

# CAREER DECISION MAKING IN ISLAND COMMUNITIES:

Applying the concept of the Aquapelago to the Shetland and Orkney Islands

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## Abstract

Geographical location plays an important part in the career decision making of young adults, both in terms of the economic opportunities provided by the local labour market, and in terms of framing the social and cultural context within which decisions are made. Despite employment and migration being key concerns within island settings, little research has been done into the role of island contexts within career decision making of young islanders. In order to conceptualise the role of island contexts, this paper explores the potential of the concept of the aquapelago – identifying how the notion of the aquapelago brings together three key aspects of island contexts: labour markets, migrations and cultural background. The paper concludes that the concept provides a useful reframing of island contexts, but suggests that a greater awareness of diversity between different island aquapelagos and different inhabitants within these aquapelagos may be necessary.

## Key words:

Orkney, Shetland, aquapelago, careers, migration

## Introduction

In island communities issues of employment and migration are often acutely foregrounded. As many commentators have pointed out islands are characterised by 'truncated' labour markets which offer limited opportunities to islanders, resulting in often high levels of outmigration to mainland communities for better employment and career prospects (Connell and King, 1999; King, 2009; Royle, 2010). At the same time in-migration from 'lifestyle migrants' who are often older and of independent means, is on the increase in many communities (Connell and King, 1999; King, 2009). The risks to islands in terms of decreasing populations, or ageing populations is widely discussed (Royle, 2001). Although research has typically shown that 'career progression' is a key motivator of outmigration in island communities (Hall Aitken, 2009), the actual *dynamics* of career and migration choices has not been widely researched. This is a significant gap in the literature, because understanding how and why people make the choices they do, who chooses to move and why and who stays and why, may offer an insight

into the processes of choice, and therefore offer potential for developing more effective initiatives for encouraging island population sustainability in the future. In order to address some of these issues this paper will start by identifying the role of context, and more specifically island contexts in the process of career decision making. The concept of the aquapelago will then be introduced as a way of conceptualising island contexts. Finally through discussion of a case study the way the concept can be applied in practice will be demonstrated.

### Career decision making in island contexts

Context has always been understood as important in career decision making. Traditionally theories of careers, such as those developed by Parsons and Holland, are based on person-environment fit models, whereby an individual's skills, values and interests are assessed and 'matched' to available occupations (Kidd, 2006). In these models, being able to objectively assess and categorise the labour market and different occupations within it is a key component of successful career decision making. Although recognising career decision making as an interplay between individuals and contexts, subsequently person-environment fit models have been challenged for not addressing the *process* of occupational choice, and for a lack of focus on the role of social and cultural influences on decision making. Considering the role of social and cultural influences in particular raises issues of specific geographic and cultural locations.

A particularly important approach is offered by Roberts who argued that for many young people occupational choice is not so much a matter of personal choice, arguing that "young people's opportunities are governed primarily by the interrelationships between their home backgrounds, educational attainments, *local* job opportunities and employers' recruitment practices" (Roberts, 1997: 345 - italics added). Here, we can see how the immediate environment of a young person, including the education system in the place they live, parental influences and the opportunities in their local labour market impact on the pathways of individuals. From Roberts' perspective the role of local labour markets on decision-making will be different according to social and cultural background of the individual. His approach has some similarities to sociological studies that have shown, for example, how "working class kids get working class jobs" (Willis, 1977) or how academic achievers "learn to leave" rural communities (Corbett, 2007). From these perspectives the local labour market has the greatest impact on working class young people, whose post-school careers depend on what is available locally so that "there is near indifference to the particular kind of work finally chosen" (Willis, 1977: 133), with high achievers being seen as more mobile and accessing larger, national or international labour markets.

While Roberts' structuralist perspective offers little room for the role of individual decision-making, a compromise position is offered by Hodkinson and his notion of careership (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 1998). Hodkinson uses Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus' to develop a 'third position' between notions of social determinism and free choice. In Bourdieu's theory, cultural fields are the contexts that we live in and that produce attitudes and values. The partly unconscious acceptance of these values by individuals is termed 'the habitus'. However, the relationship between an individual and the 'habitus' is reflexive, meaning that individuals retain an element of personal choice about how they mobilise different perspectives, values or positions.

