Towards an experiential identity of place: The case of Manchester's Craft and Design Centre

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to explore the role and potential of lived experiences in informing and shaping the formation of place identity within the sphere of the production and consumption of craft objects.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is part of a larger funded research project and focuses on Manchester's Craft and Design Centre. It draws upon a series of in-depth interviews conducted with craft makers and visitors.

Findings – The analysis and interpretation of textual data help to theorise an experiential identity of place which revolves around the fusion of the cultural heritage and lived insideness of the physical setting, activity spaces and the micro-encounters of craft-making, and conflicting meanings and attachments to the Craft and Design Centre.

Originality/value – This study provides a novel perspective to the understanding of place identity in the context of craft-making by focusing on the lived experiences of various stakeholders and acknowledging the multi-faceted, dynamic, and processual nature of place.

Keywords: Place identity, place marketing, craft makers, craft consumption, cultural industries, geographies of making

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Place is often perceived as a lived and phenomenological concept which is constituted by material and symbolic dimensions that cut across the built environment, social processes, and cultural manifestations, amongst others (Casey, 1998; Creswell and Hoskins, 2008; Tuan, 1977). To these ends, place identity refers to the fluid and processual nature of specific places and unfolds via 'a complex system of interactions between the individual and the collective, between the physical and the non-physical, between the functional and the emotional, between the internal and the external, and between the organized and the random' (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013: 76). Although place marketing has been primarily concerned with the fine-tuning of specific places to manage the provision of offerings and the demand of consumer groups (Boisen *et al.*, 2018), the role of place identity in shaping the variety of ways in which different places are positioned, that is the 'jostling of places for stakeholder attention' (Hanna, Rowley and Keegan, 2021: 113) has gained significant traction (Andehn *et al.*, 2020; Coffin, 2020; Kalandides, 2012; Skandalis *et al.*, 2017; Warnaby and Medway, 2013).

Although prior work has repeatedly highlighted the dynamic nature of places and place identities, the experiential aspects of locality and their role in crafting a 'non- reductionist, non-commodified and more inclusive place identity' (Kalandides, 2012) which incorporates change and continuity in relation to specific places remain relatively underexplored. Departing from any assumptions that places are 'products' to be marketed and instead focusing on place-specific experiences (Campelo *et al*., 2014; Campelo, 2015; Lichrou *et al*., 2014), the aim of this paper is to develop further insights into the ways in which diverse lived experiences participate in how place identity comes about (Pink and Servon, 2013). More specifically, this paper investigates the lived experiences of producers and consumers of craft objects in a specific place and draws implications for place marketing theory and practice.

This study focuses on Manchester's Craft and Design Centre which hosts the studios of various craft makers and acts as a retail platform to showcase and sell craft objects. A two-stage methodological approach was employed which included conducting in-depth interviews with seventeen craft makers and twenty visitors within Manchester's Craft and Design Centre. This paper puts forth an experiential conception of place identity which accounts for the place-specific experiences of craft makers and visitors in the Craft and Design Centre. The findings suggest that experiential identity of place revolves around the fusion of cultural heritage and physical settings, activity spaces and the micro-encounters of craft-making, and conflicting meanings and attachments to a specific place. This study provides insights into the idiosyncratic essence and sense of place of the Craft and Design Centre and its potential for developing a non- reductionist and non-commodified place identity which also takes into consideration the needs of various stakeholders such as producers and consumers of craft.

Next, the usefulness of a lived phenomenological conception of place and the shift towards an experiential identity of place are discussed. The research context and methods of the study are then outlined and the findings are presented. The concluding section draws implications for place marketing and branding scholarship and provides insights into the role of experiential place identity in the development of a more holistic and inclusive approach to place marketing.

Theoretical Background

A lived conception of place

In place marketing scholarship, place has been most recently theorized as a complex and multi-faceted concept which should not be only treated as a another 'product' to be marketed but also as a dynamic entity that emerges through the creation of multiple narratives from various stakeholders (Kalandides, 2011; Lichrou *et al.*, 2014; Warnaby and Medway, 2013). Such a phenomenological conception suggests that human experience lies at the heart of what a place is and highlights that its meaningfulness emerges when it is used and lived (Cresswell, 2009). Experience is an all-encompassing term for the various modes through which individuals construct and perceive reality (Tuan, 1977). Through the realm of experience, space turns into place and becomes meaningful (Cresswell, 2009). To these ends, place is the accumulation of lived experiences that individuals have within it and is subject to change depending on their perceptions of and attachments with it (Jiraprasertkun, 2020; Low and Altman, 1992); in line with humanistic approaches which foreground the interrelationships between people and various locales and perceive place as a central ontological structure of being-in-the-world (Casey, 1998; Malpas, 1999; Seamon, 2013).

