



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Science - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health

2009

Musical work in a university town: The shifting spaces and practices of DJs in Dunedin

Andrew McGregor

Dept of Geography, Uni of Otago, NZ

Christopher R. Gibson

University of Wollongong, cgibson@uow.edu.au

Recommended Citation

McGregor, Andrew and Gibson, Christopher R.: Musical work in a university town: The shifting spaces and practices of DJs in Dunedin 2009, 277-288.

<http://ro.uow.edu.au/scipapers/274>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Musical work in a university town: The shifting spaces and practices of DJs in Dunedin

Abstract

Increasing attention is being paid to how workers in the creative industries negotiate transitions from amateur to professional status and seek opportunities for work and spaces for expression that suit artistic desires. The settings have usually been large cities with populations that can support diverse and specialised audiences and subcultural scenes. In this paper, we discuss research where we participated in a music scene, and talked to dance music disc jockeys and venue owners in a small, regional university city - Dunedin. In Dunedin opportunities for musical work are comparatively plentiful but are constrained in a number of ways. Disc jockeys negotiate audience demands, distances from key musical centres and associated infrastructure, and the shifting venues available for performance. We emphasise the importance of an ethnographic perspective to the study of musical work that remains attuned to the manner in which urban spaces are created, transformed, challenged and remade in the musical nightlife economy.

Keywords

town, work, dunedin, shifting, musical, spaces, practices, djs, university

Disciplines

Life Sciences | Physical Sciences and Mathematics | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Musical work in a university town: The shifting spaces and practices of DJs in Dunedin

Andrew McGregor* and Chris Gibson†

*School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.

Email: andrew.mcgregor@vuw.ac.nz

†School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia.

Email: cgibson@uow.edu.au

Abstract: *Increasing attention is being paid to how workers in the creative industries negotiate transitions from amateur to professional status and seek opportunities for work and spaces for expression that suit artistic desires. The settings have usually been large cities with populations that can support diverse and specialised audiences and subcultural scenes. In this paper, we discuss research where we participated in a music scene, and talked to dance music disc jockeys and venue owners in a small, regional university city – Dunedin. In Dunedin opportunities for musical work are comparatively plentiful but are constrained in a number of ways. Disc jockeys negotiate audience demands, distances from key musical centres and associated infrastructure, and the shifting venues available for performance. We emphasise the importance of an ethnographic perspective to the study of musical work that remains attuned to the manner in which urban spaces are created, transformed, challenged and remade in the musical nightlife economy.*

Keywords: *creative industries, cultural work, DJs, Dunedin, music, small cities*

Introduction

There is nothing new about the idea of earning a wage from music (Hudson, 1995), but only recently has analysis of musical work become more widespread and accepted, particularly within the multidisciplinary field of 'creative' industries research. The context is increasing interest in the creative industries (such as film, music and design) as legitimate sectors of the contemporary capitalist economy that employ many people and that have catalytic effects on urban economic performance (Scott, 2000; Beck, 2003). Scholars providing ethnographic insights into the nature of cultural work in cities and regions have focused on music as a cultural or creative industry (Toynbee, 2003; Cohen, 2007). Geographers have made contributions to this emerging field, particularly as music and the conditions of work vary from place to place (Scott, 1999; Gibson, 2003).

In this article, we seek first to provide a distinctly Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective. We

describe and analyse musical work in Dunedin – specifically its disc jockeys (DJs) who play dance music from recorded vinyl records, CDs, and laptops in the city's nightclubs and bars. Dunedin has a well-established reputation for music and nightlife, but it has unique demographic and geographical characteristics that provide opportunities and constraints to musicians. The result is a vibrant yet always vulnerable musical scene. Our second aim is to extend literatures on musical work from this case study. Our central argument is that place matters and that factors such as critical mass, scale, marginality, and remoteness fundamentally influence how creative industries emerge. Musical work is necessarily shaped by demographic and geographical contexts, both at the scale of the city, and more closely within the specific architectural spaces of music consumption such as venues. Yet as we show here, there can be contradictory tendencies in what makes a place 'unique' in a musical sense: we focus on the uniqueness of Dunedin in creating

particular work opportunities and constraints for one group of practising musicians (dance music DJs) rather than on creating any particular unique, place-based 'sound'. Indeed, the geographic and demographic uniqueness of Dunedin works *against* the production of a particular unifying dance music 'sound'. Acknowledging these contradictions is, we argue, as important as exploring the aspects of place that can fashion unique musical sounds.

