Spaces of Secular Faith? Shared assets and intangible values in diverse and changing communities.

In the current political climate, questions of shared identities, inclusive communities and public spaces are of utmost urgency. Compounded by the context of austerity, the value and purpose of public spaces is under question. This paper argues that the established boundaries and categories limit the ability to bring about progressive change in this situation. Urban planning categorises 'places of worship' as tangible and discrete entities. The broader, more societal value of spaces such as churches remains unsaid and ill-defined, as does the intangible, spiritual value of public and community spaces. The paper presents four diverse spaces within Bristol, UK. It explores how their current and potential future use both challenge and are challenged by the context of postsecularism, austerity and community divisions. By conceptualising them as implicit sacred spaces which can transgress established boundaries- of both planning policy and categorical religiosity- the paper questions the meaning, possibilities and problems of 'municipal spirituality'.

1.1 Introduction

Spaces which function as some sort of community asset, but are not necessarily owned or run by the community, or the public sector, are ubiquitous across UK cities and towns but seldom systematically considered by mechanisms of urban management and governance. This is further complicated by the lack of a clear divide in terms of practices and daily usage between some places of worship, some former places of worship and various nominally secular spaces and buildings. This includes, but is not limited to, places such as community halls, redundant churches, arts centres and other arts spaces, libraries, community leisure facilities such as swimming pools and dance spaces, and halls and other spaces within church premises[1]. Where and if boundaries between such places should be drawn is much more complicated, changing and arbitrary than policy classifications suggest. These issues are particularly salient in modern hyper-diverse and multi-faith times (Peterson, 2017), with newer religious practices challenging boundaries between dwelling, education and worship (Gale, 2008). Further, new questions of 'appropriate' scale and location of places of worship also arise in this context (Greed, 2016). These questions and challenges begin to expose some of the assumptions made about what constitutes religion and its relationship to urban planning.

Moreover, these debates should be set within the current political and economic climate. Firstly, the decade of 'austerity' politics in the UK has placed increasing pressure on local authorities to sell off, close down, asset transfer or rationalise their stock of assets; including libraries, children's centres, public toilets and parks (Locality, 2018). Alongside critiques that this is motivated by political ideology rather than a neutral logic of economic efficiency, this paper suggests that the scale and nature of what is being lost is not fully understood or articulated in mainstream debates. Secondly, there is a sense of increasing fragmentation and degeneration between groups and communities, represented symbolically by the Brexit vote, but building upon increasing instances of racial abuse (Bulman, 2017), residential segregation in terms of both ethnicity and class and more broadly an atomisation of the workforce within increase casualization and the 'gig' economy (Katz & Kruger, 2016). Wider social trends of

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[1] For a greater understanding of the sorts of spaces considered here see:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyWhToLwcd4 . This is discussed more fully later in the paper.

disintegration are unlikely to be stemmed when shared spaces of potential 'encounter' (Peterson, 2017) such as libraries and community centres are being lost.

Conceptually, these issues should be framed within a context of postsecular urbanism (Baker and Beaumont, Baker, 2016); wherein the processes of secularisation continue (in a Global north/European context), but a myriad range of faiths, beliefs and spiritualties re-emerge, challenging the notion that secularisation is a uni-direction journey towards the extinction of religion (McLennan, 2010, 2011). In this context, there is 'a poor quality of conversation about religions and beliefs alongside their growing prevalence and visibility' (Baker and Dinham, 2017, p2). By assuming itself to be neutral on matters of religion, secular liberalism does not see that this in itself is a value position, and one in which certain definitions of religion are relied on at the exclusion of others. A more active engagement with these issues, and their implications for contemporary cities is needed to take the debate forwards.

To explore the issues around 'community' buildings and spaces, there is a need to look beyond the assumptions which underpin categorisations of places and practices based on assumed divides between 'religious' and 'secular'. To do so, it is necessary to consider how implicit religion (Bailey, 1997, 2010) plays out spatially. What places enable or promote practices which can be categorised as implicit religion? How are spaces and cityscapes shaped by practices of implicit religion, or more generally by practices which transgress assumptions about secular and sacred spaces or categories of 'worship' or 'community use'? Moreover, how does the loss of public and community spaces impact on practices of 'municipal spirituality' (author, 2015): the role of civic institutions in providing and promoting spaces which allow access to transcendence and the common good for an undefined generic public. By asking these questions, the paper reframes the debate about community assets, making it respond to the challenges of post-secular urbanism. This, in turn, demonstrates the importance of such places in promoting more holistic notions of human well-being and offering the potential to overcome contemporary toxic societal fragmentation on the micro, everyday scale. Bringing issues in urban planning together with the conceptual lens of implicit religion opens up a (reframed) research agenda to carry forward questions of postsecular austerity urbanism, belonging and values.