Following Agnew (1987), Cresswell (2004) argues that place as a meaningful entity can be perceived as location (e.g. where it is positioned on the map), locale (e.g. its physical and material manifestations), and sense of place (e.g. people's subjective and emotional attachment to place). The latter conception highlights that place is a mixture of social constructions in conjunction with material settings (Campelo et al., 2014; Campelo, 2015). Place acquires cultural meaning and significance once individuals create narratives and tell stories revolving around their diverse, and often contested, experiences in specific spaces (Lichrou *et al*., 2014; Tilley, 1994). The realm of meaning of place transcends geographical position (location) and the built environment (locale) and is manifested in a more abstract and intangible manner (Creswell and Hoskins, 2008); a situation which makes any given place much more than its static and tangible dimensions and focuses on dwelling and the variety of ways in which we live *in* the world (Cresswell, 2009). However, prior work in place marketing and branding scholarship regularly embraces standardized conceptions of place-meaning which are often directed towards a commercialized understanding of places as marketized commodities (*cf.* Andehn *et al*., 2020) and/or assume the existence of monolithic sense of places as 'natural units inherited from time immemorial' (Agnew, 2011: 22). Such efforts somewhat fail to consider the competing and shifting narratives of place (Lichrou *et al.*, 2014) which emerge through the idiosyncratic lived experiences of various stakeholders and understand place as a dynamic entity in the constant flow of social relations with permeable boundaries, thus, leading to a strong sense of belonging (Agnew, 2011) and/or place attachment (Low and Altman, 1992). Accordingly, place identity has been predominantly theorised as something that is relatively stable and cannot be easily altered (Dovey, 2009) whilst, at the same time, it is heavily shaped and configured by place branding strategies (Andehn *et al.*, 2020; Kalandides, 2012). In fact, there are limited attempts to delineate how place identity is constituted, negotiated and/or contested amongst various stakeholders and its linkages with lived experiences remain under-theorised (Kalandides, 2011). A notable exception is the study Campelo *et al.* (2014) on destination branding (see also Campelo, 2015) which develops a more holistic understanding of sense of place as experienced by local residents.

Extending this line of inquiry, this study suggests that we need to turn our attention into the experiential dimensions of locality in order to develop a more nuanced theoretical account of the specificity of place and associated local ways of being (Pink and Servon, 2013; Tilley, 1994). We need to further acknowledge the dynamic and evolving nature of place as something more than a closed product (Dovey, 2009; Kalandides 2011; Massey, 1994) which is never really finished and instead remains in constant transformation (Cresswell, 2009). This bears the potential to lead to an experiential conception of place identity which will serve as a depiction of place 'arising from the experience and memory of place users' (Warnaby and Medway, 2013: 356) and will take into more serious consideration 'the aspirations, needs, and functional rhythms of personal and group life' (Tuan, 1977: 178).

The experiential aspects of place identity

Place identity has been previously theorised and understood in numerous ways across various disciplines and its evolving and dynamic nature has been previously documented in human geography and environmental psychology (Creswell and Hoskins, 2008; Dovey, 2009; Massey, 1991; Relph, 1976). As Kalandides (2011: 37) argues, place identity should be understood as 'a process, never immobile or fixed, and any attempt to define it will always be futile'. In other words, prior studies argue that we need to abandon any theorisations of nomothetic accounts of place identity which, by putting forth a conception of place as generalised location and pre-supposing a relatively static sense of place (Agnew, 2011), somewhat fail to explore the morphogenic processes through which place-making occurs (Dovey, 2009). Place identity signifies a sense of belonging at personal and social levels and often emerges from a complex set of interactions and linkages with various places and stakeholders, amongst others (Dovey, 2009). As Malpas (2014: 37) points out, 'human identity [is] interdependent with the identity of the places in which human lives are embedded, and more than this, the very fabric of human lives – the character and structure of both personal and collective life – [is] interdependent with the character of places and spaces in which that life is played out'. In place marketing and branding scholarship, prior work has started to emphasise the processual and heterogeneous aspects of place whilst recognising the impact of place branding efforts upon perceptions of place identity (Andehn *et al.*, 2020; Coffin, 2020; Giovanardi, 2012; Kalandides, 2011; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Warnaby and Medway, 2013). For instance, Kalandides (2011) identifies various elements of place identity (e.g. image, relations, institutions) which underscore its processual nature. Similarly, Andehn *et al.* (2020) highlight the significance of acknowledging the ascription of meaning to place from place marketing and branding strategies and its limiting influence on inhabitants. Finally, Giovanardi (2012) argues that we need to take into consideration both functional (e.g. physical) and representational (e.g. symbolic) characteristics of place as part of ongoing place branding efforts depending on the various stakeholder groups involved.

