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**INTERROGATING INFORMAL CULTURAL PRACTICES
IN LONDON AND MUMBAI:
TOWARDS A MULTI-FACETED UNDERSTANDING**

Ulrike Chouguley

Thesis submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy

Centre for Culture and Creative Industries

School of Arts and Social Science

City, University of London

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DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

Despite a recent revival in the research field, there remains a lack of nuanced discussion of urban informality, especially for cities in the global North. Moreover, existing studies (whatever their geographies) show a very limited engagement with issues of culture. The extant research is frequently focused on forms of economic value and thus fails to provide a multi-faceted valuation of informal cultural practices. My thesis sets out to address these gaps using a grounded theory approach. This methodology enables such a multi-faceted understanding, both theoretically and empirically, and it is developed through five case studies in two cities. These case studies include busking, book sharing initiatives and guerrilla gardening in London, as well as the open street event Equal Streets and 'spot fix' public space improvement practices in Mumbai.

The findings show that urban actors are motivated by a wide variety of factors, stretching from intrinsic, personal reasons to more instrumental, social or environmental agendas. The study further emphasises that informality can be a tool and tactical choice for urban actors, deployed by many to fulfil their varied aims and ambitions, but also in response to the complex negotiations of internal values and external, contextual factors (including their interaction with public authorities).

The thesis offers a robust challenge to the predominant economic-deterministic interpretations of culture in the urban context, and calls for a shift in the debate by academics and policy-makers alike towards a more multi-faceted valuation of informal cultural practices. Furthermore, this thesis goes beyond existing research on urban cultural informality in highlighting the tactical use of informal practices. Finally, by examining urban informality in the field of culture in both cities in the global South and the global North, this study contributes a rare exchange of empirical knowledge and theories in relation to data from such different geographies.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

APS	Advanced Producer Services
BMC	Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation
DIY	Do-it-yourself
DRM	Divisional Railway Manager
GaWC	Global and World Cities
ILO	International Labour Office
LETS	Local Economic Trading Systems
MDF	Medium-density fibreboard
MRVC	Mumbai Railway Vikas Corporation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SLA	Service level agreement
TNC	Transnational Corporation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

PART I: RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

1 INTRODUCTION

“We care about our stations. [...] Mumbai is alive because of the stations and its locals [trains]. And we feel that it’s our thing. [...] But [...] slowly we came to know that there is no permission to clean this way. We cannot clean the station. That was the statement the DRM [Divisional Railway Manager] used: ‘Who told you to clean the station? Who gave you the permission to clean the station?’ And we were stunned. Because nobody is giving permission to spit or dirty the walls and nobody is bothering to ask those people, arrest those people or at least inform the police or inform other authorities about them. But when we started cleaning, everybody is rushing to our side: ‘How you can do this? This is illegal!’” (SF13, Interview, 2015)

1.1 Purpose and aims of the study

There is the busker who quit his old job in the film industry and started busking on the streets to overcome his depression. He now pays his mortgage by busking five days a week for four hours on the licensed London Underground busking scheme. There is the initiator of a book swap who spent significant amounts of his own time and money to restore an old phone box and turn it into a book swap, because he did not want to be held up by bureaucratic fundraising processes. He does not think that his book swap is very good at replacing the functions of the local library that was recently closed, but he sees it as an excuse for people in his neighbourhood to be nice to each other. There is the guerrilla gardener who gets upset about people picking the flowers that she has planted in tree pits along the public high street, because that means that the plants are no longer there for everyone to enjoy. There is the community activist who brought together friends and acquaintances around a campaign to raise awareness of environmental issues and of shrinking public spaces. Working together with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and Mumbai Police they organised an open street event that attracted 10,000s of people each Sunday. And there is the group of students who one day on their way

home from engineering college just bought a broom and a brush and started cleaning their local railway station because they were appalled by the rubbish and dirt around them, but who refuse to constitute themselves as an organisation or to formally adopt the station.

This list of examples is just a snapshot of the various ways in which informality is interlinked with urban cultural practices. Some of these practices are aimed at ambitious societal change, while others are motivated by modest and personal objectives. But – whether deliberately or not – they all touch on the big issues that affect our contemporary cities: issues of community in the midst of ethnic, religious, political and socio-economic tensions; issues of civic engagement in the midst of pressures on public services; issues over public space in the midst of overwhelming private development and gentrification of cities. And yet, little attention has been paid to informal cultural practices, by urban studies scholars and policy-makers alike. This thesis sets out to address this gap and improve our understanding of the multiple informal cultural practices in the urban context.

While there has been a revival of studies on urban informality in cities in the global South in recent years, the literature has been lacking in a number of respects. Firstly, for cities in the global North, there remains a lack of nuanced discussion and understanding of informal practices in the urban context. In the last four decades, the Global and World Cities (GaWC) literature has been an important strand of research within the studies of urban issues, influential not only in its theoretical scope to provide a universal theory for cities across the world, but also in its practical implications, having informed much of the policy-making in those cities. As I argue in this thesis, this is problematic, since the GaWC discourse has largely ignored issues of informality, or – where they have been considered – they have been conceptualised through a normative framework that considers informality as backward and undesirable, rather than as a complex and multifaceted urban process.

Secondly, the existing studies on urban informality (whatever their geographies) show a very limited engagement with issues of culture. Informality in the cultural sector has been predominantly discussed in terms of the cultural and creative labour market (Mbaye & Dinardi, 2018) or in relation to urban economic development and processes of gentrification.

As a result, and thirdly, there remains a lack of research that provides a multi-faceted valuation of informal cultural practices. The extant research is all too frequently centred on forms of economic value and fails to provide an in-depth understanding of the broader (non-economic) roles and purposes that informal cultural practices take on in the urban context.

This thesis sets out to address these gaps and to interrogate the variety of informal cultural practices in the urban context. In order to do so, I seek to go beyond the predominant conceptual and methodological frameworks in urban theory, as they have often resulted in a dualist and biased separation between cities in the global North and the global South, or tried to fit diverse urban experiences into one universal theory. Instead, in this thesis I aim to put into conversation theoretical debates and urban practices from these different contexts. I will do this through a ‘grounded’ analysis of how informality is negotiated and produced in the cities of Mumbai and London through a number of case studies. The inclusion of two cities that appear as geographically, culturally, socio-economically and politically diverse as London and Mumbai is justified by my research aim to interrogate the *variety* of informal cultural practices. Choosing a ‘grounded’ theory approach will ensure that any theoretical construction or conceptual framing is – on the one hand – firmly rooted in empirical observation and evidence (Nijman, 2015), and – on the other hand – emerging from the actual, diverse experiences of the people engaging in informal cultural practices. The case studies included in my research are busking, book sharing initiatives and guerrilla gardening in London, as well as the open street event Equal Streets and ‘spot fix’ public space improvement practices in Mumbai.

1.2 Scope of the study

An interrogation of culture, cities and informality inevitably cuts across different disciplines. Indeed, this thesis is situated at the intersection of urban studies, cultural policy studies and urban informality studies. However, my thesis also engages with urban geography, development policy studies, migration studies, social policy and literature on creative work and employment. Drawing on these various bodies of knowledge and scholarship has allowed me to explore certain theoretical questions (such as “What does ‘informality’ mean?”, or “How is

'informal culture' affected by urban policy-making?, or "How do informal cultural practices interlink with issues of spatial negotiations?") and to refine my overall research subject around the multiplicity of informal cultural practices in contemporary cities. However, at present, there is not a single sub-disciplinary category that would provide an easy home for the various theoretical questions explored in this thesis. As I argue in this thesis, the extant theoretical approaches in these disciplines are conceptually and geographically restricted and do not provide an adequate framework to analyse issues of informality and culture in the different contexts of London and Mumbai, and neither are their predominant methodological approaches. Thus, it is not sufficient to 'pick and choose' from existing theoretical approaches and to adopt the 'usual' methods of that particular framework. Instead, my thesis seeks to go beyond the a-priori assumptions that are inherent to disciplinary boundaries and make connections across such different frames of reference. In this way, I intend to revisit the theoretical object of informal culture through a grounded reconceptualisation of informal cultural practices that considers the issue in its multiple dimensions.

There are, however, three things which I do not seek to develop in this thesis. Firstly, although this study uses two global cities as its research context and draws on a wide range of urban studies literature, it is not intended as a city analysis or comparison. In contrast, my focus in this thesis is on the informal cultural practices themselves. Notwithstanding the fact that these practices are inevitably influenced by the context in which they take place, my concern in this thesis is to explore the variety of practices that can be found in these cities, rather than characterising a given city through the prevalence of particular types of cultural informality. In this sense, my approach and intention differs from the work of many urban scholars from the GaWC or comparative urbanism tradition.

Secondly, while this study is interested in issues of policy and the interplay between policy-making and informal cultural practices, my project is not carrying out any policy analysis as such. It does not include any detailed analysis of existing cultural (or other) policies, or policy rhetoric, that might be relevant to my case studies, nor does it come up with specific policy recommendations. Nonetheless, by providing a much more in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of informal cultural practices, it is hoped that this thesis may be a useful basis for developing such policy recommendations in the future.

Finally, I do not seek to write a work of theory *per se*, either. Although, of course, I critically engage with theoretical questions surrounding the topics of cities, informality and culture, I do not set out to create a new general urban theory of cultural informality. As I argue in this thesis, this is because great care must be taken not to attempt to fit the diverse experiences of cities, and of the informal cultural practices taking place within them, into one universal theory. While my research finds common threads across the case studies, my thesis foregrounds the multiplicity of informal cultural practices, across and within different cities.

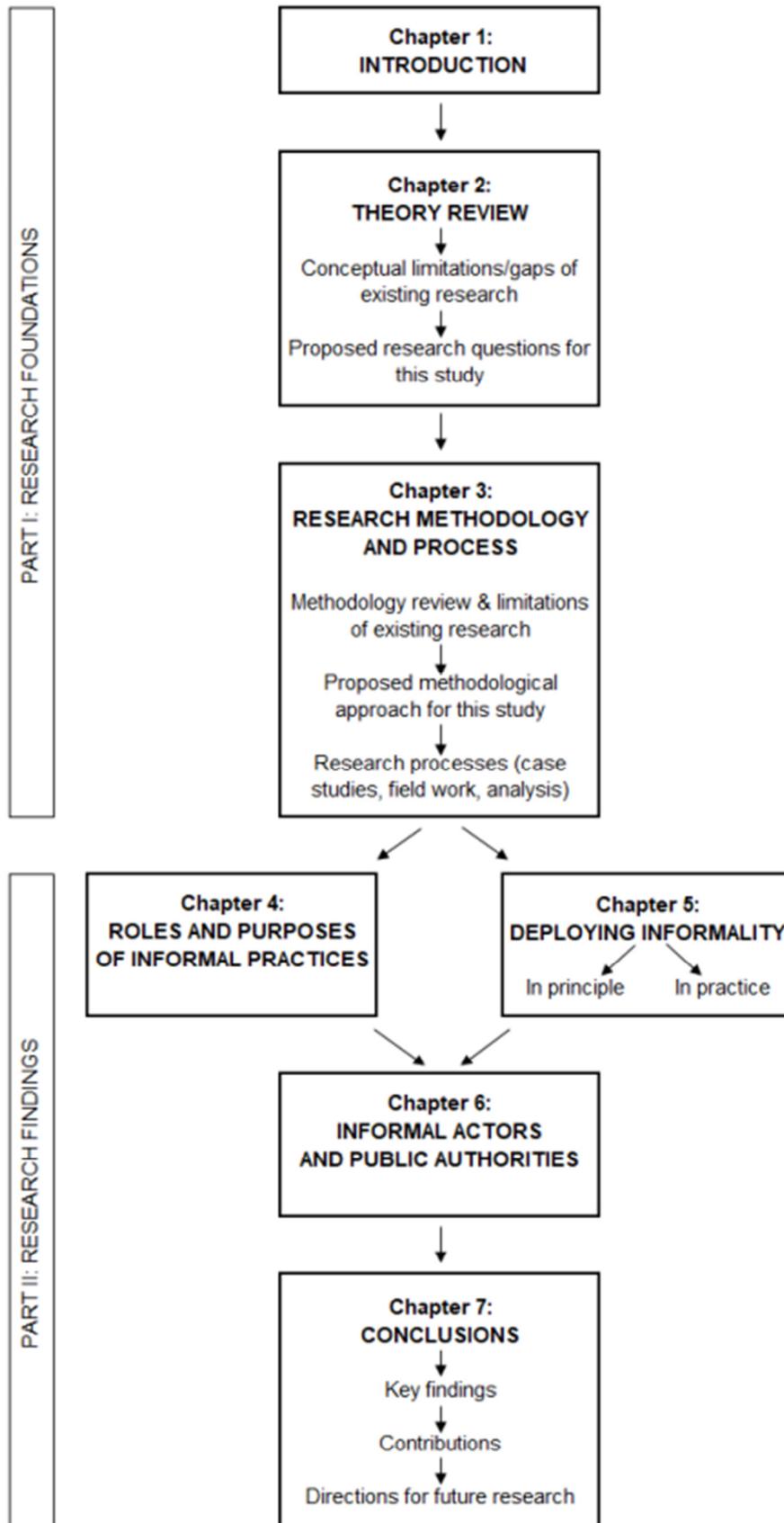
1.3 Overview of the thesis

This section provides an overview of the thesis. A summary of the thesis structure can also be found in Figure 1. This thesis is divided into two main parts: Part I, the Research Foundations, and Part II, the Research Findings.

Part I sets out the foundations of this research. It begins with the present chapter 1 which has outlined the purpose, aims and scope of my thesis. The role of chapter 2 is to situate my research within the existing literature. In particular, I review the extant theoretical positions in three areas: global cities, urban informality, and the intersection of cultural practices with urban informality. This division reflects the interdisciplinary nature of my research object. The final section of this chapter describes the conceptual gaps in the literature and outlines the research questions that have been developed to fill these gaps.

Chapter 3 provides a review and critique of the methodological approaches in the existing literature to interrogate cities and issues of informality. Based on this methodological review, as well as on the findings from extensive secondary data analysis, the chapter lays out my overall methodological approach and argues for the use of a grounded theory approach to reconceptualise informal cultural practices. It then describes the detailed research methods and processes I employed to answer my research questions. It discusses the methodological limitations of my studies and draws particular attention to the methodological and ethical challenges inherent to researching 'the informal'. It also covers in detail how I analysed my data.

Figure 1: Overview of thesis structure



Part II comprises the research findings and contributions of this thesis and draws on the extensive fieldwork undertaken. My empirical findings are reported in chapters 4 to 6. In response to my first research question on the role and purposes that informal cultural practices take on in contemporary cities, Chapter 4 discusses the motivations that lead civic actors to engage in such activities. Chapter 5 tackles the questions of how civic actors define and delimit informal practices, and how they deploy informality in practice. In doing so, the chapter provides answers to the second and third research questions. Chapter 6 is the final analysis chapter. It deals with the fourth and supplementary research question on how and why policy-makers engage with informal cultural practices. Finally, chapter 7 provides concluding thoughts on the thesis' main findings and discusses its main contributions to existing academic literature. It also offers directions for future research

2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

This chapter builds on the issues set out in the introduction and lays the foundations for this thesis by introducing relevant literature and situating my project within it. Based on this review, it identifies theoretical gaps in the literature and explains how they will be addressed with this research.

The purpose of this literature review is to establish a conceptual framework with which I can interrogate issues of informality and culture in the urban context. In doing so, I review the different, important theoretical positions across a number of research disciplines, and I interrogate the strengths and weaknesses of these theoretical positions. In particular, I focus on the GaWC agenda as an emblematic example of urban theoretical discourses in the last four decades that have either ignored issues of informality or conceptualised them through a normative framework that considers informality as backward and undesirable. Part of this chapter is to look at how such normative assumptions have rendered the issue of informality almost invisible in urban theory, especially in the global North.

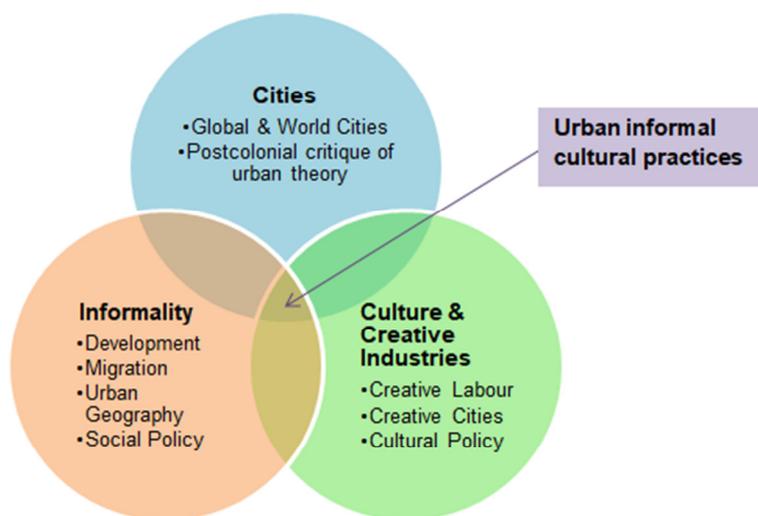
Also, the GaWC discourse problematically suggests that there is a hierarchical system of cities in the world – the hierarchical ranks of which are established using measures that were empirically researched in a small number of cities, but are then universally applied. This largely results in a dualist separation between cities in the global North and the global South. Throughout this thesis, I explore and challenge such boundaries. Furthermore, I argue that the limitations of the existing theoretical framework are closely linked to the methodological approaches used in the literature – which are discussed more fully in chapter 3.

As I emphasise at the end of this chapter, the existing conceptual frameworks to analyse issues of informality and culture in the urban context are inadequate, as

they mostly ignore, universalise or over-simplify the complex and sometimes conflicting experiences of urban life. Thus, it will not be sufficient to 'pick and choose' from these different theoretical approaches. Rather, I will need to reformulate and revisit the theoretical object of informal culture from the 'ground' up. As I discuss in more detail in section 3.2.1, this calls for the use of a grounded theory approach. In this chapter, however, I focus on conceptual and theoretical issues.

From a disciplinary perspective, any interrogation of culture, cities and informality is bound to cut across different disciplines. Thus, I engaged with a range of bodies of research, most importantly the fields of urban studies, urban informality and cultural policy studies. Figure 2 shows the main areas of research that I have drawn on in this literature review. It also indicates where my thesis subject is situated within this field.

Figure 2: Scope of literature review



It is important to note that I have not sought to provide an all-encompassing review of the three main fields, but have focused on those bodies of research with relevance to my thesis subject. An all-inclusive review of literature of these areas would be impossible. In what follows, my more limited goal is to discuss the main topics and debates that might help me build a conceptual framework for this thesis. In section 2.1, I set the broad context for my research by reviewing literature from the field of urban studies. The following section 2.2 focuses on the subject of informality, and how it has specifically been theorised

in the context of global cities. More specifically yet, in section 2.3, I discuss the existing literature on informal culture in the urban context. In section 2.4, I then review more recent conceptualisations of informality on cities in the global South. Finally, I discuss the major research gaps in section 2.5.

2.1 Global cities

In this section, I begin by reviewing urban studies literature from the latter part of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Within this time period, an important research strand within urban theory has been the GaWC discourse. While there have been a number of competing research strands at the same time, including feminist approaches by authors such as Massey (1994) and McDowell (1997), or Marxist geography (Harvey, 1973), the GaWC agenda's influence extended beyond theoretical debate into the realm of policy-making in many cities across the world and became the normative lens through which urban theory was considered. While this thesis is not positioned within this epistemological tradition and advances important criticisms, it nonetheless has to engage with, and respond to, the theoretical propositions that lie at the core of the GaWC literature (a critique of the predominant methodological approaches will follow in chapter 3). Thus, in what follows, I briefly outline and discuss key arguments of the GaWC literature.

The GaWC literature is built around the central premise that, since the early 1980s, the global economy has experienced major restructuring around knowledge, human capital, and business and consumer services (Dicken, 2011; Knox, 1995). The global city has emerged as a study object in its own right precisely because these larger economic trends are most prominent at the level of the global city (Sassen, 2001). Global cities are seen to be centres of authority and command, as they are the places where high-level decision-making takes place and where global control is produced (Sassen, 2001).

Sassen's work provides a legitimate analysis for a select number of cities (those specialising in international, financial and commercial services). What is problematic, however, is that many other GaWC authors, such as Friedmann (1995) or Taylor (1997; 2001; 2002) have gone on to universally apply their urban theory to other cities, without taking into consideration the specific

experiences and trajectories of these cities, and unaware of their conceptual shortcomings (Nijman, 2007; Robinson, 2002; 2011; Roy, 2009).

One major conceptual shortcoming lies in the strong focus of the GaWC analysis on economic aspects and, in particular, a very specific area of the economy, namely the APS and the finance sector. As outlined above, the GaWC literature asserts that these economic functions (and the cities that concentrate these functions) are not only important, but sufficient for the control and management of the global economy. As Smith (2013) points out, this is far from a 'natural' truth. Rather, the idea has strong ideological foundations in the political economy context in the late 1970s/80s, which saw the rise of a neo-liberal system in both Britain and the United States, celebrating the free-market and global capitalism (*Ibid.*). Problematically, this conception of the predominance of the APS also leads to different types of exclusions. In particular, it raises questions on how to deal with cities that are not hubs of these specialised industries. In practice, it has meant that cities are either degraded to 'secondary' or 'tertiary' levels of significance, or omitted from the analysis altogether. Taylor's argument (2002: 233) that the inclusion of 300 cities in his world city index ensures "that no cities that can reasonably be deemed 'world cities' are omitted" is an example of the ignorance and lack of valuation of the majority of the world's urban centres. This is particularly, but not exclusively, relevant for cities in the global South.

Moreover, the overemphasis of the GaWC research on economic explanations leads to an exclusion of other urban processes, including political, social and, indeed, cultural. Pratt (2010) argues that within global city discourses, culture has been positioned in a dualistic, but unequal, relation to the economic. He states two examples of this type of argument: firstly, the idea that culture is a mere means to attract other economic activities; and secondly, the assumption that demand for cultural goods is derived from the 'real' economy, but will not generate any economic activity on its own, nor have secondary effects. The problem with both these conceptions is that they ignore the fact that cultural production has an economic value *per se* (*Ibid.*). Much more than just having its own economic value, culture has a much broader role to play in the urban context – a central argument that this thesis seeks to develop.

These conceptually limiting assumptions are closely linked, and further enhanced, by the primary use of quantitative methodological approaches. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3, such approaches are inadequate to account for more complex and differentiated urban processes, such as informal cultural practices.

Instead of using the 'global cities' category, Robinson (2008) advocates for applying a lens that sees all cities as 'ordinary'. This considers cities to be constituted through multiple and overlapping networks that vary in their spatial reach – some global, some not. It also highlights the diversity of economic, social, political, cultural and other relations that compose a city, thus putting back into focus their distinctiveness, specificity and complexity. As Robinson (2016: 196) summarises:

“A vital and urgent consequence of any new geography of theorizing [...] should be that the mode and style of urban theorization itself is transformed from an authoritative voice emanating from some putative centre of urban scholarship to a celebration of the conversations opened up amongst the many subjects of urban theoretical endeavour in cities around the world, valorizing more provisional, modest and revisable claims about the nature of the urban.”

This suggests that there remains a need for a more multi-faceted conception of cities and, indeed, of culture in cities. The extent, to which such a multi-faceted valuation of the role of culture in cities exists, is dealt with in section 2.3. But before then, I look at another issue that could be put back into view by such an approach – that is, the issue of informality.

2.2 Informality in cities

Unlike previous debates about globalisation, which centred on the Transnational Corporation (TNC) as the focus of analysis, shifting attention to the city has been useful in uncovering a range of economic functions and actors that are implicated in the global economy, including less powerful ones. This opens up the possibility – at least theoretically – to bring into view processes such as the increasing informalisation of the economy. In this section, I discuss the extent to which the literature has been dealing with the concept of informality within the

context of cities. However, in order to situate this debate, I begin, in section 2.2.1, by providing some background on the origins of the term informality and its roots in the development policy literature, focusing on the global South. In section 2.2.2, I discuss existing conceptions of the informal in the context of the global North, and then look specifically at the conceptualisation of informality in the GaWC literature. Section 2.2.2 provides a conclusion.

2.2.1 Key informality debates in the global South

The origins of the term informality go back to the theorisation of the ‘informal economy’ in a very different theoretical and policy context, namely within the development policy literature in the early 1970s that focused on the global South. Unlike the central premise of the GaWC literature which emphasises the emergence of a global or world system since the 1980s, the focus of development policy was on countries and locally-produced inequalities. Coined within the report of the International Labour Office’s (ILO) employment mission to Kenya, the term informal sector was used to describe those economic activities that are characterised by ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership of enterprises, small-scale operation, highly labour intensive technology, skills acquired outside the formal school system, and unregulated and competitive markets (ILO, 1972). According to Sethuraman (1976: 70) the term provides a holistic understanding, describing a “distinctive organisation of production activities” and a new focus on the characteristics of the enterprise, rather than on the technology used or the individual. Although the report highlights that the majority of those activities are “economically efficient and profitmaking”, it also emphasises that they are “limited by simple technologies, little capital and lack of links with the other (‘formal’) sector” (ILO, 1972: 6). The report lifted informality onto the development policy agenda and it quickly became a target group for employment policies (Sethuraman, 1976). Such policies were ultimately aimed at integrating the informal into the formal sector.

However, the concept has also evoked much criticism. At the centre of this criticism is the dualist view of the urban economy that the informal-formal dichotomy entails (if not invents). This dualist conception is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it does not take account of the complexity of reality.

For instance, Moser (1978) argues that unlike the dualistic view of society that the informal concept creates, there is a continuum of productive activities in reality. Further, Castells & Portes (1989) challenge the association of informality with the poor. Instead, their definition of the informal, as those activities which are unregulated in an economy where similar activities are regulated, opened up the possibility of applying the concept at the same time to “a street seller in Latin America and a software consultant moonlighting in Silicon Valley” (*Ibid.*: 12). Further, Maloney (2004) and Lobato (2010) highlight the complex set of motivations and reasons for working in the informal sector. Thus, simply defining the informal in opposition to the formal is not sufficient. Rather, it needs to be attempted to understand the interconnectivity between the two ‘poles’.

Secondly, the dualist conception is problematic because it frequently involves a value judgement of each ‘pole’, with wide-ranging consequences. While Sethuraman (1976: 72) argues that the term, in its original use, is “neutral” and untainted by the judgemental bias of the “modern-traditional dichotomy” used in reference to the prevalent technologies, more recently, many scholars have refuted this point of view (Robinson, 2002; 2011; Roy, 2005). They point out that the predominant use of the term informality in development policy has not escaped such value judgements, but rather that informality – in this discourse – is opposed to ‘modern cities’ and rather equated with poverty, anachronism, tradition and backwardness.

This dualist conception of informality as theorised in the development literature has had significant implications. On a theoretical level, it has resulted in an exclusive focus of the urban studies literature on certain cities, primarily situated in the global North. This was justified on the basis that developed and under-developed cities have nothing to learn from each other (Robinson, 2011). But equally important, reminiscences of this discourse are still impacting policy-making today. For instance, a whole range of analyses from different parts of the world of informal uses of public space (such as street vending) speak of the continued association of the informal with public disorder, chaos, noise, pollution, dirt, congestion, crime and poverty (for example, Anjaria, 2012; Bromley, 1998; Donovan, 2008; Öz & Eder, 2012). As is discussed in more detail in section 2.4.1, the informal is also framed as undesirable and a hindrance in those cities’ pursuit of modernity and world city status.

In response to the association of informality with a discourse of crisis in the initial development literature, a body of work from scholars primarily from Latin America developed a different interpretation of the informal. In his influential works (1989; 2000), the libertarian economist Hernando de Soto presents informality as heroic entrepreneurship. He argues (1989: 14) that:

“[t]he informal economy is the people’s spontaneous and creative response to the state’s incapacity to satisfy the basic needs of the impoverished masses.”

According to this strand of work, informal economic activities, such as street vending, provide a livelihood and a social safety-net in absence of a developed welfare system (Donovan, 2008; Steel, 2012). They are also considered to expand the formal economy by selling goods from regulated business in areas or at times that are not served by the former (Donovan, 2008). Hernandez-Garcia (2013) further argues that public spaces in informal settlements are often the product of self-help and self-management.

In this line of thought, informality becomes a means of fighting for economic rights and property. This is seen as necessary, as the formal system excludes the poor from their essential rights. De Soto (2000: 159) talks of a “legal apartheid” system created by governments. He promotes the widespread legalisation of informal property ownership as a solution to end inequality and underdevelopment.

However, critics argue that this celebratory notion of informality is equally problematic. Firstly, the propagation of self-help and enablement of the poor obscures the responsibility of the state, but also of civic society organisations (Roy, 2005). This ultimately plays into, and legitimises neo-liberal policy agendas (Jessop, 2002; McFarlane, 2012b). Secondly, the revaluation of the informal as a positive category does not address the problems that stem from a dualist opposition between the formal and the informal. Far from addressing this issue, the literature continues to equate informality with poverty, and does not recognise informality as a differentiated process, employed by different actors (Roy, 2005). Thirdly, it shares with the developmentalist approach the assumption that informality emerges as a result of being cut off from the global networks of capitalism. However, as Roy (2005) argues, it is important to

recognise that informality is closely interconnected with, and produced by, the global market system. For instance, sweat shops in informal settlements in the global South will often produce goods for the global markets.

These arguments show that a more nuanced understanding of the concept of informality is required to account for the complex realities. The extent to which this has been developed in the wider literature is discussed in the following sections. The following section also moves the focus back onto cities and discusses how informality has been conceptualised within the urban studies literature.

2.2.2 Conceptions of the informal in the global North

Within the global North, there has been much less discussion of the informal sector. However, some literature has considered the role of informality within the context of locally-specific employment policies – thus bearing similarities to the original intentions of the development policy literature in the global South. While conventionally, government employment policy in the global North has primarily focused on formal employment routes (Pacione, 1998; Seyfang, 2002; Williams, 1996), some have argued that the informal sector could be a means to help those marginalised from full-time employment to get by, where government policy has failed to do so, including through Local Economic Trading Systems (LETS) and time banks. While both can be considered to be informal trading or community exchange systems, it is important to note that informality has not been at the centre of interrogation in the body of work on LETS and time banks. Rather, the research has tended to focus upon LETS and time banks as a new type of moral economy (Lee, 1996), a response to globalisation (Pacione, 1998), a tool for promoting 'green' movements (Purdue et al., 1997) or, indeed, in terms of their ability to deliver social policy outcomes (including unemployment, youth criminal justice or social mobility) (Seyfang, 2002; Williams, 1996; Williams et al., 2001). Nonetheless, the work is relevant as it often points to the interconnectedness between formal and informal practices, as well as highlighting the importance of informal practices in the global North and the role it plays for people as an alternative strategy to deal with contemporary issues.

2.2.2.1 Informality within the GaWC debate

Looking at how the issue of informality has been discussed in the specific context of cities in the global North, it is striking to observe that within the GaWC discourse, the issue of informality has been largely overlooked – despite the shift of the analytical focus to the city opening up the possibility for such interrogation. Firstly, this is due to the primary conceptual focus of the literature. As argued in section **Error! Reference source not found.**, the definition of a global city around the very specific economic functions of the APS leads to other economic sectors and areas of city life largely being ignored and undervalued.

Secondly, there is a geographical division in urban studies which segregates the world in developed and underdeveloped areas – a division that is also reflected in scholarly traditions. While urban theory has looked at cities of the global North, developmentalism dealt with cities considered ‘third-world cities’ (McFarlane & Robinson, 2012; Robinson, 2002). Since informality is seemingly less prevalent in cities of the global North, these geographical delimitations have led to the issue not being considered. However, it might be argued that the oversight of the issue is more than merely coincidental or a matter of preponderance. Rather, it points to an influence of the developmentalist conception of informality as ‘backwardness’ – an antithesis of the modern, global or world city (Ghertner, 2011).

There are some exceptions within the GaWC literature. Both Sassen (2001) and Castells (2010) have discussed the growing informalisation of the city economy as part of their analysis of rising socio-economic urban polarisation. Sassen (1996c) argues that the very possibility of the informal economy is not foreseen in the main theories on economic development in developed countries. Nevertheless, she points out, there are many economic activities that are required in global cities but are unable to make profit within this unequal system, at both ends of the consumer spectrum. On the one hand, there is increased demand for high-priced, customised goods and services by the expanding high-income population, a trend that has led to outsourcing of the production to smaller subcontractors, often operating within the informal realm (Sassen, 2012). As Sassen (2001: 329) explains:

“The growing inequality in the bidding power of firms has meant that a whole array of firms that produce goods and services that indirectly or directly service the firms in the new industrial core have growing difficulty surviving in these cities. They [...] resort to various mechanisms for reducing costs of production – notably subcontracting, and employing undocumented immigrants at below-average wage levels and in below-standard work conditions.”

On the other hand, there continues to be demand for low-cost services and products by the expanding low-income population. These are products and services which are typically produced in firms with low profit rates. Given the increased costs for rents and production, these firms find it increasingly difficult to survive (Sassen, 2012). Informalising their business, whether production or distribution activities, becomes a means of enduring within these conditions (Sassen, 2001).

Unlike the theories of informality discussed in the previous sections, Sassen thus acknowledges the direct link between informality and the global, capitalist system. Both Sassen (2001) and Castells (2010) also highlight that this system is consciously produced at the will of economic, political or social actors, and hence concerns issues of power and exclusion.

There is also some recognition in their work that the informal economy is not the same as the urban poor, as it can be a highly dynamic, growth-oriented and very profitable sector (Castells, 1989). Sassen makes a similar point by acknowledging that there are firms who choose informality not because they struggle to survive but because it gives them increased flexibility within their operations. In this case, informalisation is essentially a profit-maximising strategy (Sassen, 2012). Despite this nod towards the existence of differentiated motivations and locations of informality, the majority of the GaWC research applies a restrictive, normative framework: considered primarily as a negative side-effect of the emergence of global cities. As Roy (2009: 826) puts it, the GaWC debate reduces informality to:

“a sphere of unregulated, even illegal, activity, outside the scope of the state, a domain of survival by the poor and marginalized.”

This limited understanding and negative value judgment of informality does not do justice to the multi-faceted role that informality plays within contemporary cities.

2.2.2.2 Informality and tactical urbanism

More recently, a body of work on temporary urban interventions has emerged that touches on issues of informality, even if it more commonly uses terms such as DIY (do-it-yourself) urban design (Douglas, 2016; Finn, 2014; Sawhney et al, 2015; Spataro, 2016;) or tactical urbanism (Lydon et al, 2011; 2012; Mould, 2014; Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014). On the one hand, such temporary interventions have been praised for their capacity to reveal and engage in socio-spatial struggles and transformation (Finn, 2014; Tardiveau & Mallo, 2014), as inclusive, sustained and meaningful form of cooperative urban engagement (Sawhney et al, 2015) and their potential to alter planning practices and stimulate civic-minded, socially aware practices (Douglas, 2016; Wortham-Galvin, 2013).

On the other hand, the temporary has been dismissed as aligning to neoliberal and austerity ideology. Adams et al (2015) and Douglas (2016: 132) raise concerns about the “imperfect reflexivity” of actors engaged in DIY or tactical urbanism, which means that they only consider the laudable spirit of their actions, while ignoring potential negative impacts on other members of society, as well as unintended consequences. In particular, Spataro (2016) and Douglas (2016: 130) warn against de-politicised notions of tactical or DIY urbanism which ignore the fact that they “further enable the retreat of the state and foster the individualistic order that supposedly pervades the neoliberal city.” Mould (2014: 529) further argues that the concept has been turned to strategic use in promoting a neoliberal political economic order, rather than providing a tactical response to it:

“So-called Tactical Urbanism has become a popular movement for people who have a desire to change and reconfigure their city and do so without governmental involvement. Tactical Urbanism has become a brand in itself, with the term being used by urban governments as a means of continuing neoliberal policies of urban development in a post-2008 recessionary era. Thus, Tactical

Urbanism is defenestrating the former, in favour of the latter. In so doing, it is fast becoming the latest political vernacular of the Creative City”

Thus, similar to the debates in the global South around the role of informality, the debate about DIY and tactical urbanism is divided between dualistic poles. A few authors (Colomb, 2012; Douglas, 2016) have gone beyond this dualist conception, arguing that there is an inherent tension within temporary urbanism, between the search for alternative forms of urbanism and their co-option by profit-oriented urban development processes. However, as with the debate around specifically cultural, temporary uses of urban spaces (see section 2.3.2), the debate remains framed within economic terms, linking it to processes of urban economic development and gentrification.

2.2.3 Conclusion

In this section I have reviewed the literature dealing with the concept of urban informality. Initial conceptualisations in the development policy literature in the early 1970s and a body of work from scholars primarily from Latin America have played an important part in highlighting the crucial role that urban informality plays, especially in relation to housing and labour (McFarlane & Waibel, 2012). However, both conceptualisations were deeply rooted in a dualist conception of the formal and the informal – a problematic view of the world that fails to recognise the complexity of economic and social realities. Both perspectives also equated informality with poverty.

Urban theory in the global North, and especially the GaWC debate, has largely ignored the issue of informality or reinforced this dualist and normative conception of urban informality. This limited understanding of informality does not do justice to the multi-faceted role that informality plays within contemporary cities. In particular, it falls short of recognising that informality is an important aspect of all cities, not just those in the Global South. This is partly due to the narrow conceptual focus of the GaWC debate, but it also points to an influence of the developmentalist conception of informality as ‘backwardness’ and as antithesis of the modern, global city.

More recently, some academic contributions in the global South have offered more nuanced discussion of the importance of informality in the context of

today's cities. As I discuss in more detail in section 2.4, these contributions do not amount to a definitive conceptualisation of the informal. Rather, they provide different sensitising concepts that could lend themselves as starting points of a grounded theory study. But first, I turn my attention to the extent to which cultural practices have been considered in the debate around urban informality.

2.3 Cultural practices and urban informality

In the previous two sections I have reviewed the literature on global cities and the concept of informality within this context. In this section, I now consider the existing research that deals with informal cultural practices. As argued in section **Error! Reference source not found.**, due to the overemphasis on economic factors, the recent urban studies debate has overlooked many other areas of city life. Thus, other sectors could have been chosen to 'situate' my analysis, and indeed a number of other authors have done so, looking at issues such as housing (Briggs, 2011; Hernandez-Garcia, 2013; Lombard & Huxley, 2011), informal commerce (Anjaria, 2006; Bromley, 1998; Rukmana, 2011), ethnic tensions (Appadurai, 2000), sanitation (Desai et al, 2015) and crisis management (McFarlane, 2012), amongst others. In contrast, there has been very little research that connects issues of urban cultural policy and informality (Mbaye & Dinardi, 2018). This is despite the fact that – as I would argue – the cultural sector is especially pertinent to the study of informality, given some of the particularities of the sector.

Indeed, it is important to note that much of what might be called the cultural economy originates in the informal. For instance, Leadbeater & Miller (2004) argue that there is a growing trend of 'pro-ams' pursuing amateur activities to professional standards who make a major contribution to today's cultural life. Boundaries between 'amateurs' and 'artists', as well as 'audiences' and performers are also increasingly blurred, as the rise of digital media has provided easy access to technology (UNESCO, 2012). In this way, the cultural economy challenges a number of dualist conceptions between the formal and the informal, but also between culture and the economy. More than that, and in contrast to conceptual approaches like the GaWC agenda that focus on economic value, there is a value to diversity *per se* in culture. Other particularities of the cultural sector include the importance of collaboration as

opposed to competition (as evidenced by the extensive body of research around creative clusters), as well as the embedded relationship of cultural urban centres with their 'hinterland' (Pratt, 2008). Such complexities and particularities suggest that the cultural sector has much to gain from, and indeed requires a more multi-faceted understanding of urban processes – much like the discussion of urban informality – and is thus a very pertinent context for this study.

In section 2.3.1, I begin by looking at the intersection of informality and the creative industries, followed by section 2.3.2, where I review the work on informal cultural practices in the urban context. Section 2.3.3 provides a conclusion.

2.3.1 Creative economy and informality

In this section I look at the research that links the creative with the informal economy. While there is a wide-ranging body of research on the creative economy in the global North, the issue of informality has rarely been at the centre of the debate. Where it has been considered, it has been in terms of authors acknowledging that many 'formal' cultural products originate from the informal, as well as exploring the links between informal cultural practices and youth and sub culture (Daskalaki & Mould, 2013; Mould, 2016; UNESCO, 2012). There has also been a set of authors which connect the concept of informality to the much more extensive debate on precariousness of creative labour. For instance, Vivant (2010) argues that creative work conditions symbolise the deep changes in the labour market and work conditions in the current knowledge economy, which include increasingly flexible, short-term, uncertain and precarious jobs. They are project-specific, free-lance (and hence own-risk), part-time, competitive and require high qualifications and specific skills. Boyle and Joham (2013)'s study in Australian and Hong Kong links creative employment to earnings below the minimum wage, and portfolio work. Gornostaeva & Campbell (2012) talk of a "creative underclass" that is underemployed and underpaid. As Boyle & Joham (2013) argue, all of these employment practices are descriptions of the informal economy.

In the global South, the literature about the creative economy – whether formal or informal – is a lot less extensive (Isar, 2013). As a number of authors have

pointed out, this is partly due to the fact that the economic angle of the creative sector is less developed and that governments have not yet recognised the potential of creative industries for development and “have neither any specialised nor general policies for the development of this field” (Barrowclough and Kozul-Wright, 2007; Isar, 2013; Mbaye, 2011: 32). Another important factor is that the creative sector in the global South, due to its relative importance of the informal sector, does not easily fit into the main creative industries and cultural policy literature which is based around measurement (for further discussion see section 3.1.1). More than that, the very definition of the creative industries around the concept of intellectual property rights is problematic in the context of many areas of the global South. This is because many crafts or other cultural production such as rituals or ceremonies that are accompanied by cultural expressions, are considered to be communally owned cultural knowledge and technology, tied to everyday life cultures (Bharucha, 2010; Dhamija, 2008; Isar, 2013; Reis & Davis, 2008). In some cases, they are also designed for immediate consumption and thus, impermanent by intent. Such creativity cannot be framed in terms of intellectual property (Isar, 2013). Informal creative activities, then, require a different kind of theoretical and policy thinking, and appropriate responses and interventions will vary widely from locality to locality (*Ibid.*).

Kean & Jing Zhao (2012: 2017) make the case for such local policy-thinking in their study of “shanzai” creative production in China – the production of “cheap copycats, fakes, pirated goods, local versions of globally branded goods, celebrity impersonators, as well as parodies of mainstream and official culture”. However, their work bears traces of the kind of celebratory optimism that lay at the basis of the discourse of informality as heroic and creative entrepreneurship described in section 2.2.1.

Thus, there is also need for a more thorough, and at the same time, nuanced theorisation of (informal) creative production and policy-making in the global South (Dinardi, 2012; Mattelart, 2012). Lobato’s study (2010) of Nollywood, Nigeria’s local video production industry is a good example of a more differentiated perspective on the informal creative economy which explores how informality is deliberately deployed, and a key part of the success of the industry. Mattelart’s work (2012) on piracy of audio-visual products is another

example of research that highlights the complexity of informal cultural production. Not only does he identify a range of different reasons that lead people to use pirated goods, but also a great heterogeneity of the piracy economy in terms of its configurations and the diversity of its players, blurred boundaries between legal and pirated audio-visual production, as well as informal practices among state actors (*Ibid.*).

According to Bharucha (2010: 33), there remains a great need for “creative economists” to acknowledge and understand “the numerous local and communitarian economies” that are commonly present in the global South, but also to be found in the “non-commercial and non-profit alternative sectors” of the global North. This means, that the debate needs to go beyond the dualist focus on precariousness and entrepreneurialism that is found – at least to some extent – in the literature. The work on informal creative practices in the global South provides a starting point towards a more differentiated perception of the informal economy, but the body of research remains scarce to-date. The literature reviewed in this section also does not deal with issues that are specific to informal cultural practices in an urban context. This is the subject of the following section.

2.3.2 Informality and urban development

As argued in section 2.1, cultural aspects have rarely been the focus of work on global cities. In the development literature, culture has received more attention, but only seen as ‘traditional’, ‘folkloric’ and ‘backward’ economy. However, within the discipline of cultural studies and policy, a specific urban form has emerged in the last four decades in congruence with the turn towards urban research more generally (Grodach & Silver, 2012). Similar to the focus of the GaWC discourse, the academic and policy discussions of urban cultural activity have been concerned first and foremost with economic dimensions, interrogating whether and how the creative industries can drive urban economic growth. Much of the literature has interrogated culture’s ability to remake the physical environment, for example, through flagship cultural institutions (Comunian & Mould, 2014; Grodach, 2010; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010), improve the city image through large-scale cultural events (Garcia, 2004; Garcia & Cox, 2013), diversify the economic base and plug into the global economy (Scott,

1997; 2004), and attract and retain a skilled workforce through enhanced consumer amenities (Florida, 2004) – all of which are seen to stimulate urban economic development and sit within the context of the ‘Creative Cities discourse’. As Edensor et al (2010:2) argue, within this work, there has been a “fusion of culture and creativity with the economy”. Much of this work has also tended to employ, or relied on, quantitative data (such as economic impact assessments) to build its arguments – an issue that is reviewed and critiqued in greater detail in the following chapter 3.

Looking more specifically at informality and culture, a few authors have dealt with the use of derelict sites and vacated warehouses for informal cultural activities, albeit using a range of terminology, including “brownfield sites”, “off-spaces”, “alternative”, “marginal”, “interstitial” or “liminal” cultural spaces (Colomb 2012; Groth & Corjin, 2005; Shaw, 2005; Vivant, 2010). Shaw (2009: 3) defines such informal spaces as “characterised by a temporary absence of an official attributed function”, but which are appropriated by diverse actors for a range of temporary, informal, (broadly) cultural uses. These include a wide range of activities, from avant-garde productions to mass-subcultural activities (like rave parties), from beach bars and beer gardens to open air theatres, and from flea markets and car boot sales to sculpture parks and living projects (Colomb, 2012; Vivant, 2010).

The main focus of this research is on the links between informal cultural practices and urban economic development, as well the role that informal cultural practices play within gentrification processes (Andres & Gresillon, 2013; Chapple et al., 2010; Morgan & Ren, 2012; Zukin, 2009). Colomb (2012), Gornostaeva & Campbell (2012) and Vivant (2010) situate city governments’ support for temporary artistic use of spaces within the context of ‘Creative City discourses’ and city competition, arguing that artistic life and informal cultural activities are used as tools in their marketing strategies to promote urban development. However, several authors criticise that policy-makers value these activities as a means to an end (i.e. gentrification), rather than for the cultural or social value of their liminality (Gornostaeva & Campbell, 2012), or as an alternative to capitalistic forms of urban development (Colomb, 2012).

The strongly economically motivated support by policy-makers has implications for the actual informal cultural practices. Firstly, the predominance of forms of

economic value is considered to lead to a bias towards formal uses of spaces. As Andres & Gresillon (2013), Colomb (2012) and Shaw (2005) argue, temporary uses are often only supported so long as there are no alternative, more profitable, development options for the site. Should these emerge, artists face the choice between their “right to centrality” (while often accepting formal recognition and institutionalisation of their practices) and displacement (Shaw, 2005: 153). Formal recognition by cultural policy-makers is feared by many to destroy the subcultural model, their ability to operate freely and their authenticity. Thus, if alternative culture is not displaced, it may become the subject of political or market appropriation (Gornostaeva & Campbell, 2012; Shaw, 2005).

Secondly, the predominance of economic forms of value may lead to the exclusion of marginalised communities from the urban development process. That is, only certain uses are being included and promoted – those that fit into the image of the Creative City (Kosnick, 2004; 2012; Mattson, 2015; Morgan, 2012). Shaw (2005: 167-8) argues,

“further work is needed on the more compelling question of how governments can be persuaded to extend these practices to enable, by all marginal people, more complete usage of place, and deeper social and cultural diversity in the city”.

A major contribution of this research is that it acknowledges the complexity of the contemporary city and seeks to situate informal cultural practices within this. Vivant’s (2010) analysis of different artist squats in Paris provides a good example of a nuanced discussion of the issue that highlights the fluidity of borders between the formal and the informal space.

The literature on street art and graffiti also deals with similar issues. One of the main foci of this work is on the different (and changing) policy approaches towards street art, which range from zero tolerance policies in some cities, due to the association of graffiti with criminal activity as visible index of social deprivation and urban decay, to active support in the form of commissioned street art in others (Ehrenfeucht, 2014; Hansen, 2015; Lombard, 2012; Young, 2010). Another emphasis of the research is on the implications of these policy approaches for street art (Halsey & Pederick, 2010; Hansen, 2015; Young,

2014). In particular, authors highlight a number of dualisms within which street art is positioned. Firstly, this includes a supposed choice between institutionalisation and erasure. And secondly, street art is thought to be caught between the poles of commodification or market appropriation on the one hand (for example, as street art works are carefully excised and moved to galleries and auction halls) and authenticity on the other. While some authors seem to emphasise these dualisms (Bengtson, 2013; Merrill, 2015), most of the research acknowledges the complexity and fluidity, and focuses its discussion on the way street art practices are negotiating these different poles.

The proliferation of this body of research does suggest that informal cultural practices such as street art (and the issues they raise) are of key interest to contemporary cities and urban policy-making. So far, other, comparable urban cultural practices – be it busking or parkour – have only received an occasional mention by authors interested in urban issues (Mould, 2009; Quilter & McNamara, 2015) – an area where this thesis is seeking to make a contribution.

However, the literature on street art, as well as that on informal cultural uses of derelict sites and vacated warehouses remains situated within the framework of urban economic development. Whether or not they subscribe to the idea that informal cultural practices do indeed contribute to economic development and processes of gentrification, they focus and frame their analysis within this context, thus implicitly supporting the agenda and, like policy-makers, further emphasising the predominance of forms of economic value.

There are a few exceptions to this, who argue for a “more critical perspective on the instrumental use of creativity” for urban regeneration and economic development (Edensor et al, 2010: 1) and for considering informal cultural practices for highlighting “the social and cultural complexity that constitutes contemporary urbanity” (Groth & Corjin, 2005: 503). In particular, a collection of work focusing on what are termed ‘spaces of vernacular creativity’ makes the case for a broader and more inclusive conception of what constitutes creative practice. Edensor et al (2010) argue for a rethink in at least three ways, which will be discussed in more details below: firstly, in relation to the spaces that creative practice takes place in; secondly, in terms of the kind of practices defined as ‘creative’; and thirdly, in relation to the value that is placed upon such practices.

The first critique is made with regards to the spatial dimensions in which creative practice is often conceived. As Edensor et al (2010: 11) explain:

“One of the most glaring inadequacies of the creative class thesis is its geographical specificity, privileging downtown cultural enclaves and quarters in large metropolitan centres as sites of creativity. The champions of creative regeneration have fetishised these urban settings while ignoring forms of creative endeavour that emerge in rural, suburban, working-class, everyday and marginal spaces.”

Bain (2010:74), Gibson et al (2010:105) and Hrasc (2010) all argue for greater recognition of the creative activity that takes place in suburban and rural areas – albeit they return to a conceptual economic framework, by suggesting that only then creativity will remain a “viable and inclusive tool of urban economic developments” and for shaping “regional economic futures”.

