

Episode 07 – The Value of the Creative Economy

Ashleigh King: Welcome to this podcast created by Newcastle University Business School or 'NUBS' for short. The Oxford Dictionary states that the nub of something is the central or essential point of a situation or problem. So we hope that in this series, we can help you to get to the NUBS of it.

This podcast series looks at a key theme of value, the value of our creative economy, the value of our student experience, the value of our research, the value of our collaborative networks. In this series, you will meet academics, alumni, students, graduates, and professional staff of Newcastle University Business School, as they talk about what value means to them.

In this episode, join your host Ashleigh King as she speaks with Janine Antony, Dan Ellis and Louisa Rogers about the value of the creative economy. Janine is a current student studying her Masters in Business Administration, an MBA at Newcastle University Business School. Dan is the co-founder of Jam Jar Cinema, and Louisa is the Creative Director of Studio Courtenay as well as Trendlistr.

Hi Janine, how are you?

Janine Antony: I'm very well, happy to be here, honoured to be here with the celebrity.

Ashleigh King: I am so excited to have you here, because I know that you have so much experience in radio broadcast journalism, and I always wanted to be a journalist, a journalist from very young. So I'm actually, I feel like a bit of a fan girl, um, it's- I'm intimidated and, and just delighted to have you here.

Janine Antony: Yeah. Your dreams are still valid, you know? There are a couple of roles, maybe, maybe you can still live your dreams.

Ashleigh King: I think, uh, I, I am very fortunate that I get to do wonderful projects like this

Janine Antony: Yeah

Ashleigh King: In my activities at Newcastle University Business School. I would love to know, um, about you and what can, what can listeners learn about you and your experience, your background? Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Janine Antony: Okay. Um, I'm Janine from Nigeria, I'm- I've been a journalist for-journalist, producer, presenter- depending on the hats you want me to wear, for about a decade now? I started quite young. And I started because I didn't value

myself to know that I had that talent. I had to have people who said, Janine, you ha- you can do sports. You've always talked really well about it. You can do sports broadcasting. But I didn't think I wanted to do that because I wanted to play football professionally. But my, my dad stopped me from doing that. So I kind of like ended that dream. And then when people could hear me talk about it, they just really pushed me to do it and supported me to do it. I felt a bit like a fish out of water because, you know, I didn't see a lot of women doing that, so I was like, you know, it would be strange? Can I compete? Will I be good enough? Um, it just took one opportunity. The rest has been history. I started a women's football website for African women's football and African women footballers.

I started it in Africa. And then from there ended up working with the BBC. I became the first African female commentator at a major men's tournament, which was the Africa Cup of Nations. Um, and yes, just been breaking the ceilings ever since. And now I'm doing another one, I'm taking up another challenge in doing my MBA, which I have no idea about how business runs - I'm passionate about by start-ups, but not in any idea about how it runs. Um, but yeah, I'm really excited about this journey.

Ashleigh King: Excellent. Gosh, I have so many questions for you already, and we're both chatterboxes. This is the fun part. Um, but I want to know first of all, you know, I'm so interested in your, all of what you said about your dreams and about wanting to be a, um, a sports commentator and being a journalist in that way, but also feeling like worried about, um, being the only woman doing that. I'm interested, what kind of response did you get when you started commentating on those things?

Janine Antony: I really thought I wouldn't go there because... I didn't believe I could do it. And you know, thing about women is, when you get into a position, you carry the, the, you know, you carry the hopes and dreams of millions, billions of women right on your back. I was like, if I mess this up, they're going to say the whole woman race can't commentate. Um, and it wasn't perfect at the start. But I, I think I sailed through it, and I, and I inspired other women to do it. And then even watching the Euros a few weeks ago, and having Emma Hayes absolutely boss it - on Twitter, she was trending. Women can do it, and I'm happy that I got my chance to.

Ashleigh King: I love that. I love your passion and your enthusiasm, and I'm just really delighted for you as well. And just to hear how other women are taking up the mantle, going out there and spreading their message and hearing, using their voice to be heard. I think that's really powerful.

Um, and so you also mentioned that you are studying an MBA. Can I ask how that's going for you? So, um, being a creative and then going in and learning from a very, it's typically very corporate, very business-orientated. How are you finding it?

Janine Antony: I always throw this joke around like, I knew where all my loose change was in the house, all my pennies, my pounds. When it came to finance and accounting, I was like, what is this income statement about? What's this balance sheet about? I don't understand! I know where my money is, I don't know, I need to put it in a chart or something. Um, and that's just the difference.

Um, and I thought I was coming to learn something completely different, which means I have to start from the ground up. I've actually found out that there's really similarities to this, um, in terms of being a creative. One of the biggest things creatives, um, are quite known for is they don't really value themselves. They could do things for free, for as long as possible. Um, and they don't understand, some of them don't understand the business behind their brand and what they do. They don't understand the demand and the supply aspect of it.

But coming to do an MBA, um, means that there is a lot of difference- there's a lot of similarities, rather. Businesses now are getting in touch with their end users and consumers, who are always, almost, visually drawn to the products on social media. And that's where you have a lot of creatives there, um, who ensure that, you know, that products, businesses, what they're selling appeals to new consumers, different markets, different target markets as well, and different, um, you know, uh, customers. Um, and then there's a huge and beautiful fusion. Um, and I've seen that come through in a lot of case competitions I've done, how in the end, I'm like, oh, if we just marketed this, this here, with this form, then you get a new, uh, a new set of customers, and it absolutely worked. And yeah, so I've realized that there's a good fusion between creativity, the creative industry and the creative economy, and of course, core corporate business as well.

Ashleigh King: I love what you're saying, because it seems to me that although you were scared at first about being a very creative person studying in that way, actually you're bringing a lot to the table. You know, compared to your peers who may think in a very similar way, you are dynamic and different, and then, you know, for instance, like you've said, when you were running, and being part of case competitions, you're able to influence things, and- and actually, am I right in saying that you've actually won a couple?

