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'This Must Be the Place': The Evolving Economic Geography of Music

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The Economic Geography Research Group
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Organizers

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Session Abstract

The geography of music production and consumption offers a lens to examine how creative economies develop and operate locally, nationally, and internationally. While local music scenes catalyze urban economic development in creative centers and peripheral areas alike, music festivals have emerged as sophisticated placemaking and branding tools for rural communities and city-regions. Although geographers have demonstrated a sustained empirical interest, documenting music-related activities that fluctuate temporally and spatially has proven difficult. Indeed, new technologies, organizational forms, and competition are restructuring the industry and the processes of music production, promotion, distribution, and consumption. As a result, cities that once dominated the North American music industry including New York, Los Angeles, and Toronto are now challenged by emerging scenes in Nashville, Atlanta, Montreal, and Halifax. The papers in this session, aptly held in Los Angeles nearly 15 years after the introduction of 'Napster' and the ensuing 'MP3-Crisis' will address the evolving landscape of music and raise new questions for further music-related research in geography.

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Chair: Brian J. Hracs - Uppsala University

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Andrew Leyshon - University of Nottingham

Sounding Live in Austin, TX

Caroline O'Meara - The University of Texas at Austin

Hip Hop Tunity? The socio-economic situation of Dutch hip hop artists

Joni R. Haijen - University of Amsterdam

Homelessness in the Global Urban City: Producing Public Spaces through Making Music

Jeff Rose - University of Utah

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Abstracts

Session I

What if Hewlett and Packard had Started a Band Instead?... Denton, Texas' Music Scene as Economic Cluster and its Broader Implications on the City's Economy

Michael Seman - University of Texas at Arlington

Local music scenes are often referred to as economic clusters but with little detail of how they operate in their local economies or impact their surrounding landscapes. The bulk of attention is paid to how these clusters operate in the framework of the broader music industry. This paper examines Denton, Texas' internationally recognized music scene through the lens of economic cluster theory in order to address this research gap and gain a better understanding of the structural dynamics and potential economic externalities of a music scene. Structured and semi-structured interviews with key music scene participants yield preliminary findings detailing the level of competition and cooperation amongst scene members, how the process of innovation unfolds, the role of untraded interdependencies, supplier linkage dynamics, and the scene's value as a catalyst for economic development. Framing music scenes as economic clusters in the urban economy and detailing their dynamics differentiates and further defines popular music in the growing body of research examining the production processes, economic activity, and symbolic value of the arts in the urban economy. In addition, this research may give policymakers insight on how to better address music scenes, in turn benefiting scene participants and the communities they occupy.

The hardening of local music scenes: a case study of Dalston, east London

Tarek Virani - Queen Mary, University of London

It has been argued that the allure of local music scenes has been diminished in the digital age. The argument states that, through the use of digital technology, locality no longer means what it used to regarding music scenes. This paper argues against this notion. Based on empirical work in the Dalston area of east London, this paper argues that although the internet has 'democratized' the accessibility of many genres of music, it has also simultaneously created a 'hardening of the local'. In many circumstances local music scenes are thriving. This is no truer than in the Dalston area of the borough of Hackney in east London. The area is brimming with venues that exist in order to showcase experimental/new music. Some of these venues are internationally renowned. Within these spaces and places, a subculture of experimentalism thrives. It is at these venues that scenes are created, thus reiterating the importance of locality in the creation of art scenes. Although these scenes embrace the internet and have trans-local and virtual extensions, they are also highly locally connected. This connection allows for all sorts of collaborations that would not be possible if the actors communicated purely online. Subsequently this local hardening of the scene has all sorts of

economic and cultural benefits for the surrounding urban area of Dalston, making it an important cultural area within the city of London.

The Street, the Row and the Hood: Legacy, Industry and Scene in Nashville

Richard Lloyd - Vanderbilt University

Nashville is today widely known as Music City, birthplace of a major American genre, site of active major label and independent recording, and home to diverse organizations like the Country Music Association, the Americana Music Association and the International Bluegrass Association. But where and how does music happen in Music City? This paper examines three constituent spaces of the Nashville musical identity: Lower Broadway (the street), organizing a district containing the Ryman, the Country Music Hall of Fame, the Arena and the honky-tonks; Music Row (the row), the agglomeration of music business enterprise; and East Nashville (the hood), a thriving scene of musicians, songwriters and independent studios and labels. These in turn depict principles of musical differentiation both between and within cities: legacy, industry and scene. These spaces allow us to map in real geography the definitive symbolic dichotomies of popular music production and preservation. I show how they oppose one another, but also how they are mutually constitutive