The paper does this with reference to four different places within the city of Bristol, UK. They are each presented in a short film and discussed at greater length below. Next, the paper explores the issues emerging from both the context, and the ways in which planners and urban managers view and codify places. It then defines the idea of *implicit sacred space*, drawing on and spatializing the idea of implicit religion with reference to the notion of 'municipal spirituality' (author, 2015). In turn, this idea demonstrates how boundary management and category formation impact on the definitions and ascribed value of places. This is important as it will show how the notion of implicit sacred space not only transgresses current boundaries and categories in both planning and popular thought, but could promote meaningful everyday encounters and also rearticulate the (implicitly) spiritual value of a range of places which are currently under-funded or under threat. After describing the four places mentioned above, demonstrating similarities and differences, which would be occluded by a standard divide between 'religious' and 'secular', the paper concludes by considering the implications of this analysis both for concepts of religion, and for the practice of urban planning.

2.1 *Spaces for social cohesion (and maybe something more?)*

The current political debate in the UK at the municipal/local government level is dominated by the climate of austerity economics. Public assets, such as parks, public toilets and libraries are increasingly being seen as public liabilities viewed through the lens of economic rationality. These shared spaces are being lost; be they previously public-owned or run by community groups/voluntary sector organisations who are now unable to get grant funding for their upkeep. This loss of shared, communal assets needs to be seen within the socio-political context of mistrust and deep divisions epitomised by the Brexit vote in the UK and the subsequent rise of racist abuse and violence. The ongoing removal of places where people may mix with others from different backgrounds is fundamentally problematic in this context. Residential segregation is still strongly in evidence in cities throughout the UK, although the patterns increasingly complex and difficult to measure (Catney, 2017, Harris, 2014, Gale, 2013), this is bringing with it fewer opportunities for 'encounter' between different groups and individuals. This is compounded by the notion that social media- growing in importance as a means of socialisation and conversation- is an 'echo-chamber'; somewhere people will seek out and therefore only hear like-minded individuals (Garimella et al, 2018). Without (physical) places where people are able to mix with others who do not share the same educational background, views, religion, income and other such demographic factors, albeit on a brief and passing manner, the deep divisions, and their attendant problems will only increase. These claims are supported by writers arguing for the importance of 'encounter' in planning for, and maintaining a multi-cultural society (Fincher and Iveson, 2008, Peterson, 2017). Authors argue for the importance of people from different backgrounds meeting each other, from fleeting interactions to more sustained dialogues. However, commentators also note the need to be cautious about the claims which are made: '(t)here is a danger of mistaking social expectations of urban civility for 'meaningful contact' (Valentine and Harris, 2016, p916). Simply because people from different backgrounds are inhabiting the same space does not mean that they necessarily have any sense of shared understanding or values. However, without such spaces, the possibility for 'encounter' therein is lost, compounding the damaging divisions between groups and individuals.

These issues and debates need to be framed in the broader context of postsecularism as mentioned above. There is neither the scope nor the intention to rehearse debates about the meaning(s) of postsecularism in any depth here. However, it is important here highlight that notions of religious decline, or peripheralisation, have not been uniform and therefore create myriad opinions, beliefs and needs within contemporary cities (Baker and Beaumont, 2011, McLennan, 2010). Moreover, this makes the classification of religion into a designated 'place of worship' something problematic in both theory and practice, yet somethings which remains largely unexplored in planning practice.

2.2 *Planning and Religion*

2.2.1 *Policy Considerations and Framings*

Moreover, practices and regulations of Town Planning have little interaction with ideas of religion, spirituality and theology, and research about urban planning and faith and belief is very limited with notable exceptions discussed below. However, both planning and religion- explicit or implicit- have a central role in shaping people's daily lives, and this disconnect is therefore problematic (Greed, 2016b, Beebeejaun, 2012). For the purpose of this paper a

brief overview of the English[2] planning system is necessary to contextualise the case studies and the later discussions. Since 1947, the right to develop land has been nationalised, meaning to build anything, or change the use of an existing building, planning permission has had to be sought from the respective local authority. To guide whether planning permission should or should not be granted, there are policies, the format and titles of which have changed over the last sixty years. Some of these are at local level, some at regional/sub-regional level and some national. The latest, and currently most important document in terms of framing the overall orientation of planning policy is the National Planning Policy Framework (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018). It is interesting to note that the terms 'religion', 'religious' and 'faith' do not feature at all within this, whereas the term 'place of worship' features only three times. In the section entitled 'Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy' (p15), places of worship are listed alongside other local services and community facilities in villages. The second is in 'Promoting Healthy Communities'(p23) where places of worship are listed alongside shops and sports facilities, and the third mention (p47) includes places of worship in a list of what needs to be considered in local plans (the tool which local authorities develop to make national policy directly applicable to their own localities). In contrast, the term 'economic' is mentioned 45 times, with 'economy' getting an additional eleven mentions, and 'social' receives 24 mentions. This brief analysis of the NPPF highlights the lack central governmental of engagement planning policy has with issues of religion.