Building on these lines of research, this study argues that we need to take into further account the lived dimensions of place to develop detailed insights into the number of ways in which human perception and experience contribute to place-making (Campelo *et al*., 2014; Lichrou *et al.*, 2014; Pink and Servon, 2013). According to Low and Altman (1992: 7), we can identify various degrees of place attachment which 'may be primarily associated with the meanings of and experiences in a place'. It is crucial to develop a shared common understanding of place identity which allows for the identification of the wide spectrum of place-specific experiences and their diverse meanings for various stakeholders. Most places constitute significant centres of our direct experiences of the world we live in and, hence, place identity can be perceived as one of the main features of 'our experience of places which both influences and is influenced by those experiences' (Relph, 1976: 45). Place identity comprises of three interrelated basic elements (e.g. the static physical features of place, its activities or functions, and its meanings or symbols) whose relative weighting and fusion leads to the creation of a distinct place identity (Relph, 1976). However, Relph (1976) also notes that these three elements of place identity are not entirely pivotal or fixed and it is only in conjunction with the in-depth investigation of the sense of place or what he calls lived or existential insideness - the degree of attachment, involvement, and concern that a stakeholder holds for a specific place and signifies their lived intensity of meaning with this place - through which we can hope to develop a more thorough understanding of the identity of a given place. Lived insideness helps to bring together those basic elements of place identity through the combination of materiality, meaning, and practice (Cresswell, 2009) and highlights the degree to which individuals belong to and associate themselves with a specific place.

Nevertheless, such a conception of lived insideness should also be understood as being the result of everyday experience given that our own sense of a specific place relies heavily upon regular social practices and experiences within the realm of our day-to-day lives (Dovey, 2009). To these ends, Massey (1994: 154) argues that the specificity of place 'is not some long internalized history but the face that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus'. For Massey (1991), places can also be perceived as articulated instances grounded within networks of dynamic social activities and relations. This implies that place might also include a series of internal tensions and conflicts and points towards the rejection of any monolithic conceptions of sense of place, that is the existence of single and unique place identities (Massey, 1994). Instead, Massey (1991;1994) puts forth a progressive or global sense of place, that is a particular character of place which is continually reproduced based on dynamic social relations, activities and people's experiences. In other words, lived insideness entails capturing 'the meanings and signifiers that create the uniqueness of each place' (Campelo et al. 2014: 58) and further acknowledging the co-existence of different social relations and processes for various stakeholders within a given place which might give rise to multiple meanings and conflicting place identities (Massey, 1991).

As such, this paper aims to explore the lived insideness of place in Manchester's Craft and Design Centre and its antecedents for the development of a holistic and experiential conception of place identity which takes into account the lived experiences of different stakeholders such as producers and consumers of craft. Next, the connection between craft-making and place identity is discussed, the research context and methods of the study are presented and the emergent findings are discussed.

Craft-making and place identity

Place is thought to be of increasing significance for augmenting the value of cultural production and consumption (Hracs *et al.*, 2013). Craft makers often attempt to develop small businesses which are deeply rooted in specific places to emphasise the authentic nature of their products by building upon local traditions (Crafts Council, 2012; Garcia *et al*., 2018). Although prior business and management studies and sociological literature on globalisation argue that place is no longer important, recent industry reports and academic studies indicate that the cultural and creative industries become more and more connected with specific localities and highlight the importance of place as an essential spatial context for cultural entrepreneurs such as craft makers (Drakopoulou *et al.*, 2018). While technological advancements have enabled craft makers to trade at a global level, this is largely an ecosystem which is grounded within local relationships (Bennett, 2018). In fact, craft production and consumption is often associated with 'the rise of "maker" scenes within western cities previously thought to have eviscerated manufacturing legacies' (Gibson, 2016: 62). Prior research further highlights the growing significance of place for craft consumers as a sign of exclusivity, personalisation and originality tied to local production as opposed to globalised distribution and mass-market production (Bennett, 2018).

