

N. Shedenova^{1*}, A. Yessenamanov¹, N. Omuraliev²

¹Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

²Center for Social Research, Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

*e-mail: nshedenova@gmail.com

CREATIVE CLASS IN A MODERN CITY: THE PARADIGMATIC MODEL OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION FACTORS

The creative class is a new factor in shaping the social, economic and cultural spheres of the city, influencing its attractiveness to talents and the comfort of living. The purpose of the study is to analyze the factors of institutionalization and development of the creative class in Almaty, the largest metropolis in Kazakhstan. The theoretical framework of this study is the theories of Richard Florida's creative class and Charles Landry's creative city. The main ideas of the study: the creative class in Kazakhstan is insufficiently institutionalized, the city of Almaty is an important center of innovation and creativity in Kazakhstan, which has the potential to institutionalize the creative class due to the concentration of the infrastructure of creative industries, therefore, the phenomenon of the creative class has positive consequences for Almaty as a creative center. The scientific significance lies in the fact that theoretical knowledge about the possibilities of developing the potential of Almaty as a center of attraction for creative talents has been expanded and supplemented. The practical significance lies in the fact that the in-depth expert information obtained will be used to develop recommendations on support measures for the further institutionalization of the creative class in Almaty. A qualitative method was used for this study – an expert interview. To analyze the expert interview, the methodology of grounded theory was applied, which is a set of inductive procedures aimed at climbing from unstructured data to their conceptualization. As a result, a paradigmatic model was constructed that demonstrates the logical relationship of the central categories identified during the analysis. The conducted research proves the applicability of the theories about the creative class of R. Florida and C. Landry in the Kazakh context, namely, the existence of a creative class in Almaty and the city of Almaty as a center of attraction for creators. This study revealed a logical connection between the factors of institutionalization of the creative class in the city of Almaty. It seems possible to extrapolate the methodology used to identify current trends and missing elements for the full-fledged formation of the creative class in large modern cities.

Keywords: creative class, creative industries, creator, creative city, institutionalization.

Н.У. Шеденова^{1*}, А.Р. Есенаманов¹, Н.А. Омуралиев²

¹Ал-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

²Қырғыз Республикасының Президентіне қарасты Қырғыз Республикасының Ұлттық ғылымдар академиясының Философия институтының Әлеуметтік зерттеулер орталығы, Бішкек, Қырғызстан

*e-mail: nshedenova@gmail.com

Қазіргі заманғы қаладағы креативті класс: институционалдану факторларының парадигмалық моделі

Креативті тап қаланың әлеуметтік, экономикалық және мәдени салаларын қалыптастырудың жаңа факторы болып табылады, оның таланттарға тартымдылығы мен өмір сүру жайлылығына әсер етеді. Зерттеудің мақсаты Қазақстанның ірі мегаполисі Алматы қаласындағы креативті тапты институттандыру және дамыту факторларын талдау болып табылады. Бұл зерттеудің теориялық шеңбері Р. Флориданың креативті табы мен Чарльз Лэндридің креативті қаласының теориялары болып табылады. Зерттеудің негізгі идеялары: Қазақстандағы креативті класс жеткілікті түрде институттандырылмаған, Алматы қаласы креативті индустриялар инфрақұрылымының шоғырлануының арқасында креативті тапты институттандыру әлеуеті бар Қазақстанның инновациялары мен шығармашылығының маңызды орталығы болып табылады, сондықтан креативті класс феномені Алматы үшін креативті орталық ретінде оң салдарға алып келеді. Ғылыми маңыздылығы – креативті таланттарды тарту орталығы ретінде Алматы қаласының әлеуетін дамыту мүмкіндіктері туралы теориялық білім кеңейтіліп, толықтырылды. Практикалық маңыздылығы мынада: алынған терең сараптамалық ақпарат Алматы қаласында креативті тапты одан әрі институционализациялау үшін қолдау шаралары туралы ұсынымдар әзірлеу үшін қолданылатын болады. Бұл зерттеу үшін сапалы әдіс – сараптамалық сұхбат

батты талдау үшін негізделген әдістеме қолданылды теория, бұл құрылымдалмаған деректерден олардың тұжырымдамасына көтерілуге бағытталған индуктивті процедуралар жиынтығы. Нәтижесінде талдау барысында анықталған орталық категориялардың логикалық байланысын көрсететін парадигмалық модель құрылды. Жүргізілген зерттеу Қазақстандық контексте Р. Флорида мен Ч. Лэндридің креативті табы туралы теориялардың ережелерінің қолданылуын, атап айтқанда, Креаторларды тарту орталығы ретінде Алматы қаласы мен Алматы қаласында креативті таптың болуын дәлелдейді. Бұл зерттеу Алматы қаласындағы креативті тапты институционализациялау факторларының логикалық байланысын анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Қазіргі заманғы ірі қалаларда креативті таптың толыққанды қалыптасуы үшін қазіргі тенденциялар мен жетіспейтін элементтерді анықтау үшін қолданылған әдіснаманы экстраполяциялауға болады.

Түйін сөздер: креативті класс, креативті индустриялар, креатор, креативті қала, институционалдану.

Н.У. Шеденова^{1*}, А.Р. Есенаманов¹, Н.А. Омуралиев²

¹Казахский национальный университет им. аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан

²Центр социальных исследований Института философии Национальной академии наук Кыргызской Республики при Президенте Кыргызской Республики, Бишкек, Кыргызстан

*e-mail: nshedenova@gmail.com

Креативный класс в современном городе: парадигмальная модель факторов институционализации

Креативный класс является новым фактором формирования социальной, экономической и культурной сфер города, влияя на его привлекательность для талантов и комфорт проживания. Целью исследования является анализ факторов институционализации и развития креативного класса в городе Алматы, крупнейшем мегаполисе Казахстана. Теоретическими рамками данного исследования выступают теории креативного класса Ричарда Флориды и креативного города Ч.Лэндри. Основные идеи исследования: креативный класс в Казахстане недостаточно институционализирован, город Алматы является важным центром инноваций и творчества Казахстана, который имеет потенциал институционализации креативного класса благодаря средоточию инфраструктуры креативных индустрий, поэтому феномен креативного класса несет в себе положительные последствия для Алматы как креативного центра. Научная значимость заключается в том, что расширены и дополнены теоретические знания о возможностях развития потенциала города Алматы как центра притяжения креативных талантов. Практическая значимость заключается в том, что полученная углубленная экспертная информация будет применена для выработки рекомендаций о мерах поддержки для дальнейшей институционализации креативного класса в городе Алматы. Для данного исследования был применен качественный метод – экспертное интервью. Для анализа экспертного интервью была применена методология обоснованной теории, которая представляет собой набор индуктивных процедур, направленных на восхождение от неструктурированных данных к их концептуализации. В результате была построена парадигмальная модель, демонстрирующая логическую взаимосвязь выявленных в ходе анализа центральных категорий. Проведенное исследование доказывает применимость положений теорий о креативном классе Р. Флориды и Ч. Лэндри в казахстанском контексте, а именно существование креативного класса в городе Алматы и город Алматы как центр притяжения креаторов. Данное исследование позволило выявить логическую связь факторов институционализации креативного класса в г. Алматы. Представляется возможным экстраполировать использованную методологию для выявления текущих тенденций и недостающих элементов для полноценного становления креативного класса в крупных современных городах.

