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Building and sustaining freelance careers in a small nation: the case of Cardiff's film and television industries

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ABSTRACT

Often characterised as an occupational group of highly skilled, responsive, resilient and creative individuals, freelancers make a vital contribution to the strength and sustainability of film and television production. Freelancers are both intrinsically situated in the places they work through the interrelations of local authorities, cultural institutions and the labour market, and are themselves placemakers, contributing to the local milieu through building place-based communities to mitigate the inherently precarious nature of their careers. Based on in-depth interviews with freelancers and screen agencies in Cardiff, this paper explores the complex relationships between creative workers and their locality. It exams how freelancers negotiate precarious careers in a small nation through the support of local development agencies and government intervention. In doing so, this work builds on previous research concerning freelancer labour in Bristol, furthering the contention that place-based interventions and policy occupies an important role in nurturing diverse and resilient regional production sectors.

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Introduction

Creative freelancers make a vital economic and cultural contribution to the UK's cultural economies and the creative milieu of the cities in which they are based. While freelancers have often been characterised as 'placeless nomads' (McRobbie 2004; Mould, Vorley, and Liu 2014), it can be argued that freelancers are both intrinsically situated in the places they work through the interrelations of local authorities, cultural institutions and labour market, and are themselves placemakers, contributing to the local milieu through building place-based communities to mitigate the inherently precarious nature of their careers (Genders 2022). In my 2022 article on freelancers as creative placemakers, I concluded that precarity is not only an occupational issue, but also a place-based, policy issue, and that place-based interventions and policy occupies an important role in nurturing a diverse and resilient production sector. In this article, I demonstrate how this is realised in practice through examining how freelancers negotiate precarious careers in a small nation through the support of local development agencies and government intervention.

Cardiff constitutes the third largest film/TV cluster in the UK, after Greater London and Manchester, with 1,318 active firms and an estimated 2,800 freelancers working in the sector (Fodor, Komorowski, and Lewis 2021a). Cardiff's film and television sector has experienced extraordinary growth over the past two decades, with Fodor et al. stating that 'between 2005 and 2018, the number of firms in film/TV production has grown by 79%' (2, 2021a). As Cardiff's

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'creative anchor' and centre of excellence for drama, B.B.C. Cymru Wales is responsible for the production of internationally successful television series such as *Sherlock* (B.B.C. One, 2010–2017) and *Doctor Who* (B.B.C. One, 2005-). Cardiff is also home to one of the UK's largest purpose-built studios, Wolf Studios Wales. Since its establishment in 2017, Wolf Studios has housed major productions such B.B.C. and HBO's co-production, *His Dark Materials* (2019–2022) and Sky's *A Discovery of Witches* (2018–2022). In summary, Cardiff represents a thriving film and television production sector, with freelancers constituting a significant proportion of its workforce.

A central theme of this paper is examining the ways in which the precarious conditions of freelance work can be addressed through place-based interventions. The precarious nature of the creative industries is well documented, with film and television workers described as 'the poster children of precarity' (Wing-Fai, Gill, and Randle 2015). The freelance workforce fulfils an important economic role by responding to opportunities in the market as they occur. In this sense, freelancers constitute what Murdock terms 'reserve army' of cultural workers, allowing employers to offload the financial risks and precarity of creative work onto the workforce itself (2003). In examining freelance work through the lens of place and locality, this paper discusses the role of local organisations and government in creating secure, inclusive, and resilient regional screen industries. It draws particular attention to the role of local training programmes in addressing structural inequalities within the screen industries, particularly in regard to social class, and in doing so building more diverse and sustainable regional screen industries. The present article also discusses how particular localities foster resilience on a local level, with the COVID-19 pandemic providing a microcosm of the issues surrounding freelance labour in terms or precarity and resilience. Finally, with labour mobility and collaboration between regional production sectors becoming an increasing area of interest for policymakers, the paper concludes by analysing the potential for a cross-national 'cluster' between Bristol and Cardiff.

