

Understanding everyday participation *articulating cultural values*



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Major 5-year (2012-17) interdisciplinary research project

- Funded by the AHRC and in Scotland by Creative Scotland
- 4 universities – Manchester, Leicester, Exeter, Warwick
- 10 core researchers, 3 PhD students, multiple casual staff
- 16 national stakeholders and many local partners



● The Clore Leadership Programme



ENGLISH HERITAGE



What are we aiming to do in this project?

- Discover how people participate in culture in their everyday lives and what this participation means to them
- Understand how communities are negotiated through culture
- Develop new articulations and measures of cultural value
- Explore the relationship between different cultural contexts – institutional, voluntary, informal
- Reconnect policy and practice with the everyday

Why do we think this is important?

- The model of cultural participation and value prevailing in policy is a narrow one
- It attributes ‘legitimacy’ to certain – mostly formal and traditional activities and venues – but in the process obscures the value of other types and places of participation.
- Problematic in several ways:
 - Publically funded culture is mostly consumed by a small, privileged, big city-based minority – thereby creating democratic failure.
 - Connected to a ‘deficit model of participation’ (Miles and Sullivan 2012) in which culture is deployed to draw social boundaries, counting some practices, places and people in while discriminating against others.
 - It’s a missed opportunity. Previous research (Miles 2013) has indicated: (a) the richness and broader cultural significance of people’s informal interests, hobbies and social relationships; (b) that there are many ‘ghostly’ participants in formal culture who participate on their own terms

Framing everyday participation and cultural value

- Multiple frames of reference associated with the sociology of everyday life around issues of conformity and resistance (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer 1944, Lefebvre 1947, Goffman 1959, de Certeau 1984)
- Bourdieu (1984) - taste and participation as *the* key markers of social distinction and power.
- Recent UK study by Bennett et al 2009 *Culture, Class Distinction*.
- Relative lack of attention to the world of ordinary consumption (Boyne 2002) and geography, or 'site effects' (Savage 2011)

How are we doing this?

- Not defining 'culture' in advance – painting a picture from the bottom-up through qualitative research
- Viewing participation as a social process, not just about individual behaviour
- Considering participation practices as 'situated' – how they shape and are shaped by place
- Mixing methods - combining historical, quantitative and qualitative work
- Collaboration with communities, voluntary organisations, cultural professionals and policymakers

Project Design & Method

- 1. Histories** – discourses of cultural participation and value; cultural technologies; cultural policy, place and economy; representations of everyday life; community cultural practices
- 2. Reanalysis of survey data** – time-use, patterns of participation by place and through the life course
- 3. Cultural ecosystems research** – local histories, assets mapping, in-depth interviews (life history and participation narratives), ethnography and social network analysis in six contrasting locations
- 4. Application projects** – working with communities and partners to develop projects in response to findings
- 5. Research-policy-practice nexus** – reflecting on partnership and developing new models of collaboration

Where are we working?





Why Peterculter?

Culter Themes

- Creative Scotland – communities on ‘the edge’
- City/shire governance
- Economic, physical, functional and social transformation
- Working village - from agriculture to paper to oil
- Incomers and indigenous
- Residential zones and the road
- Rich voluntary associational culture