Ключевые слова: креативный класс, креативные индустрии, креатор, креативный город, институционализация.

Introduction

Creative industries are rapidly growing sectors worldwide, attracting creative talent, particularly in large cities. Creative industries represent a collection of professions and employment sectors whose activities occur at the intersection of creativity and entrepreneurship, integrating both approaches into a single direction. The intellectual workforce em-

ployed in creative industries has recently been referred to as the creative class. In modern sociology, the creative class is a subject of research that allows us to identify new trends in stratification processes, social and labor mobility, and forms of employment that define the characteristics of the information society.

The creative class, creative industries, and creative cities have been the subject of research by such

leading academics as R. Florida, J. Hawkins, and C. Landry. Their seminal works examine this topic within a societal context, and their theoretical contributions are broadly applicable to both developed and developing societies, a point confirmed by subsequent scholars. They examined such key aspects as intellectual property, human and cultural capital, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and the multiplier effect of the creative class on the city.

International researchers M. Castells, E. Pratt, E. Amin, and N. Thrift have continued their research into aspects related to the creative development of cities and creative industries in the context of an information-driven and post-industrial society.

Kazakh academics A. Kozhakhmetova, A. Zhiparova, A. Mukusheva, D. Shayakhmet, and N. Goncharova examined the theoretical premises and barriers to the development of creative industries and the development of Kazakhstan's creative economy from an economic perspective.

Currently, the creative class in Kazakhstan, as elsewhere in the world, is experiencing rapid growth. Members of the creative class are beginning to play an increasingly important role in the economies and development of societies, and Kazakhstan is no exception. The development of creative industries in Kazakhstan will create the necessary conditions for the social modernization of society, as this phenomenon creates opportunities for a gradual improvement in the quality of life of relevant urban population groups by increasing their well-being and realizing their creative potential.

However, Kazakhstan's creative industries are underdeveloped compared to countries in Europe and Southeast Asia, where these industries are well-developed. The development and growth of the creative class is directly linked to government support through targeted programs and infrastructure. Currently, the creative class in Kazakhstan is characterized by spontaneous and chaotic institutionalization. Therefore, there is a need for scientific review and study of these processes, particularly from a sociological perspective.

In Kazakhstan, Almaty is the city with the greatest potential for creative industries. The city boasts a large middle class, large educational institutions with a large student population, and self-organized creative groups. However, these movements are spontaneous and non-institutionalized.

Therefore, studying the activities of the creative class in the modern city from the perspective of current social issues is new and necessary, with the development of a new theoretical and methodological

approach to analyzing the current state of the creative class in the city, using Almaty as an example.

Thus, there is a need for a sociological analysis of Almaty's creative class and the problems of its formation, as the creative class is not defined as such at the legislative and scientific levels, nor is it perceived by the public as a distinct socio-professional group. Furthermore, relatively few studies currently examine the formation of the creative class in Kazakhstan, making this dissertation relevant and intended to contribute new information to this issue.

The problem with this research is the lack of relevant sociological research on social groups that differ from the well-known groups of entrepreneurs, cultural workers, and creative professionals, and which, in essence, constitute a distinct social class, referred to in the scientific literature as the "creative class," which requires scientific study.

The research focuses on representatives of the creative class in Almaty, specifically workers employed in the following fields: IT and game development, folk crafts, photography, television programming, architecture and fashion, music, cultural heritage, cultural and leisure institutions, libraries and museums, film and animation, jewelry, and the organization of conferences and trade shows.

Subject: Conditions and factors shaping the creative class in Almaty.

The aim of this study is to analyze the factors that influence the institutionalization of the creative class in a modern city, using Almaty as an example.

To achieve this goal, the following objectives were set:

1. To identify trends in the current state of creative class development in Almaty.
2. To determine the effectiveness of creative industry support measures in Almaty.
3. To construct a paradigmatic model of the relationships between the factors that influence the institutionalization of the creative class in Almaty.

The theoretical approaches chosen include Richard Florida's creative class theory, Charles Landry's creative city theory, and John Hawkins's creative economy theory.

Research question: What factors influence the institutionalization of the creative class in Almaty, leading to it becoming a center of innovation and creativity?

Literature review

Creative industries and the creative class employed within them are playing an increasingly

significant role in the economic and social development of cities and entire countries. The creative class theory, proposed by American urbanist and sociologist Richard Florida in his widely popular 2002 work “The Rise of the Creative Class,” argues that urban economic growth is directly linked to the concentration of creative professionals working in the arts, science, technology, design, and media. He also presented a more comprehensive classification of the occupations employed by members of the creative class. Thanks to Florida, the word “creative” has become firmly established in global, including academic, discourse on creativity. These professionals contribute to economic growth, cultural and social improvement in all countries through innovation, enhancing the competitiveness of cities, and shaping unique urban environments.

R. Florida borrows the concept of social class from Karl Marx. Like Marx, Florida identifies a new, creative class based on the economic factor, which then forms social and cultural superstructures for the class, namely, lifestyle, the way people organize themselves into social groups, identity, tastes, preferences, consumption patterns, and more. However, Florida slightly modifies Marx’s understanding of class for his theory. He does not distinguish class based on the ownership of capital or property. He understands class as “a collection of people who share common interests and tend to think, feel, and behave similarly, but these similarities are fundamentally determined by the economic function – the type of work that provides them with a livelihood. Other features are secondary” (Florida, 2007: 22).

The scholar also uses another term used by K. Marx – “means of production,” but he also reworked it in accordance with his theory: “Now people, to a greater extent than ever, control the means of production because the latter are located in their heads; the brain is the means of production” (Florida, 2007: 51). As V.D. Grigoryan notes, “in a post-industrial society, skills become the means of production, which are effectively inalienable from the worker” (Grigoryan, 2021: 167).

