

Rural arts entrepreneurs’ placemaking - how ‘entrepreneurial placemaking’ explains rural creative hub evolution during COVID-19 lockdown

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Abstract

This article critically evaluates the development and impact of a new online ‘dance practice’ service in a rural creative hub *Remote*. The research asks: ‘How does entrepreneurial placemaking contribute to the evolution of rural creative hubs during the COVID-19 pandemic?’ To answer this question, the article critically evaluates the business activities of one artisan entrepreneur, applying placemaking and resilience. Using a case study strategy, this research employs online qualitative research. Creative hub development is explained as a result of ‘entrepreneurial placemaking’, forming the main contribution of this article. This term subsumes multi-layered exchanges. ‘Entrepreneurial placemaking’ is conceptualised as continuous becoming, and illustrated by *Remote*’s adaption processes to lockdown phases. *Remote* is turned into a stage for digital placemaking during the COVID-19 lockdown via the ‘open dance practice’ service provided by a performance dance artist. Findings highlight that to enact entrepreneurial placemaking, creative professionals need to draw upon adaptive capacity, which includes the ability to develop exchange relationships and business-related digital skills. Peer-learning is a recommended solution for developing such digital skills across artist entrepreneurial communities. This article contributes to the ongoing conversation on the role of creative hubs for socioeconomic development and foregrounding the activities of hub users.

Feature article

Keywords rural creative hub, adaptive capacity, COVID-19, place, entrepreneurial placemaking, arts entrepreneur
Rural arts entrepreneurs’ creative placemaking

1 Introduction

Creative and cultural industries were the fastest growing industry sector pre-COVID-19. Between 2002 and 2015, sector income doubled globally (UNCTAD, 2018). In 2017-2018 the UK sector contributed £112 billion to the economy and grew five times faster than this economy (DCMS, 2020). Research on creative industries predominantly studies their clusters in urban contexts, co-located in creative hubs, and often focuses on the hub management perspective (Pratt, 2021; Gibson and Gordon, 2018; Waitt and Gibson, 2013). This cluster research indicates that the fastest employment growth in music, performing and visual arts is in rural areas (Gardiner and Sunley, 2020). Research outputs have often presumed that the insights derived from urban settings are also relevant for rural areas, yet, little is known about the specifics of rural contexts (Balfour et al., 2018; Bell and Jayne, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2004).

Beyond their economic contribution, creative industries contribute to society by improving well-being, individual and societal health (Stickley et al., 2015; Putland, 2008) and community-building via placemaking (Courage, 2021a). Arts events also function as a connection point for communities' socialising and discussing local issues (Balfour et al., 2018; Grodach, 2011; Stickley et al., 2015). This research answers the call to bring to the fore the 'doings' of artisan entrepreneurs' needs in hubs (Pratt et al., 2019). The term "creative and cultural" industries (hereafter called 'creative industries') refers to nine UK industry sub-sectors, including marketing, crafts, performing and visual arts (DCMS, 2020). In these sectors, increasing labour fragmentation and self-employment are prominent features (Hill, 2021). Such individual entrepreneurs often rely on income from small 'service user' groups wishing to learn skills possessed by the artist. This article focuses on the income-generating activities of these artists and those working with them (Elias et al., 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of daily business activities (Ratten, 2020); performing arts have been hit particularly hard. Given the recency of these events (March 2020 was the first lockdown in many countries), it is unsurprising that limited research has analysed the impact on businesses, often focusing on entrepreneurial responses as a form of crisis management (Branicki

et al., 2018). This research therefore asks: How does entrepreneurial placemaking contribute to the evolution of rural creative hubs during the COVID-19 pandemic? The article answers this question with an in-depth analysis of the entrepreneurial activities of a revelatory case study (see Eisenhard and Graebner, 2007) of a performance dance entrepreneur in the UK creative hub *Remote*.

Remote, is located in a cultural heritage site, owned by a trust, and managed by a committee consisting of rural village residents and resident artisan entrepreneurs. The location of the hub reflects common rural contexts, such as limited connectivity and accessibility (House of Lords, 2019), with few and irregular forms of public transport. In *Remote* the management committee only managed to install Wi-Fi in autumn 2020, and connectivity is still temperamental in the building's extremities. Moreover, without a car the hub's accessibility is limited, and the only bus stop is a half-hour walk away. The pathway to the building is unlit, pot-holed, and without tarmac, creating issues for less physically able visitors. The revelatory case study illustrates the 'digital divide' with disparate access to assumed 'ubiquitous' internet access in the UK the conversations on rural resilience in a digital society addresses (Roberts et al., 2017; Saleminck et al., 2017).

The research applies relational ontology within process theory and conceptualises business processes as co-created in everyday interactions between stakeholders (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017). The main findings concern the way placemaking is digitised and how it is managed, including insights into how an artisan entrepreneur successfully creates new revenue streams through participation fees and external funding and as a radical placemaker creates an inclusive approach to dance practice. This article makes two contributions. Firstly, it combines the research strands of placemaking with creative hub evolution, developing a lens to consider creative micro-SMEs' business adaptations to crisis. Secondly, the article explains creative hub evolution as continuous entrepreneurial placemaking and illustrates how placemaking opened up the physical space via digitisation. The article continues with a critique of relevant literature regarding arts entrepreneurs, creative hubs, placemaking, adaptive capacity and resilience in response to COVID-19. Following the methodology section, the findings demonstrate the adaptive processes of arts entrepreneurs illustrated with placemaking.

