Precarious work and creative placemaking: Freelance labour in Bristol

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Abstract

As an occupational group characterised by their responsiveness, resilience and innovation, freelancers make a vital contribution to the UK's creative economy. However, although there has been a general acknowledgement of their importance, a number of existing studies abstract freelancers from the localities in which they work. Based on twenty in-depth interviews with freelancers working in Bristol's film and television industries, this article contends that freelance work is strongly situated in place and locality and, as such, defining the nature of freelance work also requires understanding the local cultural, political and economic contexts in which it is situated. In making this argument, this article situates precarity as not only an occupational issue, but also a place-based, policy issue. It concludes by arguing that, rather than instrumentalist approaches, policy interventions designed to promote growth in local production centres should be informed by the place-based nature of how freelancers negotiate precarious careers.

Keywords: freelance labour, regional production, Bristol, creative cities, film and television production

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Biographical note

Dr Amy Genders is a Wallscourt Fellow in Screen Business and Creative Enterprise. Her current research primarily concerns freelance labour, regional production and cultural value. She has recently completed a one-year AHRC-funded project investigating the contribution of freelancers to Bristol's creative economy, the findings of which were published in a 2019 report entitled *An Invisible Army: The Role of Freelance Labour in Bristol's Film and Television Industries*. She is currently engaged in a follow-on project investigating the mobility of labour and the creative and cultural importance of place in Bristol and Cardiff as a cross national 'creative cluster'. Alongside this, she also leads a cross-European research network examining the changing nature and sustainability of regional screen industries.

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Introduction

Richard Florida's (2002) influential work on the 'creative city' proposed a direct correlation between the potential of a city to attract creative workers and local economic growth. However, his emphasis on urban regeneration has resulted in a swathe of instrumentalist policy directives that, rather than being city-specific, are designed to duplicate universal best practice in local contexts (Trip and Romein, 2014). In contrast, this study analyses the concept of the creative city as the agglomeration of particular production cultures situated within a specific place. It builds on Andy Pratt's provocation to look beyond the 'neo-liberal celebrations of a particular manifestation of "creativity'' and explore 'what the nature of life and livelihood is in the actually existing creative city' (2011: 124). With freelance workforce models becoming ever more commonplace in the UK's film and television industries, it is now imperative to understand how the distinct production cultures of creative cities are both shaped by and shape the nature of such precarious work.

As an occupational group characterised by their responsiveness, resilience and innovation, freelancers make a vital contribution to the UK's creative economy. According to a 2019 report by ScreenSkills, 50 per cent of production workers in the UK's screen industry are freelance (7). Although there has been a general acknowledgement of their importance, a number of existing studies remove freelancers from the localities in which they work. In reference to London's creative industries Mould et al., describe freelancers as having a '*role* but not a *place*' (2014: 2442, authors' emphasis). Indeed, many studies on freelancers tend to focus on the individual in terms of entrepreneurialism and self-branding (Gandini, 2016) and the role of the individual within a wider network of cultural workers (Blair, 2003; Antcliff et al., 2007; Lee, 2011). The present article contributes to this existing body of research by developing and extending the fundamental influence of place and locality within these practices. It argues that, rather than being 'placeless' nomads, freelancers are both placemakers and key contributors to the creative economies of cities. The article contends that freelance work is strongly situated in place and locality and, as such, defining the nature of freelance work also requires understanding the local cultural, political and economic contexts in which it is situated.

Specifically, this article will address the relationship between freelancers and place by examining the working lives of freelancers in Bristol's film and television industries. As the UK's third largest cluster of film and television workers after London and Manchester (Spicer and Presence, 2017), Bristol provides a valuable case study for analysing how creative work is promoted in local policy and negotiated in

