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## **Professional Mobilities in the Creative Industries: the role of 'place' for young people aspiring for a creative career**

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# **Professional Mobilities in the Creative Industries: the role of 'place' for young people aspiring for a creative career**

## **Abstract**

Within creative industries policy over the past decades two themes have been situated as central to the needs of the creative economy: the importance of geographical place in economic terms, and the role of education in delivering a better equipped workforce. However, these themes have rarely overlapped in either policy thinking or academic research, and so this article focuses on the relationship between place, education and professional aspirations for young people. Using the findings from qualitative interviews with media studies students within higher education (HE) this article analyses how the perceived attributes of some locations may provide industry credibility and the promise of enhanced professional mobility. It examines the tangible and symbolic value of place within young people's career development in the creative industries. The findings highlight how the links between place and education can be important and influential in the professionalisation process and that place shapes young people's perception of and opportunities for work in the creative industries. Finally, this research emphasises how current theories on creative industries policy and HE provision need to be extended to take greater account of the ways in which the attributes of localities can be used as a catalyst for individual professionalism amongst young people, and the ways in which certain places (mainly rural) may be disadvantaged in the current policy trajectory.

**Keywords:** *cultural policy, place, urban, young people, higher education, professionalism, creative work*

## **Professional Mobilities in the Creative Industries: the role of 'place' for young people aspiring for a creative career**

Place has received significant attention within policy-making and the field of research on creative industries. This attention has taken many forms including critical discussions on the contribution of creative industries to urban development and regeneration, the clustering of creative firms, and the use of creative outputs as important symbolic and financial resources for countries engaged in various levels of trade and globalisation (Banks et al., 2000; Oakley, 2006). The current creative industries policy trajectory also foregrounds skills development with the education system, particularly higher education (HE), positioned as an important partner in the discovery of talents and subsequently directed to make these commercially exploitable resources.

While the importance of place and the role of education are central themes for policy concerned with the needs of the creative industries, these themes have rarely overlapped in either policy thinking or academic research. Aside from Comunian et al (2011) and Comunian and Faggian (2011), little is known about the flow of students through HE into local creative economies or how place comes to condition that professionalization.

Therefore, this article focuses on the relationship between place, education and the professional aspirations of young people. The article uses the findings from a small-scale qualitative study of media students within a UK higher education institution (HEI) to understand the symbolic and tangible value of geography within young people's career development in the creative industries, and to analyse how the perceived attributes of *some* locations may provide industry credibility and the promise of professional mobility.

This research argues that the links between place and education are important and influential in the professionalisation process, and that place can shape young people's opportunities for and perception of work in the creative industries. Furthermore, current theories on cultural policy and

HE provision need to be extended to take greater account of the ways in which the attributes of localities can be used as a catalyst and resource for individual professionalisation amongst young people, and that neglect of the rural in cultural policy is visible in young people's perception and experience of limited opportunities within these locales. This research, therefore, contributes to a growing body of work which critiques current creative industry policy and highlights the disadvantages to certain geographical areas of the current policy trajectory.

### **'[T]he cult of urban creativity' (Peck, 2005)**

In the UK increased academic attention has been directed to the issue of place and creativity as a response to the various government-led programmes which have attempted to provide a strategic plan for the UK's creative industries (Drake, 2003; Oakley, 2006). The majority of policies, led by the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), have focused on the economic and symbolic potential of the creative industries to revive cities and regions particularly those decimated by the decline of manufacturing. This strategy of economic development resulted in 'the serial reproduction of an increasingly clichéd repertoire of favoured policy interventions' (Peck, 2005, p. 767-8), particularly around the branding of 'creative cities'.

The centralisation of resources and investment has been a key feature of this policy strategy. This encourages locales to differentiate themselves and then to compete strategically in national and international markets for resources, investment and talent (Peck, 2005; Oakley, 2006). As responsibility for this has largely fallen to the region to assume responsibility for its own development (utilising both public and private investment) the result has been that metropolitan centres have been the principal 'winners' in this strategy with smaller urban centres and rural areas often overlooked in policy-making and the allocation of resources (Jayne, 2005; Bell & Jayne, 2010).

