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Leisure, religion and the (Infra)secular city: the Manchester and Salford Whit Walks

Louise Platt[a], Rebecca Abushena[a] and Robert Snape[b]

[a]Manchester Metropolitan University, Faculty of Business and Law, All Saints Campus, Manchester, UK; [b]School of the Arts, University of Bolton, Bolton, UK

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the Manchester and Salford Whit Walks, a Church of England Whitsuntide procession, this research adopts della Dora's concept of the infrasecular to interpret the interstitiality of the religious or civic nature of leisure experiences in the urban context. Processional walking at Whitsuntide originated as a pre-industrial custom that was simultaneously a religious and a leisure practice. However, with the decline of religion the meanings the Whit Walks have changed in a number of dimensions. Using the lens of infrasecular geography, this research explored the ways in which these Walks have remade sacred space in the secular city through an historical account of their evolution, interviews with participants and observation. The research re-emphasises the continuing importance of custom to contemporary leisure practice and through the infrasecular lens enables new insights into the dynamics of the historical spaces of leisure practice. The study concludes that religion remains an important influence on leisure and that the concept of the infrasecular merits further investigation in leisure practices.

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Introduction

The Manchester and Salford Whit Walks see religious bodies intersecting with the everyday lives of city inhabitants by walking in procession from the religious space of Manchester's Church of England Cathedral to the civic space of Albert Square and the Town Hall.[1] These Walks offer an interesting case study of the fluid relationship between religious and secular leisure practices across progressive phases of modernity. Historically, a significant shaper of leisure practice, religion has declined in importance as secularism has advanced. However, as the Walks clearly demonstrate, it has not disappeared. The aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which religion retains the capacity to mould leisure practice and blur distinctions between the secular and the sacred. Adopting the Whit Walks as a case study example, the paper utilises the notion of the *infrasecular* (della Dora, 2018), whereby the relationship between the religious and secular is problematised to reveal the interstitiality between the religious or civic nature of leisure experiences in the urban setting. We argue that walking in religious processions and parades occupies the blurred space between the sacred and the secular. Being grounded in religious custom and church communities, such processions are of both historical and sociological significance.

In terms of leisure, the Whit Walks provoke questions around the historical evolution of processions and the ways in which they construct place, normally the streets that are paraded, as simultaneously a religious and a leisure space. They also raise questions about the expression of

CONTACT Louise Platt l.platt@mmu.ac.uk Manchester Metropolitan University, Faculty of Business and Law, All Saints Campus, Oxford Road, Manchester M15 6BH, UK

religious identity through leisure in the secular society. A historical approach to this, based on the evolution of one procession in one city over a long period, provides some tentative answers to these questions. There has been limited attention paid to the interplay between religious life and secular leisure in the literature of leisure studies. Whilst there has been some examination of how religious belief impacts on the leisure experiences of marginalised groups (see, for example, Lenneis & Agergaard, 2018; Walseth, 2006), this has mainly been within the context of sports participation. The specific contribution of this paper is its adoption of a historical perspective and the theoretical lens of the infrasecular to understand the leisure geographies of social events. This approach creates the potential for such events to reassert their role in civic society more broadly.

The paper will proceed by offering a brief overview of the Whit Walks as a phenomenon. It will then examine the theoretical foundations and underpinnings in relation to historical and religious geographies within which this paper locates its analysis. The methodology will then be outlined before we present our analysis focusing on the spatial and socio-political dimensions of the Walks.

