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## **Creative industries work across multiple contexts: Common themes and challenges**

### **Abstract**

Precarious labour is common across the creative industries and has attracted the attention of researchers worldwide; however, a lack of comparative studies has made it difficult to identify the commonality of themes or issues across multiple locations. This article examines the precarious nature of creative industries work in Australia, Canada and the Netherlands, with a focus on job security, initial and on-going training and education, and access to benefits and protection. The article reports from a largely qualitative study featuring an in-depth survey answered by 752 creative workers in the three locations. Survey data identified common themes including an increase in non-standard forms of employment and the persistence of precarious work across the career lifespan; criticism of initial education and training with particular reference to business skills; the need for and challenges of lifelong professional learning; and lack of awareness about and access to benefits and protection. Respondents also reported multiple roles across and beyond the creative industries. The presence of common themes suggests avenues for future, targeted creative workforce research and signals the need for change and action by creative industries educators, policy makers and representative organizations such as trade unions.

### **Keywords**

creative workers, creative industry, cross-cultural comparison, Netherlands, Perth, precariousness, Vancouver

### **Introduction**

Representative creative workforce research has been described as “a sociologist’s challenge, an economist’s nightmare and an administrator’s reality” (Heckathorn and Jeffri, 2001: p. 307). In addition to the difficulties of sampling this diverse and incongruent workforce, the European Union (EU, 2006) has highlighted that inconsistent creative industries definitions impede analysis (KEA, European Affairs, 2006). The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2010) added that these difficulties are exacerbated by the inconsistent approaches taken by international organizations and countries: indeed, UNCTAD (p. xxi) has argued that improved market transparency requires “better tools to gradually improve the comparability and reliability of trade statistics for the creative industries”. The complex nature of creative work, which commonly features overlapping employment arrangements and multiple, changing roles, is beyond that which can be captured by extant

large-scale data collections such as national census and labour market surveys. It is this complexity that prompted UNCTAD (2013) to emphasize the need for internationally comparable quantitative *and* qualitative indicators and data. This is the second in a series of articles that begins to answer this call (authors, forthcoming).

While in-depth qualitative studies present their own challenges in terms of working within and across multiple fragmented creative industries networks, such studies have the potential to generate unique understanding of the characteristics of creative work. Noting the scarcity of comparative studies and the associated difficulty of identifying common themes or issues across creative work in multiple locations and contexts (KEA, European Affairs, 2006), the in-depth qualitative study reported here sought to create deeper insight through largely qualitative research in The Netherlands, Australia and Canada. Due to the large geographic area of both Canada and Australia, the research in Canada was focused in Vancouver while the Australian research was focused in Perth – both beta cities.

## **Context**

The overview provided here draws necessarily on extant survey and census-based research. In reading the overview it is crucial to bear in mind that these data tend to emphasize a single occupation and may de-emphasize or ignore completely other work within a portfolio. As such, new entrants and workers with multiple roles are likely to be underrepresented by such surveys while established or company-based artists are likely to be over-represented.

There is on-going debate about how to define the creative industries (CIs) (Galloway and Dunlop, 2007). Although no agreement has been reached, they are commonly defined as industries “supplying goods and services that we broadly associate with cultural, artistic, or simply entertainment value” (Caves, 2000, p. 1) and which “have their origin in individual

creativity, skill and talent” (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2001, p. 5). As such, descriptions generally include the commercial and non-commercial industries of architecture and design; film, television, video, radio and publishing; fine arts; music and the performing arts; software and computer gaming; advertising; and crafts (UNCTAD, 2008).

In the case of The Netherlands, the CIs are characterized by a creative business services category that incorporates landscape architecture, creative games, new media and urban development (Milicevic *et al.*, 2013). In Perth, creative services such as marketing, software, design and architecture account for 70% of all creative work. The remaining 30% of creative work is located in creative production including performing and visual arts, film and television and publishing (Higgs, 2013). The CIs in Vancouver are focused around film, interactive and digital media, music, and both magazine and book publishing (Brinton, 2012).

The economic, social and cultural contributions of the CIs are considered essential elements of society (Conference Board of Canada, 2008). In Europe they employ one million people, and in Canada and Australia they account for approximately 5% of employment (actual figures are likely to be far higher for the reasons given above). The CIs also have a considerable share in the gross domestic product (GDP) of many nations and have grown at a significantly faster pace than their aggregate economy, due largely to the digital revolution and associated growth in digital and design services (Cunningham, 2011).

The CIs are less qualification driven than most industries, with many employers recruiting workers because of reputation and creative talent (Guile, 2006; Haukka, 2011). Despite this, there is evidence that the creative workforce tends to be highly educated. Over 50% of creative workers in the Netherlands are educated at post-secondary (tertiary) level: significantly higher than the national average of 35%. Similarly, the Australian creative workforce has a higher level of formal qualifications than the workforce as a whole. Australian creative workers in industries other than music and the performing arts appear also

to earn salaries above the national average. However, in a prime example of how national data can be skewed, Cunningham (2011) notes that creative industries growth in Australia over the past decade (3.1%) has been focused in the creative services sectors including architecture and design, advertising and marketing, software, and digital content, and that incomes for these creative workers are 18% higher than for other creative workers.