practice in a specific place. In recent years Bristol's production sector has also gained further recognition on a national and international scale, making successful applications to become a UNESCO Creative City of Film in 2017 and one of Channel 4's two regional Creative Hubs in 2018. Fundamental to the strength of these proposals was Bristol's strong local talent pool primarily comprised of freelancer workers. In order to demonstrate the intimate connections between freelancers and place, this article draws from twenty qualitative interviews with Bristol-based freelancers from a range of occupations within the film and television sectors. The empirical interview data is analysed thematically in order to demonstrate how their attempts to build sustainable careers are intimately connected to their location. The present work builds on and extends an initial report (Genders, 2019) that analysed the working lives of freelancers in Bristol's film and television industries and provided an overview of the particular challenges and opportunities sustaining a freelance career in the city presented. It expands on this report by situating precarity as not only an occupational issue, but also a place-based, policy issue. The first section examines the current literature concerning freelance labour, drawing attention to the role of place in understanding how freelancers mitigate the inherent precarity of their work. The article then goes on to analyse critically the concept of the creative city as both a policy directive and the context in which precarious work is negotiated. Attention is then turned to establishing Bristol's 'creative field', a concept used to analyse the role of place in setting the necessary conditions for creativity. The article concludes by arguing that, rather than instrumentalist approaches, policy interventions designed to promote growth in local production centres should be informed by the place-based nature of how freelancers negotiate precarious careers.

Placeless nomads

Freelancers occupy an important economic role by responding to opportunities in the market as they occur, constituting a 'reserve army' (Murdock, 2003) of cultural workers which enables employers to offload the financial risks and precarity of creative work onto the workforce itself. Beyond economic rationales, freelance workforce models are often proposed by policymakers to increase overall creativity through increasing competition and acting as catalysts in the generation of new and innovative ideas. In this regard, freelancers are often characterised by their responsiveness, resilience and innovation. While there is no legal or commonly accepted definition of freelancers that exists in the UK, conventionally freelancers are understood as 'skilled professional workers who are neither employers or employees, supplying labour on a temporary basis under a contract for services for a fee to a range of business clients' (Kitching and Smallbone, 2008: V). But as individual freelancers move between employers to meet the demands of the market, their connection to particular places becomes harder to discern from quantitative data and statistics alone. This has led to the assertion by Mould et al. that 'freelancers can be seen to have a role but not a place' (2014: 2442). Likewise, in 2005 McRobbie

predicted that 'as jobs and contracts are increasingly casualized and internationalized, creative freelancers will find themselves even more nomadic' (2004: 132).

However, in order to mitigate the precarious nature of freelance work, a number of studies highlight the importance of not just networks, but also *communities* built around knowledge exchange, support and in some cases mentorship. In their article on networks and social capital in the UK television industry, Antcliff et al. contend that, as the freelance labour market expanded, networks evolved to 'foster co-operation and create a sense of community within a fragmented industry' (2007, 373). In a similar vein, Merkel examines the importance of co-working spaces – which are frequently used by freelancers – as facilitating a 'collective, community-based approach to the organisation of cultural and creative work' (2015: 124). As opposed to 'network', which is often limited to describing particular relationships and connections, the term community implies shared creation of meaning and resources which emerges and develops over time (Wenger, 1998). As Goodwin concludes in her study on communities of practice within the Australian creative industries: 'creative practitioners who engage in collaborative practice not only develop critical professional skills but also obtain necessary psychosocial support that fosters resilience to sustain them in the world of creative work' (2019: 122).

While the literature concerning freelancers often discusses networks and communities as *occupational* resources, this paper emphasises the *place-specific* dimension which often provides the context for such community activity. This builds on the work of Warren and Jones, who in the introduction to their edited collection argue that 'localities fundamentally shape the connections between creative economy and communities' (2016: 2). Within this context, the concept of placemaking is understood as a 'continuous process of shaping, experiencing and contributing to a "place"', with place defined as both a locality and the relationships that occur within that locality (Mateo-Babiano and Lee, 2020: 15). The concepts of placemaking and community are intrinsically connected, with the former described by Courage as 'an approach and set of tools that puts the community front and centre of deciding how their place looks and how it functions' (2020: 3). Building on this definition, the present paper analyses Bristol's freelance community within the context of broader social inequalities which determine who can participate in the practice of placemaking. The present study also contends that there is increasing evidence of place-based community building activities in an online context, with sites such as Facebook and Twitter becoming a digital space in which jobs are shared, issues are discussed, and support is given and received.

