Framing the geographies of higher education participation: schools, place and national identity

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This paper considers the role of schools, place and national identity in shaping the ways in which young people make sense of the geography of higher education choice in the Welsh context. Drawing on two recent qualitative studies, it illustrates how attachment to nationhood and localities, as well as the internal processes of schools, bear upon the geographical mobility of young people living in Wales. The analyses suggest that this choice making process, and the ways in which young people rationalised these decisions about where to study, varies according to where they lived and which school they attended. The paper illustrates the importance of moving beyond exclusively social-class based analyses of university choice making and embracing the significance of school and place in young people's geographical mobility.

Keywords: *geography of higher education*, *student mobility, schools, place, national identity*

Introduction

Rising rates of participation in higher education (HE) in the UK have been paralleled by an increasing proportion of students studying at their local higher education institutions (HEIs) (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014). This trend has been attributed, in part, to the increase in working-class students in HE who are proportionately more likely to study locally than their more socially advantaged peers (Holdsworth, 2009; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). In explaining these patterns of mobility in relation to HE researchers in the UK (Ball et al, 2002), and indeed internationally (McDonough 1997), have tended to foreground the social and cultural contexts in which young people are situated, and the material, social and cultural resources (or capitals) they draw upon, as explanatory

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influences/factors.

The dominant explanation for the inequalities in student mobility lies in cultural (or social) reproduction theories, namely those associated with the works of Pierre Bourdieu. Researchers working with this framework have shown that, in addition to material constraints which determine young people's geographical mobility from home to university (e.g. the financial costs of travel and student accommodation), psychological constraints also operate in the form of individual 'habitus'. Habitus according to Reay et al (2001) is structured by 'conditions of existence' (Bourdieu, 1990) during childhood socialisation and informs young people's dispositions, orientations, and emotional responses towards HE (Reay et al., 2001; Archer and Hutchings, 2000, Ball et al., 2002). This has a significant bearing on the ways in which young people make choices about HE including their attitude toward locality and leaving home and 'going away' to university (Hinton, 2011; Christie, 2007; Reay et al., 2001). Young people with little in the way of family resources of knowledge and experience of HE to draw upon are more likely to construct the HE arena as something that is 'not for the likes of me' and thus position themselves outside HE (Archer and Hutchings, 2000). Conversely, where the transition to HE is a normative trajectory within a family and where there is a wealth of cultural and social resources, or 'capitals' to draw upon (Ball et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2001), including those that support geographical mobility, young people make largely 'automatic' transitions on to higher education (Reay et al., 2001; Ball et al., 2002) and to geographically distant universities. For many mainly middle-class young people, going away to university is integral to the transition to adulthood and independence (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). Thus, moving out of the family home to live and study away from home is bound up with this journey to adulthood.

While Bourdieu's concept habitus has been used to understand far more than just classed inequalities and identities, including social and spatial dimensions of aspirations (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013) as well as relationships with the built environment (Friedmann, 2002), it is the case that much of the research on HE choice-making relies upon habitus to understand classed differences in the HE choice making process. In contrast to explanations for social inequalities in HE participation and mobility which draw upon Bourdieusian concepts of habitus and capital are explanations based on Rational Choice

Theory (RCT), drawing upon the works of Boudon (1974) and Goldthorpe (1996). According to RCT, a particular educational pathway will be pursued where the calculated gains outweigh the costs. Thus, educational pathways such as HE are experienced as particularly costly or 'risky' (both socially and financially) for some, mainly working class groups which informs their decisions about HE (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005).

Whilst these explanations, drawing upon the concepts of habitus and capital or socially unequally distributed costs and rewards in relation to HE participation, are hugely valuable for highlighting the way in which social, cultural and material contexts come to bear upon student mobilities, little has been said about the way in which young people with similar social and cultural contexts might differ in their HE decision making. While research has explored how place and poverty influences young people's educational aspirations more generally (St Clair et al, 2011), much less has explored the significance of place for HE choices in particular in a way that moves beyond using locality as a proxy measure for social class (Bradley and Miller, 2010). Research on HE choice making has recognised that working-class young people are differentiated by gendered and ethnic identities and inequalities, yet there is a paucity of research exploring how locality, which is similarly middle or working-class in character, and the schools which they attend, bear upon their choices.

Some researchers (Hinton, 2011; Christie, 2007) have begun to illustrate the way in which local attachments, and inter-personal relationships at 'home', inform young people's HE decisions and mobilities. Christie (2007) for example, has illustrated the way in which young people often privilege interpersonal relationships at home over geographical mobility. Hinton (2011) has also demonstrated how loyalties and attachments to specific geographical places are important in young people's decision making. Yet, to date there has been little consideration of how, exactly, local context matters to university choice for young people who are similarly working class but living in different localities. The 'localised' choosing of working-class young people has been readily acknowledged (Holdsworth, 2009, Reay et al, 2001), but explanation for this has largely been viewed through a wholly social class or ethnicity 'lens'.

