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Working Paper

Culture's non-use values: towards a spatially informed measurement, understanding and aggregation of value(s)

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Abstract

Non-use values of culture and heritage are difficult to define, measure and aggregate. Whilst socio-cultural significance is recognised, it is often flattened to enable quantitative measurement which, in turn, often finds that more qualitative work needs to be done, with the cycle continuing ad infinitum. In this short working paper, we set out the complexities of and necessity for a more balanced interdisciplinary approach. We argue for a spatial approach that centres the site or asset and its communities beyond pre-conceived or positivist understandings of culture, emotion and wellbeing, alongside a more nuanced application of the different temporalities of use and non-use values and the porosity between the user and non-user population.

Key Words: Non-use Values, Non-Market Valuation, Culture, Heritage, Regional Studies

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Culture's non-use values: towards a spatially informed measurement, understanding and aggregation of value(s)

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1. Introduction

Non-use values, the benefits gained from an asset without specific personal engagement with that asset, were developed predominately in the environmental economics field (Krutilla, 1967) and utilised, for example, within natural capital (see, as an example, Costanza and Daly 1992). Typically defined as encompassing existence value, option value and bequest or inter-generational value, non-use values contribute to understanding and measuring the total economic value of a good or service. This then allows for the benefits derived by both users and non-users to be encompassed within the standard tools for assessing and evaluating projects such as social cost benefit analysis. More recently, non-use value has become a component in understanding and measuring non-market benefits of culture and heritage assets (Throsby, 2000; see also Lawton et al 2021 in relation to non-market valuation and heritage). Within this cultural field, non-use is less well defined and applied, mainly because of the inherent complexities in understanding and measuring cultural value(s)- be those use or non-use. Indeed, key findings from across several case study and commissioned reports (see, for example Kaszynska et al 2022) state that more in-depth research is required to define and understand non-use value of cultural assets. This is needed at a conceptual level via mixed methods and informed by individual-level data, whilst also addressing a gap in terms of valuation studies at the urban neighbourhood scale.

Non-use values of culture or heritage represent both a methodological and a theoretical challenge, a paradox even. The discussions of how we might value a cultural good necessarily bleed into the almost always present question of why we do so, and for whom. Often it is to justify spending, or the lack of it. Other times it is to attempt to prove an elusive tangible benefit- health, wellbeing, pride, identity - a perceived 'good' -and often these benefits are conflated or contested with other notions of cultural and societal value (see Stephenson, 2010; Belfiore, 2020). It is not the remit of this short paper to engage in this established - and vital- debate. Rather, proceeding from a critical position in which we might profess a cynicism for the possibilities of any single site, collection or event to be framed as a social or economic panacea, we nevertheless ask how we might economically value the existence and benefit of culture and heritage in a way that acknowledges its importance and impact beyond the use-value metrics of footfall and physical/online active (or passive) engagement. These metrics and their influence on

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conceptions of valuation can often exclude the importance of formal incarnations of culture and heritage to those who, for whatever reason, feel excluded from, or less able to engage, consume or visibly co-produce them. We ask, as a starting point for what is ultimately a funded project which seeks to better define and capture non-use within a social cost benefit analysis, how we can tread a line between capturing the wider societal values of non-use within an economic analysis without making grand claims or sweeping assumptions about those values. The methodological approach is key. As Chan et al comment: “To the extent that the definition of cultural values has been controversial, the same may be said for methodological efforts to value them” (2011: 207).

2. Perspectives: a regional lens

This working paper is situated very much in the context of a live project. Using a large-scale museum led waterfront redevelopment project in Liverpool as a case study, we are asking how we might define non-use values and move towards a more intricate means of valuation. Here, our regional case study represents a gateway into exploring and capturing non-use value and developing new methodologies to assess diverse value(s) of tangible and intangible place based cultural heritage practices. National Museums Liverpool (NML) are currently undertaking a large-scale Waterfront Transformation Project encompassing an expansion of the International Slavery and Maritime Museums, and associated public realm spaces³. This redevelopment, the associated dockland development plans, and the contextual cultural assets and ecosystem of the city and the wider Liverpool City Region (LCR) constitute a relevant and timely focus for the proposed research for several reasons.

