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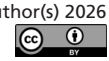

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Everyday creativity and cultural policy

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Abstract

A considerable amount of attention has recently been paid – in academia, policy and the arts sector in the United Kingdom – to the idea of 'everyday creativity', yet the significance of everyday creativity for cultural policy has not been explored beyond a preliminary overview. Prompted by the question of how policymakers might engage with everyday creativity while retaining integrity and coherence, this article integrates theory and practice into a discussion of everyday creativity's 'policy interface'. We propose a twofold framework of everyday creativity as a phenomenon (something people voluntarily experience) before proceeding to discuss everyday creativity as a policy construct (something people are structurally encouraged to experience). We review the established scholarly literature on everyday creativity, alongside the recent efforts to identify policy incentives for organisations such as Arts Council England to support everyday creativity. In seeking to make sense of these developments by placing them in the broader theoretical framing of 'everyday life', we consider the wider historical, structural and ideological reasons as to why everyday creativity may be attractive to some political formations. We thereby offer a discussion of both everyday creativity in Arts Council England policy, and an attempt to critique the concept from a theoretical perspective. We suggest that everyday creativity remains ill-defined in research and incongruous as a policy construct and that this may be a source of its strength in resisting institutionalisation and operationalisation in cultural policymaking. We conclude by suggesting that recent interest in everyday creativity may prompt pragmatic policy suggestions about how existing cultural assets are used, and whether they could be better employed to support a wider array of activities. Crucially, we note the potential to

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move the discourse of cultural policy forward, beyond the repetitive and entrenched dichotomies of lived and objectified culture, and thereby bringing about a much-needed realisation that the institutionalised forms of culture and the 'ordinary' are inter-connected.

Keywords
Arts Council England, cultural policy, cultural value, de Certeau, everyday creativity

Introduction

A considerable amount of attention has recently been paid – in academia, policy and the arts sector in the United Kingdom – to the idea of 'everyday creativity' (EC). This activity has included a resource commissioned by Arts Council England (ACE, 2020),[1] a dedicated network funded by the UKRI[2] which has produced a range of outputs (see e.g., Mansfield et al., 2024) and a systematic literature review (Ilha Villanova and Pina e Cunha, 2021). While these activities sit within the context of older research on EC in psychology (see, for example, Richards, 1990, 2007), the significance of EC for cultural policy has not been explored beyond a preliminary overview (Wright, 2022). Like much of the contemporaneous terminology of cultural policy, such as 'cultural democracy', 'care' and 'wellbeing', 'everyday creativity' has an intuitive appeal as something innocuous, if not positive, and well-understood, perhaps even banal. This supports a quotidian understanding of EC as seamlessly woven into everyday life. If EC is thus defined as 'anything any of us does that we might describe as creative for our own enjoyment or fulfilment' (Torreggiani, 2023: no pagination), in what sense should and could EC be an issue for policymakers? To put this point differently, if EC is something we choose to pursue for our sole personal gratification, why would EC require any public policy support? and moreover, is there a risk that turning EC into an object of policymaking would cause more harm than good?

To address these questions, the article brings together perspectives from both academia and the subsidised arts sector, with the collaboration of one of the authors of the ACE toolkit (Torreggiani) and two policy scholars. The authors employed a collaborative, cross-sectoral methodology combining practitioner insight with scholarly policy analysis to co-produce knowledge through iterative dialogue, document analysis and reflexive writing practices. This triangulated approach foregrounded experiential expertise alongside theoretical framing (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Prompted by the question of how ACE might engage with the practices and processes of everyday creativity while retaining integrity and coherence as a policymaker and development agency for the arts, this article integrates theory and practice into a discussion of the 'policy interface' of EC. We first seek to stabilise the meaning of EC as a phenomenon (something people voluntarily experience), before proceeding to discuss EC as a policy construct (something people are structurally encouraged to experience). We review the established scholarly literature on EC, alongside the recent efforts to identify policy incentives for organisations such as ACE to support EC. We seek to make

sense of these developments by placing them in the broader theoretical framing of 'everyday life' (de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991 [1984]); c.f. Debord, 1994) and in relation to wider considerations suggesting historical, structural and ideological reasons why EC may be attractive to some political formations, for example, Foucault's observation of the need to make the self 'governable' in modern society (Foucault, 2008, 2017), and Habermas's thesis of the 'colonization of the everyday' (Habermas, 1987), to name two.