The primacy of the creative city paradigm and the classification of the creative worker as 'quintessentially urban' (Banks et al., 2000, p. 463) make it impossible for city planners and development agencies to ignore and so policy-making has assumed the 'cult of urban creativity' (Peck, 2005). Therefore, despite the prominence of globalization within creative industries rhetoric, locality still matters but not all places are equal.

In creative industries while locality still matters spatially in terms of clustering, place branding and competition, it also functions politically in the UK. London continues to dominate in terms of economic development, cultural spend and public investment, leading the UK's creative and cultural industries with almost one-third of the sector workforce based in the capital (DCMS, 2015, p.6). While this concentration is likely to continue in the future 'thanks to a self-reinforcing and endogenous mechanism' of cultural production and interaction (Comunian & Faggian, 2011, p. 18), in the last decade a number of policies have been introduced in an attempt to decentralise the creative industries dispersing the financial and social benefits of the sector. There have been some successes outside the capital often in places with specialist clusters of creativity (for example Bristol, Cardiff, Manchester and Leeds). One shared characteristic of these secondary clusters has been the role local universities have played in supporting growth through providing industry-focused research, technical facilities, business incubation, along with steady supplies of skilled talent (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007; Charles, 2003).

### **Creative Labour and 'Professionals in the Making' (Ashton, 2009)**

The creative industries labour market is characterized by informality. Individualised labour is routinely bought and sold with limited forms of employment protection and few structured opportunities for development (Banks et al., 2000; Comunian et al., 2011; Oakley, 2006). Workers in this industry are held up as 'a model of flexibility, mobility, adaptability, and entrepreneurialism that

other sectors of the labour force can learn from' (Jayne, 2005, p. 540). A 'tournament' culture in the creative industries is prevalent where:

[A]spirant entrants are prepared to seek out a mix of unpaid internships and/or work experience and tolerate the uncertainties of low-paid freelance work in the hope that it will enable them to develop the appropriate mix of vocational practice and social capital to secure either a permanent position or longer contracts and better pay as a freelance worker. (Guile, 2010: 467 citing Marsden).

This competition is not restricted to the UK with graduates and young people 'now in competition with people from across Europe and the rest of the world' (Creative and Cultural Skills, 2015, p. 6). However, irrespective of location, accessing social and cultural capital becomes crucial to the successful conversion of these tournaments into careers and a number of scholars have pointed to this as part of the mechanisms of exclusion inherent to the sector (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013; Oakley, 2006).

Within this labour market context successive governments have identified up-skilling as both a key ingredient in the creative economy and a necessity for people to realise their potential. Higher education has been identified as a delivery agent of this agenda and a key actor in developing a sustainable creative economy (Comunian et al., 2011; Charles, 2003). This has meant that for many students degree courses in media and arts have become a popular route into a creative occupation. Indeed DCMS (2015, p. 6) report that in 2014 more than half (58.8%) of jobs in the creative economy were filled by people with at least a degree, compared to 31.8 per cent of all jobs in the UK.

At the level of the individual geography plays a significant role for students in their decision about where to go to university and whether to migrate elsewhere on graduation. The choice of whether to go to university locally or move to another place is dependent on a variety of factors including familial ties, local commitments, the provision of creative courses (Comunian & Faggian, 2011) and more recently the introduction of student fees. In 2002 52 per cent of UK students studied in their local region, but in 2008 this had increased to 56 per cent with women in particular choosing to study in their local region (McClelland & Gandy, 2012). This is positive for local regions as it provides

a youthful and skilled talent-base along with demand for local cultural services. However, while HEIs have expanded their provision Comunian et al (2011) highlight how these regions often struggle to retain graduates as local labour markets are often either not strong enough to absorb the additional capacity of annual graduates, or there is an occupational mismatch between education provision and the needs of local industry (Comunian et al., 2011; Comunian & Faggian, 2011). For those remaining in the region oversupply can lead to lower economic rewards. All of this highlights the complex interaction between HE and the creative sector.

