especially weak ones boosted by stock appreciations derived from the Bain Index, which became the key performance indicator demonstrating comparative tangible client results.

However, the Bain model, which became highly lucrative, with revenues of $150 million and a staff of 800, suffered from its narrow client base despite high billings. This also alienated middle managers of clients responsible for absorbing Bain's advice but being given no promotion-earning credit for its implementation. So in 1981 the strategic decision was taken to seek business in the UK and to access the European market. Bain's London landlord was Isadore (Sir) Jack Lyons, an 'influencer', philanthropist and benefactor of Covent Garden's Royal Opera House, The fatal flaw lay in the first choice of new overseas client, which was Guinness, seeking advice on its desire for expansion beyond mere brewing. After a bruising takeover fight Guinness acquired the Bells scotch whisky business. Shortly afterwards the Argyll supermarket chain bid for Distillers which owned a portfolio of storied whisky and other brands, competed with Bells' only two whisky brands and was feared would affect prices accordingly. By 1985 Bain had persuaded Ernest Saunders the ambitious CEO of Guinness to recommend to his board a bid for the far larger Distillers group. This resulted in Guinness defeating Argyll's bid. However the UK antitrust commission called the bid in for exceeding the 25% monopoly scotch distribution market barrier. Argyll then increased its bid above Guinness, who then submitted a counter-bid. So Bain convinced Sir Jack Lyons to write to UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who got it cleared with the regulator. But then Argyll raised its bid again, causing Guinness to seek to manipulate its share price upwards. At which point Argyll 'shorted' Guinness' stock.

Illegally, Guinness bribed investors it convinced to buy stock to prop up its price, which Guinness would 'hedge'. Sir Jack was funded by Bain consulting fees charged to Guinness, while notorious property developer Gerald Ronson and City stockbroker Tony Parnes, known as 'The Animal' also contributed. Guinness won the fight for Distillers but the fallout from the victory was chastening for the corrupt investors. Later known as the 'Guinness Four', all except Lyons, who was fined £ 3 million, were jailed for up to five years, in Saunders' case, but each served only from six to eleven months actual incarceration. Bain was paid some £ 20 million for its advice, while its managing consultant for the Guinness takeover Olivier Roux gained immunity from prosecution by providing evidence in testimony at court (once he received Bain's consulting fee of just under $1 million before departing). £ 25 million in 'fees' had been paid to the investors Ronson, Parnes and others in bribes. Bain's reputation suffered, employees departed and in the early 1990 s it was close to bankruptcy when Bill Bain resigned and Mitt Romney took over and the firm recovered.

However, by 2022 Bain & Co. was once again caught up in a huge international scandal, this time in UK and South Africa. As we shall see next, bribery and corruption have been rife on massively over-priced contracts in restructuring South African government administration (Bain) and infrastructure renewal (McKinsey). In Bain's case the firm has been barred from tendering for UK government contracts for three years after its "grave professional misconduct" in South Africa's biggest post-apartheid corruption scandal. A South African judicial commission investigating 'state capture' and corruption concluded there had been 'collusion' between Bain and the former South African president Jacob Zuma to reshape entire sectors of the economy. The commission found that between 2012 and 2015, Bain helped draw up plans to 'seize and restructure' the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and centralise procurement procedures. SARS found that in 2015 Bain & Company billed $11 million for consulting projects, where the firm gave bad advice. The scandal had rendered the company's integrity 'questionable' and the UK government was not convinced it had taken its role in the scandal 'sufficiently seriously'. Accordingly, all UK government departments were informed that Bain and its affiliates should be excluded from tendering for contracts for the three-year period.

McKinsey's corrupt practices in South Africa were outlined in Yun et al. (2022) but are here briefly rehearsed. The South African branch of McKinsey & Company was charged with corruptly advising the country's state-owned freight rail and port operator (Transnet). In 2022 it was the first time in McKinsey's 96-year history that the firm had faced criminal charges, having sought to provide restitution to the State Capture Commission of the ill-gotten gains from its role in South Africa's 'state capture' scandal under the corrupt regime of President Jacob Zuma, also involving Bain & Co. Returning to McKinsey & Co, it agreed to repay tens of millions of dollars in fees to South Africa over alleged irregularities in some of its railway renewal contracts in the country. As Bogdanich and Forsythe (2022) describe it, the firm had by 2014 contracted to Transnet for responsibility to secure – *without* confirmed orders – the supply of 1064 new locomotives at a price of $2.6 billion, later to rise 'inexplicably' to $3.6 billion. Farcically, they were guided by earlier purchase for only $200 million of new locomotives by South Africa's Passenger Rail Authority. When the first items were delivered, the locomotives were too tall to pass under South Africa's railway bridges and had to be auctioned off. For McKinsey's much larger deal, thereafter, with one of its local partner contractors having charged $420 million for the rail contract and another up to $700 million for a power network contract, in 2016, McKinsey's repaid $100 million to South Africa's Commission of Inquiry into State Capture while claiming it had not been complicit in the tainted contracts. Subsequently, in 2019 McKinsey's struck a $15 m. settlement with the US Department of Justice to resolve claims that it had failed to properly disclose conflicts of interest in bankruptcy cases. It was then that it also settled claims by US jurisdictions it 'turbocharged' the sale of opioid OxyContin by now-bankrupt manufacturer Purdue Pharma worth $600 million, which contributed to 750,000 US deaths.

