

Understanding Everyday Participation – Articulating Cultural Value

Research Update, April 2014

This update provides information on 'Understanding Everyday Participation' research activities that began in late Spring 2013 with the case study sites of Broughton, East Salford and Cheetham, North Manchester. The research brings together evidence from historical analyses, mapping, survey data, ethnographic observations and interviews with local people to understand how people participate in culture in their everyday lives.

Our analysis is only just emerging in relation to Manchester and Salford, but we want to share some early findings, and to consider how these might be best presented and shared with local stakeholders in order that they may be of practical use.

Summary of Key Points

- This focus on participation in Cheetham and Broughton is revealing the diverse kinds of activities people value in their everyday lives, and the many different and important connections and relationships they make through taking part in these activities.
- The research also highlights the importance of particular places such as the home, the high street, the supermarket and the park for certain kinds of interactions and participation practices.
- The quantitative research has mapped local data on assets, amenities and activities in the two areas from local and national statistics, and layered these over each other to create a richer, more complex picture of what people do in Cheetham and Broughton than previously available from a single source. New analyses of national data sets ('Taking Part' and 'Active People') have also been undertaken to reveal new 'lifestyle' clusters of participation.
- The ethnographic research involves the direct participation of a project researcher in the community over an extended period of time, in chosen sites and places. Using this method we have explored the values of participation and its effects on everyday social and economic networks in two contexts: i) volunteering and giving through work in a charity shop in Cheetham, and ii) daily route-making and mobility practices by observing people's use of parks and other open, green spaces in and around Broughton and Cheetham.
- Two waves of household interviews, conducted between September 2013 and April 2014, further enrich these ethnographic insights with data on the participation practices and life histories of residents, their connections to networks of families and friends and to other places, and their everyday tastes and preferences.

Why are we looking at Everyday Participation?

The starting point for this research is that in UK policy, cultural participation is largely understood in terms of 'traditional', formalised practices – such as going to the theatre or visiting a museum.

But we want to explore whether more informal activities like shopping, taking the dog for a walk, meeting up with friends, and watching TV can be spoken about as having cultural worth and what they mean to the communities in Manchester and Salford.

What follows is an update on activities since we began the research last year.

Research rationale: Why Broughton and Cheetham?

We chose these two neighbouring areas to represent our interest in the cities of Manchester and Salford as we are interested in how people participate at a local community level and how they feel more generally about the cultures of the places they live in.

Not only do these two adjacent inner city areas straddle the boundaries between two cities, they also border their respective city centres, and so in principle provide easy access to the recognised 'traditional' cultural amenities located there (such as theatres, museums and galleries, concert halls and main libraries), as well as to other facilities (such as shopping centres and transport hubs).

Both areas also have a history of rich cultural diversity, as places where immigrants from many different countries have arrived in Manchester and Salford, settling to live and work. In the recent past the Cheetham and Broughton areas have suffered from economic and material decline. As a result, they have been the subject of renewal and regeneration initiatives both from their respective local authorities, and through the continuing work of many other development agencies and voluntary community associations and groups.

They therefore offer the opportunity to consider the value and role of everyday participation from the diverse perspectives of those who live and work in these areas, related to community activism and engagement with governance and management of resources, and to the hard and soft infrastructures and networks of relationships concerning the social and cultural economies of the cities of Manchester and Salford.

The fieldwork research in Cheetham and Broughton consists of:

- Local data mapping and analysis
- Household interviews
- Ethnographic observation and participation
- Focus groups and stakeholder workshops
- Historical research using archival documents and oral histories

Between now and June 2014 we will be undertaking:

- The final focus groups and the second (final) wave of household interviews.
- Two strands of historical research, firstly looking at the recent history and use of cultural indicators in Greater Manchester, and secondly, an analysis of focus on parks and green spaces in the two case study areas.
- A Social Network Analysis in the area to help identify networks of individuals involved in cultural governance in the area and in the