Janine Antony: Yeah, um some, some tasks. Yeah, some, competitions. Um, I've come close a couple of times. However, I always say the fact that I'm here and did it: I won.

Ashleigh King: Yeah, absolutely!

Janine Antony: I won!

Ashleigh King: 100% agree for sure. And I think sometimes when we fight our own doubts, yeah, for me, when I did my MBA, it was all about the fact that, gosh, I, I really had to look at every part of my identity that I'd had, and it shook

everything up and then see what was left, you know, it really forces a mirror on you and it's an incredible year, but very, very scary. Yeah, absolutely.

Um, I would love to hear a little bit about what it's like- so you spoke about the creative economy, you spoke about valuing it. You spoke about how creatives don't themselves. Do you think there's any differences between the way, uh, creatives in Nigeria work, to the UK? Have you had the chance to network or meet many people here?

Janine Antony: Yeah, it's, it's vastly different. Um, and similar, um, at the same time. There's the passion across board. There is the need to- to... sh- shine a light on their intellectual property, um, ideation, generation of ideas, sharing of that, that content. And that's the fantastic thing about what social media has done, in the sense that I learned many things has happened in UK even while I was in Nigeria and West Africa, and, and vice versa.

However, it's, um, the difference is the enabling environment. Um, because in, in Nigeria, being a creative meant, you didn't really do well in school. And, you know, I don't know how much the education system plays a role in that, but you are the backbencher, you are the one who's got to get your life sorted. Um, you don't get as, you don't even get that cocoon of support in your home, how much more, you know, in the economy itself there aren't structures.

Nollywood is Nigerian movie industry. It actually is the second biggest movie industry in the world behind Bollywood, which is the Indian movie industry, um, as well as, um, well it's ahead of Hollywood. That industry grew on its back, but didn't get the enabling environment in terms of structure, funding, investment, um, you know, supports, um,uh, from it.

I also have to mention the fact that Nigeria at the moment is undergoing a Twitter ban. Every hour that Nigerian creatives are not on Twitter, they lose \$250,000 for every hour. And this has been since June! So you can see how the environment is completely different from here in the UK, where, you know, um, it's completely supported, you have the Department for Media, Arts, Culture, Sports. You see all of that. We don't quite have that in Nigeria. So it's vastly different. And that's where you see in business entrepreneurship, innovation has really walked there, um um, for, for young people, um, as against what you've seen there. So it's vastly different, but still it's still the same passion that runs through really.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. So it doesn't have the, quite the structures that you'd, you'd hope for, and that might embed it in culture. Very interesting to hear your experiences as a child.

Um, and, I've got two more questions I want to ask you. The- the last one I wanted to check is you mentioned, you know, you've got this passion for sport. The same time, you see yourself as creative and you are a creative, you produce content, you make things, you report on it, you talk about it. So you've got a lot of

broad skills. Um, do you ever find that there is a stigma or not necessarily stigma, but there is an idea that people who are creative don't like sport or people who like sport aren't creative? Or do you find those types of stereotypes as well?

Janine Antony: Um, no. Um, maybe, especially from Nigeria where, um, the- the... I mean, I think the BFFs in the industries are probably like creatives and sports people, like they really align, um, because they, they, it's a very symbiotic relationship, it's not parasitic in any way - they benefit from each other. Um, you know, um, so there is, there is no stereotype because they really understand each other. They work in tandem and they understand how the business, the industry is cutthroat. How the bravest, the talented, the hardworking, the smart workers will survive everything thrown at you, they do understand that.

Now the problem is, is the general wider society that can stereotype to say because, um, so because I'm doing sports, because Janine is doing sports, it means, I don't know mathematics, you know, or, you know, I I'm I'm, I'm not versed in biology. And I literally just said symbiotic, I was showing off my biology in a way: symbiotic and parasitic relationships! So it's the wider society, I would say, um, um hasn't quite, um, the government basically because they have the power to really make it more inclusive. I'm just going to throw an- you know, stats out there: the "orange economy", which is what it's called in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is also the creative economy - film, arts, craft, you know, graphic design, you name it part of the, even research on development is part of the creative economy. Now in, in, in, in 2015, um, the Inter-American Development Bank said that it provided over 1.5 million jobs in Latin American and the Caribbean, which is more than what a country like Uruguay or Costa Rica would produce in a year. Um, that's how important those economies took, and those governments took that economy. And I think if governments can tap into the show for developing and under-developed countries, um, especially now with the pandemic, we'll be unlocking a lot of potentials and it could really, really rejig and really revive the global economy.

Ashleigh King: I love that. I f- I find it such a really exciting way of looking at things and so different as well. You know, it's, it's a beautiful way to think that if we had the support systems in place, we can actually make meaningful change and contribute to our, our economy globally, which is wonderful. Thank you.

I have one final question. If I can ask you in one word to tell us what you, you would, what word you would use to say about Newcastle University Business School? What would you say?

Janine Antony: You don't mean one sentence?

Ashleigh King: One word! One word.

Janine Antony: I think it's magical. Magical. It's been magical for me, really, stuff of dreams.

Ashleigh King: Yeah.

Janine Antony: Just doing this and being here. I would say it's, it's magical. Because it's making my dreams come true, really. So, yeah, that's the word, magical.

Ashleigh King: That's beautiful. I feel it was magical for me too. So let's go with magical. Thank you so much for coming in Janine.

Hi Louisa! It's so great to see you.

Louisa Rogers: Hi, lovely to be here.

Ashleigh King: So, I am very delighted to have the opportunity to interview you because you are someone I've been wanting to talk to for a very long time. And we have met before, uh, actually, because you are one of our very engaged Newcastle University Business School alumni, who, uh, very often, you know, dedicates her time and energy to, um, supporting the University with various guest lectures, networks, mentoring. I know you've done a lot to stay connected with the school, which is really lovely.

Um, but we're actually talking today about your fabulous creative, um, uh, experience and your businesses. So I would love it if you could share with us, and the audience, a little bit more about who you are and what do you do?