Two further global management consultancy or P-KIBS worth tracking for their recent vicissitudes, are Boston Consulting Group and Arthur D. Little. In 2020, three major global consulting firms - Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey Consultants & PricewaterhouseCoopers - were implicated in assisting Isabel dos Santos, daughter of the former president of Angola, become a billionaire allegedly b y plundering state coffers. Details were revealed through a trove of 715,000 confidential financial and business records, provided to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), through the Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa. The Angolan government awarded a company controlled by dos Santos and her mother a 24.5% share in the Angola Selling Corporation with an exclusive licence to market Angolan diamonds, while her husband bought a stake in De Grisogono, the Swiss luxury jeweller, in partnership with Sodiam, the Angolan state diamond company, with a $4 million of a €5million 'success fee'. President dos Santos also gave a number of lucrative contracts such as a $15 billion deal to redevelop Areia Branca a fishing village for a $1.3billion luxury resort in Luanda, the Angolan capital, to two companies controlled by his daughter: Landscape and Urbinveste. In partnership with Dutch dredging firm Van Oord. The Luanda Tourist Agency and the Angolan government Luanda Planning Agency awarded a £ 615 million contract to Urbinveste and Van Oord. In 2015, KPMG in Portugal drafted a business case promoting the project for $315,000. Consultant PwC advised Urbinveste on how to route payments to Van Oord through Dubai to access U.S. dollars and lower its tax bill. Account managers at the Cape Verde branch of Lisbon-based Banco BIC, partly owned by dos Santos, processed payments to project consultants. In May 2019 a new President cancelled the contracts for Luanda's resort, criticising them as overpriced, saving Angola's coffers $380 million. Dos Santos and Van Oord denied overpricing. Two years earlier, BCG's Lisbon offices were raided by Portuguese police after a local client became the subject of a corruption inquiry after long-term BCG client Energias de Portugal's CEO was named as a suspect in an ongoing bribery investigation, law enforcement agents searched the consultancy's Lisbon office in June, 2017.

What is the scale and profile of management consultancy?

It will be recalled that Figure 1 showed the longevity of the main management consultancies over most of the twentieth century. In 2002 Figure 2 features one of the oldest US management consultancies, Arthur D. Little (ADL), which filed for bankruptcy protection prior to being acquired for $71 million by financier Cerberus Capital Management, which also assisted Monitor unsuccessfully to avoid the same fate. The firm had finally had to face its traditional weakness which was its failure to convert research into meaningful revenue. More importantly, the management team had mismanaged the company's core business and engaged in 'manipulation' of their Memorial Drive Trust pension fund. The firm also suffered from the simultaneous effects of the dot.com bubble on technology sector activity. This all led to the 'kaleidoscope' referred to earlier: first in 1972 ADL acquired leading Cambridge UK technology firm Cambridge Consultants. After the bankruptcy the US ADL assets were acquired by TIAX while the non-US assets and the ADL name were bought by Paris-based Altran, including Cambridge Consultants. Subsequently Altran was bought by Capgemini Engineering, also of Paris, comprising acquiree Gemini Computer Systems of New York, with Sogeti being the originally French acquirer of CAP in 1974. Later, in 1981 CapGemini acquired London and leading European management software firm Hoskyns. Capgemini later changed its identity when in 2019 it acquired French technology consultancy Altran but in 2019 changed back to Capgemini Engineering. Its strategic acquisition and alliance growth strategy had earlier emerged through its partnership with Schneider Electric, acquirer in 2022 of leading Cambridge UK energy, industrial and infrastructure software firm Aveva for £ 9.9 billion.

Fig. 2 shows the evolution of management consultancies from 1893 when Frederick Taylor set up as a Consulting Engineer in Germantown, Philadelphia -

- Morris Cooke, who launched his own firm in 1905
- Arthur D. Little, whose chemical analysis firm started in the1910s
- Edwin Booz, who founded a consulting firm in 1914

through to the 2020 s era when the industry evolved into three tiers of consultancies due to technological change creating opportunity for firms like Accenture (former Arthur Andersen), BearingPoint (former KPMG Consulting), IBM and others that were willing to conduct technology implementation commissions. After 1999, *accounting* firms also slowly started to expand their services, adding consulting arms. The 'big four' firms — KPMG, Ernst & Young, Deloitte and PwC — added technology consulting and eventually, strategy consulting, leading to the following three-tier structure.