Cultural production and consumption activities and practices have started to play a major role in place-making and place identity strategies as part of highlighting the uniqueness of certain destinations and vice versa (Richards, 2011; 2020; Sjölander-Lindqvist *et al*., 2020). In line with the creative turn in tourism and destination branding, creative resources such as craft making 'are now regularly employed to generate more distinctive identities, offering regions and cities a symbolic edge in an increasingly crowded marketplace' (Richards, 2011: 1230). Conversely, the experiential and socio-historical aspects of place identity bear the potential to augment the unique and exclusive nature of craft making by emphasising the history, traditions, and social relations of specific places, amongst others (Sjölander-Lindqvist *et al*., 2020). The rise of contemporary craft-making is place- and path-dependent (Gibson, 2016) including the existence of distinct craft marketplaces set apart from patterns of mass consumption (Mathews and Picton, 2014), a strong sense of cultural heritage and community, and close connections between producers and consumers (Carr and Gibson, 2016; Warren and Gibson, 2014). As such, this study adopts a phenomenological stance towards the contemporary craft marketplace and the formation of place identity in the context of craft-making which takes into consideration 'its consumer and producer drivers, work practices, cultural aesthetics and practices' (Luckman, 2015: 17).

Research Context and Methods

This study is part of a larger funded research project which aims to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the making and consumption of craft objects within Manchester's Craft and Design Centre in the North West of England. The Centre is supported by the Arts Council England and the Manchester City Council and is located in the city centre of Manchester, in a Victorian former fish and poultry market building (Figure 1). It hosts more than 20 studios of various craft makers and also acts as a retail platform to showcase and sell craft objects to visitors. Since its inception as a creative space for craft in 1982, the Craft and Design Centre has provided a home to local independent designers and makers selling textiles, jewellery, accessories, ceramics, and glass, amongst others. It also runs a series of craft-related exhibitions and workshops which aim to promote and disseminate craft making and celebrate local, national and international craft artists (Craft and Design Centre, 2022).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Institutional ethical approval for the research was gained before the start of data collection. For the purposes of this study, the unit of analysis is the craft maker, that is a sole business owner who operates in a dedicated studio within Manchester's Craft and Design Centre and practices craft as her/his primary profession (Pret *et al.*, 2016) and the consumer of craft, that is the visitor of the Manchester Craft and Design Centre. In doing so, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 craft makers and 20 visitors in the Craft and Design Centre. These individuals were recruited through the Centre which partnered with the research team in the scoping of the project and the recruitment of informants. More specifically, recruitment leaflets and posters were created which invited craft makers and visitors to participate in the study and these were circulated within the Craft and Design Centre and via the researchers' and the Centre's social media platforms. The sample included 37 informants between the ages of 18 and 64 with varied levels of engagement with the Craft and Design Centre (e.g. number of visits, time based in the Centre) and more details can be found in Table 1 below. Pseudonyms were utilized to ensure confidentiality and interviewees were also asked to fill out a consent form confirming their voluntary participation. All interviews took place online via video-conferencing platforms (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams) during the first stages of the pandemic. Interviews lasted between 45mins to 2.5hrs and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Although the original purpose of the research dealt with the investigation of the opportunities and challenges associated with craft production and consumption in the Craft and Design Centre, place identity emerged as one of the main dimensions during the initial analysis of the data. The overall purpose of the in-depth interviews was to give participants the freedom to construct their own understandings of the phenomena under study (Denzin, 2001). In-depth interviews broadly aimed to deal with craft makers' and visitors' lived experiences within Manchester's Craft and Design Centre and their role in the making, purchasing and consumption of craft objects. Various topics were addressed and covered such as the interactions between visitors and makers, the role of the building and its various spaces for individuals' relationship with craft and the role of the pandemic in their involvement and/or engagement with the Centre, amongst others.

Data analysis followed an inductive approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), a prevalent approach to analysis in interpretive research (Crotty, 1998). This entailed using thematic coding as part of the process of moving back and forth between the data and extant literature; in line with the constant comparative method of coding, categorisation and abstraction (Spiggle, 1994). Emerging thematic categories were identified from the initial sample of informants which were then shaped and scrutinized further as data collection continued to take place. The coding process related to the nature of the lived experience of producers and consumers of craft and their relationship with the physical, socio-cultural, historical, and symbolic aspects of place (Casey, 1998). The initial themes were grounded within Relph's (1976) elements of place identity and Massey's (1991) conception of a progressive sense of place, thus, providing a useful eventful frame for the interpretation of the study's findings (Spiggle, 1998).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Findings

The emergent findings of the study highlight the lived experiences of craft makers and visitors within Manchester's Craft and Design Centre. The analysis of these experiences suggests that the place identity of the Craft and Design Centre can be perceived as the ongoing experiential fusion of cultural heritage and the lived insideness of the physical setting, activity spaces and the micro-encounters of craft-making, and conflicting meanings and attachments to place.