Aside from this, it is important to return to the idea of changing the use of a building. The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order (UCO) 1987 outlines four categories of use of buildings, each of which are subdivided into more detailed uses, with a fifth category *sui generis*, for anything which does not fit the previous four. Very broadly, planning permission is needed to change to use of a building – this being defined by its use alternating from one category to another. The original purpose of which would have been to safeguard the varied and appropriate functions of a town, city, village or suburb. The buildings discussed in this paper are likely to all fall into Part D: 'non-residential institutions and building used for leisure activities and meetings'- some in D1 and some in D2 (see footnote for a full classification[3]), but this classification inadequately defines the distinctive features of these places (and others which share these features) in the way which it conceptualises their value(s). The paper does not claim that the current structure and categorisations of planning as demonstrated in the Use Classes Order is causing problems to the running of community spaces, but that discussion of UCO reveals much about the categorical definitions that structure planning's 'mind-set'. In turn this demonstrates the rationale on which planning judgements are made, judgements which, in the long history of planning thought and debate, should be based within

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[2] At times and in some instances, what is described here is also relevant to the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish systems. Due to different legal and policy frameworks, and more recently devolved governments, the paper will just discuss the English system as this is what is relevant for this research.

[3] Part D

D1 Non-residential institutions - Clinics, health centres, crèches, day nurseries, day centres, schools, art galleries (other than for sale or hire), museums, libraries, halls, places of worship, church halls, law court. Non residential education and training centres.

D2 Assembly and leisure - Cinemas, music and concert halls, bingo and dance halls (but not night clubs), swimming baths, skating rinks, gymnasiums or area for indoor or outdoor sports and recreations (except for motor sports, or where firearms are used).

an understanding of promoting 'the public interest' (see Campbell and Marshall, 2002, Tait, 2016 for good overviews of the debate). This means that the distinctions drawn between categories of use should meaningfully relate to issues that are central to people's lives. They should reflect meaningful categories of difference so to be able to protect and promote spaces and places which are in 'the common good' otherwise planning would become a meaningless bureaucratic exercise. In this, questions of 'better and worse' ways of life should frame the decision-making processes and categories of planning. At present, issues of holistic well-being, including religious or spiritual values are not systematically considered as part of planning decisions, nor do they form a substantive part of the current government's definition of the rationale of planning. Planning focuses solely on the instrumental aspects of social life, weakening its ability to promote or understand questions of religion or spirituality.

2.2.2 Faith, Place and Planning Research

Moreover, engagement with explicitly religious places, or the concept of explicit religion is under-researched within planning. Despite burgeoning work in the related areas of human and cultural geographies and sociology (including Tse, 2014, Dywer, 2016, Smith et al, 2013), there is very little engagement with religion - in terms of practices or theories- within planning, either academic or policy. There are some notable exceptions to this in the areas of faith and regeneration, planning for places of worship- including majority Black Christian Churches and Mosques (Greed, 2016a, Gale, 2008). There is interesting work on the role of faith groups in regeneration (Dinham & Lowndes, 2008, Dinham et al, 2009, Dinham, 2011), however attention here is on people's role in established state processes, framed within a notion of explicit religion. The focus is on the actions and motivations of those within established formal religious congregations, communities and organisations, rather than examining motivations of all actors in regeneration initiatives to explore whether there are behaviours which fit definitions of religion. This maintains rather than transgresses established boundaries. In discussing implicit religion within faith groups engaged in social action, Smith notes that there can be 'an implicit assumption that the 'core business' of the faith does not include social action (Smith, 2004, p175). He goes on to argue that this is problematic because it can both inhibit good works being done, and suggest that maintaining this divide extends/supports the processes of secularisation:

> One common assumption is that the church or mosque gets involved in social work as part of the process of secularisation, as it seeks to make itself relevant in a world where the 'sacred canopy' no longer exists and where belief in the divine has become implausible. However, if we define secularisation in terms of religion losing influence over various spheres of social life that it once controlled, then the real secularisers are the dualists who by concentrating on the metaphysical and spiritual realms, leave the material and social realms to the mercy of secularists, the market, the state and the devil! (Smith, 2004, p177-178)

This discussion is useful as it demonstrates what some of the issues that emerge from the maintenance of established boundaries between sacred and secular. It is acknowledged both in Smith's (2004) findings and in the argument of this paper, that the divide between faith and social action, is by no means accepted by many people. Participants from a range of faiths outline how social action is in itself the outworking of religious belief (Smith, 2004, p163-165),

superseding the standard divides between secular and sacred in space and action. This policy engagement with the 'faith sector' is reflected in government agendas from Tony Blair's *Faith Community Liaison Group* to Cameron's *Big Society* (Kettle, 2012). However, by maintaining a clear distinction between religious and non-religious activities and peoples in such initiatives (Ahmed, 2003), the scope for action is limited by definition as are the possibility for seeing the value and distinctiveness of actions, places and people which transgress this divide. Moreover, both Blair and Cameron's attempts at faith based social engagement have received much criticism, both in terms of what they exclude or privilege, or in Cameron's case, how this became inextricably entwined with austerity politics and economics. The sacred/secular boundary here serves to reinforce problematic divides, both in terms of conceptualisations of places and people, and also in practice as it creates artificial barriers between potentially shared interests.