Louisa Rogers: So, hi everyone. My name is Louisa Rogers, as you've just heard, and I run two fashion businesses at the moment. One is slightly newer than the other, the other I've been doing since I graduated, although it's kind of gone through a few different phases of evolution. And I also lecture at Northumbria University on fashion communication. And I have indeed lectured on the Arts, Business and Creativity Program, um, for a couple of semesters. So that was really fun, kind of getting to go back and actually teaching on the course that I did, um, as well as doing a year at University of Sunderland. So I've pretty much done all of the unis, um, in the area as well. But fashion is really the kind of thread that pulls everything together. That, and this idea of sustainability, this idea of kind of slowing down the trend cycle, um, and kind of encouraging people to think differently about how they dress.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. And fashion's an interesting one because as a recent MBA student myself, we do a lot of case studies about brands like Zara, or H&M, or many brands across the world. Um, and I think this is quite standard for MBAs, uh, courses, that you do look at case studies around the fashion industry and fast fashion.

And one of the things that I've always liked about Trendlistr, particularly during the pandemic, you actually, uh, were very innovative at a time where many

creatives would have been panicking. Uh, and you may have been panicking. There may be times like that, but you actually launched an entirely new product line. You, you created masks very quickly. Uh, it was even before people were buying masks, um, material masks, you know, you were making them out of, um, beautiful vintage fabrics. And so, I was so inspired by that at the time. And I'd like to know a little bit about for you and, you know, at a time of such change, how did you come up with such a brilliant idea?

Louisa Rogers: I mean, it was kind of, eh, I can't really take full credit for it. Um, I work very closely with a tailor called Ali, from Afghanistan, and, uh, we're very, very close friends. We ended up adopting some cats together, so very modern kind of co-parenting relationship. And, um, you know, throughout those first few weeks, few months of lockdown, when things felt like a ghost town in Newcastle City Centre, you know, I would still go in every day to my office. And bless him, Ali would be that he couldn't open to the public, but he would just come in just to get out of the flat, have a change of scenery. And he would go to a shop and kind of busy himself with different things. And, you know, we would sometimes get breakfast, um, or you know, go and fetch each other coffees, and we were having a conversation. And, you know, he was saying, have you seen that they're saying that, you know, we might have to wear masks and they might make it mandatory and blah, blah, blah. And I said, well, do you think we could make masks? And he said, yeah, I think that would be a great idea. You know, he said, I think I know how I could do it with some straps.

And I had this whole load of fabric because I think in the back of my mind, I've always wanted to be a fashion designer. But I didn't study fashion design. I have no technical ability. You know, I'm really very much on the side of styling it and then talking about it and selling it. But I could not make an item of clothing. I can't even sew a button on. And, uh, I had all this fabric that I had just bought, cos I love the prints and you know, vintage fabrics that are so unusual and vibrant, and I thought, hey, maybe we can finally put some of these to good use. So we made some prototypes, put them out there. Um, and eventually what we did was we sort of donated 50, you know, first come first serve. We were just sending them out, um, for about a month to anyone that wanted them.

And then we started to kind of put them on the website and sell them and, you know, people could request bespoke ones if they wanted specific colourways. So it was just kind of something that came to us quite early on. And it was funny cos we then ended up kind of playing around with the designs. You know, the first one was like you had to tie them at the back. And then eventually, now we've got one with sort of elastic bands, we did ones with air filters, so it was really funny, it was almost like this whole design and development process. Um, and you know, it's just funny to think how ubiquitous the mask has become, you know, and in those early days we were sort of seeing it as this novelty and, you know, over a year in, here we are.

Ashleigh King: Exactly. And we are, we are still wearing them. So I think, and we will be wearing them for a while. So I actually think that was very ahead of the

curve for both you and Ali to do that at a time and a great way to respond to some of the challenges, uh, for creatives right now.

Um, one of the things I wanted to ask you is about the power of collaboration and collaborative networks. And you've just spoke about that there so well, in terms of, you know, having friends you can lean on and work together and bounce ideas off and do things together. And one of my questions for you is, would you say in your experience as a creative business, how valuable have networks been for you?

Louisa Rogers: Really, really valuable. Um, I think especially being in the North East, you know, it is quite a sort of, highly interwoven community of people, you know, which is really nice, particularly from an entrepreneurial perspective, because you always get a sense that there's going to be someone out there that can help, and if they can't help you directly, they will be able to refer you to someone that can. I think collaboration is so important and collaboration goes beyond networking, you know, it's sort of networking made tangible. That's where you can actually start to do projects together.

Um, you know, I met one girl because she had this sort of brand herself where she was experimenting with this idea of sustainability, but she was making very specific products and we got talking and I loved what she did. And then eventually she said, well, are you looking for a maker, you know, for these sorts of products? And I sort of said, well, yeah, what, why don't you give it a go and, you know, throw some together. And we looked at some designs. And she's actually taken on now, a significant part of our making, you know, in terms of accessories. And we're actually now experimenting with homeware. So we're putting our amazing vintage fabrics and our our offcuts into, um, sort of cushion covers, um, you know, lampshades, things like that. So that's all kind of to come. So that's, uh, that's exciting. I think it's really important in terms of resilience as well.

So one of the things that I made a big effort to do during the lockdown was to kind of be a part of online programs. So uh, PNE pioneers program, that's kind of a local initiative to join people up with mentors. That's been really helpful. Um, and I also did a sort of accelerator course at the Institute for Sustainability Leadership.

And that was just really good because that kind of gets you out of your own headspace, you know, it gives you a place to talk ideas. When you're just going day-to-day and you're not really seeing anyone else, you can really quickly start to lose perspective. And sometimes you just need a third pair of eyes, you know, to come in, an external person to say, "have you tried this?" Or "that's great!" "Why don't you do that?" So I've really tried to, even when we've been very isolated, physically. To kind of maintain those open networks and open connections in a factual sense, even though it's not quite the same, but you know.

