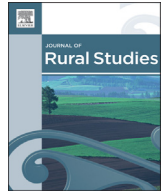


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## Broadband and the creative industries in rural Scotland

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## ABSTRACT

The creative industries potentially contribute much to the social and economic viability of rural regions. This paper explores the role that broadband connectivity plays in the development of professional and creative practices. In particular, we explore the extent to which broadband connectivity can reduce the penalty of distance for rural creative practitioners, and equally, how a lack of connectivity impacts upon the development of the rural creative economy. Our findings suggest that access to broadband of at least 2 megabits per second, download speed, had become crucial for those working in the creative sector at the time of the fieldwork (this minimum critical speed is now likely to be faster). A lack of adequate access may have a negative impact upon rural communities through prompting out-migration to areas with better digital connectivity.

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## 1. Introduction

The creative industries are an important business sector in rural areas and are seen as a major area of economic growth in the UK, although the majority of research on creative production has focused on an urban context (Gibson, 2010; Sorensen, 2009). The countryside attracts creative and artistic individuals, who often form Small and Medium Sized Enterprises<sup>1</sup> (SMEs), many of which are Micro-Enterprises or single-person enterprises, often becoming part of the pluri-active economy of rural areas (White, 2010). Indeed, as pointed out by Galloway (2007), it is micro-enterprises which dominate the economy in rural areas, and those situated in the creative sector play an important role in the development of rural economies more broadly. The creative industries are also an important sector in terms of tourism, adding to the vibrancy of the countryside as a place to visit. Creative practices are important to

the quality of life of those living in rural areas because they afford expression of identity and social cohesion (Kazana and Kazaklis, 2009; EU Commission, 2009). Digital technologies, particularly those enabled by broadband, are playing an increasingly important role in creative practices (Bell and Jayne, 2010). Unfortunately many rural areas still have inadequate (or no) broadband connectivity (Townsend et al., 2013) – in the UK as well as in many other parts of the world.

This paper considers the role of broadband and its applications in the development of rural creative economies. There is little work that has explored the value of digital technologies for rural creative practitioners (Anderson, 2010) – something that this paper aims to address. Recent work has highlighted the idyllic nature of the rural lifestyle as a motivation for creative migration (Herslund, 2012). We add to this work by contrasting the notion of a rural idyll with work that points to the penalties of rural living and working. We then discuss the role of broadband and its applications in supporting the creative industries in rural areas, drawing on globalisation discourses and the concepts of time-space compression. From the literature we derive our research questions: 1. *What are the roles of broadband access for rural creative practitioners?* and 2. *Can broadband connectivity alleviate the penalty of distance for rural creative practitioners?* We then outline our methodology and present an analysis of data collected during qualitative interviews carried out across rural Scotland with rural creative practitioners. We conclude

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<sup>1</sup> The European Commission defines Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) as those which employ 250 employees or fewer and with an annual turnover of €50million or less; Micro-Enterprises are those with 10 employees or fewer, and with an annual turnover of €2million or less.

by proposing that rural digital development, including the rollout of broadband infrastructures, should be a UK Government priority in order to support the rural creative economy.

## 2. The rural creative economy

The creative sector when considered in its entirety has a very broad scope, including, for example, businesses working in crafts, music, performance, film, advertising and video games (for an in-depth discussion of the definitions and breadth of the creative industries see the British Council's Mapping of the Creative Industries Report, 2010). For the purposes of this paper we follow the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) definition as:

*“activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. These ... include the following key sectors: advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing software and television and radio”* (DCMS Creative Industries Task Force, 1998, p10).

This differs somewhat from the increasingly popular notion of the creative worker offered by Richard Florida's thesis on the *creative class* (Florida, 2002) in which creative work is more broadly defined, encompassing not only those kinds of creative practitioners outlined in DCMS's definition, but also knowledge workers such as those working in banking, law and information technologies. This conceptualisation of creative work is too broad for the purposes of this paper, which draws on research with practitioners such as artists, musicians and filmmakers. We highlight the association of the creative industries with self-employment, entrepreneurship, micro-enterprises and SMEs (Felton et al., 2010), something we have found in our own research in rural Scotland.

The creative industries in Scotland have experienced significant recent growth – between 2000 and 2010 gross value added (GVA) increased by 25% in the creative sector in Scotland, compared with only a 14% increase in the economy as a whole (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2014). This increase in Scotland has been higher than in the UK as a whole, with GVA in the Scottish Creative Sector increasing by 15.6% since 2008, compared with an increase of only 5.4% across the UK-wide Creative Sector. The strength of the UK's creative sector is globally recognised as something that may help push economic recovery (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2014).

