

# Face-to-Face and Central Place: Covid and the prospects for cities

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*This contribution looks at how great-city working life and business are increasingly oriented towards the activities in high-added-value trades and 'opaque' markets, where face-to-face interactions are still a vital part of what they offer. It argues that whilst the pandemic has undoubtedly hit hard, its longer-term impacts should not be over-stressed: the world cities look set for continued dominance, centrality and scale will still be vital for the smaller conurbations, and the prospects for more peripheral locations may not be as positive as proponents of ex-urban flight may anticipate.*

General Haig is supposed to have said that 'the news from the front is never so good, nor so bad, as first reported'<sup>1</sup>, and the same dynamic appears to have applied to thinking about the pandemic's impact on working life and cities. Early on, the focus was on how 'things will never be the same again' with working from home (quickly rebranded as WFH) and Zoom heralding the end of the commute and the city-centre office, together with the benefits of more time spent at home with family. With time, a different view has emerged — that 'things will be remarkably like they were before' — almost comically lugubriously captured by France's economy minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, with his '*Ma crainte, c'est que le monde d'après ressemble furieusement au monde d'avant, mais en pire*'.<sup>2</sup>

Resolving this apparent tension requires that we start thinking of the pandemic as much more an accelerant of existing trends and much less a creator of new ones: yes, Covid has 'bent the curve' on how work *works*, but in our opinion this impact will be rather *less* dramatic than commonly imagined. We see the pandemic as the petrol, not the fire. In particular, we think that a much more profound engagement is needed with the ongoing vulnerability of urban economies to the impacts of digitisation and, especially, to the effects of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on urban employment and labour markets. Approached in this way, we can begin to see how the post-pandemic era can simultaneously offer greater freedom and flexibility to the select few in knowledge-intensive business which remain resistant to automation, alongside deepening inequality and worsening employment prospects as the Fourth Industrial Revolution comes for the white-collar workers.

While we elaborate on these ideas in our optimistically-titled "*Why Face-to-Face Still Matters: The Persistent Power of Cities in the Post-Pandemic Era*"<sup>3</sup>, we argue here that changes to the way we live and work are both driving *and* being driven by the varying trade-offs between virtual and physical interaction in different industries, and that the future of cities can be found in their capacity to *enable* both forms of 'face-to-face' (F2F) in the knowledge-intensive parts of vital industries. To develop this argument, we undertook interviews with nearly forty 'players' — old and young, senior and junior — from a wide range of Central London activities, and we then followed up with many of them in the midst of the pandemic to find out what they missed — and what they didn't — about those 'old ways of working'.



*Lockdown London: empty streets and offices, spring 2020*

## Why cities will still matter

We'd argue that cities were the future at the start of 2020, and that they're *still* the future at the end of 2021. Why is this? There are several closely linked reasons.

Real-life experience from our interviewees — not just bankers and lawyers (them too, though) but also a producer for *Love Island*, an account manager at OpenTable, the London-based assistant of a world-famous artist, a Google engineer, the founder of a specialist catering start-up...—stressed the importance for many of high-intensity central places: busy, well-connected, and hyper-convenient. These individuals and organisations operate in what we would — drawing on the literature on financial geographies<sup>4,5</sup> — term 'opaque' markets, where outcomes are not just about measurable risk, but unknown unknowns such as the 'creative differences' that can sink a blockbuster project. These contexts place a heavy reliance on judgement and confidence rather than calculation because they are about understanding clients (and being understood by them) and making business decisions in the absence of any certainty about the future, or even the next project.<sup>6</sup>

Face-to-face contact (F2F) is a key factor in how we make those judgements because it both entails very real costs — of travel, of effort, and of time<sup>7</sup> — and offers such a rich range of feedback opportunities. Physical meetings also open up side-channels for subtle exchanges, as one of our interviewees put it: "you can't say 'look, I had to be harsh back there, but the truth is...'" because the 'quiet chat' on the way back to reception doesn't exist in Zoom or Teams, and setting up such an exchange electronically entails a degree of formality that can work against the message we wanted to send. So all of this 'informational exchange' is not just about the meeting itself, it is about nurturing the networks that, for instance, support the internal coherence of the firm: our interviews suggested that a surprising amount of Central London's F2F is about maintaining the corporate culture and keeping things on track.