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Habitus provides: “a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks” (Bourdieu, 1977, cited in Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997: 33). From this perspective place will have an influence on career choice not just in terms of local labour markets, but may also influence wider values or attitudes – the island ‘habitus’ – that will inform individual decisions.

In terms of how decisions are made, Hodkinson’s theory challenges the notion of rational decision making, identifying that although decisions are always logical from the perspective of the young person, they are not ‘rational’ in the way policy makers would like to think. Instead the choices people make are always based on partial information, and are pragmatic, not systematic: “decision-making was context-related and could not be separated from the family background, culture and life histories of the pupils” (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997: 33). This is important when it comes to considering geographic migrations, because rather than being a logically rational choice between the opportunities in the labour market ‘here’ and opportunities ‘there’, decisions will always be informed by the contextual location of the young person. Indeed, Halfacree and Boyle challenge notions of rational decision making with regard to migration decisions in their ‘biographical approach’ to migration (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993). They point out that traditionally, migration theory has been based on a “positivistic behaviourist conceptualisation of migration... from [which], ‘migration’ was to be regarded solely as an empirical event; a largely preordained ‘response’ to the ‘stimulus’ of the potential for a higher ‘income’ at some other residential location” (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993: 334). However, they note that in reality, migration decisions are not normally quite so straightforward, instead being based on multiple factors, involving personal and lifestyle factors as well as economic factors. They also draw on the work of Bourdieu and habitus to identify how migration decisions are situated within a particular context and are influenced by social and cultural factors, and yet remain firmly embedded in an individual’s biography – their past, present and anticipated future.

### Understanding the island context

From the preceding discussion of the role of context in career decision making we can see that understanding the specific context provided by island communities will be important when considering the career decision making of young islanders. The island context will be important for the local labour market that it provides, and the opportunities within this; and the wider social and cultural impact of the values of the island habitus. Importantly when considering habitus as offering a network of positions and choices for an individual to inhabit, we can see how individuals will make practical and situated career decisions that are ‘logical’ within their own terms but may not be ‘rational’ from an objectivist perspective. As a result, this means that it is quite possible to conceive of young people making logical decisions to stay in an island location to be close to family and friends, or because of the lifestyle, even though these decisions may be seen as ‘non rational’ by policy makers influenced by positivist models of choice.

In island contexts then, career choice is a process that is grounded in the island context and where decisions made will frequently involve choices to ‘stay’ or to ‘leave’ which may not always be made on the basis of rationally where the best opportunities are. Understanding how the island context influences the decision making process is

challenging because there is very little scholarship in this area. Further, the challenges of island contexts are that they cannot be treated as simply 'smaller' versions of mainland communities (King, 2009). Instead islands need to be understood in their own terms, and when considering career decisions using a framework to conceptualise island contexts that integrates migration and employment as well as wider social and cultural processes is important. The challenge here is basically conceptual and is based on constructivist epistemology: the idea being that the conceptual frameworks and categories we use construct what we 'see', therefore without an appropriate conceptual frame for understanding the island context we risk occluding what we are able to see and discuss. This poses potentially both a challenge for theorists, careers advisers and young people alike, if the models we use are 'mainland' models, premised on larger labour markets and where 'rational' career decisions less often involve decisions to leave a community, then this will influence how easy it is to imagine island career decisions, and particularly those decisions that appear to be 'non-rational', involving staying or returning to island locations.

One possibility for re-imagining island spaces is offered by Hayward's concept of the aquapelago (Hayward, 2012a and 2012b). Through this term, Hayward challenges the land bias of traditional island scholarship, "provid[ing] an expanded concept of the territory and human experience of an intermeshed and interactive marine/land environment" (Hayward, 2012a: 5). His full definition of the concept is important:

*a social unit existing in a location in which the aquatic spaces between and around a group of islands are utilised and navigated in a manner that is fundamentally interconnected with and essential to the social group's habitation of land and their senses of identity and belonging. (ibid)*

In terms of providing a lens through which islanders' career and migration routes may be understood, there are three important points here:

- 1) that the sea is a space that may be 'utilised'
- 2) that the sea is a space that may be 'navigated'
- 3) that the utilisation and navigation of the sea are connected to islanders' 'sense of identity and belonging'

I will consider each of these points, and why they are important, in more detail below.