Stakeholder workshops and local meetings

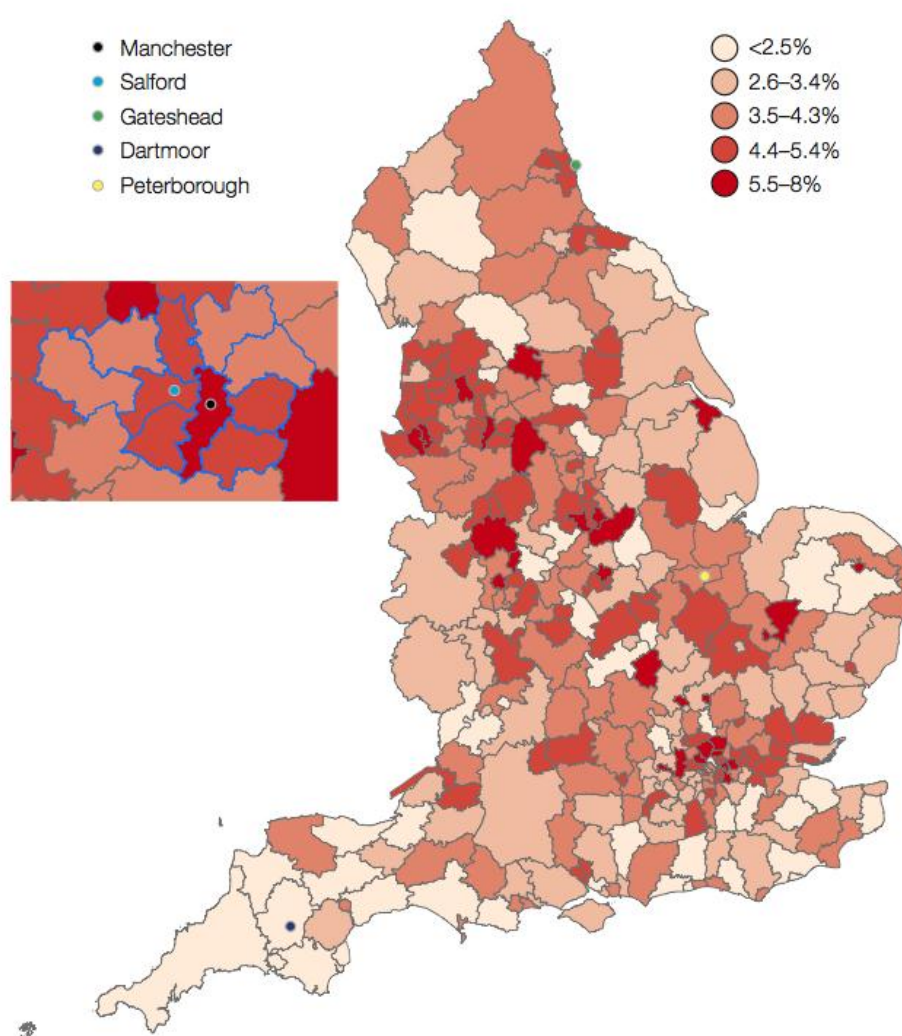
Early stakeholder meetings in Cheetham and Broughton provided the opportunity to map data sources, assets and perceptions of place and participation with a range of local stakeholders from local authority neighbourhood management teams, cultural agencies and community organisations from each area. These meetings helped orientate us towards the different landscapes in Cheetham and Broughton, and find out about the locations and types of particular resources and amenities in the areas, as well as demographic and other statistics. They introduced us to the different forms of local knowledge residing with different groups and organisations and the current priorities for local government, neighbourhood management and community development. By way of developing this approach, we are also

exploring the views and experiences of young people through discussion groups at local youth clubs and schools.

