

**Written evidence submitted by Dr Eleni Michopoulou, Dr Kathleen McIlvenna, Claire Roe, and Dr Vladimir Antchak**

**Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee Call for Evidence:  
Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up  
agenda**

**1. Introduction**

The response to this call for evidence has been put together by the following research-active academics with a range of professional industry experiences:

Dr Eleni Michopoulou is an Associate Professor in Business Management at the University of Derby. Dr Michopolou's area of specialism relates to Accessible Tourism Information Systems and her research interests include technological applications and information systems in tourism, online consumer behaviour and technology acceptance. She has over fifteen years' experience of research in this field and has published over seventy academic journal articles in a variety of high impact journals. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Spa and Wellness. She is a founding member of the Wellness Tourism Initiative, which is part of the Global Wellness Institute.

Dr Kathleen McIlvenna is a Lecturer in History at the University of Derby. Dr McIlvenna has expertise in cultural heritage management and marketing and understanding audiences and audience development. Dr McIlvenna has both academic research experience and extensive experience developed via working in large multi-site museums including the Science Museum groups and the Royal Armouries.

Claire Roe is a Postgraduate Researcher at the University of Derby focusing specifically upon placemaking and conducting an interdisciplinary study across heritage and tourism. Her research focuses upon world heritage sites, urban planning and sustainable tourism.

Dr Vladimir Antchak is a Senior Lecturer in Event Management at the University of Derby. Dr Antchak has over ten years' experience in events management, including the organisation of business workshops, conferences, and cultural exhibitions. He has worked internationally as both a professional and a research-active academic with a focus upon effective business storytelling and event portfolio design.

This interdisciplinary evidence utilises Dr Michopoulou's expertise in tourism management and value co-creation; Dr McIlvenna's interests in history and heritage; Claire Roe's focus on the role of placemaking in destination development; and Dr Antchak's specialism in event portfolio design, placemaking, strategic storytelling and cultural anthropology.

**2. Executive Summary**

This interdisciplinary evidence will:

- Highlight the importance of heritage and culture for a sense of place and how this interacts with encouraging repeat visitors to an area;
- Demonstrate the importance of encouraging local residents to “buy in” to their region as a tourist destination.
- Demonstrate the importance of local business engagement in promoting their region as a tourist destination.
- Demonstrates how fostering attachment to place by residents, businesses and visitors alike can contribute to the achievement of environmental sustainability goals. This, in turn, contributes to maintaining destination attractiveness.
- Demonstrate how an effective use of innovative technology such as Virtual Reality or Augmented Reality can enhance a visitor’s sense of place.
- Demonstrate how the staging of effective events within a region or area can contribute to the development of a visitor’s sense of a place’s authenticity.

### **3. Question 1: How can culture reanimate our public spaces and shopping streets?**

#### **3.1 The importance of heritage and culture for sense of place**

Culture has always played an important role in place identity. In times of globalisation, the local culture, history, traditions, celebrations, and beliefs are the critical ingredients of place identity. Cultural narrative can be used to create associations between the cultural heritage and a variety of experiences a city can offer. Richards and Duif (2019) argue that a city needs creative initiatives to become unique and authentic. Creativity requires imagination. Govers (2018, p. 17) introduces “imaginative communities”, which are “neighbourhoods, cities, regions and countries that reinforce local character and civic pride, while at the same time captivating outsiders”. Such communities accomplish original and uniquely local projects and initiatives to reinforce themselves and communicate authentic stories to the global audience. In other words, they are engaged in placemaking.

Russo and Richards (2016) argue that placemaking links together an array of different tangible and intangible resources available in a particular urban space with the creativity of the key actors (local residents, urban designers, event planners and visitors) and the meanings that are co-created through these interactions. Produced meanings, in their turn, help to develop and reinforce local identity and an attractive place brand (Richards and Duif, 2019). Placemaking facilitates civic engagement and empowerment. As Project for Public Spaces (2016), a non-profit organisation from New York focused on creating and sustaining public spaces, argues:

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.



### 3.2 Sense of place and the importance of ‘doing’ visitors

Research for both place attachment and sense of place regularly focuses on the importance of ‘doing’, the importance of ‘repeating’ and the importance of ‘feeling’ at tourist destinations. That performing an action within a tourist destination that is site specific creates place attachment (Hosany, Prayag, Van Der Veen, Huang, & Deesilatham, 2017; X. Liu, Fu, & Li, 2019). Culture or heritage actions that can be repeated – such as surfing at the same surf-spot, walking in the same natural heritage landscape or visiting the same theatre – strengthen place attachment (Romain, Jean-Marc, & Denis, 2016; Tsai, 2016). Repetition of actions move them from one-time experiences to practices that form part of a visitor’s or resident’s identity formation (Correia Loureiro, 2014).