These characteristics are determined by a purely economic function, that is, the type of activity through which they earn a living through creativity. “Creativity is considered a person’s capacity for flexible, innovative, and original thinking, which precedes the process of creative action” (Skavronskaya, 2024: 145). Representatives of the creative class are distinguished from other classes by what they are paid for – they create something innovative – and their working conditions are character-

ized by greater autonomy and flexibility. That is, the means of production for the creative class are “knowledge, competencies, and the mental and thinking abilities of the worker, which drive professional activity” (Petrashkevskaya, 2024: 6). They are also distinguished by their motivation to act. As Ericsson and others note, “artists are often driven by the ability to achieve non-economic recognition, and art itself and its quality are perceived as something much more important than the economic merits of art” (Ericsson, 2024: 231). Finally, another important characteristic of the creative class is its desire for collaboration: “creative industries can research, collect, and develop the information needed to stimulate the creative sector to offer services and creative products that meet societal demands. This is possible thanks to social capital” (Khaksar, 2023: 187).

On the other hand, as T.D. Stepanova notes, dividing society into classes based on professions has a drawback: “a considerable degree of ambiguity in the definition of creative professions, which leads to calculation errors” (Stepanova, 2022: 41).

Creative class theory has also been criticized for its similarity to human capital theory: “creative class theory is simply a new way of quantifying the impact of human capital on economic growth” (Pavelea, 2021: 3).

To summarize, the creative class, at least as initially defined by R. Florida, is made up of workers earning income in fields such as science and technology, architecture, design, education, art, music, the entertainment industry, as well as the high-tech sector, business management, finance, law, and healthcare, who regularly create and disseminate new ideas, forms, and content. Furthermore, the creative class as a social group is distinguished by the fact that it “has clearer boundaries of class behavior and has formed corresponding class representations, economic functions, and social identity” (Zhao, 2020: 3).

If in Marxism, classes were distinguished by the presence or absence of the means of production, today, as R. Florida argues, these concepts are outdated and have been transformed. The creative class is not distinguished by the possession of anything material. Their main asset, representing economic value, is in their minds. For this reason, among other reasons, the creative class is more resilient to economic crises than representatives of other professions. According to T.D. Stepanova, in Russia and the United States, “the general trend of declining employment is based on a reduction in the number

of workers in non-creative occupations; moreover, the number of workers in creative professions has increased” (Stepanova, 2021: 28).

In general, there are several approaches to defining the factors that attract the creative class and creative industries (Vitálišová, 2020: 248):

- “universities play a key role in creating initial advantages related to human capital development”;
- “cultural facilities (i.e., infrastructure) play an important role in attracting and retaining highly educated and talented people in regions”;
- “the importance of openness and tolerance for differences in society.”

“Through activities such as collaboration between universities, research centers, and businesses, or the relocation of research and development personnel, knowledge that is not easily systematized is disseminated” (Łuczaj, 2022: 251). Once a critical mass of creative workers is reached in a city, it creates a “multiplier effect, attracting businesses, investors, and additional talent” (Huq, 2024: 4).

R. Florida identifies numerous criteria by which creative workers choose a particular geographic location, such as: a dense labor market and education, lifestyle and active leisure, cultural preferences, socializing in “third places,” diversity of nationalities, races, ages, and appearance, authenticity and developed urban planning, quality of place, including the combination of nature and the built environment, and a safe urban environment (Florida, 2007: 249-259).

These criteria for selecting cities as creative hubs attract creative people from other locations and even countries. They move permanently to these cities because they have great potential to become creative hubs and attract creative people.

The importance of location as a magnet for creative talent is also highlighted by British urban development specialist Charles Landry in his book “The Creative City.” This work focuses on the city as a community with the greatest potential to attract and develop creative professionals and organizations, who, in turn, will contribute to the city’s development and enhance its attractiveness. Successful implementation of the creative city strategy proposed by Charles Landry presupposes that “creative individuals must be placed in key positions, for while not everyone in a creative city is necessarily a creator, the success of such a city depends on a critical mass of people with open minds and intellectual courage” (Landry, 2006: 164). Ren and others note that creative cities “serve as an effective model for addressing contemporary urban challenges, promot-

ing urban development, and enhancing international influence” (Ren, 2023: 1).

C. Landry argues that in cities, “geographic concentration, which results from economies of scale, creates a virtuous cycle of production, concentrated primarily in cities. A necessary condition for the successful application of this model is a diverse population with the knowledge and social skills to develop the sector that is currently becoming a growth point” (Landry, 2006: 68). He believes that companies in the creative industries, like creative individuals who have moved to creative cities, seek to locate in those parts of the city where a pleasant, stimulating environment prevails. Therefore, they concentrate near each other, forming clusters. Such areas satisfy not only the needs for creative work but also for lifestyle. As I.S. Antonova and E.A. Pchelintsev note: “the concentration of the creative class in a city creates the preconditions for a variety of activities, launching the process of development of a particular city” (Antonova, 2023: 3). These ideas confirm similar conclusions of R. Florida.

Another author, John Hawkins, who wrote the now-classic 2001 work “The Creative Economy,” views the creative economy as a new paradigm that identifies creative ideas, knowledge, and intellectual property as the most important resources of the 21st-century economy. He argues that in the modern era, the economy and creativity are experiencing a qualitatively new relationship. It is no longer machines that represent the greatest economic value, but ideas; it is not the people who operate and own machines, but the people who own ideas. Hawkins devotes considerable attention to intellectual property: “There are several forms of intellectual property, four of the most common being copyright, patents, trademarks, and industrial designs” (Hawkins, 2011: 11).

J. Hawkins’s message, at its core, is to identify a cohort of entrepreneurs who are brimming with new ideas and possess sufficient financial and intellectual capital to bring them to life – creative entrepreneurs. After all, creativity alone is not enough: “creativity alone cannot be considered an economic value. It must be embodied in a marketable product” (Hayal, 2025: 94).

Like R. Florida, the author notes that, unlike traditional career advancement, creative entrepreneurs focus on flexibility and project-based work: “entrepreneurs typically work independently or in small teams. This offers them distinct advantages over large organizations: they have fewer commitments, greater insight, and the freedom to quickly respond

to new ideas and market changes” (Hawkins, 2011: 237).

J. Hawkins confirms the theories of R. Florida and C. Landry regarding the importance of places and spaces where creativity is enhanced through the opportunity to exchange ideas and information. However, he also notes the need for solitude for some creative people, such as writers, who prefer to work in conditions of prolonged isolation from interaction with others. Hawkins concludes that creating conditions for both social interaction and solitude are equally important.

Thus, theories about creative industries and the creative class began to emerge in earnest in the early 2000s. Theorists such as Richard Florida, John Hawkins, and Charles Landry laid the foundations for a new paradigm in the social sciences. These theories have stood the test of time and demonstrate how creative professionals can transform urban areas, social conditions, living standards, and even national economies for the better. An analysis of these theories reveals the key factors determining the success of creative initiatives at the city level, which will be taken into account in further research.

As mentioned above, the creative city is a center of attraction for members of the creative class. Therefore, it is worth examining existing scholarly approaches to defining the concept of the “modern city.”