Religion, leisure and space: historical dimensions of the Whit Walks

Many pre-industrial leisure customs and practices had religious significance. Whitsun, or White Sunday is the feast of Pentecost, one of the great celebrations of the Christian year, so-called because of the white vestments worn by the priest. Prior to the introduction of the factory system in the late eighteenth century, feast days were the principal markers of holidays, closely connected not only to the social life of the church but the reinforcement of the spatial boundaries of the parish. As the parish was the primary spatial division of the country there was, as Pounds (1994) notes, a high degree of conformity between the community of the parish and that of the village; consequently, the identity of the congregation was that of a social as well as a religious collective. Processions became integral to the celebration of Whitsuntide and served the dual functions of asserting identity and, through Rogation processions, the 'beating of the boundary' to renew the claim to the spatial dimensions of the parish. Hutton (1996), for example, cites records of processions dating to 1200 which conflated a religious blessing of the crops and communal celebration; Duffy (1992) too has observed that although processions had symbolic meanings, for example, the bringing of good weather, they were also celebrations of communal identity. As Rosman (2003) notes, churches and churchyards were common public spaces, often used for markets, the election of local officials and fund-raising for the Whitsuntide *church ales* sold to raise funds for church expenses and the relief of the poor. Accordingly, the processions celebrated and confirmed the duality of religious and social space and identity.

Abolished under puritanism (Borsay, 2006), re-established under Charles the Second (Malcolmson, 1973) and revived in the early nineteenth century, the Walks remained relatively homogenous in terms of the religious backgrounds of their participants. Several historians have commented upon the survival of Whitsun as a secular holiday (Griffin, 2002; Lowerson & Myerscough, 1977; Reid, 2000). However, as Borsay (2006) notes, the festive calendar did not disappear with industrialisation but remained popular in urban industrial communities, especially in the north of England. Estabrook (2002) has noted the historical evolution of civic procession and pageantry and their changing blend of sacred and secular elements. The religious space of the Walks was contested; according to Royle (2012) the first modern Whit Walk was held in Manchester in 1801 by Anglican Sunday Schools following a split between Non-Conformists and the Church of England (Entwistle, 2012).

The relationship of the Walks to secular holidays and commercial leisure consumption has always been evident. The use of leisure activity to assert moral authority became well established in the rational recreation philosophy of the Victorian and Edwardian period (Heeley, 1986) and it may be argued that the early Whit Walks were a classical example of this in their attempt to distract the youth from the Races on Salford's Kersal Moor,[2] seeking to 'mould character' (p. 58) and safeguard the well-being of the local population. The pivotal role of the Church in this process has been widely

noted, particularly with regard to young people; Heeley (1986), for example, identified the Whit Walks as one such 'virtuous recreation' (p. 59). Ritual and public ceremony were a bulwark of British public life in the 1800s through to the early twentieth century and Gunn (2000) has demonstrated how they enabled civic and public institutions to construct a sense of authority. Whilst it might be thought that civic ritual has diminished, Roberts (2017) suggests that it has merely been refocused to account for changing public life, competition for leisure time and changing consumption patterns.

Wildman (2011) too has examined the Whit Walks as part of civic life in the early twentieth century, noting how the Catholic walks became an important marker of self and identity, particularly for Manchester's Irish communities. Her work emphasises the continuing relationship between faith and space in the city in the inter-war period. The enduring nature of the Walks is evident. In 2016-2019 (when this research was conducted) between 11 and 17 churches have participated, with the procession taking at least 20 minutes to pass any one point. However, the Walks have gradually become incidental to the everyday life of the city, no longer held at Whitsuntide but on the secular Bank Holiday weekend that superseded it, placing them in competition with other leisure events. The question thus becomes one of how the religious and secular spaces created by the walks have changed in an increasingly secular society.

Religious geographies and leisure: Towards an infrasecular approach

Examining ways of being in world through the lens of religious geographies is well established (Dwyer, 2016; Holloway & Valins, 2002; Hopkins et al., 2013; Kong, 2001; Tse, 2014). The growing debate on the relationship between morality and geography has become important to a better understanding of human relationships with the built environment. Smith (2000), for example, has suggested that in all aspects of life, 'values are called into play, contested, negotiated and reassessed' (ibid, p. 2), while Matless (1994) argues that spaces shape the practices of self and moral behaviour and offer a code of conduct for their leisure use. Referring specifically to religious events in England, Jenkins (1999, p. 20) has suggested that they give insight to the 'orderings of everyday life'. A significant body of literature rejects the notion of total secularisation; Kong (2001), for example, argues that religion should not be considered a residual category of geography and several writers have argued the everyday domains of the spiritual and the mundane are not mutually exclusive (Holloway, 2003; Hopkins et al., 2013; Hunt, 2005). As Kong (2001, p. 95) further suggests, religious rituals retain significant social functions which may even be in conflict, for example, enhancing bonding social capital while simultaneously eroding bridging social capital and thus being detrimental to community cohesion, potentially leading to unrest and violence. Consequently, as Tse (2014) argues, the distinction between secular and religious space is problematic in that 'religion was an interpretive key to the cultural landscape because the landscape itself was theologically derived' (ibid, p. 207) and therefore plays a key role in the social (and often physical) construction of urban space.