Ashleigh King: But it's also about attitude and, and what you've shown there as well is the resilience to adapt, try new things, give yourself some forgiveness as well when things don't work, but also ask for help, which is so important.

Um, also in lockdown, you actually launched second business. Am I right?

Louisa Rogers: Yes. Why did I do that? I don't know.

Ashleigh King: So can you tell us a little bit about, uh, I believe it's called Studio Courtenay is that correct?

Louisa Rogers: Yes, that is perfect pronunciation.

Ashleigh King: I always want to call it House of Courtenay. And so that's why I had to check because, um, there is, am I correct, there is a famous family or a French un- a legacy? Um, so when I, when I first heard it, I was really excited by the name and I think it's beautiful. I love the typeface. You can tell I like, um, a good font. Um, but would you like to tell us a bit about that?

Louisa Rogers: Yeah, of course. Um, so the name itself actually comes from my family. So my great-grandmother was, a Courtenay. Um, and if you kind of trace it back we were connected to that French family. So that's, that's quite cool. So there's a bit of history. Um, you know, my, my more recent name Rogers just doesn't have as much of a fashionable sheen to it. You've got to go French really for fashion. Um, so that's why we came up with the name.

But essentially we had been doing vintage for quite some time. So we'd been operating under Trendlistr, you know, it's been great. We've been kind of building up a customer base and, you know, really starting to focus in on what we're doing, which is European designers and amazing prints. And we just got to a point where we felt like we had taken it as far as we could, you know, we're a small team. We're like maximum four people. Um, and there was just a sense that we needed something new that we could start to really kind of brand as our own, um, because vintage is so eclectic and that's the beauty of it. And that's why I like it, but it does make it very difficult to get that consistency in that messaging right, it's very much about what product do you have in at the time. Whereas we thought, well, if we have our own range, then we can start to really create a story around that, you know, and just slowly start to build up that collection.

So we're not doing big seasonal launches. We're literally drip feeding as, and when seeing what works, what people like, what they don't like, you know, what fabrics work best for what? And we're just going slow and steady because we're, self-funded, you know, we use the proceeds from the vintage to invest in and fund this new venture and, you know, we're just going to see where it goes, and if it works, fantastic, and if it doesn't, then we've learned a lot along the way, and you know, we've done no harm. Um, and hopefully been at least a kind of voice

and a bit of representation for a more sustainable, slow fashion approach in the region.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. And you've done a little bit of, uh, actually you said you've done no harm there, but actually in many cases you've done more good because you have been repurposing fabric, using up you know, leftovers, um, repurposing pieces, trying new things. Um, it's really exciting actually, to hear all of that.

And it's funny because when I first heard of fashion or thought of fashion, I never thought of the connection with sustainability. So I wonder if you'd like to say a couple of, of words? I know you lecture on this already, but why it became so important for you to, you know, to- when did you become interested in the, the journey of, you know, uh, something that we buy and then how its- its lifetime? You know, um, the thing about vintage, we know that if you buy something from a charity shop or from a vintage fair, it usually has some wonderful material with its own secrets and memories. And that's what I love about vintage. But I'm curious about, about your journey with slow fashion, you know, what was it that made you start to wake up to the, the, the journey that our clothes go through?

Louisa Rogers: So I think I probably will arrogantly class myself as an early adopter of slow fashion. Um, my family, we only ever shopped second hand. So you wanted to buy something? It was charity shop, or car boot sale. Um, and that was just the way that we did it. I didn't think there was anything weird about that. You know, that was just normal. Like, of course I'm waking up at six in the morning on a Saturday to go and stand in a muddy field and, you know, barter with old Belgian men about, you know, a dress: "No, five euros" "no two euros", you know, "aren't you going to haggle?" Um, so yeah, so I found that very normal and what I loved about it was, you know, I always like to dress really quirky and different.

We didn't have a school uniform in Belgium. So, you know, we got to do that during the week, which was nice and um, you know, I, I was always just wearing second hand. You know, occasionally I'd get something in the sales, on the high street, but it was just a different way of consuming. And so I think, because I grew up with that, it was very normal to me.

And then that's kind of what actually got me into selling vintage because what happened was, you know, I went to university in London. Um, couldn't get a part-time job because I hadn't really had a part-time job at school, cos I was doing freelance photography, and I needed to make some cash. So I started selling off my surplus clothes, that were a lot of them vintage. So there seemed to be demand for them. You know, I was popping them on eBay, and very quickly started realising that there was demand for it. And then it got to the point where I would go out and look for things specifically to buy and sell online. And so that kind of remained my little side gig, you know, throughout my university years.

Um, and then when I came out the other side of it, that's where I thought, well, maybe there's something in this to actually make a business out of it. Um, I've always loved about second-hand clothing, about vintage clothing. That you're just more likely to be the only one in the room wearing it. It's so unique, you know? Yes. A lot of it was also handmade out of really high quality fabrics. So there is a sense of like craftsmanship, you know, and like you say, they last a lot longer, but ultimately it's also just about having something different and something unique, you know, and not worrying about you're wearing the "it" dress from Zara, but you know, you get on the bus and two other people there are wearing the same thing. So I think it was, it was always something that I did in terms of buying clothes. And then I always loved the distinctiveness of the design. So it was a combination of both of those things that kind of drew me into sustainability.

And I, I just, it never crossed my mind to make overseas with the new collection with Studio Courtenay, because I actually wanted to be involved in the process. Cos as I said, I don't have a design background. So, you know, by making in the North East, I can go, I can sit with the manufacturer. They can tell me about what they're doing. "No, that won't work," "that will work." And that's what I wanted to do. I didn't want to send documents off and get clothes back eight weeks later. That just didn't interest me.

Ashleigh King: I love that because you've almost, um, had various iterations of uh Trendlstr and also your masks as they were new iterations, but also discovered for yourself, which parts of the business you want to learn more about and how you want to grow as a leader and change and adapt. And, um, I do love that you have two businesses, you- a guest lecturer from different universities, as well as continuing, you know, all kinds of your own interests and finding beautiful clothes that no one else has.