Turning back directly to planning practices and policy, the work of Greed (2016b) outlines the problems planners and planning have in dealing with the less readily quantifiable social needs of people, specifically in relation to places of worship, and within this, places of worship which do not conform to standard Anglican norms. Ethnocentric norms which guide notions of 'genuine requirements' can cause issues with the number of parking places required; both routine services and special occasions such as funerals attract far more participants than is commonplace amongst white Christian churches. Additionally times and days of use vary from understandings framed around English norms. In a related vein, Gale (2008, also Gale & Naylor, 2002) explores how planning proposals for Mosque developments challenge (white, Christian-centric) understandings of 'places of worship', both in terms of their role within a wider (indigenous English) landscape, and the way they unsettle the boundaries between 'home', 'education' and 'place of worship. Sandercock and Senbel's (2011) discussion of planning in a postsecular context points to the need to be attentive to the wider spiritual values latent within cityscapes, and visions of future urban development, challenging the rationalist underpinnings of much contemporary planning practice. Their argument hints at the spiritual importance of places which are not defined as places of worship, and of experiences of religion which are not explicitly categorised as such.

These works demonstrate the problematic (lack of) engagement of planning with religion and the meaning it holds within peoples' lives. The limited and restricted understanding of religion which is within these planning practices leads to difficulties in accommodating the needs and wishes of groups and individuals whose religious beliefs and practices diverge from supposed traditional white European Christianity. This challenge is important in unpicking some of the imperialist norms within which planning practice remains framed (Beebeejaun, 2004, 2012), but attention also needs to be paid to implicit religious and spiritual practices which can be overlooked by these mainstream definitions of world religions and the subsequent delegitimisation of practices and places which fall outside of this. Such ideas are explored in discussions of the implicit religious values of nature and how Environmentalism works as a form of implicit religion (Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997, Nelson, 2014, Dunlap, 2006). These works demonstrate beliefs and attitudes which are not articulated as part of an established faith, but hold within them the understandings and attributes of religion. The paper next explores how the idea of implicit religion can be of use in understanding the value of urban community spaces, and how this develops the idea of municipal spirituality. Taking Edward Bailey's (2010, p275, emphasis added) key question of '(C)an our understanding of apparently secular *behaviours* be enhanced by asking whether they contain within themselves … any

element of some kind of religiosity that may be inherent to themselves?' as a starting point, this paper applies this approach to conceptualising *places;* namely developing the idea of implicitly sacred places.

3.1 *Municipal Spirituality and Implicit Sacred Space*

The notion of 'municipal spirituality' (author 2015) is an attempt to define, within planning theory, a quality or qualities of a place which do not fit the definition of a place of worship, but instead offers access to, or engenders a spiritual experience or quality. In parallel with the idea of implicit religion, municipal spirituality identifies religiosity beyond the formal, established definitions. Drawing on the latent qualities in public cemeteries, community assets and means of valuing nature, the argument for 'municipal spirituality' points to places which offer connections to the transcendent; something outside of the instrumentality of everyday life, but not necessarily tied to an established or even loosely articulated (world) religion. It can represent access to something more, something beyond instrumental rationality for those who would not readily look for this or express any explicitly religious views or feelings. Moreover, this something which urban planning should promote and defend as a necessary part of daily life, alongside other more commonly understood requirements such as housing and retail space; hence their 'municipality'. Places of 'municipal spirituality' both allow for and demonstrate the possibility of there being something other than the material, tangible, the readily discernible present and accessible (however ephemerally) in contemporary everyday life. Moreover, and fundamentally related to this sense of the transcendent, such places suggest a sense of connection to the common good- the possibility of being part of a community which is meaningful because of its shared connections (author 2018). This directly parallels Eliade's (1961) notion of sacred space, as utilised by Bartkowski & Swearingen (1997) to discuss the role of implicit religion in the way environmentalists value in Barton Springs in Austin, Texas; Specifically, sacred space provides 'nodal access'- it is *where* communities can encounter the transcendent. Secondly, it is 'communal' and 'demarcative'; it is what brings a community together, and what differentiates it from the 'outside', seeing this as a way to 'define the relationship of the community to the larger universe' (Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997, p 310, citing Eliade, 1961, p36-47).

This differs from the idea of 'Social Capital' (Putnum, 1990, Phillips, 2016) which is readily used in the planning literature when discussing the value of shared connections which make up community.   Social capital emphasises the instrumental benefits of community connections- how individuals benefit from having links with each other. Conversely, with a notion of implicit sacred space, community becomes the core location of ethical decision making and reasoning (cf MacIntyre, 1997, and see author, 2018 for how this applies to planning), and a means of finding a substantive collective basis for this. This concept relies on a definition of religion (or spirituality) which does conform with traditional boundaries, instead pursuing the argument that such boundaries both occlude important universal qualities which are needed for the continuation of successful (not measured economically) places, and in turn brings about a paucity of language to describe, define and defend the currently existing spaces and place which promote connections to a common good and to ideas of transcendence outside of traditional or mainstream notions of religion.