In common with the Netherlands and Canada, extant data from Australia suggests that creative workers' earnings vary according to portfolio of work, firm size, sectoral and/or economic growth, labour supply and demand, occupation, skill requirements, wages and working conditions, and education and training opportunities (Bennett *et al.*, 2014). Income varies not only between different professions and sub-sectors but also between comparable professionals. While some workers earn disproportionately high incomes (Mundelius, 2009), most rely on multiple jobs to generate enough income (Guile, 2006), typically diversifying their expertise with non-arts or support roles. There is also a marked reliance on financial support from family and friends, particularly during periods of unpaid up-skilling (Galloway *et al.*, 2002).

Creative workers, then, enter complex labour markets that the European Commission (2006: p. 35) describes as “highly volatile, depending on fashion, trends and consumption uncertainties”. They are as likely to work outside the CIs as within them (Cunningham, 2011) and they tend to be concentrated in the largest metropolitan areas (Polèse, 2012). To negotiate the labour market, these workers need to develop modes of thinking and learning that enable them to adapt quickly to new markets and market niches, technologies, consumer needs, business models and jobs. They need to do this as they make the initial transition from study to work (Haukka, 2011) and throughout their careers (authors, forthcoming). They need, in short, to expect and be prepared to manage precarious work.

## **Precarious work**

The precariousness of creative labour appears to be common across the creative industries and has attracted the attention of researchers worldwide (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Randle and Culkin, 2009). Rodgers (1989: p. 3) defined precarious jobs as

... those with a short time horizon, or for which the risk of job loss is high. This includes irregular work, with limited control over workplace conditions, little protection from health, social security, and low income. The concept of precariousness involves instability, lack of protection, insecurity, and social or economic vulnerability.

In research on precarious labour markets it is important to make the distinction between general and specific human capital. Using Becker's (1993) definitions, general human capital refers to knowledge and skills obtained through formal education and work experience and that are applicable to more than one job or firm. Specific human capital refers to knowledge and skills acquired "on the job" and which are not easily transferred to other firms and industries.

More recently, the notion of human capital as either general or firm specific has been challenged by the introduction of industry specific skills (Parent, 2000). Moreover, other approaches to determine wages have included general experience, firm, occupational and industry tenure (Sullivan, 2010). Human capital theory posits that those who invest in their careers through education, experience, skills and training will be subsequently rewarded in the workplace and are more likely to obtain high quality jobs because they become more valuable to an employer. The more valuable a worker becomes, the more rewards are received through

promotions, benefits and/or salary increases (Becker, 1993). Such rewards diminish the precariousness of work by providing security and greater career success (Kalleberg *et al.*, 2000). While some researchers stress the importance of specialization (see Leahey, 2007), arguing that standard human capital might not be applicable to the labour market of artists because on-the-job training is more important than education (Towse, 2006), others argue that specific human capital is present but not as valued in the creative industries (Comunian *et al.*, 2011). This is because general capital in the form of transferable, generic skills is essential to workers whose work is likely to transcend disciplinary boundaries.

Precarious employment can be characterized across several dimensions including working wage, work intensity, the presence of a union or statutory protection(s), job stability, and access to personal or family benefits. It can also be experienced along a continuum ranging from high precariousness to low precariousness depending on wage work and regulatory protection across statuses including full time and part-time permanent and temporary positions, self employment and multiple employments. Accordingly, less lucrative work situations without stability and benefits are considered highly precarious for workers.

Amended national labour laws have enabled employers to create more precarious jobs at the expense of stable employment, resulting in a proliferation of non-standard jobs including part-time and overtime work, double-shifts, and temporary positions (Vosko, 2006). The trend towards non-standard forms of work is far from new: indeed, the decrease of stable jobs in favor of work opportunities for those with strong networks and skills was described almost a decade earlier by Betcherman and Lowe (1997). These jobs are often defined as precarious because they provide low wages, few benefits and modest security (Vosko, 2006; Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, Zeytinoglu *et al.*'s Canadian study (2009) highlights that flexible work arrangements tend to be created for the benefit of businesses rather than in response to individual worker interests. This has enhanced the precariousness of creative work overall and

has particularly affected new entrants (Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011). According to Evans and Gibb (2009), in 2018 around one-third of the Canadian workforce nationally was engaged in part-time, contract and temporary work as well as self-employment. Internationally, Evans and Gibb have observed that contract and agency workers undertake the same work as permanent workers but for less pay, and that contract workers, paid only while on assignment, find it difficult to maintain a living wage.

As Platman (2004) has observed, while the tendency towards non-standard work is visible across different industries, the creative industries have long had characteristics that make workers especially prone to precarious situations. Creative workers experience employment insecurity and irregular income with periods of unemployment and under employment (Lee, 2011). The number of part-time workers and freelancers is high (Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002) and competition for work is fierce. Moreover, there is a tendency towards outsourcing work to self-employed workers and to making employees redundant only to rehire them as contingent workers (Michel and Flasdick, 2009).