## **Methodology**

Students on a predominantly theoretical BA degree covering media, culture and journalism were the focus of this study. The university is recognized as a 'new' university, having evolved from polytechnic to university in 1992. Today it actively markets degrees leading to careers in sectors including theatre, film, journalism, animation, fashion and radio. Although the main campus remains in the rural Welsh valleys, the faculty which delivers awards relating to the creative sector is based in the Welsh capital, Cardiff; a development directly responding to the urbanization of much creative industry activity. This also highlights the ways in which 'new' universities with their background in vocational training have been able to respond to the labour demands of the new economy through the provision of industry focused courses and capital investments programmes designed to support a growing employability agenda in HE.

To fulfil the aims of this research a survey and a series of follow-up interviews were completed. The survey was intended as a first step, capturing demographic and attitudinal data along with details of experience and future career aspirations shaping later interviews; for example, in the survey the Welsh capital Cardiff emerged as a key part of the responses and so the broader significance of place was then probed in more depth in the interviews.<sup>i</sup>



There were 30 students in the cohort which began level one in September 2011, with 25 taking part in the survey and 7 voluntarily participating in a follow-up interview. For all students in the cohort this was their first experience of HE and 40 per cent of the group were the first generation in their family to attend university. Again, this is often a characteristic of 'new' universities who are cited as widening participation within HE amongst under-represented social groups (Harris, 2011). Despite their relatively young age, 28 per cent had work experience across an array of creative positions including writing for a local newspaper, contributing to local radio, co-ordinating PR activities for an arts organization and working in a market research firm.

The students were all aged between 18 and 23 and the cohort was predominantly female (76%), reflecting a wider trend in creative sector degrees (ECU, 2011); four of the seven interviewees were female. None of the interviewees were from Cardiff though two came from South Wales and four from South-West England. One interviewee came from London to study at the university. The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes each and were recorded. Throughout the study the researcher was mindful of her position as both researcher and lecturer and stressed to students that responses would not impact on their academic performance. This was reiterated in the consent forms and in the guarantees of anonymity. Close reading of the narratives elicited a number of repeated themes which are explored further in the remainder to this article. They concern: how place is operationalized in a project of self-promotion and networking in response to structural conditions within the creative labour market; how discourses of the urban are bound with particular modes and expectations of professional identity; and how young people balance mobility with other lifestyle choices.

### **Operationalizing place**

Researchers highlight the ways creative industries policy promotes an individualistic logic and how matters of employability are primarily positioned in terms of personal motivation and development in many ways running counter to the networked culture and emphasis on project-based work which

characterises the industry (Comunian et al., 2011; Oakley, 2006). This individualistic logic necessitates a more 'calculating relationship' between students, higher education and the labour market, a relationship which is endorsed in policy-making for both the creative industries and HE (Oakley, 2013). As we can see in this quote from the interviews, Adam is already acutely aware of these countervailing logics and adopts a calculating, albeit defeatist, response:

[T]here is a sense you do need to be paying your dues, so you have to work hard to climb up the ladder. I'm not sure how I feel about that...that's the sort of message you get across from everyone else, you have to start at the bottom [...] I can see it is there but I don't know what to do about it. There is the rules. There is not much you can really do about that cos that is standard practice now, enforced, and you can go against it but if you try and go against it, someone who isn't going to go against it will come along and go "I'll do it" and now I'm out of a job. (Adam)

In order to create and improve their future opportunities, while at the same time competing with their peers, the interviewees had all developed strategies to position themselves favourably in a competitive labour market, engaging in the meaningful arrangement of their own biography for themselves and others (Beck, 1992). It is here we begin to see how place features.

Throughout both the surveys and interviews 'place' appeared prominently within the narratives as a strategy of differentiation. For the students the city of Cardiff played a major role in the decision of many of them to attend the faculty – in the survey nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) directly cited 'Cardiff' as a factor in their decision to pick the university as a place to study. It was clear from the interviews that students in HE see a clear triangulation between their institution, the local creative economy and the geographical place both occupy.