- *Tier 1* (Large-High Prestige): McKinsey, Bain & BCG dominate the strategy consulting industry with massive profits, growth rates and prestige among executives
- *Tier 2* (Medium-Large + Low Prestige): A second tier of Strategy& (PWC); KPMG Strategy; Deloitte Consulting; EY-Parthenon with large consulting divisions that are able to compete broadly with much more global coverage than the big strategy firms, but tend not to get the best work
- *Tier 3* (Boutique + High Prestige): Small firms like L.E.K; ADL; Booz Allen; A.T. Kearney; Roland Berger that opted not to pursue being acquired and operate at a smaller scale but with higher levels of prestige than the large consulting firms

We can conclude that with variations such as Bain's tradition of 'one industry, one firm' and 'relationship consulting' compared to McKinsey's insouciance towards 'conflicts of interest,' which is much copied in the accounting as well as the management consultancy business, client 'tethering' prevails. Typically most KIBS firms are, in one way or another, keen to identify client balance sheet problems in one contract, then extend the relationship with further contracts providing advice on how to solve them. Classically, the McKinsey playbook has, notably in the neo-liberal period since about 1980, been followed: thus first, charge overpriced fees; second, maximise shareholder value (including management returns); third, cut costs, especially the cost of labour; fourth, constrain health and safety costs through influencing legislators to deregulate; finally, advise minimal compliance with or interest in sustainability issues. The sharp and shiny scissors on the cover of Bogdanich and Forsythe (2022) symbolises the mantra perfectly.

Testing the pattern recognition profile: a reprise of academic literature

We now turn in this section to an appreciation of the work of academics in this broadly economic and economic geography field of interest. Triangulation of this kind is part of the validity testing of the 'pattern recognition' inferences. Here we essay a necessarily brief, if representative, report into academic research on such firms as have been discussed under the heading of knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) of various kinds. These nowadays include C-KIBS (creatives), P-KIBS or legal, accounting and management service consultancies compared with specialist technology or T-KIBS firms like the above-mentioned Accenture, BearingPoint and IBM plus many other technology small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Such reviewing is to assess whether and why, or why not, any significant differences from the above fairly 'dark' pattern prevails in scholarly research. It has been suggested that the KIBS terminology arose from a European Commission (1995) document. Bettencourt et al. (2002) held that: '. clients routinely play a critical role in co-producing the service solution along with the service provider. have a profound effect on both the quality of the service delivered as well as the client's ultimate satisfaction.' with the service provided. Data we have examined on management consultant performance clearly differs markedly from this Panglossian perspective as various court cases, corruption trials and jail-terms experienced by KIBS advisers and clients testify. In a technical review of the evolving variety of KIBS research by one of its pioneers Miles et al. (2018) concluded 'Much of this [KIBS] work focuses on their behaviour and relationships; rather less on the actual activities they perform, and competences they bring to bear.'.

Starting with T-KIBS, a study revealed that geographical proximity to KIBS clients is important in technology-related industries. Even tourism policies that enhance city reputation can be included in cities' strategies designed for T-KIBS. Accordingly, urban policy-makers do not need to improve all conditions to improve city competitiveness to attract T-KIBS firms (Torres and Godinho, 2019). Aslesen and Jakobsen (2007) had earlier found urban proximity was key to smooth interaction between head offices and KIBS firms, as did Corrocher and Cusmano (2014) in their study of KIBS as key players in innovation systems, particularly in advanced regions where manufacturing competitiveness largely depends on knowledge content provided by highly specialized suppliers. But none of these nor many others inquired about the nature of transaction relationships, corporate and supplier contractual relations or critical assessments of outcomes from such interactions. In other words such T-KIBS and quasi-T-KIBS relations are never demonstrated to be enough due to proximity alone. Alternatively, another KIBS pioneer Pim den Hertog studied the 'symbiotic' supplier-client co-production relationship but found it worked somewhat but for process-oriented *intangible* rather than product or service *tangible* knowledge. Herstad and Ebersberger (2015) also tested the Bettencourt et al. (2002) 'co-production thesis' that provision of advanced business services is fundamentally a process of knowledge co-production with clients, but found it overshadowed by more distant specialist needs. Accordingly, we are no nearer to Bettencourt et al.'s (2002) assertion that such proximate 'co-production' activity has 'a profound effect. on the client's ultimate satisfaction'. Rather the reader is left to assume T-KIBS are positioned more at the 'Light' Triad side of the spectrum of 'sweetness and light' rather than 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' which might be concluded from our often 'darker' portrayal of closed KIBS supplier and client relations.

