



CHAPTER 2

Histories of Failures

INTRODUCTION

The belief that civil society plays a part in supporting the cultural lives of its citizens has a genealogy that emerges as far back as Greek and Roman civilisation (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010). The same belief also preoccupies academics, with scholars as distinct in era and philosophy as Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin, William Morris, Karl Marx, Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Angela McRobbie, and Claire Bishop producing works that explore the nature, scope, and purpose of cultural participation. Within the sphere of public policy, cultural participation is, for many countries, a legitimate site of state intervention. From the commitment in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and one's right to participate in existing cultural provisions (the democratisation of culture) to UNESCO's definition of participation as the process of redistributing power over what constitutes valuable culture (cultural democracy), there has and continues to be an international drive both to increase equity and equality within the cultural sector and to use culture itself to create greater equity in society at large.

Cultural policy in the United Kingdom has, to a greater or lesser extent, exhibited a concern with determining who participates in what cultural activity since the middle of the twentieth century. For most of this time, scholars have construed non-participation as a "problem" that society needs to fix (Stevenson, 2013). As Brook (2013) explains, "the factors

that influence whether individuals attend the arts have been the subject of a considerable amount of research [with a focus on] how individual demographic and socio-economic characteristics influence engagement in cultural activities” (p. 145). Despite decades of research, policies, and promises, though, cultural policymakers in the UK have failed to make any significant or sustained changes at a national level regarding who participates in subsidised cultural activities or the organisations that receive the most public subsidy. At the same time, these policymakers have also failed to direct subsidies to the types of cultural activities that attract the largest or most diverse levels of participation. As we mentioned in our introduction, this discrepancy has led to a “crisis of legitimacy” for the cultural sector (Holden, 2006), with surveys indicating a decline in support for public investment in the arts and cultural sector (Comres, 2015; Keaney et al., 2007).

This chapter begins with a discussion about how academics, artists, and policymakers have understood cultural participation and how these different understandings have shaped different perspectives about the role of the state in supporting the cultural participation of its citizens. The chapter then discusses how a concern regarding who participates in what culture has become increasingly prevalent in recent decades. Namely, an audit culture of accountability combined with a growing focus on equity and inclusion has resulted in a proliferation of measurements and debates on what sort of cultural participation should “count”. The chapter concludes by reflecting on how much this data indicates the existence of a policy failure given that despite almost fifty years of focus on tackling the “problem” of cultural participation in the UK, policymakers, funders, and the organisations they support have neither fully democratised culture nor delivered a cultural democracy. Finally, this chapter examines why there appears to be little desire to acknowledge the scale of these policy failures or to deliver meaningful or sustainable change.

CULTURAL PARTICIPATION AND THE STATE

Although cultural participation has a long intellectual history with strong links to ideas of civic engagement, community well-being, and prosperity (Belfiore & Gibson, 2019, p. 4), until the late nineteenth century there was limited state intervention in a sphere that supposedly depended on “individual taste and fashion” (Gray, 2000, p. 38). But as in other Western countries, lobbying on behalf of some within the professional arts sector

has led to the belief that the private cultural lives of citizens are a legitimate site of government intervention (Toleda Silva, 2015). In the UK, attempts to define a shared culture (Appleton, 2007) were led by “academy-trained gentleman artist[s] of the middle or upper classes” (Upchurch, 2016, p. 510). These men argued that granting the majority of society access to the fine arts would establish and reproduce learnt sensibilities and moralities, which, in Europe, was a situation that the legacy of the Enlightenment heavily informed. Many scholars associate this perspective with the reformist ideas of Matthew Arnold and his seminal 1869 work *Culture and Anarchy* (2009). As Peterson (1963) notes, Arnold reflects on what culture is and what good it can do for society. Arguing that it is a humanising, harmonising, and ultimately civilising agent of modern society, Arnold contrasts culture with anarchy (the latter of which he associated with the mood of unrest and uncertainty that the seismic societal changes of the Industrial Revolution brought about as he was writing).