So, um, I want to ask one more question, uh, just around the creative industry in general. So, um, you know, it can be challenging for people wanting to get started in the creative industries. Um, especially right now at the moment with limited funding. And you've mentioned a couple of times about, uh, self-funding a lot of things, you know, investing, reinvesting money back into things, and you can see that right from the beginning with your first purchase, uh, sorry, first sale of your own clothing. Um, and then discovering that there was actually a gap to do that, and there was a demand for it. I'm just curious about, um, if you had any tips for new, uh, new people wanting to start out in the creative space, what would you tell them, if you could go back or tell yourself?

Louisa Rogers: So I, I think I would tell them to bear in mind that the creative industry is still an industry, you know, so it's... I feel very, very lucky and privileged to be able to do, you know, work that I find inspiring and interesting and stimulating every day. But of course, there's always a level of, you have to make money and, you know, there's a bottom line, and there are Excel spreadsheets to be filled out, and, you know, there are taxes to file. And I think sometimes because of the nature of creative work, uh, people can be quite resistant to that. But what I would also say is, you know, you don't have to compromise

everything, you know, you can do 70% what inspires you and you just put up with the other 30%, because that's what you need to do to make it viable. You know, I think a lot of creatives will, um, create amazing work, but then perhaps they will not have the impetus or sometimes even the desire to then go out there and showcase it. And I think that's natural and- and normal, in a way. Cos it, it is difficult. But it's very much about getting outside of your comfort zone. It's about focusing on what priorities you have. You know, if your priorities are flexibility, you know, creative stimulation, then make sure that you're saying yes to opportunities that are going to align with that.

And, you know, yeah, there'll be times that you try things and they don't work, but a lot of the time, I think you would surprise yourself with what can transpire. You know, I hated public speaking when I was at university; I said yes, to an opportunity through a not-for-profit that I was working with; and um, the Head of Fashion at Northumbria was in the audience and came up to me afterwards and said, basically, would you like a job? So, you know, that was something that never would have happened, had I not put myself out there. And yeah, it's stressful and it's unpleasant, but the payoff can be huge, so, it is an industry. There are compromises involved. But ultimately that compromise is- is worth making, if it means that you can make that your livelihood. I think.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. I love that.

Um, I did hear a rumour that, um, you have been nominated for an award. So I would like to hear a little bit about that, but also what's next for Louisa?

Louisa Rogers: So, uh, I've been nominated - thank you very much NatWest for the Great British Entrepreneur Awards, for the North East region. I'm a shortlisted finalist, or semi-finalist, um, in the categories of 'Sustainability' and 'Fashion and Beauty'. So that's really exciting and it's nice to get that sort of badge of, of recognition, you know, from, uh, a big business like NatWest. Um, so we'll see what happens. I was nominated a couple of years ago and, you know, we did lose out to one of the new dragons, um, Sarah, who's absolutely lovely by the way, so it was very well deserved as a win. So we'll see what happens with that. But in any case it's- it's really nice to get that recognition.

Um, what's next for me? You know, I hope that Studio Courtenay will continue to grow. I would like to take it outside of the region when things start to open up, um, you know, bring it to different parts of the country. I've got a few events sort of scheduled in the future that I think will be really beneficial for that. And just building up that range, and trying to work out, you know, what is it that people want from sustainable fashion? I want to very much run with this idea that sustainable fashion doesn't have to mean hemp. It doesn't have to mean, you know, black and white and beige. It can be colorful. It can be a bit mad. You know, it can have that really fun, vintage look to it, but also be ethically made. So I guess we're kind of fighting back against this idea that ethical has to mean minimal. So we're just more is more.

Ashleigh King: Oh, I love that. I love the eccentricity and exuberance and flamboyance that, all of that, you've just said, um, brings up for me. So I'm very excited about, uh, the future for Trendlstr but also the Studio Courtney

Louisa Rogers: Thank you!

Ashleigh King: And Louisa's future too.

Um, and yeah, I just wanted to ask the final question, which is what in one word would you say to describe your, your, um, your time with Newcastle University Business School, how you feel about the Business School?

Louisa Rogers: I mean, one word... if I could give it a sentence, I would say probably one of the best things I've ever done. If I could say one word, I would say... catalyst.

Ashleigh King: I love that. That's a very good word. I like that. We've actually got a fabulous new building called the Catalyst, have you, have you been in yet?

Louisa Rogers: No, I did not know that was happening.

Ashleigh King: Okay. I would highly recommend, when you are able to, and when things are open, that you check out the- the new building, the Catalyst, it is a really quite something

Louisa Rogers: I'll be sure to do that.

Ashleigh King: Yeah... and hopefully we'll see you speak in there one day.

Louisa Rogers: Oh, that would be amazing!

Ashleigh King: Thank you so much for coming in.

Louisa Rogers: Thank you for having me.

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Ashleigh King: Hi, Dan, thank you so much for joining us today.

Dan Ellis: No problem! Pleasure to be here.

Ashleigh King: So Dan, you are uh the director and founder of Jam Jar Cinema, that's correct?

Dan Ellis: Yes, down in Whitley Bay.

Ashleigh King: Okay. So can you tell listeners who maybe have never heard about Jam Jar Cinema yet, but will now, um, a little bit about how it started, what you do there, and how it's going for you?

Dan Ellis: Um, so I came and did a Master's at Newcastle University and to support myself through it, I was working a fairly miserable job at a local theatre scanning tickets on the front door. And the number of people who kind of came in going, oh, is this not a cinema anymore? And it used to be kind of that mixed arts venue. Um, and I kind of thought, well, okay, there's obviously a want and demand for a cinema in this town. Um, and part of my course was to kind of come up and create a business plan for a potential creative business. So, as kind of, really weirdly, kind of my di- dissertation-come-kind of studies. I ended up kind of dreaming what a cinema could look like, what it could operate like and a lot of research while I was actually uh studying as to how that might operate. And then randomly, I just kind of made it happen, in a very, kind of abridged way.