*The sea as a space that is utilised*

The direct economic uses of the sea by island communities may include fishing, maritime transportation (such as the merchant navy, and domestic ferry services), the recreational diving industry, the tourist industry (in the popularity of cruises and boat trips particularly) and the energy industries (offshore oil and gas and marine renewables particularly). In discussions of 'aquapelagic' communities much of the previous scholarship from Hayward and others has focused on the economies of islands, and in particular the fishing industry (Gear, 2014; Hayward, 2012a and 2012b). However, considering wider island labour markets, there will also be indirect uses of the sea in the cultural industries through, for example, artists and writers trading in representations of sea-scapes; and the tourist industry again trading in representations of sea-scapes to

attract visitors to island communities. Although not direct uses of the sea, trading in representations of the sea should not be underestimated – with many island communities having a strong tourist economy (Hay, 2006; King, 2009; Royle, 2001). As a result we can see that the role of the sea in island labour markets will extend beyond major sea-based industries and into other industries such as the cultural industries.

*The sea as a space that is navigated*

Alongside 'utilising' aquatic spaces, Hayward's definition of the aquapelago covers *navigating* of aquatic spaces. *Navigating* the sea may take place by islanders for a variety of reasons – including social and recreational reasons – but again, for islanders the way that marine spaces are navigated to access work will be crucial. The 'mobilities turn' in migration studies emphasises that mobility is a defining feature of modern societies, and that mobility forms a spectrum – from day to day commuting between islands in the same archipelago for example, to occasional business trips to the mainland, and to more permanent or semi-permanent moves to the mainland (Sheller and Urry 2006, Urry, 2000, cited by King, 2009: 62). All of these involve moving across the sea, whether by ferry or by air – and it is notable that Hayward adapted his concept of the aquapelago to include air spaces as well as sea spaces (Hayward, 2012b).

Some of movements across the sea would be likely to be seen by Hayward as more 'aquapelagic' than others – with commuting between islands within the same island group clearly involving regular navigation of sea space which is fundamental to day to day life of islanders. In contrast an adult who leaves the islands as a young person, and returns only occasionally for holidays or to visit family or friends may not live in an island community, and navigates the space a lot less frequently. However, from a mobilities perspective both of these experiences represent 'mobility', just different forms of mobility, and therefore similarly I would suggest that both experiences are aquapelagic, just *differently* aquapelagic. Another 'different' kind of aquapelagic mobility may come from islanders who navigate the sea space virtually rather than physically - connecting to mainland communities through telephone, internet and videoconferencing.

Importantly these different mobilities are not just individual choices, but are facilitated by the existence of strong transport links and telecommunications (Kitrinou and Mytilini, 2014). This highlights how the economic and social context in terms of investments in infrastructure may be critical to shaping individual decision making in terms of island locations. In addition, the different transport and telecommunications links will also impact on the *kinds* of work that islanders can access – with, for example, potential working timetables being determined by ferry timetables (and reducing flexibility in terms of shift work), and with some kinds of work being more possible to undertake remotely than others.

*The sea and sense of identity or belonging*

As well as the focus on *utilising* and *navigating* aquatic spaces, Hayward's definition offers an important focus on social processes, and notions of identity and belonging. Fundamentally, the aquapelago is a *performed* space "constituted by human presence and the utilisation of the environment (rather than as an 'objective' geographical entity)" (Hayward, 2012: 6). Because an aquapelago is a performed space, Hayward goes on to note that some societies may be more 'aquapelagic' than others, and that some islanders may be more 'aquapelagic' than others: "some humans inhabit aquapelagos

more aquapelagically than others; ie not all humans who live on the islands within aquapelagos are as actively engaged with integrated aquatic and terrestrial spaces as others. There may even be individuals within aquapelagos who (through intent or circumstance) exist outside of the aquapelagic assemblage." (Hayward, 2012b: 2).