For creative workers their perception of place forms an important resource:

So designers and artists will have their own highly personalised and constructed perceptions of locality and their own sense of identity related to that locality. These subjective, imagined or constructed localities will be a resource of prompts, signs and symbols as important as, if not more important than, the 'real' or objective locality. The same place will be interpreted differently by different individuals and will provide different prompts and aesthetic raw materials. (Drake, 2003: 513)

Like its role in the artistic process which is illustrated here, place is a distinct part of the learning process for creative students. Students in creative degrees acknowledge that the attributes of the locality in which their education is located form part of the resources they can draw from. However, as indicated in this quote, the learning strategy is often narrowed as this learning is not expressly communicated in terms of citizenship or cultural identity but operationalized solely in an on-going project of professionalization and as a way to enhance occupational mobility:

I thought if I am going to spend three years I want to be somewhere that I can get connections and stuff. (Adam)

In this way place-based resources become prompts and stimuli which can be turned into economic advantage. This self-conscious commodification is necessary in response to employment uncertainty within the industry (Banks et al., 2000; Oakley, 2013). Mobility, for instance, becomes central to 'the creation of metropolitan habitus and to the production of creative worker subjectivities—oriented around flexibility, enterprise and willingness to move for work. Rootedness to place is thus antithetical to the kinds of subjects demanded by the creative economy and associated with, or productive of, creative places' (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013, p. 501). Therefore, in this study we can see how and why students practice their professional identities as emerging creative workers through the place which they and their education occupy.

### **Embodying the 'Creative City'**

Networking, work experience and strategic self-promotion are all part of a process of professionalization and are enabled through physical positioning in a place. These elements, along with non-physical resources such as social media (Noonan, 2013), are put to work for the benefit of the student and their professional identity. Like in Banks et al's (2000) research of established creative professionals, in this study students were keen to develop new and informal relationships with the professional creative community as a way of offsetting and managing the risks inherent in

the current labour market. We see this through Alex's approach to networking and work experience:

I also thought it would be easier for me to get work experience here, hopefully, because there is more stuff going on in the media. [...] I think it would be easier to get work experience living in those places [London, Manchester and Cardiff] than to be anywhere else...I think there is a lot of opportunity here [...] you would have contacts and knowledge of the area and that can help you on the ladder to your first job especially if you have networked a bit when you are at university, it's not that you can call in favours, but you have got more of a chance. (Alex)

The assumption of there being 'a lot of opportunity here' is tied directly to Cardiff's development, but more so its marketing, as a 'creative city'.

The catalyst for the identification of Cardiff as a creative city can be partly traced to the recent international successes of locally developed television programmes like *Dr Who* (BBC, 2005 - ) and *Torchwood* (BBC, 2006 - 2011), and the relocation to the city of a number of established BBC dramas including *Being Human* (2009 - 2013), *Sherlock* (2010 - ) and *Casualty* (1986 - ), all of which draw on the urban aesthetic as part of their appeal. These investments have led to, and been facilitated by, the establishment of a specially developed drama production centre in the bay area of the city. These have been an essential part of the marketing of Cardiff both nationally and internationally. In the interviews many of the students highlighted their pleasure at consuming this creative content, at being 'near to the action', and the professional opportunities it offered them:

I saw it filming once and it was like "wow they actually film stuff like that here"...it means things go on in Cardiff not just in London. [...] It makes Cardiff a lot more well known to know that programmes, really big programmes like *Dr Who* have been filmed here...It's making a name for itself. (Laura)

Because of the Bay as well there is a lot of stuff going on in the Bay...and because they are putting the BBC Wales down there that is going to give us a lot of opportunities, especially if we want to do work experience because we are very close. [...] By being closer to it there is always a chance someone might talk to you, which is something that appeals to me (Katie)

When I was younger, when *Dr Who* came out in 2005, I was 13 and that was the first time Cardiff came on my radar and that I became aware of it. *Dr Who* went really well and they started making more things nationally in Wales and the attention that brought, and directed attention to South Wales especially from audiences. It might have peaked but who knows, hopefully not. (Alex)

