

Spaces of Learning and the Geographies of Knowledge

Research Group Affiliation	Economic Geography Research Group
<p>The importance of a highly skilled workforce within 'knowledge based economies' has been widely acknowledged within policy making communities and commented upon by academics for some time. More recently, attention has begun to focus on the role of education, training and skills development more generally in (re)producing such a workforce that is deemed essential for success in a competitive global economy. However, whilst economic geographers have paid considerable attention to the role of highly skilled individuals within this workforce who deliver bespoke, knowledge-rich products to a range of corporate clients, comparatively less attention has been paid to the role of education. This session seeks, therefore, to develop understandings of the role of education and specialist learning spaces offered by institutions such as professional associations, law schools business schools, management consultants and specialist training providers in (re)producing skilled workers in 'knowledge based economies'.</p> <p>More specifically, potential topics for papers might include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions of theoretical frameworks such as varieties of capitalism and cultural economy approaches in studies of the role of education and learning in 'knowledge based economies' • Education, learning and the geographical (im)mobility of economic knowledges • Methodological innovations for researching education, learning and economic practice • The study of specific educational providers and their role in knowledge (re)production • Education, training and the professions • Educational institutions in regions and clusters and their role in the training of workers and the development of their knowledge-base • Institutions and agencies providing education, training and knowledge dissemination as part of neo-liberal governmental agendas 	
Session Organisers and Chairs	Sarah Hall (University of Nottingham) and James Faulconbridge (Lancaster University)

SESSION 1	
Paper 1	Knowledge Milieus in shrinking regions: GDR-oriented professionalisation practices or competent local-global learning strategies?
Presenter	Bastian Lange (Leibniz-Institute for regional geography)
<p>Framed by harsh demographic and continuous declining economic indicators, many middle-sized East German cities have opted for Learning Regions-Approaches and knowledge-based city development policies. Situated in the middle of an east extension of an enlarged EU-Europe it is unclear if the promotion of investments in human capital will smoothen or boost existing regional inequalities. Against this background the paper will present empirical evidence from field research in two contrastive east German city regions: while Jena (Thuringia) is undergoing a successful transformation into a dynamic "knowledge city" (innovative research university mode-2 with learning-oriented actors and institutions tight in networks such as "Optonet"), Frankfurt/Oder (Brandenburg) hoped to take a turnaround based on large High-tech-investment (1.5 billion Euro chip fabrication communicant) by the state which failed in November 2003.</p> <p>Based on empirical material (semi-standardised interviews) from these two city regions above all life world- and interaction-related aspects as well as socio-spatial ascriptions (context matters!) provide a superior-level explanatory basis for certain actors and their pertaining professional knowledge-oriented groups and their networks. Those levels of meanings are reconstructed, so that first generalisations of professional and entrepreneurial biographic transformation pathways and their spatialisation become possible. These two very different post socialist city regional developments demonstrate how "de-contextualized" Learning Regions-Approaches do produce developmental paradoxes and even obstructions. For example: reinforced investment in human competency on the local/regional level will strengthen the migration tendencies, because now larger and more demanding job markets get into reach and become relevant. Learning Regions-Approaches – so the thesis of the paper - though seem to aggravate the problems they claim to solve.</p>	