Without claiming to have found a definitive answer, we consider several plausible reasons to be cynical – if not outwardly critical – of the attempts to incorporate EC into the remit of cultural policymaking. This includes asking whether embracing a type of cultural engagement that everyone chooses to do every day might be a way of making institutions such as ACE more relevant and legitimate at a time when support for subsidised culture is dwindling. We ask whether what is at issue is reimagining what constitutes a cultural resource – away from the bricks and mortar of cultural assets as traditionally conceived, to forms of subjectivity governed by the imperative to be creative (Reckwitz, 2017). However – luckily, one might say – EC remains ill-defined in research and incongruous as a policy construct. We suggest that this may well be a source of its strength in resisting institutionalisation and, by extension, forms of operationalisation or hyperinstrumentalisation (Hadley and Gray, 2017) in cultural policymaking. We conclude on a positive note by suggesting that the recent interest in EC from cultural policy in the United Kingdom may prompt some useful questions about how existing cultural assets are used, and whether they could be better employed to support a wider array of activities. Crucially, we note the potential to move the discourse of cultural policy forward, beyond the repetitive and entrenched dichotomies of lived and objectified culture, and thereby bringing about a much-needed realisation that the institutionalised forms of culture and the 'ordinary' (Williams, 1979 [1958]) are inter-connected.

What is 'everyday creativity'?

While 'everyday creativity' (EC) has recently gained traction as a topic of both academic and sectoral discussion, issues of conceptual coherence and orientation remain. If, in Torreggiani's (2023: no pagination) words, 'we think of [EC] as anything any of us does that we might describe as creative for our own enjoyment or fulfilment', then EC 'covers a dizzying range of activities – from visual arts and craft, performance, music and filmmaking, movement, writing, to gardening, cooking, creative gaming, reading, make-up, and scavenger-hunts, with new ones emerging all the time'. Importantly, these activities take place both in-person and increasingly as a digital network, as likely hyper-local as global.

Funded by the UKRI between 2022 and 2024, The Everyday Creativity Network: Developing Understandings, Methods and Applications Across Boundaries proposes that:

> 'Everyday creativity' (EC) is characterised by day-to-day actions understood in terms of little and mini 'c' creativity; the former focusing on observable creative actions/products, the latter on more fleeting 'interpretive and transformative aspects of thought' (Silvia et al., 2014). The boundaries of EC stretch well beyond the arts to a diverse range of immersive creative activities

> that millions of people engage in individually and in groups, at home, online and in the community. These include activities such as cooking, crafting, gardening, podcasting and citizen science. Such activities are often removed from established hierarchies, economic models and notions of excellence, but play a vital role in enabling people to explore their creative potential, maintain health/wellbeing, connect to others and to nature, learn/develop, and discover meaning/purpose.[3]

This expansive approach attempts not so much to define EC, as to ostensively point to a range of activities that are plausible candidates and to situate those in the context of contemporary policy considerations, including in contrast to the hierarchies of participation with an implicit understanding of excellence and the instrumental value of outcomes, and in relation to the new discourse of wellbeing, development and purpose. Such an understanding cuts transversally across existing work in psychology, education and social sciences, where the notion of EC has been well established but, as a recent systematic literature review notes, 'funnelled through two streams of thought, creating confusion for some researchers' (Ilha Villanova and Pina e Cunha, 2021: 674). As the authors of the systematic review explain,

> [. . .] One school of thought entails an individualist approach to creativity that focuses on psychological aspects impacting creative processes. It emphasizes that everyday creative outcomes can be creative experiences with personal meaning, that is, they can only be new and significant for their creator, regardless of social recognition. The other view involves a sociocultural approach that emphasizes creativity as a social system. Consequently, everyday creative outcomes are framed as creative products that must be communicated and judged by society. According to Stein (1953), the difference between objective forms of creativity and subjective forms of creativity has been neglected as creativity researchers tend to focus on genius-type creativity; and, in this form of creativity, the distance between the creative result and what existed before is quite noticeable (Ilha Villanova and Pina e Cunha, 2021: 674–675).

To exemplify this bifurcation, the seminal contribution of Ruth Richards (1990, 2007, 2010) emphasises the socially-constructed character of EC. As Richards (2010: 189) puts it,

> Everyday creativity can be operationally defined using only two product criteria (after Barron, 1969): first, originality (or relative rarity of a creation *within a given reference group*) and, second, meaningfulness (*being comprehensible to others, not random or idiosyncratic and thus being socially meaningful*).

In contrast, Kaufman and Beghetto (2009: 3) define EC in terms of 'the novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions, and events' (see also Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007). This matters insofar as these two strands – exemplified by Kaufman and Beghetto, on the one hand, and Richards, on the other hand – suggest different sources of value in EC: one rooted in personal satisfaction and the other premised on sharing, group esteem and perhaps even social benefit. In reality, the bifurcation is more a spectrum, where emphasis is placed matters for how EC is valued, and by implication, funded (or not).

A 2016 report based on research with cultural professionals and produced by 64Million Artists, Voluntary Arts (now Creative Lives) and Fun Palaces talks about everyday creativity as a range of self-directed and self-organised activities that are not mediated by creative professionals or institutions. Participatory activities offered by cultural organisations thereby fall outside this definition in that they are institutionally devised and administered. A principle much discussed in the report produced by these organisations is that in EC – as opposed to the dedicated work of a full-time artist – *process takes precedence over output*. It is the making, moving and mixing that provides value, not the product, intention or any meaning conveyed (64Million Artists, 2016). Similarly, the Research Digest from the Centre for Cultural Value (Wright, 2022) notes that those engaged in EC do not always make conceptual distinctions between activities in the way that many arts professionals do. The value of EC for participants is frequently intrinsic and emotive, as opposed to being centred on a specific output/product. Studies reviewed for the CCV digest cite participants' strongest motivation as enjoyment, with a significant correlation between positive emotional states and EC. This aligns with the personal and individualistic emphasis in the literature discussed above – this is Kaufman and Beghetto's (2009) reading rather than the socially situated and collectively constructed understanding of the value of creative engagement suggested by Richards (2010).

