CULTURE IN MANCHESTER

Institutions and urban change since 1850

Edited by
Janet Wolff with Mike Savage

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Culture, participation and identity in contemporary Manchester

Andrew Miles

Introduction

Manchester's cultural institutions have historically played a pivotal role in shaping the city's public spaces, civic identity and international profile. Both the mid-Victorian reconstruction of the city and the narratives underpinning its late twentieth-century regeneration were fundamentally 'culture-led'.[1] The image of contemporary Manchester is one of a city lifted out of industrial decline and transformed by a new 'spirit of place' founded on cultural investment and creative industries development. In turn, the roots of its success as England's leading provincial 'creative city', which has continued with the BBC's recent relocation to Mediacity on Salford Quays, have been presented in terms of a set of local particularities marked by the emergence of a diverse 'urban growth coalition' of city elites spanning the arts, popular culture and the creative industries.[2]

The relationship between culture, class and identity has been a consistent theme linking studies of Manchester's past and present. Just as the opening up of 'high' cultural institutions as the focus of a new public sphere is associated with the articulation of new middle-class identities in the second half of the nineteenth century,[3] so the formal cultural fabric of the present-day urban centre – comprising many of the same institutions – has been invoked as the focal point in a process of symbolic identification with the city through 'elective belonging' among an otherwise diverse array of current middle-class residents.[4] However, the significance of the city's traditional cultural venues to the wider Manchester public is less clear. While theatre and classical music were given as the main reasons for visiting the city centre by the respondents in a study by Mike Savage *et al.*,[5] a contemporaneous survey of local arts attendance showed market penetration at below the national average in almost

two-thirds of Manchester and Greater Manchester postcodes, with annual attendance rates at arts venues averaging out at 20 per cent of the population.[6]

Accordingly, what I want to explore in this essay is the apparent disconnect between Manchester's long-established, high-profile cultural institutions and the majority of those who live in the city. In particular, I focus here on the 'non-users' of such institutions, who, in the profiling discourses of audience development in the arts, are deemed to be culturally disengaged. In doing so, I draw on research arising directly from within this discourse, generated as a by-product of a project designed to create a dialogue between academics working on issues of cultural taste and the concerns of the local cultural sector. The findings of this work offer a very different sense of the role of culture in articulating identities – both identification with Manchester and self-identity – among working-class residents of the city, while for those concerned with the arena of cultural policymaking, they highlight the limitations of an official model of participation, the assumptions, processes and technologies of which obscure and so neglect the realm of everyday participation and its significance.

Cultural policy and participation under New Labour

Labour's 1997 election victory was quickly followed by a radical overhaul in the administration of the subsidised cultural sector, which profoundly challenged the preceding 'arm's length' principle of culture governance.[7] This was marked in particular by the creation of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in place of the Department of National Heritage and by the formation of the Regional Cultural Consortia, as New Labour sought to co-ordinate and integrate cultural policy within its wider political programme.

Alongside this new interventionist structure, the dynamics of cultural policymaking were transformed by the explicit adoption and intensification of a new style of public administration, dubbed the 'New Public Management'.[8] Rooted in the concerns of Conservative governments of the 1980s to expose public spending to market mechanisms and models of accountability based on the private sector, this focused on an instrumentalist, resource accounting approach to cultural investment. Such investment had to be justified in terms of the cultural sector's contribution to the government's wider economic and social objectives. This was established through Public Service Agreements (PSAs) with the Treasury by which funding was performance-dependent and both the DCMS and its sponsored Non-departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) committed to target-setting to ensure best value.[9]

Participation – expressed in terms of widening access to cultural activities – was at the heart of New Labour's cultural project and accordingly remained a consistent priority for the DCMS after 1997. The party's cultural policy

document *Create the Future* had asserted that the arts must be 'for the many not the few' and that 'Access will be the cornerstone of our cultural policy', a position re-confirmed in *Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years*,[10] and pursued through initiatives such as free entry to National Museums and Galleries and the setting of precise targets for increasing engagement among socially disadvantaged groups and young people. Following the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, the department adopted a set of core strategic objectives, the first of which (DS01) was 'Opportunity: to encourage more widespread enjoyment of culture, media and sport'.[11]