Here it is important to note that there is an existing body of literature concerning the relationship between place and working practices which are familiar to freelancers. For instance, in *The Politics of Cultural Work* (2007) and *Creative Justice*: *Cultural Industries, Work and Inequality* (2017) Mark Banks discusses the role of place in the working lives of cultural entrepreneurs in Manchester. The work of Annette Naudin also focuses on 'micro-entrepreneurs' in relation to place and local networks with specific attention given to Birmingham (2017). A further important work to note is Greg de Peuter and Nicole Cohen's article on the ambivalence of coworking, which makes a connection between local community building among creative workers and negotiating precarity. This paper contributes to this body of knowledge by emphasising the relationship between place and freelancers as a specific and significant occupational group within regional film and television industries. In doing so, it draws on Grandadam et al.'s definition of place as providing 'the local milieu with physical platforms of knowledge, where communities can build a common understanding', going on to state that 'they not only favour the diversity of creative communities, but also provide continuous and ever-renewed opportunities to intertwine communities, transfer knowledge across and within communities, and accelerate the translation of ideas and practices' (2013: 1704).

While national policy occupies an important role in spearheading regional production through regulatory obligations on broadcasters and ringfenced funding, freelance communities are often built and maintained through local infrastructure, organisations, and informal and formal networks. In her case study of Manchester's film and television industry, Johns describes how, alongside national policy and regulation, the city benefits from a number of localised interventions, including the ability for firms and freelancers to 'engage with communication services and network development co-ordinated by North West Vision which oversees film and television activities in the North West' (2010: 1066). Spicer's more recent analysis of Manchester's film and television industry foregrounds the role and politics of place in shaping both 'outputs and production cultures' (2020: 297). Beyond the UK, Grandadam et al. discuss how Montreal offers a high concentration of informal network spaces such as bars, clubs, museums, art galleries and performance halls, alongside regular festivals and events in city, facilitating interaction among creative professionals (2013). They use the concepts of underground, middleground and upperground to analyse the relationship between skilled individuals, the communities and the spaces and places in which they congregate, and institutions, organisations and companies, respectively. Most importantly, it is the more localised activities orchestrated through the relationship between the underground and middleground that 'nourish the upperground firms with new ideas' (ibid: 1710). In essence, the more outward facing, seemingly globalised facets of a creative city are built around highly localised knowledge exchange and community activity.

Precarious work and the creative city

The general relationship between the city and creativity is not a new concept. As the locus of industrialisation and modernity, from their inception 'cities were thought to engender a type of 'freedom' and other such 'liberating' notions as rationality, individuality, and, of course, creativity' (Van Damme and De Munck, 2018: 15). By the late nineteenth-century, cities were believed to 'embody culture, progress and civilisation' which was materialised in the building of museums, universities and 'world exhibitions'. (ibid.) Peter Hall's seminal *Cities in Civilisation* argues that cities are central to human civilisation and that their size and complexity make cities natural sites for 'the innovative milieu' (1998). It was not until the end of the twentieth century that the relationship between the city and creativity began to become more prominent in political and economic discourse. Van Damme and De Munck outline how, as many western societies started to move into an era of post-industrialisation in the 1970s and 1980s, a 'new economy' emerged centred around 'knowledge' and by extension 'culture' and 'creativity' (2018: 5). Landry and Bianchini's important intervention *The Creative City* (1995) positioned cities as conduits for creativity and innovation which would revitalise de-industrialised towns.

