



Hidden Culture in Leicester

| Research Proposal

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1 Introduction

1.1 Context to the Study

Urban leaders globally have shown increasing interest in the city as a site for artistic and culture-led regeneration, and as such attempts to measure the value of culture and the impact of cultural growth have increasingly come under scrutiny. Arguably the application of traditional methods of capturing, measuring, and assessing impact using units of financial measurements remain totally unsuitable for the diversity and nuances of cultural activities, as cursory assessments leave much 'hidden' form public view.

This research begins with the problem of how to suitably capture value in hidden cultural forms. Hidden in this sense might relate to:

1. Hidden culture can be hidden from view (in other words taking place in the home, or in marginalised communities)
2. Hidden culture may lie outside of mainstream society
3. Hidden culture may be tacit, and cannot easily be communicated outside of those who have an intrinsic understanding of it.

Finding ways to capture and articulate the impact of this type of hidden culture is the primary objective of this study.

1.2 Cultural Impact

Cultural impact is most commonly measured by drawing on financial values such as costs, profit, investment, or quantifiable impacts such as numbers of attendees or job creation. These are encapsulated in the UK's 'Green Book' method, which have been noted as being flawed for study of the arts as noted by O'Brien (2010). Social benefits such as quality of life and health and wellbeing are considered marginal by the Green Book approach, and although it is acknowledged that cultural services do not generally have direct market values, it is recommended that the impact of such resources be quantified and monetised as far as possible (HM Treasury, 2018).

From a preliminary assessment, Leicester City Council appears to currently gather primarily quantitative data with a focus on audience figures and associated spend in measuring cultural impact. This approach draws parallels with other leading cities. In this project, we will instead focus upon alternative data sets including tacit knowledge, and with a focus on narratives and sensory techniques, to build a richer picture of the significance of tacit and intrinsic cultural forms in Leicester and beyond. This in turn will equip Leicester City Council with a methodological framework and terms of reference to easily gather and disseminate the value of a broader range of cultural activities and forms in the city, as well as showcase an alternative approach nationally with other civic leaders.

1.3 Value Creation

The primacy of value is a key factor in both obscuring and locating hidden cultures.

- Power is socially constructed - Power is culturally and symbolically generated through reciprocal social norms, which set the boundaries of how members of a society think feel and act (Bourdieu, 1993; Navarro, 2006).
- Culture can be exclusive - This symbolic power also relates to the unspoken conventions which can come to be a tool for exclusion for marginalised groups who do not share the context necessary to understand.
- Cultural exclusion can be perpetuated - Cultural entities are important because they recursively shape our understanding of ourselves and society. A pattern in which the privileged allocate value in the cultural sphere through programming and making may exclude significant groups from mainstream cultural activity.
- Cultural exclusion can lead to further disenfranchisement - Cultural production from an unrepresentative group of producers may reinforce wider disenfranchisement. The appropriation by dominant groups of cultural production associated with minorities often changes or dilutes the meanings of important signifiers and can affect the authentic value of cultural forms (Hesmondalgh and Saha, 2013; Throsby, 2001).

These questions of power and value are particularly important in Leicester, where a disparate group of producers and participants in a wide variety of cultural activities coexist, and where multiple waves of migration have prompted differing rates and geographies of settlement and integration. As such, policy-makers must be sensitive to these spatial variations and tailor provisions and programme in different areas of the city.

1.4 Hidden Culture

The notion of 'Hidden Culture' is used in the broader context of this project to denote that part of culture that is currently not captured in traditional impact studies but which nevertheless has broader value. This approach evokes a more plural stance; challenging white, elitist and divisive elements to mainstream culture.

2 Why Concern with Hidden Culture in Leicester?

2.1 A Multicultural Leicester

There is significant academic and policy interest in the current iterations and networks of English multiculturalism, which are rapidly changing. Leicester is an excellent example of these networks.

There is notable social mobility amongst the suburban South Asian population since the 1990s (Bonney and Le Goff, 2006; Tyler, 2006), and this community plays an important role in local governance. However, newer migrant communities often share few similarities, socially or culturally, to more established BAME groups, which can contribute to uneven social provision, and contradictory interactions between communities (Perry, 2008).

Differing statuses within groups of the same national or ethnic origin may exacerbate these ruptures; for example, among the Somali community in Leicester are found British citizens, refugees, asylum-seekers, persons granted exceptional leave to remain, undocumented migrants, and people granted refugee status in another European country.