The drive to increase participation was predicated primarily on instrumental concerns with equity and social inclusion.[12] It was conceded that consumption of the largely traditional art forms and cultural assets funded by the DCMS and its NDPBs was the preserve of a small minority, with a large proportion of public funds going to support iconic metropolitan institutions. Democratising access was therefore necessary to justify such spending to the taxpayer and establish value for money. At the same time, it was presented as a way of combating social exclusion by spreading cultural capital and in the process developing a more inclusive 'cultural citizenship'.[13]

Establishing the impact of policies to widen access was a primary concern. The Labour government's embrace of the New Public Management framework had brought issues of evidence, and in particular the requirement for 'measurable outcomes', to the fore. As a report by the DCMS's Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team made clear, 'The [cultural] sector cannot continue to compete with other increasing demands for expenditure of education, health, law, etc. without the essential ammunition that performance measurement offers.'[14] However, while the drive to collect data became pivotal to the department's operations, the quality, consistency and mobilisation of what was produced left much to be desired.[15] Subsequently, in an attempt to address such criticisms, the DCMS commissioned *Taking Part*, a major annual survey of participation in culture and sport, which was designed using National Statistics protocols to ensure 'quality assurance'.[16]

This short account of the development of Labour's core policy narrative on cultural participation paints a picture of the widening access agenda and its prosecution as a seemingly neutral technocratic process. Yet, viewed from beneath the surface, what can be seen to underlie this procedural framework of 'evidence-based' policymaking is a deficit model of participation, which both helps to define and is reinforced by a politics of differentiation and exclusion. In the first place, the 'official' model of participation remains a top-down affair, operationalised as a demarcated set of activities and practices, defined largely by what government has traditionally funded, and informed by middle-class norms and understandings of what counts as 'legitimate' culture.[17] From this

perspective, the 'non-users' of culture can, in turn, be construed as a social problem: a passive, isolated and inadequate group morally adrift from the mainstream and therefore in need of mobilisation. Such a formulation casts the DCMS and its NDPBs in the role of cultural engineers. As the 2003 Arts Council England (ACE) manifesto *Ambitions for the Arts* put it:

> We will argue that being involved with the arts can have a lasting and transforming effect on many people's lives. This is true not just for individuals, but also for neighbourhoods, communities and entire generations, whose sense of identity and purpose can be changed through art.[18]

In this way the notion of social inclusion in cultural policy can be reinterpreted as a polarising device, simultaneously allowing for the cajoling of those 'in deficit' while marking them out and marginalising their practices.[19]

Moreover, the technologies and conceptual models that are employed to provide 'robust' evidence of the impact of cultural policy tend to be self-confirming of this narrow and tendentious view of participation and participants. *Taking Part* is a cross-sectional or 'snapshot' survey focused on those traditional and formal activities that are associated with the DCMS's funded sectors and a set of variables that have been selected for the purpose of evaluating performance against targets rather than research into the socio-cultural dynamics of participation.[20] This approach reflects the adherence of government social research to a positivist model of social science, which ranks large-scale quantitative data and variable-led 'causal' analysis at the top of a 'scientific methods scale'.[21] This is a framework that relegates descriptive and qualitative methods, which can reveal the contexts, meanings and significance of participation, to an ancillary status.

Another important factor in the delimiting of the official perspective on participation is the strong influence of market models on policy design and evaluation. Traditionally government has relied on partnerships with market research agencies, much more than academic researchers, to produce, analyse and interpret data on participation. Most recently, this can be seen in the DCMS's CASE (Culture and Sport Evidence) programme, which constructs actual and potential participants as customers in a market for culture and adopts a linear, logic-chain, approach to assessing policy impacts on levels of consumption and the 'drivers of demand'.[22]

Engaging the local cultural sector in participation research

In the sections that follow, evidence from a collection of in-depth qualitative interviews is employed to probe the apparent disengagement and marginalisation of those labelled as 'non-users' of culture on the basis of quantitative

population surveys such as *Taking Part*. These interviews demonstrate that many are in fact positively engaged in forms of interaction and participation that are not usually captured by survey evidence. That is, they make positive choices about not engaging with traditional or high cultural forms, even though they might actually appreciate their wider value. At the same time there is another group of people to which this label is applied who actually do engage with these forms. However, they do so in a personal or private way and therefore don't see themselves as members of an 'arts' community or as cultural participants more broadly.