At the turn of the millennium, the 'creative city' as a concept became increasingly popularised through Richard Florida's bestselling books *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) and *Cities and the Creative Class* (2005). Florida proposed that the future of urban economies was directly connected to the attraction and retention of the 'creative class', whose job was to 'create meaningful new forms' (2005: 34). Florida was an influential policy adviser as well as author and central to his thesis was the notion that a 'creative' city can be built through prescribed policy directives: 'I like to tell city leaders that finding ways to help support a local music scene can be just as important as investing in high-tech business and far more effective than building a downtown mall (2002: 229). Since its introduction and subsequent popularisation at the turn of the century, the concept of the creative city has received much critique. In their paper reflecting on the past two decades of creative industries research, Mark Banks and Justin O'Conner use the example of Manchester to note how the creative city narrative of cultural innovation, regeneration and a shared sense of purpose obscured 'the fact that while many Manchester people may well have shared a certain 'state of mind', they were also conjoined by high levels of relative deprivation, as well as being quite divided within the city, in both social and economic terms' (2017: 639). Banks and O'Conner go on to argue that while the notion of the 'creative city' had a substantial impact on policy, it did so at the expense of more critical analysis of participation and inequalities. As

they conclude: 'getting creativity to the 'top table' of policy making came at the cost of renouncing all arguments outside that of economic growth' (ibid: 644).

Cities employ their status and reputation for creativity strategically to attract high quality talent and often offer incentives to encourage companies to locate in the city and thereby gain international investment in the form of large-scale productions. However, beneath the large investment figures and regional growth statistics it is important to acknowledge that the economy of the creative city runs on precarious labour. As Pratt states:

> The new work that is being created so quickly, which is presented as the saviour and future of cities and nations, is some of the most unstable and precarious work that reproduces the most regressive social and economic structure. Far from the creative city and the creative worker being the meretricious and liberal solution to urban change and future growth, it looks more like a neo-liberal hell. (2011: 128)

Many of the policy initiatives influenced by Florida and others emphasise attracting middle class workers, further perpetuating diversity issues within the creative industries. Such discourse tends to promote freelance workforce models that, in their current iteration, are inaccessible and unsustainable for those from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. As Peck contends, Florida's *Rise of the Creative Class* 'both glorifies and naturalizes the contracted-out, 'free-agent' economy, discursively validating the liberties it generates, and the lifestyles it facilitates, for the favoured class of creatives' (2005: 756). As I argued in a previous study, freelance work is not a meritocracy and surviving as a freelancer in the film and television industry requires access to 'financial resources and social capital that is out of reach to many from less privileged socio-economic background' (Genders, 2019: 29). More broadly, a 2018 report into social mobility and inequalities within the creative industries, only 12.4% of those working in film, TV and radio are from a working-class background (Brook et al., 2018). While present studies suggest that Bristol also follows this trend as indicated by levels of education (Spicer and Presence, 2017) and access to financial support (Genders, 2019), future work to address issues concerning diversity would benefit from more comprehensive surveys on the socioeconomic profile of creative workers in the city.

While often touted as kickstarting the economy of deindustrialised cities such as Manchester and Cardiff, the creative industries in which freelancers work are themselves an agent of gentrification. Florida identified the importance of living close to places of work, stating that the 'ability to move around easily – to get to and from work of anywhere else for that matter – is significant to a daily sense of well-being' (2008: 297). Marans and Stimson have compared this to the working class during the

industrial era, with both 'communities' located 'in the inner city, close to places of work' (2011: 15). However, as Pratt argues, policy aimed at increasing quality of life in a 'creative city' is often targeted at 'making the quality of life of the few rather than the many better (that is the middle or senior management, and/or cosmopolitan lifestyle migrants)' (2011: 125). City centre living is not economically viable for a significant proportion of the population with house price rising in part due to initiatives designed to increase the attractiveness of such areas to the middle classes. In *The Creativity Hoax*, Morgan and Nelligan devote a chapter to the social and cultural issues surrounding the distance between those from working-class and minority backgrounds and the epicentres of the creative economy. While city centre living can offer access to the informal networks necessary to get work, creative ambitions can be 'limited by the structural factors than can exclude the aspirant: high rents, low incomes and a lack of social capital that would open doors' (2018: 43).