Emerging Research Findings

Mapping Cheetham and Broughton

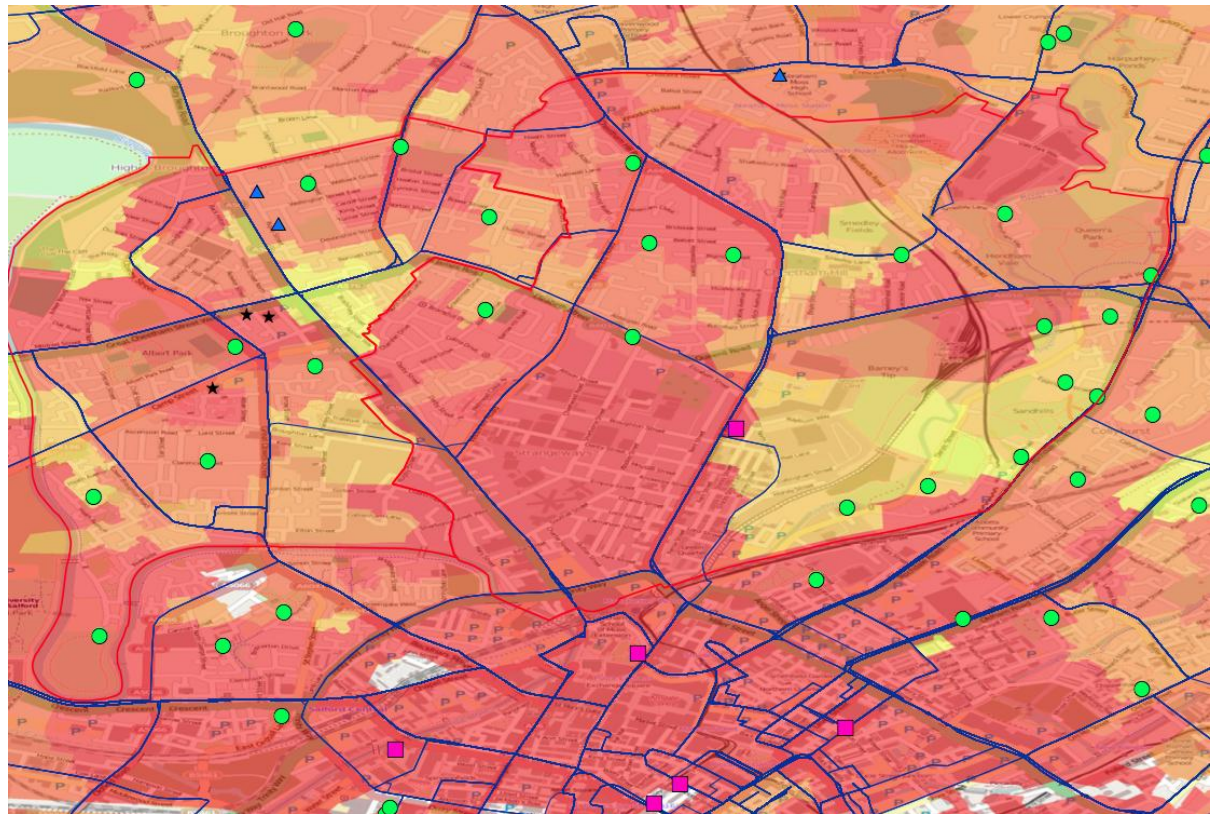
Official statistics on cultural participation are produced through national surveys which ask people whether they visit arts and heritage venues and sites, and take part in creative, sports, and other leisure and recreational activities. The data produced provide an indication of the types and rates of participation at national, regional and local levels for some activities, but cannot represent these activities accurately at neighbourhood or ward levels. To explore what mapping different local data sources onto these statistical pictures might tell us, we have produced a number of maps¹ of the case study areas:



This map shows participation in football: the percentages represent the fractions of respondents in each local authority reporting that they have played football in the preceding four weeks. The research project's English case study sites are also marked on the map (Source: Active People Survey 4, data collected 2009–2010).

