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Sense of place on the periphery: Exploring the spatial practices of the creative class in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

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Abstract

Urban and regional spaces in the early 21st century have been dramatically reshaped by economic performances linked to innovation, knowledge and creativity. Professionals in these sectors, often referred to as the “Creative Class”, are the focus of growing scholarship across the social sciences. Urban geographers, in particular have scrutinized this complex labour category and increasingly question the core spatialities of the concept, including raising awareness of the creative class in rural and peripheral spaces. In this paper, we explore the spatial practices carried out by the creative class in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador—an important yet peripheral urban hub in Atlantic Canada. Drawing upon the findings of interviews with local stakeholders from municipal government; innovation, knowledge and creative industries; and the R&D sector, our analysis points to the existence of a complex and creative “sense of place” that simultaneously envisions a favourable environment for innovation and creativity but that also consistently impedes talent attraction (and retention) from outside the province. Given this context, we highlight two central issues: (i) the proximity to the Atlantic Ocean as an economic and cultural determinant of a “sense of place”; and (ii) the appropriation of this “sense of place” as a spatial practice of the local creative class fed by social and symbolic distinction.

Keywords: sense of place; spatial practices; creative class; St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Résumé

Les espaces urbains et régionaux du début du 21^e siècle ont été profondément remodelés par les performances économiques liées à l'innovation, la connaissance et la créativité. Les professionnels de ces secteurs, souvent désignés sous le nom de « classe créative », font l'objet d'une recherche croissante dans les sciences sociales. Les géographes urbains, en particulier, ont scruté cette catégorie de travail complexe et remettent de plus en plus en question les spatialités fondamentales du concept, y compris, la sensibilisation à la classe créative dans les espaces ruraux et périphériques.

Dans cet article, nous explorons les pratiques spatiales mises en œuvre par la classe créative à St-John's, Terre-Neuve et Labrador – un centre urbain important et périphérique au Canada atlantique. En s'appuyant sur les résultats des entretiens avec les auteurs locaux du gouvernement municipal; l'innovation, la connaissance et les industries créatives; et le secteur de la recherche et développement, notre analyse souligne l'existence d'un « sens du lieu » complexe et créatif qui envisage simultanément un environnement favorable à la créativité, mais qui entrave aussi constamment l'attraction (et la rétention) de talents de l'extérieur de la province. Dans ce contexte, nous soulignons deux enjeux

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centraux : i) la proximité de l'océan Atlantique en tant que déterminant économique et culturel d'un « sens de lieu »; et (ii) l'appropriation de ce « sens de lieu » comme pratique spatiale de classe créative locale nourrie de distinction sociale et symbolique.

Mots-clés : « sens du lieu »; classe créative; St-John's, Terre-Neuve et Labrador

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Introduction

Over the last several decades, prominent urban and regional growth strategies have increasingly emphasized the value of the innovation, knowledge and creativity (hereafter, IKC) sectors (Florida 2005; Scott 2014). Globally these sectors have exploded in response to the rapid evolution of Post-Fordist service-based economies, new rounds of capital investment, and labour market restructuring that target growing Asian economies and emerging urban-regions of the global south. Furthermore, while the expansion of IKC industries have had dramatic impacts on labour markets and local economies, these sectors have also played an important role in reshaping social, cultural and political relations in urban space. Such relations are often linked to the process of attracting and retaining highly educated (Grant 2014) and cognitive-cultural professionals (Scott 2014) who, among other descriptions, are also popularly described as the 'creative class'. Largely accredited to urban scholar Richard Florida (2014), the creative class and its socio-spatial correlate, the creative city (Florida 2005), have arguably become among the more discussed, and hotly debated, ideas in urban studies of late (Peck 2005; Evans 2009; Cohendet et. al 2011; Vinodrai 2015).

Scholarship across the social sciences continues to question how the creative turn affects everyday life and influences local and regional development strategies. Research on the economic geographies of innovation (Asheim and Gertler 2004; Gertler 2003), for instance, have used Florida's work to explore how creative professionals choose to locate in places through a globally oriented "portfolio of attractive employment prospects" (Asheim and Gertler 2004: 298). This research, however, foregrounds significant criticism of the creative class thesis. First, critical economic geographers highlight that the creative class operates as a political-economic narrative deployed by policymakers to endorse and facilitate strategic urban revitalization plans that tend to reproduce conditions of capital growth and accumulation for a select few (Peck 2005; Pratt 2008). Second, scholars increasingly point out the diverse geographies of the creative class, moving beyond the large and global metropolis to small and medium sized cities (Waitt and Gibson 2009; Rich 2012). Third, and relatedly, the creative thesis is scrutinized for its applicability in contexts beyond metropolitan US. In particular, Canadian scholars point to the varying geographies and outcomes of the creative class across Canadian cities. However, while large cities like Toronto closely reflect the American metro-experience (i.e., patterns of talent attraction and retention, social dynamics of innovation and urban governance), many other urban and regional spaces across the country show a diverse range of outcomes (Bradford and Bramwell 2014; Grant 2014; Phan 2010; Wolfe and Gertler 2016; Pottie-Sherman and Lynch 2019).

Even given these important critiques, there remain notable intellectual and practical gaps in our understanding of how the creative class evolves and changes, and how it interacts in and with specific socio-spatial contexts. In particular, little research has traced the emerging and ongoing relationships of the creative class and creative city-making in smaller and peripheral urban spaces. In these contexts, vital questions remain: Which social classes are identified and labelled as 'creative'?; What geographies emerge from this particular class in places outside of the mainstream?; How is the creative class recognized, understood and, indeed, deployed in IKC discourses and policies in peripheral spaces?

Considering these and other essential questions, this paper explores the practices, processes and challenges of the creative class in the context of smaller and peripheral urbanism. Here, we argue that the geographies of the creative class are neither universally applied nor similarly experienced across space. Rather, we contend that the socio-cultural and economic subjectivities of the creative class and the ways in which it has been deployed, leveraged and understood in peripheral urban spaces are highly contingent on local cultural and political practice.