Creativity on tour: The growing importance of music festivals for contemporary musicians in Sweden

Jimi Nilsson - Uppsala University

In the contemporary music industry, work is increasingly fragmented across time and space and the working lives of musicians are characterized by short-term projects. To cope with these dynamics and the associated conditions of risk, uncertainty and spatial mobility, musicians are developing new organizational strategies. In particular, temporary spaces and events such as music festivals have become key spaces of knowledge exchange, networking, creativity and risk mediation. However, while geographers have started to examine temporary spaces in the context of international trade fairs and conventions, little is known about their role for musicians. Drawing on ongoing research in Sweden, this presentation will highlight how and why Swedish musicians use music festivals to cope with the spatially-fragmented nature of work. In particular it will be argued that musicians use music festivals to access information about job opportunities, risk mediation strategies and to establish new creative collaborations. One example involves participation in "artist villages" at music festivals to access desirable networks thus improving career opportunities in the music industry. Crucially, the initial findings suggest that accessing these temporary spaces in a 'just-in-time' manner is considered more efficient than 'hanging out' in permanent and locally-rooted spaces such as bars and coffee shops.

Outback Elvis: musical creativity in rural Australia

John Connell - University of Sydney

Music is often seen to be inherently linked to place: an organic extension of vernacular creativity that in time, in some exceptional places from Liverpool to New Orleans, becomes more widely

known. Here we take a different tack: examining a place - the small Australian town of Parkes - where a musical association from half a world away has been grafted onto an otherwise staid rural identity. The Elvis Revival Festival, dedicated to the life, music, memories and fashion of Elvis Presley, has transformed Parkes from an innocuous service centre in the Australian bush into southern hemisphere's 'Elvis capital' - even though Elvis had never visited there, let alone Australia. The story is one of a small group of keen Elvis fans who initiated an event, with few resources, and with concerted efforts to promote the festival turned Parkes into a place defined in the Australian imagination through its link to Elvis. Despite its apparent lack of musical creativity (featuring hundreds of Elvis impersonators rather than 'original' performers), the Elvis Festival offered a quirky challenge to the town's inherent rural conservatism. It catalysed a new form of rural creativity, one that eschewed 'proper' heritage but nonetheless delivered important economic benefits to an otherwise struggling town. In certain ways, and in unexpected places, inspiration triumphs over musical authenticity and transforms place.

Session 2

Thirdspace and the Lubbock Music Scene

Caitlin Grann - Texas Tech University

Lubbock, Texas is known for its universities, agricultural background, and conservative politics. Lubbock is the hometown of Buddy Holly, whose global musical influence continues today. Although Buddy Holly is the most renowned musician to call Lubbock home, he belonged to a community alongside many other musicians, each an active member of the music scene. This music scene serves as an elemental aspect in the construct of Lubbock's sense of place, and further to the construct of Lubbock's Thirdspace. Edward Soja's Thirdspace theory recognizes the importance in all factors involved with the spatial construct of a landscape. This theory provides a lens through which the importance of all active societal forces must be acknowledged. This paper utilizes interviews with local musicians and key figures in the musical landscape, mental maps collected from them, and the words of their music to construct the spatial character of Lubbock as expressed by its musicians. The "musical" Lubbock is a reflection of an imagined landscape that resonates with residents and that has been capitalized on by city officials and others to create an image for the city.

What Country Is: Changing Space-times, Cultures, and Lifestyles in Song Lyrics

Michael Longan - Valparaiso University

Songs about country identity have existed in country music for a long time, but became more popular after the turn of the 21st century. Content analysis of the lyrics of these songs reveals what they collectively say about being country. Though there are fewer older songs, comparisons of lyrical content over time also reveal subtle changes in country space-times, cultures, and lifestyles that may be a product of rural economic restructuring. Country is the reintegration of nature with culture, a space of freedom and connection, and a lifestyle marked by the unity of work and leisure. Being country means living, working, and playing in a variety of rural place types that foster a

close relationship with nature. While older songs paint images that suggest unmediated experiences of nature, in contemporary songs experiences of nature are often mediated through recreational pursuits. Country time is marked by the weekly rhythms of hard work and hard fun, but is most strongly experienced on Friday night, Saturday, and at church on Sunday. The country is a source of freedom and independence and a refuge for authentic connections with family, community, nation, and God. Finally, in the country, places of labor and leisure coincide as country people seek out hard work and hard fun. Being country means valuing the products of one's own labor over mass production. Nevertheless, even as songs advocate for authentic consumption, they celebrate a variety of consumer products, the most important of which is country music.