Manuel Castells, one of the leading sociologists of post-industrialism and the founder of the theory of the new urban sociology, defines the city as “a process that integrates developed services, production centers, and markets into a global network, occurring with varying intensity and at different scales” (Castells, 2002: 358). Castells departs from viewing the city as a geographical space and emphasizes the network of social relations and processes, such as production, consumption, exchange, and administration, that shape the city’s appearance. He also argues that the global economy, through globalization, has become rooted precisely in cities as “nodes” of transportation and telecommunications networks.

Other theorists, E. Amin and N. Thrift, define the city through metaphors: “The first is the metaphor of transitivity, which marks the spatial and temporal openness of the city. The second metaphor depicts the city as a place where diverse rhythms converge, gradually being etched in daily contacts and multiple experiences of time and space. The third metaphor points to the city as the imprint of traces: traces of the past, daily paths of movement

along and across the city, as well as connections beyond its borders.” (Amin, 2002: 4).

Generally, in sociology, definitions of the modern city are reduced to higher, abstract, sometimes symbolic and even sensory categories. Definitions of the same nature are also given to the city in the context of its creative content.

In his work “Creative Cities: The Cultural Industries and the Creative Class,” researcher A.C. Pratt defines a creative city as “a city attractive to the creative class operating in the new economy” (Pratt, 2008: 6). He also emphasizes that a city’s development depends not only on economic and infrastructural factors but also on cultural and social capital.

C. Rodrigues and H.J. Schmidt focus on the city brand, arguing that “the creative class is an active participant in the branding process in cities of various sizes and typologies. In other words, the creative class naturally participates in the creation of brand meaning and intrinsic value associated with the intrinsic characteristics of a given place” (Rodrigues, 2021: 33).

On the other hand, some argue that the term “creative city” should be “grounded in a culturally specific understanding of creativity, as it does not necessarily imply the same level of collaboration and engagement as portrayed in the prevailing creative city literature” (De Jesus, 2020: 8).

In any case, all researchers agree that a creative city is a culturally and creatively developed modern city where the best conditions are created for the development of the creative class.

Kazakhstan, like other countries, uses its own unique list of economic activities included within the creative industries, as there is still “no global consensus on which activities should be included” (Silva, 2024: 6029).

Briefly, creative industries in Kazakhstan are “sectors that combine advanced technological products and creativity in the cultural arts” (Zhuparova, 2021a: 43).

One of the peculiarities is that the majority of entrepreneurs in the creative sector start their businesses with their own funds, while a very small proportion receive public funding: “65% of entrepreneurs used their own capital, and 17% of respondents were forced to apply for bank loans. Regarding government support, only 6% of respondents received funding from the state” (Zhuparova, 2021b: 104).

Another characteristic of entrepreneurs in the creative industries is that most are self-taught in

business, acquiring the necessary knowledge as they go along, rather than before launching their business. Consequently, many creative entrepreneurs lack the necessary competencies. “The result is an increase in ‘costly business mistakes,’ a complete mismatch of quality standards and norms across market players, and, crucially, serious disappointment due to the inability to build the business of their dreams” (Goncharova, 2020: 63).

In Kazakhstan, “four national higher/postgraduate education organizations directly represent creative and cultural education and set standards and programs for national education in the field of creativity and culture, two of which are based in Almaty and two in Astana” (Kim, 2024: 54). Despite this, it is easy to see that today’s creative class in Kazakhstan does not meet modern global standards and requirements: “The creative economy at the present stage is more characteristic of developed countries. It is there that the majority of representatives of the creative class are currently concentrated: scientists, technologists, engineers, marketers, and others – the so-called ‘brains and creativity’” (Pilipenko, 2020: 27).

Materials and methods

The lack of coverage of the formation and development of the creative class in Kazakhstan, and particularly in Almaty, and the absence of sociological research in this area hinder the application of methods that require extensive primary statistical data. Due to the need for in-depth discovery of unique information about the current state and development trends of the creative class, expert interviews were chosen.

Expert interviews in sociology are a qualitative research method designed to obtain information difficult to obtain by other methods and conduct an in-depth analysis of the topic under study. “Expert interviews are one of the most common methods for gaining knowledge about a problem, used in the social sciences and applied research, including in studying the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies. Such interviews can be used both independently and in combination with other methods of collecting empirical data (questionnaires, focus groups, document analysis)” (Chernova, 2023: 76).

Purposeful sampling is the most appropriate sampling method, as it involves the targeted selection of respondents who best match the research subject based on specific characteristics and criteria.

Experts were selected based on their familiarity with the internal and external processes shaping the creative sector, as well as the challenges and needs of creators in Kazakhstan, and particularly Almaty. Fourteen experts from fields such as creative hub leaders, representatives of creative industries (theater, fine arts, festival organization, architecture, and literary creation), and creative industry researchers agreed to participate in the interview. The selected experts possess unique insights and knowledge about Almaty’s creative industries and are familiar with all the nuances of development and the challenges faced by representatives of the creative class. The number of experts selected was sufficient for a comprehensive analysis within this study, as they collectively covered all aspects of the research subject.

Expert interviews were conducted from March 21 to April 28, 2025. All interviews were conducted in Russian as the official language, as this approach suited the experts. Thirteen interviews were conducted online via Zoom or WhatsApp, and one interview was conducted offline. On average, each interview lasted 60–75 minutes. An expert interview guide consisting of 12 questions covering the formation, analysis of the current state, and support measures for the creative class in Kazakhstan, and in Almaty in particular, was developed as a tool. All interviews were video, or audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. All 14 experts agreed to remain anonymous. The interview conditions required the experts to freely share their views and provide any other relevant information that could contribute to an understanding of the topic under study.

All sociological methods used in this study are theoretically sound, and the results obtained are reliable, as appropriate research procedures were followed, consistent with the scientific approach adopted in the social sciences and humanities. All methods were conducted in accordance with the guidelines for their application, considering the rules for conducting interviews with experts.

Research methodology

The research stages included:

1. Developing a research program;
2. Compiling an expert interview guide based on identified gaps in existing research on Kazakhstan’s creative class and creative industries;
3. Finding experts using purposive sampling;
4. Interviewing experts from March 21 to April 28, 2025;

5. Transcribing all interviews;
6. Extracting 180 codes from expert quotes;
7. Combining codes into 36 categories by meaning;
8. Combining the categories into six core categories, linked into a single narrative by constructing a logical connection within the paradigmatic model;
9. Developing recommendations based on the findings.

To analyze the expert interviews, grounded theory, a methodology developed and described in the 1960s by A. Strauss and J. Corbin, was applied. This methodology represents “a set of flexible inductive procedures aimed at ‘ascending’ from unstructured data to their conceptualization” (Semenova, 2021: 107).