¹ See also www.everydayparticipation.org for further data maps

This map shows local cultural assets – the various resources and amenities in the study areas, including sports facilities, parks and green spaces, museums and galleries, libraries, and bus routes. These are laid over demographic data representing how ‘young’ the area is. The coloured areas show the fraction of adults in each output area who are aged 18-29 - the redder the area on the map, the higher proportion of this age group (Source: Salford City Council, Manchester City Council, Office for National Statistics).



Key

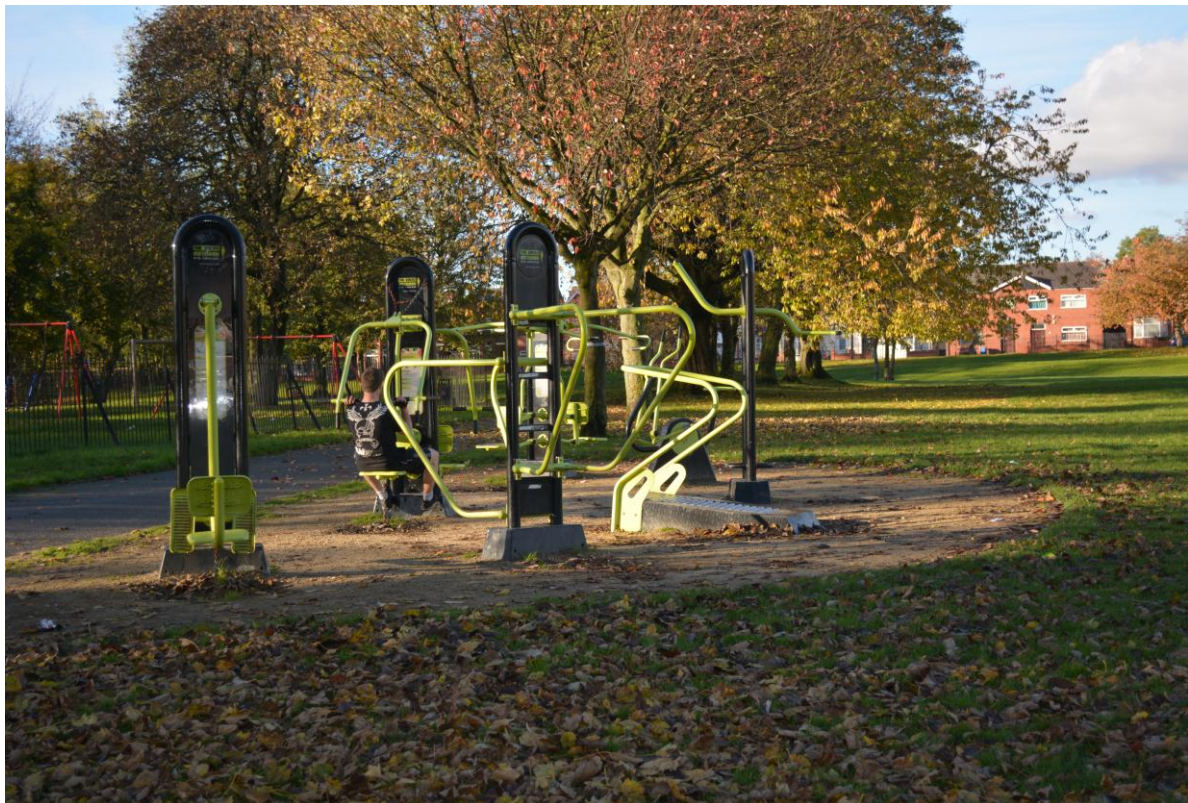
★	sports facilities	■	museums and galleries
▲	libraries	●	parks and green spaces
Blue lines	bus routes	Red lines	ward boundaries

We are also developing maps which show more of our primary research findings – from interviews and focus groups – plotted against other neighbourhood data, for example the perceptions of safety and environments of places against crime reporting data. Bringing existing official data together with qualitative findings from our research can reveal more nuanced interpretations of the attitudes and perceptions of the different communities living in Cheetham and Broughton and uncover real concerns which are not reported through official statistics.