The notion of being 'more' or 'less' aquapelagic is challenging when considering island contexts and career decision-making. As we have seen in Hodgkinson's theory of careership, context is complex, and drawing from Bourdieu we have identified how the habitus provides a range of resources which may be differently mobilised by individuals in their decision making process. In terms of island labour markets we have already identified how the sea may be utilised in different ways, and in terms of island navigations, how there are many different forms of mobility. It is perhaps therefore appropriate to adopt a concept of aquapelagic *difference* or *diversity*. The notion of diversity has been touched on in some of the literature surrounding aquapelagos, with Suwa pointing out that the "assemblage of (human) livelihood provides a mediating process between land and marine environments and it constructs cultural landscapes with diversity as well as complexity" (Suwa, 2012: 14), and Hayward himself in his discussion of Haida Gwaii noting that "adequately representing and comprehending any single aquapelago requires complex multi-facetted research and conceptualisation" (Hayward, 2012b). However, understanding the aquapelago as a concept which is differently realised in different communities and for different people may be particularly important when it comes to practical use of the concept.

The notion of difference may indeed be of even greater importance in island rather than mainland communities, because the small scale of islands, and their differences in resources, social, cultural and historical background means that the experiences of island communities may be characterised by difference. As King (2009) and Royle (2010) have pointed out one of the key features of island economies is that they may pursue quite different economic strategies – for example some islands are dominated by occupational pluralism, some by scaling up production in single industries, some characterised by single large companies (like the Falkland Islands company), and some following a MIRAB model (migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy). However, what is important in all island economies is the importance of 'economic nimbleness' allowing industries and services to develop quickly and responsively – something that is "perhaps easier from a small scale jurisdiction" (King, 2009: 58). This means that aquapelagic identities as well as being quite different between islands may also change and adapt quickly depending on the economic situation of the island. Indeed in Bertram's discussion of the MIRAB model in the 21st Century context he identifies a refined three-way taxonomy of island socioeconomic formations, but notes that overall island economies resemble a 'kaleidoscope' involving a "sequence of temporarily stable pattern" (Bertram, 2006:12).

Alongside different aquapelagic island identities, socially and culturally the experience of islanders is also likely to be marked by difference. So, for example, the relationship of someone employed in the fishing industry to the sea is likely to be quite different to the relationship of an artist with the sea. They may spend equal amounts of time involved in thinking about or relating to the sea, but their experiences will be different. Experience may also differ according to social background – for example the relationship of fishing families to the sea and to careers at sea may be different to those families with no prior experience (Corbett, 2007). Further, the relationship of 'locals' and 'incomers' may also be different: for example in Gibbons study of Madeline Island (in Lake Superior), he

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notes how islanders negotiate their identity within their context, and this includes, for example, where they keep their boats (with the marina, the creek and the offshore anchorage being used by different groups of islanders) (Gibbons, 2010: 175).

### Understanding career and migration choices through the lens of the aquapelago: a case study of Orkney and Shetland

Having looked at how the concept of the aquapelago can provide some insight into island labour markets, island movements and migration, and social and cultural identity, I will now apply the concept of the aquapelago to a case study of two island communities – Orkney and Shetland. The island groups of Orkney and Shetland are situated to the North of the Scottish mainland, with Orkney 16 km north of the mainland, and Shetland 80km northeast of Orkney (Figure 1). The two groups of islands are similar in many ways, sharing a Norse cultural heritage (both were under Norwegian rule until the 15th Century) and are of a similar size and population. Orkney comprises approximately 70 islands, of which 20 are inhabited. Shetland comprises over 100 islands, 16 of which are inhabited. According to the census of 2011, Shetland had a total population of 23,167 and Orkney 21,349 (Scotland's Census, 2015a; Scotland's Census, 2015b). Both island groups have a labour market that includes substantial volumes of work on, around or related to the sea. According to census data, both island groups compared to Scotland as a whole have above average employment in the transport and distribution (which would include those employed by shipping companies and on the island ferries) and agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2014a and 2014b). Both island groups are also well positioned for the offshore oil and gas industry – with major oilfields to the East and North of the islands. Apart from the major sectors of employment both island groups support a significant tourist industry which trades heavily on island representations, and provides some employment in sea-based recreational activities (such as boat trips and recreational diving).