Employment and income insecurity, as well as intense competition for work, contribute to a range of hazardous practices including work intensification, cutting corners, accepting hazardous tasks, working when injured, and multiple job holding (Quinlan and Bohle, 2004). Boundaried work, increasingly common for creative workers, is exacerbated by the prevalence of sole traders and micro businesses within which individual workers bear the responsibility of risks and responsibilities (Hracs and Leslie, 2013). Contingent workers are less able to collectively organise or to be heard in the workplace (Quinlan and Bohle, 2004), and workers are therefore less often protected by a trade union. There is also little benefit for employers in financing apprenticeships or other training schemes for short-term workers.

Sargeant and Tucker (2009) attest that inconsistencies or discriminatory aspects in both the form and implementation of regulation practices bear most heavily on workers in



precarious employment: indeed, Robinson and Smallman (2006: p. 91) argue that employers seek to “control the costs of short-term projects and avoid the costs of protection generally enjoyed by permanent employees”. Potential impacts for workers include ill health and injury, both of which are problematic for workers who experience gaps in employment protection and have minimum entitlements. If this is the case, contingent workers will be less aware of their rights. Another possibility is that compliance is likely to be weakened as employee awareness of entitlements declines or is undermined by their labour market vulnerability, and enforcement processes encounter hurdles such as identifying those with legal responsibility in multiemployer worksites (Underhill and Quinlan, 2011).

## **Methodology**

### *Instrument and sample*

This was a largely qualitative study that sought to create detailed individual cases of creative work. The survey instrument was designed in five discrete sections and included 58 closed and open questions. Section 1 amassed data about location, engagement, motivation and identity. Section 2 explored the characteristics of work. Section 3 addressed the distribution of time. Section 4 focused on formal and informal learning. Section 5 recorded demographic information, after which respondents were invited to write freely about their creative work. The broad questions reported in this article are included as Appendix 1.

Shown at Table 1, the sample consisted of 752 participants: 511 from the Netherlands, 182 from Perth and 59 from Vancouver. The survey first asked participants to describe their creative practice. The 693 respondents who answered this question reported diverse creative disciplines and listed up to four consecutive roles (a median of two paid roles was recorded). Table 1 also illustrates the number of responses from each creative industries segment and reveals that the majority of responses came from music and the performing arts, and from the

visual arts and design. This somewhat simplistic sub-division was taken from respondents' description of their creative practice (Q1) and is presented as a crude descriptor. Although all creative industries segments were represented, we note that the numbers are not yet sufficient to enable detailed analysis of work at the level of creative industries segment or artform. Neither do we claim to have a representative sample of the creative industries, although the demographics and the representation of sectors is characteristic of the creative workforce recorded in each location.

We describe the sub-division at Table 1 as a crude descriptor because of the diverse and often unboundaried nature of creative industries work. Individual workers in this study reported work across the traditional boundaries of employer and client relationships, across the online, digital and traditional domains of work, across different creative industry segments, and outside the creative industries either utilizing their creative skills (embedded work) or utilizing other skillsets (unrelated work). For these reasons it is not possible to report workers as belonging to a single sector; rather, we report the sample as a whole and seek to understand multiple dimensions of work within each individual case.

In the Netherlands we had access to the database of the biggest creative industries trade union, which has 4,286 members of which 73.5% are men (average age 55). Members received an email invitation to participate and 511 responses were obtained, giving a response rate of 11.9%. This is in line with similar surveys involving a non-personalized approach coupled with a long questionnaire (see Sahlqvist *et al.*, 2011, who concluded that a 10% response rate is realistic in these circumstances). The researchers had to adhere to use the database as agreed, and participants in an early trial had agreed that the survey length was necessary in order to amass the required data. In Perth and Vancouver, where union membership is far less representative of the creative workforce, participants were recruited

through arts networks and arts events, industry press, local media, and unions. The population in both cases is unknown.

*TABLE 1 here*

### *Procedures*

The survey was piloted before being administered in Perth and Vancouver (2011-12) and the Netherlands (2013). The survey was translated into Dutch through back-and-forth translation, and in each case small adaptations were made to ensure contextual relevance (for example the names of education courses). The survey was distributed by e-mail and in hard copy. Two follow-up e-mails were sent.

### *Analysis*

The data were checked and cleaned in order to make cross-cultural comparisons possible. Closed questions were analyzed using SPSS, while open questions were analyzed using content analysis. We first coded in line with the three themes or aspects of precarious work identified in the literature, namely: employment and income security, initial and on-going training and education; and benefits and protection. We then looked for other aspects or categories, but we found that the responses aligned with the initial themes. Content analysis enabled the systematic, replicable compression of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding (Weber, 1990) and inspection of the data for recurrent instances (Wilkinson, 2011). Frequency counting was used where appropriate, assuming that the words mentioned most often reflected the greatest concerns.

## **Findings and discussion**

Hereunder, the quantitative and qualitative data combined to provide a picture of the precarious nature of creative work in the three locations. Quotes serve to illustrate and deepen the findings. While there were differences between the three study sites, the findings suggest the presence of similar themes across multiple contexts and locations.

