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## **Everyday Participation and Cultural Value in Place<sup>1</sup>**

Andrew Miles and Lisanne Gibson

Corresponding Author:

Professor Andrew Miles

School of Social Sciences

University of Manchester

3.038 Arthur Lewis Building

Oxford Road

Manchester, M13 9PL

Tel: +44 (0)161 275 8987

Email: [Andrew.Miles@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Andrew.Miles@manchester.ac.uk)

Associate Professor Lisanne Gibson

School of Museum Studies

University of Leicester

19 University Road

Leicester, LE1 7RF

Ph: 07921265662

Email: [lg80@le.ac.uk](mailto:lg80@le.ac.uk)

Twitter: [@MuseumPolitics](https://twitter.com/MuseumPolitics)

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In the introduction to the first part of this special issue (Miles and Gibson 2016), we outlined the rationale and focus of the *Understanding Everyday Participation – Articulating Cultural Values* (UEP) project. Here, we drew particular attention to the relative neglect of location and ‘place’ in recent work on the dynamics and meanings of cultural participation. This, we suggested, is partly the product of the dominance of sample survey methodology, which typically represents cultural participation as a limited set of activities while simultaneously reifying the ‘national’ as the appropriate scale on which participation should be understood.

These methodological and substantive restrictions on the conception of cultural participation and its value reflect a failure on the part of cultural policy and practice, as well as in much related academic work, to take seriously the sub-national and local political economies within which cultural support operates. The geographies of cultural support and participation have long been an issue for cultural policy; from debates about so called ‘culture-led regeneration’ (Gibson and Stevenson 2004) to more recent critiques of the spatial inequality in English cultural funding, which privileges cultural activities in London and the South East of England (Stark et al 2013, 2014). There is much at issue in these debates, and the metropolitan bias of the liberal arts and heritage establishment could be perceived as symptomatic of the regional ‘culture wars’ informing Brexit. This opens up not just the matter of where cultural funding from the public purse should go but returns us to the more fundamental questions at the heart of the UEP project: what and whose culture is at stake in these disputes; and what are the effects of variations in valuation and support?

Accordingly, the contributors to this second volume of this special UEP double issue mobilise the project's focused, cultural eco-system research to consider questions of everyday participation 'in place'. The papers in part one of the special issue revealed the ways in which contests over cultural value, and the relations of economic, social and cultural capital that ensue, feature across a broad network of practices located in the everyday realm, as well as in the more formal realms of 'legitimate' culture. The articles in this second volume extend this argument to show how the everyday cultural realm is fundamentally rooted in the experiences and relations of place. These articles are, then, concerned with everyday participation as a *situated* process; with the ways in which cultural practices and relations give meaning to, are impacted by, and shape the material spaces, environments and institutions in, and through, which they occur.

In contrast to the restrictive agenda enforced by the participation survey, this distinctive situational lens is enabled precisely by UEP's expansive and eclectic methodological approach, which mixes together several qualitative and quantitative techniques in order to reveal and flesh out the nature and dynamics of everyday cultural engagement. The facility afforded by qualitative methods, in particular, has been critical here and this is reflected in the use of ethnographic work and in-depth interviews in several of the articles in this issue. However, two of the papers in this issue also demonstrate how less orthodox quantitative approaches can be used to illuminate the relationship between space, place and participation.

In the first article of this issue, Leguina and Miles deploy the novel approach of Multiple Factor Analysis, using data from the Taking Part Survey to recompose the social space of lifestyles, and then to explore the regional spatial dimensions to

cultural participation. Their resulting map of the English cultural field highlights the importance of the ‘free-time’ subfield – which is most clearly associated with everyday cultural practices – in structuring this space. Breaking this down, they reveal geographically specific cultural characteristics that both complicate and refine existing conceptions of boundaries at the regional spatial scale, and how – alongside more traditional stratification and demographic variables - ethnicity and gender work to define and mark off lifestyles at this level.

Delrieu and Gibson’s paper on the geography of library use in Gateshead in the North-East of England is an early presentation of ongoing research, which seeks to understand the impact of geography and asset ‘attractiveness’ on particular kinds of cultural participation. This work utilises the urban planning concept of trip-chaining and a geographically defined categorisation of asset attractiveness (Thill and Thomas 1987, O’Reilly et al 2015) in order to reveal the impact of geospatial variables on cultural participation. In doing so, Delrieu and Gibson argue for geography as an additional and important frame in understanding attendance and participation.

Turning to some of the qualitative methods used by the UEP project, Gilmore’s paper on public parks in Manchester/ Salford in the North West of England draws on ethnographic and interview-based work which reveals the ways in which parks are valued and recognised as community assets and spaces for both tolerance and distinction, where different communities can meet, become visible, and perform shared and distinct cultural identities. Gilmore argues that parks present important opportunities for civic participation through contemporary processes of ‘commoning’,

defined as a dynamic and collective resource that stands in tension with commodified and privatised space.

Schaefer, Edwards and Milling's paper on performance-based participation – amateur theatre, community-based theatre and Carnival - in a market town on Dartmoor in the South West of England also draws on ethnographic research in order to examine the rural dimensions of participation and cultural value. Schaefer et al argue that participation is a fundamentally embodied and emplaced practice. As such rural areas are 'doubly disadvantaged' by the inequity in the geographic distribution of government cultural funding, as well as by the limited nature of the cultural forms and practices supported by government cultural funding.

Miles and Ebrey are also concerned with participation beyond the city, focusing specifically on the roots, effects and future of the rich fabric of associational activity at the centre of everyday life in a 'suburban village' on the edge of Aberdeen in the North East of Scotland. Combining perspectives from several strands of embedded ethnographic research, they argue that this associational life draws upon a particular local historical legacy of the relationship between work and leisure to foster a civic-minded 'common culture', which revolves around key institutions, and within which, social tensions and ambiguities have been offset by a 'village imaginary'. As they go on to consider, however, the alternative model of participation and cultural economy that this configuration implies is currently under threat from generational transition and ongoing socio-economic change.

Finally, Edwards and Gibson draw on ethnographic research, undertaken by Edwards in Manchester, to discuss the charity shop as a site fundamentally involved in the ‘cultural economy’; defined broadly to refer to the relations between the cultural and economic values of particular participation practices and institutions involved in cultural production and consumption. This article argues for an understanding of the charity shop as not simply a place of consumption but also as location that is enmeshed within a set of relations between cultural and economic value, which have effects into the social sphere. This research identifies a number of forms of participation, including but extending beyond consumption to various production practices, volunteering and other modes of social interaction, which take place within and through the charity shop.

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