The analysis presented is based on 18 in-depth interviews with freelancers based in and/or working in Cardiff, alongside interviews with the Managing Director of Screen Alliance Wales, and the CEO of Ffilm Cymru. These organisations were chosen based on their involvement in the Welsh screen sector, both in terms of training programmes and policy initiatives. Concurrent with other small-scale interview-based qualitative studies, the empirical findings of this paper are limited in terms of the generalisability of the findings to a broader population of freelancers or industry stakeholders. The interviews were conducted in 2021. The freelancers interviewed are identified by their job title and any other identifiable information has been omitted to retain a level of anonymity.

Cardiff's film and television industries: engineering growth

To understand the growth and development of Cardiff film and television industries over the past two decades, this article uses the concepts of 'incremental' versus 'engineered' growth as a lens through which to analyse and compare the development of particular regional production centres. Incremental growth can be characterised as building on and developing existing infrastructures, knowledge and networks. Incremental growth is often the result of decisions and processes that occur within a particular production sector, with parameters set by the history, culture and industrial contexts of a particular place, rather than a top-down approach in which the industry develops within parameters set by local government through funding and policy initiatives. For instance, Spicer and Presence describe the development of Bristol's film and television industries as one of 'incremental growth that based on the talents and enterprise of its labour force and self-help rather than from large-scale external investment' (2017, 6). Conversely, the nature of engineered growth can be characterised by cohesive strategies for growth through interventions such as policy initiatives and investment. While the strengths of incremental growth centre around innovation within the industry (Spicer and Presence 2017) and a strong sense of community within the workforce (Genders 2022), engineered growth, as this article will explore, offers the opportunity to build

a diverse and sustainable workforce from the ground up, integrating strategies for addressing issues of precarity and the structural inequalities of freelance labour that has come to define work within the film and television industries.

Cardiff's film and television sector has been heavily engineered by Welsh Government interventions and B.B.C. investment. Between 1999 and 2016, the GVA of film and television production in Wales grew from £59 million to £187 million, an increase of 217%, compared to an increase of 84% in the UK as a whole (The Welsh Assembly, 2019: 11). As of 2021, Cardiff's film and television sector is valued at £199 million, with an estimated annual turnover of £545 million (Fodor, Komorowski, and Lewis 2021a, 2). A key driving factor of this growth has been targeted investment by the Welsh Government, which provides not only dedicated funds for film and television production, but also sets criteria through which these funds can be accessed. Launched in 2014, the Welsh Government's Media Investment Budget constitutes £30 m of potential funding for TV and film productions. The conditions of this funding stipulate that at least 50% of the production is shot in Wales, and 35% of the below the line production budget 'must be spent on "Welsh Production Expenditure" (i.e. expenditure on goods and services supplied by businesses and individual freelancers located in and operating from or within Wales)' (National Assembly for Wales 2019, 10). In this regard, the conditions of public funding often aligns with the strategies of screen agencies and organisations such Screen Alliance Wales and Ffilm Cymru. As the founding CEO of the development agency for Welsh film, Ffilm Cymru stated:

> If they have any public money they will always have spend criteria, so there is an alignment of interest to get as much in terms of local crew and services and facilities as they can.

This emphasis on employing locally permeates Wales' production culture, with Fodor et al. stating that, when measuring the impact of UK tax relief for film and high-end television (HETV), 'proportionately speaking, Welsh HETV creators are more likely to rely on local service providers than their counterparts elsewhere in the UK – making the value chain more inclusive locally' (2021b, 5).

The other way in which growth has been engineered within Cardiff's screen industries is through B.B.C. investment and strategy. As a public service broadcaster, the B.B.C. is required to 'reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom' (B.B.C. 2023). This has resulted in varying investment in programmes and services from and about Wales since the regional scheme was established in 1932. For B.B.C. Cymru Wales, the biggest intervention in terms of funding came in 2008 with the launch of 'Centres of Excellence', a new strategy to increase spending on programming outside of London to 50 per cent of the B.B.C.'s overall budget by 2016. Cardiff was designated a 'Centre of Excellence for Drama', so the achievement of this target in Wales has been bolstered predominantly by the relocation of high-profile series such as *Casualty* and the production of big budget drama in Wales in the B.B.C.'s purpose-built 'drama village', Roath Lock studios in Cardiff Bay. Although the Centres of Excellence initiative has been criticised for being a process of centralisation (Genders 2019), it serves an important role in nurturing and promoting Cardiff's identity as a centre for high-quality drama production. Drama production is a particularly valuable foundation on which freelancers build sustainable careers. As McElroy and Noonan note in their chapter on building a sustainable labour force in regional drama production:

> The scale of production can often mean more stable contracts, especially where production is more predictable such as within a returning or continuing series. Furthermore, the professional prestige of drama also bestows occupational value for many television workers. Drama is a form where you can build your reputation—an essential strategic currency in this labour market. (2019, 63)

However, despite the above-mentioned funding initiatives from Welsh Government, the growth of drama in Cardiff has also made the city vulnerable to crews being 'helicoptered' in from London. While it often assumed that this primarily affects more senior positions, it can also have a domino effect, as one freelance camera operator described:

> If it's a big money drama coming to Cardiff a lot of the time the camera team are helicoptered in from London. They'll get a Director of Photography from London and he likes to work with this camera operator and then that camera operator likes to work with this focus puller and then the whole team comes from London. a lot of that funding is dependent on people having a Welsh address, so they just like, on the paperwork they just put down your Airbnb address and say that's where you live. That's what happens a lot.

While government funding initiatives are intended to secure the employment of local crews, there are evident loopholes that demonstrate the issues with relying on this type of ringfenced approach. But another crucial factor in Cardiff is a lack of sufficiently trained and experienced crew to fill these roles. A key issue in this respect is the lack of a cohesive strategy for growth in terms of both funding and skills development. A 2019 inquiry by the National Assembly for Wales stated that the initial recoupment estimates of Media Investment Budget were 'wildly ambitious' and a potential skills shortage was the 'biggest factor restricting growth in the screen industries in Wales' (2019, 5). The Managing Director of Screen Alliance Wales in 2021 was acutely aware of this issue:

> The explosion of production has meant that there is a lack of crew. We have to be working to make sure we have got enough crew coming through and giving that opportunity. And it is only by leading by example when production sees these trainees coming in and that they are good trainees do they feel confident to take them on because the most important thing to a line producer, or a producer, or a coordinator is getting the job done. So, it is breaking that sort of cycle of getting people in who you know, and it is giving other people the opportunity.

As stated above, a limiting factor can be the few opportunities for 'on-the-job' training, which, without some form of intervention, could perpetuate the current skills shortage and limit opportunities to those who already have connections to the industry, which in turn stifles ambitions to increase diversity. With this potential skills shortage highlighted as Cardiff biggest restriction when it comes to the growth of its screen industries, the following section examines both current and emerging strategies for nurturing new and existing talent, based on the experience of freelancers who have engaged in training and skill development opportunities, and those who designed them.

Training initiatives and funding: widening participation

Universities are often positioned as 'talent pipelines' into the film and television industries, with Creative Skillset's 2014 workforce survey reporting that 78% of respondents were educated to degree level, while only 1% of the workforce had undertaken an apprenticeship. More recently, the UK Government Department for Education reported that apprenticeships in motion picture, video and television programme production, sound recording and music publishing activities rose slightly from 170 in 2019/20 to 190 in 2020/21, but were still below the level recorded in 2018/19 of 380 (Puffett 2022). With the decline of apprenticeships and increasing reliance on university courses in media production with all the associated debt, freelancers are now increasingly paying to train, rather than being paid to train, which limits career prospects for those from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. With respect to nurturing a highly skilled local labour force, many employers are also sceptical about how well university courses prepare students for work in the industry. Graduates often expect to enter the industry at a certain level due to the skills and experience gained while undertaking their degree, yet this experience is often limited to very small-scale projects, compared to the realities of working on set as part of a large crew. Alongside this, employers also suggested that graduates were often not prepared for entering the freelance workforce and the realities of building a sustainable freelance career (Genders 2019).

While many freelancers interviewed in Bristol expressed frustration about a lack of local and affordable training schemes (Genders 2019), the career trajectory of those interviewed in Cardiff often started with and was sustained by access to affordable local training schemes and grants, as a freelance editor recalled:

> What really gave me my break or got me in with other people was a trainee editor scheme. So that was it really and that was perhaps 2014, I think. That was a trainee scheme for six months and they essentially taught me some of the technical things and I shadowed other editors for a while.

