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Peripheral visions: the film and television industry in Galway, Ireland

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to blur the periphery versus centre binary by considering the emergence of a small, but vibrant, agglomeration of cultural industries in Galway, Ireland. Key agents in this story include postcolonial activists, Irish language supporters, Hollywood directors, and local politicians. This is an example of an industry agglomeration in a 'peripheral' setting and in the context of a threatened language. Language, culture and community are argued to be fundamental to the case and can be traced back to an underrepresented community finding a voice for itself. It is argued that studies of industry and innovation should not ignore small scale or peripheral cases; that being in the periphery can be an asset in terms of entrepreneurship, creative freedom and field formation; that periphery must be set in a relational framework; and that the medium of cultural production must be part of understanding industrial dynamics and innovation.

KEYWORDS

Core periphery; cultural creative industry; TV-film industry; ireland

Urban milieus seem uniquely suited to serve as crucibles for creativity. Urban proximity, agglomeration and clustering have proven to enable economies of scale and scope, externalities, amenities and diversity seemingly central to creativity and valuation. For industries such as film and TV with creativity at their core mega cities like Los Angeles (Scott 2005) or Mumbai (Lorenzen and Täube 2008) cast long shadows. However, there is a growing acknowledgement that beyond these places' weighty circles of gravity exist a range of places and contexts where creativity and value arise.

Based on a qualitative case study conducted in Galway, Ireland the paper sets out to unpack local and global factors that together drove the development of a niche industry into a small, yet vibrant cluster in a peripheral location. Since the early 1980s, an animation, film, and TV production network have grown here despite being in a largely rural area, on the edge of Ireland, on the edge of wider networks of film and TV production, and despite being conducted largely in the medium of a marginalised minority language. In this case peripherality, it is argued, is not hampering development. Rather on the contrary, actors managed to take advantage of the peripheral location. We suggest that both global (US Film makers) and local (a regionally embedded Irish language movement) forces have combined in the creation of a relatively unique network

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and agglomeration of cultural producers in this seemingly peripheral region. We suggest whilst it has been shaped by inward investments and outside influences it is equally so that isolation, independence and an indigenous political community trying to find its voice have been of central importance. The case can be conceptualised as peripheral in a topographical sense (i.e. at the edge of a region) and peripheral in a topological sense (i.e. at the edge of a network). The agglomeration is also balancing on a cultural edge as it can be considered to be simultaneously culturally centred by virtue of being the heartland for contemporary Irish language cultural expression and culturally remote in a country and a sector where the English language dominates.

The paper aims to highlight how being peripheral does not necessarily mean being disadvantaged or deficient and draws attention to the possibilities that the peripheral may enjoy. The paper attempts to contribute to the increasing engagement with an 'urban bias' in organisational and geographical research (Shearmur 2017; Grabher 2018). The chief theoretical promise of this emerging strand of inquiry is not to draw up an alternative geography of all the 'fly-over' - and 'left behind' places. At stake seems rather an interrogation of key assumptions on creativity and innovation that, for the most part, are implicitly derived from a literature that celebrates density, proximity and critical mass as prerequisites for creativity and innovation. Therein we attempt to highlight the complexity and diversity of peripherality and to critically engage with the idea that peripherality can be an asset just as it can be a liability. More broadly, we consider how the actions of cultural communities can help explain how organisational fields come into being, and help create the conditions for peripheral regional development and, indeed the leveraging of peripherality for creativity (Woods 2007).

1. *Core-periphery*

Theoretically, this article contributes to ongoing debates in economic geography and creativity/innovation studies on notions of core-periphery. As Grabher (Grabher 2018) suggests the periphery has often in the discipline of economic geography been seen as a lack of, and obstacle to, economic activity and to creativity. There has been a considerable 'urban bias' (Shearmur 2017) that rightly celebrates the role of the city in creativity and economy but wrongly belittles and obscures the role of the periphery. Here we suggest that in three respects we need to reappraise the relations between core-periphery and reappraise the role of what is often lumpenly referred to as the periphery.

First, we suggest that it is patently wrong to think of the peripheral as a non-urban residual holding ground for places that are in some way deficient and lacking in the externalities and affordances that urban density is held to offer. Common to most of the geographic approaches to economic activity is the notion of agglomeration and the recognition of the role of networks in economic development and functioning. In contrast to the use of network analogies in other disciplines though is a greater appreciation of the role of agglomeration or of density of proximity in space and place. The discipline understands proximity to have a highly spatial character and that proximate network relations tend to be embedded and reproduced in spatial concentrations: most commonly urban regions or industrial districts.

The portrayal in geography of cultural production, in particular, is one largely set on metropolitan stages. Much of the literature on cultural production firmly places the role of urban agglomerations at the heart of both creative generative processes and the at the heart of the systems of value and valorisation that cultural markets rest upon. As Lorenzen (Lorenzen 2018) notes, accounting in economic geography for the locational fix of the cultural industries has often resorted to the ‘Marshallian’ idea of external economies of agglomeration and the ‘Jacobian’ perspective of external economies arising from urbanisation. This has meant that the literature is overwhelmingly focused on the affordances of urban centres (Scott 2008; Power and Scott 2004; Currid 2007; Glaeser 2011) and those beyond the centre have been largely ignored or relegated. Implicit, though seldom theorised, in such accounts is the idea that the density or volume of the centre are what makes for proximity and that contexts lacking in density and volume will be deficient. In short, a key assumption is that creativity and innovation are, for the most part, implicitly derived from density, proximity and critical mass (i.e., genuine features of urbanity) and these are prerequisites for creativity and innovation. We argue this is assumption that the periphery is creatively deficient is both overstated and, in many cases, misleading or incorrect.

Part of the problem with urban-centred assumptions is that, as a growing literature suggests, peripheral cases can have many of the characteristics of proximity noted of other cultural industries places albeit in a tighter circle and on a smaller scale. Studies have shown that ‘even’ in the periphery, and even ‘rural’ regions, we can find interpersonal and interfirm networks supporting project working and diminished transaction costs; entrepreneurial cultures; local buzz and developed sets of global pipelines that support knowledge generation and dissemination; and localisation economies based on the existence of local institutions and facilities (e.g. (Collins and Fahy 2011; Collins and Power 2019; Luckman et al. 2008; Luckman 2012; Grabher 2018; Bunting and Mitchell 2001; Hautala and Jauhiainen 2019; Warren and Gibson 2014; Ray 1998; Gibson 2002; Bell and Jayne 2010). Whilst obviously not of the scale or scope found in large cities such examples tempt us to use distinctly urban nets to cast around in the periphery for clusters or agglomerations. Whilst it can be interesting and enlightening to find the known mechanisms (relational proximity, diminished transaction costs, buzz and pipelines, communality) far from their natural habitat, the puzzle remains why all these factors seem to be in place despite a marginal geographical position. Later in the article, we will suggest that a more thorough understanding might come from understanding ‘relational distance’ (Ibert 2010) as a creative asset and the idea that new aspects should also be highlighted: in our case how the periphery has become a place where ‘the past’ can be found in an untouched way.