The interviews arose from a wider study of engagement with the cultural sector in Manchester, designed to explore the value and application of academic research to local institutions.[23] Eleven prominent organisations were contacted and discussions were held with directors and their marketing and outreach staff to scope issues of interest for potential research collaboration.[24] What quickly became evident during the course of these discussions, however, was the way in which policy imperatives defined at the centre held sway, reflecting a strong process of alignment of regional and sub-regional cultural governance with the DCMS's national agenda.[25] Although a range of possibilities was covered, the overwhelming concern for these organisations was to grow whilst broadening their audience. As one marketing manager put it, 'There's a lot of interesting things we'd like to do but basically we are in the business of bums on seats.'

On the basis of this series of consultations, it was therefore decided to focus a research project on those people who didn't attend the kinds of organisations and venues involved in the study, whom the institutions themselves found by their very nature particularly illusive and 'hard-to-reach'. A range of issues – which included the time and availability of personnel, the set up and focus of marketing departments, and data protection limitations – made direct collaboration with the institutions difficult, but contrasting samples of cultural 'users' and 'non-users' were eventually identified with the help of the city's arts development agency, Arts About Manchester.[26]

Interviewees were recruited by means of a questionnaire about leisure practices and engagement, which included a question about willingness to be interviewed in detail. The users were contacted via Arts About Manchester's online e-bulletin. Candidates for interview were then selected by postcode from among the 192 respondents who completed the e-survey. The non-users were contacted via the mailing lists of the national marketing organisation CACI, from which households that have declared a lack of interest in arts attendance and participation in marketing surveys can be identified. A total of 2,000 surveys were sent out – 500 in each area – and 133 people responded.

The final result was a collection of 102 semi-structured, in-depth interviews

with users and non-users of Manchester's mainstream cultural institutions, with samples drawn in roughly equal proportions from four area types in and around the city: the largely affluent areas of Sale and Altrincham to the south-west, the ethnically mixed areas of Longsight and Levenshulme on the city's south-eastern fringe, the predominantly white working-class communities of Openshaw and Gorton further out in east Manchester, and both the new and more traditional residential districts of the city centre. Interviewees were asked a range of questions designed to explore their interests and practices in the context of their backgrounds and day-to-day lives as Manchester residents using a topic guide organised under four main headings: 'Home and neighbourhood'; 'Leisure interest and activities'; 'Cultural influences and trajectories'; and 'Manchester as a place'.

Cultural ambiguities: the importance and irrelevance of the arts

While not amounting to a 'scientific' sample survey, the questionnaire responses from which the interviewees were recruited provide an overall, aggregate picture of the differing demographic and attitudinal profiles of those who do and don't take part in formal arts and cultural activities. Confirming what we would expect on the basis of previous studies,[27] Table 1 indicates that these samples of users and non-users of formal cultural sites in Manchester are strongly demarcated by gender, age, income, education and lifestyle. Users tend more often than non-users to be female, younger, wealthy, highly educated and middle class. Particularly striking in this analysis is not just the relative levels of formal economic and cultural capital displayed by these two groups but the absolute disadvantage of non-users, around half of whom had annual incomes of less than £10,000 and a quarter no educational qualifications. This may in part reflect the fact that a moderate incentive was offered to people who returned questionnaires and were subsequently interviewed. Yet it is notable that one in eight of the respondents who subscribed to the Arts About Manchester e-bulletin actually hailed from the most deprived category of households in ACORN's life-style classification of consumers by postcode,[28] and while almost none of the non-users returning survey forms were from the wealthiest households, one in ten were relatively prosperous (ACORN Categories 1–3).