Ethnographic Study

Ethnography involves close, participant observation over a period of time of the activities and behaviours of people in particular spaces and places. The first site – a charity shop in Cheetham - revealed the importance of charity shops in the areas as places for different kinds of interaction and economy. It disclosed the flows, relations and values around donating items and money, and provided new perspectives on the concept and spaces of charity. It also emphasised how items, objects and people become assembled as part of a familiar, everyday landscape for some: offering a place to spend time, to express tastes and decision-making through the day-to-day practices of a very particular type of shopping.

The ethnographic work on parks involved observation and informal conversations with park users whilst they were using the park. Different forms and levels of participation were identified, such as active and passive participation for example. Active park users are participants who appreciate the recreational value of the park, such as the outdoor gym users:



The research explores whether the participation practices observed confirm or refute both the formal regulations and informal expectation of the local authorities who manage these amenities. For example, there is a great amount of evidence that users break the rules and negotiate their participation in parks, by for example riding a bike or walking a dog off the lead.

The ethnography suggests that the parks themselves constitute neutral spaces within the areas, by providing a place in which participants overcome other social and cultural boundaries.

Parks provide an example of where people come together in public spaces in an everyday way:



The research shows how the parks themselves constitute boundaries within the two local areas, as well providing ways in which participants overcome social and cultural boundaries by coming together in public spaces.

At the same time, the ethnography has shown how solitary practices – doing stuff on your own – is an important aspect of everyday life, but also suggests how parks in the two areas can exclude individuals and groups in various ways and at particular times, through the perception of them as unsafe or as unsuitable places for certain kinds of behaviour. This was observable through indicators of more problematic forms of participation that are not so visible during the day, such as drinking or graffiti.

The ethnography concludes that both the charity shop and parks are important community spaces for intentional and non-intentional social contact and in some cases interaction. This is principally because of their position as impartial spaces, where people regardless of religious/cultural/ethnic background come to participate not necessarily together but side-by-side in an everyday context; whether that is shopping, taking the kids to play on the swings or sitting on a park bench. The forms and levels of participation can be self-negotiated and this is where the value of participation lays, in choice or in agency. Understanding participation in such everyday spaces will be invaluable for working towards a knowing of underlying community dynamics in the two areas and the important role place can have in such dynamics.

Household Interviews

In Cheetham and Broughton we are conducting two waves of household interviews, with broadly representative samples of people living in these localities. These are designed to produce rich accounts of what people in these areas do in their everyday lives, and the values they attach to their participation in the context of their homes, local neighbourhoods, working lives and networks of family, friends and associates.

Emerging findings from interviews have demonstrated the significance of Cheetham, particularly, as a home in Manchester for those seeking refuge, work and a new life with better prospects. 'Communities' here find strength in the networks they create and/or join, often quite soon after arriving, often within their own diaspora communities but sometimes making bridges across communities co-located within the area. On the other hand, second or third generation migrants in the UK have sometimes chosen Manchester as their chosen home (in contrast to other northern cities) both for its openness and tolerance of difference.

The values and importance of participation

The interviews suggest that cultural participation takes many forms. Some forms of participation are not necessarily connected to the immediate physical area or local 'community'. The cultural participation of, for instance, relatively recent migrants, might occur on two levels. One might be the conviviality of friends in a living room in Cheetham getting together to eat food and watch a Bollywood movie. On another level, this participation in sharing food and film-watching acts as a connecting link, stretching across continents to the folks and culture back home.

Most people we talked with also have their own special interests and pastimes which they participate in at home, for example; 'listening to music – including Hip Hop, Rap, Bhangra;; reading newspapers, books, magazines, religious texts; hosting church friends groups; exercise, including dance and fitness classes; DIY and sewing.

The interviews discuss the meanings and value of participation: some people describe their hobbies and interests as an integral part of life, and essential to their sense of identity. A lot of participation is about pleasure, relaxation, health and wellbeing, as well as a way to meet people and connect with others, and a way of strengthening family bonds. However relationships don't always develop beyond the activity itself and interaction isn't necessarily always what people want, for example, when watching football in the pub or walking the dog in the local park.