More importantly for this study, the work draws attention to the creative potential of ‘everyday’, ‘mundane’ spaces, from back alleys (Milbourne, 2010) to house facades (Edensor and Millington, 2010), and from allotments (Crouch, 2010) to rubbish tips (Potts, 2010). This presents an important contribution as the majority of research on informal cultural practices has focused on derelict sites and buildings, while cultural practices taking place in “mundane public spaces” have often been overlooked (Adams et al, 2015).

Secondly, the research on vernacular creativity highlights the need to rethink how cultural practices are conceptualised, to include more “ordinary” activity, “grounded in the materiality and experience of everyday life” (Burgess, 2010: 117). Vernacular creativity is characterised by an “improvisation quality that [...] requires people to adapt to particular circumstances” (Edensor et al, 2010: 8), “as we construct, handle, make sense, cope, respond and anticipate amid a complex collision of influences, unbidden occurrences and desires, only partly planned” (Crouch, 2010: 132). Such vernacular creative practices are considered to operate both outside the high-cultural institutions and value systems, and the commercial popular media; although they may interact with these in “dynamic and productive ways” (Ibid: 116). The focus on non-elitist cultural expression also references Raymond Williams’ famous suggestion that “culture is ordinary” (Williams, [1958]: 2), shaped by the “everyday actions and

associated creativities of ordinary people” (Milbourne, 2010: 142). As Evans (2010: 19) points out, William’s idea that cultural development can take place through incremental change and exposure to new practices stands in contrast to the “imposition of grands projets or schemes, and the promotion of the high arts to those with lower ‘cultural capital’ which have been an enduring feature of instrumental state arts” and creative city policies.

Thirdly, Bromberg (2010), Edensor and Millington (2010), Edensor et al (2010), Markusen (2010) all highlight the need to reconsider how such vernacular practices are valued. They critique the instrumental use of creativity for economic development and call instead for developing a “more reflective and inclusive position regarding the value of everyday or vernacular forms of creativity” (Edensor et al, 2010:14) – an important argument that this thesis seeks to develop, too. This is important, as they point out, because participation in such vernacular cultural activities is not primarily driven by career development motivations or expectations of economic return. Rather, activities such as community gardening or Christmas light displays highlight values such as “communal conviviality and social solidarities” (Edensor et al, 2010:14), “cultural identity” (Milbourne, 2010: 153), “economies of generosity” (Bromberg, 2010: 214) and “sense of belonging” (Edensor and Millington, 2010: 181). As Edensor and Millington (2010: 173) argue:

“The challenge, therefore, is to unpick dominant discourses of creativity and aesthetics, and develop greater critical engagement through empirical studies which attempt to ground the analysis of creativity, and account for its transformative potential, within embedded local experience.”

To develop such greater critical engagement through empirical studies is a key concern that this thesis is seeking to address.

In the global South there has been less debate about cultural practices within the context of urban economic development or the Creative City discourse. This is partly due to the problematic notion of the creative industries in the global South (as discussed in section 2.3.1). Like the notion of the creative industries, the concept of the Creative City has originated, and been strongly advanced, in a Northern post-industrial context (Mbaye & Dinardi, 2018). Bharucha (2010:

32-33) further argues that informal cultural practices are also often based outside the cities, highlighting that “creativity [...] is not the prerogative of the city alone”. Indeed, there is a range of studies that considers issues of informality (and in particular focuses on informal employment) in the crafts sector which is predominantly based in rural areas (see, for instance, Noronha & Endow, 2011; Singh, 2013; Wood, 2011).

In contrast, only a few authors touch on the area of culture in their discussion of spatial conflicts in cities of the global South. This includes some work on the impact of conservation policies and heritage tourism on street vendors (Bromley, 1998; Donovan, 2008; Steel, 2012). Street vendors are primarily seen as “anathema” to city marketers and “ruinous” for a city’s image and place promotion; however informal practices may be supported and valued within the framework of city marketing and urban economic development provided they agree to fit within the structures and narratives of these urban processes (Donovan, 2008: 30).

2.3.3 Conclusion

In this section I have reviewed literature that deals with informal cultural practices specifically. There is a body of research that looks at informality within the context of the creative economy, especially in the global North, which continues to frame informality within the kind of negative, normative perspective that we have seen in the wider literature on informality. Some more nuanced perspectives are offered in the global South; however, there has been less debate on the creative industries, both in academic and policy circles. This is at least partly due to the limitations of the creative industries concept itself, which favours formal cultural practices through its definition around intellectual property rights.

Looking specifically at the urban context, informal cultural practices (such as street arts or artists squats) have been explored primarily in terms of their link to urban regeneration and gentrification processes. However, the debate remains limited to issues of urban economic development (whether or not they contribute to gentrification, how they are affected by, and respond to, urban economic development processes, etc.). Thus – even if implicitly – it reduces informal cultural practices to forms of economic value. It is also important to

note that this literature almost exclusively focuses on cities in the global North. A few authors have called for paying more attention to everyday, ‘vernacular’ cultural practices and to reframe the value categories to account for their non-economic significance, but further empirical work is necessary in this area.

In the following section, I review a body of work that has emerged in the last decade and which has begun to develop a more refined perspective on informality. This may provide a starting point for further developing my research enquiry.

2.4 Re-viewing urban informality

In the previous sections, I have reviewed a wide-ranging body of research in relation to global cities, urban informality and, specifically, informal cultural practices in the urban context. The review has shown that the focus of the literature is often too narrow, both conceptually and geographically. Too often issues of urban informality are considered within a dualist relationship of the formal and informal – a problematic and normative view of the world that fails to recognise the complexity of economic, social and cultural realities. As a result, many informal practices (including cultural ones) remain ‘hidden’ to theoretical enquiries. Where considered, the analysis lacks in nuance and sophistication, failing to answer questions about the broader, non-economic role of informal cultural practices in contemporary cities, how informality is negotiated and deployed in such practices and why urban actors engage in first place.

However, more recently, there has been a revival of work focusing – primarily – on cities in the global South, including in Latin America, the Middle East and South-East Asia, which has begun to develop a more refined perspective on informality and has drawn attention to the need to transcend binary thinking (McFarlane, 2012b; Roy, 2009b). Rather than constituting a definitive conceptualisation of the informal, these contributions provide important ‘building blocks’ or ‘sensitising concepts’ that could lend themselves as starting points for further empirical enquiry. In what follows, I outline these different building blocks that are crucial to a more nuanced conception of urban informality. In section 2.4.1, I begin by discussing the multiplicity and interconnectedness of informality and formality. Section 2.4.2 looks at the importance of processes of

negotiation, while section 2.4.3 deals with the diversity of actors. Section 2.4.4 concludes the discussion.

2.4.1 Beyond dualisms

The most important contribution of the work on urban informality in the global South that has emerged over the last decade is its emphasis on the multiplicity of informal processes, and the interconnectedness between the formal and the informal realm. Ghertner's (2011) study of the visioning of Delhi as a world class city, and the extent to which slum residents are part of this process and make it their own, makes this point very clearly. He finds that a public discourse centred on aesthetics, that opposes the world-class city Delhi to the polluted, disorderly and unclean slum, is used to justify slum demolitions (Arabindoo, 2012; Ghertner, 2008, 2011; Roy, 2015). This aesthetics discourse or "bourgeois environmentalism" (Baviskar, 2011) in Indian cities frames upper- and middle-class concerns around beautification, leisure and health under "seemingly class-neutral discourses of environmental quality of life" (Desai et al, 2015: 99) and uses them to create a "new urban imaginary that condemns the informality of the poor" (Arabindoo, 2012: 74) and ultimately promotes neo-liberal political agendas (McFarlane, 2012b). These criticisms remind us of the links established by Adams et al (2015) and Douglas (2016) between tactical urban interventions and austerity and neo-liberal ideologies. However, Ghertner (2011) observes that many slum residents have internalised a notion of their informal settlements needing improvement for the sake of the world city of Delhi, while at the same time appropriating the claims of the bourgeois for themselves, as they re-inscribe or re-imagine themselves within the world-class city. This point is also made by Anjaria's (2006) interrogation of the practices of street hawkers in Mumbai, which challenges dualist separations, as well as preconceptions that link informality with disorder and chaos in the public space. He argues for the need to overcome such preconceptions by developing a deeper understanding of street hawkers' work, their daily interactions with the state and their own visions of a well-functioning city.

Similarly, Simone (2011: 269) has cautioned that terms such as the informal tend to:

“oversimplify, normalise, or occlude methods of composing everyday life that entail much less stability or calculation than those terms would seem to connote”.

Instead he considers informality as a practice deployed by urban residents to make life viable and help them to adapt to the unexpected of everyday situations (Simone, 2008). In highlighting adaptation and improvisation, Simone’s conception of informality bears similarities with the conceptions of vernacular creativity discussed in section 2.3.2.

As these accounts demonstrate, there is no easy definition of informality. In contrast, a review of literature reveals a multiplicity of ‘dimensions’ or ‘characteristics’ by which informality is defined. Such characteristics might include, for some authors, whether or not an activity is legal, whether or not it is regulated by the state, where it takes place or the degree to which it is organised. But in addition to such multiple dimensions, there are also significant differences in terms of what is considered to be informal in relation to each of these dimensions. For instance, while two authors might define informality by whether or not the activity is legal, they might differ in their assessment of a particular activity and at which end of the ‘spectrum’ it should be positioned. An example of this discursive space is the discussion of the Tacheles site in Berlin by two different academic researchers/research teams concerned with urban informal cultural practices (see section 2.3.2). Shaw (2005) cites Tacheles as an example of a venue that has remained a site of alternative culture, even following official development, which remains self-organised, autonomous and where artists were not displaced. In contrast, Andres & Gresillon (2013) use the same site to exemplify a situation where the cultural element has disappeared since its transformation, and where the previously informal cultural activities are now managed by a neo-liberal understanding of arts and culture.

In order to illustrate the points made above, I have scoped out the multidimensional ‘field’ that constitutes informality, based on my review of literature. This is shown in Figure 3. The chosen dimensions are not comprehensive of all the ways in which informality is defined in the literature. However, the ones included provide a sense of the “differences within informality” (Roy & Alsayyad, 2004) – a reflection of the complexity of the concept itself. Consequentially, McFarlane & Waibel (2012) refer to the notion

of 'urban informalities' to linguistically reflect the differentiated nature of informality.

Figure 3 also gives examples from the literature on the 'spectrum' of informality for each dimension. Through these examples, it brings to light the difficulty of delineating boundaries between the formal and the informal. Thus, it reminds us of the critiques of a dualist conception of the formal and informal, as discussed in section 2.2.1 and emphasised by urban theorists such as Bunnell & Harris (2012), Lombard & Huxley (2011), McFarlane (2012), Porter (2011), Roy (2004; 2005; 2011), Roy & Alsayyad (2004), among others. That is, the dualism of formality and informality is not helpful in understanding the real issues, as it only serves to discursively construct an artificial, normative opposition between the two.

Figure 3: Field of informality

Dimension	Informality spectrum		Examples from the literature
	from...	to...	
Legality of production and distribution process	illicit	licit	- street vendors operating without license seen as illicit traders who congest public roads vs. street vending seen as means of securing livelihood in Bogota (e.g. Dorovan, 2008)
Legality of end product	illicit	licit	- Graffiti seen as vandalism vs. graffiti seen as art (e.g. Lombard, 2012) - Pirated audiovisual products seen as criminal act vs. as right to cultural access (e.g. Mattelart, 2012)
State regulation	absence	presence	- Refusal to distribute street vending licenses in Mumbai (Anjaria, 2006) vs. bribery and clientelism despite official licensing in Dhaka (Hackenbroch, 2011)
Type of employment	self-employment	casual employment	- micro-entrepreneurs in Mexico choosing informality (Maloney, 2004) vs. exploitation of Mexican immigrant labour in US cities (Castells, 2010)
Means of enforcement of agreement	none	social ties and mutual trust	- immigrant labourers in Miami who are paid lower wages than originally promised (Stepick, 1989) vs. importance of social ties and trust in subcontracting networks in France (Lorenz, 2000)
Social benefits/protection	none	in-kind	- homeworkers in the garment industry without any social benefits (Fernandez-Kelly & Garcia, 1989) vs. provision of complementary housing for informal workers (Maloney, 2004)
Reporting	Unreported	Unreported	- evasion of tax by street vendors through undeclared commercial activity (Öz & Eder, 2012) vs. reduction of labour costs through informal subcontracting by large TNCs (Castells, 2009)
Economic wealth	poor	rich	- precarity of residents of informal settlements in Calcutta (Roy, 2011) vs. informal land occupations by private developers in Delhi (Ghertner, 2011)
Individual benefits	Social safety-net	independence, flexibility, resistance	- young street vendors in Cusco, Peru, attempting to make a livelihood (Steel, 2012) vs. greater independence and job status by entrepreneurs in Mexico (Maloney, 2004)
Setting of work	sweatshop/street	home	- poor conditions in garment sweatshops (Fernandez-Kelly & Garcia, 1989) or physical danger from working alongside a busy road (Donovan, 2008) vs. flexibility offered to women to balance home care and work (Maloney, 2004)
Skill & technology requirements	low	high	- low skills of informal workers in Kenya (ILO, 1972) vs. advanced skills of creative informal workers (Vivant, 2010)
(Social) organisation	low/unorganised	high/organised	- street vendors (especially children, new migrants) fighting for their survival (Steel, 2012) vs. networks of artisan micro-producers in central Italy (Portes & Haller, 1994)
Intentionality	organically grown/natural/unplanned	top-down/planned	- temporary cultural use of old warehouses in Helsinki (Groth & Corjin, 2005) vs. important role of informal networks in establishing an art district in Berkeley (Chapple et al, 2010).

2.4.2 Negotiated spatial practices

In addition to drawing attention to the need to go beyond dualisms, more recently, urban scholars have also re-emphasised that informality is consciously produced in a particular space, involving processes of negotiation. As Markusen (2010:186) highlights, informal or “vernacular” cultures must often rely on “borrowed spaces for participation and presentation – churches, plazas, community centers, for-profit restaurants, or casinos” – the ownership of which, and access to, frequently is contested.”

Roy & Alsayyad (2004) argue that by looking at the spatial dimension of urban informality it is possible to reveal the social structures and political struggles that are embedded in it. For instance, Appadurai (2000) notes a close connection between increasing struggles over space for housing, vending and sleeping in Mumbai and the ethnic tensions that culminated in the 1992/3 riots. He argues that the problem of scarce space was instrumentalised by nationalist and Hindu fundamentalist party Shiv Sena and translated into an imaginary of “sacred, national” and “ethnically cleansed” space (Appadurai, 2000:644). While Öz & Eder’s (2012) example of the forced relocation of periodic bazaars in Istanbul also note the rising of ethnic tensions as a result of this struggle over space, their primary concern is that the eviction of the temporary bazaaris reflects and (re)produces the socio-spatial inequalities found in today’s neo-liberal cities (e.g. by encouraging competitive bidding for stalls in the re-located market building, thus leading to rising rents). However, they also stress that neoliberalism, or state spatial strategies, alone, do not explain spatial transformations that are taking place. Rather, these need to be seen in the context of social relations and contestations which leave room for resistance and change (Öz & Eder, 2012).

While policy makers and urban planners set boundaries for the uses of space, these are often – in practice – being transgressed, which subverts the determinism of the planned environment (Shaw, 2009). As a number of authors argue, the use of public space in everyday life is the result of a negotiation process, where different actors use multiple strategies to justify and legitimate their claims, which may include statutory rules, regulations and contracts, but

also social relations (e.g. powerful friends or family members), social institutions and religious norms (Alsayyad, 1993; Hackenbroch, 2011). Thus, space is never the result, but a temporary 'settlement' that is continuously reproduced and renegotiated (Hackenbroch, 2011). Alsayyad's (1993) analysis of informal settlements further shows that there are cultural specificities that shape urban informality, considering factors such as systems of ownership, systems of social organisation, legal norms, religion, kin systems, ethnic relations and gender relations.

The importance of negotiation processes also suggests that informal actors are in possession of a certain amount of agency. According to Roy (2009), informality literature is a treasure trove for work on the grassroots and political agency within the urban context, including Bayat's work (2000) in the Middle Eastern context, Portes et al.'s discussion (1999) of migrants' informal transnational practices, and Chatterjee's (2006) and Benjamin's (2008) work highlighting the complexity of different forms of political agency. A comprehensive review of literature with regards to the concept of agency lies beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth noting that political agency is seen as an important factor in motivating informal practices, especially by disenfranchised groups. However, as Nederveen Pieterse (2004; 2010) points out, while the more recent turn within the social sciences from deterministic perspectives (such as the economic deterministic perspective of the GaWC discourse) towards more interpretative, agency-oriented views has been very useful, care needs to be taken to not create a new dualism between dominant and subaltern forces. Rather, it is important to recognise that there is exchange and interaction, not just resistance and struggle from below (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Ong, 2011).

2.4.3 Diversity of actors

The third and final 'building block' highlighted by the literature is that informality can be employed by a range of different actors, including by the state. Roy's (2009; 2011: 228) and Jeffrey's (2009) work in India emphasises that informality is not simply the "habitus of the dispossessed", but is internally differentiated and strategically employed by different social classes and actors. Examples of

this include unauthorised farmhouses built illegally on agricultural land, and new shopping centres built illegally by developers or, indeed, mafia organisations on land belonging to state government (Gidwani, 2006; Roy, 2005; 2011; 2015; Ghertner, 2011; Weinstein, 2008; Yiftachel, 2009). As Roy (2011: 233) argues:

“Urban informality then is not restricted to the bounded space of the slum or deproletarianized/entrepreneurial labor; instead, it is a mode of the production of space that connects the seemingly separated geographies of slum and suburb. [...] Informal urbanization is as much the purview of wealthy urbanites as it is of slum dwellers. These forms of urban informality – from Delhi’s farmhouses to Kolkata’s new towns to Mumbai’s shopping malls – are no more legal than the metonymic slum. But they are expressions of class power and can therefore command infrastructure, services and legitimacy. Most importantly, they come to be designated as ‘formal’ by the state while other forms of informality remain criminalized. [...] The valorization of elite informalities and the criminalization of subaltern informalities produce an uneven urban geography of spatial value.”

As this quote highlights, informality exists not only among the poor, but is also within the scope of the state. Not only is it within the power of the state to determine what is informal and what is not, but the state works itself in informal ways. One of the practices is the official use of ‘uncertainty’ by politicians and public administrations. Anjaria (2006:2145) describes the hawkers’ legal status as being “in a constant state of flux”, threatened by demolitions and obliged to pay high bribes in order to continue to operate, but not being offered the option to obtain a legal license. In this case, deploying ambiguity and uncertainty becomes a conscious state strategy (Roy, 2011). According to Roy (2004; 2005; 2009c, 2011), this is a common phenomenon. Using examples from Delhi, Mumbai and Calcutta, she argues that the planning and legal system strongly influence what is defined as informal, and what is not; and which forms of informality thrive and which will disappear. Similarly, Ghertner (2008) argues that much of the construction in Delhi violates some planning or building law, but only some of it is designated as illegal and worthy of demolition. In contrast, in numerous other cases, courts have “granted amnesty” to blatant land use

violations for capital intensive developments that have the “world-class” look (Ghertner, 2008:66).

Informality, then, is not the “chaos that precedes order, but rather the situation that results from its suspension” (Agamben, 1998:18; cited in Roy, 2005:149). Analysing informal settlements in Calcutta, and the official responses to them, Roy (2004) observes a system of patronage that does not object, and even encourages such practices. Moreover, in removing and resettling squats and hawkers, a process of selection, of inclusion and exclusion, is taking place whereby political support is ensured. she also notes a conscious “unmapping” of some parts of Calcutta, where an absence of a masterplan and a failure to maintain detailed maps and records of land ownership creates an ambiguity and “a territorialized uncertainty that deepens state control over the informal city” (Roy, 2004:154).

These practices are not particular to Indian cities. For instance, Donovan’s analysis (2008) of street vending practices in Bogota and Hackenbroch’s study (2011) of the ghats in Dhaka both demonstrate that a formal licensing system and price controls do not necessarily prevent a sophisticated system of corruption and clientelism from developing. These cases show that a ‘predatory’ state that demands bribes or threatens the termination of contracts does not only exist in cases where there is no licensing system (as described in Anjaria’s case study (2006) of Mumbai), but despite the existence of statutory regulation.

Thus, according to Roy (2009c), there is nothing casual or spontaneous about the informal, territorial practices of the state, but rather it engages in a conscious process of deregulation. This system of deregulation is very distinct from the mere failure of planning or the absence of the state. Thus, informality cannot be understood as an unregulated domain, but rather it is structured through “various forms of extra-legal, social and discursive regulation” (Roy, 2009b: 826). According to Roy (2009c: 83), this indicates a

“calculated informality, one that involves purposive action and planning, and one where the seeming withdrawal of regulatory power creates a logic of resource allocation, accumulation, and authority”.

Highlighting that informal practices by urban planners are always calculated also relates back to the criticism of de-politicised notions of tactical urbanism, by authors such as Mould (2014), Douglas (2016) and Spataro (2016), as discussed in section 2.2.2.2.

2.4.4 Conclusion

The existing conceptual frameworks to analyse issues of informality and culture in the urban context are inadequate, as they do not take account of the complex realities of urban life. The recent research on urban informality discussed in this section goes beyond these limitations and offers a more nuanced conception that highlights the need to go beyond dualisms, the diversity of actors who deploy informality, and the processes of negotiation that produce urban informal practices. Together, these perspectives offer useful 'building blocks' or 'sensitising concepts' for analysing informality in other geographical contexts (especially the global North) and disciplines (including culture). However, so far, little work has been done to advance this research direction. This thesis seeks to address this gap, as will be outlined in the following section.

2.5 Prospective research direction

Seeking to bring into a new resolution the fragmented state of the literature with regards to urban informal cultural practices, the key research gaps and conceptual limitations can be briefly set out as follows (for methodological limitations, see chapter 3):

- **Firstly, there is a lack of research that provides a *multi-faceted valuation of informal cultural practices*.** The current research is centred on forms of economic value and fails to provide an in-depth understanding of the *broader (non-economic) roles and purposes* that informal cultural practices take on in the urban context.
- **Secondly, there is a lack of research that interrogates the role of informal *cultural practices for cities of the global South*.** Within the significant body of work interrogating urban informality in the global South, the field of culture is largely omitted. While some studies look at informal cultural practices predominantly found in rural areas, there is a

particular gap in the literature on the global South that considers informal practices that are urban and cultural.

- **Thirdly, there is a lack of nuanced discussion and understanding of *informal cultural practices in the urban context***, especially, but not exclusively, in the global North. The current state of urban research is too often framed in dualist conceptions, and restricted to a normative framework that prevents the analysis of complex and multifaceted urban processes, such as informality.

Bringing these together reveals the fourth and final major gap in the literature; namely there is a need to not only recognise the relevance of informality to cities of the global North, but to actually apply the learning from urban theory in the global South to cases elsewhere (as well as vice-versa). As Daniels (2004) has pointed out, no political system functions on the basis of formal structures and processes alone. And while authors such as Roy (2009a, 2009b) and Robinson (2011) have advocated for some time for planning and urban theory in the global North to acknowledge the relevance of cities in the global South, only few authors have put this into practice. The few researchers who have entered this comparative space (such as Echanove, 2010; Harris, 2008; Lowry & McCann, 2008) have demonstrated that such comparative work can and should be undertaken, as it can help to highlight distinct urban particularities, and – based on these – provide an important source of learning across the different geographies.

Admittedly, it is not an easy task, since it is not enough to simply study cities in the global South as “interesting, anomalous, different, and esoteric empirical cases” (Roy, 2009: 820). Instead, there needs to be a dislocating of theory itself (Robinson, 2011; Roy, 2009). This includes promoting theory cultures that are

“alert to their own locatedness and sources of inspiration, open to learning from elsewhere, respectful of different scholarly traditions and committed to the revisability of theoretical ideas”. (Robinson, 2016a: 188)

As explained in more detail in chapter 3, my proposal for achieving this is to move beyond an interrogation of informal cultural practices through the lens of

the global South or the global North, but rather to seek to understand them, from the ground up, through the experience of the actual practices in the city. The three main building blocks (multiplicity and interconnectedness of informal/formal, negotiation processes, and diversity of actors who deploy informality) set out in the previous sections provide a useful starting point for guiding this interrogation.

My main research aim, then, is to provide an in-depth and grounded understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context. In order to gain such an understanding, my empirical enquiry is guided by the research questions set out below (and summarised in Figure 4).

- i. According to the urban actors themselves, what are the different roles and purposes that informal cultural practices take on in contemporary cities?

The first question is going to help me address the knowledge gap around a multi-faceted understanding of the role of informal cultural practices in the urban context, both in the global North and the global South (as outlined in the first and second research gap). It will help improving our understanding of the *broader (non-economic) roles and purposes* that informal cultural practices take on in the urban context. Interrogating questions about these broader roles and purposes will also provide new insights into the reasons why informal cultural practices are important in the urban context, and what motivates people to engage with them in first place.

- ii. How are informal cultural practices defined and delimited by urban actors themselves?

The second question is going to interrogate the fluid relationship between the informal and the formal – in line with the first of my analytical ‘building blocks’ (as discussed in section 2.4.1). It will examine the boundaries of the informal that are defined and delimited by urban actors by interrogating their principles and values, thus addressing the third research gap.

- iii. How is informality deployed by urban actors to fulfil the different purposes of their practices?

The third research question looks at how informality is deployed in practice. By examining the actual processes used by urban cultural actors to realise their ideas, this research question will help provide answers about the role of (specifically) *informal* practices to fulfil their various purposes, as well as providing a more nuanced understanding of informality. Setting out how informality is actually deployed on the ground and comparing this to urban cultural actors' theoretical boundaries and delimitations, will also interrogate the various negotiations that urban actors engage in (the second of my analytical 'building blocks', as discussed in section 2.4.2).

- iv. How and why do urban policy-makers engage with, and respond to, informal cultural practices?

The fourth research question is a subsidiary enquiry, based on the acknowledgment of the role of public policy in influencing the specific manifestations of informal practices in different cities (Harris, 2008) and thus, as a particularly important field of negotiation for urban actors (as argued in the discussion of the third 'building block' in section 2.4.2). It will also help addressing the first three research gaps. This subsidiary enquiry will generate insights to questions including whether policy-makers are supportive of informal cultural practices; to what extent and under which conditions; whether they actively engage with informal cultural practices, and if so, why; and what challenges arise when policy-makers engage with informal cultural practices? The reason why it has been set as a subsidiary research question is the methodological scope of this study (see section 3.3).

Figure 4: Research questions of this study

<p>Overall research aim:</p> <p>To provide an in-depth, grounded understanding of informal cultural practices in contemporary cities.</p> <p>Main research questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. What are the different roles and purposes that informal cultural practices take on in contemporary cities?ii. How are informal cultural practices defined and delimited by urban actors?iii. How is informality deployed by urban cultural actors to fulfil the different purposes of their practices? <p>Subsidiary research question:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">iv. How and why do urban policy-makers engage with, and respond to, informal cultural practices?

The final gap in the literature mentioned above is not directly covered by the theoretical and conceptual knowledge that will be generated through the research questions. Rather, it will require a different methodological approach. The extent to which the extant research provides for such a different methodological enquiry will be reviewed in chapter 3.

2.6 Conclusion

As argued throughout this chapter, the literature on cities, urban informality and informal cultural practices has often been caught in unhelpful dualisms – between the global North and the global South, between the formal and the informal, between the overvalued economic and the undervalued non-economic urban dimensions – which have led to urban facets such as informality or culture being obscured from the analysis, or subjected to a simplistic and normative analysis. Therefore, in order attain my research aim of an in-depth understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context, I need to

reformulate and revisit the theoretical object of informal culture. The three main 'building blocks' that have emerged from more recent literature on urban informality in the global South will provide useful analytical tools, or 'sensitising concepts' to guide my enquiry. However, in order to genuinely revisit the theoretical object of informal culture I need to develop the knowledge from the ground (the actual informal cultural practices) up. As I discuss in more detail in section 3.2.1, this calls for a grounded theory approach. However, before I will review the methodological approaches that are predominantly used in urban research and discuss whether or not they will enable me to achieve my research aim and answer the research questions set out above.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

In the previous chapter I have begun to set out the broad conceptual framework through which I will interrogate informal cultural practices in contemporary cities. I have reviewed important theoretical positions across a number of research disciplines, and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of these theoretical positions. I have argued that the existing approaches are conceptually and geographically restricted and do not provide an adequate conceptual framework to analyse issues of informality and culture in the urban context. Thus, it will not be sufficient to 'pick and choose' from the different theoretical approaches, but rather, I need to revisit the theoretical object of informal culture. The previous chapter has identified a number of theoretical ideas, that have emerged from more recent literature on urban informality in the global South, which I will use as 'sensitising concepts' to guide my enquiry.

In this chapter, I now shift my focus to research methodologies. In the first section 3.1, I discuss the research methodologies used in the existing literature to interrogate cities and issues of informality. I argue that the approaches used in the existing literature are not only conceptually, but also methodologically inadequate to provide an in-depth understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context. Based on this discussion, in section 3.2, I then outline the overall research approach that I propose to use in this study. The lack of 'readily available' conceptual and methodological frameworks, and the need to genuinely revisit the empirical object of informal cultural practices from the 'ground up', call for the use of a grounded theory approach that interrogates a number of case studies of informal cultural practices in two cities – one in the

global North and one in the global South. Moving then on to the actual research methods and processes that I employed in this study, in section 3.3, I outline how I selected the sites of my case studies, the actual case study activities, and my interviewees. I describe my rationales for choosing them and give a more detailed introduction to each case study, as well as explaining how the case study fits the selection criteria. In section 3.4, I then explain step-by-step how I gathered my data. This also includes a critical reflection on the practical and ethical challenges of conducting research on the 'informal' – issues that I argue are inherent to my research topic. Finally, in section 3.5, I describe my analytical approach and the detailed process of conducting my analysis. Section 3.6 concludes the chapter.

As becomes apparent throughout this chapter, the discussion of my research methods – which are exploratory and developmental themselves – is an integral part of this thesis. This is because it reflects many of the issues that my thesis is dealing with regarding the nature and multiplicity of the informal. In particular, I highlight that “flexibility, creativity and daring in creating and seizing opportunities” (Cohen & Arieli, 2011: 433) were not only supporting the research, but were a basic condition that enabled me to carry out any research at all on my research topic of the informal. However, it is important to note that such a flexible approach is not only consistent with the object of my study, but also with the methodological approach I set out in section 3.2. Indeed, implicit to a grounded theory approach is a reflexivity that stipulates that my research ‘listens’ to my respondents, and responds flexibly to the requirements of the research subjects and the emerging theory.

3.1 Methodological review

The conclusions from the previous chapter about the inadequacy of existing theories suggest that the choice of my own methodological approach is not as simple as adopting the ‘usual’ or ‘preferred’ methods of a particular theoretical framework. Rather, I need to interrogate the existing approaches in terms of whether they enable me to achieve my research aim of providing a grounded re-conceptualisation of informal cultural practices that considers the issue in its multiple dimensions. In this chapter, I argue that the limitations of the existing

theoretical framework are also closely linked to the methodological approaches used in the literature.

I begin by briefly reviewing the predominant methodologies used in the GaWC literature. As I argue in this section 3.1.1, a methodological approach that is restricted to quantitative methods is insufficient for providing an in-depth understanding of informal cultural urban practices. Rather, in order to adequately interrogate informality and culture in their multiplicity, a more explorative approach is needed.

Indeed, more recently, urban scholars have advocated for a ‘comparative turn’ (Robinson, 2011) to address some of the methodological (and conceptual) shortcomings of the dominant urban theories. In section 3.1.2, I review the main contributions, as well as some of the limitations of this new approach. I argue that the focus of comparative urbanists on the case study method has been useful to bring into view cities in parts of the world that were previously ignored and to question supposedly ‘universal’ urban theories. However, a case study that simply focuses on the particularities of one or more given cities will not enable me to achieve my research aim. Rather, I need to shift the attention from the ‘city’ to the issue of ‘informal cultural practices’ – a shift that I propose to take in my overall research approach.

3.1.1 The methodological approach of the GaWC literature

The main purpose of carrying out a methodological review is to interrogate, whether the methodologies used provide me with the kind of data that I need in order to achieve my research aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of informal cultural practices.

Arguably, one of the strong points of the GaWC literature is its focus on data and measurements. Friedmann’s famous ‘World City Hypothesis’ (1986) laid the foundation for this. He argued that, as a result of global economic integration, cities are not only connected within a global system, but they can also be hierarchically ordered according to their function in this system. Proving and testing this hypothesis, and the search for appropriate proxies for such city connectivity, has been at the centre of the debate about global cities since, as

clearly exemplified by the proliferation of quantitative city rankings. The central case about global city networks remains centred on economic and financial data (and in particular APS) – things that are (supposedly) easily measurable. Other issues are considered to be too difficult to collect data on and are excluded due to pragmatic reasons (Taylor et al, 2002). This is problematic considering that it may lead to the omission of important elements of life in cities, simply because they are difficult to measure – such as culture or informality.

Given the paucity of literature dealing with cultural data on global cities, I decided to interrogate the usefulness of the GaWC methodology to the cultural field. In order to do so, I attempted to construct a cultural global city index using secondary data. Due to the scope of this thesis, I cannot present more than a very brief summary of the key findings from this secondary data hereafter. However, further detail on the secondary data analysis can be found in Appendix 1. Chouguley (2015) also provides some discussion of the findings.

The data exercise showed that it might be possible to construct a city ranking based on cultural indicators (assuming an improvement of the existing data sets) and that some valuable insights may be gained from it. However, it also very clearly demonstrated that an approach that is inherently driven by economic considerations of value and by a need for solely quantitative data is greatly flawed and of limited meaning when it comes to culture.

Thus, the strong emphasis on measurement and quantitative data in the GaWC debate leads to an undue focus on measurable formal elements while the ‘immeasurable’ informal is ignored. For the purpose of my study, the GaWC methodological approach simply collects the wrong kind of data. Interestingly then, the supposed strong point of the GaWC literature, i.e. its focus on data and measurement, is at the same time its weak point.

Therefore, in order to better understand informal cultural practices in their multiple dimensions, the horizon of the debate does not only need to be extended conceptually, but also methodologically. This requires moving beyond purely quantitative methodologies and focusing on explorative approaches that do not foreclose the results of the enquiry. The extent to which this has been

achieved by the recent turn to ‘comparative urbanism’ is discussed in the following section.

3.1.2 Comparative urbanism: review and critique

As the previous section has argued, the approach taken by much of the GaWC research, which is inherently driven by economic considerations of value and by a need for solely quantitative data, is greatly flawed and of limited meaning when it comes to culture. This is even more relevant for informal cultural practices which are inherently unstable, constantly evolving and, thus, very hard to categorise in the kind of quantitative way that the GaWC literature suggests. Thus, in order to provide a genuine reconceptualisation of informal cultural practices, a more exploratory, qualitative approach is required.

More recent contributions by scholars advocating for a ‘comparative urbanism’ have shared this concern, as this quote from Robinson (2002: 532) demonstrates:

“[The GaWC research has] been valuable, and offer[s] great insights into the limited part of the world and economy that they study. My suggestion, though, is that these insights could be incorporated in a broader and less ambitious approach to cities around the world, an approach without categories and more inclusive of the diversity of experience in ordinary cities.”

An important demand made by scholars of this body of work has been to “urgently” engage with cities in the global South (Parnell et al, 2009: 240) and to explore them in their own terms, as opposed to as “theoretical anomalies” (Peck, 2015: 161). In doing so, they aim to move away from a-priori theorisation (especially of those theories that have emerged from a small sample of cities in the global North) and focusing, instead, on the uniqueness and particularities of individual urban places (Peck, 2015; Scott & Storper, 2005).

Methodologically, they also call for more explicit comparative research, as a way of opening up new ways of understanding the multiplicity and complexity of cities (Jacobs, 2012; McFarlane & Robinson, 2012; Robinson, 2016a; Robinson, 2016b). This is because comparative urbanism questions

preconceived biases and assumptions that underpin broad categories such as 'like' and 'unlike' cities (Ren et al, 2015). Indeed, McFarlane & Robinson (2012) criticise that urban research in recent times has focused exclusively at comparing the 'most-similar' cases (including much of the GaWC research that compares primarily wealthy cities). Instead, they argue that "difference needs to be viewed less as a problem to be avoided and more as a productive means for conceptualizing contemporary urbanism" (McFarlane & Robinson, 2012: 767). This is in order to do justice to the multi-dimensional, contextual and interconnected nature of urban processes in contemporary cities (*Ibid.*).

As Robinson (2016b) points out, perhaps the most useful comparative tactic in urban studies to enact these principles is the case study. However, she warns against applying formal comparative case study methods that try and enact quasi-scientific methodologies (Robinson, 2011; 2016a), as it not only restricts the object of analysis (as it once again limits comparison to a few 'most-similar' cities), but also the kinds of processes that can be interrogated and the forms of causality that can be explored. In particular, it prevents from considering the particular context of the city itself as a major factor in explaining a particular urban form (Robinson, 2011; 2016a, 2016b). Instead, McFarlane & Robinson (2012: 769) suggest to

"bring the experiences of different cities into conversation in a variety of ways – by tracing a connection between different locations, by exploring the replication of similar phenomena across different contexts, or by comparing similar or different outcomes in a particular sphere of urban life across more than one city".

Perhaps most importantly, the focus of comparative urbanists on the case study method and the diversity of 'experience' in cities (Robinson, 2002) has not only been useful to question the existence of universal urban theory and to bring into view cities in parts of the world that were previously ignored, but it also opens up the possibility to the interrogation of new and different subjects. This includes issues of informality which have tended to be overlooked in an urban research context that is driven by (universal) theory and which fails to take account of the

multiple, complex and often conflicting experiences of urban actors 'on the ground'.¹

But there are also relevant criticisms of the comparative urbanism approach. Most fundamentally, comparative urbanism research has been criticised for its overemphasis on local particularity and their rejection of any forms of generalisation (Nijman, 2015; Peck, 2015; Scott & Storper, 2015). Scott & Storper (2015) argue that conceptual abstraction is an essential prerequisite for the construction of useful empirical taxonomies. And while most critics accept that a universal theory alone is inadequate for the understanding of a particular city, they argue that the same is true for "a strictly internalist" case study of the city, because it risks remaining largely descriptive, "skirting close to theoretical ambivalence, indifference or cynicism" and being incapable of constructing alternatives (Peck, 2015: 178).

The way forward, then, is likely to lie somewhere in the middle. As Nijman (2015: 184) points out, theoretical construction only makes sense if it is based on empirical knowledge:

"There comes a time when yet another round of theoretical declarations and armchair research agenda-setting, in the absence of substantial empirical research efforts, starts to ring hollow."

For him, comparing involves empirical observation, conceptual framing, as well as the development of theory (Nijman, 2015). Peck (2015: 178) further suggests that existing theories should not be seen as a "source of inexorable laws", but rather be used as sensitising devices that are at the same time "testable and

¹ It is worth noting that this trivialisation (and common exclusion from theorisation) of complex 'experiences' is not unique to the issue of informality, but equally relevant for cultural debate more generally, whereby the experience is often secondary to terms such as 'users' or 'audiences' – which are more easily translated into conceptions of economic value.

contestable”. As I discuss in further detail in the next section 3.2, this is the approach that I intend to use for my empirical work.

Coming back to the question of whether the use of the methodological approach favoured by comparative urbanism scholars provides me with the kind of knowledge and data that I require to achieve my research aim of reconceptualising informal cultural practices, the answer is a “yes, but”. As I have argued in this section, comparative approaches have the ability to generate new knowledge about the urban, especially by including cities from different geographies. Looking at a range of different geographies and contexts is also essential for understanding the multiplicity of informal cultural practices.

However, care must be taken that the attempt to broaden out the geographical scope of analysis to other cities does not result in an exclusive focus on cities in the global South (as is the case with the large majority of comparative urbanism research), but rather put cities from different geographies into conversation. This section has also emphasised that any such urban comparisons should not attempt to fit the diverse experiences of cities around the world into one universal theory. Indeed, the aim of my study is not to come up with a universal definition or framework of informality in cities, but rather to show the variety of informality across different cities, but also across different cultural practices. Moreover, rather than employing them as quasi-scientific methods, my study needs to seek out genuinely explorative methodologies. This is particularly noteworthy, as – otherwise – the valuable ambition to have a real exchange of knowledge between the global South and the global North seems near impossible. A case study approach seems useful in this respect, but only if it serves this specific purpose.

As has been pointed out in the latter section, such an explorative approach does not need to be devoid of theory, which can be usefully employed – not as a tight theoretical framework – but as sensitising device. While this very broadly scopes out my intended methodological approach, the next section sets this out in greater detail.

3.2 Proposed overall methodological approach

In the previous chapter 2, I have argued that there is no 'readily-given' theoretical framework that would lend itself for analysing informal cultural urban practices. Given the lack of adequate theorisation, I need to genuinely revisit the theoretical object of informal culture in the urban context. Rather than testing an existing theory or attempting to prove a particular hypothesis, I need to develop a new conceptualisation from the ground up (i.e. from the actual informal cultural practices).

In section 3.1 I have argued that the conceptual and theoretical shortcomings are closely linked to inadequate methodological approaches. Firstly, there has been an overemphasis on quantitative data and rankings. As I have shown in section 3.1.1, these are not meaningful for the field of culture, and even less so for informal cultural practices. Secondly, where comparative approaches have been used, these have unhelpfully focused on quasi-scientific methods. This has restricted any comparison to 'most-similar' cases, thus further deepening the conceptual dualism between cities in the global South and North.

These kinds of methodological approaches do not allow me to gather the kind of data and knowledge that I need to provide a multi-faceted reconceptualisation of the informal cultural practices in the urban context. Thus, my choice of methodology is not simply justified by the requirements or preferences of a particular theoretical framework (for example, the tendency in systems theory towards generalising, quantitative data approaches; or the preference for case studies in anthropology). Rather the choice of my methodological approach needs to be determined by the purpose that it serves, i.e. to achieve my research aim.

3.2.1 Grounded theory approach

In order to overcome the methodological shortcomings, and to enable the object of informal culture to be revisited, I require:

- An explorative, qualitative approach that really tries to understand informal cultural practices in their multiplicity, and the various processes and factors at play in determining these various forms. Such an approach

must not pre-determine the findings, over-simplify the object through the use of inapt categories or hierarchies, or try to fit the diverse urban experiences into a universal theory.

- A methodology that allows making connections across different geographies and contexts.
- A methodology that considers the ontological linkages between theory and empirical knowledge.

This calls for a grounded theory approach, based on a series of case studies. The grounded theory concept, originally described by Glaser & Strauss (1967) does not start with hypotheses or preconceived notions. Instead, the researcher attempts to discover, understand, and interpret what is happening in the research context (Bowen, 2006). It is a research approach that calls for continual interplay between data collection and analysis to produce a theory during the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This is mostly done using inductive analysis, whereby themes and categories emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis (Bowen, 2006: 13). As Mäkelä & Turcan (2007: 133) have pointed out, “the use of grounded theory method is especially appropriate when confronted with an inadequacy or inexistence of theory on a subject”. As I have argued throughout the previous chapter 2, this is the case for informal cultural practices in the urban context.

However, a grounded theory does not imply that the approach is devoid of any theory. Instead, my review of literature has identified three main ‘sensitising concepts’ that will guide my analysis (see section 2.4.4). Blumer (1954: 7) defined sensitising concepts as those concepts that give the user “a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look.” They may or may not ‘survive’ until the end of the research and emergent concepts from the data may supplement or displace them. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that such concepts usually exist at the beginning of a research project, whether the

research explicitly states them (and, indeed, is aware of them) or not (Bowen, 2006).

3.2.2 Multiple case studies

As Yin (1994) points out, a case study methodology is particularly good at exploring complex contemporary phenomena in-depth and within their real life context. They are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed. Or as Easton (2010: 119) argues, case research enables to “tease out and disentangle a complex set of factors and relationships” and to “understand a phenomenon in-depth and comprehensively”. All of these apply to my study, given that my main research aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context. But more important than this normative, methodological reason, my choice of a case study approach is the logical consequence of my earlier critique of the existing methodological approaches and the only way in which I am able to explore the multiple dimensions of informal cultural practices from the ground up. As argued in section, 3.1.2, choosing a ‘grounded’ case study approach will ensure that any theoretical construction or conceptual framing is – on the one hand – firmly rooted in empirical observation and evidence (Nijman, 2015), and – on the other hand – emerging from the actual, diverse experiences of the people engaging in informal cultural practices.

Furthermore, while scholars such as Roy (2009a; 2009b) and Robinson (2011) have highlighted that much could be learned from putting the experiences of cities in the global South in conversation with those in the global North, this call to action largely remains to be put in practice. This is something that my empirical study is going to address, thereby pushing the theoretical agenda of comparative urbanism further still. In order to do so, I will choose two different sites for my case studies, one in the global South and one in the global North, considering them both as “resources and sites for theory generation” (*Ibid.*: 17).

While the two different cities provide an important context of analysis, the focus of my research is on five specific informal cultural practices, which are my cases. As Robinson (2016a) argues, cases do not need to be defined territorially but could be any kind of urban process or outcome. Choosing these

specific practices as my units of comparison (as opposed to the cities itself) allows me to interrogate the issue at hand – urban informality in the field of culture – from a number of perspectives, thus improving our understanding of the issues involved. It therefore ensures that my research focuses on the grounded reconceptualisation of informal cultural practices, as opposed to the similarities and differences between the cities.

In this sense, my approach differs from Robinson's work and that of other comparative urbanism scholars, as it goes beyond the analytical boundaries of the city (and the ambition to provide a new conceptualisation of a given city) to explore a process that – despite being distinctly urban – can only be better understood when not confined to the experience of a particular city. In other words, looking at multiple case studies within each city does not only strengthen the robustness of my theory (Yin, 1994: 45), but is also more “fruitful” by emphasising the “various, complex layers” that urban processes, such as informal cultural practices, are composed of (Ren et al, 2015: 153). In using this approach, I also seek to avoid further deepening and emphasising the existing conceptual and methodological dualism of the global South and the global North.

The case study sites and the specific informal cultural practices which I have chosen as case studies, as well as my rationales for selecting them, are explained in the following section 3.3.

3.3 Case study selection

In the following sections I set out the rationale for choosing the particular informal cultural practices as case studies and for selecting the cities of London and Mumbai as context of this interrogation.

It is worth pointing out at the start that, given my overall research aim which seeks to interrogate the multiplicity of informal cultural practices in the urban context, it is less important which particular practices are chosen and which cultural sector they belong to, but rather that there is a selection of practices. Similarly, for the choice of the cities, considering the dearth of studies that actually compare cities from different geographical regions, the most important

criterion for the city selection was that there is one city from the global North and one city from the global South. In that sense, the final choice of London and Mumbai is less important for the attainment of my research aim – although it was not random, as outlined below in section 3.3.1. Section 3.3.2 deals with how I selected my case studies and section 3.3.3 with the sampling of my research participants.

3.3.1 Selection of cities

As I have argued in section 3.1.2, despite the fact that it remains scarce to-date, comparative work that cuts across cities in the global ‘North’ and the global ‘South’ can and should be undertaken, as it can help to highlight distinct urban particularities, and – based on these – provide an important source of learning across the different geographies. Another, equally important justification for including cities from different geographies in this present study is my research aim. As I seek to interrogate the multiplicity of informal cultural practices, including a city in the global North and one in the global South will likely increase the range of informal practices that I will be able to observe.

In choosing the actual city, I drew on both conceptual and pragmatic rationales. With regards to the latter, the existence of personal connections to both London and Mumbai played an important role in my decision. This is because I felt it was important to choose cities that I have a relatively good knowledge of, in order to reduce (if not entirely prevent) the implications of being a ‘foreign researcher’ (for further discussion see section 3.4.5.3) and the danger of reinforcing “power differentials in the production of knowledge about cities and urbanism” (Harris, 2012: 2964). London has been my place of home, work and study for many years now. I have also visited Mumbai many times and part of my family-in-law is based in that city. Thus, although I am not native to either of the cities, I felt that I had sufficient familiarity with both London and Mumbai to carry out my research.

More important than these pragmatic considerations, there were a number of conceptual rationales for choosing these two cities. The salience of the issue of informality may be more obvious in cities of the global South. As demonstrated in chapter 2, the majority of the existing research focuses on this geographical

context. However, there remains a gap in the literature in relation to urban cultural practices. In Mumbai, as well as many other cities in the global South, one of the most important characteristics of urbanisation is the expansion of informal housing settlements, commonly referred to as slums (Zhang, 2017). According to the latest census data from 2011, 42% of Mumbai's 12.44 million population² live in slums, which compares to one third of the world's urban population (Census Population Data, 2015; UN Habitat, 2009). In Mumbai, nearly half of these slums are built on land of private landlords, and the other half on the land of the central government, state government and municipal corporation (Zhang, 2017). It is estimated that 68% of Mumbai's workforce is employed by the informal sector (Brown & Hubl, 2009).

While the city of Mumbai boasts a variety of cultural institutions and activity, the formal cultural provision is not as comprehensive as in London (BOP Consulting, 2012). One reason for this is the lack of a dedicated arts and culture department at the BMC with public funding streams specific to culture (Observer Research Foundation, 2015). In line with this, there has been little explicit cultural policy development. Neither the state government of Maharashtra, nor any of the eight municipal corporations in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, including the BMC, have a cultural strategy for Mumbai.³

As Harris (2012: 1956) argues, over the last decade the city has acquired an "international cultural cachet", as exemplified by a growing interest of cultural practitioners and promoters in art, popular literature, film and architecture originating from, or being based on, Mumbai. At the same time, the city has

² This figure relates to the Mumbai City. Mumbai Metropolitan Region has a population of 18,39 million, according to the 2011 census.

³ There is, however, a thriving private media and entertainment industry (in particular the TV and commercial film sectors) which contributes significantly to the rapid growth of the Indian economy, and which has been the subject of some policy thinking in the last decade (Isar, 2013).

achieved prominence in academic debate, owing to the city's size and demographic growth, its connections to global circuits of capital and a renewed theoretical interest in issues of informality and cities of the global South (*Ibid.*). However, despite the cultural links by practitioners, to-date the city has rarely featured in academic cultural policy debate (perhaps with the exception of the field of architecture). This suggests that Mumbai constitutes a particularly rich case study for interrogating the multiple forms and uses of informality in the field of culture.

Even more so than Mumbai, in the last few decades London has been at the centre of much urban studies debate, as well as being prominent among academics interested in cultural policy. London has a very established formal cultural sector, with a plethora of cultural institutions and activity across the city (BOP Consulting, 2012; 2015). The city also has a strong cultural policy-making tradition. For instance, the Greater London Council's work in the early 1980s has been credited with the first cultural industries strategy at a local level (O'Connor, 2010). While at first sight it may seem illogical that the informal persists within this context, a more thorough interrogation is necessary.