One of the strengths of the beforementioned engineered growth that Cardiff has undergone is the ability to integrate accessible training initiatives within the sector through policy and funding conditions. As the CEO of Ffilm Cymru explained:

> Every single film that we have ever supported has had to have trainees on it. Actually creating opportunities to work on production is a fundamental. We've tended to have at least 3, but we've had anything up to 35 trainees on a given production, depending on the scale of the production. I think it is about trying to embed ways of working within a sector. It is always tricky with schemes, because they have a tendency to come and go, and you want to create a culture where the production companies value having trainees and growing the sector as well and also because of the work it can do in terms of developing the diversity of the sector and the inclusivity of the sector.

It is also important that schemes are accessible to those often excluded from the screen industry through its working and employment practices. The CEO of Ffilm Cymru discussed the importance of looking beyond the sector and engaging with public sector partners when trying to address this issue of diversity and inclusion:

> We work with housing associations as key partners here on the ground. So, they help us actually recruit. They are in the network, they know the individuals, what programmes they've done before, what skill sets they have etc., and they also offer things like locations for doing the training and for doing the recruitment. They provide support like transport and childcare, that start to address the particular barriers as to why we might not have people from socially economic disadvantaged places. You're also giving people practical support to overcome those barriers of like, 'I can't afford wet-weather gear. I don't have the software for it. I don't have a laptop. I can't afford a phone.' You know, all these sorts of practical things. So, whether that is bursaries or direct provision of transport for example, supporting them with driving lessons. So, all these kinds of things that can close an industry down and stop it having capacity to grow.

This outward facing strategy curbs the tendency of the industry to replicate and perpetuate existing models and power structures, which have long excluded particular groups. According to Fodor et al. the Cardiff Capital Region 'Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) is one of the most deprived parts of the UK' with 24% earning below the Living Wage following decades of industrial decline (2021a, 6). Local training programmes and funding initiatives occupy an important role in addressing structural inequalities within the screen industries, particularly in regard to social class, and in doing so building more diverse and sustainable regional screen industries. But, as the quote above demonstrates, there is also a need for economic support. The film and television industries are often characterised as being part of the 'knowledge economy' and the labor force 'knowledge workers'; however, the rhetoric ignores the economic capital needed to participate in the sector, which resources primarily placed on knowledge-building training activities. Indeed, Cardiff's screen industries are also sustained through Welsh Government grants and initiatives outside of the sector. These also play an important role in widening participation through removing or lessening financial barriers freelancers may experience when trying to start their careers, particularly in terms of obtaining technical equipment. As one freelancer recounts:

> There was a grant scheme for starting your own business, I think it was £3,000. I applied for that and in the summer of 2015 I was able to use that money to put towards my own kit, which now when I look back is a fraction of what I now earn, but at the time it was like, 'Oh yes I can really use this, and get some useful stuff.' [. . .] You basically applied with your business plan, and they give you £3,000. Then on the back of that, they also provided me with a business adviser to meet with once a month.

A number of freelancers also discussed accessing bespoke business support through the government funded services such as Business Wales. Kate Oakley contends, that entrepreneurship has become a crucial skill when navigating the precarious landscape of the creative sector. She proposes

the following two questions as crucial: 'How can we make "entrepreneurship" in the cultural industries genuinely open to all and more sustainable?' 'What policies might help with that and whose responsibilit(ies) are they?' (2013, 157). From using the case study of Cardiff's film and television sector, the answer to these questions would appear to place emphasis on place-based, knowledge-based and economic interventions from, in this case local government, but may also be the responsibility of local or regional authorities in the case of larger nations.

However, according to Hannah and McElroy, a lack of a 'clear strategy for workforce and skills development operating across the entire screen sector is a major obstacle to progress in the Cardiff Capital Region' (2020, 6). The Screen Work 2020 report also revealed that there was a significant gap in training opportunities at more senior levels, with only 5.5% of all training organisations delivering this type of training (Hannah and McElroy 2020, 27). This is important as even when freelancers have built a career within the screen industry, they are expected to continue to take responsibility for their own training and skills development to meet the demands of a quickly changing sector and remain employable, alongside progressing to more senior levels. While the Welsh Government and organisations such as Screen Alliance Wales and Ffilm Cymru are aligned in their goals of building and nurturing Welsh talent and production, the speed at which Cardiff's film and television has grown over the past decade has essentially outpaced the development of clear and coherent training and skill development strategy that covers this rapidly expanding sector.

