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## Understanding everyday participation in Gateshead **briefing document**

### Overview

This project proposes a radical re-evaluation of the relationship between participation activities, cultural value and the relationships between participation choices and social inequality and engagement.

Orthodox models of culture and the creative economy are based on a narrow definition of participation: one that captures engagement with traditional institutions such as museums and galleries but overlooks other activities. This project aims to paint a broader picture of how people make their lives through culture, and in particular how communities are formed and connected through participation. In doing this, and through collaborations with partners and participant groups, we aim to inform practice for policy makers and cultural organisations.

From 2013 to 2017 focused fieldwork, supplementing national level quantitative and historical research which commenced in 2012, is taking place in 6 locations in England and Scotland: Manchester/Salford; Aberdeen; Gateshead; Dartmoor; Stornoway; Peterborough; and secondarily, through related PhD projects, Barnsley and Glasgow.

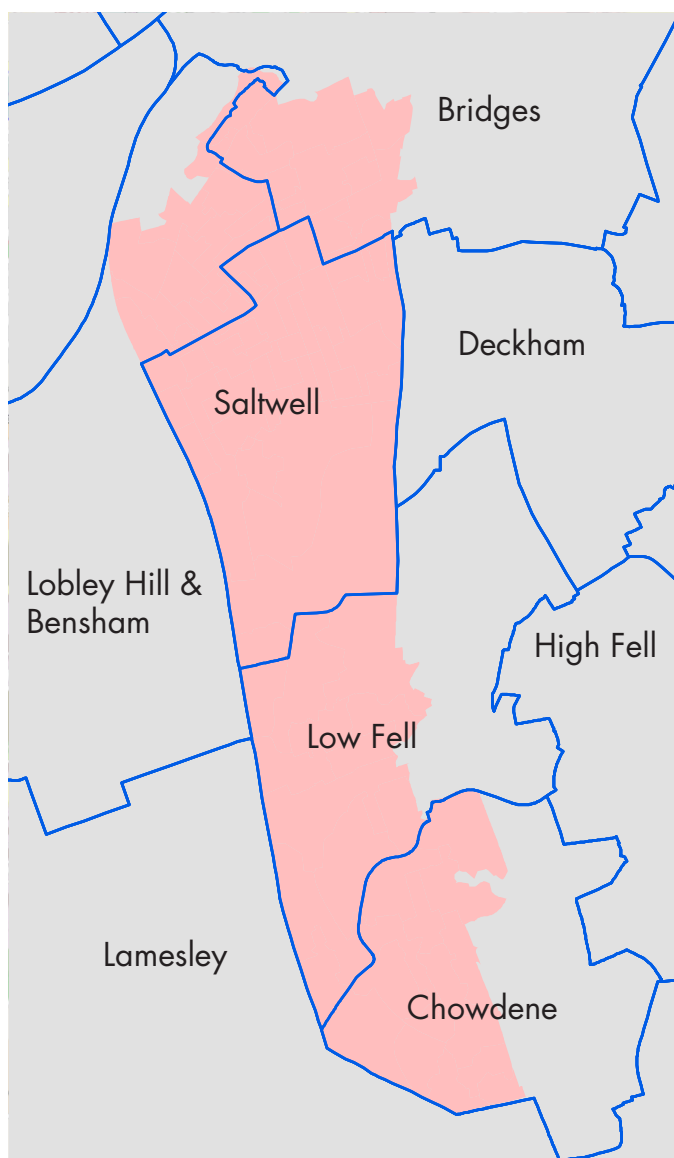
### Gateshead Research

According to the Active People survey, Gateshead is in the bottom 20% nationally for its levels of cultural participation. Our research aims to get 'behind' this data by seeking to understand the variety of 'everyday' participation taking place in Gateshead. In undertaking this research our aim is to challenge the 'deficit model' which privileges particular cultural and leisure forms as constituting participation. By focusing on 'everyday participation' instead we hope to understand the ways in which the huge variety of different forms of everyday cultural participation have consequences - good and bad - for social engagement and community formation.

### Corridor of 'situated participation'

The geographic corridor that is the subject of the intensive 'thick description' of participation in Gateshead is bounded by the A1 to the South, the A167 to the East, the train line to the West, and the B1426 to the North. This covers an area which includes 4 wards- Bridges, Saltwell, Low Fell and Chowdene. We have chosen this corridor on the basis

of two major factors: proximity to 'formal' participation assets and diversity. We carried out sociodemographic mapping based on a large number of variables available in the 2011 Census. On the basis of these characteristics there is a significant distinction between the North of the area (taking in parts of the wards of Bridges, Saltwell and Bensham) and the area south of Saltwell Park: Low Fell, with the exception of pockets of Chowdene. This diversity of 'life stage' and 'life experience' across the corridor and its relative geographic proximity to Gateshead's 'major' leisure offers - Saltwell Park, the Quayside, civic amenities (library, leisure centre, gallery), town centre, the Metrocentre etc, - provides a unique opportunity for understanding a diversity of everyday participation practices and experiences and their relationship to Gateshead's amenities.