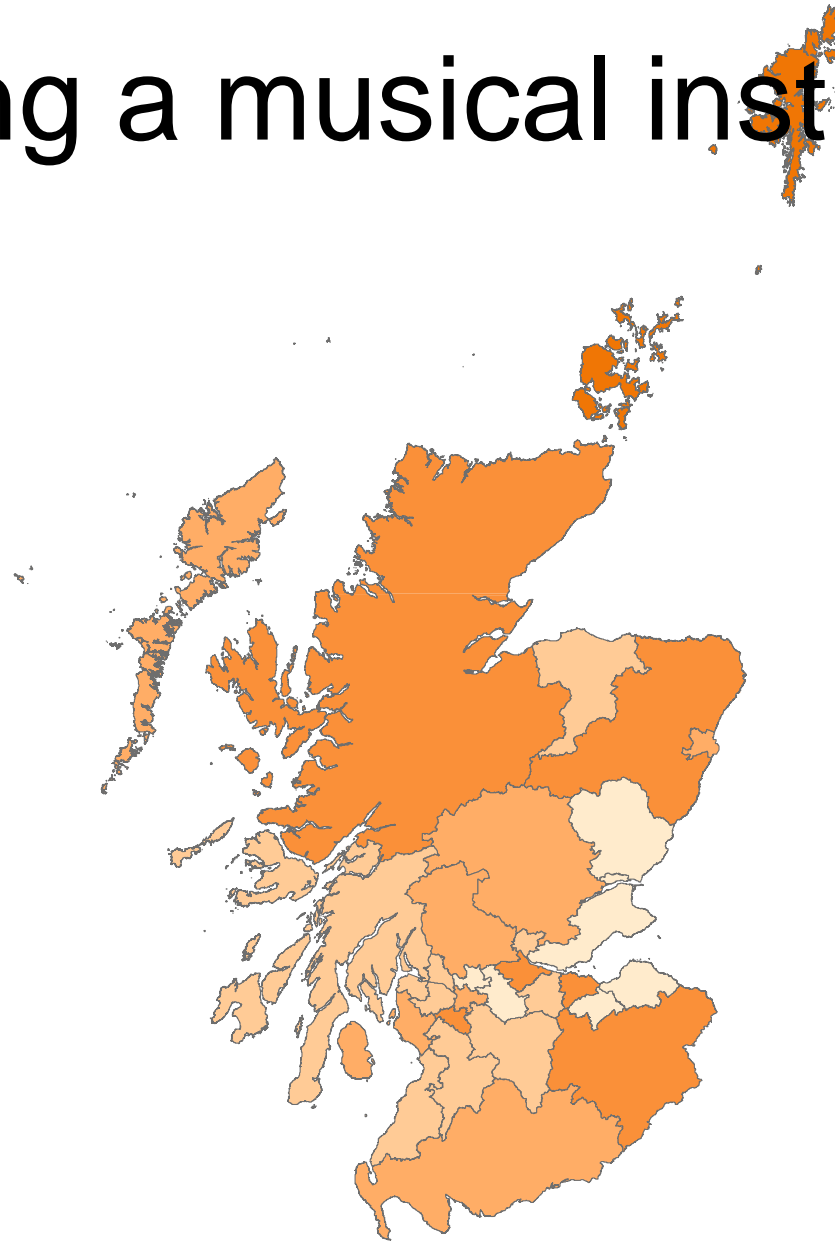


Mapping participation in Aberdeen

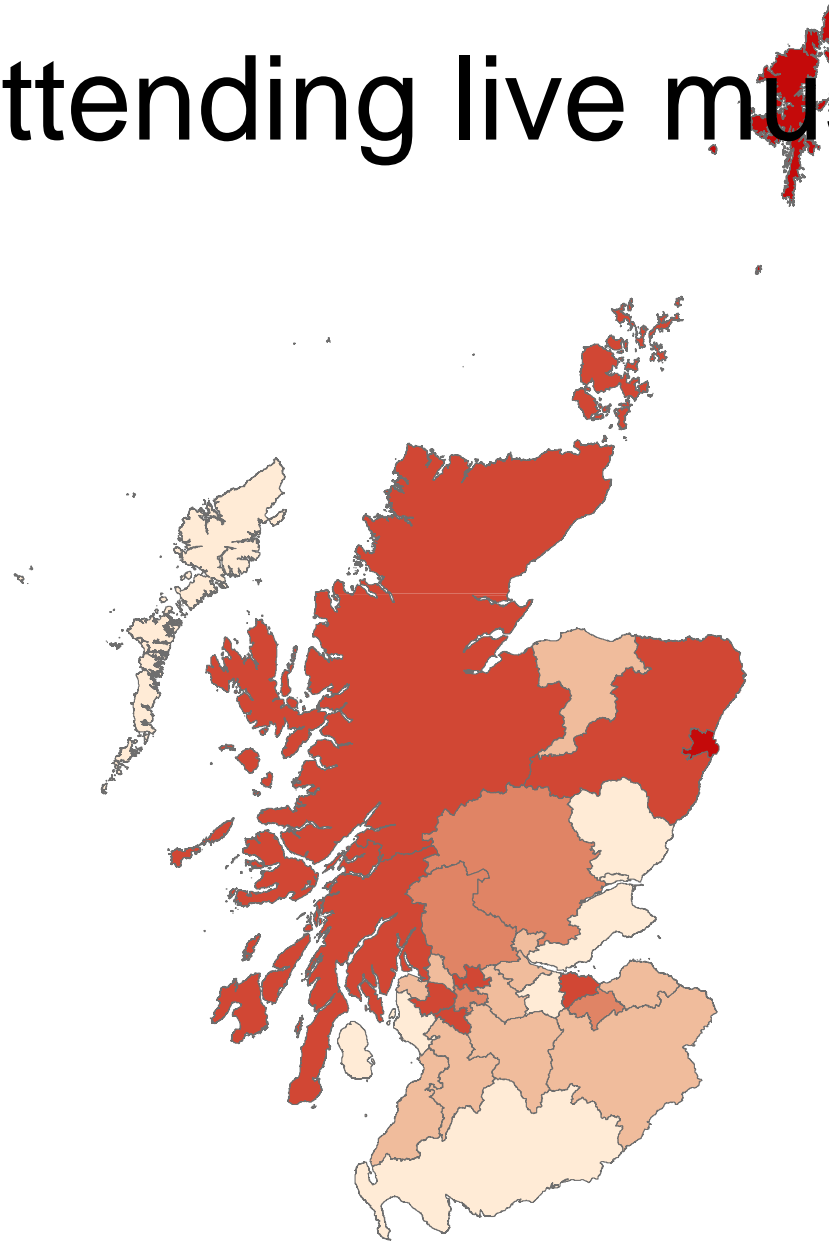
Mapping participation with the Scottish Household Survey

- The SHS is a general survey targeted primarily at Holyrood:
 - rolling since 1999 (repeated cross-sectional)
 - N = 11,000ish pa
 - has specific focuses on housing, social justice, and transport
- Contains questions on participation; can identify differences between council areas