Despite their similarities there are also some key differences between the two islands. The main difference is in the size of the fishing industry with “more seafood... landed in Shetland than across the whole of England and Ireland” (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a: 4) Indeed in Shetland average salaries are estimated at above the average in the Scottish Highlands but only because of the “high share of employment in relatively high paying (if occasionally erratic) sectors notably the oil industry and fishing” (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2011b). In contrast, in Orkney no such trend is apparent with salaries estimated at below average (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2011a). In some respects this could make Shetland appear more ‘aquapelagic’ than Orkney, however, this is perhaps to overlook the *differences* in the maritime industries in Orkney.

One key point is that although Shetland has a greater fishing industry overall, Orkney has a significant role in a particular *part* of the fishing industry: shellfish. In 2010 Orkney's shellfish fishery was valued at £7,464,000 and the industry is of national importance with velvet crab landings from the county contributing 33% of the Scottish total, brown crab 20% and lobster 12% (Lamb, 2011). Indeed looking at the fishing vessels in Orkney and Shetland we find that although Shetland has considerably more large vessels (consistent with the white fish industry) Orkney has more vessels in the 10-15 metre category (Table 1).

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<b>Vessels at Dec 2012</b>	<b>Orkney</b>	<b>Shetland</b>	<b>Eilean Siar</b>
10 metres & under	102	135	169
>10-12 metres	23	5	17
>12-15 metres	9	4	7
>15-24 metres	4	16	21
>24-40 metres	4	9	0
Over 40 metres	0	8	1
<b>Total Vessels</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>215</b>

Source: Marine Scotland Science

Table 1 – Numbers of vessels in Orkney, Shetland and Eilean Siar (Outer Hebrides)  
(reproduced from Orkney Islands Council, 2013: 17)

What this suggests is some practical differences in the fishing industry, and although these differences will be partly *geographical* (with, for example, Shetland's closer proximity to major fishing grounds, and Orkney's large expanse of sheltered inshore waters), these differences may also be partly *cultural*. Gear's previous paper on the Shetland fishery demonstrates how different islands within Shetland responded differently to changes within the fishing industry – with one island, Whalsay, having the physical resources (finance), relevant skills (in the form of fishing tickets) and the cultural heritage to make the most of the opportunity provided by pelagic fishing (Gear, 2014). In Orkney and Shetland it is perhaps significant that as well as geographical differences, cultural differences exist with Orcadians classically known as 'farmers who do a bit of fishing' and with Shetlanders 'fishermen who do a bit of farming' (Melchers, 2008: 35). The combination of fertile agricultural land, and a tradition of part-time fisheries give Orkney quite a different aquapelagic identity than Shetland.

Further differences between the aquapelagic identities of Orkney and Shetland are apparent in the recent development of the marine renewables industry in Orkney, with the Pentland Firth and Orkney being designated Scotland's first Marine Energy Park in July 2002. This relatively new industry is opening up new opportunities within the Orkney labour market and is also changing the marine environment by increasing the physical infrastructure of the ports and harbours of the islands as well as changing the marine landscape with the installation of renewable devices in various offshore locations. Importantly, however, it should be noted that the marine environment is a resource, and that there can be competing demands on this resource, so the development of marine renewables has implications for fishing by limiting access and navigation and by having a potential impact on the fish themselves (Alexander, Wilding and Heymans, 2013). In addition both the fishing industry and the renewables industry are under environmental scrutiny to prevent degrading the maritime environment, and the infrastructure of these industries will also be subject to planning regulations to avoid degrading the visual environment. How an island community balances the competing demands of different industries will impact on the nature of the aquapelagic identity that is developed.<sup>1</sup>





Figure 1 - Map of Orkney and Shetland Islands (with inset of their position relative to the Scottish and Norwegian coasts, top left) (Christian Fleury, 2015)

### Orkney and Shetland: Aquapelagic mobilities

Both Orkney and Shetland are archipelagos, made up of 16-20 inhabited islands. As a result movement of goods and people across the sea is a common part of island life. In both island groups, population and employment are centred in the main towns: Kirkwall and Lerwick. Islanders from other islands within the archipelagos may commute to

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these towns on a daily basis: travelling by ferry from the islands of Bressay, Rousay, or Shapinsay for instance, or over fixed road links from the linked South Isles in Orkney and from Burra and Trondra in Shetland. Islanders living further out from the main towns may not be able to commute on a daily basis to Lerwick or Kirkwall for work (in the North Isles of Orkney for example and the communities of Out Skerries, Fair Isle, Foula in Shetland) but for these communities, travel to the main towns will still be necessary at times – for visits to the main hospital for example.