**It is the culture of ‘we always do this/go there/eat this when we visit’ that creates an emotional pull for people to revisit and re-engage.**

Destination dependency that is borne of the emotions it inspires, but is not necessarily geographically unique, becomes symbolic. Slow City destinations are popular for their ability to allow visitors to take a step back from city stresses; the Lake District in the UK is popular for similar reasons. (Han, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2019; Jepson & Sharpley, 2015) These destinations symbolise a cleaner, freer and simpler way of life. Destinations that host sports events or are hot spots for engaging in specific sports activities often create place attachment through their intangible attributes, such as atmosphere and culture, whilst their geographical location has no impact upon this (Kaplanidou, Jordan, Funk, & Rindinger, 2012; Reineman & Ardoin, 2018). This would suggest that **it is the people who are creating the ‘sense of place’** at these sites, rather than the physical site itself.

### 3.3 Sense of Place is multi-layered and personal: residents

Creating a sense of place for residents also relies on behaviours. However, there is an added temporal dimension that means these behaviours go beyond individual, separate interactions that occur at one specific moment in time and develop into a way of life. **Behaviour that demonstrates local values or shares experiences of local places builds links between residents that creates a nuanced and fluid sense of place** (Amsden, Stedman, & Kruger, 2011). The stories that residents tell about place are personal; there is not one through line or common perspective. However, story layering allows a multitude of place attachments to sit together to create a sense of place. ***Why it is important is almost secondary to the collective belief that a space is important.***

Sense of place is personal, rooted in action and reinforced by repetition. Whilst the place will stimulate related emotions in people, such as a connection to nature or a famous celebrity, visitors and residents alike will always connect in ways that resonate with their own lives and past experiences (Hosany et al., 2017; S. Lee, Joo, Lee, & Woosnam, 2020). In this sense, a sense of place is co-created between place and person and from person to person (Pera, 2017). **Space to experience destinations in multiple ways is key to developing as many opportunities as possible for people to find their own connections to destinations.**

**Local residents** with a positive attitude towards tourism development are more likely to recommend the site to others, even **acting as unofficial ‘guides’, thus strengthening the authenticity** of the destination and visitor experience (Clarke & Bowen, 2018; Styliadis, 2018). Place attachment can enhance resident wellbeing through feelings of ‘rootedness’ and a sense of belonging. (Li, Pan, & Hu, 2021; Wang & Xu, 2015). Levels of place attachment have been shown to correlate with levels of tourism support (Lalicic & Garaus, 2020; Schuster, Sullivan, Kuehn, & Morais, 2011; Soo, 2019). In effect, this is a self-perpetuating cycle; **if communities are not involved in the place making process, they are demotivated to engage in the cultural tourism-based activities that create a sense of place.**

4. **Question 2: How can creatives contribute to local decision-making and planning of place?**

**Sense of place and entrepreneurship**

Local businesses are also instrumental in contributing to destination image and sense of place. Visitor interactions with local tourism services and businesses has been shown to positively influence intention to revisit (Prayag & Lee, 2019). Local businesses can both create a sense of place and be a product of sense of place. Arts-based businesses often contribute significantly to organic place-making as owners are personally invested in the work they create and sell. (Zhou, Cheng, Wall, & Zhang, 2020) Although such culturally dependent businesses are instrumental in shaping a sense of place, they often develop independently from one another and lack overall co-ordination. Businesses that build networks within their local community have been shown to be more successful than those who do not (Hallak, Brown, & Lindsay, 2013). In addition, local businesses that identify strongly with their locality contribute to community cohesion which in turn reinforces sense of place and develops an holistic destination image (S. Liu & Cheung, 2016).

5. **Question 3: How can the Government support places without established artistic infrastructure to take full advantage of the opportunities that the levelling up agenda provides?**

**Place attachment and environmental sustainability**

Place attachment is also key for triggering Environmentally Responsible Behaviour (ERB) in *businesses, residents* and *visitors* alike.