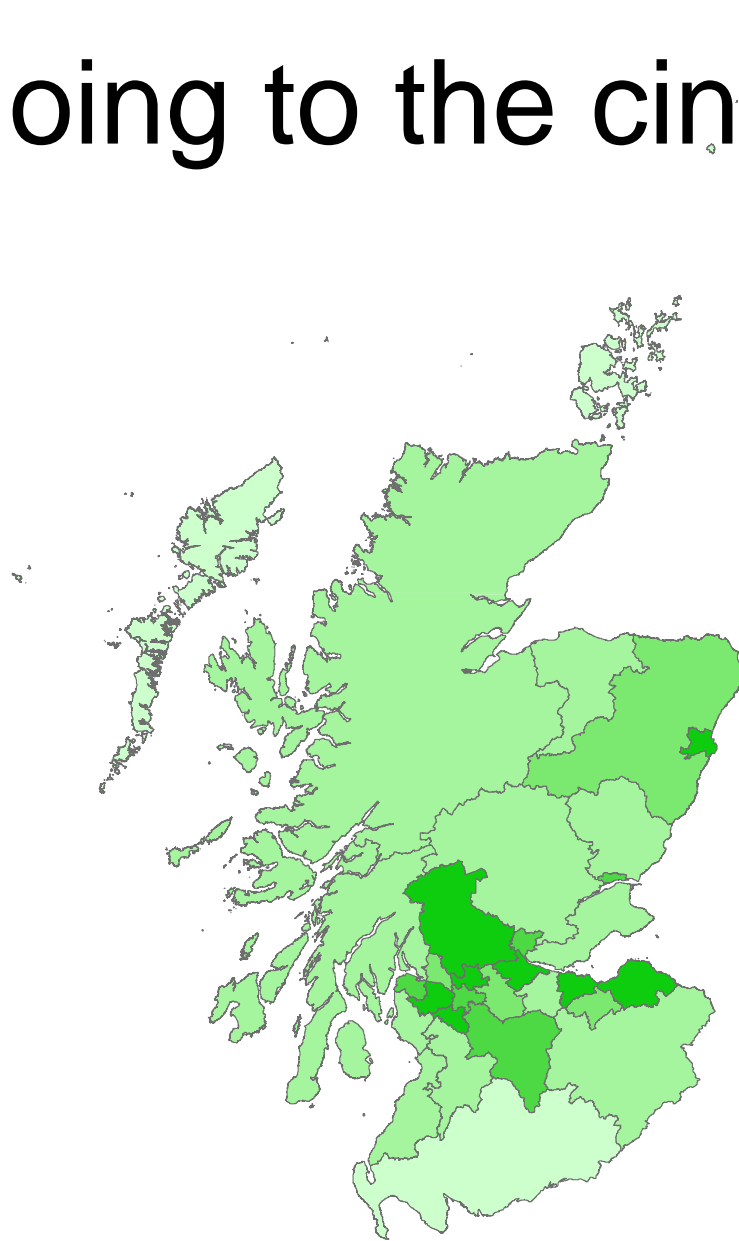
Playing a musical instrument



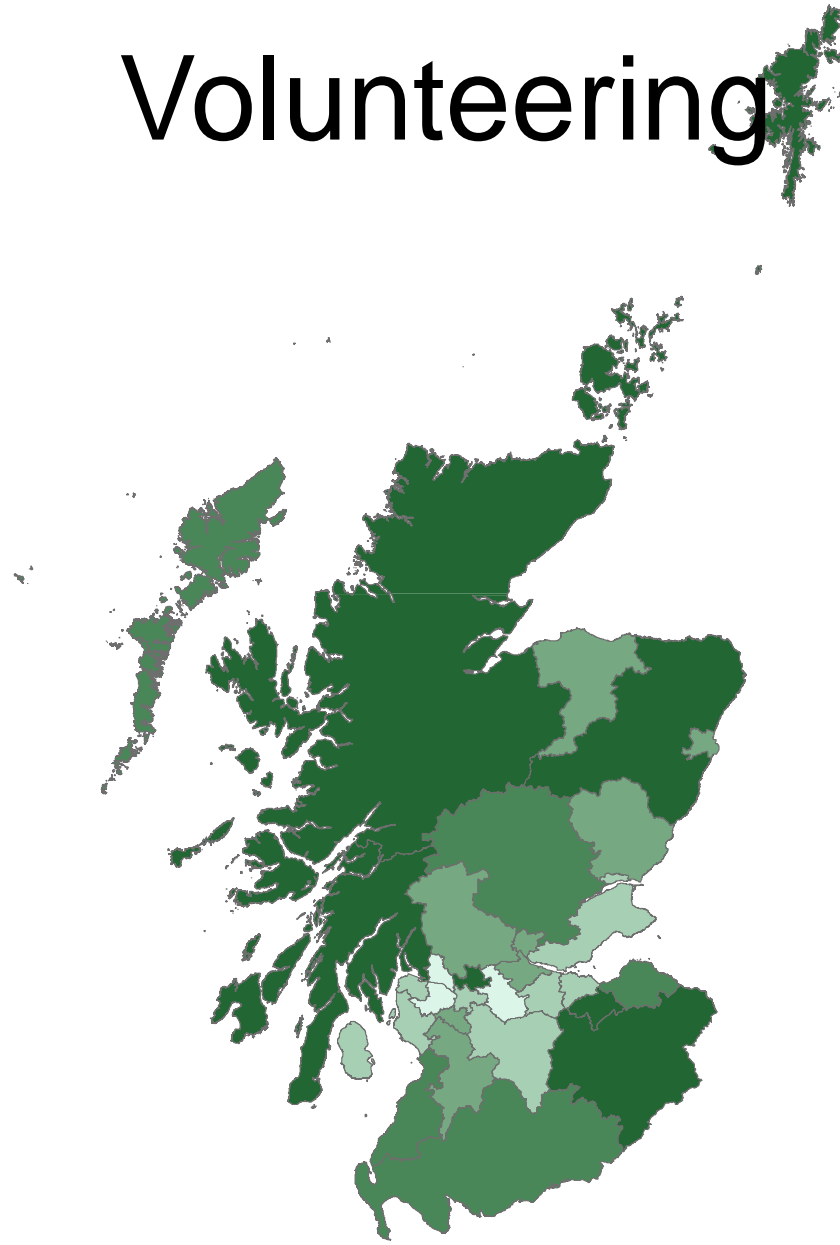
Attending live music



Going to the cinema



Volunteering



Mapping participation in Aberdeen

- The questions we're asking are:
 - How 'situated' are different kinds of participation?
 - How do demographic factors interact with the geography of assets to frame participation?
 - How strong are the differences between different kinds of participation in different places?
- These can (broadly) be answered with three different kinds of maps

The geography of cultural and community assets

- “Cultural” is a broad term:
 - museums, galleries, concert halls, theatres
 - pubs, bars, working men’s clubs
 - libraries, archives, community/leisure centres
 - places of worship, scout huts, conservation areas
- The distributions of cultural and community assets helps us to understand the kinds of facilities available to people in different places