Indeed, this perhaps can also be said about sociological research in the UK and elsewhere on the influence of schools. Extending Bourdieu's work on habitus, most studies examining the role played by schools in progression to HE have used the concept of 'institutional habitus' to illuminate such processes. Schools are typically represented as embodying the social class composition of their intake, in terms of their cultural orientations and kinds of practices they develop. This concept undoubtedly has been gainfully used to describe and explain the ways in which schools with predominantly socially advantaged intakes often mediate progression to HE and high-status universities through higher expectations, knowledge and support (McDonough, 1997, Pugsley, 1998, Reay et al., 2005). However, whilst school intakes are undoubtedly constraining in a number of ways, this conceptual framework is problematic for a number of reasons, as demonstrated elsewhere (Atkinson 2011, Donnelly, 2014). Most importantly, it is not always necessarily the case that pupil intake and school practices are so 'culturally' intertwined, as assumed by the concept. Indeed, other research has suggested that schools may differ irrespective of their intake in terms of the ways in which they prepare their students for progression to HE (Donnelly 2014a, Oliver and Kettley 2010).

Given the paucity of research which explores how local factors, as well as in-school processes come to bear upon young people's HE choices and subsequent geographical mobility, we felt it appropriate to place these foci at the centre of the paper. We draw on data from two related studies both of which were concerned with exploring the ways in which young people make decisions about university study. One study critically examines the ways in which local contexts inform decision making processes and is referred to as the 'locality' study. The other was particularly concerned with exploring how schools shape this process and is referred to as the 'schools' study. Both studies aimed to move beyond a social class analysis of HE decision making to explore the ways in which young people with similar social, cultural and economic resources but living in different local contexts and attending different schools make decisions about HE. The aims of this paper are, therefore, twofold; to illustrate the significance of nuanced local contexts and school processes in young people's prospective student mobilities, and contribute theoretically to sociological understandings of inequalities in student mobilities.

The 'locality' and 'school' studies: data and methods

Beyond the divergent foci of the two studies drawn upon here, both were comparable in a number of key ways; methodologically, both studies employed purposive sampling techniques that would foreground the significance of local contexts and school processes in young people's HE decisions and prospective mobilities. Thus, the 'locality' study selected two similarly post-industrial and relatively socio-economically disadvantaged localities as the focus of the inquiry, while the 'schools' study selected two case study schools with similarly advantaged intakes, based in the same locality, but with differing patterns of progression to HE. By purposively sampling in this way, we were able to explore the significance of locality and school in young people's university choice in a way that went beyond viewing places or schools as proxy measures for social class. In addition to this common sampling technique, both studies were carried out in South Wales and young people aged 16-18 were the focus of the inquiry.

Located in Wales, the study offers a unique insight into the ways in which HE choice making is geographically nuanced. Wales has a relatively small population yet its economic, social and demographic landscape are far from homogenous; the rural and relatively isolated parts of mid-Wales including parts of the South Wales Valleys where about a quarter of the young people discussed in this paper lived are vastly difference from the urbanised cities in the South, where the rest of our young people lived. Different parts of Wales manifest historic variations in national identities, culture, Welsh language use and political preferences (Balsom, 1985); in some parts of Wales inhabitants evoke powerful Welsh identities and national loyalties which are all but absent amongst residents in other parts. These differences, as we shall see, play out in the University choices of young people living in these places.

The fieldwork for the 'locality' study was conducted during the academic year of 2010/2011. This study involved qualitative interviews with 57 young people aged 16-18 who live in two distinct geographical locations in South Wales. Each locality shared some key characteristics whilst having district and distinguishing features. One of these locations is a semi-urban area situated in South Wales; Newport, the other was situated in

the South Wales valleys, the Rhondda Valleys. These places are located less than 30 miles apart and both can be described as typically working class in character, both having industrial heritages associated with manual forms of labour. Today, both suffer higher than national average level indicators of socio-economic disadvantage. Yet each place has its distinct characteristics; the Rhondda Valley is relatively geographically isolated compared to Newport and its residents are more likely to hold a strongly Welsh national identity (in 2013, 84 per cent of inhabitants of Rhondda Cynon Taf identified themselves as 'Welsh' compared to 63 per cent of those of Newport (StatsWales, 2013)). In Newport, a British-Welsh identity is stronger, influenced by its geographical proximity to England, its extensive transport connections with England and its influx of international migrants over the centuries. As will be shown, these differences in the senses of national identity held by inhabitants of these contrasting areas, and variations in the character of the local social landscapes of these localities, have implications for young people's relationships with their 'homes' and in turn their university choices.

In the 'locality' study, all student interviewees were in post-16 education and attended English-medium comprehensive school 6th forms, 26 of the young people involved in this study attended a school in Newport, and 31 in the Rhondda Valley. Young people from both locations overwhelmingly came from 'non-traditional' backgrounds; many being the first in their family to expect to progress to HE. Young people from the Rhondda Valley were all white, born in Wales and spoke English as their first language. While the majority were working-class, there were a small number (six out of 31) within the sample who could be described as middle-class having parents with professional or managerial occupations. Of these six, four had at least one parent with a higher education, of which, two had a parent who had experienced HE as a mature student.

 In our Newport sample, the majority of young people also came from working-class homes, only four students had parents with professional or managerial jobs. Of the four students from Newport who would be described as 'middle-class,' one had parents with experience of HE and another one had one parent with experience of HE as a mature student. Compared to students from the Rhondda, those from Newport were much more ethnically diverse. Eight students in the Newport sample were from ethnic minority backgrounds or mixed heritage backgrounds, seven of these speaking additional

languages to English; usually Bengali. Two female students spoke English as a second language and were born outside Wales, one in India and the other Pakistan. The differences in the schools' ethnic make-up reflected those of Newport and the Rhondda at large.