Municipal spirituality highlights the importance of places offering access to shared belonging and transcendence in a way which is not informed or shaped by established religions. It brings into focus the 'religious' elements of nominally secular places- community centres, pubs, allotments, civic cemeteries, sports facilities for example. However, it does not claim that all community centres, pubs, allotments, civic cemeteries, and sports facilities hold spiritual qualities. Paralleling Bailey's (2010) question about the value in asking whether secular behaviours can be better understood through the deployment of religious categories of understanding, 'municipal spirituality' asks of places whether the value of 'secular' places can be better understood through examining their non-instrumental, non-functional uses. Instead of looking for the *function* a place provides: following the previous examples respectively, meeting space, beer, somewhere to grow vegetables, hygienic disposal of dead bodies and exercise, municipal spirituality looks for the emotions and relationships engendered within a space – connections (beyond standard family and friendship groups) with other human or non-human actors, or with a sense of history, or broader intangible presence, feelings of belonging and collective ownership and exchange and interactions which are not governed by the market. Changing the focus in this way allows for spaces and places to be understood and valued differently. It identifies a different set of needs which require new ways of assessment. This change of focus challenges established boundaries and categories of space; not just formally in terms of planning policy or Use Class, but also in broader common understandings.

Using the assumed boundaries of explicit religion, policy understandings frame places of worship as 'sacred spaces', consequently, everywhere else is profane, or at least secular. This is problematized by postsecularism which challenges the privatisation and compartmentalisation of religion as something for 'people of faith', happening in (designated) places of worship. Attention to ideas of implicit religion further transgresses and undermines this divide. Current understandings place churches, mosques, temples, synagogues and other formal places of worship within a category of 'religion', excluding all other spaces. Implicit religion, or more precisely implicit sacred space, *could* include such places listed above, but also *could* include cemeteries, community centres, sports facilities, libraries and former churches. The distinction is not to be drawn between tangible definitions of explicit use, but by exploring the values and attributes felt and experienced within any such place: 'sacred spaces are constructed, and given force, as symbolic representations of the *community* that defines them as such' (Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997, p316). The collective value of a place is necessarily shared by and between a range of different people united in their connections to each other and to something greater than themselves. This emphasises their vital role in terms of shared identity/inclusion and exclusion.

However, such places do not (have to) represent 'a radical disjuncture from the secular world of everyday existence' Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997, p310). Implicit sacred space is fundamentally different from instrumental spaces of (capitalist) exchange, or private spaces of home, but it sits liminally within the quotidian cityscape. It is openness and accessibility which make 'municipal spirituality's' sacred qualities implicit and everyday. It is because of its commonplace nature; its ubiquity that municipal spirituality may have the potential to infuse places of genuine encounter and connection within multi-faith, multi-ethnic, multi-national postsecular urban communities. What this might mean in practice is discussed in the four case studies, with reference to how those spaces are used and how they are described by those who have a role in their running.

4.1 Four Places in Bristol, seen differently.

'Places of secular faith' is a film made by 8th Sense Media. It presents four places in Bristol, UK where forms of 'secular faith' are enacted. The film was commissioned/produced by (author) as part of a British Academy funded academic engagement project. The description and discussion that follows emerges from this work as well as informal discussions with key stakeholders in each case. The film is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyWhToLwcd4 and should be viewed alongside the paper. This discussion is then used to reflect on the nature and implications of spatial categorisations within planning, in turn setting a research agenda to develop and challenge the ideas of implicit sacred space and municipal spirituality in the context of austerity, fragmentation and post-secular cities.

4.1.1 Space and activity

The four places are all classified as community spaces within the city of Bristol, England. They were chosen because of their specific diversity in terms of social locations, building types and histories, but also collectively offer insight into the issues faced by such places as well as their implicit value. They are all potentially spaces of encounter- offering access and opportunities for different groups, and for different groups to meet, intentionally or unintentionally. Moreover, they are all potentially threatened under austerity politics through cuts in grant funding, or loss of local authority support. Two are of particular interest because of the current changes that they are undergoing, the other two because of their stability *and* variation over time. Moreover, it is argued that they all can be seen as implicit sacred space.

They are Jacobs Wells Baths, a former swimming pool, currently undergoing asset transfer and redevelopment, St Mary Redcliffe Church, a long-established Christian place of worship with the dual functions as city (if not country-)-wide heritage asset as well as being the parish church of a deprived inner city community, the Trinity Centre; an arts and cultural centre in a former Anglican church with a history in African-Caribbean community movements, and finally Barton Hill Settlement, a diverse and independent community setting in inner East Bristol established in 1911. The first two are in transition; whilst the latter two are stable: they are changing constantly, but offer something consistent and understood to their users.