## Face-to-face and its place dimension

There's a constant whirl of quick contacts, and despite the availability of many digital alternatives, there seems to be more, not less, of such interaction: particularly early evening contacts ('lunch is dead' in many sectors). In this matrix, F2F is more important, not less, even though the range of

contact ‘channels’ is undoubtedly wider and deeper than at any time in the past. But face-to-face contact provides extra ‘bandwidth’ that other channels cannot: especially for the tacit, the ‘understood’, and the inferred.

Storper & Venables describe co-presence as ‘like being on stage and playing a role’, and indeed sometimes it is about the performance as much as the message.<sup>8</sup> We read a lot into who is at the table (and who is not), who is engaged (and who is not), and we adjust our message on the fly through this kind of subtle, but instantaneous, feedback. As one of our Central London interviewees observed: “Getting a sense of the person...it’s a two-way process of trust... we need to be in touch with each other, get a feeling of how we do it. It’s face-to-face, it’s multi-sensory.” And from a hard-headed private equity investor: “face-to-face is mission-critical at the beginning, I struggle to see how you could do it any other way. Forming a judgement about someone, do they know what they’re doing, is there reality behind the pitch, are they someone in whom you can have confidence - it’s the core of the requirement, can only be done face-to-face.”

More ‘transactional’ exchanges — whether it’s buying pens and paper, or sending the ‘keep warm’ email to a professional contact — can rely on ICT, but for insight and knowledge F2F will always have the edge. It offers speed, quality, reciprocity, and the clues of body language. It is critical to building relationships, and relationships are key in a world and an economy where competition is as much about affinity as about competence (everyone is competent, so how do you pick your collaborators?). In this environment, ICT is no more (or less!) than a complement, not a substitute.

All this ferment necessarily has a *place* dimension, and cities have both the transport (rail, air, etc.) and the social infrastructures (bars, clubs, restaurants, etc.) to make it happen at scale in terms of both geography and volume. The ‘Death of Distance’<sup>9</sup> never happened in these sectors so being in the right place is still critical, and it tends to be dominated by Central London, by Lower Manhattan, and by Paris-Ville.<sup>10</sup> The clubs and coffee shops, and the openings and seminars-with-Chardonnay, make it *possible* to run into someone useful or interesting is integral to the buzz of ‘being there’<sup>11</sup>. So this isn’t *just* about where your office is, very often neutral venues like hotel lobbies, co-working break-out spaces, and the more spacious but less functional cafe-restaurants are essential for the ‘not random, but not by accident either’ encounters that seem to be such an important piece of the jigsaw.

These continual contacts help to reduce uncertainty by providing wider and deeper access to ‘the players’ as well as to the buzz *about* those players, and so this helps to lower the transaction costs faced by businesses that run on, and deal in, confidence; it’s why firms pay those Soho and City rents, and why staff dive into all this ‘buzz’. When it operates well, F2F makes markets more transparent and more efficient; however, anchoring access to markets in particular places and times is not without its downsides: the dominance of an ‘in group’ with the right kinds of network can easily perpetuate lazy characterisations, opaque hiring practices, and the familiar comforts of ‘people like us’. It’s a difficult line to tread, but a genuinely open society and economy needs to tread it.

## So what *will* change?

Our insistence on the continuing power of face-to-face and centrality doesn’t mean that we are saying ‘it’ll be all be back to as-before’. There is obviously a big question about cities’ resilience in the face of major shocks like COVID-19 and consequent lockdowns. The pandemic ran a full-strength test of what an ‘e-only’ work world could be like for many (though far from everybody, of course) and the results are still coming in, the effects still playing out.