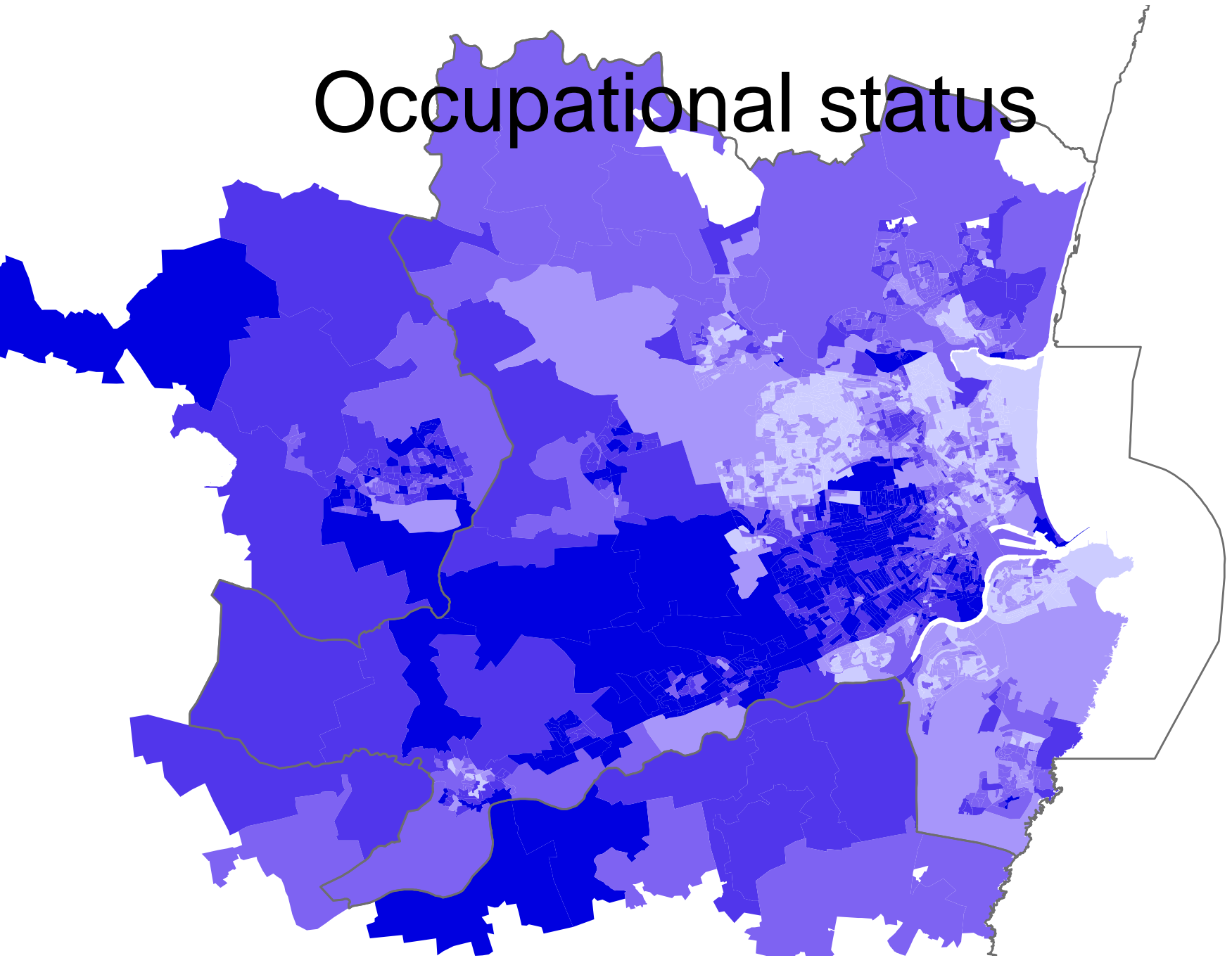
The geography of demographics

- Some information at council area level, some at data zone level, some at output area level
- Contextualizes participation and assets
 - age distribution
 - indices of deprivation
 - educational indicators
 - patterns of migration
 - ethnic and religious diversity