Notwithstanding the contrasts in the aggregate demographic profiles of users and non-users, what is striking about their responses to a series of attitudinal questions about the value and significance of the arts and culture is the broad level of agreement they reveal (Table 2). Whether or not people directly engaged with them, Manchester is recognised by a large majority as being a major centre for the arts and culture, suggesting the city's leading

Table 1: Demographic profiles of users and non-users of formal cultural institutions, per cent (rounded).

Characteristic	Users	Non-users
Women	76	43
Men	24	57
Aged 16-45	69	53
Household income under £10,000	9	45
Household income over £50,000	21	4
No educational qualifications	1	23
With postgraduate degree	31	6
Non-white	8	14
ACORN Cat. 1 ('Wealthy Achievers')	18	1
ACORN Cat. 5 ('Hard Pressed')	13	59
N.*	192	133

* This number refers to the size of the overall sample obtained in each case. The number of cases varies slightly for some analyses due to missing values, where respondents failed, or chose not, to provide information.

cultural institutions have what economists refer to as a high level of 'existence value'. Regardless of their own particular interests, most people also agree that the arts should be more central to mainstream education.

The views of participants and non-participants diverge mainly in two respects, and in one in particular. First, a significant minority of non-users think that arts and cultural opportunities are not very accessible. Secondly, and here the disjunction is stark, there is disagreement about the justification for public investment in the arts. Those who gain most from such funding in terms of use are very largely satisfied that the type of 'high' culture supported by government is of universal benefit, while almost half of those who don't take part feel that such art forms are irrelevant to the lives of the majority. On the face of it, the apparent ambiguity of non-participants who recognise wider value in a set of activities they don't themselves practise seems curious. However, as previous Arts Council research indicates, this is not an isolated finding.[29] Nor is the fact that the main reason given by non-participants in Manchester for not taking part in the arts is that they are just 'not interested' (32%), which was also the top reason for not attending arts events, given by 31% of respondents, in the first wave of the national *Taking Part* survey.[30]

What lies behind such responses? In the remainder of this essay I explore

Table 2: Attitudes towards the arts and culture – users and non-users of formal cultural institutions, per cent (rounded) agreeing with the statements shown.

Agree that:	Users	Non-users
Manchester is a major international centre for the Arts and culture	78	70
Arts and cultural events and venues in Manchester are very accessible	79	62
The Arts should have a larger role in school education	81	71
Arts as funded by government are of little relevance to ordinary people	10	45
One person's taste in drama, literature, music etc. is as good as the next person's	58	58
N.	180	128

non-users' narrative accounts of participation and identity to examine the nature of their estrangement from the formal cultural sphere.[31] What these accounts reveal is two distinct groups: firstly, those for whom the arts are irrelevant because they are already positively engaged in practices and activities that are not captured by standard indicators of participation; and second, a group of people who are not really non-users at all but whose participation in traditional culture is largely hidden from view and which the standard participation survey approach again fails to pick up. Moreover, both of these groups can be seen to actively dis-identify from the cultural city, but in different ways, which in both cases turn prevailing assumptions about the relationship between arts participation and social exclusion on their head.

Everyday participation and ordinary culture

In the context of a cultural policy defined by the twin concerns of social exclusion and audience development, the problem of dealing with non-partic-ipation is couched in the language of 'barriers' and their removal. Reflecting on the extensive consultation exercises carried out as part of Arts Council England's 'arts debate', the study's lead author concludes that behind expressions of a lack of interest and supposed practical barriers, the causes of non-participation in the arts are at root psychological.[32] Arts participation is 'risky' for the uninitiated because they don't know what to expect or how to behave and feel out of place, and therefore the solution is to develop strategies and approaches that reassure them.

It is certainly possible to detect this kind of personal insecurity amongst the non-users of Manchester but what is missing from such individual-level interpretations is an appreciation of the relational socio-cultural context that shapes understandings and encourages behavioural norms. Adopting the frame of interpretation developed by Pierre Bourdieu,[33] participation in the arts and other high cultural practices reflects and reinforces a process of social distinction, so that cultural preferences are a defining feature of class 'habitus' and division. For many Manchester interviewees the formal cultural institutions of the city centre and the kinds of practices they represented were alien to or at odds with their own lifestyle and simply not part of their world.