But it's important to think about what changes and what doesn't, and we think it's important to link the 'effects of Covid?' question to the 'effects of digital?' and the 'effects of AI?' questions. In our view, we'll see an **intensification** and a **continuation** of trends that were already well under way. Indeed, our argument is that the pandemic working experience will cement and accelerate tendencies that already existed but it will not create fundamentally new ones. By looking backward, we can see overall continuity across multiple seeming 'revolutions'. People and cities have short memories but long evolutionary histories: a short, sharp negative shock followed by slow recovery and yes, reconfigurations, seems most likely to us.

Change is clearly being accelerated by COVID and lockdowns. But they didn't *cause* it. They are doing what 'new tech' has been doing for 200 years, since coal and steam and capital launched the first Industrial Revolution in the Midlands and North. Similarly, with AI: artificial intelligence is penetrating deeper into white-collar activity and, like that first revolution, it is shaking up job patterns, along with how and where business is done. But no innovation in technology has yet reduced the *total* number of jobs, even while it has been laying waste to individual sectors. Law, banking, insurance are just three sectors that we think will look very different in 10 years' time, but wherever they need high-level contact, judgement, and the personal touch, they won't be relying on AI.

## The Push and the Pull

We don't mean that COVID-19 will have no effect on how businesses organize themselves and their employees. But it won't do away with the need for F2F or cities either. So we'd push back very strongly against the idea the pandemic means that London and New York will inevitably fall once again — as they did in the post-war period — into a deep, long-term decline.

City businesses and city workers are hovering, permanently, over an ever-moving boundary: between what *has* to be done in-situ, often face-to-face, and what *can* now be done remotely, or even off-shored entirely. Our interviews showed how these boundaries are continually shifting: patterns of recruitment, for example, are now very different from only a decade ago, with both job-seekers and employers far more comfortable with using on-line platforms of different kinds to both formally and informally make the next move. And 'face-to-face' means different things from formerly, when 'bar chat' and 'e-chat' can be interchangeable for a whole range of gossip and influencing.

And so in the urban space-economy more businesses will ask 'why are we here?', with obvious implications for CBDs and office values there - we already know of big property players commissioning research and think-pieces on just such choices. In this world of change for cities, who's going, and who's staying? We know the greatest benefits of central-city proximity will continue to be to firms in uncertain markets with complex outputs, short 'product cycles', and constantly changing transaction patterns: such as high finance, consultancies, and creative / cultural organisations. Their world is one where the subtlety and happenstance of F2F can be vital. As one of our interviewees said, reflecting wryly on the impact of lockdown: "You can't nobble someone in the corridor if there's no corridor!" These are the likely 'stayers'. At the 'going' end of the scale are sectors such as 'traditional' lab-based R&D (creative though that may be), logistics and many of the 'back-office' functions of banks and other large employers.

So what determines whether it's actually worth the investment in a city-centre location? It is the type of input or output (what are you trading, who with, how easy is it to assess value) and the associated transaction costs (how often you need to meet, how complex the informational exchanges). And we stress, this is a continuing process, not a new one: the 'knowledge bases' literature<sup>12</sup> provides a useful perspective here, stressing the difference between analytical (e.g. traditional R&D), synthetic (e.g. engineering and consultancy), and symbolic (e.g. the arts and design) knowledge. On to this we would

layer the structure of information flows: analytical knowledge seems to us to be about persistent collaboration within research groups or software development teams who operate in relatively ‘closed’ environments (while disseminating findings widely in the form of software or publications) while, at the other end of the scale, symbolic knowledge is generated through ‘promiscuous’ exchanges between set designers, producers, directors, cinematographers and actors who might never have worked together on a project before.

Closed, highly structured information flows are far more amenable to being relocated to a cheaper location with greater amenity. The developers who work for Oracle and Microsoft, and the researchers who work for Astra Zeneca or Arm, don’t need to be in London, so they won’t be. Indeed, from a corporate standpoint, you want to keep your star researchers as far away from the competition as possible! In contrast, in the world of TV or theatre, today’s competitor might be tomorrow’s collaborator, and gossip casually exchanged in the bar might lead to work down the line. Again, it’s not that none of this ‘buzz’ can be captured digitally — our television producer interviewee found their last job through a friend-of-friend’s Facebook post — but that, until you’re sufficiently senior that people come to you, you need to be where the action is in order to be in on the buzz in the first place.