Indeed, informality is not only a phenomenon of the global 'South' but remains a feature of human settlements across the world (Porter, 2011; Roy, 2009; Williams & Windebank, 1995). Schneider & Williams (2014) estimate that the informal economy in the UK accounted for 10% of the country's GDP in 2012. A report by the Community Links and Refugee Council (2011) estimates that about 20% of people of working age have done some sort of informal work in the last year. While most statistics relate to the UK as a whole, it is likely that the informal economy in London is at least as big, if not bigger. For instance, Gordon et al (2009) reported that approximately 70% of the UK's estimated 618,000 illegal immigrants were based in London, many of whom work informally in sectors such as construction, cleaning, catering, and hospitality services (Rajan, 2009). But as argued in section 2.3.1, many descriptions of the informal economy are also characteristics of employment practices of the cultural and creative industries (Boyle & Joham, 2013; Vivant, 2010). In the UK, the sector is heavily concentrated in London, as recent figures by the Greater London Authority show: 47% of the UK's creative industries jobs are based in

London, while the capital also accounts for 47% of total UK GVA for the creative industries (Rocks, 2017). Other research suggests that one of the city's most famed 'hot spots' for culture, the East End of London, is rooted in a congregation of informal actors and their cultural practices (Pratt, 2009).

Moreover, the exclusion of urban experiences of less researched cities, and in particular "average cities and atypical cities" (Ren et al, 2015: 149) often "prevents urban studies from operating 'on a world scale'" (Robinson, 2011: 17). Ren et al (2015: 149) further adds that

"researchers are called upon to build theory from under-researched empirical cases in comparative perspective: cities that look different, feel different and add to the story of how socio-spatial relations evolve across time and place".

In the case of urban informality, the majority of the research has focused on cities in the global South. Thus, for this very specific research subject, London constitutes an 'atypical' city (*Ibid.*). This suggests that London constitutes an interesting city to study the role of informal cultural practices in the context of an established formal cultural sector and cultural policy-making environment.

The two cities, one from the global 'North', one from the global 'South', thus represent a different balance of formal and informal cultural provision and infrastructure. It is assumed that carrying out case studies in these different contexts will enable me to attain my research aim of exploring the multiplicity of informal cultural practices in an urban context.

3.3.2 Selection of case studies

As argued in section 3.2.2, I interrogate my research questions through a range of case studies that look at specific informal cultural practices. Selecting relevant case studies was not an easy undertaking, partly because of conceptual issues of definitions and partly because of practical, methodological problems that arose from researching 'the informal' – as will be discussed hereafter.

3.3.2.1 Conceptual considerations in sampling case studies

The first conceptual challenge was to decide on the kind of ‘informal’ practices to interrogate. As I have argued in section 2.4.1, there is no easy definition of informality. Indeed, to provide a more in-depth understanding of the multiplicity of informal cultural practices is the main research aim of this study.

Nonetheless, in order to select a number of relevant case study activities, I needed to develop an operational definition. For this, I have drawn on the work of Roy (2009, 2011) and McFarlane (2012) which considers informality as a form of practice. This definition foregrounds the idea that informality is a way of doing things, rather than being associated with a particular group (‘the poor’, ‘the marginalised’) or a particular kind of space (‘the slum’). This conception also reflects the three sensitising concepts outlined in chapter 2.4, namely that there is a multiplicity of informal processes, that these processes are subject to negotiation which produce urban informal practices, and that there is a diversity of actors who deploy informality.

In line with these guiding principles, I could have chosen any urban cultural practice in the two cities – from graffiti in the East End to the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad, from hand-painted Hindi movie posters to the Ganesh Chaturthi⁴ – and interrogated the extent to which informality is deployed within those activities. I also could have chosen activities that are carried out by a range of actors, from slum dwellers or squatters, to cultural organisations and public administrations.

However, since the main aim of my research is to interrogate the multiplicity of informality, I decided to look for case study activities where I was likely to encounter different kinds of informal practices. Therefore, I chose to look for urban cultural practices with an ‘informal’ mode of organisation, that is, those

⁴ The Ganesh Chaturthi is a religious festival that reveres the Hindu God Ganesha. It is Mumbai’s biggest festival.

that can be described as ‘self-organised’ (Srinivas et al, 2009) or as ‘grassroots organi[sed]’ (Grodach & Silver, 2012). The practices I decided to focus on were also supposed to be carried out primarily in a personal, rather than a professional capacity and carried out by civil society actors (including ordinary citizens and small civil society organisations). This definition allowed me to narrow down my case study options, while – crucially – allowing for my research to encounter a diversity of actors, as opposed to excluding a-priori certain groups of people or spaces. It is also important to note that each of the case studies that was finally selected might also display other ‘characteristics’ or ‘dimensions’ of informality (as set out in Figure 3 and discussed in section 2.4.1) and these are discussed in more detail in the case study descriptions in section 3.3.2.2. However, the features outlined above were the main selection criteria and are common to all of the case studies.

Deciding on the kind of *cultural* practice I was going to interrogate was the second conceptual challenge. The difficulty to define the cultural sector has also been noted (for example, Bain, 2005; Markusen & Schrock, 2006; Zhong, 2016). Given this conceptual difficulty, Karttunen (1998) recommends that the definition should be aligned with the purpose and context of the research study. In light of my research aim to interrogate the multiplicity of informal practices, an approach using a broad cultural definition was deemed necessary.

However, the study does not attempt to make a ‘representative’ selection of case studies or to take a statistical sampling approach. Instead, and in line with my grounded theory approach, I decided to use a purposive sampling approach, which is generally considered most appropriate for the selection of small samples “when inference to the population is not the highest priority”, but rather sampling is aimed toward theory construction (Battaglia, 2008: 645). Given the limited resources (both financial and time) of this study, I decided that two to three case studies in each city would be appropriate. The final case studies included the cultural subsectors of music, literature, arts, gardening and wider leisure activities.

In attempting to further narrow down the possible case study choices, I decided to focus on activities that take place in the public space. As I have argued in

2.2.1, spatial contestation is a key feature of contemporary cities in which informals get implicated in different ways (Castells, 2010; Grodach & Silver, 2010). Roy & Alsayyad (2004) also issue a call to pay attention to the spatial dimensions of urban informality. Although, increasingly informality is found in privatised spaces, it is primarily located on public land and practised in public space (Roy, 2009). It is also around the use of public space that conflicts surrounding informality often emerge (Bromley, 1998; Hernandez-Garcia, 2013).

Moreover, as I have argued in 2.3.2, while some work has looked at informal cultural uses of abandoned or derelict (public or private) sites and buildings (Colomb 2012; Groth & Corjin, 2005; Shaw, 2005; Vivant, 2010), there is a lot less work on informal cultural practices that take place in “more ordinary, everyday and mundane” urban public spaces (Milbourne, 2012: 945). Thus, I decided to focus my empirical research on activities that take place in such everyday and mundane public spaces.

Finally, I chose to interrogate cultural production of urban actors, rather than cultural consumption – the latter having received comparatively more attention in the literature (Pratt, 2009). However, looking at the uses of informal cultural practices would equally be an interesting subject for further research.

3.3.2.2 Practical considerations in sampling case studies

Based on these conceptual criteria outlined above, I chose my case studies. Considering the fairly broad selection criteria, it might appear as if there would have many possible choices. However, as Bunnell and Harris (2012: 342) have pointed out

“many informal activities are dependent for their survival upon invisibility – on not being seen. This, in turn, presents challenges to well-meaning academics and activists”.

Thus, due to the informal mode of organisation of the activities I was looking for, I encountered a number of practical challenges in terms of being able to identify a suitable range of activities.

The first of such issues was related to the timing of these events. Originally, I had envisaged choosing a number of one-off events as case studies. However, I found that many of the potential activities that I was interested in were organised spontaneously or at very short notice. These short timescales made it very difficult to organise my field work in time. I did carry out interviews for my first case study (busking) at such a one-off event. However, after having missed out on a few other potential case study activities, which I had found out about too late, I decided to prioritise case study activities that were on-going or taking place over a limited, but extended period of time.

Secondly, the organisation of the activities was also characterised by uncertainty and subject to frequent change, for instance events being announced that were later much scaled-down, changed focus or were cancelled altogether.

Thirdly, I was often struggling to find information that would allow me to take a decision whether or not the activities were suitable. In addition to researching information online and through personal networks, where possible I also carried out 'scouting' site visits in an attempt to gather further information (for instance on what the activity entailed, how it functioned, who was involved etc.). However, due to the limited financial resources of this study, I was only able to carry out such site visits in London. In contrast, for my research in Mumbai, I had contacted a number of local informants from my personal and professional network with the request for suggestions. The ideas generated through this means were fairly limited, and in some cases, unsuitable. In other cases, the suggestions seemed interesting but I was struggling to find information, especially since I needed to rely on a 'formal' web presence (at least a social media presence) in English⁵ for further details, including contact information.

⁵ I have a very basic command of Hindi, but not sufficient to carry out research in the language.

Notwithstanding these challenges, I eventually identified five case studies, which I briefly outline hereafter.

Busking

Busking practices are defined as a range of – often impromptu – performances that take place in public places for gratuities. Most buskers are either individuals or small groups and ‘self-organise’ their practice. Thus their practice can be considered to be ‘informal’, as outlined above. However, the busking case study also touches upon a number of other ‘dimensions’ of informality (see Figure 3), in particular around the legality and regulation of their activities (for instance, the ‘illegal’ sales of CDs, potential disrespect of licensing requirements, or of tax avoidance for those carrying out busking as their main source of income, etc.).

Busking may include a wide range of cultural forms including

“poetry, music of a wide assortment of genres, portraiture and landscape painting, tarot cards and palm reading, miming, juggling, freeze posing, politics, tap-dancing, shticks such as ‘dog playing dead lying in a coffin’, comedy, and so on.” (Marina, 2016: 3)

Figure 5: Busker in London



Source: ‘Baritone Horn’, by Stephen Percival, is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

I chose to conduct interviews with buskers who were performing at a one-off Street Performer Festival in London (but who all had busking experiences

outside the festival context). The festival took place in a public square and was freely accessible. The event was targeted at a cross-range of buskers, but due to stipulations by the local authority that prohibited the collection of donations at the event, many buskers dropped out. As a result, the buskers participating in the event were all musicians, while other cultural forms were not represented.

Figure 6: Busker near the Greenwich Street Performer Festival



Source: Author, 2015

The 'profile' of the buskers I interviewed varied. There were a number of music students or recent music graduates who busk in their leisure time. There were also several people who did not have a music background, but liked playing music as a leisure pursuit, including privately at home, with friends, at open mics, or indeed, busking. The list of interviewees also included one 'full-time' busker who was licensed on the Transport for London Underground Busking Scheme.

Book sharing

Book sharing practices describe a range of initiatives that enable the free and anonymous exchange and storage of books, often found outdoors in public spaces or in a range of public indoors venues such as coffee shops, pubs or in train stations. According to Openbookcase.org, there are currently more than 3,200 public book cases across the world.

Figure 7: Book swap in London train station



Source: Author, 2015

Book sharing initiatives are set up and financed by a wide range of (mainly small civil) organisations and individuals. These include initiatives started by neighbourhood and resident associations, cafes and pubs, individuals, artists/activists and environmental charities, but are largely grassroots initiatives (thus fitting my selection criteria). However, the case study also touches on other aspects of 'informality', including issues of regulation around the use of these book sharing initiatives (for instance how many books can be taken without considered to be theft) and legality of their operation (for instance whether or not a permission is required to set up a book sharing initiative in a public space). As the name of the case study suggests, the focus is on books and literature – thus meeting the cultural aspect of my case study criteria.

Using a quantitative survey, Pierkowsky et al (2008) established a user profile for a book swap in Bonn, Germany. However, to-date this remains the only academic study of the phenomenon.

Figure 8: Book swap in London



Source: Author, 2015

The majority of book sharing activities included in my case study were book swaps in London train or underground stations set up by individuals or small neighbourhood or resident associations. However, a couple of them were also managed by Transport for London staff. The case study also features a number of different book sharing activities, including two ‘free book shops’, set up in temporary spaces earmarked for private development – one set up by a group of civic actors, the other run by a larger charity. Furthermore, the case study included a book swap in an old phone box, a ‘free little library’ installed in an individual’s garden, and a project where new books donated by publishers are distributed for free on the London Underground.

Guerrilla Gardening

In London, there are a number of different initiatives broadly fitting under the umbrella of guerrilla gardening, which are either 'self-organised' by individuals or 'grassroots organised' by small community organisations. According to Adams et al (2015:1232), guerrilla gardening is an urban trend that involves volunteers targeting:

“spaces of neglect: they transform the environment [through cultivation] without the landowner’s consent, and thus could be deemed to be acting unlawfully.” (Adams et al, 2015: 1232)

As this citation highlights, the guerrilla gardening case study thus also relates to other informality dimensions such as legality and regulation (for instance, whether or not guerrilla gardeners have the authorisation for their activities).

Figure 9: Guerrilla gardening project on London high street



Source: Author, 2015

While there is a growing body of research on guerrilla gardening, mainly from North America, many existing accounts derive “from those practising the activity” and “various other writers and informal bloggers” (*Ibid.*: 1231). As a result, they often present a celebratory representation of guerrilla gardening groups as resisting against the mainstream and oppressive authorities (Adams et al, 2015; Adams & Hardman, 2014). Indeed, my desk research found that there is a significant number of guerrilla gardening projects in London which originate from activist or political campaign groups around issues such as environmental protection, sustainable food production or legalisation of cannabis. But Adams & Hardman (2014) argue that guerrilla gardening activities are not exclusively about resistance, but that ambitions around the beautification of space are equally of importance. Thus, guerrilla gardening touches on issues of visual and public design, as well as aesthetics. In this sense, guerrilla gardening initiatives can be considered a cultural form in its broader sense. Given the broad cultural definition I employed for my case study selection, this case study meets my criteria.

Figure 10: Guerrilla gardening project in London



Source: Author, 2016

The guerrilla gardening projects included in this case study covered a breadth of actors and set ups. A couple of my interviewees were individuals who

engaged in guerrilla gardening in their local area (and sometimes further afield) on a range of public spaces, mostly without consent of the landowner. A couple of projects were now part of an official residents' association but had emerged from a group of neighbours getting together to start guerrilla gardening in their streets. These projects generally took place on land owned by the local Council, often either officially authorised or implicitly condoned by the public authorities concerned. There was also one project set up by an individual on a temporary site earmarked for private development that had negotiated an official lease of the space, while another one was part of a larger action and campaign group that set up a community garden and squatted on a private site.

Equal Streets

The Equal Street movement in Mumbai is a campaign that aims to 'reclaim' streets for public usage and to create permanent walking and cycling infrastructure change in the city. The campaign was built around a weekly event which was inspired by the Ciclovía movement, which began in Bogotá, Colombia, in the 1970s and has since spread to cities around the world (Cohen et al, 2016). In Mumbai, the event was first launched in November 2014. Each Sunday morning select roads were closed off to motorised transport in the Bandra, Santa Cruz and Khar areas. The streets were then made freely accessible to the public for a range of cultural and leisure activities, including cycling, yoga, dancing, meditation, board games, chalk drawing, painting and crafts. The event was organised by Equal Streets Movement, a group that was formed by various individuals, local activists and grassroots organisations such as cycling clubs and residents' and neighbourhood associations. Thus, the case study meets the main criteria for inclusion as being 'grassroots organised'. Although cultural aims are not at the forefront of the event, the cultural elements included in the project were not coincidental, but purposely included (see section 4.6.3 for further discussion).

Figure 11: Chalk drawing at Equal Streets event



Source: Equal Streets

The event ran for about six months in the Bandra area and in the following two years in the Juhu area of Mumbai. At the time of the interviews, the event had been interrupted while the organisers sought to obtain further permissions from Mumbai Police and local authorities. While similar events (in particular in North America) have been subject of a number of evaluation and academic studies, the almost exclusive focus of this research has been on the events' links to public health and preventive medicine (for example, Cohen et al, 2016; Engelberg et al, 2014; Hipp et al, 2014), while a broader interrogation, that also includes elements of culture, remains lacking.

'Spot fix'

'Spot fix' initiatives are part of a recent urban trend in India. They are often inspired by, if not necessarily directly affiliated with, the activities of The Ugly Indian, a group of anonymous citizens that started out in Bangalore to

“fix[] streets, neighbourhoods, cities and the country – one ugly spot at a time [– using] their own time, hands and money.” (Rattanpal, 2015)

Spot fix initiatives aim to clean up, maintain and beautify public spaces. They are (self-)organised by individuals and small civic groups, thus meeting the main selection criteria. The activities generally comprise a range of public space improvement activities that go beyond merely cleaning public spaces, but include a range of cultural elements such as painting and art work, planting and landscaping, and improvement of public realm design. As with the Equal Streets case study, while not having specific cultural aims, many of the projects deliberately choose to include cultural elements to achieve their (wider) objectives.

Figure 12: Spot fix project site in Mumbai



Source: Author, 2015

The case study comprises a diversity of projects. The majority of these projects is concerned with the transformation and beautification of train stations or the

area immediately adjacent to train stations. However, one project was rather a campaign to clean up, save and increase a large public green space; while another one was aiming to raise awareness of environmental issues by transforming dead trees into art works. These projects were run by a range of civic actors, including a couple of groups of young college students, a university lecturer in conjunction with recent graduates from this university, a group of house wives, a group drawn from members of a specific socio-religious community, as well as by a number of individuals.

Figure 13: Spot fix project in Mumbai



Source: Nimesh Dave

Most of the five case studies outlined above consist of multiple ‘projects’, while one is a single project case study (however, for each, multiple individuals were interviewed – see section 3.4.1).

Figure 14 briefly summarises how the case studies meet the selection criteria. It also indicates whether they are multiple or single case studies.

Figure 14: Overview of case studies

City	Case study	Selection criteria			Multiple or single-case
		<i>Self-organisation</i>	<i>Main cultural form</i>	<i>Public space</i>	
London	Busking/Street Performer Festival	Individual self-organised busking practices/event organised through personal networks	Music	Public spaces across London/public square	Multiple: 9 busking acts
London	Book sharing	Initiatives by individuals or under umbrella of local civic association	Literature	Range of public spaces, including train and tube stations, shopping centre and streets	Multiple: 12 book swaps
London	Guerrilla gardening	Initiatives by individuals, or under umbrella of local civic associations, or by political campaign groups	Gardening and public realm design	Range of spaces, including tree pits, local squares, squatted area, private development site - all accessible by public	Multiple: 8 guerilla gardening projects
Mumbai	Equal Streets movement	Joint initiative by range of individuals and local civic organisations	Mixed cultural forms and leisure activities	Select roads	Single
Mumbai	Spot Fix initiatives	Initiatives by individuals, or under umbrella of local civic associations	Arts and public realm design	Train stations and roads	Multiple: 7 spot fix projects

For each case study, I then needed to select my research participants; that is, the individuals organising the informal practices. How I proceeded to sample the relevant research participants is subject of the following section.

3.3.3 Selection of research participants

As argued in section 2.4.2, despite the common research emphasis on ‘the poor’ and other ‘disenfranchised’ groups, informality is not restricted to these groups (Roy, 2009; 2011). Given my overall research aim which seeks to interrogate the multiplicity of informal cultural practices in the urban context, it would therefore be desirable to speak to a wide range of urban actors who engage in the informal cultural practices that are subject of my case studies.

In order to do so, I used purposive sampling to strategically choose “with whom, where, and how” I do my research (Palys, 2008: 697). Applying my expert knowledge, I aimed for a maximum variation sample. That is, I was searching for informants whose knowledge and experiences would allow me to look at the chosen informal cultural practices from as many angles as possible. I used a mix of desk research, gate keepers and snowball techniques in order to identify suitable projects and/or individual organisers for each case study. The process of identifying my research participants is discussed in more detail in section 3.4.4.

The research also included a small number of stakeholder interviews with public authorities. The first purpose of these wider stakeholder interviews was to contextualise and triangulate my findings from the research with urban actors, thus increasing its reliability and validity. Therefore, I chose to talk to public authorities that were directly involved with the projects I was researching. All contacts for these interviews were provided to me by the urban actors themselves. The second purpose of these interviews was to interrogate how policy-makers and public authorities deal with informal cultural practices. Such a perspective was of interest to the study because public authorities are key players in en- or disabling informal cultural practices. Their regulations and boundaries are intricately linked to the (unregulated) informal practice: they are informality's 'other'. Due to the limited resources of the study, I was only able to conduct a small number of these contextual interviews, which provide useful data for answering my fourth research question. However, in order to fully answer this question, further research would be necessary (see section 7.3.1).

In this section, I have outlined my rationales for choosing my case studies, the cities they take place in, as well as the participants of my research. What follows hereafter is a description of the detailed processes by which I gathered my data.

3.4 Field work

While the previous section described my rationales and approach for sampling my case studies and research participants, this section now discusses in detail how I collected the data for this study.

In planning my research, I had decided that I would use in-depth, semi-structured interviews as my main method of data collection, as they were most appropriate for an in-depth exploration of issues of informality in relation to urban cultural practices – the main research aim of my study. However, as I outline below, throughout the course of my field work I had to deal with a number of methodological challenges – intricately linked to researching the informal – which meant that I had to adapt my research methods, sometimes at short notice. As a result of these changes, in addition to my interviews, I

employed a number of other data collection methods, which are briefly summarised in Figure 15.

In what follows, I describe all of the data collection methods I used in more detail. In section 3.4.1, I describe the interviews I carried out. In section 3.4.2, I discuss my focus groups, before dealing with site visits, informal interviews and participant observation in section 3.4.3. In section 3.4.4, I then describe how I gained access to interviewees and the role that gatekeepers played in this process. In section 3.4.5, I discuss the process of actually carrying out the interviews before, finally, in 3.4.6, dealing with some of the ethical implications of conducting research on *informal* cultural practices.

Figure 15: Overview of data collection, by case study

Case study	No. of projects	Informal actor interviews			Informal actor focus groups		Site visits	Stakeholder interviews	
		No. of individual interviews	No. of group interviews	Total no. of research participants	No. of focus groups	Total no. of research participants		No. of interviews	Total no. of research participants
Busking/Street Performer Festival	9	7	2	12	0	0	9	1	1
Book sharing	12	13	1	15	0	0	7	1	3
Guerrilla Gardening	8	9	1	11	0	0	6	2	3
Equal Streets	1	6	1	8	0	0	0	0	0
Spot fix	7	3	2	7	3	26	3	1	1
Total	37	38	7	52	3	26	25	5	8

3.4.1 Individual and group interviews

Between July 2015 and January 2016, 48 interviews were carried out across the five case studies. The large majority of those interviews were held with urban cultural actors who deploy informality (hereafter, simply referred to as 'informal' actors), while a small number was carried out with stakeholders. I decided on carrying out interviews because they allowed me to explore, in-depth, an individual's perception of my topic of interest (Crabtree et al., 2013) – that is, informal cultural practices in the urban context. As Charmaz (2006: 28) argues, "intensive qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well" since both are "open-ended, yet directed, shaped, yet emergent, and paced, yet unrestricted". I opted for a semi-structured interview guide in order to allow my research participants to "address issues in their own terms", while leaving myself the opportunity to probe deeply and clarify meanings (Crabtree et al, 2013: 142).

For most projects, I carried out one interview with the main organiser. However, in a few cases, organisers advised me to conduct a separate interview with a colleague, because they felt that the other person had valuable views to add to my research. In the case of the Equal Streets case study, I spoke to 7 of the 14 main organisers, all of whom represented a different civic organisation. I continued interviewing until I felt that I was not learning anything new and that I had an in-depth understanding of the Equal Streets project from different viewpoints.

My original intention was to carry out one-to-one, in-person interviews. Apart from two exceptions, all interviews were carried out in-person. The two other interviews were conducted by phone at the request of the interviewees. This highlights the importance of flexibility on behalf of the researcher in successfully carrying out research on informal practices.

Most interviews were also carried out individually. However, a number of interviews were conducted in a small group of two or three people (see Figure 15). In each case, this happened at the request of the interviewee. Of course, it

is important to note that there are differences between individual and group interviews. One of the major differences lies in the relative depth with which subjects can be explored, with individual interviews typically allowing for greater depth, while group interviews tending to have greater breadth (Crabtree et al., 2013). More importantly, the data from group interviews is the result of group interaction, discussion and debate, which may influence the contributions of each individual research participant (Morgan, 1996). Some research (Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1996) has found this to be problematic in studies perceived as sensitive by research participants (for example, HIV or adolescent sexuality). However, Kitzinger (1994) highlights that there is no generalised effect of groups on data difference, but rather it depends on the group's composition, the topic, the relationship of the interviewer to the group, and the general context of the interview. She also points out that, although possibly different, data from one type of interview has no more validity or "truth" than the other (*Ibid.*: 117). Since there was no particular sensitivity about my research topic, differences in the data should only be a minor concern. Furthermore, the group situation was an expressed preference by the interviewees.

Most interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, with group interviews typically lasting slightly longer than individual interviews. All interviews were conducted in English, although some interviewees in Mumbai would use basic words or short phrases in Hindi.

3.4.2 Focus groups

In addition to the interviews that took place in small groups, I also conducted three focus groups with larger groups. They were not initially planned, but took place because interviewees from a number of spot fix projects requested for the core team to be involved in the interview process. While it would have been desirable to interview all of the team members individually, this was not possible for several reasons. Firstly, the logistics of arranging a potentially large number of individual interviews (considering that a total of 26 individuals were involved in the focus groups) would have been very difficult within the short time scale available (all of these projects were identified through snow-balling referrals by

interviewees less than 10 days before my departure from Mumbai). Secondly, the interviewees voiced a strong preference for being interviewed as a group. In two of the cases, I sensed a certain inhibition among the participants about the interview situation and my status as the foreign researcher. Being interviewed in a group seemed to give the research participants the confidence and a feeling of 'security' that made them happy to participate in the research. For further discussion of this issue, see section 3.4.5.3 and 3.4.6.

The number of participants that took part in each of the three focus groups varied. In each case, my main contact had requested to bring along 'a couple' of the other core team members. However, in two cases, I was surprised to be met by as many as 8 and 14 people upon my arrival at the agreed interview location. While I was prepared to conduct a small group interview, the much larger number of people meant that I had to quickly adapt my data collection strategy.

While the focus group method was not planned, it still fitted within my overall research approach (as outlined in section 3.2) – that is to carry out an in-depth, grounded study of informal cultural practices. Indeed, Hennink (2014) argues that focus group discussions are an ideal method for exploratory research. Similar to group interviews, the most important characteristic of focus group research is "the interactive discussion through which data is generated which leads to a different type of data not accessible through individual interviews" (*Ibid.*: 2-3). During the discussion, participants both query each other and explain themselves to each other, which may trigger additional issues being raised, and clarity, depth and detail of the discussion being increased (*Ibid.*; Morgan, 1996). In my experience, the focus groups led to more spontaneous and lively debates, and gave me more often the opportunity to just 'listen in' – something that was well-suited to my explorative research design. Undoubtedly, this requires additional facilitation skills on behalf of the researcher. However, due to my professional background, I had previous experience in conducting focus groups and was able to deal with the situation when required.

While I broadly followed the same question guide, I structured the discussion in a different way. I introduced a number of key 'structural' focus points in order to

manage the group dynamics and to ensure that all research participants were involved in the discussion. I also left more space for the discussion of newly emergent issues. All of this led to the focus groups taking longer than the interviews, with durations from one hour to close to two hours.

3.4.3 Site visits, informal interviews and observation

In addition to conducting formal interviews and focus groups, I also carried out site visits for 25 of the 37 projects across four case studies. Only for the Equal Streets case study I did not carry out any site visit, since the event had been interrupted during the time of my research.

Site visits had formed a part of my research design, wherever possible, as an additional way of gaining insights into the specific practices that I was observing. However, during the course of the research, the site visits took on an increasingly important role. They greatly helped me to deepen my understanding of the practice and to contextualise the data collected through interviews and focus groups. In particular, they enabled me to carry out a range of informal interviews and participant observation, which I discuss hereafter. However, as I elaborate further in sections 3.4.5 and 3.4.6, they also added some practical and ethical challenges to my research.

Informal interviews seem to be “casual conversations”, but where structured interviews have an explicit agenda, informal interviews may have “a specific but implicit research agenda” (Fetterman, 2015: 187). Usually these informal interviews were snippets of conversation with my interviewees, while they were showing me around the site and before the recording had started, or after it had stopped. Rather than being guided by a script of specific set of topics, I often used them to follow up on something that my interviewees had said and which had kept my attention (Mbaye, 2011). But in a number of cases, they also involved impromptu meetings with individuals other than my interviewees.

Such informal interviews often only provided me with interesting context to the project (rather than generating significant amounts of data for my interrogation). However, there were some exceptions to this, as this example illustrates:

During one site visit, I had arranged a formal interview with a station manager in relation to a spot fix project. The interview itself was very unsatisfactory, since he gave very brief, seemingly rehearsed and defensive answers. After the conclusion of this interview, I remained seated in his office for about half an hour, alongside my mother-in-law who had accompanied me to the visit, as I was waiting for the main project organiser to join me for an interview. While waiting, my mother-in-law engaged him in a conversation in Marathi (both her and the station manager's mother tongue), which she translated for me. The conversation soon turned to the project that I was there to interrogate. While during the formal interview he had seemed suspicious of my intentions and very aware of my status of a foreign researcher and of being recorded, he was much happier to elaborate and share his views in the following informal conversation. [Excerpt from my research diary]

Such material fed into the findings of my thesis alongside the data collected through formal research methods, as set out in section 3.5.

Given that the majority of the people with whom I conducted informal interviews were also participating in my formal research, they were aware of my status as researcher and that, even though I was not recording them on an audio device, their views would feed into my research. Therefore, the terms of the consent form they signed during the formal data collection tasks (see section 3.4.5) also applied. Similarly to the formal interviews, they made it clear to me, if they wished for certain statements to be 'off the record' and not to be included.

In addition to conducting informal interviews, the site visits also allowed me to partake in participant (and more passive forms of) observation. Participant observation – in combination with questioning of actors – permits an “intense depiction” of the community or practice that is being studied, which leads to a deeper and fuller understanding (Fine, 2015: 530). For instance, a number of book swap organisers invited me to take part in their usual practice, whether it was dropping books on the London Underground, tidying up a book shelf in a

station, or indeed engaging with the book sharing initiative as an active user. These practical experiences helped to contextualise or clarify what they had told me in the interview. Participant observation also allowed me to compare the statements made in the interviews to actual behaviours in practice. As Fine (2015: 532) puts it, observations “provide a check on what one is told for reasons of impression management”. While in the majority of cases, the direct observation of practice seemed to confirm what my research participants had told me, sometimes my observations challenged some of their earlier statements. This provided me then with an opportunity to further investigate the issue, usually in the form of an informal interview.

Since informal interviews and participant observations could not be audio-recorded or transcribed, I had to rely on detailed field notes which I made immediately after the end of my site visit in my research diary. Field notes consist of the “facts that are observed, including actions, statements, and the feelings of the observer” (Field, 2015: 233). As much as possible, I recorded informal interviews in the words of my informants in my notes. Keeping a research diary thus enabled me to take note of my observations and informal interview data, of incidents that occurred, as well as to start reflecting on different aspects of the research process (Blaxter et al., 2006; Mbaye, 2011).

3.4.4 Access to research participants

Having set out the different data collection methods I used in my study, I now discuss how I identified and accessed my research participants. For each case study activity, I needed to identify relevant projects and individual interviewees. In order to do so, I mostly used a mix of desk research and snowball techniques; that is, the sampling process by which researcher “accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (Noy, 2008: 330).

Snowball techniques are considered to be particularly effective to access hidden or otherwise inaccessible research populations (Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Noy, 2008). While the majority of my research participants was not intentionally hiding or “shield[ing] themselves from public awareness” (Cohen & Arieli, 2011:

427), they were hard-to-reach for research purposes, due to the informality of their organisation, public profile and communications. Being introduced or referred through a trusted friend or acquaintance also decreased any potential fear or mistrust of myself, as a researcher, and increased the likelihood of my participants agreeing to speak to me. Thus, using this technique was the only way in order for research to be conducted at all (*Ibid.*).

However, critics argue that snowball sampling is prone to selection bias and that it should not be the “first choice of research methodology when a more representative sampling method is possible” (*Ibid.*: 427; Sedgwick, 2013). In their paper entitled “What we didn’t learn because of who would not talk to us”, Groger et al (1999: 834) further argue:

“Because as qualitative researchers we focus on meaning, we tend to be satisfied with the meaningful utterances of our informants. [...] When we encounter redundancy, we feel assured that we have tapped the full range of variation; actually, we might not have because of who would not talk to us.”

In order to limit the selection bias, I used a number of parallel snowball networks, but admittedly, further ‘variation of meaning’ is likely to exist. However, it is important to note that representativeness was not an objective of my study. Indeed, my overall methodological approach rejects any kind of generalisation or universalisation of experiences (see section 3.1.2). Arguably, it even strengthens a major argument of this thesis: in the following chapters, I will use my findings from the field work to demonstrate that there exists a multiplicity of informal practices – which would most likely increase by talking to more (and different) people, engaging in different informal cultural practices and in different cities.

Figure 16 summarises how I accessed my interviewees for each case study.

Figure 16: Means of access to interviewees

Case study	Source of initial contact details	Direct observation of practice	Snowball techniques
Busking	Line-up of programme for Street Performer Festival; followed by desk research to obtain contact details (identified and contacted 16 out of 32 acts)	Some direct approaches at the festival	Some further introductions to other buskers at the festival
Book sharing	Online directory openbookcase.org; followed by desk research to obtain contact details (identified and contacted 25 out of 45 listed entries)		Some further referrals through interviewees
Guerrilla Gardening	Websites guerrillagardening.org and pimpyourpavement.com, as well as general desk research (identified and contacted 15 organisers)		Some further referrals through interviewees
Equal Streets	Desk research to obtain contact details of all civic organisations involved in the campaign, (identified and contacted 9 out of 13 organisations)		One further referral through an interviewee
Spot fix	Desk research of news pages and social media (identified and contacted 7 organisers)	One direct observation of practice, followed by desk research to obtain contact details	Several further referrals through interviewees

My final sample of research participants included individuals from different backgrounds, including professionals, political activists and squatters, housewives and mothers, university and college students, and retired people. While I did not collect detailed information on the socio-economic background of my interviewees, the information that I recorded through the data collection and through participant observation suggests that most of them were well-educated and part of an 'urban' middle class. The profile of interviewees was broadly similar across the different case studies in both cities. While there were a

couple of interviewees from a lower socio-economic background in London (especially in the busking and book sharing case studies), in Mumbai, the large majority of my interviewees had a relatively high socio-economic status. While I did not intend to focus on interviewees with such a well-educated, middle-class profile, in the case of Mumbai, this was at least partly due to the fact that I carried out all of my interviews in English (thus requiring a relatively high level of education).

This clearly suggests that my findings are not 'representative' of the overall population of London and Mumbai. However, this was not an intention, and in contrast, the findings for this particular group provide a novel contribution to the research field, as discussed in section 7.2.2.

I used a range of communication tools in order to identify and contact research participants. In particular, I used different social media platforms (including Facebook, blogs, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and AboutMe), alongside phone, email and website contact forms. In London, the most successful approaches were made via email or Facebook messaging. In Mumbai, I got very few responses to emails, while more 'instantaneous' forms of communications, such as social media and WhatsApp, proved most successful.

Most of the interview arrangements I made in Mumbai, but also for the busking case study, were at very short notice – bearing witness to some cultural norms, but perhaps more importantly to the spontaneous nature of the informal practices I was researching. In some cases, information was only being made available at the last minute (as for the street performer festival), while in others contacts were shared through personal referrals by interviewees, and interviews then had to be arranged within the limited time of my research trip. However, even where I did have contact details earlier and my contacts had agreed to an interview in principle, many of my Mumbai interviewees were reluctant to be pinned down on a date or time that was several weeks away. Thus, my numerous emails and exchanges that began three months prior to my research trip to Mumbai, only yielded 3 confirmed interviews. In contrast, a further 9

interviews and 3 focus groups were arranged at short notice once I had reached Mumbai.

The advantage of this lack of planning meant that I remained open to seize a number of additional, relevant interview opportunities that presented themselves during my trip and during the event. However, there were also disadvantages to this approach. In particular, the logistics of organising interviews were made more difficult by the last minute interview confirmations. For instance, one interview that had been agreed spontaneously at the busking festival lasted considerably longer than the previous ones. This meant that I ended up running late for another interview that I had agreed in advance and my interviewee had left.⁶ In addition to interviews overlapping, coordinating my travel to the interviews was equally made challenging by last-minute confirmations. The short timescales also meant that I rarely had time for in-depth preparation for the interview, for instance to carry out background research on the interviewee, or to adapt the question guide in advance. It also meant that I was sometime not able to provide the interviewees with the information sheet about my research project until immediately before the interview. In these cases, I gave my interviewees time to read and process the information, before asking them whether they wished to go ahead with the interview.

Sometimes my interview arrangements were also mediated through gatekeepers. In particular for my stakeholder interviews I relied on organisers to provide me with the relevant contact details. Some of my interviewees were happy to put me in touch with public authority staff they had dealt with. This made it much more likely for me to arrange an interview than in those cases, where I was only given a name or department and I had to send an unsolicited email. A number of interviewees preferred me to not speak to their contacts at

⁶ I was subsequently able to re-arrange the interview for another day.

the public authority. In at least two cases, they felt that their relationship was politically sensitive, that their negotiations over the continuation of the project had reached a crucial point, and that my interview might negatively affect the outcome of their negotiations (for example, by raising issues that might reflect negatively on them). While I tried to reassure them, re-iterated the confidentiality of anything they had told me, and shared my question guide with them, they were unwilling to share their contacts.

On the whole, public authorities were less likely to agree to an interview than the organisers themselves. This is likely because stakeholders seemed to value my research a lot less. For instance, interviews with the local council staff dealing with the street performer festival, as well as with the Mumbai Railway Corporation staff dealing with a couple of spot fix projects never went ahead (despite initial email exchanges) due to a perceived lack of priority. Others never replied to me in first place. In addition to issues of priority, other factors (such as my role as 'foreign researcher') might also have played a role for gatekeepers to refuse me access. This is further discussed in section 3.4.5. In the following section I also explain the process of carrying out the interviews and focus groups in greater detail.

3.4.5 Research process

Before carrying out the interviews and focus groups, all my research participants were provided with an information sheet that gave details about the research project and outlined their ethical rights (see Appendix 4). The interviews were audio-recorded. At the end of the interview, research participants also signed a consent form, whereby they stated that they had understood their rights and the way I was going to use their data. All my interviews were carried out confidentially.

3.4.5.1 Question guide

The interviews followed a semi-structured question guide, which can be found in Appendix 2. The main themes of the question guide remained the same across all case studies, although it was slightly adapted for each case study to take

consideration of project-specific elements. Also, during the course of my interviews I became aware of an additional theme (around 'informal' actors' approach to media and publicity) that was frequently mentioned, especially in my research in Mumbai. Thus, I adapted my question guide to include a prompt on this issue. Such adaptation of the interview topics is in line with grounded theory practice, which suggests refining (and potentially narrowing) interview topics in order to gather more "specific data for developing our theoretical frameworks as we proceed with conducting interviews" (Charmaz, 2006: 29). I also adapted the question guide for my focus groups, as set out in section 3.4.2.

3.4.5.2 Research settings

The interviews and focus groups took place in a range of settings. These interview locations were generally suggested by my interviewees. About half of my interviews and focus groups took place indoors, public venues, such as cafés and hotel bars. A small number took place in the research participants' private homes or in an office. But a sizeable number of interviews (15) took place outdoors, including near railway stations, at the site of the street performer festival or over a garden fence. These different research settings proved challenging in a variety of ways.

Perhaps the most obvious challenge for interviews that took place in public spaces was the background noise, including loud espresso machines, background music in cafes, hotels and at the festival site, and trains or traffic going past at outdoor sites. Such background noise affected the quality of my interview recordings, which made the transcription process more difficult. Where possible, I tried to move my interviewees away from the source of noise; however, interviewees were not always willing to go away very far (for example, to walk away from the festival site to a quieter spot).

While noise was not a problem in office spaces and (most) private homes, these settings presented other challenges. Office environments gave the interview a more 'official' and 'professional' feel, which also translated into a different attitude by research participants towards the interview. Apart from one exception, the interviews in office spaces were a lot more concise and focused,

with interviewees less likely to expand on their responses or to divert from the question asked. In contrast, interviews that took place in public spaces were more relaxed and interviewees seemed less aware of time constraints.

In line with ethical guidelines, I tried to avoid meeting my research participants at their private homes, in order to guarantee the health and safety of myself, as the researcher. However, due to logistical reasons, I had to make a number of exceptions. In these cases, I took care to ensure that my personal safety remained paramount, usually by taking along a chaperone. However, conducting research in private homes also meant that I had to adapt, and to some extent submit, to the habits and norms of the individual I was welcomed by. In most cases, this did not constitute a problem, but in the case of one focus group in Mumbai, the norms of the specific socio-cultural group of my research participants affected the research process. For instance, the focus group was clearly dominated by the male voices in the group. In contrast, several of the women felt obliged to their hosting duties, and periodically left the focus group discussion to prepare food and offer drinks. Towards the end of the focus group, the discussion was also cut off prematurely by one participant, who was the project lead, who thanked me for speaking to them and announced that food was now being served.

During interviews and focus groups which took place in other informal, public spaces or on-site I also had to contend with interruptions. Such interruptions included interviewees meeting acquaintances on-site and interrupting the interview to have a chat, or a station manager, who carried out the interview while on duty, periodically making station announcements. A few of my interviewees also wanted to show me around the site at the same time as being interviewed, which meant that the flow of the conversation was sometimes interrupted by them pointing out a particular feature of the site.

Overall, the research participants showed a positive attitude towards the research project and my request to speak to them. The research setting sometimes had a bearing on the research participants' attitude. Often, research participants valued the fact that I had made an effort to come and see them at

the site of the project. One exception to this was the street performer festival, where a couple of interviewees gave me the feeling that I was interrupting them from having a good day out in the sun, listening to friends playing music – despite the interview having been pre-arranged. As a result they were reluctant to move to a different (quieter) interview location.

3.4.5.3 Status of ‘foreign researcher’

In the case of the Mumbai case studies, the attitude of my interviewees was often linked to my status as ‘foreign researcher’. As Roy (2009, 2016: 201) reminds us, it is not only important to pay attention to the ‘geographies of theory’, but

“such geographies are also necessarily biographies. Those biographies indicate the ‘politics of location’, a term I borrow from feminist poet Adrienne Rich (2003 [1984]), within which we are centered or marginalized. To speak is to speak from a place on the map which, as Rich reminds us, is also a place in history.”

It is worth noting, that I was a ‘foreign’ researcher in both cities. However, having lived in the UK for a decade and given the internationalism of the city of London, my status as ‘foreign researcher’ was hardly ever remarked or commented upon.

In contrast, in the case of the Mumbai case studies, many interviewees expressed that they felt honoured that I had come ‘all the way from London’ to speak to them. As Dinardi (2012: 75) observed for her research in Argentina, the mention of this “global city certainly awakened curiosity, if not postcolonial admiration of Europe”. This was equally true in my research and helped to gain access to research participants. More than that, they were sometimes willing to make a significant effort to meet me. For instance, during one focus group that took place in the hotel where I was staying I became aware that several of the research participants had got up early on a Saturday and travelled up to two hours to participate in my research.

Thus, participating in a research project linked to an English speaking university carried some prestige and formality. However, this status as ‘foreign researcher’

sometimes affected the power relations between me, the researcher, and the research participants. While I generally positioned myself as a friendly, non-threatening interlocutor in an informal conversation, I still sometimes became aware of this unequal power balance. For instance, a couple of interviewees were wary of my intentions and very keen to promote the project, and their involvement, in a positive light, including one interviewee who specifically requested me at the end of our conversation to be “kind” in my reflections on India.

In another case, I realised from comments made by the participants of a focus group, who were mostly young college students, that they felt somewhat intimidated by the environment of the western-style hotel which we were meeting in. They were also extremely reluctant to order any drinks or food, even after I had reassured them that I would pay the bill for everyone, which suggests that they were just not accustomed to the norms and behaviours expected of them in this particular space.⁷

However, being sensitive to such feelings was an important element of me being able to conduct my research. For instance, with regards to the group of college students, I quickly realised that – despite the unfamiliar location – they were gaining confidence from the fact that they were in their group of friends. Thus, I decided that I would not insist on carrying out individual interviews with them, or to only interview a couple of the lead team members. Instead I adapted my research technique to that of a focus group. These decisions made them feel valued and helped to quickly build trust and bridge the power inequality, as proven by the length and increasing openness of the conversation, and that by

⁷ This was not the case with all research participants in India, as I met many of them in the same space and they seemed much more at ease in the surroundings.

the end, group members liberally asked me questions and requested personal favours.

The latter issue touches upon an ethical issue – that of the boundaries between the personal and the research – which I frequently came across throughout my field work. Indeed, while similar issues may occur in all types of research, I would argue that the very subject of my research, the informal, meant that I was presented with a number of ethical issues that I may not have otherwise encountered. This is further discussed in the following section.

3.4.6 Ethical challenges of conducting research on the ‘informal’

Throughout the previous sections, I already highlighted a number of practical challenges that I faced during my field work that were at least in part linked to my research topic, the ‘informal’. Such challenges included difficulties to find information about relevant activities, uncertainty and lack of planning with regards to the actual practices and my research activities, the need to adapt data collection methods to changed circumstances, as well as dealing with the implications of my variety of ‘informal’ research settings. All of these practical, methodological issues also have an ethical dimension, as I needed to negotiate an often delicate balance between complying with the ethical standards of good research and being able to carry out the research at all. In this section, I now discuss a number of ethical challenges that go beyond research design and methods, which I had to navigate throughout the course of my field work.

The first issue for me, in particular in my research in Mumbai, was to avoid offending social and cultural norms. What Fine (2015: 533) argues for the context of participant observation was very relevant for my research as a whole:

“The participant observer must become socialized to the environment with its norms, cultural traditions, and jargon. [...] Participant observation is a methodology that depends upon the establishment of relationships. It relies upon sociability. [...] The researcher who lacks the ability to make connections will have difficulty collecting credible research data.”

Given the context of my research and the kind of research participants I was dealing with, building relationships was crucial. Building a friendly rapport and trust with my interviewees was an essential component to a successful interview, as it made them more likely to fully engage with the issues I was interrogating. In my research in Mumbai, building such a trusting rapport was more difficult, given my status as the 'foreign researcher'. In order to bridge the perceived distance, I often began by sharing some of my personal biography and how it is linked to India. Where appropriate, I also affirmed my knowledge of Indian customs, history, food and drink, geographical landmarks, political context, etc. I was also asked several times by interviewees whether I spoke and understood Hindi, as I had subconsciously started using simple Hindi words in my conversation. As such, I was also aware of the importance of socio-cultural sensibilities and keen not to offend them. The following example illustrates this dilemma I faced repeatedly during my field work:

"At the time of my field research in Mumbai, I was 6 months pregnant and had to be particularly careful about my diet. This often meant refusing drinks or snacks that I was offered by my research participants. Given the importance of hospitality in the Indian culture, such behaviour might be perceived as a personal offence. During one site visit, I declined drinks and food offers repeatedly. I eventually felt that I had to 'honour' my research participant by accepting the next drink he offered, a 'lassi' [a spiced yoghurt drink]. This was despite the fact that I was not supposed to consume unpasteurised milk products and that it was purchased for me at a small street stall next to a railway station, which only seemed to have limited cooling facilities for the drinks on offer. In this situation I had to weigh up the ethical obligations I had towards the feelings and sensibilities of my research participant, with the ethical obligations I had with regards to maintaining the health and safety of myself, as the researcher. The outcome of this decision was dependent on each case: while in this situation, I felt that I should take the risk in order

not to jeopardise my relationship with my interviewee; I decided differently in other instances.” (Excerpt from my research diary)

While I was encountering such ethical dilemmas more frequently during my research in Mumbai, I was aware of not offending my research participants in both cities. In London, this was most prevalent in relation to drawing the boundaries of my research scope. Since I was relying on snowball techniques for identifying further relevant projects and interviewees, I always asked my research participants for suggestions. I interrogated all of the suggestions which were made to me, but they were not always relevant, or within the scope of my research. As a result I sometime found myself in an awkward situation, where my initial interviewees wanted to directly broker my contact with the people they had suggested or invited me to come to events, and I had to decline their offer.

Another ethical challenge I faced was to decide on the boundaries between research and my personal life. As I mentioned above, I was happy to share relevant information about my personal biography, especially with regards to bridging cultural difference. However, where to draw the boundary? For instance, in one interview in London, one interviewee repeatedly diverted from my interview questions to ask about my background and interests. Again and again, I had to politely steer the conversation back to the interview themes. Furthermore, since I used a range of social media to contact my research participants, I found myself ‘connected’ to them beyond my interview and I was sometimes unsure of how to deal with my new social media ‘friends’. Interviewees themselves contacted me a number of times, via WhatsApp or Facebook in the months following the interview, to ask about my research, but also to find out ‘how I was doing’ more generally. To continue the relationship felt like going beyond the research remit and the ethical stipulations I was bound to, but simply removing them from my contacts would have most likely offended them. More than that, I felt ‘indebted’ to them for taking the time, and sometimes making a considerable effort, to speak to me.

How to ‘return’ their favour, thus presented another challenge. Many research participants felt pleased and honoured that I had chosen to speak to them, and

this feeling, along with thanking my interviewees after each conversation, would be all they expected. But in some cases, I was asked for other 'return favours'. Most frequently, my interviewees in Mumbai requested me to take photos with them, which they then sometimes used for the promotion of their project. These requests for photos are another witness to my special status as 'foreign researcher' and the prestige that they associated with this. But it also raises questions to what extent I was being instrumentalised for their purposes. In general, I accepted to have my photo taken with them but requested them to inform me of any public use of the pictures.

More rarely, interviewees requested me to feedback my findings to them (for example, the views of a public authority stakeholder involved with their project). While I promised to send feedback on my main findings at the end of the research, I had to decline providing individual feedback due to confidentiality requirements. A few requests went much beyond the research, for instance when one interviewee requested me to review the CV of his brother (who was currently studying in my home country, Germany) and to forward it onto my network for placement opportunities. Since I was intent on helping out where I could, I ended up reviewing and circulating his application documents among my network, although I was unconvinced of his suitability. All of these examples bear witness to the principles of reciprocal exchange that many informal relationships are bound by, and which also applied to my research.

Finally, I faced an ethical challenge in dealing with family members during my Mumbai field research. My family-in-law was implicated in my field research in Mumbai since I had to rely on their help in order to mitigate any health and safety risks that could have occurred during my research trip. In particular, I requested them to accompany me to a number of site visits and interview locations. This was partly to ensure that I was able to find the interview location (which sometimes involved conversing in the local language Marathi with several passers-by), and partly to ensure my personal safety (for instance when I went for a focus group with more than 10 people, in a private home at the outskirts of Mumbai, a two-hour drive from my hotel, on a Sunday evening).

Sometimes, the presence of my in-laws helped to bridge cultural differences, instigate interesting informal interviews and to mitigate a number of the ethical dilemmas described above (for example, to refuse snacks and drinks on my behalf). On other occasions, their involvement in the research process was less helpful. For instance, on a couple of occasions, they responded to my questions on my interviewees' behalf during an informal interview. Thus, their involvement was once again a negotiation and careful balance between conflicting ethical principles, namely the health and safety of the researcher and the integrity of my research.