This is reflected in the way the term 'culture' evokes an entirely different set of meanings for people from working-class and minority communities. When asked during their interviews whether they thought Manchester was a 'cultural place', this group, rather than mention theatres, museums or art galleries, invariably talk about the mixed ethnic profile of the city and of culture as a way of life:

> Oh, there's a very diverse cultures, Manchester and you get all walks of life
> don't you, blacks, Asians, lot of Polish influence now and Czech now, yeah
> … yeah, there's quite a lot, like, you know. (Male, 30s, Ancoats)

In terms of their own practices, the detachment of people from the forms and sites of traditional cultural participation rarely implied a state of social exclusion. Indeed, most of the non-users interviewed were not passive and isolated at all but were instead members of vibrant informal cultural networks defined by ordinary, ostensibly mundane, pursuits and centred on relationships with friends and family. Their expression is found in a vast swathe of activities, hobbies and pastimes, such as house visiting, barbecues, meeting friends over coffee, shopping and (just as important for those on low incomes) window shopping, weekend pub meals, driving out to garden centres and other attractions (including the moors, the Lakes and Blackpool), following football, swimming, going to the gym, cooking, gardening, fishing, gambling, listening to music, watching TV and DVDs, reading, drinking and clubbing.

These forms of everyday participation are often highly structured and planned out. Here a young single mother from South Manchester who works part-time describes a typical weekly routine:

> Right. Monday … go for a mooch into Altrincham … a bit of browsing,
> think of what I'm going to buy on Thursday … Do window shopping first,
> and then pick my daughter up from nursery, go to the local park, bring her
> back and watch the telly, do her tea, bed, watch the telly … And Thursdays,
> when I get my money [laughs], love it, go to Tesco, do my food shopping,
> and I go into Altrincham and think, ooh, what shall I … what shall I treat

myself to this week? I normally go in to every single clothes shop, and then start out at the end and work my way up and then go back to the end again and think I'll have that one. So I do that, go and have a coffee somewhere and then go and pick my daughter up from nursery, go back to Tesco, do a bit more food shopping ... Saturdays, it depends on what my daughter wants to do, park or swimming or whatever ... Sundays ... maybe go up and see my mum and dad.

The intensity of engagement that underpins this apparently prosaic routine then comes through when the interviewee was asked to talk about her favourite activity:

I love going food shopping. I love it. I'd love to go into Tescos and think right I haven't got a budget, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom ... I love going round and thinking, you know ... 'cause I watch Gordon Ramsey, I think ooh what can ... what can I make tonight, you know. I think ooh, ooh I'll have that, I'll have that and I love doing all weird concoctions.

The remoteness of formal cultural institutions from this informal, vernacular culture of the everyday is reinforced by community norms expressed in peer group pressures, as another young woman, living in Levenshulme, explains:

... because, like, none of my other friends are into, like, going to museums and stuff like that, so ... you just wouldn't do it ... Yeah, I think if I told my friends I wanted to go to a museum they'd probably just laugh at me.

This external pressure to fit in creates an internal pressure not to stand out. A slightly older woman from Longsight, who does have an interest in art stemming from a textile degree that she took as a mature student, describes why she feels unable to reveal her interests to people in the neighbourhood:

... there's someone up the road and if I was walking down the road with her I would not be talking about going to an art gallery because she'd just be like, 'You what?' She really would. I don't mean that nastily either, you know, but she'd just be thinking, 'Who do you think you are?' 'cause that's ... there's still a lot of people like that round here unfortunately, you know. And I'm not saying I'm better either, you know, I just try different little things, that's all really. But there is a lot of that.

At another point in the interview, she refers to the way in which her own socialisation in a white working-class family had been antagonistic to the development of broader cultural horizons:

I mean my mum was very much ... my mum's worked probably since she was about 11 years of age, you know and I think early on in life she'd be going on about going to university and then when it coming close to the school end it

was like, 'You need to get a job' kind of thing, you know, and she was more encouraging me to work. Because my mum doesn't have that many interests, in all honestly ... she never took us swimming, I don't think she's ever been to a cinema in her life, and things like that ... All I can, kind of, remember is my mum at work all the time, all the time ...