Rather than providing affordable housing and more access to training opportunities, current local policy directives primarily focus on encouraging 'the artistic imagination in how the city is put together' in terms of having fewer 'ugly or soulless buildings' and making universities 'creative places' (Landry, 2012: xxiii). In summary, and as noted by Banks and O'Conner (2017) above, it is often the more complex, class-based issues that are strikingly absent from such analysis. The very conditions of freelance labour in terms of precarious work and informal recruitment procedures and networks makes work in the creative sector difficult to sustain for those from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. While such issues have often been associated with the deeply ingrained culture of the creative industries, it is important to recognise the role of local policy in both improving the working lives of those already in the sector and widening access to those without the cultural or financial capital to sustain a career under such precarious conditions.

Place and Bristol's 'creative field'

The role of place in setting the necessary conditions for creativity is well documented within the literature concerning creative cities (Florida, 2002; Trip, 2007; Smit, 2011). However, such work often focuses on instrumentalist policy to attract and retain creative workers, rather than the need to understand placemaking as a process that may hinder or facilitate the conditions for creativity. Comparing placemaking to place marketing, Richards and Duif describe the former as involving 'non-market processes and an effort to improve the quality of the lives of all those who use the place. An attractive external image should be a by-product of placemaking, not the goal' (2019: 16). According to the authors, this is a process that involves utilising the available and potential resources of a place to create 'their own image and identity on the basis of their own DNA' (ibid: 19). To return to the primary contention of this article, freelance labour work is inherently situated in place. The particular historical,

cultural, political and economic forces discussed above that constitute Bristol as a creative city shapes the ways in which freelance networks function and freelance work is experienced.

According to Scott, creative cities are organised around a 'creative field', defined as 'a set of interrelationships that stimulate and channel individual expressions of creativity' (2006: 8). Most importantly, the creative field is highly localised, with production systems intrinsically embedded within particular geographic milieus. Cultural institutions and networks often serve as intermediaries in this process through facilitating information generation and exchange and providing the context in which both formal and informal freelancer networks can be developed. The creative field of a city operates at a number of different levels, from decision making and behaviour to expressions of culture and infrastructural facilities (Scott, 2006).

The first major component of the creative field that Scott identifies is what he terms the 'intra-urban webs of specialized and complementary producers' (2010: 115). As a 'creative cluster', Bristol's film and television sector has evolved from the establishment of its 'anchor firms', the BBC and Aardman Animations in the 1930s and 1970s, respectively, to a diverse and expanding production centre comprised of nearly 200 screen-based small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and the largest dedicated film and TV studio facility in the West of England, The Bottle Yard Studios (for a more in-depth history see Spicer and Presence, 2017). The proliferation of independent companies from the 1990s onwards has resulted in an environment in which freelance work has become the dominant employment model within the city. Many of these independent companies are situated in the 'sub-clusters' of natural history and animation due to the size and influence of the BBC's Natural History Unit and Aardman Animations within Bristol's creative ecology. For freelancers, the boundaries between these sub-clusters are often-non-porous in nature, with those interviewed described how their own networks of both employers and other freelancers were often confined to particular genres.

Another important element of a city's creative field is the local labour market and the social networks that bind workers together in urban space (Scott, 2010). A significant organisation to note here is the freelancer-run Bristol Crew, which offers a database of freelancers that is hand-picked and independently verified by industry professionals. But beyond a database, Bristol Crew occupies an important role in building and maintaining a local freelance community, with 'members encouraged to share work, skills and participate in the mentoring of less experienced crew in their department' resulting in a 'strong and supportive team of freelancers with excellent connections and big ambitions

to excel in our chosen fields' (bristolcrew.co.uk). When referring to the rigorous vetting process involved in becoming a member, Bristol Crew's founder stated:

> It's not only to find out what they're currently capable of, but also to work out what their ambitions are so that I can connect them [with mentors]. Because if the formal training isn't there you need somebody to learn from above you, but also someone that's got time to teach you all those things and give you advice, whether it's one person or several. I really actively encourage that and I get so much satisfaction out of seeing the trainees and assistants take absolutely every opportunity I've offered them and really make the most of the time that people are giving them. Because they're always busy, it's tough being a freelancer, but the ones who take those opportunities are succeeding really well. It's really brilliant.