Prior research on musical work

Forms of musical work are varied – from being a live musician or singer to a sound engineer, tour promoter, talent scout, or marketer. Across these careers the transition from amateur to professional status is relatively unregulated (with exceptions for classically trained performers and some sound engineers), haphazard and risky (Gibson, 2003; Luckman, 2007a). Some train at universities or specialist colleges, but most do not. Some traipse a pub circuit in bands, building crowds, signing record deals and eventually earning incomes (working their way up what Frith (1988) called a 'rock pyramid', from grass-roots gigs to superstardom and success). Some musicians perform at a professional standard but never make a proper income. Some form collectives; others focus on festivals (Gibson, 2007). Some become session musicians or play in cover bands (Homan, 2006). For dance music DJs, the trend is to pick up skills at home – sometimes referred to as 'bedroom DJing' – in mixing (specifically 'beat-mixing', where concurrent tracks are played one after the other, with the transition smooth and 'in tempo') and/or 'scratching' (where unique DJ sounds are manipulated by manually pushing records or CDs back and forth quickly). Early opportunities arise from DJing at friends' parties, and then seeking slots at bars and night-clubs (sometimes playing for free), before 'headline' gigs at larger venues. Budding DJs can enrol in beat-mixing and scratching courses (often run by already established 'name' DJs) and can find lessons online. However, none of these are compulsory or ubiquitous. There is no single career path for musicians, and even less so for DJs.

Building on earlier work (Cohen, 1991; Straw, 1991), sociologists and geographers have also

been interested in how musicians secure work linked to subcultural 'scenes'. Network sociality is crucial (Wittel, 2001); 'who you know' governs access to gigs, performance slots, and gatekeepers in the live and recorded music industries (Banks *et al.*, 2000; Brennan-Horley, 2007), while MySpace and Facebook have improved scene networking for musicians building audiences and maximising work opportunities. Methods of finding musical work, spaces to perform, and markets have diversified. Record contracts with established major and independent labels still matter (Hesmondhalgh, 1998) and have been augmented by the likes of iTunes (Luckman, 2007b); but more diverse avenues have emerged, linked to subcultural specialisms in the case of online music distribution (Gibson, 2001) and allied industries such as television, advertising, fashion, and mobile phone ringtones (Power and Jansson, 2004). Musicians are increasingly becoming adaptive micro-entrepreneurs: practising instruments and techniques; booking gigs; organising recordings; generating publicity; establishing fan bases; and managing email, MySpace and Facebook networks (McRobbie, 2002). The loose and diverse pathways to paid work in music necessitate flexibility and multiskilling.

Context also matters enormously: musicians participate in scenes and generate work as micro-entrepreneurs in particular places and their demographic, cultural, and economic fabric (Connell and Gibson, 2003; Montano, 2006; Brennan-Horley, 2007; Watson *et al.*, 2009). Local music policies are important (Brown *et al.*, 2000), as are available venues and venue licensing (and policing) laws (Johnson and Homan, 2003) and the formation of sustainable audiences around those venues. In some places musicians face competition from other cultural pursuits; in some places it is easier to access key industry gatekeepers (because of the presence of influential labels, studios or critics) or to secure live gigs because the local labour market might be under-supplied with musicians. This may be particularly so in university towns where demographic factors produce readily accessible audiences of (often young) people willing to see live music and go clubbing. Often, musicians are willing to perform for free, just to get a gig. It might be that musicians do not want to perform for money

(they 'do it for the love of it' and do not consider music 'work'). But often performing for free is about local over-supplies of musical labour in places such as Lismore, Australia, a university town with a major music degree (and to which musicians also migrate for its 'alternative' cultural life) but which does not have enough venues or sustainable audiences for the bands who want to perform there (Gibson, 2003). Bands and DJs can out-compete each other by lowering their price to zero in order to gain exposure in an over-competitive musical labour market. Optimistic musicians balance playing for free against the benefits of exposure and an expectation of future paid benefits. Pathways to work thus vary because of local institutions and policies and the presence (or absence) of music industry connections, but also because of the supply and demand for musical labour – because of how venues and audiences materialise in those places.