This is a familiar refrain amongst interviewees growing up in such communities, where economic necessity was paramount, and where long working hours and shift patterns imposed parameters on both the amount of spare time available and the ways in which people could – and preferred to – use it.

Hidden participation and ghostly engagements

Alongside the importance of ordinary, everyday pursuits and relationships, the other notable feature to emerge from the narratives of individuals classified as non-participants by marketing questionnaires and standard participation surveys is that a significant number do after all turn out to be, or to have been at some time, engaged with the realm of legitimate culture. This highlights an important issue with the use of standard indicators for cultural engagement, which cannot account for the ways in which people, regardless of what they actually do, decide to identify – or not – as a particular type of participant.

A number of non-users refer to a kind of incidental participation in formal culture, which is presented in largely instrumental terms. Often this type of engagement is life-course related. In particular, it might involve taking children to museums and heritage sites. Here the content and experience of an arts or cultural venue is secondary to its use as a form of distraction and entertainment, 'something to do' at the weekend alongside a range of mundane activities:

Saturday or on Sunday I might take the kids out so ... Normally take them to Parrs Wood [a local entertainment complex] or sometimes we hit the museum ... What we do normally is go to the museum like we did last time, we went to the museum then we went to town, did a bit of shopping, clothes shopping and went to Nandos then just came back home. (Male, 30s, Levenshulme)

However, the interviews also revealed several quite serious cultural partic-ipants who are hidden from view because their engagement is personal, private and divorced from any mainstream institutional context. 'Maria', for example, is a single mother of two children in her late 30s who lives in east Manchester, works part-time on the night shift in a local supermarket and is a prolific painter. An advocate for the arts in general, she is also a fan of classical and

operatic music, which she follows by reading, watching documentaries and listening to CDs rather than attending concerts. Having failed to get onto a university arts course when younger, Maria feels resentful of what she sees as a socially closed arts establishment:

> I've always done art as a hobby because I never wanted to let go. I've always been ... haven't been able to express my feelings a lot, so I've always done a lot of it in art ... I've actually now considered taking it up full time and doing it as a job but it's just knowing what steps to take and where to turn to and who to talk to ...

Maria does not see herself as part of the arts community but her identity as an artist is central to the way in which she presents her role and relationships in her neighbourhood:

> I had an old boy on the street, it was his birthday ... and I'm trying to do a painting now of him ... it's the character that has to shine through the paint and people don't understand it ...
> ... there's like Ray and Carol across the road ... He has a lot of interest in art which he didn't realise that he had and so it's good because we can sit ... we sit down outside sometimes ... and ... he'll say, 'Oh, I went into so and so gallery down London.' And I'm like, 'Oh great, did you like it?' 'Yeah.' And then we have a discussion ...

Although examples of such concealed or 'ghostly' participation spanned a range of forms, painting and visual arts were the most commonly practised. A strong theme running through these accounts is the ambivalence of the practitioners to the sites and venues of the official arts world. 'Richard', a young financial services adviser who paints three times a week, wants to turn his interest into a business but is going about this independently, by getting leaflets printed and setting a website up 'so I can do loads of art when I want'. He has little time for art in formal settings:

> to be honest I wouldn't really go out of my way to go to museums but if I'm with my girlfriend and we've got time to kill then we'll go in and have a look around and like just like be amazed at how some things can be perceived as art ...

Similarly 'Michael', who paints watercolours which his father-in-law thinks are good enough to sell, was originally inspired by the Sky Arts channel on TV and, as his account of a recent trip to The Lowry indicates, has no wider interest in galleries:

> There was some artist on, we didn't go specially for that, it was just that we went down there ... Catherine, my daughter, was there doing a thing

for school and ... while we were there, there was an exhibition on for some artists so I went around and took a look at them. Couldn't tell you who it was ...