This emphasis on individual satisfaction and the idiosyncratic orientation of engagement raises problems, however, when considered in the context of cultural policy. For instance, Crossick and Kaszynska (2016: 27) note in the *AHRC Cultural Value Report* that

> The value of amateur activity, whether through musical or theatrical societies or quilting at home, is too frequently assessed as a leisure activity, and therefore according to criteria that neglect the artistic or aesthetic, as if they were not a key part of its purpose for those involved.

This need not imply that EC must be assessed against some set of artistic or aesthetic standards, but does presuppose that there is an element of peer review or at least an aspect of intersubjective warranting, whether other people like it or not, and thus, in Richards's words, of 'being socially meaningful'. This way of framing the experience of EC poses a challenge to those accounts of EC which insist that it is for each of us to define what we believe to be expressions of our own creativity, and thereby to ascribe value to those expressions in our idiosyncratic terms.

These considerations make it evident that EC does not have a congruous definition and that there is a tension in the way the concept has been used. This is perhaps not a problem from the point of view of how EC is experienced as a non-wage, labour-based creative engagement and something that people enjoy for a variety of reasons, including personal gratification and group validation. The bifurcation in the approaches to EC outlined in Table 1 above is, however, problematic at the level of policy. Notably, recent attempts to operationalise EC are characterised by unease regarding any potentially limiting definitions, and are underpinned by a desire to safeguard the autonomy of everyday creatives to reject the concept and/or vocabulary of EC itself, should they so wish. Bluntly put, from this perspective, to determine self-determination can only be seen as an imposition, if not colonialisation (more on this below). This leads to a tension in policy

terms. On the one hand, everyday creativity is explicitly defined as private and idiosyncratic – 'individual, unique and personal' (Torreggiani, 2023: no pagination). On the other, the very framing of EC as something deserving public policy support seems to imply that EC presupposes social recognition and, perhaps, social benefit. However, it is far from clear that all forms of EC, when understood in terms of absolute self-determination and autonomy, will bring about social benefits. In this vein, we could argue that not all activities that people would deem 'individual creative expression' – from casual gardening to erotic photography – require public policy support on the ground that they don't contribute to social welfare but also because people would voluntarily choose to pursue these activities anyway.

Everyday creativity and cultural policy

Key to the sectoral discourse around EC is the foregrounding and strategic context of ACE's Let's Create (2020–2030) strategy. The policy framework articulated by *Let's Create* starts with a 10-year strategy describing the change ACE want to see, and an ongoing series of Delivery Plans set out how ACE will work to achieve this ambition. The strategy marks a significant shift in English cultural policy, emphasising broad access to cultural participation and engagement, and echoes wider international debate over 'the participatory turn' (Bonet and Négrier, 2018) and the end of the democratisation of culture policy approach (Mangset, 2020).

In reframing participation beyond institutionalised arts, the strategy aims to ensure that everyone can access and enjoy creativity and culture. Rooted in a more inclusive cultural democracy framework (though the term 'cultural democracy' is notably absent from the document's lexicon), Let's Create departs from traditional hierarchical distinctions between professional and amateur arts, acknowledging creative expression in diverse forms and communities.

In policy terms, Let's Create has, to date, operated within a broader context of devolution, social prescribing and the 'levelling up' agenda (HM Government, 2022), presenting arts and culture as a tool for wellbeing, social cohesion and place-making. The strategy reflects international trends towards cultural wellbeing and community empowerment while retaining a distinctively English focus on locality and partnership models. Indeed, by 2030, ACE (2020, p.14) want England to be 'a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish' .

The Let's Create strategy builds on theoretical developments around cultural capability and participatory culture, aligning with concepts advanced by Matarasso (2019) and Belfiore and Bennett (2007) among others. Such work challenges the elitism of canonical arts policy and promotes a more pluralistic understanding of culture. ACE's work on developing a policy approach more grounded in cultural democracy (see Belfiore et al., 2023) – most notably through research partnerships, funded projects and initiatives like Creative People and Places – seeks to capture the value of informal, community-based creative practices. This includes crafts, digital creativity and socially engaged art forms often marginalised in conventional cultural narratives.

While *Let's Create* recognises 'the growing support for and celebration of everyday creativity' (ACE, 2020: 10), this is the only reference to EC in the strategy. The term

Table 1. Everyday creativity and cultural policy.