We focus our investigation on St. John's, the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), an important yet often ignored edge space in Atlantic Canada. Though the province and its capital have long been recognized as important nodes in the regional fisheries sector, the collapse of fish stocks along with systemic declines in infrastruc-

tural and resource investment encouraged new economic development related to IKC occupations. In the last few decades, this region has been redefined by the oil/gas, and marine engineering sectors, and more recently through the development of Information and Communication Technology and culture and arts economies (Colbourne 2006; Doloreux and Shearmur 2009; Greenwood and Hall 2016). An important result of these new economic clusters is the rapid growth of creative professionals who not only live and work in the city-region but are also instrumental in (re)making places throughout the city centre and surrounding communities.

With these ideas in mind, the paper begins by exploring the debates surrounding the conceptualizations and subjectivities of the creative class. We then consider emerging scholarship on the urban and economic experiences of small and peripheral cities. While global urban areas consistently receive attention for their positions as command-and-control centres of economic, political and labour power, the complexities of creativity, talent and class are increasingly relevant and influential in emerging peripheralities, like those in Atlantic Canada (Pottie-Sherman and Lynch 2019). Beyond simply rehearsing popular debates however we propose a reinterpretation of the term ‘creative class’ from a sociological conceptual framework based on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1987; 1991; 1992; 2000). Following a description of our methods, we discuss the outcomes of interviews with local stakeholders and key informants whose work illuminate the local context of creative class development in and around the City of St. John’s.

(Re)spatializing the creative class: The making and meaning of creativity and talent from global cities to global peripheralities

In its simplest sense, the creative class relates to the emergence of a group of highly skilled professionals whose labour is primarily cognitive and intellectual. Over the last decade, scholarship on the creative class has developed from the vast literature on the ‘creative economy’ (Scott 2006), the emblematic labour sectors associated with the global post-industrial economy (e.g., technology, fashion design, arts, etc.), and seeks to understand how creative workers organize themselves socially, economically and spatially. As Richard Florida (2014; 2017) has consistently argued, the differences between creative professionals and those of the “other classes” (i.e., the service class and the working class) are distinguished by the type of work performed (see Table 1, next page). In this case, the creative class is divided into two groups: the *super-creative core* and the *creative professionals*. The former group is comprised of a long list of creative technical experts including scientists, programmers, engineers, researchers, artists, designers, and architects. Usually well-paid, the creative core is characterized by their skills in developing solutions, ideas and projects with market applicability, such as the creation of consumer products or software development. The latter group, the creative professionals, relates to the activities of work-intensive industries, including technology, financial, legal, healthcare and management sectors. In this type of work, professionals with advanced training are said to use the “scope of their minds”, that is, their creativity, to solve complex problems (Florida 2014).

The normalization of the creative narrative is now widely established. Across much of the literature in economic geography and urban planning, it is largely assumed that city-regions with well-developed labour markets tied to IKC industries are inherently spaces of the creative class. What is not clear, however, is how we define, measure and explain how this class produces space. Research on the economic geographies of innovation, for instance, points out that the competitive success of economic clusters can be measured by their ability to support more dynamic practices of information and knowledge sharing (Porter 1998). By stimulating these practices, it is argued that clusters build more cohesive social relationships, trust and cooperation among the actors involved, outcomes which encourage the success of regional innovation systems (Gertler 2003; Asheim and Gertler 2004; Wolfe 2016). Here, the role played by the creative class is tacit, since the individuals engaged in creative occupations are directly responsible for materializing such practices. These claims are supported by recent research that reveals the upsurge of a particular type of microscale/bottom-up urban social practice (Merkel 2015) centred on self-employed and freelance professionals organized into shared workplaces (e.g., coworking spaces, makerspaces, fab labs) (Capdevila 2018; Bürkner and Lange 2020). In the Canadian context, Jamal’s (2018) study of seven medium-sized cities in Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe accounts for a positive potential of this new practice to stimulate local development, particularly by activating downtown real estate. Here, coworking spaces offer new businesses an affordable locational alternative within revitalizing, and indeed gentrifying, areas while playing an active role in defending municipal incentives related to the civic and commercial infrastructure of their respective cities.

Recent research also points to several limitations and reinterpretations of the creative thesis, especially focused on how the concept varies across urban space. Pratt’s (2008) work on the relationship between the creative class and

Table 1

Class-occupation types (adapted from Florida 2017 and Statistics Canada 2019)

Class	Type of occupations (according to Florida)	Canadian National Occupation Classification (NOC) equivalents
Creative	Computer science and mathematics; Architecture and engineering; Sciences (life, physical and social); Arts (design, music, entertainment); Sports and media; Management, Business and Finance; Law, Healthcare, Education and Training.	<p>Management occupations: senior management occupations; specialized middle management occupations; middle management occupations in retail and wholesale trade and customer services; middle management occupations in trades, transportation, production and utilities.</p> <p>Business, finance and administration occupations: professional occupations in business and finance; administrative and financial supervisors and administrative occupations; finance; insurance and related business administrative occupations.</p>
		<p>Natural and applied sciences and related occupations: professional occupations in natural and applied sciences; technical occupations related to natural and applied sciences.</p> <p>Health occupations: professional occupations in health (except nursing); Professional occupations in nursing; technical occupations in health.</p> <p>Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services: professional occupations in education services; professional occupations in law and social, community and government services; paraprofessional occupations in legal, social, community and education services.</p> <p>Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport: professional occupations in art and culture, technical occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport.</p>
Service	Food service-related occupations; Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; personal care; low-end sales; office and administrative support; community and social services; Protective services.	Office support occupations; Distribution, tracking and scheduling coordination occupations; Assisting occupations in support of health services; Occupations in front-line public protection services; Care providers and educational, legal and public protection support occupations; Retail sales supervisors and specialized sales occupations; Service supervisors and specialized service occupations; Sales representatives and salespersons - wholesale and retail trade; Service representatives and other customer and personal services occupations; Sales support occupations; Service support and other service occupations.
Working	Factory production; Extraction, installation, maintenance and repair; Production, transportation and material moving; Construction.	Industrial, electrical and construction trades; Maintenance and equipment operation trades; Other installers, repairers and servicers and material handlers; Transport and heavy equipment operation and related maintenance occupations; Trades helpers, construction labourers and related occupations; Supervisors and technical occupations in natural resources, agriculture and related production; Workers in natural resources, agriculture and related production; Harvesting, landscaping and natural resources labourers; Processing, manufacturing and utilities supervisors and central control operators; Processing and manufacturing machine operators and related production workers; Assemblers in manufacturing; Labourers in processing, manufacturing and utilities.