With this in mind, multiculturalism is not understandable in terms of broad stroke concepts, and a focus on everyday lived experiences of citizens can give more robust information about socially diverse urban environments (Neal et al, 2013). Structural factors contribute significantly to cultural forms remaining hidden, and their value unarticulated, so an acknowledgement of the importance of interactions at community level is a step towards establishing a progressive politics of place.

Leicester City Council is the major funder of arts and culture in the city, funding a museums service, cultural venues including theatres and a concert hall, and running a range of city-wide festivals and celebrations. However, the service has not been immune from regional authority cuts in arts and culture spend of around 19% (Harvey, 2016).

The arts and culture offering in Leicester celebrates the diversity of the city, arranging large-scale celebrations for Diwali, a Caribbean festival and programming works in cultural venues which reflect the city's demographic. However, there remain communities within the city who do not engage with arts or culture programmes.

There is the possibility that there is simply no interest in cultural programmes from certain groups of residents. However, we must hold in mind that structural factors and their concomitant inequalities need to be taken into account in understandings of multiethnic social relations, because cultural encounters never take place in a space free from history, material conditions and power.

The institutionalisation of festivities, celebrations, and ceremonies is sometimes used to maintain asymmetrical systems of social order (Mbembe, 2001). Proximity to cultural offerings does not necessarily lead to meaningful contact, and as such it is essential to look outside of institutional settings: by acknowledging the importance of domestic and grassroots culture in Leicester, more spaces in the city can become cultural spaces, which creates a sense of ownership within communities.

2.2 Hidden Culture in Leicester

Based on preliminary assessment, it seems that Leicester is the first city in the world to consider hidden culture and its place in cultural policy. In creating a working model of capturing and valorising hidden culture, and in placing value on such cultural forms, Leicester will make important inroads in developing a new policy area, and challenge old ways of approaching culture.

Focusing on hidden culture sends a message that a focus on the richness and diversity of local cultures, rather than gentrification and economic growth, is the aim of inclusive cultural policy. This removes Leicester from the perceived competition between cities, exacerbated by destination marketing and a focus on economic growth, and instead puts the city on a unique path, and therefore comparable with much larger or capital cities making similar (but less encompassing) attempts to create a more inclusive cultural policy, such as Hong Kong and Montréal (World Cities Culture Forum, 2018).

Yet the question remains: how might we access these hidden cultural forms, and how may we reliably assess their value?



Figure 1 – Culture in Leicester

3 Co-Designing Research on Hidden Culture

3.1 The Nature of Co-Design

Through a process of co-design with Leicester City Council, this research seeks to examine the hidden culture of food in the city, as a way of developing a model that has wider reach and scalability.

Co-design is an approach which attempts to actively involve all stakeholders (e.g. governance, partners, citizens) in the research and project design process to help ensure that the result meets their needs and is usable. From the outset, the idea is to develop a model that works and can be scaled-up to work and be used as a mainstream model in all areas of the city. As such, the methods detailed below are both experimental and evolving: as stakeholders contribute to the research process, the concept of hidden culture will develop as we work together to apply knowledge and explore ideas.



Figure 2 – Co-designing the project

Leicester City Council can then use the methods from the co-design, along with the data, to inform programming and policy decisions in the cultural sector and beyond. LCC may wish to target specific communities who are marginalised, or do not engage with citywide events, by contacting them to take part in the research in order to gain a greater understanding of community dynamics and interests.

This may then be developed into a research model to apply to other cultural forms in the city (for example, street art, textile production, dance practices), which could lead to the creation of an Index of Cultural Value. This living document could be promoted in and curated by communities.

3.2 Participatory Methods

At the heart of the proposed work is the idea of community participation. Co-design of projects gives all participants a sense of agency. In this case, cultural policy is not something imposed upon the citizens of Leicester, but something to which they can contribute and take ownership of. This hopes to subvert the idea that cultural policy can reinforce elitist and exclusory social structures, by valuing the knowledge and culture of 'ordinary' people. The participatory elements of the research designs include:

(i) Citizen Science

Citizen Science is most commonly used to gather ecological and environmental data. The general public will be involved in gathering data and offers some potentially exciting features beneficial to the cultural arena:

- Volume and range of data gathered
- Offering access to locations which researchers cannot reach
- Potential for gathering of longitudinal data to demonstrate change over time
- Greater appreciation of nature for participants (can also apply to culture)
- Upskilling participants (Cohn, 2008; Bonney et al, 2009)

A central tenet of Citizen Science is that the environment belongs to all of us, and equipping citizens to observe and monitor changes within it enhances the population's interest in its preservation and care. This may prove equally applicable to the idea of 'Citizen Culture', by which the definition and legislation of cultural activity is democratised through citizens valorising their own tacit cultural forms.