There is less research on an important part of our concern in this contribution, which is 'Creative Economy' or C-KIBS client-supplier interaction and outcome satisfaction. An article that contributes directly to this 'satisfaction' issue is Navarro et al. (2016) using qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). Theirs is a study exploring the relationship between value co-creation and customer satisfaction in spa services. The sample consisted of hotel clients that used the spa service. In value co-creation, customer satisfaction is presumed essential for companies' success. The research results were, however bifurcated: meaning, users reporting satisfaction were those who either helped other customers and were tolerant, or those who helped or gave feedback to employees (what we would call 'Light' or even 'altruistic' psychological traits). Users reporting dissatisfaction did not display responsible behaviour, did not recommend the service, and did not share either information or feedback with employees. So secrecy, intransparency and uncommunicativeness were 'darker' (cf. McKinsey or Bain) than more tolerant, open or humane interlocutors ('crooked timber' 'cosmopolitans' – no KIBS examples). Novelli et al. (2006) inquired of SME suppliers when tourism is dominated by requests for tailored experiences, providing satisfying products and services to tourists, by responding to their most specific requirements, in particular Healthy Lifestyle Tourism in Brighton and East Sussex. Results showed that for suppliers dedicated to a 'commons' style of commitment (Yun et al., 2022) towards co-operation, results were intrinsically satisfactory. However, clients were more satisfied when offered greater variety of diet, exercise, local food and wine experiences which could only work where agglomeration 'synergies' evolved. Some SME network participants found such requirements too demanding and exited or stood back from involvement in such 'co-production'. But the former C-KIBS providers expressed satisfaction with their innovation and customers with their variety of experiences. Finally, although favouring the growth trajectory of T-KIBS as dynamic in overall KIBS growth in London, Wood (2009) realised at the conclusions of his study that:

> 'Innovative business services may also be more 'creative' than technological. Advertising and marketing, for example, are particularly concentrated into London, and even Manchester currently attracts only modest levels of activity. KIBS need to be associated with the current enthusiasm for 'creative industry' strategies, including multimedia associated with TV, radio and film production, Web-based enterprise, and the arts (Rantinsi et.al, 2006)'.

In other words, 'seeing like a city' rather than a more impersonal 'seeing like a state' (Scott, 1998) is superior in that the city is more practically, day-to-day cosmopolitan and tolerant as the 'crooked timber' of social life rubs personalities up against each other rather like a Jane Jacobs 'urban walking festival' experience (Jacobs, 1961). That is more preferable than the silo-like obtuseness, confidentiality and secretiveness of the apparently paranoid P-KIBS firms the narrative of this contribution somewhat sadly conveys. However, generally academic KIBS research is customer-focused and producers are SMEs.

Some 'creative economy' mis-steps at the behest of C-KIBS

We have reached the penultimate part of this narrative critique of the creative economy and regional development by deploying 'pattern recognition' that largely explains the pernicious effects of globally-active KIBS management consultancies in the destruction of this planet's sustainable condition. This has occurred because they are leading 'agents' of the neoliberal advisory promotion of: maximising shareholder and management return from profit extraction; driving out labour cost and living labour from production processes; further driving down production costs of goods and services by lobbying regulators to weaken health and safety standards; and trivialising environmental, social and governance (ESG) concerns to clients thereby fomenting vast and global life-chance inequalities. To complete this remit to study the 'dark side' of 'creativity and regions' by focusing on the 'agentic' role of management consulting in many undesirable facets of contemporary 'late capitalism' (Mandel, 1975) we identified C-KIBS under the sprawlingly unchallenging academic literature on knowledge-intensive business services as the 'creative' variant. In the remaining space for this paper three illustrations of C-KIBS drivers of their dystopia are briefly illustrated. The first is 'fast fashion'; the second is 'cruise tourism'; and the third is 'climate killer' architecture.

Management consultancy and fast fashion

There are innumerable up-to-date fast fashion reports online to be sourced from McKinsey & Co. among the four main C-KIBS apologists including our other KIBS familiars, Bain & Co, Boston Consulting Group and Accenture (formerly the disgraced accountant Arthur Andersen). Parsing some of their nine reports for 2021–2, the following may be concluded about their planet-destroying hegemony. The most recent, at this writing, dated 29 November 2022, sees the industry in general 'Holding onto growth as storm clouds gather.' The storm clouds in question: 'Hyperinflation and depressed customer sentiments have already resulted in declining growth. likely to continue through 2023′ (Amed et al., 2022). However the luxury sector is expected to thrive as wealthy shoppers continue to travel and spend, especially in China (McKinsey expected luxury sector growth rate 9%−14%; Bloomberg GDP expectation 4.5%) and the USA (McKinsey luxury growth expectation 5%−10%; expected US GDP 2023, 0.8%, SPF estimate). Meanwhile Europe remained in the doldrums from 'currency rates' and the 'energy crisis' with luxury growth expectations projected at only 3%−8%. McKinsey expected the general fashion market – luxury excluded – to struggle, dragged down by Europe to between − 2% and + 3%. Fashion leaders also worried about their supply chains, disrupted by bad weather (climate change?), Covid-19 in China and the war in Ukraine. Luxury shoppers will be spending 'largely' as before, insulated from any slowdown. Accordingly, 2023 expectations were: global fragility; regional uncertainty; bargain-hunting; gender-fluidity; more renting of formal wear; direct-to-consumer downturn; more 'greenwashing' scrutiny; nearshoring; metaverse; and new C-suite 'sustainability' talent recruitment.

