

Craftsperson, Hobbyist or Micro-Enterprise: The rise of the Pro-C Artist in the periphery regions of Mid and West Wales.

Sophie Bennett (PhD Student, School of Management & Business and Psychology Dept, Aberystwyth University)

This paper identifies a resilient type of creative individual who operates within the Crafts sector in the periphery regions of Wales.

In comparison to the majority of other micro and small creative enterprises located in rural areas, the Professional Creative Artist (Pro-C Artist) described here receives little recognition in regional policymaking. Despite this lack of visible support, and in an economic climate and geographic location where employment opportunities are limited, the number of Pro-C Artists appears to be increasing. The lifestyle of this creative type is presented in this paper as a 'Pro-C Artist' model of creativity; given the increase in this type of 'pure art' (Chaston, 2008) creative output within periphery regions this model is identified as an emerging future direction for grass-roots creativity.

The current economic climate, regional policymaking and the associated impact this has had on the pure arts creative sector.

In 2010 the European Commission produced a 'green paper' for unlocking the potential of the cultural and creative industries to counteract the effects of a world-wide recession (Creative Business, 2012). This was the culmination of a century of investment into creativity that came to prominence with the identification of the Creative Class (Florida, 2002), alongside predictions by economists and sociologists that creative activities, practices and people will dominate economic and cultural life in the century to come. In many respects the creative industry has progressed towards these expectations. The UK has the largest creative sector in Europe, possibly the largest in the world (Creative Business, 2012) and has been praised as one of our fastest growing sectors with an average annual growth of 8% between 2007 and 2011 - that is 3% more than the overall economy (DCMS, 2001). A similar trend has been witnessed worldwide; in America the creative industries have shown major contributions to growth generating annual economic activity of \$166.2 billion, an increase of 24% since 2002 (Americans for the Arts, 2007). However while more commercial areas within the sector such as the film industry and computer programming, which are often based in urban areas, demonstrate measurable and direct economic growth; the value of industry traditionally associated with 'pure art' (Chaston, 2008) such as Arts and Crafts and located in

periphery regions is not so visible or well-suited to such measurements. This directly impacts upon their status in regional policymaking because, as Markusen (2007) argues, it is difficult to integrate artists and their ideologies with '*neoliberal urban policy regimes*' that evaluate regeneration efforts on industry growth alone. Statistically the pure arts sector is underperforming economically with a 0% growth rate (Comunian, 2009), yet Markusen's Consumption Based Theory (2007) which considers the potential within regions has highlighted the indirect benefit that investment in the artistic sector can provide to increase local spending and growth. The benefit of this is emphasised in Arts Council reports that identify qualities such as the ability to shape new environments, engage communities and create a sense of identity and pride as important contributions to regeneration (ACW, 2011). These are, however, viewed as societal values and qualities that economic regeneration policies are not designed to measure. The knock-on effect is that purely creative areas such as Arts and Crafts are side-lined by a system that gives value to innovation and economic success (Coulson, 2012), and in this structure individual artistic occupations become of less worth and therefore face increasing cutbacks at regional and local level. The 2004 Welsh Assembly Government Creative Industry Strategy identified the creative industries as one of the six strategically important sectors of the economy; yet policy making strategies for this area focus primarily on the exploitation of intellectual property that offers higher return on investment (Hargreaves, 2010) rather than the creative industries as a whole. The lower priority level occupied by 'pure art' is evidenced in the 2010 Government's annual spending review where the Arts Council took a 29.6% budget cut (News, 2010), which affected over 30 art organisations in Wales (News, 2010). At local level this becomes most prominent with the disappearance or reduction of work by organisations such as Creu Cymru, the theatre support network based in Mid-Wales, the uncertain future of popular festivals such as Brecon Jazz and the withdrawal of or reduced funding for grass roots Arts organisations and Craft collectives.

In what ways and in what forms local artistic networks will move forward is therefore a key cause for concern. Comunian (2009) suggests that there has been a lack of research into how creativity works at local level. Given the current economic climate and the diminishing governmental support for the pure arts sector, investigations into how arts enterprises can survive are necessary to both evaluate the potential benefits this sector may have for regional regeneration, and to consider the future direction for local level creativity. This study considers the latter, focusing on pure arts activity in the rural periphery regions of Wales and the type of artistic output that is surviving in these areas in the current economic climate.

The Pro-C Artist as the dominant creative type operating within in the pure arts sector in periphery regions.