(ii) Participatory Digital Methods

Citizens documenting their day to day lives provides scope for unlocking certain patterns in production and consumption of cultural objects.

With technological advances, the use of cheap smart phones has allowed for a process of documentation in the virtual domain. A project in Delhi called Gendering the Smart City (Datta, 2018) uses WhatsApp Diaries as a medium to curate and co-produce the idea of gendered mobility and safety through text and images.

The idea of virtually documenting activities in private and domestic spheres would allow this project to gain insight into the identity, role and value of hidden cultures. Combining elements of Citizen Science/ Sense and WhatsApp documentation approaches may lead to a new model long-term model for Leicester to gain insight into the cultural lives of residents, with hope of replicability elsewhere.

3.3 The Proposal

How might participatory approaches be used in Leicester?

It is proposed that food is selected as a case study as it provides a lens into wider cultural aspects, and has both reach and meaning i.e. it is not exclusionary at heart.

This will be a study of food culture among different communities and individuals city-wide, to identify hidden cultural forms in homes and neighbourhoods, and to build a model that can be scaled-up and used as a demonstrator for future research in the city.

The initial stage of the research would feature a participatory, Citizen Science-inspired method in which communities of practice document their own cultural processes and activities via individual WhatsApp diaries. Data generated from this may include:

- Photographs, Audio and Video clips - providing visual and other sensory data, for use in subsequent interviews.
- Diaries - providing narrative information about processes, outcomes, thoughts, memories and experiences of the participant.
- Network information - details of who is present shows how actors interact, beginning to explain the flow of tacit knowledge and codification processes amongst community members.
- Spatial information - participants can drop pins to show location of activities, or use GPS to track their movements during certain events (such as Iftar or Diwali), showing participants' spatial relationship with the city.

This data will be used to create 'StoryMaps' (Datta, 2019,) which provide multi-sensory information on 'intimate infrastructures' within the city. These StoryMaps could be hosted on an open source, interactive site. They may prove useful to Leicester City Council in showing how audiences to arts and cultural venues navigate the city in comparison with hard-to-reach groups, giving insight into how programming decisions, building design and wider city strategies may affect both resident and visitor inclination to attend museums, galleries, theatres, festivals and other cultural events.