### And what won’t change?

So lots won’t change, or not in particularly striking ways. We argue that cities and towns will fall back into recognisable and long-established patterns. We should hastily add that these are our thoughts, not predictions; as Keynes said in 1937 about long-term forecasts: “About these matters there is no scientific basis on which to form any calculable probability. We simply do not know.”<sup>13</sup> But we can and do argue that tendencies can be identified.

World city dominance will continue. Central London, Lower Manhattan and Paris-Ville will hold on to, and continue to attract, businesses and markets with a high degree of customization, quality-sensitive clients, collaboration for complex outputs and advice to decision makers. Management functions will go on concentrating at strategic global locations because even though technology will enable more and more electronic interactions and transactions, personal contact will still be vital — Torre (2008) wrote of agglomeration “as a social effect of the embeddedness of economic relations.”<sup>14</sup> So the personal contact industries, and the jobs *within* firms that rely on personal contact, will still see central place, proximity and convenience as an essential driver of office location. As our interviews showed, even some of the activities which decentralized a generation ago are, at least partially, moving back inward.

Indeed, we think that widespread coverage of the ‘flight to the countryside’ in the popular press needs to be taken with a large grain of salt: to our knowledge there is little evidence that out-movers from London are relocating permanently and *en masse* to towns never-before graced by their ‘metropolitan elite’ presence, rather they are heading to places with good (*i.e.* rail) connections back to the capital’s myriad employment opportunities or are leapfrogging directly to areas known for their scenery.<sup>15</sup> So these moves appear set to deepen London’s hold over the labour pool of the Greater South East of England and it’s clear that a primary driver is the lack of appealing — in a post-pandemic sense of having gardens and accessible greenspace — city-centre housing for many.

People *will* undoubtedly take advantage of the newfound flexibility to commute *less-frequently* by commuting *further* when they do, but the long-term viability of this pattern is up for debate: how do teams continue to function effectively when different members WFH on different days? Permanently. And what is the impact of these longer commutes — which might involve overnight stays, or early-morning departures and late-night returns, on the allocation of work around the home? While there are

feel good stories to be found about men ‘stepping up’ at the start of the pandemic<sup>16</sup>, the wider gendering of the pandemic experience<sup>17</sup> is likely to become more pronounced as businesses try to get ‘back to normal’ and the more mundane obligations of living the ‘good life’ in the country risk locking in those losses for a generation of working women.

Alongside this will be the growing impacts of AI on previously skilled employment. Although there’s no chance of an AI legal team taking on argumentation for the foreseeable future, there’s every reason to think both that AI can quickly replace the tedium — and billable hours for trainee barristers — that went with document discovery and the more mundane tasks of ‘retail’ legal services that supported a comfortable life for a country lawyer. We can anticipate similar effects on the more standardised parts of accountancy and other white-collar professions and, consequently, a kind of dematerialisation of these necessary services; so once again the future is far more mixed for the smaller cities that have made these kinds of operations their bread-and-butter than the WFH rhetoric might anticipate.

So although the focus of our analysis and argument is on the mega-cities of London, New York and Paris, and the interviews are a slice of working life in the centre of one World City at a particular point in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they seem to point to wider patterns and conclusions about the behaviour of firms and people. Not everything can be generalised from that experience, of course, but there are some indisputable common themes: F2F will remain key, but at the same time ICT and AI will carry on with the process of substituting for, and complementing, what personal interaction can offer. And, inevitably, the different business cultures of cities and countries will affect how these interacting trends play out. It is hard to imagine that a proportion of previously essential, all-company, in-person meetings won’t remain ‘dial in’, but history also militates against people remaining as fully remote as they are now: eventually, the pressures of ‘being there’ will be too great as the kinds of opportunities that arise from ‘not random, not by chance’ patterns of interaction flow to those who are able to make their own luck.



