

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This project was a collaboration between the University of Bristol, Real Ideas Organisation and ten cultural and arts organisations across the city of Bristol. It was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under the two year Cultural Value Project which aims to make a major contribution to how we think about the value of arts and culture to individuals and to society. Teenage Kicks began in September 2013 and ran until the end of May 2014.

The project's overarching objectives were: first, to build a better understanding of young people's understanding of cultural value from their perspective; and, second, to use these insights to inform the design and provision of cultural and creative activities across a city. Our belief was that in contemporary accounts of cultural value young people's voices have largely dropped off the radar. Where they remain, they have tended to be restricted to analyses of young people's encounters with culture and 'creativity' in more formal cultural institutions and in schools or to debates on the implications of digital cultural spaces. Other studies of the value young people<sup>1</sup> accrue through cultural experiences have often been dominated by instrumental accounts of potential future economic benefit and skills development.

We wanted to find out more about how young people construct and create judgements of value for their everyday activities and for their participation in more formalised cultural activities. Do young people have a particular 'take' on cultural value that is different to other generational groups? We were also interested in the similarities and differences between these contemporary accounts and historical accounts of youth culture, identifying whether there are distinctive contemporary conceptions of cultural value emerging amongst young people today. The question of who and what influences young people's understandings of cultural value was also important to the project - are contemporary youth conceptions of cultural value informed by parents, peer groups, and/or wider cultural contexts? How do young people from different socioeconomic, gender and ethnic groups within generational groups understand cultural value?

Over the period of nine months our research involved recruiting diverse groups of young people between the ages of 12-18 years old in discussion with our cultural partners. We then ran two youth only workshops in seven locations across the city involving approximately 10 young people in each location. The workshops elicited evidence of young people's perceptions of cultural value across different cultural experiences and explored how historic conceptions of 'youth culture' might act as prompt for critical reflections on young people's views of cultural value today. Following these workshops we curated a final event bringing together young people who had been involved in the initial workshops and adults working as policy makers, cultural leaders, youth workers and others. Researchers here presented the project and young people engaged in creative workshops to elicit more data and reflect on data collected so far.

## KEY FINDINGS

Young people told us that:

**The home (and family) matters:** they spoke about the importance of the home as a site of cultural activity and value and the role of the family in influencing their engagement in culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst acknowledging the diversity of youth practices and identities we choose to use the term 'young people' throughout the report to refer to the 12-18 year olds that we worked with.

**Public space matters:** young people told us about the importance of the provision of public space within the city for young people to be together without being subject to a regulatory gaze in order for them to develop personal and collective spaces of (cultural) identity making.

**Different ways of knowing are encouraged through arts and cultural engagement and making:** young people told us about the intrinsic value of the arts and culture in their lives, and how this connects with their health and well being.

**Schooled notions of culture can seek to control not enable:** schooled discourses and practices of art making in schools can influence young people's take on cultural value and their engagement with cultural institutions in the city in a positive and a negative way.

**Culture is social and flourishes in diverse groups:** young people saw culture as social and told us that this was enhanced where people from diverse backgrounds and communities come together and felt included in cultural activity across the city. An awareness of the range of barriers for some in engaging in these activities also emerged as important.

**Formal cultural institutions can be 'deadly' for some:** Many young people suggested that they didn't want to visit formal cultural institutions in the city as they did not value what they perceived they had to offer or see them as 'comfortable' spaces for young people.

**Discourses of high and low culture remain powerful:** young people suggested that their cultural values still function as markers of social distinction and that notions of cultural capital (which is both classed and gendered) are still relevant.

**The digital matters:** young people highlighted the increasing role of digital practices in their lives, for instance in relation to changing understandings of what counts as private and what might be shared publically. Technological artefacts (such as phones) increasingly mediate young people's (embodied) experiences of culture, as well as their individual and collective judgements about what they value culturally.

**The picture is complex:** young people are not a homogenous generational group equally affected by societal and sociotechnical changes. Therefore an awareness of differences amongst generational groups as well as similarities across them is sensible.

Our collaborative work with Real Ideas Organisation on dissemination and in thinking about policy and practice is ongoing.

For more information or if you are interested in getting involved with dissemination then please get in touch. Contact Dr Helen Manchester email [Helen.manchester@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Helen.manchester@bristol.ac.uk)