Personal meaning	**Social meaning**
Subjective creativity	Objective creativity
Individualist approach	Creativity as social system
Value as personal (personal gratification)	Value as social (group validation)
Self-directed and organised	Professionally mediated
Self-validation	Group validation
Aesthetic and artistic criteria	Aesthetic and artistic criteria
What is desired (personal inclination)	What is worthy of desire (normative)
Everyday creativity as phenomenon	**Everyday creativity as policy object**
Voluntary experience	Structurally encouraged to experience
Self-defined for personal enjoyment	Requires conceptual integrity/coherence
Individuation	Institutionalisation
No public policy support	Public policy support
Individual creative expression	Imperative to be creative (Reckwitz)
Limited (community) asset base	Repurposed cultural assets
Hyper-local and global	National
Personal value	Administrative value
Unpaid leisure activity	Wage-based creative labour
Self-determination	Determined self-determination
Resource need (support, networking)	Resource need (space, money, materials)
Autonomy of intent and realisation	Autonomy enabled and encouraged
Opportunity for non-normative creativity	Normative policy criteria
(Potential) site of resistance	Official narrative
Process (intrinsic)	Output (extrinsic)
Being in the world	Production and consumption of culture
Creativity as subjective process	**Culture as aesthetic/intellectual product**

features in neither ACE's four Investment Principles nor the 2024–2027 Let's Create Delivery Plan. The 2016 report referenced above from 64Million Artists resulted in a somewhat belated response from ACE (Dyer, 2020) which nonetheless saw a whole raft of activity subsumed under the banner of EC, including the Creative People and Places programme, Grants for the Arts, Voluntary Arts Network and Get Creative. What is notable in ACE's response to the report is both a conceptual slippage which co-opts EC within 'art and culture', and the suggestion that arguments for public investment in art and culture are strengthened 'by demonstrating the everyday benefits in all our lives' (Dyer, 2020: no pagination).

Developing from the conceptual framing that 'everyone can be creative', and that more could be done to use the existing cultural infrastructure to support EC in their communities, the research process undertaken by The Audience Agency in 2023 to develop work on EC for ACE involved both an informal steering group (Creative Lives, 64Million Artists, Fun Palaces, Crafts Council, Libraries Connected and staff at ACE) and a range of interviews with creatives, libraries and the organisations, to form a series of EC case studies. The subsequent Everyday Creativity Toolkit includes a document detailing 'Supporting

Everyday Creativity Resources', 'A Star-Map of Everyday Creativity' and a selection of personal stories that link to the four themes identified during the research and development phase – *Validation*, *Connections*, *Practical Support* and *Navigation*. To develop the four themes, the consultants collected stories from participants about what would help in enhancing and developing their EC practice(s). The themes are articulated as follows:

Validation

A recurring theme in much of the data is that people seek validation and encouragement for their work. Such validation or support may be provided by peers and critical friends but also via platforms and modes for celebration and showcasing of the work. Support for such activity might involve offering exhibition or showcasing opportunities, perhaps with a group or for individuals.

Connections

Everyday creatives place a high value on being part of a community linked by a shared passion, with one of the major benefits being the opportunity to come together with friends and/or new people. Peers and collaborators are important not just for encouragement but as sources of inspiration, ideas, information. Given the value placed on this theme, lone creatives are often seeking places and channels for connection. Intervention here might involve hosting/supporting networking for local creatives.

Practical support

There is a clear shortage of practical supports – both material and immaterial: spaces, materials, practical know-how, money, time. Everyday creatives, particularly at the group level, are short of all of them. Small sums of money can be significant, particularly where the boundary between paid and voluntary is blurred, with some everyday creatives working towards a paid portfolio. Support in this area could involve access to free spaces and micro-grants.

Navigation

Although less urgent and evident than the other themes, groups and individuals of everyday creatives share navigational needs, including in relation to what cultural and other organisations may have available: support and resources, funding (and application protocols), potential partnerships, research for advocacy and inspiration. The toolkit notes that this knowledge may be taken for granted by professionals but can be usefully cascaded down through the EC ecology. Support for this area could include directories, asset maps and resource packs.

Noticeably, the Everyday Creativity Toolkit records that respondents 'rarely if ever mention the need for artistic support or instruction from professional artists and creatives'. Overall, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the research suggests that there may be a role for professional creatives, albeit not necessarily one to which they are accustomed, within the pre-existing funding value frameworks.

As important to the overview of EC which the ACE work provides is its articulation of what EC is *not*. In this regard, what professional organisations provide is not included with the category of EC, unless the impetus – and the activities – come from an individual or group outwith the subsidised sector. Moreover, the activity must be undertaken solely on their terms. On this basis, activity such as professionally orchestrated community arts projects are excluded. Autonomy of both intent and realisation remains paramount. As the case studies exemplify, organisations can undertake a role in encouraging and enabling their community to realise this autonomy. In this regard, the ACE-commissioned stress how EC should not be conflated with similar practices in the sector, such as participatory arts, participatory governance, co-creation or co-curation.