*Businesses* that exhibit a high degree of integration with local communities have higher place attachment, and this has been shown to increase their capacity for behaving responsibly towards their localities. (Wen, Zhang, & Li, 2020) Service quality was shown to have a direct impact on visitors’ levels of ERB, suggesting that local business behaviours can positively influence visitor behaviours (Sifeng et al., 2019). This means that local business ERB has a double impact; that of their own ERB and the ERB they inspire in others.

The greater the *residents’* place attachment, the more likely they are to engage in pro-environmental behaviours (Zhang, Zhang, Zhang, & Cheng, 2014). Positive tourism perceptions also increase the likelihood of resident ERB (J. S. H. Lee & Oh, 2018). If

residents feel invested in their locality, either emotionally or through place dependency, their will to preserve it increases.

This contributes to maintaining destination attractiveness which is an important aspect of *visitor* satisfaction. In areas of nature-based tourism or heritage-based tourism, this not only supports *financial sustainability* but contributes to the *preservation of site* attributes as well. (Alice, Anson, Gwendolyn, Theresa, & Lewis, 2019). Tourists are more inclined to exhibit ERB if they understand the destination is committed to ERB too (Silva, Kastenholz, & Abrantes, 2013).

**Onsite behaviour of residents and local businesses greatly influence a multitude of visitor intentions; from intention to revisit to how they treat the site. Only through collaboration, compromise and honest and open communication can a holistic destination be cultivated, an identifiable sense of place established, and a sustainable tourism culture founded.**

6. **Question 4: How might changes to the UK's broadcasting landscape affect investment in cultural production outside the capital, and what could the consequences be for artists and communities?**

**Deliberately constructing sense of place and the role of digital technology**

Digital reconstruction through Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) and mobile app tours were popular themes, mirroring the trend identified in wider heritage literature (Chang, Hou, Pan, Sung, & Chang, 2015; L. Falconer, 2017; Liz Falconer et al., 2020; Howell & Chilcott, 2013). Due to the fact that digital platforms are purposefully constructed, *there is scope to include multiple timeframes within their storytelling* (Howell & Chilcott, 2013). This makes it more agile than static, onsite forms of interpretation. Nonetheless, there was a strong sense that digital storytelling to create sense of place must be rigorously factually correct and avoid any temptation to embellish historical events in order to evoke stronger place attachment (Howell & Chilcott, 2013).

*The more realistic and believable the augmented or virtual reality is, the greater a sense of place is established* (Liz Falconer et al., 2020). Because sense of place is not universal, the need for multiple stakeholders to be involved in constructing sense of place is vital to its success (Puren, Roos, & Coetzee, 2018). This echoes wider heritage literature in calling for multiple heritage narratives to be considered (Geoghegan et al, 2017), thereby presenting a 360° version of the past and avoiding the exclusion of differing cultural perspectives (L. Smith, 2006). Including multiple perspectives in contemporary sense of place construction is the act of incorporating multiple cultural narratives from the beginning of interpretation. **To do so, a bottom-up, multi-stakeholder approach is recommended, in order to create robust, meaningful, and culturally and socially responsible heritage destinations.**

7. **Question 5: How should Government build on existing schemes, such as the UK City of Culture, to level up funding for arts and culture?**

**Placemaking through events**

Public events have been long recognised as valuable components of place authenticity and uniqueness. They create meanings and images of a city and add dynamism and vibrancy to city life. Events can change city rhythms (Antchak, 2018) and showcase aesthetic features of urban areas (Zukin, 1995). Events are capable of making a place and putting it “on the map” (Richards, 2017) offering memorable experiences in an everchanging world (Michopoulou et al, 2019; Ramsbottom et al, 2018). An ordinary space, therefore, is re-designed into a place, “a framed spontaneous play which contrasts routine everyday life” (Jamieson, 2004, p. 65). In the case of large-scale events, the entire city becomes not just a stage for events, but a place that is produced through events (Richards & Rotariu, 2015).

A. Smith (2016) introduces a notion of eventalisation, a process of producing urban spaces via the staging of events. Eventalisation opens up opportunities for a new reading of urban space, “underline the softness, malleability and potentiality of ostensibly fixed urban space” (Lehtovuori, p. 174). There are several ways events can transform an urban space.

Firstly, **events change urban rhythms, introducing tempo diversity.** Events bring vitality to the urban areas involving hanging around, drifting and lingering (Jackson, 1986, Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011, Smith, 2016). A special feeling of festivity and surprise breaks the everydayness and provides new perception of time. Time flows at a different pace, creating a volatile and liminal situation (Lehtovuori, 2010).