Cultural heritage and the lived insideness of the physical setting

One of the initial findings of the study concerns the static physical setting and cultural heritage of the Craft and Design Centre and the lived or existential insideness that individuals develop within it (Relph, 1976). Prior work highlights that architecture and built form have become increasingly important for the conversion of post-industrial buildings into spaces of craft production and consumption (Mathews and Picton, 2014). In the context of this study, it is all about how the physical appearance and history of the centre makes individuals feel as being *in* place.

For instance, some of the visitors in the Craft and Design Centre refer to the historical aspects of the building and its role in the shopping experience (Warnaby, 2009), as illustrated in Noel's quote below:

"I personally quite like the building, it has that kind of heritage feel to it, which I think works in favour of the Arts and Crafts Design Centre because it's part of Manchester's industrial past, I suppose, textiles and weaving, and artists that span from that development."

(Noel, visitor)

Noel highlights the physical features of the building and the fact that the Centre is part of Manchester's industrial past and refers to its cultural heritage feel, 'textiles and weaving'. In fact, prior research notes that an industrial image lends authenticity to craft communities by recalling images of a time when production was a more central aspect of the urban landscape (Miller, 2017). This is further evidenced in Corrine's quote below:

"[I]t's an old building that's been kept pretty much as it is, I think that's nice, our heritage isn't gone. Quite often when I speak to people who used to come to market, sort of elderly people who used to visit the market as a child and they remember it, and it's lovely to see, like, the old photos when people find of the market and you can see the original structure and that

kind of thing, and that's really important. There's been talk of renovations and that, and I'd hate for any of the original features to be lost and just think it's a really nice building, it has a really nice light, it's freezing cold and mouldy, and stuff like that, but the essence of the building is really lovely". (Corinne, maker)

Corinne, one of the resident makers in the Craft and Design Centre, highlights the added value of making and selling craft in a historic building and focuses on the past experiences and memories of other users, 'elderly people', in the Centre. By referring to its 'original features', she foregrounds the representational characteristics of the building (e.g. aesthetics and form)_over its more functional aspects (Giovanardi, 2012), 'freezing cold and mouldy', to further appreciate and value the atmosphere of making in historic industrial settings of urban landscapes (Zukin, 1998). Similarly, Helen discusses other related atmospheric dimensions of built form:

"It just feels really natural and well-lit [...] it changes with the weather outside, you can go there at Christmas and it feels like a really Christmassy, festive place to be, but go in there in summer and it is a bright, open space and it feels like a summer space as well." (Helen, visitor)

Her quote illustrates how natural, well-lit and bright the Centre feels because of the way it is designed (e.g. its glass ceiling). Helen describes how its atmosphere changes depending on the weather conditions, 'natural and well-lit', 'changes with the weather outside'. Such an atmospheric conception of place (Anderson, 2009) is in line with Relph's (1976) notion of homeyness which, amongst others, refers to individuals' embodied and emotional immersion *in* and psychological attachments *with* place (Low and Altman, 1992). Such feelings of homeyness further differentiate the Craft and Design Centre from standardised retail spaces which foreground mass consumption practices (Mathews and Picton, 2014) and serve to position craft-making within broader discourses of local industrial heritage (Miller, 2017).

Next, Amanda, one of the resident makers in the Craft and Design Centre, further elaborates upon her emotional attachment with the centre:

"I love the fact that it's Victorian and it's got the glass ceiling and it's got windows all around, it's an amazing building and it's a really nice place to work. I can't imagine being in another type of studio now as I've been there." (Amanda, maker)

For Amanda, the translation of built form and cultural heritage into homeyness is exemplified through the variety of ways in which makers create a sense of place through their everyday experiences and work practices in the Centre (Cresswell, 2009; Dovey, 2009), 'got the class ceiling', 'amazing building', 'really nice place to work'. The lived insideness of the physical setting highlights the significance of cultural heritage in the production and consumption of craft objects and further suggests that space becomes place in the experiential sense when a person or group feels a degree of felt attachment and involvement with a specific place such as the Craft and Design Centre.

Activity spaces and the micro-encounters of craft-making

A second emergent theme deals with the activities and functions of place, that is the variety of ways through which individuals might engage into a series of social practices and activities that shape the identity of a specific place (Cresswell, 2009; Dovey, 2009; Relph, 1976). Spaces of craft production and consumption are often designed in such a way as to facilitate and encourage face-to-face encounters between producers and consumers and foster the creation of such activities (Luckman, 2015).