The coding procedure according to A. Strauss and J. Corbin’s methodology is divided into three stages:

- open coding: searching for codes and identifying their properties;
- axial coding: searching for relationships between codes and grouping them into categories;
- selective coding: searching for key categories.

Grounded theory is an approach to analyzing data obtained through multiple interviews. It involves coding a body of information, comparing it, grouping it into categories, and developing core concepts.

Ultimately, a theoretical model is constructed based on the completed work, designed to describe and explain the phenomenon under study.

This study constructs a paradigmatic model of the creative industries phenomenon in Kazakhstan based on an analysis of expert interviews conducted by researchers and industry representatives.

According to the grounded theory developed by A. Strauss and J. Corbin, the paradigmatic model is designed to link “subcategories to a category through a series of links denoting causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences” (Strauss, 2001: 83). By applying this model, categories can be conceptualized and linked into a unified framework that will form a logical explanatory model, as shown in Figure 1.

A phenomenon is a core category that embodies an idea and requires action.

Causal conditions are the events that lead to the emergence of a phenomenon. There may be multiple such events, or there may be only one.

Context is the set of conditions that guide the necessary steps and measures to influence a phenomenon.

Intervening conditions are a set of more general conditions that influence the development of a phenomenon.

Action/interaction strategies are measures aimed at implementing methods that lead to the management of a phenomenon.

A consequence is an event or result of actions and interactions taken, which are both potential and actually achieved, and can occur in both the present and the future.

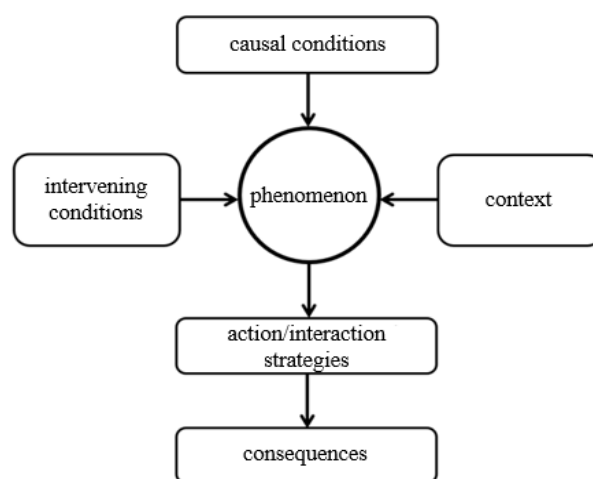


Figure 1 – Logical diagram of the paradigmatic model

Note – compiled by the authors based on the source (99, p. 107)

Results and discussion

A sociological analysis of the factors shaping and prospects for institutionalizing the creative class in Almaty was conducted using expert interview analysis and the inductive grounded theory approach.

According to the methodology of A. Strauss and J. Corbin, following the first stage of grounded theory, namely, open coding, codes were first extracted from all transcribed interviews by condensing the meanings expressed by the experts: key ideas from the experts’ quotes were condensed into basic semantic units. Each code was then assigned a name, usually consisting of the expert’s own words, or, less commonly, our own. A total of 180 codes were extracted.

The second stage – axial coding – involved identifying relationships between codes and grouping them into common semantic categories. All codes were combined based on meaning and the re-

currence of similar themes into 36 categories, each of which was also assigned names.

Finally, during the third stage – selective coding of quotes from expert interviews – core categories were selected, uniting several categories into a single narrative.

Due to the extensive scope of the study, six core categories were identified, representing several narratives, as presented in Table 1.

It should be noted that the identified core categories are of interest from a sociological perspective, as this approach has not previously been explored in the literature.

The core category of “institutionalization of the creative class” unites nine categories and, overall, clarifies the existence of a creative class in Kazakhstan, including Almaty, and potential growth areas for the full development of a creative class.

Table 1 – Stages of axial and selective coding

Categories (36 in total)	Core categories (6 in total)
1. The creative class is just emerging in Kazakhstan	Institutionalization of the Creative Class
2. There is a lack of consolidation of the creative class	
3. Strengthening professional socialization and communication is necessary	
4. Trends in socio-professional synergy	
5. Prospects for international recognition	
6. Motivation	
7. Creativity in Kazakhstan is developing thanks to the growth of national self-awareness	
8. Young people are moving into creative industries	
9. Entrepreneurial skills are necessary for creators	
1. The state's economic situation affects the formation of the creative class	Financial Issues of Creative Industries
2. Expensive rent hinders development	
3. Creativity requires money	
4. Creative industries do not require large investments	
5. Creativity requires targeted investment	
6. Tax breaks would help creators	
1. Almaty is an established creative center of the country	Almaty as a Creative Center
2. There are many events in Almaty	
3. Almaty attracts young people	
4. Evenly support all creative industries in Almaty	
5. Insufficient infrastructure for creators from akimats	
1. The state is insufficient Pays attention to creative industries	State Support for Creative Industries
2. The state supports the creative sector	
3. Support is formal	
4. Legislation is imperfect	
5. Freedom fosters creativity	
6. State censorship hinders creativity	
7. The state fights against creators	
8. The role of the state in creativity should be minimal	
9. Reforms are needed in creative education	
10. Creativity differs from business	

Continuation of the table

Categories (36 in total)	Core categories (6 in total)
1. Intermediaries are needed	Intermediaries between Creators and the State
2. Creators are poorly informed	
3. Creators’ activity influences the focus of support	
1. Support from non-governmental organizations and individuals is limited	Support for Creative Industries by Non-Governmental Organizations
2. International organizations sponsor Kazakhstani creators	
3. Business supports creators	
Note: compiled by the authors	

Many experts have expressed the relatively recent emergence of a creative class and creative industries in Kazakhstan, owing to the recent recognition of the importance of creative industries at the state level. Consequently, consolidation remains lacking in the country. Class consciousness among Kazakhstani creatives remains low. Given the weak consolidation of creative workers, experts emphasize the importance of strengthening professional socialization and communication. Various event formats have been proposed to bring together creatives, where they could exchange experiences, information, and establish social connections. The unique characteristic of creative workers lies in their ability to create new forms of experience through mutually reinforcing associations: *"...if they unite, get to know each other better, get to know each other better, they would come up with many more cool, awesome ideas, super-cool projects..."*

Regarding the Kazakhstani specifics of institutionalization and strengthening the identity of the creative class, experts note the growth of national self-awareness and its influence on the work of creatives: *"Certainly, a positive factor is the overall growth of national self-awareness in Kazakhstan... there is social and national activity that did not exist 20 years ago."*

Experts highlight another trend in the development of Kazakhstan's creative class: the growing share of youth. Young people, as the social group most brimming with new ideas and ambitions, are increasingly choosing creative work as their career. Perhaps because of this, experts note among the weaknesses of the emerging creative class a lack of competencies in running and promoting a business, legally formalizing it, finding clients, and protecting the rights to their product – in short, a lack of entrepreneurial skills, although John Hawkins wrote about intellectual property as the new currency of

the creative economy back in 2011 (Hawkins, 2011: 28).