This call to attend to religion in the so-called secular city has highlighted a postsecular turn towards the acceptance of the social function of religion in modern society that has been argued to be useful to the conceptualisation of experiences (Moberg et al., 2012). Consequently, the city cannot be examined as a space in which religion plays no role; the blurring of religious and secular boundaries needs to be accounted for reflexively in any analysis of urban life (Beaumont, Eder, & Mendieta, 2020). Habermas (2008), for example, has suggested that the notion of the postsecular society most readily applies to affluent western nation states where, he argues, there has been a shift to secularisation as higher standards of living have, 'increased existential security' (ibid, p. 18). It is however important to note that the idea of post-secularisation is not merely a 'coming after' or a replacing of secularisation; as Cloke and Beaumont (2013) stress, the postsecular is a blurring between boundaries rather than a negation of one state by the other. Accordingly, as Olson et al. (2013) comment, post-secularism it is not solely about new relationships with religion but about

a plurality of religious subjects being contested in the urban space through lived experiences. Consequently, the postsecular demands a reflexive approach to secularisation whereby analysis neither rejects nor normalises one position or the other (Beaumont et al., 2020).

To help unravel this complexity, della Dora (2018) has proposed the idea of the *infra*secular as an alternative to the postsecular. Whilst her analysis is grounded in the transformation of the built environment from religious into secular usage, for example, the conversion of churches into community centres or apartment living, the notion of infrasecular has remained under-utilised within geographies of religion and spirituality and notably absent from leisure scholarship. della Dora suggests that the infrasecular is useful in 'capturing the complexity of a society in which the secular and the religious coexist, overlap and compete' (ibid, p. 5). The prefix of 'infra' suggests on the one hand, middle, something that happens between the positionalities of religious and non-religious and, on the other, a way of accounting for latent, affective and embodied religious experiences. As della Dora notes, 'sacred space must be approached not as a static entity, nor as a disembodied set of practices and discourses, but as an assemblage, always made and remade' (p. 65). Seen through this perspective, the Whit Walks, are not static, despite their seeming historical uniformity (see Platt & Medway, 2020), but have persisted through changing landscapes and evolving codes of moral conduct in relation to religious practice, leisure and civic society. Indeed, one interpretation of *infra-* given by della Dora is that which is invisible – or concealed. This is relevant here in that despite their the 200-year history, the Walks have become virtually invisible in the city with many believing they do not happen anymore. Drawing on Perec's 'infra-ordinary', she suggests that the *infra-* allows us to analyse that which is so deeply embedded in a community or space it has become 'unseen' (ibid, p. 48).

In this paper we respond to della Dora's conclusion that 'Infrasecular landscapes can be imagined "cross-sectionally", that is, as dynamic palimpsests whose layers move simultaneously at different speeds and scale . . . ' (p. 64). Platt and Medway (2020) argue that the Whit Walks are a refrain in the DeleuzoGuttarian sense whereby the Walks are repeated, but with difference. The historical approach adopted here gives insight to how the Whit Walks have historically blended religion into the civic and secular identity of the city, ebbing and flowing through the changing physical, social and cultural landscapes. The importance of a historical approach has been emphasised by geographers (Brace et al., 2006, p. 38) where, 'religion as an axis of identity formation intersects with other axes of identity, belief and practice, and which, crucially, is often performed outside of the overtly "sacred" spheres of religious adherence'. In summary, these historical accounts are important in enhancing our understanding of what is past but also of the present. Events that have a long historical lineage should not be viewed as linear events if we are to understand their longevity – we need an *infra-* analysis.