The data from the 'school' study discussed in this paper comes from a wider study which examined school influence on HE choices in a wider sense, including overall entry to university as well as progression to research-intensive universities, the findings of which have been published elsewhere (Donnelly 2014a, Donnelly, 2014b). Young people's anticipated mobility in relation to going to university emerged as a significant theme from this research, and it is this element of the original study that we turn our attention to in this paper. The study adopted a mixed methods approach, drawing on quantitative analysis of administrative data-sets from which case study schools were selected for further in-depth, qualitative research. The administrative data-sets drawn upon here, for the 2008 HE cohort, included HE destinations data and Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) take-up rates as a proxy measure for the intake characteristics of schools. Although EMA does not have equivalence to Free School Meals (FSM) in terms of its higher threshold, it offers a much better proxy for the composition of a school's sixth form, given that it only relates to those studying in the sixth form, not the entire school. This guards against situations where schools may have a large influx of pupils into their sixth form, possibly making its social composition unlike the rest of the school. Whilst the original study examined patterns in progression to HE, these data-sets have been used for the purposes of this paper to explore the relationship between school intake and patterns of student mobility.

To explore the importance of school processes, two case study schools from the 'schools' study are drawn upon here, selected on the basis of their similar intakes but differing patterns in student mobility. These schools, 'Maple Grove' and 'Oakville', both large English medium 11-18 comprehensives, had similarly advantaged intakes and were based in the same urban locality of South Wales. Whilst they were originally selected owing to their differing rates of progression to HE, it was also evident that they differed in their patterns of student mobility. Qualitative research in these schools sought to explore what might account for these differences by examining their practices and processes. The

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fieldwork took place from Spring 2009 until Summer 2010, drawing on ethnographic methods, including observation, interviews, and the collection of documents and artefacts. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with ten students (aged 17/18) and around four to five members of staff, including those with leadership roles such as heads of year groups, at both schools. The young people interviewed were all studying 'A-level' courses, with predicted grades making them eligible to progress to university. Routine aspects of school life were observed including assemblies, tutorial periods, HE preparation activities and presentations by universities. Issues around mobility were apparent from several of the interviews with staff and some of the observations of key school events, and it is these data which are mostly drawn upon in this paper.

In the localities study the original place names have been preserved (Newport and the Rhondda Valley). These places are sufficiently large that individual schools and students should not be identifiable. In all other respects, pseudonyms are used across both studies throughout this paper to protect the anonymity of schools, students and teachers.

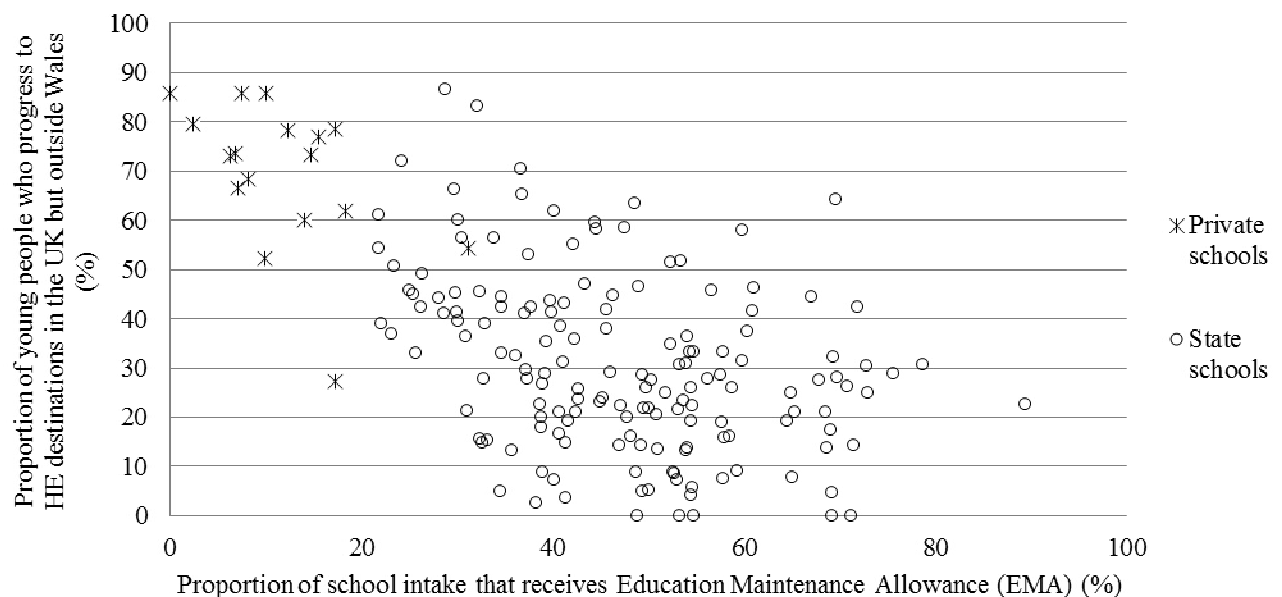**Framing student mobilities: social class, schools and places**

The two studies drawn upon here commonly found strong links between social class and the prospective HE (im)mobility of the young people we spoke to, as others have similarly found (Reay et al 2001; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). In the 'localities' study, young people from both the Rhondda and Newport overwhelmingly emphasised a preference for studying at a university in Wales and staying 'close to home'. Reflecting on his reasons for choosing a 'local' university, Callum from our school in the Rhondda said:

> Well it's only Ponty [Pontypridd], and I wouldn't be allowed to live there because I live too close so, and it's easier anyway, it's like cheaper If I stayed with my parents because they're offering me support that's all (Callum, Rhondda)

From both studies, young people from the least advantaged backgrounds tended not to consider HE destinations far afield from home. In contrast, moving away from home to

study at a geographically distant university was often an assumed and expected decision for their more advantaged peers, illuminating the intra-class fractions within this group. This group of largely first generation HE students were not homogenous in their access to economic and cultural resources; these differences were played out in their mobility decisions in relation to HE. Indeed, the quantitative element of the 'schools' study lends support for the notion that the social positioning of young people can have a strong bearing on the geography of their HE decision making. A cursory re-analysis of the administrative data-sets from the original study revealed a negative relationship between the intake characteristics of schools (EMA is used as a proxy measure here) and the proportion of their intake who progressed to universities outside of Wales (figure 1). Whilst this analysis does not take into account *intra*-national mobility within Wales, it does capture the potential significance of national identity as a factor in young people's mobility choices. High rates of student mobility were particularly prevalent in the private schools, in contrast with a number of state schools that had no students move out of Wales.

Figure 1 School-level analysis of Education Maintenance Allowance take-up and proportion of young people progressing to universities outside Wales (2008 HE cohort)

The financial cost of mobility, in terms of living away from home, is likely to be an important factor shaping these mobility patterns here. Indeed the young people from the Rhondda and Newport were making HE choices at a time when the funding of HE in the UK was undergoing considerable change. In 2010 the UK Westminster Government proposed substantial tuition fee increases, from an average of £3,000 to a maximum £9,000 pounds a year. At the time the Rhondda and Newport students were making their HE choices, the decision had not yet been made with respect to the funding of Welsh universities, while in England tuition fees had been hiked to up to £9,000 a year. Since 2012/13 the Welsh Government HE student funding arrangements havemeant that Welsh students now pay the same tuition fees wherever they decide to study in the UK. This has, however, not always been the case and the uncertainty over the funding of HE in 2010, at a time when these young people were making choices, clearly operated as an incentive for our Rhondda and Newport students to study in Wales.,

Notwithstanding these important structural influences on student mobilities, this analysis also reveals that structural factors might not fully account for mobility patterns of Welsh students. Figure 1 also shows significant variations between schools with similar intakes in terms of the movement of their students to universities outside of Wales. An array of factors could go some way in accounting for these school-level disparities which may not be related to the social class of their intake. It might be that ethnicity, attainment, and the availability of local HE provision could go some way to accounting for the differences. Through drawing on our two studies, we hope to show how the schools themselves, as well as the localities within which they are situated, might go some way in explaining these patterns. Before exploring the importance of place, we explore the ways in which schools themselves can frame the geography of HE choice through their everyday practices and processes.

School processes

Past research exploring the role played by schools in the university choice process have understood its influence as being shaped by the social composition of its intake (Pugsley 1998, Reay et al. 2005). However, conceiving the school as a mediator of the social class consciousness of its intake can obfuscate the differences between schools that may exist

independent of their intake. In the same way that localities are nuanced and differentiated, schools can also differ in their everyday practices and processes independent of intake, which may be important in shaping young people's HE and other choices.

In order to explore how internal aspects of the schools themselves might explain some of the patterns in student mobility, two of the case study schools ('Maple Grove' and 'Oakville') from the 'schools' study are drawn upon here. These 'paired' schools were based in the same locality and had similar intakes, both having similarly low levels of their young people in receipt of an EMA grant. However, the quantitative analysis presented above revealed that there was a ten percentage point difference between them in the outward mobility of their students, with Maple Grove having a greater proportion of young people opting for HE destinations outside of Wales. Whilst this does not represent some of the largest differences between schools with similar intakes as identified in figure 1, it is nonetheless significant and worthy of further investigation.

In exploring what may account for these patterns in student mobility, Bernstein's (1975) theoretical ideas around educational transmissions, and in particular his concept of framing, is used here to elucidate the implicit messages carried by their everyday practices and processes. The concept of frame refers to 'the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organization, pacing and timing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship' (Bernstein 1975, p. 89). Boundary strength is critical in Bernstein's thinking, in terms of how this can structure pedagogic interactions. The strength of framing determines the range of options presented, and is evident from the selection, ordering and arrangement of content. Strongly framed messages could reduce the range of options open to young people, through the selection of a geographically narrow range of universities, for example. In other contexts, weaker framing might open up a wider range of options through the selection of a geographically broader choice of universities. Various aspects of the school setting can frame geographical mobility in particular ways, including the social dimensions of school life, the use of space and time, routine practices and processes, texts and visual artefacts. Framing provides a precise analytic tool to examine in detail these in-school properties, in order to uncover the implicit messages they may carry.

Using this framework of analysis, some of the key events, activities and teacher-student interactions at Maple Grove and Oakville will be explored here, paying attention to the kinds of messages these carried about the HE landscape.