The region continues to face significant and ongoing social and economic challenges, with deprivation and unemployment figures high and skills, health and education levels lower than UK averages. It has an extremely rich tangible cultural heritage that includes the largest concentration of listed buildings outside of London and the recently de-listed Liverpool UNESCO world heritage site (see West 2023). Its intangible heritage includes musical and sporting practices, and the award of the UNESCO City of Music (though the tangible and intangible are to be seen as linked through lived practices, see for example, Harrison 2010). The city hosted the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2008 and, more recently, the Eurovision Song contest in 2023 (for critical exploration of these, see the What Works Centre for Economic Growth reports⁴). An LCR mayor was elected in 2017 and combined authority plans and policies, including those for culture, are now established and are addressing city-centric cultural initiatives by refocusing on the region’s boroughs.

³ <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/waterfront-transformation-project>

⁴ <https://whatworksgrowth.org/insights/one-hit-wonder-eurovision-and-economic-impact/> referring to <https://whatworksgrowth.org/resource-library/sport-and-culture/>

By holistically exploring this local ecosystem our understandings of use and non-use values needs to emerge from, and be tested by, how any understandings of value might differ across different stakeholders, diverse socio economic and ethnic groups and perspectives. The visibilities of stakeholder narratives of locale and value, from a ground-level perspective, is often lacking in the academic and policy field. Equally overlooked is the importance of using equally weighted interdisciplinary mixed methods to understand and capture the multi scalar interactions across value(s) of local and regional heritage.

We are still in the process of adapting and applying mixed methods, and as such, midway through addressing several questions relating to the capture and analysis of non-market values. In attempting to place a monetary figure on such values it is crucial to understand the role of complexities of response, temporality, and belonging/ non-belonging in large scale cultural sites, collections, and redevelopments – all things which themselves contain complex and often contested meanings. These are issues that have for some considerable time now been well discussed in cultural, geography and planning literature. These range from creative cities discourse through to explorations of culture led redevelopment, and the role of the museums as civic space (see, for example, Peck, 2005; Cooke and Lazzeretti, 2008; Pratt 2010, 2011; Degen and Garcia, 2012). However, these issues and debates have been less considered in the understanding of how a cultural site or collection can hold or promote non-uses values and, with them, importance and significance beyond the user focused measurements.

The implications of these questions are multi-faceted. If there is – and it is almost certain that there is- conflict between the values promoted by the redevelopment of cultural goods and pre-existing or embedded values, is it then still possible to capture and scale the complex meanings of non-use values of heritage across different groups and communities without destabilizing any aggregation and measurability? To what extent is it viable to integrate place specific and community relevant intricacies within understandings of non-use values?

To do this, we need first to revisit the basics - and with this the most complex element of measuring value(s) - the importance of place level data, both qualitative and quantitative, across different lifespans. Currently, spatiality and temporality are overlooked within recent studies and applications, both conceptual and methodological, relating to cultural non-use values and their population. Such an omission can be doubly problematic when estimates which don't (or can't) address this heterogeneity are the basis for benefit transfer within SCBA further embedding the problem within decision making around cultural and heritage projects.

3. Existing Definitions and Approaches

One could argue that in the current state of the art non-use value is more clearly defined by how it cannot be captured than by how it can. As there is no market for the non-use of

cultural goods, market-based revealed preference techniques for monetary valuation are out of reach. This then suggests limits on how well we can capture “true” non-use value given the drawbacks of the stated preference methodology (see Hausman (2012) and Throsby (2003) for a critical discussion; Carson (2012) and Champ et al. (2017) present the more optimistic view).