In this section, I have described the detailed research methods by which I gathered my data. I have also discussed how I gained access to my research participants, as well describing the actual process of carrying out the research. In what follows, I will describe the process of analysing my data.

3.5 Data analysis

In this section, I explain how I analysed my data and arrived at my findings. As outlined above, the main body of primary research data included the recordings of my interviews and focus groups, as well as the field notes that I had taken for them and for any informal interviews and participant observation. In section 3.5.1, I outline my overall approach to data analysis. In section 3.5.2, I then describe the process of coding my data, before discussing in 3.5.3 how I dealt with the data from my site visits.

3.5.1 Overall approach

Since my main research aim is to provide an in-depth and grounded understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context, I needed to find ways of analysing the collected material without much of my interference, "in order to let the data emerge by themselves [sic]" (Mbaye, 2011: 178). Thus, I used a grounded theory approach for my data analysis, in a sense that my theory was derived inductively through the systematic collection and analysis of data (Bowen, 2006). My data collection also followed an iterative and simultaneously analytical process. For instance, throughout the course of my

field work, I made decisions on the breadth and depth of sampling on an on-going basis, thus responding to the data I had already gathered and the gaps I perceived.

However, the transcriptions and the detailed analysis of the transcribed interviews and focus groups only took place the following year after I had completed all interviews.⁸ In this sense, my use of grounded theory must be considered as a version of the original conception, which would favour a continual iterative process of data collection and coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bowen, 2006). However, beginning the transcriptions and the coding process later ensured that I had developed some analytical distance to my collected material and could really let the data speak to me. It also meant that I was not overly influenced by particular data sources that were more recent and hence more present in my mind. More than that, in coding and analysing the interviews, I did not follow the sequence of the initial interviews. Rather than beginning with all case studies in London, followed by those in Mumbai, I continuously mixed up the order. This helped me to “try and disrupt the standard flows of urban theory [...] and develop new lines of enquiry” (Harris, 2008: 2412).

3.5.2 Coding of research data

As indicated above, an important analytical step in developing a grounded theory is thematic coding. Coding describes the process of understanding the meaning of the data, by summarising segments of data and categorising them with a short name (Charmaz, 2006). In line with my grounded theory approach, I coded for “semantic” themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 84), as opposed to

⁸ There was a gap of one year between the end of my field work and the beginning of my transcriptions because of a 12 months suspension of my research, due to maternity leave.

carrying out a positivist exercise of looking for 'regularity', as often used in quantitative content analysis.

I began with an initial close, line-by-line, examination of the data in order to develop provisional categories. At this stage, I coded for as many potential categories as possible. Where relevant, I also coded individual extracts multiple times to fit with different categories.

Through a subsequent process of constant comparison, these categories were then collapsed into themes or common threads that extended throughout an entire research transcript or a set of transcripts (Bowen, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Themes were usually concepts that were indicated by the data, rather than concrete statements made by the participants themselves (Bowen, 2006). I also paid attention to ensure that each of my themes had internal homogeneity (i.e. that they cohered internally) and external heterogeneity (i.e. that they were clearly distinct from other themes) (Patton, 1990).

I used the qualitative data software NVivo to help me in my coding process. Thus, I imported the original transcripts into NVivo and then coded the data using the software. I coded 3,736 extracts of text in NVivo from the 'informal' actor interviews, in addition to 323 references from the stakeholder interviews. Once I had completed the initial coding of these extracts of data, I created the larger themes. In doing so, I employed a mix of intuitive reflection, digital memo-writing (to elaborate categories and specify their properties) and on-paper organising (to define the relationships between different categories). I then re-organised the codes in NVivo to reflect this new structure. This sometimes involved re-naming codes. I also went through all of the individual data extracts again to ensure that they were still fitting under the relevant code name and – where necessary – re-coded the data extract under a different heading. I finally used NVivo to create and export reports with the detailed data extracts for each category and theme. These reports then provided the basis for developing a broad structure for my findings chapters.

3.5.3 Participant observation, informal interviews and field notes

As mentioned above in section 3.4.3, the data collected from my site visits was captured in detailed field notes which I made during, or immediately after the end of my visit or interview. This information was then typed up, thus producing a record that could be coded in a similar fashion to my interview transcripts.

Apart from some rare exceptions, the data collected from my site visits corroborated the material I had collected from my formal interviews and focus groups. In this sense, it provided a way of triangulating my findings, thus increasing their validity through cross-verification. However, it also added an additional layer to my understanding of the practice and helped to contextualise my findings.

3.6 Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, I have shown that the strong emphasis on measurement and quantitative data in the GaWC debate leads to an undue focus on measurable formal elements, while the 'immeasurable' informal is ignored. In order to genuinely revisit the theoretical object of informal cultural practices, the horizon of the debate does not only need to be extended conceptually, but also methodologically.

Comparative approaches have the ability to generate new knowledge about the urban, as long as they do not attempt to fit the diverse experiences of cities around the world into one universal theory. Moreover, rather than employing them as quasi-scientific methods, any study needs to seek out explorative methodologies, allow for making connections across different geographies and contexts, as well as between empirical data and theory. This calls for a grounded theory approach – which I have employed for my thesis in order to achieve my main research aim of providing an in-depth understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context. My grounded theory is developed through a number of case studies of informal cultural practices that are situated in two cities – one in the global North and one in the global South. By doing so, I go beyond merely paying lip service to the idea that much could be learned from putting the experiences of cities in different geographical areas

into conversation (an argument regularly made by scholars), and push the comparative urbanism agenda further still.

The chapter then went on to describe the research methods and process I employed in this study. I described how I selected the sites of my case studies, the actual case study activities, and my interviewees. I introduced the five case studies of busking, book sharing and guerrilla gardening in London, and the open street event Equal Streets and public space improvement ('spot fix') activities in Mumbai, as well as explaining how the case study fits the selection criteria.

I then explained step-by-step how I gathered my data. As Isaac (2013: 933) has pointed out: "The methods of inquiry ought always to be determined by the objects and the purposes of inquiry". This is even more important given the range of practical and ethical challenges that I was presented with throughout my field work – challenges that I have argued are inherent to my very research topic, i.e. conducting research on the 'informal'. These various challenges highlighted the need for flexibility and an ability to adapt to specific research contexts, sometimes at very short notice. This could mean increasing the range of research methods, making changes to the question guide, to 'make-do' with the research setting, and an individual and situated negotiation of (sometimes conflicting) ethical principles. While the changes in the research design constitute some challenges to the exact comparability of the data, this did not affect the validity of the data. In some cases, in particular the greater than expected number of site visits, it even helped to triangulate my data, thus increasing its validity.

Finally, I have discussed the process by which I analysed my data. In line with my overall methodological approach, that seeks to provide an in-depth and grounded theoretical understanding of informal cultural practice in the urban context, I used a grounded theory approach for my analysis. Thus, I conducted inductive, thematic analysis of my data. In the following chapters, I present the findings that emerged from such a methodological grounding in the field.

Throughout the chapter, the discussion has emphasised the importance of a reflexive research practice – one that not only “acknowledges the weaknesses and strengths of the research design” (Mattocks, 2017: 131), but recognises and highlights the implications of methodological decisions on the outcomes of the research. For instance, the decision to define ‘informal’ practices as those that are ‘self-organised’ and civic practices certainly had implications on the kind of people I interviewed, as well as on their perspectives. Inevitably, this needs to be reflected in the discussion of the findings (see section 7.2.2). Similarly, who I did not speak to equally has a bearing on the findings. As Groger et al (1999: 834) point out, this is a common issue for qualitative researchers who are “plague[d]” with “nagging doubts of ‘What if?’”.

However, the discussion also brings up a broader question regarding the validity of research that does not always go ‘by the book’. Cohen & Arieli (2011: 423) describe the ‘dilemma’ that I often found myself in:

“On the one hand, scientific research should conform to common principles; it should be systematic, reproducible, reliable, and valid. Adhering to these principles is in essence the difference between research writing and other texts. [...] On the other hand, there are many cases in social research in which one cannot fully uphold these rigid principles of scientific research. Should we give up the attempts to improve our understanding of those cases due to lack of optimal conditions?”

The argument that I have made throughout this chapter is that a flexible approach and the willingness to make some compromises were essential in order to carry out any research at all on my research topic of the informal. As Bunnell & Harris (2012: 342) have pointed out:

“the very nature of urban informality means that such investigations are likely to be fraught with difficulties. [...] Nonetheless, it is only through such approaches that the voices of people involved in informal activities may be heard and their aspirations understood.”

While I always conducted myself with integrity, transparency and sensitivity towards my research participants, implementing an over-rigid methodology could have potentially broken the trust with my research participants and led to me not being able to collect any data at all. Thus, conducting research on the informal sometimes required an informal methodological approach. Rather than shying away from describing such difficulties which researchers sometimes face, I would argue that they should be seen as a reflection of the complex political, social and cultural realities that the research participants navigate, and which I describe in the following chapters.

PART II: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4 ROLES AND PURPOSES OF INFORMAL PRACTICES

The previous chapter has outlined the research methods that I have used to gather and analyse my data. The following three chapters 4 to 6 present the findings from my analysis. While each individual chapter focuses on one of my three research questions, together they build up a picture of the multiplicity of informal cultural practices in contemporary cities today. However, before then, I briefly outline my overall approach to presenting the data. Further details, including the rationales for my decisions on how to present the data, can be found in Appendix 2.

The cities of London and Mumbai provide an important context of analysis; however, the focus of my research is on the five specific informal cultural practices. Although the cities of London and Mumbai, as well as the preponderance of informality, may be very different, the processes at play and the issues that people face in deploying informality are often quite similar. And while ‘informal’ actors deal with such issues in multiple ways, these are only sometimes particular to one city, but not necessarily so. In line with this, I do not use city identifiers in the presentation of my findings as a matter of course, but rather focus on the specific case studies. Notwithstanding this, I highlight any issues that are particular to a specific city where relevant.

Furthermore, while the focus is on individual case studies, rather than cities, I do not present the data for each case study individually. This is in order to avoid constant repetition. This decision was taken following the analysis of my data by individual case study, which revealed that the identified themes cut across all five case study activities, albeit their importance may vary for specific thematic aspects. Any such particular emphasis (or lack thereof) in one or more case studies, is highlighted in the discussion.

In line with my overall explorative, qualitative research approach, I do not use statistics in presenting my detailed findings. While the number of references in relation to each theme is interesting, a simple focus on preponderance would be reductive and tells us little about the real meaning and importance of a particular thought. Thus, instead of focusing on numeric importance, I present a range of views and responses. Indeed, my research aim to interrogate the multiplicity of informal cultural practices requires me to do so. This enables me to highlight major points along with other points that might be contributory factors. Finally, it permits me to draw out any potential contradictions between different responses.

Throughout the text I use examples to illustrate the theme I am discussing. In many cases, there were multiple examples from different case studies that I could have used for the purpose of illustration. However, in order to limit the length of the findings chapters, I restrict myself to giving only one example for each point.⁹

Pseudonyms are used for all participants who are cited in the study. These pseudonyms only give information about the type of case study which the participant belonged to, along with a randomly assigned number. A citation cypher is included in Figure 19. The citations used in this study are the exactly transcribed words of my interviewees. Local expressions and phrases, as well as any grammatical errors, have not been changed or corrected.

4.1 Overview of the chapter

This chapter discusses the multiple roles and purposes that informal cultural practices take on in the urban context. Looking from the perspective of the

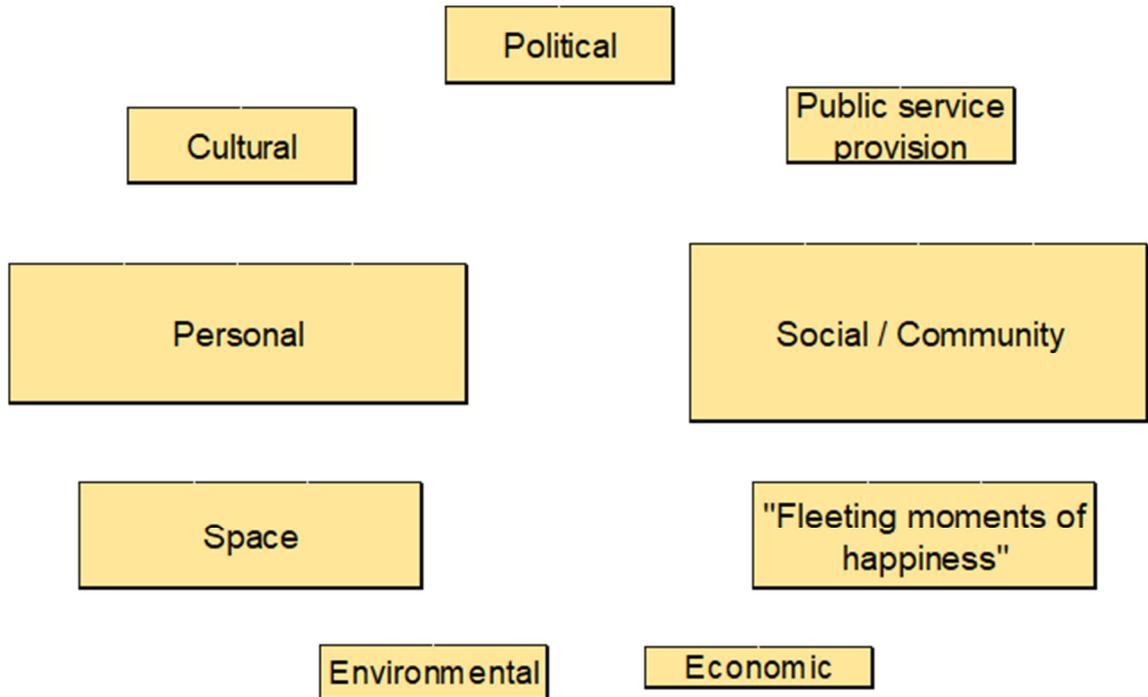
⁹ All interviews have been transcribed and analysed, and both transcriptions and analysis can be made available to the examiners, if requested.

'informal' actors, it provides answers to two interlinked "why" questions. Firstly, why 'informal' actors engage with informal cultural practices and secondly, why they believe them to be important in the cities they live in. Interrogating these questions will help to build up a more multi-faceted understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context, both in the global North and the global South, and thus provide an answer to my first research question:

According to the urban actors themselves, what are the different roles and purposes that informal cultural practices take on in contemporary cities?

The chapter is divided into nine sections, which reflect the different purposes, motivations and aims of 'informal' actors. These themes emerged from the interview coding and thematic analysis that I carried out for the 'informal' actor interviews described in section 3.5. Figure 17 shows the different themes, which are discussed in this chapter. Section 4.2 begins by discussing personal motivations, followed by section 4.3 which deals with social and community objectives and section 4.4 which tackles ideas about transforming public spaces. Section 4.5 then looks at more contained visions of small improvements, such as fleeting moments of happiness. Section 4.6 proceeds to looking at cultural motivations, while environmental objectives are discussed in section 4.7; economic motivations in section 4.8; and political motivations in section 4.9. Finally, section 4.10 discusses aims around the improvement of public services. Figure 17 also indicates the relative (numeric) importance of each of the sub themes, as the size of the squares reflects the number of references made to them by 'informal' actors. However, as discussed above, it is important to note that preponderance is only one factor in determining the importance of a theme and analytical judgement has been used throughout to draw out important threads.

Figure 17: Preponderance of motivation themes



In the following sections, each of the themes is discussed in turn.

4.2 Personal motivations

The first theme deals with the role that informal practices play in satisfying personal desires and ambitions. Unlike a lot of the other themes that aim at change in the world surrounding the 'informal' actors, this theme is centred on their intrinsic needs or personal fulfilment. Section 4.2.1 looks at personal satisfaction and enjoyment, followed by section 4.2.2, which discusses the theme of interest, challenge and learning, and section 4.2.3, which looks at issues of identity and well-being.

4.2.1 Satisfaction and enjoyment

Perhaps the most important purpose that informal practices have for the individual is to provide personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Interviewees across the five case study activities talked about their enjoyment of the informal activity they engage in, such as gardening or making music. "Loving", "adoring", "enjoying", "enthusiasm", "passion" and "enriching" were all terms used to

describe their practice, but the expression most commonly used was “It’s just so much fun”. Several interviewees explained that while their practice did serve a secondary purpose (such as saving a tree, earning money or doing social work), this was overridden by the primary motivation: the fun they get out of their practice. This is especially true for the busking case study. The reason why “fun” was such a strong motivation for this group might be that, while many of the interviewed buskers are professional musicians, only few make their living with busking. Thus, busking was their ‘strings-free’ leisure pursuit that stands in opposition to their professional music practice. Indeed, a number of buskers mentioned that they were occasionally willing to forego paid gigs, because busking was a fun activity to do with their friends.

Interviewees also personally enjoyed the things that their practice offers to others (such as the opportunity to read or listen to music) and made use of it themselves (for instance, walking in a greened up public area). But for many, there was particular enjoyment in the fact that others respond positively to their practice and make use of it. One of the initiators of a book sharing initiative expressed it as follows:

“One thing, I did lots of interviews for newspapers and TV and things like that, and after a while, it was just the same...same old answers to the same old questions, but for a while, I was a minor celebrity. But still, the biggest buzz ever was just walking down the street and just see someone has just taken a book out, that was still the best thing, just to see it function, because that was by far the greater...greater achievement than any publicity, fame, anything like that.” (BS10, interview, 2015)

As this quote also highlights, interviewees got a sense of satisfaction from making things happen and achieving what they set out to. Many interviewees considered their practice to contribute to “something good” and assumed that it will be appreciated by others – and this is what they get enjoyment from. For instance, one of the interviewees from a spot fix initiative talked about the happiness she felt when doing a “selfless act”. However, when this assumption

is proven wrong, 'informal' actors often get quite disheartened. For instance, a couple of buskers spoke of the feeling of insult, when people throw in "one p[enny] like they were doing us the biggest favour"¹⁰; while one of the book swap initiators talked about the importance of positive affirmation from others, after one person vandalised the book shelves. Several other interviewees talked about the pleasure or excitement they get from receiving external recognition (ranging from appreciative words from acquaintances to publicity in print and broadcast media) and as that being an important part of their enjoyment of their practice.

Interestingly, a few of the interviewees who mentioned their personal enjoyment as motivation for their practice described it as a "selfish" motivation and seemed to feel the need to apologise it. This was perhaps most prevalent in the cases where the interviewee was primarily motivated by larger social, environmental or political agendas.

4.2.2 Interest, challenge and learning

In addition to the enjoyment and satisfaction, 'informal' actors engaged in their practice because they considered it an interesting or challenging activity. A number of interviewees mentioned that they had a low boredom threshold, that they were always on the look-out for something interesting to do and, as one of the interviewees from a spot fix initiative explained, it provided a change from their everyday life:

¹⁰ Interestingly, the recent promotion of 'tap to tip', cash-less payments by the Mayor of London's 'Busk in London' initiative directly intervenes into this issue, by allowing buskers to pre-set the amount that passers-by can donate using the contact-less payment form. For further discussion of the role of cultural policy in shaping 'informal' cultural practices, see Chapter 6 and section 7.3.1.

“You have to really give time, and everyone's busy in their everyday lives. But still [...] we like to do this, get out of your mundane routine that you are doing all the time, running after your kids, your work, your family, and the social... We all have a really hectic social life but we still enjoy doing this.” (SF9, interview, 2015)

Many ‘informal’ actors were also motivated by the challenge that the practice presents to them. It could be a challenge because the individual had never done anything like this before. For instance, a couple of interviewees took on a fairly large DIY project although they are professional musicians or writers. In addition to not having done the activity before, in some cases there were also few precedents of doing anything similar (such as obtaining a building for free). Other interviewees talked about wanting to challenge themselves by continuously taking the project to the next level, whether by improving the quality of the initiative (for example, making a better flower display), by doing more of it (for example, obtaining more things for free and giving them away) or doing it elsewhere (for example, taking on an additional site for planting or cleaning). Finally, several interviewees were keen to challenge themselves by doing things in a different way from what they are used to. For instance, a number of buskers talked about the need to improvise in a busking situation which they found to be challenging due to being a classically trained musician. In each case, they described it as a positive challenge that they specifically sought out to take them out of their comfort zone.

One of the consequences of ‘informal’ actors seeking out interesting and challenging activities was their increased knowledge and skills. For instance, interviewees mentioned that their gardening or singing has improved over the course of their practice. Others talked about the unintentional learning process they go through while setting up a particular initiative (for instance, by learning about licensing laws, planning regulations, or different types of paints).

Unlike most of the other areas discussed in the personal motivation theme, this educational aspect could be considered an instrumental motivation. A number of interviewees talked about the benefits of this increased knowledge and

learning for their continued (and/or scaled up) practice. There are also a few examples, where interviewees saw their learning benefitting other areas of their life. For instance, two of the guerrilla gardeners had published books about their projects, although that is not where they had “planned to go”. The latter point is worth taking note of, as it is characteristic of what most interviewees report: namely, that any increased personal knowledge, skills and learning was an incidental outcome, as opposed to a motivation they set out with.

4.2.3 Meaning, identity and well-being

Another important role of informal cultural practices is to give meaning, identity and well-being to the people engaged in them. One of the ways in which this happens is purely through people investing themselves (their time, their financial resources, their thoughts, etc.) into their practice. For instance, one of the initiators of a book sharing initiative, who moved away and had to handover the project to someone else, described his sadness at leaving it, because it had become like a “monument” of his efforts, that “means something”. But more than that, he and several other interviewees from book sharing initiatives talked about their emotional investment in the project, as well as the importance of passing on a particular message. For instance, a couple of interviewees saw their initiative as an implicit critique of neoliberal values.

Other interviewees mentioned that their practice was – or had become – an intrinsic part of their identity. In some cases, the activity was also placed in opposition to an unloved or limiting professional activity. In these instances, the informal practice was seen as an opportunity to do something that they cannot otherwise do and to realise unfulfilled ambitions or dreams. As one initiator of a book sharing initiative explained:

“It is a bit of my life where I fully get to express myself and be who I want to be. That's why we...we have done this from the very beginning and stuck with it. That's why so many...over 6,000 people have joined us and so many companies. It's because it represents a unique opportunity to express a side of character which, in the

absence of something like this, would be very hard to express.” (BS8, interview, 2015)

For other ‘informal’ actors, engaging in their practice was an essential part of maintaining or improving their well-being. One interviewee explained that his decision to become a full-time busker was a key turning point in improving his well-being:

“I needed to change my life. I was really unhappy. I’d done a couple careers and I was ‘I’m going to have to get this one right, otherwise I’m finished here’. I’m not being overdramatic, it was... And fortunately, because I was at such a low ebb, I didn’t get disheartened. I just kept doing it because otherwise it’ll be the Betty Ford Centre or suicide. So I just kept doing it. And I was lucky, because I’m sure I was really bad at it when I started. But because I stuck with it long enough, I learned not to be so bad and then learned to enjoy it.” (B8, interview, 2015)

As he explained, the nature of busking required him to take control of the situation and thus helped him take back control of his life.

A number of interviewees from guerrilla gardening projects also highlighted the therapeutic nature of gardening and nurturing plants – which people used as part of their therapy to recover from cancer treatments or the death of a close relative.

4.2.4 ‘Activist’ personality

Finally, for many ‘informal’ actors, their practices were part of their wider engagement in a range of activities. Sometimes, these activities are similar to their informal practice. For instance, one of the buskers was also voluntarily helping to programme music events at a pub. But more often, interviewees talked about a diversity of engagements that did not have a particular link to the informal practice, such as in their local community as a member of their local residents’ association, neighbourhood watch schemes, or local fruit picking projects. Mostly, their involvement in such activities was not pre-meditated, but

opportunistic and coincidental. Notwithstanding the spontaneous nature of such involvement, some of this local involvement results in an additional personal benefit to the actors and fits with personal needs at different stages of life. For instance, one interviewee initiated an intergenerational meet and play session, which was partly motivated by the fact that she was keen for her children to engage with elder people, since their grandparents were living abroad.

However, many interviewees were also involved in social work that went beyond their local area. Examples of such wider civic engagements include regularly spending time with an old lady in another part of London, collecting donations for the Calais refugee camp, setting up a home stay scheme for Syrian refugees, helping out in slum schools, organising blood donation initiatives, volunteering in orphanages or initiating political campaigns for the rights of slum dwellers. As the following quote from one of interviewee from the Equal Streets case study demonstrates, such community engagement was generally not short-term but had become an intrinsic part of people's personality:

“So that’s me, and I have been working therefore on many fronts for the past 35-40 years. Whether it’s issues of the slum dwellers for housing rights, or the workers housing rights questions, or it’s the civic [...] rights of people, or the environmental question, or issues relating to planning and design of the city, as a whole.” (ES5, interview, 2015)

In this sense, interviewees saw their practice as a way of maintaining their integrity and acting on strong personal convictions. A number of ‘informal’ actors talked about the fact that their practice was just another expression of principles that they had adhered to since their childhood. For instance, one of the interviewees from the guerrilla gardening case study remembered her first guerrilla gardening experience as a way of acting on injustice – a local politician moving his fence onto public land in an attempt to increase the size of his private garden – by helping her Dad to tear down the fence and start planting up that area. The significance of keeping up their integrity was an issue mentioned

by several interviewees. Examples of this include people setting clear boundaries for their practice (for example, by refusing to remove bee-friendly plants from a flower bed on public land in favour of 'prettier' plants) and upholding truths (for example, by insisting on the correction of a newspaper article, even when the incorrect facts were praise for the initiators of a spot fix initiative). A more detailed discussion of 'informal' actors' principles and values follows in section 5.1.

4.3 Social and community objectives

One of the most frequently mentioned purpose was the theme of social and community objectives. Such motivations were strongest for my interviewees from the spot fix initiatives, but played an important role in all other case studies. The only exception to this is busking, where only few interviewees mentioned larger social ambitions for their practice. These differences are partly to be explained by interviewees' self-understanding of their own capacity, as well as the likely effect that their practice may have on their local community or society. Thus, the majority of interviewees, especially (but not exclusively) from the Mumbai case studies, strongly believe in their ability to effect change. As one of the interviewees from a spot fix initiative explained:

"The main reason why we didn't involve any political party, like he said, why we started working individually is that we wanted to spread a very particular message: that any citizen or any person who has a problem, should take up the responsibility and work on it, rather than shouting at it, like he said, or rather just ignoring it. Just take an issue, be responsible for that issue and start working on it. You don't need any affiliation, any NGO [non-governmental organisation], any political party, you just need to be a human being who cares. That is the message we want to pass. And people who look at us will get inspired and do such activities in their areas. That is what we want, once we associate a political party's name, an NGO's name, everyone will be like 'oh, it's a difficult job, we need some NGO. We are not an NGO'. People ask us, a very usual question is 'kaunse

NGO se ho?', which NGO you belong from. We are not from NGO, we are citizens." (SF12, interview, 2015)

More than simply believing in change, these actors believe that they can realise ambitious aims and are prepared to take on large-scale projects, too. On the other hand, there were a number of interviewees (especially from the busking and book swap case studies) whose ambitions for their practice were much more limited. They argued that their activity will not "change people's lives or save the world". This does not imply that they do not consider their activity to be valuable to others, but they see its value in a much more contained and specific way. This is further discussed in section 4.5.

The social and community theme is presented in four sections. Section 4.3.1 looks at altruistic reasons, followed by section 4.3.2, which discusses the theme of building community. Section 4.3.3 then interrogates people's aim to effect behavioural change and section 4.3.4 a perspective that sees informal cultural practices as a social experiment.

4.3.1 'Doing good'

Many interviewees who talked about a social role of their practice mentioned that they wanted to do something good. A number of interviewees, especially from the guerrilla gardening case study, talked about their practice positively affecting a particular person and how they set out to do so. For instance, one interviewee talked about how she would plan the time she was going out to water the guerrilla garden in order to make it coincide with an elderly man's daily walk, because she knew that he enjoyed stopping and having a chat to her.

More often than helping out a specific person, interviewees wanted to do something for the 'public good' or society at large. Several mentioned that they like helping other people and that they have an altruistic personality. One way of expressing this motivation is the term "giving back to society", which was used repeatedly by interviewees. There were a number of reasons for them wanting to do so. Firstly, interviewees said that they love their local area or city and

hence they wanted to do things that are good for it. Secondly, people appreciated that the city has given them many opportunities and they wanted to 'repay' those. And finally, several interviewees mentioned that they feel very fortunate in terms of their socio-economic position and wanted to improve others' lives.

A few of the interviewees also wanted to make a bigger statement about the contribution that each individual can make to society, as this initiator of a book sharing initiative explains:

“Every time they take one of their books and put it in the [book swap], they're doing something that makes themselves worse off. And so, they are doing something counterintuitive, to an extent. But...but by the fact that a large number of people sacrifice a very miniscule thing, it enriches everyone. [...] In the Second World War, people...they were sacrificing lives. But this is a notion of – if you have a lot of people making a small amount of sacrifice, it's something that is benign.” (BS10, interview, 2015)

This quote also highlights another important point for many interviewees, namely that their practice is selfless. Several added that there should be no expectation of pay back or reward. This includes any expectations about how others will receive the practice and whether they will show themselves grateful, as well as expectations of others in terms of how much support they will give to the initiative. Rather, 'informal' actors should simply do the activity, because they want to, or enjoy it. Several interviewees, especially from the Equal Streets case study, also added that the idea was more important than their own involvement in the practice. That is, they would be quite happy for someone else (such as public authorities) to take the credit, as long as the idea of opening up public spaces was taken forward.

These findings mirror Edensor and Millington's (2010:176-7) observation of the “sense of generosity” that marked local Christmas light displays, where “the displayers undertook this practice without expectation of any return or contractual arrangement, other than a sense of gaining pleasure from seeing

other people enjoy their illuminations.” Interestingly, these views stand in some contrast to the views described in section 4.2.1 which highlighted the importance of external recognition. However, this might be explained by the greater importance of personal ambitions by these individuals, as opposed to an emphasis on a social role.

4.3.2 Build community

One of the most frequently mentioned aims of my interviewees was the idea to build community through their informal practice. Interviewees talked about their initiative as a resource for the local community to meet, connect and get to know their neighbours. They saw it as a place or initiative that “anchors” people within their community. That is, it provided them with a place to go to or stop by, when they are looking for a chat with someone. Many interviewees reported that the initiative has helped people locally to get to know others, giving their local area a “village feel” in the middle of London. Several also talked about greater safety in the neighbourhood and decreased social isolation. One initiator of a guerrilla gardening project mentioned that older people in the area feel that – unlike before – people would notice if something happened to them.

Several book sharing initiatives were considered to help promote the concept of exchange – of giving and receiving – between neighbours. Interviewees mentioned that it took people a while to get used to the idea that they could take books for free, while at the same time prompting them to make a conscious decision to give back something of their own.

In several cases the initiative acted as an information hub or events space for the community. One organiser of a book swap that is supported by a local community association (and labelled as such) also recounted that people use it as a hook to get involved locally: they phone up the local community association in order to find out more about things going on in the area and how to get involved with, or support, different issues.

Furthermore, several interviewees highlighted that – in the context of living in big cities, where there is much greater cultural diversity than elsewhere – their

practice gives them an opportunity to take advantage of this diversity and to specifically involve members of the community that tend to be excluded. One of the organisers of a guerrilla gardening project put it as follows:

“It wouldn’t have been any fun. There wouldn’t have been any point in doing this, if it had only been white middle class ladies. [...] Everybody meets everybody. It’s a bit like Obama’s inauguration speech. It becomes like a microcosm of how things should be, where people come together irrespective of race, income, sexuality or religion.” (GG3, interview, 2015)

Similarly, a couple of interviewees from the Equal Streets case study talked about the open street event giving people the opportunity to meet and connect not just with “your group of people”, but everyone. Several interviewees feel that they are able to bridge the divide more successfully with this particular practice than with other community activities (see section 4.6.3 for further discussion), while others see their informal practice as part of a menu of community-focused activities. This is because the particular initiative, for example, a book swap, may not be of interest to all community members, but they might be drawn in by a community garden or a street party instead. However, they still see it as important to provide this particular point of engagement.

It is worth noting that while the community motivation was an aspect of all case studies, it was particularly strong for book sharing and guerrilla gardening initiatives. This might be because these types of projects tended to have a fixed site and become a relatively permanent feature in the local area. Thus, they provided more scope for community engagement, than more temporary activities such as busking or some of the one-off spot fix initiatives.

4.3.3 Effect behavioural change

Changing mind-sets and behaviours was another purpose that ‘informal’ actors saw their practice fulfilling. While the envisaged behaviours depend on each individual case study (prevent littering, using sustainable modes of transport,

etc.), the idea at the core of this ambition is that each individual should play their part in society in order to improve the lives of everyone.

The first way in which interviewees were trying to effect such behavioural change is by raising awareness of a particular issue. Some of them mentioned how they directly confront people about behaviours that they consider undesirable (for example, asking them not to spit on the roads) or provide guidance. The latter might include signs of where to put litter or, in some cases, actually creating the facilities (such as bins or public washrooms). Perhaps more importantly, interviewees attempted to lead by example. Indeed, not only did they consider action to be more powerful in convincing others to change their behaviour, but they also recognised that unless their own behaviours was in line with the principles they 'preach' they would come across as hypocritical and untrustworthy. Several interviewees also referred to the 'broken windows theory' (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), whereby the maintenance of urban environments to prevent small crimes is thought to help prevent more serious offences from happening. In the same vein, interviewees talked about the positive effect they had seen (or believed in) from keeping areas clean and tidy, in terms of encouraging people to looking after the area themselves.

Creating a sense of ownership in others was considered to be another key step to effect behavioural change. One of the initiators of a spot fix initiative therefore spent considerable effort in engaging others in the practice. For instance, he ensured that he got a group of volunteers from a neighbouring slum involved in the cleaning of the railway station he adopted, as he believed that they will be less likely to dirty the area themselves and more likely to stop others from doing it. At another railway station, he also got a number of school classes involved who collected signatures from commuters, whereby they were pledging not to spit or litter the station in future. Interviewees also expected a sense of ownership in people to help maintain the initiative (for example, by sorting the books on a book swap or by watering plants in a tree pit) and to make it spread. This, they felt, was important as they recognised their limited capacity and that the only way to scale up their practice to other areas was for other people to take responsibility.

While there was unanimity among the interviewees about how important this sense of ownership was, many also acknowledged that it was very difficult to ‘instil’ this in others. This is partly due to a lack of confidence, as people may feel like they are not allowed to work on public land (for example, plant up a tree pit) or that they need a bigger organisation to be part of (for example, to clean up a railway station). According to other interviewees, this is because of people’s feeling that it is someone else’s responsibility to clean this and that it is not ‘their’ land. One guerrilla gardener argued that people changed their behaviour, the moment they crossed their front door. Behaviours that they would not tolerate inside their own home (like throwing litter on the floor) were considered acceptable outside. An organiser of one of the spot fix initiative felt that this problem was made worse by the fact that many people in big cities are not staying in the same place permanently, but might move every few years to a new area and hence are not as rooted in their local community or care less for it. These debates about feelings of ownership highlight the difficult negotiation between, and attitude towards, public use rights and private exchange rights of the urban ‘commons’ – as conceptualised by Porter (2011), Blomley (2008) and other literature on the intersection between informality and ‘commons’ property. This will be further discussed in the Conclusions (see section 7.2.3).

4.3.4 Social experiment

Finally, a considerable number of interviewees, especially from the book sharing and guerrilla gardening case studies, talked about their project as a social experiment. Recognising that their practice takes place in the public space and that they are unable to ‘guard’ it, they were keen to test out people’s behaviours, on the one hand, and encourage good behaviour, on the other. As one interviewee from a book sharing initiative put it, it gives people a chance to be nice, whether that is by ‘giving back’ when they see the book swap empty, or by spontaneously tidying it up when it is in disorder. Several interviewees explained that part of their motivation of their practice was to just see what will happen, but they implicitly assumed that their experiment or test will have a positive outcome – that is, that there will not be any major vandalism or theft or

anything else malicious. Thus, part of their motivation was to send out a positive message about the particular community that their practice takes place in, as “it’s a good commentary about the people around, in the neighbourhood.”

Several interviewees admitted that their risk was low. That is, they did not have much to lose should the experiment fail – a few books stolen that someone wanted to get rid of anyway, or a few plants – and hence they were happy to take the risk.

4.4 Transformation of public space

All of the informal practices included in my research took place in the public space. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that many interviewees thought that their practices had a role to play in the transformation of public space. In some cases, like the Equal Streets case study, this motivation was at the very core of the activity, but it also took significance in the guerrilla gardening and spot fix initiatives. For the book sharing and busking case studies the theme, while not negligible, was less prevalent. This might be because, for the former cases, the activity actually involved making physical changes to public space, while for the latter, public space is primarily a ‘location’ for the activity to take place in. Notwithstanding this, the public location did matter and many interviewees could not imagine the activity to be simply transferred to a different venue without changing its nature.

The discussion of the public space transformation theme begins by looking at objectives around cleanliness and beautification of space (section 4.4.1), followed by ideas about improving its atmosphere and perception (section 4.4.2). Section 4.4.3 then looks at the aim to improve mobility and street design and section 4.4.4 at the ambition to reclaim public space.

4.4.1 Cleanliness and beautification

Many of the case study activities were looking to change the aesthetics of public space; that is, to make cities look more beautiful. Many interviewees from the guerrilla gardening and spot fix case studies described their ambition as simply making streetscapes look “nice”, “pretty” or “appealing”. They were looking to

“brightening up” spaces, to insert “a little drop of beauty” or make streets more “colourful”. This did not necessarily require major interventions. At its most basic, it involved efforts to clean streets or stations, to remove dirt, garbage and stains from spit. Further, it could involve planting “beautiful flowers”, encouraging bio-diversity (including bees and other insects), or simply adding a “bit of green” that can be seen from the corner of the eye, “even if you’re looking on your smart phones”.

In addition to adding pretty things, interviewees were keen to avoid or replace aesthetically unpleasant things. Several interviewees talked about the need to clean and plant up public space in order to remove “eye sores”, or to avoid the streets looking like a “desert with rubbish in it”. In one case, a guerrilla gardener was also stirred into action, when the local council decided to replace an overgrown flower bed in front of a local town hall with plastic grass. In order to avoid having to look at the “appalling” and “disgusting” plastic lawn, she and a group of people offered to the council to take up the maintenance of a real flower bed. However, while aesthetics were important for interviewees, they were inseparable from other values they held for their practice, such as ensuring that their practice was environmentally-friendly or inclusive. For instance, a group of interviewees who were painting dead trees in Mumbai argued that they were trying to make a “piece of art” of their trees, but they refused to paint trees that are still alive. The connection between environmental aims and inclusive values is an important observation as it challenges Baviskar’s conception of ‘bourgeois environmentalism’ (2011; 2012: 95) as a mere strategy of affluent urban residents to “deny the poor their rights to the environment” (for further discussion see section 7.2.2).

In line with the above, while interviewees talk about the importance of pleasant looking streets, for most of them that is achieved simply by public spaces being greened up. One guerrilla gardener talked about wanting to get “the streets really singing” by means of creating a “mad flowering street”, while another was quite happy for it to look a bit “straggly” and for “stuff happening all over the place”, rather than it being a “clipped formal garden”.

4.4.2 Improved atmosphere and perception of local area

Several interviewees, who talked about the importance of their practice to be aesthetically pleasant, also made a connection to this making public spaces more “friendly” or “human. A number of interviewees also felt that their practice made public spaces feel more safe and relaxed. For instance, a couple of buskers mentioned that in places where people are often stressed or rushed (such as the Underground, train stations, or big cities in general), their music helped putting people at ease and counter nervousness. Other interviewees emphasised the role of busking for adding a nice ambiance to an Underground station and for contributing to the vibrancy of a city more generally.

Interviewees also sought to improve the perception of others of their local area. This must be seen in the context of general perceptions of life in a big city. Many interviewees deplored that cities are often seen as faceless and anonymous, where people are supposedly lonely, unfriendly, inhospitable and individualistic. These views stand in contrast to what many interviewees think of their city. They see their city as a place where people help each other, even when they are in a rush to get to their office and where people care for each other and their local community. Thus, their informal practice becomes part of a message they want to send out to counter negative perceptions; namely, that this area is a place where people are offering things for free, where people are not vandalising or stealing, and where there is a sense of community. This quote from one initiator of a book sharing initiative summarises these thoughts:

“And you know, it's kind of saying that just because we are a big city and people think we're kind of dehumanized, because we're all in our own little worlds, doesn't mean we can't have cute things like book swaps, it doesn't mean that people don't care. That people don't want to share their stuff. [...] So, therefore, this is exactly what we should have and people are always really surprised. They're like ‘Oh I've seen one of those – pick rural village or town of your choice – I never thought I'd see one in London’. It breaks down people's perceptions of what a big city is. I think it gives a really good impression because people go ‘wow, that set of shelves can sit in that station and not be

vandalized when it's only made from cheap MDF [medium-density fireboard]'. [...]. 'Maybe this place is safe. Maybe this place is nice. Maybe people do care.' (BS12, interview, 2015)

While not an intentional outcome, both an increased vibrancy and an improved perception of the local area may have a bearing on the local economy (see section 4.8).

4.4.3 Improved mobility and street design

For the Equal Streets case study, improving mobility and street design was a key purpose. At the very core of the Equal Streets initiative lays the idea to turn the roads in Mumbai into a truly 'public' space, where every road user has equal rights. As several of the interviewees explained, this has to be seen in the context of a great current imbalance, where only 5% of Mumbai's population are car owners, but they occupy 99% of the street space.

Thus, the Equal Streets campaign was aimed at two constituencies. Firstly, it aimed to sensitise the general public to use more sustainable modes of transports (such as walking, cycling and public transport) and cut down on motorised transportation, especially for short distances. The blocking of roads to motorised transport and its opening, instead, for all kind of public, "fun" uses during the course of the weekly Sunday Equal Streets events, was a key part of helping people develop such a "different imagination" of what roads can and should be.

Secondly, the events were part of a larger campaign targeted at public decision-makers to actually make changes to the infrastructure. This might include creating safe walking and cycling tracks, or full pedestrianisation of certain areas. In this sense, streets (alongside green and water spaces) would become an integral part of a vision to create a network of public spaces, or "500km of streams of open space" that could run across the city of Mumbai.

4.4.4 Reclaim public space

The final aspect of the motivation to transform public space is linked to the previous section and has to be seen within the larger context of shrinking public spaces in contemporary cities. Many interviewees talked about the lack of green spaces in their city. This negative conclusion from one of the interviewees from a spot fix initiative is exemplary of the views expressed about Mumbai:

“For a city like Bombay, when you go to any buildings terrace, you don't see trees at all. I've been to over 12 countries. I think the most concrete place I've seen is India, is my city, Bombay. I've been to most of the cities, be it New York, be it Los Angeles, be it London, be it Singapore, be it Hong Kong, you name it all. I have been to major cities by virtue of my wife being a travel freak. But, I have nowhere seen the equation really horribly wrong as I have seen that in my city.” (SF7, interview, 2016)

But there were similar concerns about London. Interviewees felt that there was a dire need for green spaces, especially as more and more housing is being built in the city. Even where green spaces exist, they are not always open for public use – for instance, children not being allowed to play on certain grass areas. Also, according to one guerrilla gardener, the perception of London as the “great green city” is “a bit of a misunderstood cliché”. He argued that while there are some great big parks in the city, a lot of the green space actually consists of people’s big back gardens, and is hence not available to the public.

Interviewees in both cities were also concerned about the increasing control of public spaces by private businesses and the impact this has on public usage of these ‘quasi-public’ spaces – “where anyone can walk around, there’s no gate, there’s no door, but somebody else owns it”. For instance, while busking is legally allowed on public land in London, in the case of such privately-owned ‘public’ spaces the rules are down to the private owner.

Within this context of decreasing public space, ‘informal’ actors were keen to make use of whatever space is left. Many guerrilla gardeners talked about wanting to make use of the “redundant”, “neglected”, “disused”, “undervalued”

bits of public space that nobody seems to care about or sees the potential in. Many 'informal' actors were happy to use spaces, even in the knowledge that it might only be a temporary use. For instance, two of the book sharing initiatives made use of buildings, while the owner was waiting for planning permission.

However, some interviewees felt that there was a need to go beyond simply making use of what is left. For instance, one of the spot fix initiatives saw its role within the context of a larger campaign to save and expand 98 acres of green space in Mumbai that was in discussion for development into a storage space for Metro cars.

4.5 Fleeting moments of happiness

As mentioned above in section 4.3, for a group of interviewees, the purpose of their practice was much less about achieving ambitious goals. This does not mean that they did not consider their practice to be valuable to others, but they saw its value in a much more contained and specific way. This was the predominant view among the interviewed buskers, but the 'informal' actors from other case studies also recognised this angle of their practice. These interviewees considered their engagement with others through their practice to be fairly ephemeral and momentary. Section 4.5.1 discusses the theme of happiness and surprise and section 4.5.2 the idea of providing moments of personal encounter and connection.

4.5.1 Happiness, fun and surprise

Many interviewees argued that their practice made other people feel better, even if it was just for a brief moment. For instance, a couple of the Equal Streets organisers talked about the "big, huge smile" the event brought to people, and especially children, because they experienced a feeling of freedom (to cycle or run around on the street) that they were not used to.

There were also many mentions of the role of their informal practices in making people happier during their daily commute on public transport. For instance, an interviewee from a spot fix initiative wanted their improvement and beautification of a station to result in people being "charged up" and "energetic" when they go

to their office in the morning and to “add colour” to someone’s life when they come back exhausted.

Another aspect of this is to do something “fun”, “a bit wacky” or “mischievous”. While many buskers talked about people having fun while listening to their music, several specifically talked about trying to entertain their audience, or to provide an element of spectacle, for instance, when one busker changed the broken guitar string of her partner, while he played on.

Part of the fun and mischief arises from the element of surprise – something that is also mentioned by other interviewees. The surprise often springs from chancing upon the informal practice in an unexpected place, and several people emphasise the importance of this. For instance, one interviewee who drops off a number of free books in different places across the London Underground every day recounted that she was offered to put up a book shelf in a station instead. She turned it down, as – in her eyes – that would mean losing all the excitement of suddenly finding a book.

4.5.2 Moments of personal connection and encounter

Another way in which informal practices made people feel better is because they helped to create moments of personal connection and encounter. For instance, many buskers talked about the fact that playing music on the streets allowed them to build up a close connection to their audience. Such personal connections can be very brief and yet powerful, for instance if they happen to play someone’s favourite song. In the view of one busker, establishing such a connection is also once again crucial in making someone throw in a few coins:

“That first communication, that non-verbal communication, it’s fascinating. [...] I used to think ‘Oh, I need to have this kind of song for this kind of person.’ That’s really not what it is. It’s when you think you’ve made that connection; it’s what you do, what happens afterwards between the two, the giver and the receiver. And it can be so subtle, it can be a smile [...].” (B8, interview, 2015)

The reason why these snippets of personal connection are so powerful is because of the context in which they take place. Several interviewees talked about the fast pace of city life, the fact that people are always busy, in a rush and that they know exactly where they are going without looking up. As a couple of book swap organisers argued, anything that makes people stop and look up opens up a window of opportunity for interaction – a moment that makes us more “human”.

Many other interviewees talked about the spontaneous social interactions that arise from their practice – either with themselves or amongst strangers. For instance, one of the organisers of a spot fix initiative recounted that she at one point had a bus driver stop and start a whole conversation and holding up the traffic when seeing her group painting trees.

A number of guerrilla gardeners argued that their practice led to many chance encounters which can then develop into deeper relationships over time. For instance, one guerrilla gardener mentioned that she knows that whenever she goes out to do “ten minutes of pruning”, it is going to take her three quarters of an hour, because everyone will stop by and chat to her. Like other interviewees, she highlighted the importance of these local chats in big cities, like London, as they create a “village street feeling” in a “huge city of millions and millions of people”.

4.6 Cultural motivations

Interviewees also mentioned that their practice had a cultural role to play; however, this was not as prevalent as other areas. One of the reasons for this relative lack of specific cultural motivations might be the broad definition of culture that was used in my research (that included broader public realm design and beautification activities). Indeed, when looking at the two case studies with a focus on what might be termed ‘core’ cultural practices (i.e. literature and music), cultural motivations were being brought up – although they featured more marginally in the accounts of buskers than for book swap initiators. One hypothesis to explain this fact is that many of the interviewed buskers are professional musicians and might see the development of their cultural form to

belong primarily to that professional realm, while playing music on the streets focused less on musical accuracy or skill, and served a different purpose (see, for instance, section 4.2). Nevertheless, 'informal' actors from across the different case studies mentioned some cultural motivations, which are further discussed below. Section 4.6.1 looks at the ambition to promote specific cultural practices and section 4.6.2 at increasing cultural access. Section 4.6.3 discusses the specific role of cultural aspects.

4.6.1 Promote cultural practice and innovation

The first cultural ambition was to promote a particular cultural practice. This ambition was particularly strong among book swap organisers who wanted to encourage people to read more, but was also mentioned by other interviewees. For instance, one organiser of a spot fix initiative explained that they used a particular painting genre to promote traditional tribal art.

One busker was also conscious of raising the reputation of busking *per se*. Thus, he mentioned that he tries his best not to be moved on by police or wardens when busking – not so much because of fear of any fines or legal implications, but because he believes that it gives a bad impression and makes people (and especially tourists) believe that busking is illegal and hence look down on the practice.

In addition to simply promoting their cultural practice, a number of interviewees talked about the importance of quality and cultural innovation. Interviewees from across the different case studies mentioned that they wanted to achieve high quality work and they prided themselves with their practice. Several guerrilla gardeners emphasised that they were experienced gardeners and that most people who bother to engage in gardening activities in the public space have a good knowledge about the field. For several interviewees it was very important to make this point, as they had faced criticism from “celebrity gardeners” and in the mainstream press which suggested that guerrilla gardeners were no ‘real’ gardeners, or upset the balance of the natural environment by introducing invasive or non-native plants.

Several book swap organisers wanted to encourage others to read different things and try out something new. Part of this ambition is to simply stop people from reading “terrible” journalism that is “damaging to their mental health”, such as the free newspapers available on the London Underground, as well as other mainstream media. The other part goes beyond this to encourage people to read books they would not otherwise read and to open people’s minds to new authors or genres. Several interviewees believed that the book swap is successful in doing so, as it allows people to experiment without taking a financial risk. When going to a book shop, people tend to go with their “pre-defined” tastes and buy what they know they like; but when the choice is between the free newspaper and a different kind of book, they might be more likely to pick this up. The idea that low risk encourages cultural innovation was also highlighted by other interviewees.

4.6.2 Increased cultural access

For many interviewees, increasing access to cultural activities was an important purpose, too. That is, people did not simply want to promote the cultural practice *per se*, but do so to new audiences and those who do not tend to have as much opportunity to engage. This ambition influenced the choice of location for several book swap organisers. For instance, one interviewee felt that the station was a “very democratic” location, unlike, for instance, the local pub which would have excluded people who do not drink alcohol (for example, Muslims), or women on their own who may not feel comfortable going inside a pub.

During the course of one of my interviews, my interlocutor walked up to his book swap and found that someone had scribbled a comment on it saying “All for middle class”. However, he strongly rejected this view based on his observations of the diversity of people using the book swap. Like other organisers, he cited as evidence that there were frequently books in many different languages in the book swap – suggesting that people of different nationalities and backgrounds use the book swap.

