

MidWest's Know Your Place Programme

Can policy be Artist-led?

Perspectives from a policy analyst / researcher

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Background | Practitioners meeting session

- Issues / perceptions emerging from previous conversations
 - Artists lack social confidence
 - Decision-makers do not offer sufficient support to artist-led initiatives
- Follow-up discussion issues
 - Understanding 'creativity' | an over-used term?
 - Losing meaning since it has been appropriated by policy-makers
 - Cultural policy in cities | geography / context issues
 - What is common across the UK? What is specific to the MidWest, NorthWest
 - The experiences of Birmingham, Manchester; relationship with London
 - Language barriers between artists and policy-makers
 - Lack of common meaning between arts community and decision-makers
 - Can the arts learn from other sectors? Building on the language of entrepreneurialism
- Main questions
 - How can artists influence policy-making?
 - What is the role of research and evaluation in informing / influencing policy-making?

Discussion | What is cultural policy?



- Culture is connected to policy in two registers: the aesthetic and the anthropological.
 - In the **aesthetic** register, artistic output emerges from creative people and is judged by aesthetic criteria, as framed by the interests and practices of cultural criticism and history.
 - The **anthropological** register, ... takes culture as a marker of how we live our lives, the senses of place and person that make us human - neither individual nor entirely universal, but grounded by language, religion, custom, time and space.
- Cultural policy refers to the **institutional** supports that channel both aesthetic creativity and collective ways of life - a bridge between the two registers
 - Cultural policy is embodied in **systematic**, regulatory guides to action that are adopted by organizations to achieve their goals"
 - ... it is **bureaucratic** rather than creative or organic

(Miller & Yudice, 2002)



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Discussion | Implementing cultural policy



- **Organisations** *solicit, train, distribute, finance, describe and reject* actions and activities that go under the signs of **artist** or artwork, through the implementation of **policies**.
- Governments, trade unions, colleges, social movements, community groups, foundations and businesses, *aid fund, control, promote, teach and evaluate* creative persons; in fact, they often decide and implement the very criteria that make possible the use of the word 'creative'.

(Miller & Yudice, 2002)



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Discussion | Can artists influence cultural policy?



- Language differences... barriers?
 - The language of policy is **bureaucratic, systematic, regulated**
 - It emerges out of: "legal doctrine, citizenship education, tourism aims, impresarios' profit plans or philanthropic desires"
 - The language of art is **creative and organic**
 - It emerges out of personal (individual) experience, inspiration ...
- Opportunities to influence policy...
 - policy is not always the result of highly deliberate practices
 - at times it results out of *ad hoc* decisions, on an inconsistent basis
 - **"Performativity rather than constativity characterizes policy"**
 - It is frequently made 'on the run' in response to unpredictable pressures
- In order to have a chance to influence cultural policy...
 - Artists must engage and try to understand the decision-making process



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Discussion | Can artists influence cultural policy?



- Overcoming the language barrier
 - Policy cannot respond to individual demands / needs / aspirations
 - Artists must thus act as an organised group rather than individuals
 - Finding the common ground, learning to 'lobby'
 - Acting as brokers, protecting 'practice' beyond particular interests
- The policy setting cannot address all artists' needs
 - Policy is designed to establish coherent frameworks
 - The arts world is not coherent, nor stable, nor easily 'framed'
 - Artists need to understand which areas of policy they should try to influence, benefit from, and which areas should remain outside the policy remit in order to protect their capacity to challenge the status-quo



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Discussion | Can artists influence cultural policy?



- The need to understand the wider political agenda
 - To maximise the opportunity to influence policy, artists should engage with the process of decision-making within which policy operates
 - The political agenda often drives policy beyond the arms' length principle
 - This is done on the basis of agreed values and targets that justify spending efficiency
 - Due to the growing lack of public trust in the political process, 'evidence' is branded as the ultimate justification for policy decisions
- The emergence of a new language: evidence-based policy making
 - Can the world of research and evaluation support artists' interests?
 - How does 'evidence' inform and influence policy-making?



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Discussion | Evidence-based policy-making...