urban growth suggests that local policy makers have been applying the creative thesis in a strategic way that supports urban regeneration plans. This argument mirrors Peck's (2005, 761) claim that the creative class is a tactic that both produces and enables the development of 'fast' urban policies, that is, a "suite of supply-side and promotional strategies" that allegedly give cities the competitive edge to lure mobile creative labour, and global investment. Emblematic of so-called 'turnaround' cities like Baltimore and Manchester, these entrepreneurial governance models are firmly part of the neoliberal playbook, a stratagem that has rolled-out across large and global cities over the last two decades (Scott 2006; 2014; Vivant 2013).

Other research, however, has expanded this scope to explore the spatial (re)production of the creative class ‘beyond the metropolis’ (Bell and Jayne 2006), to include smaller cities and regions. Waitt and Gibson’s (2009) investigation of Wollongong, a medium-sized city near Sydney, Australia, shows how the intersection of local narratives about size and proximity is essential to a critical understanding of the contradictions involved in the development of the creative economy. Similarly, Rich’s (2012) research on the revitalization strategies of Scranton, Pennsylvania, shows how local policymaking directly deploys Florida’s creative class ‘toolkit’ but that local values of livability and social capital (relationships that maintain communities) are essential in delivering successful outcomes. Overall, both studies recognized, in different ways, the consequences that the creative city model exercises in peripheral spaces and underscores the indispensability of taking local strengths and contingencies into account to achieve development.

We note then that this vital mediation between scale, size and local contingencies has become a pivotal point of debate and analysis in the urban planning milieu. In Canada, this research has accelerated in recent years as urban and economic scholars investigate the presence and impact of the creative class across Canadian cities (Grant 2014; Bramwell and Bradford 2014; Wolfe and Gertler 2016). Recent research from the Innovation Systems Research Network (ISRN), for instance, explores issues of talent attraction and retention, the social dynamics of innovation, and urban governance practices in Canadian cities of various sizes; while other research has assessed the dynamic geographies of innovation through investigations of specific IKC sectors, from video games to fashion design, and often taking a regional or comparative point of view (Bramwell et. al 2008; Cohendet et. al 2011; Vinodrai 2015; Pottie-Sherman and Lynch 2019). In general, this growing body of work concludes that there is no one size, industrial structure, governance framework or strategic route to success in attracting and retaining creative talent.

As much as these approaches provide valuable contributions to the understanding of urban and regional development processes in light of IKC economies, many remain steeped in Florida’s limited and contentious conceptual formulation of the creative class. In particular, we argue that prior to assessing whether a city-region needs creative workers to succeed, a more nuanced understanding of what ‘class’ means and how it varies across socio-spatial contexts needs further evaluation. Therefore, in the following section we explore the creative class theory as a socio-logical conceptualization and argue that its application is vital in assessing a rather underestimated social layer of innovation-led spatial practice.

(Re)classifying the creative class and its spatial geographies: A Bourdieuan contribution

A first point of departure lies in Florida’s (2017) recent self-critique of the effects of the creative class approach applied across numerous urban economies in the last 15 years. As the subtitle of his reflection suggests, ‘gentrification, housing bubbles and increasing inequality’ are among the most apparent socio-spatial consequences of this urban strategy. Given these concerns, however, Florida maintains a focus on large and global cities as the key spaces of the IKC economies. How, then, do we explain the theoretical grounds of Florida’s use of the term class? Throughout his central work, Florida’s (2014; 2017) concept of the creative class is systematically presented as a professional class with high levels of human capital that uses creativity as the essence of labour, and in doing so invokes Max Weber’s (1946, 181) definition of class:

We may speak of a ‘class’ when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets.

For Weber, an individual’s position in the labour market determines the class in which the individual belongs, and this position is largely distinguished through different class situations for both property owners (e.g., of lands, companies, buildings, etc.) and those who do not own property but offer services instead. Hence, individuals are distinguished according to the type and form of services they provide (Weber 1946). This articulation of class presents a central scaffold for understanding Florida’s conceptualization of the creative class in a sociological reading. The possession of specific qualifications for performing intellectual work, as well as its actual performance, are pivotal elements in defining and distinguishing the creative class, a socio-economic practice and service rendered by high skilled and creative professionals.

Given this direction, questions remain, for instance, as to how the creative class corresponds to a situation where professionals who do not own properties distinguish themselves because of their higher level of training. Clearly, economic explanations on their own do not fully explain the complexity of this issue. With this in mind, Pierre Bourdieu's (1987; 1991; 2000) work presents fruitful ground to explore the role of culture and social distinction in the development and deployment of class and creativity. For Bourdieu (1987, 15), a class:

exists when there are agents capable of imposing themselves, as authorized to speak and to act officially in its place and in its name, upon those who [...] recognize themselves as members of the class, and in doing so, confer upon it the only form of existence a group can possess.

Importantly, each social agent has a set of resources, acquired or inherited according to his/her life history, that are negotiated through power relations with each other, and are contained in four forms of capital: economic capital (e.g., referring to land, financial and monetary resources); cultural capital (e.g., a set of resources and knowledge acquired or inherited); social capital (e.g., resources that provide access and linkage to groups of social prestige); and symbolic capital (e.g., how different types of capital accumulated by a social agent are perceived and recognized as legitimate by others).