COVID-19 and resilience: interventions at times of crisis

The resilience of screen industries – i.e. the ability to recover from the impact of unexpected events – has been a key point of discussion for academics and policy makers during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, in which many productions had to cease operations for an extended period of time (see: Comunian and England 2020). It may be argued that the screen industries are inherently resilient due to their reliance on flexible labour structures in which freelancers are often characterised as innovative and dynamic workers, responding to changes in the market as they occur. However, as Pratt argues, this resilience comes at the price of freelancers bearing 'the costs and risks of uncertainty' (2017, 136). Furthermore, while Comunian and England (2020) argue that it is during times of crisis that the precarious livelihoods and working conditions of creative and cultural workers become visible to the eyes of UK policy and policymaking, freelance labour was actually a significant blind spot in the UK government's initial response to the pandemic, with many freelancers unable to access financial support through government furlough schemes due to not meeting the eligibility criteria. According to the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU), only 2% of freelancers who responded to their survey had been furloughed in the first month of the pandemic (BECTU 2020). In Wales specifically, the 2022 Cultural Freelancers Wales report stated that '92% of freelancers indicated that their work has been negatively impacted by Covid-19, with half losing 80% of their work in 2021' (Donnelly and Komorowski 2022, 2). Alongside this, 'freelancers lost 76% of income in 2020'. Those groups who are disproportionally disadvantaged by the conditions of freelance labour were more heavily impacted economically by the pandemic with 'women, people of colour, D/deaf and disabled freelancers, and those with caring responsibilities experiencing increased financial inequality' (IWA 2022). While the sector may be characterised as resilient, the pandemic has demonstrated that the individuals who are supposed to embody that resilience are anything but.

The case of Cardiff demonstrates the vital role government intervention can play in stabilising screen industries during times of crisis through not only directing funding to organisations and companies, but also to individual freelancers. In October 2020 Welsh Government launched the Cultural Recovery Fund, which included the UK-first Freelancer Fund, allowing freelancers in the sub sectors of arts, creative industries, arts and heritage events, culture and heritage to apply for a £2,500 grant. Over the course of the pandemic, this funding played a pivotal role in stabilising Wales' screen industries, According to Welsh Government, '3,783 unique freelancers were supported with the total

value of the grants awarded amounting to £10.39 million' (2022, 5). Alongside individuals, organisations were also offered grants to pay bills, staff salaries and to cover their overheads. Welsh government reported that 'for organisations in receipt of funding across both rounds the total number of unique contractual freelancer postings supported is estimated at around 21,000 (2022, 7). Beyond financial support when productions had to cease operations, the Welsh Government also played an important role in advising on the practicalities of safely working on set in the pandemic once lockdowns were lifted. As one freelance runner describes:

> Quite a lot of [Freelancers in England] said that they didn't know how to get support [with COVID]. They didn't know anything. They said that when they Googled stuff nothing really came up at all for where they were, even if it was their local area or just overall within England. There wasn't a lot of support there. They couldn't ring someone up and be like, 'What is happening? I'm a bit confused'. Whereas a lot of us, on the Welsh side, we had so many resources. We were like, 'Just hop on to the Welsh GOV website, it is fine'.

The provision of safe work conditions is particularly important to a freelance labour force that is often vulnerable to exploitation because of low levels of unionisation and collective action (Genders 2019). Indeed, Hannah and McElroy reported that during the first year of the pandemic trade union membership increased, with BECTU UK reporting a 7% increase in membership resulting in an additional 2,856 members (2020, 47).