2 Context and theoretical framing

2.1 *Creative industry entrepreneurs' in changing socio-economic contexts*

Creative industries have a role beyond economic performance, contributing to mental well-being, entertainment, physical exercise, and education (Meyrick and Barnett, 2021). Engaging in dance and musical activities with others creates physiological and psycho-social benefits, such as improving depression, giving joy and physical flexibility (Murcia et al., 2010; Quinn et al., 2007; Stickley et al., 2015). In many countries, government cultural policy has focused on supporting creative industry organisations via public grants (Meyrick and Barnett, 2021), but in the past two decades, UK policy has focused on promoting efficiency and self-reliance as the economic model for creative industries (Hill and Rowe, 2021; Pratt, 2021); a view has emerged that 'The Arts' should be self-sufficient, reducing cultural policy engagement to a utilitarian, economic equation. This view has manifested in increased entry fees to museums and galleries and reduced subsidies for major arts organisations (Meyrick and Barnett, 2021). Prior to this policy agenda, self-employment is prevalent amongst those working in creative industries (33.3 %) in the UK. However, in the music, performing and visual arts sectors, the focus of this paper, self-employment rises to 72 % (in 2018, UK Office for National Statistics, ONS, 2020). Earnings for UK dancers can be £13,000 (the 2021 average salary was £28,000), compared to the UK average salary of £31,000 (Glassdoor, 2021).

Performing arts are a broad subgroup of live art forms (including performance dance, concerts, ballet, spoken theatre). Performance dance uses body movement as an expressive medium, typically accompanied by music. Venue capacity to seat audiences impacts the total revenue earned. Besides performing in theatres, most performance dancers have a portfolio of income streams, such as, training other professionals and/or the wider public, and sometimes non-arts-related part-time jobs (Towse, 2019). Training sessions are usually delivered in a dedicated studio space, to which participants travel. Alternatively, sessions may take place in community centres, wherein a meeting room is temporarily transformed into a dance studio (Gibson and Gordon, 2018).

Over the last decade new forms of delivery have developed *without* audiences being physically present, through the use of technology. Examples include streaming of live performances in cinemas worldwide, and recordings of events, which can be downloaded and/or bought as stored media. These technology-based delivery forms can greatly increase the reach of a performance. However, they usually have little impact on productivity, as the artists' work itself is labour-intensive, emotional and physical, and cannot be replaced by technology or artificial intelligence. The derived economic benefit has gone mainly to the venues and artist agencies (Towse, 2019) and not produced benefits for the performers, as the majority are time poor and reliant on emotional and physical resources to create and deliver their services.

2.2 *(Creative) hub development*

There is no consensus in the literature on what a creative hub is (Pratt, 2021), the associative benefits that can be derived, and whether it delivers a positive financial return. A creative hub can be conceptualised as having three dimensions (Pratt, 2021): firstly, it is a discrete space: a building with co-location of creative activities, often re-using past industrial buildings; secondly, it is a managed space with 'easy in and out' processes, and thirdly, it is a place of exchange (knowledge and information) and support of and by co-located artists. Focusing on the real estate aspects of creative hubs and their role for economic development (Cowie et al., 2020; Virani, 2019), seem to have distracted from the intermediating role of linking atomised self-employed performers with social work arrangements in hubs (Pratt, 2021). The conceptualisation of a creative hub needs to go beyond the physical unit and artist co-location (the hub provider perspective) and consider the user perspective within the associated local context (Pratt, 2021). Rather, creative hubs are sites where the social aspects of artists' interactions are inextricably linked with the economic aspects of gaining a living. Creative hubs also reflect the social, structural and economic problems of society (Pratt et al., 2019). This conceptualisation as a site of exchanges informs the research considerations of placemaking.

2.3 *Placemaking*

Underlying the discussion of ‘place’ is the shared assumption that ‘space’ is indeed a social product (following Lefebvre’s conceptualisation, 1991, Panchoili et al., 2015; Basaraba, 2021). Within these discussions, in applied research and planning practice ‘place’ is associated specifically with local contexts, where people interact (Basaraba, 2021; Pierce and Martin, 2015). Placemaking is revisited by a number of disciplines including environmental psychology and sociology. Generally, academics struggle to define placemaking (Courage 2021a, b; Massey, 2005). Geographers specifically view the various ontological dimensions of ‘place’ as relationally constructed and not denoting a ‘coherent, unitary whole’ (Pierce and Martin, 2015, p. 1294). Rather, it is seen as a continuous process of co-creating meaning and attachment to create liveable spaces for residents and space users (Cilliers and Timmermans, 2014).

Most recently, the concept of ‘creative placemaking’ as a location-based concept and practice led by creative professionals and local people in the cultural sector, has led to an increase in publications, particularly as a result of the issuance and impact of the US White Paper on defining this concept (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). The aim of ‘creative placemaking’, with a focus on physical locations and buildings, is to build equitable thriving communities by interlinking the public space with personal interactions. Since 2010, a paradigm shift in placemaking theory and the transdisciplinary academic discussion has reorganised the key actors: these actors include the community voice and the users as stakeholders in the placemaking process (Courage, 2021a). For local economies, ‘places’ are essential, as they attract tourists and/or commuters, and residents. ‘Places’ allow visitors to feel welcome in the location and to spend money locally on hospitality and retail.