Events and activities

The events and activities commonly held in schools that are aimed at preparing young people for their progression to university can often present the geography of HE in particular ways. Some events can strongly frame the geography of the HE landscape, which could mean the range of choices presented to young people are limited to a small range of local institutions. Other events may weakly frame the geography of HE choices, making visible a much broader range of geographically dispersed and distant universities. Maple Grove, which had a higher proportion of its students move away from Wales, presented the HE landscape in geographically broad terms, sending out messages to its students that they should be mobile when making university choices (at least nationally mobile within the UK). This was evident from the universities which the school selected to take students on trips to visit.

> …I've taken students to Aberystwyth, the Universities of Manchester, Liverpool, Exeter, and stayed overnight at all these places, we have stayed in youth hostels or university accommodation in the city, you know we have a wander around and have a pizza… (Head of year 12, Maple Grove)

The majority of universities the Head of year 12 took students to visit were based outside of Wales, sending out implicit messages about the value of geographical mobility in choosing a university. Another event at Maple Grove which sent out these kinds of messages took place during one of their days that were designated for HE preparation. Ten former pupils, who had progressed to university and were approaching the end of their first year of study, were invited back to school to talk about their experiences at university. During the activity, former pupils gave separate talks which current pupils could select and choice which ones they wanted to hear.

Table 1: Destinations of former pupils invited back to Maple Grove (as listed by the school)

University	Course
Imperial College London	Earth Sciences
Loughborough University	Sports Science
Cardiff University	Biology
University of Bath	Accounting & Finance
University of Birmingham	Medicine
University of Warwick	English/Creative Writing
Liverpool John Moores University	Primary Education Teaching and French
University of Exeter	Geography
Cardiff University	Law
Glasgow University	Psychology, Philosophy and Geography

This event carried implicit but nonetheless powerful messages about mobility and HE choice, evident from the selection of former students. The former students who were selected by the school mostly attend universities further afield, with only two students attending a university in Wales (as shown in table 1). The presence of only two students who attended universities in Wales could reflect the fact that only one Russell Group exists in Wales (Cardiff University) which restricts the school's choice of former students if it is only interested in selecting those from research-intensive institutions. However, universities were included from just about every region of the UK, with only international universities excluded. This sends out powerful messages about the value attached to geographical mobility in relation to HE participation, suggesting that students should not restrict their choices of universities to those located in narrow geographical boundaries from their homes and that universities all over the UK should be considered. Despite this, a significant proportion of students from the school choose Welsh HEIs, with 40% of the cohort who progressed to university in 2008 doing so. Of course, in another sense, with the exclusion of international HE transitions, it could be argued that weak framing is only evident in the context of UK-based HE provision.

The former students spent time talking to pupils at their old school about their HE choices and experiences at university so far. Having been geographically mobile themselves, these students often made explicit what they perceived to be the value of progressing to a new locale for their HE study.

> Living in London is great, I can't imagine going to university anywhere else because there is so much to do… all the other little universities get excited about their one little street with their bars and shops on it, whereas we are like, look we have got an entire city with bars and shops everywhere! (Jessica, Maple Grove)

This kind of narrative reflects the desires and aspirations of many middle class families for whom leaving home is often characterised as an accepted and valued part of their transition to HE and adulthood (Allatt 1993).

In contrast, at Oakville, which had a comparatively lower proportion of students leave Wales for their HE studies than those from Maple Grove, it was representatives from local universities that would come to give talks to students in events organised by the school during their preparation for HE entry. This was with the exception of a talk by the University of Cambridge, which a small group of students attended. However, for the majority of students, there were no other events or activities held in school where universities beyond the local area appeared. Unlike Maple Grove, universities further afield (in the UK at least) were 'absent' from events or activities relating to HE at Oakville. At the beginning of year 12, students attended a day of activities at a local post-1992 university, aimed at introducing them to sixth form life and thinking about HE study beyond. Further talks, later on in the year, and also at the beginning of year 13, were held by representatives from the same institution. These talks covered not only aspects relating to making HE choices and completing applications, but also wider issues such as student life including finance. Whilst this choice of 'local' HEIs perhaps arose out of pragmatic necessity, at the same time it presented the HE landscape in a geographically limited way.

This is not to say that the young people attending Oakville did not visit universities further afield themselves, indeed many of the young people I spoke to spent a great deal of time in the summer term doing this. Oakville allowed students to take time off in order to attend university 'open days', however this was weakly framed, giving students the freedom to frame the geography of the HE landscape in their own terms. Unlike Maple Grove, which strongly framed choice making by selecting geographically distant universities for young people to visit, the weak framing evident at Oakville gave the

young people themselves a greater degree of control in considering *where* they might like to study in the UK (and beyond).

Teacher-pupil interactions

A further important aspect of everyday school life to consider here are the daily and routine interactions that take place between teachers and pupils. These interactions can also vary in terms of the extent to which they broaden or narrow the geography of HE choice. At Maple Grove, it was evident that the Head of year 12 presented a geographically broader view of HE, making explicit the importance of being mobile when making HE choices, evident from the universities he mentioned in conversations with students.

> I have had in the past parents who have said to me 'why are you encouraging my child to go to Durham, you know it's a long way away?' and I'll say I didn't say for them to go I said don't be afraid of going to Durham because it's a long way away, you know because anywhere is only a day away. (Head of year 12, Maple Grove)

Messages of this kind might be instilling the same kinds of values and dispositions that are often common within middle class families in relation to their educational and life trajectories (Allatt 1993). However, it is also clear that in some cases this message about the importance of mobility created a conflict between the home and school. It could be that strong ties to the home and community (as illustrated in the next section) may make it difficult for some families to accept the kinds of geographical mobility transmitted by the school.