In the context of this study, the unique layout of the Craft and Design Centre, wherein the studios of craft makers are visible to visitors, gives rise to what Massey (1991) calls activity spaces, that is spaces of circulation and meeting that collectively contribute to a shared 'common sense' of inhabitation. This is evidenced in Debbie's quote below:

"It's really unique in the fact that the workshops are there, and you can make and sell your work on the premises. It doesn't suit a lot of makers because, you know, I've had a closed studio before and you're not tied down, whereas when you have the studio in the Craft Centre you're tied down, you have to be there […] it's like having a shop, isn't it?" (Debbie, maker)

Debbie highlights the uniqueness of the Craft and Design Centre in providing the chance to craft makers to both create, showcase and sell their work under one roof. However, she goes on to note that this is not something that suits all craft makers who might be more used to a 'closed studio' that is not open to visitors, because you always need to be there and treat the studio as a retail space. Another craft maker, Alice, elaborates further on such issues:

"[I]f you leave your shop, usually you have to lock it up so if I go to see another artist, I have to lock up my shop so meaning that I won't get the sale, so most of the time, the makers like to stay in their own shops to keep the shop open, so you won't be interacting as much if it was just a studio because of the selling space there". (Alice, maker)

As her quote suggests, treating the studio as a retail space might have a significant impact upon community formation and hinder the interactions between makers themselves, 'you won't be interacting as much', 'because of the selling space there'. In other words, Alice seems to prefer the 'closed studio' approach which helps to foster a sense of community between local makers and facilitate social interactions.

Nevertheless, Nick, one of the visitors in the centre, also highlights the value of the open studio approach for the visitor experience:

"[I]t's a place of, there's lots of colour, lots of activity, it's quite a vibrant space […] when I was looking into the units [studios], there were people in there, it wasn't a normal shop, you could see people sort of crouched over a work bench, working away at a project, and that kind of made the connection that the things that were laid down in front of you were made by the person working away in the corner." (Nick, visitor)

For him, the Craft and Design Centre is perceived as a ‘vibrant’ and colourful space with ‘lots of activity’ especially due to its uncommon setup and orientation, ‘it wasn’t a normal shop’. By making craft production spaces visible to consumers, craft makers often aim to highlight the making process and the local dimensions of production; something which further helps to cultivate shared cultural values and understandings and certify the authenticity of the final product (Miller, 2017). This is further evidenced in Sophie’s quote below:

”You can just cast your eye over what they are doing, and again, you know, that makes it into a much more inspiring space to go into and it has a soul to it and a sort of a community to it.” (Sophie, visitor)

Sophie focuses on the various forms of proximate sociality within the Craft and Design Centre between producers and consumers of craft (Carr and Gibson, 2016) and their role in re-imagining and ameliorating the shopping experience, ‘makes it a much more inspiring space’, ‘a sort of a community to it’. The significance of the micro-encounters of craft-making (Carr and Gibson, 2016), that is the social interactions between makers and visitors and/or the lack of social interactions between makers themselves suggest that the Craft and Design Centre can be perceived as a dynamic process (Kalandides, 2011) which brings together various forms of social relations that evolve and change over time (Massey, 1991).

The findings highlight that the nature of such activity spaces can be creative and inspiring for visitors but, at the same time, these can also become a bit destructive and lead to a less communal experience especially for craft makers; such emergent tensions are further unpacked in the next theme.

Conflicting meanings and attachments to place

The final theme relates to the identification of conflicting meanings in Manchester’s Craft and Design Centre, that is the creation of social meanings through human actions and interactions *in* place (Campelo *et al.*, 2014; Massey, 1991; Relph, 1976) which bear the potential to lead to varying degrees of attachments to place (Low and Altman, 1992). The analysis of the data reveals a series of conflicting meanings which emerge in the Craft & Design Centre and are often the result of the social interactions between visitors and makers. This is further evidenced in the following quotes by two of the resident craft makers:

"Partly the reason why the Craft Centre was appealing was that working in a closed studio is quite isolating, and the Craft Centre gives you the opportunity to be with like-minded people, other makers, you know, engage with them and what they're doing, you know what's going on and also, being more connected with your buyers and the feedback that you gain from having that conversation with [them]." (Anna, maker)

"Some people just like to talk and they don't want to buy, they're not prepared to buy, and it becomes quite tiring and then you're not making the sale at the end, so it can go either way." (Alice, maker)

On the one hand, Anna discusses the attractiveness of the previously mentioned 'open studio' approach by comparing and contrasting it with her past experiences working in a 'closed studio'. As she mentions, this helps 'to be with like-minded people', engage with them and be more closely connected with visitors and gain feedback from them, thus, leading to the formation of a strong feeling of socio-cultural attachment to place (Campelo, 2015). On the other hand, Alice, downplays the open studio approach by highlighting the fact that the social interactions between makers and visitors might often be 'unproductive' when saying that some people 'just like to talk' and 'they don't want to buy', hence, putting forth a markedly distinct belonging to place which appreciates the dynamic flow of social relations (Agnew, 2011). Although prior work emphasises the merits of inviting consumers to experience craft production in terms of enhancing the authenticity of cultural products (Miller, 2017), these findings also highlight several tensions associated with such efforts.