Platt’s (2021) critical evaluation of placemaking discourses found that the term has become part of common language, ostensibly referring to something with a physical existence. She reminds practitioners and academics of the need to reflect the messiness and temporariness of place (Massey, 2005) and suggests reconceptualising placemaking as a process of continuous ‘becoming’, a

conceptualisation this article follows. Arts and placemaking have been inextricably intertwined as a ‘performative metaphor and practice’ (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010; Platt, 2021). Thus, the radical potential of placemaking can be released and the frequently documented benefits of arts-based approaches to locations can become effective. These benefits include:

- Attracting and retaining residents
- Respite and pleasure
- Re-organising new discourses for individuals and place-based communities
- Employment and self-employment opportunities, and
- Active community participation (Courage, 2021b).

Most importantly, the process of placemaking requires agents or ‘placemakers’, a term artists would not apply to their activities for developing communities. Courage (2021b) positions the placemaker as a facilitator, often initiator, who creates a platform that enables community members to use their power, share resources and interact. Hence, placemakers do not give voice to users, but amplify their voices, and use their possible privileges and knowledge to work alongside community members. Artist placemakers’ work lies at the ‘...intersection of object, structure, and action’ (Courage, 2021b, p. 220) and demonstrates a relational concept of space. Placemakers are able to manage this complex ecosystem and the fluctuating symbolic, material and social dimensions of human interaction and communication. Indeed, placemaking is fundamentally a co-production of all stakeholders in the public space, which can arise independently, or through artists’ facilitation.

Importantly, discussions of how COVID-19 has changed placemaking reflect on ‘social distancing’ and the temporary move of social interaction into new realms. ‘Social distancing’ is regarded as an inadequate term and various authors instead suggest the use of ‘physical distancing’ (Courage 2021b). These events have sharply reminded us that social interaction is core to human nature and has been disrupted by people practicing ‘distanced sociability’ (Courage, 2021b, p. 2). Authors call for a new narrative for and about placemaking, that reflects the changed context, the messiness and

temporariness of places and placemaking (Courage, 2021b; Platt, 2021), to which this article offers a contribution.

A term used originally to describe ways of enhancing existing physical urban public spaces (Basaraba, 2021), ‘digital placemaking’ has become increasingly prominent during COVID-19 lockdowns, as many processes and services have moved online (Kraus et al., 2020, Wilken and Humphreys, 2021). The concept links to ways to enhance visitor experiences of physical spaces, such as town squares or heritage buildings. However, digital placemaking is both limited and enabled by the technical capacity of the platform and the users’ skills (Wilken and Humphrey, 2021); the phenomenon of ‘location indication’ and camera phones have fundamentally altered placemaking (Hjorth and Pink, 2014).

Recent research on Snapchat (Wilken and Humphreys, 2021) found that such platforms prompt users to enact identity in online places, sharing ‘versions’ of themselves in snapshots, usually with buildings or views behind them. Place-based interactions via online platforms have increased both the possibilities and frequency of virtual interaction, bridging geographical distance, making distance less significant. Thus, a digital place is continuously enacted and re-negotiated across media, online and physically in real-time space (Wilken and Humphreys, 2021). These insights highlight the significance of seemingly straightforward activities when moving something online that was previously carried out face-to-face, and the need to further investigate the nature, structure and impact of these business processes for wider creative hub development. Online platforms’ conceptualised in this article include software such as Zoom, MS Teams, and social media, accessed via a smartphone.

2.4 Managing COVID-19-induced lockdowns

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen socioeconomic turmoil on an unprecedented global scale (Bressan et al., 2021), and in many countries micro and small businesses have been affected most by lockdown measures (Cucculelli & Peruzzi, 2020); the performing arts are amongst those businesses worst

affected. Early research studies indicated two basic business responses: exit from the industry, or innovation.

Indicatively, we report insights by two early studies in 2020 into SMEs' responses with a focus on attitudes, behaviours and mindsets. For example, four possible strategic crisis responses to COVID-19 are (based on Wenzel et al., 2020, for 27 family firms in the German-speaking parts of Europe and Italy): retrenchment, persevering, innovation and business exit. Retrenchment in this context refers to behaviours aimed at reducing cost and complexity to simplify business value creation; the other behaviours are well known. The related strategic moves can be reactive due to decreased performance, or proactive to maintain liquidity, both a basis for long-term survival and recovery. The behavioural intentions of these firms seemed to be either temporary or permanent business model adjustment, involving operative crisis management, innovation, digitisation, safeguarding liquidity, and process streamlining (Kraus et al., 2020). Other authors underlined the significance of mindsets towards the crisis (e.g. resourcefulness, proactiveness), subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, firm owners-managers' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, controllability and coping capabilities (for Italian wine producers; Bressan et al., 2021).

Regarding the impact on creative industries, research into government reactions to COVID-19 in five smaller European countries showed severe budget cuts (Betzler et al., 2020). In the first UK lockdown, prominent creative businesses were forced to close and did not reopen for over 18 months (UK Parliamentary Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport, 2020). The dominance of portfolio income arrangements in the industry likely meant that many were ineligible for UK government support for furloughed staff and the self-employed (Comunian and England, 2020). Many creative professionals found employment elsewhere: 27 % under the age of 25 had left their professions in late 2020 (O'Brien et al., 2021).