From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, casual patronage of the arts by wealthy individuals developed into direct state intervention. At this time, Governments across Europe and beyond established Ministries of Culture and/or other semi-independent bodies, the latter of which were to ensure that state funding was spent independent of political influence (Landry & Matarasso, 1999). What both models of governance share is the logic of culture as a social utility through which societies agree upon their shared values. In doing so, society might prevent social fragmentation and anarchy either by challenging traditional values, as in the Cultural Revolution in China, or by preserving them through the European focus on a shared heritage in the classical civilisations of antiquity.

In the UK, what Minihan (1977) calls an act of cultural nationalisation operationally took the form of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB). Formed in 1946, the UK government set up the ACGB based on an arm’s length principle, while at the same time granting permission to local authorities to support the cultural and entertainment needs of their constituents. This approach saw access to state-sanctioned arts as an inalienable democratic right. The UK thus adopted subsidies as part of an egalitarian process of democratising what was presented as both cultural excellence (Landry & Matarasso, 1999) and part of the intangible wealth of the nation. But as we have argued elsewhere, this model heavily directs cultural policy in the UK towards “supporting artistic independence for a professional class of artists, rather than the universal creativity or

participation of society in general” (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2019, p. 174). While political science understands participation in terms of one’s ability to exert power over decision-making processes, participation in the democratising agenda of cultural policy has only been a priority in so far as it supports the preservation and development of a professional artist class.

The dominant model of cultural policymaking in the UK for most of the twentieth century has been one of democratic elitism (Gray, 2000). As Hewison (2013) argues, this model “consigns the management of cultural policy to a group of experts who know transcendence when they see it” (p. 57). This is a situation that arises when society perceives such elites as being equipped to know what sort of cultural participation is more valuable than other forms. This patrician perspective has not been untested. The growth in higher education throughout the 1960s also saw the development of cultural studies as a discipline that challenged the hegemony of the cultural canon (Williams, 1983). Academic attention transcended debates over the intention of the artist and the aesthetic quality of the work to include examinations of how the public received, interpreted, and reproduced the work. This change took place against a background of broader social, political, and cultural changes including those of immigration and emigration that made the UK a progressively multicultural society. Increasingly, academics recognised the multiplicity of cultures that made up Britain’s cultural landscape. More voices wanted to be heard, and these voices had different cultural traditions from those that had thus far exerted the most influence over Britain’s cultural policy (Khan, 1978). At this time, the UK also started to adopt a less centralised approach to arts funding, with Regional Arts Associations exerting their influence (Hutchison, 1982) and local authority funding for art and culture matching, and often exceeding, that of the central government.

At the same time, a new generation of artists began to explore new art forms and challenge what it meant to be an artist. Community arts became more prevalent (Jeffers & Moriarty, 2018) partly in response to a reduction in opportunities for workplace-based creative activity that occurred as the UK closed or privatised traditional industries. Indeed, many of these industries had been significant supporters of creative activity among the working classes (Ashworth, 1986). Artists working within community arts at this time comprised what critics such as Kelly et al. (1986) describe as a cultural democracy: a democratic form of participation that requires a pluralistic system of values. In terms of participation, cultural democracy moves policy focus from one that manages the vertical relationship

between the participant and the public institutions of the state to one that values a more horizontal form of social participation between peers. As Belfiore and Gibson (2019) note, this approach sees culture not as the professional arts but as “everyday vernacular practices” (p. 166). Proponents argue that cultural democracy better meets the needs of a diverse and pluralistic cultural landscape rather than focusing narrowly upon the professional “high” arts. This perspective challenges the construction of cultural non-participation as a “problem”. Instead, it questions the legitimacy of the taste hierarchies that policymakers traditionally refer to when constructing cultural policy, allowing non-professionals to participate in decision-making processes (Stevenson, Balling, & Kann-Rasmussen, 2017; Jancovich, 2017).