#### *Employment and income insecurity*

Previous studies suggest that many creative workers rely on multiple jobs to generate an income (Galloway *et al.*, 2002; Guile, 2006). Shown at Table 2, we found multiple jobholding to be prevalent in all three locations. In addition to several concurrent paid roles, however, respondents reported that between 30% and 47% of their time spent in creative practice was unpaid. These unpaid activities occurred in the form of committed time: for example, rehearsals, grant writing and business administration. It also took the form of volunteer or pro bono work such as community arts initiatives, workshops and mentorships. While unpaid labour has previously been observed among aspiring and new entrant creative workers (Haukka, 2011), this study suggests that there is no significant difference in the presence of unpaid work across the life of a career.

#### *TABLE 2 here*

As explained, the rationale for using a lengthy survey and a largely qualitative approach was to generate detailed individual cases. This enabled us to look “inside” each portfolio to understand the interactions between multiple roles. In all three locations, multiple jobholding was described as necessary to manage the precarious nature of creative work. The following participant illustrates that for some workers, unrelated (often unskilled) work supports but is separate from creative work. As such, it forms a welcome and positive part of the portfolio of work.

*The Netherlands: I'd love to just work in the creative industries, but so far this isn't possible. I use my income in a call centre for sustaining my creative activities. This situation is not perfect, but it allows me to get more experience and do what I like.*

*[Writer, producer, actor]*

Other workers take casual work that fills income gaps as required:

*Perth: We are at the bottom of the economic pile! I was never aware of this as a student. The need for freelance artists to multi-task and juggle their numerous jobs in order to make decent money is a very exhausting act. [Writer, theatre director, producer, micro business owner]*

Some workers create a sustainable portfolio by transferring creative and business skills to related activities:

*Vancouver: I felt that there was only 1 primary career after leaving university, and that was as a performer, but I quickly realized that there are SO FEW opportunities for performers so I chose to also teach and work in administration when the opportunity came up. [Dancer, educator, administrator, director of a non-profit organisation]*

Finally, many creative workers transfer creative skills and knowledge to other economic sectors: “embedded” creative work. Other than teaching, which was common across the cohort, embedded work was most common among designers and visual artists. For example:

*I teach art activities in my non-arts role as a recovery worker. [Visual artist, teacher, micro business owner, recovery worker in the health sector]*

In the Netherlands, 89% of participants had derived income from their creative work during the past year and 6% had yet to earn an income from their creative work; however, the “superstar” phenomenon was evident in the variation of incomes. Few creative workers earned salaries in the top quartile range and the main sources of income were sales of work (45%) and teaching (40%).

Of concern, the financial situation of creative workers appeared to be deteriorating; 49% of participants indicated that income from their creative activities had decreased over the past 18 months. Multiple factors seem to have combined over the past decade to create a particularly challenging environment. One of these is the 2009 global financial crisis (GFC), which resulted in funding losses that are unlikely to be recovered (Moldoveanu and Ioan-Franc, 2011). The financial situation for 63% of the Netherlands participants had drastically deteriorated, and participants related this to funding cuts and the lasting effects of the GFC. Only 37% of workers had found a way to replace their lost income. Of these, 10% found other creative industries work, 11% claimed employment support benefits and the remainder found work in other economic sectors. Alongside the reduction in income was the feeling that the arts are both vulnerable and undervalued:

*The Netherlands: I've earned less than last year because the government no longer thinks arts are important, so there are no subsidies and no work. With the increase of unemployment we see highly educated people take jobs that are under their educational level, leaving out the ones who have a lower vocational training or less. We're now*

*unemployed, because even unskilled work outside the creative industries is no longer available. [Self-employed producer, writer]*

In Vancouver, 81% of participants had derived income from their creative activities over the past twelve months. Here again, main sources of income included sales of work (48%), contract-based work (41%) and teaching (30%). Income generated from creative activities had decreased for 36% of participants and increased for 29%; only 17% had found a way to replace their loss of income. Replacement income was equally distributed between other skilled arts work and skilled work outside the creative industries.

Similar to the Netherlands and Vancouver, 79% of Australian participants derived income from their creative activities and the main sources of income were sales (34%), performance fees (33%) and teaching (30%). In contrast, the financial situation of 45% of Australian creatives had improved over the past 18 months and for 26% it had stayed the same. Only 29% reported a decreased income and 26% of these respondents (7.5%) had replaced this income, most commonly with other skilled arts work. A summary is provided at Table 3. We suspect that this variation is accounted for in part by the slightly earlier survey implementation, at which time the full impact of the GFC had not yet been felt.

Respondents typically reported multiple career paths, increasingly global opportunities and challenges (including high mobility), extended working hours, increasing rates of contract labour and constant demands for new skills. We note also the recent diminution of the role played by agencies in mentorship, apprenticeship and structured whole-of-career pathways (Cunningham, 2011). An inability to meet these requirements increases insecurity, inequality and poverty. Much of the professional learning reported by creative workers related to overcoming these concerns.

*TABLE 3 here*

*Training and education*

The data suggest that lack of alignment between initial education and training and the realities of creative industries work, together with the need for lifelong learning, adds significantly to the precariousness of creative work. Previous studies have found both creative industries employers and workers to be dissatisfied with initial education and training (Author A, 2008; Guile, 2006), particularly in relation to communication, teamwork, problem solving, business management, legal issues and project management (Haukka, 2011), since creative industries work is often project-based (Blair *et al.*, 2001). This study attempted to understand why these aspects are so important.