Another interviewee talked about the importance of critical reading in a democratic society and convincing people that books can be a part of their life. In order to do so, she considered it less important what kind of books they read and, thus, the book swap provided a great opportunity to engage with reading. However, there was also one interviewee who felt that – while in theory anyone could come and take a book – his initiative was unlikely to effect deeper social change, such as improving literacy or decreasing inequality.

4.6.3 Role of cultural aspects

While the cultural objectives discussed in the previous two sections primarily related to the busking and the book sharing cases studies, in the other three case studies, interviewees less often talked about specific cultural motivations. However, this does not mean that they did not purposely chose to engage in a (broadly) cultural activity to achieve their other objectives.

Firstly, interviewees talked about cultural activities being able to engage diverse groups of people in a way that other community activities might not be able to. For instance, one of the Equal Streets organisers talked about the appeal of music and cultural spectacle that draws in people from different backgrounds (including people who live in slums).

Secondly, they valued the cultural aspects of their initiatives because of their ability to attract attention. For instance, the organisers of a book swap argued that its visual appeal and design features that liken it to an art installation, made it immediately recognisable and attractive, and was an important reason for attracting the significant media publicity and social media coverage of the project. Organisers of spot fix projects and the Equal Streets campaign felt that the cultural angle of their project had helped them raise awareness for the environmental or political issues which were at the core of their initiatives.

Thirdly, spot fix and guerrilla gardening project organisers had included cultural aspects since – in their eyes – art works and beautiful displays command respect and are able to effect behavioural changes (such as preventing spitting,

littering or dog fouling) in a way that is not the case of simply white-washed walls and prohibition signs.

Interestingly, while several of the spot fix organisers mentioned the importance of art *per se*, they admitted that the choice of the actual artistic style was determined primarily by pragmatic considerations. For instance, several projects used Warli painting, a traditional tribal art form, due to the fact that it is very simple to paint and does not require advanced artistic skills. This finding is reflective of the kind of people I interviewed. Indeed, only few of the ‘informal’ actors I spoke to would describe themselves as artists, and even less of those, as professional artists. More often, I found people with an “activist personality” (see section 4.2.4), who valued and engaged in artistic practices. Finally, as I will argue in section 7.3.2, the lack of prevalence of cultural motivations is also partly due to a limited conception of cultural value that is employed in the cultural policy debate (Isar, 2013; Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) which fails to account for the particularities of ‘informal’ forms of cultural expression.

4.7 Environmental motivations

While larger environmental change was not mentioned very frequently as a primary purpose of their activity, acting in an environmentally-friendly way was an important underlying consideration of many people’s practice. Furthermore, specific environmental motivations were raised throughout interviews of the different case studies, with the exception of busking. The absence of this motive in the latter might be because their practice was not seen as a direct intervention – whether positive or negative – in their environment.

The environmental ambitions of book swap organisers were primarily about recycling and preventing landfill. Several interviewees described themselves as people who hate waste and throwing things. Instead, through the book swap initiatives, they wanted to encourage the ‘recycling’ of books by keeping them in circulation. As one interviewee remarked:

“I really hate landfill. I’m not an eco-warrior at all. But, I think it’s a travesty, a blasphemy to put books, even bad books, in landfill. And,

it just...if you recycle it, if you can make that work, it has to be better.” (BS1, interview, 2015)

For guerrilla gardening projects and the spot fix case studies, the main environmental motivation was to make cities greener. Several guerrilla gardeners talked about wanting to make the city look less like a concrete city through the planting up of tree pits, or – in one case – paying to remove concrete from a few people’s front garden. A number of them were also aiming to increase wildlife and biodiversity, by choosing plants that attract bees and other insects. One of the spot fix initiatives was seeking legal protection status for a large green space in Mumbai, while another was trying to save trees from dying, as well as planting new ones.

Finally, the organisers of the Equal Streets initiative were most concerned about addressing the issue of air pollution. At the time of my primary research in December 2015, India’s capital Delhi, was about to implement some emergency measures to address its air pollution levels judged to be ‘hazardous’. Interviewees made recurrent references to this situation, arguing that – while Mumbai’s pollution was not quite as bad yet – measures to address the causes of air pollution had to be taken now in order to prevent a similar situation a few years down the line. Most importantly, such measures needed to look at cutting down on motorised transportation and, instead, promoting more sustainable modes of transports.

4.8 Economic purposes

Across the five case studies, economic ambitions played only a marginal role for ‘informal’ actors. The only notable exception to this was the busking case study, where direct financial rewards were an important factor (see section 4.8.1). While not an intention, some interviewees also reflected on the role their practices played in economic regeneration and gentrification processes. This is discussed in section 4.8.2.

4.8.1 Financial rewards

In the case of busking, several interviewees made reference to direct financial motivations for their practice. Indeed, several interviewees stated that they could earn “some really good money” when busking and, at least for some, the “extra cash” was the primary driver for going out. Their expectations of a particular financial reward were also a consideration when taking a decision whether they should go busking with others or not. For instance, one interviewee mentioned a time when a friend joined their usual busking trio. This resulted in each of them earning £10 to 15 less than normal – a financial loss they were not prepared to accept in the longer term. Thus, they told their friend that he could not come out busking with them in the future.

In some cases, busking became a means of survival. For instance, one of my interviewees was also a professional busker on the London Underground. He busks four hours every day, thus enabling him to pay his mortgage. This financial element adds significant pressure:

“By its very nature, street busking is very confrontational. Well, it has to be, because it’s much more...not life and death but if you’re not going to earn that money, there’s no point in coming out. And that’s real pressure, that’s one of the worst things about street busking.”
(B8, interview, 2015)

It is worth noting that for the majority of the buskers I interviewed, payment was considered more an important incentive than an essential means of survival. This is likely to be due to the fact that most interviewees were not professional buskers. In contrast, the organiser of the Greenwich Street Performer Festival, where I interviewed buskers, mentioned that many busking acts had pulled out of the event, following a stipulation by the local authority that participants were not allowed to collect donations during the festival. This suggests that – at least for a proportion of buskers who treat this as their full-time occupation – payment is an essential component of their practice, rather than simply being an add-on.

In a couple of the guerrilla gardening projects that used or occupied sites earmarked for development, the informal practice also helped with, or provided

the basis for people's sustenance. In one case, an interviewee had started setting up the gardening project while studying for a PhD. By the time his PhD funding ran out, the project had become a full-time job and if he wanted to continue it, he could not take up any other job. In order to save up on money for rent, he ended up living in a caravan on the gardening site for a period of time.

Overall, these cases where the informal practice is generating a financial return were in the minority. More often, the informal activity was unpaid and this sometimes became an issue when time resources were scarce and people had to take a decision between committing to their professional, paid activity and their informal practice. A detailed discussion of issues of time commitment follows in section 5.1.2.

4.8.2 Local economic development

As mentioned in section 4.4.2, informal practices in some cases may have an unintentional positive side-effect on the local economy. Interviewees highlighted that their practices helped to "liven up" spaces, make them more "vibrant" and look less "sterile". This was acknowledged to help local businesses that might benefit from the street or neighbourhood becoming more attractive to people, thus increasing footfall and walk-by customers.

Moreover, improving the perception of the local area may have a bearing on the local economy. Several of the guerrilla gardeners mentioned the link between their practice, an improved perception of the neighbourhood and a tangible outcome on local property values – something that may lead to gentrification. For instance, one of them explained that she had no doubts that the financial support they got from a local estate agent (for buying plants to share out among neighbours for tree pits and their front gardens) had little ethical foundation but was purely motivated by the prospect of raising property values in the area. However, she felt that the substantial community benefits resulting from their activity outweighed this potential downside.

Another guerrilla gardener was more careful of the potential of instrumentalisation through the private development company that had allowed

him make temporary use of their space. He was relieved to find that the company was not interested in gaining positive publicity by exploiting their association with his project, as this would have made him “feel dirty”. He was also clear that he would not have started the project had there been a viable chance of stopping the entire private development. However, by the time he got involved, the development had already been signed off and residents of 1,200 homes had been removed from their flats. Notwithstanding these morals, he did not feel guilty of ‘art’ or ‘greenwashing’:

“I am just dubious about arguments [...] where projects are written off as being complicit or as doing damage, in a vaguely specified way. I mean, it’s not an ideal world. It’d be nice, ideal to get a permanent site for a community project, but it doesn’t look like a possibility.”
(GG8, interview, 2016)

This tension is further discussed in section 7.2.2.

4.9 Political motivations

Political motivations were mentioned by a number of interviewees across the different case studies but they did not play a major role, apart from a few projects that were motivated by a specific political campaign. One of these was a guerrilla gardening project that emerged as the community base of a larger political campaign group that opposes the construction of a third runway at London Heathrow Airport. As my interviewee explained, adhering to the political cause was a major criterion in the squat community’s decisions on whether or not someone was allowed to become a permanent resident on the site. There were also a couple of spot fix initiatives that were directly motivated by a political campaign, namely the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan campaign. This was an initiative launched in 2014 by India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi aiming to improve cleanliness and sanitation across the country. A number of interviewees from spot fix projects mentioned that they got involved in the project because they wanted to do “their part” or “make a contribution to this Clean India movement”.

Rather than promoting a specific political campaign, other interviewees talked about broader political issues that motivated their practice. Most importantly, interviewees saw their practice as a way of opposing the predominant neo-liberal ideology. This includes their ambition to fight the increasing privatisation of public spaces in cities across the world. For instance, one of the organisers of the Equal Streets initiative argued that since the economic liberalisation in India, successive governments have facilitated the take-over of public space through private development and investment. He saw the Equal Streets campaign deeply rooted within this larger “democratic struggle” to break those deals and networks, and to expand spaces for public participation and engagement.

On a more individual level, several interviewees mentioned their ambition to fight against the mentality that is engrained in people’s mind that everything has, or needs to have, a commercial purpose. Thus, initiatives like sharing books, seeds, plants or vegetables for free were seen as a way of countering the “sense of self-gratification and individualism propagated by market forces”. In a couple of cases, the informal cultural practice was just one of a number of engagements of the interviewees to promote the “sharing economy” and a more “sustainable lifestyle”. For instance, one initiator of a book swap was also involved in a street bank that encourages the sharing of tools and skills among neighbours and in a local co-op that had raised money to buy solar panels for the purpose of an energy-sharing project. According to Bromberg (2010:218), such initiatives may be conceptualised as forming part of an “economy of generosity”, which “encourages sharing and non-competitive forms of sociality” and which can be “distinguished from the gift economy because it is not tied to feelings of obligation”.

4.10 Public service provision

Finally, interviewees believed that their practices had a role to play in the provision of public services. This was a particularly important theme in the case studies in Mumbai, but also featured in the book sharing and guerrilla gardening case studies. The fact that this issue was not picked up in the busking case

study is likely because busking tends to be a very short-term, ad hoc intervention and thus may lend itself least well to supporting the generally consistent and long-term public service delivery. The following sections discuss to what extent informal cultural actors wanted to improve public services (section 4.10.1) and how interviewees saw their activities to be different (section 4.10.2).

4.10.1 Improving public service delivery

There were significant differences among interviewees over the extent to which they were willing to get involved in the provision of public services. However, all those mentioning this theme agreed that they wanted to help improve public service delivery through their activities.

The most important way in which they attempted to attain improvement, was by holding public authorities to account. As many interviewees from the Equal Streets and the spot fix case studies argued, often public authorities and politicians are not doing the work that they are legally obliged to do and have been elected for, but they should be held accountable for it. For instance, interviewees from spot fix projects recounted several instances where different public authorities could not agree on the ownership of various bits of public land, because they were reluctant to take responsibility for its maintenance. Even where the ownership or responsibilities were clear, tasks were not always performed. For instance, interviewees mentioned that trees across Mumbai are dying, despite there being a specific tax for tree conservation.

In such cases, interviewees saw themselves as pressure groups that make public authorities answerable for their actions (or lack thereof). They were often quite knowledgeable on the various statutory and legal obligations of public authorities and used this knowledge to achieve results. Several interviewees from the Equal Streets case study emphasised the importance of group action and popular movements in influencing decisions and effecting change. This is because the ideas put forward by groups were believed to be more likely to benefit the public at large (since purely individual interests would have been “filtered” at the group level). However, as one interviewee explained, the

economic liberalisation of India has given rise to a new kind of civic activism, driven primarily by the middle and upper classes, while the workers movement has died down, leaving a void of representation for “the poor, the informal sector”. He argued that governments are working alongside market forces to make cities more exclusive, by excluding more and more people from being represented. At the same time, he saw a slowly growing awareness and acceptance by middle and upper class civic groups that these groups are an integral part of the city and cannot be “pushed under the carpet, or whisked away, or bulldozed out of the city”. He saw the Equal Streets campaign as a way of furthering this cause and increasing participation and civic representation from these groups in the public space.

Insisting that public authorities should fulfil their legal duties, does not mean that ‘informal’ actors were not willing to “help”, “meet in the middle” and “do what is in [their] power.” This is partly because they believed that there is a joint responsibility by the public to look after the public space, such as keeping an area clean. They acknowledged that the government “can’t do it all” and that the system is not equipped to handle the pace of urban population growth in Mumbai, especially with scarce financial resources.

Interviewees also highlighted that everyone in society has a role to play in taking care of their environment. Indeed, several interviewees voiced their exasperation with people who only complain but do not take action, as this quote from an organiser of a spot fix initiative demonstrates:

“So there are people who are not doing anything. Then there are people who are complaining. Then there are people who are complaining about the people who are complaining. [...] People are saying ‘yaar [brother], we Indians just talk’, and there are many people who say this same line again and again and again. And they themselves are not doing it so we call them pseudo-intellectuals. They are shouting on twitter, they are shouting on social media and they are creating the most of the attention. [...] In Hindi there’s a line

'muh band kaam chalu', which means 'shut your mouth and start working' [...]. That is our example.' (SF13, interview, 2015)

For several interviewees taking action also meant instigating action. They argued that complaining alone got few results, while showing yourself collaborative made authorities more willing to engage to understand the root cause of the problems. They understood it as a partnership agreement, where each side keeps their part.

However, there were also voices that saw their involvement and support more as a temporary means to an end. For instance, a few interviewees from spot fix projects talked about the fact that they had taken on the responsibility of cleaning a railway station, but that they were all the while engaging in negotiations with the MRVC and the BMC in order for them to increase their cleaning efforts and replace their voluntary efforts in the long term by dedicated staff. In these cases, their practice was a way of “enter[ing] the system” in order “to change the system”.

In a few cases, interviewees went as far as saying that they wanted to substitute missing public service provision – at least to some extent. For instance, a few of the spot fix projects had taken on a formal “adoption agreement”, whereby they took on full responsibility not only for the cleaning of the railway station or the piece of public land, but also for the security, the gardens and general upkeep and maintenance of the premises. A couple of the book sharing initiatives also talked about their substitution role in a context of austerity and public libraries being closed. In one case, the latter actually influenced the very idea of the project. As my interviewee told me, he and a group of friends had secured a building and then decided to use it as a free book shop, after a public library was closed down close-by.

In other cases, the choice of the initiative was not as directly influenced by public services cuts, but interviewees were conscious that they were taking on public services to a certain extent. One of the guerrilla gardeners argued that by planting up the flower beds on her local high street, she was taking on a task that the council or their contractors should be doing, but were not. In addition to

the motives mentioned above, interviewees agreed to take on this work because they wanted to be the beneficiary of the change (such as an improved public realm), but also because they wanted to “cut red tape” and because they felt it would be too cumbersome to get the authorities involved.

These considerations reflect the discussions in the literature around ‘austere creativity’ (Forkert, 2016). On the one hand, some authors (Milbourne & Cushman, 2015; Forkert, 2016: 26) criticise such a model that essentially accepts the principles of austerity, thus turning the “ingenuity of citizens” into a resource to be exploited in the absence of state funding, but “which does not have the autonomy to challenge the state’s directives”. On the other hand, such activities have the potential to act as “site of resistance to neo-liberal doctrine” (Lee, 2014: 179) and as “positive attributes embedded in another potential society” (Levitas, 2012: 336). These tensions are further discussed in section 7.2.2.

4.10.2 Differences between informal practices and public service

Notwithstanding the previous examples, only few ‘informal’ actors were prepared to take on full responsibility from public authorities. This is due to some of the fundamental differences that they saw between their informal practice and the provision of a public service, namely their capacity and powers, their ‘operational model’ and their function.

With regards to capacity and powers, several interviewees highlighted that, unlike themselves, public authorities have the power to act on certain issues (for example, to enforce fines for spitting in a public place, to address complaints about noise levels, to build a wall on public land, or applying pesticides to trees). A couple of interviewees further argued that if public authorities are in charge of a certain campaign (such as infrastructure improvements or promoting sustainable modes of transport), they are able to attract more leverage than a group of ‘informal’ actors. Also, many ‘informal’ actors noted that they simply did not have the skills that are required to substitute a public service. For instance, the skills required to promote the enjoyment of a public park by a Friends group differ quite substantially from those required to fully

manage and maintain that park. Finally, ‘informal’ actors may not have access to specialist equipment required to carry out certain tasks (such as soldering or fixing chains to their mooring in a public square, repairing a foot bridge or cutting down trees).

Interviewees also pointed to differences in the ‘operational model’ between informal practices and public service provision by public authorities, the main one being the much greater requirements and expectations of the latter. For instance, interviewees from various book sharing initiatives highlighted that a library may require fees and paperwork to join, all books need to be returned, and within a particular time frame, too. A library is also expected to open at consistent times. In contrast, such requirements did not apply to book swaps and – as one interviewee pointed out – it did not even matter if the book swap was sometimes empty. Further characteristics of the ‘operational model’ of informal practices are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Finally, while some interviewees saw their initiative as providing a public service, most argued that their practice had a different function. For instance, one book swap interviewee mentioned that if considered as a library, his project was a failure, as there are only a “couple of good books” among a lot of “dross”. Rather, its main achievement has been to give “people an excuse to be nice to one another”. Notwithstanding the above, the organisers used the expression “micro library” to describe the book swap – a terminology that has made them face criticism by social media users who felt that – in the context of cuts to public services – it was wrong to use the association with a library, given that it only fulfilled a very limited range of the functions.

One of the interviewees from a guerrilla gardening project summarised the view of many others, arguing that their practice was really about providing an additional, rather than an essential service. She gave the example of a discussion with neighbours about street sweeping in her area – which had been reduced by the local authority to once every eight weeks. One neighbour felt that they should organise a street sweeping rota to make up for the lost service. In contrast, my interviewee strongly argued against this, as she felt that the

Council would never consider re-instating the service if they assumed this task to be taken care of by someone else. Instead, she suggested an 'emergency top up' approach for when it was really necessary. She admitted that there was only a fine line between taking responsibility for your environment as a community and taking over work that is a legal, statutory responsibility of the local council. However, like many other interviewees, she felt it was important to maintain this boundary and to understand their practice not as a replacement, but as an add-on to the existing public services provision.

4.11 Conclusion

As outlined in this chapter, the findings from my primary research reveal that 'informal' actors are motivated by a wide variety of issues, stretching from intrinsic reasons, such as personal enjoyment of the activity, to more instrumental, social or environmental agendas. While some had ambitious plans to transform society, others were content with a more contained vision of small improvements. Moreover, there was no singular aim for each individual actor. Instead, a particular practice may be seen to fulfil a multiplicity of purposes. However, most of the 'informal' actors consider their practices to play a role in improving the lives of people (including themselves) in the big cities that they live in.

By demonstrating that informal cultural practices take on a wide range of roles and purposes within cities that go beyond, and are often primary to, economic functions, this chapter also strongly challenges the economic-deterministic interpretations of culture in the urban context that remain prevalent in the literature (as argued in Chapter 2). It suggests that the narrow focus that is often placed in the literature on the role of informal cultural practices as drivers of urban economic development is highly problematic. Direct economic motivations were almost negligible for most case studies (other than busking). While some of the other motivation themes (such as a better, safer and more vibrant neighbourhood, or an improved perception of the local area) may have a bearing on economic issues (such as local business returns and property prices), these only featured marginally in the accounts of 'informal' actors and

how they understood their role in their cities. Consequently, the findings from this chapter call for a shift in the debate by academics and policy-makers alike towards a more multi-faceted valuation of 'informal' cultural practices.

This chapter has provided such a conceptualisation by foregrounding the multiplicity and diversity of motivations – thus also answering my first research question. However, in order to more fully comprehend the role of 'informality' in these activities, a better understanding of how 'informality' is deployed in the practices of 'informal' actors is required. The following chapter provides a discussion of my findings in relation to this, thus helping to answer my second research question.

5 DEPLOYING INFORMALITY

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the multiplicity and diversity of motivations that lead ‘informal’ actors to engage in informal cultural practices. The research findings have demonstrated that a simplistic conception of informal practices as a facilitator of urban economic development is reductive at the very least. However, many ‘informal’ actors do strive to improve lives in their cities, including their own.

In this present chapter, I interrogate how they try to achieve these aims. I examine their internal (or stated), theoretical values and principles that they desire to adhere to in their practices, and how they go about achieving their aims in practice. By interrogating actors’ theoretical principles and actual practices, this chapter reveals the role that informality plays in the pursuit of their goals, and in particular, the extent to which informality is a defining characteristic of their practices. It also explores how actors perceive and practically negotiate the relationship between ‘acting informally’ and ‘formal ways of doing things’.

Drawing on the same data, as in the previous chapter, I begin in section 5.1 by looking at how ‘informal’ actors themselves define rules and boundaries for their practices – a reflection of their principles and values. In the second part of the chapter (section 5.2), I then look at how, in their practical decisions, actors deploy informality.

5.1 Principles and values

This section looks at the principles and values that ‘informal’ actors adhered to, and how they are reflected in the boundaries that the ‘informal’ actors drew for

themselves and for others engaging with their practice. Thus it provides an answer to my second research question:

How are informal cultural practices defined and delimited by urban actors themselves?

When asked directly whether there were any rules or guidelines for their practice, many interviewees declined. For instance, a number of book swap organisers emphasised that they did not ‘censor’ the content of the books on the shelves in any way, nor did they try to implement rules on the number of books people take. One of the interviewees from a book sharing initiatives put it as follows:

“It’s whatever we want to do. Bear in mind, we’re not a charity, we’re not a business, we are just some people who do this as friends, so we have no guidelines, rules or targets to reach, or anything like this. It’s just whatever we want.” (BS8, interview, 2015)

Notwithstanding these responses, when probed further, interviewees did frequently mention rules or guidelines that they themselves abided by or that they wanted others to follow. Such boundaries are discussed in the following six sections.

Sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 look at different ideas of ‘informal’ actors with regards to the requirements for engagement – ranging from efforts to keeping barriers for engagement as low as possible to expecting a significant personal commitment. Sections 5.1.3 and 5.1.4 discuss interviewees’ approach to obeying the law and avoiding offence through their practice, while section 5.1.5 discusses their attitudes towards political, religious and commercial aspects. Finally, section 5.1.6 looks at the extent to which interviewees are trying to enforce these rules and guidelines.

5.1.1 Keeping barriers low

A common theme in terms of how interviewees defined and delimited their practice was the requirement to keep barriers for engagement very low – both for the organisers of the practice and other users or participants.

5.1.1.1 Low barriers for use and participation

Many interviewees emphasised that they considered it crucial to lower the barriers that might prevent people from engaging with their practice. One of the ways in which they tried to ensure this was by making their initiative free of charge. For instance, while a comparable 'service' or 'experience' might occur at a cost (such as joining a library, visiting a garden or renting a bicycle), interviewees from book swaps, guerrilla gardening initiatives and the Equal Streets events all highlighted that their initiatives did not involve any registration, usage or entry fees. More than that, many initiatives offered free goods, such as books, seeds, compost or bulbs. For some interviewees this was a key part of their understanding of their practice. For instance, an interviewee from a guerrilla gardening initiative argued that for a substantial number of participants, money would have been a limitation (and for a small minority, a huge impairment), as people would tend to think of buying bread and other things first, before investing in plants for the garden.

This also highlights another important principle for many interviewees, namely to be inclusive and to be open to "everyone and anyone" – be they a "millionaire" or "on the poverty line". More than just being open to everyone, several interviewees wanted to involve specific groups that tend to be excluded, such as people with alcohol problems, people with disabilities, or – in the case of one of the spot fix projects – rag pickers.

Their aim to be inclusive sometimes had concrete implications for the choice of the project focus. Thus, one interviewee from a guerrilla gardening project justified their choice of growing vegetables over flowers:

"Not everybody is a gardener, per se, and just wants to spend their time growing flowers. Whereas everybody is an eater, per se. Everyone requires food. [...] And there's something we've grown, like 'trombontino' courgettes, which you simply cannot buy in a shop. They're not sold. And people love seeing the unusual shape, like a trombone [...]. And the baby carrots: the children who mightn't be interested in gardening or might do it once or twice, then it's boring,

whereas they always want to pick carrots to eat, and little cherry tomatoes.” (GG2, interview, 2015)

For others, it determined their location choice. For instance, organisers of the Equal Streets initiative argued that they wanted their event to be accessible to all strata of society. This includes physical accessibility. Hence, they were insisting on it taking place in an area that is easily accessible by public transport. They also rejected offers the following year to re-launch their weekly Sunday event in the Bandra Kurla Complex, a planned commercial district in Mumbai, because there were no public transport links and the organisers did not want to exclude people without a car.

Finally, a number of interviewees pointed out that their practice was not supposed to be intimidating in any way. Interviewees from both book swap and guerrilla gardening initiatives also highlighted the importance of the activity taking place in a public space, as opposed to a particular building (like a library) or someone’s house. As one interviewee explained:

“You know, whenever I go in anywhere, you always feel like people are making a decision about whether they want you to be there or not. And there’s none of that. With the [book swap] you go in, you take it, you go out.” (BS15, interview, 2015)

Interviewees from a spot fix project also mentioned that when going out to clean or paint, the group made a conscious effort to look like a “common man”, avoiding any badges, caps or t-shirts, in order to make it easier for people to approach them and join in spontaneously without feeling singled out.

5.1.1.2 Low barriers for organisers

Many organisers also highlighted simplicity and keeping the project “realistic” and “contained” for themselves as an important boundary of their practice. This was partly by design – because organisers wanted to keep it simple – and partly by necessity – due to a lack of capacity to maintain it at any greater level.

For instance, book swap organisers explained that the concept was very “simple” itself and most felt that any attempts to turn it into anything more

complicated (such as encouraging users to give a rating or write a review about the book they read; or scaling it up across more stations) were doomed to fail or had done so. Other interviewees argued that it was important to consider the limits of their capacity, as it is better to do something small than nothing at all. Keeping the activity relatively small-scale also had the added benefit of less administration. As one guerrilla gardener explained, she was secretly quite happy when a grant application for the project fell through, considering the extensive evaluation and administration work the grant would have entailed.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of making pragmatic choices or compromises. For instance, one guerrilla gardener explained that he had started gardening in a playground area. He remarked that it initially did not feel like his “kind of space”, as he was used to work on pavements or at road junctions, rather than a space “behind a fence”. The reason why he took the decision was that his personal circumstances had changed and he now had a young daughter. Such pragmatism about his choice of location allowed him to continue his practice even in this new phase of life.

In addition to a simple concept, interviewees emphasised the importance of keeping the implementation and maintenance simple. Indeed, several interviewees mentioned that their project tends to “run itself”, is “self-perpetuating” and requires “little time and effort”. Guerrilla gardeners also repeatedly talk about the importance of finding the right plants that are resilient enough to survive with little watering or that might even recover from being trampled on. As one interviewee put it:

“You've got to plant things that can be resilient to these sort of treatments. It's a very different kind of gardening. And you can't always do a nice design, 'cause you're thinking in terms of 'how will that plant survive in that location? I need to plant that there to block that there'. You're not coming up...and sometimes things like colour schemes don't...forget it. Forget it. 'What survives?'” (GG7, interview, 2015)

Interviewees from the book swap and guerrilla gardening activities also highlighted that the practices can be very low cost, as books are generally donated and seeds or bulbs can be obtained very cost-effectively, sometimes even for free, as samples from companies selling gardening products or from other gardeners who are splitting plants, while compost is sometimes provided for free by the local authority.

5.1.2 Personal commitment

In contrast, there were also voices across all case studies that saw their practices defined through significant personal commitment, including investing their own financial resources and their personal time, as well as taking personal initiative and responsibility.

5.1.2.1 Money and time

Across all the case studies (except busking) there were organisers prepared to invest their own financial resources into their project – in some cases, hundreds of pounds. Interviewees spent their personal money on printing materials, on hiring cars to transport materials or on travel, on buying shelves, materials for the refurbishment of a phone box, on acquiring plants or containers or gardening equipment, buying food, drink or rain clothing for workers involved in the project, as well as paying others to do manual labour, such as removing posters from walls or doing tiling. In most of these cases, interviewees were prepared to bear the costs because they did not have anyone else to pay for it. In other cases, they did so, because they were reluctant to engage in a laborious fundraising or grant application process, as this quote illustrates:

“I probably spent about £500 on it, and [a woman from a local community association] said ‘Do you want us to do a fundraiser?’ I said ‘No, don’t’. I couldn’t be bothered. I thought, ‘I’ll just do it.’ [...] I like the fact that it’s just totally non-procedural.” (BS10, interview, 2015)

Even where organisers raised external funds, they were willing to take a financial risk. As one interviewee from a spot fix project explained to me, at the

beginning of the initiative, he asked himself the question, whether he could sustain it with his own resources, even if no donations were made. Since he was able to positively answer this question, he decided to embark on it.

In addition to investing financial resources, many devoted considerable amounts of their personal time to the initiative – several hours each day (or more) in some cases. Since many of the participants had another occupation or job at the same time, this time was often spent in their lunch breaks, working late at night or very early in the morning, and on weekends. Arguably, the initiatives where people spent most time on, either involved regular events (for example, daily distribution of free books) or larger scale (for example, running a large guerrilla garden and community space).

5.1.2.2 Taking responsibility

Another important principle for many interviewees was that they took responsibility. Interviewees emphasised that rather than complaining or getting annoyed that things were not getting done, they wanted to act and do something about the issue they were concerned about – whether it was about encouraging neighbours to get to know each other better by initiating a guerrilla gardening project, setting up a safer cycling initiative, or cleaning up a railway station. According to one organiser of a book sharing initiative, the most important factor is a willingness to try:

“Something that’s worth emphasising [...] is that it’s very easy to look at what we do and think it’s something very special about us. ‘Oh, these guys have something I don’t have, and that’s how they did what they do’. Really, there’s nothing special about us. What’s special about us is that we bother. And this is a really key fact, that I think people must really understand this, that...that the difference between making something positive happen and nothing happening is that you must try. If this could really be understood by more people, then more would try. And if more people try, then more people will succeed, because that is all it takes to succeed, is that you have to try.” (BS8, interview, 2015)

Taking responsibility was also seen as crucial in keeping an initiative going. As one interviewee from a guerrilla gardening project put it, each project needs at least one “obsessive” who takes responsibility for maintaining it (such as consistently watering plants in the summer, pulling out plants when they have died or sorting a book swap at a regular basis).

As a result, several interviewees developed a sense of ownership for their initiative in particular, and their community at large. As one interviewee from a spot fix initiative explained, when he cleans the streets or station, he understands it as cleaning his own home. As argued in section 4.2.1, this sense of ownership often goes hand in hand with an emotional attachment, and – on the flipside – a feeling of offence or hurt, when “bad things” happen, such as plants being stolen, tree pits plants being sprayed off by the Council, or people spitting or urinating on a freshly painted or cleaned wall. Interestingly, a small number of interviewees from a guerrilla gardening project opposed this view, arguing for the need to keep some slight distance to the initiative and not get “your heart invested in it too much”. This is because they saw their practice as a “tougher kind of gardening”, where one could not expect people to show the same respect or attention to plants being put on private property.

5.1.2.3 Attitudes and behaviours

For many interviewees, the sense of ownership and attachment was a direct consequence of the personal attitudes and characteristics that were, in their eyes, required to make such an initiative happen. Interviewees from across all case studies emphasised the need to have a real passion for, and interest in, whatever they are doing. They emphasised the importance of feeling very strongly about their cause and having great clarity of purpose. This, they argued, is essential as otherwise any opposition or criticism will quickly wear them down, while competing priorities will soon lead to the failure of the project. Instead, organisers felt that they require great determination to complete the task, even if there is no support from others. ‘Persistence’ and ‘dedication’ were other terms frequently used to describe this requirement. This is particularly

important when dealing with public authorities, as one interviewee from the Equal Streets case study explained:

“We have to be patient; we have to have tenacity, and perseverance. I think these are the three things that are very, very important. Otherwise, we can’t last, not even a day. We’ll crumble, frustrated, angry, et cetera. That’s what the system wants sometimes. They’re testing you with time. How soon will you be crumbling, and collapsing?” (ES5, interview, 2015)

Other interviewees emphasised the importance of being assertive and confident. For instance, one of the guerrilla gardeners argued that people who take the initiative tend to be “bolshy, annoying people” because they are the “people who have the oomph”. A couple of book swap organisers who had set up their book swap when assuming to have tacit approval, but not having received official permission by the land owners, argued that you needed to be fairly “forceful” and “confident” to go ahead in these circumstances. Confidence was also highlighted by several buskers as a key component of becoming a successful street performer. This is because of the particular relationship that buskers have with their audiences: compared to other concert situations, buskers are much more exposed as a performer. A busking audience is made up of people who have not come intentionally to listen to their music. Thus, the busker needs to try and hook them, ideally making them stay and listen for a while. However, if things do not go well, people may feel disturbed by the music or as if the busker intruded in their space. The implication of this is, as one busker explained, that the audience’s reaction is completely unpredictable and, therefore, buskers need to be “thick-skinned” and prepared to deal with, and recover from, bad criticism straight away.

5.1.3 Obeying the law

Notwithstanding the fact that many interviewees felt the need to be very assertive and confident, for most interviewees obeying the law was an important delimitation of their practice. This applies both to their own activities and their expectation of how others interact with their practice.

For instance, organisers of the Equal Streets event ended up preventing a music event from taking place again – despite it having proved very popular in the first couple of weeks – as they did not possess the correct license to play Bollywood music.

With regards to others interacting with the informal practices, many organisers drew clear boundaries when it comes to theft, vandalism or violence. For instance, a number of book swap organisers and guerrilla gardeners talked about instances where people had taken all of the books at once from the book shelves or had taken plants – an unacceptable behaviour for many (but not all) actors. Several guerrilla gardeners felt upset about plants being removed because it meant that the flowers could then no longer be enjoyed by everyone. They also felt that theft was worse when it was clearly pre-meditated. For instance, one guerrilla gardener had some artichoke flowers cut off, where the stem is so thick that it needs to be cut with proper gardening scissors. Other organisers felt that most stealing was more opportunistic, like in a “pick-n-mix sweet shop”, because it was “too tempting” and people thought that no one would care if the plants were being taken.

Similarly, organisers bemoaned some “tragic” instances of vandalism, including someone putting fire to books from a book shelf, someone using a book shelf as a weapon and breaking it, and someone repeatedly smashing the glass panes of a book swap.

Finally, one of the guerrilla gardening projects including a squat, reported that they had stringent rules on preventing any violence and that people would be asked to leave the project if there were behavioural issues.

5.1.4 Avoiding offence and inconvenience

More than simply obeying the law, a considerable number of interviewees wanted to ensure that their practice did not cause any offence. This theme was mentioned in all of the case studies, but was particularly often raised by buskers. One hypothesis, why my interviewees from the busking case study were so concerned about their impact on others around them, is that they

almost always undertake their busking practice without explicit permission. This is in contrast to the book sharing, Equal Streets and spot fix case studies, where a majority (if certainly not all) of the projects had permission to carry out their activities and, hence, perhaps felt slightly less dependent on, and vulnerable to, the public's reactions to their practice. And while a proportion of the guerrilla gardeners also acted without license or permission, the nature of busking, which involves sometimes loud music or amplification, is arguably more intrusive to others than gardening activities.

Of course, there was some debate over what constitutes an offence. For instance, most book swaps interviewees agreed that they would not tolerate any pornographic content. However, within that disapproval, there was a spectrum of opinion. For instance, one interviewee said that, although she would be uncomfortable with it, she would probably leave it for a while to see if someone picks it up. But another book swap organiser explained that he even rejected books that he considered "risqué". The same interviewee had chosen to remove a historical book on the Holocaust, as he felt that this book – while potentially interesting – was likely to cause offence to some people. He argued that the book swap should contain "borderline easy reading, everyday reading". It is worth emphasising that the majority of book swap organisers would not agree with this statement, but many did make value judgements and sometimes took out books if they felt they were "inappropriate".

Other interviewees were concerned not to inconvenience the people closest to the location of the practice, whether through a particular design on a painted tree, or a piece of street furniture. The following quote from one guerrilla gardener illustrates such deliberations:

"The only thing we agreed on informally was that there wouldn't be a bench or seat. And that was mainly out of deference to the people who live around, because there are some rough sleepers around and there are people who, and I know other parks have had the same problem... I would love there to be seats. It would be lovely if people could just...and people do sit, they sit on here, having their lunch in

the sunshine in the summer. And I'd love there to be benches and things, but it's not fair if suddenly you end up with a row between drunks at 4 o'clock in the morning for the people who are living directly opposite." (GG10, interview, 2015)

Where they could not avoid inconvenience entirely, many organisers made efforts to minimise it, whether by offering alternative routes for residents affected by road closures or by carrying out cleaning and painting work at a railway station in the late evenings when there were less commuters.

Interviewees were also prepared to 'self-regulate' their practice. For instance, several buskers talked about the fact that they try to play down if they are in a space that echoes a lot, or indeed move location; that they ensure that they do not block shop fronts or play too close to other stall holders; and that they do not swear in spaces where children are around.

A few interviewees also talked about their efforts to ensure that direct participants did not have a negative experience of the project. For instance, one organiser of the Equal Streets case study talked about the importance of choosing good roads (without holes or rubbish) to prevent accidents from happening while event participants cycle or walk along the street.

5.1.5 Politics, religion and commercialism

As mentioned in section 4.9, only a few interviewees had specific political aims, with others subscribing to broader political ideas like the opposition to neoliberalism. Indeed, as shown in this section, more frequently, interviewees actually objected to incorporating political, religious or commercial aspects into their practice. This does not necessarily mean that these interviewees did not hold political viewpoints or religious beliefs. Rather, it needs to be seen in the context of what was discussed in section 5.1.1 with regards to the inclusiveness of their practice and in section 5.1.4 about not wanting to cause offence to anyone. For instance, one of the organisers of a spot fix initiative explained that she had rejected the suggestion of covering a tree in painted flags for fear of others defacing particular countries' flags. Other interviewees were clear that

they simply did not wish to associate with particular religious or political thoughts. For instance, one organiser of a book sharing initiative argued that she would not distribute books that are “heavily” political or religious, since she did not want to be associated with these.

It is worth noting that while most interviewees treated political, religious and commercial material in the same way, a few made distinctions. For instance, one book swap organiser mentioned that he would remove religious material from the book swap, while he did not oppose political content as a whole. And while several interviewees from the book swap case study talked about their rejection of advertising and commercial material, only the organisers of the Equal Streets case study put great emphasis on this aspect. They were very clear that no money transactions or distribution of brochures and advertising materials were allowed during the event. The reason why they so clearly defined this stipulation was that the event was made possible by a great number of police officers in action (paid for by public monies). Thus, the organisers were very keen to ensure that Equal Streets was seen as a public event and not promoting any commercial interests.

A number of interviewees from the Equal Streets, spot fix and guerrilla gardening case studies also brought up the issue of political instrumentalisation. In particular, the organisers of the Equal Streets case study emphasised that – while being very happy to collaborate with public authorities – they were not willing to associate with any particular political party, often because they feared that their objectives and core arguments would get blurred. The organisers from one spot fix project equally felt very strongly about not wanting to be instrumentalised for party political interests. They reported that they had been approached a number of times to join the ruling political party in order to gain access to funds and get permissions for their practice. However, they refused those attempts, arguing that they did not want to associate with any particular party. This is because they felt it would dilute their core argument, namely that it is greatly important for individuals to take responsibility for the cleanliness of their environment and that any such initiatives are not down to the involvement of a particular party. Indeed, they argued that many of the projects that were

officially affiliated with the government's Swacch Bharat Abhiyan campaign tended to be more about photo opportunities, while not doing much work. This assessment reflects a number of commentators' analysis of the relevance of the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan campaign as an example of the Hindu-nationalist government's use of symbolism (Sen, 2016) and mythology (Kaul, 2017: 532) that seeks to portray Prime Minister Modi as "a savior of the country who promises ideological cleansing of India to its purer origins unsullied by minority appeasement" and as a non-elitist leader associated with cleaning politics from corruption and family-dynasties. As Sen (2016) argues, the campaign had great appeal for a key constituency of Modi's voters in 2014, namely India's growing urban middle class, a group who largely subscribes to notions of 'bourgeois environmentalism' (Baviskar, 2011; 2012).

This might also be the case for a couple of the other spot fix projects, which openly associated with the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan campaign, or were not opposed to political affiliation. For instance, one spot fix organiser group, who had previously adopted two stations locally to where most participants were living, took on a third station at the request of the Railway Minister. This third station was the "home station" for this Minister and – having heard about the success of their previous projects – he approached them to also take on 'his' station. The group felt that it was a good thing to oblige to his request, as they saw it as a way of spreading support for this kind of idea across the whole MRVC.

There were also a couple of book swap organisers who specifically emphasised that they would keep political and religious material in the swap – even if they disagreed with it. One interviewee argued that – unlike the common perception of politics as being "dirty" – he felt that all people who engage in politics do so because they believe it is for the betterment of society, and that alone should be valued. Interestingly, there was also no mention by any of the busking interviewees of steering away from political or religious contents. Given the preponderance of political and religious themes in music more generally, it would be an interesting point for further exploration to what extent this is the case in busking.

5.1.6 Enforcing 'rules'

Interviewees did not only talk about the various principles they felt were important for their practice and others engaging with their practice, but also about how they reacted when 'rules' were broken or how they attempted to prevent this from happening.

A few interviewees mentioned that they will undo or remove whatever harm has been done to their practice. For instance, one interviewee mentioned that she was planning to check the book shelves in a homeless shelter and a nearby pub to see whether any of those books had her book swap's stickers on it, and if so, she would take the books back.

Other people would go beyond this to try and find out who committed the offence and to confront them about it or to refer them to the relevant authorities. This includes a few "quiet words" with people who were taking too many books or had taken freshly planted plants, or collaboration with public authorities to ensure that fines for littering or spitting are imposed. One member of a guerrilla gardening project who had plants repeatedly stolen from a tree pit in front of her house went even further. With the help of a neighbour working in an electronics shop, she installed CCTV at her window for a period of time. Once she had identified the thief, she performed a citizen's arrest on him, before handing him over to the police.

Perhaps more often, interviewees talked about how they tried to prevent people from breaking their rules, for instance by codifying them. In order to encourage people to return books, several of the book swap organisers mentioned that they put labels or stickers on the books that indicate that they belong to a particular book swap. A couple of other interviewees, who told me that they did not put stickers in the books because they felt it was too much work, still agreed that it would probably incentivise people to bring them back, and to discourage people from trying to sell them. Many book swap organisers and guerrilla gardeners also put up notices or signs to explain the basic principle (for example, taking a book and returning one) and who was behind the initiative (for example, a certain community group or individual). Several interviewees felt

that this might make people think more carefully before taking any plants or trampling on them.

Another way in which interviewees tried to prevent any offence was to try and remove the incentives for vandalism or theft, including by using low value plants or by physically fixing components to make any potential theft harder. One book swap organiser, who had received quite a lot of media publicity for his initiative, also recounted that he stopped wearing his football scarf to interviews. His rationale for doing so was that most people in the local area supported a different club and he was worried that any aggression against him would be transferred to his book swap.

Other interviewees also counted on social surveillance in order to deter any undesirable behaviour. For instance, many book swap organisers mentioned that they deliberately chose a “semi-supervised” public space. It is worth noting that people have different definitions of what that means. While for some, it was inside the waiting room of a train station, for others it consisted of a place where there was some CCTV, or of a visible, well-lit part of the road. Nonetheless, they all felt that in these spaces “there’s a bit of surveillance” and that people were likely to stop anyone who might attempt taking larger amounts of books. In the cases where the book swap was located within a station, organisers also often mentioned their good relationship with station staff who takes on a certain surveillance role. In other case studies, people talked of a more direct form of surveillance, including through allocated personnel who was moving around the Equal Streets event to check that all the activities complied with the rules.

Another way of pre-empting unwanted behaviour was to restrict access, at least at certain times. For instance, a couple of the book swaps organisers highlighted that the book swap could only be used as long as the station ticket hall was open. In one of the spot fix projects, the initiator got the railway to erect a wall to prevent direct access from neighbouring informal housing onto the platform – something that he hoped would help reduce the waste and garbage.

The Equal Streets case study went furthest in ensuring that their rules were adhered to, as the organisers decided that people who wanted to do an activity

at the open street event needed to ask for permission. They had to send an email, setting out the objectives of their activity, and if these were judged to fit with the overall ethos of the Equal Streets campaign, they would be sent a confirmation letter. On the day of the event, the organisers then had dedicated staff to check whether people had confirmation letters or not. These permits were not a requirement from public authorities put on the organisers. Rather, there was a consensus among the group that they needed to ensure that the activities did not undermine their overall objectives and that the event would not turn commercial.

Despite these various attempts to ensure that other people do not behave against the interviewees' own principles and values, there was a proportion of them who argued that they either could not, or did not want to enforce these rules. For instance, several book swap organisers pointed out that although the idea was that people take a book and bring one back, this was very hard to police or pursue. Indeed, many felt that following this rule was "not absolutely required", "not compulsory", "all very flexible" and "not a problem". This was partly because the book swaps tended to replenish regardless, for instance when people de-clutter and put in a lot of books at once, and partly because organisers showed some understanding for people breaking the rules. For instance, a couple of interviewees explained that – given the low re-sale value of second hand books – if someone had so little money that they needed to take books from the swap to sell them, then they "can't get upset about it".

Interestingly, even in the case of Equal Streets, one interviewee told me that their checks on whether people had a confirmation letter or not, were not very stringent:

"So we did not ask the police to do it very strictly. It's because we do not want to be very authoritative. Six and a half kilometres and we don't own it. Let people do something. If they get away, they get away." (ES1, interview, 2015)

This quote also aptly illustrates the fluidity that exists between informal and formal ways of doing things – a theme that runs through this entire first part of

the chapter. Indeed, while some actors have a preference for acting informally (e.g. spontaneous and non-bureaucratic), or formally (compliant with law), in most cases their overall 'ethical' concerns or values take precedence. On the one hand, this implies that actors are willing to change their initial idea about how the practice should look like if it better achieves their overall purpose (as exemplified in the above quote, where the organiser of the Equal Streets event was willing to renounce on a strict obedience of their rules in favour of an enhanced sense of ownership that people develop for the public space). On the other hand, this suggests that even a firm subscription to a 'formal' or 'informal' way of doing things is motivated by actors' desire to achieve their larger purpose (e.g. their requirement to obey the law is due to them wanting to contribute something to the entire community; or their insistence on spontaneity and lack of processes is a way of guaranteeing access for all). In this sense, acting informally or formally primarily becomes a tool to achieve their larger aims and purposes. The extent to which this is also true for actors' actual practices (as opposed to their theoretical principles and values) is subject of the second part of this chapter.

5.2 Informality in practice

This second part interrogates in detail how informal practices are organised and structured, and to what extent actors deploy informality in making their practice happen. The following sections also examine the extent to which the actual practices reflect their stated internal principles and values (as discussed in section 5.1) and how, in their practical decisions, 'informal' actors negotiate the larger external framework of 'extra-legal, social and discursive' and, indeed, formal regulation. Thus, this section will provide an answer to my third research question:

How is informality deployed by informal cultural actors to fulfil the different purposes of their practices?

In order to do so, this part looks at different stages or elements that are common in many of the interviewees' practice. Section 5.2.1 begins by looking at how 'informal' actors prepare for their activities, followed by section 5.2.2

which considers whether or not they obtain permissions, section 5.2.3 that discusses how they implement their practice and how the practice is funded, section 5.2.4 which deals with how they recruit other people and promote their activities, and finally section 5.2.5, which tackles how projects grow over time.

5.2.1 Preparation

This section looks at how informal practices draw on people's professional background and training and to what extent the practices are dependent on such formal training. It then discusses the extent to which they deploy informality in planning and rehearsing their practice.

5.2.1.1 Training and professional background

For a number of interviewees, their informal practice had a direct link to their professional background and training. For instance, several of the buskers had a music degree, while others had taken private lessons in guitar, piano or singing at some point. However, it is interesting to note that most of the interviewees did not feel that their formal training was necessary for street performance. This is partly because they felt that the skills that were required for busking were sometimes quite different from what they were taught in their music education, as this quote highlights:

“Imagine you were a ballet dancer and you were building this beautiful body aesthetic [...]. And then you want to become a street or hip hop dancer. You need to just throw all that stuff out of the window and just develop a completely new way of expressing this. And so I think, we're trying to do that. It's hard, it is hard.” (B1, interview, 2015)

In the other case studies, there were also examples where interviewees used professional skills in their informal practice, such as people with a gardening qualification being involved in guerrilla gardening, or trained architects and physical planners, worked on road and public space design as part of the Equal Streets and spot fix initiatives.

In other cases, there was not a full overlap between their professional background and their informal practice, but their previous experience or skills benefitted an element of their work. For instance, one guerrilla gardener who set up a community gardening project as interim use of a property development site and needed to submit a planning application for this project, was only able to do it because he was a trained landscape architect who had previously worked on planning applications as part of his job.

However, there were also many interviewees who emphasised that their practice had no link whatsoever to their professional background and they rather learned informally while working on their project. For instance, there were several buskers who said that they were either completely self-taught or taught by friends and family. This includes the one busker I interviewed for whom busking is now his full-time job. He explained that he never had a singing lesson, but out of necessity to keep his voice healthy, he worked a lot on his musical skills, such as his breathing. Similarly, one of the guerrilla gardeners argued that she set up a large project by “trial and error”. She explained that she read up on a lot of things, but that ultimately it came down to doing it in practice:

“There’s this saying that if you haven’t killed something personally, then you don’t know the plants. And I’ve killed a lot of plants, but I’ve learned a lot by growing it.” (GG1, interview, 2015)

Among those interviewees who highlighted that they had no prior training or experience in the work that they were doing as part of their practice, some felt that this informal approach made their work a little bit harder, or at least progress more slowly. For instance, one book swap organisers aiming to scale up his idea and set up book swaps in all London Underground stations felt that because he did not have any background in either literature or in a campaigning organisation, he was lacking the network and the professional recognition to make his idea happen.

5.2.1.2 Planning and rehearsal

There was a great breadth of approaches to planning and rehearsal across the different case studies and individual practices, ranging from the very formal to the very informal. The Equal Streets case study was the project where detailed planning was considered most important. Interviewees mentioned that they had started initial discussions two years prior to the event being launched, while they engaged in detailed planning for eight months. Such planning included carrying out feasibility studies for the most appropriate roads for the event, setting up emergency plans, planning for traffic flow, and entry and exit points for participants.