Given the lack of textual and strategic inter-relationship between *Let's Create* and EC, in considering EC from a policy context we take the position that ACE's approach is currently both rhetorical and symbolic. In a similar vein to their engagement with ideas of cultural democracy (see Hadley and Belfiore, 2018), ACE have yet to clearly map out how these different ideological, conceptual and policy categories inter-relate within their own strategic and operational framework. Torreggiani's (2023) article is titled 'Everyday creativity – for everyone?' in reference both to ACE's own mission of 'great art for everyone' and to Jancovich's (2011) article critiquing engagement and participation policy in the subsidised arts. This signals that for a national development agency such as ACE, incorporating EC into their portfolio is not unproblematic. On one level, it is not surprising that EC – understood as a form of cultural engagement that people themselves choose to pursue – should be attractive to an organisation such as ACE. The practice of EC offers a frequency of quotidian engagement and demographic reach which the subsidised arts have always aspired to and never attained. As Torreggiani (2023) notes, given that significantly less than half the population attends a state subsidised performance or exhibition once a year, policy solutions by necessity must question how to engage with the other 60+ percent of the communities ACE serves. Data produced by the Cultural Participation Monitor is helpful in illuminating this policy dilemma.

The Cultural Participation Monitor (CPM)[4] was part of The Audience Agency's work on the Covid-19 Impact Research with the Centre for Cultural Value at University of Leeds, funded by the UKRI Covid Response fund. Utilising a representative cross-section of society, from autumn 2020 to autumn 2021, the agency undertook several waves of a population survey asking about changed and changing attitudes to culture and creativity, going out and staying in, spending time and money. The Audience Agency and Centre for Cultural Value have continued to repeat the survey subsequently, exploring emerging questions, such as about the cost of living, working from home, climate change and more. Three times per year the survey asked what people thought about the issues of the moment – the cost of living, working from home, climate change and more – and how it was affecting their creative and cultural lives.

In contrast to cultural engagement with institutions, the Cultural Participation Monitor shows that 85 percent of the population say they do at least one type of creative activity on a regular basis. During the Covid-19 pandemic these numbers increased, with people who already had 'creative hobbies' doing more, a trend that skews towards younger people and has continued post-pandemic. For instance, the results from CPM wave 7 in show that the percentage of population engaged in any creative activity (excluding

Table 2. Data from CPM wave 7 (for details on 'activity' see Appendix 1).

Activity	Overall	16–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75 or older
Making music	**28%**	54%	41%	38%	16%	12%	11%	10%
Dancing	**25%**	50%	40%	34%	17%	8%	6%	5%
Other performing arts	**18%**	43%	31%	25%	8%	5%	2%	2%
Visual arts	**29%**	58%	43%	35%	17%	15%	12%	10%
Film and audio creation	**22%**	48%	38%	31%	10%	7%	3%	2%
Creating with the natural world	**41%**	50%	49%	43%	35%	38%	37%	33%
Making food	**66%**	78%	75%	69%	63%	62%	61%	50%
Writing	**25%**	51%	38%	34%	15%	10%	8%	7%
Craft	**37%**	56%	51%	40%	33%	23%	24%	20%
Fashion and style	**31%**	65%	49%	36%	22%	12%	10%	4%
Gaming	**36%**	67%	58%	48%	28%	18%	6%	2%
Discussing arts and culture	**26%**	48%	40%	35%	15%	13%	9%	6%
Another sort of creative participation or activity	**27%**	50%	37%	33%	17%	17%	12%	12%

reading) before the pandemic was 80 percent and rose to 85 percent in that period, with these figures at 93 percent and rising to 96 percent for 16 to 24-year olds. Indeed, the level of participation in EC from the young demographic is higher across all the itemised activities in CPM (see Table 2) and is particularly striking for gaming ('for example, creating board or video games, LARPing, playing roleplaying games, building in Minecraft or Roblox. . .') and fashion and style ('for example, doing hair or makeup, creating new outfits, cosplay, drag. . .') with 67 and 65 percent participation rates, respectively (compared to 6% and 10% for the 65–74 group).

These rates are not something that the artistic and cultural activities currently supported by ACE can rival. For instance, the wave from November 2021 to November 2022 recorded the participation of 30.4 percent of all surveyed, with 40.7 percent of the 16–24 group, in the category 'Spent time doing a creative, artistic, theatrical or music activity or a craft'. (This category, according to the given definition, 'includes any activities connected with painting, artistic photography, sculpture, digital or electronic art/music, crafts, music, literature, drama and the theatre, carnivals, circus and festivals. These could be professional, amateur and faith-based activities in your local area or elsewhere'.)

The policy challenge here is that a significant proportion of the activities which ACE lists as falling under the rubric of EC in their Everyday Creativity Toolkit sit outwith the parameters of their current funding remit. In fact, the percentage of the population who do EC activities which could be said to fall broadly into the categories ACE might realistically support is about the same as the percentage who regularly attend subsidised arts and culture.