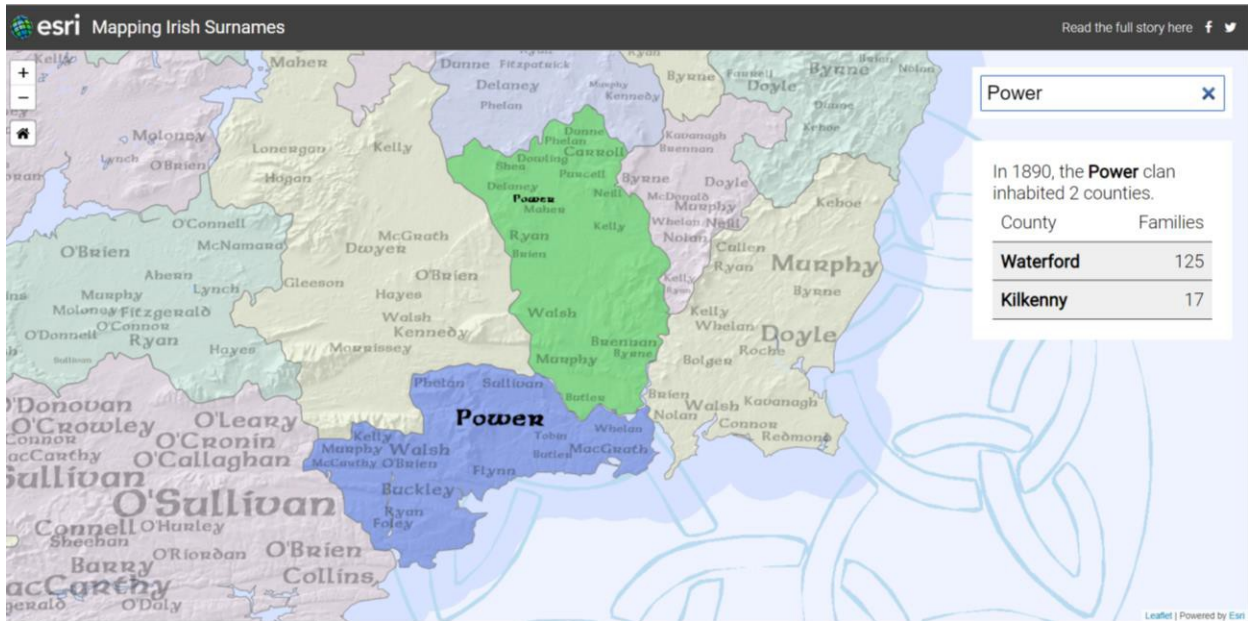


Figure 3 – Example of an interactive story map

The second stage of the research would involve the researcher recruiting contributors to the map for in-situ interviews in the form of shop-alongs and cook-alongs, using the interview data to complete phenomenological readings of food practices, to gain in-person understanding of participants' choices, values, memories and emotions.

3.4 How will it Work?

The co-design element of this project means that Leicester City Council may wish to gather data from certain groups or communities, according to strategic priorities, and members of these groups may be recruited to provide the Citizen Science and in-depth data for the study. They may wish to co-collate or co-manage the process or to supplement the data to enhance scalability and reach.

Suggested participants currently include:

- *A Leicester Past?* - 2 Leicester Market traders - to explore white, working class food practices.
- *The City's Culture* - 2 2nd generation East African migrants from Indian sub-continent - to analyse ways in which long-term settlement in Leicester has affected the flow of knowledge within communities and whether outside influence has changed food practices.
- *New Migrant Cultures* - 2 Somalian Muslims - to compare the food practices of more established migrant communities with new migrant communities.
- *Sharing and Identifiers* - 2 refugees to explore how the sharing of food between disparate groups changes food practices and serves as an identifier in times of flux.

However, this is open to alteration as per city needs.

The research process will currently be a nine-stage undertaking as per the figure below, encompassing both Citizen Science and participatory digital methods, and ethnographic interview methods.

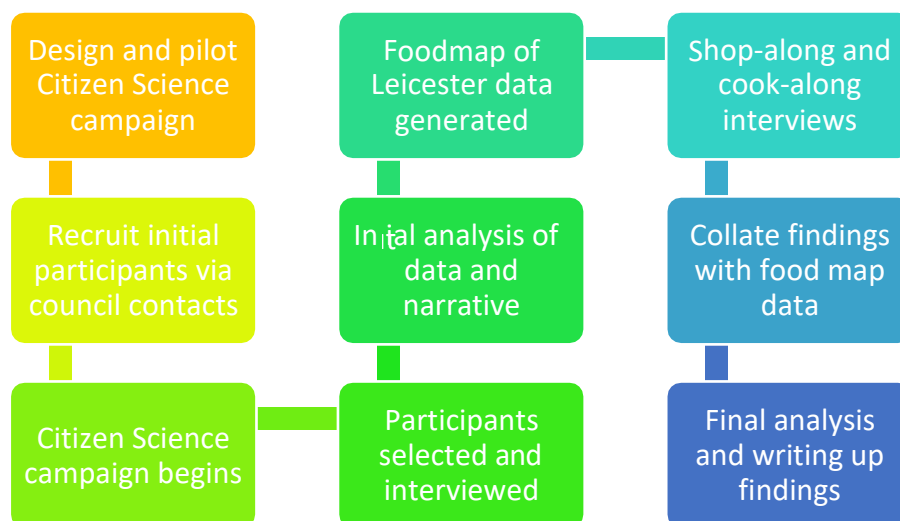


Figure 4 - Research workflow

The questions asked of participants will aim to uncover:

- Cultural entities (i.e. recipes, foodstuffs, rituals, objects associated with food) produced or performed by certain communities
- How knowledge and meaning is transferred between members of communities
- Sites of cohesion and integration in Leicester; Sites of conflict and separation
- Sites of empowerment and agency within communities

4 Researching Food in Leicester

4.1 Why Food Culture?

The term food culture encapsulates:

- food practices
- cooking practices
- the attitudes and belief systems around food products, production and consumption
- the social and spatial networks in which food is produced and consumed
- the institutions which govern and distribute food
- the historical context of foodstuffs and food practices
- how food is emblematic of identity, collective values, memory, power structures
- the art and creativity expressed by food

All communities have food cultures, which provides a common theme and a shared lens through which to complete a city-wide research project.