In essence, Bristol Crew functions as a cultural intermediary, not only providing the infrastructure to connect disparate individuals bound by locality, but also structuring these connections around a set of values such as trust and professionalism that directly benefit and resonate with freelancers in Bristol.

Scott (2010) also highlights the significance of the wider urban environment, including the relationship between individuals and groups and the physical spaces and places of the city. Bristol is host to a number of institutions that act as a locus for both creative work and leisure, including one of the leading film culture and digital media centres in the South West, Watershed (see Presence 2019a). Located in Bristol's historic harbourside in the city centre, Watershed provides spaces for professional activity through the Pervasive Media Studio, which hosts a community of over 100 artists, creative companies, technologists and academics, and spaces for leisure through its three cinemas and café bar. Another example of this aspect of the creative field in practice is the activities of the Bristol-based group 'Freelance Mum', which offers resources and hosts networking events with the aim of 'supporting, promoting and connecting freelance mums across Bristol and the South West' (www.freelancemum.co.uk). The child-friendly networking and so-called 'net-walking' events use the public spaces of the city such as parks and cafes as meeting places in which professional networking and childcare can occur simultaneously.

The final area of the creative field that Scott (2010) identifies is institutions of governance and collective action. An important facet of Bristol's creative field is its local occupational and sector networks. In terms of occupational networks, Bristol Editor's Network (BEN) is one of the largest in the city. BEN defines itself as a 'community project for editors and assistant editors' (bristoleditorsnetwork.co.uk), in which jobs and expertise are shared and where creative workers can 'generally have a good old rant about what makes editing one of the best jobs in the world' (ibid). A number of the freelancers interviewed for the present study were active members of BEN, using the network to find jobs and

share their CVs. BEN also functions as a knowledge exchange and even support network for members, predominantly facilitated through online discussion:

> If someone wants to have a rant about something, they can do that on the closed Facebook group and they get support from other editors. Young mothers have said that they've felt that they've had pressure put on them when there's childcare issues and things like that. We understand who the companies are, and we also try and provide support, although it's only moral support, but a support. That's as far as it goes. (Editor)

While BEN lacks the necessary influence to incite and organise the type of collective action and institutional/policy change akin to a union (See Presence, 2019b), it occupies an important role in not only creating a space for support, but also mitigating future instances of exploitation through sharing experiences of poor treatment by employers. This was a common theme among the freelancers interviewed when asked about the role of online networks such as local Facebook groups, with many referring to the importance of communicating and upholding shared values around fair employment practices.

The conditions for creativity

Bristol has long had a reputation for 'free-thinking independence' and 'spirit of innovation' (Spicer and Presence, 2017: 14). As Jon Dovey asserts: 'Culture is like terroir. Bristol is an activist/green/difficult and contrarian place, with creative/tech crossovers such as the BBC Natural History Unit/Hewlett Packard/Toshiba/Aardman. Bristol has vernacular creativity in music, theatre and graffiti. It has local critical mass and freedom to experiment.' (quoted in Holden, 2015: 24). Spicer and Presence trace Bristol's reputation for innovation and resilience back to 'the formation of the Merchant Venturers in 1552', going on to state that the city 'has never been over-reliant on one particular industry, its diversified and resilient economy has proved to be adaptable and responsive to change' (2017: 14). The notion of Bristol as a city that is creative, culturally diverse and innovative was also strongly evident in the rhetoric employed to persuade the UK's 'alternative' public service broadcaster, Channel 4, to locate one of its new creative hubs in the city. At the launch of the new offices, Bristol's Mayor, Marvin Rees, proclaimed that 'Bristol is an ideal partner for Channel 4, as a thriving, diverse and innovative city' going on to describe Bristol as a 'hotbed of creative talent' (quoted in Pipe, 2020). Channel 4's relocation exemplifies how this reputation for innovation and creativity can translate into economic value, making nurturing these principles a key concern for policymakers in terms of attracting investment to Bristol.