Second, we should be concerned to transcend the dualism and ill-fated finality that the core-periphery dichotomy presumes. Being peripheral need not mean deficit or permanent relegation but rather can afford agents productive creative and experimental agency. Literature in sociology and cultural studies, in contrast to literature that builds upon geographical or regional development cases, reminds us that being peripheral or an outsider need not mean permanent relegation. Being peripheral – or in the language of sociology an outsider, deviant or marginalised – can afford agents highly productive creative and experimental agency. Freedom from or relational distance to norms and expectations can allow agents a different perspective allowing them to easier innovate. As

Ibert suggests, relation distance involves ‘sociocultural tension’ (Ibert 2010, 190) and the negotiation of or competition between these differences can be an important part of innovation processes. In cultural studies, we are alerted to how marginalised groups (such as deviant groups or subcultures) use cultural creativity and taste to construct group identity and norms. Both in terms of forming an identity outside the mainstream and by having freedom/distance from the mainstream novel formulations, new combinations and genuine novelty or creation can occur (Sweetman 2013). However, we must be careful to nuance such assertions and recognise that dancing in the dark can have its drawbacks:

“Relative geographic isolation has long facilitated the development of unique, if not discrete, local cultural practices. For creative practitioners, the frequent lack of critical feedback in smaller and/or regional creative communities where often everyone feels the need to be able to get along with one another, coupled with the absence of professional development opportunities can be an ongoing barrier to developing professional skillsets and expectations and thus wider commercial and aesthetic success.” (Luckman 2020, 172)

In relation to cultural or creative potential, a further factor is crucial to understanding core-periphery and that is language and the cultural-linguistic communities it signifies and binds. For cases where a central cultural trait is unique, such as in marginal or threatened language groups, creative potential emerges both internally due to the unique nature of independent languages and cultural traditions; and in opposition or contrast to dominant linguistic cultures and set of institutions. We argue that a central factor that has initiated and united the networks and local milieu has been a shared sense of political and linguistic community; or more precisely a shared artistic and political desire to found a community with a shared political constituency and linguistic community centred around minority language media.

Third, a strict dichotomy obscures the potential relational trading zones and interdependencies between spaces of generation and creativity and spaces, processes and networks of value and valorisation. Recent turns in economic geography towards a more nuanced appreciation of relational geographies (Bathelt and Glückler 2018; Dicken and Malmberg 2001; Ibert 2010) open up for the idea that proximity is characterised just as much by relational proximity (e.g., having something in common) as by the proximity of volume and density (e.g. proximity by virtue of being crammed together). Once we understand being peripheral as a relational positionality (Glückler 2014) we get away from primarily understanding core-periphery in the sense of geographical distance. Relational thinking highlights the complex interdependencies and mobilities that exist between core and periphery. As Menzel suggests, learning, connecting and moving constantly occur and both make possible (and hinder) interaction; and bridging, reducing and making distance are key factors in determining economic spaces and activities (Menzel 2015). As Ibert shows relational distance is situated in practices that find form in often interpersonal interactions and meetings such as those involved in the mobility of people, knowledge and product between different parts of innovation and commercialisation processes (Ibert 2014). Furthermore, mobility and interdependency exist between places of origination and places where novelty can be valorised (Jeannerat 2013; Aspers 2011); partly due to what Cattani et al (Cattani, Ferriani, and Lanza 2017) refer to as the ‘legitimation journey of novelty’. Equally such mobilities and

interdependencies are particularly central to markets characterised by Chamberlinian competition where differentiation and dissemination form important parts of value chains (Power 2010; Power and Scott 2004; Levitt 1960). Relational thinking also allows us to go beyond simple dualisms and understand that the same place can be central and peripheral (though in different dimensions) at the same time (Dicken and Malmberg 2001; Bathelt and Gluckler 2003; Grabher and Ibert 2014). Following from this we must also presume that creative people, places or communities can become more central or peripheral over time (Barnes 2018; Vermeulen 2018). As we shall see, the latter aspect seems particularly relevant to this case study which is based on long-term observations with a longitudinal character and points to the case's 'ascension' in the core-periphery hierarchy.

What does this mean then for how we should define the meaning of periphery? Peripheral places can be but need not be places defined by deficit or lack even if they do not exhibit urban density. Peripheral places can be sites for creativity and innovation: most likely due to the creative possibilities afforded by distance from control and power. Peripheral places cannot be defined in opposition or in pure contrast to core places as fluid interrelations and mobilities between places blur lines.

2. The medium as the message

Understanding cultural production – whether in the periphery, centre or wherever – needs to involve an engagement with the medium of cultural production: i.e. language. To date, the literature on cultural production, outside from the humanities, has mostly been concerned with the organisational practices and geographical patterns of cultural production. In effect, this has meant neglecting contents and the medium of production.

The case of Galway is not merely a case of being on the edge of a country or peripheral to the mainstream industry but also part of a highly charged political and cultural identity movement focused on a minority or threatened language. At first glance, the birth of a concentration of film and television activity in Galway may seem accidental; however, as we will see it is the result of a coincidence of factors innately linked to the role of Galway as a centre for the making of 'Irish' identities: first through Irish-American filmmakers' imaginaries; and later around the Irish language (*Gaeilge*). However, the recent history of the case is all about the centrality of working in the Irish language. Sharing the geographical traits of many European peripheral rural regions, reliance on agriculture and primary industries, county Galway is also home to the largest *Gaeltacht* (Irish speaking region) in Ireland. Despite being the official first language of Ireland, the Irish language is a minority language in mainly English-speaking Ireland.

For several hundred years during the colonial period the Irish language was brutally repressed and became a symbolic marker of identity in Ireland and nationalist politics and later in postcolonial politics (Watson 1996). *Language is not just a medium of communication it is also an important carrier and symbol of identity as well as it is an emotionally charged subject*. Kiberd termed the complex and instable postcolonial Ireland as 'a quaking sod' (Kiberd 1995) and suggests that the Irish language has been central to reimagining Ireland and Irishness and as such as 'has been embraced by many as a force for a "counterculture" quite distinct from nationalist attachments'.

We are alerted here to something that economic geographical accounts of cultural production often overlook or downplay: that the medium and the output of these is culturally important and is not simply an economic act. What is created is value in a deeper sense than market value. Culture is produced by these firms and with-it collective identity, belonging and many other very foundational values. Equally, the use of the language valorises the medium itself.

Hourigan (2001) suggests minority language movements operate in the periphery and are reflective of an unwillingness to accept societal structural change premised on economic growth alone. Minority language media and representations are emotive topics not least since their threatened status is linked to the politics of colonialism, separatism and nationalism. Most often minority language movements and media thus take place in the context of a broader struggles seeking self-actualisation and identity formation. For minority languages in particular, examples from Wales, Scotland and Spain (Hourigan, 2001) demonstrate that the creation of a film and TV sector means not just control of media and of symbolic production in the face of globalising forces, but as an essential premise for political and community mobilisation. For Lysaght (2009) and her comparison between the Irish language TV station TG4 and Māori Television in New Zealand, the identity forming political struggles in the formation of these entities directly influence their produce from branding to content as well as the output of those that produce for them. Cultural production in such cases is tightly bound with shared interpretation of meanings which, at least partly, emerge from the political life of communities.