In addition, other types of conflicting meanings were identified amongst visitors in relation to the pricing of craft objects in the Craft and Design Centre, as illustrated in the following quotes:

"[O]ne argument could be, you know, is it really sort of catering to the whole community, is it welcoming to everyone if it's an expensive place to be, I guess it's what I'm trying to say." (Rita, visitor)

"I think something that is distinct and has character, and sometimes when you see something, pick something up, you have a connection with something so that helps, and I think I spoke at the beginning that I feel if I buy something that is handmade, I'm willing to spend more because it's unique, because I appreciate where it's come from." (Eliza, visitor)

On the one hand, Rita expresses her concerns about the expensive prices of the range of products on display and wonders if such a pricing is inclusive for the various audiences that visit the Centre. In doing so, her quote also puts forth a place-specific conception of pricing which is connected with the Craft and Design Centre itself, 'expensive place to be' and the 'whole community' within it. On the other hand, Eliza holds a different view when arguing that these products are priced reasonably given their 'distinct', and 'unique' character. She refers to the handmade nature of these products to justify their pricing, 'I appreciate where it's come from'.

The analysis of the data highlights that these conflicting meanings reveal a series of internal contradictions and tensions which develop and change over time and further point towards an understanding of the processual aspects of place and the multi-dimensional nature of place attachment (Low and Altman, 1992). Such an understanding suggests that we cannot perceive of places as possessing single and unique identities since they contain a number of internal conflicts resulting from the wide spectrum of social relations and lived experiences of various stakeholders (Agnew, 2011; Massey, 1991; Kalandides, 2020).

Conclusion: Rethinking place identity in experiential terms

The aim of this paper was to focus on the lived experiences of various stakeholders in a specific place to develop a more holistic and inclusive understanding of place identity. The findings reveal the existence of an experiential identity of place which relies upon the lived experiences of various stakeholders (e.g. makers and consumers of craft) and is manifested through the cultural heritage and lived insideness of the physical setting, activity spaces and the micro-encounters of craft-making, and a series of conflicting meanings and attachments to place. Such an experiential theorisation puts forth a lived conception of places as 'significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world' (Relph, 1976: 141) by acknowledging that the Craft and Design Centre is not connected to a single static identity (Massey, 1994); it should be better understood as a lived experiential process whose specificity is continually reproduced (Kalandides, 2020).

This paper argues that it is crucial to take into consideration the variety of ways in which the emergent themes of this study are interrelated and their fusion leads to the construction of what is being termed here as an experiential identity of place. During the interviews, both makers and visitors of the centre drew extensively upon their place-specific experiences to discuss and elaborate upon their relationship with craft. This further suggests that contemporary craft production and consumption continues to be place-dependent despite the dramatic rise of online marketplaces which facilitate the connection of independent craft makers with global audiences (Miller, 2017). To these ends, this paper argues that a more in-depth exploration of the economic geography of craft production and consumption will help to understand 'the manner in which logics of cultural capitalism intersect with uneven geographies of growth and decline from the mass-manufacturing era' (Gibson, 2016: 36). For the purposes of this study, Manchester's Craft and Design Centre serves as a meaningful entity

(Cresswell, 2004) for craft makers and visitors to perform their passion for craft within the confines of a distinct place which is set apart from standardised spaces of mass-market production and consumption (Bennett, 2018; Matthews and Picton, 2014) and is grounded within localised narratives of cultural heritage (Miller, 2017).

By reconceptualising place identity in experiential terms, this study adopts a processual perspective to place which focuses on various stakeholders and their place-specific practices (Kalandides, 2011). More specifically, the analysis of the data highlights various social interactions within Manchester's Craft and Design Centre between makers and visitors. These play a significant role in establishing a multi-faceted sense of place as everyday lived experience which moves away from prior monolithic conceptions documented in the literature (*cf.* Dovey, 2009). In line with Massey's (1991; 1994) work, this study sheds further light into the micro-encounters of sociality (Carr and Gibson, 2016) and their antecedents for place-making processes. As such, it is argued that place marketing efforts should aim to take into consideration the lived experiences of various stakeholders, such as producers and consumers of craft, to move away from commodified and marketized discourses of place identity (Andéhn *et al.*, 2020; Coffin, 2020; Kalandides, 2012). Promoting an experiential identity of place can be realised by communicating and promoting the lived insideness of specific places and rethinking their specificity as being dynamic and relationally constructed (Kalandides, 2020). Extending the work of Relph (1976), this paper suggests that individuals create varying degrees of attachments to place (Low and Altman, 1992) through the emergence of conflicting meanings and associated internal tensions and contradictions as part of their ongoing social practices and interactions in Manchester's Craft and Design Centre.