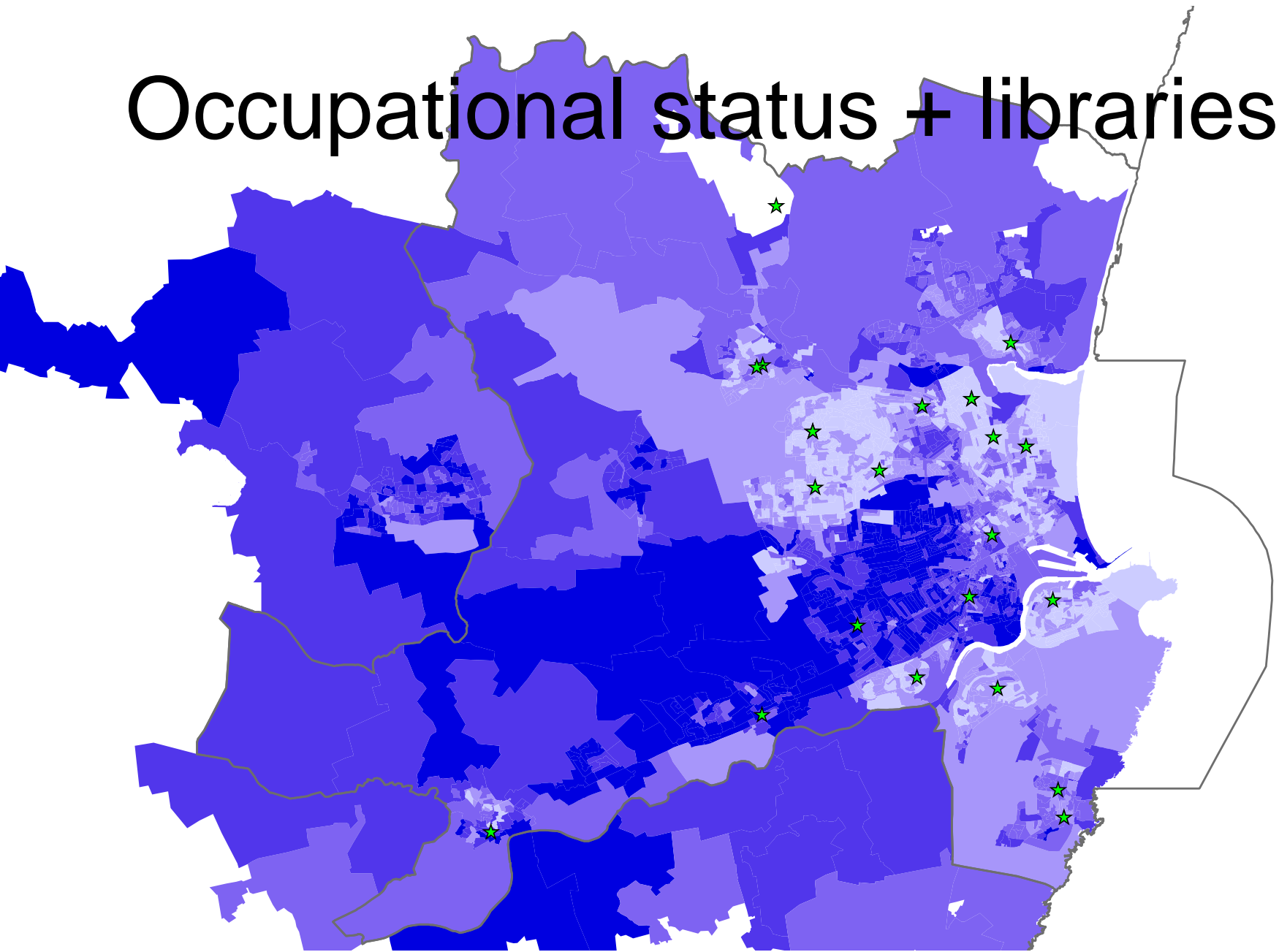
The geography of participation

- Levels of participation in different activities in the cultural assets defined earlier
 - or in activities which aren't tied to specific locations
- Some of this is comparisons with other council areas; others can be more specific
- Also (loosely) incorporates measures of spending and investment