Small cities: more than mere setting

We also draw inspiration from research on creative industries in small and remote cities. 'Smallness' and geographical proximity are material conditions measured by geographers and demographers and are culturally constructed discourses that infuse small city life (Bell and Jayne, 2006). Perceptions of a place as small or remote can be as important in shaping creative industries in place as the experience of these conditions (Waite and Gibson, 2009). As Luckman *et al.* (2008) argued, because urban centres are more likely to have vibrant or sizeable scenes, academic research on music has usually focused on cities of over 100 000 people (e.g. Cohen, 1991) and more often than not on important large cities, usually in the West, of well over 1 million people (Kong, 1996; Brennan-Horley, 2007). Major cities are more likely than small ones to have professional studios, niche music venues and specialist record shops. They are also more likely to 'brand' music styles as unique to a place – even when, musicologically, the magnitude of such uniqueness may be exaggerated (Connell and Gibson, 2003). In a place like Dunedin a different series of questions relating to the working conditions of musicians arise from its modest size and geographical position: on how lack of

proximity to touring networks and larger markets shapes working opportunities for musicians; on the presence or absence of a sense of unity of 'sound' in Dunedin's music (which can, in turn, influence marketability, and thus working opportunities for musicians; see McLeay, 1994; Mitchell, 1997); and on the role of venues and music shops – forever precarious in their survival – in anchoring music scenes. In the past, Dunedin has been associated with a 'unique' indie rock sound, promoted by the Flying Nun label, which was pinned to a perception of remoteness and quirkiness (McLeay, 1994). Twenty years on and in a very different subculture, our point is not what makes Dunedin's music locally unique (indeed, as we discuss below, its dance music is in a musicological sense practically indistinguishable from those found elsewhere), but more systematically, how cultural work in music is generated in the institutional, demographic and cultural contexts of place (with these contexts themselves shaped through flows of people, technologies, and products in and out of places; see Stahl, 2003; Shuker, 2008).

Dance music – and on being a DJ

Dance music and DJing have been regular subjects of research in popular music studies and less frequently in cultural geography since the early 1990s when rave and club culture became more visible. Emphases have included scenes, 'neo-tribes' and subcultural formation (Bennett, 1999), radicalised elements of dance music culture (Gibson, 1999; St John, 2001) cultural capital and credibility (Thornton, 1995), bodily relations and gender (Bradby, 1993; McRobbie, 1993), moral panics (Homan, 1998), and regulation and policing (Luckman, 2000). Less often in academic discussions is DJing obviously tied to a place (for an exception, see Luckman, 2003).

In this paper we acknowledge prior research and advance a place-based discussion of dance music in terms of cultural work in the context of a particular town. Whereas too often DJing is thought of as an art of collecting discs, mixing and reproducing particular sounds – with place mere context – our perspective is rather different. We are interested in how musical work is produced, and in turn produces, networks of

people, institutions, spaces, and actors in and across particular geographical contexts.

Our interest is in part because one of us was an active DJ in Dunedin's dance music scene for five years (2003–2008). For the other of us, dance music has been an ongoing research interest for over a decade. Our methodological approach very much stems from this positionality. Weekly involvement in Dunedin's DJ scene for five years enabled an extensive participant observation of its key people, venues, trends and challenges. Rather than pursue this research through formal interviews, questionnaires or analysis of official statistics (which can prove problematic when attempting to understand work in such informal industries – see Brennan-Horley and Gibson, 2009), we instead drew upon the experience of regular participation and interactions within Dunedin's DJ scene. This began with successfully securing a DJ performance slot at a local bar (after presenting a demo tape of a house music mix) and subsequently grew to a more established position in the local DJ scene by building relationships with venue managers, securing regular slots at a number of venues, organising and promoting DJ nights with other DJs, supporting touring DJs from Auckland and Sydney, and establishing a weekly dance music radio show on Radio One Dunedin.

In the second half of 2007, after several years in the local scene (through which trust and credibility were established), we initiated informal discussions with key players about the themes for this article. A range of ideas and opinions were debated and discussed with local DJs, MCs and venue managers. Although the risk of parochialism is ever present, 'embedded' ethnographic methods such as participant observation are valuable for their ability to reveal how network sociality shapes work opportunities (Montano, 2006; Brennan-Horley, 2007). They are able to expose opinions and issues not normally revealed within formal interview settings and generate insights revealed only in the context of performances (Cohen, 1993). Similar forms of autobiographical (and biographical) analysis are becoming accepted within geography (Moss, 2001; Crang, 2003), and while much of this is naturally concentrated on telling 'stories collectively about "our tribe", that is, who we are and what *our* rites and rituals are within academic culture'

(Murphy, 2002: 251), we all have multiple identities. The unusual positionality of one author as DJ/academic provides insights into a creative industry that can be difficult to access and interpret for outsiders. Indeed, the knowledge produced for this paper derives from the sometimes awkward transition from a nocturnal DJ identity to a diurnal academic one that involves audiences/patrons transforming into students/colleagues and vice versa in different spaces.