The Welsh Government also established its Freelancer' Pledge in 2021, the first of its kind in the UK. This document established a commitment to the freelance community in Wales that would work alongside the Culture Recovery Fund to design a new approach to the way in which the public sector works with the freelance community in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This commitment included a promise of 'fair work, with all work provided paid at no less than Industry standard/union agreement' and for the public sector to 'work with the freelance community to identify any actions needed, such as training' (Welsh Government 2021). The Freelancer Pledge demonstrates how resilience is not only fostered through financial interventions at times of crisis, but also more strategic interventions in terms of rethinking and redesigning the working relationships between different actors in the film and television sector. Most importantly, this shifts the 'responsibility' of resilience from the freelance workforce to policymakers. In doing so, it places a much-needed emphasis on policymakers to create conditions within which freelancers can build and sustain their careers and contribute to a resilient and sustainable screen industry.

Cardiff and Bristol: labour mobility and the potential of a cross-national cluster

Although freelancers and their work are intrinsically embedded in particular localities, in cases where two or more regional production centres exist in close proximity questions arise around where the boundaries of place are situated beyond geographical understandings of regions, cities and nations. Just 44 miles and 50 minutes apart by car or train, it is often assumed that creative freelancers work across Bristol and Cardiff on a regular basis. In this regard, it is sometimes assumed that Bristol and Cardiff have the potential to constitute a cross-national economic cluster, with the only barriers being the cost and access to transport across the two cities. Since the abolition of the Severn Bridge toll, which separates, Wales and the South West of England, in 2018 there have been proposals to create a shared economic region, or 'Western Gateway', between Cardiff, Newport and Bristol. A Great Western Cities report describes this moment as a 'once in a lifetime' chance to create a cross-border economic region that will rival the northern powerhouse and challenge the south-east of England (2016). Such proposed policy initiatives are firmly embedded within the rhetoric of 'creative clusters', with NESTA identifying Bristol, Bath and Cardiff as a 'strong example of connections between clusters … policymakers, development agencies and universities should factor these connections into their network support initiatives and ensure they do not inadvertently displace them' (6). Over the past three decades the concept of creative clusters has increasingly been the subject of considerable academic interest

and gained significant currency within political debates concerning industrial strategy and regional growth. Often cited as first introducing the notion of 'industrial clusters' in the early 1990s, Michael Porter defines clusters as 'geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (e.g. universities, standards agencies, trade associations) in a particular field that compete but also cooperate' (2000, 15). However, the definition and conceptualisation of creative clusters is primarily based on quantifiable metrics, with little attention given to the cultural and political distance between particular localities.

One barrier to greater collaboration between the two cities is the ways in which Bristol and Cardiff have developed distinct communities of practice based around the location of particular genres. Evolving institutional policy and broader pushes toward increasing 'out of London' production has resulted in an ecology in which Bristol and Cardiff function as distinct sub-clusters confined by specific specialisms. Most notably these are Natural History and Animation in Bristol (anchored by the B.B.C. Natural History Unit and Aardman, respectively) and, as already discussed, drama in Cardiff. As the CEO of Ffilm Cymru stated:

> I'm sceptical that [better transport links] will make that much difference. I do think it is more about, well two things, what are the existing networks, because everybody seems to talk of those to start off with, but also the nature of the type of content that they're making.

The notion of Cardiff and Bristol constituting separate networks was also evident when interviewing freelancers in Bristol. While these interviewees expressed a desire to work in both cities, there was a sense that it was difficult to build and maintain the network needed to gain steady work in both simultaneously. As one Cardiff-based freelancer explained:

> When somebody is in charge of a programme, they want to have somebody they know and trust. I went along to one of these job fairs and at the end of a very, very long line to go and speak to this Bristol-based production company I had a conversation with a recruiter, and they said, 'No, the thing is we don't really know you.' And I said, 'But you won't unless you give me an opportunity.'

Those Cardiff-based freelancers who had managed to secure work in Bristol often did so through some engaging with an employer that was already operating across the two cities:

> Bristol and Cardiff are very much two separate networks. The very first Bristol contact that I got was from a company that supplied their equipment to a production in Cardiff, so that's how I got the connection. And then, from there, I don't know, I just jumped from one place to another. So, I have cracked it, but only on the surface level.

Indeed, there are multiple production companies that operate across Bristol and Cardiff, including one of the largest independent production companies in the UK, Plimsoll Productions. Alongside this, the establishment of one of Channel 4's new creative hubs in Bristol in 2019 has also introduced new potential for cross-national connections, with an investment in the Welsh independent production company, Yeti Media and a new training partnership with B.B.C. Cymru Wales and the Welsh-language channel S4C to support the development and growth of factual television production in Wales.