Paper 2	Education, Learning, Skills and the Commercialisation of Creative Expertise in knowledge based economies
Presenters	John Bryson (University of Birmingham) and Peter Daniels (University of Birmingham)
<p>The importance of expertise has been highlighted in much of the business and professional services (BPS) literature; yet skills, expertise acquisition, learning and development have not actually been addressed in any great detail. This paper addresses this omission with a detailed empirical analysis of skill acquisition and development within BPS firms in the UK. The relationship between the supply and demand for skilled professionals as well as the local availability of skills training should be central to both regional and national policy. Many of the professional bodies provide world class training in technical expertise, but neglect to provide training in commercial skills. The evidence suggests that successful BPS firms and professionals are those best able to commercialize their expertise. This implies that much BPS knowledge or expertise may be standardized and largely generic; creativity may lie in the process of customization and commercialization rather than in the actual expertise. This raises important questions regarding the nature of the creativity that defines Florida's creative class (2002). In many instances, creativity may just be a reflection of a BPS professional's commercial or entrepreneurial skills rather than an indication of creative expertise. The paper is based upon a detailed survey of 1198 BPS firms located in the West Midlands (UK), 208 in-depth face-to-face interviews and six focus groups.</p>	
Paper 3	
Presenters	Parvati Raghuram, Leroi Henry, Joanna Bornat and Gail Wilson (Open University)
<p>In recent years there has been increasing recognition of the centrality of knowledge in shaping many aspects of the world, and especially in acting as a filter in selecting migrants. In this paper we explore the ways in which knowledge was the basis of entry of migrant doctors to the UK in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but how their skills became devalued within the strongly hierarchised area of employment of the National Health Service. We then look at how skilled migrants developed a new set of skills, focusing their energies on the organisational and scientific development of the provision of medical care for some of the most marginalised groups of NHS patients, frail older people. We draw on interviews with retired South Asian geriatricians who were at the forefront of the development of geriatric medicine in the UK to consider how opportunity, status and career were negotiated by migrant doctors and the role of networks and regional hubs in validating and bringing to fruition their knowledge and skills in the post-migration context. In this way the paper locates itself in the daily knowledge practices within the hospital setting that shaped geriatric medicine and the role of its global workforce in these developments. It also provides historical depth and a 'caring quality' to current debates on the knowledge economy.</p>	
Paper 4	Learning episodes? On educating to manage and create in the fragrance industry
Presenter	Bodo Kubartz (University of Oklahoma)
<p>The role and significance of creativity in cultural industries has been addressed in economic geography. However, two significant gaps exist: first, against the understanding that creativity is a given capacity, the professional development of creative personnel is poorly understood. This has to do with a lack of understanding of how creativity relates to education. Second, creative work is often conceptualized in contrast to management. However, in cultural industries both managerial and creative aspects are relevant: managers are creative and artists manage. This paper addresses these lacunae by using the example of the fragrance industry. It explores the processes of becoming a professional using two cases: the brand manager and the perfumer.</p> <p>The paper is in three sections. First, these two professions are characterized and the idiosyncratic ways and means of upbringing are presented.</p> <p>Second, the paper discusses how both professions learn to manage and create and how they communicate and interact with each other. Mutual understanding and learning takes place even though they approach branded goods differently.</p> <p>Third, this discussion is intertwined with a geographical perspective. The paper examines the places and practices of their professional education and looks at the spatialities of interaction. It contributes to the conceptualization of professional education and job interaction in a knowledge-intensive cultural industry.</p>	
Paper 5	Migrating knowledge, knowing migrants: International migration, knowledge and skills
Presenter	Huw Vasey (University of Exeter)

Knowledge, skills and migration are each subjects of much study and debate in various parts of the social sciences and humanities. However, they have rarely been brought together and analysed as deeply intertwined processes that are constantly altering and adapting.

This research seeks to redress this balance and to critically analyse how international migration, knowledge and skills interact in the dynamic setting of the local economies of the South West.

This presentation of a work in progress will explore the three elements of the title - international migration, knowledge transfer and the regional skills gap – and place them within the context of the South West of England. Each element presents its own theoretical and practical problems. However, we must take a holistic view of migrants as diverse and dynamic ‘knowing individuals’ who adapt and interact throughout the process of migration to their social, cultural, economic and environmental surroundings. In this way, knowledge and skills are often developed in non-traditional ‘learning spaces’ in ways that are not always readily quantified or widely recognised by employers or mainstream education and training institutions. This lack of recognition of the ways in which knowledge and skills are developed can lead to highly capable migrant workers being classified as ‘low-skilled’ and lacking in useful knowledge.

SESSION 2

Session Chair: James Faulconbridge (Lancaster University) & Sarah Hall (University of Nottingham)