Digitisation and other innovations were seen as unlikely to compensate for the enormous losses resulting from the COVID-19 lockdowns (Betzler et al., 2020). Yet, digitisation of performances may continue, and it is expected that professional dancers may work more with venues and theatres

(Walmsley et al., 2021). Hence, the research presented here examines digital placemaking activities by an arts entrepreneur and the impact on evolving a creative hub.

Research and policy makers agree that digital skills are highly desired for the workforce of the 21st century (van Laar, et al., 2020) to enable thriving economies (together with problem solving, creativity). Creative industry professionals, excluding IT and marketing professionals, are known to have more limited business-related digital literacy than other industry sectors (Kamprath and Mietzner, 2015; van Laar, et al., 2020). The various COVID-19 lockdown phases meant that many of these professionals either had to adapt and learn quickly how to use technology for business use or accept much lower income-making possibilities and temporarily or permanently leave the sector (Walmsley et al., 2021).

2.5 Adaptive capacity and resilience

'Adaptive capacity' is the ability of a system to cope with novel situations without reducing options for the future, and where possible, to thrive within a new environment (Folke et al., 2002). Some researchers infer that people can have varying degrees of context-related adaptive capacity, visible in their behaviours, and mediated by interpretations of change and not necessarily translated into adaptive behaviour (Ayala and Manzano, 2014).

The capacity of organisations to adapt to external and/or internal changing conditions is termed 'resilience'. Resilience research within business and management studies analyses how organisations, ecosystems, teams and individuals cope with adversity (Ayala and Manzano, 2014; Korber and McNaughten, 2018). Research further evaluates how individual business-related resilience affects micro-organisations and hubs, following calls for a more nuanced understanding of resilience processes between individuals and organisations (Branicki et al., 2018). Community resilience has been mostly researched in the context of disaster management, referring to how local groups of people in particular locations or topic related communities manage to recover from adverse situations

(Nemeth and Olivier, 2017). This article sees adaptive capacity as the underlying competence needed to enact resilience for individuals, organisations and groups.

Research regarding SMEs' business-related resilience is currently limited. Moreover, these studies seem to assume that 'resilience' is a *state of being*, a potential to react to external or internal disruptive changes, rather than a dynamic competence, which can be enacted under particular circumstances (Linnenluecke, 2017). The majority of studies share the assumption SMEs lack resilience and are more impacted by a wide range of external shocks than large organisations (Branicki et al., 2018). However, findings on actual behaviour in response to extreme events are scarce. One example is that SMEs quickly returned to Lower Manhattan after 9/11, defying the external threats, demonstrating their resilience (Korber and McNaughten, 2018). Branicki et al. (2018) examine the interrelationship between entrepreneurship and individual resilience considering survival instincts and resilience as personality traits, a capacity for learning and connection, the propensity for adaptability or flexibility, and the ability to respond and recover.

2.6 *Theoretical framing*

To answer the research question of how entrepreneurial placemaking evolves the business processes of rural creative hubs during the COVID-19 pandemic, this research applies a relational ontology lens. The research conceptualises business processes as continuously accomplished activities, which are co-created with stakeholders in social interactions (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017). Hence, the unit of analysis in the article is the behaviours of individuals or organisations. Given this lens, the article conceptualises 'place' as socially constructed continuous organising processes of becoming. 'Place' include forms of interactions between people who are attributing emotions and meaning to a physical or online location. Essentially, 'place' is a temporary iterative interaction of people in a location, on or offline. 'Places', need to be enacted by place-users, acting as place co-creators. In other words, placemaking is an open 'becoming' process, making use of the assets and tools available. The notion of 'becoming' implies that participation in this placemaking process changes all participants, in line

with a strong process-theoretical approach (Hill, 2022; Langley and Tsoukas, 2017). The intention of community development and the people focus are essential to this placemaking process, and organisational development is one outcome of these activities. Artist entrepreneurs need to enact adaptive capacity to successfully engage in digital placemaking, as the existing skills and behaviours need to be applied to new situations to make money. Analysing individual changes in use of resources and behaviours and how they are applied to the artisan entrepreneur's venture allows the study to capture 'adaptive capacity'. The next section explores the research strategy.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research site, approach, design and positionality

The creative hub *Remote* was chosen as a revelatory case study (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) representing an example of a rural creative hub. "Rural" refers to its location in a cultural heritage site with limited building maintenance and heating, offering a performance space and workspaces for artists. Local rural residents use the building as a community space and turned it into a creative hub. Typical tenants for these kinds of UK creative hubs in rural economies, include arts entrepreneurs in performing arts, textile and visual arts, and craft. This research details the creative placemaking by one resident artist entrepreneur, John (a pseudonym). The professional dance entrepreneur John rents a studio offering a pay-as-you-go 'Dance Practice' service, aimed at bringing the public and professional dancers together. Studying a dance arts entrepreneur (Towse, 2019) allows for exploration of the impact of lockdown measures and the successful adaptation strategies and in so doing highlights resilient behaviours.

The article's analysis homes in on the delivery side of John's service and its impact on the creative hub's evolution. Basing the case study on *Remote* and focusing on the resident dance entrepreneur, John, allows for theory-building (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) through multiple data sources, interviews, researcher participation in online dance sessions, observations of John and participants' social media and a website (Yin, 2018). Consent for access to this evidence was given by John. This

case allows the researchers to exhaustively illustrate how a service, open dance practice, became re-imagined and reorganised during a time of disruptive change to business processes, and led to placemaking, with a positive impact on creative hub evolution ('doing the centre' is how John refers to the creative hub, see Table 2). Other arts hub professionals were either using their studio as an external workspace during lockdowns or did not come in.