The way social agents articulate their different types of accumulated capital reflects in the social positions they occupy in the "social space"—a system defined by Bourdieu (1991) based on how different forms of power are distributed in a given society. While social space represents the social positions that a group occupies accordingly to how much capital it possesses, Bourdieu (2000, 124) also argues that, indeed, "social spaces translate into physical space" to the extent that the power exercised by different forms of capital over space is revealed through a relationship "between the spatial structure of the distribution of agents and the spatial structure of the distribution of goods and services, private or public." Put another way, both social and physical spaces are produced and disputed simultaneously in economic, cultural, social and symbolic ways from the power relations operated by social agents through the negotiation of their capital among themselves and with agents of other groups/classes.

Given these contributions, we argue that defining creative class (as well as analyzing their spatial practices) is not just about understanding 'class' from a concrete standpoint, such as Weber's market position or Florida's cognitive advantage. Rather, to understand it as a useful category, we need to explore how individuals recognized in this class derive social and spatial distinction from their different accumulated capital. With these ideas in mind, in the remainder of the paper we assess the spatial implications of resources-transformed-into-capital (that is, practices and representations) of the creative class in a peripheral urban context. Such an approach provides relatively underexplored yet important insights into the debate concerning the consequences of prioritizing creative occupations in local development policies, particularly as they are implemented in peripheral spaces.

Methods

This research uses employment/occupational data, and key informant interviews to critically explore the role and impact of the creative class in St. John's, a peripheral yet significant urban economic centre. First, we used Statistics Canada data on employment by Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and occupation from 2010 to 2019 to estimate the share of creative, service and working-class employment. Our analysis of this data focuses on three contexts: i) the St. John's CMA, ii) the four CMAs in Atlantic Canada (St. John's, NL; Halifax, NS; Moncton and Saint John, NB) as a means of regional comparison; and iii) all Canadian CMAs (33) as a means of national comparison. October 2019 was adopted as a reference point for extracting data for all the years analyzed, as it provided the most updated data available.

Second, in order to examine the complex policy discourses and changing occupational landscapes, and, to understand how local leaders perceive the role of the creative class in the IKC economy, we conducted interviews with key informants (Table 2). Specifically, we completed nine semi-structured in-depth interviews that lasted between 40–90 minutes: four with experts in local innovation industries and civil society organizations; three with public servants directly involved with local development policymaking; and two with senior professionals in the innovation Research and Development (R&D) sector. The interviews were transcribed, manually coded and sorted inductively into three main contextual themes: i) the evolution of the St. John's IKC labour market; ii) the role and impact of

Table 2:
Characteristics of key informants (n=9)

Interview #	Sector/Organization Type	Date/Location of Interview
1	Public/St. John's Municipality	05/23/2019/Public Office
2	Public/St. John's City Council	05/28/2019/City Hall
3	Public/St. John's City Council	05/28/2019/City Hall
4	Private/Capital Investment	05/30/2019/Private Office
5	Private/Industry Association	07/08/2019/Virtual
6	Private/Oil & Gas	07/12/2019/Coffee Shop
7	Non-Profit/Regional Development	07/19/2019/Private Office
8	R&D/University	07/06/2019/MUN Campus
9	R&D/University	08/22/2019/Virtual

urban/regional planning practices and urban development strategies in attracting or repelling creative labour; and iii) the key challenges and obstacles in retaining and maintaining creative talent and labour in the region.

Though we use a small sample size, this research focuses on a select number of key informants who are prominent in their specific fields, are situated within creative occupations and are directly responsible for designing and implementing IKC-led local development strategies. Given their roles and positions, in addition to highlighting critical issues and perspectives in the local context, these strategic interviews also afford an opportunity to both translate the practices of these individuals in the local and regional creative class and illuminate how such practices can be read in terms of spatial practices adopted and circulated by influential actors in both local and peripheral contexts.

Creatives on the edge: Values and visions of urban growth along the North Atlantic

While most urban and regional research continues to trace the socio-cultural and economic consequences of the creative class in larger city-regions, scholars have increasingly turned to investigate these spatial practices in peripheral spaces (Bell and Jayne 2006). In the Canadian context, St. John's represents a compelling case study. With a regional population of approximately 215,000 residents, St. John's is a cultural, political and economic hub for the province and the North Atlantic region, but also remains firmly on the margins of the wider national and global economy. Lepawsky et al. (2014) highlight this persistent countervailing identity in their comparative study of talent retention in Kingston (ON) and St. John's. While St. John's isolated position at the eastern-most point of North America is a critical challenge for attracting and retaining talent, its peripheral location at a distance from other urban competitors has helped to maintain the city's position as the primary regional center—what Lepawsky et al. (2010) call a “metropolis on the margins”. With access to other regional CMAs like Halifax, St. John's has been able to concentrate more amenities and services than cities of similar sizes but in closer orbit to major metropolitan regions – such as the proximity of Kingston to Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. Moreover, we highlight that despite its relatively small size, the St. John's city-region is home to a proportionately high concentration of creative class occupations compared to the ‘service and working classes’ across all other Canadian CMAs (Statistics Canada, 2019) (Figure 1).

A key point then, and one that our interviews emphasize, is that peripherality is a complex and sometimes counterintuitive geographical condition, especially when it involves localized decisions and expectations of the creative class. In particular, interviewees consistently related the value of proximity and access to the ocean as an inherent context in which a local creative identity thrives. In general, our participants characterized this association through both socio-cultural and economic lenses. Regarding the former, one interviewee who is a local investor stated, for instance, that St. John's “is a city where people have a sense of place ... which comes from its history” (Interview #4). Likewise, a leader of the local technology sector explained that St. John's “is a rugged, beautiful city on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, with a vibrant culture” (Interview #5). This coastal vibe was shared by these and other interviews and was largely considered as a prerequisite for building a wider creative culture in the area, as an arts-based public servant explained:

Even though there is a province-wide shrinking population and a lot of demographic concerns, in the city I know that a lot of people are here because they're creatives, and that's what I think, from my perspective, what we excel at. (Interview # 3)