A number of freelancers asserted that Bristol's innovative and 'free-thinking' reputation arose from the city having a laidback and relaxed atmosphere, which afforded more freedom to develop new ideas and take creative risks:

> There's some great ideas coming out of Bristol, really creative, revolutionary stuff that's doing really well online and on TV. Yeah, I think that makes it quite attractive because it seems to me there's a lot more creativity here in general because people have time for it, whereas in London you're just running to catch up constantly. (Director of Photography)

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the appeal of Bristol was naturally contrasted with London as the primary locus of the creative industries in the UK. For many of the interviewees, the quality of life offered by Bristol was privileged at the expense of accelerating their careers by working in London. While creative work is often characterised as 'working excessively long hours for little pay' (Cohen, 2012: 146), many interviewees described Bristol as offering a better work/life balance than that found in the capital:

> It's got that right balance of industry and people know when to switch off whereas, what I've heard, the working week in London doesn't really end. You work hard in Bristol but then people know when to stop and take time out to relax. That feels quite important. (Animator)

Furthermore, while much has been written about how the precarious nature of freelance employment has a particularly adverse effect on women (Wing-Fai et al. 2015; Genders, 2019; Berridge, 2020), the greater work/life balance offered by Bristol had a positive effect for those trying to manage childcare responsibilities. A number of participants argued that while caring for a child and maintaining a freelance career was still challenging, it was slightly more achievable in Bristol due to the more relaxed attitudes and greater recognition of the importance of a reasonable work life balance described by many of the freelancers interviewed:

> I mean, my experience now that I've had a kid is that it is do-able, it's just hard. Most people in Bristol thankfully are pretty flexible, if you say I need to pick up my kid they're okay with that and people have gotten used to working around other people's family time. (Editor)

But while Bristol has seemingly developed a more balanced and relaxed working culture than the capital, the informal nature of these arrangements still leaves freelancers in an extremely precarious position. Rather than protection from regulation or policy, the ability to negotiate childcare and maintain a satisfactory work life balance is embedded within a working culture that is subject to change, particularly at any sign of economic decline. As freelancers are defined by their versatility and ability to respond and adapt to changes in the creative industries, it follows that the working culture of any place-

based freelance community is one that is also inherently precarious and susceptible to changes in the market both at a local and national level.

Many of the freelancers interviewed also contributed the Bristol's greater quality of life to the relatively small scale of the city compared to London. Those living and working in the Bristol described how the shorter commutes and distances to work allowed them to spend more time with their families, engaging in leisure activities or even further build their informal networks through social activities with their colleagues:

> It's amazing when you get Londoners in Bristol suddenly going, hang on I can go back to my accommodation, have a shower, walk to the pub and still be in bed by 11.30? (Costume Designer)

However, as discussed in the previous section, the opportunity to live close to places of work which are primarily concentrated in the city centre is not economically accessible or sustainable to a large percentage of the population. In her monograph, *Artistic Lives: A Study of Creativity in Two European Cities* (2016), Kirsten Forkert compared the working lives of artists in Berlin and London, concluding that the substantially higher cost of housing in the latter negatively impacted on the development of both the individual artist and the wider artistic community within that locality. As Berlin artists often did not need to have a second non-artistic job in order to survive in the city, Forkert argues that they 'seemed less anxious about their careers because their material circumstances – in which they were able to make art full time – did not contradict their expectations of themselves as 'serious artists'' (ibid: 133). The conditions of freelance labour which can often lead to low and precarious incomes (particularly at the start of a freelancer's career) is a particular challenge in relation to the high cost of living in cities such as Bristol. House prices in Bristol are now rising faster than London, up 4.6% year on year while in London prices are only rising by 0.4% (The Hometrack UK Cities House Price Index.). A 2018 report by the Lloyds Bank Affordable Cities Review also found that Bristol was one of the least affordable places to live in the UK, with house prices almost nine times higher than the average wage. Situating creative work within this wider context, along broader issues in terms of precarious work within the film and television industry, highlights the reasons why those from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds are excluded from these processes of placemaking.