Yet as an increasingly neo-liberal approach to government saw the decimation of local power along with community cultural infrastructures, changes in the wider political landscape towards the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s significantly constrained the advance of this alternative perspective (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2019). The reduction in local support for everyday culture alongside a reappraisal of all state responsibilities shifted the political logic of all cultural policy bodies. From the 1980s onwards, the logic of economic development and, since the millennium, the logic of social development became increasingly more important than those of art form development. As a result, the Arts Council, which in 1994 devolved into the different nations that make up the United Kingdom, was also forced to shift from a focus on “supply to demand” (Bunting, 2006). Thus, a logic of participation increasingly took centre stage. This change, as we discuss below in further detail, led to the growth of audience development initiatives such as outreach programmes that aimed to address education deficits or concessionary ticket schemes intended to reduce or remove the barrier of low income. But as Hadley (2021) notes when discussing the history of audience development: “it remains the single biggest demand-side initiative ever undertaken by the Arts Council [...] and yet it was simultaneously a remarkably small undertaking with a tiny percentage of overall Arts Council spend allocated to it” (p. 193).

The lack of financial commitment indicates the extent to which, despite the rhetorical shifts, little has fundamentally altered regarding the dominant logic of what national cultural policy should be or how the government should execute it. For example, participation has been far more evident in the shifting language of policy documents in England than

through changes to the distribution of Arts Council England (ACE) funding. While ACE policy documents promised to end the historic funding patterns of the past, in 2004 for example 76% of those already funded gained increases to their allocated money (Jancovich, 2017). Since then, and despite growing policy rhetoric about a shift to place-based investment, critics have accused funding distribution of becoming more centralised rather than less (Stark et al., 2013). Despite the swell of enthusiasm for the idea of a cultural democracy across all four nations of the UK, most policymakers continue to understand cultural participation as participation in those activities that receive subsidies rather than adequately resourcing what people already participate in.

Furthermore, the sort of policies and projects commonly pursued under the banner of cultural democracy (64 Million Artists and Arts Council England, 2018) fall far short of the radical proposals that the original manifesto for cultural democracy outlined (Kelly et al., 1986). This proposal included the recommendation that the UK should disband the “oppressive” Arts Councils of Great Britain and abandon the idea of “the arts” as an exclusionary label that diminishes the value of other creative acts. Against these aims, advocates for cultural democracy have arguably failed as much as those who hoped to democratise “high” culture for the masses.

MEASURING CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

While, for much of the twentieth century, the legitimacy of cultural policy decisions rested on the expertise of the so-called great men of culture (and they were mostly men), the new principles of public management that arose towards the turn of the century increasingly called upon policymakers to justify their decisions with evidence as part of a new “audit society” (Belfiore, 2004). Despite their arms-length distance from central government, the fact that arts council and local authority spending comes from the public purse and not wealthy philanthropists means that those distributing public subsidy to the arts must provide evidence that the system is not simply an elite that “defend[s] their own tastes and status in the name of the masses” (Charles Paul Freund; cited in Jensen, 2002, p. 197). Rather, they must prove that this funding provides positive societal impacts. This directive has resulted in an ongoing dialogue with politicians that many arts sector workers, along with some academics, refer to as “making the case” for public subsidy for the arts. Indeed, as we discuss in

Chaps. 4 and 5, the perception that there was a need to constantly justify and defend funding for the sector was a major reason why those we interviewed felt uncomfortable about acknowledging failure publicly.