There were different reasons for carrying out such detailed planning. For instance, the organisers from a spot fix project felt that carrying out a survey with close to 100 residents of a neighbouring slum to really understand the problem of why so much garbage is produced was necessary in order to be taken seriously by public authorities, especially because the core organiser group was made up of young female college students (including some minors). A few other spot fix organisers argued that advance planning helped to ensure that everyone involved is sharing the same vision and concept, but also because it made the execution much easier.

A number of buskers also talked about their advance preparation. While some regularly rehearsed at home or hired a rehearsal space to work on some new ideas and try them out with other band members, only few practiced for a street performance. Rather, many interviewees saw the busking performance as an opportunity to rehearse. The following quote sums up what several interviewees thought of busking as paid practice:

“If you are going to sit at home and practice, you might as well just sit here and sort of practice and people throw a few quid in and it just buys you a drink at the end of the day. So that's why we do it, it's fun, it's good time to practice and you get a little bit money for it.” (B10, interview, 2015)

While not as frequently, interviewees from other case studies also mentioned that they do not prepare much in advance. For instance, one interviewee involved in one of the free book shops explained that they did not have any consistent opening times. They only opened when they wanted to open, which meant that sometimes they could be open for 24 hours and sometimes not at all. Notwithstanding the above, people who wanted to come could phone in advance and if someone was available, they would open the book shop specifically for this one person. A few of the interviewees from spot fix projects also argued that they had not engaged in much prior planning. For instance, one interviewee said that he did not have a plan for a particular theme or concept for the paintings put up on his adopted stations. Rather he left it to the volunteers involved to come up with ideas.

In terms of preparation, there is thus a real mix of interviewees who draw on their formal training and those who learn on the job, those who carry out detailed planning and those launch into the activity without rehearsal or other preparation. In some cases, the latter feel that they do not need to prepare, because their previous formal training allows them to improvise on the spot, while for others the lack of fixed planning is central to the understanding of their practice. Such different approaches and sometimes internal tensions are further discussed in the following sections.

5.2.2 Permissions

Across the case studies, about half of the interviewees mentioned that they got formal permission for their practice, while the other half opposed the idea of getting permissions.

There were examples from all the case studies where 'informal' actors asked for a permission for their practice first, whether this was to set up a book swap in a train station, to apply for a busking license, to do some guerrilla gardening on a playground, to paint trees or to close roads for an event. However, there were quite a lot of differences in terms of how onerous the process of receiving permission was and how long it took. A couple of book swap organisers reported that they only had a chat with the station manager, briefly looked at the

site where the book swap was supposed to be put up and then got their permission. But there were also many examples from this and other case studies where obtaining permission involved much more drawn out negotiations with public authorities that could take from several months up to two years, and sometimes, had to be repeated. These examples highlight what might be considered a paradox, namely the need, for some, to be organised and follow formal procedures in order to carry out an informal activity.

Several interviewees talked about ways in which the application process for permissions could be made easier. Some felt that the way they engaged with public authorities was of importance. For instance, a couple of book swap organisers highlighted that decision-makers were more likely to say 'yes' if their life was not made more difficult by the activity:

“Do research first. Find out who to contact, how to contact them, how to get them on side, without saying anything that looks risky or difficult for them. You’ve got to make this easy for people who can give you permission for what you want to do. And, you can – if it’s not difficult for them, if it doesn’t take them time, it doesn’t involve them in risk assessments, legal troubles or any of those things. You’ve got to keep it simple, so simple, so it’s not difficult for them.” (BS1, interview, 2015)

Other interviewees emphasised that it was good practice to consult with public authorities, or at least inform them, about details of the process or their activities, even if they did not require it. Thus, one of the spot fix projects, out of mere courtesy, sent all their designs for beautification works in one station first to the railway authorities and granted them a veto, should they have any concerns.

Other interviewees talked about drawing on their informal networks in order to gain official support and speed up the process, whether people who had received permission for a similar project or could give legal advice, political connections or people within public authorities. In contrast, a few interviewees felt that it was more helpful to formalise their practice (for instance, by

registering as a company or not-for-profit organisation, or by associating with a local residents' or community association) in order to add credibility or "weight" to their application.

Across the case studies there were also examples of informal 'social contracts' that replaced official permissions. A couple of buskers talked about 'informal license schemes' that regulate which busker is allowed to play in popular tourist spots in London. If such "unwritten rotas" are ignored by people like one of my interviewees who only occasionally play in these areas, other buskers who are part of the 'informal' scheme would often confront him and ask him to leave. Another busking couple talked about similar issues with people begging in the streets, as this quote illustrates:

"(B11): Beggars are interesting. They often get really shirty about it, so...

(B5): So, this guy, yeah...we went along and this guy was there. We went a bit further along, and then he started moaning at us; didn't he, in [that town]? And I said, 'You're alright there, mate?' I said, 'Do you mind if we play here?' He said...I can't remember what he said...he said, 'Oh this isn't a buskers spot...' or something like that.

(B11): Yeah...'Get off my land!'

(B5): I said, 'Can I get you a coffee or something?', and I bought him a coffee basically and he cheered up, didn't he?

(B11): He left us alone until we left.

(B5): Bought him a coffee and a bun, and he shut up and let us busk. You just have to, you know...buy yourselves a licence from the local beggars."

(Interview, 2015)

One of the guerrilla gardeners also talked about the importance of such 'social contracts' which, in some cases, were worth more than official permissions. He argued that despite their months-long negotiations for planning permission and a lease, their legal agreement did not offer them any protection and they could

be evicted at any point. Rather, they were relying on their informal networks, and in particular on their standing within the local community and among local councillors to avoid being moved on.

There was also a large part of my interviewees who did not ask for permissions, whether that was to distribute free books on the London Underground, to put spare plants in the local library's garden or to live in a caravan on a community garden site. Some interviewees argued that they did not ask for permission, since they felt a sense of ownership of public spaces, and they did not see why they should be required to ask when they are helping to look after "their own things" or "their home" (for instance by planting in public spaces or by cleaning public areas). They felt even more justified to do so, when the person or authority who legally owned the place, did not look after it adequately. Several guerrilla gardeners also argued that they were not prepared to ask for permission, because they believed that their practice did not do any harm. In other cases, interviewees from the guerrilla gardening case study said that they did not ask for permission, because they knew that they had tacit approval for their activity by the land owners or public authorities. For instance, one interviewee argued that while throwing seed bombs or planting up tree pits would be considered guerrilla gardening in other places, she did not think it was really 'guerrilla' in her case (and hence she did not request permission), since the local council liked the idea and "they're not going to cut it down".

In the case of one of the spot fix projects, the organisers did not ask for a formal permission for cleaning a local station, because they initially were not aware that they needed one. They felt that it was a travesty that people spitting on the station were never asked to stop, while when they started cleaning the stains of the spit, they were approached by "thousands of people" from the MRVC asking them to justify their actions. Many buskers shared this opposition to the very principal of having to ask for permissions or apply for licenses. Several argued that busking is a very positive thing and everyone should have the right to sing and play in the streets. They felt that it was morally wrong to ask artists to pay for their right to perform and saw it as an infringement on their freedoms. They felt that everyone should be able to express themselves in that way and find out

if they are good enough. Instead, they saw busking licenses as a way of asserting control over town centres and other public spaces.

A few interviewees even continued their practice despite not having received permission or even after having their permission refused. For example, a guerrilla gardener who had worked with public authorities to include planting in a new road design but eventually had his suggestions rejected, was planning to remove some paving slabs once it was finished and to plant up various areas. He admitted that this was a “kind of guerrilla gardening [he hadn’t] done before, where it’s being done to make the point”, but he assumed that the authorities would turn a blind eye to his planned actions, since they would probably think that someone within the organisation had given him the permission to do so.

5.2.3 Implementation

There is also a range of different approaches to the implementation of the different practices. Although they were in the minority, interviewees did talk about using formal processes in their practice. For instance, the guerrilla gardening project that included a squat had very stringent processes, starting from a process for becoming a long-term resident to having weekly meetings, and setting up conflict resolution teams and procedures to pre-empt any issues. Other interviewees from book swap and spot fix initiatives talked about providing certificates or references for volunteers, while one free book shop insisted on stamping each free book in order to legitimise people taking them away. The most common way of formalising their practice was to register as an organisation or to officially affiliate to an existing one. An interviewee from the Equal Streets campaign felt that a registered organisation provided more accountability, especially as their growing activities come under public scrutiny. One of the spot fix organisers also explained that public authorities did not take them seriously until they were affiliated with a registered organisation. But the most common reason that interviewees gave for constituting themselves formally, was in order to apply for funding. This included both grant applications from the public or the third sector, and private sponsorship. In particular, a number of spot fix projects and the Equal Streets organisers talked about their

efforts to raise money from private companies and their need to be a registered organisation in order to access a Corporate Social Responsibility scheme, which stipulates that large companies in India have to contribute 2% of net profits to social or environmental development.

In contrast, the majority of interviewees seemed to prefer flexible arrangements, a lack of formal processes and improvisation. Several interviewees highlighted the importance of flexibility, either in relation to their own commitment or others' involvement. For instance, buskers explained that they valued the flexibility that came with busking – but was impossible with formal gigs – including to take breaks whenever they wanted, to keep playing or to stop, or to decide not to turn up at all, for instance when the weather is bad. Several interviewees from guerrilla gardening and spot fix projects also highlighted that others could get involved as often or as little as they wanted to. This might mean that organisers do not know in the morning whether anyone is going to turn up for the planned activity, but they felt that since people were giving their time voluntarily they could not be pushed.

Other interviewees emphasised the lack of formal processes or governance, as they did not want to be “paralysed” by committee meetings or form filling. Rather, they valued their ability to act spontaneously. Buskers gave examples such as spontaneously doing some busking while waiting for a family member, or filling the spot at the Street Performance Festival when others dropped out. Interviewees from spot fix initiatives recounted how they had walked past a shop selling toilet brushes one day and just decided to start to clean their local station that same day, while one guerrilla gardener emphasised that most of her choices were emerging out of serendipity, for instance, noticing that some beds looked uncared for, while she just got some boxes of bulbs for free.

In addition to spontaneous action, interviewees talked about the importance of improvisation. This included opening up a free book shop, even when many books are still in boxes or on pallets on the floor; or allowing children attending the Equal Streets event to come up with ideas for activities on the spot, such as doing chalk drawings on the road.

Interviewees admitted that there were challenges to operating with such flexibility. In particular, they found it difficult to commit others to the project, for instance to rely on others to help water a guerrilla garden. Relying on improvisation also leaves greater potential for mistakes, such as using paint in a spot fix project that later turned out to peel off when exposed to rain or sunshine. Interviewees also talked about the greater level of risk and uncertainty. For instance, an interviewee from a spot fix project felt that their work to clean the surroundings of a station could be lost at any time, since they were not protected by any structure or organisation.

Despite this lack of formal protection, many interviewees received support in different forms through their personal networks. Firstly, interviewees used their personal networks to bounce off ideas. For instance, interviewees mentioned that the idea for an event like Equal Streets came from seeing the work of colleagues in Delhi. Secondly, personal networks provided encouragement and support for the 'informal' actors. For example, an interviewee reported having been encouraged by another more experienced guerrilla gardener to have the confidence and start her activity locally. Thirdly, interviewees received direct help with the maintenance and implementation of their practice, including colleagues helping with the distribution of free books on the Underground, family and friends helping to tidy up book swaps, family members helping to water a guerrilla garden, or procuring equipment in the middle of the night, as this quote illustrates:

“On the job that day, 11 o'clock suddenly you realise that those architects are asking for [...] chinks to mark [...] which colour to put where. And I said, 'We don't have chinks'. At 11 o'clock, which shop will be open? None. Then also some of the volunteers, [...] he said to me, 'I know, one of my friends has [a] stationery shop'. He called, got him from [...] home, opened the shop, and we got the chinks.” (SF6, interview, 2015)

Finally, the majority of 'informal' actors drew on their personal networks for financial and in-kind support. This included the supply of equipment or materials

that were required for the practice, such as donated book shelves, books donated by members of the local residents' association, printing costs covered by an interviewee's employer, free glass panes for a green house, free seeds from growers, as well as music and sound equipment for a street performance festival being procured because "everyone comes together and helps out and makes it happen". Interviewees also explained that they drew on their friends and family to get access to specialist services, such as the design of a poster for a book swap, pro-bono legal advice by lawyers specialising in squat eviction cases, landscaping work to flatten an area and then create a garden done at cost price as part of a spot fix project, and design and technical advice by academic colleagues on another spot fix project. Finally, interviewees also received direct funds from family and friends, local acquaintances or former students. Several interviewees also mentioned that they drew on the support of local organisations (such as community or residents' associations). Often, the 'informal' actors were already a member of such organisations and then got the organisation to take on or support their idea. For instance, one book swap organiser who at the time was chair of the community association got the association to pay for the labels to be put on the books.

Drawing on support from informal, personal networks was not without challenges. In particular, several interviewees mentioned the difficulty of aligning others' ways of working with their own expectations, capacity and principles. For instance, one book swap organiser repeatedly complained that volunteers from a friendly, local free book shop kept filling up the book swap too much, to an extent where she started being worried about the shelves collapsing. Unlike these volunteers, she did not consider it a problem if the book swap was sometimes empty as she thought it might encourage users to put a book back in. She found it difficult to communicate her needs and wishes, as she did not want to offend the very people who helped her out. This is a good example of how, in their practical decisions, 'informal' actors have to negotiate various social and discursive regulatory frameworks, and in some cases make a trade-off against their own principles and values.

5.2.4 Recruitment and Promotion

This section extends on the previous discussion of the role of personal networks by looking at it in relation to recruitment and promotion of informal practices. But the section also discusses other means of communications that 'informal' actors used to promote their activities and recruit participants.

5.2.4.1 Recruitment

As discussed in the previous section for the implementation of projects, informal networks and word of mouth played the most important role in terms of recruitment of other participants. For instance, many of the spot fix projects mentioned that they drew on their family and friends from college, university and other contexts, who then in turn brought along their own friends. However, one of the interviewees from a spot fix project emphasised that it was important to value friends who offer their help by giving them 'appropriate' tasks:

“So personal networks is what we work with. The amazing part is that I haven't approached anyone for volunteering. They approached me and I make sure they don't escape. So if they offer to help, I grab them. And I don't make them sweep or anything. Because it's not work. I don't make them clean the spit. So I make them paint. Easy to do, right? So they happily come and do this.” (SF5, interview, 2015)

Other interviewees drew on wider acquaintances from their community. In particular, one of the spot fix projects was made up entirely of members of the Gujarati community in Mumbai. A number of interviewees also drew on acquaintances they had made in prior community engagements. For instance, one interviewee from the Equal Streets case study contacted “everyone [she] had met in five years as an activist”.

But in addition to existing social networks, a considerable number of projects recruited helpers very spontaneously. For instance, an interviewee from the Equal Streets event explained that there were three or four people who simply helped out during the first few events without being asked to do so. Only latterly, the organisers approached them and asked them to join their team officially.

5.2.4.2 Promotion

In contrast to these ad-hoc approaches to recruitment, most interviewees were more intentional about the promotion of their practice to potential users, including a few projects which had a deliberate media strategy. For instance, the Equal Streets organisers worked with a large media company as their official media partner to promote their event and popularise their ideas. In the case of a few spot fix and book swap projects, the organisers did not have a specific media strategy, but they recognised the importance of media publicity, especially in order to inspire other people to do similar projects. For this reasons they organised a big launch event or inauguration, with invited honorary guests, such as local politicians and public authorities.

More than media publicity *per se*, some interviewees particularly highlighted the importance of shaping the message that gets put out through the media. For instance, the media team of one guerrilla gardening project specifically refined their messaging ahead of meeting with the press. According to my interviewee, this was one of the reasons why they got so favourable and supportive media coverage, including by right-wing newspapers who called them the “best run squat in the country”. In some cases, promoting a particular message was seen as more important than media attention *per se*. For instance, one spot fix project insisted on having a media article corrected that claimed that they had adopted several stations. Even though the article was praising their actions, they did not want to appear to be a big entity, as this would have gone against their core belief that anyone can and should take action. They also took the decision not to talk to the media in the initial stages of their work, because they did not feel they had enough “to show for”. This was important to them, as they wanted their work to speak “for itself”, rather than promoting themselves. In the same way, they avoided taking pictures with local politicians or officials. With this attitude they do not only stand in opposition to some of the other spot fix projects, but they also situate themselves within the thinking of The Ugly Indian, an anonymous group of volunteers who clean streets in cities across India. The popular movement is organised via social media but insists on absolute anonymity. The spot fix interviewees I spoke to felt inspired by The Ugly Indian

and their motto to “Stop talking, start working”, but did not feel that anonymity was an absolute requirement.

As this discussion already suggests, social media was by far the most important communication tool mentioned by my interviewees, with the exception of buskers. Indeed, the buskers I interviewed did not promote any of their street performance, but rather used their busking as a way of promoting their music practice more generally, for instance by putting up a sign with their name and website or putting out CDs for sale.

Interviewees from the other case studies used a variety of social media sites and local groups, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Freecycle, Gumtree, Streetlife or Meetup. Examples of interviewees using these sites include a number of books swaps requesting people to drop of spare books and spot fix initiatives promoting their activities and encouraging others to join or set up their own. An interviewee from the Equal Streets case study explained that they used Facebook specifically to stimulate discussion about their bigger vision for public spaces. In the case of one of the book sharing initiatives, the use of social media is a central part of the practice, as the organisers might post a picture with a ‘clue’ of which station the free books are about to be dropped off, while finders of books are encouraged to tweet acknowledging their find. My interviewee felt that the in-built instantaneity of Twitter was particularly suited to her activity:

“Facebook is more of a discussion thing [...]. Twitter is like, ‘This is what’s happening now. It’s at this station now. Go, go, go!’ kind of thing. So it’s more live.” (BS2, interview, 2015)

For the same reason, several of the spot fix projects highlighted their use of WhatsApp messages. For instance, one of the spot fix interviewees felt that the instant messaging service was an integral success component, arguing that it was possible for him to get “50 volunteers in a day easily”, while it would have been difficult executing their project without it.

A few interviewees from book swap and guerrilla gardening projects also mentioned that they promoted their activities through more ‘traditional’ mailing

lists or through the official channels of other organisations. For instance, one of the book swaps was part of the global Free Little Library network, which lists his book swap on their website. Several interviewees also mentioned publicity in newspapers. In most cases, this would be in local newspapers, but some projects were also featured in national papers. In some cases, like a couple of the book swaps, this publicity was unintentional, while in the case of Equal Streets it was part of their media strategy and included significant coverage on the front, second and third page for three consecutive days ahead of the launch of the event. On the other hand, some interviewees from the book swap, guerrilla gardening and spot fix case studies mentioned that they promoted their activities locally, for instance by knocking on neighbours' doors, and felt that this face to face approach was most successful.

As this section has shown, 'informal' actors used a range of communications methods that included more informal and more formal ways. Indeed, none of the interviewees used exclusively informal or formal means of communication, but rather chose from a menu of options depending on their intentions, or used them combined to strengthen their message. The differences between those choices are in part reflecting the different ambitions for their practice – the extent to which people want their projects to grow – and how deliberate any such growth is. The latter topic is discussed in the following section.

5.2.5 Scaling up

As discussed in section 5.1.1.2, a significant part of interviewees wanted to keep their practice contained and at a small scale. However, others had ambitions to scale up their practice and to extend it. Often, this was not an intention or conscious decision when they first started out their practice. Rather, their practice grew incrementally as a result of the initial project going well and organisers considering extending the project to other people or spaces. One interviewee from a guerrilla gardening project argued that once the project had gathered momentum, it was difficult to stop, as people started having expectations, such as for them to enter a local gardening competition.

A key challenge of such “organic” or coincidental growth is the capacity of organisers to take on further work (for instance the maintenance of several books swaps or of a number of guerrilla gardening spaces, or the adoption of a very large train station). In order to increase their capacity, many interviewees talked about the need to delegate work. As some suggest, delegating also had the added benefit of drawing in people with new ideas and renewed motivation and enthusiasm, as well as being able to get done more, more quickly, all the while having “camaraderie”. In most cases, interviewees were very happy to give continued support to people who wanted to take on a similar initiative or share their work load. For instance, a guerrilla gardener worked together with library staff to create a garden (that she initially had started planting up without permission), only to then handover the responsibility to them after a year. However, she continued to provide advice and help.

Nonetheless, a number of interviewees argued that it was difficult to find committed collaborators, who were willing to take on responsibility. This was a real struggle for some, including a guerrilla gardener who recounted that he tried to organise steering group meetings with people using the community garden, but nobody ever came for the meetings. As a result he felt that he needed to establish more formal structures (including becoming part of formal volunteering schemes), as the “informal, structure-less way that we’ve been operating in has not gelled.” The way in which a few of the spot fix projects solved this issue was to pay professional agencies or workers to take care of a particular task, like regular cleaning of stations or debarking and preparing trees for painting.

As these examples suggest, fundraising also became an integral criteria of scaling up. Thus, several guerrilla gardening projects argued that raising funds allowed them to extend their project to more people and spaces, and to be more ambitious about what they were doing. While this suggests that as projects grow and practices are scaled up, they require a certain degree of formalisation, it is still worth pointing out that there may be different ways of how this formalisation looks like. For instance, one group of interviewees working on a spot fix project felt strongly that they did not want to register as an organisation,

due to the commitments and legal responsibilities this was going to entail. However, they emphasised that this did not imply that they did not follow processes:

“It’s not like just because we don’t have on-paper registration, we don’t have rules and regulations.” (SF12, interview, 2015)

An example of this is the fact that the group of students had appointed a health and safety officer to ensure that their work did not entail any major risks.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the principles and values that ‘informal’ actors hold for their practices, as well as how informal practices are organised and structured, and to what extent ‘informal’ actors deploy informality in making their practice happen.

The findings from my primary research reveal that there is not one singular definition of informality, but rather that it manifests itself in different and nuanced ways. While there may be a tendency to the strings- and barrier-free, spontaneous and simple, improvised and coincidental, there are also examples of ‘informal’ actors setting strict rules, planning deliberately and creating formal structures. The findings also show that any given activity is rarely ‘exclusively’ informal or ‘distinctly’ formal, nor would actors define themselves by either one or the other. Instead, they choose from a ‘menu of options’ that includes elements that tend to be seen as ‘informal’, as well as those considered ‘formal’. Thus, it problematises the dualism that is often applied to the formal and the informal in the literature and policy-discussions (as discussed throughout chapter 2), as many of the projects display elements of both at the same time. By highlighting that informality is not a defining characteristic, but rather a tool, or a means to an end, it also emphasises the agency of the actor and suggests that informality does not belong to a particular group of people. In challenging the common assumption that informality equates with poverty, my findings provide support to the work of authors such as Roy (2009b, 2011), Jeffrey (2009) and Ghertner (2011) who have pointed out that informality is internally

differentiated and employed by different social classes and actors (as discussed in section 2.4.3). At the same time, my work goes beyond this existing research by demonstrating its relevance for civic actors from (pre-dominantly) middle-class backgrounds. This issue is further discussed in chapter 7.

Further, the chapter draws attention to a range of, often complex, negotiations which 'informal' actors are engaging in through their practices. Firstly, the very definition of what the informal practice should look like (in theory) is in itself the result of internal negotiations of different values and beliefs. Indeed, the findings in this chapter show that such principles that an actor holds may change, as well as sometimes being contradictory to each other. Secondly, urban actors negotiate a range of external, contextual factors and conditions, including their geographical and cultural context, their socio-economic background, their personal, professional and political networks, and thus their level of agency, to name just a few.¹¹ All of these factors influence their decisions on their deployment of informality. Thirdly, and as a consequence of the previous two, the research sometimes reveal tensions between 'informal' actors' stated principles and values and their practical decisions. Any such tensions are once again subject to more or less conscious negotiations on behalf of the actor.

By emphasising the importance of such negotiations, my findings confirm the contributions made by authors such as Alsayyad (1993), Roy & Alsayyad (2004) and Hackenbroch (2011) which have made similar arguments (see section 2.4.2). However, in demonstrating the significance of negotiations pertaining to internal values and principles, my findings extend and go beyond these

¹¹ The situated interplay of these various external factors raises a number of interesting issues, including the extent to which external factors such as socio-economic status and level of agency affect the perception of, and reaction to, the use of informality by a particular actor – which could be an interesting subject for further research.

contributions, which have focused on informality as the result of negotiations of a range of external factors.

Finally, negotiations take place between 'informal' actors and other external (and often more 'formal') stakeholders, such as public authorities. As the findings from this chapter have indicated and as will be more fully discussed in the subsequent chapter 6, one of the major challenges of such negotiations lies in the mediation of the 'rules of engagement' and the way in which the informal and formal relate to each other.

The outcome of these negotiations will be dependent on the specific situation and context of each individual, as well as on the negotiation partner. This suggests that there are limits to the extent to which we can devise a 'general' or 'global' theory on informal cultural practices in cities.

The following chapter now examines the relationships between informal practices and public authorities as a particularly important field of such negotiations.

6 'INFORMAL' ACTORS AND PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

The previous two chapters have begun to draw up a picture of the role of informal cultural practices in contemporary cities. Based on the perspective of 'informal' actors, these chapters have highlighted the multiplicity and diversity of motivations, as well as of the ways in which they implement their practices. Informality is deployed as a tool, chosen from a menu of options, and the eventual practice is dependent on a complicated and situated set of negotiations by the 'informal' actor (and other 'negotiation parties'), which reveal the complexities of the interplay between informal and formal.

This chapter interrogates the relationships between informal practices and public authorities, as they present a particularly important field of negotiation and influence the specific manifestations of informal practices. Thus, the chapter provides an answer to my fourth research question, namely:

How and why do urban policy-makers engage with, and respond to, informal cultural practices?

In addition to the main body of 'informal' actor interviews that were used in the previous two chapters, this chapter also presents the findings from the interviews with external stakeholders in public authorities that were directly involved with my case study projects. However, due to the methodological challenges discussed in section 3.4.4, I was only able to conduct one formal stakeholder interview in relation to a spot fix project in Mumbai and this was very short in length, too. Therefore, the stakeholder views presented in this chapter are mainly representative of the London case studies.

More generally, it is important to treat the findings from these stakeholder interviews as indicative, only. The main focus of this research was to gather the views of 'informal' actors. Therefore, I only conducted five interviews with stakeholders (involving eight individuals). While the information from these interviews did generate interesting insights, the data does not compare to the richness and diversity of the 43 interviews (involving 51 individuals) and three focus groups (involving 25 individuals) and should not be considered to be carrying equal weight.

In section 6.1, the chapter begins by looking at the motivations of public authorities to engage with informal practices. The following sections of this chapter then discuss the types of support that public authorities provide to 'informal' actors (section 6.2), as well as challenges that arise in their relationship (section 6.3).

6.1 Motivations by public authorities

This section interrogates the motivations, aims and ambitions that lead public authorities to engage with, and support, informal cultural practices in today's cities. Section 6.1.1 looks at 'internal' motivations. This set of motivations is based on the assumption that the support of informal cultural practices helps public authorities to achieve their own organisational objectives. The following four sections then consider 'external' motivations – all of which were also important themes in the 'informal' actor interviews. Section 6.1.2 discusses social and community motivations. By engaging with informal cultural practices, public authorities are hoping to effect particular behavioural changes, leverage existing social engagement and foster a sense of community. Section 6.1.3 focuses on ambitions to improve the local area – whether aesthetically, by improving the quality of life or by supporting local economic development. Section 6.1.4 looks at cultural aims. In particular, it discusses public authorities' attempts to improve the quality of informal cultural practices by engaging with, and supporting them. Finally, section 6.1.5 considers environmental motivations, such as encouraging bio-diversity within the constraints of green

spaces in big cities and improving the sustainability of any environmental engagement by the public authority.

6.1.1 Internal, organisational motivations

The first theme looks at the role that informal cultural practices play, according to public authorities, in helping them to address their internal, organisational objectives. This includes addressing conflicts within their constituencies, countering complaints and improving the relationship between staff and constituents.

Addressing existing conflicts was probably the most important reason for public authorities to intervene in the practice of busking. Interviewees from the Greater London Authority and Transport for London, as well as a couple of buskers themselves talked about the problems and conflicts that exist in popular busking spots, such as dense tourist areas or the London Underground. As interviewees argued, public authorities intervened in order to identify the problems and work out systems to be put in place to address any such conflicts. In the case of the London Underground, a license scheme was created. For London's public spaces, a code of conduct was created, as well as marking out official busking pitches in popular areas and putting out guidance for the usage of those (such as performance times, rules on queuing systems etc.). As one interviewee involved with the Busk in London scheme recognised, formalising busking in this way is contrary to the informal nature of street performance, but it had become necessary:

"We started in the West End, and we've piloted...because it's so busy there, because Leicester Square was so densely packed with performers, we've actually marked out busking pitches. Which goes contrary to the spirit of busking in a way. You should just be able to self-manage, but unfortunately, people aren't very good at self-managing. And so that's why the guidance says: 'If you perform here, you're less likely to get complaints.'" (SH4, interview, 2015)

In other cases, public authorities got involved with informal practices as a way of directly responding to public demands. For instance, one local authority staff encouraging guerrilla gardening and 'street champion' projects in their borough through in-kind support explained that his intervention would often come as a result of a member of public making complaints about issues in their local area.

In other cases, public authorities feel compelled to act as a result of, or in mutuality with, improvements made to a public space by 'informal' actors. For instance, one interviewee from a spot fix project mentioned that once he had started cleaning, painting and planting up a station, MRVC agreed to fix the lights that were not working across the station:

"So once they saw the work being started, basically within a couple of weeks they put the lights. So it went very fast. Because they also knew that it was unsafe. [...] And imagine this place being fixed up and the only light being from the platform. So they knew it." (SF5, interview, 2015)

In addition to public authorities acknowledging that they have a duty to be answerable to their constituency, a few interviewees found that supporting informal practices helped staff to perform their jobs and improved the relationship between staff and customers. One way in which informal practices help staff is that they provide an additional resource. For instance, interviewees from Transport for London argued that buskers sometimes took on an informal surveillance role. Referring to Jane Jacobs' (1972) influential book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, they argued that buskers were "Jane Jacobs' eyes on the street". As busking pitches are often located in places where there is no station staff situated, buskers become a first point of alert to a situation or problem (for example, on escalators). As one interviewee explained:

"It's certainly not an official role, but it's certainly something...they're not there to do that. They're there to perform and entertain customers, but it's a natural coincidence of that situation that [...], if they see it and they've been doing it long enough they'll...they'll alert the station staff to take over." (SH3, interview, 2015)

In addition to providing specific help to staff of public authorities, several interviewees felt that informal practices improved the relationship between members of the public and staff of public authorities, which they thought would ultimately lead to less conflicts and even crime. For instance, an organiser of the Equal Streets event thought that the police was happy to support the event as they saw it as a way to engage at a social level with members of the public, thus helping to improve relations. Similarly, interviewees from Transport for London felt that informal practices could help improving the customer's experience of that station (through a chat at a book swap or a "moment of delight and surprise" from hearing a busker) and, thus, to build up a positive and personal connection to the station. According to my interviewees, due to the important role that the Underground plays in people's lives and how much time they spend on it, they have an association or connection with their local station and the Underground regardless. Supporting informal practices led by station staff was felt to be an opportunity to ensure that the connection is a positive one. A positive connection between customers and station staff was also thought to decrease conflicts between them, which in turn could lead to greater staff motivation. Staff getting involved in informal practices was also thought to help 'humanise' them in the eyes of customers and for them to recognise that they are part of the local community.

Informal practices such as allowing them to green up their stations were also seen as a way of making people's working environment more pleasant – another factor in improving staff retention and motivation. Interviewees from Transport from London felt that it was important to keep any such interventions targeted and specific to each station and their staff. Thus, one interviewee was opposing the idea of putting a book swap in each station across the network, as she believed it was more important to give some flexibility to station managers about what works best in their particular context. Also, while my interviewees from Transport from London primarily referred to book swaps or gardening activities that were set up by members of staff, they felt that similar connections between the station, its staff and the community would occur from initiatives set up by other individuals.

Arguably, all of these internal, organisational motivations are essentially driven by instrumental thinking. This is also true for the motivation themes discussed in the following sections.

6.1.2 Social and community motivations

As in the case of ‘informal’ actors, public authorities believed that informal cultural practices had a particularly important role to play in contributing to social and community agendas.

Firstly, public authorities and policy-makers were interested in effecting behavioural change through informal cultural practices, as it was seen to help address different agendas of public authorities. For example, a number of interviewees talked about informal cultural practices, such as guerrilla gardening projects or spot fix initiatives helping to reduce littering and other anti-social behaviours. As a station manager in Mumbai believed, an initiative like the spot fix project could help create an awareness of littering and spitting as unacceptable behaviours. In particular the young people who (sometimes spontaneously) got involved in the cleanliness drive would change their attitude and pass on the message to other members of their family or friends, thus slowly creating a behavioural change across society.

Similar to the discussion in section 4.3.3, stakeholders emphasised the importance of creating a sense of ownership in order for any such behavioural change to be lasting in the long-term. As one local authority interviewee argued, in order for people to get engaged and maintain a project, such as a guerrilla gardening space, they need to feel that they “own” it. And in order for this sense of ownership to occur, the initiative needs to have come from the community itself, rather than the local authority. This highlights the importance of co-creation and suggests that an initiative by the state may not be successful unless a number of different social triggers are present.

Secondly, several interviewees engaged with informal cultural practices in order to help strengthen the local community. They believed that informal cultural practices could help provide a community focus. For instance, a number of local

authority staff felt that guerrilla gardening areas gave people a space to come together, to stop and to talk to each other. They also helped to break the barrier of making an initial contact with other people, since they provided something to talk about. In turn, such a community focus encouraged increasing neighbourly interaction and closer community links. One local authority staff from London used the same expression as a number of 'informal' actors had done; that is to create a village feel in a big city:

"My little dream is to...is to make everyone feel like they live in a little village. So, while they live in [...] this inner city borough, they feel like their street is like a little village. And it's about just trying to get people out, talking to their neighbours and saying hello to each other in the morning and, and that sort of thing. And I think that's where the real value is in what I'm doing at the moment. Just trying to encourage that" (SH5, interview, 2015)

Another local authority staff felt that some guerrilla gardening projects had helped to include people who were otherwise often excluded. One example was a guerrilla gardening project in front of a drug and rehabilitation centre which had created a "lovely little garden" that is increasingly used by residents of the centre and people from the surrounding community alike.

Finally, public authorities argued that informal practices can lead to much greater community involvement and hence they tried to leverage such existing social engagement. A number of interviewees highlighted that people engaged in such practices regardless. Their choice as public authority was therefore between trying to stop, and encouraging these activities. The interviewees I spoke to had all taken the view to encourage them. One interviewee summarised the feelings of others in arguing that it would be a shame to waste people's positive energy, especially since in many cases the informal practices were in line with public authorities' interests. For instance, in one case, a local authority in London had run a number of clean up and beautification events in deprived wards with the help of public agencies such as the fire brigade, police and council departments. During the course of these events, they became

aware that community members themselves wanted to get a lot more involved. As a result, the local authority created a scheme that supports community action in the public space by providing advice, tools and equipment. The same interviewee emphasised that he would never ask people to do litter picking (a statutory duty of the local authority), but was happy to provide the tools if community groups wanted to take action. One interviewee involved in a spot fix project in Mumbai argued that public authorities were increasingly supportive of such projects, since they realised that there was a “mass movement” in India instigated by the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan initiative, that attitudes around street cleanliness were changing and that it was in their interest to encourage such activities, rather than being “a bottle neck”.

Another reason for engaging in a positive way with existing civic engagement was the possibility to shape the practice and, for instance, to ensure that it is compliant with regulations by the public authority. For instance, when liaising with a library that was keen to put up a book swap in their local station, Transport for London got involved to ensure that the book shelves complied with health and safety regulations.

Many interviewees also highlighted that they were actively trying to enable residents or constituents to take social action. One example of this is the busking code of conduct which encourages busking in marked out busking pitches, which is hoped to encourage the building of a busking community in that space and the emergence of a self-regulatory approach within this community. This effort to encourage and enable people also needs to be seen in the context of public authorities’ need to manage tight resources. For instance, as one of my interviewees from Transport for London argued, they were unable to support all projects that were brought forward by the community or staff. Pro-actively engaging with the ideas and trying to encourage those that have the right balance of ease of implementation, community priority and cost, helped them manage their limited resources.

6.1.3 Revaluation of space

Similarly to the 'informal' actors, public authorities were interested in role that informal cultural practices could play in the improvement of local spaces. This included aesthetic considerations and a desire to improve the quality of life for the people living in the area. Thus, a number of local authority staff explained that they were keen to support guerrilla gardening and public space interventions because they helped improving the aesthetics of the street environment. While contractors simply maintained existing shrub beds, a group of 'informal' actors was much more likely to add beautiful plants, colourful flowers or sometimes even design features. As a result of such activities, public spaces were not only maintained, but actually improved.

Public authorities also acknowledged that informal practices such as guerrilla gardening could make the street environment feel more welcome and create a nicer atmosphere for people to live in. Other interviewees emphasised the role of busking for adding a nice ambiance to an Underground station and for contributing to the vibrancy of a city more generally. As one interviewee involved with Busk in London scheme argued, busking makes London feel like an exciting place to be and highlights the fact that it is a young city.

However, while 'informal' actors were often motivated by their apprehension of the disappearance of 'public' spaces, this concern was rarely voiced by public authorities. Instead, they were much more likely to value the improvement of spaces for its potential to stimulate local economic development and urban regeneration. For instance, a policy-maker from London felt that rehabilitating busking and street performance to become associated with something valuable and legitimate was ultimately going to contribute to the economy. In his view, busking helps to retain people, especially families, in an area or makes them come back, since they know that they are going to see something interesting and "different" there. This in turn could lead to an increased spend in cafes, restaurants and local shops.

As this reference to local difference suggests, public authorities were also interested in supporting informal cultural practices in order to distinguish a

particular local area or the city as a whole from others. This concern over city distinctiveness must be seen within the context of global competition between cities (see section 2.1). However, such competitiveness also exists, and motivates action, at a more local level. Thus, several interviewees argued that the decision of public authorities to support informal practices was partly driven by a sense of competitiveness. For instance, an organiser of a spot fix project talked about his efforts to get the lights fixed in and around the station that he had embarked on cleaning and beautifying. Since the land ownership was divided by the BMC and MRVC, he had to liaise with both agencies. Eventually, he convinced the BMC to repair the lights on the land they were responsible for. Once MRVC saw that these lights were repaired, they equally took action less than a couple of weeks later. An interviewee from Transport for London supported this view of competition between public agencies or – as in the case of the quote – station managers:

“I think it's an element of...not necessarily jealousy but some area managers will travel around and they'll see something or the other and they'll go, 'Oooh, I'd like to do something at my station' and that is what often drives it. It becomes infectious to a certain extent.”
(SH3, interview, 2015)

The ambition to make a particular space distinctive or special is also related to public authorities' cultural ambitions, which are subject of the next section.

6.1.4 Cultural objectives

In contrast to the 'informal' actor interviews where cultural motivations only played a minor role, public authorities put a greater emphasis on the role that informal practices play in realising cultural objectives. However, similar to the 'informal' actors, this set of motivations was only mentioned in relation to 'core' cultural activities (i.e. street performance and book swaps).

For public authorities in London, the issue of quality was most important in justifying their support and engagement with informal practices. In particular, interviewees from Transport for London were very outspoken about the

importance of quality. Thus, while community engagement was a very important driver, it still had to uphold to their expectations of quality, as this quote illustrates:

“There are certain things we would do, but through a different channel. So, for example – and this is going to sound horrible – but, if somebody comes and says, ‘I really want to do a children’s art display’, my answer is probably, ‘No’. Because we have Art on the Underground, and they have a schools programme where they can get artists in to engage with schools and produce really high quality stuff that benefits both the artist and benefits the ambiance of the station, versus putting up some drawings that were done by a primary school.” (SH2, interview, 2015)

Another interviewee from Transport for London explained that in addition to dealing with conflicts, the introduction of the busking license scheme for the London Underground was equally about ensuring a certain level of quality of the buskers. He felt that the busking scheme is not merely about entertainment or about highlighting an interesting individual (as some talent shows on television might do), but about “professional musicians in a professional environment”. For this reason, buskers are selected through a process of auditions where they have to prove in front of a panel of judges (primarily made up of artists) that they “meet that standard”. Notwithstanding this emphasis on professionalism and quality, the interviewee did mention that a good busker, who can also make money from his performance, requires a different skillset from other great musicians or performers. In this sense, he at least acknowledged what most of my interviewees from the busking case study argued, namely that musical training and ability was not the most important quality a busker needed to possess. However, the importance he placed on professionalism and quality might also be indicative of a different expectation of the ‘type’ of buskers that the London Underground’s formal scheme seeks to attract – namely buskers who treat this practice as their profession, as opposed to the more casual nature in which most of the interviewees from my busking case study approached this aspect of their musical practice.

A policy-maker involved with the Busk in London scheme on the streets equally talked about wanting to raise the quality of busking on the streets. Indeed, he argued that there were some poor acts, that did not make any effort at all and where there was “no art” involved, but were essentially begging. He felt that those needed to be distinguished from ‘real’ buskers:

“[Busking is] a very democratic thing, it's something anybody can try. And that's what so wonderful about it. [...] it does mean you've got people who may be on the brink of being homeless and this is all they can do. They've got a skill and they can use that to make some money and keep their head above water. In that respect it's great. But you also see people who've tipped over the edge and there might be problems with alcoholism and they might be begging. We need to try and just say, 'That's not busking really. That's its own issue. That needs to be dealt with separately. What we're talking about is genuine street performance.’” (SH4, interview, 2015)

Therefore, the code of conduct he had lead on defined busking as something that is “entertaining” and “requires considerable thought and effort”. Within that, there was a great variety of acts, including circus, dance, music, theatre, mime, bubble art, BMX riders and others. This variety was an integral part of the quality of the offer.

However, he did not feel that a formal license scheme would help to achieve this aim. In contrast, he felt that the city should seek to attract buskers touring from other parts of Europe. In his view, a license scheme that involves the payment of fees and waiting times would put off talent from coming and doing “exciting” things. Moreover, he argued that it was important to be prepared to have some acts that he might personally not like as much, but that someone else will like. For him, this was part of the “excitement” and would likely suffer from implementing a license scheme. Rather, he felt that it was important to change the perception of busking as a legitimate and valuable performance. This, he hoped, would attract better musicians to play in the streets and this

greater competition by good artists for the busking pitches would help improve the overall quality.

6.1.5 Environmental change

Finally, for some public authorities the purpose of their engagement with informal cultural practices was to effect environmental change. These motivations were in particular raised by interviewees who supported guerrilla gardening activities. Such activities were seen to contribute to the improvement of the environment overall. More specifically, guerrilla gardening activities were supported to encourage biodiversity. Thus, one local authority had actively encouraged guerrilla gardening by giving out free seeds of wildlife and bee-friendly plants to residents to put in tree pits in their streets. According to one organiser of a guerrilla gardening project in this local authority, this initiative has to be seen within the context of the lack of green space within this densely populated borough. She felt that because of these limitations the Council always had to think laterally and has been very imaginative about how to green up public spaces by planting trees along streets, making use of little beds on the corners of streets and cultivating other unusual spaces.

There were different opinions among stakeholders as to whether or not informal cultural practices contributed to environmental sustainability. On the one hand, a local authority staff supporting guerrilla gardening schemes argued that working with 'informal' actors was much more likely to lead to a sustainable change in the environment than one-off clean up drives that other local authorities engaged in. On the other hand, staff from another local authority argued that most 'informal' actors did not consider the sustainability of their practices in the long-term (such as what will happen to a high-maintenance flower bed once they move away). In order to ensure that 'informal' actors are considering issues of environmental sustainability she favoured formal service-level agreements (SLAs) with them.

6.1.6 Conclusion

As this part has shown, there are considerable differences in approach and motivations among different stakeholders, in the same way that we found a multiplicity and diversity of motivations among ‘informal’ actors. While many public authorities recognised that there are great synergies between the roles that informal practices play and their own agendas, only some were backing them unconditionally. Others’ engagement was at least in part motivated by a desire to achieve compliance with their processes, rules and regulations.

It is important to note that these different views in themselves only offer a snapshot of a much bigger variety of public authorities’ attitudes to informal cultural practices. Considering that the interviews with public authorities were brokered by ‘informal’ actors who had a good relationship with them, they can be considered to be all broadly supportive of certain informal practices. Other public authorities who I contacted never replied or refused to talk to me after seeing a draft questionnaire – which could be indicative either of a lack of priority of such practices in their eyes or, indeed, a negative or hostile attitude towards them. The lack of representation of views of public authorities from Mumbai might be due to the same reasons (in addition to methodological challenges discussed in section 3.4.4).

The extent to which differences and similarities exist in the way public authorities and ‘informal’ actors reflect on the kind of support provided is subject of the following part.

6.2 Support

Having discussed the various motivations of public authorities to engage with informal practices, this part now discusses the specific ways in which public authorities support them. Thus, this section complements the earlier discussion in section 4.10 on the extent to which informal cultural practices play a role in public service delivery.

‘Informal’ actors and public authorities alike talk about collaborative work and supportive mutual relationships. Indeed, while ‘informal’ actors from across the

different case studies raised challenges they have in their relationship with public authorities, the majority of them foregrounded the support they received from them. Similarly, while public authorities mentioned a number of areas of tension, much more often they talked about the mutually supportive way in which they engaged.

Notwithstanding the above, it is worth noting that this has not always been this way. In some cases, the relationship has changed significantly over time, as this quote illustrates.

“The attitude towards busking has significantly changed, not just on the Underground but generally. And I think there’s an appreciation; whereas in the past it’s been a dirty secret. Buskers, in the past, [...] we didn’t permit it on the Underground. But now [...] it’s perfectly acceptable. They’ve got away from that idea that they have to rebel against a cause, and they’re out making their own money, and not fitting into any particular peg, as such. [Now] they embrace it quite a lot and that attitude has changed significantly in the what, 12 years that we’ve had busking as a full time programme. In the early days, it was very much a ‘You’re making us follow rules; how dare you?’ Now, it’s actually quite accepted.” (SH3, interview, 2015)

As is highlighted by this quote, this change in relationship is at least in part due to public authorities having directly engaged with informal practices. The different ways in which public authorities engage and offer support to ‘informal’ actors is discussed in detail in the following sections. Section 6.2.1 discusses the ways in which public authorities provide encouragement and remove hurdles for the informal practice. Section 6.2.2 looks at practical support and section 6.2.3 considers support through patronage and protection.

6.2.1 Encouragement and removal of hurdles

The first way in which public authorities provided support to ‘informal’ actors was through their positive and helpful attitude. A number of buskers talked about situations where they had friendly conversations with wardens or police

who actually enjoyed their practice. Even where they approached them in order to inform them about the law around busking, or to request them to move on, buskers appreciated some public authorities' polite and friendly manner of doing so. Organisers of the Equal Streets initiative, a spot fix project and a guerrilla gardening project, talked about the development of mutual trust and respect over time. This they saw demonstrated, for instance, by public authorities now always agreeing to meet them, and trying to understand their issues.

Many interviewees also talked about the supportive attitude by public authorities when they first approached them about their idea. In many cases, they had met people who were backing or encouraging their practice at various hierarchical levels: starting from front-level station staff or traffic police securing the Equal Streets event, to station managers, the overall manager of a London Underground line, local authority staff and the Mumbai Commissioner of Police. Interviewees felt supported by authorities' agreement to help make the initiative happen (for example, to facilitate the permission process for setting up a book swap or partnering in the Equal Streets campaign), by creating a local authority-wide scheme to facilitate guerrilla gardening activities, or by liaising with third party agencies (such as cleaning companies on the London Underground or in stations who had sometimes removed free books or moved around a book swap).

Secondly, interviewees appreciated public authorities' efforts to facilitate application processes for permissions or removing bureaucratic hurdles to make an informal practice happen. For instance, a spot fix project mentioned that they had not been given any restrictions on the kind of designs or paintings they were allowed to use in a station they adopted. A couple of interviewees also mentioned their positive experiences of a very quick turnover for permissions. For instance, one interviewee who ran events in a guerrilla gardening space explained that after having proven that their events will not yield complaints, the local authority tended to approve his license applications within two days.

Finally, a number of interviewees from public authorities highlighted that much of their support was about trying to simplify rules and regulations. For instance,

the code of conduct for street busking in London was created in order to simplify and streamline the various rules and guidelines in existence in the 33 boroughs across the city. An interviewee involved with the creation of this code of conduct explained his ambition to simplify existing processes:

“It’s about avoiding any sort of regulation, totally avoiding any sort of licensing. The borough [...], where we are now, introduced that busking licence, and it’s just another barrier that stops people from getting out there and doing it, and we want to make it as easy as possible for people.” (SH4, interview, 2015)

The code of conduct itself consisted of a set of basic principles that fits on two sides of paper, while a common website about busking rules was created to replace information on the websites of each individual borough. Arguably, in these examples, public authorities facilitated informal cultural practices by informalising their processes themselves.

6.2.2 Practical support

Over and above encouragement and facilitating the process of receiving permissions, public authorities gave practical support in the form of advice and guidance, help with maintenance, in-kind and direct financial support.

For instance, a number of local authority staff involved with guerrilla gardening activities mentioned that they provided advice on the type of street improvement activities that members of the community could carry out, on fundraising sources and processes, on the types of plants that should be put in a particular space, as well as disseminating any relevant information about free plants, bulbs or seeds. Interviewees from local authorities also mentioned that they facilitated the creation of new groups, such as street performer associations, or community members wanting to take responsibility for planting up a public space. In some cases, interviewees also reported of public authorities directly helping with the maintenance of their practice, for instance by helping to tidy up book swaps or to repair the book shelves after it was vandalised.

In other cases, public authorities provided financial or in-kind support. For instance, a number of book swaps were able to make use of in-house resources, such as a book swap in a London Underground station being able to draw on in-house designers to design a poster and another book swap organiser being able to use the laminator of the train station for their poster. Organisers of the Equal Streets event also mentioned that the Mumbai Police had spent significant amount of time on planning the stationing of police forces to secure the event.

Occasionally, public authorities also provided direct financial support to the projects. This could either be by paying for materials that were needed for a particular initiative, such as pots of paints, screws, packets of seeds, specific plants, a book case, or the works to re-structure an unsafe footbridge in a station in Mumbai. In a few cases, organisers also received direct funding from public authorities. For instance, one local authority provided funds to edge tree pits in one street and paid to replace tree pit plants when their local contractor had cut them down. When setting up service level agreements, they would also calculate how much money it would have cost for a contractor to maintain this area of public space and then hand over the equivalent amount of money to the community group. Finally, interviewees from Transport for London mentioned a type of indirect financial support by carrying out research and then strategically positioning busking pitches in a way that buskers can earn a maximum amount of money.

In many cases, such practical support took the form of ad-hoc and light-touch provision, rather than being part of a substantial policy or programme, thus facilitating engagement with informal operational structures.

6.2.3 Patronage

The final way in which public authorities provided support to informal activities was in a less tangible way, namely by providing patronage, protection, as well as adding credibility and weight.