Clearly, crisis clarified KIBS advice conditions to re-emphasise the retreat to luxury and curtailment of fast fashion, though this was never stated. However, it was stressed precisely in another McKinsey article, albeit of 2016:

> 'Fast fashion has been a particularly hot segment and a source of enviable growth for some clothing companies. By compressing production cycles and turning out up-to-the-minute designs, these businesses have enabled shoppers not only to expand their wardrobes but also to refresh them quickly.' (Remy et al., 2016)

This had resulted in 'good' results with production doubling and garments purchased per capita up by 60% from 2000 to 2014. Here comes the contradiction: on the one hand, consumers keep clothing items about half as long as they did 15 years ago and clothing sales could rise significantly if developing-country consumers choose to buy more clothing as their purchasing power increases. But, on the other hand, if 80% of the population of emerging markets achieved the same clothing-consumption levels as the Western world by 2025, and the apparel industry does not become more environmentally efficient, then the environmental footprint of the apparel industry will become much larger. So what is to be done? As Lenin might have said. Cotton uses masses of water, pesticides, and fertilizer, clothing relies mainly on fossil fuels for energy and 1 kg of fabric generates an average of 23 kg of greenhouse gases. The following are recommended: (1)Develop standards (2) Invest in new fibres: but unfortunately the Sustainable Apparel's (SAC) Higg Index was suspended in June 2022 for its unsustainability biases; (3) use low-energy garment care; (4) raise wages and conditions; (5) engage suppliers. Outlawing these might have been more effective than 'blame the victims' platitudes.

Regarding Bain, BCG and Accenture on fast fashion, Bain is an undiluted apologist for its one firm/one industry favourite Zara. Over the past 44 years, Inditex Group global retailer Zara has captured a major share of a diverse market, growing to more than 2200 stores. During its time it has experienced fast growth and the highest profit margin among its peers in the fast-fashion industry (see Fig. 3).

Accordingly, the retailer's speed of market response and logistics have conditioned customer behaviour: customers expect frequently updated designs and are conscious popular items will be available only for a limited time. As a result, Zara customers visit their stores four times as often as lower-speed retailers (Figure 3). BCG, reporting on the resale market perceived it as three times its scale in 2019, which indicated sensitivity but along with its resale study partner Vestiaire Collective, Boston Consulting Group (BCG) expected the resale market to grow by 126% by 2026. However the exemplars included Isabel Marant, Balenciaga (disgraced for child abuse; Petter, 2022), Selfridges and Net-a--Porter's integrated resale platforms to monetise their luxury, albeit second-hand brands. Finally, Accenture (2022), as befits a former accountancy KIBS, concentrates on what it sees as six barriers currently blocking change agency in fast fashion: strategic thinking (sustainability equal to shareholder value – unlikely?); delivering value (no more 'cheap and cheerful'); overconsumption (stop Aral Sea drying up); common standards (again; but 'the creation of a garment is a global event'?); sustainability audits expensive and complex (accountancy issues); not fast but 'frumpish' fashion (more accounting tools needed). This must strike the reader as similar to the Abraham Maslow quote: 'To the man who only has a hammer, everything he encounters begins to look like a nail.' (Maslow, 1966).

Management consultancy and cruise tourism

Management consultancy in the cruise ship tourism industry is common but specialised, with dedicated counselling for operators and passengers. However, Bain & Co. revealed an interest in welcoming the new, since re-named Virgin Cruises into the market quoting Sir Richard Branson, "We plan to shake up the cruise industry and deliver a holiday that customers will absolutely love. They'll be sailing on the latest ships