The need to “evidence” the value of state subsidies for culture has led to a significant body of work on “capturing” the impact and value of culture and cultural participation (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) as well as the rise of what Prince (2013) calls calculative cultural expertise. Although value, impact, and benefit are closely related and even interchangeable terms, they are not wholly synonymous (Carnwaith & Brown, 2014). Scholars generally refer to benefit in terms of a wide range of positive outcomes (both tangible and intangible) and associate the term with cultural activity in relation to both communities and individuals (Brown, 2006; McCarthy et al., 2005; Ruiz, 2004). Unlike benefits, impacts are both positive and negative and tend to refer to changes that occur through the virtue of interactions with an activity or organisation (Brown, 2006; Leadbetter & O’Connor, 2013; Matarasso, 1997). While scholars use the term “cultural value” in economics to refer specifically to the non-economic value that arises from goods and experiences (Throsby, 2001), beyond this discipline it primarily refers to the process through which cultural activities produce benefits and impacts for the individual, institution, and society (Holden, 2004, 2006). Scholars also tend to draw distinctions between instrumental and intrinsic value (Belfiore, 2012; Brown & Novak-Leonard, 2013; Holden, 2006; McCarthy et al., 2005; Orr, 2008). Regardless of which term we use, the focus of contemporary research (both within the cultural sector and within academia) has tended to involve clarifying the positive effects of cultural participation with relatively little consideration of the negative effects. As we discuss in subsequent chapters, this asymmetry in research also appears in the narratives that artists, organisations, and funders are most likely to adopt when talking about the projects and policies that support cultural participation.

No matter the claimed impact, almost every claim relies on participation in some form or another. As Pinnock (2006) notes, “art which no-one wants to use is *not* an addition to the nation’s wealth” (p. 175; emphasis in the original). Although arguments exist about the value of public subsidy, and which do not appear to depend on use, such as option, existence, or bequest value (see, e.g., Holden, 2004), these arguments still rely on the presumption of use by somebody at some point. For example, if you value an art gallery not because you use it but because you want future generations to be able to use it (bequest value), then your

valuations of this place assume that someone else will value using it in the future. However, a perennial problem for the subsidised cultural sector has been that much of what supposedly provides value to society appears to be irrelevant to the majority and only of benefit to a minority. Thus, such organisations face consistent challenges to legitimise their claims on the public purse of a liberal democracy. Indeed, various individuals, from across the political spectrum, have voiced this challenge over the last fifty years. Community artist Su Braden (1978), for instance, argued that local authorities should redistribute subsidies to community-led cultural activities at the grassroots level. Conservative MP Norman Tebbit, too, contended that state subsidies for the arts were elitist and politically biased and should thus be reduced or even removed entirely (Dodd, 1995).

For policymakers, academics, and artists who are committed to a more equitable cultural sector, the supposed elitism of cultural policy has remained a considerable concern, especially given the level of government intervention in the arts. Evidence that supports the “elitism hypothesis” (Courty & Zhang, 2018) is long-standing and global in scope. Throsby and Withers (1979), for example, show that the wealthiest proportions of households benefit the most from public subsidy for the arts, a finding that the Warwick Commission (2015) has recently corroborated. Initially, this sort of demographic data was limited (Hadley, 2021). Over time, however, these critiques have led to a significant focus on generating evidence about what sorts of cultural activities people are involved in and how regularly they participate.

Most research into patterns of cultural participation is empirical, descriptive, and survey-driven and comes from one of three sources. First, arts organisations gather an increasing amount of data about their members and audiences as well as from organisations whom they commission to produce studies, such as the Audience Agency in England (2021). Second, statistics derive from academic studies that often undertake secondary analyses of existing data sets or attempt to aggregate the figures (e.g., Taylor, 2016). Finally, and despite the acknowledged difficulties (Schuster, 2007), the largest body of quantitative data comes from national and/or regional level studies that various countries have undertaken. They include Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Japan, the United States, and Uganda as well as many countries in the European Union. Some of these studies now provide a time series of data that stretches back over several decades (see, e.g., UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012 for international approaches). The United Kingdom is no exception here. All four nations