For instance, in the case of busking, the Greater London Authority used its political and administrative clout to help improve the situation of street buskers. They facilitated engagement of a range of different stakeholders, including police, street performers, business improvement districts and the musicians union, who came together to work on a code of conduct. The GLA also provided training for private wardens and the police on how to deal with any issues with buskers. As one interviewee argued:

“We do the things that can only be done by pulling stuff together on a London basis. We sorted busking where people weren't able to manage it in their own areas because buskers don't tend to stick to one area. When you go out busking, a musician will probably play in four or five different locations in a day. And then you've got to know the different rules for each area and then it becomes really difficult. So we spotted that gap and we said 'Let's do something about this'.”
(SH4, interview, 2015)

A couple of guerrilla gardening projects also gave examples of the value of political patronage and local authority backing. For instance, in the case of the guerrilla gardening project that was facing eviction, on the proposed eviction date, the local MP came to the site to hand over a letter to the landowner, requesting him to negotiate with the squatters who were willing to buy the land. Another interviewee talked about the local council providing high-vis vests with a 'street champion' logo to people who wish to use it. He argued that the Council's support (and its visual confirmation through a vest like this) gave people the confidence to knock on their neighbours' doors to encourage them to get involved. He also added that rather than making them feel compromised in their independence, the official support empowered and legitimised many people in what they were doing.

Feeling legitimised also provided 'informal' actors with a feeling of safety and security which they might otherwise not have. For instance, in one of the spot fix projects, the station manager took action to guarantee the safety of the 'informal' actors involved in a cleanliness drive. Since some of the volunteers

were working very closely to the train tracks, he positioned a security staff close to the tracks to blow a whistle every time a fast train was approaching, thus allowing the volunteers to move away from the tracks in good time. This measure was not required by either his supervisor or the organisers of the project, but taken by the station manager because he was nervous that something might happen and it might be held against him.

Over and above physical safety, one of the buskers on the scheme highlighted the financial security that came with the scheme and the knowledge that he was almost guaranteed an income: even if he had a bad day, he could make up for it by playing on a good spot the next day.

In addition to safety and security, the London Underground scheme also offered “reputational” value to buskers, as an interviewee from Transport for London believed. He argued that buskers from countries as far as Australia, Brazil and Japan, specifically came to London in the hope of getting a busker’s license on the Underground. He also mentioned that they regularly got requests from people who wanted to play on the Underground just as a one-off, because they considered it a “bucket-list experience”.

Thus, the interviews provided evidence for a range of ways in which public authorities supported informal practices, often through informal means themselves, and in which they effectively collaborate. However, interviews with ‘informal’ actors and public authorities also revealed challenges in working together. These are the subject of the next part.

6.3 Challenges

As argued in the previous part, ‘informal’ actors and public authorities alike foregrounded their collaborative work and supportive mutual relationships. Notwithstanding this, ‘informal’ actors, public authorities and international policy-makers also raised challenges and tensions that occur in their relationships, which are discussed hereafter. Section 6.3.1 looks at challenges in relation to their different processes, ways of working and the wider regulatory context. Section 6.3.2 then discusses issues stemming from a lack of inter-departmental

collaboration and different priorities within public authorities. Finally, section 6.3.3 considers specific attitudes and behaviours of the individuals involved that are considered problematic by their counterparts.

6.3.1 Processes and regulatory context

An important reason for challenges to arise, were different processes and ways of working, as well as the wider regulatory context.

A number of interviewees from public authorities highlighted that informal practices such as busking or guerrilla gardening were very ad-hoc, spontaneous and generally took place without asking for permissions. As a result, they were “difficult to control” – which for some authorities was an issue. As one interviewee from a local authority explained, this is because sometimes people will plant “inappropriate” things, such as invasive plants, or a tree right next to a building, which could cause structural issues. Another interviewee was more relaxed and, in fact, criticised other public authorities or decision-makers who were nervous to let go of control:

“It’s a bit like this area here [the site of the interview]. Everything that goes on in this space is planned. There’s very little that happens here that is informal. And that means it looks all very nice, managed and curated. But, personally, I think it misses something. We’ve had conversations with [the developer], but they’re very nervous about letting go of that control [...]. And you just have to wait for people to gradually come round. Seeing it happening elsewhere and thinking ‘Oh, that’s good’. And they always get a surprise when we say the busking at Covent Garden isn’t programmed, that it’s not licenced. People go, ‘Oh, I’m sure it’s licenced’. No, it’s definitely not licenced. So, it’s just an issue with trust. It blows people’s minds that good stuff can happen without you organising it.” (SH4, interview, 2015)

‘informal’ actors also reported that fear of losing control over a space was prevalent among public authorities. For instance, one guerrilla gardener recounted that she and a team of collaborators had repaired and put back into

use a greenhouse in a local park, but the local authority struggled with the idea of not having been in control (for example, of ensuring that the repair was compliant with building and health and safety regulations) and, as a result, intervened and demolished the green house, without rebuilding it.

Instead, many public authorities relied on bureaucratic processes and insisted that proper procedures were followed through. For instance, one of the station managers in Mumbai argued that he could not give permission for a spot fix project until applicants had followed all of the official procedures, including the formation or joining of an NGO and a formal application to the general manager.

'Informal' actors often struggled with this insistence on following procedures. This was partly because of the resources this required and partly because they disagreed with the bureaucratic process *per se*. For instance one interviewee from a guerrilla gardening project lamented the lack of differentiation or adjustment of bureaucratic processes according to the type of project:

“The planning department was even worse the second time around. Like they made us do all the stuff we had to do the first time, but then they refused to validate the planning permission. Because they said that we had supplied insufficient information. There was a small B&Q tool shed that we'd moved from the old place, like a tiny timber tool shed, and we hadn't marked it as a tool shed in our plan. And the planning department said that for all structures we had to show elevation drawings [...]. You know, it's a tool shed! The level of inflexibility! And it was just like we were interacting with machines. There was a planning officer who didn't give a shit. He just wasn't interested in who we were, what we were doing, the nature of the project. He was just applying the rules as he saw them. [...] They're bureaucrats. [...] I think they've got no interest. They've got [...] very little interest of engaging with the idea of what the project is or shall be, no flexibility or leeway, just rules that say 'You need to supply this information'.” (GG8, interview, 2016)

While in this case, the planning permission was ultimately obtained by the local council, in other cases activities were limited by bureaucratic processes. For instance, one organiser of a book swap situated in an old phone box had originally planned it “to be mad” and paint it in gold and glitter. But all phone boxes are considered Grade II listed buildings and can only be painted in a certain shade of red.

In a couple of cases, the insistence on following particular processes was even to the detriment of the activity itself. For instance, the idea to have book swaps set up in all stations across the London Underground ran up against too many bureaucratic hurdles and considerations, including consultations with senior management to ensure the project fits with the organisation’s overall vision, with the unions to consider any potential impact on station staff and with health and safety officers to consider any potential infringements and risks. While the organisers did have some understanding for certain requirements, they felt frustrated by the indecision of what exactly these requirements were and how they could be met. While the organisers had not officially given up on the idea, at the time of my interviews, they admitted that they had lost most of their momentum and energy to pursue the idea, and rather focused on the day-to-day maintenance of the book swaps in their respective local stations.

Regulations around health and safety were particularly often mentioned by ‘informal’ actors and public authorities as an area of contention. Several interviewees working for, or acting within the context of, the London Underground highlighted that the organisation is a very “health and safety-driven environment”. In considering whether an informal practice is allowed to take place or not, issues such as the question whether the practice might obscure important corporate information, block emergency exits or could provide a hazard were all raised. For instance, busking is only allowed in certain places and only music, as other types of busking, like juggling, might carry the risk of balls dropping and providing a tripping hazard to people walking past. Similarly, book shelves have to meet fire regulations and should be fixed to the ground to ensure that they cannot be used as a weapon or thrown down an escalator.

One of the reasons why health and safety was an area of particular contention is likely because the assessment of whether or not a certain activity presents a risk involves a subjective judgement. For instance, one guerrilla gardener had worked with public authorities to include planting in a new road design eventually had his suggestions rejected on the basis of health and safety concerns. He “just couldn’t get it”, as he felt that the edges of the areas in question were perfectly safe to stand on and that he had worked in “far more precarious situations”. The issue of subjectivity is discussed in more detail in section 6.3.3.

While health and safety concerns were mentioned particularly often, several interviewees highlighted broader regulatory and legal issues as an impediment to informal cultural practices and public support thereof. For instance, one guerrilla gardener found that even for small-scale cultural activities such as a display of a film or playing music at an event that is open to the public required an event license – something that added cost, complexity and delays to his project.

6.3.2 Departmental collaboration and culture

In addition to the overall regulatory framework, public authorities and ‘informal’ actors highlighted challenges that arise from a lack of inter-departmental collaboration, diverging priorities between various departments in public authorities or between ‘informal’ actors and public authorities.

At its most basic, such challenges related to miscommunication between internal staff or with contractors. For instance, in the case of one spot fix project, contractors charged with trimming dead trees cut off the entire tree despite having been asked by BMC to only cut it up to a height of 10 feet in order to enable a spot fix group to paint the trees. In some cases, the communication challenge was made even more difficult by the fact that there were a lot of different stakeholders involved and the ‘message’ aimed at a more fundamental attitudinal change – such as how to deal with issues with buskers. As one local authority staff working on Busk in London scheme argued:

“When you look at how many different people can affect buskers, it’s the police, it’s wardens, it’s business owners, it’s council enforcement officers, private security people. Trying to get to all of those people...just trying to tell front line police officers what the situation is, is almost impossible. There’s no way to actually communicate directly with these people and get a message like this across, which is not high on their priority list.” (SH4, interview, 2015)

Over and above the issue of communications, interviewees raised more fundamental challenges in the form of departmental culture or mind-sets. For instance, the interviewee cited above felt that many problems between buskers and security wardens arose from the fact that often security personnel comes from a police background where they are used to assert control through legally enforceable rules. To use communication and negotiation instead is difficult for them to understand and to trust. He also criticised that there was a prevalent mind-set among established institutions in the arts sector that only a curated programme and selection can guarantee quality, which may be the cause of confrontations with buskers. For instance, prior to the set-up of the Busk in London scheme, there were a lot of issues between buskers and security at a popular busking spot in London, where the land belonged to the adjacent major cultural institution. According to my interviewee, these issues were largely due to the institution opposing busking on the grounds of concerns over quality and hence taking a hard-line approach to buskers on their land.

Such ‘sectorial’ bias against informal practices was less frequently noted by ‘informal’ actors. Rather, many of them emphasised that their relationships were very much dependent on the particular public authority they were dealing with. For instance, a couple of guerrilla gardeners who worked in different areas across London found that some local authorities were very supportive of their activities, while others were not. One interviewee argued that this often came down to longstanding cultural traditions within the public authority:

“Cultural traditions are often very deep-rooted and quite hard to change. [...] some councils, that aren't particularly green, take a long

time to 'bed down' and find out how things work, and develop that cultural awareness. And councils that have cultural awareness just build on it, so it grows exponentially, and I think [our local council] is one of those councils and has been for a very long time." (GG2, interview, 2015)

In addition to departmental culture, other interviewees attributed different attitudes to diverging organisational structures. For instance, the majority of the book swaps included in the research was located in railway stations, rather than London Underground stations. According to several book swap organisers, this was because of the way the respective organisations were structured. Thus, group station managers at railway companies tended to have a lot more authority than station managers in Transport for London – a company that was seen by them to be much more hierarchically structured. Similarly, a number of guerrilla gardeners, as well as one interviewee from a local authority supporting guerrilla gardening, argued that some local authorities were very hierarchically structured and, as a result, a lot more controlling than others. Therefore, even if a local authority understands in principle the value of informal activities such as guerrilla gardening, they lack the required

"culture of trust that is facilitating, guiding, nudging [people...] to just get on and do it." (GG9, interview, 2015)

One of the reasons why public authorities might not have developed such a culture of trust was because they doubted that 'informal' actors have sufficient knowledge to "get on" by themselves. For instance, a couple of interviewees from a local authority that supports guerrilla gardening in principle but prefers a more formalised arrangement with them, criticised that many guerrilla gardeners did not know enough about plants to make them survive over time. In some cases, they were also seen to be ignorant to potential dangers involved in their actions, such as when some people had planted in and around a rotten tree (where the ground could potentially fall away at any point). In contrast, some guerrilla gardeners accused public authorities themselves of ignorance or a lack of knowledge about plants. They gave a number of examples where their plants

had been removed or mowed over by local authority staff or their contractors because they mistakenly took them for weeds or invasive plants.

More often than lacking knowledge and understanding, the challenges were due to departmental priorities that did not match with informal practices. As discussed in section 6.1, the public authorities I interviewed (who were generally supportive) and 'informal' actors had diverging priorities in some areas. However, the differences are likely to be more pronounced when considering the larger pool of public authorities who 'informal' actors engaged with (who may include those ambivalent or hostile towards informal practices).

Examples of such different priorities included a couple of book swap organisers, who mentioned that their request to have a book swap placed in an Underground station was denied due to organisation preferring to use the space for commercial purposes. Other interviewees felt that their request was not very high on the public authority's priority list, as they "probably have bigger fish to fry". For instance, one of the organisers of a spot fix project argued that green space and the environment were "not a priority at all" and that, because space was at such a premium in the city, decision-makers prioritised the economic value of spaces (including existing green spaces) over their environmental or human value. This quote by another interviewee from the Equal Streets case study also makes this point:

"When we finally put up the plan to bring about a structural change in the design of the SV Road and Linking Road in Bandra, they resisted. They stopped it. They didn't give the approval. Because, ultimately when it comes to stopping, closing down roads for cars, the car lobby interests, the upper class interest prevailed bigger than [...] popular engagement." (ES5, interview, 2015)

Many interviewees voiced their exasperation with the lack of foresight by public authorities in relation to such matters. For instance, several interviewees from the Equal Streets case study raised the issue of air pollution. They acknowledged that the levels of pollution were not as bad as in Delhi yet, but it would only be a matter of a few years before they were in a similar situation. As

argued in section 4.7, they saw the Equal Streets campaign as a vital tool to bring about change and to prevent the situation from getting worse, but they all felt that public authorities were lacking the foresight to understand this.

6.3.3 Individual attitudes and behaviours

While the previous section discussed challenges that arose from departmental culture and mind-sets in public authorities, in this final section I elaborate on specific attitudes and behaviours – both displayed by individuals in public authorities and by ‘informal’ actors – that cause challenges to their relationship.

Firstly, both ‘informal’ actors and interviewees from public authorities complained about unhelpful attitudes by their counterparts. On the one hand, interviewees from public authorities in particular highlighted the fact that ‘informal’ actors are sometimes unwilling to collaborate. For instance, a number of interviewees engaging with buskers (either on the Transport for London scheme or through the Busk in London scheme) argued that when they first started talking to them about implementing new systems, many were very suspicious and reluctant to do so. According to my interviewees, this was partly due to them opposing the very idea of rules, and partly because they were worried about giving away information (for example, about good busking pitches) that might negatively affect their income streams. As one interviewee involved with the Busk in London initiative emphasised, the majority of buskers are now happy to follow the code of conduct, but the few who are refusing to are causing a “disproportionally large problem”.

Rather than purposefully not wanting to engage, several interviewees from a local authority complained that guerrilla gardeners unintentionally made the Council’s work more difficult. For instance, they regularly found that people planted small shrubs or plants in the middle of a large grass expanse – something that makes mowing with mechanical grass mowers a lot more difficult.

On the other hand, ‘informal’ actors reported grievances in respect to the attitudes of individuals in public authorities. In some cases, they did not

necessarily display a negative attitude towards them, but they simply did not act. Examples of this included staff members not responding to emails (for example, when a book swap organiser tried contacting his station manager for a newspaper story), or not taking forward ideas and plans that had been discussed or agreed on (for example, the plans suggested by Equal Streets campaigners for changing the road infrastructure in Mumbai).

In other cases, 'informal' actors found their counterparts to be outright unhelpful and unfriendly. Interviewees described their interactions with individuals in public agencies in terms such as "extremely aggressive", "what a hassle", "not very forthcoming" or "not welcoming at all". For instance, one spot fix organiser mentioned that they had received criticism by the station manager for petty issues or "silly things" like having cleaned a painted surface with the wrong kind of brush. A number of interviewees also highlighted that public authorities treated them with arrogance. For instance, one guerrilla gardener who had gone through the pain of applying for a full planning permission for his project and was asked to leave the site shortly after obtaining permission, spoke of the displayed arrogance and offence, when the representatives of the developer subsequently asked him to justify why they should give him another site to work on.

Secondly, and going beyond the unhelpful nature of the attitudes described above, 'informal' actors and interviewees from public authorities raised certain behaviours among their counterparts that they considered unacceptable. For instance, an interviewee involved with the Busk in London scheme highlighted that there could be no tolerance for buskers selling their own CDs as this constituted "illegal street trading". While this example might be argued on a legal basis, in other cases behaviours are primarily interpreted through the lens of a particular value system. For instance, one guerrilla gardener, who had temporarily lived in a caravan on the site of his project, recounted that the developer owning the land had a very "emotional reaction" when finding out about it. According to my interviewee, the land owner felt "disgusted", very "threatened" and it was "more than they could comprehend". In contrast, for him, it had been a "rational" decision, based on the choice between being able

to run the gardening and community project full-time and having to find another job in order to pay for his accommodation. Unlike the land owner he was dealing with, he took a holistic assessment of his situation, where his professional and community engagement was a key part of, rather than separated from, his personal life.

The third and final set of challenges in relation to individuals' attitudes and behaviours was about feelings of uncertainty, lack of consistency and ambiguity. Some interviewees, especially from the busking case study, mentioned that they often felt uncertain about the law, in particular with regards to whether they were allowed to busk in a given place or not. As a result, several buskers mentioned that they felt worried about being moved on every time they see a warden approaching, especially when they busk in a new place. A couple of the book swap organisers mentioned similar concerns. In their cases, the uncertainty arose from the tacit agreements they operated under. In one case, the book swap had been set up with a tacit approval only – that is, the organiser had attempted to receive permission, but never got either an explicit permission or an outright refusal. While the organiser assumed that she had the tacit approval from the station manager, that individual had since moved on, and she had not attempted to contact the new station manager in charge. The organiser was therefore hoping that “it wouldn't come up” with the new people in charge.

Occasionally, the uncertainty was also used deliberately by public authorities as a means of testing, and exerting power over, the ‘informal’ actors. For instance, interviewees from the Equal Streets case study argued that they had faced great uncertainty whether they would get the final permission from the police to start their Sunday events until a couple of days prior to the event. They argued that this was done deliberately to test out “how well you are ready for it”.

Related to the issue of uncertainty, ‘informal’ actors deplored the lack of consistency and continuity when dealing with public authorities. Many interviewees argued that the institutions they were dealing with did not have a consistent line (or policy to underpin it) on whether or not they should support

such informal practices. As a result, they found that some people within the organisation were very supportive, while others were not. For instance, a number of book swap organisers highlighted that some station managers working for Transport for London were supporting book sharing practices, while others did not. In other cases, a supportive staff member left the public authority and the subsequent person in charge was opposing the idea or, at least, less favourable to it. An example of this was the Equal Streets case study, where the first police commissioner was an active champion of the idea, while his successor refused to give permission to restart the events. Such changes of direction or inconsistency in approach were partly due to a lack of policy support in this area. According to one interviewee from the Equal Streets case study, the lack of official policy also made the activities vulnerable to complaints (even if it was only a small percentage of people complaining) and such complaints could lead to decision-makers changing their mind or losing interest.

Finally, 'informal' actors talked about the ambiguity that sometimes characterises their relationships with public authorities. For instance, interviewees from several case studies complained about double standards that public authorities applied to their practices (in contrast to others). For instance, interviewees from a spot fix project complained that people who spat or dirtied public spaces were hardly ever reported to the authorities or asked why they are doing it, even though the law stipulates that fines should be issued for such behaviour. However, when he and his team started cleaning, everybody required permissions and stopped them, based on the argument that it was an illegal practice. In some cases, the law itself seemed to be applying different standards to similar practices, as one busker explained in relation to the law around Morris Dancing:

"Morris dancing, again, is another form of busking. [...] When the first draft of the [licensing] bill went through, then it became very apparent that in its current [...] state, Morris Dancing would basically be obliterated. [...] but then it turned out that people who were dancers were also Law Lords, and were also members of Parliament, etc., etc. and so they put together a case and won an exemption. [...] And

because that exemption to that bill became national law, then all the by-laws went away. So, it then meant that Morris Dancing was legal anywhere. And all related activities, so, singing in the pub afterwards, or singing outside, or playing music outside or music inside the pub -- all of these things are legal everywhere. So, when pubs say 'no, you can't do that in here', well, that's their preference, and it's entirely fine if they say, 'Well, I'm the host and you're not welcome to do that here'. That's not unreasonable. But, legally, there's no legal foundation for it. They can't eject Morris Dancers, but they can eject other folks. You wouldn't be able to just walk into a pub and busk. Whereas, you could go in with 30 Morris Dancers, all dressed up in your hats, and order loads of food, drink and sing, and that'd be fine."
(B5, interview, 2015)

While it is worth noting that the legal situation on this has changed since the Live Music Act came into force in 2012, this quote also highlights the impact of some informal practices having representation from people in position of power, while others do not.

Interviewees also complained about the subjective interpretation of rules by people in public authorities. For instance, a number of buskers talked about the problematic term "causing nuisance" and the implications for their practice. One busker mentioned that he had witnessed situations where the police made buskers stop, took their instruments and confiscated any donations they had collected on the grounds of them causing "nuisance". In other cases, it was not so much the interpretation of the law that was subjective, but public authorities' taste. For instance, two buskers had been stopped by the owner of a Christmas market, although other officials had told them that they were allowed to busk in this place. The reasons why the owner stopped them came down to personal taste, as he argued that "there's no drums at Christmas".

In each of these cases, the subjectivity of the (potential) decisions is problematic, because of the unequal relations of power between 'informal' actors and public authorities. In itself, subjective taste and opinion are not an

issue, but 'informal' actors voiced concerns because they affected the way that public authorities exercised power – whether unintentionally or deliberately. The same was true for situations of uncertainty and the lack of consistent policy. Of course, the objection to a lack of consistency presents, to some extent, a contradiction to 'informal' actors' frustration with bureaucratic processes that was described in section 6.3.1. This is partly due to the range of opinions among my interviewees. But it might also be argued that some 'informal' actors are looking for both: policy support (or an affirmed support of informal practices in principle), along with light-touch processes and bureaucracy to accompany this support. The examples in this section demonstrate the difficulty of negotiating the level of informality and formal support. It is also worth stating that there is not one 'middle ground' to be found, but that a satisfactory outcome may look very different depending on the specific 'informal' actor and public authority representatives involved in the negotiations. However, this section has also shown that some of the challenges go beyond individual attitudes and are derived from institutional cultures, processes and larger regulatory frameworks.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the relationships between informal practices and public authorities, as an example of a particularly important field of negotiation that urban actors engage in. As the majority of 'informal' actors and public authority representatives argues, they have a collaborative relationship. While both public authorities and 'informal' actors are motivated by multiple and a diverse range of objectives, there are a lot of synergies.

In particular, social and community objectives, space improvement and environmental motivations featured large in both accounts. Supportive public authorities see informal cultural practices as a way of delivering their agendas and thus provide support in the form of encouragement and removal of barriers, practical support, and patronage and protection.

However, there are differences in emphasis when it comes to engaging with informal practices. For instance, public authorities are more likely than 'informal' actors to frame the value of informal practices in economic terms. On the other

hand, they are also more likely to highlight specific cultural objectives. To some extent this is due to the use of language and policy 'jargon'. Interviewees from public authorities were framing their motivations in more general categories and seemed much more accustomed to linking specific practices to broader policy areas. For instance, an interviewee from a local authority who supports guerrilla gardening activities argued that their support of such practices was not considered as an "essential" public service in the overall strategic priorities of the local authority. Thus, she and her colleagues were consciously re-framing their activities to fit under the ring-fenced health agenda (as green spaces offer people a space for exercising). It is likely that in other cases a similar, internalised process of re-framing takes place and affects the ways in which they talk about their activity.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that there were actual differences in priorities. In particular, it seems that 'informal' actors placed greater value on specific and brief moments, and small-scale positive 'impact'. In line with this, public authorities were more often driven by instrumental aims. These differences can lead to tensions and challenges.

Indeed, it might be argued that challenges such as an overly insistence on bureaucratic processes, a lack of differentiation, the unwillingness to create suitable regulation and provide the necessary resources, lack of collaboration, unhelpful attitudes and a subjective interpretation of rules and laws are all due to a different valuation of informal practices (and what they aim to achieve). However, it is important to note that there is no simple opposition between public authorities and 'informal' actors. Thus, some interviewees from public authorities talk about the very same issues when dealing with other departments or colleagues.

The findings also suggest that the terms of engagement between 'informal' actors and public authorities affect the outcome of any negotiation on whether and how informality is deployed. Arguably, where a mediation of the rules of engagement takes place (for instance, 'formal' structures combined with light-touch processes), 'informal' actors are more likely to choose to work

collaboratively within formal boundaries. In contrast, the findings suggest that where creative, new ways of engaging with each other cannot be found, challenges are more likely to arise. Notwithstanding this hypothesis, as noted in previous chapters, there is a range of opinions among 'informal' actors and a satisfactory relationship may look very different depending on the specific 'informal' actor and public authority representatives involved in the negotiations.

At its best, then, 'informal' actors and public authorities act in a symbiotic collaboration and work towards the common goal of a better city. However, in some cases, the challenges of working with each other prevail and prevent any such synergies to come together.

Nonetheless, my findings clearly demonstrate the importance of a differentiated discussion of public authorities' engagement with informal practices. Thus, they also suggest that a more extensive and nuanced interrogation of urban cultural policy-making in relation to informal practices is necessary than has been the case in the literature to-date (see section 2.4.4).

As a closing remark it is worth noting that this chapter has touched on all of the key findings from my empirical research and which have been discussed in the previous chapters. Urban actors (like public authorities), engage with informal cultural practices for a wide variety of reasons, which include intrinsic motivations and more instrumental, social or environmental agendas. However, while public authorities are more likely to frame the value of informal practices in economic terms, the evidence base developed in chapter 4, strongly challenges such economic-deterministic interpretations of culture in the urban context and makes a compelling case for shifting the debate by academics and policy-makers alike towards a more multi-faceted valuation of informal cultural practices that takes account of their diverse roles and purposes. Chapters 5 and 6 have further foregrounded the many different definitions of informality and its varied practices. In particular, the findings emphasise that informality is seen as a tool and tactical choice for many urban actors, deployed to fulfil actors' varied aims and ambitions, but also in response to the complex negotiations of internal values and external, contextual factors (including their interaction with public

authorities). The extent, to which these findings relate to existing literature and the contribution these findings make to the literature, is discussed in the following chapter.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter brings together and discusses the main findings of the thesis. The main enquiry in the thesis has been the question of informality and culture in cities. While there has been a revival of studies on urban informality in cities in the global South which draw attention to the need to transcend binary thinking, the literature has been lacking in a number of respects. Firstly, in the global North, there remains a lack of discussion and nuanced understanding of informal practices in the urban context (especially in the context of the GaWC work). Too often, issues of informality are ignored altogether in the discussion of these cities or restricted to a normative framework that prevents the analysis of informality as a complex and multifaceted urban process. Secondly, the existing studies on urban informality (whatever their geographies) show a very limited engagement with issues of culture. Thirdly, there remains a lack of research that provides a multi-faceted valuation of informal cultural practices, that takes account of their diverse roles and manifestations. The extant research is all too frequently centred on forms of economic value and fails to provide an in-depth understanding of the broader (non-economic) roles and purposes that informal cultural practices take on in the urban context (see chapter 2 and section 3.1).

In order to address these gaps, my study set out to provide an in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of informal cultural practices, that moves beyond attempts to fit the diverse urban experiences into a universal theory, but which takes account of the multiple, complex and often conflicting, lived experiences of 'informal' actors in contemporary cities. As argued in section 3.2, a grounded theory approach was chosen in order to enable me to develop such a new understanding – both theoretically and empirically.

In this chapter, I discuss the main thesis findings and link them back to the current state of the literature. By doing so, I show in detail how the research gaps have been addressed, and how our knowledge and understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context have been enhanced. I begin by providing a summary of my main findings in section 7.1. This is followed by a discussion of how my findings make a contribution to the existing literature and state of knowledge in section 7.2. In section 7.3, I outline directions for future research, before concluding the chapter in section 7.4.

7.1 Key findings

In this section I summarise the main findings from my thesis. I digest the main themes of my research and, by doing so I provide direct answers to my four research questions. Together, the answers provide an in-depth and grounded understanding of informal cultural practices in the urban context – the main research aim of this study. Section 7.1.1 explores the roles and purposes of informal cultural practices. In response to the second research question on how informal practices are delimited, section 7.1.2 summarises my findings in relation to definitions and boundaries. Section 7.1.3 outlines how informality is deployed by cultural actors to fulfil the different purposes of their practice – as response to the third research question. Finally, section 7.1.4 deals with my fourth, and subsidiary, research question, looking at how and why urban policy-makers engage with informal cultural practices.

7.1.1 The role of informal cultural practices

The first research question of this thesis was as follows:

According to the urban actors themselves, what are the different roles and purposes that informal cultural practices take on in contemporary cities?

The findings from my empirical research (as set out in chapter 4) give ample evidence of why informal cultural practices are important in the urban context, and what motivates people to engage with them in first place. They reveal that ‘informal’ actors are motivated by a wide variety of aspects. On the one hand,

'informal' actors from all five case studies were motivated by intrinsic reasons. Personal fulfilment (such as satisfaction with, and enjoyment of, the activity, being challenged and learning, deriving meaning and improving well-being) was often the primary motivation, even if they saw their practice serving another (secondary) purpose. Commonly, their engagement in such practices was not a one-off, but more like a 'second nature', an intrinsic part of people's personality, and a way of maintaining their integrity or of acting on strong personal convictions.

On the other hand, many 'informal' actors also saw their practice as serving a range of instrumental purposes. Social and community concerns were perhaps the most important theme in this regard. Across all case studies, and in particular, among the spot fix projects, there were 'informal' actors with a general desire to 'do something good' for society, to build local community and to effect behavioural changes. They often strongly believed in their ability to effect change and saw their practice as a 'social experiment' that allowed others to join in and prove critics wrong.

In the context of increasingly built-up, privatised and fast-paced cities, informal cultural actors also raised a number of issues in relation to the transformation of public space. These included ambitions to clean and beautify specific corners and spaces, to improve their atmosphere and perception, and ranged to larger plans to improve mobility and street design across the city, and to reclaim public spaces. Such objectives were at the very core of the Equal Streets case study, but also of importance in the guerrilla gardening and spot fix initiatives. In each of these case studies, the practices involved making physical changes to public space – unlike in the busking and book swap case studies, where public space served primarily as a setting or location, and where the theme was mentioned less frequently.

In contrast, more (if not exclusively) 'informal' actors involved in busking and book swap case studies saw the cultural enrichment of the city as an important role for their practice. Encouraging others to engage with their cultural practice and facilitating cultural innovation was important to them, just as increasing

access to the cultural form by groups who do not tend to have as much opportunity to experience cultural activity. Cultural access was also one of the reasons why ‘informal’ actors from the other case studies had purposively chosen to focus on cultural aspects in their practice, along with culture’s ability to appeal and attract attention, and to command respect.

Less frequently, ‘informal’ actors saw the purpose of their practice in driving environmental or political change – be it in the context of specific political campaigns, or a more general political stance on opposing the dominant political-economic, neo-liberal ideology.

While some had ambitious plans to transform society, others were content with a more contained vision of small improvements. The latter was the predominant view among buskers, but was also found among other case studies. Prompting a smile, a moment of surprise and happiness, or creating a moment of personal connection and encounter were all seen as valuable and important to make life in the big, anonymous cities more human.

Indeed, many ‘informal’ actors conceived their practice as a contribution to improving the lives of people (including their own) in the big cities that they live in. In this sense, they were ‘serving the public’. More than that, many were keen to improve existing, state-provided public services – whether seeking improvement by simply holding public authorities to account, by supporting them in their activities, or – in a few rare cases – by actually being prepared to substitute public service provision. Notwithstanding their willingness to work collaboratively with public services, most saw fundamental differences between their informal practice and the provision of a public service, namely their capacity and powers, their ‘operational model’ and their function.

As becomes clear from these findings, ‘informal’ actors generally saw their practice to serve a number of purposes, and each individual was often motivated by a multiplicity of reasons.

Thus, the findings from my research show that the narrow focus in the literature on the role of informal cultural practices as drivers of urban economic development is highly problematic. In the majority of my case studies, direct

economic motivations were insignificant. The only exception to this was the busking case study, where financial incentives were mentioned as being important, but by no means the only reason why buskers engaged in their practice. While some of the other motivation themes (such as a better, safer and more vibrant neighbourhood, or an improved perception of the local area) may have a bearing on economic issues (such as local business returns and property prices), these only featured marginally in the accounts of ‘informal’ actors and how they understood their role in their cities.

Instead, my findings have foregrounded the multiplicity and diversity of motivations – the most important response to my first research question.

7.1.2 Definitions and boundaries

The second research question of this thesis is set out below:

How are informal cultural practices defined and delimited by ‘informal’ actors themselves?

The findings from my primary research (as set out in chapter 5.1) showcase the range of definitions and boundaries set by ‘informal’ actors for their cultural practices. They also give an indication of the principles and values that ‘informal’ actors hold, as they are reflected in the boundaries and delimitations they draw.

For many ‘informal’ actors from the book swap case study, but also for some from the guerrilla gardening and the Equal Streets case studies, the research found an interesting tension between their self-perception as having no rules or guidelines for their practice, and the various principles they considered important, and would like others to adhere to. This shows that although their ‘informal’ practice may not abide by any codified ‘laws’ and regulations, acting informally does not equate with acting outside of any rules and bounds. Rather there are a multitude of considerations and value frameworks that affect informal cultural practices.

Across my case studies, ‘informal’ actors considered it important to keep barriers low, both for those who use and participate in the practice and for

themselves as organisers. Thus, many organisers aimed to make participation in the practice free of charge, physically accessible, low in commitment and inclusive; while trying to keep the concept, maintenance and implementation simple for themselves.

Despite this pragmatic approach, many 'informal' actors also valued great personal commitment for the practice, in terms of time (and sometimes money) and in taking initiative and responsibility for a particular project, space, or other people. Many also highlighted the importance of being driven by passion, and of being assertive and confident in making things happen. However, the majority of actors believed that they their practice should obey the law, and that others interacting with it, should do the same. More than that, frequently 'informal' actors sought to avoid any kind of offence and inconvenience to others. Especially the buskers and actors involved in the Equal Streets campaign were concerned about finding ways to self-regulate their practice to minimise the risk that it will be perceived as intrusive by other users of public space.

While there were examples of 'informal' actors who had specific political ambitions or consciously included political elements into their practice, my research found that many of the 'informal' actors tried to keep politics, religion and commercial aspects out of their practice. Rather than necessarily suggesting that these interviewees did not hold political viewpoints or religious beliefs, this principle needs to be seen in the context of their ambition to be inclusive in their practice and about not wanting to cause offence to anyone, as well as their awareness that the practice takes place on public property (see section 7.2.3).

Similar reasons were used to justify the attempts of various actors to actually 'enforce' their rules and guidelines. Such enforcement took many forms, from undoing or removing anything that went against their principles, to directly confronting them; and from trying to prevent the breaking of rules through a 'light-touch' approach of codifying rules, removing incentives or relying on social surveillance, to a more directive approach of requiring authorisation for participation. At the same time, there were actors who would have liked others

to remain within the delimitations they set for the use of their practice, but acknowledged that they could not enforce adherence, or they did not wish to go as far as enforcing it.

Thus, my research findings in response to my second research question demonstrate that acting informally in the context of urban cultural practices is defined in numerous ways. These multiple definitions and delimitations – of what the practice should or should not be – reflect the manifold principles and values that ‘informal’ actors hold. Thus, they show that the multiplicity of ‘dimensions’ or ‘characteristics’ by which informality is defined (as highlighted by emerging contributions on urban informality in the global South) also applies to the field of culture.

Importantly, the research also draws attention to a number of tensions between different actors’ views of what informal cultural practices should look like (or not), as well as sometimes contradictions between different principles and values that any one individual holds. This shows that the definition of what the informal practice should look like is in itself the result of, sometimes complex, internal negotiations of different values and beliefs. By emphasising the importance of such negotiations of internal values and principles, my findings thus also go beyond, and extend, the emerging conceptions in the literature on urban informality in the global South that focus on informality as the result of negotiations of a range of external, contextual political, social or legal factors.

7.1.3 Purposeful deployment of informality

The third research question that was answered in my study was the following:

How is informality deployed by informal cultural actors to fulfil the different purposes of their practices?

The previous sections have shown that there is a considerable range and diversity of motivations among ‘informal’ actors, as well as that there is not one singular definition of informality. My research findings (discussed in section 5.2) further show that such “differences within informality” (Roy & Alsayyad, 2004)

can also be found in the actual practices, as different motivations and definitions manifest themselves in different and nuanced ways.

Across the different case studies, there were as many 'informal' actors who talked about planning and rehearsing for their practice, as those who did not; those who had formal training, as those who did not; and those who asked for permission to carry out their practice, as those who acted without authorisation. While the majority of interviewees preferred flexible arrangements, a lack of formal processes and improvisation, some created formal structures to implement their activity.

In terms of recruitment, the use of informal, personal networks and word of mouth was most important for recruiting other participants, in addition to some spontaneous recruitment during the activity itself. In contrast to these ad-hoc approaches to recruitment, most actors were more intentional about the promotion of their practice to potential users, including some with a deliberate media strategy. Social media was by far the most important communication tool, but some mentioned more traditional mailing lists, collaborations with other organisations or direct, house-to-house promotion in their neighbourhood.

Often such differences existed between different projects; for instance, whether a particular busker saw busking as a professional or a leisure pursuit; whether or not a particular spot fix project operated with license or permission; and whether or not a particular guerrilla gardener sought to formalise the organisation of their activities. But different, more or less informal practices equally exist within projects; such as a guerrilla gardening project that was illegally occupying a piece of land and drawing on a range of informal networks for legal advice and day-to-day management of the site, while at the same time having established a tight set of rules for the squatting community and being willing to formalise their claim to the land by purchasing the piece of land.

These findings show that any given activity was rarely 'exclusively' informal or 'distinctly' formal, nor did actors define themselves by either one or the other. Instead, they chose from a 'menu of options' that included elements that tend to be seen as 'informal', as well as those considered 'formal'. By highlighting that

many of the projects displayed elements of both at the same time, my findings problematise the dualism that is applied to the formal and the informal in much academic literature on urban informality, especially (but not exclusively) in the global North.

Importantly, and contrary to the normative view of this literature, it also suggests that informality is a tactical choice for many urban actors. In this sense, informality is a tool, deployed to fulfil actors' varied aims and ambitions. Conceptualising informality – as I have done here – as a tool and tactical choice helps to explain why there are so many different manifestations of informality. This is because the choice of whether, and how, informality is deployed is subject to complex negotiations of both the internal values (see section 7.1.2) and the external contextual factors. Such external conditions include the geographical and cultural context, the socio-economic background of the actors, their personal, professional and political networks, and thus their level of agency, to name just a few. All of these factors are negotiated by urban actors and influence their decisions on their deployment of informality. By emphasising that the 'outcome' of these negotiations will be dependent on the specific situation and context of each informal, cultural actor, my findings link back to the emerging work on urban informality in the global South that highlighted the importance of negotiation processes (see section 2.4.2), and reveal their relevance for the field of culture.

7.1.4 Public authorities and the informal

The fourth research question was a subsidiary question and interrogated the following:

How and why do urban policy-makers engage with, and respond to, informal cultural practices?

The relationship between 'informal' actors and public authorities presents an important example of a field of negotiation that determines whether and how informality is deployed as a tactical tool. My research findings (discussed in chapter 6) show that across my case studies the outcome of this negotiation

was often a collaborative relationship. While both public authorities and 'informal' actors were motivated by multiple and a diverse range of objectives, there were a lot of synergies. In particular, social and community objectives, space improvement and environmental motivations featured large in both accounts. Supportive public authorities saw informal cultural practices as a way of delivering their agendas and thus provided support in the form of encouragement and removal of barriers, practical support, and patronage and protection.

However, my research also found differences in emphasis when it comes to engaging with informal practices. For instance, public authorities were more likely than 'informal' actors to frame the value of informal practices in economic terms. On the other hand, they were also more likely to highlight specific cultural objectives. To some extent this is due to the use of language and policy 'jargon', but it is also important to acknowledge that there are actual differences in priorities. These differences can lead to tensions and challenges.

Across the case studies, 'informal' actors complained about an overly insistence on bureaucratic processes, a lack of differentiation, the unwillingness to create suitable regulation and provide the necessary resources, unhelpful attitudes and a subjective interpretation of rules and laws. At the same time, public authorities criticised 'informal' actors' ad-hoc, and sometimes illegal, action, limited knowledge, ignorance of health and safety requirements and a lack of collaboration. All of these can be – at least in part – explained by a different valuation of informal practices (and what they aim to achieve). However, my research shows that there is no simple opposition between public authorities and 'informal' actors. Similar issues also existed between different departments or colleagues within a particular public authority. More importantly, as the answers to my first three research questions have shown, there were a range of ambitions, values and practices among 'informal' actors and a satisfactory relationship may look very different depending on the specific 'informal' actor and public authority representatives involved in the negotiations.

By emphasising the importance of a differentiated discussion of public authorities' engagement with informal practices, my findings call for a more extensive and nuanced interrogation of urban cultural policy-making in relation to informal practices than has been the case in the literature to-date (see section 2.4.4). By drawing on evidence from 'informal' actors, and from a limited set of interviewees from public authorities, my findings summarised above provide a base for such an interrogation. However, as discussed in section 7.3.1, further research would be valuable to provide a more comprehensive answer to the fourth research question from the public authorities' perspective.

7.2 Contributions of my thesis

As suggested above, the findings obtained from my research have theoretical and methodological implications for the body of knowledge around cities, informality and culture. In this section, I discuss my findings in relation to these various conversations in academic research and highlight the extent to which they present a contribution to the literature. In section 7.2.1, I offer my contributions to the urban studies literature, before turning to the academic discourse around informality in section 7.2.2, and to the cultural policy literature in section 7.2.3. In the final section 7.2.4, I discuss how my findings can also enrich academic thinking around methodological approaches.

7.2.1 To the urban studies literature

My research findings clearly demonstrate the wide range of motivations, values and practices that exist among urban informal cultural actors. The multiple understandings held by 'informal' actors of the role that their cultural practices take on in the urban context much exceed its limited conception as drivers of urban economic development that remains prevalent in the urban studies literature (see section 2.1). In response to the first major research gap I identified in section 2.4.4, the evidence from my research provides a much more multi-faceted valuation and, thus, strongly challenges the predominant economic-deterministic interpretations of culture in the urban context.

This is not to say that economic issues are of no relevance. In addition to my findings in relation to the financial incentives sought after by buskers, I found some acknowledgement by interviewees from guerrilla gardening projects that their practice might be benefiting gentrification of the area. These specific findings are in line with recent work by Adams & Hardman (2014) which found that guerrilla gardening practice does not always equate with transgression and resistance, but may be congruent with local authority regeneration plans. It also confirms established literature on issues of gentrification (for example, Deutsche and Ryan, 1984; Zukin, 2009) and the specific role that informal art sites may play in this regard (see section 2.3.2).

However, overall, economic issues only featured marginally in the accounts of 'informal' actors. In contrast, my findings reveal the extent of the diversity and multiplicity of motivations, ranging from intrinsic reasons, to instrumental social, political or environmental agendas; from ambitions aiming at deep transformations of society, to more modest visions of small improvements. By highlighting the multiplicity of motivations and values, my research makes a considerable contribution to the vast amount of economic-deterministic urban studies literature (including the majority of the GaWC research discussed in section 2.1). It also offers new conceptual avenues and interpretations to the discussion of urban informality in relation to the cultural and creative field – which to-date, in addition to the studies linking informal spaces to processes of urban economic development, also includes a substantial body of research that considers economic issues surrounding the precariousness and exploitation of the cultural and creative labour market (see section 2.3.1). Therefore, my findings call for a shift in the debate, and in the kind of things that value is placed upon, by academics and policy-makers alike.

7.2.2 To the informality literature

Collectively, the findings from my thesis support the emerging body of literature on urban informality in the global South (see section 2.4) by rejecting dualist conceptions of the formal and the informal, and by drawing attention to the complicated negotiations that 'informal' actors engage in. However, my

research goes beyond the existing literature, offering contributions both to the general body of knowledge and to some more specific debates.

7.2.2.1 Interrogating urban informality through culture

The present study extends the discussion of issues of urban informality to the field of culture. This conceptual extension was much overdue, as identified in my second research gap (see section 2.4.4), but also confirmed by the recent interest in urban informal cultural practices, including work by Adams et al. (2015); Mbaye & Dinardi (2018), Marina (2016) and Quilter & McNamara (2015).

Indeed, this study suggests that some distinctive contributions can be made by interrogating the issue of urban informality through the lens of culture – contributions that may otherwise not be made, or made less well.

On the one hand, there are some key parallels between informality and culture, which provide an opportunity for a re-appraisal of informality as an important part of urban life, but which also highlight the need for nuance and a situated analysis of issues of informality. One of these parallels is the difficulty to appropriately describe, capture or measure cultural practices and ‘informal’ practices within a framework of economic value (see chapter 2 and 3.1.1). Another parallel is the importance of diversity. As argued in section 3.1.1, and demonstrated by the findings of this study, in culture, there is a value of diversity *per se*. Both, the understanding of the need to go beyond economic considerations and the recognition of the value of diversity, provide an ideal starting point for interrogating the diverse manifestations of informality, and the complex urban realities in which they are situated. As will be further discussed in section 7.2.2.3, my call for nuance and situated analysis is a key contribution of this thesis to the informality literature.

On the other hand, more than in other sectors, there is a history in cultural policy discourse to account for ‘informal’ aspects. Arguably, at the origin of this is the complex definition of the term ‘culture’, which – among its different meanings – includes its conception as ‘a whole way of life’ (Williams, 1983; also see discussion in section 2.3.2). As a result, cultural policy debate has never

exclusively been about professional artistic production, but has also included amateur and community arts, intangible art forms, oral traditions *et cetera* – as for instance in the idea of cultural democracy. In addition to such long-standing cultural policy concepts, more recent literature has highlighted key defining characteristics of culture as interactive and collaborative work across different sectors (Scott 1997; 2004; Pratt, 2008) and increasingly blurred boundaries between the cultural and non-cultural, the professional and the amateur, and the producers and consumers (Leadbeater, 2004; UNESCO, 2012). The findings of my research could equally be used to highlight such cross-sector engagement (as exemplified by the ‘activist personality’ of many ‘informal’ actors, discussed in section 4.2.4) and the blurring of boundaries (for instance, professional musicians who busk without license). Being open to such an understanding of an urban reality that is not fixed, where urban actors seamlessly move across sectoral and professional boundaries, and where the achievement of a particular aim is more important than the adherence to a specific way of ‘doing things’, is once again a useful starting point to recognising how urban actors deploy informality in a tactical way – as will be further discussed in the following section.

7.2.2.2 Tactical deployment of informality

While recent work (Mbaye & Dinardi, 2018) has highlighted the importance of informality for cultural practices in the global South, my study has demonstrated that it is equally relevant for cultural practices in cities in the global North. By broadening the discussion of urban informality to new disciplines and carrying out empirical research in two cities from different geographies, my research has also responded to the call by urban scholars to put into conversation the experiences of cities in the global South with those in the global North (see chapters 2 and **Error! Reference source not found.**), thereby pushing the theoretical agenda of comparative urbanism further. But in addition to making a contribution methodologically (for further discussion of the methodological implications of this approach see section 7.2.4), crucially, this approach has enabled me to make a contribution to a number of specific debates, by connecting theoretical discourses from the global South and the global North. In

the following I shall use two examples, where my findings offer contributions to such specific debates, based on my comparative approach.

Firstly, this study confirms and extends our understanding of the different types of actors who deploy informality. By highlighting that informality is not a defining characteristic, but rather a tool, or a tactical choice to achieve a particular end, my research shows that informality does not belong to a particular group of people. This supports Roy's (2009b, 2011: 228) argument that informality is not simply the "habitus of the dispossessed" but that it is employed by different social classes and actors. However, while her work, and that of authors such as Gidwani (2006), Weinstein (2008) and Ghertner (2008), has focused on highlighting the use of informality by upper-class, political, state or commercial actors, my research strengthens the case that informality is equally deployed by civic actors from (predominantly) middle-class backgrounds.

Douglas' recent work (2016: 131) on informal or DIY urban design practices in American cities confirms my findings of the range of "unsanctioned but civic-minded 'contributions'" made by civic actors. While my interviewees had a broader range of profiles than the research participants that Douglas describes, I also found examples of "highly professional, technical, academic" actors (*Ibid.*: 119) who "learn the facts, use the tools, and quote the rationales of professionals and scholars to inform and justify" (*Ibid.*: 131) their practices – and I did so across all my case studies. Thereby, my research demonstrates that such educated, middle-class 'informal' actors exist both in cities in the global North and the global South.

At the same time, my findings provide some nuance to the argument made by Roy (2009c: 82) that "there is nothing casual or spontaneous about the calculated informality" of the planning system. Admittedly, her focus is on state practices, rather than on civic actors – many of whom, I would argue may not only be seen as "*de facto* cultural policy-makers" (Mbaye & Dinardi, 2018: 9), but as *de facto* urban planners, too. In the kind of urban planning they engage in, informality is used as a tool, but only few use it strategically. More

commonly, informality is not pre-meditated but deployed as a tactical choice, emerging as the best option from the situated negotiation of different factors.

At the same time, and in line with Harris' (2018) recent paper on engineering projects in Mumbai, by highlighting the tactical use of informality, my research also emphasises that an understanding of informality alone, as the 'omnipresent' way of life in cities of the global South, does not do justice to the complexity of such urban processes.

7.2.2.3 From resistance to neo-liberal co-option: a call for nuance

Secondly, my research offers new insights into the debates on the extent to which in(formal) practices promote neo-liberal ideologies. Similar debates have been held with regards to tactical or DIY urbanism in cities in the global North (see section 2.2.2) and on aesthetic or 'environmental' improvement activities of the urban space (see section 2.2.1 and 2.4.1 of the lit review) in the global South.

In contrast to the prevalent one-sided interpretations of such activities, as either entrepreneurial and creative practices that have the potential to transform socio-political and physical spaces, or as (more or less intentional) vehicles of neoliberal ideologies, the findings from my research foreground the complexity of such processes, that hitherto has not received sufficient attention in the debate.

Indeed, across my case studies, examples could be found of practices that could be accused of being co-opted by neoliberal or austerity policies: whether book swaps that aimed to replace some of the resources lost by the closure of public libraries; guerrilla gardening projects that beautified streetscapes, thus contributing to rising property prices and gentrification; or spot fix projects that set out to clean up public spaces, thereby appropriating some of the 'aesthetic discourses' in Indian cities.

