AHRC / ESRC Impact Fellowship

Impact Fellowship in Cultural Policy and Regeneration

The School of Sociology and Social Policy and the Management School at the University of Liverpool have been awarded a three year Impact Fellowship jointly funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council.

The aim of the fellowship is to develop an academic programme of research on the impacts of cultural policy in the context of regeneration. This will complement work currently being carried out around the main Impacts08 programme, offering an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen knowledge-transfer activities and inform decision-making at a critical moment in the history of Liverpool, as well as protect the integrity of academic research into the theory and practice of cultural policy, which can be used as a reference point for other cities throughout the UK and beyond.

Noting the broader debate currently going on regarding how best to capture 'cultural value', the proposed research aims to establish the grounds upon which such judgments can be made. Arguing that the functional role of culture in terms of its economic and social outcomes only tells half the story, and that research has struggled to comprehend the value of culture in its own right, the fellowship will focus on the immediate contexts in which culture is played out.

The research focuses both on the interaction between the different local life styles in urban space and on the interaction of the local population with urban space. Based on the ethnographic method, it analyses the process of social exchange and spatial engagement within urban space in order to find out how this interaction contributes to the construction of a local cultural identity. The objective is to find out what impact Liverpool 08 will have on local cultural habitus, and how the sustainability of this impact can be measured and monitored.

The Impact Fellowship is exploring two key areas of concern:

First, the value of space and place: the research seeks to understand the communication process between local residents and the City Council concerning the construction, the use and the recognition of cultural space. It focuses on the interaction between users and the places of their choice to understand how local identity is 'imprinted' in urban space and then reproduced. A map of the historic transformation of cultural space in the city of Liverpool will give an idea of what the local population identifies with as cultural activity and what qualities it expects from a cultural space. An in depth case study will clarify the strategies a community is able to develop to get the recognition of a place considered important for local cultural life. Together both approaches permit a heuristic outlook on the sustainability of cultural policy.

Second, the value of creative entrepreneurship: the research team is examining how aspects of deprivation and social exclusion impinge on or provide new opportunities for creative industries entrepreneurs. Such an assessment will open up new avenues of enquiry into how cultural investments and events stimulate local social and economic change and thus allow us to investigate the cultural conditions that best support the emergence of the creative industries.

This research will generate additional data that will feed into national and international policy debates about the social and cultural impact of cultural policy through culture-led regeneration. A key concern here is to use the proposed research as a means of establishing a higher profile for cultural policy research grounded in the

intrinsic value of the cultural and artistic experience which is currently excluded from the established regeneration research agenda.

Methodologies

1. Case Study
In order to understand the daily construction process of a cultural place and how people adapt their cultural habitus to changing conditions in the urban space, an in depth case study of a community in Liverpool 8 will be undertaken. It will clarify the capitals - symbolic, economic, cultural and social –that a community can set off to make its claim heard by the authorities. The case study case allows evaluation not only of the capacity of the community to impose its request, but also the functionality of the existing communication channels between the authorities and the community for these matters.

2. Cognitive Maps
Cognitive maps will be used to illustrate the historic evolution of the cultural space up to the present. In workshops, members of three different generations as well as local cultural producers will represent what space they use(d) at present and in the past for cultural activities. Piling up these different maps onto the official map of cultural space visualises the variation between local and official perceptions of cultural space and also indicates the individual emotional attachment towards urban space.