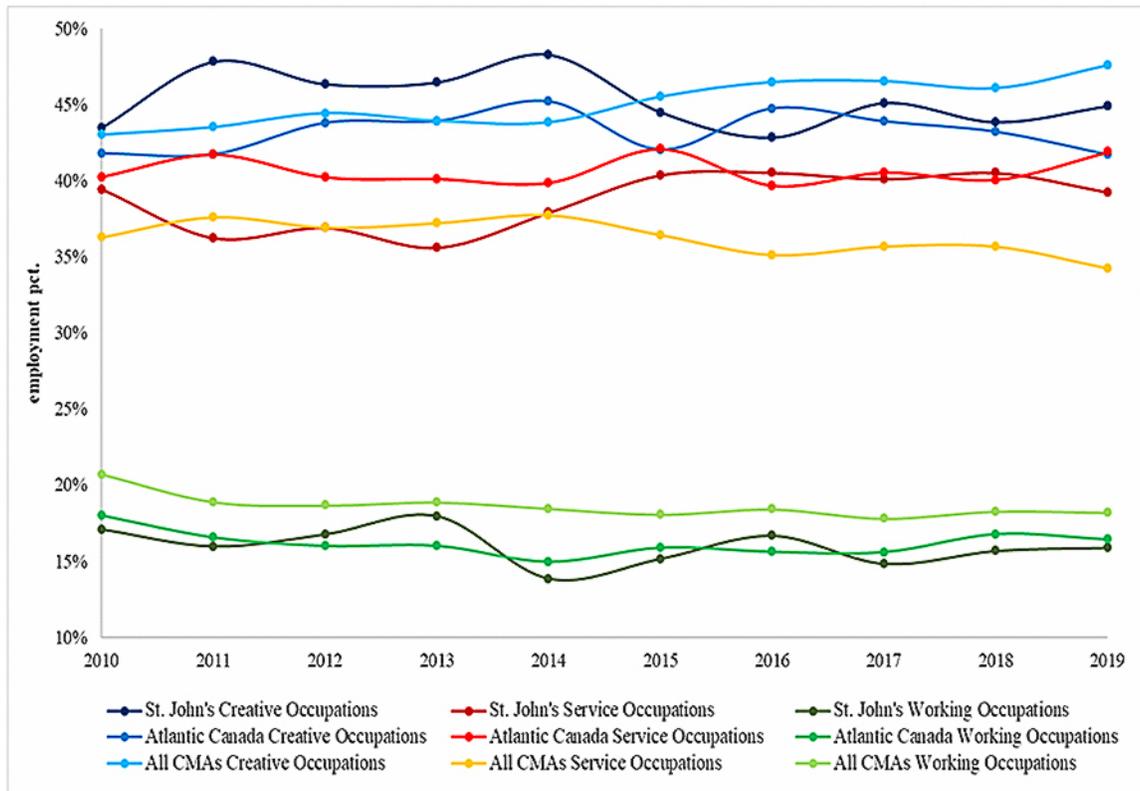


Figure 1:
Employment rate by class-occupation types (adapted from Statistics Canada 2019)

Beyond its cultural value, most of the interviewees reflected on the economic potential that emerges from this context. As one city councillor argued, “there is not a lot of cities that can claim the expertise in Northern harsh-environment exploration ... which is a huge benefit” (Interview #2). This is corroborated by another respondent, a senior researcher, for whom such a geographic context sparked the development of a critical mass of educated workers with “technical capabilities and connections to the industry that makes [St. John’s] sort of a hub for ocean technology” (Interview #9). According to this expert, St. John’s benefits from the Labrador current that “brings -1 degree water south, which makes our environment an arctic-like thermal climate ... which makes it unique for research and testing equipment and stuff like that.” Across the interviews, our participants recognized the ocean as an essential resource for the development of the city-region by linking prominent economic activities, such as offshore oil and gas production and fisheries, to the prospects of building a local creative economy through encouraging technological innovation and talent attraction to these sectors (Colbourne 2006; Doloreux and Shearmur 2009; Lepawsky et al. 2010).

More specifically, the interviewees highlighted deep socio-spatial relationships between the city’s downtown core and the ocean as a central feature of the emerging IKC sectors and the creative class. Several respondents argued that close proximity and clustered planning centred close to the downtown harbour facilitates casual encounters that enable opportunity. As a local government representative put it, “there’s a whole bunch of people down there living, working or doing fun things, so that is going to lead to people meeting, communicating, sharing ideas and starting new things” (Interview #2). Reflecting this connection with the ocean as an economic and cultural resource, the downtown also emerged in the interviews as the clear space for the experimentation and evolution of the local creative class. Asked about the best location to facilitate creative activities, a local government leader commented that “it has to be somewhere that reflects back who we are. And who we are is back on the harbour and back on the ocean. And that’s downtown” (Interview #1).

Remarkably, respondents overwhelmingly suggested that successful policies to retaining talent should favour key placemaking and ‘quality of life’ tactics like heritage conservation and the adaptive reuse of historic urban fabric. While their general perception of the risk of gentrification is marginal – and, indeed, while anecdotal there is little

evidence that such a process is underway in St. John's – these discourses hint at a predisposition of some prominent local development stakeholders to admit the controversial yet prevalent creative class thesis as a means to generate inner-urban regeneration. This was emphasized by comments like “I know where I want it to grow, it needs to be downtown” (Interview #1) and “I think the city needs to be more proactive in supporting downtown because that's where innovation will take place” (Interview #4). Combined with the potential of a ‘downtown renaissance’ due to its historical value and proximity to the sea, these responses partially corroborate Florida's (2005) creative theory and, at the same time, reflect some of its criticisms—namely, how this discourse was captured by place marketing strategies (Pratt 2011) to the point of influencing local policy making.