Significant movements of people across aquatic spaces in both islands occur for educational purposes. Although most primary age children have access to schools within their island settings, by secondary age travel is common. Both Kirkwall Grammar School (in Orkney) and Anderson High School (in Shetland) have hostel accommodation for students from the outer isles who typically travel in to school at the beginning of the week and home again at the weekends. Outmigration of young people to the mainland is a major concern of both island groups, with net out migration of 15-29 year olds in both island groups. This rate is significantly higher for 17-20 year olds and is balanced by some in-migration of people over 20 years old (Highlands and Island Enterprise 2014c). However, again there are some differences between the islands, with higher levels of in-migration in Orkney meaning that widening the age band to 15-39, the county has a net in-migration whereas Shetland retains a net out-migration (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a). The relatively high levels of in-migration and specifically return migration of under 25 year olds, has led to some suggestion that for young people in Orkney “leaving was part of a planned process which involved gaining qualifications but returning to Orkney for work if possible” (Hall Aitken, 2009: 3). The pattern of ‘return’ continues for Orcadians and Shetlanders, with about half of returning Orcadians returning after the age of 25 (Hall Aitken, 2009: 3).

### Orkney and Shetland: Aquapelagic impact on migration and career choices of young people

As we have seen the communities of Orkney and Shetland may both be characterised as aquapelagic, however the communities are marked by strong differences as well as similarities, resulting in a context marked by complexity, and change. How the aquapelagic contexts of the islands may impact on the careers and employability choices of young islanders is therefore complex and requires further research to be able to understand completely. However from existing data and research it is possible to sketch out some potential impacts.

The strong labour market in both island groups means that unemployment is relatively very low. This means that for school-leavers direct entry into the workforce is a realistic possibility, and in Shetland entry to employment after school is the highest in the Highlands and Islands area (39%), with Orkney a close second at 36% (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a). In terms of the destinations young people pursue, it is notable that aquaculture features alongside retail and construction craft as one of the three highest modern apprenticeship frameworks by number of starts in Shetland (Skills Development Scotland, 2014a). Both islands provide training in maritime courses, with Orkney College having a Maritime Studies Department offering short courses for seafarers, and with the specialist NAFC Marine Centre providing Merchant Navy and Fisheries Training in Shetland.

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Where the *structure* of the labour market influences the options young people choose to take up, in line with Roberts' theories of career development, what options young people take up will differ by their social and cultural backgrounds. Some evidence of what the impact might be is given a piece of research conducted by Michael Corbett in Digby Neck, a fishing community in Atlantic Canada (Corbett, 2007). Here he notes that the gendered structure of the fishing industry offers better opportunities for men and that family connections are very important for facilitating entry to the fishery: with licences being passed down through the family. There is also a wider impact of the industry, with women and those from families not involved in fishing more likely to progress to further and higher education, and through this choice to 'leave' their communities.

In the Orkney and Shetland context no specific research such as Corbett's has been conducted. But certainly there are some characteristics of the labour market that are consistent with his findings. First of all there are significant gender differences in the community with both Orkney and Shetland having proportionally more men resident than the rest of Scotland, and Shetland is unique in having proportionally more men than women resident (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2014a; Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2014b). This suggests that perhaps the labour market in both areas offers a gendered structure. Alongside the gender differences, the 'return' offered by qualifications in maritime industries in the UK, like in Corbett's Canada, is greater than in other industries. So for example, being a merchant navy deck officer in the Scotland requires HNC or HND level training and provides an average starting salary of £25,000-£27,000 for a third officer, rising to £34,000 to £42,000 for a second officer. This compares to average starting salaries of similar levels for primary school teachers (£25,716) and for social workers (£25,000) that are both degree-entry professions (data taken from Skills Development Scotland, 2014b).