There are emerging findings concerning the values and importance of everyday participation:

The use of parks especially for young men - the public spaces of the municipal parks in the area seem to provide an important point of entry, particularly for new residents to participate in various cultures of sport, primarily football and cricket which take place informally in Cheetham (and Broughton) parks.

The development and embedding of cultural practices as skills - migrants may bring business skill, which encourage participation in their new cities of residence; one example includes opening a café in North Manchester.

The importance of televised sport as a form of participation - in both the home and pubs especially for young men, but some women too. Going to a Premier League football game regularly would not be financially possible for most people with whom we spoke.

Importance of neighbours, this is really significant and important. Evidence from interviews suggests that in different ways, participation in the often unseen web of community solidarity often involves skill sharing amongst neighbours (this includes those living in the immediate area of residence rather than just next door) for example, car maintenance and dress-making, but also in the 'affective' skills of supporting those in any kind of distress.

Some activities come up over and over again:

- Watching TV – including movies, box sets and music channels
- Having friends round and going to people's houses – including parties and BBQs in the summer
- Internet, social media and computer games – checking email, Facebook, YouTube, Ebay, Amazon, downloading music, watching TV and films over the internet, online shopping
- Going to the pub
- Going out to eat – and getting takeaways
- Shopping
- Football – watching it on TV (at home, with a group of friends at someone's house, in the pub), going to see matches, playing football (informally in the park

We asked about people's experiences and perceptions of 'formal' culture.

Some people express a lively interest in creativity and culture but for others 'formal' culture is off the radar. Some interviewees are conscious of 'not fitting in' to formal cultural institutions, such as art galleries and the theatre. There was sometimes curiosity to find out more, and several people describe specific activities that they've always wanted to try but have never been able to for various reasons, including lack of time or confidence, or just simply never quite getting round to it. For some people illness or difficult financial circumstances are a major barrier.

The interviews questioned how people felt about their localities and the communities they share these places with. Several people mention a lack of suitable facilities and spaces, and arrangements for booking and using amenities. However, people in Cheetham Hill and Broughton appreciate the convenience of local amenities, and also mention the easy access to the city centre.

Interviewees described the influences and changes to their participation over time, for example, the ways in which parents and their experiences growing up can encourage and limit interests and activities. For some people, getting married and 'settling down' means giving up some of the things they used to do – while others see it as an opportunity to develop new interests. Religion can be a route into participation, but also a moderating influence, and participation is influenced by social relationships and place, and can shift in response to peer pressure from friends and colleagues.

Participation in schools and also in higher education is for some younger people a way of furthering a career, or developing new forms of knowledge, but is also regarded as a means of participation, of discovering new networks of friends or colleagues.

People in Broughton are concerned about litter, vandalism and 'rougher people' but there's also a sense that the area is improving. Whilst the interviews revealed there's a lot of passion for Manchester (the city) the notion of its regeneration is contested. Some people feel that Manchester is on the up, while others don't feel that the benefits extend to them. There's nostalgia – and anger – about the disappearance of special buildings and spaces.

Current local and national strategic contexts – how might this data be used?

The research findings are intended to be useful to local and national stakeholder communities – for use in developing policy and implementation, and to help inform future actions, services and the allocation of resources. We are also intending to develop specific projects where research findings are used to experiment and pilot new activities, in each case study area. For Cheetham and Broughton area, as with each case study area, the local strategy planning context influences the ways in which the research might be used, and the following section makes some suggestions about the relevance of the research to particular local policy agendas.

The Greater Manchester area, embracing both Cheetham and Broughton, remains an extremely important city-region in the UK. The recent BBC 2 documentary 'Mind the Gap' emphasises the appetite and support for Manchester in becoming England's 'second city' outside of London (Manchester was ranked first in the BBC's survey, above Birmingham and then Liverpool. The significant attention on Manchester's economic growth also features in the RSA's City Growth Commission, which has brought Manchester once again to the fore as a city with the ambition and potential to out perform others in the UK.