While these opinions reflect the idea of face-to-face communication as an asset for clustering—mostly developed within the debate on the ‘knowledge bases’ of regional innovation systems (Asheim and Gertler 2004)—a central narrative from the interviews is that densified, mixed-use neighbourhoods are more suitable to stimulate creativity. In this sense, we also note that these responses reveal a mismatch between the way interviewees project visions of growth, that is, between visions that are normative (how the city-region should grow) and operational (how it does grow). Though the ocean-centric perspective is both, according to our informants, a pivotal lens on and source of economic and cultural capital for the local creative class, it has not been sufficient to anchor urban design and development in the last decade. Indeed, respondents unanimously identified, and lamented, that current planning and development practice privileges urban sprawl into sparsely populated greenfield sites away from the ocean. As a community development expert put it:

I live in a neighbourhood just down here [suburb of St. John's], but it could be anywhere in Eastern Canada. You could take my entire street and put in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia or whatever. You'll never know the difference. And there are obvious reasons for that, the way we designed our homes and how the construction industry works, but I don't get a huge sense of “St. John's-ness”. I feel it could be anywhere, except for the icons: there is the hills, the harbour... That's how you know you're in St. John's. Otherwise, you could be in any other maritime city (Interview #7).

The interviews point to several reasons for the continued urban disconnection from the sea. Some responses attributed part of this process to the movement of large companies to suburban and ex-urban areas, as a local government official stated, “we have seen companies, particularly from the oil sector and supply side, moving outside of downtown” (Interview #1). According to this informant, the lack of adequate office spaces in the downtown to fulfill the needs of these businesses—as most of the buildings in the area are old and offer little physical flexibility—is a remarkably powerful repellent as businesses “can move to an historical space and do a major retrofit or go out to a greenfield space and get exactly what [they] want, so it is a bit of a trade-off” (Interview #1).

Most respondents, especially those directly linked to local development policies, related this pattern of urban decentralization to a recent master-planned and new urbanist-style development called Galway. Located in the southwestern area of the city, a 15-minute drive from downtown St. John's, Galway is a 2,400-acre development described as “a place where you can live, work and play ... [with] residential neighbourhoods, light industrial/mixed-use office space and retail areas” (Galway 2019). While rehearsing the now common tropes of other master-planned developments found across North America, Galway is a divisive project with local business leaders (led by former NL Premier and Galway CEO, Danny Williams), urban developers and big box retailers (e.g., Costco) on one side and a growing cadre of residents, environmentalist and local politicians on the other (CBC 2015).

A key point of debate, and one that our participants argued, is that Galway is emblematic of a type of suburban placemaking that has been replicated (and heavily marketed) across North American cities for several decades. To be sure, these are complex and paradoxical places as they are often branded as sites that offer the ‘best of all worlds’ (i.e., cost efficient, spacious, sustainable, creative) but that are largely regarded by creatives themselves as unsustainable, outdated and, indeed, uncreative (Perrott 2020). According to one interviewee in the public sector, “for example, Costco is moving from one part of town to Galway, so a whole a lot more people are going to be driving further to get there ... so it's sprawling. It's sad to say” (Interview #2). More holistically, a senior urban and regional planner added:

That's not a “City of St. John's” thing. There is a particular model of growth that most of our municipalities [in the region] seemed to have adopted. That you need to develop the land. That physical growth equals economic

growth ... It's definitely impacting the way Northeast Avalon is growing, and I don't particularly think for the better. (Interview #7)

Mirroring these sentiments, a local government official explained that Galway and subsequent suburban projects weaken the city's creative potential highlighted in the beginning of this section:

It destroys [creative potential] for sure. The more you pull people away from the core of the city, the fewer connections can happen between people. So, I think it's a force that pulls apart the creative glue of the city. (Interview #3)

In contrast, for both of the respondents associated with the R&D sector, decentralization is not necessarily a major issue. Referring to St. John's CMA municipalities as "bedroom communities" due to the relatively limited territorial size of the city-region, a research leader in maritime technology development remarked that, instead of classic urban sprawl, "St. John's has allowed a significant growth in surrounding communities", also adding that "sometimes, the companies, start-ups especially, don't need to be downtown on Water Street in a high-rise building" (Interview #9). In the same way, another senior researcher argued that there is wider cultural perspective at play, namely that a majority of Canadians are not interested in a creative-urban-scenario, but instead want the benefits of living in a less dense urban core, somewhere between the city and the urban-rural fringe (Interview #8). According to this expert, "as long as [people] want the best of both worlds, [they] want to get into a big medical center, a nice restaurant or a nice downtown. But [they] also want a nice yard, and [they] want to be able to drive easily to a hiking trail, or a beach" (Interview #8).

One way or another, our interviews highlighted the value of the ocean as a resource deployed by the local creative class through the accumulation of economic capital (e.g., nature transformed into goods) and cultural capital (e.g., the mastery of harsh-environment exploration). While the articulation of these capitals suggests the emergence of a particular "sense of place" as a spatial practice of the local creative class, it does not seem sufficient to affirm St. John's as an inherently *creative city* in Richard Florida's terms—although some of our informants maintain that is it as a feasible strategy of downtown revitalization and creative occupations have proved to be the main local workforce in the last decade. As the interviewees acknowledged, the city is following a path of sprawl and growing placelessness, in opposition to what most of our respondents, and indeed, a share of the related literature, recognize as typical of places where the labour market is mostly attached to creative occupations. Therefore, a more nuanced analysis on the meaning of "sense of place" is necessary to understand the nature of this inconsistency.

Sense of place? The complexities of size and localism

Over the last decade, there has been considerable opposition to the narratives of global and mega-cities as aspirational and normative models for other urban regions. Indeed, for some, small is beautiful. But is smallness enough to attract and retain creative professionals?