Despite these concerns, methods such as contingent variation and discrete choice experiments are seen as the only viable means of quantifying non-use value usually via a willingness to pay (WTP) estimate (Epstein, 2003). Like the theoretical grounding for non-use this methodology comes from environmental economics (Arrow et al, 1993). Despite confidence in some areas that a continual commitment towards rigour can produce less biased estimates (Champ et al., 2017) there remains foundational issues. At a basic level as Aldred notes the method presents respondents with the tricky psychological challenge of measuring “values in the absence of value” (1994: 83) – how well can respondents quantify the value of something with which they do not have direct engagement? Further, Binder (2020) expresses concern that stated preference methods elicit attitudes rather than the more stable preferences on which the economic theory that underpins cost-benefit analysis depends.

Outside of these live concerns within the economic literature there is a wider issue regarding the extent to which the act of placing a monetary value on non-market benefits excludes important components of the “true” value. The presence of one central estimate of value (even accounting for different levels of statistical confidence) occludes key assumptions. How much may WTP vary according to salary or tax band? If value is at least partially dependent on mobility, how does individual-level capability - be that economic, physical, or emotional - interact with this? Moreover, stated preference surveys struggle to account for those (potentially unknown) groups who don’t see themselves as belonging to that space/place or practice who nevertheless perceive an important personal value to the site’s existence. Arguably, the testing and valuation of non-use remains tethered to the assumptions and testing of the valuation of the more readily measurable direct use – that people will travel, use or protect something if only they understood it better. Bille and Storm (2024) view this as wrong-headed as non-users as less likely than users to understand the external impacts of cultural goods. Using the same approach to capture these different values seems ripe for inducing bias.

Equally, definitions of the scope of non-use values do not adequately consider temporalities. For example, understandings of bequest value do not necessarily address the fundamental questions whether it is a wish for the continued existence of a cultural good to enable future consumption. If so, the questions of how and by whom, and at what point, become important. Does bequest have at its heart assumptions how future generations will value culture? Or is it simply casting one’s present-day subjective utility into to the future: a discounted version of existence value? Aldred (1994: 384) briefly touches on the point that bequest value can encompass future use - it is “vicarious consumption” and so that can push bequest value onto the next generation who then

obtain value from future use. There is a risk of “infinite regress” here that detaches the meaning of the present-day evaluation. Crowards (1997: 146) highlights how bequest value could include future use and non-use value which may make it difficult to unpack. This still underexplored idea suggests fundamental problems in understanding let alone accurately valuing a crucial part of non-use.

How then to value and encompass something that is non-monetary, open to temporal complexities, and which often includes locale specific intricacies or community specific understandings of value and practice? Given the issues outlined above one answer would be to move beyond the constraints transferred over from the environmental valuation literature by allowing the possibility of a wider conception of non-use within the cultural framework. As Chan et al (2011) explore in relation to First Nation peoples, “cultural ecosystem services and non-use values inspire deep attachment in human communities.” Here non-use values can be spiritual as much as they might be educational (Costanza et al. 1997: 254). They can also be tightly bound to place and the social relations within it. The authors argue for, and set out, a distributed value approach, wherein non-user group stakeholders are engaged. Such engagement is useful especially in allowing for a greater understanding of what constitutes a non-user.

Despite this existing framework, the identification and qualitative engagement of non-user groups to elicit definitions and applications of non-use values remains underexplored in the cultural field. Recent scoping reports and studies rely on existing definitions and fail to define the non-user population as diverse and vital to any understanding of use-value itself. Whilst there is interest in a wider embrace of a narrative approach (Bille, 2024; Klamer, 2017; Beckert and Bronk, 2018) it is yet to be picked up by most practitioners. Temporality and proximity are often assumed, rather than queried in any depth. This includes a lack of research into testing the assumption that the dichotomy between users and non-users can be simply defined by their direct consumption of a cultural good. Individual and group level engagement with cultural sites as they exist in space appears to present a more complex relationship and so calls for a more nuanced spatial approach.