So uh we opened uh Jam Jar Cinema in a derelict old bookmakers, a derelict job centre above the bookmakers, should I say. Uh, in Whitley Bay in 2013. You know, it was a one screen venue. Um, we did all right for quite a while. We lied, begged, borrow, stole, were voluntary and then became staffed. Um, and we spent about three years trying to get an adjacent building.

So in 2019, we took that building on and just before, uh, the lockdown for COVID we'd signed off and we've now got three screens. Um so we show all the latest films as well as kind of independent specialized content. We have an education program. We do a lot of outreach and community fundraising work. And yeah, so it's a real mix. We show the best of kind of Independent, British and Hollywood titles. And then have a World Cinema strand as well. So it's normally seven days a week. Um, and it's a real kind of flag bearer for our town.

Ashleigh King: I think it's absolutely incredible for anyone listening and for, for, for me, just to see. Um, you had a dream, and you've grown it so much, uh, despite challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, but also funding challenges, which is a key issue we're talking about today, you know, valuing the creative economy, what does the creative economy mean? And you know, how do we value our creatives? So, I mean, the fact that you've had an idea, you've gone and done a course and, and sure it's been part of the development in the course that you've, you've developed that idea, but to actually go and make that happen. But now, you know, have multiple screens running seven days a week, have staffed, uh, you know, teams. That's really something! So I'm, I'm actually really inspired by you. And I know that many of our listeners will be.

Um, I would like to know what was that journey like for you? So. Growing that business from, you know, a tiny derelict studio, as you said, did you have to do lots of scrubbing and algo- elbow grease and

Dan Ellis: It was hell!

Ashleigh King: Yeah. And mop buckets and all the things? Yeah!

Dan Ellis: Um, no, so, yeah, that's a really interesting, um... so you've touched on, do we value our kind of creatives? No, we don't. Do we support them? Um, at face value, I think? Um, and a lot of that support is via kind of larger organisations, but in terms of kind of direct support, we're pretty poor here in the North East. Um, I think that's mostly set from central government as well as kind of through a- through a variety of arts organisations. But it only seems when you kind of established and made that there's regular support and funding there. So actually as a new person coming in, it's terrifying, it's lonely, it's scary.

Um, and everything that you've just described, we beg, borrow and stole to get the money to start the place. We thought, oh yeah, we'll build a cinema on like 20 grand. And we went to start-up loans and said, can we have a 10 grand loan? They were like, yeah, but you need to get it match funded. So we said, oh no, we have, the council have given us a 10 grand grant. So then we went to the council and said, oh, we've got a 10 grand loan if you match fund it. And that's kind of how we started, but £20,000 does nothing. It, um, we didn't realise you needed a certain standard of equipment to show films. Um, we just kind of started just, we just got in deep, to be honest with you, and like scary deep.

But I- I'm in a different, very different position in my life now, as to 10 years ago, when my exact line was, I can't afford to buy a house in Whitley Bay, it doesn't matter if I go bankrupt. And I find it really tragic that the only way that I was able to start, um, a career in the creative industries was that premise of, do you know what if I go bust it doesn't really matter, because it becomes a class issue. It becomes actually about who can afford to do this. I moved back in with my family, I, um, worked three jobs, on top of kind of setting this off. Um, so yeah, it's really tough and really challenging.

Ashleigh King: I think as well, what you've said there about the- the hustle, you know, we can sometimes glamourise hustle culture, but also sometimes it is the real, the real um way that things get done. And it's the only way that it happens is through pushing yourself through it and against the odds because many people start businesses and not everyone actually keeps them running for such a long time, as yours has, and to actually grow it even further and start to become more self-sufficient. So I think that's really important what you've said there about wanting to, you know, work really hard and make use of networks. And, you know, sometimes your negotiation is that you need to get one piece of match funding and then another piece and match them together.

But how did you keep yourself sane at that time? So, you know, what kind of strategies can creatives who are maybe recent graduates wanting to start out in their own creative journey, or even for uh more established folk who have their own creative businesses, but maybe all going through the bankruptcy phase

where they're thinking, "you know what, I don't know how to do this, what am I going to do?" How can they keep themselves, uh psychologically safe? Um, that's not the right word, I mean, you know,

Dan Ellis: Well

Ashleigh King: What kind of tips did you use? Yeah

Dan Ellis: Yeah. Um, so I think it's really important, um, at times I wasn't, is the big thing. And I used to refer to them as grey days of it's just miserable, and you don't wanna talk to anyone, and you're really ratty and angry with your friends. But I think it's about kind of trying to tap into as many networks as you can, and not in that really showy networking type way where you're forcing business cards down people's throats. Just going for a coffee, going for a walk, having a chat with a pal, and also someone who might not be necessarily in the same sector as you.

Um, people talk a lot about the value of mentors. Um, I think mentors in the creative sector are useless because most people are kind of free spirited and they'll do their own thing. Um, but actually having friends who can empathise, understand and not kind of doing very similar things, in different fields, has been a really useful resource for me. Um, being able to kind of just, I... get a bit of perspective. It's not all that it's- it's cracked up to be. It's not the most important thing. It's a job. If you go bust, you go bust. If you make millions, well done for you. Um, it's about kind of realising what your own goals are, keeping those in perspective.

And I always remember everyone kind of starts out with kind of, you know, write yourself a business plan and that'll help, and then you never look at it again. My business plan mission statement was I want a minimum wage job in the arts. Because at the time there was no jobs. I started just after the last kind of recession, financial crash. And it's very similar. I'm seeing the same echoes as we saw then. Those kinds of jobs are not there. We're seeing kind of inflation in academia, in jobs, people who are massively over-qualified post-pandemic, people are changing their careers now and going into different things.

And so my attitude, if there isn't a job there to take, make one. And, um, the worst that you can happen, is fail. You might get laughed at, your friends might kind of take the mick out of you at the pub, but in real terms that's it.