monitor rates of participation in and/or attendance at arts, cultural, and heritage activities. Since 2005 in England, for example, the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport in partnership with Arts Council England, Sport England, and English Heritage has undertaken the yearly *Taking Part* survey (see Keaney, 2008 for a discussion of *Taking Part* and its relative merits). Likewise, the *Taking Part in Scotland* survey of 2004, 2006, and 2008 studied participation with culture in residents north of the border. This survey built upon those that the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) had undertaken in 1991, 1994, 1998, and 2001. Although this survey is no longer conducted, the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) still measures cultural participation (see McCall & Playford, 2012 for a discussion of the SHS and its relative merits). Since 1993, the Arts Council of Wales has measured cultural participation as part of the broader *Omnibus Survey*, whereas the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's *General Population Survey* has reported biennially on rates of participation with art and culture since 2004.

However, the above surveys are not without their critics; many scholars have questioned the quality and value of the accumulated statistics (Madden, 2005; Schuster, 2007; Selwood, 2002). Moreover, the data provides few details that would allow policymakers to draw a satisfactory disaggregation and thus highlight the level of cultural participation that relies on government subsidy. Furthermore, the data does not clarify the degree to which policy interventions make tangible differences over those that one would find in any market. For the above reasons, other scholars have highlighted the shortcomings of the data for policymakers (Brown, 2006; Keaney, 2008). Despite these weaknesses and the inherent difficulty in measuring something as contested as culture (Galloway & Dunlop, 2007; Gray, 2009; Roodhouse, 2008), most scholars appear to accept that agencies at the local, national, and international level can and should monitor cultural participation.

In general, the above surveys present an uneven picture and show little evidence of sustained progress. For example, if we take the figures from England that track public engagement with the arts between 2005/06 and 2018/19 (see Fig. 2.1), a policymaker might claim "success" at noticing a rise of engagement by 3% over that period. However, the year-to-year changes do not indicate a consistent upward trend. Indeed, in half of the intervening years, engagement dropped below those levels seen at the start of the survey period.

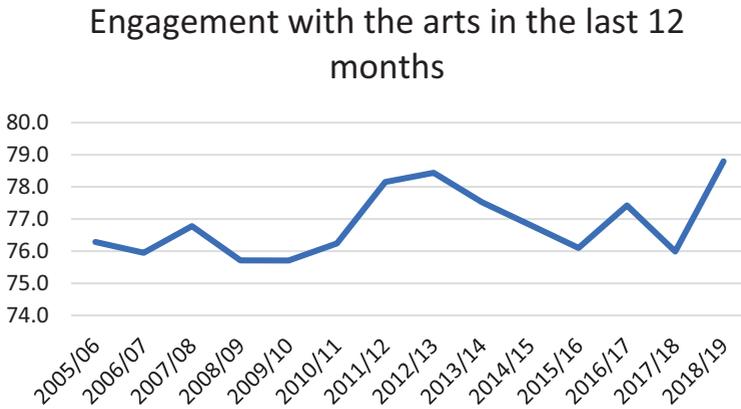


Fig. 2.1 Rates of engagement with the arts in England between 2005 and 2019. (Adapted from data at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201819-statistical-release>)

With over three-quarters of the population participating at the baseline, though, some might reasonably ask, “what’s the problem again?” (Stevenson, 2013). Is anything less than a 100% level of cultural engagement unsatisfactory? What if people just do not want to take part? What if we define this problem not in relation to how many people participate but in relation to a comparison between patterns of participation among the most and least deprived segments of society? Further scrutiny of the data from *Taking Part* demonstrates this variance, with only 60% of the most deprived participating in 2009/10 compared with nearly 86% of the least deprived. When viewing these figures, policymakers might celebrate the ten-year increase in the rate of engagement for the most deprived and the unchanging levels for those in the least deprived segments of society. Again, though, the rates are not consistently progressive and the most affluent members of society are still some way ahead (see Fig. 2.2).