Over the last eight years successive local governments in both Salford and Manchester have initiated individual policies to try to create vibrant, sustainable and cohesive communities as well as through more collaborative strategies such as 'The Greater Manchester Strategy: Stronger Together', produced in 2013 by the Greater Manchester Combined Authorities. This overarching plan feeds into the sub-regional economic growth plan that is the responsibility of the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), established in 2011.

In a report on sustainable communities, Manchester Independent Economic Review MIER (2009), whilst not covering Salford city, identified Cheetham Hill as an isolate neighbourhood - the most disadvantaged type out of four classifiers (isolates, escalators, transits and gentrifiers), which applied to the worst fifth of places in terms of indicators of deprivation. Isolates are defined as: 'Neighbourhoods whose households move between areas of similar or greater deprivation. Households in these neighbourhoods, which are characterised by concentrations of social housing, are in effect trapped'.² The report also commented on the need for better integration and for more responsive policy and delivery between key agencies and players, and importantly, including local communities themselves.

The economic slowdown has increased unemployment across both Salford and Manchester, which has reinforced levels of deprivation, reducing private investment and public spending as the fiscal environment becomes tighter. Within both City Councils there have been structural changes with stronger neighbourhood focus led by either Neighbourhood Regeneration or Neighbourhood Management Teams.

However, despite the external changes, a number of the issues remain present due to long term entrenched levels of deprivation. Accordingly the priorities for both local authorities and external agencies supporting local communities have changed little over the past decade, and remain focused on:

- Place: making local areas attractive places to work, live and raise families, with easy access to services; and
- People: residents fully benefiting from prosperity and jobs, the wider city and city region.

² cited in 'Understanding Community Resilience in Cheetham Hill': Final report prepared by Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) for Manchester City Council (CLES 2012: 17)

Several initiatives have also been undertaken in an effort to improve the vibrancy of the Cheetham Hill and Broughton areas, including a pilot programme 'Better Life Chances' in 2011-12 exploring shared services and resources across the two local authorities and wards with a particular focus on: drug dealing and anti-social behavior; Worklessness; Tenancy Management; Case Management; Streetscene; Leisure and Culture, and Early years.

There have been other recent small-scale interventions involving community engagement in parks, open spaces and other community resources, for example, the work of the public art agency, Buddleia in Cheetham Park and Cheetham Hill Road. There is also a BITC Business Connector, seconded from Fujitsu, match-funded by Manchester City Council to support community relationships with business.

These initiatives are clearly important steps towards addressing the needs of local people and local communities. However with the long-term viability of many local services under threat because of forecast reductions in public subsidies, there are numerous calls to find new ways of delivering, managing and operating public services. In any circumstance there will be challenges in developing and adapting new ways of thinking, particularly in co-operation and collaboration across two neighbourhoods in different administrative areas.

The research undertaken by Understanding Everyday Participation provides evidence that derives its authority from the excellence of the methods employed and probity of the consortium that produced it. The findings could be used in multiple ways, for example in support of funding applications to grant making bodies such as the Big Lottery or Nesta. Local agencies and local communities could use the insights generated by the research to help them 'make a difference' to the areas and people that live there, or more directly to use data in support of community plan-making or as part of the evidence base in new neighbourhood plans.³

As part of the next stage of this research, there will be further opportunities to use the forum of research and experimentation to explore new models of managing and sustaining community assets in the future. The ethnographic study, for example, could be used as a basis for dialogue amongst communities that wish to explore new funding models for local parks, such as the long-term management by 'Friends of' groups or enabling charities to provide day-to-day management in lieu of rent for use of facilities.

By exploring 'Everyday Participation' we are able to paint a broader picture of how people make their lives locally through culture. In doing so this project creates the potential for new understandings and measures of cultural value that more fully reflect the reality of how people live today and what is important to them.

Acknowledgements

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³ see more at <http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/>