The geographic corridor that is the focus of our study is highlighted in pink.

## Mapping participation and assets with thick description

When the word “participation” is used as shorthand for ‘participation in a certain limited set of activities’, levels of engagement in these activities can then be used to rank local authorities from high to low. For example, between 2008 and 2010, respondents to the Active People Survey were asked whether they had “been to, or participated in, any creative, theatrical, artistic, theatrical or musical events”. These results have been used by Arts Council England in their ranking of local authorities; on this measure Gateshead comes 301st out of 354 local authorities.

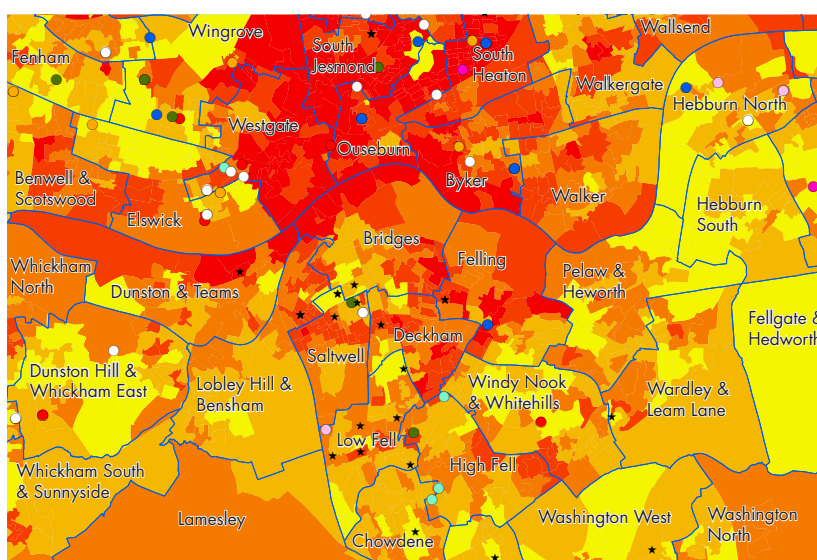
This impression of participation is partial. In the UEP project, we are aiming to combine multiple measures of participation, and combine these with information about cultural and community assets. This will allow us to understand the dynamics of participation in the North East compared with the rest of the country, in Gateshead compared with other local authorities, and within Gateshead. These measures of participation and of assets are being mapped and combined with other geographic measures, such as demographic data derived from the 2011 Census, in order to generate a thicker description of the dynamics of participation in and around Gateshead as well as in the “corridor” where our qualitative research is taking place.

“Cultural and community assets” is a deliberately broad term. While it is important to acknowledge institutions such as theatres, museums, art galleries, and concert halls as cultural assets, several other kinds of physical asset could also be considered cultural assets, such as pubs, community centres, working men’s clubs, schools, shops, rights of way, and parks. These are all settings where participation takes place, and each one of these has been named by at least one of our interview participants as important to their participation.

The mapping of, broadly defined, cultural and community asset reveals the nature of the cultural and leisure offer in particular

geographic locations. This deep understanding of the assets of a place can then be combined with information about the characteristics of those different locations. Through our gathering of participation data from as wide a variety of sources as possible we are interested in cross mapping a detailed or ‘thick’ understanding the specificity of participation in a particular location. This understanding of what data tells us about the types of participation undertaken by people living in particular areas can then be understood in relation to our maps of cultural and community asset and also in relation to our sociodemographic maps. This will provide a significant contribution as currently our understanding is limited to estimates from social surveys about

levels of participation in specific activities – if people have been to the circus, or watched film noir, or the kind of housework they do – but while these estimates can be used to identify differences between broad regions of England, they cannot be used to understand the nature of participation in specific places or even between Gateshead and its neighbouring local authorities.



The symbols in this map report visitors to TWAM venues who had filled out its questionnaires. Each symbol refers to a visitor to a particular venue; black stars refer to visitors to the Shipley. The coloured polygons report how many people living in these areas have degrees: Yellow: <17% with degrees. Light orange: 17–22% with degrees. Medium orange: 23–29% with degrees. Dark orange: 30–38% with degrees. Red: 39%+ with degrees.

In order to achieve this ‘thick description’ we have secured and

are seeking data from as wide a range of culture and leisure service providers as possible. The image in the centre of this page represents one example of what can be done with this data. Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM) shared with us some information about responses to their questionnaires at their venues: having “jittered” this information so that people cannot be identified, we have plotted these people’s addresses to a map of people with university educations in and around Gateshead. The plot shows that the corridor, and the area around it, does not have a disproportionately low number of respondents to these surveys. It also shows that most of the people in this area had filled in the questionnaires for the Shipley gallery. Significantly, it suggests that the relationship between museum attendance and education is not as strong in this area as has been estimated elsewhere. This map is a provisional, early piece: it represents two pieces of information, but it gives a snapshot of the potential in combining quantitative data in this way. This quantitative analysis is one aspect of our work; the multi-dimensional pictures revealed by the quantitative data are being even further layered through the qualitative work also being undertaken.