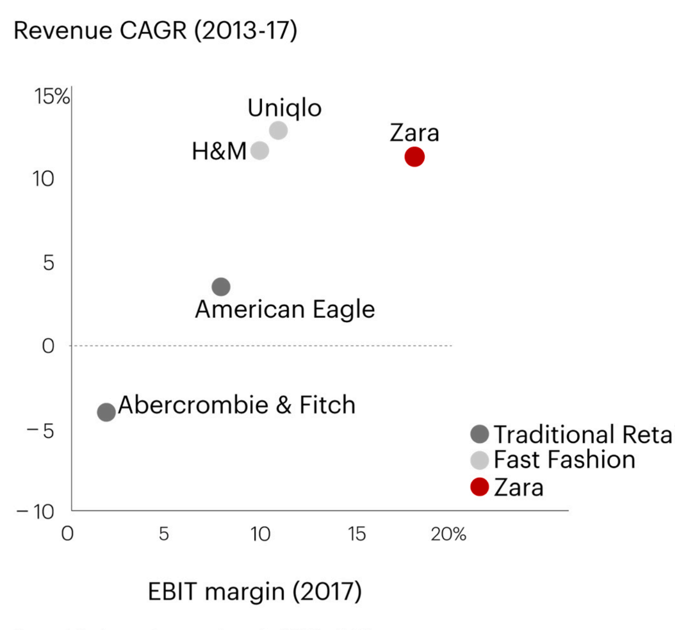

Fig. 3. Bain Fast Fashion Revenue and Margins, 2017.

offering great quality, a real sense of fun, and many exciting activities all delivered with the famed Virgin service." (Bain and Co, 2014). The latter foresaw the likely impact upon the traditional version of the cruise as a luxury experience with a bizarre encomium for Virgin Voyages 'disrupting' the traditional kiddy-infested waters with tattoo artists and hipster vinyl. Although digital booking had expanded choices in the travel sector, 'the path to purchase had become an ever more complicated odyssey' (Kleweno et al., 2019). 'Insurgent brands' have grown rapidly by designing their entire marketing strategy around a focused set of needs, like Airbnb noticed an unmet craving for connection in the accommodation market. Less noticed is how the depredations of the cruise ship industry (and Airbnb) on overtouristed cities like Barcelona, Florence and Venice forced the, to introduce protective measures. These were to prevent the literal undermining of their monuments by cruise tourists in, for instance, Venice's Giudecca canal, forcing passengers to embark and disembark from the less than scenic petrochemicals port of Mestre across the Venice lagoon, necessitated to protect the UNESCO-designated attraction from the ships' massive bow-waves and crowds. The 2019 report continued 'Virgin Voyages. emphasized how it will break with tradition by not having children, buffets or water slides on its vessels when it sets sail in 2020.[but a] fun tone through innovations such as onboard tattoo artists and vinyl record shops. These are higher-order needs, not basic wants' (Kleweno et al., 2019). The floating tattoo-parlour was thus fixed in the Bain world-view as a higher-order need than solving the climate change crisis contributed to by cruise ship tourism.

The 'Climate killer' art museum MegaProject

McKinsey's reverence for post-state (parastatal) or 'agentic' governance is founded on exemplars from urban and regional 'creative' planning like the Basque parastatal Metropoli-30 which pioneered the 'Bilbao effect' through 'starchitect' Frank Gehry's canonical design of the Guggenheim museum. The agency also overhauled the province's shipping, rail, urban-infrastructure, and cultural strategies. McKinsey also extolled Songdo's smart city in Korea labelled by urbanists as a 'stupefying city' designed by a parastatal partnership of IBM and Cisco Systems (Cooke, 2022). "It is no wonder then that mayors are increasingly referred to as the "CEO of the city." (Khanna, 2012). The Herzog and de Meuron partnership are two of the world's 'starchitects'. They have won the US Pritzker Prize and Japan's Praemium Imperiale. Global success as designers grew following London's Tate Modern, Beijing's Bird's Nest Olympic Stadium and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie after years building modernist buildings in their home city of Basel, Switzerland. But their new Messe Basel trade fair hall and its Roche Tower have been criticized for dominating the skyline of their home town. The tower of the new Biozentrum at the University of Basel, which is 70 m high and even farther away from the Old Town, has been described by the president of the City Planning Commission as ".barely tolerable! When it comes to architecture and city planning, you can't lie. The urban, social and ecological consequences have to be clearly communicated". But, Herzog objects, "The new trade fair hall also comes with a bonus. a covered plaza under the building. [earning]. public acceptance of other large-scale projects like all the new high-rise buildings that are currently planned in Basel. Besides, it makes sense to concentrate workplaces. One might say that the premises of the Messe and of the pharmaceutical companies are "global cities within a local city," (Herzog and Meyer, 2013), Possibly this sounds rather authoritarian but with little respect towards the post-Covid 'digital decentralisation' of work, less commuting, pollution and embodied CO2 sustainability issues. But in 2022 Herzog and de Meuron suffered their worst critique for designing their 'Climate Killer' art 'Museum of the 20th Century' megaproject in Berlin. It is castigated by architectural critics and conservationists for its poor energy and environmental credentials as both crises worsen. Its cost rose from €179 m. to €450 m. The main criticisms are of its use of concrete, which emits the most carbon into the atmosphere and its open structure that needs expensive ventilation for temperature and humidity control. It requires 450 kW hours per sq.m., four times Berlin's Altes Museum built in 1830 (Connolly, 2022).