These stories of private participation in social and cultural isolation from the arts establishment tend to have a strong spatial dimension, as narratives of dislocation and disorientation. With the exception of some younger non-users, for whom it was a place to hang out and go shopping – or more often window shopping – in by day and for drinking and clubbing by night, Manchester city centre was commonly viewed as a remote place, infrequently visited, providing little by way of a reference point in people's lives. This was a feeling shared even by some centrally located residents, one of whom remarked, 'although I'm like spitting distance from the city centre, I feel a bit detached from it'. However, it was a sentiment expressed most frequently by those interviewees living in south and east Manchester, with the latter more often than not facing the other way entirely, towards Ashton-under-Lyne, for services and amenities.

Several non-users with an interest in the arts identified the regeneration of Manchester as having negative effects on local cultural resources. Although Maria was enthusiastic about the city's cultural institutions, particularly its museums, she had reservations about the regeneration process for its neglect of the urban periphery:

> I think the problem is that there's so much regeneration going on in the centre, because that's where the money is, that they're tending to forget about the ones in the outer sites. You know, I mean something like, a little ... just a tiny gallery opened up round here, how many eyes would that wake up, you know, how many people would come?

Older residents pointed to the displacement of cultural amenities, with the loss of institutions that used to provide a focal point for the local community, and the reallocation of such resources towards the city centre. Along with the constant flux of population churn caused by council-sponsored growth of the private letting sector to accommodate the need for social housing in such outlying areas, this had resulted in a sense of disorientation. This is well expressed by 'Frank', a retired former council transport worker:

> Well some of the people living here now, some are a bit rough. Because they pulled houses down, they're just housing them here, there and everywhere ... But the general area has gone down ... We've got a park over there, yeah, well I go in there because I play bowls ... But other than that we've got nothing. No picture houses. We used to have two picture houses just across the road. They're both gone. We had one a bit lower down ... And then we had one,

two, three, four more lower down towards Manchester. All within five, ten minutes from here ...

Frank also expresses a widely held distaste among people of his age for the way Manchester's cityscape has been transformed in recent years. An evident pride in the city's history and profile is mixed with a feeling of a loss of ownership and control over what has been done to it, which he communicates in a scathing critique of the regeneration aesthetic. When asked if he thinks the city is changing, he replies:

It's completely completely changed ... In every way, shape and form ... all of the new buildings they're putting up, I don't like them. I don't think there's anything nice about them ... Too many clubs, far too many clubs now. I wouldn't go down there at night. I'll stay away from it ... They're supposed to be modernising it, but I think they're ruining it. And that ... what's the other building? That one on Corporation Street. Bit of a museum it's supposed to be ... Urbis. I think that's an eyesore ...

Conclusion: (dis)identification with the cultural city

The non-users of Manchester's cultural institutions have an uneasy and ambivalent relationship to the city. Unlike the middle-class residents in the 2005 study by Savage *et al.*, they actively dis-identify with it, and their relationship to the formal realm of legitimate cultural practices plays a central role in this process. Non-participants from white working-class communities around the city tend to understand culture primarily in ethnic terms and as a way of life rather than something to do with 'the arts'. There is recognition of the symbolic value of the high cultural institutions in the city centre but these are felt to be of no relevance and little interest to them. Here the narratives confirm the conclusion of Bennett *et al.* that such communities are detached from legitimate culture but are not thereby excluded.[34] This is because the people in them maintain a rich vernacular culture of everyday practices based around ostensibly mundane activities and social networks. There is, however, another group of people labelled as non-users in the official statistics who do in fact participate in legitimate culture but are missed by the standard data-gathering methods employed by government and consumer research agencies. These are people who participate largely in isolation from the sites and institutions of the arts establishment. For some members of this group, particularly older people and those living in outlying areas, their dis-identification from the cultural city is bound up with a sense not of irrelevance but of remoteness and loss caused by the centripetal effects of the regeneration process.

This last observation draws attention to the role of spatiality and

territorialisation in mediating the relationship between culture, participation and identity[35] and the ways in which the re-centring of culture in Manchester is actually an important dynamic in the broader distribution and decentring of urban life.[36] In relation to the policy context that informed the research project on which this essay is based, the participation narratives of the non-users of traditional cultural institutions highlight the shortcomings of a model of evidence-based policymaking rooted in the assumptions and technologies of market research and the New Public Management. The effect of the emphasis on indicators and measures in this approach is to decontextualise participation by abstracting from place, space and social relations. By obscuring and discounting the practices and significance of the everyday realm, the outcome of this process is to re-affirm the official model of participation and the domination of the middle-class norms that underpin it.