It is from this liminal position that stories can be articulated about the internal architecture of a music scene – beyond the music itself. To an outsider, Dunedin's DJ music scene might even appear derivative or lacklustre in comparison to those found in bigger cities. Much of Dunedin's DJ scene, as we discuss below, is based in small bars as an accompaniment to a night-out (rather than the focus of it) and might appear to an outsider to be principally about part-time DJs playing records produced elsewhere, about having a good time and trying to get people to dance rather than performing work, or about experimenting or producing 'art'. There is seemingly little that is novel about much of Dunedin's DJ scene. Yet the view from outside cannot fully comprehend how creative scenes are the product of the places that host them, without some kind of embedded observational process. Our point is precisely *not* what makes Dunedin locally unique in a musicological sense (although below we do describe the music played there) but how, practically, DJs generate work in a town where demographics, geographical remoteness, and available venues combine to simultaneously create opportunities and constrain creativity. To understand the DJ scene in Dunedin one cannot assume that its music bears all the relevant markers of the local story (or even judge its comparative uniqueness based on its music – as if music was ever purely 'local' anyway). Instead, auto-ethnographic methods enabled us to dig deeper to understand how a DJ scene arises (even if its output is indistinct musically) as a function of local demography, available venues, opportunities and constraints. This latter story is the focus here.

Dunedin: small, remote, musical, creative?

Dunedin is the smallest and most remote of Aotearoa/New Zealand's main cities, located in

the far south of the South Island. Its Scottish heritage, cold climate, small size, and marginality contribute to a city identity traditionally based on hardiness, practicality, and independence. Dunedin is also increasingly promoting itself as a culturally sophisticated cosmopolitan city with strong arts, fashion, entertainment and education industries. The city's size and remoteness are reinterpreted as assets in recent 'I am Dunedin' City Council campaigns that promote the city as a place of nature and relaxed living, as well as a 'creative city' with 'an edgy experimental sub-culture' derived from its marginality (Boon, 2007: 77). The fashion industry is the most prominent of the contemporary creative industries and receives council investment through the 'I am fashion Dunedin' campaign (see Thompson-Fawcett, 2007). A parallel campaign, 'I am alive Dunedin', promotes the city's nightlife and café scene (Hooker, 2007); however, little of this funding has trickled down to DJs.

Dunedin has a population of approximately 100 000, which is complemented by around 20 000 students who converge on the city each year to attend the University of Otago or Otago Polytechnic (Statistics New Zealand/Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2006). Students come from across the country and tend to stay for the length of their degree before returning home or seeking work elsewhere, creating an overrepresentation of transient 18–24-year-olds. Most are attracted to the quality of the educational institutions but also to the 'scarfie' experience, a term used to refer to Otago students and derived from the scarves worn during winter months. Living away from their parents for the first time, scarfies have developed a nationally infamous partying lifestyle, revelling in an extra-curricular social life based in student-friendly bars, clubs, cafes and restaurants. Scarfies are vital to Dunedin's economy, with more than half of the city's retailers reliant upon business derived from the university (Browning and King, 2007). These characteristics of place – marginal and remote location, small size and influential but transient student population – are all active elements shaping the musical work of DJs in Dunedin.

Dunedin is well known as a musical place in the literature on the geography of music (McLeay, 1994; Bannister, 1999; Connell and Gibson, 2003), and its identity, particularly

linked to 'the Dunedin Sound', which emerged in the 1980s through the Christchurch-based Flying Nun label, is a university town where creativity and nightlife matter. This paper is not concerned with the indie rock Dunedin Sound or with rock music in Dunedin. Instead we focus upon dance music and DJing. First we explore how the particular characteristics of Dunedin shape the sounds DJs are playing; second we look beyond the music, at how locally contingent demographic and economic structures are enabling but also limiting work opportunities and careers for DJs.

Shaping sounds, creating work

The Dunedin DJ scene is divided between those who mix particular genres of music such as dub, hip hop, funk, house, breaks or drum and bass, who are referred to here as specialist DJs and are the focus of this paper, and more commercially oriented DJs who tend to select rather than mix top-40 hits. There are approximately 25 regular specialist DJs based in Dunedin and a sprinkling of MCs, singers, drummers, and flautists who accompany DJ gigs. The busiest DJs rarely play more than three times a week, generally from Thursday to Saturday night. Reflecting trends evident elsewhere (see Whiteley, 2000; Mitchell, 2003; Baker and Cohen, 2008), the majority of performers are male. The size of the DJ community means that most people know or know of each other and there is a spirit of camaraderie with collective organising of gigs, comparing of experiences, and sharing of music and musical knowledges. The social distance between performers and venue owners that can be barriers to participation in larger cities (compare Banks *et al.*, 2000; Brennan-Horley, 2007) is shrunk in Dunedin, with entry into the DJ scene considered comparatively easy.