Built under the provisions of the 1842 Baths and Washhouses Act, Jacobs Wells Baths was opened in 1889 to provide working people access to hot water for recreation or hygiene purposes (Goldsmith, 2018). It remained a working swimming pool until 1977 when it was closed; subsequently Bristol Dance Centre Project took up the lease in 1981 and the building remained a dance centre until 2016. In 2017, the space was taken on by the charity Artspace-Lifespace aims of bringing different temporary and often arts-based, uses to unused or under-used buildings. However, the building's needs were beyond their budget, and Bristol City Council put the building up for community asset transfer. This has been taken on by the group Fusion Lifestyle who propose to regenerate the building as a gym and possibly even a swimming pool, with a focus on the local community's needs and aspirations in an area lacking other local community spaces. Despite the leisure offer of the proposed new development,

this would not provide for the Bristol Dance community in the way the space had been doing until 2016. For them, the community asset transfer represents a loss of community facility.

St Mary Redcliffe church is a Grade I listed building, a prominent feature of the built heritage of Bristol, if not of the UK. However the concern of this paper is the current and (possible) future. The online message of welcome states:

> the current generation of 'SMR' is a diverse community: old and young, rich and poor; Bristol-born and migrants to the city; Redcliffe through-and-through and newcomers to the church. We are diverse in our ethnic backgrounds and cultural identities, in our relationships and family circumstances, in our levels of physical and mental health and ability, and in our understanding of gender and expression of sexual identity.

> As a diverse community we do not share a single understanding on theological debates, but at the heart of our faith we believe that every person is made in the likeness of God and reflects the image of God. We do our very best to welcome and include each and every person in the name of God who made us and loves us for who we are. (St Mary Redcliffe, 2018)

St Mary Redcliffe are currently applying for funding to develop their visitor centre; in part to cater for large numbers of annual tourists, but more centrally, to meet the needs of the 'current generation of SMR'. Their aim is to host and to create an inclusive community space for their parish, and for the city in all its diversity, rather than offer a space of 'worship' in any simplistic or instrumental way, going beyond secular assumptions about the boundaries of established religion. This space is one founded within Christian faith practices, but not solely for explicit believers or church members. Catering for a congregation who come from across the city rather than from the local area, is not the same thing as, and may at times be in conflict with, catering for local social needs. Time and resources devoted to one means time and resources not given to the other.

Both of these spaces are 'becoming'; they are undergoing changes where their values and uses are not clearly fixed, and are contested and changing. Both show the contest between the needs and desires of specific interest based groups and wishes for local facilities from neighbourhood groups and residents. Both sets of interests in both spaces have valid yet (potentially) incompatible claims for space, although both would be classed in planning terms as having community functions.

Moving on to the other two spaces, Holy Trinity Church was built in the 1830s and remained a Christian place of worship until April 1976 when it was declared 'redundant'. In December 1981 the building was bought by Bristol Caribbean Community Enterprise Ltd to be used for community purposes, and rapidly became a renowned venue for music, especially punk and Ska (Trinity Community Arts, undated). Since then, ownership has changed hands, going to the local council, then from 2004 being transferred as a community asset to Trinity Community Arts. The centre is widely known as a music venue, but it is also a space where a range of events take place; groups meet- for example dancing classes, lunch clubs, the Sunday Assembly, workshops and classes take place targeting both vulnerable groups as well as the local and citywide population.

Barton Hill Settlement was established 1911 by the University of Bristol as part of the wider 'settlement house' project of the time, seen both across the UK and in the USA (Cunningham, 2001). It has run continuously since then, but without direct structured involvement from the University since the 1970s. The buildings remain at the heart of a deprived community, providing a range of services and support but also are the 'home' to a range of arts, welfare and community organisations with wider remits such as Locality and Travelling Light Theatre group. The centre is used by 45,000 people per year, with staff stating they aim to engineer casual overlaps between different groups of users.

Both of these places can be classed as 'being'- multifunctional community spaces hosting a range of events and services, and also cannot be defined in a similar way, or by a singular feature. However, unlike the spaces which are 'becoming', the contestation of their nature is less apparent, or more settled; they actively co-host different functions and events, constantly meaning different things to different people, without this being seen as problematic incompatibility.

All four places together demonstrate, despite their varied histories and different current uses, a range of distinctive values and shared qualities that are obscured by current designations and expectations of the sacred/secular boundary. Moreover, they begin to illustrate the definition of implicit sacred space. The next section demonstrates this more fully. Specifically, it draws on Bartkowski & Swearingen's (1997) Eliade-derived, two-fold definitions of sacred space: being a point of 'nodal access', and fulfilling 'communal' and demarcative' functions in defining and consolidating community identity. Before doing this, however, it demonstrates how such places sit outside of the established formal and popular understandings of categories of space.