Thus, Kazakhstan's creative class is characterized by weak institutionalization, reflected in a low degree of consolidation, intra-class communication, and a lack of entrepreneurial skills. At the same time, creatives have the potential to emerge as a fully-fledged class with its own national cultural identity.

The question is what barriers hinder the realization of this potential and what measures should be taken to reduce these obstacles. This will be addressed in the analysis of the following core categories.

The core category, "Financial Issues of Creative Industries," includes six subdivisions.

Experts cite the state of the country's economy as perhaps the most significant factor influencing the development of the creative industries and, consequently, the creative class. Experts point to high rents for spaces occupied by creatives as one of the major barriers to the development of creative industries in Almaty. Independent theaters, micro-entrepreneurs, and other creatives, whose activities require studios, spaces, and hubs, are particularly vulnerable to high rents: *"I believe that the biggest scourge for all people involved in so-called creativity is the rental of space, which in Almaty is prohibitively expensive. People who are starting art studios and other creative projects are often faced with this very stumbling block."*

Many experts argue that financial resources are essential for creative endeavors. However, others are convinced that entering the creative industries is easy, as it often doesn't require a huge financial investment. Some creators simply need a phone and internet access, and smartphone apps and features allow them to create high-quality content without a computer: *"All it takes to start a creative business is*

one person and their phone. And once they register as an individual entrepreneur, they will be considered a player in the creative economy of a country or city. Entry is very easy."

Additionally, experts suggest introducing tax breaks or, at a minimum, not increasing them for creatives to facilitate the free conduct of their businesses. Otherwise, creatives are forced to operate without officially registering their activities: *"Don't raise taxes. The creative class isn't yet fully capable of earning a living and stifling it with heavy taxes is a real shame."*

Therefore, to facilitate the institutionalization of the creative class in Almaty and Kazakhstan, it is necessary to pay attention to the financial component of state support, which includes rent relief and targeted support for promising creative initiatives. This will enable the country's creative economy to develop sustainably and attract socially vulnerable groups such as young people.

However, this is not the only condition that must be met for the sustainable development of creative industries, as financial support is often not the primary motivating factor for stimulating creativity. Equally, if not more, important is location – specifically, the city as a creative hub.

Almaty, as the country's creative and cultural center, harbors the greatest creative potential, and therefore requires close research attention. The core category, "Almaty as a Creative Center," focuses on the city's characteristics and conditions for the development of the creative class and includes five categories.

Many experts are convinced that Almaty has all the conditions for the fruitful growth of the creative class. Specifically, they cite the city's well-developed infrastructure, the initiative of its residents, and the presence of numerous universities. These factors contribute to the overall feel and atmosphere so important to creatives: *"The city's architectural appearance is very interesting because it has a certain atmosphere, which always attracts the creative class. The creative class always loves the atmosphere and nature around Almaty."*

Experts also note the growth of creative activities in the city, as well as the increased involvement and interest of young people, which they attribute to the presence of numerous diverse fields, including creative universities in the city, such as music and film. Therefore, many experts consider film and music to be the most developed creative industries in Almaty. However, experts advise against separating creative industries and focusing on some over

others, as all creative industries are interconnected. A prime example is film production, which employs representatives of several creative fields: screenwriters, artists and designers of various disciplines, photographers, and musicians. Following this logic, experts see no benefit in focusing, for example, on developed industries for the purpose of maximizing exports or on sectors that are not yet so economically viable: *"I advocate that the state not single out specific creative industries. I think it makes sense because they are all very interconnected... If attention is only paid to one specific area, then what will be done in other areas... We need to develop, say, not a specific creative industry, for example, design or music and film, but we need to pay attention to support measures that run like a red thread through all creative industries."*

Creative spaces are "third places" for creators, where weak ties are established and joint projects are born, as demonstrated in the first core category. At the same time, most experts unanimously agree on the city's significant infrastructure problem. A paradoxical phenomenon is observed: Almaty is teeming with idle, unused spaces where creators could develop creative spaces for a small fee, but are unable to do so due to external financial and bureaucratic constraints: *"The first and most important thing, based on the experience of House 36 on Baribayev Street, conducting surveys, focus groups, business incubations, and acceleration programs, is physical space. There's a shortage of affordable space because rents are very high, both for living and for establishing workshops and production facilities."*

Almaty is a classic example of a creative center, according to R. Florida, which attracts people with its natural environment, architectural environment, abundance of cultural venues, events, creative people, and, in general, the provision of opportunities for creative self-realization and diverse experiences (Florida, 2007: 258). However, a serious barrier preventing Almaty from reaching the same level as global creative centers is the lack of "soft" infrastructure, in the terms of Charles Landry, which is extremely important for the development of creators and the creative class, given the excess of untapped potential "hard" infrastructure (Landry, 2006: 198).

Supporting the development of Almaty's creative class also entails the adoption of government support measures affecting the creative class nationwide.

The core category, "State Support for Creative Industries," consists of 10 subdivisions.

Most experts argue that the government doesn't pay enough attention to the creative industries. While many acknowledge that state budget funds are allocated, they are convinced that all these actions are purely formal and merely for the sake of reporting: *"New hubs are opened, legislative amendments are made, subsidies and support methods are determined, and so on. But my personal experience tells me that it's all just a formality, just for show."*

Some experts noted the fundamental difference between creative workers and entrepreneurs in the classic sense. Unlike businesses, creatives don't always turn a profit, often operating at a loss: *"If we're talking about cultural products, only some, maybe half, of the projects follow a business model, because in culture, and especially in art, the principle is slightly different. It's not demand that creates supply, but supply that creates demand."*

Furthermore, some experts note the poorly developed legislation in the creative industries, specifically the need to revise such a large and important area as cultural policy: *"Kazakhstan's cultural policy is still archaic, not well-developed, and not designed to take into account modern realities."*

Experts also note the importance of freedom of creativity, expression, and freedom from fear as factors in the development of the creative class, the creative economy, and the advancement of creative thought. However, according to many experts, the state restricts their creative activities, which sometimes results in self-censorship: *"...state censorship prevents creative people from fully realizing their talents. <...> This gives rise to internal self-censorship and internal limitations, which impacts the development of creativity and the unleashing of people's potential."*

Consequently, many creatives are dominated by the idea of a desirability of non-interference by the state in their activities: *"The state's involvement in all of this is minimal; that is, they created, for example, a department, a hub, facilitated the opening of creative spaces and community centers. And that, in my opinion, is where their role should end."*

Contrary to the above opinions, some experts believe that the state is paying attention to the creative industries: *"...creators are now granted various privileges. They can apply for various state support programs ranging from 1 million to 5 million tenge."*

Given the fundamental difference between creative entrepreneurship and conventional entrepreneurship – namely, that the ultimate goal of creative entrepreneurs is not always profit, but rather

self-expression – one can conclude that standard support measures will not support the emergence of creators as a class. A different approach is required to establish a class identity for creators. Specifically, focusing on expanding and improving their venues, such as creative spaces, hubs, studios, and galleries; easing censorship, which often serves as a stumbling block for creative individuals to express themselves; and revising certain legislative provisions, particularly in the area of copyright protection.