The Mid and West Wales regions of Wales are characterised by a sparse population centred within a network of small market and seaside towns, (Fuller Love, Midmore, Thomas, & Henley, 2006) with constricting transport networks and an outward migration of the younger generation who seek more diverse and better paid employment than a rural community can offer. The Mid and West Wales regions display one of the lowest economic activity rates in the country, yet despite these conditions they contain a disproportionately high population of creative people (Econactive, 2010) and increasing creative output. It is clear that a certain type of creative output is surviving, thriving and multiplying in the rural regions of Wales; the origin of this is in Craftwork. Craft is one of the largest creative subsectors in Wales with an estimated 3,530 employees (Hargreaves, 2010); the prevalence of this output is apparent in small galleries, craft fairs and art organisations across Mid and Wales. An increase in part time employment, coupled with the low cost of living in the rural backwaters of Wales has contributed to an increase in people working within this area and up to 35% of these are ‘career changers’ (Burns, Gibbon, & Rosemberg, 2012). Many of these ‘new’ Craftspeople can be described as creative hobbyists who decide to join the ranks of long-term Craftspeople to operate micro-Craft enterprises in areas of low economic activity. This type of lifestyle tends to be motivated by the desire to maintain a *‘personal satisfaction deriving from creativity’* (Ball, Pollard, Stanley, & Oakley, 2010 p.31) that can be derived from creative engagement and is prevalent, during a period of recession, amongst those choosing portfolio careers, freelancing and self-employment. These producers are described here as ‘Pro-C Artists’, a term used by the author to encompass both those who have recently changed to a Craft career and those who have been working in this area for a longer period of time. A profile of their lifestyle is presented in the rest of this paper as the ‘Pro-C Model of Creativity’ to highlight the emergence of a resilient creative type who is increasing in prominence at local level.

Data Collection:

The ‘Pro-C Model of Creativity’ has been identified using a demographic questionnaire study and follow up interviews involving sixty five Pro-C Artists based in Mid and West Wales. The Pro-C Artists in this study identified themselves as Painters, Illustrators, Photographers, Quiltmakers, Jewellers, Textile Artists and Visual Artists. The Pro-C term used here to

collectively identify this grouping is not a new concept however the description used here varies from the original definition. Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) developed the term Pro-C to describe professionals who make a living at their work but are not at the top of their profession. This concept is adhered to but attached to the identity of the Artist or Craftsperson. In this study the Pro-C Artist has been identified as those earning over 21% of their annual income from their Craft. In this respect they are distinct from Craft hobbyists as the sale of their creative work makes a significant contribution to their overall income.

The questionnaire included demographic data to investigate the average age, gender and the nationality of the Pro-C Artist and has been analysed using SPSS software to create a profile type. Questions such as their annual creative income, how long they have lived in Wales, their type of creative work and the length of time they have been involved in their particular creative area are used to investigate the lifestyle of this artistic individual. In addition to this, the questionnaire combined the Flow State Scale (Jackson & Marsh, 1996) and the Work preference Inventory (Amabile, 1987) to measure the level of intrinsic motivation involved in creative work to gain an insight into the career choice of these individuals. Eight follow up interviews have been completed to investigate the extent to which the Pro-C Artist makes a living financially from their work, what sort of support they receive from their local community and how the location they are based in impacts upon their product/outcome. The results of both questionnaire and interview data have been combined to provide a profile for this creative type and offer potential insights into how and why they are able to survive in austere times.

The Pro-C Model of Creativity:

Demographic data from the questionnaires indicates that the average Pro-C Artist is female¹, aged between 45-64yrs² and would identify themselves as a Craft-maker rather than a Visual Artist as they work within the 'functional' area of Visual Art. The majority earn less than £10,000 per annum for their creative work which contributes towards 21% or over of their annual income. It is evident therefore that the Pro-C Artist forms part of the older, nearing retirement age population that is prolific in periphery regions and that they occupy a position at the lower end of the income scale.

Further investigation into the career choice of the Pro-C Artist indicates that many take on additional work to support their creative lifestyle; this work was identified in interviews as

¹ Representing 68% of the overall sample.

² Representing 64.6% of the overall sample.

ranging from arts workshops to graphic design or even working in unrelated areas such as agriculture. A number of Pro-C Artists also have an additional source of income such as savings or pensions. The willingness to take on additional occasional or part time work and, for some, the assurance of a second income offers a plausible explanation for the durability of the Pro-C Artist in times of hardship such as a recession.

The relationship between the Pro-C Artist and the rural location was investigated and six of the eight Pro-C Artists interviewed identified the physical area in which they were based as having a directly negative impact on the sale of their work. This was due to a limited customer base and transport and network barriers; it was clear however that these limitations, which are characteristic of periphery regions, do not deter the Pro-C Artist from living and working in areas of low economic activity. The majority of Pro-C Artists indicated a preference for a better aesthetic quality of life over any increase in income they may gain in more central areas; this was a clear motivator for moving to or remaining within periphery regions.

The preference for a rural idyllic location was investigated alongside the ability of the Pro-C Artist to sustain a career in this environment. Although the majority of Pro-C Artists were not born in Wales³ they have stayed and worked in the area for an average of 20 years indicating that it is possible to make a sustainable living based in Craft in these locations. One of the main factors influencing their decision to remain in this area was the inspirational location, as one interviewee explains:

'We came here for the peace we can here for the space and the ability to see the sky see the sea and have interrupted silence, to have all of this. So ... my work ... is driven by this beauty which we are living in the middle of and we are very lucky here, we have this beautiful garden and we are surrounded by natural forms which completely influence our designs'.