Conclusions

In the main, there are three of these showing up frequently in our 'pattern recognition' exercise. Recall the underlying idea was to seek to penetrate beneath the management consultancy rhetoric by means of which it engages clients with its persuasive discourse and technology as 'agentic' activist, 'influencers' (Yallop, 2021) towards political guardians of taxpayers' increasingly scarce public and social investment resources. We found some five lineaments of this essentially 'false' hegemony, in some cases almost comedic, if it were not so tragic. The first infraction is the privileging of shareholder and managerial reward structures as bribes that keep such beneficiaries persuaded repeatedly to re-invest in the often dysfunctional message. Second, to mobilise the resources to pay for the astronomical fees invoked, key advice is consistently to reduce client workforces, reduce related labour costs and generally seek automation, including robotics to replace labour. Third, and closely connected, is the implication that health and safety standards should be relaxed for remaining labour until ultimately robots will have rendered health and safety regulations redundant. Fourth, the misconduct that we have reported upon consistently arises from an entitled, privileged and narcissistic, often 'dark'- including Machiavellian, outlook on the consultancy world in which they operate – including advising on normally relatively benignly motivated 'creative' societal enhancements. Finally, as a standard advice, the observer hunts tirelessly to discover any meaningful sustainability discourse other than the most superficial, meaningless or unchallenging 'greenwash'. Our strong recommendation is that 'agentic' intervention in public affairs of the kind we have investigated needs dissipation as entropy takes its natural course. In Mazzucato and Collington (2023) published after this contribution was written, they recommend is strengthening the civil service, rebuilding internal capacity within government, improving the process of contracting and evaluation of outsourced outcomes, and requiring consultancies to disclose conflicts of interest when they bid for public sector work. They also stress improving the process of procurement, contracting and evaluation is surely an easy decision.

Author contribution

The draft is completed by the author own.

Funding

This study is one of SOI 2024 conference keynote speech paper and will be supported by Society of Open Innovation: Technology, Market and Complexity(SOI).

Ethical statement

Not applicable because this study did not involve the use of animal or human subjects.

Declaration of Competing Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

References

Accenture, 2022. Threads that Bind: Transforming the Fashion Supply Chain through Transparency and Traceability. Transforming the Fashion Supply Chain | Accenture.
Amed, I., André, S., Balchandani, A., Berg, A., Rölkens, F., 2022. The State of Fashion 2023: Holding on to growth as storm clouds gather. BoF and McKinsey & Co., London & New York.

Aslesen, H., Jakobsen, S., 2007. The role of proximity and knowledge interaction between head offices and KIBS. Tijdschr. Voor Econ. En. Soc. Geogr. 98 (2), 188–201. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2007.00391.x.

Bain & Co. (2014) Virgin Group Announces Plans to Make Waves in the Cruise Industry, Boston, Bain & Co. https://www.baincapital.com/news/virgin-group.

Bettencourt, L., Ostrom, A., Brown, S., Roundtree, R., 2002. Client co-production in knowledge-intensive business services. Calif. Manag. Rev. 44 (4), 100–128. https://doi.org/10.2307/41166145.

Bogdanich, W., Forsythe, M., 2022. When McKinsey Comes to Town: The Hidden Influence of the World's Most Powerful Consulting Firm. Bodley Head, London.

Broderson, M., Heller, J., Perrey, J. and Remley, J. (2017) "Creativity's Bottom Line: How winning companies turn creativity into business value and growth", McKinsey Quarterly, June 16, https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital.

Cahill, H. (2022) Bulb's tech assets sold to creditor, The Times, December 8, 41.

Connolly, K. (2022) Critics call for pause on 'climate killer' art museum project, The Guardian, 28 November, 37, ⟨https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-guardian⟩.

Cooke, P. (2013) 'Eventually even attractive illusions come to an end': the death of Monitor -- and demise of 'clusters'? in Fornahl, D. and Hassink, R. (eds.) The Life Cycle of Clusters: A Policy Perspective, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, pp. 258–274.

Cooke, P., 2019. Responsible research and innovation? From FinTech's 'flash crash' at Cermak to digitech's Willow Campus and Quayside. Eur. Plan. Stud. 27 (12), 2376–2393. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2018.155661.

Cooke, P., 2021a. Three disruptive models of new spatial planning: "attention", "surveillance" or "sustainable" capitalisms? J. Open Innov., Technol., Mark. Complex. 7 (1), 45, 1033901/joitmc70190046.

Cooke, P., 2021b. After the contagion. Ghost city centres: closed 'smart' or open greener? Sustainability 13 (6). https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063071.

Cooke, P., 2022. Callous optimism: on some wishful thinking 'blowbacks' undermining sdg spatial policy. Sustainability 14, x https://doi.org/10.3390/xxxxx.