In all these narratives the interviewees occupy both the position of audience and future cultural producer. This challenges some of Comunian and Faggian's (2011, p. 18) conclusions suggesting that cultural consumption is indeed a factor in student's choice of university and in many ways is a bridge between young people and their professional development. It also raises the question would Cardiff have been as attractive without their viewing of these programmes? As these quotes show many of the students perceived this new production capacity as valid and authentic; one which could offer the students professional credibility through their association with that internationally successful output and furthermore, provide access to the structures and networks which it has nurtured. The emerging status of Wales as a creative hub also raises their professional status hence it would offer the promise of career opportunities both now, in terms of work experience and access to professional networks, and later in their ability to leverage this knowledge into paid and sustainable work. In this way their participation and learning in HE is framed as a process of becoming a member of this community of practice.

However, as Alex alludes to in the final quote above, places are not static and often these periods of creative expansion and inward investment are cyclical. They are often driven by political will, access to public and private investment and, as with all creative products, are subject to volatile and subjective tastes amongst audience and institutional decision-makers (such as commissioning editors):

[W]hereas before it was Bristol because that is where everything was happening, now you have *Dr Who* here; parts of *Sherlock* are filmed here; *Being Human*, all of this stuff and when you look into it you see that parts of this were actually filmed in Wales and if all of this stuff is happening in Wales what am I doing when I could be here, where all of this stuff is going on. (Katie)

This raised an anxiety amongst the students that they could be left behind if trends shifted and thus investment moved elsewhere. In a post-industrial, globalised society such anxieties are not uncommon. Traditional work structures and arrangements are in transition with stable wage labour replaced by an expectation of freelancing and therefore unstable living. The result is a loss of

control for workers and, as suggested above, a sustained feeling of ‘missing out’. Certainly not unique to new workers (Banks et al., 2000), anxiety is acutely felt by those aspiring to join in the creative sector as they attempt to fashion themselves into ‘a sophisticated, worldly, mobile and individualised worker’ (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013, p. 507). This quote from Kate hints at the consequences of choosing not to be mobile – in the example given above, what choices do workers in places like Bristol have when creative opportunities move away? In both mobility, and its counterpart fixity, power is exercised, experienced and negotiated.

Therefore, there are significant consequences of this operationalization of place and its conversion into a professional resource. The interviews visibly demonstrate the anxiety that is created for many of these young people at a key stage in their personal development as they grapple with gaining acceptance, negotiating availability and projecting an identity which enables them to compete often in multiple places. As Allen and Hollingworth (2013) argue, in order to mobilize place as a resource, converting this place-related capital into professional and economic capital, requires young people to harness other stocks of social capital (such as the ability and confidence to network). Therefore, any discussion of place is inevitably bound with questions of exclusion and inclusion, and how one can transition from one to the other.

### **‘You haven’t experienced anything properly’: discourses of the urban/rural**

As outlined the coupling of cities and creativity remains largely uncontested, especially in policy circles (Banks et al., 2000; Bell & Jayne, 2010). In these discourses the urban is framed as a liberating and empowering place – a place of superiority, creativity, and a culture where individuality and risk-taking are encouraged – characteristics which resonate with the working culture of the creative industry itself. In the view of the respondents in this study the city provides a better market in which to exchange talent and skills for opportunity.

Despite the existence of well-established local media (including local radio stations and newspapers) and perhaps a less aggressive job market, for the interviewees less urban areas were simply not recognised as creative or as legitimate pathways to a creative career. The frequent description was of curtailment, of being from a town in the ‘middle of nowhere’, and for people like Laura this was a professional hurdle to overcome: ‘If I said I was from my little town they would be like “what experience do you have”? I feel like they would think that you haven’t experienced anything properly’. Inevitably, and however problematic this may be, the city became associated with opportunity and social mobility:

I come from a little tiny village in the middle of nowhere with builders and farmers, but here [Cardiff] there are all these creative jobs and you can see it in the people all these creative people walking around. (Adam)

The urban, while often perceived unequally, became simultaneously the site of creativity and opportunity. This echoes Allen and Hollingworth’s (2013) study which highlighted how the supposed cosmopolitanism and dynamism of Nottingham and London allowed young people within these areas to identify careers in the creative sector as desirable and achievable. On the other hand, the invisibility of a local creative sector in Stoke on Trent (as a result of its industrial and economic heritage) meant that young people there felt that any desire to make it as a creative worker would mean moving away. For participants in both Allen and Hollingworth’s (2013) research and the study here less urban areas are bound up with particular ways of being, self-image, feeling and expectation.