The above data indicates how much these survey types collectively affirm what Courty and Zhang (2018) call the “elitism hypothesis”, where a correlation exists between certain forms of cultural participation and social status, wealth, and education. Related research has also demonstrated that attained characteristics such as education and income are more significant in predicting patterns of cultural participation than determined characteristics such as one’s age, gender, or place of birth (DiMaggio &

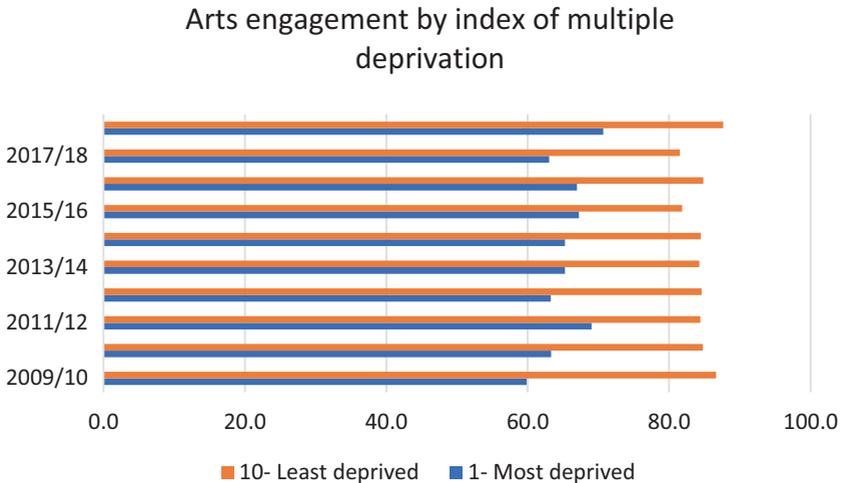


Fig. 2.2 Arts engagement in England in the last 12 months by Index of Multiple Deprivation decile (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201819-statistical-release>)

Ostrower, 1992; O’Hagan, 1996; Peterson et al., 2000). Scholars have identified this pattern in the UK (Keaney, 2008), America (National Endowment for the Arts, 2015), Europe (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016) and China (Courty & Zhang, 2018). In particular, those with degree-level education and/or higher incomes are more likely to participate in so-called highbrow cultural activities that are also more likely to benefit from public subsidies.

However, surveys such as the *Scottish Household Survey* and *Taking Part* are not neutral technocratic instruments (Bunting et al., 2019; Stevenson, 2013). Rather, they are created by, and in turn recreate,

normative conceptions of desirable cultural participation which are at the heart of the administrative machinery for the promotion of culture and the public’s access to it, and the driving ideals behind much of contemporary audience development and ‘engagement’ work within publicly funded cultural institutions. (Belfiore & Gibson, 2019, p. 5)

This can be seen in the way that some scholars have employed an analysis of this type of statistical data in support of a problem construction

wherein tangible and/or acquired “barriers” prevent certain people from doing things that they otherwise would do, and which would be valuable to them as both an individual and citizen (Stevenson, 2013, 2019). Such scholars suggest that there is the potential for society to remove these barriers. As such, there is an assumed duty for policymakers and the organisations that they support to make such changes wherever public money is involved (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016). In turn, this assumption has resulted in policies and practices that focus on finding ways to support so-called cultural “non-participants” (Stevenson, 2019) and help them overcome socio-economic “barriers”. However, these “barriers” relate only to those cultural activities that societal norms expect them to value. Thus, the above policies do not pursue fundamental structural change to the types of cultural participation activities that receive support. In other words, policymakers represent patterns of cultural participation as a problem of deficit amongst certain individuals and uphold that state intervention must build the capacity for these people to partake in mainstream culture (Miles & Gibson, 2016).

Some, such as theatre director Danny Moar, have argued that this belief has turned into a “remorseless and obsessive preoccupation” of subsidised organisations to “[chase] after new audiences who, for perfectly legitimate reasons, are just not interested” (Culture Media and Sports Committee, 2011, p. 19). Indeed, Keaney (2008) shows that, while a lack of time and money are often the reasons why people do not participate in the type of activities that most national cultural participation surveys monitor, it is a lack of interest in these activities that represents the most significant “barrier”.