The lead author, Researcher 1 (R1) conducted netnographic research with *Remote* arts entrepreneurs (including John) between February 2020 and April 2021, followed by two personal site visits once UK COVID-19 measures were relaxed. The only possible research strategy during the UK COVID-19 lockdown in early 2021 was netnography (Kozinets, 2020), online ethnographic research with associated online data collection methods (Salmons, 2015). Digital research methods for data gathering allow direct and quick interaction with interview partners, at their chosen time and place. While the disadvantages of this research approach are acknowledged, e.g. not seeing the interview partner in action, using only one channel of online communication, missing out on other ways of communication, including full-body language, such as live direct interaction in a three-dimensional setting (see Abidin and Seta, 2020), the research findings provide an authentic insight into the reality of doing business during the third UK COVID-19 lockdown.

This research assumes that business processes only gain relevance in the minds of individuals in context. In interview situations, meanings can emerge through dialogue with the researcher reflecting on questions not considered before. This open approach allows new themes to develop (Cunliffe and Scaratti, 2017; Ketokivi and Mantere, 2010) and to be brought to the researcher's attention (Hill, 2021).

3.2 Data collection and data sources

The unit of analysis is the behaviours of individuals and organisations. The research process aims to discover situated iterative patterns of behaviours. Online qualitative research (Salmons, 2015) offered a methodological fit with the research design, and has become acceptable in entrepreneurship research

(Nambisan, 2017). Suitable data gathering methods included naturally-occurring data such as social media posts with images, client testimonials sent via email to John, (Paulus et al., 2014; Thomas, 2021), and researcher-generated data included semi-structured interview transcripts, observation notes, notes from informal chats, and emails. These multiple data sources meet the requirements of a case study with a minimum of three different sources of data (Yin, 2018). While some interview questions provided the prompt for the interview, R1 allowed the arts entrepreneur to develop the sequence and importance of the topics, letting a dialogue emerge.

The interviews and informal conversations took place via Zoom between February 2020 and April 2021. Three informal conversations were conducted before and after an online dance session (unrecorded), and one recorded interview of 90 minutes was separately arranged. Social media post analysis covered the time period before the first lockdown in February 2020 to June 2021. The observational research notes were taken during participation in two online dance sessions, capturing the use of technology for online interaction. All data generated was treated as texts that could be interpreted by the researchers (with permission of the artisan entrepreneur John; testimonials show the use of technology by participants, see table 2).

3.3 Data analysis

The question frame was grounded in the academic literature and then served as a starting point for the development of codes following Gioia et al., (2013). The analysis focused on identifying themes and insights relevant to business development for the arts entrepreneurs. During the coding processes, the topics of ‘resilience’ and ‘placemaking’ emerged as relevant, and further codes were developed to match them (See Table 1). Evolving the creative hub emerged as significant during the second coding phase. In the open-ended inductive analysis, the researchers moved back and forth between data, literature, and emerging themes and theory (Cunliffe and Scaratti, 2017; Hill, 2021). This recursive process allowed for the discovery of details. NVivo (Version 12) was used to support the analysis. Gioia et al., (2013) suggest a systematic process for theory development to add rigour to

qualitative analysis: starting with first order concepts, further abstracting to second order themes and finally aggregate dimensions (see Table 1). To triangulate interpretations of the transcript and observation notes, the researchers analysed social media posts. R1 discussed insights with another committee member and evaluated how interview narrations matched the online service delivery and if the language use in social media reflected the actual 'online practice' delivery.

The findings are presented in two sections: section four on the placemaking impact of the 'dance practice' service before and during lockdown phases in 2019-21. Section five explores digital placemaking in the context of the case study and demonstrates how 'entrepreneurial placemaking' can be applied to explain rural creative hub development integrating digital placemaking.

<about here Table 1 first order concepts and second order themes >

4 'Dance Practice' as placemaking - pre-COVID-19 and at the start of lockdown

Prior to COVID-19 lockdowns, John offered the service 'Dance Practice' in *Remote's* shared performance space, multiple times a week, for an hour in the morning. These open practice sessions usually attracted up to 20 participants on a weekday, and more on a weekend. John lives within walking distance of *Remote* and is a well-known figure in the village community and beyond, as he is an internationally known dancer and teacher of dance. He was an active *Remote* committee member for two years by early 2021. These committee and local engagements had a positive effect on his service offer take-up; community members participated to engage socially with other residents via the dance class (Stickley et al., 2015) mainly for the joy of moving to music and the effects of physical activity on their well-being (Balfour et al., 2018; Murcia et al., 2010). *Remote's* rural location (i.e., remote to urban centres) meant participants have potentially to travel some distance to take part, requiring time and cost to reach it, on top of the small participation fee of £ 2, paid via PayPal or in cash on the day. Pricing aimed at making the service financially accessible, regardless of income level. Local community groups and schools used the performance space, but no other resident artists

apart from John. During dance practice, participants would usually pass each other closely, often touching one other. Music was played to inspire different movements. On occasions, John might assist participants in movements. John's interactions with *Remote* consisted of paying rent for his studio, regularly renting the performance space for dance sessions and organising occasional performances of artists from his vast network. Facebook followed by email were the main means of communication with customers. This short summary details the resourcing essential for this service pre-lockdown.

John's pre-COVID-19 portfolio income is typical of self-employed dance artists: he travelled to international performances for 38 weeks per year, managing and directing stage productions and training other dancers in Europe and beyond (Gibson and Gordon, 2018; Towns, 2019). Even then, the 'open dance practice' offer was a placemaking activity for professional dancers with limited opportunities to practice with each other without simultaneously delivering a service to paying customers (Pierce and Martin, 2015). Income from this dance service for locals in *Remote* was not essential for John, but creating a livable space was foregrounded (placemaking), co-created with participants (Cilliers and Timmermans, 2014; see Table 2). Through relational business enactment, John and participants transformed the shared community performance space temporarily into a place of dancing with others, allowing community to be enacted (creative placemaking, Courage, 2021a). The physical space became the place for 'doing business and community' simultaneously.

And then lockdown was imposed in 2020. During the first lockdown (starting in March 2020), the 'Open Dance Practice' service was disrupted. It could not be offered, as meetings indoors were not allowed, and meetings outdoors were only allowed for small groups. Wi-Fi was not yet installed in *Remote*. Due to the imposed 'social distancing' guidelines, running the service was impossible even outdoors whilst adhering to safety guidelines. Between July and November 2020, the face-to-face service was resumed, but with another lockdown announced from December 2020, John considered other options for creative placemaking including on-line provision.

<about here Table 2 – Indicative raw data, interview quotes from John >

5 Digital placemaking as entrepreneurial placemaking and hub development

‘When COVID happened I decided that I’d put it online because it was the only way for it to happen, and now we have, like, about 30, 40 people a day coming. Er, and er, so it’s a whole different thing, you know, of course it suddenly made it possible for a lot of people to be there. And that’s, you know, there’s been about a thousand... people’.

5.1 Digital placemaking

When lockdown made the operational model of face-to-face dance practice impossible, John had to reconsider his offer. Reluctantly, he turned to using Zoom as a dance service delivery tool, which he had previously only used for meetings, following customer demands to do ‘something online.’ As a result, John opens up the physical space into the digital realm using Zoom, with limited social interactions between participants and John, mediated through the camera and transferred via the internet. John increased the business use of digital tools through ‘trial and error’, demonstrating resilience: He used PayPal a lot more than before, as no cash payments ‘at the door’ were possible and all participation fee payments had to be done online; the email interaction increased as each week and each new participant needed an email with the Zoom link; the length of at least an hour for the online dance practice required the purchase of a Zoom license. At the individual level, John did not change many of his behaviours. He applied the existing tool Zoom to a new form of service delivery. This behaviour change demonstrates his agility, adaptive capacity and ability to apply an existing tool to a new situation (Van Zyl and du Plessis, 2012). He demonstrated self-efficacy that this new offer would attract and keep customers (organisational and entrepreneurial individual resilience traits, Branicki et al., 2018).

At the venture level, the self-employed arts entrepreneur John changed the channel for his service delivery, demonstrating skills for future thriving economies (van Laar et al., 2020). As his

interactions with customers were solely online, it did not matter where participants were located. John's customer reach grew from rural England to the world (including Korea, US, Germany). The global reach creates temporarily on-line 'glocal' places of interaction where local UK rural residents can now interact with professional dancers and the public across the world. These on-line 'places' were inclusive allowing many more, and different, professional and non-professional dance enthusiasts to take part and exchange experiences, mainly non-verbally. Participants gained a window into many houses and dance movements, simultaneously being inspired to move by other participants. Participants had equal service access and paid the same fee, indicating the radical placemaking impact (Courage, 2021b) achieved via digital placemaking (Basaraba, 2021). Marketing and communications channels (social media and email) remained the same, however, he altered the content of the messages indicating the online place of meetings and to extend the invite for open dance practice to his international contacts and their networks. John's dance practice is also inspired by engaging with the demonstrated visible dance movements by participants wherever they are in the world. These behaviour changes, coping strategies for the business, demonstrate organisational resilience at the venture level (Van Zyl and Du Plessis, 2012), typical of SMEs (Floetgen et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2020). Averaging 30 to 40 participants daily, up to 60 on some days, five days a week, even with a fee of £2 the income amounted to over £8000. This amount was able to replace some of the losses resulting from not being able to travel to perform and teach others across the world. John's behaviour is different to most other artisan entrepreneurs in three ways: he actively reimagines and implements a new service. John co-created the online service with other professional dancers and the public, inviting other dancers to organise dance sessions, and paying them for this contribution. He also successfully gained external agency funding. Lastly, these funding streams allowed him to not charge a fee to selected participants. These elements differentiate his approach and make his behaviours a revelatory case study (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) suitable to discover 'entrepreneurial placemaking' - the management of funding flows – there was no need to offer free places, but he chose to do so.

John stopped this online service when lockdown regulations eased and small groups could start to meet indoors again, for several reasons. The first one was that John spent on average four hours daily creating music compilations, not proving time-effective. Secondly, this online service was a reaction to lockdown: John decided to redirect his time returning to train and perform elsewhere rather than preparing the online sessions. Finally, John stated ‘... things have to come to an end, and that most likely something else will emerge...’ After closing dance events online, John again offered face-to-face dance practice on three to four varying days, excluding weekends. While he could theoretically travel again for work reasons, the invitations were forthcoming. Due to restrictions on indoor meetings until July 2021 in England, only a maximum of six participants were allowed indoors. Keeping the fee at £2 per participants, the financial impacts were apparent.