The lower cost of living associated with periphery regions' is also a main reason given by many to remain or re-locate to these areas even though a basic standard of living is necessary to engage in creative work. During interviews this hand-to-mouth lifestyle was described by one interviewee:

So if not enough orders come in, then I might, I mean the kids have left home now, I might have to eat out of the hedgerows, I might eat nettle soup and potatoes. That costs nothing. That's when I say 'live on the edge'. It isn't quite so much like that anymore, but 20 years ago when my husband had just left, it was me and two kids in a big place.... Life was hard

³ Representing 72.3% of the overall sample.

Further exploration at the interview stage suggests that the Pro-C Artist pursues this type of work and make-do-and-mend lifestyle rather than seek a higher quality of living that may be obtainable through relocation or a non-arts related career because it is aligned with their own strong personal values, as one interviewee describes:

I got into a French college in London, and the course was 2 years and I managed a year. And if you can imagine me with all the pretty high heeled secretary girls, I've stood out like a sore thumb. I didn't fit in with any of it. I didn't want to be given orders. I didn't want to be, couldn't ever imagine myself sitting at a desk doing what somebody told me. And I threw up my hands in horror and ran away. Which was the only thing to do really. It was awful.

Clearly the ability to choose and develop their own career and output is aligned to the personal satisfaction and self-fulfilment of the Pro-C Artist in a similar way to the freelancers and self-employed creatives described by Bull *et al* (2010) and referred to earlier. This provides a plausible explanation as to why periphery regions, which offer the ability to exist on a low annual income proves attractive to the Pro-C Artist.

The level of support the Pro-C Artist has received from funding bodies or local council initiatives was also explored, and it was evident that few Pro-C Artists in this study have received grant support for their work, yet over half have worked in their creative area for over 20yrs. This indicates that their career choice is self-sufficient and sustainable and explains why so many of them are still involved in their activities despite the recent Arts Council cuts and limited regional support.

The increase in the number of Pro-C Artists in periphery regions is also an indication that they not only survive, but thrive in this climate. Results from the demographic questionnaire show that those who have moved into Craftwork within the last nine years make up 20% of the sample; this highlights the popularity of this creative art-form and demonstrates its capability to provide a viable income. The follow-up interviews indicated that these 'career-changers' were post-hobbyists who had previously pursued their Craftwork in their spare time before deciding to focus on this as an income avenue. This is reinforced by evidence produced by the Craft Council which suggests that Wales has the highest percentage of career changers in the UK (Burns, Gibbon, & Rosemberg, 2012). Clearly the geographic and economic conditions in Wales and its periphery regions which are often seen to restrict other industry growth provide the idea climate to foster the career of the Pro-C Artist.

The motivation for the Pro-C Artist to remain in a creative career offering low income potential was further explored using the Work Preference Inventory (Amabile, 1987). The results from this indicated that the majority of Pro-C Artists are more intrinsically than

extrinsically motivated and from the interview data it was clear that the determining factor for continuing to work in their creative area is a desire to engage with their Craft to retain a feeling of self-satisfaction. As described by one interviewee when asked why she does her Craftwork:

because I loved doing it. Simple as that really. I have always got new ideas I always try new aspects of sewing to see if I can do it and it makes me feel much happier ... I do it because I love it.

This study demonstrates that working within the periphery regions of Mid and West Wales is a conscious, deliberate and viable choice for Pro-C Artists. It both facilitates a low-cost lifestyle and provides inspiration for their Craftwork. This gives the Pro-C Artist the freedom to continue in their preferred low income profession.

The Pro-C Model of Creativity is presented here as evidence to support the rise of the Pro-C Artist in the periphery regions of Mid and West Wales, and as a potential future direction for pure arts creativity in times of recession. The results indicate that the Pro-C Artist, encompassing both the original craftsperson, who has carved a sustainable and long-term creative career and the post-hobbyist who is a more recent career-changer, make up the maturing age group that dominates rural areas with limited employment opportunities. Instead of acting as a barrier to this type of Craftwork, the limited geographical and demographical nature of these locations attract the Pro-C Artist who can pursue a hand to mouth existence where the cost of living is reduced and the surroundings provide a source of inspiration for their work. The overall effect is a resilient, vibrant grass roots Craft industry that may not be considered to make a significant contribution to periphery regions in terms of direct economic growth but which demonstrates self-sufficiency and a determination to survive without direct major support from regional policymakers. In this environment they are able to prosper in an artistic rather than economic sense. The Pro-C Model of Creativity demonstrates that the dominant traits of the Pro- Artist which include resilience and determination, a make do and mend attitude, and a love of one's Craft appear to be the key tools for the survival for the pure arts industry at local community level.

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