- E.g. Arts and social impact
 - "Arts policy today (within the wider remit of cultural policy) is infused with the idea that the arts are good for society, and that they can help achieve a number of social policy objectives. The people who fund the arts, provide the arts, and research the arts have all produced a consensus about the value of what they do, which hardly anyone challenges." (Mirza, 2006)
- Issues to consider
 - Is there any evidence?
 - Can the arts deliver such evidence?
 - Are we risking the freedom of the artist by imposing box-ticking?
 - Can research and evaluation provide adequate measures for the arts?
 - Are researchers in a better place to influence policy-making?



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Discussion | ... or policy-based evidence-making?



- We need to ensure 'quality' of evidence
 - Advocacy can replace evidence and damage arguments
- Arts agencies (representing artists) must be pro-active
 - they should be prepared to liaise with policy-makers and provide hard and soft evidence in support of their case
 - they should argue for appropriate key performance indicators rather than accept imposed measures
- Research councils (AHRC) should partner arts organisations to commission work and thus move away from advocacy
- Researchers should be more confident in shaping evidence
 - Establish a shared 'language': not 'measure' but 'value' and 'assess'
 - Present a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence as appropriate
 - Assertiveness on the need for alternative evidence should be used to convince government about limitations to appreciate the value of the arts



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Case studies | Urban cultural policy experiences



- Culture-led regeneration | a definition
 - Using cultural activity as the catalyst and engine for the transformation of a place that has displayed the symptoms of environmental, social and/or economic decline
- Approaches to culture-led regeneration | cultural 'engines' for change
 - Major cultural events
 - Iconic cultural infrastructures / 'grand projects'
 - Cultural / creative quarters
- Common aims of culture-led regeneration
 - reposition urban centres | branding exercise, attracting tourists, inward investment, retaining talent
 - revitalise urban economies | making the transition from industrial into post-industrial (service-led, knowledge-based) economies
 - upgrade service provision for locals and visitors | transport links, shopping, hospitality, ... - 'cultural attractions'



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Case studies | Urban cultural policy experiences



- Who benefits from culture-led regeneration?



In Sydney and Torino, a non-arts led mega event led to some legacy towards artists



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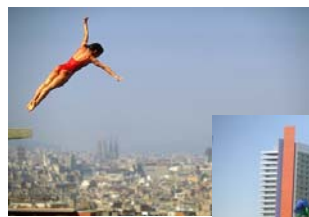
Case studies | Urban cultural policy experiences



- Who benefits from culture-led regeneration?



Guggenheim BILBAO



Barcelona and Bilbao are celebrated as cultural centres, but the local arts community has not benefited as much as the 'city' at large



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Case studies | Urban cultural policy experiences



- Who benefits from culture-led regeneration?
- It is possible to develop successful culture (arts)-led regeneration without actually benefiting the local artist base
- Approaches to measurement tend to allow for this to remain unnoticed :
 - You can argue positive economic impact, physical impact, social impact
 - No clear emphasis on demonstrating cultural/ arts impact



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Conclusions | Provoking additional debate



- The **language** of policy is bureaucratic. The language of arts cannot be
 - Policy provides a frame, but cannot respond to all arts and creative needs
 - To protect integrity, freedom, risk, leave some aspects at the margins of policy
- To **influence** policy, artists cannot act as individuals
 - They need to act as a coordinated group of interest / lobby.
 - This requires a compromise – some values may not be fully represented
- **Creativity** is not exclusive to the artist, but all areas of human enterprise
 - Do not consider the arts world in isolation from other areas of human creativity
 - The corporate world can be a relevant point of reference for artists, as it has been for policy makers by providing the language of 'entrepreneurialism'.
 - The world of science can also provide relevant reference points.
 - Business and science worlds can be good allies for the arts - to produce the kinds of 'lobbies' that, ultimately, may influence policy
- **Evidence** is relevant to policy-making, but must be of the right quality
 - Researchers must ally with artists to challenge established approaches to 'measurement'



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A personal take on the questions proposed...



- Can policy be artist-led ? Not fully, nor should it
- What is arts policy? A bureaucratic exercise to guide decision-making
- What is the artists' relationship with policy?
 - policy frames the artists' work, but should not guide it
 - ongoing artists' frustration results from a lack of a shared language
- What could the artists' relationship with policy be?
 - act as a group of interest, beyond the individual - compromise
 - link to other interest groups beyond the arts - build on their language
 - challenge policy, so that it evolves, but do not become the policy-maker
 - act on the fringes of policy, as well as within it - respond to policy imperatives in order to get the funding that can also support independent practice



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Thank you

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