It is this lack of interest that marks one of the main reasons why the practice of “audience development” (Hadley, 2021) does not lead to sustainable changes regarding those who engage with subsidised organisations and activities (Mandel, 2019). Many professionals in the field acknowledge this issue (Hadley, 2021, p. 193). As O’Hagan in 1996 explains:

...many arts councils and arts bodies have explicitly adopted a policy of pursuing more equal access to and participation in the arts as a policy objective. [However], it is a picture that has changed little, to the best of my knowledge, in any country in the last forty years. Why then are arts bodies still “going through the motions” of emphasising the importance of access for all to the consumption of the high arts when it is known that so little can be

achieved? [...] Arts bodies emphasise the issue of access primarily because it appears their continued public funding sometimes relies on such pronouncements. (pp. 269–276)

What is most dispiriting here is that O’Hagan says exactly the same thing, almost word for word, in a subsequent publication twenty years later (O’Hagan, 2017). Thus, it remains the case that “the wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of the UK population makes most use of publicly subsidised cultural organisations and events (and thus enjoys a significantly higher public spend per head on their cultural interests)” (Stevenson et al., 2017, p. 94). Yet this discrepancy should not be a surprise. Time and again over the last sixty years, scholars have argued that state-subsidised attempts to support “access” to culture in the UK have made little difference to the patterns of cultural participation at a national level. Furthermore, “there is no significant indication that countries with different cultural policies are able to attenuate the effect of education and income on cultural participation” (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016, p. 147).

In reflecting upon this apparent failure, it is important to recognise that much of the existing research into cultural participation “barriers” overlooks an important aspect of social life: the extent to which symbolic boundaries determine what is or is not for you (Lamont, 1992, pp. 11–12). As Holden (2010) states, non-participation is not the same as exclusion. Thus, Stevenson (2019) argues that we should make a distinction between those “who express an interest or desire to participate in an activity but who are hindered from doing so and those who have expressed no interest or desire in the same activity and identify no detriment to their life because of it” (p. 55). It is also notable that policymakers do not deem “non-participation” in state-subsidised cultural activities by some types of people to be a problem at all. For “if someone is not understood as a social or economic problem for the state, then their patterns of cultural participation are of no interest to those acting on behalf of the state” (Stevenson, 2019, p. 60). In practice, this assumption means that an extensively educated or affluent person who does not participate with state-subsidised cultural organisations and activities would not be the target of outreach and participation programmes in the same way that less affluent or extensively educated people would.

There are good reasons to perceive one’s refusal to participate in certain types of culture as an eloquent affirmation of their agency, one that may allow them to participate in something else (Harper, 2020). Given that most cultural participation in the UK takes place in the commercial

sector or at community-based events, this “something else” is arguably one of the biggest challenges that face those who seek to defend the cultural policy status quo (Taylor, 2016). Thus, some scholars argue that the participation gap “is not caused by a lack of demand among the public for cultural and creative expression” (Warwick Commission, 2015, p. 33). Rather, cultural policy values different forms of cultural and creative expression to various degrees.

Indeed, a significant body of scholarship in the UK has considered the rich and diverse nature of “everyday” participation (Miles & Gibson, 2016). If we widen our understanding of cultural participation or allow respondents to self-define the term, then scholarship shows that people participate in culture at much higher rates across all demographics (A New Direction, 2014; Public Perspectives & Middlesex University, 2015; Walker & Scott-Melnyk, 2002). While most of the UK population has low levels of participation in the type of cultural activities and organisations that are most likely to receive public subsidy, they are “nonetheless busy with everyday culture and leisure activities” (Taylor, 2016, p. 169). A recent Eurobarometer survey points to similar findings across Europe (European Commission, 2017).