4.2 Food as a Cultural Lens

Food is frequently the centre of events, occasions and familial gatherings, and an important element of culture.

Immigrants bring the food of their countries with them wherever they go and cooking traditional food is a way of preserving their culture when they move to new places. Food then may represent a shared value between first and second generation immigrants.

Food is an intrinsic and inclusive part of social and familial interactions, and thus does not have to be framed as a cultural form, meaning that the exclusory connotations around mainstream cultural activity are diminished.

Food, and its organisation, opens up analogous systems of meaning and associated cultural activities. If we understand food practices, we may recognise the significance of relationships and social networks, common narrative threads in communities and the importance of certain events and rituals.

Food can serve as a personal, national, regional or familial identifier (Petridou, 2011; Trubek 2012), and marks producers and consumers as occupiers of certain social realms (Højlund, 2015; Ulloa, 2019).

Food culture may reveal other tacit cultural forms. However, cultural policy within local governance tends only to acknowledge the quantitative and economic benefits of food culture, such as associated spend by visitors, or in the context of specific events (.ie. food festivals). This excludes culture in community and domestic spheres, which in turn has gender and class implications.

Food practices bring everyday realities and socio-political context to the foreground, through implicit and explicit rules, specific language, and through the specific classification of culinary knowledge (for example, the different value placed on home cooked food made

by a mother versus fine dining designed by a top chef). This allows us to consider agency, social obligation, division of labour and authority, giving insight into power structures within homes and communities.

Food practices are also inextricably tied to notions of value, making food cultures a natural springboard to theorise about value in hidden cultures more broadly. In a study of Palestinian olive oil producers, Menely (2014) describes the thick, dark green oil which Palestinians favour evoking what the Greeks call “xenetia”, or the taste of the homeland; however the recent quest to gain international recognition for Palestinian oils as an elite product, and the Europeanised production processes to gain ‘extra virgin’ status for the oils leads to an excoriation of traditional methods.

‘Quality’ is perceived as a tool to gain international recognition of its olive oil and, by proxy, of Palestine itself. In this sense, food serves as a cultural entity, where taste and other sensorial properties are symbolic of a homeland, and of struggle. In looking at what citizens of Leicester cook, share and eat we may uncover symbolic meaning similar to this, to understand how policy may valorise minority cultures.

4.3 Leicester’s Culture of Food and Drink

Food and drink is central to Leicester’s economic future. The food and drink manufacturing sector is worth £600m in the Leicester and Leicestershire economy and provides twice the national share of employment (Leicester Food Plan, 2014). The East Midlands food festival held in Melton Mowbray attracts over 14,000 visitors locally: such profitable ventures locally demonstrate the existence of an audience who are both relatively local, and interested in various aspects of food culture.



Figure 5 - Advertising for Melt Street Kitchen, a monthly food festival in Melton Mowbray

However, while Leicester City Council food strategies intersect with health and wellbeing, sustainability and alleviation of poverty initiatives, arts and culture provision is not included within the plan. This may prove a missed opportunity:

“a common theme running through the delivery of this Food Plan is the role of working at a community level: bringing diverse communities together, teaching and sharing skills, increasing knowledge and understanding, bringing underused land into productive use and

developing local scale solutions. This needs to happen through community food projects, in schools and training programmes and via public services” (Leicester City Council, 2014)

Council-run arts and culture services currently present an under-utilised opportunity to expand on the city’s Food Plan, and bring those targeted by health and wellbeing and poverty alleviation strategies into cultural venues, thus expanding and diversifying audiences. Equally, food culture provides an accessible way to gain insight into cultural practices in domestic and community spheres, which may lead to gathering knowledge to inform strategies such as reducing obesity, or evidencing skill or knowledge gaps in specific communities

Researching food culture in the city provides an opportunity to further celebrate diversity and migration in Leicester. Food provides an inclusive lens through which to view wider culture: through this project, participants can share their food practices without having excellent language skills, as visual and audio data is considered equally valuable, and participants do not even need to leave home to share their cultural practices digitally. In gaining an understanding of the authentic food practices of Leicester residents the city can focus on the talent and creativity that sits within the city, as an opposition to the gentrified street food market model seen in many cities, where food cultures are appropriated and monetised by vendors outside of the communities from which the foods originated.