## Household interviews

The research in Gateshead involves 2 waves of 30 household interviews. The first set of interviews has been completed and we have started analysing these before the second wave interviews (with the same people), due to commence in the autumn. The first wave analysis is already revealing the following themes and issues:

### Participation

- People in Gateshead describe an incredible range of activities, taking in a range of settings as constituting their everyday participation.
- Participation can be about pleasure, relaxation, duty, health and wellbeing. But is also influenced by social relationships and place, time and money.
- For some, hobbies and interests are described as an integral part of life and essential to their identity.
- Participation changes over the life course: when people marry, have children, and when they retire.

### Culture

- A number of participants expressed a lively interest in 'formal' culture.
- Some interviewees were content to talk about 'cultural interests' and what this means to them, however this particular term made other participants uncomfortable.
- Gateshead is viewed as a 'cultural place' either because of its ethnic diversity or because of the presence of the Sage and Baltic. Others feel that Gateshead is trying to become culturally middle class but insist that it will always be a "working class town".

### Gateshead

- Some interviewees appreciate the convenience of local amenities and good access to Newcastle, but still feel that Gateshead is "missing a heart" – a town centre.
- Some interviewees talked about when Gateshead was a bustling town centre.
- Places, landmarks and buildings of significance include the Tyne Bridge, St James' Park, Baltic, Shipley, The Angel, and Metrocentre. These various places are valued for different reasons including architecture, history, location or experiential memories.

## Young people's participation

The qualitative research in Gateshead focuses on understanding the participation practices and experiences of young people. This aspect of the research has involved community participant meetings, focus groups and simply spending time with a variety of groups of young people.

We have spent time and held discussions with a number of young people from Gateshead who attend youth projects in the Bensham area. The following are some of the activities they like to do and where they like to spend time:

### "Hanging out"

- Young people all talked about "hanging out with friends", yet the meaning of this term differed:
- For some this takes place in formal spaces, such as the Metrocentre and activities like bowling or cinema.
- For others, it takes place in more 'everyday' settings and involves casual activities such as sitting with friends on the street or gathering at a friend's house.
- Settings such as Saltwell Park can be formal and informal spaces for "hanging out". Some have picnics and play rounders; others will sit and "get wasted" in the bandstand.

### "Why else would you go to Newcastle?"

In contrast to the memories of some of the older interviewees, Newcastle is the favoured place for shopping because there is more choice. When the weather is unfavourable however, the Metrocentre is preferred.

### Gateshead Town Centre or Metrocentre?

Some of the young people do not acknowledge that Gateshead has a town 'centre' and would never spend time in this area because "it's trumpy and full of drunk people". The sole purpose for entering Gateshead town centre would be to get a bus at the interchange to "the Town" or to the Metrocentre or "to go to Greggs".

### At Home

Time spent at home is minimal; when at home, participation tends to be solitary. They watch DVDs, TV but "only if something good is on", read magazines, listen to music.



CoMusica Arches. Photograph by Delyth Edwards.



## Further research

### Ethnography

As well as this focused work with a variety of young people an ethnography with young people in care and their experience of 'facilitated participation' is about to commence to run from July to September. From our engagement with the Councils Girls' Project, we discovered that the girls who attend the project wanted to make a film about their experiences of being in care in Gateshead, for submission to the Councils Celebrating Achievement Awards. Through discussion with the social and youth worker and the girls, we have decided to combine the ethnography with their project. The girls will be invited to explore any aspect of their facilitated cultural and also everyday participation over a number of months, using the iPad's and video cameras we will make available. This means that they can document their participation through film, photography or even through digitally written diaries. We will work with a professional filmmaker who will run a workshop at the start of the project to train the girls how to use the equipment and then also to work with them to edit the final film to put forward for the Award. The premise of this reciprocal ethnography will be for the young people to be the ethnographers of their own facilitated cultural and everyday participation.

### Social Network Analysis/ History

Also commencing in July is an SNA and history of socially informed cultural and civic practice in Gateshead from 1980 to the present day. During the course of our research in Gateshead we've been told that there is a particular socially engaged character to cultural practice in Gateshead that has its origins in work that's occurred in Gateshead since the 1980s. We've been told that this particular flavour inflected much of the subsequent cultural work in Gateshead including the development of the plans for a culture-led regeneration. In order to understand the extent of this the social network analysis/history will identify the role and influence of individuals, events, projects,



Metrocentre. Photograph by Delyth Edwards.

organisations, and also key terms, theories and approaches in the recent historical development of cultural practice in Gateshead.

### Wave 2 Interviews

Where wave 1 of household interviews focused on leisure and activities, influences on how these came about, personal identities, and impressions of the places people live, the 2nd wave of household interviews, running from October to November, will focus on friendships and relationships, specific local issues, economics and resources, and change over time.

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