In the same way that families can shape the way young people understand and make sense of their HE choices, schools can also vary in the kinds of messages they send out from their everyday practices and processes. Some schools, like Maple Grove, send out messages presenting a wider range of geographically dispersed and distant universities. It has been shown here how other schools, like Oakville might present the HE landscape in geographically narrower terms. These messages could shape the way young people

consider their HE options, and have a bearing on their choices, which might go some way in accounting for Maple Grove's higher rates of student mobility relative to schools with similar intakes, including Oakville. The geographical framing of HE choices by schools could also be important in explaining other, larger, quantitative disparities between schools with similar intakes.

Welsh National identity and local attachments

So far we have discussed the ways in which in-school processes might explain differing patterns of mobility of young people from similar social class backgrounds. As will be shown below, the overwhelming preferences for Welsh and local universities expressed by the young people in our 'localities' study were not simply informed by classed but also spatialised processes (Mannay, 2013), including their relationships with their home localities, regional and national identities and attachments (Pugsley, 1998), as well as individual agency. Since schools are situated in local contexts, the differences in mobilities documented in Figure 1 might also be explained by these local nuances and their bearing upon young people's relationships with their 'home' localities.

Whilst young people from both the Rhondda and Newport overwhelmingly expressed a preference for remaining within Wales, and expressed a preference to study locally, the explanations for doing so were subtly different, reflecting nuances in young people's relationships with their immediate home localities and communities and the wider geographical space, their nation. Compared to students from Newport, those from the Rhondda more readily explained their preference to study in Wales and 'close to home' in relation to a sense of attachment to Wales in general and the immediate physical locality of their home in particular. Moreover, this sense of attachment, loyalty and belonging to both immediate locality and nation was expressed more intensely by students from the Rhondda.

> I do think that I would feel more comfortable in Cardiff [University], I know that you'd have all walks of society in each university but I think it is kind of on my territory sort of thing and Bristol I'm new to that so yeah. (Dylan, Rhondda)

Dylan's preference to stay in Wales and to study at Cardiff reveals his sense of attachment and loyalty to Wales which he appeared reluctant to sever. Pugsley (1998) found that the preference for 'keeping-close' was overwhelmingly held by her working-class participants. However, this desire to 'keep close' seemed to extend to some young people in our study who were more economically and socially advantaged, as illustrated by Dylan who was one of the minority of middle-class young people in our study who lived in the Rhondda. It must be noted of course that choosing Cardiff University enabled Dylan to fulfil this preference to study 'close to home' whilst simultaneously accessing a high status, Russell Group university. Nonetheless, we can see how local attachment might in part explain differences in patterns of mobility between schools located in different places documented in Figure 1. Like Dylan, others from the Rhondda also held strong feelings of attachment and loyalty to their locality reflecting a strong regional Valley's Welsh identity:

> Interviewer: So you've listed all Welsh universities, what makes you want to go to a Welsh university?
>
> A Welsh heritage. I wouldn't want to go further abroad, well I say abroad, England, just to stay close to the community, to stay close to where you're from. (Hywel, Rhondda)
>
> Yeah I think Wales is a little bit of a sense of home in Wales isn't it, whereas England, you'd probably realise, then it'll kick in that you're not at home. (Vicky, Rhondda)

These young people's relationships with the places they call 'home' appeared to bear upon their university choices, endorsing Hinton's (2011) contention that for many young people the nation often represents 'home' because it is a familiar and comforting place leading to a preference to stay within its borders. For young people from the Rhondda in particular, choices were made which enabled them to be geographically mobile while maintaining a sense of being at 'home' (i.e. moving out of the family home, and thus

gaining a degree of personal independence from their parents, while studying within Wales) through moving in new but familiar spaces (Hinton 2011).

The relative absence of this sense of attachment to Wales as explanation for studying in Wales in the narratives of students from Newport as compared to those from the Rhondda may also reflect the different kinds of Welsh national identity claimed by our young people from either location. The majority of those from the Rhondda identified themselves as 'Welsh' or 'Welsh-British' (23 out of 31), the remaining eight out of 31 students identified themselves as 'British.' In comparison, less than half of those from Newport identified themselves as 'Welsh' or 'Welsh-British'. These differences in national identity map on to Balsom's (1985) 'Three-Wales' model in which he identified three distinct socio-linguistic and cultural identities relating to different geographical areas of Wales. Balsom (1985) called the area of South Wales which encompasses the South Wales Valleys, the Rhondda included, 'Welsh Wales', or 'Valleys Welsh' (Roberts 1994) reflecting a strong sense of 'Welsh', and in particular, 'Valleys Welsh' identity claimed by local, largely English speaking inhabitants. Osmond, (2002) has argued that these inhabitants largely see themselves as sharing a collective experience of the recent industrial past and a common cultural heritage. In contrast, the Welsh border areas with England and coastal regions of South West Wales, Balsom (1985) argued, are characterised by a 'British-Welsh identity'. This 'British-Welsh' identity which characterises the type of 'Welsh' identity claimed by inhabitants of Newport is said to be the product of Newport's industrial heritage and the influx of immigrants from England, Ireland and Asia and, more recently, Europe drawn to Newport's docks and steel works and the employment opportunities that have since developed in the area. Its physical proximity to, and extensive communication and transports links with England, as well as the dominance of broadcasting from England has resulted in Newport's local and national identity, its accent and dialect, being more anglicised than that of the Rhondda Valleys (Osmond, 2002).