Participants were asked to rate their initial education and training from 1 (very bad) to 10 (very good), and to comment on their rating. In the Netherlands, an average score of 6.9 was obtained. Participants reported being unprepared for the realities of creative work and expressed the need for more business skills:

*The Netherlands: I know everything about painting techniques, but that's not what makes you succeed as an artist. What you need is good networking skills, knowing how to introduce yourself to important people in the small artist community, how to show your capacities without showing off, how to get yourself into some exhibitions etc. [Visual artist, arts teacher, micro-business owner]*



Australian respondents rated their education 6.8 and advocated for similar improvements including a more hands-on approach to prepare for the realities of creating and managing a business, including commercialization.

*Perth: Some emphasis on applying creative works to commercialisation. Difficult with writing that is not directed towards theatre or film/TV. [Film maker, lecturer, researcher]*

*Perth: There need to be more actual real-world things, not just theory: i.e. grant application writing, making a living as an artist etc. [Visual artist, digital artist, micro-business owner]*

Respondents also advocated for opportunities for students to interact with industry:

*Perth: I would like to have had more focus on developing technical skills around my craft, including opportunities to apply my skills. [Entertainer, performer, designer]*

Similar themes emerged from the Canadian cohort, who rated their education 6.2 and focused on the need for business acumen. The inclusion of work placements and internship emerged strongly within this cohort:

*Vancouver: ... there should be specific arts-related courses like business for dancers, how to become a non-profit organization, grant writing. There needs to be a more practical learning environment for arts education instead of focusing primarily on practice. [Teacher, micro business owner, arts administrator, grant writer]*

We note that graduate dissatisfaction with career preparation is not limited to the creative industries: there is global concern that higher education graduates are not ready for work (Fullan and Scott, 2014). However, there is also broad acceptance that graduates entering complex labour markets such as the creative industries face particular challenges; these challenges are often unmet within initial education and training provision.

*Dealing with uncertainty: the role of continuous development or life-long learning*

The data highlight the turbulent nature of the creative industries and associated requirements for workers to maintain their skills, competencies and industry knowledge (Mietzner and Kamprath, 2013) as self-directed, self-funded learners (Guile, 2006). This instability is compounded by the rapid growth of new technologies (Bartosova, 2011) and the need to work across diverse sectors and tasks (Haukka, 2011). The convergence and complexity of creative projects also brings together global teams with different backgrounds and qualifications, requiring intercultural skills (Jeffcutt, 2004). It is in precisely these general skills areas that Mietzner and Kamprath (2013) have identified a mismatch between the needs of the industry and the skills of workers. In determining why these issues persist, we note that the need to be “protean”—changing shape to avoid under- or un-employment—adds to the impact of insufficient initial preparation such that life-long learning becomes an essential component of creative work.

Asked about their skills needs, participants in all three locations identified the need for generic rather than specific skills. In the Netherlands the focus was marketing and publicity, networking, and financial management. Australian participants most urgently needed marketing skills, but business and financial management also featured strongly. In Canada, the need for networking skills was more prominent than skills in marketing and business:

*The Netherlands: The reality is that most people become self-employed because there are so few stable jobs. But they do not tell us this during our training and they do not prepare us either. That's a big mistake, we should know more about the administrative hassles of running a business. [Dancer, teacher, choreographer, director of a dance school]*

*Perth: Train students more effectively in being a practicing artist. I felt that I had no formal knowledge on how to maintain a career. [Visual artist, micro business owner, public art coordinator, cultural community development coordinator (government post)]*

*Vancouver: [Higher education] must be capable of launching the artist into the industry prepared, not just the artistry but the business side of being an artist. [Actor, stilt-performer, clown, artistic director, municipal worker (arts), micro business owner]*

While the comments above leaned towards the period of transition into the workforce, the need for generic skills featured strongly in relation to creative industries practice. Across all three locations, the most important skills for a successful practice were artistic, problem-solving, communication, marketing, adaptability, technology and new media. These findings are in agreement with previous studies involving established artists (Galloway *et al.*, 2002) and aspiring artists (Haukka, 2011).

Participants described the rationale for their on-going development as both reactive and proactive, including learning that is undertaken during periods of unemployment or under-employment. Participants also revealed that while some aspects of learning, such as basic business acumen, are more prevalent towards the start of a career, the need for professional

learning declines little over time. Particular challenges to professional learning include, not surprisingly, cost, time-pressure and rapid technological change:

*The Netherlands: The sector is so uncertain, what is important today is already outdated tomorrow. We have to juggle with so many aspects: staying up-to-date, being able to pay for all the training in order to stay up-to-date, having the time to do this training, while at the same time continuing one's creative activities as well as other non-creative activities in order to have enough money to live from, it's a crazy life. [Visual artist, digital artist, micro business owner]*

Of particular concern were the reports of what DeFilippi and Arthur (1998) describe as “learning by watching”, which involves poorly paid or unpaid work adopted purely to build skills and to develop networked opportunities for work (Randle and Culkin, 2009).

