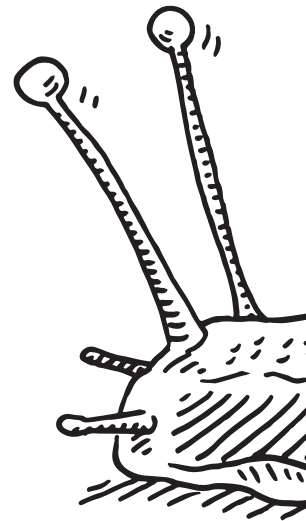


“ There is an increasing awareness of the importance of social fabric, our lived experiences, and crucially, how we feel in, about and of places ”



PLACE-BASED POLICIES

Dr Rebecca Madgin is a Professor of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, and the Programme Director for the AHRC's Place-Based Research Programme.

Place is the foundation stone of individual and collective life, a geographic location and a repository of emotions, experiences, meanings, and memories. Places are where life courses are shaped, social networks are formed and the site of lived and felt experiences. Accessing the way that people feel in and about place is a crucial, yet often neglected, aspect of place-based policies and practices. However, it is something that each of us intuitively know. We can each probably think of places that make us feel happy, calm, sad, or angry. We probably each have somewhere that we like, and dislike, and we probably also have places that make us fearful or places that we long for. This information shapes what we can and want to do in place and feeds into tacit decision making concerning how we nurture places.

The concept of 'felt experiences' is, in its broadest and simplest definition, the 'way we feel in and about places and the felt relationships we have to and within place' and in doing so centres both place and people within place. However, rather than focus on felt experiences, we have, in a UK

policy context, instead, often focused on place as a geographic location where boundaries can be mapped, data can be collected, economic trajectories can be explored, and policies can be enacted. While these dimensions of place remain crucial there is also an increasing awareness of the importance of social fabric, our lived experiences, and crucially, how we feel in, about and of places. This is seen both in the UK government's focus on 'pride' in both the *Levelling Up White Paper* and the Shared Prosperity Fund Prospectus (2022) and across the four nations, for example in the Social Renewal Advisory Board's Report '*If not now, when?*' published by the Scottish Government (2021).

Bringing together the social, lived and felt with the geographic, administrative and economic is crucial to securing positive long-term outcomes based on inclusive strategies for both place and people within place. Put differently, we cannot understand place if we do not understand both the everyday and existential relationships that people have with their geographic locations.

UNDERSTANDING PLACE

The arts and humanities are playing a leading role in advancing this conceptualisation of place. Understanding people's felt experiences in place, and how this shapes social fabric and economic development, is central to the work undertaken across arts and humanities disciplines. This

work produces understandings of belonging, identity, attachment and locates these key aspects of place-based work in time and space.

As part of a deep, embedded and rich understanding of place, the arts and humanities produce a corpus of material including artworks, poems, novels, films, museums, and exhibitions that powerfully curate, tell and translate both the stories of place and the stories of continuities and change within place. Crucially, the arts and humanities are also central to the future of place, most obviously through formulating heritage policies, developing the creative industries and generating varying forms of cultural engagement.

Finally, through research and creative practice the arts and humanities also actively shape the everyday lived and felt experiences of people within places and make a significant contribution to the cultural economy of place. This is all achieved within the ethos of partnership working as community groups, academics and practitioners work across a range of sectors to shape places. Building an understanding of place therefore relies heavily on approaches drawn from across the arts and humanities.

SHAPING FUTURE PLACES

The AHRC Place-Based Research Programme is built upon the belief that understanding felt experiences is a vital aspect of securing improved



outcomes for places. We approach this by focusing on not just on how felt experiences can help us to understand places in a deep, inclusive and rich manner but also how this knowledge can be used to shape and lead the development of place-based policies and practices. To achieve this, our Programme is developing an evidence base that demonstrates the many ways in which approaches from the arts and humanities contributes to understanding past and present places and shapes future places in ways that can also support a case for further investment from UKRI and beyond. This is achieved through looking at the impacts of existing research projects, such as the ways in which creative methodologies contribute to more inclusive forms of community engagement and a greater understanding of the felt ownership of places, as well as through nine newly funded Knowledge Exchange projects.

The *nine KE projects* are working on places across the four nations and at different geographic scales. They are each united in their focus to co-produce research with local and national partners in ways that interact with a range of different policy areas including health and wellbeing, cultural recovery, tourism and placemaking. Each project is also inextricably connected to a multi-level policy context and will result in direct contributions to local strategies, national evaluation frameworks and international discourse. Crucially each

project is also re-thinking the ways in which arts and humanities methodologies can shape the process of decision making within places including the trialling of innovative approaches to building and nurturing partnership-working across a range of stakeholders from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. At the heart of these projects is a desire to centre the relationship between people and place and to ensure that place-based policies are inclusive of a range of different felt experiences.

ROLE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

All this work is crucial to the further development of a UK policy landscape that is shaped around the belief that improving places can help to improve social fabric and economic development. However, the exact ways in which this can be achieved is not yet fully understood. This is exemplified by the *Technical Annex* to the UK Government's Levelling Up White Paper in which it is acknowledged that some missions are 'exploratory', some metrics are in their 'infancy' and a desire to see more collaborative working to understand data that speaks to improving outcomes for both place and people within place. There is a clear role within this context for the arts and humanities to continue our work with partners to develop the kinds of understandings that can support and nurture social fabric, lived and felt experiences. We are, for example, developing an evidence base for 'pride in place' and

supporting work that contextualises the wider felt experiences from which pride can be generated.

Tackling key socio-economic place-based issues will take insights not just from the arts and humanities but will require collaborative working across disciplines, beyond academia and led by communities in place. Working in partnership has the potential to evidence, understand and communicate that 'place' is more than a geographic, administrative and economic reality. In doing so, the aim is to unlock an understanding of how these dimensions interact with a rich, complex and intimate set of social, lived and felt experiences that shape the life course not just of places but of people within places.