*Just ‘being there’: after work in Seoul*

For many of the major regional cities, there is a lot of promise: the task is to cement their role, often very long-established, as their catchment area’s attractive market and social centre in a world of online shopping and offshored office jobs. This won’t be easy, since the pandemic pushed all of us into ordering many of our staples online and there’s no reason to think that we’ll go back to the ‘old way’ of doing things here: who, given sufficient storage space, will go back to buying toilet paper a six rolls at a time after experiencing the empty shelves of the first lockdown, and who would have anticipated online Asos’s buy-out of bricks-and-mortar apparel chain Topshop?<sup>18</sup> Pinning an area’s

hopes on an out-of-town, big-box retail development with a named anchor tenant has never seemed more risky — one Topshop employee observed “It is good doing online shopping, but what then replaces the High Street? There's going to be nothing left, eventually...”<sup>19</sup> — though flagship developments offering a consumption *experience* on the Westfield format seem to have weathered the pandemic fairly well so far.

And in the ‘penumbra’ of the great cities too — the Île de France, or the South East of England, or New York’s Tri-State region — there is both potential, because of their convenience and lower cost base, but also menace, because sometimes those apparent advantages will be undercut by the fact that businesses that can relocate away from the great urban cores can now just as easily locate *anywhere* at all. As for the strengths and weaknesses of smaller places: they need to work at it, because economic activity is not going to fall in their laps despite the more excitable prognoses of a flood of businesses relocating to pleasant market towns. The challenge for the smaller cities and towns further from the centre of it all is to define a credible place in the space-economy of the 21st century.

At the scale of a SMC like Shrewsbury (population 72,000) — or Bourges, or Lancaster PA, two other case-studies — the benefits and costs of agglomeration are evidently different from a London, Lyon, or Philly. There are far fewer of the diseconomies of scale — congestion, painfully high housing costs, chart-topping office rentals — but set against that there is also a huge difference in the scale and type of potentials offered by a much smaller urban area. The local market is much smaller (Shropshire’s quarter-million people), and the far lower density of possible clients and competitors means that the high cost of finding new business limits specialisation<sup>20</sup> and makes unviable the kinds of Knowledge Intensive Businesses (KIBS) that abound in London<sup>21</sup>. That doesn’t mean that ease of contact, and centrality in its own market, aren’t assets of value to these places; but it does limit the businesses that they can attract however much the inward investment team stress Quality of Life and however enthusiastically property agents hymn the ‘Covid exodus’ from cities.<sup>22,23</sup>

The key for places of this scale is *quality*: turning the town centre and its streets into an experience that people — visitors, businesspeople, residents of the hinterland — will **choose**. Shrewsbury has the head-start of history and character to help cluster the face-to-face interactions of traders, clients, acquaintances, but others are not so lucky and will not be able to build new clusters of knowledge-intensive businesses on top of bland logistics parks and suburban research facilities. So the job is that much tougher for the towns which owed much of their *raison d’être* to 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> century manufacturing (Oldham, Lancashire; Erie, PA; Roubaix, Nord-Pas-de-Calais). They are often now short of assets and advantages in a world where size, variety and connectivity are such key attributes, and where they do not dominate their hinterland as they used to.



*What future for the small & medium cities? - Standishgate, Wigan, 2020*

Many Small and Medium Cities (SMCs) in England's North West are characterised by the think-tank IPPR North as 'overshadowed'<sup>24</sup> by larger neighbours, and places like Wigan need to think hard about how they relate to, in this instance, Manchester. It might not prove popular, but we think this relationship needs to be informed by a people-first approach: WFH *does* create options for residential development, but these in-movers will be looking for something subtly different from the current inhabitants, bringing both residential and (ultimately) retail pressures akin to gentrification.<sup>25</sup> However exciting this might be for sleepy town centres, it should *not* be cause for the council-led redevelopment of the old mall or the building of shiny low-rise office blocks with dreams of 'start-ups' bringing flat white culture to the countryside. And even where a town is rather less hemmed in by its neighbours, as we say about Carlisle, it should be a case of "caution, not gung-ho development mania"<sup>26</sup> and, where possible, the maximising of locally-generated potential on the 'Preston model'.<sup>27</sup>