Ashleigh King: I absolutely love that way of thinking about if there isn't a job for you, make one, because what you've said there about the echoes of the past recessions, and also, you know, for yourself when you were, when you were graduating and also, you know, the, the expected economic challenges we may have coming up, um, already have, especially in the creative sector. Um, I think that, that is something that it's really important for us to talk about.

Um, some of the discussions that we've had in this series so far as well, has been around things like how in the creative industries and the cultural industries, um, there is a lot of the idea of "hope work" and working for the idea of hopefully getting something out of it. And at the same time, uh, you wouldn't have been able to launch your cinema without that as well. You know, without volunteers helping you, without you, you know, leaning on friends, and, and so it is, it is, um, it's challenging because in some places it has a place and it is about collaboration over competition. And then in other ways, could there be more structural support? Could there be more policy or, um, ways to make it easier to start a business in the arts? And you touched on class before, and I'm just curious about your thoughts around this, especially around the concept of exposure, working for exposure, volunteering, um, what, what are your thoughts there around what could be done to support artists and creatives more?

Dan Ellis: Um, so we have a lot of great organisations in the North East who run very successful internship programmes, paid internship programmes as well. We have hundreds of graduates coming out from kind of our universities and colleges here. People, um, there's- but for me, there's a real disjoint between, unless you want to go into that institutional kind of mindset, or working for an organisation for a given job or, um... It's a big step then to set yourself up as self-employed, to have that confidence to say, this is what I'm doing. And I think there's some real structural support that needs to happen to get people to go, "right, okay. I want to set myself off as a videographer, a copywriter, an artist, or, um, how do I do it? Where do I go?" And the specialised support just isn't there at the moment.

We have a lot of kind of, uh, business support in terms of kind of like for start-ups and, uh, freelancers. But I think the support targeting creatives, people who are working within the arts economy, especially, um, it's just not there. They don't get it. They don't understand the same challenges. And in real terms, as I mentioned earlier, kind of, the advice to always lean on a mentor - those people don't have time, because the one thing that someone who's working within the creative economy values above all is their time. And I think what we need is some, almost, guide on fairness. I see people who either massively undervalue their time, or give it away free, or expect others to give it to them... you've talked about the hope economy of, oh yeah, the number of times I see the word "exposure". Um, and the flip side of that is, oh people value themselves and go, "yeah, I'm £500 a day," "I'm £300 a day." No one actually knows, talks about fairness. And I think that's a real difficult thing to tackle, and needs a lot of people that are in the same room. And at the moment that's just not happening here.

Ashleigh King: It's really, uh, interesting your points there, because what I would like to know is now that you are established, and you have been running your business for some time, and you are one of the few, um, cinemas locally in the North East of England that does offer, not only your standard, you know, Hollywood type films, but also a World programme as well as Independent films. So I'm curious about, um, you know, are you finding that as you've become more established, you are now becoming someone that people seek out to talk about

some of these issues? So are you able to use your voice to speak on behalf of other creatives, but at the same time, I guess my question there is as well, is whose, whose responsibility is it to fight for the creative industries? And that, that is something, you know, is it something that as a society we should collectively value or is there, uh, you know, is it something that someone should lead on from a policy perspective? Have you got any thoughts around that?

Dan Ellis: Um, yep. I think that very much boils down to money and, um we're caught in a very uncomfortable position of being that the arts or creative, uh, economy have a social good that they are good for towns, they are good for people's wellbeing, they are good things. But the converse of that is they're caught between money, cost, what's that good worth? Why should I support that good?

Um, in terms of being seek- sought out. Yeah. For especially with regards to kind of film, cinema, um, luckily the UK has a great Cinema Association, so most kind of cinema operators and owners work closely together. And I think that model could be replicated across different sectors.

I think within the North East, it's quite disjointed and it comes from some people are doing quite well. Other peoples are really struggling. And there's only so much work. There's a real kind- and there's a competitive, competitive element up here as well. Um, but I think the North East is a fantastic place, if you wanted to start something, because everything's so cheap. Like if you want to get a half decent building and turn it into a studio, you're paying £500, £600 a month. Whereas if you try doing that in Salford or London, you're paying four times the price. Um, you might not get anywhere near as much work automatically or from this, but if you want to put your toe in the water, it's a great place to start.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. And also that friendliness of the network locally and the collaboration opportunities as well, I think can be really helpful for starting something. Um, it's, it's really interesting what you said there about being sought out in some ways, because I think, um, it's just so nice to see your journey of how you have, uh, grown something from nothing and now, uh, you know, you have the opportunities to feed into, to key issues.

Um, so I guess I'd like to know if you have any top tips for anyone who you've already shared, um, you know, how to keep yourself sane in tricky times, but, you know, um, how, how can people, um, uh, I guess, I guess my question here is, um, in terms of that hope economy and things like that, how do you deal with those questions now? Because you have shared that there is a bit of a, a bit of a contradiction between the, you know, that, oh, I'm, I'm this much a day and the also undervaluing yourself. So maybe you could share your points about how you value your time and energy and where you put that?

Dan Ellis: Um, ok- so yeah, I work from a real baseline of if I can pay my mortgage, if I can pay all my bills, put food on the table and have a bit of

spendies at the end of month, I'm pretty happy. And I think if everyone kind of starts at that point, or how they get there. And I mean, when I first started, I used to, I didn't get paid for three years. I used to make 20 quid on a Friday, uh, out the till we go at the pub with. I couldn't afford to go to the dentist, it was that kind of level. Now, um, but even the pandemic's hurt my business. Um, as it will have a lot of kind of hospitality, leisure and creative companies. Um, we were forecasting for 2020 to have between 80 and a hundred thousand visitors. We had 14 staff, we've lost some staff. Um, realistically we think that we won't get back to where we were until 2023 now. Um, but I'm going- shall- I'll tell you what I'll distill a Masters degree into kind of two minutes.