Emotional Geographies and Los Angeles Record Shops

Tyler Sonnichsen - California State University- Long Beach

While the mp3's domination of contemporary music listening has refocused a sociological and economic light on the subculture of vinyl record consumption, very little attention has been paid to geographic influences on this pocket of the culture industry. I argue that emotional geographies, or feelings associated with places both concrete and romanticized, have been an overlooked yet undeniably major influence in music collecting, particularly of vinyl records, both prior to and concurrent with the digital era.

Despite the numerous long-standing chains and independent music stores that have closed their doors throughout North America, many new independent vinyl retailers have opened their doors in the past few years. In order to cater to this increasingly niche market of music consumers, these shops need to focus on recreating and catering to consumers' nostalgically and romantically driven ideals of place. In doing so, they forge new spaces that could reinvent classic perceptions of the prototypical 'record shop.'

In this presentation, I will present findings based on qualitative research conducted in such recently opened retailers (within the past four years) in Los Angeles, focusing on how the proprietors (re)create place to attract clientele, and how place influences the buying habits of the clientele. This study could provide insight into the value of how emotion and place intersect in generating and supporting burgeoning markets within the culture industry, particularly given how much of the vinyl consumer subculture operates in pointed opposition to corporate hegemonic music retail practices.

Sonic capital, local scenes and digital buzz: shifting modes of value creation in Berlin's electronic music production

Hans-Joachim Bürkner - Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning

During the past decade, electronic club music has increasingly left the local cultural underground. Virtual social networks and the rise of digital music markets have directed global public awareness to musical forms and artists which formerly had been bound to local scenes. At the same time, the rapid devaluation of physical sound carriers and the tremendous rise of digital recording and distribution technologies have created new options, yet also new constraints, for artists and

producers of electronic music. Local artists have been confronted with the need to rearrange value creation and income generation. This paper develops the proposition that it needs advanced practical knowledge and specific capabilities and resources to cope with this challenge. It draws on the original theoretical notion of 'sonic capital' as well as on ideas derived from the 'communities of practice' approach in order to capture the specific socialities and spatial concepts involved.

The presentation refers to the empirical case of the city of Berlin (Germany), tracing flexible modes of value creation as practiced by locally interconnected DJs, clubs and independent labels. As many artists have abandoned focused, single-issue production concepts, there presently is a diversifying field of trial-and-error micro-concepts involving musical invention, digital recording, label management, internet distribution, live performance, event management and merchandising. Local scenes of customers and producers retain some significance in this process of reorientation, albeit on an altered social and economic basis.

"You can book Earth Crisis tomorrow for free, interested?" - on the role of a booking agency as a mediator between a local Swedish community and the global alternative music scene

Bjorn Berglund - Linköping University
Stefan Petrini

Our story takes place in the provincial Swedish steel town of Sandviken with 15000 inhabitants. During the course of the 1980's and onwards, Sandviken experienced the creation of a flourishing alternative music scene centered around the venue Kungen ("The King"). This venue was not only the main stage for local DIY bands of different sorts (none of which ever gained any national following), but more importantly the office where Luger, Swedens by now largest booking agency for alternative bands, was started.

Our presentation will discuss the role of the booking agency Luger as a mediator between the local community in Sandviken and the global alternative scene. We will present how this relationship developed over time, and how the relocation of Luger's head office, first to downtown Sandviken and then to Stockholm, had significant influence on both the national Swedish music scene and the local music community in Sandviken. We explain how Luger took an active role in shaping the local music scene, by bringing internationally acknowledged bands to Sandviken on empty weekdays in their tour schedules.

The glorious days of Kungen as an alternative scene with a broad spectre of cultural events has recently transformed into a more streamlined concert venue for punk rock and heavy metal, making Luger's local importance increasingly smaller.

Our presentation will highlight results from our ongoing historical book project on Sandviken's youth culture.