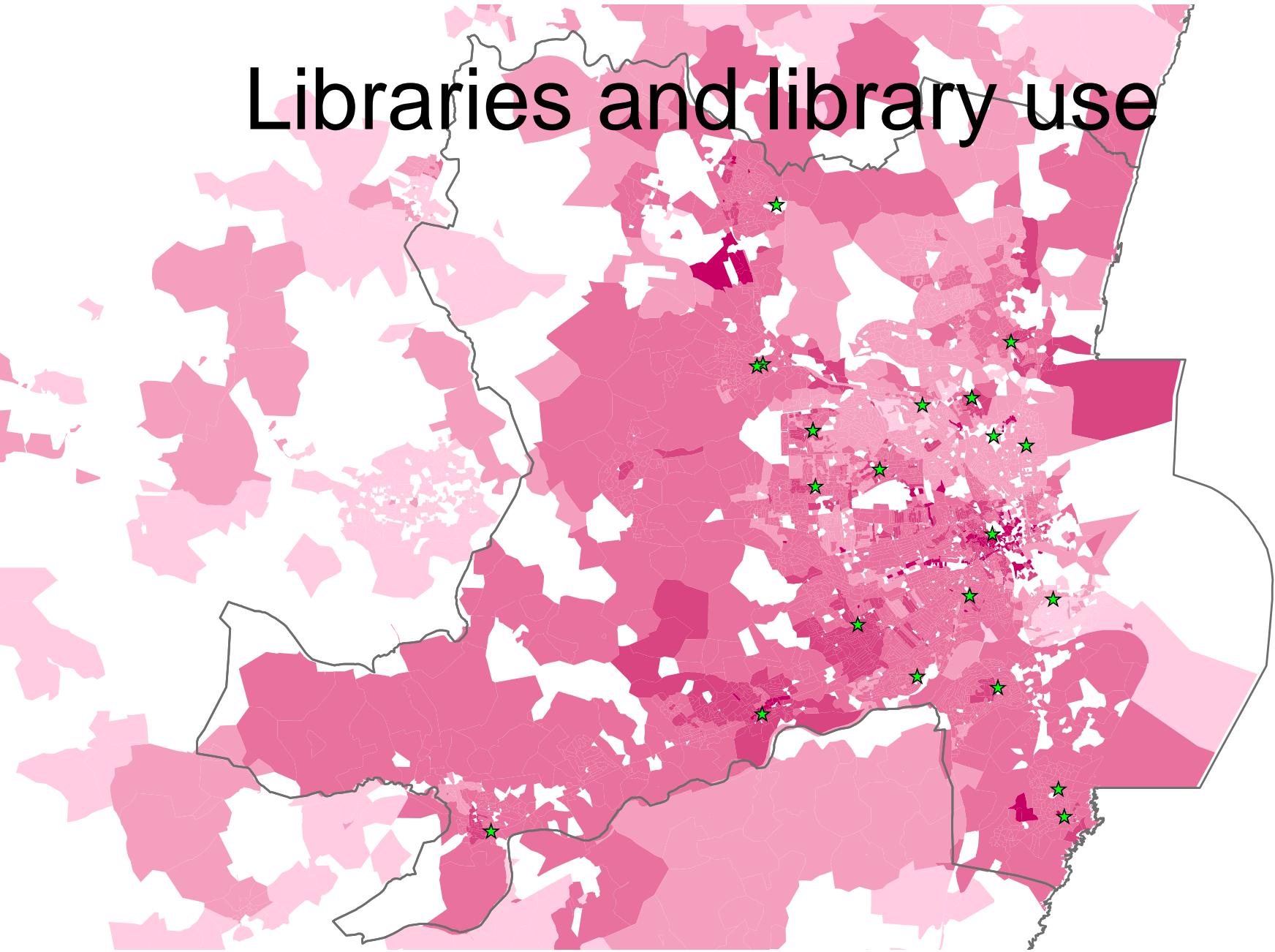
Occupational status



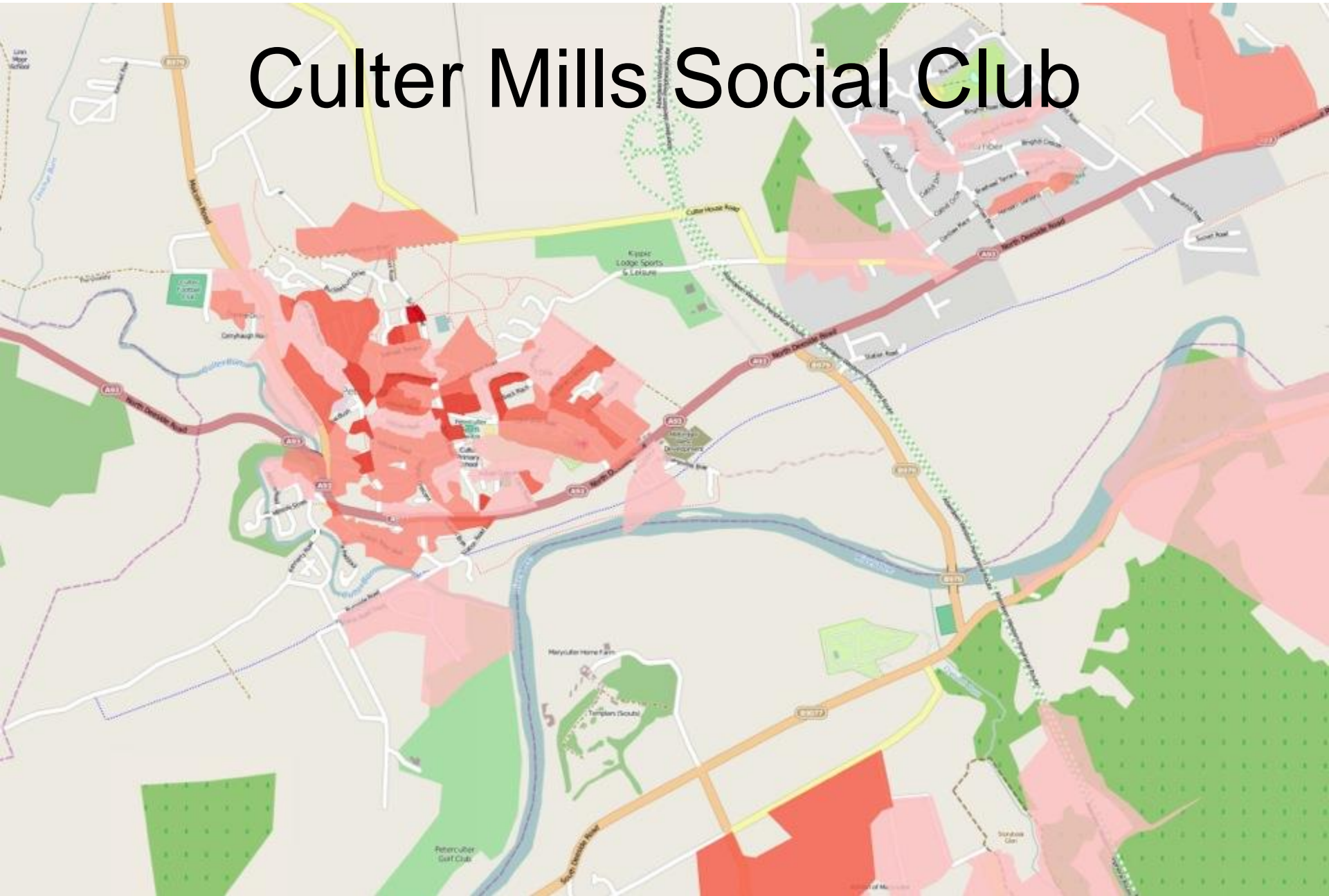
Occupational status + libraries



Libraries and library use



Culter Mills Social Club





In-depth interviews

Participation narratives

- 30 people in each location interviewed twice for 90 mins-2 hours
- Wave 1: Belonging, day-to-day activities, life histories, influences on tastes and activities, identities
- Wave 2: Change, friendship, geographies and economies of participation

The ubiquity of plenitude – at home

- TV
 - a bit
 - documentaries
 - the rugby)
 - Gogglebox, Eastenders, The Good Wife, The Mentalist, The Big Bang Theory, How I Met Your Mother...
 - NCIS, Endeavour, Mystery, Period Drama, Countryfile...
- Friends round from work
- iPlayer – film, documentary
- Sitting in the garden, barbecues
- Puppet making
- Knitting group (via Facebook)
- Facebook
- Etsy shop (online craft)
- Film making
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- YouTube
- Cooking
- Gardening
- Read paper
- TV (not daytime)
- Visiting relatives
- Skype
- Scrabble (Internet)
- Facebook
- Crossword puzzles
- Sewing (Cross stich)
- Having family round to eat
- Sitting outside/in the garden
- Listening to the radio
- Making cards
- Garden
- DIY
- Cooking
- Baking (for Church teas)

The ubiquity of plenitude - out and about

- Salsa
- Line dancing
- Walking around the village
- Hill walking (a lot)
- Pubs
- Restaurants
- Swimming
- Gym
- Golf
- Cycling
- Late night shopping
- Theatre (occasional as part of work club)
- Race Night (occasional)
- Ceramics (classes, club, formerly a business)
- Cross country skiing (used to)
- Canoeing (planning)
- Jazzercise
- Running
- Classical music concert
- Heritage
- Church
- (women's) Guild
- Walking
- Skiing (general/downhill)
- Sailing
- Flying
- Gym
- Dancing
- Food shopping
- Reflexology
- Shopping (Glasow/Edinburgh)
- Cinema
 - Grand Bucharest Hotel
 - Frozen