To convey all of the above recommendations from creators to decision-makers at a higher level, intermediaries are needed. This topic is given a separate core category, "Intermediaries between creators and the state."

Experts note the creative class's poor awareness of any information related to their activities. Therefore, some experts believe in the need for intermediaries, such as producers and art dealers, to assist creators with promotion, advertising, and finding clients. They also believe in the need for intermediaries, such as private organizations or individual influential opinion leaders, to act as bridges between the creative community and government agencies, which some experts call "intermediaries," and which creators trust. *"There's such a thing as intermediaries, or we call them 'intermediaries.' That is, these are organizations, agencies, or groups of producers, who act as a bridge between the government and entrepreneurship."*

Currently, there are extremely few intermediaries speaking on behalf of the entire creative community or the larger groups that comprise it: *"Because the community is very fragmented, not very united, not very cohesive, it turns out that these voices are more individual, disparate, and the state does not work with individuals."*

Thus, there is a critical shortage of intermediaries transmitting information from the state to the entire creative class community, and the demands and problems of the creative community to the state. It is assumed that the most suitable individuals or organizations for this role are those familiar with both the operating processes of government agencies and the specifics of creative entrepreneurship, which differs from standard business practices.

Regarding the role of non-governmental organizations in supporting the creative class and creative industries, experts expressed mixed opinions.

The core category of "support for creative industries by non-governmental organizations" contains three categories.

Many experts note that large businesses support creators, but only when this implies mutual economic or reputational benefits. Therefore, comparing the frequency and scope of support from large local private organizations with international ones, experts highlight the latter's greater commitment: *"Everything that happens in our region has generally been financed not by the state, but by foreign organizations – so-called NGOs, non-profits, and others – that have been and remain the driving forces of our art."*

At the same time, some experts note a more straightforward and transparent approach to building cooperation with the business sector: *"Today, it's easier and more understandable for us to interact, for example, with the business sector, with whom we can somehow build our relations on clear terms. For example, we can do something, stage a corporate performance, conduct a master class, organize or direct an event, and thus support, for example, our theatrical activities."*

Thus, experts note a small but understandable level of sponsorship from large businesses that are openly guided by their own interests.

Based on the first and fifth core categories – "institutionalization of the creative class" and "intermediaries between creators and the state," respectively – one can conclude that the institutionalization of creators in Kazakhstan, and in Almaty in particular, as a social class has only recently begun, initiated by the adoption of legislation in this area.

For the purposes of this study and to develop the topic, the core category of "Almaty as a Creative Center" was selected as the phenomenon from the six core categories selected, as the purpose of this expert survey is to analyze and forecast the state and development of the creative class in Almaty.

The remaining categories are equally important for analyzing the development of the creative class, but for the purposes of this paper, it is important to highlight the aforementioned core category.

A. Strauss and J. Corbin recommend focusing on one core category as a phenomenon for its full development. Selecting two or more phenomena will complicate the design and prevent precise, unambiguous conclusions (Strauss, 2001: 101).

Applying the paradigmatic model to the data obtained from the expert interviews, the following logical diagram can be presented, as shown in Figure 9:

- phenomenon (Almaty as a creative hub);
- causal conditions of the phenomenon (State support for creative industries);
- context of the phenomenon (Financial issues of creative industries);
- intervening conditions (Support for creative industries by non-governmental organizations);
- action/interaction strategies (Intermediaries between creators and the state);
- consequences (Institutionalization of the creative class).

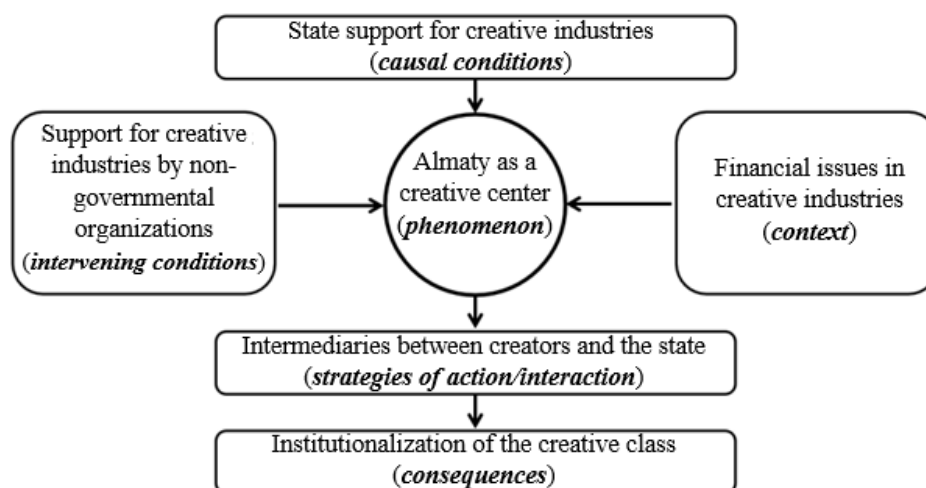


Figure 2 – Construction of a paradigmatic model of the creative industries phenomenon in Almaty
Note: compiled by the authors

The paradigmatic model demonstrates the logical interconnection of the identified core categories. Thus, the phenomenon is Almaty, which historically has been a city home to both “hard” infrastructure (theaters, libraries, concert venues, art galleries, creative studios, abandoned non-residential buildings and structures, etc.) and “soft” infrastructure (creative hubs, creative spaces, creative industry parks, co-working centers, etc.).

The causal conditions for the development of the creative class in Almaty were the formation of a legislative framework for the creative industries of Kazakhstan, namely, the approval of the Concept of the development of creative industries, criteria for classifying entrepreneurs as creative industries and the list of codes of the NCEA for creative industries. According to experts, the causal conditions have not been fully created, since, for example, copyright is poorly developed, some NCEA codes do not correspond to creativity, or there are no other relevant activities in the current list, and creative education is insufficient at all levels.

The context of the phenomenon for the formation of the creative class in Almaty refers to the core category – financial issues of creative industries. Most experts interviewed believe that the financial challenges include insufficient budget funding, the need for tax breaks, and inflated rents for creative spaces.

