

## **Social Divisions/Social Identities 2**

### **W702, HAMISH WOOD BUILDING**

#### **MARKING OUT BOUNDARIES, MAKING UP PLACES: EVERYDAY PARTICIPATION AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF CULTURAL VALUE**

The papers in this panel are rooted in research being undertaken for the 'Understanding Everyday Participation – Articulating Cultural Values' project ([www.everydayparticipation.org](http://www.everydayparticipation.org)); an interdisciplinary project funded for 5 years from 2012 by the AHRC as part of the 'Connected Communities' programme. In a challenge to the deficit model of participation that has helped to inform the canonisation and funding of particular cultural forms and activities by the state, this project is undertaking a re-evaluation of the relationship between participation and cultural value: firstly, by examining the meanings and stakes people attach to 'everyday' practices, such as hobbies, pastimes and informal social involvements; and secondly, by exploring the interplay between participation, time and place. In this way, the research seeks, amongst other things, to extend recent attempts to apply a Bourdieusian frame to understandings of cultural consumption and social stratification in the UK, which have arguably neglected the 'ordinary' domains and spatial dimensions of cultural engagement. To this end, the project is working in six contrasting 'cultural ecosystems' across England and Scotland, using a mixed-methods frame comprising focus groups, interviews, ethnography, mapping and social network analysis to explore the situated nature, dynamics and meaning-making of everyday participation practices. Drawing on early findings from work in the first three cases studies – in Manchester/Salford, Aberdeen and Gateshead – along with that from a linked PhD project, the four papers in this session reflects more specifically on the process of boundary making through participation and how this is rendered empirically through the deployment of different methodologies.

#### **Participation Narratives**

*Miles, A.*

*(University of Manchester)*

Alongside Putnam's (1995) work on social capital, consideration of the 'stakes' attached to participation is most clearly associated with the debate around Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital and the role this plays, alongside the possession or otherwise of other assets and resources, in processes of domination and social closure. Here the cultural omnivore thesis (Peterson and Kern 1996) vies with the concept of 'emerging' cultural capital (Prieur and Savage 2013). Yet the preferred method of understanding variation in practices in the cultural field - the analysis of cross-sectional survey data on tastes and activities - reveals nothing of the value or dynamics of participation in different activities at the individual level, nor for groups. In this paper I explore the potential of 'participation narratives' and life histories from longitudinal in-depth interviews for understanding the formation, negotiation, presentation and relationality of cultural tastes and identities. These interviews are taken from the first three case studies (in Manchester/Salford, Aberdeen and Gateshead) of the 'Understanding Everyday Participation' project. As well as offering different perspectives on the salience of time to participation, including the ways in which *habitus* is configured, testimonies from these contrasting locations reveal how participation is understood and valued spatially through the interplay of mobility and

belonging. Within this frame, the paper goes on to discuss two emerging themes in particular: the 'timing' of participation, in relation to work time and family time (Elder 1994); and, drawing on Willis's (1998) concept of grounded aesthetics, the significance of vernacular cultural capital.

**Habitus and Value: The 'Situatdness' of Participation and Value**

*Gibson, L., Taylor, M.*

*(University of Leicester and University of Sheffield)*

This paper argues that place plays a fundamental role in informing everyday participation in leisure and cultural practices of all kinds. Many studies focus on understanding attendance and participation in their various forms through individual- and household-level demographic and socio-economic characteristics. However, such an exclusive focus loses sight of the mundane effects of supply and, perhaps more controversially, the 'cultural signature' of participation and the ways in which the value ascribed to participation in different activities varies by place. We are exploring the ways in which the 'situatdness' of participation is important, with an intensive focus on six locations (or 'ecosystems') in England and Scotland. In each one, we focus on the specific geography of physical cultural and community assets, socio-demographic characteristics, and a radically expanded range of participation data. Through this we are seeking to answer two questions. First, what is the situated character of participation in different places? Second, how do socio-demographic factors interact with the geography of assets to frame participation? Following debates in the sociology of culture about the generalizability of the cultural capital ascribed to participating in different activities: can we understand the specificity of participation in a particular location as constituting a specific habitus; if so, how does such a situated habitus interact with other dispositions related to class, gender, age and ethnicity? This paper will explore these proposals through the discussion of findings from studies of Aberdeen, Gateshead and Greater Manchester.

**Standing Close to the Action: Ethnography and the Times and Spaces of Everyday Participation**

*Ebrey, J., Edwards, D*

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As members of the UEP research team currently engaged in ethnographic work in two of the project cultural 'eco-systems' in England and Scotland, we have explored people's everyday participation in a number of different settings. We concur with Willis and Trondman (2000) and consider ethnography to be 'a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experience'. There are also varying accounts across disciplines of what constitutes a 'real' ethnography, all grounded in particular ethnographic time frames spent 'in the field'. Couldry (2014), in his exploration of ethnography and civic engagement, proposes three questions, which seem particularly useful to ask in the context of time, participation and ethnography, for both ethnographer *and* agent. Firstly, how might time mediate engagement for both participants? Secondly, what might being connected represent and thirdly, what does ethnography mean for participation, since it is in itself a participative practice? Using examples from our work in Aberdeen and Gateshead, we will discuss the process of ethnographic work in relation to these questions and will conclude by suggesting that

our 'short and dirty' method, in its combination with interviews, mapping, historical analysis and quantitative analysis, has been innovative in its exploration of everyday participation.

**Considering Participation in the Measuring National Well-being Debate: 'What Matters' as an Evidence Base for the 'Good Society'?**

Oman, S.

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The UK's Office for National Statistics is one of many national government agencies appealing to languages of crisis by seeking to decipher and track national well-being as an alternative measure of 'progress'. Its 2010 *Measuring National Well-being: What Matters to You?* debate involved 34,000 citizens in an exercise of political participation which was alleged would inform the (then) forthcoming well-being measures. This paper outlines how the ONS neglected to listen to all who participated, disqualifying the project as a democratic exercise and thus as an accurate representation of 'what matters'. While there were no boundaries set by the ONS with regards to who might participate in the debate, there were methodological boundaries to the inclusion of data forms in establishing this evidence base for policy-making.

I will look at the debate's online survey as a method of participation with two response registers: tick-boxes, which one participant called 'forced choices', or the *free-text* fields which the ONS labelled 'Other'. The two response methods present radical differences in the order of importance placed on well-being concepts in or outside the ONS' multi-dimensional index. The most commonly mentioned dimension in the free-text fields, and not reflected in debate outputs, was what might be described as 'everyday participation' as a contributor to overall quality of life. I will conclude that the well-being agenda, with its current evidence base and methods, cannot sufficiently understand inequalities in the 'good life' in order to effect positive socio-political change as advancement towards the 'Good Society' the debate promised.