Reflecting this, our students from Newport were less likely to claim a purely Welsh identity than those from the 'Welsh Wales' Rhondda. In turn, young people from Newport tended not to qualify their preferences for Welsh universities in terms of a

sense of attachment and loyalty to Wales as those from the Rhondda had done. When asked why she had chosen a Welsh university as her first choice, Alice replied:

> Not for the fact that it's Welsh, but I think if I decided that I was gonna move out and everything it would just be costs again cos the English ones are so expensive and that! (Alice, Newport)

We can see here, Alice's preferences (like those of many others in Newport) for Welsh universities is much more strongly informed by economic pragmatism than a sense of loyalty and attachment to Wales, a prominent narrative within Valley students' explanations for their preferences for Welsh universities. In contrast,the strong sense of 'Valleys Welsh' identity claimed by young people from the Rhondda seemed to be projected into their university choices through the way it created a sense of attachment not only to their nation but also an identification and belonging to the geographical area of the Valleys and its accent and culture.

> I dunno, I think, I think the English accents might annoy me if I was surrounded by them all the time. (Vicky, Rhondda)

Reflecting the relational nature of identity (Woodward, 2002), Vicky marks out her difference through direct opposition with others (the English) through reference to the English accent. This construction of her Welsh identity, and her sense of difference from the English, is evidently significant in her choices of universities which were all located in Wales.

For students from the Rhondda it was not only towards their nation that they expressed a sense of loyalty and belonging towards, but also their immediate locality, the Valleys. The character of the social landscape and the 'sense of community' they felt existed in the Valley appeared to form the basis of their intense sense of attachment and loyalty which in turn played an important role in their university choices.

> I think it's just cos I've grown up here like all my life and it's just, like it's so comforting to know, like well everyone, like you know everyone in this part

> of the Rhondda Valley, like somebody knows me through a different something or another, it would be a nice thought just to stay here with everybody like. (Ruth, Rhondda)

Relph (1976) has argued that the sense of knowing and being known in a place is particularly important for underpinning a strong sense of attachment to a place, and indeed, as Ruth's excerpt suggests, the social landscape of the Valley was a source of attachment and belonging. Whilst perhaps more apparent than real, students from the Rhondda frequently alluded to the notion that 'everybody knows everybody' which for some students was a source of fondness and attachment to the Valley.

> I think it's like really pretty where we live, um just like you can walk down the street and you know most of the people, um, I dunno it's just… I think it's still got that miners sort of community sort of everybody knows each other. (Fay, Rhondda).

These emotionally loaded relationships seemed to have particularly important bearing on Rhondda student's university choices. In understanding this sense of attachment, associated with the social landscape, we might turn to consider the Valley's industrial heritage and the imprint it has left on the social landscape of the Valley today. A number of historical community studies (not least Jackson, 1968; Young and Willmott, 1957) have described the way in which the economic landscape of a locality underpins the formation of its social landscape. Jackson's (1968) seminal study of working-class communities in England in the 1960s, for example, documented how the economic landscape of a locality shapes the social character of a community. According to Jackson (1968), the division of labour, combined with the lack of variation in wages amongst families in working-class communities, their common working experiences, (often physically sharing working conditions, such as working in the mill or down the pit) and the shared and repeated experience of poverty and hardship throughout the life time bind members of a 'working-class' community together. The necessity for support and trust, born out the mutual experiences of hardship and poverty within these communities, fostered the growth of co-ops, unions and societies and other group activities and 'life-styles' which bind members of the community together.

Historically, the economic landscape of the Rhondda bore close resemblances to those described in Northern England by Jackson (1968), and its legacy clearly has left an enduring imprint on the contemporary social landscape, creating close-knit communities which foster a strong sense of attachment and fondness towards the locality. Distinguishing characteristics (for example a 'Wenglish' valley's accent, culture and values) highly geographically specific to the South Wales Valleys further compound the sense of belonging and difference (Woodward, 2002), which, as we have seen are powerfully evoked in some young people's constructions of their national identities. Together, these 'qualities' appeared to foster a very strong sense of attachment which acted, if not as a social 'cement' then certainly as a 'pull' towards remaining 'close to home' while at university. In essence, a local 'sense of place' (McDowell, 2003) forges a local 'structure of feeling' (McDowell, 2003) impacting young people's identities and sense of attachment not only to Wales in general but to the Valleys, and its accent and culture, and therefore certain Universities in Wales in particular.

The data discussed here suggests that whilst structural factors experienced by young people from both locations informed their anticipated mobility in relation to HE, there were nuances within their explanations for choosing Welsh and 'local' universities. These nuances reflected the peculiarities and specificities of the places they lived in. Self-exclusion from geographically distant universities is not simply a classed process whereby limited social, cultural and education resources (Reay et al., 2001; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) render geographically distant universities infeasible for many working-class young people. This process of self-exclusion has a *placed* dimension. For non-traditional students from the Rhondda, in particular, attending a local and, most importantly, a Welsh university promised not only continuing contact with friends and kin, but maintenance of national and local identities, smoothing transition. Evidently, the geographical location in which young people lived bore upon the decision making *process*. It cultivated dispositions and attitudes, affective relationships with 'home' and a sense of belonging to the wider nation which operated as a 'pull' towards staying in Wales and studying 'locally', which could help explain some of the broader patterns in Welsh student (im)mobility.