#### *Benefits and protection*

As discussed, researchers have argued that employee awareness of entitlements declines or is undermined in line with labour market vulnerability (Underhill and Quinlan, 2011). The extent to which this is true for creative workers was unknown: hence it was included as a particular line of inquiry for our study. In the Netherlands, 74% of participants reported having no access to benefits and protection including pensions (superannuation), health insurance, salary and secondary terms of employment, life and/or disability insurance, or career counseling. The situation in Australia was similar, with only 58% of participants reporting access to any benefits and protection and only 31% receiving them. In Canada only 63% of workers had access to benefits, and only 20% received them.

These facilities are often negotiated by a trade union as part of industry-wide, collective agreements, and temporary jobs and multiple jobholding are known to complicate workers' knowledge and/or entitlements, enhancing the precarity of their work. It has been argued that at least in Europe the strong institutional position of trade unions places the organization of new groups of workers low on the agenda (Kloosterboer, 2008). The rise in atypical forms of work as seen within the sample adds strength to calls for changes to trade unions' development of strategies, policies and structures, and challenges their traditional ways of thinking and organizing (Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011). In line with research in other sectors, we also found many creative workers to be unaware of their rights. They appeared to be less protected than workers in many other industries; this was often reported in terms of the need to self-manage contractual issues or injuries, or in the acceptance that remuneration may not be received for contracted work:

*The Netherlands: I'm struggling to make ends meet at the end of the month. I'm not thinking about my retirement or insurance. I should, but I do not have the time to think about these things and, anyway, I cannot become ill, that's simply impossible financially. I'll see if I get something when I'm older. [Actor, producer, writer]*

*Perth: I had serious injury, which took years to heal. In this time, instead of becoming a dancer I became a director/choreographer/consultant. [Project manager, arts consultant, producer, cultural and community development worker (government), choreographer, arts career counsellor, filmmaker, micro-business owner, teacher]*

*Perth: Being a creative writer means being self-motivated, managing time, opportunities, researching, writing speculatively, selecting genres, specialising and finding outlets for*

*my work, with nothing - neither publication or payment (even with publication!) ever guaranteed. [Poet, author, journalist, professional writer (education and conservation), educator, micro-business owner, reviewer, creative writing mentor in the health sector]*

Further analysis illustrated precariousness in more subtle ways. In Australia, for example, professional learning was accessed by 24% of participants and did not align with company employment. Closer analysis suggests that the majority of learning is accessed through industry associations rather than through an employer. This is characteristic of a freelance career. Furthermore, although 51.4% of the Australian participants reported that an employer made superannuation contributions, 25% of participants did not receive contributions. The most likely explanation for this is that the amount earned with any one employer was insufficient to meet the superannuation payment threshold.

Until 2009, membership of the Netherlands' biggest creative industries trade union was compulsory. Since that time, membership has fallen by 15%, and the workers most likely to have cancelled their memberships are vulnerable workers attempting to save money. Union membership in Australia and Canada is low (~0.04% of workers), and membership is concentrated in small to medium and larger, established, enterprises. Sole traders and micro businesses are far less likely to have the protection of a union, and participants in each location expressed frustration at the level of union interest. For example:

*The Netherlands: I was a trade union member, but when I needed them they could not help me. Trade unions are for workers in big companies that they can sue for misbehaviour, not for individual cases with several jobs, a low income and a self-employed status, that's too complicated for them, they do not want to burn their hands.*  
*[Self-employed sculptor, visual artist, painter]*

## **Concluding comments**

This study examined the characteristics of work among creative workers in Perth, Vancouver and the Netherlands and it has begun to answer the call for more comparative studies. The findings suggest striking similarities between the challenges faced by creative workers in different locations. These common challenges have implications for individual workers, creative organizations and regional, national and supranational policymakers. Starting with limitations of the research, we next bring these implications to the fore and discuss avenues for future research.

### *Limitations*

Exploring the characteristics of creative industries work within a portfolio of multiple roles necessitates empirical studies such as that reported here. We have reported across the creative sectors; however, we are mindful that creative workers are not a homogenous group and that such studies cannot provide generalizations. This is because the multiple creative industries have unique ecologies of labour markets and networks (Jeffcutt and Pratt, 2002). In addition to further qualitative work, future studies might create more specificity by studying the similarities and differences of different sub-sectors with a less intensive, quantitative exploration of the key themes.

A second limitation concerns precariousness itself, which has multiple facets. We reported those aspects that revealed themselves in the participants' narratives. Future studies might extend this work by targeting other aspects of precariousness in order to provide a more complete picture.

In addition, this study is descriptive in that no statistical analyses can be conducted until sufficient cases have been amassed in a single sub-sector. While this can be perceived as

a weakness, our aim was to provide an initial comparison of precariousness in a way that created a more nuanced understanding of work and moved away from the existing reliance on simplistic datasets. Further in-depth qualitative research might focus on similar locations and also those that provide contrast, such as regional locations.

### *Labour laws and precarious work*

The first set of common challenges relates to amended labour laws, which have enabled employers to create more precarious jobs at the expense of stable employment. In line with previous research we found an increase in non-standard jobs with low wages, few benefits and modest security. This was experienced as a decrease in subsidies, opportunities and alternative sources of income. Participants emphasized the precarious nature of creative work, with common features being multiple entry attempts, periods of under-employment or unemployment, short-term contracts, high mobility, casual/part-time employment within and outside the creative industries, the need for lifelong learning, and limited access to benefits and protection.