The debated spill-over effect (Korber and McNaughten, 2018) from the individual to the venture is more easily recognised in a business run by one person. John’s flexibility in using a known tool for meetings (Zoom) for a different purpose, directly charging others for participation in the dance practice, had a direct positive impact on his business (Ayala and Manzano, 2014, demonstrating individual resilience), as this organisational behaviour change opened business opportunities (organisational resilience): to widen the customer base from local to across the world, hence, making more money, and to apply for funding. And, this opening up of the world for *Remote* showcases how a physical space’s limiting properties (remote, inadequate public transport and road infrastructure, small local community) can be overcome through digital placemaking.

5.2 Digital entrepreneurial placemaking for creative hub development

It’s amazing how happy people are to be there, and so it is a place where, you know, we are building a thing, taking time, money’s not been the most driving thing, but I do think that we could - we are building something that can, generate enough money to support some artists, to support space [Remote], to support the development of it. (John)

John not only developed his own business, he also twice gained funding from an arts funding agency to the value of £ 30,000 for delivering this ‘open dance’ service. The Wi-Fi installed in autumn 2020 physically and figuratively facilitated John and his ‘open dance practice’ eligibility for applying for ID LEC-21-0115 Rural arts entrepreneurs’ creative placemaking

arts' funding. This funding allowed him to pay other artists to compile music and run sessions; purchase license fees for music tracks from other artists; and offer fee reductions or 'no fee' places. The use of the funding and the modified fees demonstrates John's adaptive capacity to develop personal and business resilience through reimagining the organisation and delivery of open dance practice. The outcomes from this entrepreneurial placemaking demonstrate aspects of the benefits of radical placemaking such as delivered respite and pleasure, employment and self-employment opportunities, and active community participation (Courage, 2021b). The impact of the 'open dance' sessions goes much further than just John's businesses, and this is intentional.

A consideration of how the creative hub *Remote* has gained from an individual's active business development needs reflection on the direct and indirect impact of the dance sessions and the funding application itself. *Remote* is turned into a stage for placemaking during COVID-19 lockdown, reflecting the interlinking of social and economic function of creative hubs (Pratt, 2021). For some online dance sessions, John was carrying out his dance moves in the shared space. Hence, the physical location not only of his studio, but the hub itself was showcased to the 'world'. John is internationally known and has a close-knit artist network he can draw on to perform or exhibit at *Remote*. *Remote*'s name was part of the name of the 'open practice'; thus, *Remote* was daily mentioned to his thousands of social media followers, spreading the word of the hub's existence. More so, participants from all over the world could experience the hub via the small lens of his laptop camera, via Zoom, indicating global digital placemaking (Wilkin and Humphrey, 2021). He has been an active placemaker creating temporary places for artists to interact in the UK. Furthermore, the funding enabled him to bring into use music from particular artists creating themed days once per week and to pay another performance dance professional to run a session another day per week, generating a small income for them (radical placemaking, inclusion, Courage, 2021b).

This relational use of the funding for, and with, professionals and the public, integrated the physical creative hub building with the virtual creative hub in as much as using the organisation's name created impact for the 'Centre' (see Table 2). The focus of funding and business activities on the people and

what they gain from the use of the physical space, albeit it is transferred online through Zoom meetings or used physically, reflects how the ‘spatial perspective has pivoted to the hyperlocal place’ (Courage, 2021a, p. 1). John created and performed a ‘relational hub’: while name and location remained the same, John’s ‘open practice’ created a new presence and existence of *Remote* as a rural creative hub with a different ‘texture and feel’. This placemaking is more than the traditional raising of awareness of a product as the first stage of creating leads and eventually sales. Nevertheless, in late summer 2021, the leads created by these dance offers alone created more than double the numbers of bookings of the shared performance space for events by the local and regional community than in the summer of 2020. Moreover, more artists now offer to exhibit or perform, which enriches the income generation activities for all resident artists and the creative hub and evolves local cultural life. *Remote*’s name is associated with cultural life where people gather, building on John’s above-mentioned international connections. The community space in *Remote* has become a public space, shared symbolically and physically with many more than the resident arts entrepreneurs and the local village community. A successful funding application and delivery on its promised outcomes creates a positive association with the organisation, a well-known effect of placemaking (Courage, 2021a and b), illustrating the financial benefits of John’s funding use, illustrating how creative hubs represent an economic as well as a social discourse (Pratt, 2021). John is indeed a placemaker in Courage’s sense (2021b), applying an ethical and collaborative approach to placemaking (Platt, 2021).

The impact of the ‘open dance practice’ service affected income generation, respite and pleasure, self-reflection, attracting new resident arts entrepreneurs, and attracting the public to actively use the space for the benefit of communities. John has demonstrated this relational concept of space (Courage, 2021b), as a place to enact group experiences. John’s use of *Remote* has transformed and transcended the physical building. John’s ‘online dance practice’ has co-created a relational reconstruction of *Remote* with ‘online dance practice’ users. The physical building has become a symbolic place of positive impactful experiences for participants across the world. The interaction

with professional dancers and the local community allowed a feeling of place to emerge, conceptualised as an ongoing becoming of a community of co-creators of the online dance experience. Opening up of participants' living rooms through the laptop camera demonstrates how zooming into people's living rooms is creating many places simultaneously and temporarily. John's ability to welcome returners and newcomers to the dance sessions at the start of each online session reveals his adaptive capacity underpinning the entrepreneurial resilient capabilities.