Everyday Creativity

'I sit down and do puzzles. I get books of puzzles, name or word puzzles, and I do a lot of those. I write things for people if people sort of--, I've written for poems for people for particular things. I've got some samples of what I've written there. But I'm quite--, quite okay with words and that sort of thing, and so I sort of write things, mainly for myself. I don't get many of them published. (P02)

'Well, I always wanted to, like, be Jim Henson, basically [laughs]. And then I was--, I got a sewing machine for my birthday/Christmas one year so...so I started making hats. So I bought some fleece and I did, like, a slouchy hat kind of thing. And then I was like, this looks like a head shape, I could make a head [laughs]. So I just did a hat with another hat underneath and I was like, oh, it's like a head. So then I was like, oh, I could just try and make a puppet. So I made this puppet, it was absolutely gigantic' (P04)

'And I do a lot of baking, so I bake cakes...Yes, I bake my own bread, I use cakes as a convenience gift. If you're going to see someone, you take them a cake or add it to a birthday present. So I look at recipe websites...but I make things like carrot cake so it's sort of healthy, a balance between healthy carrot cakes and healthy muffins and rich cheese cakes, and then making most of my own bread. So yes, I am baking three or four times a week.' (P06)

Culture as Social Life

'After being here a year or so, I felt lonely, so I went and joined an evening class and I've still got the friends I made from joining an evening class. You have to make the first move. You can't wait for people to knock on your door...I've got my church just a few minutes along the road. Everything is contained within a small area. I've got lots of friends here. I've made lots of friends.' (P16)

'I've been going to badminton regularly for the past year and it's a very small group, there's only five or six of us, but it's lovely. We have a chat and we also play badminton as well, and it's not high impact badminton, it's sort of social badminton. So that's--, actually I do enjoy that as well, yeah.' (P10)

Being Busy at Leisure

'And then weekends are archery, so really my main sports at the moment are fencing, dancing, archery and swimming, and then horse riding every so often 'cause it's quite expensive. About once every three weeks I'm going horse riding now... And then next weekend I'm going to Oban on a two day course on sea kayaking'....I go to the gym two to three times a week in work, we have a gym in work so I do that for about half an hour, three quarters of an hour two to three times a week. No, it's like the Greek ideal of this balance between mental and physical, and I try and maintain that, I try and do that....also I do restoration, like I restored a frame, a 100 year old frame and I've got a little studio in the back, and I'm going to start doing more wood carving, I do wood carving here' (P09)

'I go to two classes. The first is a very official class, run by the RSCDS, the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. That's held at a place called Holburn South, which is within Aberdeen city, a church hall. That's the advanced class. Then on Wednesdays I go out to Banchory where I go to a class, but it's less formal than the RSCDS, run by an RSCDS member but with more emphasis on dancing and less emphasis on formal teaching. So they make a good contrast to each other, 'cause I can go through the very highly formalised teaching on Monday, and perhaps put into practice some of what I've learnt on Monday by dancing on Wednesday.' (P06)

'Work Gets Under the Skin of Life'

'And then normally I do 8am till 5.15pm, and we get every second Friday off. We've got like a nine day fortnight thing. So yeah, I was doing 7am till 6.30pm kind of thing, 6.15pm, something like that. So I did that Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and then I thought, stuff it, I've done my six hours [laughs], I'm not doing any more. And then Thursday night I went to--, I joined a knitting group that's in town [laugh]. So I just thought--, when I moved here I was like, I want to find something so I can meet girl friends, because when you work in a male dominated area and then you come home and you live with a male and it's just like male, male, male [laughs].' (P04)

Sometimes Leisure Time Means Not Doing Very Much At All

'And I love this place, looking out of here, and the windows upstairs look out over the river. Over there where there's that line of trees, I don't know if you can see it from here, that hill just behind that is the site of Norman Dykes, which was a Roman marching camp, so I like looking at that, thinking about, yeah, history.' (P05)

'Yes, all of us will sit outside. And now my neighbour upstairs, she's on her own. Now if she was in a house on her own she wouldn't have any contact but she feels quite free to come out, sit with us, she doesn't feel uncomfortable because she's on her own.' (P14)

Participation and Place: Culter

'But the landscape is probably the most beautiful, I mean the fact I've got the river, just a three minute walk, I've got the old railway line I can cycle, that to me is what I enjoy about here' (P09)

'Outside as much as I can, really. Do a lot of gardening because that's outside, walking. Go out on my bike, cycle quite a bit. It depends on the weather. I mean, it's hard to say, really. Yesterday was a good day. I was meeting a pal for lunch and was outside then. We walked along by the beach, came home and played in the garden for the rest of--, almost the rest of the day, and then I had to do more of that stuff.' (P05)

'Yes, and fresh air. I don't care if it's a howling gale, I'll just put on some waterproof trousers and go out. So it doesn't matter really what the weather's doing, yeah, I'll still keep going out and I still think you get the same enjoyment and the same relaxation. You come back feeling really relaxed and you come back feeling in a positive frame of mind. And you must do something in life I think that gives you that, and if it's knitting or sewing, that might give you same sort of pleasure and relaxation. But that's my relaxation. If I haven't been for a decent walk for two weeks I'm miserable.' [Laughs] (P01)

Participation and Place: Aberdeen

'Aberdeen's okay but it is going down, it is looking shabby now. Where's all the oil money went? Again it's been squandered, they've nothing to show for it. (...)It certainly doesn't look like the oil capital of Europe, I mean Edinburgh is a treat compared to what Aberdeen is. So if you was having visitors coming from abroad you would steer clear of Aberdeen. You would show them Marshall College and that would be it. But again, if you look outside Marshall College it's all alchies and junkies hanging about who can't be into the housing and that. I think it's gone down hill in the last ten, 20 years. It's still an okay place to bide.' (P13)