Much writing on creative production has focused exclusively upon the urban context (Gibson, 2010; Sorensen, 2009) – a focus which creates an urban-centred “*imaginary geography of creativity*” (Gibson, 2010). This is, to some extent, influenced by Richard Florida's *creative class* thesis (Florida, 2002) which examined the rise of knowledge workers in-migrating to and clustering in city hubs, a phenomenon which, according to Florida, promised innovation and economic growth – “*the salient feature of contemporary post-industrial capitalism*” (Gibson, 2010). Florida's *creative class* has been embraced whole-heartedly by policy makers responsible for encouraging the economic development of urban regions (Brennan-Horley, 2010) but is rarely referred to in rural development discourses. It has been argued that applying ideas about the *creative class* outside of the US context is inappropriate given cultural and economic differences found in other national contexts (Oakley, 2004). However, the focus on creative clusters precedes Florida's contribution. For example, in 1999 Leadbetter and Oakley referred to cultural entrepreneurs as being densely interconnected within cities or regions. The literature, focusing almost entirely on urban regions, suggests that creative economies require tight-knit

networks (or clusters) of knowledge and resource exchange to thrive, something which might be harder to achieve in more sparsely populated areas (Felton et al., 2010). This may explain the lack of creative industry promotion in rural development strategies. Here we note the importance of virtual communities of practice (such as networks of professional creatives) which are not always bound by geographical location, and are enabled through digital technologies (Wenger et al., 2009).

An urban bias has resulted in academic discourse often entirely ignorant of the creative potential of rural places. Some recent research has focused on creative industries in regions outside of urban centres, including rural and remote regions (e.g. Eversole, 2005; Markusen, 2007; Wojan et al., 2007; Bell and Jayne, 2010). For example, Mayes (2010) found a rich and vibrant creative and cultural scene in a remote rural community in Australia, leading him to question his own urban bias and that of his contemporaries. Creative industries in rural areas of the UK have much to offer their local economies: they can contribute to tourism, adding to the vibrancy of the countryside as a place to visit. Indeed, the characteristics of rural places can be marketed through the creative and tourism industries, such as is the case with the lochs and glens of Scotland, and the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina (Anderson, 2010) – landscapes which can inspire creativity in local artists, as well as provide subject matter for creative products which connect with local identities and appeal to tourists and locals alike. Creative practices might also enhance the social sustainability of rural communities; they are important to the quality of life of those living in rural areas because they afford expression of identity and social cohesion (Kazana and Kazaklis, 2009; EU Commission, 2009; McHenry, 2011).

Despite the urban bias found in the literature, creative practitioners *do* operate from rural areas, often having been attracted to relocate there from more urban settings. Rurality offers qualities that cannot be found in urban environments, particularly in terms of landscape, tranquillity, and notions of a more laid back lifestyle and tight-knit community life. Yet rural regions also present challenges to those who live and work there. This tension is now explored in more detail.

## 3. Rural idyll or rural penalty?

Across Europe, the populations of rural areas are ageing faster than those of urban areas. Long-term migration patterns of young adults leaving rural areas for urban centres of education and employment continue in many rural areas. The in-migration of adults in mid-life or following retirement contribute to the older age profiles now common in many rural areas (Townsend et al., 2013; Philip et al., 2012). Rural areas in the UK are also characterised by in-migration of professionals seeking a different quality of life – something typically restricted to suburban areas across the rest of Europe, but widespread in rural Scotland and the rest of the UK (Jedrej and Nuttall, 1996). This means that rural communities can be both relatively rich and relatively poor (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Amongst these in-migrants are those belonging to the creative sector, seeking rurality for quality of life and creative inspiration and bringing their enterprises with them when they relocate (Bosworth, 2008; Roberts and Townsend, 2015; Drake, 2003; White, 2010). We acknowledge along with others however (McGranahan et al., 2011; Hoyman and Faricy, 2009) that empirical evidence for the influence of creative talent on local economies is limited; further we note that although we observe a movement of creative people to rural areas in Scotland, many creative practitioners do not have the luxury of relocating for lifestyle reasons and may instead be bound (or more influenced) by the location of jobs, property prices and attainable income levels.

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