## Thinking about recovery

Trying to understand the dynamics of urban change, and the way in which markets work and businesses choose, gives a basis for place-by-place judgements about specific cases, potentials and threats. The pandemic has been a grim and chilling experience, and it has hit the big cities hard. Yet if we stand back and look at the battering they took in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century — particularly in the Second World War — their resilience and longevity is all-the-more striking.

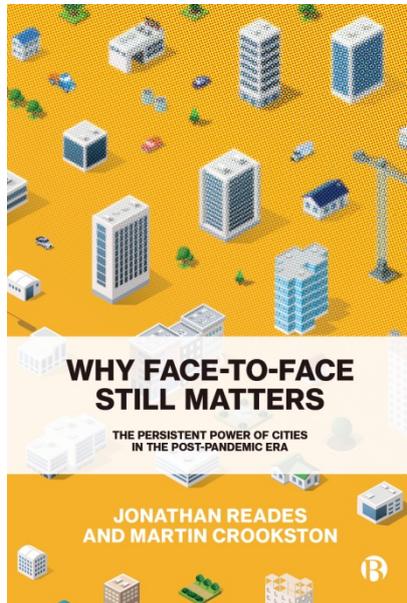
At the end of that desperate period, the insufferably bouncy 'Chips' Channon confided to his diary on 10 January 1946:

*At the fashionable, carefree Carcano-Ednam wedding reception I remarked to Emerald [Cunard] how quickly London had recovered from the war and how quickly normal life had resumed. 'After all,' I said, pointing to the crowded room, 'this is what we have been fighting for'. 'What,' said Emerald, 'are they all Poles?'*

<sup>28</sup>

Chips and Emerald were two of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's great airheads, no doubt: but London did recover, and from a fearsome pounding.

In the end, we'd argue that: “ ‘Being there’ is still at the core of the urban experience. Even in a world of instant digital access and unparalleled connectivity, central places matter, and face-to-face contact is what they do for a living. That is their story, and it will be their future.”<sup>29</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, W. (1923) *The World Crisis 1911-1918* London, Thornton Butterworth p.1322

<sup>2</sup> Le Drian, Jean-Yves (2020) quoted in *Le Monde*, 20 April 2020: “My worry is that the world ‘after’ will be terribly like the world ‘before’, only worse.”

<sup>3</sup> Reades, J. & Crookston, M. (2021) *Why Face-to-Face Still Matters: the Persistent Power of Cities in the Post-Pandemic Era*, Bristol University Press, Bristol.

<sup>4</sup> Engelen E. (2007) ‘Amsterdammed’? The uncertain future of a financial centre. *Environment and Planning A*. 39(6):1306–24

<sup>5</sup> Faulconbridge, J., Engelen, E., Hoyler, M. and Beaverstock, J. (2007), ‘Analysing the Changing Landscape of European Financial Centres: The Role of Financial Products and the Case of Amsterdam’. *Growth and Change*, 38, pp.279-303.

<sup>6</sup> Boden, D. & Molotch, H. (2004) ‘Cyberspace meets the compulsion of proximity’ in S. Graham (ed.) *The Cybernetics Reader*, Abingdon, Routledge, pp.101-105, reprinted from *Journal of Urban History* (1987)

<sup>7</sup> McCann, P. (2007), ‘Sketching out a model of innovation, face-to-face interaction and economic geography’, *Spatial Economic Analysis*, 2(2), pp.117-134.

<sup>8</sup> Storper, M. & Venables, A. (2002) ‘Buzz: face-to-face contact and the urban economy’, paper presented to the *Center for Globalization and Policy Studies* UCLA, March 2002.