Methodology

Seeking to test the infrasecular, as an explanatory tool to explain the dual religious and secular nature of the Whit Walks as a leisure event, the research adopted a multiple-method approach. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with participants in the Whit Walks. A total of four churches took part in the focus groups and an interview was conducted with a Canon who had written a self-published book based on oral histories of the Walks (Burns, 2013). The group discussions predominantly comprised Church members between the age of 60 to 95 (the dominant age group participating in the Walks). One focus group had a younger congregation member, a woman in her twenties and another group was arranged by a community worker in her 30s. The smallest group had 5 participants and the largest had 12 but some members dipped in and out of the discussions as they were busy preparing the church hall for an event. The groups were assembled through email and phone contact with their Church leader/vicar. Observations by the lead author were undertaken over a period of four years with extensive field notes, film and photo records made. Alongside this primary data collection, news archives were examined using the Manchester

Archives and Local Studies library and the online databases of British Newspaper Archive and Newspapers.com.

All data sources were collaboratively mined across the authors employing collective reflexivity and emergent themes related to the blurring of secular and religious leisure practice were extrapolated (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis was reflexive in the sense that we individually reviewed the data and came together to discuss our own understandings, but different authors had embodied understandings of different data sets. The first author for example, had conducted the participant observations and therefore this 'data set' was known from the inside by this author (Coffey, 1999). The other two authors had a more in-depth knowledge of the archival data. This back-and-forth process led to two core themes which demonstrate the blurring of religious and secular leisure practices: the spatial dimensions and the social/political landscapes.

Analysis and Discussion: Blurring secular and religious leisure

Spatial Dimensions

Participants' responses suggested a diminishment of their connection to the spatial dimensions of a particular parish. As the processions became limited to the city centre their capacity to create a sense of identity and place had weakened. Participants spoke of how they historically would walk into the city centre from their parish:

William: All the churches walked down the roads, didn't they? We're not talking of a short distance; we're talking of a few miles.

Steve: A couple of miles.

Sandra: Blakely, Higher Blakely, [inaudible] and all that.

William: And there wasn't . . . I think probably the bus services might have even stopped, I can't remember, but they may have done. So, getting into Manchester wasn't a problem. But now, we've got, like as you say, we've got the tram system. We've also got twice as much traffic on the roads as probably was then.

There is a definite sense that spatial boundaries have changed over the years and with this a loss of identity which has been reflected in some aspects of the Walks.:

> I came to live in Chorlton, but I am apparently, more importantly, now resident in South Manchester. For the big shops, cinemas, The Whit Walks and other events we used to go to 'town'. Now it's the city centre. I'm not sure Manchester actually has a centre ' [. . . .] I can't be the only one who feels that those well-defined districts of days gone by had their own identity and made everyone feel that they belonged somewhere. (*Manchester Evening News*, 15 December 2011).

Evidenced in earlier Walks the connection of Walkers to the city centres would have been stronger due to living and working in these spaces rather than today's experiences of the postindustrial suburbanisation of cities. However, this community identity formation, despite geographical fragmentation, is symbolically maintained through the banners carried by processants. Many of these are adorned with the name of the parish or the town from which the church is based. They literally carry their parish location with them on banners, inserting the space of their church into the urban setting asserting a sense of micro-local pride (see Platt & Medway, 2020).

The above has evidenced that infrasecular spatial dynamics have played out through the history of the walks. This was exemplified in 2018 where an inebriated homeless man joined the procession, embodying an encounter between the 'secular' city (one with extensive homelessness) and the temporal religious space of the procession. The movement from an enclosed religious space such as a Church building into the public space of the street makes such encounters inevitable and the boundaries between the sacred and the profane become 'illusory' (Leone, 2014). This adds weight to the idea of the existence of an infrasecular city whereby both kinds of events not only coexist but are also increasingly consciously intertwined. As della Dora (2018, p. 45) states, this is evident in, 'contemporaneous co-habitation and competition between multiple forms of belief and non-belief,

as well as by the hidden layers of a collective "religious subconscious" which underpins contemporary Western European societies, no matter how secularized'. Thereby a process of making and remaking the social and religious spatialities of leisure experiences is evident through these processions.