4.1.2 Perceptions and perspectives: difference and similarity

Nearly all participants discussed the undefinability of their space. Direct quotes in this section come from the film, whereas other discussions also draw on the more informal conversations with officers and volunteers in each location. This relates to both the formal functions of the places and more personal uses and interpretations of the space:

> 'it means a lot of different things to different people' (Kathyrn, Jacobs Wells Baths)

> 'a venue, a building, a heritage destination or a Christian community...different groups would miss different elements of that' (Rev Tyndall, St Mary Redcliffe)

Moreover, this lack of clear and simple definition of the meaning of the place is a central part of their identity and tied to their history:

> 'because we've been here for such a very long time, we're here throughout people's lives, so the space means different things' (Joanne, Barton Hill Settlement)

This lack of sharp definition, or explicit shared articulation of the value of the place is core to the building's identity as implicit sacred space. Lack of clear definition allows different people to engage holistically with their values without feeling excluded because of a pre-given boundary of who that space is for. It permits a wider set of values to active within the place

which if made explicit would become excluding or restrictive. For example, one of the workers at Barton Hill Settlement described the settlement as 'aggressively atheist', but also states that it hosts three churches as well as other multi-faith organisations. One of the members of staff at St Mary Redcliffe stated how pleased they were when they saw women wearing (assumed Muslim) headscarves attending the annual Treefest event in the church, seeing this as indicative of their role in providing hospitality for the wider community. This demonstrates the complexity between spaces of community and spaces of (explicit) faith or worship and how such understandings and definitions unnecessarily simplify the meanings of places because of the categories which they are using.

The way these spaces can provide everyday 'nodal access' to the transcendent can be seen in the film in the way many participants pause or 'err…' when asked to describe the value of their space. Many have a lack of ready words to describe the place and its qualities, echoing Bartkowski & Swearingen (1997; p315) discussion of environmental values and implicit religion where they claim:

> 'many have a difficult time explaining in precise terms the contours of the seemingly transcendent reality to which they gain access…(t)hese individuals simply find it difficult to put their sense of direct spiritual connection into discernible terms; not unlike many religious believers'

The film was professionally made and edited, therefore these pauses represent this difficulty rather than just momentary hesitation in a transcript. Both Josh in Jacobs Wells Baths and Rev Tydall in St Mary Redcliffe describe how on entering the space (for the first time) it engenders in many a feeling of breathlessness, of awe- a response which implies a spiritual dimension to the feelings evoked. This exhibits the shared attributes and emotions provoked by a place of worship and a (former) swimming pool. Josh is one of the few participants to who attempts to put this into words, when discussing the value of the space for contemporary dance:

> 'the arts…help us think about what we are, and help us imagine life as something more beautiful' (Josh, Jacobs Wells Baths)

Everyday implicit sacred space can allow access to a sense of transcendence, from understandings if 'beauty' to that which generates 'awe'. Without access to spaces such as the ones showcased in the film, as noted by numerous participants, access to the less material (i.e. the spiritual) aspects of life will be lost for many people.

The role of community spaces as 'communal' and 'integrative' was articulated by both the film participants and in the wider background discussions with key actors in each location. It can be that such places are 'symbolic space that ties the current generation to previous generations' (Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997, p317) as well as providing physical places in which the ephemerality of community can form and be sustained. Staff members at St Mary Redcliffe involved in the redevelopment plans emphasised the importance of the proposed building as somewhere to stitch together a fragmented community, one which does not currently have a central place to bring people together: a place of congregation. This was more important than being somewhere to provide certain tangible services. Similar thoughts were echoed in the conversations about local neighbourhood aspirations for Jacobs Wells Baths reported by one of the workers there, and reiterated on their website (Jacobs Wells Community Hub, undated). The local neighbourhood group was vocal about having a space

that was 'ours', seeing their area as having been asset stripped, and that they needed a place of their own to form and maintain a sense of community. Although their formal motivations (an established church and a small local community organisation) may appear different, their desires and aspirations for shared space resonate.

More widely, there is a strong sense that such places are both necessary for, and made by, community:

> 'people keep it living, people keep it growing because all sorts of people get involved' (Maggie, Barton Hill Settlement)

> [the settlement is] 'at the heart of a local community that needs as much help, support.. .as possible' (Joanna, Barton Hill Settlement)

> 'the variety of ways Trinity sits in different people's memories…we don't want to be seen as a gig venue for the sake of being a gig venue…its part of a wider ecology of provision to the local area. Our objective is to serve' (Edson, Trinity Centre)

The final quote cited here from Edson is of particular interest. It clearly demonstrates that instrumental functions do not define such places, but also his statement 'our objective is to serve' hints at the active role such places, and those who are part of them, have in providing implicit sacred space. It implies a wider desire to provide for ill-defined and intangible needs, rather than provide a specified function. If Trinity wasn't there, some of the instrumental purposes it fills could be sorted elsewhere, but it would be lost as an implicit sacred space; other 'venues' would not necessarily provide for municipal spirituality, as their aim would be more deliberately specified and therefore excluding, and this whole category could be lost before its need had been truly recognised.