However, this mobility and the transition from ‘small town’ to the ‘creative city’ also render fears of powerlessness and dispossession at being away from home and having to make opportunities for themselves. The student narratives highlight the welcomed autonomy but also fears of isolation and exclusion, both of which are features deeply embedded in the conditions and structure of creative work (Noonan, 2013; Oakley, 2006, 2013). It is clear from their narratives that these young people

have firmly adopted the predominant creative industries discourse: the centrality of connectivity, individual productivity and agency, and how all of these are enabled through the urban setting.

Rural and peripheral areas were not seen as a viable career move for young people, though by the time of graduation that view might have changed due to over-saturation of the labour market in urban areas and personal circumstances (i.e. unable to find work they might have to move home after university). All of the interviewees believed that they would have not chosen the faculty had it been located in the Welsh valleys; like their home towns this was framed as uncreative and 'away from the action'. Although creative industries policy has been taken up enthusiastically in many regions and by many local stakeholders, not all places have been able to access the resources necessary to leverage this as a marketable strategy (e.g. through the development of an iconic building or cultural quarter, the presence of national institutions dedicated to arts and culture such as the BBC or national theatre, etc.). Therefore, for more peripheral areas the creative economy can be more of 'an aspiration than a reality' (Comunian & Faggian, 2011, p. 19; Oakley, 2006, p. 262). This has implications for universities and their campuses based in rural areas or those areas not perceived as creative especially in light of cuts to public funding as these universities are reliant on student income and the promise of employment on graduation.

### **Centralisation and Creative Work**

Students are regarded as mobile members of society but they don't regard urban places as equal. For instance, Cardiff was not the only place appearing in the students' narratives underscoring the high degree of mobility that these students already exhibit. Much of their discussions extended to other cities in the UK including Manchester; indeed one student talked about a 'golden triangle' for those aspiring for a career in television between the developments in MediaCityUK (in Salford, Greater Manchester), Cardiff Bay and London:



I think things are quite centralised in England and Wales...it is probably easier to have everything in the one place starting out...so yeah it's like a golden triangle between places like Cardiff, London and Manchester...and when starting out it is good to be there for access to people. With internet connection and more Skype maybe in a few years you won't have to be in a central location, but when we graduate we will have to be. (Alex)

Centralisation, and the associated specialisation that takes place there, addresses some of the risks of creative work for both the industry and the worker. Graduates tend to concentrate in a few regions to study and even fewer regions to work (Comunian et al., 2011). These places offer 'a feeling of belonging to a shifting but essentially cohesive cultural or creative network' (Banks et al., 2000, p. 462). As outlined earlier London continues to dominate the creative economy, therefore, it is not surprising that London features so visibly in their career aspirations; as it does for other 'Bohemian' graduates (Comunian & Faggian, 2011).

However, although the lure of London remains strong for many, it is not for everyone:

I know the main stuff happens in London but you think that some of the industry does happen in Cardiff and it is close to home if you wanted to work here and be in the industry. London is such a big and scary place and it's quite overwhelming. (Laura)

I'll go to Cardiff or Manchester...not really London because it is big and it is scary and it is so competitive. (Alex)

For these students the motivation to work in the creative sector is overshadowed by decisions about their quality of life and personal resources. Unlike policy discourses which frame creative work in terms of economic value, it is clear that creative workers sometimes do resist such conceptualisation offering an emphasis on self-actualisation. According to Creative and Cultural Skills (2015, p. 6) this 'values-driven' approach to work in the sector is a feature of the millennial worker to a much greater degree than preceding generations and will impact on the future of the workplace both in the creative industries and beyond.