Contemporary processants were adamant that the Walks were religious processions. One parishioner emphasised this strongly:

> Can I make a distinction as well? Because we are a procession of witness. We're not a carnival which is entirely different. And we're not a march. (Laughter). Because people sometimes try to put that in those names, to our procession of witness. It is a procession of Christian witness. But we're not a carnival which were just there for the fun of it (Ron)

Whilst it is worth pointing out that carnival is a spiritual event, the perception of that label makes the processants uneasy. However, the importance of walking through the urban spaces of the city centre on a busy Bank Holiday is not unimportant to participants. As explained above, the procession is about 'Christian witness' but this idea of witness extends beyond a religious connotation of witness and can instead be seen in terms of being witnessed by outsiders in the creation of a 'definitional ceremony' (Myerhoff, 1986). Moving out of the spaces of their local parishes or from inside church buildings was considered important to one bystander, 'we need to be seen – Christians need to be seen'. The existence of religious identities has never gone away in the modern urban city but the persistent viewpoint of the city as secular has created an illusory spatial boundary that leads us to believe that the religious body will not be found on the streets in public view complicating categories of faith and secular space (della Dora, 2018).

Social and political landscape

By the late nineteenth century Whitsun had become a fixed point in both the religious and secular calendar as a communal celebration in which walks and processions, especially those organised by Sunday Schools, were a common feature of religious and civic celebration, especially in the north and midlands of England (Rosman, 2003). In Bolton, for example, cotton mills closed at Whitsuntide from Thursday night to Monday morning with processions accompanied by temperance bands in the eighteen-sixties (Boyson, 1970), while in 1871 Whit Monday was designated as a Bank Holiday, retaining this status until 1972 when it was abandoned for a fixed-date Spring Bank Holiday. Contemporaneously, political and social issues became embedded in the Walks as changes of monarchy and royal celebrations were mirrored in their planning. Over time, the distinctions between the sacred and secular became less solid. Whereas in 1838 there was concern about the resources needed to support both celebrations for the coronation of Queen Victoria and the Whit Walks (Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser, 1838), by the time of the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 1887 there was a harmonious integration of the religious and the secular, as evidenced in the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser's report* (31 May, 1887):

> The great Whitsuntide demonstration of the Manchester Church of England Sunday scholars, which took place yesterday, must be described as one of the most interesting and successful that have been held. All who were either directly or indirectly interested in the proceedings seem this year to have thrown themselves into the matter with greater zest than has been the case for some year's past. The reason is not far to seek. Is it not the Jubilee year of her Majesty, and was it not meet, therefore, that extra efforts should be put forth in order to make the spectacle as imposing as possible?

As Roberts (2017) notes, a mid-nineteenth century transition from the traditional to the recreational civic ritual took place as many towns began to promote civic ceremony and pageantry as a form of entertainment to create civic pride. This was true of the Manchester Whit Walks which in Queen Victoria's Jubilee year included several displays of loyalty, for example, banners bearing celebratory inscriptions and the wearing of Jubilee medals by all of the school children. This is

evidence of Roberts (2017) conclusions that processional forms in the civic setting have been employed for various purposes from civic ritual to entertainment. Here we witness how one procession adapted its form in order to suit the needs of the times – the boundaries between religion and the civic evidently malleable.

We argue that the Walks have always been inextricably linked with the historical events of the time and this is still true in the contemporary social and political landscape of urban life. Their infrasecular nature has come into sharper focus both socially and politically in more recent years through their embracing of a range of denominations and to an extent other faiths and belief systems. This has been seen as a necessity for two main reasons; the decline in the participation of the traditional Church of England Walkers and the ethnic diversification of society as a whole:

> Because we've had the Muslim mayors as well. And they've joined in the hymn singing as well as taking part in the walk. And the present Lord Mayor, he's certainly a Christian and as well as being a member of the LGBT community. I think that's good because it just shows the diversity of the church. (Ronald)

This diversification of Walkers has been reflected in the participation of official dignitaries and can also be seen in the attitudes of religious leaders as recent news reports show:

> We won't turn anyone away. While it is traditionally a Church of England celebration, it is open to any Christian congregation to join us. It is part of community history. There are certain parishes for which there is a historical connection, but it really is open to everyone. (Rev Canon Roy Chow, quoted in, Qureshi, 2011).