5.1 Planning for Implicit Sacred Space: a necessary paradox?

It is now necessary to return to the issues raised by this discussion for the contexts of austerity, social fragmentation and post-secularism. Three specific issues which deserve further consideration emerge from these examples. The idea of implicit sacred space is a concept that is developing, particularly as the number of people actively identifying with mainstream (Christian) religions in the UK is diminishing. It requires further consideration at both theoretical and empirical levels. This exploratory study has shown that people and communities have a range of- at times poorly defined- needs ranging from the material to the spiritual. Needs that because of their undefinability in established terminology cannot be readily provided for within current categorical thinking. To be able to quantify the potential (spiritual) loss to society of the closure or sell-off of such material assets, it is first necessary to be able to understand and articulate *what* it is that is being lost, and implicit sacred space offers a new vocabulary to do this with. By challenging the established boundaries of formal religion, implicit sacred space can strengthen and deepen our understanding of community values.

Secondly, this debate raises interesting questions about churches, and other places of worship, in the contemporary landscape. Can places be both *implicit* and *explicit* sacred

spaces at the same time? Would this change or challenge their status and value by blurring the formal boundaries of religiosity by overlapping explicit and implicit religion? Moreover, these questions can be asked of the role of former places of worship, asking what is lost on their closure or sale. In his discussion of the conversion of churches into 'loft living' in Toronto, Lynch (2016, p867-8) states:

> although privatisation of heritage properties through loft conversion and ownership retains urban fabric and fragments of religious culture, it does little to open up the possibilities for wider public engagement. While these gentrified spaces offer their owners unique, interesting story-lines and represent investments and enactments of economic and cultural capital, what do they do for the rest of us?'

Thirdly, the question of conflict has only been hinted at in this discussion. Although one of the features of implicit sacred space as defined above is its undefinability and multiple character, this can- as seen in the conflicts between dance groups and the local population in Jacobs Wells Baths- be problematic. One person's, or group's, access to the transcendent and shared sense of purpose may well necessarily exclude (by demarcation) others. This is not merely a conceptual point about identity and boundaries as it relates to use, redevelopment and therefore existence of a certain places in cityscapes where space and resources are often limited. This relates to the challenge that 'researchers might begin to explore how the very notion of 'belonging' itself can be redefined in a quasi-religions context' (Bartkowski & Swearingen, 1997, p321). Belonging necessitates boundaries, and the idea of implicit sacred space helps to challenge and redraw some of these, but it is necessary to ask that in such a process, who or what finds themselves newly 'outside'.

6.1 Conclusions

By unsettling assumed divisions between 'religious' and 'secular' spaces, it is possible to see potential collective spiritual values within secular community venues and the non-worship value of religious buildings for a wider community in a way which both goes beyond and alters the previous ways community engagement with 'faith groups' has been thought about by policymakers. This paper has aimed to put questions of value and use on the agenda, questions which are currently unseen or overlooked, in part because of the contemporary practices of boundary setting- in both spatial and planning practices, and in discourses of religion and secularism. Maintaining a divide- in policy mind-sets if not legislation- between religious places and secular places minimises the importance of 'secular worship' or municipal spirituality, overlooking the value of spaces which bring people together for a common good; and experiences and emotions which are beyond everyday materialism (and consumerism)- implicitly sacred spaces. The categorising of 'place of worship' reflects broader assumptions about the meaning and extent of religion and its (discrete) role in contemporary society. Such categorisations are particularly problematic in a multifaith and multicultural society wherein religious experience and rationale do not fit such ready compartmentalisation.

Further, current planning regulations which put places of worship in the same category as the long list in footnote three risk losing sight of the value of religious spaces. This categorisation is not *necessarily* problematic, but reveals a wider logic which maintains a categorical and dualistic view of religion, and a poorly defined and unhelpful notion of community space. By focusing on tangible activities and functions (sport, music, worship, books), values such as

transcendence, shared belonging and the common good remain unseen. Within current UK planning's categories, the Trinity Centre, if classified as a 'music and concert hall', or Jacobs Wells Baths as a gym and swimming baths would be viewed in the same way as commercial enterprises providing performance space or sports recreation. Planning categorisations would see no 'change of use' should either be taken over commercially, however, as has been argued here, something fundamental would be lost.

There is a need for a greater appreciation of the lived experience of such places, to deepen the understanding of their meaning and influence on a range of people. Such research could explore the boundaries and differences between such places, rejecting the categorical standpoint of contemporary practice and understandings. Moreover, it could look beyond the urban experience to see how these issues play out in rural settings where the range of spaces is more limited and different challenges such as aging populations and second home ownership face local communities. As well as rural focused research, attention needs to be paid to suburban experiences, especially in areas of large-scale new developments to see what facilities are being built, why and with what consequences. Such studies could investigate the different ways in which users and officials understand such spaces, and the implications of these understandings in (decisions taken about) changing cityscapes and neighbourhoods. An officer from Barton Hill Settlement stated that the Settlement was 'at best when working with paradoxes', paradoxes which emerge from, and help to redefine categories, and paradoxes in which indefinability is the key to the definition of such places. The notion of implicit sacred space offers a way to give shape to this indefinitabilty without over-categorisation, and with the aspiration that such an understanding can contribute to defending such places in times of austerity.

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