Alongside the structural impact of the labour market, there is also some research to suggest that the wider values and 'habitus' of island communities impact on young people's choices. In an earlier piece of research I identified how graduates living in Orkney typically mobilised narratives that characterised Orkney as 'home' in opposition to the dichotomous term 'south'. That these narratives were consistent across participants in the study suggested they may be community narratives informed by the island 'habitus'. Within this framework 'home' narratives were associated with values of family, community, equality, stability, and 'south' narratives were associated with youth, excitement and dynamism (Alexander, 2013). Utilising this discourse provided a neat way for graduates who had chosen non-typical life courses to explain their choice ie in this case to explain potentially compromising career prospects in order to be at 'home' with the associated benefits of family and community. Within the island context, then, the habitus offers ways of structuring experience and thinking about choices – with certain values being construed as 'Orkney' values in contrast to those south.

In terms of this article it is significant that the distinction between 'home' and 'south' is only made possible because of the clear boundary provided by the sea – in mainland communities delineations between communities are likely to be more arbitrary (based on county borders for instance) and less clear cut (for example where does the city 'stop' and the suburbs 'start')? In addition, as well as providing the physical delineation that allows the creation of narratives of 'home' and 'south', I also suggested in this research that historical movements over the sea may have impacted on island values. With a history of goods and skills (in the form of professional people who needed to

train off the island) being transported up 'from south' I suggested that this impacted on the cultural narratives, with 'south' being typically characterised in terms of (worldly) success.

How these narratives of 'home' and 'south' may impact on the choices of young people when they leave school requires further research, but certainly the impact of such community values may have a much wider impact on the choices of young people than simply the structuring impact of the immediate opportunities provided by the aquapelagic labour market. The role of the wider habitus is also indicated in my earlier research that suggested that certain working values were more highly prized in Orkney than elsewhere: with practical skills, flexibility and enterprise being valued very highly (Alexander, 2013). These wider community values may again have a relationship with the aquapelagic labour market (with fisheries depending on practical skills, and in many cases enterprise, and with renewables and oil and gas often also requiring high level practical skills), and also impact on the nature of the choices young people make, as well as how they go on to explain these choices to other people.

## Conclusion

Throughout this article I have demonstrated how the concept of the aquapelago may provide a useful framework through which to conceptualise island labour markets, cultures and the interrelation of career and migration choices. I have also argued for a wider conception of the aquapelago than has been proposed by Hayward and others, tracing the influence of the sea in other industries rather than the directly sea-based, and the influence of the sea in the island habitus and social and cultural narratives surrounding migrations. I have also argued that a concept of aquapelagic diversity is important in terms of understanding the *different* ways islands may utilise their sea resources, and the *different* ways islanders may situate themselves within the social and cultural context of their islands. Rather than considering islands or islanders as 'more' or 'less' aquapelagic, I argue that the value of the term comes from the way that the notion of the island context is fundamentally refocused to emphasise the role of the sea in terms of employment and in terms of navigation, but that what it 'means' to be aquapelagic will be different in different island communities and to different people. Using a case study of Orkney and Shetland I have demonstrated how these islands may be considered 'differently' aquapelagic, and I have sketched some ways that the aquapelagic context may impact on the career choices of young people in the islands. The impact of the aquapelago may be seen in the structure of the opportunities afforded in the labour market, and the differential access young people have to these opportunities. However, more significantly I have suggested that the island habitus will have a much wider influence on the way that young people make decisions and explain these decisions to others. Although some indication of the way island habitus may influence young people's decisions is sketched out further research is necessary to enable a more complete understanding of the issue.

Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed in the marine spatial plan for the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters, strategic issues and interactions were noted between the various marine sectors, the main sectors identified being: natural environment and heritage, renewable energy, shipping and navigation, ports and harbours, other infrastructure, commercial fisheries and mariculture, tourism and recreational development, oil and gas and aggregate extraction. (Scottish Government, 2011)

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