If minority language media tend towards a peripheral position in the media landscape this need not be a reflection of the actions of the community itself. There is a recognition in media and cultural studies that minority or threatened language programming and film has been historically marginalised, overlooked or actively worked against by mainstream media and indeed mainstream social science (Fishman 1991). We must therefore understand places and communities involved in minority media as both linked and in conflict with the mainstream; and understand that it is this relation that may be more constitutive of actions and outputs than local milieu dynamics. Cormack (2004) argues whilst minority language media is often overly fetishised by activists, minority language media is important in four main respects: to show that minority languages and communities are not outmoded heritage issues; that these media activities can be important economic and career arenas for minority language speakers; that they are a vital public space for community development and news; that they are central to representations of the community internally and externally (Cormack 2004, 4).

Community can be a useful concept in explaining cultural production: providing one does not err into the blind normative celebration of shared values that communitarianism can involve. The concept is useful as it alerts us to questions of whether such community values, constructions of identity or post-colonial mobilisation are either a spur or hinder to creative and experimental agency. In this regard that the work of Johnstone and Lionais (Johnstone and Lionais 2004) and their argument that depleted communities can act as hosts to unique forms of enterprise that combine business and community goals such as language becomes relevant. For them, depleted communities are places that have lost much of their economic rationale through processes related to the uneven nature of capitalistic and colonial development. Despite or more likely because of this depletion they are free to act as sites where the entrepreneurial process

can manifest itself differently and can be adapted to particular circumstances (ibid). In a similar vein Drakopoulou Dodd (Drakopoulou Dodd 2014) highlights the significance of place (alongside power and practice) in entrepreneurship; as something more than a site of production or consumption but as an area of communal socialisation and cultural acquisition. Places are made up of complex sets of social relations and as such they create distinct communities with their own voice and identities. This sort of generative or creative capacity is one that the focus on organisational issues and ‘urban bias’ (Shearmur 2017) in innovation studies has served to overshadow.

1. Methodology

The paper is based on a long-term study of the inception and development of a film and TV sector in county Galway. We use a single case-study method (Flyvbjerg 2006) to develop a narrative ‘that is an account of actors and events based on a subset of historical facts that permits us to systematise existing knowledge ... [and] exposes key contextual circumstances that affect the opportunities facing outsiders and the constraints to their efforts.’ (Cattani, Ferriani, and Lanza 2017, 966). A primarily qualitative approach was adopted in an effort to move beyond treating the case as an agglomeration of economic activity and to understand the socio-spatial context of its evolution. As with much of the scientific analysis of network formation, ethnographic research also proved essential (Currid 2007; Harvey, Hawkins, and Thomas 2012). Research took place between 2010 and 2019. 25 interviews were carried out with representatives of production companies: managing directors/CEOs, independent producers, filmmakers, members of key institutions and broadcasters, and education providers. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and ranged in formality but for the most part abided by a semi-structured framework. The interviews were later transcribed and subject to analysis focusing on the collective movement behind the inception of the sector as well as key events that helped formalise it. Scale proved important, the relative size of the sector (at its largest no more than 400 people) as did time (less than 50 years in existence). Our first set of interviews targeted those widely considered as the founding members of the cluster (ten interviews 2010–2011). Our second set of interviews took place as Galway sought designation for UNESCO city of film (ten interviews 2012–2015), the final set of ten interviews took place between 2017 and 2019. Initial interviews helped identify the key stages of growth as well as influential factors in enabling change. A consistent set of themes through all interviews helped test the validity of these stages against insights from newer members of the industry in the region (more recent interviews).

Interviews were supplemented with participant observation of companies, studios, broadcasting houses and industry events. Key amongst these were repeated company visits (to TG4, Telegael, and Solas Studios) that involved escorted visits through the workings of individual operations gaining an understanding of work practices. Membership since 2009 of the Galway Film Centre allowed for access to and attendance at events (annual general meetings and workshops). This work was supplemented by access to two databases, the Company Registrations Office (through Solocheck.ie) that provides information on company reports and the Internet Movie Database Pro (Imdb.

com) that provides detailed information of the filmography and output of Galway-based companies. Access to the back catalogue of 'Film West' a publication (published by the Galway Film Centre that ran from 1989 to 2001) dedicated to news relating to film and TV production and training in the West of Ireland also proved beneficial for historical context.

2. Galway and its film and television industry

Notwithstanding its small size, the film and television sector plays a special role in Galway and its surrounds. Designated in 2014 as a UNESCO City of Film, Galway is home to a sector that is comprised of 50 production companies, supported by one national broadcaster, 3 national funding agencies, 2 third level institutes offering education in film and TV production, alongside a raft of other supporting agencies, national and international films festivals and film clubs located around the county. In their 2009 report, the Western Development Commission put employment in the creative sector at 3.5% for the county, highlighting significant concentrations in the performing arts (music and theatre) and the film and TV sector (Western Development Commission 2009). The sector directly employed 610 people in county Galway 2017 (470 on a full-time basis and 240 [full-time equivalents] on a part-time basis), and many more in a supporting capacity (IT, catering etc.). It is a vibrant and growing sector with an average growth in production company employment of 24.5% between 2009 and 2015.

The region this case is embedded in is predominantly rural and agricultural despite being centred around the small historic city of Galway. With the decline of the fishing industry (Laurec and Armstrong 1997) together with the pursuit of neoliberal economic policies in an effort to attract American multinational companies (Collins and Grimes, 2008) the development trajectory of the Irish state has often run contrary to the traditional ways of life in peripheral regions and regions such as Galway have become increasingly marginalised. This is part of a longer history of poverty, mass emigration, marginalisation and economic decline: the greater regional population of 258,552 (2016) has grown from its lowest point of 148,340 (1966) but has still not recovered to its peak of 440,198 (1841) just before the Great Famine of 1845–49.

Despite population and economic decline, Galway is a young and vibrant region and the city, although small (79,900 inhabitants), has an impressive buzz and a disproportionate number of cultural facilities. The film and TV industry in Galway have to be seen in the context of a wider field of related cultural endeavour. Home to over 100 cultural facilities (Collins and Fahy 2011) the city and wider county have a cultural fabric that has broad appeal and popular local support. Galway features prominently in Ireland's cultural calendar and is home to international festivals of film (Galway Film Fleadh), literature (Cúirt Festival) and general arts events (Galway International Arts Festival) and was designated European Capital of Culture 2020. Interdependence and shared relational spaces with, for instance, traditional Irish music, festivals and theatre scenes undoubtedly help build links to other forms of cultural knowledge and expression. As Menzel might suggest these relational spaces and temporary meetings involve cognitive proximity, spatial proximity, and network proximity (Menzel 2015). These cross fertilising relational spaces are not the same type of interdependencies that Porter's (Porter 1990) idea of related industries typically suggests. Rather they suggest that film

and TV here is part of a wider field that is not united by or primarily defined by core products or marketisation. In many ways the impetus for the film community came from a wider cultural community that centred itself around Galway (both permanently and temporarily at festivals etc.): a community that was/is all about reimagining Irish identity through culture that is innovative but grounded in heritage just as it was political; and a parallel and intersecting movement focused on creating Irish language media content. In the rest of the article, we shall treat three main phases in the development of the film and TV sector in Galway. In the first phase Galway was used as a peripheral location for filmmaking. The second involved the inception of a productive collective intent on making their voices heard. The third is best defined as field building and the development of interdependencies leading to a broad sector with a strong regional embeddedness.

2.0.1. *Early stages: on the edge of irishness*

Filmmaking in Galway dates back to the early 20th century, with early filming relying on ethnographic exploration. The early high point was American director Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* which won Best Foreign Film at the 1934 Venice International Film for its powerful depiction of the lives of islanders at the mercy of the sea. The 1950s saw the arrival of Hollywood in Galway. John Ford and his crew, with substantial financial backing from the Irish state (through the Irish tourist board and national airline Aer Lingus) produced their 'postcard from the west of Ireland' (Flynn 2011; Flynn and Brereton 2007) entitled *The Quiet Man* (1952). Ford was among the first of Irish American filmmakers to be inspired by the Galway's unique geography and history.¹

Table 1 places the evolution of creative production in a timeline. The works of Flaherty and Ford are identified as the first forays into a new form of creativity and storytelling in the west of Ireland. Important here is how Irishness is defined in both (these very different) productions as edge, as a way of life very different to that in the core. Best described as diaspora nostalgia, in these Hollywood productions longing and memory took narrative and representational centre stage. Life in, and the geography of, the West became incorporated as a backdrop and location for discourses of 'Irishness' established and propagated elsewhere. Through these early stages filmmaking in Galway was a predominantly exogenously led pursuit and tended to appropriate the landscape and its meaning for intrinsically political and identity-based constructions that were ultimately rooted and served a purpose elsewhere. In this period little bridging of relational distance took place and the relation between Hollywood and those regional actors involved was for the most part on the level of local suppliers. Essentially Hollywood filmmakers appropriated an imagined periphery and past to service the identity politics of a mainstream north American diaspora. Creatively the idea of the periphery as place where 'the past' can be found in an untouched way drew filmmakers to the region.

Insert Table 1 'Creativity in the Periphery' about here

Galway also became a location shoot destination for a number of Hollywood films. Among those who used Galway as a location was the acclaimed American director John Huston who used Galway in a number of features including *Sinful Davey* (1969) and *The Mackintosh Man* (1973). Huston took up residence in Galway and in 1964 renounced his

¹J Fielder Cook (*Home is the Hero*, 1959), Arthur Dreifuss (*The Quare Fellow* 1962), Robert Butler (*Guns on the Heather* 1968) and Clive Donner (*Alfred the Great*, 1969) among others, chose to tell their stories against the backdrop of Galway.

Table 1. Creativity in the periphery.

	TIME →			
	Edge of Irishness	Finding a voice	Getting heard	Relatively centred
Identified by:	Foreign (usually American) productions. External gaze Diaspora nostalgia "The Quiet Man" Dir Ford "Man of Aran" Dir Flaherty	Birth of an indigenous sector Internal reflection Authentic representation European tradition and Arthouse medium "Lament for Art O'Leary" Dir Quinn	Establishing the sector National recognition Language activism "Garage" Dir Abrahamson	A significant cluster of activity National and international recognition for AV output Seeding of new subsectors in animation and games. "Calm with Horses" Dir Rowland
Inspiring change:	The west on screen. John Huston, calls Galway home. Birth of an industry, production and staging knowledges. "Sinful Davey" Dir Huston Report on the Film Industry Committee	Medium as message Narrative spaces for community voices Representation, nationalism, Irish Language. "Poitín" Dir Quinn Activist entrepreneurs / Irish language advocates	Galway Film Centre Galway Film Fleadh Training opportunities Coiste ar son Teilifís Gaeltachta Roger Corman Studio	Irish Film Board TG4 Oscar shortlisting UNESCO City of Film WRAP Fund - production funding at the regional level
Role of the periphery:	Landscape as character Landscape as backdrop Historical, traditional and mystical representations	Place of refuge Periphery as outside Periphery as other Site of authenticity	Alternative sites Radical change Home for radical voice Site of opportunity	Periphery as a site of creativity Periphery as a site of innovation Periphery as a site of celebration

US citizenship for Irish citizenship and residency. His manor house in Galway became a destination for both Irish and international cultural stars. Moreover he quickly became a focal point, and took an active role, in the industry nationally: for example, contributing to the development of an audio-visual policy through the Report of the Film Industry Committee in 1967 (Flynn and Brereton 2007). Huston’s 20 years or so in Galway signalled something of a shift away from temporary project work servicing international productions with few spillovers in terms of knowledge transfers. From the 1970s onwards external links and co-production became more common as did instances of non-local creatives and technicians becoming embedded in Galway over the longer term.

2.0.2. Finding an independent voice

If the early history of filmmaking in Galway rested creatively around the periphery as a convenient backdrop or as a place where an untouched ‘past’ could be found and appropriated, then the next phase rested on a much more active engagement with the past and the particularities of this periphery. In this phase we see a break from the past as the periphery moved from background to centre. Here the periphery is reframed as somewhere blessed with a living cultural tradition and a threatened language that could be used as both a stage and medium for ‘authentic’ forms of cultural and political expression. Equally in this stage a variety of Irish, and American, filmmakers sought out a periphery where they could be away, but not cut off, from national media norms and networks. For some, such as US filmmakers, this peripheral remove from the core was about finding cheap, perhaps subsidised, and unregulated creative space. For many of these filmmakers who moved to and worked in Galway, it was not merely pull factors but also push factors that underpinned the move. For some, especially Irish and Irish

language filmmakers, it allowed them to not just get away from or challenge the mainstream but to invest in an alternative centre they imagined could be both contemporary and embrace elements of the past. In these cases the act of ‘disassociation’ (Ibert et al. 2019a, b) central to their mobilisation of the periphery involve ‘spaces of denial, severed relationality’ (Havice and Pickles 2019, 74).

Between the two lay director John Huston. After taking up residence in Galway (a 13-year sojourn from 1952), Huston brought international renown to the region, and also lent a degree of trust and authority in the region’s ability to produce quality content. Table 1, summarises the changing role of the periphery, how it promotes creative work in a number of ways: for instance, by virtue of distance, remove or freedom from established industries; or by virtue of giving creatives access to unique culture and community. Peripherality is about relational distance (Ibert 2010) just as it is also a particular place and space with unique affordances. The periphery here plays many creative roles: an imagined or remembered past to be appropriated; a location away from established norms and powers; a cheaper alternative; a place to build a defensible cultural bastion; a unique lived cultural system to work within.