4.4 Food Culture Elsewhere

New Art Exchange is a contemporary arts space in Nottingham with a mission to display work by BAME artists, and celebrate diversity in the East Midlands region. The exhibitions shown are often challenging, and concern difficult themes.

NAE run an annual food festival which celebrates local culinary talent, with a focus on women who cook in the home. Authenticity is a key selling point, to differentiate the festival from the standard street food model which is springing up in towns and cities naturally. The festival showcases the cuisines of various communities in the city, allowing groups to form friendships and support networks. The refugee support group Global Sistaz United play a significant part in the festival, with their members sharing their recipes and making contact with a community they often feel excluded from.

Global Sistaz United create a regular zine for their members with recipes, stories and signposts to support groups. The platform given to refugee women through the festival empowers them, while encouraging audiences who may not otherwise visit contemporary art institutions to visit the gallery to share authentic food from around the world.



Figure 6 – (l-r) food stalls at Diwali in Leicester; Street food in Brixton; Whitecross Street Market, London

Case Study – Melting Pot Festival, New Art Exchange, Nottingham



Figure 7 – photos from Melting Pot Festival, New Art Exchange, Nottingham

5 The Impact of a Hidden Culture Model in Leicester

5.1 Practice-based Scaleability

In discovering cultural entities specific to certain communities, understanding how knowledge is passed between members of this community, and contextualising power structures within these communities, it may be understood how hidden cultural forms add value to the community, and the city more widely.

How can this be used?

Co-designed outputs of this project may include:

- A city-wide **Citizen Science campaign** to develop a digital **Leicester food map**, which would serve as an interactive resource for both residents, and visitors to the city, and could be hosted on Leicester City Council web platforms and promoted on social channels.
- **Pop-up community food stalls** at city galleries, museums and theatres, which would both legitimise and place value upon the cultural products of marginal communities, and attract new audiences to these venues. Visitors would attend with the specific purpose of consuming cuisines which may not usually be available commercially, but the welcome received in these cultural venues may encourage hard-to-reach audiences to engage with the city's arts and cultural provision.
- Both the in-depth data from the researcher, and the broader data from the Food Mapping project may provide material for **an exhibition** documenting the diverse and evolving food practices in Leicester. The crowdsourced nature of the materials empowers residents to feel ownership of and connection to the city's culture and heritage policies.
- This may result in the creation of an annual **Leicester Food Festival**, which moves away from the traditional artisan model seen in Melton Mowbray and instead encourages local communities to promote and represent both the symbolic and material value of their food practices and the resulting cultural products.

5.2 Academic and Policy Outputs and Outcomes

The research also aims to make a significant contribution to literature around cultural value, hidden culture, material culture, food practices and local government research methods. This contribution will take the form of:

- a thesis detailing the phenomenology of hidden culture
- a collated series of working papers on emergent citizen science methods and digital engagement strategies for local government
- conference attendance presenting findings and publicising 'The Leicester Method'
- A series of curated events and workshops for culture and food scholars, including the sharing of ideas and best practice around diaries, visual and sensory research methods, and digital participatory methodologies

These combined outputs may contribute to the wider adoption of such methods in local government research, making Leicester City Council a thought leader and early-adopter in utilising valuable qualitative findings.

5.3 Anticipated Outcomes

This rapid evidence review has highlighted a range of drama school models that have been Using participatory digital research methods, it is hoped that this study will build a legacy in Leicester by:

- developing a scalable research model for Leicester City Council

It is hoped that this method of gathering data from citizens may be used to elicit data from communities on the margins and inform both arts and culture planning, and wider council engagement strategies.

- collating data that will inform cultural policy design especially in local government settings

This project aims to promote and progress the use of qualitative data and narrative within local government settings, leading to altered perceptions of value and quality more broadly.

- developing a channel for ongoing communication between communities and the city council

In an age of ongoing austerity and stretched resources in local government (Hastings et al, 2015), this digital method offers an efficient and low-cost model for citizens to engage with the city council. In promoting digital literacy amongst communities, this study may encourage citizens and communities who may not historically have engaged with local government firstly to participate in local decision making, and also to use online forms and resources, thus taking some pressure off council services.

- adding to the emergent field of Citizen Science and opening up avenues for its application in the cultural discourse

This project presents an opportunity for Leicester to be at the centre of the development of Citizen Science methods in cultural research, while also contributing to the prominent area of Smart City policies and new digital research methods.

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