At the same time, the findings from all of my case studies reveal examples of 'informal' actors consciously opposing their association with political agendas in general, and neoliberal agendas in particular. For instance, many of my interviewees from the spot fix case study subscribed to the ethos of the Ugly

Indian movement, which maintains that “we are all Ugly Indians” (The Ugly Indian, 2010) and actively denounces the tendency to shift the blame for dirt and garbage to particular groups of people, such as slum residents or rag pickers. Thus, these findings challenge the idea that civic actors simply promote a ‘bourgeois environmentalism’ (Baviskar, 2011) that positions upper- and middle-class concerns around beautification, leisure and health against the informality of the poor (Arabindoo, 2012). My finding with regards to ‘informal’ actors considering their practices as a ‘social experiment’ (but with the implicit assumption that their experiment will reflect positively on the particular community that their practice takes place in) further strengthens the argument for a more nuanced conception of the role of civic actors.

Also, and notwithstanding the valid arguments about the potential for co-option, it is important to note that collaboration with public authorities does not automatically equate with the promotion of neoliberal values and policies. Firstly, an interrogation of the specific policies of local authorities would be necessary before making such claims. Indeed, as chapter 6 has demonstrated, there are considerable differences in approach and motivations among public authorities.

Secondly, my research finds that often ‘informal’ actors pay careful attention to maintaining their integrity even when dealing with public authorities that can be seen to promote neoliberal ideologies. The guerrilla gardener who refused the demands by local authority staff to remove bee-friendly plants from a flower bed on public land in favour of ‘prettier’ plants is just one example. The numerous challenges discussed in section 6.3, also bear witness to the ways in which ‘informal’ actors resisted and challenged public actors and their policies.

Finally, even where ‘informal’ actors did not openly challenge or resist public authorities, they were often keenly aware of the difficult balancing act that they were attempting (for instance in relation to the fine line between taking responsibility for their environment or community, and taking over the actual provision of public services in a context of austerity and free-market policies).

As Webb (2018: 59) pointed out for his recent analysis of temporary interventions:

“a dualistic distinction between order and response or between domination and resistance can [...] be criticised for failing to appreciate the full complexity of political behaviour within the city and for potentially fostering a reductionist view of change”.

Similarly, my research provides a means of understanding the complexity of informal cultural practices and clearly demonstrates that a nuanced and situated analysis must not be omitted to fully understand the role of civic actors.

7.2.3 To the cultural and creative industries literature

The contributions of this thesis that were discussed in the previous two sections in relation to the urban studies literature and the body of work around informality are equally contributions to the cultural and creative industries literature.

On the one hand, my research provides a much more multi-faceted understanding and valuation of informal cultural practices. Thus, my study advances the state of knowledge in the urban cultural geography and policy disciplines that have primarily studied informal cultural practices in terms of their link to urban regeneration and gentrification processes (see section 2.3.2). Recent work, which has been published throughout the duration of my research, including Marina’s study on busking (2016) and Adams et al (2015) and Adams & Hardman’s (2014) work on guerrilla gardening has highlighted similar issues; however, arguably my research provides the most detailed and comprehensive evidence of the extent of the diversity and range of motivations and practices, both in cities of the global South and the global North.

On the other hand, my thesis has addressed the gap in the urban cultural geography and policy research (as identified in section 2.4.4) with regards to a nuanced discussion and understanding of informality in relation to cultural practices in the urban context. Mbaye & Dinardi’s recent paper (2018) makes a similar argument for the link between informality and cultural governance in cities of the global South. My study demonstrates that such a nuanced

understanding of the interplay between the formal and the informal is as relevant for cultural practices in cities in the global North, as it is for cities in the global South.

In addition to these cross-cutting issues, my thesis also makes specific contributions to the cultural and creative industries field. Firstly, my research suggests that there is a need for a re-appraisal of the conceptualisation of cultural value in light of my findings, as I discuss in section 7.2.3.1. Secondly, in section 7.2.3.2, I discuss how my thesis offers a contribution to the discussion of informal cultural practices in ‘mundane’ public space.

7.2.3.1 A re-appraisal of cultural value

As discussed in section 4.6, cultural motivations were part of the multiple ambitions of the ‘informal’ actors I interviewed. However, they were not as prevalent as other motivations. As discussed in section 4.6.3, my research has demonstrated that culture is being valued in different ways for a number of reasons, and in some cases, is clearly preferred to other activities, due to its unique characteristics and effects. But it is also clear that for some interviewees, culture serves an instrumental function. This is partly due to the broad definition of culture that was used in my research. The case studies included not only ‘core’ cultural activities, but also public realm design and aesthetics. The former were more likely to value cultural features *per se*, rather than the latter which included a broader set of activities.

But over and above the parameters of the definition, the apparent lack of focus on ‘cultural’ aspects might be due to a limited conception of cultural value. In their recent review of the value of arts and culture, Crossick and Kaszynska (2016: 40) note that “the variety of locations and modes in which culture is experienced complicates consideration of cultural value”. More than that, as I have argued in section 2.3.1, the commonly used definition of creativity around intellectual property (which is prevalent in the creative industries and cultural policy literature in the global North) does not suit a creative sector that is marked by informality (Bharucha, 2010; Dhamija, 2008; Isar, 2013; Reis & Davis, 2008). Furthermore, Edensor et al (2010:6) note that the current

conceptualisations of creativity imply that a whole set of social groups “lack the necessary creative skills, cultural tastes and competencies to effectively operate within the creative economy”, and hence, are considered to be not creative. This suggests that other types of cultural value would emerge when going beyond the boundaries of established theoretical and policy thinking and jargon, and re-thinking them in relation to informality.

For instance, civic agency and civic engagement is considered to form a component of cultural value, by promoting “civic behaviours” such as volunteering and voting, as well as helping minority groups to find a voice and express themselves (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016: 7). However, such a conceptualisation is not sufficient to understand the specific cultural value of informal cultural activities. Instead, the findings from my study suggest that the concept of cultural value needs to go beyond the commonly noted ‘pro-social’ or ‘democratic’ potential of cultural activities, to include more ‘transgressive’ or ‘borderline’ aspects. For instance, as I have argued in section 4.3.4, the ‘experimental’ and ‘risky’ dimension of setting up a book swap in an unsupervised public space, or gardening a tree pit on a public high street, is an integral part of how ‘informal’ actors understand such informal cultural practices. Gornostaeva & Campbell (2012) make a similar argument, suggesting that the liminality that is often inherent to informal cultural practices should be considered as a cultural and social value *per se*. Mould’s (2015: 115) conception of creative subversion – defined as “the momentary crystallisation of creative practices that re-appropriate the urban topology in innovate and unexpected ways” – also points to creative aspects that challenge and subvert the status quo.

Secondly, my findings have highlighted the salience of the spontaneous and fleeting nature of many informal cultural practices. Within this ephemerality, a second element of cultural value that is specific to informal cultural practices could reside. My findings suggest that these practices give rise to short moments of encounter, personal connection and impact – a smile on someone’s face, a short conversation, a tune heard in passing that remains stuck in someone’s head – which, for a brief instant, improve people’s lives by making

them more human. Given the research bias towards long-term and sustained cultural engagement, paying attention to such temporary aspects presents a shift in the conceptualisation of what constitutes cultural value. Undoubtedly, in the past few decades, culture has often sought to demonstrate its value to a diverse range of policy areas, from the social to the economic, and from environmental to health agendas. The findings from this study also make the case that informal cultural practices play a role in these areas. However, the findings also suggest that perhaps one of their most interesting and distinctive features lies in the fleeting and spontaneous moments they create. This is far from being insignificant. Indeed, as Debord (2006 [1957]: n.p.) argued for his concept of ‘constructed situations’, such “ephemeral”, “transitory” “passageways” may give a glimpse of an alternative society and future that could be possible.

While Crossick and Kaszynska’s recent work (2016: 6) rightly highlights that “definitional and boundary difficulties [...] have bedevilled debate about what constitutes the value of culture” and advocates for increased attention to ‘informal engagement’ (defined as cultural engagement in “purpose-built cultural buildings, small-scale adapted spaces, institutions such as care homes and prisons, and most commonly the home and the virtual space of the internet”); they stop short of actually re-assessing the criteria by which cultural value is defined, ultimately falling back onto elements that can be measured and evaluated.

My findings thus suggest that a re-appraisal of the conceptualisation of cultural value is required. This goes beyond the parameters set for this thesis, but provides an important future research project (see section 7.3.2).

7.2.3.2 Cultural practices and mundane public spaces

In addition to these issues, my thesis offers a contribution to the discussion of informal cultural practices in “mundane public space” (Adams et al, 2015: 1233), which has rarely been the focus of attention (see section 2.3.2), until very recently (Marina, 2016; Mould, 2016; Wees, 2017). My study highlights such

mundane public spaces as key sites of the complicated negotiations and tactical choices that informal' actors engage in.

In particular, my research finds an interesting tension between 'informal' actors' (sometimes unauthorised) use of public space, and their (explicit or implicit) expectations of others to engage with their practice in a certain way (see section 5.1). The findings demonstrate that many 'informal' actors had a strong sense of ownership of the public space they use on a daily basis. This sense of ownership was derived from, and justified based on two assumptions.

Firstly, my thesis shows that many 'informal' actors believe in the 'morals' or 'ethics' of their practice. They were keen to be 'doing good' and believed in the positive impact of their practice on the lives of others around them (see section 4.3.1). Thus, in following Banks' conception of the 'moral economy', many 'informal' actors in my study had strong convictions of their practice as "exhibit[ing] moral ways of acting towards others" (Banks, 2006: 456).

Secondly, the 'informal' actors in my study treated public spaces as 'commons property', claiming communal rights over privately or publically-owned land through "intensive patterns of use and collective habitation" (Blomley, 2008: 311; Porter, 2011). The discussion in sections 4.3.3 and 5.1.2 suggest that they share such a conception of public space. Their recurrent references to their action in public spaces as looking after their "own home" or "their own things", as well as their mundane, "domestic" interventions (such as cleaning, painting or planting) can all be seen as a "claim of entitlement" (Blomley, 2008: 312) and an enactment of their perceived "use rights" of the commons (Porter, 2011: 118).

In this sense, informal cultural practices do not only take place in public spaces, but they create, what Mbaye & Dinardi (2018: 4) recently termed an "effective *agora*", that is, a "place for performing citizenship" through "an active process of civic encounter and the making of public culture".

However, in addition to providing support to such a conception of informal cultural practices reclaiming urban public spaces "beyond neoliberal urbanism" (*Ibid.*: 4), my research also emphasises that care must be taken to avoid an

overly optimistic perspective. Indeed, the strong sense of ownership for the public space and the conviction of the moral goodness of their practice carry the risk of exclusion themselves. Examples from my research, such as book swap organisers challenging users and claiming back books, or unwritten rules by buskers in popular tourist spots which exclude more occasional or spontaneous buskers, suggest that in some cases, the use rights of the ‘commons’ are interpreted around what Blomley (2008: 316) argues is a central element of the definition of private property; that is “the power to exclude [...], to displace, evict and remove”.

Despite this caveat, I would conclude with Mbaye and Dinardi’s (2018: 11) more optimistic argument that ordinary urban citizens can “participate in creating an alternative public sphere, through their constructive intervention in the cultural field.”

7.2.4 To the literature on methodologies

The findings from my research also enrich current academic thinking around methodological approaches. In particular, my study has addressed the fourth research gap (identified in section 2.4.4) by including a city from the global North and a city from the global South in the empirical research. Over and above reconfirming the relevance of informality to cities of the global North, the inclusion of case studies from both cities has helped me to connect theoretical debates and urban practices from these different contexts. Using key findings from the emerging body of literature on informality in cities in the global South as sensitising concepts for my own research has meant that I was able to draw on learning from urban theory in the global South and remained alert to its potential relevance to cases elsewhere.

Notwithstanding the above, it is important to note that my empirical research has taken place in two very different cities, but using the same methodological approach. While some might object to the study of cases in such dissimilar contexts, my study did not simply transpose one particular lens onto two very different cities, without taking account of their specific context. Instead, my focus on the actual, experienced practices makes it easier to remain open to

both commonalities and differences between practices in the different cities than when seeking a characterisation of a given city through certain types of cultural informality.

Furthermore, and importantly, my application of a grounded theory methodology has helped me to understand informality as it is negotiated and produced 'on the ground' in each of the cities. At the same time, my use of a grounded analysis was a strategic choice in order to avoid the constraints of normativity and to go beyond dualist categories that pre-determine what informal cultural practices in cities in the global North and South supposedly look like.

Thus, my study directly addresses the criticisms that comparative urbanism scholars have advanced against the predominant urban theory in the global North, including their demand to engage with cities in the global South on their own terms, to focus on their uniqueness and particularities, as well as to engage in explicit comparative research (see section 3.1.2). However, while my research has much in common with the spirit of the comparative urbanism agenda, it has gone beyond it in terms of realising its ambitions.

Firstly, while the attempt by comparative urbanists to broaden out the geographical scope of analysis to other cities has resulted in an almost exclusive focus on cities in the global South, my study has genuinely conducted *comparative* empirical work using the same (grounded) methodological lens and approach across two very different cities, thus putting planning and urban theory in the global North and South into conversation.

Criticism

Secondly, my methodological approach addresses Nijman's criticism (2015) of the post-colonial perspectives that figure prominently in calls for comparative urbanism, whereby "the post-colonial city is set apart as a firm category". Nijman rightly highlights a paradox in these perspectives, as they strongly reject Western-dominated paradigms, but at the same time define the cities in the global South precisely through their colonial, Western-dominated past – thus often ignoring "indigenous urban dynamics" of the more recent history (Nijman, 2015: 184). In contrast, my focus on 'grounded' practices, rather than a

particular ‘type of city’, has enabled me to include cities with diverse geographies and histories and to analyse and value them each on their own terms, through actual experiences of the case studies.

Thirdly, by highlighting the multiplicity of informality in both cities, my study also challenges the idea of any kind of exclusivity about the “more complex, more grounded or more deeply hybridized urbanisms” of the global South (Peck, 2015: 162).

Finally, I did not seek to generate a new universal theory of informal cultural practices, but my work did not shy away from stating commonalities across practices. Instead, my research in these two cities finds similarities in their (internal) nuance and difference. While the practices are highly contextual and situated, my study has found logics that are common across them. For instance, in both cities, I found a multiplicity of informal cultural practices that were each the result of complex negotiations of personal motivations, internal values, and external contextual factors. My findings also highlight the importance of a multi-faceted valuation of informal cultural practices that is crucial to their deeper understanding, independent of their geographies.

In reflecting on methodological approaches, it is finally worth stating that my thesis makes the case for conducting research on ‘difficult’ topics, such as the ‘informal’. It argues that despite the practical and ethical challenges that may be inherent to approaching research topics such as mine, the theoretical advances are worth being pursued. This may require a flexible approach and the willingness to make some compromise – in short, an informal methodological approach. Rather than shying away from describing and employing such informal methodologies, I would argue that they should be seen as a reflection of the complex political, social and cultural realities of the research object, which ‘informal’ actors navigate and negotiate on a daily basis.

7.3 Directions for future research

The main findings and contributions of my thesis open up many avenues for further research. Perhaps most evidently, given the limited comparative

research to-date on informal cultural practices in the urban context, there is considerable need and opportunity to study various informal cultural practices, as well as to do so in the context of different cities. However, my research also highlights a number of specific areas that would merit more research attention, as outlined hereafter. This includes a more detailed study of policy-makers' interaction with informal cultural practices (see section 7.3.1) and a reconceptualisation of cultural value to take account of specifically informal cultural practices (see section 7.3.2).

7.3.1 Policy-makers and informal cultural practices

A subsidiary research question of this thesis interrogates how and why urban policy-makers engage with informal cultural practices. Such a perspective was of interest to the study because public authorities are key players in en- or disabling informal cultural practices. As argued in section 7.1.4, this present study has provided an answer to this question by drawing on evidence from 'informal' actors, as well as from a limited set of interviewees from public authorities. Due to the limited resources of the study, I was only able to conduct a small number of these contextual interviews. Further research would provide a more comprehensive answer to the question from the public authorities' perspective.

For instance, my research finds different patterns of engagement between different public authorities. While some public authorities showed their wholehearted support for informal cultural practices, others were happy to work with 'informal' actors towards joint goals, while others yet engaged in order to achieve compliance with their regulations. Further research could substantiate the extent to which policy-makers' engagement with informal practices can be understood as behavioural 'nudges' that intend to persuade others to adopt desired forms of behaviour (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Perhaps more importantly, additional work is required as the views represented in my thesis only offer a snapshot of a much bigger variety of public authorities' attitudes to informal cultural practices. Considering that the interviews with public authorities were brokered by 'informal' actors who had a good

relationship with them, they can be considered to be all broadly supportive of certain informal practices. Other public authorities who I contacted never replied or refused to talk to me after seeing a draft questionnaire – which could be indicative either of a lack of priority of such practices in their eyes or, indeed, a negative or hostile attitude towards them. The lack of representation of views of public authorities from Mumbai could have been due to the same reasons.

The different values that are placed upon informal cultural practices by policy-makers and ‘informal’ actors respectively are a key reason for tensions that arise in their relationship. Identifying the main priorities from both sides could provide a start for addressing existing challenges. The findings from my research suggest that many ‘informal’ actors and public authorities in London and Mumbai are interested in a collaborative relationship and keen to remove challenges to such practices. The results from a brief survey with a small sample of policy-makers from eight different cities¹² corroborate my findings. This survey revealed that policymakers in these cities were engaging with informal cultural practices due to a diverse range of objectives, including social and community motivations and urban regeneration. Informal cultural practices were also seen as expression of a city’s cultural vibrancy, diversity and distinctiveness. Thus, a range of measures have been put in place by cities in view of supporting and enabling informal cultural practices, from regulatory change in Stockholm to innovative finance models in Austin.

The survey respondents also recognised a number of challenges in relation to informal practices, including gentrification, planning regulations and a perceived

¹² These results are based on a short qualitative survey that I conducted in 2017 with a selection of policy-makers who participate in the World Cities Culture Forum. Responses were obtained from cultural policy-makers in Amsterdam, Austin, Edinburgh, New York City, Stockholm, Sydney, Taipei and Warsaw.

incompatibility of the informal with legislation. They further highlighted the close links between the informal and the formal within the cultural sphere (sometimes involving the same people), which complement and support one another, but which also make it more difficult to develop dedicated policy for this sector. Thus, they believed that in most cases the solutions to these various challenges did not require substantive strategy documents, but rather an influencing and 'tweaking' of policy positions across different city departments.

While these survey responses provide an interesting base line, they can only be seen as anecdotal evidence and further in-depth research is required with public authorities in London, Mumbai and cities across the world. This would also help assess the extent to which cultural policymakers in cities across the world are already acting on Mbaye & Dinardi's call (2018: 3) for "an engagement with the form of the informal" and an emphasis on "the value of collaboration as a platform for innovative policy design."

7.3.2 Cultural value and informality

As argued in section 7.2.3.1, my findings suggest that a re-appraisal of the conceptualisation of cultural value is required. As I have begun to outline above, such a reconceptualisation might consider a number of distinctive features of informal cultural practices, which have emerged from my research. Firstly, such a conceptualisation might consider aspects of liminality, transgression and creative subversion. Secondly, attention needs to be paid to the spontaneous, fleeting and ephemeral nature of many informal cultural practices.

Other aspects could equally be conceived to form a part of this re-appraised notion of cultural value. For instance, Edensor et al (2010) suggest that cultural value should be less defined in terms of 'innovation' (a common indicator used in cultural impact assessments and a key term in the debate around the knowledge and creative industries), but rather in terms of 'improvisation quality', as there is creativity in the maintenance of established tradition, too. Similarly, Crouch (2010: 139) draws attention to the subtle and slower creative interventions:

“Creativity is not pushy; it does not necessarily insist. The more explorative, uncertain and tentative ways in which our surroundings become engaged in living suggest a character of flirting, exemplified in the way one often comes across very familiar sites seeing new juxtapositions of materials and materialities, as it were, ‘unawares’. The unexpected opens out; we discover new ways of feeling, moving and thinking, however modest these may be, unsettling familiar and expected cultural resonances and the work of politics.”

Ideas such these only form the beginning of developing a more inclusive conception of cultural value that is able to capture the specifics of informal cultural practices. A genuine reconceptualisation of cultural value that addresses such issues goes beyond the remit of this thesis, but would provide an important future research project – and a necessary step – to further advance the understanding of informal cultural practices.

7.4 Conclusion

Collectively, the findings of my study support the existing literature on urban informality in the global South by rejecting dualist conceptions of the formal and the informal. Beyond merely pointing out an interconnectedness of formality and informality, my research draws attention to the complex negotiations that ‘informal’ actors engage in. The findings further emphasise that informality is a tool and tactical choice for many urban actors, deployed to fulfil actors’ varied aims and ambitions – which presents an important finding to explain the many different manifestations of informality.

By examining urban informality in the field of culture in both cities in the global South and the global North, the present study contributes a rare exchange of empirical knowledge and theories in relation to data from such different geographies.

My research is also novel in providing a detailed study not only of the “intimate and intricate relationship with the domain of the formal” (Mbaye & Dinardi, 2018: 13), but also of the multiplicity of urban informality in respect to culture. In other

words, the findings from this study go beyond the existing research both in terms of detail and in revealing the extent of the diversity and range of manifestations of informality.

Finally, my findings strongly challenge the predominant economic-deterministic interpretations of culture in the urban context and call for a shift in the debate, and in the kind of things that value is placed upon by academics and policy-makers alike. At the same time, I show that a reconceptualisation of cultural value is an important future research project to further advance the understanding of informal cultural practices.

However, it is important to note that my argument here does not licence a general, urban theory of (cultural) informality. As I have argued in section 3.1.2, care must be taken not to attempt to fit the diverse experiences of cities (and I would now add, of projects and ‘informal’ actors) into one universal theory. While my research finds common threads across the case studies, my thesis foregrounds the multiplicity of informal cultural practices, across and within different cities. Extending the research to other cases and other cities is an important future research agenda. Nonetheless, the findings from this study suggest that such future research would only add to the plurality of practices. Thus, my findings should be read as sensitising devices that remain both “testable and contestable” (Peck, 2015: 178).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Index of global cultural cities

This appendix provides an overview of the secondary data analysis I carried out in order to interrogate the feasibility and meaningfulness of establishing an index of global cultural cities, similar to the ones that exist in the economic sphere (e.g. the *Globalization and World City Index* produced annually by researchers at the Loughborough University).

1. Premises

I began by looking at the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) Index, one of the most widely used global cities indices, in view of identifying key aspects of such an index. As Beaverstock et al (1999) point out identifying cities that qualify for 'world' status is not an easy undertaking. They suggest using a functional approach which interrogates the "global capacity of cities"; that is, analysing the extent to which global firms are present in cities across the world. This presence of global firms is interpreted as concentration of expertise and knowledge in a city (Beaverstock et al, 1999).

In their review of existing city rankings, they note a lack of systematic approach and use of consistent criteria in order to create a global city roster. In attempting to address these issues, they apply a three-step process to their analysis: firstly, identifying relevant firms and their global locations in a particular sector; secondly, identifying the cities which host the greatest number of firm branches in that sector; and thirdly, identifying the cities which are most important across all the sectors considered. The sectors included in their resulting GaWC Index are all advanced producer services (namely accounting, advertising, banking

and law), however “there is room for other inventories emphasizing other aspects of world-cityness” (Beaverstock et al, 1999:457).

I decided that it was not appropriate to use exactly the same methodology, for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the GaWC index’ focus on large, multinational corporation does not fit with the prevalence of small businesses and organisations in the cultural sector (Pratt, 2006). However, the example highlights two features that should be considered when establishing an index: the combination of information from several sectors and a systematic approach to analysing the various composite factors.

Applying these features to the cultural sector, it becomes clear that any index of global cultural cities should look at a range of cultural domains and sub-sectors. This is especially important given the large diversity of governance and operating models within the sector, which includes a broad spectrum from commercial businesses to fully publicly funded organisations. Beaverstock et al’s work (1999) focuses exclusively on service firms (i.e. issues of production); however, given the role of cultural consumption in cities today, it seems important to consider this angle, too.

2. Presentation of data sets

In attempting to test the GaWC methodology in the cultural field, I began by considering what might be an appropriate proxy for cultural connections. I collated and analysed secondary data on nine ‘cultural global city networks’. The nine data sets, each representing a ‘global city network’, covered a range of cultural domains, including cultural heritage, art, film and fashion. It also considered networks at different stages of the cultural value chain, including networks with a primary focus on production, exhibition/distribution or consumption. These data sets did not provide a comprehensive coverage of the cultural sector. For instance, a brief glance over the data sets makes it obvious that they are all focusing on formal cultural forms. Also, other important issues such as the extent to which cities are hubs in cultural education and training, where creative innovations and trends emerge from, what editorial and curatorial ‘functions’ cities take on, were not considered due to data challenges.

However, for the purpose of illustration, they were deemed sufficient to interrogate the feasibility of the overall approach. Figure 18 below presents the nine data sets and the main information analysed in each.

Figure 18: Global cultural networks data sets, 2014

Data set	Description of collected information
Cultural heritage	Location of 347 national lead organisations of the 4 of the 5 main international, professional networks in the cultural heritage sector; representing museums (ICOM), heritage sites ((ICOMOS), libraries (IFLA) and publishing (IPA)
Archives	Location of 1,200+ members (individuals & organisations) of the International Council on Archives (ICA), the 5 th main international professional network in the cultural heritage sector
Film Festivals	Location of 1,700+ film festivals
Art Fairs	Location of 166 international art fairs
Exhibition attendances	Cities hosting the greatest number of top 10 exhibitions (in terms of attendance and across different genres)
CowParade public art	Location of 86 host cities
Auction sales	Location of top 50 auction houses (by sales)
Private art collectors	Location of 200 biggest private art collectors
Luxury fashion stores	Location of 3,700+ stores of top 10 luxury fashion brands

Given the importance of a systematic approach (Beaverstock et al, 1999), I applied a consistent method to scoring and aggregating these data sets. For each indicator, I established a ranking of cities. Cities within the top 10 were then awarded 2 points in the final index matrix, whereas cities ranking 11 to 20 received 1 point. Due to the particularities of the data, I had to take a slightly adapted approach for a small number of indicators. In these cases, I had an

unranked list of cities, all of which were awarded 2 points for inclusion in the final index matrix.

Based on the scoring criteria explained in section 2, a composite index was established including 126 cities. The composite scores reflect the discussion in the previous section; that is, there is considerable diversity in the different cultural networks. The majority of cities (77 cities) are top scoring in only one of the networks. Indeed, only 28 cities (22%) in the composite index are part of more than two networks. At the same time, there is a small number of cities that 'excels' across the cultural networks included: notably London (the only city that top scores in each of the nine networks), Paris (8 out of 9), New York and Tokyo (7 out of 9), and Hong Kong and Berlin (6 out of 9). Arguably, this small set of cities is what one might consider an 'alpha global' city in culture.

3. Discussion

The exercise showed that it might be possible to construct a city ranking based on cultural indicators and that some valuable insights may be gained from it. For instance, it highlights a small number of cities that is represented across most of the cultural networks. Arguably, this small set of cities is what would be considered a 'global' city in culture, in the sense of the GaWC debate. These cities tend to have a long history or 'track record' of being a cultural centre. They concentrate cultural producers, production facilities and expertise in specialist areas. They are able to 'afford' culture – in terms of maintaining cultural sites, and building or running cultural spaces. They can rely on large numbers of audiences and consumers, including very specialist audiences. These cities also offer links and connections with non-cultural sectors and their workforce: to political decision-makers as well as to other important sectors of the economy.

However, the data exercise also demonstrated that an approach that is inherently driven by economic considerations of value and by a need for solely quantitative data is greatly flawed and of limited meaning when it comes to culture. This is because the ontology of culture is fundamentally different from that of the economy in at least three ways, as I discuss hereafter.

Firstly, cultural data that can be measured at all is limited, flawed and does not necessarily indicate cultural value or power.

Across the data sets, I was forced to make pragmatic decisions, due to the lack of alternative data. As mentioned in section 0 above, this has resulted in the omission of informal practices from the exercise. Furthermore, some of the data sources are flawed. For instance, the film festival database used to determine the initial list of cities seems to be strongly biased towards cities in the Global North in general, and in North America in particular. This meant that I had to use a further two sources to cross-reference the data in order to be reasonably confident of having a global coverage.

This data paucity affects the construction of an index such as this: not only does it exclude all aspects or forms of culture that cannot easily be measured (such as informal cultural practices), but also what is measurable might not be the best indication of cultural value or power. An illustration of this is yet again the film festival data set, which looks at the number of film festivals that takes place in each city. However, the city of Cannes, that hosts undoubtedly one of the most respected film festivals in the world, does not appear anywhere near the top of the list. This clearly demonstrates that quantity does not necessarily match up to cultural influence, and suggests that there is a need for a different way to articulate the value of culture to cities more holistically.

Furthermore, a methodology that restricts the number of cities at the start of the analysis is pre-determining its results. This is made clear when comparing the slightly more than 300 cities included in the GaWC index (which Taylor et al, 2002, deem comprehensive of all world cities) to my own analysis which identified 1,344 cities that linked into one or more global cultural networks. Apart from the danger of neglecting important findings, an approach that pre-determines the cities included is problematic in that it introduces a large degree of subjectivity and personal judgement. The results are not only reduced to a smaller number, but also skewed towards a particular kind of cities. This suggests that an exploratory, grounded approach that does not foreclose the results of the enquiry is much more appropriate.

The second way in which the cultural sector is ontologically different from the economic realm is its great internal diversity, which render an aggregate index problematic. An example of this is the variety of organisational structures and business models in the sector, including commercial as well as not-for-profit activities. While a number of GaWC authors (Abrahamson, 2004; Beaverstock et al., 1999; Krätke & Taylor, 2004) claim that the global network of media firms can be interrogated and adequately described through the lens of the TNC, Pratt (2006) and Grabher (2001) have argued that the standard TNC structure does not apply to all media sectors, let alone to other areas of the cultural economy. Such structural differences are important to note as they are likely to be reflected in businesses' location choice, and hence in the precise configuration of a particular network. For instance, Pratt (2008) emphasises that cultural industries tend to co-locate and cluster, thus forming creative production networks; whereas the recent debate about regional imbalances of public support for arts organisations in England highlights the kind of administrative and political constraints that publically-funded organisations are bound to (Leland, 2014; Stark et al, 2013).

Thirdly, the very idea of a hierarchical classification is questioned by the fact that, in culture (perhaps unlike in the economic realm), there is a value to diversity *per se*. Much of the GaWC literature is based on the assumption that there exists a “‘hierarchy of spatial articulations’ where different spaces are integrated by different classes of cities from global to regional” (Taylor, 1997: 328). In line with this, the initial GaWC classification into Alpha, Beta and Gamma cities is considered to be a reflection of the cities' respective role as a hub of international, regional or sub-regional importance. However, in culture, this kind of hierarchical approach has limited value. While it may be possible, for instance, to identify regional cultural hubs, these are no more or less valuable than a city that concentrates and interlinks international cultural flows. Indeed, it might be true that cities with a greater economic capital are more easily able to operate at an international level, but from a cultural value perspective, they are simply different types of cultural expressions. Rather, it should be emphasised

that there is a value to diversity *per se* in culture which cannot be accounted for by hierarchical rankings.

Thus, while there are merits to establishing such an index, the danger is that any such composite score oversimplifies matters and brushes over important specifics of the subsector or the data set in question.

Appendix 2: Guidelines for presentation of empirical findings

This section details my approach to presenting the empirical data.

1. City identifiers

As argued in section 3.3.1, including two cities (one in the global ‘North’ and one in the global ‘South’) in my study has been an important element in order to achieve my research aim of interrogating the multiplicity of informal cultural practices. This is because it has helped to increase the range of informal practices that I could observe. Moreover, as Peck (2015: 178) argues, one may “fruitfully consult” comparisons between cities

“as a source of testable and contestable claims on causality, as a means of making non-proximate connections, as a means of glimpsing the processes and relations operating behind the backs of street-level actors, and as a means of rendering the familiar newly strange.”

However, Peck (2015: 178) also highlights that “unilateral declarations of local particularity” are not helpful. Indeed, whilst cities of London and Mumbai, as well as the preponderance of informality, may be very different, the processes at play and the issues that people face in deploying informality are often quite similar. And while ‘informal’ actors deal with such issues in multiple ways, these are only sometimes particular to one city, but not necessarily so.

Thus, while the cities of London and Mumbai provide an important context of analysis, the focus of my research is on the five specific informal cultural practices. By focussing on the specific practices of my case studies, I ensure that my research remains alert to the possibility that different practices within the same city may not be similar in all respects, but display differences, too. At the same time, there may be commonalities across practices in different cities. My aim, then, is to provide a multi-layered comparison that helps me to achieve my research aim; i.e. to interrogate the multiplicity of informal cultural practices in each city, as well as across cities.

In line with this, I do not use city identifiers in the presentation of my findings as a matter of course, but rather focus on the specific case studies. Notwithstanding this, I highlight any issues that are particular to a specific city where relevant.

2. Cross-case reporting

While the focus is on individual case studies, rather than cities, I do not present the data for each case study individually. This is in order to avoid constant repetition. Instead, I report on findings from across the five case study activities. This decision was taken following the analysis of my data by individual case study. This analysis of each individual case study activity found that – while certain thematic aspects are more important in some than in other case study activities – there is no exclusive homogeneity within, and heterogeneity between different case studies.

Instead, the themes that are discussed in the following chapters can be considered to cut across all five case study activities, albeit their importance may vary for specific thematic aspects. Any such particular emphasis (or lack thereof) in one or more case studies, is highlighted in the discussion. The discussion also highlights any cultural or geographical differences, and particularities of the form of practice that is being discussed, where relevant.

It is important to note that despite reporting the results across all five case studies, this does not amount to generalising across all activities. Quite the contrary, the discussion in the following chapters shows that there is a great multiplicity of informal cultural practices in terms of what motivates them, how they are deployed and how they relate to urban policy-making – both between and within case studies. Thus, I do not attempt to fit the diverse experiences of cities and practices around the world into one universal theory. Rather, it is a mere presentational choice in order to avoid recurrent repetitions of themes, as well as to highlight the multiplicity and range of practices within each theme.

3. Qualitative presentation of findings

In line with my overall qualitative research approach, I do not use statistics in presenting my detailed findings. While the number of references in relation to each theme is interesting, a simple focus on preponderance would be reductive and tells us little about the real meaning and importance of a particular thought. For instance, a greater number of data extracts or references pertaining to a particular theme might simply be the result of linguistic styles. Indeed, it was not uncommon for my interviewees to repeat themselves. And while in some cases, this may be a deliberate rhetorical choice in order to emphasise a certain concept, in others, it may have been a mere habit of speech. An example of such repetition is the following citation from one of my interviewees:

“We just do it for fun. We don't really do it for the money. We're doing it for the fun of it.” (B4, interview, 2015)

It is also worth pointing out that some ideas should be given weight in the analysis, even if they have been raised by as few as one or two interviewees. This is because these individuals might have a different perspective or specific knowledge and insights about the research subject that allow them to make different points. For instance, one of my interviewees was an activist and theorist, who reflected on the larger context of urban development and issues of public space during the course of his interview. He also talked about a number of historical and political developments that were instrumental in shaping the present shape and issues of the city of Mumbai. Although such broader issues were not brought up during most other interviews, they may still hold true for other cases and provide an important context to interpret the activity that he and other interviewees were part of.

Thus, instead of focusing on numeric importance, I present a range of views and responses. Indeed, my research aim to interrogate the multiplicity of informal cultural practices requires me to do so. This enables me to highlight major points along with other points that might be contributory factors. Finally, it permits me to draw out any potential contradictions between different responses.

Throughout the text I use examples to illustrate the theme I am discussing. In many cases, there were multiple examples from different case studies that I could have used for the purpose of illustration. However, in order to limit the length of the findings chapters, I restrict myself to giving only one example for each point. However, it is worth re-iterating that all interviews have been transcribed and analysed, and both transcriptions and analysis can be made available.

4. Attributions and citations

Pseudonyms are used for all participants who are cited in the study. These pseudonyms only give information about the type of case study which the participant belonged to, along with a randomly assigned number. The citation cypher is included in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Citation cypher

Case study	Code used in citations
Book sharing	BS [+Number]
Busking	B [+Number]
Guerrilla Gardening	GG [+Number]
Equal Streets	ES [+Number]
Spot Fix	SF [+Number]

Throughout the text, great care is also taken to ensure that no information that could lead to identification of particular individuals is disclosed.

The citations used in this study are the exactly transcribed words of my interviewees. Local expressions and phrases, as well as any grammatical errors, have not been changed or corrected.

Appendix 3: Interview guides

The following interview schedules provide an example of the question guides I used in my interviews with 'informal' actors and stakeholders. They were used as guide only. While in many interviews, the exact sequence or wording of the questions was not used, they all covered the thematic focus of the questions. The interview guides were also adapted slightly to accommodate any particularities of the case studies.

1. Theme guide for organiser interviews (spot fix case study)

Introduction

- Thanks for participating
- Reminder of aim of research
- Reminder of anonymity & confidentiality

Theme A: Type of activities

1. If you had to describe the initiative to someone who has never come across an idea like this, how would you describe it? What does it entail?
 - a. [If applicable]: What other activities does your organisation do? How different (if at all) is this initiative from your other activities? In what way?
2. Was this the first time that you personally have been involved in an initiative like this, or had you been involved in a similar activity before? If so, can you tell me about it?
 - a. [If applicable:] To what extent is the current initiative different from the previous activity?

Theme B: Planning and organisation

3. How did this initiative come about? Whose idea was it and how did you get involved?
4. How long did it take you to materialise the idea? Was it fairly spontaneous or did you have to plan this in advance?

- a. [if applicable:] How does this compare to other activities that you do/your organisation does?
5. What did you do in order to set up this initiative? Was there a formal process to follow (e.g. get authorisations for works)? If yes, what did it involve? And how did you go about it?
 6. Were there any guidelines/conditions that you had to comply with? (e.g. about the kind of improvements you make)? If yes, which ones?
 - a. [if applicable:]: Was this different from other activities that you're involved in? In what way (e.g. rules and regulations)?
 7. Did you set any guidelines/rules for the use of this space following your activity (put up a banner about keeping it clean)? If so, what are they? And how do you ensure that they are adhered to?
 8. How is the space maintained now?
 - a. Does anyone regularly check up on it, or goes back to clean it? Who takes responsibility for this (and how is this organised)? What else needs to be done to maintain it?
 - b. Do you have a formal organisational structure? How is the continuous running of the initiative organised? Who takes responsibility for this?
 9. Do you live locally?
 - a. [if applicable]: Do you often get involved in activities locally or are you involved in activities further afield? If so, why?

Theme C: Preparation and training

10. What are your professional training and qualifications? In what way (if any) are they connected to the initiative?
11. In your view, what does it take to set up an initiative like this? (e.g. what kind of training/education do you need? Do you need a particular attitude? If so, what kind?)

Theme D: Resources

12. Is your involvement with this initiative/this organisation your main occupation? [Or do you consider it to be recreational?]

- a. [If applicable] Roughly what proportion of your time do you spend on this initiative/your activities with this organisation?
- b. [If applicable] Do you have another occupation at the same time? If so, what else do you do?
- c. [If applicable] Why do you have another occupation? How important is it for you to have both? Do you find it difficult to do several things at the same time? If so, in what way? Or are the two complementary? If so, in what way?
- d. [If applicable] Does your involvement with this initiative/this organisation affect your other occupation (in a positive or negative way) and how you approach it? (e.g. Does it give you greater independence/freedom to work fewer days in another occupation? Does it affect your commitment and attitude towards the other occupation?)

13. How is this initiative funded?

14. What other resources did and do you need in order to set up and maintain this initiative?

Theme E: Networks

15. Did anyone help you with the set up and maintenance of this space (e.g. provided advice on how to fix it, transport material, helped with the cleaning)? If yes, are they friends and family or are they more 'formal' acquaintances? And are they individuals or do they work for an organisation?

- a. [If applicable:] Are they the same people you engage with on other occasions?

16. Are you aware of similar initiatives in Mumbai?

- a. If so which ones? Can you provide me with their details?
- b. What is the role of wider networks like The Ugly Indian and Mumbai Rising. Do you connect with them? If so, in what way?

17. In setting up and maintaining the space, did you deal with any other bodies, such as public authorities, police, private landowners, adjacent businesses etc.?

- a. [if applicable:] Did you ever come into conflict with any of these? If so, why?

Theme F: Motivations and outcomes

18. Why did you decide to set up/get involved in the initiative? What were you hoping to get out of it? And would you say this happened?
 - a. [If applicable:] And are your rationales any different from other initiatives/activities that you/your organisation get involved in?
19. How do you make a decision on whether you get involved in an initiative or not? What factors are important to you in that decision-making?
20. How important is your involvement in this initiative to you personally/to your lifestyle? If you weren't involved in this initiative, what else might you be doing?
21. What were the biggest challenges of setting up the initiative?
 - a. [If applicable:] To what extent were they different (if at all) from other initiatives that you are involved in?
22. In your view, what is the value of an initiative like this in a city like Mumbai? What contribution do they make?
23. Would you like to tell me anything else that you feel is important about the initiative that we haven't covered yet?

2. Theme guide for organiser focus group (spot fix case study)

Introduction

- Go around the table and briefly introduce yourself: your name, what is your main occupation, one thing that you really like/care about in this city and one thing that you don't like

Theme A: Type of activities

1. If you had to describe the initiative to someone who has never come across an idea like this, how would you describe it? What does it entail?

Theme B: Planning and organisation

2. How did this initiative come about? Whose idea was it and how did you get involved?
3. How long did it take you to materialise the idea? Was it fairly spontaneous or did you have to plan this in advance?
4. What did you do in order to set up this initiative? Was there a formal process to follow (e.g. get authorisations for works)? If yes, what did it involve?
5. Were there any guidelines/conditions that you had to comply with? (e.g. about the kind of improvements you make)? If yes, which ones?
 - a. [if applicable]: Was this different from other activities that you're involved in? In what way (e.g. rules and regulations)?
6. Did you set any guidelines/rules for the use of this space (put up a banner about keeping it clean)? If so, which? And how do you ensure that they are adhered to?
7. How is the space maintained now?
 - a. Does anyone regularly check up on it, or goes back to clean it? Who takes responsibility for this? What else needs to be done to maintain it?
 - b. Do you have a formal organisational structure? How is the continuous running of the initiative organised? Who takes responsibility for this?

Theme C: Preparation and training

8. In your view, what does it take to set up an initiative like this? (e.g. what kind of training/education do you need? Do you need a particular attitude? If so, what kind?)

Theme D: Resources

9. Is your involvement with this initiative/this organisation your main occupation?
10. How much time do you spend on this initiative?
11. Does your involvement with this initiative affect your other occupation (in a positive or negative way)? Is there any cross-over? Can you take anything from this initiative and apply it in another area of your (professional or personal) life?
12. How is this initiative funded?
13. What other resources did and do you need in order to set up and maintain this initiative?

Theme E: Networks

14. Did anyone help you with the set up and maintenance of this space (e.g. provided advice on how to fix it, transport material, helped with the cleaning)? If yes, are they friends and family or are they more 'formal' acquaintances? And are they individuals or do they work for an organisation?
15. Are you aware of similar initiatives in Mumbai?
 - a. What is the role of wider networks like The Ugly Indian and Mumbai Rising. Do you connect with them? If so, in what way?
16. In setting up and maintaining the space, did you deal with any other bodies, such as public authorities, police, private landowners, adjacent businesses etc.?
 - a. [if applicable:] Did you ever come into conflict with any of these? If so, why?

Theme F: Motivations and outcomes

17. [Go around the group:] What was the main reason for you to get involved in the initiative?
18. How do you make a decision on whether you get involved in an initiative or not? What factors are important to you in that decision-making?
19. [If you weren't involved in this initiative, what else might you be doing?]
20. What are the biggest challenges of setting up the initiative? And to what extent are they different (if at all) from other initiatives that you are involved in?
21. [Go around the group:] In your view, what is the main contribution of an initiative like this in a city like Mumbai?

3. Theme guide for external stakeholders (busking case study)

Introduction

- Thanks for participating
- Reminder of aim of research
- Reminder of anonymity & confidentiality

Section 1: Your role

1. What is your role and its remit?
2. What kind of organisations and activities do you come into contact in your work?
3. What was your role in relation to the Greenwich Street Performer Festival?

Section 2: About the Festival

4. Did you provide any funding to the Festival? Who (else) funded it?
5. Can you tell me how the Festival came about? Why the focus on street performers? Why did you decide to support it?
6. How does the event fit with wider activities that you support/engage with? How different (if at all) is it from other events that you support? And in what way?
7. Was this the first time you came across a street performance festival in your work?
8. Were there any differences in the working with a street performance festival as compared to other arts festivals that you might have supported/authorised? If so, what was different? Did you have specific guidelines/regulations (e.g. regarding collecting donations)? If so, which?
9. Were there any other challenges particular to working with a street performers festival (e.g. attitudes, language, expectations etc.)
10. The Greenwich Street Performer Festival coincided with the National Busking Day (initiated by the Greater London Authority). Were there any other activities within the Greenwich Borough that link to the National Busking Day? If so, which?

Section 3: Other busking activities in the Borough

11. Does the Council have a policy towards busking and street performances? Does the Council encourage these practices? Under what circumstances/conditions? If not, why not?
12. Are you aware of the Busk In London code of conduct, championed by the GLA?
13. If so, did you/Greenwich Council sign up to it? If not, why not?
14. In your view, in what way is a Festival like the Greenwich Street Performer Festival different from other busking activities?

Section 4: Outcomes

15. Would you say that the Greenwich Street Performer Festival achieved its aims?
16. In your view, what did the street performers get out of participating in the Festival? Do you think they got anything out of it that they couldn't get out of performing in other contexts?
17. In your view, what did audiences get out of participating in the Festival? Do you think they got anything out of it that they couldn't get out of listening to a street performance elsewhere?
18. In your view, is there a value to street performances in a city like London? If yes, what contribution do they make?
19. In your view, what is the value of an initiative like National Busking Day?

Appendix 4: Ethical approval

1. Ethical approval confirmation



Undergraduate, Postgraduate & Research Programmes
Economics
International Politics
Psychology
Sociology
Northampton Square
London EC1V 0HB
Tel: +44(0)20 7040 8508
Fax: +44(0)20 7040 8560
www.city.ac.uk/social
Date 24 May 2016

To whom it may concern:

Principal Investigator: Ulrike Chouguley
Project Title: Behind the scenes of world cities' cultural show: exploring the boundaries and value of informal cultural practices in London and Mumbai
Supervisors: Prof Andy C Pratt
Degree: PhD
Start Date: 18/07/2015
End Date: 31/12/2015
Approval Date: 17 July 2015

This is to confirm that the research proposal detailed above was granted formal approval by the MCCI Committee. CCI projects now fall under the remit of the Sociology Research Ethics Committee. Please note the following:

Project amendments

You will need to submit an Amendments Form to the Deputy Chair [redacted] if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research:

- (a) recruit a new category of participants;
- (b) change, or add to, the research method employed;
- (c) collect additional types of data;
- (d) change the researchers involved in the project.

Adverse events

You will need to submit an Adverse Events Form to the Deputy Chair of the Committee [redacted] copied to the Secretary of Senate Research Ethics Committee [redacted] in the event of any of the following:

- (a) adverse events;
- (b) breaches of confidentiality;
- (c) safeguarding issues relating to children and vulnerable adults;
- (d) incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher.

Issues (a) and (b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than 5 days after the event. Issues (c) and (d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, then please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the Sociology Research Ethics Committee, I hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

Dr Diana Yeh
[redacted]

City University London
Northampton Square
London, EC1V 0HB
Email: [redacted]

2. Information sheet for research participants

INFORMATION SHEET

Behind the scenes of world cities' cultural show: exploring the boundaries and value of informal cultural practices in London and Mumbai

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study examines a range of different informal cultural practices in London and Mumbai.

The aim is to better understand informal cultural practices and to find out, from the people who are involved in them, how they view and define them. Moreover, the research wants to explore what these practices mean to different actors, why they engage in them, and in what ways these activities add value to the life in cities like London or Mumbai.

Why have I been invited?

As part of this study, interviews will be carried out with practitioners, organisers and external stakeholders (such as policy-makers). You have been selected to take part in this research due to your unique perspective as a *[practitioner/organiser/stakeholder]*.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

The interview lasts approximately 30-45 minutes and is conversational in style. You are asked to tell us about your views and experience of your practice at *[insert name of event/activity]*. The interview is recorded, transcribed and analysed. No personal data that might allow identification is collected nor are any intrusive questions asked. Anonymised quotes may be used in publications.

What will happen after my participation?

The findings are published as a PhD thesis and in academic articles. If you would like, you can receive a summary of the findings when the study is finished.

It is hoped that the study will contribute to a greater understanding of the role of informal cultural practices in our cities today and help policy-makers to take more informed decisions in this area.

Your interview transcript is kept for 5 years before they are permanently deleted. Within this time period, your information may be analysed again for a follow-up research project by the researcher. All data is confidential and is kept in secure storage only accessible by the researcher.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City University London Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Culture and Creative Industries.

Further information and contact details

Researcher: Ulrike Chouguley [REDACTED]

Supervisor: Prof C Andy Pratt [REDACTED]

Research Ethics Committee: Anna Ramberg [REDACTED]

(if you wish to lodge a complaint)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

3. Consent form for research participants



**CITY UNIVERSITY
LONDON**

CONSENT FORM

Exploring informal cultural practices in London and Mumbai

Please initial box

1.	<p>I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records.</p> <p>I understand this will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be interviewed by the researcher • allow the interview to be audiotaped 	
2.	<p>This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication as a PhD thesis • Publication in academic articles • A potential future research project by the researcher <p>I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.</p>	
3.	<p>I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.</p>	
4.	<p>I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.</p>	
5.	<p>I agree to take part in the above study.</p>	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

4. Ethical approval extension confirmation



Northampton Square
London EC1V 0HB
Tel +44(0)20 7040 8508
Fax +44(0)20 7040 8580
www.city.ac.uk/social

Date 2 July 2016

To whom it may concern:

Principal Investigator: Ulrike Chouguley
Project Title: Behind the scenes of world cities' cultural show: exploring the boundaries and value of informal cultural practices in London and Mumbai
Supervisors: Prof Andy C Pratt
Degree: PhD

Ethics Approval for Project Extension

Submitted: 2 July 2016
Approval Date: 2 July 2016

This is to confirm that the amendment/extension detailed above has been granted formal approval by the Sociology Research Ethics Committee. Please note the following:

Project amendments

You will need to submit an Amendments Form to the Deputy Chair [REDACTED] if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research:

- (a) recruit a new category of participants;
- (b) change, or add to, the research method employed;
- (c) collect additional types of data;
- (d) change the researchers involved in the project.

Adverse events

You will need to submit an Adverse Events Form to the Deputy Chair of the Committee [REDACTED] copied to the Secretary of Senate Research Ethics Committee [REDACTED] in the event of any of the following:

- (a) adverse events;
- (b) breaches of confidentiality;
- (c) safeguarding issues relating to children and vulnerable adults;
- (d) incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher.

Issues (a) and (b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than 5 days after the event. Issues (c) and (d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, then please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the Sociology Research Ethics Committee, I hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

Dr Diana Yeh

[REDACTED]
City University London
Northampton Square
London EC1V 0HB
Email: [REDACTED]

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