We note that both professional learning and multiple jobholding were positioned as activities in support of continued involvement in the creative industries. Respondents expressed high levels of career commitment. Despite the challenges relating to creative work, none of the respondents exhibited the characteristics of the precariat (Standing, 2014) in that creative work was positioned as central to their lives and identities.

Despite policy makers' arguments that temporary work can provide a bridge to permanent employment, very few creative workers progressed to what Gumbrell-McCormick (2011) describes as a "normal" employment contract; rather, precariousness persists across the career lifespan and reduces only in response to increased opportunities due to reputation and established networks. On that note, however, the maintenance of technical and technological skills was a concern expressed by older workers. In line with Bennett's (2014)



analysis of creative workers in Perth, Australia, the data highlighted the contrast between creative services workers and other creatives such as musicians, performers and actors, who tended to earn only a proportion of their income from their creative activities.

We take time here to observe the broader implications of the creative industries career. An important feature of the CIs is the high level of self-employment, which has been heralded as foreshadowing labour market trends more generally within the experience economy (see de Propis, 2013; Lampel and Germain, 2015). It may be possible to learn from the experiences of creative industries workers in order to predict necessary changes to labour laws. There is also general acknowledgement that many national statistics collections under-represent the growing number of part-time, freelance and multiple-employed workers (Mietzner and Kamprath, 2013). This has implications for the designers of data collection instruments, which need to be able to record multiple roles for individual workers. To increase understanding, future research might look at further creative industries samples and also at other fields including occupational therapy, information technology and academia, all of which have experience rapid change and casualisation over the past decade

### *Education and training*

The second set of challenges relates to education and training. To sustain their work and manage their careers across multiple economic sectors, creative workers create their own learning experiences, build a broad base of skills and networks, and remain informed of industry trends. Participants stressed that many of the costs of managing a business and retaining the currency of the skills and knowledge were borne by workers themselves.

Creative workers tend to be highly qualified, and yet participants reported dissatisfaction with their initial education, which did not adequately prepare them for work. While participants in all countries rated artistic skills as the most important skillset, they felt

unprepared for working with people with different backgrounds, for work outside the creative industries and for a career as self-employed individual (Galloway *et. al.*, 2002; Jeffcutt, 2004). Feelings of unpreparedness and the stress of having to deal with their lack of certain skills added to their vulnerability.

Adding weight to previous studies (Author A, 2008, 2009; Mietzner and Kamprath, 2013; von Rimscha and Siegert, 2011), we contend that there is now sufficient evidence to demonstrate that certain fundamentals are required for all fields of creative work. These include a basic knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities, small business skills, management and technological acuity, personal attributes that enable graduates to confidently express, market and apply their skills and knowledge, and entrepreneurial thinking. We assert that these aspects should form the core of creative industries programs. Further, we observe that the commonality of embedded work suggests the need for initial education and training to extend its scope and equip students with the generic human capital required for creative roles across multiple economic sectors.

Participants reported limited opportunities for professional learning alongside pressure to stay abreast of technological developments. Participants experienced transitional periods of work and education and struggled to predict industry trends. Because of this, the investment in professional learning presented a business risk in that the learning may or may not be relevant. These challenges were exacerbated for new entrants by weak linkages between industry and education, adding weight to calls for initial education and training to include flexible placements and internships both in and outside of the curriculum. Given that professional learning is a feature across the career lifespan, it emerges as a critical issue for the providers of this learning, including local governments and arts organizations. We suggest that much of the requisite expertise is within the creative industries itself, and that the impact

of available funding might be maximized if funding were provided to arts collectives with a focus on mentorships, sustainable careers and professional learning.

### *Benefits and protection*

The final set of challenges relates to benefits and protection. Internationally, many trade unions neglect the growing number of temporary workers with multiple concurrent jobs. It could be argued that the strong institutional position of some unions makes them less likely to adopt rules and regulations to integrate new groups of workers. Few of the workers in this study received basic benefits and facilities and many workers were unaware of their entitlements. As suggested by Underhill and Quinlan (2011), this is likely to have incited some organizations to provide few or no benefits.

Some participants were simply too occupied with their daily struggles to think about their rights. While trade unions existed in all three locations and larger companies appeared well organized, self- and multiple-employed workers reported an increasingly precarious situation with little or no protection for either their current work or their future needs. Respondents reported multiple jobs in multiple outlets, irregular or limited hours of work, mobility pressure, and extended shifts, workdays or working weeks. These factors are all likely to negatively impact health and safety, including psychological wellbeing.

Further research is needed to ascertain why so many workers believe they have access and are reluctant to make a claim. In terms of injury we speculate that worker vulnerability may include a culture of non-disclosure. This has been reported in performing arts companies where artists have the protection of an employed role and yet resist reporting an injury because of fears of being overlooked or replaced: Chimenti and colleagues (2013: p. 54) found “frequent under-reporting of injuries to workers compensation among orchestral musicians”, despite 93% of their sample reporting playing-related injuries. It may also point

to lack of awareness, which strengthens the call for initial education and professional learning to explicitly teach these aspects of career.