The 1970s marked a departure point for the region and for Irish filmmaking as Galway became the centre for the so-called ‘first wave’ of indigenous Irish filmmaking that had no ties to Hollywood, were consciously disassociated from Dublin and mainstream Ireland, and that actively worked towards more local and ‘authentic’ representations (Rockett, Gibbons, and Hill 2014). It was a departure that was inspired by a series of intertwined postcolonial narratives: speaking out against issues of colonialism and post-colonial legacies; concern with the portrayal of women’s role in Irish history; concern with the negative role of the Catholic Church in Irish life; concern with giving space to a community in search of a voice and recognition for their unique and threatened language; and a concern to more authentically represent rural Ireland (Bradshaw, Hadfield, and Maley 1993).

“History and geography are intimately related, this place is influenced by its history, but the fact that the language lives, means we have a different perspective on the past. The past is here and we have to do what we can to ensure that it remains”. (Interview with Producer)

As Bradshaw et al point out, Ireland and its representation has long been of political interest in both Ireland and England but that it has never been a ‘fixed, stable entity’ and has always been a ‘complex, differentiated, heterogeneous and variegated text’ (Bradshaw, Hadfield, and Maley 1993, 3). Film from the 1970s onwards directly addressed this with a profound series of interjections and engagements with rural Ireland, the colonial past, and postcolonial inheritances, narratives, texts and political imaginations. This wave is associated with content that breaks entirely with romanticised and often heavily stereotyped depictions that Hollywood had filmed on location in Galway. Foremost in this movement was a new generation of filmmakers and activists aiming to carve out discourses that gave space to different forms of postcolonial voices, representations and not least, the indigenous and under threat language.

There has been a longstanding series of narratives in Irish cultural output aimed to ‘mould the lore relating to the . . . history of Ireland into an origin-legend tailored to the needs of its . . . Catholic community’ (Bradshaw, Hadfield, and Maley 1993, 167). Film in Galway from the 1970s attempted to create narrative spaces for community voices and

lived experience, that actively eschewed mainstream Nationalist origin-legend narratives, and that challenged state-sanctioned notions of the centrality of the Catholic Church as the spiritual and moral authority in Irish life, while also providing a glue for value-oriented minority language movement in the region. Working in the Irish periphery was perceived to allow a degree of freedom from established networks and the demands of cultural institutions and mainstream media centred in Dublin but moreover a freedom to challenge national cultural norms and values.

The above narrative is probably best associated with the work of filmmaker Bob Quinn² who first came to prominence in 1975 with *Caoineadh Airt ui Laoire (Lament for Art O'Leary)* which spoke of a community and their language under pressure and dealt with issues of colonialism head on. The film is based on Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill's Irish language epic love poem and lament for Ireland's subjugation that had been handed down in the oral tradition. In Quinn's film a contemporary theatrical group is attempting a staging of the poem and the local amateur theatrical group clashes with their English producer just as the film switches to the historical period to make clear an analogy between past and present. The film was partly financed by Official Sinn Fein (which was to become the Workers Party) and at that time:

“in the midst of a split with the republican element of Sinn Fein, the Provisionals and the Irish National Liberation Army ... The Officials were less interested in utopic dreams of nationalism than in the nuts and bolts of socialist organizing.” (White accessed 15-11-2015).

The booklet accompanying the film states:

“The hard reality which must be faced in Ireland is that there is an exploiting class and an exploited class. The latter comprises the vast majority of our people and only needs to be organised to win state power and undo the conquest we have so long endured. Romantic acts of heroism or defiance may inspire people but will never organise them.” (Sinn Fein 1975)

The film received acclaim and was followed by his film, *Poitín*. Now considered a landmark in indigenous Irish film; railing against previous sentimental romantic depictions of rural Ireland, the film instead presents a harsher view of life in the West and bitterly unromantic character portrayals.

“I got a lot of heat for that – people thinking I was a Provo [member of the provisional IRA], indeed my house got raided a few times. Whenever a Provo was thought to be on the run in the west, my house was on a list that the Guards [Police Force] had, so they'd just turn it over ... I must add, I was never part of that organisation”. (Interview with Bob Quinn)

Quinn's work alongside that of others of his generation and afterwards often used the Irish language to reflect the communities they were engaging with but also as a tool in the reimagining of Irish identity and community. Galway was and is the ideal location for such work as the presence of a large Gaeltacht³ in Galway County – the Connemara Gaeltacht – has had massive cultural ramifications for the region. ‘Home’ to the Irish language, it is seen as the last outpost of Irish traditional culture and heritage (Hindley 1990). With a population of close to 50,000 (around 15,300 of this population reside

²Other notable contributors to the ‘first wave’ of Irish filmmaking in the West include Keiran Hickey, Joe Comerford, Lelia Doolin, Pat Murphy and Tom Donovan.

within Galway City), the Connemara Gaeltacht accounts for over one quarter of all Irish speakers in Ireland and is one of the few regions where Irish is a 'living' language. The Connemara Gaeltacht covers extensive parts of rural County Galway, mainly in the west of the County, and is the single largest and most populated Gaeltacht area in the country.

With this first wave, an indigenous and Irish language-focused film industry network began to grow and drew to it writing, acting, musical and technical talents. Galway quickly established itself as a creative haven on the edge for edgy indigenous filmmakers:

“It seemed like the natural place for people like me to be. We were speaking out against the mainstream; we were providing a radical and subversive voice” (Interview with Independent Producer)

Filmmakers such as Quinn, Joe Comerford, Thaddues O’Sullivan and others became vocal local anchoring points as they worked for the emergence of an indigenous Irish language industry. They were cultural entrepreneurs that were innately bound to their place: cultural entrepreneurs can often be both embedded in and highly attuned to local social and cultural milieus (Banks 2006, 463). What is interesting here for the longer-term story of the film and television sector in Galway is that they were activists as well as cultural creators: it was the political-linguistic and cultural medium which was to be paramount.

We may suggest that at this stage we have a cottage industry driven by a small, coherent and almost conspiratorial clique of activist entrepreneurs that mobilises the values of the local community and a growing intellectual challenge to national cultural and social institutions. As we shall see in the next sections anchoring creative projects and community values to the periphery, firmly refusing to move to the centre, making active links to the outside, and accepting subsidies from the national level, helped in the growth of a veritable organisational field (with producers, financing bodies, network stations, associations etc.). As the clique broadened, as the community values became more mainstream, as its members moved into the national political sphere, as the Irish language became reframed from past to present, and as the industrial field grew the relational positionality of the periphery changes: Galway became central to Irish cultural production and less peripheral to film and television nationally and internationally (see Table 1). This highlights the complex interdependencies between centre and periphery, as the same place can be central and peripheral (though in different dimensions) at the same time and as peripheral moves hierarchically closer to the centre over the course of time. As Hautala and Ibert suggest:

“Creative outsiders who transit between centre and periphery might catalyse shifts in evaluative frames (Powell and Sandholtz 2012) in the course of which the former periphery morphs into the centre of a new creative movement. Centre and periphery, then, cannot be reduced to a static dualism, but rather are relationally constituted and functionally interconnected (Hautala and Ibert 2018)” (Grabher 2018, 1787)

³The term 'Gaeltacht' is used to denote those areas in Ireland where the Irish language is, or was until the recent past, the main spoken language of a substantial number of the local population.