<sup>9</sup> The title of Frances Cairncross’s exploration of ICT’s potential impacts: Cairncross, F. (1997) *The Death of Distance: How The Communications Revolution will Change Our Lives*, Orion Business Books, London.

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<sup>10</sup> See Cook G.A.S., Pandit N.R., Beaverstock J.V., Taylor P.J. & Pain K. (2007) 'The role of location in knowledge creation and diffusion: evidence of centripetal and centrifugal forces in the City of London financial services agglomeration' *Environment & Planning A* 39, pp.1325-45

<sup>11</sup> Currid-Halkett, Elizabeth (2007) *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art & Music Drive New York City* Princeton University Press; a book which gives an acute and often very funny overview of the world of 'buzz' and schmoozing.

<sup>12</sup> Asheim, B., Coenen, L. and Vang, J. (2007), 'Face-to-face, buzz, and knowledge bases: sociospatial implications for learning, innovation, and innovation policy'. *Environment and planning C: Government and Policy*, 25(5), pp.655-670.

<sup>13</sup> Keynes, J. M. (1937) 'The General Theory of Employment', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 51(2), February 1937

<sup>14</sup> Torre, A. (2008), 'On the role played by temporary geographical proximity in knowledge transmission'. *Regional Studies*, 42(6), pp.869-889.

<sup>15</sup> Peachey, K. (2021), 'How Covid has changed where we want to live', *BBC News*, 19 March 2021, URL: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56359865>>

<sup>16</sup> Schulte, B. and Swenson, H. (2020), 'An unexpected upside to lockdown: men have discovered housework', *The Guardian*, 17 June 2020, URL: <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/17/gender-roles-parenting-housework-coronavirus-pandemic>>

<sup>17</sup> Petts, R. J. and Carlson, D. L. and Pepin, J. R. (2020), 'A gendered pandemic: Childcare, homeschooling, and parents employment during COVID-19', *Gender, Work & Organization*, DOI: 10.1111/gwao.12614

<sup>18</sup> BBC News (2021), 'Thousands of jobs at risk as Asos strikes Arcadia deal', *BBC News*, 1 February 2021, URL: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-55884596>>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> An well-trodden argument readily traceable back to Christaller's *Central Places in Southern Germany* (1933) and even, in a more limited way, to von Thünen's *The Isolated State* (1826).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, discussions in Wood's 'Knowledge Intensive Services in Cities: Reflections on Current British Experience' (2009) and 'Urban Development and Knowledge-Intensive Business Services: Too Many Unanswered Questions?' (2006)

<sup>22</sup> Marsh, S. (2020), 'Escape to the country: how Covid is driving an exodus from Britain's cities', *The Guardian*, 26 September 2020, URL: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/26/escape-country-covid-exodus-britain-cities-pandemic-urban-green-space>>

<sup>23</sup> Neate, R. (2020), 'Covid led to huge London property exodus, says Hamptons', *The Guardian*, 26 December 2020, URL: <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/dec/26/covid-led-to-huge-london-property-exodus-says-hamptons>>

<sup>24</sup> Cox, E. & Longlands, S. (2016) *The Role of Small & Medium-Sized Towns and Cities in Growing the Northern Powerhouse*, IPPR North, Manchester.

<sup>25</sup> Konotey-Ahulu, O. (2020), 'Life After London: Covid-Era Exodus Isn't Just for the Wealthy', *Bloomberg*, 29 December 2020, URL: <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-29/life-after-london-covid-era-exodus-isn-t-just-for-the-wealthy>>

<sup>26</sup> Reades, J. & Crookston, M. (2021) *op.cit.* p.195

<sup>27</sup> A useful outline of Preston's focus on local economic circuits is in Eaton's (2018) 'How Preston - The UK's "Most Improved City" - became a success story for Corbynomics' *New Statesman*, 1 November 2018/

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<sup>28</sup> Channon, 'Chips' (1984) *Chips: The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, ed. R. Rhodes James, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

<sup>29</sup> Reades, J. & Crookston, M. (2021) *op.cit.* p.224