However, particularly for public service broadcasters such as the B.B.C., the different strategic priorities and working practices when producing content in and for a nation as opposed to a region can also create barriers for collaboration. Since the beginning of political devolution in Wales at the turn of the millennium, television has occupied a central role in both creating and reflecting a sense of Welsh national identity and belonging (See Andrews 2006; Medhurst 2009). Under its external regulator, Ofcom, B.B.C. Cymru Wales is required to create content of interest and of relevance to the people living in Wales and 'must ensure that it provides a range of genres in its programming that reflects Wales's culture' (Ofcom 2019). As the Head of Corporate Affairs and Public Policy at B.B.C. Cymru Wales explained, these cultural and regulatory

obligations that come with broadcasting in a small nation as opposed to a region shape the production culture in which freelancers work:

> If you work on Radio Wales, Radio Wales is a national radio service. Radio Bristol is a more local service. And while, obviously, there are commonalities, in terms of radio production, there are some quite salient differences as well. Your strategic focus can be a barrier. Also your understanding of the culture you operate in can be a barrier.

The Managing Director of Screen Alliance Wales also discussed these barriers were the result of the disjunction between Bristol being situated in a region of England (the South West), and Cardiff being the capital of a small nation (Wales):

> We do live in a different country. We are a nation and we have our own language. We have our own political set-up. We are devolved. It is not just as easy as setting up something and people zip from one place to the other.

As workers who are intrinsically connected their localities, freelancers form communities of practice that are shaped by the institutional and cultural contexts in which they work. In the case of Bristol and Cardiff, this currently results in a Venn diagram of freelance workers within the two cities that may sometimes overlap but often do not completely converge. The above quotation also refers to the Welsh language, and while the need for Welsh provision, particularly in terms of Welsh-language content, creates sustainability, it also has the potential to stifle cross-national collaboration. However, fostering cross-national collaboration through initiatives such as the Western Gateway remains central to ambitions to promote regional economic growth. In contributing to this, the findings of this paper highlight several barriers particular to the place-based nature of freelance work in the film and television industries. While overcoming these barriers is multifaceted and complex, the creation of a cross-national screen agency covering South Wales and the South West of England would likely have a positive impact on collaboration across the two regions.

Conclusion

Through a case study of Cardiff's film and television sector, this article has contributed to the growing body of evidence that freelance labour is place-based, and freelance workers are intrinsically linked to the localities in which they work. In doing so, the present analysis builds on previous work examining freelance work in Bristol (Genders 2022), to examine how the engineered growth of Cardiff's film and television sector over the past two decades has established the conditions in which freelance work is experienced within the city, including the associated opportunities and challenges. It has also highlighted the value of knowledge-based and economic interventions led by local government in the form of local training schemes and grants. In particular, the Ffilm Cymru training initiatives also demonstrate the value of public sector partnerships in engaging with communities, which are often excluded from the film and television sector. However, it is more difficult to imagine how such place-based interventions may be orchestrated and funded outside of the small nations where there are larger and more geographically dispersed populations and more competition between regions and the production centres within them.

This article has also explored how at times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the responses of local government and policymakers, which build resilience within the sector, rather than this responsibility falling on freelancers. The case of Cardiff would suggest that a sustainable and resilient sector is one in which the responsibility for fostering resilience is both shouldered by those with the power to implement policy and strategize across the industry, rather than those who are most vulnerable due to the precarious nature of their work.

Finally, mobility and collaboration between regional production sectors has been gaining increased prominence on the political agenda as part of broader ambitions to boost economic growth outside of London. But the fostering of successful and sustainable cross-national

collaboration in the film and television sector requires an understanding of how freelance work is experienced beyond quantifiable metrics and the rhetoric of creative clusters. While much of the rhetoric around a 'Western Gateway' is based on geographical proximity and public transport infrastructure, the experiences of freelancers and industry professionals in both Cardiff and Bristol suggests the need for a way to measure the cultural and political distance between production centres.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

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