2.0.3. *Making themselves heard and finding a medium*

The first wave moved quickly to focus on more than narrative and representation as its members became central to a community and cultural-political movement aimed at broadcasting in their voice. A sequence of transformation processes, with resulting institutions, started with a clique of filmmakers and local activists (with a strong set of shared values and perceptions of identity) that mobilised the local community through a set of projects to establish an Irish language broadcasting agenda. Key here is the formation of Coiste ar son Teilifís Gaeltachta (The Committee for Irish Language Television) in rural county Galway in the 1980s. The committee had as their mission to provide Irish language TV programming and to counter what they perceived as the ‘cultured oppression’ and Dublin/East coast urban bias of RTÉ the national broadcaster (FilmWest 1989).

The seeds of this collective can be traced back to 1968 and events that took place at RTÉ. The resignation of three producers and the subsequent publication of their book ‘Sit Down and Be Counted’ (Quinn, Dowling, and Doolan 1969), sparked a national debate over the commercial orientation of the state broadcaster. The three producers (two of whom would become active in the formation of the Galway movement) argued against commercial and political interference and for a deliberate dissociation from the orthodoxy. TV was, they argued, the most important cultural institution of the time and they proposed the establishment of a Gaeltacht regional television service broadcasting daily from each of the Gaeltacht regions around the county. Placing the production and broadcast of TV away from the centre of the mainstream TV industry and the capital city was viewed as an advantage both in terms of symbolism and as a way to free these activities from established norms, practices and vested interests. Their arguments rested on *ideas of cultural learning with a focus on the role of language.*

Coiste ar son Teilifís Gaeltachta sought not merely to focus locally but to network with other peripheral milieus and communities. They actively sought to frame themselves in alignment with, to learn from, and connect with other ‘under-represented communities’ (e.g. in Wales and Scotland) who had sought to give themselves a voice through the medium of television (Hourigan 1998). In what has been termed as both a ‘proof of concept’ (Interview, TV producer) and ‘an act of sheer boldness’ (Interview, Coiste Member) members’ expertise was put to use (a transmitter was constructed) and a pirate station in the heart of the Galway Gaeltacht was set up in 1987 and 18 hours of television were illegally broadcast wholly through the medium of Irish:

“the content didn’t really matter, we just wanted to show it could be done, done here and done *as Gaeilge*” (Interview with representative of Coiste ar son Teilifís Gaeltachta).

The setting up of a community-led pirate TV station is an example of a creative outcome building on limited local resources but rooted in a wider project. Essentially these early actions were bound together in a ‘legitimation journey’ (Cattani, Ferriani, and Lanza 2017) that was just as much about getting the attention of exogenous actors as it was about endogenous network building and creative activity. Grassroots activism created not only the operational foundations for and proof of concept for an Irish language TV channel but gathered political pressure and lobby groups around the idea of establishing a national Irish language broadcaster. We class the activities of Coiste ar son Teilifís Gaeltachta, together with the activities of independent producers such as Doolan and

Quinn as both a sector-specific entrepreneurial network but also as a socio-political movement.

By the late 1980s, it had made itself public on the streets of Galway with demonstrations and picketing of court appearances for members of the collective that refused to pay their TV licence. Within the broader movement, there were overt efforts to mount symbolic challenges, to influence policymakers through disruptive actions and to bring together many different ideological outlooks. If coming together around Irish defined the movement, the collective identity of those involved was catalysed and concretised by not just the push for language recognition but by the demand that recognition be given in form of Irish media channels to be based in rural county Galway. [Table 1](#) places the combination of both factors as pivotal in the evolution of creative production in the region.

The focus in this phase on activism and alternative and radical rural and Irish voices remains intact in Galway and did not stop when, as we shall see in the next section, government and industry started listening to those based in Galway. An example of this is the 2007 film ‘Garage’ directed by Lenny Abrahamson. In the film, there is a blending of an appreciation of the landscape as a character in itself with social realism that focuses on personal isolation in the countryside. Content of this type represents a shift away from nationalism and a singular focus on language to a more internationally accepted and accessible type of alternative filmmaking whilst remaining firmly situated in community concerns and the idea that peripheral voices need to be nuanced and heard.

There is an interdependence here between the cultural sector and the language movement; an interdependence and relational proximity that is locally and sectorally focused. The growing numbers working in film in the region and their economic contribution to the region, helped translate the wishes of the movement to something that was more politically digestible. Political representatives from the West inspired by both cultural and economic imperatives began to champion the cause of the film and TV industry in Galway from their positions within central Government. In the following section we portray a shift from local network-initiated development to development dominated by state-driven policy initiatives that drew on national funding, inward investment strategies and on European structural funding but were driven by regionally embedded but national-level political actors attempting to build on the film industry’s success.

2.0.4. Relatively centred: a growing organisational field

In this stage of development, a growing indigenous field was added to by outside agency and national policy aimed at creating and subsidising an organisational field that allowed for further inward investment (such as location shoots and new entrants from outside the region). In this stage the film and TV industry in Galway become strong enough that they begin to be a hub or centre in its own right. To some extent, this relatively centred phase can be seen as following from the making themselves heard phase. Whilst this is true to some extent it hides the reality that the ‘stage’ dealt with in this section has slowly unfolded alongside the success of those making themselves heard.

The role of institutions and state support in the sustainability and growth of an organisational field is well accepted in the literature on economic development. Over the course of the 1980s, and in tandem with the increasing momentum of the Coiste

movement, already established institutions shifted their remit in recognition of a growing regional network of firms active first in film and subsequently in television. By the mid-1980s the state agency Údarás na Gaeltachta began to take note of filmmaking in Galway. Their dual focus on sustaining Irish language culture and job creation in the Gaeltacht fit perfectly with investment in a film and TV sector:

“The 1980s were very difficult for us here [Connemara Gaeltacht], it wasn’t just about jobs or welfare, it was about whether this place would survive to make it to 1990. So, we had to approach it in a very innovative way” (Interview representative of Údarás na Gaeltachta).

Údarás combined with RTÉ to offer residents of the Gaeltacht training in AV technologies.

“Fishing was not going to be a viable option, so we had to retrain anyone that was willing. It felt like there was a real movement around the language and the AV” (ibid).

One of the region’s anchor companies grew directly out of these efforts. Telegael Teoranta has grown to a large-scale pre- and post-production facility, developing its own projects and co-developing and co-producing animation and live-action content with partners from around the world. Telegael – headquartered in Spiddal, Galway, with offices in Belfast, London and Los Angeles – employs over 60 full-time staff, with up to 200 additional personnel engaged on various projects in production.