EC also appears to offer a way out of another source of policy frustration for ACE: that the subsidised forms of cultural participation are said to be elitist. In this context, EC offers 'everydayness', 'ordinariness' and the 'quotidian' character of culture, which suggest a

way to overcome the problem of cultural hegemony wherein 'great art' consumed by the privileged few dictates 'tastes' for the rest. There is a pronounced concern from EC advocates that linking everyday creative pursuits to institutionalised culture would bring with it a set of implicit, normative policy criteria, and by extension, that the kinds of EC promoted by ACE would reinforce the professional/amateur divide and the traditional hierarchy of cultural values present in arts subsidy. Indeed, as stressed by Torreggiani, the proponents of EC 'talk about everyday creativity as the huge range of self-directed and self-organised activities that are *not* mediated by creative professionals or institutions' (2023, no pagination). This leads to an interesting situation whereby, even in circumstances in which someone decides to join a professionally organised dance class, a community play or an amateur theatre group, what makes such activity 'EC' – rather than say, participatory or community arts – is that the person concerned has full agency over their decision, their process and judgement of its value on their own terms. There is an important but subtle difference here between 'active creative' and 'passive participant' but, from the point of view of EC, there's no such thing as a passive participant. This yet again reinforces the individualistic reading of EC and the need to 'go into individuals' heads' to understand their motivations, as well as the value of their participation.

Part of the attraction of EC is thus that, if emphasising autonomous subjectivity, the necessity of administrative value judgements dissipates. Arguably, there is no 'Good Everyday Creativity' or 'Bad Everyday Creativity' when it comes to types of activities falling under EC. Indeed, the creative activities most enjoyed by the British public, according to CPM, are: Making food (engaging 66% of 16 plus) and Creating with the natural world (attracting 41% of 16 plus), while for younger generations, they include gaming and fashion, as mentioned above.

EC may thus be seen to offer an easy solution for organisations like ACE to deliver on the objectives set for sector bodies with regard to extending and democratising participation. And yet, it is far from obvious that incorporating EC into the portfolio of subsidised activities is, or should be, an option for ACE. Arguably, cooking and gardening are those areas to which cultural sector and policy have far less to contribute. Indeed, arm's length bodies such as ACE may rightly ask whether their remit extends that far. In this context we could ask why, after several millennia of happily getting on with being self-directed, everyday creatives need a policy intervention. Not all forms of EC have social benefit, nor can they be plausibly considered in terms of human rights – so why do they deserve public policy support? Furthermore, if EC is framed in terms of self-directedness and self-organisation, there is a question of whether public policymaking should be extended to something that is so subjective and idiosyncratic, and, going back to this article's introduction, whether turning EC into an object of policy might cause more harm than good. This is when we turn to a yet bigger picture.

From neoliberal compliance to the tactical moments of everyday life

Putting EC into a wider frame allows understanding as to how it interacts with the socio-economic and political-ideological developments shaping the way we live, including the drive towards *the governmentality of the self* and the *colonization of the everyday*. The

'governmentality of the self' (Foucault, 2008, 2017) refers to a set of disciplining practices designed to make subjects compliant not by using brute force or external coercion, but through techniques enabling individuals to govern and regulate *themselves*. As Kaszynska (2023: 24) commented, the governmentality of the self can take many forms and manifestations: 'The "happiness industry," the "quantified self," and the importance of social media statistics to self-perception and self-esteem, all exemplify how subjects can be set up to compete against themselves'. In spite of all the protestations and claims to self-determination, a policy-governed form of EC is, in this sense, yet another disciplining practice to make subjects more governable.

Habermas's thesis of the 'colonization of the everyday' (also known as the 'colonization of the lifeworld') is not unrelated: 'the thesis of internal colonization states that the subsystems of the economy and state become more and more complex as a consequence of capitalist growth and penetrate ever deeper into the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld' (Habermas, 1987: 367). This process, according to Habermas, leads to the 'reification' of social relations, whereby the symbolic meanings and mutual understandings that are fundamental to a healthy society are overshadowed by the imperatives of efficiency and power. In this sense, everyday and communicative interactions become transformed by the consistent application of the logics of the market and the state, which operate very differently from how informal human relationships function. The self, as colonized, is detached from the lifeworld and becomes an asset, an investment, a locus of capital (Birch and Muniesa, 2020). This is in line with the normalisation of the-self-as-resource proposed by Reckwitz (2017) who points out how being creative has become an economic and social imperative in modern societies. On this reading, incorporating EC into public policy frames can be interpreted as an instance of *colonization* and *assetisation* of the self. With creative subjectivity turned into a cultural resource, we can be said to come full circle to Bourdieu's (1984) 'cultural capital' as a way of holding economic and social power, but this time not so much by virtue of being in a privileged position but by simply exercising our everyday creative urges.

Alternatively, we could look at the changing understanding of the everyday as a backdrop to explaining the policy interest in EC. In Debord's (1994) *Society of the Spectacle* (p. 14), everyday life is a mere 'negation of life that has invented a visual form for itself'. Framing the everyday in these terms – inauthenticity, 'false consciousness' and the 'hyper-real' (see also Baudrillard and Glaser, 1994) – reduces discussion of the everyday to an ideological positioning. On this reading, the co-option of EC into the national cultural policy framework is nothing but 'the reach of imperialism into "our heads"' (Smith, 2012: 24).