In the context of this study, place promotion entails bringing together the variety of place images that emerge which lead to the establishment of different collective mental perceptions of place (Kalandides, 2012). For instance, the analysis identifies different feelings of homeyness experienced by various stakeholders groups which are grounded within the socio-material and historical milieu of the Craft and Design Centre, that is the physical setting and local cultural heritage, and point towards the significance of both functional and representational dimensions of place (Giovanardi, 2012). Similarly, the systematic tracking and documentation of the conflicting meanings of place identified in this study can inform place marketing strategies and lead to a more inclusive and holistic design of place identity. In other words, it is crucial to take into consideration the place-specific narratives and perceptions of resident craft makers and different groups of visitors as part of acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings at play held by different social groups (Massey, 1991; 1994) in Manchester's Craft and Design Centre. In terms of designing an experiential identity of place, one of the main challenges for place marketing is the consideration of conflicting and shifting narratives and meanings of place (Lichrou *et al*., 2014). However, it is argued that a careful analysis of the spatial stories of various stakeholder groups (Malpas, 2017; Tilley, 1994) is important to fully articulate discursively how places come about.

To sum up, this study invites future work to explore further the experiential identity of specific places in other settings within and beyond the cultural industries and shed light into the experiential fusion of cultural heritage and physical settings, activity spaces and micro-encounters, and diverse meanings and attachments which are associated with a specific place.

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Figure 1: Manchester’s Craft and Design Centre

Table 1: Profile of participants

Pseudonym	**Profile**	**Age**	**Education**	**Number of visits in the C&D Centre**	**Time based in the C&D Centre**
Amanda	Craft Maker	52	Masters level	N/A	17 years
Anna	Craft Maker	46	Bachelors level	N/A	8 years
Alice	Craft Maker	42	Bachelors level	N/A	1 year
Anabel	Craft Maker	34	Bachelors level	N/A	8 years
Beth	Craft Maker	38	Bachelors level	N/A	12 years
Debbie	Craft Maker	38	Bachelors level	N/A	11 years
Jessica	Craft Maker	57	Bachelors level	N/A	1 year
Judy	Craft Maker	32	Bachelors level	N/A	1.5 years
Kate	Craft Maker	59	Bachelors level	N/A	1 year

Liam	Craft Maker	51	Bachelors level	N/A	22 years
Lily	Craft Maker	48	Bachelors level	N/A	24 years
Naomi	Craft Maker	46	Bachelors level	N/A	17 years
Nora	Craft Maker	40	College level	N/A	2 years
Rebecca	Craft Maker	56	Bachelors level	N/A	34 years
Robin	Craft Maker	36	Bachelors level	N/A	7 years
Corinne	Craft Maker	64	Bachelors level	N/A	11 years
Scarlett	Craft Maker	38	Bachelors level	N/A	2.5 years
Alexandra	Visitor	27	Bachelors level	> 50 visits	N/A
Ava	Visitor	61	High School level	> 20 visits	N/A
Daisy	Visitor	18	Student	> 30 visits	N/A

Elisabeth	Visitor	26	Bachelors level	< 10 visits	N/A
Eliza	Visitor	43	Bachelors level	> 50 visits	N/A
Helen	Visitor	37	Masters level	> 100 visits	N/A
George	Visitor	57	Bachelors level	< 10 visits	N/A
Kevin	Visitor	27	Bachelors level	> 100 visits	N/A
Maria	Visitor	27	Bachelors level	> 100 visits	N/A
Nadia	Visitor	26	Bachelors level	> 10 visits	N/A
Noel	Visitor	28	Bachelors level	>10 visits	N/A
Patricia	Visitor	42	Masters level	> 50 visits	N/A
Rhea	Visitor	36	Masters level	> 10 visits	N/A
Richard	Visitor	44	Bachelors level	> 10 visits	N/A
Rita	Visitor	30	Bachelors level	> 20 visits	N/A

Scottie	Visitor	36	Bachelors level	> 50 visits	N/A
Sophie	Visitor	52	Bachelors level	> 50 visits	N/A
Spring	Visitor	44	Bachelors level	> 10 visits	N/A
Nick	Visitor	41	Bachelors level	> 50 visits	N/A
Vicky	Visitor	37	Masters level	> 10 visits	N/A