The main event though was in 1993 when Coiste ar son Teilifís na Gaeltachta’s campaign was actualised with the Government commitment to establishing a dedicated Irish speaking television channel. Teilifís na Gaelige (rebranded as TG4 in 1999) went on air in October 1996 and remains headquartered in the Galway Gaeltacht. TG4 marked a significant stage in the development of the film and TV sector in Galway, and in the county itself (Lysaght 2009); and the high-skill employment TG4 generated is of particular importance in the Gaeltacht. The channel is the largest and most strategically important investor in the region and sector with an annual investment upwards of €35 million per annum and the employment of 80 high-skilled people. It wholly or part funds over one third of production companies and is the primary buyer of content for nearly half the agglomeration’s companies. The then Minister for Arts and the Gaeltacht Michael D. Higgins was given responsibility for establishing the station. Higgins (currently Uachtarán na hÉireann, President of Ireland) was twice Mayor of Galway and a vocal Galway-based advocate of the movement throughout the 1980s. The Government’s decision to establish the channel and subsequent institutions and support packages was not just about economic or regional development but also tightly linked to the politics of national identity: an identity that was progressing towards a more self-assured identity that was comfortable with embracing a unique identity on its own terms.

The foundation of TG4 can be related to the historical suppression of cultural and linguistic self-determination and it is tempting, as Coiste themselves did, to relate the movement to ones in other areas of Europe such as Scotland, Brittany, Catalonia, and the Basque. What is different here is that Galway is part of a free state where the Irish language, though a minority language, is tightly intertwined with both postcolonial national identity and the state itself. It does not share with the other cases links to a domestic separation movement: though the Irish language movement in the Republic

of Ireland is linked to movements in neighbouring Northern Ireland. What is interesting here for debates about periphery and core might be how we could elucidate the circumstances under what a tradition of cultural suppression can be leveraged for a movement that results in peripheral creativity and industry. There are many regions around the globe that sit on the spatial and often economic periphery that suffer from some sort of cultural suppression, yet most of them remain locked in this tradition and only a few can turn this tradition and self-understanding of marginalisation into a catalyst for sustainable counter-movements.

A partial answer to this might be in parallels between the emergence of the sector in Galway and the emergence of aboriginal film and media in New Zealand. According to Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (Hesmondhalgh and Pratt 2005) nations dealing with postcolonial issues, like New Zealand, tend to have a more coherent approach towards cultural industries such as film, based not only on the recognition of their economic value but on the construction and defence of their national culture. Film and TV clusters like that in Wellington have been particularly astute at matching foreign investment and state support with an emerging aboriginal voice (Brabazon 2009) enabling Hollywood blockbusters to be shot alongside local artisan films. National self-determination and growing acceptance for cultural hybridity mean that indigenous voices can be reframed as opportunities rather than threats and find a place in wider projects of national cultural assertion and defence. A further catalyst has been the existence of local advocate politicians working at a national level. In the Irish case, there is a strong constituency orientation (or localism) among Irish parliamentarians in peripheral regions (Kusche 2017) leading to high levels of Gaeltacht and Irish language advocacy at the national level. Similarly, in New Zealand, a tradition of constituency politics and a number of Maori reserved parliamentary seats may have helped link local movements to national policy agendas.

The combination of TG4 establishment, formal and informal support networks in the region, alongside a production line of new graduates trained in industry techniques set the scene for the emergence of a raft of production companies in the mid to late 1990s, bringing employment in the sector from circa 120 in 1995 (Fennell 1997) to 610 in 2014 and the establishment of up to 70 firms in rural county Galway. TG4 can be seen as an example of the institution building that Bathelt et al see as fundamental to a cluster of firm's sustainability (Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004). While positive benefits from the presence of a large institutional actor can be posited (O'Connell and Walsh 2008), others contend that the presence of one big customer has a tendency to encourage myopia in its suppliers (Dosi 1988).

“For so long TG4 was the only game in town, but you realize that it can become very easy to be over reliant” (Interview with Production Company Manager)

Creatively the shadow cast by TG4 is a long one. This has major impacts in terms of content creation and adds to the often-held misconception that to produce from Galway is to produce for TG4 and to produce in Irish. Over half of Galway's production companies are mostly dedicated towards TV production, with just under one-third oriented towards film (10% are part of the growing animation subsector). Owing to the fact that much of the output from the TV subsector is geared towards the

national and in many cases the Irish speaking market, it is perhaps of little surprise that this subsector is tightly concentrated in the Gaeltacht area. For Martin (Martin 2010) the presence of TG4 in the cluster could foster path dependency and lock-in. Indeed, local companies seem aware of becoming over-reliant and creating links (for example through co-production) to other milieus and places has become commonplace.

“We looked further afield and established links with companies in the US, France and the Philippines. We are involved in co-producing 4 or 5 animation series a year now and the production chain is global. Much of the pre-production is done in the US, the labour-intensive stuff is done in Asia and we bring it back here to put the whole thing together” (Interview with Production Company CEO)

The growth of institutions supporting an increased number of production companies over the course of the last 20 years has seen Galway emerge as a ‘real hub’ for audiovisual content. This development has further garnered policy attention and support from the political core: in 2018 Ireland’s first and only regional cultural industries investment fund was set up by the government (the WRAP Fund/Western Region Audiovisual Producers Fund). This hub is spread throughout rural county and Galway city with a particular concentration in the rural Irish speaking area around Indreabhán/Inverin: where a location quotient of 4.32 points to a significant co-location of film, TV and related firms.

As well as the project-based character of work, the youth and small scale of most firms may make accessible local networks a particularly valuable resource. Analysis of data from the Companies Registration Office and Screen Producers Ireland database shows firms in the sectors are an average of six years since establishment; the average number of employees is five with many 1–2 person firms. However, significant shares of the total employed in the independent production sector are employed by a small number of large production houses.

Even as the Galway field grew it remained peripheral: especially to international filmmaking. This peripherality coupled with enough essential resources made it attractive to those wishing to escape the core and those wishing to find cheap, perhaps subsidised, and unregulated creative space.

“We came to shoot here because of the beauty but also because people here know film. There is a supporting infrastructure, that is important, and funding too, that is great.” (Interview, Producer, Irish/UK Film Company)

At roughly the same time of the siting of TG4, new and generous tax incentives for filmmaking in Ireland drew foreign firms and location shoots to the country and region (Collins and Power 2019). Incentives and a lack of history – or more precisely a perception of a high level of relational distance to the US film industry – were key reasons that in 1996 the Hollywood ‘B movie’ director Roger Corman set up a studio in the Connemara Gaeltacht under the name Concorde Studios. Corman was prodigious from his very earliest arrival:

“Before the studio was even built, we had made 6 movies out of portacabins here” (Interview, Manager Production Company)

Despite controversies over the quality of its output and working conditions (Fennell 1997), the studio had a very local orientation. It sourced heavily from the local milieu and

was active in training local workers. The studio attracted professionals and projects to the area that alongside the growth of the indigenous sector added to activity in the area and its reputation:

“When I and a colleague got approached by Cormac, I remember I was in Dublin at the time and somebody had to take out a map and asked where the hell we were going . . . now people know Galway as a real hub” (Interview, Manager, Film Production Company).