Dunedin is not associated with a distinctive dance music sound with different genres being played regularly and attracting alternating levels of support. Live music is experiencing a revival, with most DJs commenting on declining audience numbers. Within this environment three further characteristics of Dunedin shape the types of music DJs play: the music retail market, performance spaces and the transience of scarfie audiences.

Music retail

There has been a transition in the last five years in what music is played, because of the shifting manner in which DJs access their music. DJing traditionally relied on vinyl records and thus record shopping. Partly a function of population size and marginality (in relation to European and North American centres of dance music production) in combination with the generally low-income status of residents and students, there were limited opportunities to purchase records. The few record stores that existed focused on second-hand records because of the small market narrowing the records available. The only retailer of new records was the local branch of Real Groovy, which was headquartered in Auckland and closed its doors in November 2008. DJs could use Real Groovy to order tracks from catalogues but were restricted to records selected by Auckland-based buyers when browsing record racks. Consequently DJs looking to develop their own styles tended to 'stock up' when they travelled to larger cities with dedicated record stores.

To overcome these disadvantages, DJs now purchase their music online. Popular record-buying Internet sites, most based in Europe or North America, provide DJs with access to a much wider palette to develop individual musical identities. However, online music sites only play a snippet of the song, take up to three weeks to deliver and have expensive postage costs. As a consequence, downloading music from the Internet in its entirety, in digital files, has become popular. Most DJs now play on 'CDJs' (CD players that act as turntables which can facilitate mixing) alongside vinyl decks, or have purchased the Serato Scratch Live software package (designed in Aotearoa/New Zealand) to mix digital music files from a laptop on 'real' decks. Digital files can be downloaded for a fraction of the price of importing vinyl records; indeed, many sites offer (legally or otherwise) free downloads, significantly cutting DJ costs.

These new technologies mean the variety of music available in Dunedin today is less restricted and much broader than earlier; however, they, and the lack of record stores, work against the development of a regionally distinct sound. In larger cities like Sydney or

Auckland record stores play a vital function in providing a space for DJs to network, promote events, release local productions and act as taste makers by importing particular sounds (Montano, 2006). In Dunedin the lack of such stores encourages fragmentation and diversity rather than common styles.

Venues

The limited number of DJ venues profoundly shapes Dunedin's musical work opportunities. There is only one 'club' – meaning a venue purely for DJs performing to a dedicated dance floor with a large sound system – known as Bath St. Established in May 1995, Bath St is one of New Zealand's oldest clubs, regularly hosting touring DJs and local dance music nights catering to most major dance music genres. Over the past five years four other large establishments (Backstage, 12 Below, Refuel and Sammys) have acted as live music and DJ venues with dance floors and are sites where touring artists play and local promoters host special events. In Bath St and these larger venues a cover charge is often applied and local DJs must compete with touring acts for performance slots.

Beyond these, there are seven 'groovy' bars, smaller venues that provide the most consistent income and work opportunities for local DJs. These are not specifically oriented at dance floors, rarely apply cover charges, stay open late and can remain profitable (due to relaxed licensing laws) even with modest crowds, many of whom are attracted to the music being played. Some bars promote a particular sound while others are more eclectic, engaging in a range of styles depending on the DJ for the night. In the more 'clubby' bars DJ music is a focus where DJs are promoted, the music is played loud and people expect to dance. In other venues DJs create mood and atmosphere rather than dancing, with little DJ promotion. As one DJ remarked, 'Half your wage comes from just standing behind the decks so people come in, the other half is from the music you play'. All 'groovy' bars hire local DJs on Saturday night and most also employ DJs on Thursday and Friday. The larger performance venues like Bath St also provide work opportunities for local DJs as support acts on slower week nights and over summer when scarfies return home.

Drinks prices in the groovy bars are higher than those in other establishments. The emphasis is on exclusivity and style with high standards of service and long cocktail menus, something that deters younger students but attracts older ones as well as locals avoiding the student scene. The DJ provides a point of difference that legitimates the upmarket style and distinguishes them from wine bars, cocktail bars, Irish pubs, and larger establishments that cater for younger students with cheap drinks, sports screens, and commercial DJs. In recent years the growth of the Octagon as an entertainment area has seen new establishments open that do not employ DJs, with one owner explaining that having a cocktail bar *without* a DJ was his 'point of difference'. The proliferation and popularity of such establishments can be a real threat to DJ work opportunities – a potential problem everywhere, but particularly so in small university cities (Waitt and Gibson, 2009).