Another pressing issue highlighted by a number of interviewees was a lack of local and affordable training opportunities in Bristol. With the decline in 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. In this regard, freelancers are often expected to take

responsibility for their own training and skill development to meet the changing technical and creative demands of the film and television industries and stay employable. Many of the freelancers interviewed described the training courses they wanted to access as prohibitive due to high fees, inconvenient locations, travel expenses and fear of loss of earnings/work:

> There's a lot of training out there. I see it on Twitter quite a lot, "Come in for a week learning animation at our studio" or "Places available for this, that and the other" but then you need the time. You're spending a week not working and travelling and, if it's in another city, suddenly you're out of pocket trying to learn. You'd be quite fortunate to be in a position where you could afford to do that. Most of the time, you're just trying to pay the bills. (Animator)

As an issue that is unlikely to be addressed by commercial companies and public service broadcasters alike, such accounts highlight the significant role of policymakers in providing funding for local training schemes and apprenticeships to meet the needs of Bristol's freelance community and contribute to setting the necessary conditions for a thriving and creative production centre.

The high cost of living coupled with the inherently precarious nature of freelance work and lack of affordable training opportunities has resulted in Bristol's creative industries being one in which the opportunity to be creative, innovative and revolutionary is a privilege primarily afforded to the middle class. It then follows that the term 'creative class' has become synonymous with this demographic and the policy that aims to attract this group-based on a fundamental, class-based, inequality. This is ironic given that outside the film and television sector, the working class has arguably been the principal contributors to Bristol's 'creative' and 'revolutionary' reputation through its world-renowned street art and long history of protests. Yet the current freelance employment model on which the creative industries is now based is one that actively excludes this group. Within this context the process of creative placemaking is appropriated to represent Pratt's previously referenced vision of a 'neo-liberal hell' that, rather than regenerate cities, reproduces regressive social and economic structures.

Conclusion

This case study of Bristol has demonstrated that freelancers not only occupy an important economic position, but also a cultural one as creative placemakers. However, it is important to recognise that the processes of creative placemaking largely excludes those from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. The inherently precarious nature of freelance work militates against ambitions to foster a diverse and equal workforce within the film and television sector. As argued, although a proportion of these issues are embedded within screen industry structures, place-based interventions and policy occupies an important role in nurturing a thriving and diverse production sector. This study supports

other studies which argue that, rather than creative classes 'regenerating cities', the infrastructure, policy and employment and training opportunities necessary to developing and sustaining careers within the creative industries across a wider range of demographics needs to be implemented. In particular, this article calls for a more holistic approach that recognises the importance of issues such as transport, housing, education and other public sector concerns that contribute to the quality of life beyond the workplace.

At the time of writing, the UK – and indeed the world – is still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the interviews for the present study were conducted prior to this, initial evidence would suggest that COVID-19 has intensified the issues concerning precarious labour, highlighting the fine margins in which freelancers live and work. From a national perspective, a survey by the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU) reported that 47% of freelancers in the Pay as You Earn (PAYE) tax classification do not expect to be eligible for support through the government's COVID-19 job retention scheme and only 2% of the freelancers BECTU surveyed had been furloughed. According to the trade magazine, *Screen Daily*, 93% of freelancers were out of work in April (Rosser, 2020). Within this context it is expected that the issues concerning diversity discussed in this paper are likely to intensify as only those with access to adequate financial resources are able to support themselves while out of work. Indeed, even freelancers who have established more stable careers may find that the effect of fundamentally precarious working conditions that were once in their periphery have suddenly been brought to the foreground. Beyond just national government, it is important to also look to what is being implemented on a local level in terms of supporting the production ecologies of cities such as Bristol.

The findings of this study suggest the need for further research concerning the relationship between creative labour, place and the notion of creative cities and/or clusters. Further case studies of specific production centres have the potential to build an understanding of how creative cities evolve within distinct cultural, political and economic contexts. In particular, studies of freelancers would benefit from this more place-based approach, shifting the focus from the concept of 'placeless nomads' toward that of 'creative placemakers'. It is the contention of the present research that this approach provides a deeper insight into how precarious work is experienced and managed in practice.

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