Ashleigh King: Please do. I would love that.

Dan Ellis: Um, so yeah, I did Arts, Business and Creativity, and my takeaways from that, and this is the kind of all I remember 10 years down the line, is if you can't get someone's money, get their time. And it's a really hard thing for someone, if you ask them, "can you help me?" As humans, you kind of want to say "yes". So if you just say to someone "look, can you help us?" You'll either get a really honest response or- response from someone going, "do you know what? I just haven't really got the time, but have a look at this" or they tend to signpost you to something that might be useful, or they might just say yes.

And the other bit that kind of was how to grow a business. And everyone's like, well, and this could be anyone, whether you're kind of just starting out - I still kind of govern our business by this. Um, the only way you can grow is get more people spending with you; get more people spending more with you; get them to come more often; or cut your costs. And so long as you can get more people coming, spending more, or spend- an increase in how often they spend with you, they're the hard things to do. But actually you're always going to have like a baseline cost. Um, and, we kind of run with that.

We also have the fifth one, which for us, we're a social enterprise. So for us, um, which I haven't really mentioned, the big thing about Whitley Bay was it used to be an old stag and hen town. Um, it was kind of really sad when we opened, um, we were the first real business to be the- we were referred- we're referred to as flag bearer in that we changed the night time economy. No one else had invested into, um, what was a dying pub and club scene. And now we have a very vibrant culture of pubs, restaurants, microbreweries... um, it's a really diverse, it's a mint night out! Um, but it's a different night out and different proposition.

Um, so we, our kind of fifth governed one is, is it right? So when we look at things like, is this right for us? Is it right by our kind of morals? Is it right by our ethics? Would people like us to do that? What's the potential reputational blow back if we go against it? And I think if people do things fairly for the right reasons, then they cannot really go wrong. And if they go wrong, it might just be that they're unlucky, or it might be that they're a bit rubbish.

Ashleigh King: I think that's um some very sage advice, especially the series of tips there. The way that you, your framework for making decisions and your governance is really interesting. And I'm actually going to make sure that in our show notes, we list those five top tips, um, so that people can, can use a little checklist for themselves, if they're working in the creative industries.

I also want to say I've never actually had a night out in Whitley Bay, or I may have been to a wedding in a hotel once. But I am going to check it out in a hurry, uh, now that I know

Dan Ellis: It's amazing now!

Ashleigh King: What a good night out is! I do like a microbrewery. Um, and I love the idea of supporting local and small, independent businesses as well, which is really lovely.

Um, okay. So the, the only thing that I wanted to ask you just as a final thing is Newcastle University Business School, you are an alumnus of the Business School. You studied there, you've gone on to use your degree. You've also very kindly, you know, come along here today and you stay connected with the school in lots of ways. Do you still work with, or stay connected with your alumni network? Have you found any benefit in networking with other, um, people who were maybe on your course with you? Um, so from that, those programmes, um, you know, is there anyone that you were able to, grow alongside? So not necessarily what you said about mentoring, but those networks, did you stay connected with anyone?

Dan Ellis: Do you know what, it's fab- uh, fantastic. Uh, my course um was very international.

Ashleigh King: Yeah

Dan Ellis: So a lot of people have kind of gone back home and are doing really interesting things in their own communities. Um, there was one other local student, who lives about three streets away from me, so we kind of keep in touch. I keep an eye on what kind of she's doing. And she's still working with kind of creative enterprise, which is amazing.

Um, in terms of kind of, hooking up with other kind of graduates, not really. Bec- and that's purely based on like the kind of, kind of graduates and alumni coming out. Um, we probably do, but we pay for the services. So we pay for kind of our accountancy. We pay for our legals. We have our own marketing person, and then we outsource marketing to different kind of companies. So there's probably a lot of NUBS out there, we just don't really know about it.

Ashleigh King: Yeah

Dan Ellis: Um, but in terms of kind of direct linkup, um, it's really weird for us because we probably have closer links to kind of like music courses, filmmaking, literature, um, and a lot of, kind of like our education, outreach, community work has more of a reach across the University, and universities and colleges in that respect. Um, we are so proud to be based in the North East, from the North East. Um, I think it's a mint place to live. It's a mint place to work. It's lush up here. And I just hope that we retain talent, um, post-pandemic. We can, I hate the term, build back better, but build back differently and finding new ways to solve old problems. Um, and I think a lot of people are starting to re-evaluate the why, the how, the what they really want from their careers, their lives. Um, and I think there's some really, really exciting opportunities on the horizon.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely! Gosh. I'm so inspired talking to you. And I love hearing the Geordie, uh, Geordie slang, uh, lots of great words there.

So my last question was just, if you could describe Newcastle University Business School in one word, what it means to you, what would you say?

Dan Ellis: Um, do you know what, it was confidence? Cos for me, I came, I trained at drama school and making that transition from kind of London conservatoire training into someone who ha- felt that they had the skills and knowledge to run their own business and like run a business that- run a couple, to be honest with you, run a couple of businesses. We're now branching out into doing some theatre work, we're looking at kind of some arts investment as well. So, um, that's a really, um, interesting thing, but I would say it gave me the confidence to actually kind of go: yeah, do you know what, I've got a couple of letters after my name, and that's great, but actually internally being able to say, yeah, I can do this.

Ashleigh King: Absolutely. I love that, and uh, yeah, I hope that anyone listening as well, feels inspired by that too. Uh, I know just what you mean about confidence. I felt the same doing a Master's and I think there is something about a Master's that helps you feel equipped to tackle lots of the- the challenges coming your way. Um, and gives you a new set of skills and frameworks, so, um, but yeah, that that's all we'll have time for today. So thank you so much for joining us.

Dan Ellis: No worries! Thank you for having me, that's fantastic.

Ashleigh King: Thanks for listening. We'd love to hear your feedback. You can drop us a line at nubspodcast@newcastle.ac.uk. And you can also tag us in any of our Newcastle University Business School social media channels. You can find these links in our show notes.

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