'Oh right, okay. Er, what do I think of Aberdeen? It's quite nice. I don't think there's enough cultural stuff. Like, I mean, on the street kind of thing. Obviously it's all granite buildings and things and there's a lot of old buildings, but town centre wise there's hardly any new buildings, unless they're making the new ones look like old ones. So I think they could do with a bit more funky architecture. Maybe not quite so--,' (P04)

'Well I suppose it has got an art gallery, and there's Majesty's Theatre. But I mean I lived near London, yeah...You know, we could just pop up to the Royal Albert Hall after work. I'm not going to find Aberdeen very cultural, am I? ' (P06)

The ethnography: 'culture is [extra-] ordinary'

The importance of ethnographic work in
Culter:

'...everyday life is precisely the place where (this) complexity unfolds, and therefore why studying it is important. This requires, I would argue, an ethnographic sensibility and an ongoing engagement with lives unfolding in real time and through time'. (Les Back, 2015)

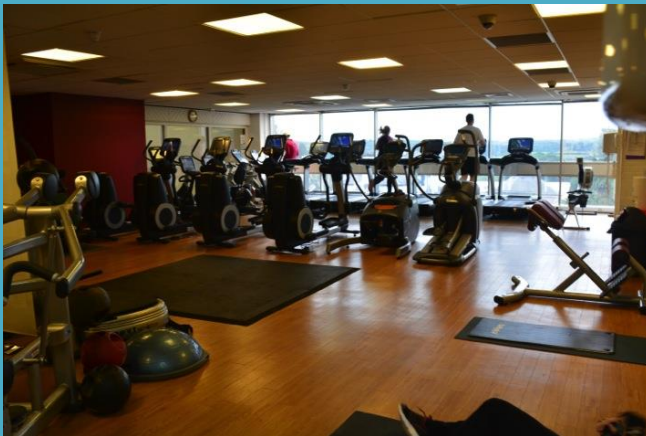
Initial settings: 'club life'



The Village Hall



Bingo at Culter Mills Social Club



The gym at Kippie Lodge



The value of public spaces and publicly owned resources to the people of Culter was emphasised constantly in our conversations. Everyday participation is both routinised and enchanted, in, for example, the old railway line (now a cycle and walk way) and through which communities and communities of interest are constructed. It is too, the site of making the place of Culter through such activities as walking the dog, cycling to work or meeting a friend for an evening walk.



The informal economy of gifting, skill-sharing and volunteering ensures that clubs and institutions in Culter are viable. Raffle tickets, in particular, are a ubiquitous currency often purchased in addition to paying the entrance fee.

People might give their time and skill for example, to save the village hall having to pay for minor repairs. A member electrician fitted the sound system for the Culter Mills Social Club. Many groups of women bake, when it's their turn to volunteer for afternoon teas at the Heritage Centre...

The Heritage hall, 2014 – home to weekend afternoon teas (amongst other things) from Apr – Oct

Photo: Jill Ebrey for UEP

Paul Mason (2015) has written recently of the alternative economies operating in the shadows of capitalism where ‘whole swathes of economic life are beginning to move to a different rhythm’. He perhaps neglects to mention that mundane alternative economies have operated unnoticed, supporting participation here and elsewhere for centuries, still today having enormous transformative potential. Worrying, are the new patterns of work and childcare which mean that the volunteering and its participative culture is under threat.



Making the teas: *Fizz and Fashion* event,
(June 2014) at Culter Mills Social Club

Photo: Jill Ebrey for UEP




Parents at the Mother and Toddler group here commented often on how important the village hall and its connection to place and community, was to their lives. They spoke of the differences between the public and private provision of childcare: S says, (At the village hall) 'You get to meet people who live in the area. Kids make friends in a different way than a private nursery. I used to go to one and I never saw people outside of the nursery. Now I bump into people (I know) along the street (in Culter)'.

Culter village hall, 2014



There is generally an absence of young people aged 16-30 in public life in the village (except, interestingly, at the annual village gala). Anxiety over their autonomous presence in village institutions (for example, organising a club night), means that worries over drugs, alcohol and damage to property and reputation are prioritised over the future viability of the village. Without addressing these issues, meeting places in Culter may well wither and die, leaving the cultures of young people as the sole province of the market.



Our work in the village, particularly at Kippie Lodge Sports and Country Club (formerly Aberdeen Petroleum Club) revealed to us the close interweaving of social relations and the economies of the oil and gas industry. The gendered nature of employment in ‘the oil’, means that the separation of married or partnered men and women in everyday life is common, often therefore, embedding them in more traditional gender roles, particularly if they have children. Throughout our research we therefore encountered networks, particularly of women with children, supporting each other to counter the isolation of these somewhat separate lives.

Photo workshop:
Secret Places of
Culter, 2015

Photo: Caroline Edge for UEP



It was through our visual research methods of film and photography that the imagination of the village was more widely engaged. *A Short Film About Culter* enabled people to take part in our research more closely through film production, whilst *Postcards from Culter*, an AHRC festival event both requested local people's photographs of the village for exhibition and offered workshop events (pictured), most led by village residents, in which participants shared their experiences of photography.



The extended time frame of the research and the different methods that we were able to use, meant that the research became a co-production between the academic world and the worlds of the village. It was a productive and meaningful meeting, unforgettable for both parties.

From Culter to the Outer Hebrides

- The contemporary diaspora and the ‘modern island’
- Leaving, returning – ‘homecoming’
- ‘Place’ as a site of belonging and category of identity that is understood as much through movement as stasis.
- Young people (16-35) – orientations, flows and trends
- Through the medium of music
- Facilitation, moderation and representation through digital communication and social media
- Cross-island study linked to the mainland

Project Team

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