4. On the need for a more spatial approach : Next Steps

There is a tendency in existing studies to assume that what is missing in understanding is the mode of measurement: Do we have the correct statistical model? Are the attributes we test on respondents the right ones? Crucial questions, no doubt, but before asking them it is important to acknowledge the potential for a greater understanding of non-use values that comes from exploring its non-market nature. This allows us to question why the market for cultural goods may exclude certain types of individuals or emotional responses and so make them de facto non-users. How does such an excluding mechanism relate to complex or traumatic heritage or practices? There is vast scope for a truly mixed-methods approach to understanding the underlying heterogeneity of non-use by

engaging in a deeper phase of qualitative work before the more formal valuation begins than is seen in current practice.

A fuller approach would consider how non-use varies geographically, overlaps with non-participation (and the barriers or choices that underpin this), and how direct users (or consumers) of cultural goods can still derive non-use value. There are elements of this more holistic approach to the issue in Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis. Whilst this approach is included in the UK Treasury Green Book techniques for decision making it is designed for the ranking of multiple options and so is thought to do best during a longlist appraisal stage. Whilst it is acknowledged that this approach allows for a deeper consideration of non-monetizable attributes, the ranking itself involves an element of quantification which suggest the core issue of placing a figure on non-use value remains (O'Brien 2010). Rather than excluding complications of this sort, they should be embraced and acknowledged in any evaluation.

This means that an evaluation requires a ground up approach that first queries:

1. *The sample population itself, as relevant to the cultural asset.* What are the parameters of use, and of non-use. Crucially these definitions need to be generated from the population themselves considering the timeframe in which such values are generated.
2. *The barriers to use - real or perceived.* This is not to make non-users users but to understand that value/use is not so simply defined. For example, a person may have coffee in a gallery shop everyday but not care about/engage with the gallery itself. Does this value count as use or non-use? Or is it something else not related to the cultural good? Such questions have implications for who should be included in the SCBA. Is value enrichment? Is non-use value potential for enrichment?
3. *The role of the site itself - the gallery, the WHS, the visitor centre - in determining users and non-users?* This is a crucial question in redevelopment where a new cultural asset that attracts new use value may potentially exclude users of the existing site for both spatial and cultural reasons. Does this then induce a negative non-use value?

Once these foundational issues are better understood the nuances of valuation must be considered. Non-use value cannot be measured purely through WTP unless we begin to understand the layers of difference, both geographically, socio economically, ethnically – in what those things mean to different people, at different times, in different locations. We can't question bequest, or educational value, and expect, or indeed want, the answer to be the same across multiple heritage or lived experience. Equally, there needs to be an understanding that non-use might shift not just according to person but according to activity or emotion. Methodologically, whilst some quantitative methods do allow for some of these distinctions there are limitations in how granular we can get. The large sample sizes that are necessary to split the population into sub-groups can quickly get prohibitively expensive. Also, in terms of interpretability even if the different monetised preferences could be precisely estimated they then feed in to generate a population

average estimate of non-use value. This then goes back to the question of the population of non-users. How do we aggregate if we cannot identify everyone?

We can't -and shouldn't- get around regional specificity, the stock specificity. All cultural goods are not one and the same and the emotion or sense of belonging attached to them (or not) cannot be easily replicated. Still the methodological approach must be replicated in order to encompass the complexities of identities, ethnicities, shifting stake(s) in place. Cost-benefit analysis has always recognised the limits of what can be measured (in the UK, the Treasury Green Book provides for the inclusion of unmonetisable factors). Embracing this should not be seen as an admission of defeat but rather giving us the space to understanding these important areas of value in more depth. If SCBA is ultimately a decision-making tool, then acknowledging and including the qualitative spatial and temporal nuances of non-use value hands important power back to the decision maker.

So far, we know it needs to be done better - and this, in turn, directs us back to our starting point - that any understanding and measurement of non-use values needs to be understood and embedded at ground level, in the same way that use-values need to be. The key implication of this is a more thorough and reflective engagement with locale- with regional level data, stakeholders, and cultural context, and with an understanding of when and how people interact across their and the assets lifespan.

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