Paper 1	International Higher Education and the Transnational Mobility of UK Students
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Presenters	Johanna Waters (University of Liverpool) and Rachel Brooks (University of Surrey)
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This paper will draw on preliminary findings of a current research project examining: the transnational mobility of UK students as they seek higher education overseas; and the subsequent employment experiences of ‘overseas-educated’ UK graduates. It contributes to a burgeoning academic interest within and beyond geography in the internationalisation of education and its relationship to migration and labour markets. To date, most work on international student mobility has focussed on young people moving from countries in East and Southeast Asia to the major ‘student-receiving’ destinations in North America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or the UK. Whilst these young people are motivated by a desire to acquire the valuable ‘cultural capital’ attached to an English-speaking, Western education, the drivers behind *UK students* going overseas for their education are less clear. Existing research on the international mobility of UK students has focused on temporary mobility *within* a degree programme, for a period of between 6 and 12 months, and is concerned primarily with student migration to Europe. In contrast, our project examines mobility for the whole of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, it considers the range of potential destination countries, limited only by the restrictions of our sample, and it also explores the impact of mobility on subsequent employment experiences. We are interested in establishing the ‘value’ provided by an ‘overseas-education’ in the context of a competitive graduate labour market.

Paper 2	Academies: Neoliberal educational institutions?
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Presenter	Kristen Purcell (University of Cambridge)
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When the Academies programme was introduced in England in 2000, it was presented using discourses that arguably reflect a neoliberal government agenda. Academies are publicly funded independent schools, led by sponsors from business, faith, or voluntary organisations, encouraged to develop their own distinctive ethos, and given flexibility in their management, teaching, admissions and curriculum arrangements. In government rhetoric about the programme, neoliberal education discourses were drawn upon regarding increased choice and diversity, the need to equip young people for active citizenship and lifelong learning, the value of business leadership in the management of schools, and the opportunities and innovation that arise from greater independence and from the creativity of the private sector. However, there is a growing feeling that the Academies programme is changing, that this neoliberal agenda is being softened. For example, sponsors from educational organisations are now being prioritised, Academies’ freedoms are being reduced, and there is increased emphasis on integrating Academies into the local family of schools.

This paper seeks to analyse the nature and scale of this shift. By building upon and adding a longitudinal aspect to Woods et al’s (2007) study of the sponsor type and specialism of Academies, and through the study of government discourses in official publications and interviews with policymakers, it attempts to assess the extent to which the Academies programme is, or ever was, a quintessentially neoliberal project.

Paper 3	Educating professionals and professional education in a geographical context
Presenters	James Faulconbridge (Lancaster University) and Sarah Hall (University of Nottingham)
<p>Economic geography has a well-established tradition of studying a range of professional service firms (PSFs) including law, advertising, architecture, accountancy, management consultancy and banking. Within this literature, considerable attention has been paid to the role of highly skilled professionals who use their expertise to deliver bespoke, knowledge-rich products to a range of corporate clients. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to the role of professional education, offered by institutions such as law schools, university business schools and professional associations in preparing future employees for their careers in PSFs. This forms part of a broader silence within economic geography on the role of different forms of education in the legitimisation and emergence of powerful professional industries and practices. In this paper we to begin to address this lacuna by showing how geographers' understanding of professional industries and firms can be enhanced by integrating studies from the sociology of the professions, research into the so-called 'knowledge-based economy' more generally and studies of the spatial heterogeneity of professional practice that all focus specifically upon the socializing and legitimating influence of educational institutions and practices. Two arguments run throughout the paper. First, we identify the different roles played by professional education in relation to PSFs, ranging from specialist, profession specific knowledge transfer to inculcating students with a broader sense of the profession as a whole. Second, we consider how the relationship between professional education and PSFs varies both geographically and between different professions. Combined we suggest that economic geography can learn a lot about the spatial peculiarities of different professions from such studies, something that is in need of significant empirically-grounded research.</p>	
Paper 4	Skills in Professional Geography: An Assessment of Workforce Needs and Expectations
Presenter	Michael Solem (Association of American Geographers)
<p>This study compares the skills of professional geographers and the needs of employer organizations across major sectors of the U.S. workforce. Following a series of focus groups, two surveys were developed to explore: (i) the extent specific skills were performed by geographers in different professional positions, and (ii) the value of and anticipated demand for those skills from the perspective of employers. Overall, respondents in the focus groups and both surveys emphasized the importance of general skills ranging from time management and writing ability to information management and computer literacy. But employers also cited the need for having a strong conceptual grounding in geography, especially the ability to think spatially and the ability to work across disciplinary boundaries, as being vital for the effective use of GIS and related mapping technologies, as well as for enhancing the work of organizations in other areas.</p>	
Paper 5	Discussant
Presenter	Andrew Jones (Birkbeck, University of London)