Notes

1 Simon Gunn, 'The sublime and the vulgar: the Hallé concerts and the constitution of "high culture" in Manchester, c.1850–1880'; Jamie Peck and Kevin Ward, 'Placing Manchester', pp. 4–5.

2 J. O'Connor and X. Gu, 'Developing a creative cluster in a post-industrial city: CIDS and Manchester', pp. 125, 129–30.

3 Gunn, 'The sublime and the vulgar'.

4 Mike Savage *et al.*, *Globalization and Belonging.*

5 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

6 Arts About Manchester, *Manchester 1998–2003. Report on Arts Attendance within Greater Manchester District Boundaries.*

7 Sara Selwood, 'A part to play?', pp. 35–8.

8 Christopher Hood, 'A public management for all seasons?'; Eleonora Belfiore, 'Auditing culture. The subsidised cultural sector in the New Public Management'.

9 Selwood, 'A part to play?', pp. 37–8.

10 Quoted in Robert Hewison and John Holden, *The Right to Art. Making Aspirations Reality*, pp. 4–5.

11 DCMS, *Annual Report & Accounts 2009*, p. 31.

12 Eleonora Belfiore, 'Art as a means towards alleviating social exclusion: does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK'.

13 Tony Bennett and Mike Savage, 'Introduction: cultural capital and cultural policy', p. 9.

14 Quoted in Belfiore, 'Auditing culture', p. 189.

15 Sara Selwood, 'The politics of data collection: gathering, analysing and using data in the subsidised cultural sector in England'.

16 The first sweep of *Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and*

Sport took place in 2005. It was originally based on a representative sample of 29,000 people (aged 16 and above) but numbers were subsequently reduced to 14,000.

17 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*; Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951*.

18 Arts Council England, *Ambitions for the Arts 2003–2006*, p. 3.

19 Ruth Levitas, 'Let's hear it for Humpty: social exclusion, the third way and cultural capital'.

20 Andrew Miles and Alice Sullivan, 'Understanding participation in culture and sport: mixing methods, reordering knowledges'.

21 For a general critique, see Ray Pawson, 'Assessing the quality of evidence in evidence based policy: why, how and when?'.

22 DCMS, 'Understanding the drivers, impact and value of engagement in culture and sport. An over-arching summary of the research'.

23 The project was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Northwest Regional Development Agency as part of the second round of the Higher Education Innovation Fund.

24 These institutions were the Manchester City Art Gallery, Royal Exchange Theatre, Museum of Science and Industry, Opera House, Contact Theatre, Palace Theatre, People's History Museum, The Lowry, Urbis, Green Room and Comedy Store.

25 Deborah Stevenson *et al.*, 'Tracing British cultural policy domains: contexts, collaborations and constituencies'.

26 Arts About Manchester subsequently had its remit expanded and was re-branded as All About Audiences, the audience development agency for the North West. Recently it merged with Audiences London Plus to become The Audience Agency, the national audience development agency for England.

27 For example, Ken Roberts, 'Leisure inequalities, class divisions and social exclusion in present-day Britain'; Tony Bennett *et al.*, *Culture, Class, Distinction*.

28 CACI, *ACORN User Guide*.

29 Adrienne Skelton *et al.*, *Arts in England: Attendance, Participation and Attitudes in 2001*.

30 Emily Keaney, 'Understanding arts audiences: existing data and what it tells us', p. 107.

31 All personal names mentioned in these accounts have been changed in order to preserve the anonymity of interviewees. Some of the material cited here was previously used in Miles and Sullivan, 'Understanding participation in culture and sport'.

32 Keaney, 'Understanding arts audiences', p. 109.

33 Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

34 Bennett *et al.*, *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p. 212.

35 See Talja Blokland and Mike Savage (eds), *Networked Urbanism: Social Capital in the City*.

36 Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*.

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