A more nuanced critique of everyday life comes from Lefebvre (1991 [1984]), who theorised the everyday both as a site of control and ideology, and as a site of participation, co-creation, resistance and reflexivity – the everyday is 'not only a concept, but one that may be used as a guide-line for an understanding of society' (p. 28) wherein the everyday is a site of both complicity and change. Lefebvre argued against,

> denouncing the habitualized illusions and foibles of daily life as a form of 'false consciousness', so as to proffer an unequivocal and universal truth through some definitive flash of insight. The 'bad' everyday is, after all, always bound up with the 'good' everyday – which is not to say that

> we cannot exercise analytical and value judgements about the differences between them. Rather, critique as Lefebvre understands it is about opening ourselves up to multiple possibilities, in order to embrace a myriad of alternative ways of thinking and living. (Gardiner, 2004: 247)

In a similar vein, de Certeau (1984) objects to totalising theories of the everyday and argues that there is always a potential for resistance. In 'The Practice of Everyday Life', de Certeau (1984) writes that walking the city is a way of remaking it and considers the different ways that individuals, collectives and institutions produce, inhabit, rework and challenge narratives of – and about – practices of cultural significance. As Highmore (2006: 107) argues, 'De Certeau's poetics of the everyday is built around acts of appropriation and reappropriation that actualize culture and can't be confined by its dominant meanings'. This is then a useful way of thinking about how EC is a way of remaking the definition of culture. In the same way that cities are shaped by people, so culture – and, in this discussion, cultural policy – could be shaped by EC.

Everyday creativity as a phenomenon and as a policy object

As has been discussed, many forms of EC – as what people experience – are maintained outside hegemonic cultural institutions, by a range of individuals, groups and organisations, who also employ different creative methods to produce narratives that may, explicitly or implicitly, question, refute or defy official narratives and make visible what such narratives ignore. Arguably, it is in response to such counter-hegemonic practices that institutional discourses of EC have started to include a wider scope of tangible and intangible culture in their designations, from which preservation and promotion strategies proceed. Moreover, EC institutions have begun to produce different narratives about long-established sites, artefacts and practices of EC, with the aim of acknowledging problematic histories and/or marginalised experiences. Such changes are not always easily accommodated within existing norms, creating tension both within EC institutions and in their relations with other actors, including governmental bodies and different community sectors.

In the same way that leisure and idleness have been argued as modes of resistance to extractive, colonial and patriarchal economic systems (e.g. Coetzee, 1982; Poulain, 2019), so the 'creativity' of EC can be used against the extractive models we find through the publicly subsidised arts and, more broadly, the creative industries. This is further corroborated by Dewey when he argues against the artificial reification of 'high art' as an implement of the western capitalist project, separating higher-minded culture from base bodies to control and exact order. It is dis-order, or '. . .opportunities for resistance and tension', Dewey (2005: 22) claims, that make everyday living rich and fulfilling. For Dewey, the very practice of 'doing' or 'being' in the everyday is fundamental to our attraction to (indeed is the purpose of) aesthetic experience. Dewey offers examples of the 'raw' of aesthetic experience, such as poking a fire and watching the embers, or tending to a houseplant, which in their own way demonstrate the physicality, process and purpose of aesthetic experience. This is a productive life, but productive in terms of an

enriched experience of being in – and interacting with – the world, rather than as a producer or consumer of 'art' in the capitalist sense.

While considering poking fire as an aesthetic experience and a form of EC can be useful as a way of questioning the institutional boundaries of ACE, we have hinted at the difficulty of extending the remit of an arts development organisation to activities such as gardening or preparing food. Arguably, the emphasis on self-determination in contemporary EC discourse makes extending the 'canon' more difficult, not easier. If taken seriously, the claim to absolute individual autonomy in EC would mean that it is not just fire poking but promoting autagonistophilia, agalmatophilia or other – arguably creative – forms of fetishism that must be considered as a public policy issue. This is not the right framing. Going back to the tension identified in the literature on EC, between 'personally meaningful' (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009: 3) and socially meaningful (Richards, 2010: 189), we would like to suggest that any attempt at turning EC into an object of policy-making should reconsider where the emphasis is placed. The distinction made by Dewey (1988) between what is desired, a factual statement of a person's inclination, and what is desirable, a normative statement about what is worthy of desire, speaks rather well to this. Perhaps here the question is: can self-determination be determined enough to be socially meaningful without being over-determined in a way that it becomes the status quo? These issues are difficult and abstract, but perhaps a preliminary way of tackling them could be through addressing the question of the role of established cultural organisations vis-à-vis everyday creatives.