Across our interviews, St. John's position as a small/medium city-region was perceived as a positive attribute, particularly with respect to building a local creative economy. A key here includes the ability to present and maintain a coherent sense of community, a context supportive of social and economic mobility where it is easier to connect with peers, and with various services (e.g., retail, entertainment) within the city. As a senior R&D expert put it, St. John's "got a small ecosystem that everybody in the city sort of knows everybody else ... it's small enough to be nimble but big enough to be noticed" (Interview #9). Similar reasoning was found in other interviews, for instance, a local government official admitted that "geographically [St. John's] is very small, so it means that you can meet face-to-face with people very quickly, and people will often have involvement and perspective in a variety of things" (Interview #1). For another participant also linked to the public sector, smallness is also an asset that strengthens the economy by encouraging a tailored and arguably more local consumer experience despite the recent ascendancy of online shopping:

Even though we're seeing [the power of] Amazon's online shopping – which can pull away from local retailers—it is also creating a need for an in-person-bespoke-custom-whatever experience. Being a small center means that we're closer together, which means that you can get to all these little shops more

frequently, you probably know the people who work there, and so we have a potential for a renaissance of the local retail. (Interview #2)

To be sure, geographers have long argued about the positive aspects of promoting sense of place, especially since the rapid development of globalization has reconfigured the socio-cultural and political nature of modern life (Massey 1991). The reassertion of a local sense of place, what Tomaney (2013) refers to as ‘urban parochialism’, is one clear reaction to globalization. Though routinely subject to critique for its tendencies toward ‘essentialism, romanticization and reactionary politics’, Tomaney (2013, 659) considers parochialism as a critical locus for “the development of virtues including commitment, fidelity, civility and nurture”.

With these ideas in mind, it is not surprising that respondents often pinpointed size and localism as key attributes linked to creative identity. In particular, most of the interviewees hinted at an emerging social capital arising from this context. As these values are both individually appropriated and collectively shared, social capital here stands for the capacity to access and establish business networking, a fundamental resource for creative workers to meet, engage in professional endeavours and build a sense of belonging through the development of occupational communities (Pottie-Sherman and Lynch 2019). For instance, an interviewee associated with the public sector and the local arts and culture scene advocated for the idea of small-scale livability, as “it is very easy to get to know everybody in the community that you’re working in”, a context that allows one to “have a close relationship with them [others in the community] and then just run into them casually at a coffee shop because everybody hangs out in the same places” (Interview #3). However, smallness as a resource-converted-into-social-capital was not considered an asset particularly in terms of labour performance and openness to newcomers. A local investor pointedly remarked that the city is having a hard time attracting talented people, a practice that also directly implicates a weak immigration record,

I don’t think there’s any involuntary unemployment in St. John’s right now. The problem is a skill shortage. It’s not having a shortage of jobs; it’s having a shortage of workers and we need people to come and help solve that problem ... I still don’t think that the majority of people understand the requirements for having a very aggressive immigration policy. (Interview #4)

Another respondent also tied to the private sector pointed to systemic challenges that are part of an overall “fear of newcomers, and an unwillingness to accommodate/change to meet their needs ... though we are a friendly bunch in St. John’s, we aren’t necessarily friendly or welcoming to immigrants” (Interview #5).

We note, then, that the social capital negotiated by the local creative class leads to a divergent spatial practice, one that simultaneously strengthens ties between members of a given community but that also creates a context-specific social barrier to newcomers. Despite being IKC professionals, newcomers do not have the same access to social capital as compared to their local peers and thus do not share the resources related to the previously explored economic and cultural capital. Consequently, similar clues of a sense of place also appeared in the interviews as triggers of symbolic capital, defined by Bourdieu (1992, 120) as “credit, but in the broadest sense, a kind of advance, a credence, that only the group’s belief can grant those who give it the best symbolic and material guarantees”. More specifically, this relates to how our interviewees envisioned the future of St. John’s IKC economy. When asked which cities around the world St. John’s could emulate to build a more creative environment, respondents overwhelmingly cited smaller and medium-sized metropolitan regions as models. Indeed, one participant, a leader in the local technology industry, rationalized smallness as an advantage in the uncertain global space economy: “I think it would be difficult to compete with Silicon Valley, Toronto, Vancouver, etc. but if we embrace our size and choose to promote the benefits of that, it can be turned into a competitive advantage” (Interview #5). Beyond size, the economic and cultural benefits of being a harsh environment reappeared as a competitive advantage. For a senior researcher, while “Halifax [has] no oil & gas sector at the moment ... the oil development is deep-water placed and very much Newfoundland and Labrador and St. John’s-focused activity” (Interview #9). Indeed, given the status and location of St. John’s in the Atlantic region, Halifax, as opposed to Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, was widely regarded as the central metropolitan competitor, in part because of both its geographical proximity and recent success in various service and creative economies (Pottie-Sherman and Lynch 2019).

Outside of Canada, Scandinavian cities like Bergen and Stavanger (Norway) were also highlighted as places to emulate since they share similar historical and geographical traits (e.g., relation with the ocean; winter cities) and have maintained well developed educational and oil sectors, as well as a desirable governance model. Indeed, it

appears to be a two-way relationship. According to an interviewee linked to the R&D sector, there are Norwegians working in local technology firms who “just felt totally at home in St. John’s the second they came here [while] there are some people from across Canada who come here ... and just can’t stand it” (Interview #8).

Bearing in mind that “sense of place” refers, here, to a spatial practice carried out by the local creative class from the articulation of their economic and cultural capitals, such a challenge of being a welcoming place to *outsiders* can be interpreted as a type of power resource negotiated almost exclusively by those who own these capitals. Therefore, the making of a “sense of place” is also a spatial practice resulting from a very particular and restricted form of apprehension and negotiation of social and symbolic capital. This reasoning substantiates Phan’s (2010, 69) findings that St. John’s creative class is deeply predicated on the cultural and heritage values of its workers—as the author argues that the city is “much less diverse both in terms of its immigrant population, and its population of Canadians born outside of Newfoundland and Labrador.” On the other hand, recent work concerning the experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs in St. John’s reveals the existence of a budding ‘start-up’ ecosystem supported by the local university and the provincial government that has been enhancing opportunities to foreign creative talent (Graham and Pottie-Sherman 2020). While an in-depth investigation of the performance of local governance is necessary to fully grasp the complexity of this issue (Greenwood 2016), it is important to note that our participants regularly cited governance as an important obstacle in talent attraction.