Support for creative industries by non-governmental organizations, specifically international and Kazakhstani private organizations, serves as intervening conditions for the development of a creative class in Almaty. Global trends toward the emergence of a creative class encourage international organizations such as the British Council to support creative initiatives in Kazakhstan, including in Almaty, the country’s largest creative hub. Kazakhstan is integrated into global processes and trends in the growth of creative industries, adopting international experience and leveraging the knowledge and practical skills of successful foreign businesses. However, according to experts, the local business sector, driven by its own interests, does not always support creatives.

The development of intermediaries between creators and the state is action/interaction strategies for the development of the creative class in Almaty. According to experts, such intermediaries are currently lacking. The emergence of such intermediaries will lead to a closer and more rapid government response to the needs of the creative class, as well as collaboration among creatives to create new mean-

ings, forms, and experiences within creative spaces of various formats, engaging more and more potential creators.

The consequences of this phenomenon’s emergence are manifested in the institutionalization of the creative class in Almaty and throughout Kazakhstan as a whole. The institutionalization of the creative class as a result of the adopted strategy of action and interaction is currently only potential. In the future, if all elements of the paradigmatic model are observed, it will be possible to confirm the institutionalization of the creative class in Almaty. This will be reflected in internal consequences such as personal fulfillment and self-expression among creative individuals, their satisfaction with the process and results of their work, and a clearer class identity. External manifestations of these consequences will include interaction between individual groups of creative industries, collaboration between creative industries for entrepreneurial and economic benefits, contributions to the city’s improvement, and an increase in the cultural level and outlook of the urban community.

Thus, the aforementioned internal and external consequences lead to Almaty becoming a creative hub for Central Asia, attracting creative talent from other regions and strengthening its brand and image.

The paradigmatic model examined allowed us to identify the factors influencing the formation of the creative class in Almaty and Kazakhstan as a whole.

Based on the above arguments, recommendations were developed to support the creative class as an element of the social structure of Kazakhstani society, using Almaty as an example. These recommendations include necessary support measures to further stimulate self-identification and a sense of community among members of the creative class:

- use the results of the research by government agencies and local executive bodies to develop infrastructure measures for state support of creative industries in Almaty, such as increasing the number of creative hubs and spaces;
- create an institution of intermediaries between government agencies, businesses, and creative industries;
- consider state support for rent relief for spaces occupied by creative individuals;
- review legislative provisions regarding copyright protection;
- revise the list of economic activities related to creative industries with a view to expanding it.

Further research will cover a review of international experience in developing a creative class through support for creative industries, the legislative framework for the activities of Kazakhstan's creative industries, and a study of the characteristics of representatives of the creative class of Almaty, including professional and class self-identification, motivation factors, satisfaction with working conditions, and creative infrastructure.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the expert survey and grounded theory methodology, all the research objectives were met, enabling the study to achieve its goals.

Thus, Almaty's high potential for becoming a creative hub in Kazakhstan was identified thanks to its "hard" and "soft" infrastructure. Data analysis demonstrates that the creative class phenomenon in Almaty has positive consequences for the city's community.

Using grounded theory methods, including procedures for coding and categorizing the content of expert interviews, and applying and examining a paradigmatic model, we identified the phenomenon and conditions of the formation of the creative class, its influence on individuals employed in the creative industries and individual groups within the creative sphere, as well as on class consciousness resulting from the interactions between these groups. Using grounded theory analysis of expert interviews, we demonstrated that the creative class in Almaty is insufficiently institutionalized. Furthermore, the paradigmatic model allowed us to identify the influence of this phenomenon on the collaboration of creative industries to increase the share of the creative economy, its contribution to the development of urban

spaces, and the upliftment of the cultural level of the urban community, all of which ultimately allow Almaty to become a creative hub in Central Asia.

In summary, this study suggests that some propositions in R. Florida's creative class and C. Landry's creative city theories correspond to observed phenomena, namely the existence of a creative class in Almaty, the unique motivation of creative professionals, and Almaty's position as a magnet for creators. Furthermore, many Almaty creators lack the skills necessary to function as fully-fledged actors in the creative industries described by J. Hawkins. Despite the objective fact of an emerging creative class in Almaty and the historically determined economic, social, and cultural prerequisites and factors for its development, which differ from aspects described in classical literature by creative economy theorists, similarities can be observed in both the systemic approaches and most of their components.

The recommendations developed can contribute to the further development of the creative class and its more complete institutionalization by identifying necessary support measures for creative industries. This will increase creators' satisfaction and their fulfillment in their chosen fields through a more pronounced self-identification. Improving working conditions and the creative class's sense of self as a group within the social structure of the metropolis under consideration can lead to a multiplier social effect on other social indicators of Almaty's development, including its role as a creative hub for the Central Asian region.

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Information about authors:

Shedenova Nazym (corresponding-author) – Doctor of Sociological Sciences, Associate Professor of the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: nshedenova@gmail.com)

Yessenamanov Azat – Researcher at the Center for Sociological Research and Social Engineering, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: azat.yessen@gmail.com).

Omuraliev Nurbek – Doctor of Sociological Sciences, Professor, Head of the Center for Social Research of the Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, e-mail: nurbekcsr@mail.ru)

Авторлар туралы мәлімет:

Шеденова Назым Утегалиевна (корреспондент-автор) – әлеуметтану ғылымдарының докторы, әлеуметтану және әлеуметтік жұмыс кафедрасының доценті, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті (Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: nshedenova@gmail.com)

Есенаманов Азат Расулұлы – Әлеуметтік зерттеулер және әлеуметтік инжиниринг орталығының ғылыми қызметкері, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті (Алматы, Қазақстан, e-mail: azat.yessen@gmail.com)

Омуралиев Нурбек Ашимканович – әлеуметтану ғылымдарының докторы, профессор, Кыргыз Республикасы Президентінің жанындағы Кыргыз Республикасы Ұлттық ғылым академиясының Философия институтының Әлеуметтік зерттеулер орталығының басшысы (Бішкек, Қырғызстан, e-mail: nurbekcsr@mail.ru)

Сведения об авторах:

Шеденова Назым Утегалиевна (автор-корреспондент) – доктор социологических наук, доцент кафедры социологии и социальной работы, Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби (Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: nshedenova@gmail.com);

Есенаманов Азат Расулұлы – научный сотрудник Центра социологических исследований и социального инжиниринга, Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби (Алматы, Казахстан, e-mail: azat.yessen@gmail.com);

Омуралиев Нурбек Ашимканович – доктор социологических наук, профессор, заведующий Центром социальных исследований Института философии Национальной академии наук Кыргызской Республики при Президенте Кыргызской Республики (Бишкек, Кыргызстан, e-mail: nurbekcsr@mail.ru).

*Келіп түсті: 09 қазан 2025 жыл
Қабылданды: 02 желтоқсан 2025 жыл*