This ‘hub’ has developed into what we might suggest a small but sustainable field: an institutional and organisational ecology that make up a sufficiently coherent space of socio-economic activity. The arrival of foreign direct investments, co-productions and location shoots at roughly the same time as increased state recognition of the sector (as evidenced by tax breaks and new film initiatives) and TG4, gave the set of collocated companies and local institutions a focal point and helped solidify the film and TV sector in the region. This points to a sequence of transformative processes which has gradually led to a creative field encompassing film and television as well as animation and gaming.

“We now have a critical mass. When I came to Spiddal first [late 1970s] the only work was in three small factories [Italian owned textile manufacturers], but with global forces and what have you, they left. Now we have about the same number employed in a creative high-tech sector” (Interview, Manager, TV-Film Production Company).

The development of a supportive institutional field and a degree of critical mass has created a sense that this is now something of a hub or centre in its own right: that it has moved towards the centre. Certainly, it has long been a centre for Irish language arts and culture but now it is also a centre for filmmakers, TV production, animation and games developers that work both with Irish language content and that of other languages. What might this indicate for the future of creative productivity in this peripheral region? At the time of writing the impact of government restrictions in response to COVID-19 have potentially created a new junction in the case’s history. Recent experience suggests a mix of experiences: the shutting down of live action shoots countered by the increase in demand for screen-based content (see (WRAP 2020)). Both animation and games sector recorded an increase in production in the first 9 months of 2020. Together, both now account for 19 enterprises and an increasing relative share of AV output in the county. Both subsectors have their roots in the established sector, animation owing much to the original practice of translating children’s programming into Irish for TG4. The overlap between games and animation has been noted elsewhere (Van Egeraat, O’Riain, and Kerr 2013), but in the local context here, it is notable how both have combined to provide content for TG4, a television station that has been lauded for its transition to online formats. A cluster of indie games producers are selling their produce through the world’s biggest app stores and the Galway GameDev cluster has been boosted by the relocation of Romero games (developers of the well-known Doom title) and the setting up of EA games in the city. In a manner that mirrors the creative content of the first wave of Irish filmmakers, there is within the content produced by some of the games developers overt reference to an imagined Irish past and a use of the landscape as a backdrop: for instance the game ‘Runes of Aran’. Just as in film here is a focus on indie titles made by small operations. Together all these factors have strengthened Galway’s reputation as a place for those interested in pursuing careers in innovative creative produce: something that

may be indicative of a relational move to the centre, or a move by the centre to the attractions of the periphery.

3. Conclusion

We have set out to track the changing nature of creative production in a peripheral European region. This work sits alongside recent contributions (Grabher 2018; Glückler 2014; Luckman 2020) in highlighting the nuanced and relational nature of creativity in peripheral places. We have attempted to gauge the role of peripherality in the evolution of the film and tv sector in Galway and the longitudinal nature of our study has suggested to us that the way periphery has been mobilised has differed quite significantly over time. That role has changed with the sector, while remaining a defining aspect of it. From the fertile cultural grounds of tradition and culture to the place of refuge, a site for experimentation (Cattani, Ferriani, and Lanza 2017), a 'site of protest' (Prechter 2013 cited by Grabher 2018), the relational position of Galway has changed and changed again. In the latest stage, the evolution of related creative endeavours such as games and the location of offices of large global gaming companies in the region can be interpreted as centralising the core. In this latest stage we see the periphery as a site not just of creativity but of as a destination site for cultural celebration, innovation and industry. Yet, the games content being developed in the region is best described as indie publishing. The peripheral identity remains strong in the cultural produce of the place, and Galway's relative position in that could in itself be considered the most centralising aspect (Luckman 2020).

Here then we have a case where the dynamics of growth are complex and changing but continually fuelled and underpinned by the place's mobilisation of its relation to both the core and the periphery. The case is one that shares much with development trajectories shaped by inward investments and outside influences: location shooting, inward creative migration, partnerships, government and policy support have helped create a sectoral specific organisational field and firm network. Yet the case is equally one where isolation, independence and an indigenous political community trying to find its voice have been catalysts. The article attempts to contribute to an emerging strand of inquiry that highlights the possibilities of peripheral spaces and industries. The point of this is not to draw up an alternative geography of all the 'left behind' places but rather at stake is an interrogation of key assumptions on creativity and innovation. Many of the key assumptions in this area have been derived from a literature that celebrates density, proximity and critical mass (i.e., genuine features of urbanity) as prerequisites for creativity and innovation. Implicit in this core bias is a prescriptive and teleological developmental analysis that we argue is misplaced on a number of points. Firstly, we have argued that lacking in urban density need not define peripheral places as deficit or lacking in vibrant economic activity. Secondly, creativity and innovation may find, an albeit different character of, support in the periphery: most likely due to the creative possibilities afforded by distance from control and power and access to or embeddedness in unique local characteristics. Thirdly, we cannot define in opposition or in pure contrast core places with peripheral places as fluid interrelations and mobilities between places blur lines.

If core-periphery dynamics and relations are important to how we should understand sectoral case studies this paper adds another dimension. The case crucially has centred itself around a cultural medium (the Irish language) which in some ways is threatened and marginal just as it is also a vibrant, living, and independent cultural field in itself: at once both a threatened cultural periphery and a living cultural core. Studies of creativity and innovation in the cultural and creative industries have largely avoided engagement with the medium and content of cultural production. There has been a tendency towards concern with organisational practices and geographical patterns of cultural production which has shifted our focus from the actual contents and medium that flow through the plumbing of local networks and global pipelines. In this case the medium and the community and politics surrounding it have been foundational. Even if our primary concern is firm growth or industrial dynamics, we cannot in cases like this ignore shared artistic and political desires or the founding of communities with shared political constituency or cultural-linguistic identity.

The ways of creativity in the periphery depend then it seems on identity and community. This is also the case for the ways of creativity in the core but it seems that size does matter. Size matters for the core in that scale offers creators scope advantages through the existence of a wider range of community and identity options. This may bring with it challenges in the form of difficulty in assessing or accessing the range of alternatives: that one may be lost in a crowded marketplace and labour market. Size matters in the periphery it seems in the sense that sectors can be more transparent and accessible to creators and that shared identities and constituencies (defined at least in part by relation to the distant and to the core) can nurture and give context for collective creative work and endeavour. Challenges arise though for all members of communities when shared values can work to exclude innovation and individuality and when the smaller pool of resources does not prove adequate for the scaling up of projects and careers. Being far from the maddening crowd can give creatives space to experiment, protest and innovate, just as it gives them space to develop their own slightly smaller crowds; but even small crowds can be maddening.

What is clear is that the ways of creativity in the periphery are more nuanced than the mainstream celebration of urbanity and core would suggest. Creativity and innovation need not be the preserve of dense urbanised networks. Creativity and innovation can also emerge from relative isolation and from unique and different cultural identities and contexts. In conclusion, we suggest that studies of industry and innovation should not ignore small scale or peripheral cases; that being in the periphery can be an asset in terms of entrepreneurship, creative freedom and field formation; that periphery must be set in a relational framework; and importantly that the medium of cultural production must be part of understanding industrial dynamics and innovation.

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