In groovy bars there is rarely a sense that DJs can play whatever they want. DJs complain about the lack of flexibility they have to take musical risks. This has less to do with the skill of the DJs or the musical acumen of audiences and has more to do with the nature and purpose of the venues. DJs work in *bars*, where there is a contradictory situation: the music is important in that it distinguishes a bar as 'classy' or different, but pressure is consistent on DJs to keep a crowd in the bar – people will leave if they do not like the music. Accessing regular music work in Dunedin thus involves acute judgments on the part of DJs about stylistic parameters – even in those venues considered less 'commercial' and seemingly more sympathetic to creative DJ cultures. The exception to this is Bath St where people pay a cover charge and are more likely to give the music a chance, whatever it is that a DJ chooses to play. The more successful local DJs have secured regular residencies at Bath St; one in particular held a Thursday night residency for almost a decade, where he has been able to develop his sounds, styles and reputations. Other exceptions include special genre-specific nights at the other large venues where groups of DJs host parties and feel less restricted in what they play. However, with only one club in town, and that club generally preferring touring acts, there are

limited opportunities for local DJs to build unique identities by experimenting with less 'bar-friendly' sounds.

Audiences

DJ work opportunities are also shaped by the transient nature of the audience. Because older students make up a large part of Dunedin's DJ audience, they cycle through the specialist music scene relatively quickly. This audience 'churn' means many students only 'discover' the specialist music venues towards the end of their studies and only spend a year or two supporting particular sounds. Styles of music demanded by audiences can thus change rapidly. DJs familiarise an audience with a particular sound and build up a particular following linked to it. However, as students from the same year or group tend to socialise together, the following a DJ has developed can disappear when the students graduate *en mass* and move away. Long-term loyalties are hard to win, and as DJs are micro-entrepreneurs handling all aspects of networking and publicity, marketing efforts must remain high because of student audience churn.

At a more condensed temporal scale students regularly make transitions between styles and venues in a single night. In larger cities, where there are multiple dance music scenes and styles, there can be precise borders between scenes: levels of insider subcultural knowledge are required to access venues and events, to know DJs, and to participate in scenes (what Bennett (1999), Gibson (1999) and others have referred to as 'neo-tribes'). One simply could not know about a night or find a venue without being in the 'in-crowd'; those 'in-crowds' are large enough to support the musical endeavours being undertaken. In Dunedin the scale of the city means it is difficult to sustain multiple niches or neo-tribes with a sustainable audience critical mass (see Waitt and Gibson, 2009). As a result, subcultural borders are more fluid (for a parallel case see Luckman *et al.*, 2008). Venues are within relatively short walking distances of each other, encouraging students to make the transition from cheap drinks in a beer barn to groovy bars hosting local DJs in an evening. The transitory nature of audiences places added pressure on DJs to take fewer musical risks and retain a crowd by conforming to expectations. It

is not that Dunedin is a musically conservative place. Rather, the city's size, in combination with audience demographic (especially students) and the format and geography of a night out in town, govern what and where opportunities for DJ work arise.

Career prospects

The three factors discussed above – no DJ retail stores, limited opportunities to play in clubs and transient audiences – create challenges for those seeking DJ careers. There are no DJs currently earning a living exclusively from DJing in Dunedin. Wages remain low and static at around \$25–35 an hour, comparing unfavourably to larger cities such as Auckland and Sydney where rates start from \$50–70 an hour and increase rapidly after that. These low wages, the high cost of buying records (something DJs try to minimise through music downloads), and limited gig opportunities do not enable DJs to work full-time professionally. If anything, local DJ economies are declining with the proliferation of non-DJ establishments and a revival of interest in live bands.

Gibson's (2003) argument about the culture of industrial relations in musical work has relevance in Dunedin: because DJ work is accessed socially, often from people DJs socialise with, issues of workplace conditions and pay are rarely raised. DJs feel uncomfortable asking for more pay, particularly as DJ bars struggle in an increasingly competitive market. As one Dunedin DJ put it, 'It's almost like you're being paid to go buy records which you then play to your friends'. The designation of DJing as a sociocultural pursuit undertaken by micro-entrepreneurs influences the way 'work' is perceived. There is no union covering DJ work, enabling large differentials between the rates of pay that touring, visiting DJs receive at Bath St and those earned by local DJs supporting those acts or playing in a smaller venue. Big-name visiting acts earn more because of their potential to attract larger crowds. But even acknowledging this, Dunedin has all the characteristics of a dual labour market, where differentials in DJ labour stem from how subcultural value is attributed to geographical origins (see Stahl, 2003). Visiting DJs (flush with 'subcultural capital' (Thornton, 1995) as 'guest star from