Indeed, Church of England statistics reflect this diversification of parishioners with a four-figure percentage increase in black Christians in the Manchester and Salford districts (Council for Christian Unity, 2014). It can be observed that in recent Walks the diversity of modern Manchester is overtly on display.

As the Walks strive to retain their religiously motivated customs and traditions, they appear to have become increasingly at odds with a rapidly changing political and social postmodern landscape, forced to compete for space both literally and symbolically. For instance, the walks have conflicted with secular, commercial events. A newspaper article from 2011 describes how, 'about 1,500 people from Manchester and Salford took part on the Whit Walks after the start was delayed owing to United's parade along Deansgate' (Kirby, 2011). In fact, many reports of twenty-first century Walks pick up on this tension, citing other events such as the Queens Golden Jubilee celebrations and the Great Manchester Run as 'giving the heart of Manchester more than a run for its money' (Palmer, 2003). It is telling that such competing events seen to coexist with the Whit Walks processions and indeed, as can be seen in the case of the Queen's Jubilee celebrations there was a conscious decision by organisers to combine the two.

More recently, elements of the secular have infringed upon on the Walks in terms of official public holidays. These have reflected the wavering public attitude towards the Walks whereby increasingly Walkers and bystanders have gone away on holiday over the bank holiday weekend. This tendency led to a brief rescheduling of the Walks to a Sunday – however the longevity of the customary Monday date was not to be dismissed. A local person, interviewed in the Manchester Evening News, felt that, 'I don't think there's been any consultation about this. It seems like they don't care about the tradition at all' (Qureshi, 2013) Soon after they were reinstated to the original bank holiday Monday, Rev. Canon Roy Chow, organising secretary for the annual Walks, said:

> Last year, it was moved because churches were finding it difficult to raise people to walk, but popular opinion wanted it back on Monday and we had a great turnout. I think it will stay on Monday now. (*Manchester Evening News*, 27 May 2014).

With so many other secular events and leisure activities on offer during public holidays people are increasingly finding that either they are having to make a choice between attending the Whit Walks or another event but, as the earlier analysis also highlights, people are attending the Walks alongside or incidental to other more secular activities within the city. However, when viewing the city as an infrasecular space we begin to notice that the religious aspects of the Walks play an important role

in the secular nature of the city. An apt example of the merging of boundaries between different events and belief systems occurred after the 2017 Whit procession in the week following the Manchester Arena terror attack which took the lives of 22 people, many of whom were children. One of the brass bands, after the procession, gathered in St Ann's Square where a spontaneous memorial of flowers had formed and played the hymn 'Abide with Me' to a socially and ethnically mixed crowd. This event is a clear example of an *infra* or *middle* point where the secular and religious co-exist in time and space. Further evidence, as pointed out by della Dora (2018), that conceptual boundaries between religion and the secular needs rethought.

Conclusions

Through examining both the spatial and social/political dimensions of the Whit Walks considering their urban setting we have demonstrated that the relationship between leisure and religion is still salient. We contend, using the example of the Whit Walks, that leisure and religion are not always so distinct, even in modernity. It can be argued that the continuing practice of the Whit Walks, despite the marked decline in religion over recent decades, is due in some part to the historical significance of this feast for working-class communities. By drawing on data from over 200 years of news reporting plus contemporary perspectives and observations we have demonstrated that this is a phenomenon that is by no means relegated to history. Leisure experiences here, recalling della Dora (2018), are assemblages whereby the material, affective and temporal nature of their construction are enmeshed.