While earlier we saw how place was commodified and the rural was deemed problematic to their professional aspirations, the depth of mobility of young people should not be over-estimated. As discussed previously students often go to university locally and the comments above highlight how, while London is still central to their career development, other places have a unique offering which

is often linked to the quality of experience and lifestyle choice. Therefore, emerging creative workers have their own highly personalised and individually constructed perceptions of place and its relationship to their professional identity. These subjectivities challenge simplistic notions of the relationship between place and professional mobility.

## **Discussion**

Some may argue that social relations are becoming increasingly dislocated from locality and face-to-face interaction. Pointing to the developments in technology and the growth of working from home especially, one could suggest that place is increasingly irrelevant in discussions of contemporary labour. However, this research argues that location and geography still matter to people in the relationships and access to communities of practice which are nurtured by proximity and place. In this case, as in Allen and Hollingworth's (2013) study, the young people who informed this study identified with their locality in specific ways, often within the context of their emerging professional identity. Locality, in particular the virtues of cosmopolitanism, still hold considerable value for both their personal development but also features in a range of functional ways – access to work experience, access to contacts and networks, direct exposure to creative practice. The commodification of place in their professional biography is therefore enabled by their participation in HE.

These 'professionals in the making' (Ashton, 2009) are important actors in both the creative city and the wider creative economy. They may have narrow experiences and perceptions of the city, which are often framed and celebrated at the expense of rural and peripheral areas, but their ability to move meaningfully in and through creative spaces and places is an important element of their professional development. Young people are in a dynamic process of negotiating their identities so their experiences and transitions can contribute to a nuanced understanding of the concept of place.

While this research is situated within a particular context, and so the conclusions generated here are not necessarily applicable to the diverse experiences of HE which exist in the UK and internationally, the study does point to some areas which have been overlooked in policy-making relating to the influence of place on a young person's work-life biography. The research illustrates how creative and educational policies are unconsciously experienced, negotiated and deployed by social actors such as young people and prospective creative workers. What is notable in this research is how the explanations and narratives of these young people echo the established policy position. Any attempts to disrupt or challenge creative work are immediately rendered futile and counter productive.

Investigating the interface between location, education and creative practice will enrich our understanding of the geographies of the creative economy and the life-course of creative workers. The outcomes of this research will also have implications for universities and educational policy makers. These discussions remind us that contemporary learning spaces extend beyond the classroom and this is especially relevant to the creative sector where many of the necessary resources are found in a variety of places: informal spaces, social venues, large institutions. If the learning environment is enlarged (for instance to work placements and internships) we need to ensure the quality of that engagement and to nurture the productive activities that happen. Writing about place within culture work, Banks et al (2000, p. 457) argue that 'new forms of social solidarity' are needed as a way of challenging some of the structural issues inherent in this work. The *employability* agenda which has been taken up so enthusiastically by HE needs to be complemented with an *employment* agenda where understanding and unpacking the exclusionary practices of industry and the problematic routines of work is part of the educational experience for these future workers, most especially those aspiring to join the creative sector. Universities are well-positioned to encourage this through, for instance, guiding critical reflections on work placements, developing a curriculum which critiques the axiomatic structures of the creative labour market, and incubating new businesses which promote new forms of creative working and 'solidarity'.

For researchers interested in cultural labour the research suggests that locality and geography need to be attended to in much greater ways in order to understand how professional identity is constructed and exchanged, and how the geographies of the creative economy enrich or constrict this professionalization process. Through the narratives we see how an authentic creative experience is associated with cities and regional disparities are actively perceived by these young people. As policy makers and government departments work hard to create creative cities and investment becomes increasingly centralised, it becomes a crucial time for more rural areas or cities with a less creative image along with the HE institutions which occupy these places. How do they compete with the lure of the creative city rhetoric and marketing which places like Cardiff and London are keen to promote? As Oakley (2006) asks 'what of the places that lose out?' this research adds 'what of the young people that lose out'?

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<sup>i</sup> More discussion on the findings of the survey can be found in Noonan (2013).