[place xyz]' are paid nationally competitive rates while local DJs (who generate subcultural capital in a more grass-roots fashion) are trapped in a secondary wage environment. Visiting DJs are exotic outsiders, and when they perform it is a rare occasion, while local DJs play the same circuit of venues each week. With no 'rarity value' to command higher wages, rates for locals remain lower. This is despite many industry insiders believing there are not enough DJs in Dunedin. Bar owners struggle to find replacement DJs at short notice and tend to book DJs for the whole night rather than play for the 'standard' two-hour set common in bigger cities. Multiple DJ nights are preferred in bigger cities for marketing and performance reasons, as each DJ competes to play their best and most recent tunes. The solo DJ approach in Dunedin reflects an under-supply of DJ labour as there are not enough DJs with similar styles to host regular multiple DJ nights. But also crucially, for DJs, persistent low wages make a two-hour performance financially unattractive. The under-supply of DJ labour has not translated into rising rates of pay.

How, then, do DJs survive financially? In a manner typical of musical scenes elsewhere (e.g. Gibson, 2003), DJs in Dunedin cross-subsidise musical work through other jobs that include academia, dentistry, photography, retail and hospitality, or are students. As one DJ reflected, 'everyone has another life'. Some play in Queenstown and Wanaka in winter – tapping into a seasonal tourism market where as 'visiting DJs from Dunedin' they are paid nationally competitive rates. If anything, however, more DJs arrive in Dunedin from those places – because towns like Queenstown, with lucrative tourism markets and larger-paying gigs in peak season, are able to support a few professional full-time DJs, who tour Dunedin.

More entrepreneurial DJs have borrowed marketing concepts from international examples to build reputations and offset risks. They have formed DJ collectives like Subs 'n' Breaks Krew (SBK), Future Sound of Dunedin, Soundclash Soundsystem and Thunk Radio DJs. Each collective pursues distinct styles, often promoting their brand through weekly slots on student radio, as well as through mix recordings, posters, stickers and t-shirts. The drum and bass collective SBK is the longest-running DJ

entity, formed 10 years ago, hosting a collection of performers, promoting gigs of local and touring artists, and producing music. The personnel has changed over time as people have moved away, but in labelling themselves as an entity, SBK have developed a strategy for permanence and recognition in an inherently fluid, small place. The SBK brand provides continuity to which a particular musical community can adhere.

Another example is Future Sound of Dunedin started by three drum and bass student DJs who formed the brand to promote events that involved local, national, and international drum and bass acts. Their marketing and links to the student population transformed the musical landscape of the city, which became dominated by drum and bass events by 2007. This was particularly evident in Bath St shifting a long-running house music night on Saturdays to drum and bass. Ironically, however, one of the Future Sound DJs remarked that their success in bringing visiting artists to Dunedin, which would sell out despite high ticket prices, has stifled support for local drum and bass DJs. Fans would save their money for big nights when touring artists were in town. The founders of Future Sound have completed their degrees and moved on, but successors maintain the collective.

Such strategies are adaptive to local conditions in Dunedin and to the nature of its night-life labour market. They rely not just on an individual's name but on an entity, lessening the risk of coming across as a 'big ego' in a small town. Such collectives and branding exercises are competitive, demonstrating awareness of marketing and promotion – a direct parallel to McRobbie's (2002) observations about the nature of contemporary cultural capitalism in Britain. Being active in these ways has also highlighted the industrial relations dimension of DJ work, with some collectives becoming persistent in requesting higher wages from venues, funnelling the money back into label activities.

Despite these adaptations to the vulnerable landscape of work opportunities, local electronic music releases remain relatively few. Those that have emerged have mostly focused on drum and bass (through SBK), hip hop (through local label Dudstow Records), electronica and techno (through local label

Cartoon Records), and a small number of self-released productions by individual DJs/producers. There is a recording studio available through Radio One; however, most electronic music is produced on a computer, meaning accessing studio space is less of a constraint than for live music bands. SBK hosts an annual producers awards night for best local release, with some recordings being picked up by national labels like Empathy Recordings; others are available for purchase and download through music websites. However, the majority of local recordings are distributed free of charge through informal networks and downloads in an attempt to boost profiles. Sonic Smith's *Robots Are People 2* album twists normal record label logic by claiming 'Unauthorised copying or public performance is strongly encouraged'.