Secondly, **an event can affect an urban space which lacks attractiveness or artistic merit through recirculation.** Lehtovuori (2010) compares city events with labyrinths where special simplicity is replaced by opaqueness and complexity. The temporal physical structures made for events (selling booths, stages, fences) challenge the routines of the space and provide new opportunities for exploring, being lost and being able to discover something new.

Thirdly, **events bring interactivity, increasing face to face encounter and contributing to the creation of enjoyable and game-like street culture** (Lehtovuori, 2010). Through interactions between visitors, local residents, participants and attendees, a new public space is produced (Smith, 2016) and new place meanings are created. A place meaning is associated with symbols, icons, identity, narrative and storytelling (Richards, 2017). It reflects people’s feelings, emotions, traditions, values and goals. Michel de Certeau (1974) in his seminal work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, argues that pedestrian movements represent real systems that make up the city. Pedestrians compose their own paths in the manner of writing stories, where footsteps are words or phrases. Events become mediators of such stories, pointing to the hidden and clandestine aspects of urban spaces. Hence, eventalisation becomes a critical component of placemaking.

Importantly, **a city can be perceived as a socially constructed collage of images and stories co-created by both inhabitants and visitors.** Events emphasise the

presence of enchanting elements in the physical environment and provide an opportunity to explore and experience them. *The communication of positive meanings and stories about the city through events, as well as the generation of attractive and memorable images, reframe the city as a modern and desirable place of play and consumption* (Smith, 2016). Placemaking through events involves strategic programming in a city that mobilises key stakeholders over a sustained period (Richards & Duif, 2019). A city needs to be clear whether the events are to be perceived as a key element of place rejuvenation, tourism and marketing development or if they are solely a supporting platform. **Successful, enchanting events generate attention.** Richards (2013) argues **that attention can be treated as a type of city capital that should be developed.** Maintaining lasting attention demands the existence of points of difference and contrast; otherwise, the level of public, media and visitor attention to a particular place drop and eventually leads to stagnation and loss of attractiveness.

## 8. Conclusion

Culture and heritage are important keystones for locations to create place identity and a sense of place as they facilitate actions of ‘doing’ and can evoke ‘feelings’. These actions are not only integral for shaping identity and creating place attachment, but also help to shape a location as a tourist destination. Culture and heritage are the foundations upon which central stakeholders in locations, notably residents, local communities and businesses can build and maintain a sense of place. Residents and business are integral to placemaking and need to be involved collaboratively throughout the process to enable value creation for all stakeholders (Cavagnaro et al, 2021; Michopoulou et al, 2022). This is partly because residents and business help to create a sense of place but if both display strong place attachment, they are more likely to act responsibly towards the environment. This feeling and action towards environmental responsibility is important due to the climate crisis, but also because it attracts tourism and encourages tourists to act responsibly towards the environment. Technology can also be utilised to enhance and shape a sense of place. Events can be conduits for value co-creation amongst multiple stakeholders (Azara et al, 2022; Wallace & Michopoulou, 2022). The role of events is pivotal in creating ‘places’ and destinations; hence reanimating public spaces and shopping streets as well as enabling cultural production outside the capital.

## 9. Recommendations for Action

- **Fostering a sense of place within an area and engaging in place story-making will encourage a culture of repeat visitors.**
- **Space needs to be provided to experience destinations in multiple ways. This is key to developing as many opportunities as possible for people to find their own connections to destinations.**
- **Communities need to be involved in the place making process. If they are not involved in consultation exercises, they will be demotivated to engage in the cultural tourism-based activities that create a sense of place.**
- **We recommend that building networks between businesses can facilitate the creation of an umbrella placemaking strategy that can benefit business owners and create a more holistic destination image for visitors.**

- **Onsite behaviour of residents and local businesses greatly influence a multitude of visitor intentions; from intention to revisit to how they treat the site. Only through collaboration, compromise and honest and open communication can a holistic destination be cultivated, an identifiable sense of place established, and a sustainable tourism culture founded. Consultation at all stages is key.**
- **We recommend interaction with site-specific AR and VR can enhance a visitor's sense of place through place attachment and identity, and that this is true for all age ranges, not just younger visitors (Chang et al., 2015; L. Falconer, 2017; Liz Falconer et al., 2020).**
- **We recommend the development of high-quality AR/VR experiences for digital storytelling which incorporates multiple narratives and evokes stronger place attachment.**
- **We recommend the development of successful events in order to generate attention and contribute to place-making.**

## 10. Further Information

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