Cooke, P., in R. Boix & L. Lazzeretti (2024) The KIBS Scandal: Destructive Agents of Creative Economies and Regional Sustainability, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Cooke, P. and F. Kitagawa (2013) From state to market via corruption, in Sugden, R, Valania, M. and Wilson, J. (eds), Leadership and Cooperation in Academia. Reflecting on the Roles and Responsibilities of University Faculty and Management, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 70–87.

Corrocher, N., Cusmano, L., 2014. The 'KIBS engine' of regional innovation systems: empirical evidence from European regions. Reg. Stud. 48.7 (2014), 1212–1226.

Florida, R., 2017. The New Urban Crisis. Basic Books,, New York.

Giddens, A. (2006) The colonel and his third way, The New Statesman, accessed February 13, 2015 at http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2014/04/colonel-and-his-third-way.

Herstad, S., Ebersberger, B., 2015. On the link between urban location and the involvement of knowledge-intensive business services firms in collaboration networks. Reg. Stud. 49 (7), 1160–1175. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2013.816413.

Herzog, J. and H. Meyer (2013) Très Difficile (after Corbusier): Interview of Jacques Herzog with Ulf Meyer, Très difficile (English) - HERZOG & DE MEURON (herzogdemeuron.com).

Jacobs, J., 1961. The Death and Life of Great American Cities. Vintage, New York.

Khanna, P., 2012. The Rise of Hybrid Governance. McKinsey & Co., London.

Kiese, M., 2019. Regional cluster policies in Germany: challenges, impacts and evaluation practices. J. Technol. Transf. 44, 1698–1719. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10961-017-9589-5.

Kirkland, R. (2013) Building the Creative Economy: An interview with Richard Florida, New York, McKinsey & Co. ⟨https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/⟩.

Kleweno, P., Venkataraman, K. and L. Beaudin (2019) Today's Traveler: Infinite Paths to Purchase, Bain & Co, Washington and San Francisco.

Konigsberg, D., Thorne, S., 2021. Women in the Boardroom: a Global Perspective, seventh ed. Deloitte Global Boardroom Program, London.

Mandel, E., 1975. Late Capitalism. Verso, London.

Maslow, H., 1966. The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance. Harper & Row, New York.

Mazzucato, M., Collington, R., 2023. *Allen* lane the big con: how the consulting industry weakens our businesses. Infantilizes our Governments and Warps our Economies London. Allen Lane,.

Miles, I., Belousova, V. and Chichkanov, N. (2018). "Knowledge-Intensive Business Services: Ambiguities and Continuities" Foresight. https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-10-2017-0058.

Navarro, S., Llinares Millán, C., Garzon, D., 2016. Exploring the relationship between co-creation and satisfaction using QCA. J. Bus. Res. 69 (4), 1336–1339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.10.103.

Novelli, M., Schmitz, B., Spencer, T., 2006. Networks, clusters and innovation in tourism: A UK experience. Tour. Manag. 27, 1141–1152.

O'Shea, J., Madigan, C., 1999. Dangerous Company: The Consulting Powerhouses and the Businesses They Save and Ruin. Nicholas Brealey, London.

Petter, O. (2022) Fashion thrives on backlash – the Balenciaga 'child abuse' scandal won't change that, The Independent, December 1, https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/balenciaga.

Rantinsi, N., Leslie, D., Christopherson, S., 2006. Placing the creative economy: scale, politics, and the material. Environ. Plan. A 38 (10), 1789–1797.

Remy, N., Speelman, E., Swartz, S., 2016. Style that's sustainable: A new fast-fashion formula. McKinsey & Co, Paris, Amsterdam and Los Angeles.

Schwab, K. (2017) The Fourth Industrial Revolution, Davos, World Economic Forum.

Scott, J., 1998. Seeing Like a State. Yale University Press, New Haven.

Shackleton, L., 2012. Women on Boards. February 8. Institute of Economic Affairs, London.

Soete, L. (2012) Maastricht Reflections on Innovation, UNU-MERIT Working Paper 2012–01, Maastricht University, UNU-MERIT.

Torres, P., Godinho, P., 2019. The influence of city reputation on T-KIBS concentration. Eur. Plan. Stud. 1960–1978. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1700484.

Wood, P., 2009. Service competitiveness and urban innovation policies in the uk: the implications of the 'london paradox. Reg. Stud. 43 (8), 1047–1059. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343400801968437.

World Economic Forum, 2018. Creative Destruction: The impact of emerging technologies on the creative economy. World Economic Forum, Davos.

Yallop, O., 2021. Break the Internet in Pursuit of Influence. Scribe, London.

Yun, J., Cooke, P., Yeung, K., Yang, B., 2022. Theme issue: open innovation and 'catch-up': globalist or localist? Eur. Plan. Stud. 31 (1) https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2022.2146942.