The dearth of recordings reflects the small local dance music market and the difficulty for local DJs to generate a following and build a distinct sound. With no retail store to promote local sounds, limited opportunities to play headline gigs in good-quality venues, and annual and nightly audience 'churn', producers are forced to compete in national and international markets, with producers not faced with the same constraints. As one local DJ reflected, there is not enough buzz in the local scene to inspire more production. Unlike the local fashion industry, which has felt some benefits from council attempts to build a collective identity, the lack of a distinctive Dunedin dance music sound puts producers at a disadvantage when competing with those who can explore new sounds in larger, more resilient and established markets.

In Dunedin the markets that matter most are students, and most successful DJs draw on social networks to encourage student crowds. There is a variation here on explanations of network sociality in dance music discussed elsewhere (e.g. Bennett, 1999; Brookman, 2001; Brennan-Horley, 2007). Although 'who you know' does mediate access to gatekeepers on the supply side (venue managers and promoters), links to Dunedin's scarfie networks are just as important. Some DJs attempt to establish new nights around genres but do not have key student links and fail to pull crowds. In Bath St collectives like Future Sound have been successful in securing gigs on busy nights because

venue managers know they have connections to student networks. Access to cultural work in Dunedin is thus not just 'who you know' in the industry; it is also about how many students you know and whether they like to party. While this might prove lucrative in the short term, the demographic paradox persists that as the student market is transient it is difficult to cement longer-term working opportunities on these connections.

Conclusion

This article sought to explore how work opportunities in the cultural sphere are created, accessed and constrained. Drawing from one author's autobiography and participant observation, we generated insights into geographical factors such as critical mass, scale, marginality, the presence of a university, student movement, and remoteness, which fundamentally shape cultural life in Dunedin. If creative industries are increasingly being seen as new growth engines of cities and regions (as is the case in Dunedin), then sensitivity is needed to know how creative industries emerge in specific places, the conditions of work they support, and how participants negotiate careers within them.

Useful insights can be gained from the Dunedin experience. First and most immediately, being a university town generates a ready-made market for DJing. This brings with it challenges of population churn and mobility and the risk of losing subcultural capital carefully built up through DJs' own publicity and performance efforts. Improvements in marketing and professionalism, including the formation of collectives, can provide a better sense of permanence, and improve financial viability. However, not many – if any – DJs from Dunedin have built well-recognised national profiles. Most successful DJs in Aotearoa/New Zealand are based in Auckland or Wellington, with larger populations, more diverse club scenes, and more numerous record shops and radio stations. Remoteness and size clearly influence musical landscapes and careers. Because Dunedin DJs constantly respond by reinventing themselves for a shifting local audience and demographic, it becomes more difficult to specialise and experiment to the extent that a reputation grows and national tours become

possible. The demands of Dunedin's bars and student audiences mean that DJs tend to become flexible and audience friendly, which is a skill in itself, but generally not a prerequisite for DJs developing their own sound or building national and international reputations. Added to this, radio stations such as *George FM*, which broadcasts from Auckland and reaches Dunedin, reinforce the idea of which DJs are at the 'core' of the national DJ scene – and they are rarely from Dunedin. Perceptions of proximity, city size, and relative centrality are thus as important in shaping musical work opportunities as 'real' smallness and remoteness (see Bell and Jayne, 2006; Waitt and Gibson, 2009). This is amplified by local events that host Auckland DJs and draw large audiences in support – when differentials in rarity value and subcultural capital influence DJ pay (see Stahl, 2003). To become a serious full-time DJ and to gain status and more regular opportunities in this form of cultural work, Dunedin DJs must consider leaving town.

Of course, commercial success is far from the only rationale for being a DJ (see Cross, 1993). For some, being a DJ in Dunedin is about gaining experience in a town sympathetic to nightlife culture, about pursuing a passion for a particular style of music and sharing it with others, and about being in a scene in a transitional stage of life when earning an income and developing a career simply is not a priority. Creative industries are, by definition, more than mere 'work': they encompass cultural expression, subversive intent, artistic excellence and the simple pursuit of pleasure. However, as argued extensively elsewhere (Connell and Gibson, 2003), it is intellectually hazardous to ignore 'the economic' in cultural analysis of music, as if 'economic' factors are subordinate to 'pure' creative or artistic imperatives (or could possibly be resisted). Music is a cultural-economic phenomenon (Scott, 1999); it is simultaneously commodity and cultural expression. Even if we were interested solely in Dunedin DJ music (in a musicological sense) or in Dunedin's dance music scenes (from a subcultural studies perspective), one could not tell the whole story without addressing geographical, demographic, and political economic issues of venue availability, city size, wage rates, and audience mobility – and crucially, how DJs