A key finding from this inquiry, mainly through a Bourdieuan lens, is the existence of pressure points that highlight the ambiguity of the creative ‘sense of place’ as a spatial practice fed by accumulated social and symbolic capital. On the one hand, this practice is relatively well appreciated and even affects how St. John’s is envisioned and compared to other urban contexts. On the other hand, its unbridled quest—in some discourses even tending to reify space—is likely to maintain an aloof and closed posture towards what (and whom) is not inherently local. Although most interviewees have paid attention to the urgency of improving practices and policies of welcoming newcomers, our key informants expressed a significant contradiction regarding their own tendency to reproduce the mantras of the creative economy-led urban redevelopment. After all, following Richard Florida’s (2005, 139) playbook, “talent powers economic growth, and diversity and openness attract talent.” Ultimately, while the creative class theory keeps failing to comprehend peripheral urbanism contingencies, especially in city-regions with a high proportion of creative workforce such as St. John’s, the local creative class seems to remain trapped in a paradoxical “sense of place”.

Conclusion

Over the last several decades, the creative class, especially those tied to the IKC sectors, have radically transformed urban and regional economies around the world. And while debates across critical social sciences have consistently highlighted the prospects and impacts of the creative class in large metropolitan regions, there is increasing interest in expanding our understanding of the wider geographies, and indeed peripheralities, of the issue. Given this development, this paper has had two objectives. The first theoretical objective expands the common understanding of creative class beyond its immediate significance, that is, the socio-economic differentiation of professionals labelled as ‘creative’ due to their type of training and labour performance associated with IKC economies. While scholars have successfully traced the socio-spatial character and boundaries of creative class practices, we argue that insofar as being contained in Florida’s paradigm, these analyses impoverish the heuristic potential of the concept and largely ignore new layers of the social, cultural, economic, and even symbolic contradictions of contemporary urban life—namely in peripheral spaces.

In response, we have re-read Florida’s creative class thesis using Bourdieu’s broad theoretical narrative on social classes. For Bourdieu, the sum of capital ownership—whether economic, cultural, social or symbolic—acquired or inherited by individuals throughout their lives are articulated and negotiated through power relations which reflects the positions occupied by these individuals in social space (hence, in different social classes). Accordingly, the way individuals project capital ownership in physical space (or in reified social space) results in the spatial structuring of power—clearly unequally distributed. Importantly, we acknowledge that Bourdieu’s social class theory is too dense to be fully deployed in an empirical research paper. Indeed, a comprehensive understanding of the ways his theoretical corpus can be helpful to geographers and urban researchers is beyond the scope of this article, although it has been the subject of recent scrutiny (Wacquant 2018). Nonetheless, this work interrogates some of Bourdieu’s key categories (e.g., economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital) to explore how a specific social group recognizes and legitimizes itself, in space and time, while maintaining “outsiders” excluded from this process – whether deliberately

or unintentionally. In this sense, the insights developed here add to the debates around these categories, especially concerning how class distinction impacts the production of space at the local level.

With these contributions in mind, we explored the complex spatial performance of the creative class in St. John's, a peripheral yet nevertheless important urban hub in Atlantic Canada. Here, interviewees consistently highlighted the value of proximity and access to the Atlantic Ocean as an inherent and essential resource of the local creative class. As a complex 'space', the social, cultural and economic aspects of this coastal linkage have evolved over time and have been central in influencing a more recent socio-economic identity and, indeed, 'sense of place' for the local creative economy. Emblematic of this profoundly local liaison, St. John's downtown is consistently cited as a desired space for supporting creativity, from enabling chance encounters to establishing an identifiable area to carryout, develop and spatialize creative practices. While powerful, visions of a revitalized and bolstered creative downtown are increasingly compromised by the continued (economic) logic of sprawling suburbanization – a spatial fix away from the coast and into the urban rural fringe.

Importantly, we also note the messy, double-edged meanings that the idea of "sense of place" occupies in the discourses and practices of the local creative class. Here, a distinct and creative sense of place is shaped foremost by the collective values of those who possess a sort of tacit grasping of *what St. John's is really about*, thus revealing itself as a powerful form of social capital, which can either nurture a sense of community and belonging for whoever is 'inside' or exclude creative newcomers and outsiders. Following this, respondents consistently evaluated St. John's future creative landscape against successful smaller and peripheral locations of geographical and historical proximity such as Halifax and Norwegian cities like Stavanger and Bergen, revealing an important (and no less critical) geography of symbolic capital.

Clearly, however, building a creative city and revitalizing a local and creative sense of place are not always, if ever, clear cut. Indeed, the values of what best constitutes creativity and creative economies are unevenly shared. In particular, our findings indicated a lack of openness to newcomers and inadequate immigration policies as major obstacles to achieving a diverse and healthy place for the local creative economy. So too, a creative sense of place also represents a paradoxical spatial practice as it creates a favourable environment in terms of size, amenities, culture, community, etc. to boost IKC industries while simultaneously reproduces social and symbolic distinction that holds back the city in comparison to other Atlantic urban regions. The challenge for peripheral places like St. John's then is to overcome a number of these critical issues including encouraging new ways to revalue, preserve and promote central urban fabric that elevates local histories of creativity, identity and change. Nonetheless, such practices should maintain a focus on what Relph (2016, 31) calls *re-embedding*, "the formation of new social relationships and connections with places chosen for their distinctive attributes by like-minded groups." This means prioritizing the inclusiveness of whoever is 'outside' in creative spaces that support rather than alienate newcomers due to their lack of inherited knowledge or cultural incompatibility.

Decisively, the kind of "sense of place" that is shared by the individuals of the local creative class in St. John's is indeed a prominent spatial practice and one that holds a potential to guide local development attached to a very particular global pipeline without giving up on its roots. This case foregrounds the need to adopt a more open mindset towards creative cultures. For instance, IKC models based on open/shared/circular/solidarity economies instead of those centered on orthodox strategies of capital accumulation is a starting point in this regard.

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