Session 3

A social experiment in the musical economy: Terra Firma, EMI and calling creativity to account

Andrew Leyshon - University of Nottingham

This paper focuses on an attempt to financialize the musical economy. The music industry has been in crisis since the turn of the 21st century, as record companies have struggled to find new business models and viable income streams in the wake of Internet piracy and the arrival of new market entrants based on legal digital download systems that between them have lowered margins. This environment was ripe for exploitation by the Private Equity sector, the repertoire of which includes the restructuring of struggling companies in failing industries. The paper focuses on the implications of the private equity firm Terra Firma's purchase of EMI, the UK's last remaining large record company, in 2007. Terra Firma sought to turn around EMI by calling its culture of creativity to account, and forcing its employees to focus on the bottom line, with implications for the London music industry in particular. Terra Firma's social experiment in the musical economy failed, but which was less a result of its social experiment than a shift in the socio-technological bases of the musical economy and the depth and duration of financial crisis which was its background and context.

Sounding Live in Austin, TX

Caroline O'Meara - The University of Texas at Austin

Austin, Texas calls itself "The Live Music Capital of the World," but despite the slogan's apparent inclusiveness, it is deployed in ways that support existing racial and/or ethnic divides. Austin's reputation as a "music city" first emerged with the progressive country community of the 1970s, a reputation it maintains with a diverse and concentrated geography of performance venues and a growing number of music festivals that takes advantage of this concentration. Today, there is a tight connection between Live Music and Austin's economic development.

In this paper, I explore the limits of this connection by examining how Austin's music communities express the city's racial, ethnic and cultural diversity, tracing the limits of Live Music alongside some common musical expressions of liveness in Austin today. My earlier research has shown homologous representations between how music entered into Austin's growth coalition and the way elites continue to imagine Austin's musical sound. The sound of Austin music today, while not shaped by the city's elites, must conform to certain limits and roles in order to fit within a proscribed sense of "liveness" supported by the city. I consider how this sense of liveness might function as a genre in Austin today, and what this means for the music performed within Austin's city limits.

Hip Hop Tunity? The socio-economic situation of Dutch hip hop artists

Joni R. Haijen - University of Amsterdam

Nederhop is currently considered one of the most fruitful music genres in the Dutch music industry, even though most of the artists have an ethnic minority background. This is peculiar given the current negative political discourse on the integration of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. At the same time, the music industry experiences a change in its business ecology that create different opportunity structures - especially the rise of the Internet has had a massive impact. What kind of chances do rappers from different ethnic backgrounds get in the Dutch hip hop scene? Or, to use the words of the famous rapper Jay-Z: "does hip hop provide them a chance to make it in the world"? And how is the changing business ecology of the music industry affecting the opportunities of hip hop artists in the Netherlands?

The main purpose of this paper, based on extensive ethnographic research, is to find an answer to these questions by examining how artists in the Dutch hip hop scene negotiate the opportunity structure; exposing the ways in which hip hop has provided opportunities; analysing the unique life stories; uncovering dynamics on personal level; mapping the socio-economic situation; and relating all this to the broader context of Dutch society. The paper also engages more general questions concerning the role of ethnicity in the cultural industries. What role do migrants play in the cultural industries? Do these 'new men' (Schumpeter, 1939) indeed contribute to creativity and innovation?

Homelessness in the Global Urban City: Producing Public Spaces through Making Music

Jeff Rose - University of Utah

This research engages with a group of individuals who reside in an urban municipal public park and adjacent open spaces. Opposed to traditional stereotypes of individuals facing homelessness, these "Hillside residents" are well embedded in the processes of internet surfing, connecting via social media, and making music collaboratively online. For these individuals, making music serves as a method for resisting neoliberal impulses of remunerated labor, as well as way to form and maintain social relationships around the world. The Hillside residents' engagement with music-making processes therefore confounds spatial scales, as the urban context of their songs is simultaneously mixed, edited, and overlaid with global lyrics, beats, perceptions, and influences.

As part of a 16-month critical ethnography, this research project presents some of the Hillside residents' music, as well as analyses of lyrics, genres, and technological formulations. These songs, artistic expressions of a highly marginalized group, are often mournful of current life circumstances, critical of a capitalist society's political economy, as well as hopeful of its future. Beyond solely artistic expression, music is also a form of resistance toward a perceived unjust society as well as a potentially lucrative exit from current oppressive economic circumstances. The process of music production itself is also a form of resistance, as public space transforms from a relatively static notion to a performative process that the Hillside residents leverage to further advocate for their own needs and aspirations.