Nevertheless, the dominant discourses regarding cultural participation in post-war UK cultural policy have focused upon social deficit rather than inequitable distribution, accessibility rather than relevance (Belfiore, 2019; Warwick Commission, 2015). There has been a consistent failure to respect or even recognise the value of some forms of cultural participation. The prevailing discourses thus limit any concern about equitable access to those areas of the arts that already receive large public expenditure. As a result, these discourses do not result in equitable help for people to overcome any barriers they face when pursuing their cultural lives, irrespective of the form this participation may take.

For all the work that has examined the value of cultural participation, none has involved comparative research into the relative merits of different types of cultural participation. As such, there is no evidence, for example, about why the government should fund outreach projects to encourage people who are already regular cinema attendees to go to the ballet. Likewise, there is a lack of evidence on the additional benefits that someone might gain from going to a gallery rather than listening to live music at their local pub. The focus on encouraging some forms of cultural participation over others thus raises ethical questions about whether contemporary liberal democracies should try to change individual tastes and

cultural preferences without clear evidence as to why such changes would be desirable.

Likewise, as Ruiz (2004) acknowledges, scholars have paid little attention to the relative impact of cultural participation compared to other types of activity. For example, current research has not considered whether cultural participation has a greater or different impact on community cohesion over participation in sports, or whether cultural participation is more likely to increase a teenager's self-efficacy than gardening or volunteering. Despite the significant amount of research time and expense that scholars have directed towards the question of cultural participation, researchers have arguably failed to provide insights that have fundamentally altered how the state supports cultural participation. Over forty years after the work of Braden (1978) and Throsby and Withers (1979), research continues to tell us that different people participate in different activities, that governments appear to value some forms of cultural participation more than others, and that state subsidies for culture continue to disproportionately benefit the most affluent and socially advantaged members of society. Scholars have paid far less attention to why decades of cultural participation policies and projects in the UK have failed to make any sustained difference to the "problem" that academics, artists, and policymakers have been attempting to address for at least half a century, if not longer.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, cultural policy in the UK has been preoccupied with the "problem" of cultural participation for decades and has coalesced around two primary perspectives. One regards the problem of participation as being about access and opportunity. Proponents of this perspective thus seek to increase the number of people who regularly participate in those organisations and activities that cultural professionals identify as being of greatest value to society. Another perspective regards the problem as one of redistribution, representation, and respect. This alternative perspective seeks to increase the diversity of those involved in decision making, recognise that the fullest spectrum of cultural participation is societally valuable, and reallocate public subsidies accordingly. Yet contemporary research would suggest that cultural policy has failed to deliver on either perspective.

Where policymakers face "wicked" problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973), they often attempt to address the symptoms rather than the causes

(Stringer & Richardson, 1980). Furthermore, policymakers tend to adopt “placebo” policies that underplay or remove difficult issues from the political agenda (Gustafsson, 1983). Cultural participation is one such “wicked” problem given that so much debate exists over what the phrase constitutes in terms of policy, why participation should represent a state concern, and how cultural policy should address the issue. As such, many of the associated policies and projects are primarily symbolic. Despite delivering little or no objective long-term change, such policies demonstrate governmental, institutional, and individual commitments to address cultural inequities and inequalities. At the same time, ever more eloquent evaluations employ the same narratives of either individual transformation and empowerment or social and economic impact. While these narratives justify public funding for policies, organisations, and projects, many of these policies and projects continually fail to change existing patterns of cultural participation, diversify the voices who make significant decisions or increase the breadth of activities and organisations that benefit from public subsidy.

The primary motivation of this research has thus been the task of understanding the dissonance between stories of success and the UK’s history of failure when delivering meaningful change in this area. In the next chapter, we will consider some of the literature on policy failure that explains why it is so hard to recognise and why it is so difficult for policy implementers to acknowledge failures when they do occur. We will also consider the potential for learning that policy failures can provide if there is a culture of talking about them openly and honestly.

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