The evidence suggests that such events are central to community formation and that there is a remaining adherence to customs that cut across religious and secular spaces and experiences. This is true both historically and in the 21st century where urban community life may be viewed as more fragmentary. We contend custom is an important factor of leisure practice; as Joyce (1991) noted, it involves informal practices and observances which regulate social and economic relationships within and between different social groups and can be seen in the persistence of wakes and fairs. However, as Joyce also argues, custom is not passive; rather it is an active process through which culture is made and transformed. This process is clearly evident in the historical evolution of the Manchester Whit Walks and the blurring of the distinction between religious and secular experiences which, using della Dora's (2018) term, can be viewed as infrasecular leisure experiences which highlight, ' ... the interstitiality of religion's "invisible visibilities", that is, aspects of historically dominating religions that are so deeply embedded in a society's collective memory, culture, values, institutions, everyday speech, and in the landscape that they become unseen' (Ibid: 48). In order to understand leisure experiences in the urban landscape from both a historical and contemporary perspective this interstitiality between the secular or civic nature of the city and the religious experiences of those who live, work and play in these places, needs to be considered in more depth than it has been before in leisure scholarship.

Our findings indicate that the adoption of infrasecular as a theoretical lens to leisure may be essential in order to keep pace with the changing social, political and legislative landscape and to meet the challenge of keeping the Whit Walks going in an environment where there are ever competing demands on our time. In practice, religious events have often been marginalised by a secular civic society. Indeed, participants in the Whit Walks were frustrated that as they were a religious event, they could not access funding in the same way secular events could. To reframe such events and practices as infrasecular opens up the possibility for such events to reclaim importance in civic society. We recommend that that this be a consideration where religion and leisure intersect socially and spatially. There needs to be a more fluid understanding of how the sacred and the secular intersect, in particular in our urban environments. The Whit Walks have persisted for over 200 and only war and, more recently, a global pandemic have halted the procession. It could be argued that in the future, as we saw in the aftermath of the Manchester Arena bombing mentioned above, that the spaces of religious and leisure experiences, like

processions, needed to be examined not as distinct experiences but as temporal and relational spaces where communities can gather. Infra- as interpreted as 'middle' or 'between' allows for a perspective where sacred and secular are not placed as binary opposite. Infra- as in 'below' of 'latent' further allows us to attend to the invisible and unseen experiences that persist unnoticed in our urban centres. As such, the research reveals that the infrasecular lens enables a new insight to the dynamics of the historical spaces of leisure practice where religion remains an important influence on leisure and that the concept merits further investigation in leisure practices where the religious and the secular collide.

Notes

1. The Whit Walks take place in Manchester city centre but involve parishioners from both Manchester and the neighbouring city of Salford.
2. The races at Kersal Moor were known as a place where the working classes gathered at Whitsun to partake in drinking, gambling and other undesirable pursuits.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Louise Platt is an interdisciplinary researcher and Senior Lecturer in Festival Management at Manchester Metropolitan University. She is a fellow of the Institute of Place Management and member of the Executive Committee of the Leisure Studies Association. Her research focus is on placemaking and festivity with a particular focus on processional forms, and experiences of festivals and leisure spaces. Her work predominantly draws on cultural geography, dance/performance theory, and poststructural philosophy to elucidate a more fluid understanding of place and community using festivity as a lens. She teaches festival studies at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and supports PhD students on festival-related topics.

Rebecca Abushena is a Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader in retail at Manchester Metropolitan University. She has previously also worked as a researcher at Manchester Business School, where she completed her PhD. She spent some years working in management consultancy advising organisations operating within the arts, culture and leisure sectors. Her current research aims to combine more traditional business/marketing approaches to retail with placemaking looking at the use of retail spaces in terms of leisure and atmosphere. She teaches on the Retail Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship programme in Business and Management.

Robert Snape is Professor in Cultural History in the Centre for Worktown Studies. His principal research interest is the socio-cultural history of leisure in Great Britain 1850-1939. His recent work is concerned the ways in which modern social understandings of leisure were formed in social science and social work in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This is the subject of his most recent book *Leisure, Voluntary Action and Social Change in Britain 1880-1939*. He was Chair of the Leisure Studies Association 2013-17 and the principal organiser of the Association's 'Recording Leisure Lives' one –day social history conferences 2008-2018.

ORCID

Louise Platt http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9063-1110

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