The process of 'online dance practice' has been transformative for participants and John. When the online sessions were still offered, this service was in a state of continuous becoming, no day was the same as any previous one (Langley and Tsoukas, 2017). Without being fully aware of the complexity of the processes and their impact, John has managed a complex ecosystem of the *material* (building and people), the *relational* (the interaction between people and the building) and the *symbolic* (the imagined relations to the hub (Centre) as presented via the laptop lens, and the interpretation of the relational experience of dance participation) (after Courage, 2021b). Combining these elements John has created an example of a digital place to do business with and for the public (Basaraba, 2021). John stopped the online dance service, as the time spent on administration was not covered by the money made. Doing business with a focus on money-exchange turns placemaking into entrepreneurial placemaking. The next section will explain further.

6 Discussions and implications

This research asked how entrepreneurial placemaking evolves rural creative hubs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through explaining John's entrepreneurial placemaking activities the article offers insight into how he reimagined his open dance practice service in the context of the restrictions during the COVID-19 lockdown. Social distancing rules led to the emergence of digital placemaking as a means to 'do business.' The 'glocal' aspect of the offering repositioned the experience for both services users and John. The lenses of adaptive capacity and resilience inform reflection on the capabilities of the entrepreneur and the degree of reorganisation of the business, described here as

evolution. The evolution of 'place' reconfigured the material, the relational and the symbolic. Examining this revelatory case study contributes to an underdeveloped research area demonstrating *how* a creative hub evolves through shedding light on the activities of hub users (Pratt, 2021). *Remote*, becomes synonymous in 'open practice' participants' minds with John's activities, simultaneously developing John's and the hub's social and economic impact.

Using Zoom transcended the three-dimensional location of the arts entrepreneur's service offer, with the limitations of physical accessibility and travel time for participants who take part in face-to-face open practice sessions. The reconfigured online service offer could operate from any location, as only a room and the technical equipment are needed for the placemaking impact of the virtual version of the service, bringing people together to co-create experiences. Hybrid and digital placemaking is the opportunity going forward for creative hubs in rural locations, through offering online or hybrid events that transcend the limiting aspects of the building's location and serve local communities directly. However, in John's case he felt he should return to the Pre-COVID model, because of the preparation time needed.

This revelatory case of arts entrepreneur John is not typical of the creative businesses in *Remote*. Creative hubs encompass multiple micro-organisations that have varied skills and abilities; however John alone had the adaptive capacity to evolve his business during lockdown. Creative hubs need thriving microbusinesses generating business for each other and the wider organisation. Solely John's entrepreneurial activities generated this income through entrepreneurial placemaking, generating more income for all artists and *Remote* through more commercial use of the shared performance space as an unintended consequence. These insights are illustrative, explaining how entrepreneurial placemaking can contribute to hub development.

This research makes two contributions. Firstly, it combines the research strands of placemaking with creative hub evolution, developing a lens to consider creative micro-SMEs' business adaptations to crisis in hubs. Secondly, we call John's successful financial, physical, social and digital interactions 'entrepreneurial placemaking', our main theoretical contribution. John's solution demonstrates the

successful combination of using technology, Zoom, with physical spaces in the online dance practice. John's purposeful facilitation of interactions is essential to make the exchange relations work. Thirdly, the research explains the evolution of *Remote* as continuous entrepreneurial placemaking and illustrates how placemaking opened up the physical space via digitisation. This research conceptualises 'place', as a temporary interplay of flows of money, visual impressions, verbal and bodily communication via a camera lens and other digital means. The differentiating feature is that an entrepreneurial (digital) place facilitates the exchange and transformation of money. Thus, the research sheds light upon how digital placemaking can develop rural creative hubs' business activities and achieve global reach bringing business back to the local site; in doing so this article contributes to the role of creative hubs for socioeconomic development foregrounding the activities of hub users.

7 Conclusions

This research asked how entrepreneurial placemaking contributes to the evolution of rural creative hubs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the lens of relational ontology has shed light upon the dynamics of exchange relationships. It has considered the material, relational and symbolic aspects of entrepreneurial placemaking with specific focus on digital placemaking. Whilst the use of one revelatory case study can be perceived as limiting, this case study has clearly demonstrated the role of adaptive capacity and resilience in reimagining open dance practice service delivery during COVID-19 lockdowns. The empirical findings illustrate the novel lens of 'entrepreneurial placemaking.' Further research should explore the role of entrepreneurial placemaking in creative hub development and evolution to establish to what extent co-creation and multi-actor reimagining can refine creative hubs and the microbusinesses that form them (Merrell et al., 2022). Further studies need to validate these research findings in other creative sectors to offer different insights into how resident artisan entrepreneurs can collaboratively reimagine and economically develop creative hubs.

Managerial implications include considering building digital skills for resident artists (van Laar, 2020) for business development, including social media for business use through focused courses and

peer learning. Policy implications include the need for a strong rural internet connection, which is still a challenge in some UK rural locations (House of Lords, 2019). Effective internet connectivity is an essential resource for entrepreneurial digital placemaking. Funding allocations to achieve ‘levelling-up’ in the UK need to focus on establishing the basic infrastructure in rural areas to offer the same spread and quality of internet connectivity (NICRE, 2021) as in urban areas.

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