While the research undertaken by The Audience Agency on behalf of ACE shows that there is an aspiration and hope that activities grouped under EC 'are *not* mediated by creative professionals or institutions' (Torreggiani, 2023: no pagination), an argument might be put forward that making the right kind of connection could precisely be a way of offering some policy support without colonialising. One way that a policy intervention to support EC – without over-determining it – might be conceived is through making a better use of existing cultural assets. Indeed, from the perspective of a national funding body, asking funded client organisations how they can contribute their assets to support popular activities is a win-win (if done in the right way), as it builds intimacy and understanding with, and within, their communities. This may simply involve opening up access to resources – spaces, booking systems, brokering partnerships and so on. Perhaps this arguably Deweyan – pragmatic and gradual – transformation is the best way, for now, to enable EC by using policy levers.

Concluding and opening up

This article argues that finding a policy framework which enables the sharing of resources and skills, while avoiding any tendency towards activity appropriation or value/financial extraction, will be key for any public body wishing to put everyday creativity within their policy orbit. In this sense, EC represents a useful challenge for ACE. This challenge may lead to a more thoughtful use of existing assets and prompt questions about mobilising pre-existing infrastructure for the purposes of EC (this as an alternative to being decommissioned so that the funds can be allocated direct to source). In this interpretation, even pragmatic engagement with EC may prove destabilising to the institutional status

quo. If, as in de Certeau's formulation, hegemonic institutions serve to circumscribe the 'proper place' of EC, then we might see such attempts to change and multiply the narratives they produce as strategies to redraw the boundaries of the institution. In either case, we argue, this can bring a productive challenge to how the object of cultural policymaking is understood.

As Bennett (1995: 201) has pointed out, a characteristic of cultural policy, at least in the United Kingdom, is that it 'relates primarily to [. . .] culture as an aesthetic or intellectual product'. EC, as something people do and experience, does not fit this frame and, in fact, purposefully undermines it. In this sense, we could articulate EC as 'the other' of the hegemonic culture – it is culture as 'ordinary' (Williams, 1979 [1958]: 1976). This would, however, amount to an uncritical and unimaginative replication of existing distinctions. We would be wasting a good crisis if all that the interest in EC were to bring is this re-staging of an old and unquestioned dichotomy. Notably, Williams (1981) also speaks of culture as realised, concrete networks of meanings – the 'manifest signifying system' (p. 208). This way of understanding culture, which links the institutionalised and the ordinary, gives meaning to the concept of culture used in the field of cultural studies: 'culture as meanings that are embodied, embedded and realized in social practice' (Storey, 2011: 1). This concept of a manifest signifying system does not assume that culture is everything or that everything is culture; nor does it claim that culture can be reductively defined as a set of institutionalised objects and activities. Rather, culture is the signifying that is manifested through material and social practices at a given time (Kaszynska, 2025). In this sense, the 'arrival' of EC in cultural policy indicates an aspiration to connect with the networks of meanings realised in the signifying practices here and now, and to link those to the institutionalised forms of culture, thereby making our understanding of what constitutes culture more complete.

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Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Notes

1. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/communities-and-engagement/everyday-creativity.
2. https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FX004236%2F1.

3. https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FX004236%2F1.
4. https://evidence.audienceanswers.org/en/evidence/cultural-participation-monitor.

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Steven Hadley is an award-winning cultural policy scholar based at De Montfort University . His research asks how audiences are constructed and articulated within the context of enabling democratic access to culture. He is the author of *Audience Development and Cultural Policy* (2021) as well as numerous academic publications and is Editor of several Routledge books including *Cultural Leadership in Practice* and *Audience Data and Research*.

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Anne Torreggiani founded The Audience Agency in 2011 and has seen it grow into an organisation employing over 50 people with hundreds of clients in the UK and across the world. She has been influential for over three decades, improving practice and advocating for change in the cultural sector, especially in terms of encouraging an audience-centred approach and in the use of data and other evidence in the development of policy and practice.

Appendix 1

Activity
Making music (e.g. singing, playing an instrument, composing, DJing, beatboxing, . . .)
Dancing (e.g. ballet, folk dance, ballroom, dancing in a club, . . .)
Other performing arts (e.g. amateur dramatics, improv, magic, circus, carnival, storytelling, comedy, . . .)
Visual arts (e.g. painting, drawing, making comics, graffiti, doodling, photography, creating or sharing memes, . . .)
Film and audio creation (e.g. filmmaking, animation, making YouTube videos, making radio shows, podcasting, compiling playlists, streaming, . . .)
Creating with the natural world (e.g. gardening, garden design, bonsai, flower arranging, . . .)
Making food (e.g. cooking, mixing drinks, tea ceremonies, celebrating a holiday with a traditional meal, . . .)
Writing (e.g. stories, poems, plays, interactive fiction, . . .)
Craft (e.g. knitting, sewing, quilting, pottery, making models, . . .)
Fashion and style (e.g. doing hair or makeup, creating new outfits, cosplay, drag, . . .)
Gaming (e.g. creating board or video games, LARPing, playing roleplaying games, building in Minecraft or Roblox, . . .)
Discussing arts and culture (e.g. film/book/art appreciation clubs, posting reviews, feedback on others work, . . .)
Another sort of creative participation or activity