Discussion and conclusions

Against a backdrop of research highlighting the importance of social class in shaping young people's HE choices (Reay et al., 2001; Ball et al., 2002; Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005), we have attempted to show here how locality and school attended may also have some bearing on mobility in relation to HE participation. Even after controlling for social class, local attachments and national/local identities underpinned the explanations young people gave for their choices, and these in combination with the ways in which schools present the geography of HE choice, could shape young people's decision making. By examining the decision making of young people from similar social backgrounds, who are living in different localities, or attending different schools, these impacts become much clearer. The 'locality' study showed that attachment and a sense of belonging with Wales and their particular locality was more important for some young people than others, irrespective of social class. Similarly, the 'schools' study identified differences between schools in their flows of students out of Wales, even after attempting to hold social class constant, which might be explained to some extent by differences in their internal practices and processes.

Through this exploration of the spatial and institutional contexts within which young people's choices are situated, we have also highlighted some of the ways in which the social class lens of analysis can be limiting. Whilst the social, cultural and economic capitals upon which young people draw act as powerful forces, they are not the only sphere of influence within which young people rationalise and make sense of their HE choices. A wider theoretical lens is needed to capture the diverse contexts and frames of reference within which young people are operating. Our findings suggest that it is important to situate young people within their national and local spatial contexts and understand the significance of these without making necessarily class-based value judgements. It is important to explore the nature of national and local connections and their significance for young people irrespective of their social class position. In our 'localities' study, our prospective HE student's university choices were qualified by different explanations, which reflect differences in local attachments. Given this, we might speculate that young people who experience similar structural constraints and

opportunities but who are situated in different localities in England and Wales (and elsewhere) which vary in the extent to which they foster strong local attachments, might translate into very different patterns of mobility in relation to university study. Bourdieu's concept of habitus seems therefore to be inadequate in its capacity to explain this because it does not capture the non-classed elements of space, which carry meaning for the middle and working classes alike. Adopting (only) a Bourdieusian frame of reference in this sense can be limiting for our understanding of how national identity and locality come to bear in the decision making process for young people.

Similarly, our findings would also suggest that it is important to move beyond a purely class based analysis when examining the impact of schools on young people's decision making. Schools may not always embody the social class consciousness of their intake, and are not necessarily constrained in the kinds of practices and processes they develop (or do not develop). In this sense, the concept of institutional habitus can in some ways inhibit our understandings of institutional practices and processes by glossing over some of the nuances between schools in the kinds of messages they send out from their everyday practices and processes. In contrast, Bernstein's (1975) concept of framing can be a powerful concept in elucidating the underlying structures of power and control within institutional settings. It shines a light on the internal mechanisms of schooling, and the messages that everyday aspects of school life can carry. By starting from the institution, rather than the family, it offers a more in-depth and critical look at institutional properties. These everyday aspects of school life, illuminated through the concept of framing, can be powerful in shaping the way young people conceive of the geography of the HE landscape, having an influence on their patterns in movement. Through adopting this theoretical framework, it is possible to see how young people may be shaped and influenced, perhaps unconsciously, in differing ways by the school they attend. It offers a valuable approach to the study of institutions, which may be applied at a variety of levels, to explore a range of issues and topics.

These findings have important implications at the level of policy and practice, particularly in terms of the availability and provision of universities across different contexts, as well as the nature of advice and guidance in schools. If attachments to place, nations, and localities is important, then the spatial distribution of universities across the UK (and elsewhere), including those most research-intensive, matters in terms of access

to HE opportunities. It could be that more local HE provision might go some way in alleviating inequalities in participation, providing opportunities for participation for those from whom moving away from home to study is materially (and psychologically) difficult to bear.   In terms of school practices, whilst there is an increasing emphasis on improving advice and guidance in relation to HE generally, these findings suggest a more detailed look at the nature of this school support, particularly the kinds of messages schools can send out about the geography of HE participation.

The impact of locality and schools on young people's mobility in making their HE choices is important on a number of levels, not least in terms of social mobility. The concentration of graduate employment opportunities in particular regions means that it is important for graduates to be mobile if they are to access these positions (Hoare and Corver, 2010). Indeed, whilst the picture is complex nationally and over time, there is a close relationship between mobility and graduate earnings (Kidd, O'Leary and Sloanem, 2014). There is also a close association between those who are geographically mobile for their degree level studies and those who are mobile for their graduate employment (Hoare and Corver, 2010). Therefore, geographical mobility is to some extent linked to social mobility. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding about the mediating influences on mobility, and consequently its possible impact on social mobility, we need to widen our scope beyond social class to include other possible mediating factors. The geographical and institutional spaces in which young people inhabit, and are shaped by, need also to be included. Consideration might also be usefully paid to other physical, societal, and embodied spaces that may act as powerful influences on HE choices irrespective of social class. These might include aspects relating to young people's religion, sexuality, language, and romantic relationships. Notwithstanding the importance of social class, a broader view of the individual and the spaces in which they inhabit might yield some fruitful findings.

Acknowledgements

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