### *Theoretical and practical implications*

While capital was not a major focus of the study, our findings suggest that while human capital would predict that workers with more education, experience and skills occupy less precarious work as defined by workplace rewards and job security, specific human capital in this study featured only in relation to networked forms of employment based on reputation building. Rather, the general, transferable capital of creative workers emerged as more important. This is in accordance with studies conducted outside of the creative industries, which have focused on human capital theory to explain the transferability of skills and knowledge between occupation and industries (Shaw, 1984; Parent, 2006; Sullivan, 2010). In line with Fjaellegaard (2015), who found that creatives workers' occupational and industry specific human capital is transferable to some degree to the wider economy, but that the opposite is not true, we found that many creatives employed general human capital in their work outside the creative industries. Our findings imply, therefore, that general rather than specific human capital is far more important to creative workers' career success. For educational institutions and funding bodies this points to the need for programs that emphasize general human capital to a far greater extent than is commonly seen.

In terms of practical implications we highlight that employment insecurity and income instability related to a reliance on multiple, often temporary roles. This challenge is difficult to tackle since it seems inherent to the creative industries and is a growing feature across other industries. However, organizations and trade unions might seek to support the specific needs of these workers by advocating the need for equitable strategies and policies. Ultimately, the rise of multiple jobholding across the labour market may require legislative changes to the

ways in which employer obligations are assessed, and as a forerunner in this regard much could be learned from the creative industries workforce. Again, an implication for the providers of initial and on-going education is the need to make students and workers aware of their legal and legislative rights and obligations as they relate to creative and other work.

Although the situation of most creative workers seems precarious, the study identified some practices that might decrease vulnerability. These include greater general knowledge about legal rights and obligations, which improve workers' situation in terms of legal protection and receipt of benefits. In addition, participation in communities of practice, networks, internships and industry mentoring (Hearn and Bridgstock, 2010) provide aspiring and practicing creative workers with experiences that increase their understanding of the industry context, practices and trends. These are logical activities to support and develop. For aspiring creative workers in particular, there is a strong case for authentic learning experiences that incorporate critical reflection and ensure that emerging capabilities are evidenced. This may require the formation of non-traditional work placements and internships that can be undertaken in multiple contexts and within irregular schedules.

Finally, while strong career commitment set these creative workers apart from Standing's (2014) precariats, the extent of (self) exploitation inherent in creative workers' practice was clear and needs to be addressed. In relation to this we highlight the need to address two explicit components of exploitation as expressed by Hesmondhalgh (2015: p. 13): "not only a sense of unjust advantage, but also implicitly a sense that significant suffering results from it".

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Table 1: Sample characteristics and a crude measure of creative industries focus

	Total sample	The Netherlands	Perth	Vancouver
Participants	752	511	182	59
Average age	49.4	51.9	43.6	46.1
Gender distribution	43% male 57% female	44% male 56% female	41% male 59% female	41% male 59% female
Broad creative industries focus (creative trident categories) (%)				
1 Advertising and marketing		2.4	2.2	1.8
2 Music and performing arts		39.4	40.5	32.1
3 Visual arts and design		45.2	37.7	48.2
4 Film, TV and radio		3.7	8.9	3.6
5 Publishing		2.5	9.6	1.8
6 Software and digital content		6.8	1.1	12.5

Table 2: Paid and unpaid jobs held by creative workers in different countries (%)

Number of positions	The Netherlands	Perth	Vancouver
1	49	52	47
2	29	33	22
3	9	11	18
4 or more	13	4	13
Unpaid activities	44	47	30

Table 3: 12-month change in income derived from creative and other work (%)

	The Netherlands	Australia	Canada
Income derived from creative work (past 12 months)	89	79	81
Decrease in creative work income over 18 months	49	29	36
Increase in other income over that time	37	26	17

APPENDIX 1: Broad survey questions (open, closed, Likert and multiple response)

*For the full Creative Workforce Initiative survey document, please contact the authors.*

- How would you describe your arts practice?
- Did you generate an income from your arts practice during the past twelve months?
- How many different paid jobs/roles do you hold at the moment?
- When your arts income fluctuates, do you replace it with other activities?
- If yes, what activities have replaced the income?
- For what percentage of your artistic or cultural works or production do you not receive payment?
- Over the past 18 months, has the amount of incomes derived from arts work increased, decreased or remained the same?
- If the amount of income derived from arts work has changed, what are the reasons?
- If the amount of income decreased, has the income been replaced by other activities?
- If you answered yes to the previous question, what activities have replaced the income?
- In your current job(s), do you have access to any of the following benefits?
- In your current job(s), do you receive any of the following benefits?
- What are the principal sources of income derived from your arts work?
- What is the relationship between your arts and non-arts roles?
- Please indicate your highest level of completed formal education
- In terms of your career as an artist, please rate the overall effectiveness of your undergraduate education on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the *least* effective and 10 being the *most* effective.
- What, if any changes would you recommend to undergraduate arts education?
- From the list below, please identify your three most urgent current business needs, with 1 being the *most* urgent and 3 the *least* urgent:
- How does your arts career relate to the career you imagined when you undertook your training?
- Please identify ALL the skills that you use in order to maintain your career as a creative artist: