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***Ubi maior, minor cessat: A comparative study of the  
relation between changing cultural policy rationales and  
globalization in post-1980s England and Italy***

**by**

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## Declaration and Inclusion of Published Work

I declare that the present thesis is the result of my own work. I would also like to confirm that neither thesis nor parts of it has ever been submitted before for a degree at another university.

I would also like to acknowledge that a version of chapter 1 and 2 has been published as:

Belfiore, E. (2004) *The Methodological Challenge of Cross-national Research: Comparing cultural policy in Britain and Italy*, Working Paper #8, Centre For Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry.

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## Abstract

This thesis presents a comparative study of cultural policy in Britain and Italy. It provides a historical reconstruction of the cultural, legal and administrative contexts for cultural policy-making in the two countries, with a view of highlighting how cultural policy priorities have changed over time. The discussion of the growing popularity, in Italy, of notions of the cultural heritage as an engine for local economic development and as a resource that can allow the government to find the resources it needs to finance infrastructural works is given particular emphasis. Indeed, this probably represents the most original contribution made to the field of cultural policy research, in that Italy is a much under-researched country, and extant literature in English is almost non-existent. The main argument that the discussion aims to substantiate is that, despite being rooted in very different cultural and administrative traditions, both the British and Italian cultural policy debates seem to display a growing popularity of an instrumentalist rhetoric, which justifies public subsidy of the cultural sector on the grounds of the alleged beneficial impacts of the sector in the social and economic spheres. The main contribution of the thesis to the current understanding of instrumental cultural policy is therefore to offer plausible explanations for this recent trend. The thesis argues that the current situation, both in Italy and the UK, can be best understood in the light of the global phenomenon of neo-liberal globalisation, and the tendency for policy-transfer between countries that it tends to promote.

## Introduction

As it is probably the case for most research projects, the questions that this thesis attempts to answer have changed remarkably as I got progressively more involved in the research process. The main spur for my interest in conducting a comparative research of cultural policy in Britain and Italy, however, has remained unchanged. As an Italian student having completed a postgraduate course in cultural policy studies in the UK, I was quite aware of the extent to which issues of instrumentality and relevance to social and economic policy were crucial aspects of cultural policy-making and administration in the UK. I was aware of how such developments had been traced back, by scholars and commentators, to the Thatcherite era and the profound transformations that it had operated in the British system of public administration. As I began to read about contemporary developments in Italian cultural policy, however, it soon became evident that the rhetoric of instrumentalism, and the emphasis on the potential for local economic development of the cultural heritage (especially in the struggling South, where I am from) had equally become current in the Italian debate. Instinctively, I felt that the exploitation of the rhetoric of the 'useful arts' (Cheit 1975) to justify the expenditure of public resources to the advantage of the cultural sector was, to a significant extent, in contradiction (if not openly incompatible) with what I perceived to be the prevailing understanding of the role of culture in the life of the nation among Italians. I was also very curious to grasp by what route such concepts, apparently extraneous to indigenous debates over cultural policy, had entered the Italian borders, and where



they came from. The equivalence and the borrowing of terms seemed to point towards the Anglo-Saxon world as the main 'exporter' of the instrumental arguments. This thesis is the result of my attempt to understand the roots and the contemporary evolution of national cultural policy in my native and adopted countries, and to provide possible and plausible explanations for what initially seemed to me to be puzzling phenomena. I believe that one way to solve the mystery is to look beyond both the British and Italian borders at trends and developments of a global nature, whose effects are currently being felt, though in different degrees and intensities, in both the countries under analysis here.

As my research progressed, I soon discovered that, not only are conceptions of culture and cultural policy different across borders, but that no rigorous methodology for cross-national comparisons exists as yet. In fact, the very concept of what a 'cultural policy' actually is (or ought to be) is far from being uncomplicated or uncontroversial. The understanding of 'cultural policy' that the present study relies upon has been clearly spelled out by Hugues Simonin (2003, 116-7):

... a cultural policy cannot be described only from a formal point of view as a neutral public intervention in the field of culture. We know that a "culture" corresponds to a set of rules, the content of which is contingent. So, it appears that cultural policies pursued in a society show us how "culture" is interpreted, in the particular case of this given society. Cultural policies have a hermeneutic dimension in that they disclose what a society holds to be "cultural", and henceforth disclose the being of a society.

Simonin (Ibid., 117) further explains that cultural policies are both “a way of moulding values into formal shapes, and formal shapes into values”; in other words, “the objects dealt with by cultural policies are intrinsically linked to the way they are dealt with: the content and the container have to be considered altogether to express the essence of the social being”. As will become obvious as the methodology followed for the present analysis is expounded in the first section of this thesis, this is indeed the main guiding principle that I have followed in the course of my research.

Because of the very nature of cultural policy studies, in order to write this thesis, I have made use of very diverse bodies of literature that belong to different disciplinary fields and that have been written under the aegis of different theoretical positions. Despite an inclusive and eclectic approach to the consultation of the extant literature, my own theoretical standpoint is based on the belief that, in order to be fully understood, cultural phenomena need to be placed in their historical and political context. Cultural manifestations can be fully understood only when placed in the context of the material development of a certain civilization, the forms that state power assumes at that particular historical time, and the power struggles that characterize class-relations within a certain social context. The centrality of the ‘context’ ostensibly becomes even more crucial when researching politically and historically sensitive issues such as the politics of culture and cultural policy. This type of approach many would label “Marxist” (Eagleton 1990. 5). The dangers of such position Eagleton (Ibid., 4) – who certainly knows about Marxist criticism - summarises as

“the ‘left-functionalism’ which reduces the internal complexity of the aesthetic to a direct set of ideological functions”. I hope to have avoided such risks of reductionism, and to have made justice to the ‘relative autonomy’ of the artistic sphere<sup>1</sup>. However, I do believe that, especially in the present cultural climate, it is important to stress how cultural production and consumption, and – consequently – cultural policy have become enmeshed with economic preoccupations and other, apparently extraneous, political agendas. Hence the importance of understanding cultural phenomena ‘in context’. Terry Eagleton (1990, 5-6) has described the present situation in a compelling passage, worth quoting at length:

The truth is that a combination of factors has contributed in many areas of contemporary left-wing thought to the open or surreptitious denigration of such questions as social class, historical modes of production and forms of state power, in the name of a commitment to more ‘topical’ modes of political struggle. Paramount among these factors has been the newly aggressive turn to the political right of several Western bourgeois regimes, under pressure of global capitalist crisis – a dramatic shift in the political spectrum and ideological climate which has succeeded in muting and demoralizing many of those whose earlier spoke up more combatively and confidently for a revolutionary politics. There has been in this respect what one can only characterize as a pervasive failure of political nerve, and in some cases an accelerating, sometimes squalid process of accommodation by sectors of the left to the priorities of a capitalist politics.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of ‘relative autonomy’ was introduced by Althusser with the intent to sidestep the potentially simplistic view of culture and art as a ‘superstructure’ completely determined by the characteristics of the economic base. In this respect, Althusser claimed that despite the undeniable connections between culture and economics, the sphere of art still maintains a certain autonomy and independence from the economic forces at work in society (Barry 1995, 163).



There is no doubt that a strongly 'militant' tone characterises Eagleton's indictment of the current acquiescence to the values of the market (even when these appear in contradiction with previously held values and policy priorities). Such 'accommodation', rather than being limited to certain sectors of left-wing academia, is in fact a prevalent attitude that can be detected in the workings of governments and public institutions throughout the Western world and beyond. Indeed, this thesis concerns itself precisely with the consequences, in the sphere of cultural policy-making, of such processes of compliancy with the values of neo-liberal globalisation and the transformations that, as a result, have taken place within public administration (and cultural administration in particular) in Britain and Italy.

This thesis, however, is not a 'militant' argument in the way that the passage quoted from Eagleton is. For the guiding ideal that has steered the present research is rather consistent with the principle of 'critical and reflexive cultural policy analysis' as it has been defined, recently, by Jim McGuigan (2004, 19):

Critical and reflexive cultural policy analysis is permitted to ask awkward questions about the conditions of culture and society in the world at large that go beyond the self-imposed limitations of management consultancy and policy-wonking.

This thesis represents, indeed, my attempt to provide plausible answers to some 'awkward questions' indeed. In particular, the present research aims to tackle the following main questions:

- Are 'instrumental' notions of the arts and culture significant aspects of current cultural policy making in the UK? If this is indeed the case, can we convincingly argue that such instrumental notions are slowly taking root in Italy too?
- How can we account for recent developments in cultural policies in the two countries? And how do they fit in the historical evolution of the British and Italian cultural policy model?
- Can we suggest possible paradigms of explanation for these new developments in British and – more recently – Italian cultural policy (in a similar way in which – for instance – Clive Gray (2000) has interpreted the evolution of British arts administration over the past sixty years as a result of processes of commodification of culture)?

The thesis deals with these questions in three different sections. The first, which includes the first three chapters, tackles methodological problems arising from a cross-national study of culture and cultural policy, and offers an analysis of the legislative, political and linguistic 'contexts' of cultural policy making in Britain and Italy. The second section (chapter 4 to 6) attempts to trace the historical roots of the British and Italian national models of cultural policy and administration by discussing the intellectual traditions of the two countries. This part also traces the more recent developments of their cultural policies with a particular focus on the apparent convergence of policy priorities in the two nations, and the common rhetoric of instrumentalism that seems to

dominate the public debate over cultural spending. Finally, the last section of the thesis seeks to find, in the spread of neo-liberal globalisation and related phenomena, a possible explanation for the afore-mentioned developments in cultural policy, suggesting that the theory of 'policy transfer' might offer a useful paradigm to make sense of the current common trends displayed by British and Italian cultural policies.

An important note needs to be made with regards to the scope of the analysis presented in the thesis. Although a number of the broader conclusions put forward for the case study of England (especially with regards to the spread of managerialism in the public sector and instrumental cultural policy) might be extended to the whole of Britain (with the exception, possibly, of Scotland, where post-devolution cultural policy appears to be developing in increasingly autonomous ways), this thesis focuses mainly on a study of policies for the arts sector in England. Thus, issues of devolution, though undoubtedly relevant to a discussion of British cultural policy, are not included in the present analysis due to limitations of space.

With regards to the Italian case, the discussion of the Italian cultural policy model and its evolution focuses mainly on heritage policy, and on the national level. It was my original intention to also cover regional and municipal heritage policy-making in Italy. However, within the extant literature, the analysis of contemporary cultural policy-making in the

English language is extremely paltry. As a consequence, introducing the very basis of policy-making in the cultural sector in Italy to an English-speaker readership entailed the need for a more detailed discussion of policy rationales and their historical evolution that was required for the British case. It soon became obvious that limitations of space meant that a decision needed to be made on whether to opt for scope or depth in the chapter devoted to Italy. In this instance, depth seemed the most crucial aspect, and the decision was made to limit the scope of the discussion mainly to policy-making at the national level, with a view to being thus able to deal appropriately with the complexity of the Italian legal and administrative systems.



## Chapter 1

### **Comparing cultural policy in Britain and Italy: Towards a methodological framework**

Today we live in an increasingly “globalised” world, in which the local, national and international dimensions are more and more interwoven, and this is true whether we are discussing the production of commodities, the characteristics of the knowledge economy, the birth of social or political movements, or the spread of new ideas and values. It is therefore inevitable for most countries to feel the need to look at each other’s experiences when making important political and administrative decisions. In this context of increasing interdependence between nations, it is easy to understand the reason for the growing interest in comparative research. These are indeed the circumstances in which comparative cultural policy studies have developed. This chapter will therefore attempt to analyse some methodological problems arising from the comparative study of public policies for the cultural sector, focussing in particular on those that appear to be especially relevant to the research on hand. The discussion will thus attempt to highlight the limitations of much of the currently available comparative cultural policy research. The conclusive section of the chapter will finally propose some ideas for further research and for a broader, multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary approach to the cross-national study of cultural policies. For only such an approach can succeed in accounting for the different cultural, administrative, political

and legal traditions between the countries observed, thus providing a better understanding of the mechanisms of cultural policy-making within the countries at the centre of the present study.

#### THE USE AND ABUSE OF CULTURAL STATISTICS IN CROSS-NATIONAL RESEARCH

Comparative cultural policy is a very young discipline which is increasingly acquiring a growing degree of popularity among scholars interested in the study of cultural studies, public policy, cultural economics, and, more broadly, the economic and legal conditions for cultural production and distribution. The earliest examples of comparative studies of this nature date back to about 30 years, when a small group of experts began conducting research and compiling reports and papers, mainly on behalf of international organizations such as UNESCO (Wiesand 2002). In Europe - on which the analysis in this chapter focuses - this phenomenon can be clearly detected in the tendency shown by European Governments, around the early 70s, to look beyond their national borders for inspiration and solutions to their policy problems. Observing one's own national policies in comparison to other countries' is indeed a very good way to get a fuller understanding of the policy-making processes and their effectiveness in the homeland. This observation is especially valid for EU countries, where the attempts on the part of international and transnational organizations (first and foremost the European Community itself) to establish common standards

in several public policy areas have represented a strong incentive for researching the ways in which other EU countries have faced common problems (Antal et al 1996, 10).

As a result of this growing interest for cross-national comparisons of public policies, the first European intergovernmental conferences on cultural policies took place in Venice in 1970, and in Helsinki in 1972, with the aim of looking at their objectives and their financial and administrative aspects (Wiesand, 2002). Furthermore, the interest in this topic has not ceased to be a stimulus for the setting up of ambitious cross-national research projects, especially on the part of European and international bodies such as the Council of Europe or UNESCO. And we cannot avoid mentioning in this regard, the programme of national cultural policy reviews that was set up in 1985 by the Council for Cultural Co-operation within the Council of Europe. The reviews involved two types of report for each country that took part in the programme: a 'national' report was produced by the relevant authorities (i.e. Ministries of Culture, of Foreign Affairs, etc.); a second was compiled by a team of experts appointed by the Council of Europe (D'Angelo and Vesperini 1998, 12-13).

This was certainly a very important step forward in the developing of an international interest for the exercise of cross-national, comparative cultural policy analysis. However, from the point of view of methodology, which is the issue with which this chapter concerns itself, there are



problems with this type of research that do not allow us to consider this project as a genuinely comparative study on various national cultural policies. The UNESCO series of publications *Studies and documents on cultural policies* presents similar problems: each of the volumes offers a description of the cultural policy of each state; however, the data presented in each booklet have been collected in different ways in each country, and at different points in time. The data are thus not harmonized because they reflect the very particular political, institutional and administrative realities of each country, as well as different practices in data collection. The data are, thus, impossible to compare (Schuster 1996, 30). Unfortunately, the harmonization of data collection, and therefore the comparability across states of national cultural statistics, is - even among EU countries - still not an achievement as much as a target, albeit a target that seems to be getting closer. At the European level, good results have been achieved, and a 'common statistical language' has been developed that allows for the collection of consistent statistics (and consequently for sound international comparisons) in the field of economics. Currently, work is being done towards a more focused development of harmonized EU cultural statistics via the involvement of Eurostat, the Statistical office of the European Communities and the institution, in 1997, of a cultural statistics LEG (Leadership Group) with a mandate to start producing statistics on cultural expenditure, employment in the cultural sector, comparable across the EU (Allin, 2000). Another factor worth mentioning here is the recent trend in the rise of the phenomenon of the international "cultural observatories", whose work is

often of a cross-national nature and whose number and importance in the context of the diffusion and production of cultural data have been consistently growing in the last decade. Schuster (2002, 29-39) in his recently published work on the cultural policy information infrastructure, has contributed a detailed discussion of the rise of organizations such as cultural observatories and networks and the ways in which their activities of data-gathering, monitoring and dissemination of information – as well as their particular *modus operandi* - has increasingly impacted (in ways that are both good and bad) on cultural policy research.

However crucial the development of comparable international cultural statistics is for the development of cross-national cultural policy analysis, it is important not to reduce methodological issues in comparative cultural policy to a mere discussion of harmonization of statistical data. In fact, too often comparative cultural policy is limited to a discussion over comparability of national public arts expenditure data, and to the 'league table' approach that tends to come with it. The problem with the latter is that it seems to reduce the comparative study of policies for culture to the production - more or less rigorous - of tables that claim to compare government support for the arts in different countries (normally by charting the proportion of per capita state expenditure on the arts and culture)<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, to borrow the words of J. Mark Schuster, who has written widely on the problems concerning the scarce availability,

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<sup>2</sup> The Research Report *International data on public spending on the arts in eleven countries* published by the Arts Council of England (edited by Feist *et al.*) in 1998 and discussed later on in the chapter is one of the most recent and ambitious examples of this type of publication.

reliability and comparability of cultural statistics in comparative cultural policy research, “the league table has become a *sine qua non* of much comparative research on arts funding” (Schuster 1996, 24). He goes on to argue that often these tables, while giving the impression of providing answers to fundamental questions about state support for the arts in various countries, actually raise more questions than they answer (Schuster 1996, 23-26). An interesting case in point is one of the latest statistics-based comparative studies of public funding of the arts carried out in the UK, and commissioned by the Arts Council of England in 1998. According to the data presented in the published report, the cultural sector allegedly occupies less than two per cent of the total public expenditure in many European countries. The proportion of public resources devoted to culture seems to be, in fact, less than one per cent in the two countries at the centre of this study, Italy and the UK (Feist *et al.*, 1998). Undoubtedly, there are a number of reasons that call for a cautious approach to such data. For instance, subsidies to public libraries are not included in the calculation of public expenditure on culture in the UK. However, in the section devoted to Italy, archives and libraries are included in the tables charting government’s expenditures on culture. Therefore, data presented in the report offer a distorted picture of the financial commitment of the British state to culture. As a result, comparing the data presented in different sections of the same report turns out to be a rather pointless, if not even misleading, exercise. This can be explained with the fact that the report is based on the analysis of *existing* published and unpublished data available in each country. Such



data has been collected according to differing criteria across different countries, and some of the extant statistical data might be impossible to disaggregate. This is indeed a problem common to much cross-national work that relies heavily on quantitative material.

Therefore, the 'league table' approach and, more generally, a study of cultural policy that relies exclusively or mainly on quantitative data (usually the comparison of national expenditure data to explain differences between cultural policies across nations) can be misleading and, indeed, has been criticized as such within the academic literature in the field (Schuster, 1988 and 1996; Kawashima, 1995; Feist and Hutchison, 1990). It is not in the intention of this chapter to provide a detailed criticism of this type of research, however, in the present context it might be useful to refer to Schuster's (1996, 34) mention of an article, now famous within the American public policy literature, written in 1971 by Max Singer. The article was entitled – rather eloquently – *The vitality of mythical numbers*. Its content is very simple, yet meaningful: once a statistic is produced (no matter how incorrectly) and starts being quoted, it takes on a life of its own. As a result, the imaginary statistics might enter the official debate on cultural policy, being quoted for years without their original source and its reliability ever being verified.

An explanation for this state of affairs can be the fact that much of the comparative research that has so far been carried out in the sphere of cultural policy is very political in its intent, and thus often confuses



research and advocacy. As a result, the desire for increased understanding often gives in to the political desirability of certain outcomes over others. In fact, it is not rare for the policy-makers that commission research to have a more or less explicit political purpose. (Schuster, 1988 and 1996; Kawashima 1995 and 1999). Consequently, too many of the available studies are the product of a time-limited commission from arts agencies or funding bodies whose genuine objective is not to further knowledge and understanding through research (Schuster, 1988, 2). Moreover, nowadays in most countries, arts organizations work on very tight budgets that do not always include resource allocations especially devoted to funding research. This means that more often than not, resources for research are detracted from resources that would have otherwise been spent on cultural activities. Hence the sometime considerable internal pressure, within arts organizations, against funding research (Schuster 1996, 34). In such a context, it is important to underline the important contribution that the academic world could make to the development of more methodologically sound and unbiased research in the field of cultural policy studies.<sup>3</sup>

#### CULTURAL POLICY ACROSS NATIONAL BOUNDARIES: THE "MODELS OF CULTURAL POLICY" APPROACH

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<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it seems still true what Kawashima wrote in 1999, that "...there has been a gap between practical, policy-oriented research and academic, theoretical research" (Kawashima, 1999, 2)

Although a significant proportion of cross-national studies in the disciplinary area of cultural policy studies are based on the presentation and the discussion of quantitative data, it would be wrong to assume that this is the only type of comparative research currently available. In fact, another important strand of cross-national research has been developing in parallel to the 'league table' type described above. This alternative form of cross-national analysis is represented by what could be labelled as the 'cultural policy models' literature. By this expression, I refer to the body of work that discusses the different administrative frameworks for cultural policy in different countries in the attempt to derive, from such observation, a number of "archetypical" models of cultural policy to which all others could be more or less be ascribed. This type of work, whose most influential examples were published in the mid-80s, quite often attempted to establish and observe the links between national cultural policies and the cultural, intellectual and historical contexts of the countries in which they had developed. In many ways the contribution of such works is still valuable, in so far as they bring to the attention of the reader how different styles of cultural policy-making are a result of a number of complex variables and historical developments. One of the most illustrious representatives of this approach to cross-national research is the influential collection of essays edited by Cumming and Katz (1987a) with the title *The Patron State: Government and the Arts in Europe, North America and Japan*.

In their introductory chapter, Cumming and Katz acknowledge the diversity among different countries' cultural policies and the institutions that are in charge to define and implement them. More importantly, they explicitly link such diversity to each country's particular context: "...this variety reflects not only differing national traditions in the organization of public functions, but differing philosophies and objectives regarding the whole area of culture and the arts" (Cumming and Katz 1987b, 4). The chapters that make up the book all share the ambition to shed light upon such differing philosophies of policy making for the cultural sector, as well as the varying definitions - adopted among different countries - of what cultural forms the state should take upon itself to finance and promote. On the basis of their historical roots, Cumming and Katz (*Ibid.*, 5) identify two main patterns of political development on which contemporary national cultural policy models have been moulded. The first is that of the royal absolutist states such as France and Austria, and the other is represented by more limited monarchies that developed in highly mercantile countries, such as the Netherlands and England. Countries like Germany and Italy - which were united in a single state only in the second part of the nineteenth century – display, according to this paradigm, a mixture of the characteristics of either group. From these diverging historical factors derived the various models of contemporary cultural policy presented in *The Patron State*.

According to Cummings and Katz (1987b, 12) there are indeed various different organisational forms that governments can choose in order to



pursue their goals with regards to cultural policies: one is the quasi-public institution at arm's length from the government which tends to prevail in the Anglo-Saxon world, having been pioneered by the UK. The alternative approach is based on the notion that cultural provision and support are simply examples of the many functions of the state, and as such, they are to be run according to the normal rules and procedures that regulate the public administration. One variant of this approach is represented by the so-called "French Ministry of Culture Model", whereby responsibilities for policy-making, funding and advocacy for the cultural sector are all reunited under the roof of a single ministry, headed by a cabinet minister. In Cummings and Katz's paradigm, Italy represents a second variant of the normal public administration approach, since responsibility of cultural programmes is – in this case – divided amongst several ministries. In both the Italian and French models, however, resources for culture are allocated following the same budgetary procedures as for any other form of public spending, and the same control mechanisms are in place as for any other government's departments and ministries (*Ibid.*). However, following the creation in Italy – in 1998 - of the first unified Ministry for Culture since the Fascist era, it might be argued that the difference identified in the late 1980s by Cumming and Katz between the French and Italian variants of the public administration-based model of cultural policy has lost much of its relevance today. Indeed, the Italian Ministry for Heritage and Cultural Activities has, according to Carla Bodo (2002, 3) "finally achieved the full

status of a ministry of culture comparable to the ones existing in most European countries”<sup>4</sup>.

Besides the obvious and inevitable obsolescence of the information it presents, from a methodological point of view, there are further limitations in this collection of essays. Arguably, *The Patron State* belongs to that category of work that Schuster (1996, 30) has wittily labelled as the ‘ten countries, ten chapters and a staple’ literature. This is because the discussion offered by each chapter is in fact developed independently from the other chapters in the book. No common framework has been adopted and shared by the many authors whose papers are brought together in the volume. No particular disciplinary perspective or methodological approach has been consistently endorsed by all the authors. So, on the one hand, the chapter on Italy consists of a detailed and rather technical discussion of the legislation relevant to the administration of the cultural sector in force at the time in the country and how it originated in the Fascist era (Palma and Clemente di San Luca 1987). On the other hand, the chapter on the UK adopts a more discursive tone and - after an attempt to link prevalent notions of culture in Britain to the country’s Protestant tradition and to the political dominance of capitalism - presents a historical review of the historical development of the main institutions responsible for the distribution of public resources to the British arts sector. As the following sections of this thesis aim to show, there is a well founded reason why a legal focus is

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<sup>4</sup> The competencies of the unified Italian ministry now include the performing arts, cinema and copyright; only responsibilities for information and arts education are still beyond its remit (Bodo 2002).

more appropriate to understand the logic of cultural policy-making in Italy - and therefore preferable to an approach based solely on historical reconstruction such as the one chosen by F. F. Ridley (1987) for his chapter *Tradition, Change, and Crisis in Great Britain*. However, no explanation or justification for the adoption of such different approaches within the same collection of work is offered, since each chapter represents, in fact, a self-contained and independent unit which the authors have developed from a number of different disciplinary perspectives, emphasising different aspects of the process of cultural policy-making.

A second influential work of the “cultural policy models” type is represented by the collection of essays edited by Cummings and Schuster and published by the American Council for the Arts in 1989. The contribution by Hilman-Chartrand and McCaughey to the volume is the most relevant to the present discussion. Their paper looks at the ways in which different governments articulate and implement their cultural policies, and on this basis, they identify four different models of the state’s involvement in the financial support of the cultural sector. Hilman-Chartrand and McCaughey’s chapter begins with a discussion of the centrality of the so-called “arm’s length principle” in Western public policy and in the promotion of the arts and culture on the part of the state. However, there are other alternative modes of public support that need to be taken into consideration. In the authors own words:



The arm's length principle [...] is not the only possible mode of public support to the fine arts. There are four alternative roles for the State: Facilitator, Patron, Architect and Engineer. Furthermore, the State can have two different objectives – to support the process of creativity or to support production of specific types of art such as socialist realism (Hilman-Chartrand and McCaughey 1989, 48).

The chapter goes on to provide examples of each of the four models of state support for the arts just described (*Ibid.* 48-53). So, the United States with its generous policy of promoting the arts through incentives to private donations in the form of foregone taxes, represent the Facilitator state. Great Britain, embodies the type of the Patron State, which is characterised by the reliance on bodies at "arm's length" from the government for the distribution of public resources to the cultural sector. France is the archetypical Architect state, where culture is highly bureaucratised and crucial decisions are made centrally by a Ministry for Culture. The fourth model of state intervention is the most appealing to governments with totalitarian tendencies, since it features the subjection of cultural policies and strategies to the obtainment of political goals, and artistic decisions are made and modified according to changes in the government's political priorities. Interestingly, after describing at great lengths the various models of state support of the arts, Hilman-Chartrand and McCaughey (*Ibid.*, 53) admit that "[a]lthough these roles are mutually exclusive in theory, in practice, most nations combine some or all of them". Furthermore, the final section of the chapter, sets out to demonstrate how these ideal roles of the state *vis à vis* the arts have been progressively converging, so that "[m]ost countries have, to varying



degrees, adopted all four modes of public support” (Ibid., 72) . In the fifteen years that have intervened since the publication of Hilman-Chartrand and McCaughey’s work, with the process of globalisation now well underway, this trend towards convergence has become even more marked, and the role of the state in the promotion of the cultural sector has become so complex – if not even, occasionally, contradictory (as chapter 5 and 6 will show) – that the four ideal types described above are not as useful a tool in understanding how cultural policy develops differently in different countries as they probably were when they were first conceptualised.

#### BEYOND A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

In the light of the preceding observations, it cannot be denied that still a lot has to be done to conceptualise comparative cultural policy, so that we are able go beyond a purely quantitative methodology based on international comparison of cultural statistical data. Cultural expenditure is certainly an important aspect in so far as it represents an expression of a government’s priorities in cultural funding and, consequently, in the broader sphere of cultural policy. Thus – as Clive Gray (1996, 218-219) warns us - what is spent, how it is spent and the effects of what is spent are important issues in understanding cultural policies. This is especially significant when public expenditure is observed over the longer term, in order to register changes in governments’ priorities and preoccupations vis à vis cultural policies. However, this chapter aims to suggest that a

quantitative approach cannot alone suffice to understand the workings of the cultural sector and of policies for it across nations. To this end, a methodological approach is needed that allows and requires a more in-depth study of the cultural, social and political history and the cultural debates within the countries being compared, as well as an understanding of their legal and administrative systems as a precondition for discussing cultural policy mechanisms cross-nationally. The importance of such an approach is indeed eloquently exemplified by the case study of the comparative analysis of the cultural policy of Britain and Italy.

#### TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGY: THE CONCEPT OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

In the light of the preceding arguments, we are forced to conclude that the methodologies that currently guide comparative cultural policy research are largely inappropriate, and do not meet the specific requirements of cross-national research. The final section of this paper will thus attempt to offer some suggestions towards the development of a more appropriate methodology for comparative, cross-national analysis within the cultural policy field. To this end, inspiration can be drawn from research and debates that have taken place in the context of other academic disciplines. In particular, comparative social research and comparative policy studies seem to be the areas that can provide the richest wealth of implications for the field of cultural policy studies. In

particular, the notion of *contextualization* elaborated by social researchers will be shown to be especially significant and useful. The reason why it seems convenient to look at these disciplines for a way out of the methodological impasse in which comparative cultural policy research seems to have been trapped, is that the theorization and discussion of methodological concerns in cross-national research are more developed within these academic fields. Moreover, a review of the available literature in cross-national social research and policy analysis reveals that the problems that scholars within these fields have had to face, when developing suitable research methodologies, are substantially similar to those facing the cultural policy researcher. Significantly, Hantrais and Mangen (1999, 91), who have written extensively on the topic, consider some of the crucial issues inherent in a comparative approach to social research as a consequence of the fact that “[m]uch of the officially sponsored research is primarily dictated by pressures to extract ‘lessons from the homeland’”. They report that the sector has only recently witnessed the establishment of a more robust research agenda aiming at the definition of well-constructed models and the testing of theories. However, they conclude that much of the extant literature on the comparative research process tends to focus on ‘thematic content and findings’ rather than on theorizations and explorations of the theory and methodology of the research process. They maintain that:

[T]he growing interest in cross-national comparisons within the social sciences since the 1970s has not therefore, been matched by commensurate advances at the theoretical and practical level.



As a result, the material collected in international projects is often not directly comparable, and the findings reported to sponsors may be biased or misleading” (Hantrais and Mangan 1999, 91).

These observations indeed reflect the objections moved against current practices in cross-national research in the cultural policy field earlier in this chapter. These methodological difficulties, thus, are not exclusive to this field of study, but seem rather intrinsic to international comparisons of cultures and policies. However, the existence of these problems has been acknowledged and thus appropriately confronted in the social sciences. A number of ways have hence been suggested in order to be able to compare cultures and policies across nations in a more rigorous and meaningful way.

In particular, the most interesting contribution that comes from the sociological field is the development of *contextualization* as an approach to cross-national comparative research that can successfully circumvent some of the difficulties inherent in this type of research (Hantrais and Mangan 1999; Hantrais 1999). Linda Hantrais (1999) maintains that contextualization is central to all the possible approaches to comparative social research. Currently, social scientists are indeed showing an increasing interest in issues surrounding contextualization, which is now considered a fundamental component in cross-national comparative studies. Hantrais (1999, 94) writes that “... an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural, economic and political context in which social phenomena develop is a precondition for successful cross-national

comparative research". In the same paper, she also delineates the development of the discipline over time, and the changing attitudes toward the importance of context in cross-national research. She identifies three possible approaches to comparative social research: the universalist, culturalist and societal approach.

According to Hantrais's schematisation, the belief of the early sociologists in the possibility of deriving general laws from sociological observation (in order to explain social phenomena across different cultures) deeply affected the international comparative research that was carried out in the 1950s and 1960s. Cross-national social research at this stage "...was grounded in the assumption that universal characteristics could be identified in social phenomena, independently from a specific context... This is because universalist theory was culture or context free" (Hantrais 1999, 94). The problem with the universalist approach is that it results in a research process which places its emphasis on the search for similarities and points of convergence among nations and cultures. It thus ignores the specificity of the social, political and cultural contexts of the social phenomena studied, since it is based on the assumption that "there are shared, universally identifiable, pressures and trends working across all industrialized societies" (O'Reilly quoted in May 1997, 181)

Alongside this school of thought, a rather different approach was elaborated by the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s, on the basis of a number of studies that were undertaken on cultural diversity in urban

settings. Whereas the universalists' body of research aimed at seeking uniformity and commonalities among countries (in order to draw generalizations and infer theories from observations), the Chicago School chose to concentrate their attention rather on particularism and national uniqueness. They aimed at trying to underline differences among countries and cultures through comparative research. If the universalist approach is regardless of context, the culturalist one is based on relativism and culture-boundedness. Accordingly, the very possibility of generalizing from field observations was rejected on the basis of the denial of the existence of universal concepts that could be meaningful across national boundaries. Indeed, this approach "placed such great emphasis on social contexts and their specificity, distinctiveness or uniqueness, that meaningful comparisons and generalization were made very difficult, if not impossible" (Hantrais 1999, 95).

In between these two extremes, Hantrais (1999, 96-97) places an intermediate position which she defines as the 'societal approach'. This is based on the view that it is possible to generalise from observation, and hence derive theories, provided that the national specificity of the social, cultural and political contexts in which social phenomena manifest themselves is properly accounted for. This last, societal, approach to comparative research is indeed at the basis of the methodological model that this chapter strives to advocate for the achievement of a meaningful cross-national cultural policy research. This is also the methodological framework within which the comparative case study research presented



in this thesis is inscribed. Such an approach might indeed successfully contribute to overcome some of the limitations, and prevent some of the abuses, of current comparative research in this area. The problems that the comparative researcher might incur are made clearer by the distinction made in 1990 by Else Øyen (1990b, 5-6) between four archetypes of comparative researchers: the purists, the ignorants, the totalists, and finally, the genuine comparativists.

The 'purists' are those who firmly believe that comparative work is no different from any other type of sociological research. They would therefore not feel the need to accompany their comparative studies with any particular methodological discussion relative to the specific problems of cross-national comparisons. The second group is represented by the 'ignorants', who are clearly ethnocentric in their approach. They indeed recognize the special nature of cross-national work, but they tend to 'import' uncritically in their research theories and principles developed in other countries, irrespectively of social contexts and historical and cultural differences. In Øyen's words, they "pursue their ideas and data across national boundaries without ever giving a thought to the possibility that such comparisons may add to the complexity in interpreting the results of the study" (1990b, 5). This is unfortunately a very common tendency in the sociological tradition. The third group are the 'totalists' who are – at least in theory – aware of the complications and the methodological issues involved in comparative research. However, "[t]hey consciously ignore the many stumbling blocks of the non-

equivalence of concepts, a multitude of unknown variables interacting in an unknown context and influencing the research in question in unknown ways. And they deliberately ignore the scientific requirements regarding the testing of hypotheses in settings which do not and cannot meet the conditions for such testing" (Øyen 1990b, 5). Finally, the 'comparativists', believe that comparative social research is a type of research that poses very specific methodological problems that need to be addressed, and they tackle their research questions accordingly.

Øyen's categorization is obviously based upon ideal types, and it is thus somewhat artificial and schematic. However, it has the distinct advantage of facilitating the task of qualifying the most common type of comparative research that has so far been undertaken within the field of cultural policy research. It seems possible at this stage of the discussion, to suggest that extant cross-national cultural policy analysis is markedly 'totalist' in nature – though 'ignorant' or even 'purist' examples of comparative cultural policy research could also probably be found. Indeed, the intent of this chapter is precisely to argue in favour of the need for comparative cultural policy research to shift towards a more genuinely and consistently 'comparativist' position.

#### RESEARCH VS. ADVOCACY

This chapter has attempted to argue against a purely quantitative methodology, and against using public expenditure as the main cultural

policy output measure, whilst at the same time alerting the reader to the incapacity of the already mentioned 'ten countries, ten chapters and a staple' literature to generate a true understanding of cultural policy issues across countries (Schuster 1996, 30). As noted earlier, changing patterns of public funding throw light on a government's changing priorities, which are of great importance in cultural policy. However, our argument is that comparisons of data on public expenditure on cultural policy alone do not suffice to offer explanations of developments within national cultural policies. Indeed, we have seen that one of the main problems with the currently available literature is its descriptive nature, and the fact that it does not always aim at providing an interpretation of the phenomena under observation. The descriptive moment is the necessary first step of any comparative research, but it will only produce information, not understanding. This is why there is a great need for a more theory-building approach to the study of cultural policy (Kawashima 1995; Schuster 1988, 6)<sup>5</sup>.

Equally important in defining an appropriate comparative methodology is the need to distinguish policy *analysis* from policy *advocacy*<sup>6</sup>. In *Understanding Public Policy*, Thomas R. Dye maintains unequivocally that "[l]earning *why* governments do what they do and what the consequences of their actions are is not the same as saying what governments *ought* to do, or bringing about changes in what they do.

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as Rose (1991a, 447) points out, "concepts are necessary as common points of reference for grouping phenomena that are differentiated geographically and often linguistically".

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the often-blurred divide between advocacy and research see Schuster (2002, 27-29) and Bennett (2004).



Policy advocacy requires the skills of rhetoric, persuasion, organisation, and activism. Policy analysis encourages scholars and students to attack critical policy issues with the tools of systematic enquiry” (Dye 1975, 5). Unfortunately, as Dye himself recognises (1975, 14), this is often easier said than done, since the people who are actually undertaking policy research are often programme administrators, who have a vested interest in proving the success of their programmes. It is thus essentially important to separate as much as possible research from policy implementation and advocacy for funding. This is very difficult to achieve in practice, though, in view of the way the cultural sector is structured and the way it works. More recently, Radin (2000, 92) has explicitly acknowledged that “[a]nalysts cannot insulate themselves from the dynamics of politics, interest groups, and deadlines”<sup>7</sup>.

Although public policy experts agree that there has been a shift away from the belief that policy research can be fully apolitical (Radin 2000, 104), Oliver Bennett (2004) in a recent article warns about the consequences that are unavoidable whenever the researcher succumbs to the temptation of blurring of the boundaries between research and advocacy:

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<sup>7</sup> At the end of a detailed discussion of the many pressures that policy analysts have to operate under, Radin (*ibid.*, 105) concludes: “... the tensions between the imperatives of the two cultures – the cultures of analysis and politics – are not easy to avoid. They are a part of the day-to-day life of the policy analyst, playing out in different ways in different environments, and the stress that emanates from them is part of the lifeblood of the policy analysis profession and should be expected in a democratic system. Analysts are rarely in the controlling role in this relationship, and most have acknowledged that their legitimacy is derived from elected or appointed political officials”.

Advocacy-inspired research [...] does, of course, impose severe limits on the kind of research that will be conducted. Research questions will be designed to produce answers that are in the organisation's interests; research that might produce uncomfortable findings will, as far as possible, be avoided.

#### AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The present discussion has attempted to show how the stated effort to conceptualise and theorize about cultural policies cross-nationally needs to be founded on an extensive knowledge of the circumstances of the countries chosen as case studies, in respect of the principle of *contextualization*. In particular, those factors that might affect the cultural sphere need to be taken into account when assessing and investigating cultural policies. This is tantamount to advocating a strongly interdisciplinary approach to methodological issues in comparative studies. This is a well-accepted notion in comparative social sciences. The sociologist Rokkan in 1978 wrote that cross-national research entails a "built-in transition from internationality to interdisciplinarity: it is simply difficult to establish acceptable comparisons between countries and cultures without bringing a broader ranges of variables than those of only one discipline" (quoted in Øyen 1990b, 11). More specifically, the most obvious requirement for the comparative research model here proposed, would be a clear and complete picture of the mechanisms of cultural policy and their functioning within the nations studied as a necessary precursor of any rigorous comparative study. In particular, what is excluded or included by governments within their domain of action is very

significant in shaping national cultural policies and should thus be a prime object of analysis. Moreover, the reconstruction of the historical development of cultural policies in the context of the political, cultural and intellectual history of the countries is unavoidable if we want to convincingly account for differences and particular national developments. Furthermore, because cultural policy does not operate in isolation from other spheres of public policy, the approach that we are here proposing would require that we investigate and compare the legal, administrative and political frameworks in which cultural policy decisions are made. This would allow the researcher to understand how policy-making in the cultural arena fits into the broader patterns of state intervention. Indeed, understanding to what extent cultural policies develop and operate independently of other policy areas, and the extent to which they feel the effects of external pressures can clarify the changing circumstances of cultural policy within different states.

These are all very ambitious aims, and indeed the research model that this chapter advocates calls for a strong methodological stance. I refer here to the need to acknowledge that, in order to achieve a comparative research that is able to go beyond the mere description (as recommended above), it is preferable to limit the number of countries being compared. This would enable the researcher to examine a larger number of variables and aspects than it would be feasible in a larger-scale comparison (Hantrais 1999, 99). The currently popular format of comparative study exemplified by the report published in 1998 by the Arts



Council of England (Feist *et al.*, 1998) which compares data on public spending on the arts in eleven countries, does not lend itself to the type of in-depth study that we are proposing. Limiting the number of countries observed would also allow one to concentrate on the question of equivalence of concepts in different contexts - or even, as shown by the case study of Italy and the UK, the *lack* of equivalence in different contexts, a crucial issue in cross-national research (see chapter 2). This is indeed an accepted principle within the social sciences. In Linda Hantrais' words, "[t]he smaller the number of countries included in 'narrow-gauge' studies... the greater the contextual detail and the chances of approaching a more holistic comparison, and the easier it is to be consistent in specifying and applying concepts and in using qualitative evidence" (Hantrais, 1999, 101). This is certainly a necessary requirement to achieve a broader, multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary approach for cross-national cultural policy comparison, which is precisely what this chapter has attempted to advocate.

## Chapter 2

### **Methodological considerations in practice: Researching policy in Britain and Italy**

The preceding chapter has examined, in general terms, a number of methodological issues arising from the engagement in the cross-national analysis of cultural policies. This chapter will build on the methodological observations already made, by focussing in particular on their adaptation to the comparative study of Italy and Britain, the two countries on which this research focuses. Differences in their cultural, administrative and legal frameworks will therefore represent crucial aspects of the discussion presented in following chapters. In particular, the second part of the thesis will be devoted to the exploration of the two different traditional cultural traditions of Britain and Italy, and the different evolution of national cultural policies that flourished within those traditions. Before turning to the detailed analysis of public policy making with specific regards to the arts and culture, however, it is necessary to consider the frame in which public policy is made and studied in the two countries, and examine whether the contrasting understanding of the very notion of *policy* might affect decisions that are made in the administration of the public cultural sector.

As Peter John explains, “research on policy seeks to understand how the machinery of the state and political actors interact to produce public actions” (John 1998, 1). Its main focus of analysis is therefore the ensemble of decisions that determine the output of a political system (in the case presently under scrutiny, cultural policies) as well as changes that such decisions produce outside of the political system itself, which are normally referred to as ‘policy outcomes’ (for example, increased levels of participation in cultural activities, or changes in the age or social composition of arts audiences) (*ibid.*). The ultimate *raison d’être* of the discipline of public policy research, thus, lies in the ambition to explore and explain the complexities of the policy-making process. As John (1998, 1-2) further explains:

Public policy seeks to explain the operation of the political system as a whole. This is its main contribution to political science. The policy-orientated approach looks at public decision-making from the viewpoint of what comes out of the political process. Each element of policy-making is considered to cause a particular output and outcome.

Despite the discipline’s focus on policy outcomes, policy researchers are well aware that policy-making remains nevertheless a highly political exercise. Indeed, each policy sector contains within itself all the elements that make up a political system: elected politicians, civil servants, pressure-groups, bureaucrats and so on, as well as the complex fabric of institutional relationships, law and regulations that govern any modern



political structure. It thus logically follows that one of the principal goals of the policy-oriented research in the politics sphere should be “to sharpen up the analysis of politics by examining the links between decision-makers as they negotiate and seek influence in the governmental system” (John 1998, 2).

As a sub-sector of public policy, cultural policy can therefore be described as the variegated forms of institutional structures that have been set in place by national and local government to support, as well as regulate, the heritage and the diverse creative and artistic endeavours that make up the cultural sector. However, as Bennett (1995, 201) points out, cultural policy is not limited to governmental activities, since also the measures adopted by organisations within the cultural sector itself are an equally important aspect of cultural policy. As Miller and Yúdice (2002, 1) explain, “organizations solicit, train, distribute, finance, describe and reject actors and activities that go under the signs of artist or artwork, through the implementation of policies”. In this sense, cultural policy, despite being concerned with the arts and what might appear – to the naïve observer – the aloft and timeless preoccupations of aesthetics<sup>8</sup> is in fact a rather political terrain, no less than other aspects of policy, such as health or social policy where the political element might seem more obvious. In fact, as Jim McGuigan (1996, 5) argues, the political element has been, until very recently, what has been most attractive to

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<sup>8</sup> It can be assumed, however, that such naïve observers are today on their way to extinction and soon to become just a figure of speech, since postmodern theory has made a point of negating the existence of any non-politically charged notion of what represents art or aesthetically valuable endeavours.

researchers working in the disciplinary fields that are grouped under the umbrella term of cultural studies. Consequently, while 'cultural politics' - intended as aesthetic practices that aim to challenge the mainstream and the cultural establishment – have received great attention, the more pragmatic 'politics of culture' - which include not only policy analysis but also policy formulation - have been somewhat neglected. McGuigan suggests that an explanation for this lack of interest might reside in an exaggerated form of critical purity on the part of researchers working within cultural studies, as well as in their reluctance to get involved in the state's regulatory processes (*ibid.*). This might contribute to explain the relatively recent development of the academic interest in cultural policy research (Kawashima 1999).

It is important, however, to put the slow development of cultural policy studies as a discrete field of research into an appropriate context. It is significant to note how, in fact, the systematic study of public policy (of which cultural policy can be seen as a sub-discipline with a stronger humanistic connotation) is itself a rather young field of enquiry within political science. Beryl A. Radin (2000, 1), in trying to describe what it means to be a policy analyst, goes as far as claiming that “[d]espite the growth of the field over the past several decades, this is not a profession that the general public understands. It is obvious that policy analysis has not gained a place in the world of professions equal to that of law, medicine or engineering”. This might seem a rather surprising statement, especially to the British reader, in consideration of the

escalating reliance of UK government and policy-makers on consultants, analysts and the ever-increasingly powerful 'think-tanks'. However, if we turn to Italy, we would have to conclude that the state of affairs there is rather different, and an Italian reader would certainly be more sympathetic towards Radin's statement.

Indeed, if research into public policy has had a slow development in the Anglophone world, this has been even slower in Italy, where public policies and policy-making have not received a degree of attention and scrutiny parallel to that of other Western European countries. In his research guide to contemporary Italy, Bull (1996, 34) attributes this to the fact that, in the early 1960s, when the question of state intervention and public policy-making became a crucial issue, Italian political science was so underdeveloped that it was just incapable of properly analysing the changing circumstances. In other countries, around that same time - following the establishment of welfare states - the interest in the understanding and evaluation of public policies constituted a crucial encouragement for the development of public policy research (John 1998, 4). The above-mentioned shortcomings of Italian political science meant that, there, public policy became the preserve of academics with a legal, economic and sociological background. A more systematic approach to the study of public policy was eventually prompted by the reform of the Italian welfare state in 1978 (Bull 1996, 35), although policy analysis first entered the world of academia only in the mid-eighties,



when the first courses on public policy were established in a limited number of universities.

As with many other Western countries, public policy still represents only a minority interest within the broader field of Italian political science - which is itself reputed to be lagging behind and struggling in catching up with international developments (Bull 1996, 34-35; Regonini 2001, 46). Regonini (2001, 46) further laments the fact that even as late as 1990 'public policy' was not to be found in the subject index of the *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* (the main political science journal in the country), nor have Italian publishing houses shown much interest for foreign publications in the field, with the result that a number of works by 'classic authors' of the public policy tradition, such as Lowi, Schön, Allison, Wildavsky and Kingdon, are not available in translation (though – admittedly, this might also be the case in other non-English speaking countries other than Italy).

The following section of this chapter will explore a possible explanation for such a late development in the interest for public policy and its study in Italy.

#### "NOMINA SUNT SUBSTANTIA RERUM"? A QUESTION OF VOCABULARY

Regonini (2001, 12) suggests that one of the causes for such a lack of interest in policy research on the part of the Italian academia might be

linked to the fact that a very large proportion of the extant literature in this area has been produced in the United States. Consequently, a certain appreciation of the administrative and political structures in place there - which the Italian policy researcher might not necessarily be acquainted with - is a required background knowledge for the full understanding of the available public policy literature. More importantly, work produced in the American cultural context refers to concepts and values that are not equally diffused - or even acceptable - when transposed into the Italian system of beliefs and values. This concept is effectively clarified by the reception, in Italy, of what is universally seen to be now a 'classic' text of policy analysis: Lindbloom's 1959 article entitled *The science of "muddling through"*. This otherwise influential article, as well as its very title, could not solicit but the uttermost suspicion in a culture such as the Italian one, characterised by a deep-rooted sense of reverence for the written law as a guide to public administration. This reverential attitude to the law is indeed reflected in disputes over conflicting interpretations of single words of the legislative text that can engage law experts and high courts alike for whole decades. It is therefore common for the educated Italian reader to feel that, while policy studies might provide useful guidance towards an improved public administration, they do not display an adequate standard of scientific solidity on the theoretical and methodological levels to command academic credibility (Regonini 2001, 12)<sup>9</sup>. The lack of a unitary *corpus* of literature in the disciplinary field of public policy to be shared by all those involved in it and commonly

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<sup>9</sup> As the opinion by Beryl A. Radin (2000) referred to above confirms, this is hardly a sentiment limited to Italian academics, though it is arguable that it might be more intense amongst them for the reasons suggested by Regonini (2001).

referred to, further enhances the difficulty of seeing public policy as a fully legitimate ambit for academic research (Regonini 2001, 13).

Such scepticism is without any doubt accentuated by the fact that the word *policy*, in fact, does not exist in the Italian language. As a result, in Italian (as well as in most other main continental European languages) it becomes much harder to make explicit the distinction between *politics* and *policy* that is immediately obvious to the English speaker. This has implications that go well beyond the impossibility of translating in an elegant way expressions such as, for example, “the politics of cultural policy”. For it is significant to point out how the words ‘policy’ and ‘politics’ have, in the Anglophone linguistic context, a strong autonomy not only of a lexical nature, but also at the level of meaning. As Regonini (2001, 19) shows, in the American political and cultural frames of reference, such distinction often shifts into an open contraposition, whereby the notion of *policy* is felt to be freer from connotations of partisanship and corruption than *politics*.

Arnold J. Heidenheimer (1986) has contributed an interesting review of the historical foundations and the principal consequences of the divergence between the concepts of ‘politics’ and ‘policy’ in English and other Continental European languages. He bases much of his conclusions on examples derived from German and French, although the paper’s central argument is also valid for other European languages.



Heidenheimer (ibid., 3) maintains that the fact that many languages in Europe do not possess a term for policy that is distinct from that for politics is a terminological problem that is primarily responsible for the difficulties in establishing a genuinely cross-national literature on political science. His paper represents an important attempt to study in a systematic way what he (ibid., 4) refers to as the "polis-family of words" (in so far as the terms under analysis in his paper are all derived from the Greek terms *polis* and *politeia*). His aim is to achieve a better understanding of the development of terminologies over time and across language areas, with a view to reconstruct the series of events that brought the English language to develop a notion of 'policy' complementary to that of politics, while in the other Continental languages both meanings came together in the sole term of politics.

The importance of Heidenheimer's work lies in the fact that, as observed by the German political scientist Sternberger, there is "no comprehensive philological study existing so far which would inform us about the curious migration or migrations of these words through the ages, or about the striking changes of meaning they underwent in the course of time" (quoted in Heidenheimer 1986, 4). Although over two decades have passed since Sternberger wrote these words in the early 1980s, the underdevelopment of research in this area seems to be still unchallenged. Accordingly, today there still is no established analytical framework that deals specifically with the variation of meanings of similar words across languages as well as changes in the meaning of those

words over time. This means that quite often both 'policy' and 'politics' are translated as 'politics' without much awareness, on the part of professional translators, of the need to make explicit the actual difference in meaning conveyed by the two English words<sup>10</sup>.

Unfortunately, limitations of space do not allow me to discuss here in great detail the historical reconstruction of the evolution of the words *policy* and *politics* offered by Heidenheimer. Suffice it to say that he establishes a correlation between the decline of feudalism and the rise of an urban merchant class in England and the diffusion of the term *policy* (with its already mentioned more positive connotation with respects to *politics*). His main argument is that:

The English *policy* became generalised in a socially downward direction in ways that the Continental term *Policey* could not. That is, terms that were initially attributed to royalty and higher strata came to be applied also to the actions of ordinary citizens. [...] In the Continental systems with higher stateness<sup>11</sup>, the terms *Policey* and *Politik* became, over roughly the same period, semantically further removed from the private word of the burgher and citizen. Both concepts were becoming associated with actions at higher levels of the evolving nation-states (Heidenheimer 1986, 14).

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<sup>10</sup> It is very telling that Regonini, writing in Italian in 2001, in order to represent faithfully the thought of foreign theorists whose work she refers to in her book, has felt the need of going back to the original texts and offer her own translation of crucial passages, in view of the shortcomings of the available published translations of those same classic texts (Regonini 2001, chapter 1).

<sup>11</sup> Heidenheimer (1986, 9) maintains that nations can be distinguished on the basis of their different levels of 'stateness'. Quoting Ernest Baker, he writes: "State societies" like France and Germany developed historical and intellectual traditions of the state embodying the "public power". "Stateless societies" fall short of perceiving "the state as an institution which acts". Englishmen tended rather to see in the executive, "just a bundle of officials, united only by a mysterious Crown which serves chiefly as a bracket to unite an infinite series of integers".

In summary, Heidenheimer believes that the shifts in meaning among the various terms belonging to the “polis-family of words” in different European languages are ascribable to the different political circumstances of the various countries, and are the reflection of their political traditions (e.g. higher or lower degree of ‘stateness’) and of different priorities in governmental concerns within the arenas of both domestic and foreign policy (Heidenheimer 1986, 7-15).

Far from being a dispute of purely linguistic relevance, Heidenheimer's arguments have very important repercussions on the ways in which speakers of different languages think and write of politics and policy. Heidenheimer himself proffers very telling examples. He recounts of his attempt to prove wrong, with a simple empirical test, the belief beheld by many Continental political scientists that – despite the limitations of their native languages – when reading foreign texts in translation, they are able to gather from the context whether the English writer refers to ‘policy’ or ‘politics’ in his or her arguments. However, when asked to translate the heading of a press release that read “Industrial Policy = Industrial Politics” the press staff of European embassies in Washington offered very different translations. More significantly, even countries sharing the same language came up with rather different renderings of the heading. So, if the French embassy translated the given sentence as “Le politique industrielle = les politiques de l’industrie”, the Belgian Embassy’s version was the substantially different “Politique industrielle = politique politicienne de l’industrie”. While the Spanish Embassy’s



interpretation is the yet different: "Una politica industrial = Politica industrial global", the Germans had to render the obviously troublesome second part of the heading with an incredibly long circumlocution: "Industriepolitik = parteipolitische Auffassung von der Foederungswuerdigkeit bestimmter Industriezweige" (Heidenheimer 1986, 20-21).

What are the consequences of the linguistic *impasse* the preceding examples so sharply point out? According to the Italian political scientist Giovanni Sartori (1984 and 1973) - who has conducted extensive research into the theory of political and social concepts, their historical development and their links to language - such consequences are, as a matter of fact, extremely significant. He insists (1984, 15) that whatever we know is mediated by language and that since "language is the sine qua non instrument of knowing, the knowledge-seeker had better be in control of the instrument". At the centre of Sartori's argument is the claim that rather than simply expressing thought, language is in fact a 'thought-moulding instrument': words 'interpret' things. Sartori therefore holds that the language user thinks through a vocabulary that embodies and reflects a general way of perceiving and conceiving things (*Ibid.*, 18). To make this concept clearer, he refers to the notions of *semantic projection* and *semantic import* (*Ibid.*, 16-17). This is how he explains their meaning:

the semantic import of words entails that (1) what is *not named* largely remains *unnoticed* or, in any event, impervious to

cognitive development; and that, (2) the *naming choice* (selecting a given word within a given semantic field) involves a far-reaching *interpretive projection*. All told, then, projective semantics brings to the fore both the *constraints* and the *pathways* that any given natural language imposes upon and affords to our perceiving, thinking and knowing.

Sartori clearly shares Heidenheimer's scepticism of the researcher's capacity to go beyond the conceptual limits of his or her natural language in order to grasp notions and concepts (as well as the full meaning of the words that express them) elaborated in other languages. Drawing on a biblical paraphrase, Sartori (*Ibid.*, 17) explains that "in the beginning is the word, that is, *naming*". When we express what we have in mind, we select, among the number of possible choices offered by our natural language, those words that can best represent our thoughts. Conversely, we would struggle to express effectively what we mean unless we are able to find the words for it, and, by the same token, we cannot form a sentence unless we already know the meaning of the words contained in it. Sartori therefore agrees with Taylor, who wrote that "language is constitutive of the reality, is essential to its being the kind of reality it is" (quoted in Sartori 1984, 17).

It should be clear at this stage that these arguments have very serious implications for the question of the consequences of the lack of the word 'policy' in many Continental languages (including Italian) that has been discussed so far. These, have been spelt out very powerfully by Whorf (quoted in Sartori 1984, 17-18), who writes: "We dissect nature along

lines laid down by our native languages ... we cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to ... our speech community". It follows thus, that "facts are unlike to speakers whose language background provides for unlike formulation of them". In conclusion, Whorf argues that thinking "is in a language – in English, in Sanskrit, in Chinese. And every language is a vast pattern-system ... by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning"<sup>12</sup>.

Sartori warns of the possible extreme interpretation of Whorf's relativism as a principle of 'untranslatability', which he thinks would be an exaggerated reaction. However, he reinforces the point that whenever people think about something at any point in time, they do so in relation to a particular linguistic system which is taken to be a 'given'. This is the meaning of Sartori's insistence upon the role of language in moulding thought which was referred to above. He exemplifies this point with a number of convincing examples (Sartori 1984 19-22). He begins with the preference displayed by the English language for the word 'government' over the word 'state', which has resulted in the systematic translation of the French *état*, the German *Staat* and the Italian *stato* as 'government'. Conversely, other European languages consider 'government' merely as one of the partitions of the state, which they still consider as a broader,

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<sup>12</sup> According to Sartori, the fact that translators have somehow managed, for millennia, to translate written works from one language into another does not question the validity of the point made, since the polyglot in fact 'rethinks' in each of the languages he or she is proficient in, rather than actually translating as such (Sartori 1984, 65).



general entity. The practical consequence of this different linguistic reference is that whoever decides to write on the topic of the state in English is handicapped, according to Sartori, in two different respects. First of all, the writer is exposed to the ambiguity of the relationship between the words and concepts of state and government. On the other hand, he or she would also tend to limit the scope of the research, in so far as the more pragmatic approach (implicit in the reduction of the concept of state to that of government) misses out on what has been written in other languages and within cultures attached to the more theoretical notion of state. These are indeed more likely to have elaborated a more abstract, juridical as well as philosophical theory of the state. As the discussion presented by this thesis will unfold in this and the following chapters, it will become evident that this is indeed a point of extreme relevance to the comparative analysis of policy-making in Britain and Italy.

Sartori (1984, 21) further suggests that even the different ways in which different peoples see themselves as part of a national community might be affected by linguistic differences. To stick with the Italian and English languages, 'people' is, in English, a plural noun, whereas its Italian equivalent *popolo* (as well as the German *Volk* and the French *peuple*) is singular. This linguistic difference is paralleled by the difficulty on the part of English-speaking political writers to see the people as "an oversoul, or as an organic indivisible entity", while such notion is at the very basis of the Italian, French and German speech communities. Sartori thinks that

this might not be a simple coincidence, rather, his hypothesis is that “when we say ‘people *are*’ we are semantically prompted to perceive and conceive a multiplicity, a sum total of ‘each body’, while those who say ‘people *is*’ are predisposed and encouraged to conceive an ‘allbody’, a whole that subsumes its parts” (Sartori 1984, 21).

What implications do the considerations presented so far have on the specific case in point for this research?

#### THE PREVALENCE OF ‘ABSOLUTE POLITICS’ IN ITALY

If one were to accept Sartori’s theory of language as a thought-moulding instrument, then it would consequentially follow that the fact that the Italian language does not possess a distinctive word to express the meaning conveyed, in English, by the word policy should be a prime reason behind the slower development of public policy studies in Italy. This seems confirmed by the observation made by the renowned social scientist Alessandro Pizzorno that the Italian public sphere is dominated by what he calls ‘absolute politics’ (*la politica assoluta*). Implicit in the notion of absolute politics is the belief that political action is the only form of activity that can significantly transform society. According to this view, political action is the only means by which the life of the nation, and in fact, the life of humanity as a whole can be improved according to an ideal of perfection (Pizzorno quoted in Regonini 2001, 18). In Pizzorno’s view, then, at the heart of absolute politics is the conviction that collective

quality of life can only be enhanced through forms of political action that aim to radically change the structure and distribution of political power within society: party activism, political mobilization, voting at political elections and even the choice to fight the current political system (Regonini 2001, 18). In this perspective, 'relative politics' (*le politiche relative*) - that is specific policies targeted at the solution of a number of issues arising from the life of the community (transport, education, health and so on and so forth) - are clearly seen as subaltern, amounting to merely dependent variables. Policies are indeed conceived, at best, as either obstacles to be removed or as useful tools to gain consensus, and therefore advantage, in the rather more significant game of politics.

Regonini (2001, 18) further elucidates Pizzorno's theory by explaining that deep-rooted in Italian political perceptions is the idea that *politica* intended as 'politics' (that is, the ensemble of the intricate relationships between government, party leaders and voters that are founded on the striving for ever stronger consensus and power) and *politica* as 'policy' (intended as the strategies put in place to tackle a collective problem or issue), rather than being two distinct concepts expressed by a single word are, in fact, just two aspects of the same phenomenon. In this case then, the first acceptance of the word *politica* expresses its most crucial and essential traits, while *politica* as policy depicts what are clearly only derivative or secondary aspects<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Regonini (2001, 20) gives a number of examples, taken from the Italian press, of public declarations of Italian ministers and politicians which clearly reveal that such



This internal differentiation in the meaning of the Italian word *politica* clearly causes the ambiguity in practical usage lamented by Heidenheimer, but also seems to prove right Sartori's claim about the neglect that befalls the concepts that a language does not explicitly express by naming them. Following Sartori's line of reasoning, the slow development of the discipline of policy analysis and, more generally, the scarce interest in public policy in Italy could be accounted for by the very lack of a word for policy. This linguistic situation creates a pathway of thought that directs attention to the more comprehensive notion of politics rather than to the more specific notion of policy which is adumbrated within it. Moreover, in the Italian case, the linguistic ambiguity is even more marked than for other continental European languages. As noted by McGuigan (1996, 7), the French language – like the Italian - does not possess a specific term for policy, however, it has managed to create a distinction between the masculine form *le politique*, which refers to institutionalised politics, and the feminine *la politique* which refers more directly to the science of politics and policy. The Italian language, as we have just seen, can only rely on the feminine noun *politica* which thus embodies both meanings, although the word is often used in the plural - *le politiche* - to refer to 'policies'.

To complicate things even further, in the phrase public policy, it is not only the noun which is difficult to translate in Italian, for so is also the

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subordination of policy to politics, far from being limited to the perceptions of the general public, is in fact shared by politicians themselves. Very telling is the case of Francesco De Lorenzo, once Minister for Health, who – when asked by a journalist whether he would like to repeat his ministerial experience - answered that rather than being involved in government (that is, policy-making) he would much prefer to go back to being involved in 'politics with a capital P'.

adjective 'public'. This, in Italy, is generally interpreted as having the more restrictive meaning of 'belonging or pertaining to the state' rather than the broader acceptation 'of or concerning the people as a whole' received in the English language (according to the OED).

Resulting from the complexity of the Italian situation is the already mentioned central role acquired by jurists, who, stretching the boundaries of their discipline, have turned public policy (and, consequently, cultural policy too) into one of their specific competences. If, on the one hand, this has had the positive effect of filling the already discussed research gap in this field, on the other hand, it confirms the unchallenged prominence that law holds on the understanding and research of the Italian public sphere<sup>14</sup>. The major consequence of this state of affairs is that, in Italy, the bridge between scientific research and active involvement in the solution of issues of collective significance has been developed to a significant extent around the contribution of the legal disciplines. As a result, the framework in which it has become customary to discuss public issues in Italy is that elaborated by the legal disciplines - though the boundaries of their competences tend to be so flexible that they often come to include also economic, sociological and organisational considerations<sup>15</sup>. Hence, policy difficulties and failures

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, during the 1960s, Italian jurists positively resisted the development of political sciences as an autonomous discipline in order to maintain their intellectual dominance over the academic study of public policy-making. (Regonini 2001, 47).

<sup>15</sup> Regonini (2001, 47) argues that while the legal discipline has displayed a clear tendency to absorb other fields of enquiry, other academic areas have generally developed in accordance to a strict and limiting interpretation of their scope for research. So, she argues, economists have limited themselves to the analysis of



have been narrowly interpreted in terms of the inadequacy of the norms and laws that regulate the public sector, or their violation on the part of the main actors in public-policy making (Regonini 2001, 47).

However, as Regonini (2001,26) firmly points out, although there are significant overlaps between the sphere of *law-making* and *policy-making*, they by no means coincide, neither practically nor conceptually. The difference between these two domains is somewhat harder to grasp in the Italian context, in view of the fact that laws often appear to be the only tool Italian institutions can use to direct public resources towards specific objectives<sup>16</sup>. Yet, the effectiveness of public policies should be rather evaluated on the basis of their success in tackling issues that concern a large section of the community. In this perspective, it might actually be a sign of a very successful strategy when policy makers manage to obtain good results just by improving institutional coordination and putting the available technologies to the best use, rather than resorting to the creation of new legislation. In short, as Regonini explains (2001, 27), there is no direct link between the scope and precision of the law and the scope and precision of the actual policies.

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economic issues, while pedagogic experts have stuck with educational issues, architects with city planning ones, and so on and so forth. However, in response to Regonini, one could also point out to the strongly interdisciplinary nature that characterises the work of a growing number of Italian economists, city planning experts and architects.

<sup>16</sup> Regonini (2001, 26) offers a corroborating example of this typically Italian attitude to law-making by referring to a newspaper article published in Italy in 1999 in which a senior Italian magistrate lamented the sorry conditions in which his profession has to carry out its functions (e.g. lack of computers, adequate furniture and office supplies) and attributed it to the deplorable fact that no new laws had been promulgated for the sector since 1990. And yet, Regonini sarcastically observes, it is dubitable that a new law could result in the sudden, miraculous apparition of the much needed and desired computers, desks, etcetera.



Public policy-making entails the conscious resort to a wider range of resources and technologies than those allowed for by the extant laws. Indeed, policies in Italy tend to be based more on what the laws does not forbid than on what the law requires to do. Consequently, mediation, persuasion campaigns and the promotion of incentives to action (which are all strategies allowed but not recommended by the law) are the most influential elements in the policy-making process and might have in fact a greater impact on the end results than the legislative act alone (Regonini 2001, 28).

If we take as an example the Italian cultural sector, if we were to judge Italian cultural policy-making purely on the basis of the legislation produced to regulate the sector, we would have to conclude that Italy does not have access policies comparable to those that have been developed in the UK. However, if we look, rather, at the number of people working in the public cultural sector, at the number of court decisions that have relevance for the field, at the level of public resources spent on keeping prices for the live performance arts and museums low (much lower, in fact, than they are in the UK), then we might reach a very different conclusion. The systematic study of public policy-making should not limit itself to the consideration of the relevant legislation, but should also include the analysis of all the actions and strategies adopted by the key players in public policy-making that can produce consequences that affect the community, as well as the decision

not to take action at all (Regonini 2001, 65). Effective policy-making thus cannot be limited to acting in conformity to the law.

We can therefore conclude the present review of the different attitude towards the notion and the study of public policy in the Italian and Anglophone context with the observation made by Regonini (2001, 48) that, in the case of 'policy' - as for any other concept that is extraneous to the lexicon of a culture - the problem is not so much the filling of a gap but, rather, the creation of a new space. This entails the necessity to challenge that culture's current systems of interpretation which join together to form a solid and shared self-sufficient structure of thought that is so strong as to be capable of making any new approach seem irrelevant. In Italy, one of the most significant elements in the current system of thought is represented by the dual concept of political parties and power. In Italy, the conviction that public policy-making is so enmeshed with and conditioned by political power-games (and so affected by the ever-changing allegiances among different parties and so functional to their political strategies) is so strong that it is felt that it would make no sense at all to make it into the object of a distinct and autonomous area of academic research (Regonini 2001, 48). Unsurprisingly then, one of the central concerns of political science research in Italy is the study of power. Conversely, the American cultural context, which provides the background for much of the available public policy literature, does not give the sphere of politics the importance nor the deference the European (and Italian in particular) context does (Regonini 2001, 66). Therefore, if we compare the approach prevalent in

political science in Italy and in the Anglophone context, we have to conclude that the relative lack of interest in public policy that Italy displays has not resulted merely in the setting aside of a large portion of the discipline (in favour of the study of the more 'political' aspects of policy making). It rather resulted in the adoption of a totally different approach to the understanding of policy altogether, an approach so different, in fact, as to make common terms such as, for instance, 'politics', 'power' and 'institutions' not completely corresponding in meaning (Regonini 2001, 66 and 52).



## Chapter 3

### **The British and Italian models of cultural policy-making: the 'arm's length principle' versus the law-making approach**

There is a general consensus, among scholars of British politics, that one of the most striking and distinguishing features of the British political system is the fact that a significant proportion of what is understood as the 'public sector' is in fact not accounted for by what is conventionally taken to be the public institution *par excellence*: a London-based, central department headed by a Cabinet minister (Jones et al. 2001, 585). As a matter of fact, a large number of people who work in the public sector do not formally belong to the category of 'civil servants', while most of the work done within the public sector is done by institutions whose official status is not that of civil service departments. Conventionally, such institutions are referred to as 'quangos' and they represent the kernel of that typical British invention: 'quasi-government'. The present chapter will look at the shape that 'quasi-government' has assumed in England, which is the country on which the analysis of the British case is based.

The term 'quangos' (which stands for 'quasi-non-governmental-organisations') is a loose definition for the broad variety of bodies that

have been created over time by British governments (both Tory and Labour) to provide a public service using public funds, while also maintaining a certain degree of distance from politics and ministerial influence (Flinders and McConnel 1999, 17). This is however, a definition deduced empirically, for, in fact, there is no agreed or official definition of what a quango actually is<sup>17</sup>; moreover, the word represents an umbrella beneath which a wide range of different organizations finds shelter (Wilson 1995, 4; Flinders 1999a, 4). Consequently, counting the existing quango organisations is an almost impossible task<sup>18</sup>. Commentators generally agree that - despite various claims made over the years by successive governments to be “culling the quangos” (Holland 1980) – their number remains a four-figure one. According to Kavanagh (2000, 222) they are about 1500 and varied in terms of size, composition, function, and powers. Indeed, the variations among them are so marked, that government itself soon grew very uncomfortable with the label of ‘quango’. In the 1980s, the Conservative government introduced the alternative label *non-departmental public bodies* (NDPBs) whereby, an NDPB was defined as “a body which has a role in the process of national government, but is not a government department or part of one, and accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm’s length from

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<sup>17</sup> Hogwood (1995, 32) maintains that “[w]e may have to accept that an agreed, workable, inclusive and exclusive definition of this type of body may not be possible to achieve and that we should be concerned primarily with the extent to which a range of bodies exhibit varying combinations of characteristics with which we may be concerned, and what the implications of these are for policy delivery and accountability”.

<sup>18</sup> Flinders argues that the lack of an agreed definition of quangos has seriously undermined the development of academic research in the field, while also generating a heated debate, since to different definitions correspond radically different indicators of quango numbers and activities (Flinders 1999a, 5).

the Ministers” (Wright 2000, 277)<sup>19</sup>. This definition is fundamentally consistent with that of quango and equally controversial<sup>20</sup>, but had, for the government, the distinct advantage of being a much more restrictive term, which therefore succeeded in limiting the number of quangos the government had to acknowledge (Ibid.).

Whether we choose to call them ‘quangos’ or ‘NDPBs’, and despite government’s declarations of their reduced numbers, the fact remains that ‘quasi-government’ is a feature of British politics that is here to stay. Moreover, it directly affects cultural policy making, since one of the most influential policy-makers and funders of the arts and culture in the UK is the Arts Council, which is indeed a quango/NDPB. To quote Matthew V. Flinders (1999a, 11), “[q]uasi-government is fundamental to any analysis of British politics, as it is now a critical layer of governance which, despite rhetoric to the contrary, is unlikely to be dismantled under any government”. Thus, in order to decide if, or to what extent, the quango nature of the Arts Council affects the policy-making process and the distribution of resources to the sector, it becomes indispensable to gain a deeper understanding of the workings, the advantages and the disadvantages of ‘quasi-government’ in general, and of the Arts Council as a quasi-government organisation in particular.

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<sup>19</sup> According to the definition here proposed, NDPBs include selected executive bodies, advisory committees and tribunals (Hogwood 1995, 30).

<sup>20</sup> Hogwood (1995, 30) laments that “[t]here is no operational definition of an NDPB; it is a pragmatic labelling, focusing mainly on a set of bodies to which government makes appointments, and applied inconsistently”.



Historically, quangos are not a new phenomenon, for semi-independent bodies have been a component of British governance for over two hundreds years. The Board of Trade, just to make an example, belongs to that group of boards that were set up in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to carry out activities that were felt to be beyond the domain of the government proper. But it was with the advent of post-war social democracy and the establishment of the welfare state that the growth of quasi-autonomous public bodies increased dramatically (Flinders 1999b, 27-28). Despite being fiercely criticised by opposition parties, quangos have in reality been created by both Labour and Conservative governments. However, 1979 was an especially crucial year, marking a definite move from the traditional form of government - based on bureaucracy - to new forms of 'quasi-government' (Flinders 1999b, 29). But what does the formula 'quasi-government' really mean?

Defining an institution as 'quasi-governmental' means that it retains many of the characteristics of public bodies, such as having the task of carrying out activities prescribed by law; receiving a portion of (if not all) their financial resources from the state; having their leading officers appointed by a minister and under his or her control. However, this kind of body also enjoys a certain degree of independence of ministers and their departments in their day-to-day activities, and they traditionally appeared to be less subject to parliamentary scrutiny than civil service departments (though this is slowly but steadily changing) (Jones et al. 2001, 585). The most important quangos are those of an executive nature, which usually

employ staff and have their own budget (quite often a substantial one). The Arts Council belongs to this category of public bodies (Wilson 1995, 9), which means that, in the UK, approximately half of the public resources for culture are distributed by quangos<sup>21</sup>. Bodies with executive powers have often been created in order to establish an arm's length relationship between government and the delivery of a particular service or the solution of a particular issue (Norton 1994, 198). As will become clearer as the discussion unfolds, the so-called 'arm's length principle' is a crucial element in the *modus operandi* of the Arts Councils in Britain, and one of the main differences between the British and the Italian models of cultural policy.

Although Norman St. John-Stevas, when nominated arts minister in 1979, proclaimed the arm's length principle as "one of the happiest constitutional inventions of the century" (quoted in Shaw and Shaw 1992, 28), this is by no means a commonly shared view. As was previously mentioned, far from being an uncontroversial matter, the use and abuse of 'quasi-government' in British politics and the pros and contra of quango bodies have all been issues at the centre of a heated debate which culminated in the mid-to late seventies but is certainly not extinguished yet.

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<sup>21</sup> The rest of public resources for the cultural sector are distributed, at the national level, by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to directly funded organizations (mainly museums and galleries) and, locally, by local government. Both forms of arts funding will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

To summarise what has been demonstrated above, 'quasi-government' has increasingly become an important and distinctive aspect of political life in Britain; quangos have indeed been created by both Labour and Conservative governments (despite furious criticism against them by the party in opposition at any given time). It was also observed that, although quangos and NDPBs of the current type are a post-war creation, semi-independent public bodies have existed in this country for centuries. What are the reasons for the enduring popularity of this form of management of the public sector? Flinders (1999a, 8) advances this explanation:

In many ways the quango state mirrors the British constitution itself. It is flexible, executive-centric and ill-defined, has evolved in a piecemeal and incremental fashion and, for the most part, relies on the 'good chaps' form of governance, which has, until recently, lacked formal rules and regulations.

As Flinders (1999b, 27) further explains, this means that subsequent British governments have enjoyed a degree of freedom in creating new public bodies and introducing bureaucratic reforms that would have been simply unthinkable in other European countries (Italy among them). This state of affairs was made possible by the fact that Britain does not have a written constitution, nor a system of constitutional law of a superior order with respects to ordinary law. As a consequence, in the UK, the executive has an influence over the legislature which is unparalleled



anywhere else in Europe. These considerations move Flinders (1999b, 27) to conclude that:

Indeed British bureaucratic reform has been conducted under Crown prerogative rather than through legislation. Elsewhere similar reforms would have necessitated major legislation. [...] Therefore, the creation of quasi-government has been a much easier option for successive British governments than it has been in other countries as there was very little law needed and no strong tier of local or regional government to battle against.

As we will see in the final sections of this chapter, things are very different in Italy, where the public sector is managed on the basis of a very complex system of regulation and a very rich, if incoherent, *corpus* of administrative law.

Flinders (1999b, 31) maintains that the growth of quangos is linked to the fundamental shift that has been taking place in the last two decades from 'government to governance'. As a result of such shift, as the formula goes, ministers "steered but did not row themselves", thus reflecting an ambition to unburden the ever-more complex political process. Another important factor in the growth of 'quasi-government' is the increasingly withering divide between the public and private realms (this trend will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5). According to Flinders (1999a, 3), it is precisely such "demise of the classic public/private dichotomy" that has actively contributed, in Britain, to the phenomenon of 'quasi-government'. As we have seen, this new tier of governance is constituted

by a large group of bodies that are neither public nor private: they are, in fact of a hybrid nature. In Flinders' words (1999a, 3-4):

[t]hey are organisations that utilize private sector methods to achieve public aims in the most efficient manner possible. They are 'quasi' in every respect: quasi-independent, quasi-public, quasi-private, quasi-legitimate and quasi-accountable. We are no longer governed by politicians alone but by a 'new magistracy' of unknowable, and often untouchable, individuals.

Interestingly, quasi-autonomous bodies have been explicitly linked to the public administration reforms that go under the umbrella term of New Public Management (NPM), which will be analysed extensively in chapter 5. According to David Wilson (1995, 3), from the central government's point of view, quangos and NDPBs represent a useful vehicle for the incorporation of NPM principles in the British public sector. The most remarkable consequence of this trend is the progressive affirmation of a new concept of accountability proposed by the NPM model alternative to the traditional one based on the accountability of the elected representative. Accountability is, as a matter of fact, one of the major issues raised by the spread of quasi-government and the main focus of discontents for the critics of the so-called 'quangocracy'.

#### ASSESSING THE QUANGOS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF 'QUASI-GOVERNMENT'

The discussion so far has referred primarily to the many criticisms moved against the institutions of 'quasi-government' rather than to the

advantages they provide. The government-commissioned report on quangos produced in 1980 and known as the Pliatzky report, identifies four principal reasons for the creation of these bodies:

Because the work is of an executive character which does not require ministers to take responsibility for its day to day management; because the work is more effectively carried out by a single purpose organisation rather than by a government department with a wide range of functions; in order to involve people from outside of government in the direction of the organisation; in order to place the performance of a function outside the party political arena (quoted in Flinders 1999b, 29).

As Flinders (*Ibid.*) notes, though, these explanations only provide half the truth, for they do not acknowledge the fact that the true motives for the creation of new quangos are, in reality, more complex and are affected by exquisitely political considerations. One of the principal 'real' reasons for the growth of quangos lies in the remarkable growth of the state and its responsibilities in the post-war years. As the size of the state grew, so did the feeling that it was increasingly becoming overloaded to the degree that many commentators felt the public sector was progressively reaching a worrying level of ungovernability. Traditional political institutions were simply not adequate to oversee and manage a public sector that was much larger and complex a structure than the one they had originally been designed for. In these circumstances, the creation of quangos appeared as an effective and practical means to reduce both



the size and the scope of the state, with the result of bringing the public realm more easily under control (Flinders 1999b, 29)<sup>22</sup>.

Obviously, the 'arm's length principle' is another of the crucial strongholds of the quango-supporters. The 'quasi-government' system would appear to offer the decisions-making process some protection against control by politicians in general, and ministers in particular. In principle at least, it should certainly be more difficult for a minister to scrutinise and impose his or her will on a semi-independent body than it would be if he or she were dealing with a civil service department headed by him or herself (Jones et al. 2001, 585). With respects to the arts and culture the importance of the autonomy from immediate political concerns was spelt out forcefully by Raymond Williams (1979, 158-159) who wrote that "while public finance, from the general revenue, is essential, it is undesirable that any governmental body, subject to changes of political emphasis, should have direct control over artistic policies and practices". Whether such independence of the public support of the arts from politics belongs to the sphere of reality or rather to that of myth, will be a question that this chapter will tackle in the following section. For the moment, it is important to observe that the arm's length principle, once distanced from the righteous rhetoric that

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<sup>22</sup> In answer to the question 'why do governments love quangos?' Flinders (1999b, 30) suggests that '[g]overnments liked quangos because they recognised that government could not carry out all functions well". The creation of quasi-autonomous bodies thus entails the acknowledgement that central government departments simply do not have the resources and the specific knowledge that are required for the fulfilment of all the tasks demanded for the smooth running of the public sector.

accompanies it, might also seem the perfect tool for the government to delegate 'hot potatoes' to specific and semi-autonomous bodies, so as to decline responsibilities for any potentially controversial decision made on the matter. In the case of the arts, making the Arts Council fully responsible for its artistic policy (which is, according to 'quango-theory' defined independently from the government's preferences) automatically frees the Arts minister from having to take any personal responsibility for any decision that might prove contentious (thus avoiding the need for the minister to get personally involved in any polemic that might arise from contested funding decisions).

Another problem arises from the very existence of bodies that, despite distributing tax-payers' money, do so outside of direct ministerial or parliamentary control. Clearly these bodies and their activities raise issues of accountability. Understandably then, democratic accountability is central to current debates about quangos (Wilson 1995, 5). As Flinders (1999b 30-31) points out, it is ironical that precisely the attempt at de-politicisation through independence - which gave quangos their legitimacy to begin with - is what is currently at the centre of debates and preoccupations over transparency and control<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> The essence of the criticism moved against the institutions of 'quasi-government' with regards to accountability have been powerfully voiced by Sir Norman Chester who, in an article entitled "Fringe bodies, Quangos and all that" wrote that the growth of semi-autonomous organisations represented "a retreat from the simple democratic principle evolved in the nineteenth century that those who perform a public duty should be fully responsible to an electorate – by way either of a minister responsible to Parliament or of a locally elected council. The essence of the fringe body is that it is not so responsible for some or all of its actions" (quoted in Wilson 1995, 5).

Consistently with the values promoted by NPM, central government activities have for quite some time now, focused on the citizen as consumer (see chapter 5). In this new perspective, contract or market accountability tend to substitute themselves to the more traditional form of electoral accountability referred to in the quote above. The government, on its part, claims that the growth of 'quasi-government' has resulted in a 'democratic gain' rather than the 'democratic deficit' lamented by the 'quango-detractors' (Wilson 1995, 6). Indeed, David Wilson explains that, in order to assess the accountability levels of quasi-governmental organisations, "the 'accountability' associated with elected local government needs to be set against the 'accountability' associated with the publication of accounts/scrutiny by press, public, etc., which often characterises the 'quango' sector" (Wilson 1995, 7). However we decide to interpret the notion of accountability within the quango debate, it remains undeniable that this is the area where many concerns about quasi-government still tend to coalesce<sup>24</sup>.

#### ISSUES OF ACCOUNTABILITY

A first issue open to questions is represented by the appointment of senior staff within quangos, for how do quasi-independent regulators and policy-makers fit into ministerial accountability? From a democratic

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<sup>24</sup> The importance of the accountability issue becomes clearer in view of the fact that, amongst advanced democracies, the concept of accountability is often used as a benchmark against which systems of government can be judged: accountable governments are reputed to be good governments (Flinders and McConnel 1999, 21).



perspective, what right do these individuals (who are not elected by the public) have to fill such crucial posts in the public sector and make decisions over how to best spend public finances? Since the boards of quangos are unelected and independent from ministers, how can quangos be held responsible for their activities and decisions? In 1994, quangos were responsible for nearly a third of all central government spending, and 10 years on their influence is far from diminished, to the extent that quangos are said to represent a new 'magistracy' (Kavanagh 2000, 111). The heart of the problem lies in the minimal parliamentary influence over appointments of the chairs or the boards of quangos. These are, in fact, chosen by ministers, and the criteria vary. As Kavanagh (2000, 111) explains, some individuals are appointed in so far as they are 'independent' persons; others, instead, 'stand for' and give voice to specific interests. In either case, the appointees belong to the vague category of 'The Great and the Good', which – in reality – tend to be drawn from the upper strata of British society and in particular from the business world. Under the Thatcher and Major governments, for instance, the relative proportion of businessmen and accountants among appointees grew compared to pre-1979 levels (Kavanagh 2000, 111). Doubts rightfully arise then, on the extent to which the appointees are actually representative of English society at large. Moreover, the practice of ministerial appointments also originates suspicions that, in reality, political affiliations rather than merit often are the true criteria for the selection of the appointees. The partisan background of many of the

'Great and the Good' has been indeed lamented, giving rise to what Wilson calls the 'quangowatch' industry (Wilson 1995, 10).

In the mid-nineties, following a government-commissioned review of quangos' appointment procedures, a recommendation was made to establish the position of Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Commissioner's first annual report, published in July 1997 presented detailed statistics of the 1753 appointments made in the nine-month period covered by the report (July 1996 to March 1997). On the whole, the statistical data seem to confirm many of the worries over appointments cited above. The report showed a clear gender imbalance, especially for the more senior positions, as well as an age bias in favour of the older generations (with young people almost totally absent). It also emerged that a significant number of appointees (mainly Chairs) held more than one appointment. Finally, the evidence on the appointees' past political activities and sympathies clearly revealed a strong political bias of the appointment decisions, especially with regards to appointment to the position of Chairs (Wright 1999, 193-195). The problem of the political affiliations of appointees is indeed a vexed question (whatever the colour of the current government) and one of the hotspots in the quango debate. As Wright (1999, 195) explains: "[m]inisters will properly want to ensure that public bodies are headed by people who are broadly sympathetic to their purposes, or at least not positively unsympathetic, and this is perfectly consistent with the Code [of Practice] requirements of appointment on merit and procedural integrity".

Wright's statement is corroborated by a study conducted in 2002 by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) on the gender, social and educational characteristics of the government appointed regulators of TV, the press, telecommunications services and advertising – that is bodies that “make decisions on quality and taste and decency in their respective areas” (IPPR 2002). The research report, entitled *All Change at the Top? Government Appointed Regulators under New Labour* (2002) concludes that “UK communications regulators are deeply unrepresentative of the general public on whose behalf they have been appointed. [...] few things have improved since 1995 when IPPR last surveyed appointments under Conservative leadership”<sup>25</sup>.

We have noted already in the course of this discussion, that the government's main argument in favour of quangos' accountability for their power and their use of public resources consists in the claim that quangos, in fact, increase accountability by making services directly accountable to their customers (formerly referred to as citizens) through Citizen's Charters and a number of other mechanisms of control borrowed from the private sector and increasingly popular since the advent of NPM. However, as Wilson (1995, 12) observes, “[m]arket

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<sup>25</sup> The data presented in the report show that 65% of members are male (in 1995 the male majority was of 57%) and more than a quarter have been educated at either Oxford or Cambridge. On the age front, the situation is not any better: the average age for board members is 56 and rises to 63 for chairs (IPPR 2002). According to the IPPR's report, only ethnic diversity has increased under New Labour, although the number of non-white ethnic background presences in boards are still remarkably low, having risen from 4 members out of 90 in 1995 to a mere 7 out of a total of 91 members in 2002. Finally, the IPPR's report draws attention to the fact that not only are the regulatory bodies under examination unrepresentative of the general population, but this fact is also kept outside of public knowledge. Indeed, as the report denounces, “[t]he regulators operate in relative secrecy and most lack clear transparency obligations”. Suffice it to say that the British Board of Film Classification, one of the bodies included in the IPPR study, refused to release any information at all on its members (Ibid.).



accountability and contractual accountability are clearly very different from public accountability”<sup>26</sup>. This argument, however, has been unsuccessful in silencing the critics of ‘quangocracy’. In the words of one of their most fierce representatives, Sir Philip Holland – who has devoted many years to the study and criticism of quangos – “[t]he whole argument of bringing power closer to the people is bogus. Quangos are always in the interests of ministers and civil servants. They are not elected and are not answerable to the people” (quoted in Wilson 1995, 12). On the other hand, the use of executive quangos/NDPBs means that while ministers are not accountable for individual spending decisions, they can still, through directives and guidelines, have a marked influence on the policy and the strategies behind those very funding allocations (Hogwood 1995, 44).

In the light of the discussion presented so far, what are we to make of quangos? Are they a useful tool of government? Do they represent power without responsibility? The heated debate on quasi-government is far from being quelled. The true kernel of the problem, according to Flinders and McConnel (1999, 24), is that Britain is a parliamentary state characterised by a strong executive that has remarkable powers of controlling the legislature in the context of a lack of a coherent framework of administrative law. Hence the seemingly unsolvable paradoxical

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<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Wilson raises the issue of the need to question the adequacy of more traditional notions of public accountability, namely elections. He argues that the stress on the periodic election “tends to assume a passive public, content to pass judgement only at limited intervals. [...] Given the levels of turnout for local elections, this has something of a hollow ring to it” (Wilson 1995, 11-12).

situation embodied by the institutions of quasi-government summarised by Flinders (1999b 21) as such:

The bodies we are considering [quangos] lie at the heart of a paradox: public administration needs to be insulated from the cut and thrust of party politics, yet the exercise of independent powers by unelected bodies is contrary to the basic principles of representative democracy. For example, the Arts Council exists to ensure that arts grants are not used as electoral sweeteners, but how then is the Council accountable?

How indeed is the Arts Council accountable for its funding allocations and its policy-making? And has the 'arm's length principle' any relevance to British cultural policy besides the mere sphere of rhetoric? What about politically biased appointments of the Council's board and Chair? These are some of the questions that the following section of this chapter will tackle.

#### THE 'ARM'S LENGTH PRINCIPLE' APPLIED TO THE WORKINGS OF THE ARTS COUNCIL: MYTH OR REALITY?

All the problems concerning appointments, accountability and the ambiguities of the 'arm's length' relationship with party politics discussed so far with regards to quangos in general are extremely relevant to any discussion of the Arts Council and its role in British cultural policy-making. They indeed represent consistently popular themes in the extant literature on the topic. The arm's length principle is traditionally seen as

the very basis of cultural governance in Britain (Taylor 1995, 185). However, whether it is a reality or merely a myth is open to question, and expressions of scepticism towards the actual independence from political power on the part of the Arts Council in its decision-making have been made for decades now. Andrew Taylor (1995, 193), who has studied extensively the political connotations of the Arts' Council's activities, has come to the conclusion that "the basic element in the Council's relationship with ministers (the arm's length principle) no longer commands general confidence, or even credibility, among participants in the arts sector". The reasons for such lack of confidence will be scrutinised in this section of the chapter.

It was Lord Redcliffe-Maud who popularised the expression 'arms' length principle' with relation to the *modus operandi* of the Arts Council. He was commissioned to report on the funding of the arts in Britain by the Gulbenkian Foundation in 1976. In his report he wrote that:

By self-denying ordinance the politicians leave the Council free to spend as it thinks fit. No minister needs to reply to questions in Parliament about the beneficiaries – or about unsuccessful applicants for an Arts Council grant. A convention has been established over the years that in arts patronage neither the politicians nor the bureaucrat knows best (quoted in Hewison 1995, 32).

Lord Redcliffe-Maud's 'definition' of the arm's length principle is interesting in so far as it contains all of the themes that have become the object of a heated debate in British cultural policy discourse. Indeed, as



this discussion will attempt to show, the separation of the Arts Council's decision-making from political concerns is, today, far from being a generally accepted or straightforward notion. On the contrary, as chapter 5 will demonstrate, nowadays, governmental influence on cultural policy - and therefore on the Arts Council's funding strategies - has been steadily increasing, to the point of bringing Andrew Brighton (1999) to define the current British cultural climate as a 'command culture', and to compare many aspects of New Labour's cultural policy to the policies that gave rise to Soviet Social Realism.

Secondly, the quote above refers to the Arts Council's independence of judgement in aesthetic matters. This is generally taken to be the very essence of the arm's length principle and a guarantee for the arts (allegedly) to be allowed to flourish without any of the restraints that direct political control might cause. However, this aspect of the British cultural policy model has also been subjected to criticism. For it might be argued – as indeed Anthony Beck (1992) does – that the agreement on the part of the government to refrain from influencing the arts might in fact be less noble and generous than might seem at a first glance. Beck (1992, 140) observes that all governments are very sensitive to any form of disapproval from the public (who periodically become voters), so they consistently attempt to avoid any circumstance that could potentially damage their image in front of the electorate. The arm's length principle, in this perspective, becomes a very useful tool to deflect any possible criticism over how tax-payers' money are spent on fostering the arts, in

particular when avant-garde, experimental or generally controversial and unpopular forms of arts are concerned. Beck (Ibid.) concludes that:

When controversy arises the arts minister can claim that government does not and must not interfere with arts; that the arm's length principle of the separation of the two is an inviolable principle; will say that he does not intend to participate in the controversy and will leave it to the Arts Council to cope and take the flack.

The convenience of this arrangement of things for the arts minister in particular and the government in general, is glaringly obvious.

Finally, Lord Redcliffe-Maud's words make it clear that supporting the arm's length principle is just tradition rather than a well-defined set of regulations. The arm's length principle as applied in cultural policy started to be codified only after criticism started being made on its workings and doubts were raised on its effectiveness in guaranteeing protection against political influences. The arm's length principle is in fact politically ambiguous since – as has been discussed in the preceding section – there is no ministerial definition for it. But this, according to Taylor is deliberately so (Taylor 1995, 191)<sup>27</sup>. Taylor (1995, 195) insists that the arm's length principle which has been for so long the basis and the distinctive characteristic of the model of cultural policy developed in the UK, has become “one of the quaint conventions of British public life”, and

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<sup>27</sup> On this ambiguity of status, Flinders (1999a, 12) comments: “It is this confusion over respective roles and responsibilities [the government's and the quango's] which gives the quangos flexibility, but it is also at the root of many of the problems over accountability and independence”.

as such deprived of any actual validity in real life<sup>28</sup>. Significantly, none other than Raymond Williams, writing after his three years at the Arts Council<sup>29</sup>, had reached a similar conclusion. In an article published in 1979 he contested the efficacy, in practice, of the arm's length principle on the basis of the observation that "it is customary for the body to direct its arm" (Williams 1979, 159). Therefore, "[t]he true social process of such bodies as the Arts Council is one of administered consensus by co-option" (Williams 1979, 160).

Why has the arm's length principle as applied to the distribution of public finances to the cultural sector given rise to such enduring scepticism and concern among cultural and political commentators as well as on significant proportions of the policy-makers themselves? The following discussion will attempt to provide an answer to this question by focusing on the two areas that the preceding discussion of 'quasi-government' has identified as the hotbeds of concern:

- Appointments to crucial positions
- Accountability

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<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Pick writes, with regards to the arm's length principle: "It was not a principle in any of the normally accepted senses. It was certainly not a legal principle. The Arts Council's Charter does not legally guarantee it any kind of immunity, any more than parliamentary law says that the British Arts Council has to be given money each year. Nor is it a scientific principle. If anything, it is a principle of etiquette, a convention that has roots in earlier systems" (quoted in Quinn 1998, 89).

<sup>29</sup> Raymond Williams served on the Arts Council of Great Britain – as it was called then - from 1975 to 1978.



As we have seen, appointments represent a controversial aspect of 'quangocracy'. This is certainly true for the Arts Council. Quasi-government institutions were a result of post-war reconstruction of the public realm. As with many other bodies created at that time, their creators did not feel the need to give a formal articulation of their relationship with the state. Taylor (1995, 188) believes that an explanation for this lies in the fact that the individuals who worked in these semi-autonomous organisations and the state apparatus shared similar social and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, their conceptions of how policy should be made and implemented were very similar. In this respect, the arm's length principle as it has been developed in cultural administration is broadly consistent with the more general pattern of what Taylor (Ibid.) calls the "government-organisation relations" that emerged in Britain around the 1940s.

Taylor's argument builds on Raymond Williams' famous indictment of the political character of the appointments at the Arts Council published in his 1979 article entitled *The Arts Council*. Williams' conclusion is that the Arts Council "is politically and administratively appointed, and its members are not drawn from arts practice and administration but from that vaguer category of "persons of experience and goodwill" which is the State's euphemism for its informal ruling class" (Williams 1979, 166). Interestingly, the aforementioned IPPR (2002) report on the social and

cultural background of the most important UK regulators (who routinely make decision of taste and morality that affect directly British media) seems to point to a fundamentally unchanged situation *vis á vis* the type of individuals appointed to senior position within quasi-government in the broader cultural sector. Williams makes it very clear that understanding the homogenous social composition of such 'informal ruling class' is indeed crucially important in order to really understand the functioning of quasi-government in general and the Arts Council in particular<sup>30</sup>. Hence Williams' denunciation of the activities of bodies such as the Arts Council as "processes of out-work and administered co-option" (Ibid.).

Significantly, the possibility for the government to influence and direct the Arts Council through the appointment of individuals sharing the same cultural attitudes as the political establishment was allowed by the very Charter, which, in 1946, instituted the Arts Council. The Charter does not formally distance the Council from the government, since it provides no criteria for prospective Council members to satisfy, nor does it set precise criteria for the funding allocations, which therefore became subjective, and dependent on the taste of the deciding panels (Quinn 1997, 129-131). One further consequence of this lack of formal procedures is that all decisions on the distribution of funding happens *in camera* and cannot be

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<sup>30</sup> In Williams' (1979, 165) own words: "It would be naïve to discuss the principles and problems of intermediate bodies without paying some attention to the character of the British State and its ruling class. Indeed, it can be argued that intermediate bodies of the kind we have known were made possible by this character. The British State has been able to delegate some of its official functions to a whole complex of semi-official or nominally independent bodies because it has been able to rely on an unusually compact and organic ruling class. Thus it can give Lord X or Lady Y both public money and apparent freedom of decision in some confidence, subject to normal procedures of report and accounting, that they will act as if they were indeed State officials".

appealed against, since the Charter did not allow the possibility for the arts community to appeal against funding allocation decisions. In view of the lack of formal allocations criteria, funding decisions seemed often mysterious and it was not uncommon for unsuccessful applicants to be left without any clues as to why their application had failed (Quinn 1997, 134). On these grounds, Quinn (1997, 132) concludes that:

From outside the Arts Council walls, it seemed that the Council was composed of political representatives representing the interests of government, directing funds towards flagship companies which could project a positive image of State involvement in the arts to the public and arts representatives dividing Arts Council funds amongst themselves and their associates, leaving crumbs for those who had no seat at the table.

This quote shows how the Arts Council has been able, in the course of time, to use the ambiguities intrinsic to the 'arm's length principle' to its own advantage. In this predicament, what had been introduced as a means to limit the influence of political concerns over arts funding allocations became in many ways a tool for what Pick refers to as "another kind of political domination of them" (quoted in Quinn 1998, 91).

It is obvious from the description painted so far that the functioning of the Arts Council and the problems inherent in the arm's length principle and its implementation have given rise to the question of public accountability for the Council's activities and its decisions on grant allocation. From the quotes presented so far it is possible to evince that scepticism and



concern are the prevailing feelings among commentators. It seems fair to conclude that the arm's length principle, rather than guaranteeing the autonomy of the support for the cultural sector and the nurturing of the arts safely from political influence has, in fact, resulted in a source of instability and has been undermined on many accounts. According to Taylor (1995, 191) "[a]ll the major participants in the arts sector have made ritual genuflections to the arm's length principle while agreeing that the relationship is under great strain and operating unsatisfactorily".

At this stage of the discussion it is important to try and understand when this relationship became strained and the politicisation of the Arts Council appointments become more marked. Andrew Taylor (1994, 133) argues that the arts become politicised after 1963, when the Arts Council's budget for the first time in its history passed the £2m mark. This was indeed an important moment in British cultural policy. Labour has won the 1964 general elections, albeit with a small majority, and the new Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, decided to transfer responsibilities for the arts from the Treasury to the Department of Education and Science and to assign them, for the first time, a devoted Minister, Jennie Lee<sup>31</sup>.

Despite an increasing in funding following Labour's election, the resources directed to the arts were not huge in public spending terms, but, compared to the meagre sums previously devoted to the arts and

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<sup>31</sup> In February 1965, Jennie Lee published the first ever government White Paper on cultural policy, entitled *A Policy for the Arts*. It was in this document that the increase in funding was announced (Hewison 1995, 121).

culture, it indicates a change of climate and a more centre-stage role for the arts in public policy. This less marginal role brought with it an increased scrutiny on the part of the Treasury, which was reluctant to allow such increasingly significant sums of money to be spent without any governmental control. This was certainly a significant moment in British cultural policy; however, the majority of commentators tend to date the increased politicisation of the Arts Council and its appointments at a much later point in time, precisely in the 1980s, when the government began to expect to be able to have a say on how the money was spent<sup>32</sup>. It was widely felt that, by the mid-80s - when the Tory government, after six years in power, had its mission of 'rolling back the frontier of the state' well underway - the Arts Council had become, as a matter of fact, 'a creature of the government' to the extent that the arm's length principle was denounced as 'a fraud' (Shaw and Shaw 1992, 28). By the early 1990s, as Taylor (1997) so effectively demonstrates, a dramatic shift had occurred. Broader changes occurred, during the 1980s, in the structure of British government, following which the executive would become the first responsible for formulating policy and overseeing its implementation by quangos and other autonomous agencies. In this changed context, the Department for National Heritage (DNH) assumed a much more proactive role than it traditionally had. The DNH's remit was now to formulate clear policy objectives, and Taylor (1997, 445 and 461) interprets this new activism as a departure, if not even a rejection, of the tradition of *laissez faire* that had for so long characterised cultural policy-

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<sup>32</sup> For a detailed discussion of the politicisation of arts funding in Britain in the 1980s, see Taylor 1997, 1995 and 1994; Hewison 1995; Quinn 1997 and 1998; Shaw and Shaw 1992.

making the British way<sup>33</sup>. The following extract from a document published by the DHN in 1992 seems to corroborate Taylor's argument:

We need to be clearer about what our objectives in each policy field are and how we expect our sponsored bodies to help us achieve them. That does not mean abandoning the long-established 'arm's length principle, particularly with the arts'. [... However] it is reasonable to expect the bodies we support to conduct their day-to-day operations, and to exercise their very proper independent judgement in dealing with particular clients, within an overall framework of priorities and public policies determined by Government" (quoted in Taylor 1997, 445).

Is it not at all surprising, in the light of this re-positioning that Taylor (1997) summarises as "arm's length but hands on", that the following year Lord Rix resigned from the Arts Council and launched against the DHN the accusation of 'defecating on' the Council from a great ministerial height (Taylor 1995, 190). Taylor (Ibid.) also reports that about two-thirds of the fourteen Council members were *interiore homine* very sympathetic to Lord Rix's complaints and shared his conviction that, over the course of the decades, the arm's length principle had been fatally compromised<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> During a debate in the House of Commons, Virginia Bottomley declared: "[w]hilst respecting the arm's length principle, I think it is reasonable for ministers to say what they want to achieve and there are a number of levers for achieving these objectives" (quoted in Taylor 1997, 461).

<sup>34</sup> If any doubt about the true governmental attitudes and expectations persisted in the reader, it would be certainly dispelled by the re-interpretation of the arm's length principle as provided by David Mellor: "[...] what they want is someone who gets them the money but does not have a view about how it is spent. [...] If you have a minister of some significance, you expect him to have a view, he is not like something out of a Hammer horror film which comes alive at PES time and goes back to bed again while they spend the money" (quoted in Taylor 1997, 452).



At the end of this necessarily brief overview of the developments over time of the arm's length principle and the issues relating to it, it seems inevitable to agree with Taylor's diagnosis of the state of things as they appeared in the mid-1990s as a result of the increasingly politicised nature of policy-making:

The pressure on the Arts Council was that it should transform itself from a 'buffer' between the arts world and government into a 'transmission belt' for government policy into the arts sector (Taylor 1994, 134).

The consequences of this pressure on the functioning of the Arts Council and, more generally, on British cultural policy will be analysed in greater detail in chapter 5 and will be put in the wider context of global economic and societal changes.

#### ITALY AND THE 'LEGALISTIC' APPROACH TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Having examined some of the more salient features of the public policy-making process in the UK, it is time to turn our analytical gaze to Italy, where the administration of the public sector has developed in very different ways. According to the historian Paul Ginsborg, who has devoted many a year to the study of the complexities of Italian history and politics, one of the principal blight on the development of the Italian public administration was the absence of a clear demarcation between the traditional culture of the Italian society and the workings of a modern

state (Ginsborg 2003, 215)<sup>35</sup>. In other words, in Italy – as well as in many other Mediterranean countries – the personal and the particular elements that characterised public life in earlier times have persisted, to the point of threatening to overshadow the impersonal (in a non-clientelistic sense) and impartial aspects of the modern state<sup>36</sup>. Consequently, Ginsborg (Ibid.) claims that when the Republican system was introduced in Italy in the aftermath of WWII, it was already possible to recognise a chasm between the formal regulations that were supposed to guide the public administration and its actual style of functioning.

This chasm resulted in what Della Rocca (2000) calls “the public administration paradox”. The paradoxical element lies in the ambivalence of the Italian public administration which is, on the one hand, an institution representing the collective interest, and on the other hand, one that is blighted by the presence of organisational practices in which

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<sup>35</sup> It is generally accepted that what distinguished the practices of the *ancien régime* from the modern state is represented by the growth of the ‘formal rationality’ embodied by the bureaucracy. While the old ordainment of society was characterised by the prevalence of asymmetrical relations of power (based on values such as loyalty, reverence, submission, obedience and so on), the new conception of state was founded on the supremacy of impersonal over personal relations (Ginsborg, 2003, 215). According to Max Weber’s theory, at the very heart of the modern state is precisely the institution of clearly understood and universally accepted norms and rules as the guide for the state’s action; the rightful application of such rules would be ensured by the smooth running of the bureaucratic apparatus. From such premise, it logically follows that the working principle of the public administration, in a modern state, should be equality of treatment for all citizens and the uttermost transparency of all its actions (Calandra 2002, 87). The essence of the modern state, Weber believed, is constituted by the characteristics of precision, continuity, discipline, strictness, reliability and equity (Ginsborg, 2003, 215). It is important to be aware of the fact that there is widespread agreement, among historians, that no modern bureaucracy developed in full consistency to Weber’s ideal model (Ginsborg 2003 215). This is because, as Paul Ginsborg (Ibid.) observes, “all modern administrations function not only on the basis of law and regulation but also on personal contact and informal relations”.

<sup>36</sup> It could be argued, however, that State bureaucracy is indeed rather impersonal in Italy too – more so, in fact, than in the UK. One could argue that such impersonality might result from the apparent impenetrability of the mechanism of the bureaucratic machine, especially for those who have no ‘connections’ with people within the administrative system. See my discussion of *clientelism* on page 97.

selective and personal interests often prevail (Della Rocca 2000, 376). It would be interesting to analyse in great detail the origin and the development, over time, of such a gulf between public and private interest in order to identify its historical causes. A question as complicated as this, however, cannot be addressed adequately here. It will suffice to say that historians agree in identifying the main cause of the Italian 'anomaly' with the "weak sense of the state" that seems to characterise the Italian people (Eve 1996, 44 ff.; see also: Filippucci 1996; Ginsborg 2003, Chapter 7).

The Italian 'anomaly' translates itself in what is, according to Paul Ginsborg (2003, 216), "a profoundly *deformed relationship* between citizen and state" (emphasis in the original). This is how the historian defines this contradiction, deep-rooted in Italian public life (Ginsborg 2003, 215-216.):

*In formal terms*, the actions of the civil service were minutely regulated by administrative law, whose principal objective was to safeguard the citizen against the arbitrary power of the bureaucracy. This was what has been called the 'justice-oriented' culture of Italian administration'. *In reality*, the habitual practice of the bureaucracy depended on a notable extent upon the exercise of discretionary power on the part of the functionary (emphasis in the original).

Crucially, in the quote above, the reference to discretionary powers used (and more often than not abused) by civil servants in Italy does not allude to the acceptable autonomy of action and decision-making that might be



desirable in civil servants working within a framework of clear and accepted norms and regulations. Ginsborg rather refers to the civil servant's "performance of favours in response to particularistic pressures" (Ibid.). Ginsborg's analysis brings together a number of problems that have been traditionally linked with the failure, on the part of the Italian people, to internalise their laws and to see them as the guide to their personal behaviour. This has been interpreted as a symptom of the Italian's lack of loyalty to the state as well as to the wider national community. One's family and circle of friends, or alternatively, the entourage of an influential individual are the true repositories of the Italians' loyalties (Eve 1996, 44 ff.; Dickie 1996, 19-20).

This interpretation of this Italian 'anomaly' has been explored and researched by a number of American sociologists who, in the 1930s, began to travel to Italy with the aim of researching the cultural foundations of the economic and social backwardness that characterised, at the time, Italian society. They focused their attention especially on the underdeveloped South - which was usually the location where they conducted their field research (Filippucci 1996, 53)<sup>37</sup>. Particularly influential was the work of the American sociologist Edward Banfield, who, in 1958 (reprinted in 1967), published an essay entitled *The Moral*

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<sup>37</sup> Filippucci (1996, 53) reports how anthropologists (mainly English-speaking ones) studying Mediterranean societies identified some cultural traits they believed to be widely diffused in the area. This included: a special centrality of the concept of 'honour'; a form of social status based on the fulfilment of sexual roles; particularly strong local and regional identities, and the preference for 'personalistic' forms of political action which often gave rise to the phenomena of clientelism and corruption. Corruption was indeed one of the most crucial issues in Italy in the early 1990s, and, according to Michael Eve (1996, 38), "[t]here is no real reason to doubt that Italy has been exceptional among Western nations in the extent of its public corruption".

*Basis of a Backward Society*. In this book - on the grounds of a research conducted on a Southern Italian village - Banfield introduced the concept of 'amoral familism' to explain the peculiarities of the Italians' weak civic sense<sup>38</sup>. Banfield's study – which is still often cited today – has influenced the hypothesis of Italy's 'weak sense of state' referred to above. At the root of the 'amoral familism' thesis lies the assumption that Italians (especially in the South), more than other European peoples, tend to pursue their personal interests or those of their close family over and above the wider interest of the community (Banfield 1958 [1967], 83-84). As a consequence of this attitude, many forms of social co-operation become unworkable, so as to inhibit an optimal economic and political development (Eve 1996, 45). Banfield's theory of 'familism', though still influential, has been strongly criticised and challenged since the late 1960s (Filippucci 1996). Ginsborg, for instance, distanced himself from the excesses of Banfield's view, while acknowledging the centrality of family values in Italian culture and identifying the strength of feelings of loyalty towards the family as one of the principal characteristics of Italian post-war history. Ginsborg (2003, 216-217) indeed maintains that:

... in the vital process of *interiorization* of codes of conduct for the public sphere, individuals were presented by the state with no constant and clear alternative to the long-standing practices of clientelism. On the contrary: patron-client relations, the

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<sup>38</sup> In the introduction to his book, Banfield (1958[1967], 9-10) writes: "The book is about a single village in Southern Italy, the extreme poverty and backwardness of which is to be explained largely (but not entirely) by the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family. This inability to concert activity beyond the immediate family arises from an ethos – that of "amoral familism" – which has been produced by three factors acting in combination: a high death rate, certain land and tenure conditions and the absence of the institution of the extended family".



exchange of favours, the use of kin and friends, became an accepted way for families to negotiate and traverse the bureaucracy. The state was not seen as either impartial or benevolent, but rather as a container of resources which individuals and families, if they found the right keys, could hope to unlock.

Ginsborg (Ibid.) acknowledges that in many ways this family-centred attitude gave birth to a system with an intrinsic logic, and endowed with vivacity and even a great deal of human warmth; however, it certainly was not a system that could ever be very conducive to the growth of citizenship values among the Italian population.

With regards to these interpretations of the Italian 'weak sense of state' based on the intrusion of 'particularistic' values in the public sphere, Eve (1996, 45) notes how the kind of framework adopted by the 'familism' approach promoted by Banfield is based on an implicit comparison of Italy with a type of society where the 'sense of state' (or 'stateness' as Heidenheimer would have it – see chapter 2) is more firmly rooted in the general consciousness, and where the levels of particularism and familism are lower. The latter is considered to be a more sophisticated society, and to have reached a higher level of social and political development. However, Eve (Ibid.) also points out that - at a closer look - this ideal type of mature society is, in fact, based on an idealised picture of the differences between Italy and the USA or the states of Northern Europe rather than on any empirical observation, and should therefore be accepted with a good deal of caution (see also Galli della Loggia 1998, 213-214).



On the other hand, when studying Italian public policy, it is necessary to be aware of the extent to which, in fact, issues of clientelism and corruption - rather than being mere subjects for the anthropologist to study - deeply affect public life in the country. The impacts on public administration of the familistic attitudes discussed above has been powerfully described by the well-respected scholar Sabino Cassese, who in the mid-1990s wrote:

In the last fifteen years, in spite of the fact that the Constitution lays down that entry to the public administration is by examination, around 60 per cent of public employees have been hired by means of temporary or 'precarious' contracts, which are then followed by permanent 'titularizations'. In this way, the bureaucrats have been able to find jobs for their relatives, following a long-standing custom of privileging family interests rather than those of the State. The political parties, in their turn, have managed to place their 'clients' in the public administration, thus fortifying their own electoral base" (Cassese quoted in Ginsborg 2003, 218-219).

Clientelism and outright corruption are therefore some of the causes of the 'weak sense of state' and the consequent 'public administration paradox' discussed above. However, Ginsborg (2003, 217) also attributes the weakness of public administration in Italy to the problems of inefficiency, disorganization and low productivity that have consistently characterised the Italian public sector. Such inefficiency, coupled with the clientelism described by Cassese, have both contributed to accentuate the traditional tendency towards 'familism' that has been discussed

earlier. According to Ginsborg (Ibid.) the main causes of such deep-rooted inefficiency of the public administration were the dominance of the legalistic approach to public administration and an over-developed tradition of centralism<sup>39</sup>. There is no doubt that one of the most striking characteristic of the Italian public sector is the coexistence, within the one country, of an ensemble of incredibly rigorous and detailed – if intricate – laws and regulations meant to limit cases of corruption and clientelism, and a particularly high incidence of precisely those phenomena. In Italy, as was noted before, very little flexibility is given to public officials (at least formally) in the application of norms and regulations, so that the practices of flexibility and small-scale negotiations that allow the administrative system workability and flexibility belong, in Italy, to the sphere of illegal activity<sup>40</sup>.

Administrative laws, on the other hand, are incredibly numerous with the result that the Italian public administration system is remarkably cumbersome and rigid. According to the data presented in a government report on the state of the public administration compiled in 1993, the laws currently in force in France were 7,325 and in Germany 5,587 (although this figure excludes the laws promulgated by the individual Länder). In

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<sup>39</sup> The predominance of a legalistic culture over one oriented towards the provision of services has been already mentioned in the preceding discussion. However, the importance of this notion for the understanding of the processes of public policy-making in Italy cannot be stressed enough. Administrative law is indeed at the very heart of the paradigm of public management in Italy, and every activity taking place in the public realm has to be set within its (inflexible) framework. As a matter of fact, the process of 'juridification' has been identified as a phenomenon developing consistently throughout the history of Italian public administration (Capano 2003, 785-787).

<sup>40</sup> Paradoxically, it is precisely such inflexibility of the bureaucratic machine that allows civil servants working in crucial positions, to abuse the system and establish relationships of political patronage and introduce illegal practices.

Italy, the numbers of laws and legally enforceable regulations was believed to be in the region of 90,000 (Ginsborg 2003, 217). Although the data proposed by other studies put the estimate at a lower figure, the exorbitant number of the laws that are supposed to guide activities that happen in the public realm is universally recognised as the most remarkable feature of Italian public administration. The aforementioned government report explicitly admits this:

The functions of the state are regulated and distributed among its organs by a highly disparate collection of acts, laws, regulations, circulars, directives, deliberations of interministerial committees, functional orders, etc. Some of these acts are not even published (quoted in Ginsborg 2003, 424).

Significantly, many public officials and central as well as local government managers have traditionally been recruited principally among graduates holding law or political science degrees, that is people with a strong legal formation<sup>41</sup>. The understanding of governance that public officials tend to have is therefore of a strongly formal and judicial nature. As a result, in the Italian public sector, compliance with the law is often interpreted as a standard to assess management performance and legalistic forms of control have developed where other countries – the UK among them – have preferred accountability-oriented systems of control (see chapter 5). In short, the view prevalent in Italy is that the 'neutral' enforcement of the law represents the best guarantee of good performance of the public administration (Mussari 1994, 55). It is hardly

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<sup>41</sup> Political science university degrees in Italy have a strong juridical emphasis.



surprising then, that - swamped with norms and regulations to be followed to the letter - the public administration in Italy has succumbed to legalism and has thus not been able to establish working practices founded on a culture of services<sup>42</sup>.

An alternative interpretation of the development of public administration in Italy has been elaborated by Robert Putnam (1993) in *Making Democracy Work*. Putnam, building on the work done by the historians Almond and Verba on the notion of *civic culture*, attempts to account for contemporary political attitudes by considering socio-cultural variables in their historical evolution. The concept of 'civic region' plays an important role in Putnam's analysis of Italy, and tracing the civic roots of different parts of the country leads him to the realization that some regions are more 'civic' than others, and display lively social networks and diffused

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<sup>42</sup> Eve (1996, 48) observes that this state of affairs, and in particular the lack of any 'reasonableness' (intended as common sense shared by both public official and client) behind the work of public institutions make the present predicament of Italian public administration a somewhat Kafkaesque situation. This is because - and this is yet another paradox - all these norms, rather than instilling law-abiding habits in public officials, have had pretty much the opposite effect. Since the law is felt to be, more often than not, an external and frequently unreasonable force, those who are in charge of ensuring its enforcement end up dissociating themselves from any identification with the norms themselves and the values they represent. Because of their passive role and the denial of any discretion in decision-making, public officials tend not to feel personally responsible for the workings of the burdensome machinery of the public administration. As a result, they may become eventually more susceptible to favouritism towards friends and family, if not to outright corruption (Ibid.). Against this background, it seems hardly surprising that, as Dickie (1996, 20) explicitly maintains, the Italians should be fundamentally sceptical of the impartiality of the State. The state, on its part, displays the same lack of faith in its citizens, as proved by the remarkable complicated procedures that for decades were involved in the simplest document requests: signatures had to be verified by notaries or public officials, a simple job application needed to be accompanied by dozens of *certificati*, official documents attesting the circumstances of the applicant (Ginsborg 200, 218). Things have slightly improved with the introduction of the *autocertificazione* - a process on the basis of which an Italian citizen can provide information about himself or herself to the public authorities without having to support every declaration with the relevant official document. However, just how little the Italian state trusts its citizens is further demonstrated by the internal resistances encountered by the institution of the *autocertificazione*: introduced by the law no.15 of 1968, it only became widely operational in the mid 1990s (Idem.).

norms of civic engagement. Other regions, on the other hand display a prevalence of what Putnam (*Ibid.*, 15) calls 'vertically structured politics' and a diffused culture of distrust in public institutions. Putnam shows that there is a clear link between different levels of modernity and institutional performance<sup>43</sup>.

The arguments presented so far have attempted to show how the issue of the deformed relationship between state and citizen in Italy is indeed complex and multifaceted. It seems opportune, thus, to conclude this necessarily brief review of the 'weak sense of state' that seems to affect the Italian people and have spread into public administration, with Michael Eve's invitation to caution (1996, 49):

None of these features – the perverse effects of heavy legal and administrative regulation, long chains of accountability, the attempt to extend state authority in the face of powerful interests – fit in with any *simple* version of the 'weak state' or lack of civic consciousness thesis (emphasis in the original).

Together with the inflation of laws, another characteristic that, according to Ginsborg (2003, 217), contributed to the inefficiency of Italian public

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<sup>43</sup> Putnam also maintains that the search for an explanation for such an uneven spread of civic values across the country, "leads us back to a momentous period nearly a millennium ago, when two contrasting and innovative regimes were established. In different parts of Italy - a powerful monarchy in the south and a remarkable set of communal republics in the center and north. From this early medieval epoch through the unification of Italy in the nineteenth century, we trace systematic regional differences in patterns of civic involvement and social solidarity. These traditions have decisive consequences for the quality of life, public and private, in Italy's regions today. Indeed, Putnam (1993, 133) manages to build a convincing argument for a clear parallel between the prevalence in a certain area of either of the two political forms and different levels of civic spirit. So, "the southern territories once ruled by the Norman kings constitute exactly the seven least civic regions in the 1970s. [...] At the other end of the scale, the heartland of republicanism in 1300 corresponds uncannily to the most civic regions of today".



administration was the over-developed traditions of centralism. By the early-1990s, various types of public institutions that in many other countries managed themselves with a certain degree of autonomy (museums and galleries, just to make an example), in Italy, were still managed centrally (and not very efficiently) by the state. As will be shown in chapter 6, things are slowly changing, although there is little doubt that, compared to the UK, Italy is still managed according to a much stronger centralised paradigm. Despite the reform introduced by the article 54 of law no. 142 of 1990, following which local authorities have acquired a certain financial autonomy, public finance in Italy is still highly centralised (Mussari 1994, 55 and 60). Almost fifteen years after the law was promulgated, the reform has not yet been fully implemented. Before the reform introduced the possibility for local authorities to increase the revenue generated from the local community (by levying taxes and applying differential pricing for the services provided) local authorities received, on average, two thirds of their resources directly from the central government. Funds are transferred to local government according to decisions made annually and ratified in the national budget. Although the distribution of resources happens on the grounds of quantitative parameters (such as regional population, size, etc.) other factors, such as the actual costs of the services provided and the efficiency levels of local governments are not always taken into consideration (Mussari 1994, 55).



It is clear that the Italian bureaucratic machine is still far from working efficiently. The problems discussed so far, coupled with the obdurate resistance encountered by any attempt at reform paint a very grim picture indeed. The inefficiency and unresolved organisational problems of the Italian public administration are reflected in the incredibly high number of court cases originating from appeals against alleged errors or illegalities attributed to public offices or civil servants<sup>44</sup>. Despite the obvious problems (only a few of which have been discussed here), however, administrative reform was never a very high political priority, and it did not become one even after an especially devoted ministry was established in the mid-1990s. Timid reforms have taken place at some point in post-war history, but they usually amounted to little more than modifications to the economic and juridical status of civil servants (Ginsborg 2003, 211-222).

#### CENTRALISED BUT DISPERSED: THE ORIGINS OF THE ITALIAN CULTURAL POLICY MODEL

As could be expected, the intricacies that characterise policy-making in general, are also reflected in the specific area of cultural policy. In particular, one of the features of cultural policy-making in Italy which contributes to making the picture even more complicated is the fact that

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<sup>44</sup> In a strongly legalist system, where administrative law is accepted to be the very foundation of public administration, it logically follows that the final form of control is represented by the law itself. Hence there were 111,000 cases of new appeals to administrative or financial tribunals registered for the year 1991 alone on top of the 800,000 already under-way but still pending (Ginsborg 2003, 219). It is legitimate to assume that the recourse *en masse* to the administrative courts is a symptom of the ineffectiveness of the routine systems of control in place in the Italian public sector.

all levels of government - State, Regions, Provinces and Municipalities – are involved in the definition and the implementation of cultural policies (Bodo 2002, 5). However, the communication and co-ordination between the various levels are very poor: very often the observer has the impression that what informs their relationship is, in fact, an antagonistic attitude. The state has historically displayed a marked resistance towards the devolution of powers and responsibilities for cultural planning and policy-making to the lower levels of government - the Regions in particular<sup>45</sup>. The problem of the persistent tendency to centralism of the Italian public administration paradigm has already been remarked upon, but - as will be discussed in more detail later – this phenomenon has been even more noteworthy in the sphere of cultural policy<sup>46</sup>.

Similarly, the inflation of legal norms and regulations that was lamented in the context of the preceding review of the Italian public administration also represents a grave burden on cultural policy-making. This is how Augustin Girard (1996, 58) has described the Italian situation:

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<sup>45</sup> Significantly, Merusi (2005) reports that recent legislation attempting to clarify the relationship between State and regional and local levels has been condemned for having achieved only 'an imperfect decentralisation' ('un decentramento imperfetto') on the grounds that a number of functions that could have been rightfully be expected to have been devolved to the regional government have, in fact, been retained at central level.

<sup>46</sup> This complicated relationship between the various governmental levels that share responsibilities in the cultural field contributes to the phenomenon that Palma and Clemente di San Luca (1987, 68) refer to as the "plurality of public administrations". This 'plurality' is represented by the large number of public bodies and institutions that are active in the cultural policy field. Because of the obvious difficulty of taking into consideration the activities of all these agencies and organisations making up the Italian public sphere, Palma and Clemente di San Luca (ibid.) prefer to use the more specific label of 'State intervention' in the arts rather than the more generic one of 'public intervention' to qualify the focus of their paper. Similarly, this section of this paper will consider issues relating more specifically to 'State intervention' in the cultural field in Italy.

Italy has an extraordinary array of legislation relating to culture, which never ceases to grow at a steady pace both at national and regional level. This plethora of rules and regulations, which especially affects the cultural heritage, seems to have the effect of gradually making the actual implementation of the laws more and more difficult.

As a direct result of its dense legal framework, cultural policy has been, in Italy, pretty much an affair for specialists, and rarely has the debate over spending decisions or legal reforms affecting the cultural sector crossed the thresholds of the professional sphere (the experts and those directly and professionally involved in cultural management) to reach the general public. This was indeed the feeling expressed by the report prepared by Christopher Gordon in 1995 on the basis of the National Report on cultural policy submitted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Culture Committee of the Council of Europe. Gordon (1995, 10) writes:

There is no comprehensive document setting out basic strategies and programme objectives for public intervention in the field of culture. The laws which guarantee financial resources are the only programme documents in the Italian cultural policy system.

It is hardly surprising therefore, that legal circles, (and especially experts of administrative law) have produced most of the available material on cultural policy administration. If jurisprudence leads the way with regards to the accepted understandings of cultural policy, art historians have retained a monopoly of debates and decision-making in the realms of conservation and restoration, which are both of paramount importance in



the Italian cultural public sphere (Bianchini et al. 1996, 291; Di Stefano 1995, 5; see also Bobbio 1992, 149).

From an administrative point of view, the model on which Italian cultural policy has always been based is founded on the direct engagement of the public administration in funding the conservation, the creation and – to a lesser extent – the promotion, valorisation and diffusion of its extensive cultural patrimony. Such direct engagement of the state often extends to the direct management and running of cultural facilities and institutions (such as archaeological sites, museums, theatres, etc,) which are responsibilities of either central ministries or special departments at the regional, provincial and municipal levels (Bodo 2002, 8). There are a number of quasi-independent bodies, whose relationship to the government could be assimilated to the one envisaged by the ‘arm’s length principle’ discussed with relation to Great Britain. Examples of this type of institution are the Venice Biennale and the *Ente Teatrale Italiano* (ETI, the Italian Theatre Institute) and the High Authority for Communications. These bodies, however, represent only an exception to the rule of direct management described above (Ibid.).

In the Italian case, the fact that responsibilities for funding and decision-making have been largely retained centrally, did not result in a strong central ministry of culture of the sort that can be found in France. On the contrary, responsibilities for cultural decision-making were for a very long period of time dispersed among a number of central ministries, giving rise

to what could be defined as a situation of 'centralised dispersion'. This status quo only ended in 1998, with the creation of the new Ministry for Heritage and Cultural Activities (*Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali*) when finally responsibilities for the various cultural activities supported by the State were grouped together within the new ministry's remit<sup>47</sup>. Bodo (2002) clearly sees the creation of the new Ministry as an important change and as a discrete improvement on the status quo ante. It is beyond doubt that before the creation of the new Ministry in 1998, the picture of cultural provision and support in Italy was very confused and presented wide areas of overlap and lack of communication between the many central departments involved in cultural policy-making. The historical development of Italian cultural policy will be the object of detailed analysis in chapter 6, however, the pervasive popularity of the introduction of the Ministry of Heritage and Cultural Activities will be much easier to understand after a brief review of the pre-1998 distribution of responsibilities for the cultural sector. The pre-1998 distribution of responsibility across central ministries appeared as such:

- The Ministry of Education (*Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione*) had been in charge of running of the Directorate for Antiquities and Fine Arts (*Direttorato delle Antichità e Belle Arti*) since the establishment of the Republic. In 1975, however, the Directorate constituted the core institution of a newly established Ministry of

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<sup>47</sup> The administrative structure of the unified Ministry has undergone further legislative change following the D.Lgs no. 42 of 22nd January 2004 (the so-called *Decreto Urbani*) and the presidential decree n.172 of 2004. The detail of this legal reform cannot be discussed here in detail, but extensive analysis of the legal innovations and their implications can be found in Cammelli 2003b, Ferretti 2004, Cammelli 2005, Pastori 2005, D'Auria 2005, Sciallo 2005, Barbati 2005 and Merusi 2005.

Cultural and Environmental Assets (*Ministero dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali*). This was, throughout the pre-1998 phase of Italian cultural policy, the only minister exclusively engaged with cultural matters (its brief included the artistic, archaeological and architectural heritage, museums and galleries, the fine arts, libraries, publishing and archives).

- The Ministry for Tourism and the Performing Arts (*Ministero per il Turismo e lo Spettacolo*) was abolished in 1993, as a result of a referendum, so that responsibility for the live performing arts returned to the office of the Prime Minister (*Ufficio della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*) which was initially in charge of them. (Bianchini et al. 1996, 293).
- Although the Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Assets represented the major player, other government departments were – and still are - in charge of other aspects of cultural policy: the already mentioned Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione is still in charge of arts teaching and training. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministero degli Affari Esteri*) is in charge of looking after Italy's foreign cultural relations and the promotion of Italian culture abroad (through the work of about eighty Centres for Italian culture located in as many different countries). The Ministry for Post and Telecommunications (*Ministero delle Poste e delle Telecomunicazioni*) is the main regulator for the broadcasting system and supervises the RAI, the Italian public broadcasting



company. The Ministry of Public Works (*Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici*) takes care, in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Cultural Activities, of restoration works carried out on monuments and buildings of historic and artistic importance.

It is obvious from this brief overview that the institutional framework of Italian cultural policy has been characterised by a long period of extreme confusion and by a high degree of fragmentation and distribution of responsibilities between a number of players and across the various administrative levels. This situation has undoubtedly affected the quality and the consistency of the actual policies, and probably contributes to the lack of strategic planning, the confused objectives and the vagueness of the state's action plans with regards to the cultural field that commentators lament (Bianchini et al. 1996, 294; see also Gordon 1995).

Why has this state of affairs, which we have referred to as 'centralised dispersion', persisted for over fifty years despite the obvious problems it involves? Commentators seem to agree that the cultural policy set-up just described was in fact intentional on the part of Italian legislators. The justification for such apparently bizarre choice of administrative framework lies in the attempt to avoid the possibility of abusing cultural policy for propaganda purposes as had happened during the Fascist era (Bianchini et al. 1996, 292; Gordon 1995, 9). When, in the aftermath of WWII, the Republic was established and the possibility of the reconstitution of a Fascist party was banned by the newly implemented

Constitution, every effort was put in place to avoid recreating a powerful and centralised institution resembling the Fascist *Ministero della Cultura Popolare* (Ministry for Popular Culture, often referred to as *Minculpop*). During the Fascist regime, the nurturing and promotion of culture on the part of the state had assumed a centrality that has remained unique in Italian history. Indeed, through the promotion of a regime-friendly version of 'national culture', the Minculpop became a crucial player in the establishment of a broad popular consensus around the Fascist dictatorship, as well as a powerful tool to counteract the activities of intellectuals and artists hostile to the regime. As Stone (1998, 23) explains, "Fascist culture originated in a contest for control of the structures of representation": hence the pivotal role of the culture ministry within Fascist Italy. The Fascist regime began its cultural project by first devoting itself to institutional reforms rather than the promotion or celebration of a particular aesthetics or arts forms. At the beginning of the century, the country did not have a distinctively Italian cultural policy, and the regime took it upon itself to begin the process of institutionalisation of public intervention in the arts (Palma and Clemente di San Luca 1987, 69). These administrative reforms served the purpose of creating a fertile ground for the creation of a very powerful and wealthy 'patron state' which had access to money as well as all the tools it needed to distribute and make visible the artistic expression it promoted (Stone 1998). This strong impetus towards administrative reform in the arena of cultural administration and support was to have long-lasting impacts which outlived the regime itself. Some of the laws that were issued in the late

1930s, at the height of the Fascist dictatorship, had a significant influence over Italian cultural policy ever since they were first promulgated. In fact, even the *Testo Unico* of 1998 - the legislative act that has re-organised all the legislation for the cultural field - is fundamentally consistent to the approach to the conservation and protection of the country's 'cultural assets' that was established during the Fascist *Ventennio* (Genovese 1995, 32).

The report on Italian cultural policy prepared in 1995 by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Council of Europe openly acknowledges the achievements of the dictatorship in this area of public administration: it praises the breadth of scope of its intervention and the importance of the setting in place of a framework for the systematic preservation of Italy's immense cultural heritage (Council of Europe 1995, 23-26). However, despite its positive contributions to administrative reform, the Minculpop was undoubtedly responsible for the unscrupulous use of culture and arts for propaganda and for the promotion of one of the most illiberal, discriminatory and despotic regimes in modern history. Hence, as Gordon (1995, 9) points out "[I]t is wholly understandable that, following the suppression of the former Ministry of popular Culture in 1953, fears in Italy led to an outright rejection of the idea that there should be a single, unified Ministry of Culture". The price to pay though, was the 'centralised dispersion' of responsibilities and competencies for the cultural sector that has been discussed above. In 1998, though, the



decision was made that this was, in fact, a price too high, and the first post-war unified Ministry for Culture was established in Italy.

#### THE ITALIAN CONSTITUTION AND THE CULTURAL POLICY DEBATE

Another crucial difference between the British and the Italian cultural policy model is linked to the fact that, while the United Kingdom does not have a written Constitution, Italy does. The preceding section has shown how the lack of a written constitution, as well as the possibility, afforded by the system, to introduce significant administrative reforms without the need for major legislative changes is what allows the British system such flexibility and the capacity to swiftly adapt to changed political circumstances. In Italy, things are very different: since 1948 the Constitution has been providing the guiding principles for the elaboration of all subsequent judicial norms. Every single law that is issued has to be consistent with the values and principles expressed by the Constitution, and failure to meet this requirement imports the highly likelihood of a Constitutional Court ruling to invalidate the law itself (Barbati 2003, 105). Therefore, the interpretation of the text of the Constitution and the reconstruction of its meaning in the intentions of the founders of the Republic becomes, in the Italian context, an absolutely crucial matter. Moreover, it is a matter that has had important repercussions on the cultural policy debate.

One of the most significant cases has been the long legal dispute over the interpretation of the meaning of the letter of Article 9 of the Italian Constitution. This question of constitutional doctrine, which is centred on the interpretation of the word *Repubblica* (republic), concerns the involvement of the various administrative levels in the promotion of the arts, and in particular the legitimacy of the regional and local government levels to be fully involved in cultural planning and provision. Article 9 ratifies and institutionalises the commitment of the Italian Republic to promote the arts<sup>48</sup>. In the course of the decision-making process that originated the Italian Constitution, the word *Repubblica* was chosen over the term *Stato* which appeared in an earlier draft (Barbati 2003, 105). This has created some confusion, since the word *Repubblica* occurs a number of times in the text of the Constitution, but not always with the same meaning. What has been at the centre of the jurisprudential debate is whether, in Article 9, by the term *Repubblica* the authors of the Constitution meant to indicate what in legal terms is often referred to as *Stato-persona* or *Stato-apparato* (that is, the state intended as the central national government) or, rather, the *Stato-ordinamento* (that is the general notion of state as embodied by any of the territorial administrative levels that belong to it - national *and* sub-national: regional, municipal, etc.) (Barbati 2003, 105; Palma and Clemente di San Luca 1987, 70).

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<sup>48</sup> Article 9 of the Italian Constitution reads: "La Repubblica promuove lo sviluppo della cultura e della ricerca scientifica e tecnica. Tutela il paesaggio e il patrimonio storico e artistico della Nazione". The translation offered by Gordon (1995, 9) is "The Republic shall do all in its power to promote the development of culture and of scientific and technical research. It shall also protect and preserve the countryside and the historical and artistic monuments which are the inheritance of the nation".

The implications of the adoption of one interpretation over the other with regards to cultural policy are obvious: in the first case, the Constitution would seem to imply that only the central government is rightfully entitled to be involved in cultural policy-making. Conversely, the second option leaves open the possibility of the regional and local administrative levels to participate in cultural-policy making besides the institutions of central government. The final prevalence of the latter option however, introduces the need to define the competences of the central state and the sub-national levels of government respectively. But, as was referred to above, this has been not a straightforward process in view of the reluctance of the centre to turn the rights of the periphery to involvement in the cultural sphere into reality. According to the currently accepted juridical doctrine, which has been endorsed by the revised version of the Constitution following the reform process that took place in 2001 (*l. cost. 18 ottobre 2001, n.3, di revisione del Titolo V, parte seconda, della Costituzione*) the central institutions of the state retain the full responsibility for the *tutela*, that is the preservation and conservation of Italy's cultural heritage. The revised Constitution ratifies the right of sub-national levels of government to exercise their authority in the sphere of the *valorizzazione*, that is the presentation, valorisation and 'exploitation' of the artistic patrimony (Barbati 2003, 106-109).

According to the scholar of Italian administrative law Marco Cammelli (2003, 12), far from having resolved the tension between centre and periphery in the Italian cultural policy system, the Constitutional reform



has in fact potentially jeopardised its unity. Cammelli (Ibid.) maintains that the process of devolution of responsibilities for 'cultural assets' has only been partially achieved, and has thus resulted in a chaotic dualism of functions (with the separation between the activities of *tutela* and *valorizzazione* as well as between the central institution of the Ministry for Heritage and Cultural Activities and those at the local level).

The framework for cultural policy-making in Italy will be discussed in greater detail in later sections of this thesis; however, the discussion so far will have hopefully shed light on some of the essential differences between the Italian and British cultural policy models. It is now time to draw some conclusions from the comparative observations that have been made so far.

## CONCLUSIONS

In accordance with the methodological conclusions reached in Chapter 1, this and the preceding chapter have attempted to present some of the principal features of the British and Italian administrative and legal systems. This was indeed necessary in order to offer a backdrop against which the in-depth discussion of cultural policy in the two countries, which will follow, can be better understood. In particular, the present overview of the framework of public policy-making in the two countries has focused on the very different ways in which policy is talked about and understood

in Italy and the UK, and the ways in which different approaches to public policy have affected the development of public policy as a field of academic enquiry. If, on the one hand, the public policy literature in the UK is characterised by a widely interdisciplinary character, on the other hand, the Italian policy debate has been the almost exclusive dominion of scholars specializing in the legal disciplines, with “administrative law” research accounting for a great proportion of the available publications on various aspects of Italian cultural policy.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of the ways in which the state is involved in cultural funding and promotion has highlighted the profound differences between the British and Italian cultural policy models. In brief, the discussion presented above can be summarised in the contraposition of the British model - partly based on the creation on quasi-independent bodies (quangos) for the allocation of public resources and the definition of specific policy and strategies for the cultural sector – and the Italian model, where responsibilities and competences for the arts and culture have been retained largely by the central state, although they were for about forty years fragmented and scattered among a number of different ministries. An attempt was also made to assess the relative advantages and disadvantages of both models. The quango paradigm seems to maximise the flexibility allowed by the loose legal system in place in the UK, which allows bodies such as the Arts Council to adapt their policies and strategies to the fast-changing circumstances of the modern world. On the other hand, the criticism moved against the British quangocracy

by a number of commentators was acknowledged, and the allegations concerning the increasing 'shortening' of the arm in the so-called 'arm's length' relationship between quangos and government have been discussed extensively. The flexibility of the British example was juxtaposed against the fragmentation of competence for cultural policy in Italy. This fragmentation, together with the hindrance represented by a dense and cumbersome legal framework within which the policy-making process happens, make for a much more rigid system, where change is slow to happen and where administrative structures are often obsolete and unable to cope with the complex need of the cultural sector in a land as culturally rich as Italy. Undoubtedly, the Italian situation is further complicated by the high degree of political instability that has consistently plagued the political life of the country throughout its Republican history. Italian governments rarely succeed in surviving a whole term, and it's rather a common occurrence for general elections to be called a matter of *years* before they are due. Although the short life of governments rarely means a radically changed political scene following new elections (the Christian Democrats were consistently in power for about forty years before the corruption-related scandals of the early 1990s), this rather unstable situation means that the normal legislative *iter* that any new law has to go through (which is already rather tortuous)<sup>49</sup> is often further slowed down. Legal changes and reforms, in Italy, can thus take a very long time.

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<sup>49</sup> Any new law has to be discussed and voted by both the Chambers that make up the Italian Legislative: the *Camera dei Deputati* and the *Camera del Senato*.



In the light of the discussion presented so far, it seems evident that the main differences between the Italian and the British cultural policy systems closely reflect the different cultural context of the two countries, especially with regards to the relationship between law and action (Lo Schiavo 2000, 693). According to Lo Schiavo (ibid.), when looking comparatively at Britain and Italy, it is of paramount importance to consider the implications of the fact that the UK is a *common law* country (where changes can be made without large scale law-making exercises being required), whereas Italy is a *public law* country. This is how he (ibid.) explains the consequences of such different legal profiles of the two countries:

In a few words, in a common law country like the UK, change in a law *follows* change in the public services. In a public law country like Italy, it is exactly the opposite: change in law is required *in advance*, but generally is not sufficient to implement real changes (emphasis in the original).

It is significant to remark that, despite such radical differences, both the Italian and the British cultural policy models show a crucial similarity. Indeed, the adoption of the 'quango approach' in Britain, and the fragmentation of competences for the arts and culture across central departments in Italy, both originate from the same intention to guarantee that the cultural sector can be supported and flourish without being submitted to unduly pressures from the government. The two models that have been the object of the present analysis are really not much other than two different solutions to the same problem. The two countries felt equally strongly the need to avoid the danger that is potentially inherent

in the notion of a powerful ministry of culture working to promulgate a set of 'official' cultural values and artefacts through an 'official cultural policy'.

As has already been mentioned, the reason for such a recalcitrant attitude *vis à vis* a unified culture ministry might be more immediately evident with regards to Italy, in view of the obvious precedent represented by the Fascist regime's instrumentalisation of culture for propaganda aims. However, there is a general consensus, among commentators and scholars, that the adoption of the 'arm's length principle' as the guiding notion of British cultural policy reflects very similar concerns to those found in post-Fascist Italy (Williams 1979; Beck 1992; Taylor 1995). According to Beck (1992, 139) the 'arm's length principle', despite all its limitations, is the embodiment of the belief that art and politics should never meet and fulfils the function of making clear what kind of relationship should be established between the two. He (Ibid.) writes that:

British government has always resisted the establishment of a Ministry of Culture. There is a fundamental conviction deep in our political culture that art and politics must never mix [...] Thus British government, because it is a liberal and democratic government, should never have a cultural policy.

Beck's quote expresses a set of beliefs that was rather consensual in the early days of the British post-war cultural policy debate. However, the times have changed dramatically, and the sphere of public policy has undergone a dramatic re-shaping. Unsurprisingly, these have had

repercussions in the area of cultural policy, and these will be the topic of the following sections of this thesis. The argumentation that will follow aims to show that, despite the common preoccupation with the perils that a more direct involvement of the government in cultural policy would entail, recent developments in both countries seem to point towards the progressive increase of governmental influence over cultural policy priorities and strategies. Furthermore, there is evidence to argue that both countries are moving (though at a different pace) towards a progressive and steady instrumentalization of cultural policy to broader governmental priorities. Significantly, such powerful forces are at work that cultural, juridical and administrative differences between the two countries seem to have lost importance, indicating the possibility that - despite their original roots in national cultural traditions - national cultural policies might in fact be one area where globalizing processes are already well under way and have been for quite some time.



### **The culture of cultural policy: A brief review of the British and Italian intellectual and cultural traditions**

The first section of this thesis has presented an overview of the political, institutional and bureaucratic background against which cultural policy needs to be viewed in both the countries at the centre of the present study. This second section opens with a brief history of the intellectual and cultural traditions of Britain and Italy, with a view of discussing the notion of culture which is at the root of cultural policy-making in the two countries. Both countries have a very complex and rich cultural history which it would be impossible to analyse and discuss extensively within the constraints imposed by this thesis. The present discussion will therefore focus on those aspects of the intellectual and cultural history of the two nations that is more immediately relevant to the sphere of cultural policy. This will provide the necessary theoretical grounding for the discussion of British and Italian contemporary cultural policy that will follow in chapter 5 and 6. Indeed, this chapter will begin by attempting to describe the most crucial stages in the evolution of notions of culture within the British intellectual discourse. This is a necessary step in order to show how shifts in the definitions of what can be ascribed to the realm of 'culture' have affected cultural policies in postwar Britain. The analysis will then move on to highlighting the different evolution of the concept of culture within Italian cultural theory, seeking to find - in the different

shades of meaning that culture has displayed within the cultural debate in Italy - an explanation for the different evolution of Italian cultural policies over time.

It is useful at this stage to refer to Oliver Bennett's (2005) warning that "the tracing of intellectual influences in institutional and policy matters is not always straightforward, as such influences are often not articulated, let alone attributed, but, rather, are reflected in unspoken policy assumption or institutional rhetoric". Special attention will thus be given to the identification of the conceptions of culture that appear to have indeed made their way from the critical debates of intellectuals and cultural analysts into the arena of cultural policy-making, becoming operational within those institutions whose responsibility it is to finance and sustain the arts in Britain and Italy.

#### CHANGING NOTIONS OF CULTURE IN THE BRITISH CONTEXT

*"Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought". (Williams, 1976, 87)*

As can be evinced by the opening quote above, taken from Williams' *Keywords* (1976), 'culture' is a word employed in a variety of senses in everyday use as well as in academic contexts. Indeed, according to the cultural anthropologist Robert Borofsky, "[c]ulture has become one of the most popular words in our global vocabulary" (Borofsky, 1998, 64). Despite its common use, though, there is not a tangible or generally agreed meaning for it, so that, when talking of culture, it is not always clear what the central concept being discussed is. A further example of the difficulties of achieving a single, systematic notion of culture might be offered by the book entitled *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* by Kroeber, Kluckhohn and Untereiner (1952), which contains over 150 definitions of culture! Moreover, to complicate things further, "the term culture has a long history of meaning different things to different people" (W. Goodenough, quoted in Borofsky, 1998, 65). If, on the one hand, defining culture is definitely a tantalising task, on the other, it is quite remarkable - considering the number of books and articles devoted to the theme of 'culture' and to cultural management and policy - how often the topic is confidently tackled without the need being felt for a proper clarification of the terms under discussion. And yet, one would assume it essential, in order to define effective policies for the area of culture, that the boundaries of this area should be clearly defined (Quinn, 1998, 72)<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> There is one thing on which, however, there seems to be a relative agreement among scholars in the humanities and social sciences alike, namely that "culture is a concept, not a reality" (Borofsky, 1998, 64). In Borofsky's words, "[d]espite the fact that people talk of culture as being something 'real', as something that exists 'out there', it is in fact an intellectual construct used for describing (and explaining) a complex cluster of human behaviours, ideas, emotions and artefacts" (Borofsky, 1998, 65).



Culture is, in fact, an idea that has developed in European cultural theory over the past two centuries paralleling great political, social and economic changes, and is substantially linked to notions of political solidarity, particularly that of the nation-state, and of national cultural identities. Culture is therefore not just a concept, but a concept with a history involving a continuous evolution of meaning. Raymond Williams has devoted a number of articles and books to the topic of the developments of the notion of culture over time. He is, as a matter of fact, considered the single most important figure in the original formation of what has come to be known, in the English-speaking academic world, as 'cultural studies' (Gray and McGuigan, 1993, viii).

In *Keywords* (1976, 87-92), Williams has traced the complex history of the word 'culture' starting from the meaning of its Latin predecessor, *cultura*. This derived from the verb *colere*, which had a wide range of meanings, including the cultivation of the soil. And indeed, originally and until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, culture was a word indicating a process, normally the process of the tending of crops or animals. The first modification in meaning happened around the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, when, by metaphor, "the tending of natural growth was extended to a process of human development" (*Idem*, 87). By this time, culture had thus become a figurative term to indicate the process of refinement of spirit and manners. However, Williams (1953, reprinted in McIlroy and Westwood,

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1993, 59) insists that the term culture at this stage always implied reference to a *process* rather than to an achieved state. This represents one of the three main fields of reference of the word culture that Williams describes: culture as 'civilisation', in the sense of a general process of intellectual, spiritual and material progress. As Eagleton (2000, 9) has noted, in this identification with 'civilisation', the term 'culture' inscribed itself fully in the spirit of the Enlightenment, with its belief in secular values and man's possibilities of progressive self-development. Only in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century will the use of the word 'culture' develop as a concept and evolve towards the sense of an absolute, an entity: the *idea* of culture. Indeed, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the word culture was rarely used on its own, but was usually preceded by an adjective, such as 'moral', 'intellectual', etc. It was probably not until Matthew Arnold that the word dropped all the adjectives that normally accompanied it to be just 'culture', "an independent noun, an abstract process or the product of such a process" (Williams, 1976, 88). In short, "in the nineteenth century, the word has become the Idea" (Williams, 1953 in McIlroy and Westwood, 1993, 60).

Williams (*ibid.*, 60-61) has explained this development in the meaning of the word 'culture' as a response to the changes, unprecedented in human experience, in the social structure and in everyday life that were occurring around Europe at the time, due to the Industrial Revolution, and the consequent phenomenon of urbanisation. Indeed, for Williams, "[t]he idea of culture is not to be considered as a process of independent

evolution; it is shaped and at times directed by the total environment to which it is one kind of response" (Ibid., 61). The era of the industrial society dominated by the machine was felt, by many intellectual and social as well as cultural commentators of that time, to be devouring and corrupting the natural character of humankind. As a result, a number of cultural and social theorists started to feel an ever-widening gap between the creative and the productive, between certain moral and intellectual activities and the values represented by the new kind of society that was then affirming itself. This new concept of culture - which was heavily indebted to the aesthetic theories elaborated within the German tradition (Hammermeister 2002 and Bruford 1962) - in the changed historical circumstances, was thus supposed to mediate between 'man' and 'machine', and to provide an antidote to the alienated, fragmented, materialistic and utilitarian values of the new era. In the words of Matthew Arnold, the main exponent of this understanding of culture, "Culture looks beyond machinery, culture hates hatred, culture has one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light" (quoted in Williams 1958, 126). Indeed, the more actual times were perceived as debased and devoid of true values, the more the idea of culture was forced into an ideal of perfection and in a critical position with regards to the present (Jenks, 1993, 7; Eagleton, 2000, 11). It is interesting to note how this interpretation of the development of the concept of culture (now more correctly Culture) as a "Romantic, pre-Marxist critique of early industrial capitalism" (Eagleton, 2000, 10) and the related notion that "if culture was once seen as allied with commerce, the two are now increasingly at



odds" (ibid., 11), seems to explain a feature of contemporary notions of culture that still has a strong hold. The reference is to the conviction that culture represents values intrinsically irreconcilable with the market. This notion has been often called upon to justify state intervention in supporting the arts that are, in this view, expected to perish if abandoned to market forces (McGuigan, 1996, 54).

This new notion of culture as being associated with an ideal of perfection has been championed, in the English cultural tradition, by Matthew Arnold. Such a concept of culture as 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 1932, reprinted in 1981, 6), has been the intellectual base for the Liberal humanist tradition that has been most influential in determining what was to be included within the boundaries of culture and, thus, in shaping postwar cultural policies all over Europe<sup>51</sup>. Indeed, cultural institutions and funding bodies in Britain - though the same can be argued about most European countries - were originally structured (and they largely still are) according to a dominant *Liberal Humanist discourse of culture*, which, in turn, they helped to reproduce (Jordan and Weedon, 1995, chapters 1 and 2). In his history of the Arts Council, Andrew Sinclair (1995, 76) openly establishes a link between the founding of the Arts Council, and the intention to promote a form of culture consistent with "Matthew Arnold's Aristotelian conception of culture". Indeed, according to John Storey (1993, 22) "Arnold established a cultural agenda which remained dominant in debate from the 1860s

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<sup>51</sup> For an exhaustive discussion of the arnoldian legacy of post-war British cultural policy, see Bennett (2005).

until the 1950s". Liberal Humanism, taking up some of Romanticism's assumptions and developing Schiller's notion of the civilising power of art, privileges 'The Individual' over social factors or social determinants. Art is thus the product of individual talent and represents the expression of the noblest aspects of human nature. The Arnoldian perspective, and, more broadly, the Liberal Humanist tradition views culture as "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activities" (Williams, 1976, 80), and has therefore tended to limit 'Culture' (now rigorously with a capital C) to a selective body of literary and artistic texts which were said to embody universal truths and values, to express a fixed and recognizable 'human nature' and which now constitute the kernel of the 'great' European cultural tradition<sup>52</sup>.

Aesthetically, 20th century culture has been shaped by the hegemony of Modernism, which thus came to be considered as the culmination and the highest expression of this European cultural tradition. However, Modernism's rejection of realism and popular culture has meant that its accessibility was often limited to an elite, educated audience (Jordan and Weedon, 1995, 58-59). This view of culture, deeply reliant on modernist aesthetic values, allows to distinguish clearly between what counts as art and what does not and its effect can be seen (even now, in the 'postmodern world') in the constitution of cultural traditions as well as in the practice of the arts funding bodies. In this view, Culture transmits the best ideas and values of a particular period, ideas and values that

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<sup>52</sup> It is precisely to this notion of Culture as the embodiment of the highest achievements of a selective European cultural tradition that I will refer to, in the course of the present chapter, when using the label of 'high culture' (see also De Mauro 1987, 13).

transcend social and cultural differences. This is the reason why 'access' has been the main focus of Liberal Humanist cultural politics, as the experiences of British, French and generally European cultural policies between the 1950s and 1970s prove<sup>53</sup>.

Williams (1953 in McIlroy and Westwood, 1993, 57) also distinguished one more use of the word culture, which is especially common in the fields of sociology and social anthropology. In these disciplines, the word 'culture' is used in the sense of 'a whole way of life' of a people. To further clarify this definition, Williams quotes a passage from Dewey's *Freedom and Culture*:

The state of culture is a state of interaction of many factors, the chief of which are law and politics, industry and commerce, science and technology, the arts of expression and communication and of morals, or the values men prize and the ways in which they evaluate them; and finally, though indirectly, the system of general ideas used by men to justify and to criticize the fundamental conditions under which they live, their social philosophy (Ibid., 37).

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<sup>53</sup> If we look at the experience of France, for instance, the influence of the Liberal Humanist paradigm on cultural policy is undeniable. If we consider the convictions held by André Malraux, the country's first Minister for Culture, they clearly appear as a pure distillation of Liberal Humanist values. Bourdieu defined Malraux's beliefs as the "illusion of immediate comprehension" (quoted in Looseley 2004, 17). The scholar of French cultural policy, David Looseley (Ibid.) defines such illusion thus: "For Malraux, the love of art could neither be taught nor bought; great art could nevertheless be relied upon to jump social barriers and speak for itself without mediation. This belief has become the ministry's default position. As a result, the relationships between the arts and education or community arts, between democratising heritage and 'création' (new works of art) on the one hand, and creativity and self expression on the other, have become the defining aspects of the policy debate".



Williams traces this particular development in the concept of culture back to the German idealists, and to Johann Gottfried Herder in particular: "He attacked the assumption of the universal stories that 'civilization' or 'culture' - the historical self-development of humanity - was what we would now call a unilinear process, leading to the high and dominant point of C18 [eighteenth century] European culture. Indeed he attacked what he called European subjugation and domination of the four quarters of the globe" (Williams, 1976, 89). Thus, Culture for Herder is nothing but a diversity of cultural forms, each characterised by its own development. To fully understand Herder's claims it is important to realise that, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the term 'civilization' had acquired a distinctive imperialist flavour that became the target of the writings of a number of liberal Romantic theorists such as Herder himself (Eagleton, 2000, 10). As Norbert Elias has remarked in his dated yet still influential essay *The Civilising Process*, the concept of 'civilization' "...expresses the self-consciousness of the West...By this term Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the level of *its* technology, the nature of *its* manners, the development of *its* scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more" (Elias, 1994, 3). Hence, Herder linked the conflict between the traditional notion of Culture and the belief, which he purported, in the existence, in the world, of numerous cultures of equal dignity to the conflict between Europe and its colonial 'other'. He wrote: "The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature" (quoted in Williams, 1976, 89). Indeed, the German concept of *Kultur* gives a special

importance to national differences and the particular identities of groups, and Elias (1994, 5) maintains that it is actually for this reason that in certain fields of research, such as the ethnological and anthropological ones, the use of the German notion of *Kultur* has successfully extended widely beyond the boundary of the German linguistic areas, and of the discipline in which the notion originated.

In Britain, the development of a similar concept of culture as a distinctive way of life developed from the discipline of literary criticism, and in particular from the desire, common among British men of letters, from Ruskin and Arnold to Eliot and Leavis, to study and understand works of art and literature in tight relation to the society within which they had been produced. In fact, according to Williams (1953 in McIllroy and Westwood, 1993, 58):

...this extension of a critic's activities in the judgements of works of art to the study and thence the judgements of 'a whole way of life', has been a marked element of the English tradition. These critics, and others like them, have certainly always been concerned with the arts, and beyond them with 'the intellectual side of civilization', but from Ruskin's ideas of wealth to Eliot's ideas of class there has been this distinctive tradition of influential social thinking by men who took their experience of the arts as a starting point.

And this 'distinctive English tradition' is indeed the object of one of Williams's most important essays, *Culture and Society* (1958), in which he follows the development of the word 'culture' in relation to social change in the works of English writers from Coleridge to Orwell. It has



been observed that this broader, anthropological view of culture as a whole way of life has had, historically, the very important function of establishing a more critical attitude towards the older, more restrictive notion that limits culture to the field of the arts and higher forms of learning. This has in turn resulted in a relative modification of the Arnoldian concept of Culture and in a certain democratisation of the way in which, today, we think and talk about culture (McGuigan, 1996, 5-6)<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> However, it would be incorrect to think that an anthropological view of culture is necessarily or intrinsically more democratic than the traditional identification of culture with the 'sweetness and light' of Western high culture. A clear example of this would be T.S. Eliot's position, exposed in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, published in 1948. Here Eliot proposes a definition of culture that reminds us of Williams's motto 'culture is ordinary' (1958, 5). For Eliot (1948, 31), culture "includes all the characteristic activities of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar. The reader can make his own list". Moreover, later in his essay, Eliot openly claims that "...a 'culture' is conceived as the creation of the society as a whole: being from another aspect what makes it a society. It is not the creation of any part of that society" (*Idem*, 37). However, Eliot did not fully develop this anthropological view of culture as the production of a whole society (rather than just certain privileged sections of it) so as to embrace a notion of culture that includes anything more than the usual high arts. In fact, according to Terry Eagleton, "Eliot's writings on culture superbly illustrate the constant sliding of the concept" (Eagleton, 2000, 112). Eliot (1948, 120) declares that culture for him means "first of all what the anthropologists mean: the way of life of a particular people living together in one place". Elsewhere in his essay, though, the narrower sense of culture as a value-term seems to be prevailing: "Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living" (*Idem*, 27). Thus, although he recognised that culture can, and does, spread across the whole spectrum of society, Eliot was still firmly convinced that the cultural landscape was articulated in the traditional pyramidal shape, with examples of high artistic achievement at the top, a middle ground of average cultural practice, and the lower level of popular forms of cultural consumption, which he mostly identified with tawdry mass entertainment, largely composed of imports from America (Hewison, 1995, 52-53). In the collection of essays here under discussion, Eliot also shows a deep scepticism of what he calls the 'dogma of equal opportunity' (1948, 103) and the conviction that "...in our headlong rush to educating everybody, we are lowering our standards..." (*Idem*, 108). Rather, for Eliot (*Ibid.*, 35), "[w]e have to try to keep in mind, that in a healthy society this maintenance of a particular level of culture is to the benefit, not merely of the class which maintains it, but of the society as a whole. Awareness of this fact will prevent us from supposing that the culture of a 'higher' class is something superfluous to society as a whole, or to the majority, and from supposing that it is something which ought to be shared equally by all other classes".



Nevertheless, with its emphasis on the importance of maintaining standards of excellence and increasing access, the understanding of culture that underpinned the foundation of the Arts Council of England was clearly based on Liberal Humanist cultural values. Indeed the Arts Council's Royal Charter that was granted on 9 August 1946, described the purpose of the newly founded public body as "developing a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of *the fine arts exclusively*, and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm, and to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts..." (Hewison, 1995, 43; emphasis mine). The stress on the need for broadening access to cultural activities can be explained as a consequence of the fact that the setting up of the British system of public funding of the arts has to be understood in the context, and as part of, the process of post-war reconstruction. In this sense, and in its aims, it parallels the development of the Welfare State (Bennett, 1995, 203). However, the Royal Charter, by limiting the Arts Council's remit to 'the fine arts exclusively', in practice purported a very narrow definition of culture as identified with the high arts that excluded both amateur and popular cultural forms<sup>55</sup>.

Such a restrictive view of culture has been eventually strongly questioned from many directions, to the extent that battles over the

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<sup>55</sup> The phrase was, in truth, originally inserted mainly with the intention (eventually unsuccessful) to obtain relief from local taxation on Arts Council buildings, and it was indeed dropped in 1967, when the Arts council charter was renewed (Hewison, 1995, 43). However, it cannot be denied that the notion of culture on which the public funding system was originally founded in Britain was a very exclusive and limiting one, corresponding to the Liberal Humanist principles discussed earlier.

definition of the word 'culture' have been a fundamental feature of the postwar critical debate (Hewison, 1995, 34). In the field of cultural theory, we have already seen how the broader anthropological notion of culture has contributed to challenge the more exclusive identification of culture with the product of intellectual, and more specifically, artistic activity. In particular, in the theoretical field, the need was felt for a stress on culture seen as a 'lived experience', and for a recovery of the 'popular' from its denigration or sentimentalization on the part of the cultural elitism prevailing at the time. In this context, the problem was not anymore to make Culture more accessible to the people for their own improvement (as in the Arnoldian view). Rather, the aim was to offer an alternative definition of culture that could be able to explain and appreciate areas of experience and creative expressions that had been previously disregarded by the traditional identification of culture with the arts, and other high cultural forms, and hence overlooked by educational, broadcasting and other cultural institutions (Gray and McGuigan 1993, viii; Lumley and O'Shaughnessey, 1985, 268). From the discussion of different possible interpretations of the notion of culture presented so far, it will clearly emerge that this was no easy task. If, on the one hand, 'culture' is a shifting noun (with all the difficulties that this implies), on the other hand, 'popular' is also a shifting qualifier. As a consequence, an intense debate over the meaning of 'popular culture' developed and spread around the mid-twentieth century, mainly within educational institutions. The result of such debates was the creation of a new and independent interdisciplinary approach to cultural analysis (Lumley and

O'Shaughnessey, 1985, 268-269). This new discipline was 'cultural studies', a label which became current in Britain during the late 1960s and early 1970s in association with its institutional site in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, founded in 1964 by Richard Hoggart at the University of Birmingham.

The new discipline of cultural studies derived from a scholarly tradition that emerged in Britain in the postwar period in the field of adult education. In particular, the birth of British cultural studies can be directly linked to the Worker's Educational Association (WEA). Significantly, among the tutors who joined WEA after the end of World War II were none other than Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson and, shortly afterwards, Stuart Hall, that is the very founders of what was to become the field of cultural studies. It was indeed adult education that, starting from the discipline of English, encouraged a new approach to the relations between 'culture' and 'society', and a new understanding of the function of culture in society. (Gray and McGuigan, 1993, vii-viii; Hewison, 1995, 93). This campaign for a broader definition of culture to include 'ways of life' was linked to struggles for a more democratic and egalitarian organisation of society. The influential 'culturalist' current in cultural studies emerged in the postwar years in conjunction with socialism or Marxist humanism, and stemmed from a growing interest in Marx's early work *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. This work seemed to offer the possibility for a conception of culture alternative to the 'orthodox' Marxist view of culture as superstructure (a bare reflection



of the 'base', that is, of the relation between productive forces), which was felt to be insufficient to account for the changed and more complex contemporary cultural landscape (Peck, 2001, 200-207). Indeed, E. P. Thompson insisted that popular culture was not just produced by and for the people but was also the result of their struggles against the dominant social and cultural order (Lumley O'Shaughnessey, 1985, 283). Thus, the core concern of cultural studies is, according to Stuart Hall, "the relationship of the social and the symbolic, the 'play' between power and culture" (quoted in Peck, 2001, 204)<sup>56</sup>. Hall belonged, together with the other theorists mentioned above, to that strand of British cultural analysis borne out of the early work of Hoggart and Williams and referred to as 'left-culturalism'. This aimed at overturning the established emphasis on high culture intrinsic to the established Arnoldian/Leavisite notion of culture, and argued for the recognition of the significance of popular culture, and against the prejudice that sees the working classes as a 'mass' lacking in critical faculties and incapable of artistic appreciation (Hughson and Inglis, 2001, 475; Peck 2001, 203).

Cultural studies, therefore, can be defined as based on the belief that culture must be understood on its own terms and in relation to other aspects of social life. Raymond Williams was certainly one of the first to

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<sup>56</sup> The interest in relations of power and culture has indeed become the very trademark of the Cultural Studies approach to the understanding and the study of cultural phenomena and products. The extent to which this is indeed the case is proven by Kendall and Wickam (2001, 2), who polemically refer to the current dominance (which they ascribe mainly to the influence of Foucauldian thought) of what they call Cultural Studies' "obsession with power-and-meanings" (emphasis mine). As Miller (2001, 1) further explains: "The "cultural" has become a "master-trope" in the humanities, blending and blurring textual analysis of popular culture with social theory, and focusing on the margins of power rather than reproducing established lines of force and authority".

move towards such a notion of culture as 'integral to the social totality' (Peck, 2001, 201). In 1958, Williams published an essay entitled *Culture is Ordinary*, in which he maintained that "[c]ulture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, and its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, arts and learning" (reprinted in Gray and McGuigan, 1993, 6). In short, for Williams, "there is a distinct working-class way of life" (1958, 9). He also wrote (*Idem*):

There is an English bourgeois culture, with its powerful educational, literary and social institutions, in close contact with the actual centres of power. To say that most working people are excluded from these is self-evident, though the doors, under sustained pressure, are slowly opening. But to go on to say that working people are excluded from English culture is nonsense; they have their own growing institutions, and much of the strictly bourgeois culture they would in any case not want. A great part of the English way of life, and of its arts and learning is not bourgeois in any discoverable sense.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies developed into a significant source of new ideas and innovative theoretical elaborations on popular culture, and in the process promoted a distinct modification in the notion of culture as it was then received in British academia. At the heart of the work of the theorists evolving around the Centre was a new notion of culture. In the 1960s, a climate of anxiety characterised certain sections of British intelligentsia. According to Helen Davis (2004, 18) around this time many examples could be found of what she calls "a siege mentality with regard to the rising tide of media



consumption. To many, commercial culture seemed poised to engulf and sweep away the treasured culture of the past"<sup>57</sup>. The more optimistic view held by Hall with respect to popular culture found expression in a book he co-wrote with Whannel in 1964, entitled *The Popular Arts*. Although the book does not accept the view that popular culture is always and necessarily valuable, it also puts forward the idea (rather revolutionary at that time) that the popular arts are a legitimate object of study in their own right and on their own terms. In other words, Hall and Whannel argued that the legitimacy of the popular arts was not limited to them being the conduit for the popularisation and thus the transmission of accepted, traditional cultural values, but that they could, instead, be bearers of cultural values of their own. Furthermore, as Chris Rojek (2003, 2) - one of Hall's students – explains, Hall's view of culture and knowledge was one in which "identity, history, agency and practice are not fixed entities but parts of a system of representation which is permanently *in process*". It is obvious then, that what we have here is an understanding of culture that is really far removed from the Arnoldian notion of "Culture". Indeed, Hall's view of culture and its role within society is a clear exemplification of the evolution that the notion of culture has undergone, in the British cultural context since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>58</sup>. The deep gap that separates Arnold's and Hall's conceptions of culture is

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<sup>57</sup> Davies (2004) refers here to the incensed debate that characterised the National Union of Teachers' conference in 1960 where such preoccupations with regards to the growing popularity of mass culture among the young were forcefully expressed. The events and debates that took place in that occasion are also extensively discussed in Hall and Whannel (1964; chapter 1).

<sup>58</sup> Unsurprisingly, these developments in the cultural sphere were paralleled by equally significant and radical transformation in the social sphere. Commenting on Hall's academic career, Rojek (2003, 10) observes that it "coincided with the erosion of the traditional white, middle-class, insular establishment in Britain".



even clearer if we look at Stuart Hall's own definition, given in the Centre's report for 1968-9:

Culture, then, not as a body of work, or particular media, or even as a particular set of ideal standards and rules, but rather as a lived experience, the consciousness of a whole society: the peculiar order, pattern, configuration of valued experience, expressed now in imaginative art of the highest order, now in the most popular and proverbial forms, in gesture and language, in myth and ideology, in modes of communication and in forms of social relationship and organisation (quoted in Hewison, 1995, 185).

Despite the radical appearance of this cultural project of re-definition of the prevailing notions of culture, Hewison points out that the notion of culture professed by Williams, Hoggart, Thompson and Hall was in fact still linked to the established tradition that originated from Arnold and had been championed by F.R. Leavis, for they had all been trained according to a Leavisite methodology. Hewison (1995, 113) explains that, as they were effectively the 'heirs' of F. R. Leavis, they all made critical evaluations on the basis of some nationally absolute cultural standard which was that of the 'high culture' - in an Arnoldian sense (which, as we have seen, seemed to be threatened by the debasing, yet growing, influence of the mass media). The essence of the problem, according to Hewison (1995, 113), lies in the fact that "[a]ttempts to understand 'popular art' (a consciously less pejorative term than 'mass entertainment') were confused by the difficulty of distinguishing between discriminations based on aesthetic grounds and distinctions that had

their ultimate justification in issues of power and class. Judgements of value were clouded by the social and political differences between the art enjoyed by a privileged minority and that by a wider community". Hewison then quotes the critic Alan Sinfield, who has drawn attention to the fact that "the idea that high culture transcends material conditions, such as class, has a good socialist lineage, especially when British culture could be seen as a means of resistance to American capitalist culture" (*Idem*; see also Lumley O'Shaughnessey, 1985, 286-287). Such a perspective shows great affinity to the approach of Matthew Arnold and F. R. Leavis, which having become accepted as the working philosophy of the British educational system<sup>59</sup>, had contributed to ratify class mobility as directly linked to the attainment of a higher level of 'Culture' (*Idem*). Indeed, if we turn back again to Williams's *Culture is Ordinary*, we can see how such a conservative cultural tradition was still in force in Williams position, especially when he seems to defend 'old' concepts of cultural value:

It is plain that what may have started as a feeling about hypocrisy, or about pretentiousness (in itself a two-edged word), is becoming a guilt-ridden tic at the mention of any serious standards whatever (1958, 8)<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> This is confirmed by the claim that Rojek (2003, 64) makes with reference to the experience of the academics that established the disciplines of Cultural Studies and that therefore contrasted the accepted philosophy of the British educational system; "To some extent [...], it is tenable to maintain that Cultural Studies was founded by intellectual misfits in the traditional British university system. This sense of being outsiders and operating on the edges of knowledge is still central to the self-image of Cultural Studies".

<sup>60</sup> For an extensive and polemical discussion of the unpopularity of the notions of 'excellence' and 'standards' in the contemporary cultural climate, see Furedi (2004).

The persisting Arnoldian influence can be further detected as Williams's (Ibid., 8 and 9) arguments unfurl:

Culture is ordinary. An interest in learning or the arts is simple, pleasant and natural. [...] As for the arts and learning, they are in a real sense a national inheritance, which is, or should be, available to everyone.

With this position we are effectively back once more to that particular view - based on the principle of the democratisation of culture and embodied by Matthew Arnold - according to which Culture transmits the best ideas and values of a particular period, ideas and values that have a universal validity and transcend social and cultural differences.

We can thus conclude this review of the evolution of the notion of culture within British cultural theory with the observation that 'culture', despite having been largely written about, and, moreover, despite having become the centre of a new academic discipline, still defies a straightforward and systematic definition on which universal agreement can be reached. This significantly brings us back to the quote from Williams's *Keywords* that opened the chapter with a warning of the complexities involved in a discussion of the possible meanings of the word 'culture'. Furthermore, we can also infer from the discussion presented so far that the acceptance of a certain interpretation of the meaning of 'culture' over competing alternatives, implies a certain approach to the whole issue of the place that the arts and other forms of human expression occupy in relation to society, and a very specific



hierarchy of cultural values. A shift has occurred, however, on the theoretical level, with the development of the critical and questioning approach that characterises the discipline of cultural studies. Whilst it would be an overstatement to claim that the establishment of the academic field of Cultural Studies was single-handedly responsible for the subsequent developments in the cultural policy arena, it certainly contributed to creating a new language and a more flexible understanding of the notion of 'arts' and popular culture. This optimistic view of the process of cultural change and the role of the popular and mass arts within it was indeed picked up by the media, so that the influence of such ideas was by no means limited to the sphere of Academia. In addition, the cultural relativism and the consequent crisis of authority that invested the traditional institutions of Western culture at the hands of postmodern theories in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Owens 1990) had significant repercussions in the British cultural policy arena<sup>61</sup>.

In the 1970s, the tension culminated in the community arts movement. The main target of the movement was the sharp division that had crystallised within the British cultural sphere between the 'professional' arts (which have a recognised place both in the market and in systems of

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<sup>61</sup> As Bennett (2005, 31-32) explains: "This authority was challenged through various forms of critical practice, often linked to postmodernism, which attacked the very premises on which the dominant artistic and cultural hierarchies had been established. From this perspective, the canonical works of Western high culture owed their privileged status not to their intrinsic properties, but to the operation of a highly selective tradition, inflected by the unquestioned assumptions of class, race and gender. The upholders of this tradition, in the academies, the media and cultural institutions, were represented not as guardians of universal cultural standards, but as prisoners of an ideology that they did not even see".

state patronage, and were accused of being restricted to rigid formulas of what was acceptable as art) and the broad-ranging category of the 'amateur' arts, which included any artistic expression that had no obvious place in the cultural arena – commercial or otherwise (Braden 1978, 4). This is how Su Braden (1978, 4), one of the most active exponents of the community arts movement, summarises the spirit of the times:

There is a change of climate, a growing awareness that what is termed 'artistic expression' can no longer be withheld from those who wish to have some measure by which to view their lives and by which to expose that view to others. [...] A whole series of moves from artists, certain funding bodies and members of different communities over the past ten years have begun to put the arts on a path which will re-establish the importance of a vernacular vocabulary of artistic expression and perhaps ultimately expose the rigid formulas of many of the 'recognised' arts. For, almost as an aside, this movement threatens to disrupt the most deep-rooted notions about the nature of art itself.

As a matter of fact, the impact of the community arts movement on cultural policy was not as disruptive or radical as Braden's words would lead us to think. However, the call for the recognition of the values inherent to a notion of cultural democracy (instead of the traditional, 'Arnoldian' principle of the democratisation of high culture) were at least formally accepted by the British institutions in charge of the distribution of public resources to the cultural sector. This became obvious during the extensive consultation exercise that accompanied the drawing up, in 1992, of the discussion document prepared by the then Arts Council of

Great Britain and entitled *Towards a National Arts and Media Strategy*. The document explicitly accepted that a more diverse and broader notion of culture ought to be at the basis of cultural policy-making, and - whilst retaining the traditional commitment to fostering excellence in the arts - the admission was explicitly made that high-standards of artistic quality could be found beyond the boundaries of the traditional high arts<sup>62</sup>.

#### THE ITALIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION AND ITS IMPACTS ON CULTURAL POLICY

As was noted in the preceding section of this chapter, the discipline of 'cultural studies', as it has been theorized in Britain and the United States, embraces a broadly anthropological notion of culture, and argues for the necessity to understand all cultural products and practices in relation to society, history and power-related issues. However, the traditional understanding of culture as it has been developed within the Italian context, was firmly rooted in its Liberal Humanist origin, and appears to have remained largely unchallenged by the questioning attitude that has characterised the discipline of cultural studies in the Anglo-Saxon world. Interestingly, English-speaking researchers working within the academic area of study that is usually referred to as 'Italian Studies' display a universal agreement that anything like the 'cultural studies revolution' simply did not take place in the Italian Academe, a point that is raised time and time again in their writings on Italy (Barański

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<sup>62</sup> For more on the 1992 national strategy and its position *vis à vis* issues of artistic quality, see chapter 5.



and Lumley 1990; Forgacs and Lumley 1996; Dombroski 1998; Barański 2001)<sup>63</sup>. The very expression “cultural studies” has no exact counterpart in the Italian language. According to Forgacs and Lumley (1996, 2), “this lack of terminological equivalence indicates that there is not an exact mapping of the field from one country onto the other. This in turn is indicative of the fact that the intellectual traditions in the two countries [Italy and Britain] and the ways in which institutions of learning and publisher’s lists have divided up knowledge are different”. Interestingly, the *Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, published in 2001, as one of its author claimed, filled a significant gap in the literature on post-unification Italian culture, in that it represented an exercise never previously attempted:

As far as we are aware, there is no single-volume study in English – and we suspect that the same is true as regards to the Italian book market – that attempts to provide a general introduction to the cultural life of the peninsula since 1860<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Although, as this chapter will show, the consequences of the lack of a corresponding approach to the study of culture as that elaborated within the Cultural Studies field will have important impacts in the development of the Italian model of cultural policy, it would be a mistake to assume that Italy is ultimately exceptional in its resistances to embrace the study of culture the Anglo-Saxon way. For instance, Roman Horak (1999), in an article poignantly entitled “Cultural studies in Germany (and Austria) and why there is no such thing”, has showed how Germany and Austria have also expressed very little interest, until very recently, for the cultural studies debate. More interestingly, Horak explicitly links this lack of interest in cultural studies’ mode of analysis to the German intellectual tradition, and especially to the dominance of the Frankfurt School over German academic thinking. Particularly influential was the negative view of the culture industry, and the notion of the passive consumer of the cheap and nasty products of the entertainment industry popularised by Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. This negative perception of the cultural industries and their products contributed to create hostile grounds for the reception of the sympathetic view to popular culture that characterises the cultural studies approach.

<sup>64</sup> This is indeed a perception that the authors of the *Companion* share with many others English researchers of Italian culture. Forgacs and Lumley (1996, 8), for instance, conclude their discussion of the present state of the study of cultural matters in Italy, by stating that “[t]he fact remains, however, that there is simply much less being done in these areas in Italy than in some other countries” (see also Barański and Lumley 1990, 3). This impression is further confirmed by a quick glance to the 2001 edition of the full

This should not to be taken as a declaration that cultural matters are of no interests to Italian academics, as that would be highly misleading<sup>65</sup>. However, it is undeniable that the emphasis, research topics and methodologies prevalent among Italian scholars seem to set them apart from the ways in which culture has been investigated in the international (and effectively predominantly Anglo-Saxon) context. Dombroski (1998, 2), writing from an American perspective, has synthetically yet forcefully summarised the main consequence of this state of things thus:

It is no small paradox that the intellectual left in Italy, a country in which Marxism has played a concrete role in the development of contemporary institutions, has retained throughout the century a humanist-intellectualist concept of culture and has made little effort to question the institution of culture and the class privileges of intellectual groups; while in the United States, where Marxism has been excluded from all

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list of books presently in print in the Italian book market and published by the *Associazione Italiana Editori* (The Association of Italian Publishers). According to the catalogue's listing by subject, only 56 titles appeared under the heading "Cultura", of which 9 (that is about 16% of the total) are translation of foreign texts. Furthermore, a mere 6 titles are in the category of "Cultura underground", and here the proportion of translations rises to 4 out of 6. Finally, under the heading of "Politica culturale" ("cultural policy"), only 12 books can be found, one of which a translation. While the very few books on cultural policy can be explained with the fact that volumes discussing the laws that apply to the cultural sector would be classified under other subject categories (of a legal character), it is certainly beyond doubt that the volume of publications on the more general topic of culture seems somewhat limited.

<sup>65</sup> The aim of the present discussion is indeed to outline the ways in which the study of culture is *different* in the two countries (not necessarily one *better* than the other), and to establish a connection between the prevalent academic approaches in the two countries with regards to studying culture, and their own cultural and intellectual traditions and history. In fairness, it must also be pointed out that Barański (2001, 10) himself explicitly states a similar position in a very insightful passage that is worth quoting at length: "... I should not like to create the impression that Italian scholarship is incapable of appreciating the implications of looking at culture from a mobile and interdisciplinary perspective. If anything, my impression is that the Italian emphasis on context, history and respect for the literal meaning of texts offers the best means to understanding the complexity of any cultural expression. In particular, given Italy's millennial regional, political and linguistic fragmentation, questions relating to culture, albeit with 'high culture' very much to the fore, have long been posed by Italian scholars in a manner receptive to geographical, historical, social and textual difference".



meaningful political practice, left leaning intellectuals and academics are more sensitive to disciplinary investments and exclusions<sup>66</sup>.

Italian academics and intellectuals, then, rather than positioning themselves as critical voices and questioning the system have, in fact, often contributed (whether willingly or not) to reinforcing its ideological bases. If the Humanities department in the UK increasingly became aware of the potential contribution of critical theory to a critique of contemporary society, Roberto Moscati (2001) in his fascinating account of the Italian academic world, explains how Italian universities were geared toward the formation of a social elite<sup>67</sup>. In his own words, the “Italian cultural tradition saw the university as being devoted more to social class organisation (reproduction of the elites) and to the organization of the state (training of the civil service) than to economic development and the related need for professional skills” (Moscati 2001, 112). Unsurprisingly then, an academic career has been traditionally considered appropriate for the social elites of the country, and the data that Moscati (*ibid.*) produces, on the social background of academic staff in Italian academic institutions, further confirm his claims. David Ward (2001, 81) reinforces Moscati’s observations by declaring, possibly a

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<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, Gordon (2000, 199) suggests that it is precisely its alliance with the Left during the period of centre-right government during the Cold War period that gave intellectuals, and therefore, traditional high culture, its privileged position in Italian society. According to Gordon’s argument, the Italian cultural elite actually “derived much authority and vitality from its status as a culture of opposition or critique”. However, Gordon (*ibid.*) also acknowledges that this situation also gave rise to complications and contradictions: “The conservatism of ‘high’ culture – its hostility to modernization and ‘progress’ and its dedication to preserving its own aura and traditions – sat uneasily with an ideology of radical, even revolutionary change”.

<sup>67</sup> As a matter of fact, Scotto di Luzio (1999, 32-33) argues that the same can be said for the post-unitary educational system in general.



touch regretfully, that “contemporary Italian intellectuals have a more prestigious existence than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts”<sup>68</sup>. By identifying a trend that can already be seen in operation at the times of Dante and his call for a supra-regional language as a unifying element in an Italy politically and culturally divided, Ward concludes (*Ibid.*) that “Italian society has consistently relied on its intellectuals, rather than its political class, to supply the nation’s agents for social change”. The central role of the intellectual in Italian culture, and its implications for the evolution of the notion of culture as it was developed within the academic and political field, is indeed a crucial point in the present discussion, and one to which we will come back to later. For the moment, it is important to point out a significant by-product of the situation outlined so far. In view of the importance that concerns for culture held in cultural life, and the

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<sup>68</sup> The theme of the ‘crisis of intellectuals’ is indeed a recurrent one in writings on contemporary culture (especially in the Anglo-Saxon context) and as such, has given rise a remarkable body of literature which it is not possible to examine here at length (see for instance Green 2000 and Posner’s (2001) aptly titled *Public Intellectuals: A study of decline*). However, the latest example of this type of literature is a book recently published by the British sociologist Frank Furedi (2004) and meaningfully entitled *Where have all the intellectuals gone?* Furedi (*Ibid.*, 8) summarises the present situation thus: “During the past two centuries, the authority of intellectuals was underwritten by the belief that the pursuit of knowledge and truth merited the affirmation of society. This belief endowed intellectual work with a unique significance and provided intellectuals with a unique sense of purpose towards their mission. Indeed within the humanist tradition, intellectual and contemplative activity was represented as the highest form of human endeavour, and it was often claimed that it was this endeavour that distinguished the human from the animal. Today, this lofty image of the intellectual appears inconsistent with the way that society regards the pursuit of knowledge”. Interestingly, Furedi identifies as the causes of this degeneration of the role and status of intellectuals a number of phenomena, some of which will be shown in the present thesis to have had important impacts on cultural policy too. They are “the growing impact of the market upon intellectual life, the institutionalisation and the professionalization of intellectual life, the growing power of the media and the erosion of public space for the exercise of autonomy” (Furedi 2004, 38). These phenomena, and academic careerism, are indeed the targets of Furedi’s incensed if somewhat repetitive polemic. What is beyond doubt, however, is that Furedi’s view of the present situation is very, very bleak: “One of the most striking manifestations of the banalization of cultural life is the transformation of the intellectual into a uniquely insignificant figure. Even in France, the supposed home of intellectuals, they appear to lead a life of cultural irrelevance” (Furedi 2004, 25). As the rest of the chapter will demonstrate, in this respect at least, Italy seems to have bucked the trend.

importance of culture as a marker of Italian identity (as suggested by the reference to Dante<sup>69</sup>), the eyes of both Italian and foreign researchers alike, have remained focused principally on the manifestations of Italy's 'high culture' (Grew 2000, 206; Bianchini et al. 1996, 291-2)<sup>70</sup>. Forgacs and Lumley (1996, 3) argue that "if one traces the usage of the term *cultura* in Italian over the last century and a half, one finds that one of its most durable features is its strong association with education and literacy, and more generally, with 'print culture'". They (*ibid.*) further argue that a corollary of this view of culture, is the fact that, in many ways, "Culture" has come to be seen as a value in itself, and thus as something which one either already possesses or should aspire to acquire. The linguist Tullio De Mauro (2004, 3) has indeed recently observed that the restrictive way in which *cultura* has been accepted in the Italian intellectual context ought to require that, to be fully understood, the term be accompanied by the adjective 'intellectual', and even further qualified as 'literary culture'.

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<sup>69</sup> On Dante's crucial role in the construction of a national culture long before Italy became a unified national state, and on the persistence of the identification of the Italian identity and national spirit with its past cultural - and predominantly literary - tradition, see this passage by Jens Petersen: "Italy is only a 'young nation' in terms of its construction as a state. As a people, as a culture, as a form of self-awareness, it begins in the fourteenth century at the latest. Dante's works remain the foundation of the collective consciousness. As the father of the Italian language he is also the father of the nation and the symbol of national greatness through the centuries. Metternich's notorious expression about Italy being merely a geographical concept was already wrong at the very moment he pronounced it" (quoted in Dickie 2001, 23).

<sup>70</sup> Gundle (2000, 124-5) observes that this is indeed a tendency that could already be detected from the eighteenth century onwards, when a trip to Italy, to admire its artistic and architectural heritage, begun to be considered a necessary element of a 'proper' education. The popularity of Italy as a prime destination for such formative trips was founded not just on the objective artistic wealth and naturalistic beauty of the country, but also on the "idea of Italy's special relationship with the aesthetic, as the *bel paese par excellence*". Gundle (*ibid.*, 139), goes as far as maintaining that "the tradition of beauty informed Italian national identity in a variety of ways", and provided the country with "an aesthetic self-awareness and a sense of cultural mission which rested on impeccable, if not always clearly defined, antecedents".



What is even more significant is that this traditional connection between culture, intellectuals and a book-based notion of cultural refinement has proved to be remarkably resilient, to the point of having survived largely unscathed not only by the political upheavals that accompanied the fall of Fascism, but even the counter-cultural movement of 1968, which in Italy was particularly intense and vital (Forgacs and Lumley 1996, 4)<sup>71</sup> The counter-cultural and political movement of the late 1960s, as well as student revolt that accompanied it, surely had some beneficial impacts over Italian culture, which Umberto Eco summarises thus:

Even though all visible traces of 1968 are gone, it profoundly changed the way all of us, at least in Europe, behave and relate to one another. Relations between bosses and workers, students and teachers, even children and parents, have opened up. They'll never be the same (quoted in Lumley 1990, 2)

Robert Lumley (1990, 2) indeed refers to the years 1968-9 as a “watershed” when the very foundations, political and cultural, of the Italian republic were deeply shaken. However, it is important not to overestimate the long-term impact of the student revolt and the industrial

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<sup>71</sup> Chambers and Curti (1984, 108) write: “Connected to this movement [that of the ‘hot autumn’ of 1969], the hierarchical structures of academic power within the universities were also heavily contested. But the hermetic world of letters and high culture emerged remarkably unscathed from the fray”. For an interesting discussion of the cultural dimension of the counter-cultural movement in Italy between the late 1960s and 1970s, see Nanni Balestrini’s *L’Orda D’Oro* (1997) and Robert Lumley’s *States of Emergency: Cultures of revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (1990). For a detailed reconstruction of the dense political battles of the “Sessantotto” see Giuseppe Carlo Marino’s *Biografia del Sessantotto* (2004).



disputes of the late '60s and following years<sup>72</sup>. Many commentators, as we have seen, are a lot more cautious in their assessment of the changes that occurred around that time in the cultural sphere, observing how deep seated notions of culture and authority, though shaken, generally remained fundamentally unscarred (Dombroski 1998; Chambers and Curti 1984, 108). A clear example of the extent to which the beliefs of the cultural establishment in Italy have remained largely unchanged is the publication, in 1975, of an essay entitled *La cultura* for the 15-volume work *Storia d'Italia* ("History of Italy"). It was written by Alberto Asor Rosa, one of the most respected and influential Marxist Italian literary critics, and former political activist. The essay in question strived to provide a panoramic view of culture in post-unification Italy. However, it soon becomes evident that, in Asor Rosa's view, a discussion of the history of Italian culture coincided with a history of intellectuals and ideas that are reconstructed through texts belonging to Italy's high-cultural tradition (in particular those of social theory, politics and literature) (Forgacs and Lumley 1996, 4). As De Mauro (2004, 4) observes, in Asor Rosa's view, culture is equivalent to a *conoscenza delle belle lettere* (knowledge of the literary arts). Consequently, any discussion at all of the role of mass cultural forms such as television, radio or cinema in shaping the cultural scene in Italy is absent. Romagnoli (1977, 28) has pointed out, in his discussion of Asor Rosa's

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<sup>72</sup> In his utterly compelling analysis of the problems currently faced by the world of Italian academia, Moscati (2001) observes how reforms launched in the wake of the student protest movement with the intent of widening access to higher education have, in fact, resulted in the compounding of the chronic problem of low efficiency and productivity of Italian universities. This has ultimately resulted in the fact that fewer students successfully complete their course of studies and graduate in the present (post-1968) system than they used to in the early 1960s.

essay, that popular and mass cultural forms also contribute to create the complete picture of a certain historical era, yet they seem to be consistently disregarded by Italian historical writers and literary critics, including learned and experienced ones such as Asor Rosa himself. Nor, he also laments, does the Italian academic tradition display any sign of interest for going beyond the study of the classic literary texts of the national tradition to look at the ways in which those text were involved in power struggles, or the use that dominant classes made of the Italian classics via their exploitation through the educational system and the publishing industry (Romagnoli, 1977, 27).

Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that in the post-1968 phase, and increasingly so in the times leading up to the present, "Italian culture has become less bookish and print-dominated", especially as a result of the growing popularity of radio and television over the years (Ward 2001, 92). Consequently to the rapid growth of the mass media and their audiences, indeed, Italian 'high' culture went through a phase characterised by a substantial degree of cross-fertilization with 'lower' and popular forms of art, which ultimately produced a succession of interesting transformations of tastes, styles and cultural practices, and audiences (Gordon 2000, 197). As Gordon (*Ibid.*, 198) is quick to point out, however, these developments do not mean that, in this period, 'high' culture disappeared from the Italian cultural scene. In fact, quite the opposite: as the wave of successful film *d'essai* in the 1960s prove, Italian high culture "retained



many aspects of its traditional autonomy and prestige and indeed flourished, even if increasingly as a 'niche' within a wider culture market".

However, and this might be one of the most original and fascinating traits of Italian modern culture, in Italy the process of cross-fertilization between 'higher' and 'lower' cultural forms seems to have been a genuinely two-way process. So that, not only were traditional forms of culture affected by popular culture and the media, but high cultural products often find themselves linking arms with cultural products of a 'popular' or even 'mass' nature<sup>73</sup>. This peculiar state of affairs has been clearly captured by the British educationalist John Haycraft (1985, 53-54), who, recalling his time in Italy, wrote:

Italians seem to make none of the distinction between poetry, theatre, music and everyday living that we do in Britain or America. "Culture" is not regarded as something pretentious or "sissy", an attitude which probably starts at school when an artificial division is often established between the "intellectual" and the games player. I was amazed to find in *Stop*, one of the popular Italian weekly magazines<sup>74</sup>, which was full of articles about a Roman prince, John Travolta, astrology and television

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<sup>73</sup> A detailed discussion of the difference, in the Italian cultural context, between the notions of *cultura popolare* (popular culture) and *cultura di massa* (mass culture) is beyond the scope of the present analysis. However, very briefly, Barański and Lumley (1990, 8-10) explain that whereas scholars writing in English generally see the two terms as broadly equivalent and choose between using one or the other (the British displaying a preference for 'popular culture', and the Americans consistently adopting the alternative 'mass culture'), in the Italian framework the two labels are used to refer to two clearly distinguished - if not even opposing - types of cultural products. They succinctly summarise the difference between the two thus: "The term *cultura di massa* often assumes some kind of manipulation of those who consume it- the production of a minority or an elite for the use of the majority. *Cultura popolare*, on the other hand, points to activities which spring from the people themselves and are fashioned for their own utilization (Barański and Lumley 1990, 10; see also Lumley 1988; Barański 1988 and Chambers and Curti 1984; Caughie 1986)

<sup>74</sup> Haycraft is referring here to the Italian counterpart of light-hearted publications such as *Hello! And OK*.



stars, that there was also a piece about Leopardi, the nineteenth-century poet, and one of his poems was printed. It was illustrated with sad portraits by Vespignani, a contemporary painter.

There is further evidence of the central role held in Italy by what could be defined as an “Arnoldian” conception of culture that identifies it with the highest and noblest artistic and cultural expressions according to the traditional liberal humanist canon. A typical example is, for instance, the collection of 26 essays edited by Corrado Stajano (1996) and entitled *La cultura italiana del Novecento* (“Nineteenth Century Italian Culture”). In Barański’s opinion, “the focus of Stajano’s book is crucially restricted by an élite sense of what is important about a national culture” (Barański 2001, 7). Indeed, a quotation from Stajano’s introduction to the collection seems to fully justify Barański’s statement:

What is [...] the condition of Italian culture within the framework of a world undergoing a great transformation? What is the condition of the arts, of the sciences, of the legal and economic disciplines [...] culture as history and as national life? [...] [The] 26 essays recount the past and present of the fundamental disciplines which constitute the framework of twentieth-century culture [...]. Each essay [...] aims to offer a kaleidoscope of the ideas, opinions and figures that have characterised the century in its various moments (Quoted and translated by Barański 2001, 7)<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> These are the title of the 26 chapters that make up Stajano’s collection and correspond to as many disciplinary areas that make up, in his view, Italian culture: Anthropology; Archaeology; Architecture; Figurative Arts; Biology; Chemistry; Film (limited to the Italian post-war film *d’essai*); Demography; Economics; Philosophy; Physics and Mathematics; Geography; Journalism; Literature; The Question of Language; Medicine; Music (though the chapter deals with classical music only); Politics and Ideology; Psychology and Psychoanalysis; Juridical Sciences; Political and Social Sciences; Education; History and Historiography; Theatre; Television; Theology and the Church.

In other words, Barański (*Ibid.*, 8) suggests that, as is typical of the Italian usage of the term, “Stajano uses *cultura* to refer specifically to ‘high’ culture, namely, to the intellectual and artistic achievements of a sophisticated élite”. In Barański’s assessment of Stajano’s approach to the study of culture, such an emphasis on ‘ideas’ and intellectuals, so prevalent in the Italian debate, ultimately risks to provide a somewhat simplistic picture of the phenomena under examination. This ultimately gives an impression of Italian culture as a much less complex and varied entity than it would appear from the broader ‘cultural studies’ perspective that Barański himself and the other authors of the *Companion* adopt (Barański 2001, 7-8).

If we accept Forgacs and Lumley’s (1996,1) list of the ‘common concerns’ that are shared, in the Anglo-Saxon context, by those scholars working in the research field broadly referred to by the label of ‘cultural studies’ - that is “to deal with culture as a set of signifying practices and symbolic social forms; to look at a wide variety of cultural materials and avoid prior evaluative rankings of high and low; to bring new theoretical considerations to bear on the study of culture” - then we would have to conclude that the understanding and the study of culture in Italy shares very little common grounds with it. Furthermore, it is evident from Stajano’s collection of essays, that the notion of culture that underlies it is a very optimistic one. As Barański (2001, 8-9) further explains:

[C]*ultura* is intrinsically valuable; it can help improve life; it can offer a safe haven during times of trouble. Stajano’s faith in the benefits

of 'high' culture is not unusual; it is deeply embedded in Italian society, even among non-intellectuals. Indeed, the idea has often been canvassed that many of Italy's problems could be alleviated if more of its citizens could be made to share in this *cultura*. Given the fairly restricted remit of what is deemed worthy to be described as culture, this means that, in general, Italian *cultura* is not as volatile a term as English 'culture' (see for instance, Raymond Williams' quote at the beginning of this chapter).

It is precisely the persistence of such an elitist conception of culture that, according to Barański (*ibid.*) is imputable for the fact that 'cultural studies' as a distinct discipline has not found acceptance within Italian academia. This should however, not be taken to mean that popular culture is not studied at all in Italian universities. Quite the opposite, but usually popular cultural forms are considered independently of each other and, more significantly, independently from 'high' cultural products (Barański 2001, 9). Personalities such as Umberto Eco, then, would seem to represent the exception that confirms the general trend of Italian universities in their approach to the study of the country's culture<sup>76</sup>.

#### THE ITALIAN 'STATUS QUO': POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

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<sup>76</sup> This is indeed confirmed by Lumley (1994, 2) who explains how, at the time of the publication of Eco's *Apocalittici e Integrati* in the 1960s, Eco "felt himself to be somewhat isolated, occupying a narrow strip between the great 'churches' of Italian postwar culture", that is, the neo-Crocean, the Marxist and the Catholic ones. (Lumley 1994, 2). Whether Eco effectively ever lived on the margins of Italy's intellectual life, is however, debatable and indeed Lumley (*ibid.*, 3) seems rather doubtful about it. Eco, as a matter of fact, actually even dedicated his influential book to the apocalyptic and their apostasies of popular and commercial culture, "without whose unjust, unbiased, neurotic, desperate censure I could never have elaborated three-quarters of the ideas I want to share here" (quoted in Lumley 1994, 3). The *integrati*, on the other hand, represent those in favour of a more relaxed acceptance of contemporary 'low' cultural forms.



The picture of Italian culture painted above, although necessarily terse, has however, identified as its crucial aspects the identification of culture with education and print, the persistent centrality of 'high culture' in spite of the late 1960s counter-cultural movement and the diffusion of the mass media, and the resulting privileged role that intellectuals and academics still hold in Italian society. The present section will now attempt to present some plausible explanations for such distinctive features of the Italian cultural situation. Forgacs and Lumley (1996, 3) identify three possible reasons for the Italian cultural *status quo*. First of all, they feel that the combination (which lasted until the 1960s) of limited access to higher education and low national rates of literacy and post-primary school attendance levels, has had important effects on the country's cultural life, and was particularly influential in rural areas<sup>77</sup>. In order to understand the educational system's reinforcing function of traditional views of culture, it is important to remember that the Italian educational model has always been based on the central role of 'the classics', and on the 'exclusive cult of the ancient' (Scotto di Luzio 1999, 15)<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> The reasons for such limited access to education amongst the Italian population is a very complex phenomenon that cannot be discussed at length here. De Mauro (2004, 122-124) for instance, suggests that the Catholic Church for centuries tried to oppose the alphabetisation of the Italian people (with the exception of the city of Rome, where acceptable standards of literacy were necessary to the recruitment of the lower to medium levels of the clerical administration) as it was feared that higher levels of education would result in the increased secularisation of Italian society. As late as 1874, one of the speakers at the first Italian Catholic Congress, maintained, with regards to the notion of compulsory education, that it was up to the family to decide about the education of its younger members. Consequently, the State had no right to make education a duty, especially in view of the fact that the obvious ultimate goal of compulsory education was atheism ("scristianeggiare il mondo") and thus, a step backwards towards pagan barbarism ("a ricacciarlo nella paganica barbarie") (Ibid.).

<sup>78</sup> This is indeed a point that Scotto di Luzio (1999) makes repeatedly in his study of the Italian equivalent of the grammar school, the *liceo classico*. See for instance, on page 36 his explanation of how the learning of classical culture came to be seen, in Italy, as

Secondly, the enduring centrality of 'high' culture and the status of intellectuals are undoubtedly linked to the prestige and resilience of a humanist intellectual tradition which "identified culture with intellectuals, cultural history with intellectual history" (Forgacs and Lumely 1996, 3). This tradition, in Italy, found its principal vehicle of expression in the neo-idealist school of thought, whose main representatives are Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile. As Umberto Eco (1983, 225) puts it, "our educated society has not yet freed itself from the taboos in which neoidealist philosophy has enveloped the word 'cultura'"<sup>79</sup>. The last section of this chapter will indeed linger over the influential role that Croce in particular had over Italian culture, and the impacts that his legacy has had on the constitution of the Italian cultural policy model. Closely related to the long-lasting influence of Croce, is also the final explanation that Forgacs and Lumley put forward to explain the peculiarities of the Italian cultural context. Since the humanistic tradition championed by Croce, and its reverence for intellectuals remained

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the assimilation of a national culture: "La cultura classica impartita dalla scuola assume per questa via il valore specifico di cultura nazionale. Nel quadro fissato dalla costruzione dello Stato unitario essa è chiamata a fornire il bagaglio etico, estetico e intellettuale del ceto che nel progetto liberale è individuato come la chiave di volta dell'architettura sociale della nazione, l'elemento connettivo che ne tiene insieme la fragile trama" (The classical culture transmitted by schools thus assumes the specific value of a national culture. In the framework established by the creation of the unitary State, culture is called upon to provide the ethical, aesthetic and intellectual formation of the class that, in the liberal project, is identified as the crucial element in the social structure of the nation, and the element that keeps connected its fragile structure). Further indications of the all-pervasive influence of the classical tradition in Italian educational institutions, are offered by Pulcini (1997, 82), who, in her discussion of the teaching of English as a foreign language in Italian schools, observes that "the humanistic tradition of Italian education has only recently abandoned models of language teaching based on those traditionally used for classical languages (translation of written literary works, little use of the spoken language)". Unsurprisingly, then, Pulcini (Ibid.) goes on to quote research showing that "Italians have a poor knowledge of foreign languages".

<sup>79</sup> "la nostra società colta non si è ancora liberata dai tabù di cui la filosofia idealistica aveva munito la parola 'cultura'".



dominant in Italy until the mid-1960s, affecting the publishing industry as well as education and the universities, the reception in Italy of the Anglo-American developments in the disciplines of political science and sociology (all of which tended to adopt a broader, anthropological notion of culture) was very slow and unenthusiastic (for a more detailed discussion of such reception delays, see chapter 3).

Sergio Romano (1984, 12) suggests one further reason for the persistent fascination of the Italian establishment for its traditional cultural tradition and the past, and for the wealth of cultural assets that he calls the 'Italian particularity':

The reasons for this Italian peculiarity are not, contrary to what is usually said, the extraordinary richness and variety of Italian history, but the poverty and decay of Italian society between the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

As Romano's argument goes, if Italy had had a mercantile revolution in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and an industrial revolution between the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as other countries in Europe did, then things would have been very different indeed. For the Italian bourgeois, enriched by trade and industry, would have demolished older buildings in order to build more comfortable and 'modern' homes, while also modernising roads and infrastructures, regardless of whether they required the destruction of Roman or Middle-Ages structures. Such development, in turn, would have hastened the process of secularisation,



which would have likely have resulted in the loss of much of the cultural heritage belonging to the Church. However, as Romano (*Ibid.*) concludes, “[b]ecause nothing of the sort happened in Italy in the three centuries between the sack of Rome of 1527 and the Napoleonic despoliation, Italy has become a gigantic cultural warehouse, a historical depository to which the laws of profit and economy do not apply”<sup>80</sup>. This is, indeed, an aspect of Italian history that, as chapter 6 will show, will have dramatic impacts on Italian cultural policy. At this stage it suffices to point out that the notions of culture that prevail in Italy discussed above, have resulted in the fact that, according to Bianchini et al. (1996, 291), “Italian cultural policy, especially at national level, has been decidedly oriented towards a narrow definition of ‘culture’, one which encompasses mainly three elements: the arts, heritage, and the media”<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Romano’s diagnosis of this ‘Italian peculiarity’ is consistent with the judgement advanced by Barański (2001, 13), according to whom, “[d]espite its position as one of the leading industrialized nations, modern Italy plays a secondary role in the world. Its greatness lies squarely in its past [...] Modern Italy suffers under the yoke of this history. Indeed, many of those who bemoan the country’s present condition do so by comparing it unfavourably to idealized versions of this illustrious past”. It is interesting to point out that, according to Gundle (2000, 124), Italians already exhibited signs of an ‘inferiority complex’ in relation to what they perceived as more advanced industrial powers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Italy became the ideal centre of the *Grand Tour*. “Most Italian took pride in their country’s extraordinary heritage. They welcomed visitors and basked in the reputation Italy enjoyed as the birthplace of genius, civilization and the arts. But there was a recurrent dissatisfaction with the idea of Italy purely as a museum, or of it as a civilization that was once great but which had decayed and declined”.

<sup>81</sup> It is important to point out again, that, although the present discussion has attempted to show how accepted boundaries of the notion of culture which is at the heart of Italian cultural policy are narrower than it is the case in the other country at the centre of this comparative study, the Italian situation is however not ‘abnormal’ or ‘atypical’ (though, for obvious reasons that will be explored in chapter 6, certain more conservative traits in cultural policy making are central in the Italian context). It is useful to quote here the Canadian academic Alan Stanbridge (2004, 1), who, speaking at the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (ICCP) in 2004, painted a general picture of the current status of cultural policy debates as such: “Although the rhetoric of cultural policy has been strongly influenced by broader conceptualisations of ‘culture’, the influence of the ‘lofty approach’ to art and culture remains apparently unshakeable. The programs and funding patterns of many cultural institutions and arts funding agencies serve to illustrate this tension, bespeaking a faith in the traditional ‘arts’, and often betraying little or no real involvement – or, indeed, cognizance, - of the full range of cultural activities implied by the cultural and creative industries”.

One of the most significant elements in the Italian intellectual tradition, and one that has proved highly influential in shaping the model for national cultural policy in Italy is, however, the legacy of the neo-idealist school of thought that developed in Italy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and that found in Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) a most representative and charismatic personality. It is therefore to Croce's influence on Italian cultural and political life that the last section of this chapter is devoted.

BENEDETTO CROCE, THE ITALIAN NEO-IDEALIST TRADITION AND ITS IMPACTS  
ON CULTURE

There is not space here to do full justice to the complexities of Croce's intellectual theory and its legacy, nor to his academic career and political engagement. This final section of the chapter, thus, will attempt to draw a necessarily terse, yet hopefully convincing picture of the vast influence that the so-called neo-idealist school of thought and its main representatives - Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) and, above all, Croce - have had on Italian educational and cultural institutions, as well as on the general cultural climate of Italy in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Croce and Gentile were initially very close, both in their philosophical elaborations and in their personal friendship. Gentile was indeed Croce's chief collaborator and supporter in the common battle against positivist thought, which was the prevalent school of thought in Italy at that time (Moss 1987, 11; Bellamy 2000, 854). They however grew increasingly apart, in the course of the 1920s. As Roberts (2002, 117) explains, the first theoretical discrepancies between the two friends' philosophical thought started to emerge in 1923, when Gentile began the process of definition of his own distinctive version of idealism, which is usually labelled 'actual idealism' or 'actualism'. One of the events that precipitated the conflict between the two old friends, was the different reaction to the Fascist regime that was around that time gathering



Indeed, as the discussion of the history of Italian cultural policy that will be presented in chapter 6 will confirm, the legal and institutional infrastructure of the Italian model of cultural policy that was established in the late 1930s, displays clear signs of the influence of Crocean views of culture and art. The present discussion – though, out of necessity, by no means exhaustive of the complexities of Crocean thought and its evolution over time - therefore represents an important premise for the later discussion of cultural policy-making in Italy.

Another important observation to be made at this stage, is that Crocean philosophy is obviously not the only factor that affected the institutionalisation of culture and cultural administration in Italy. Other aspects of Italian culture and society were also significant in influencing developments in the cultural and political spheres. I refer here for instance to the influence of the Catholic Church and the Communist Party on the cultural and political debates of post-war Italy. These

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strength and progressively organising itself as a totalitarian government. Gentile, not only officially joined the Fascist movement in 1923, but was then nominated Minister of Education in Mussolini's government, thus exerting a long-lasting influence on the Italian educational system (Scotto di Luzio 1999, ch. 9). The friendship definitely broke up in 1925, when, following the infamous murder of the socialist MP Matteotti, and the crisis that ensued, no doubt could any longer be had on the totalitarian direction that Mussolini had taken. Croce, who many claim had 'guiltily' waited until the very last moment to take position on the country's delicate historical and political conjuncture, finally expressed his unequivocal opposition to the regime. Since then, he remained one of the most coherent Italian intellectuals in this unpopular, and dangerous, stance (d'Orsi 2001, 23 refers to "una scelta colpevolmente tardiva", that is, to a 'choice that came guiltily late' when speaking about Croce's opposition to Fascism; see also Capati 2000, 129). Commentators agree, however, that after that first indecisiveness, "Croce became perhaps the world's best-known anti-Fascist as he sought to offer a modern recasting of liberalism in response to the Fascist challenge" (Roberts 2002, 117; see also Simoni 1952, d'Orsi 2002, Roberts 1987, ch. 1). Moss (1987, 15-19) succinctly, yet clearly, traces the progression from Croce's initial hopes that Mussolini "might extend civil liberties along with social order in Italy" to his disillusionment with the regime, and open opposition to it. For an extensive discussion of the relationship between Croce and Fascism, see Rizi (2003).



phenomena, however, have been widely written about (Pratt 1996; Kertzer 2000; Allum 1990 and 2000; Chambers and Curti 1984; Forgacs 1990; Bedani 2000; McCarthy 2000; Ward 1996). On the other hand, the influence of Benedetto Croce on cultural politics and policy seems to have been researched to a lesser degree (probably due also to the overshadowing popularity of Gramscian theories of culture in the field of cultural theory<sup>83</sup>). The present discussion, thus, represents a first attempt at filling this gap. Furthermore, it is my belief, that, as the discussion of the Italian model of cultural policy unfolds in later chapters, it will become clearer how numerous of its most influential aspects, such as the 'ideology of the masterpiece', the importance of the cultural past, the notion of the autonomy of art and, hence, the value of the preservation of the national cultural heritage can be all traced back to Croce's thought and the influence of the neoidealist school on Italian culture and society.

As for the actual content of Crocean aesthetics, Benedetto Croce's understanding of art and literature is based on what we might call 'a cult of the masterpiece'. Croce's main work on aesthetics is *Estetica Come Scienza dell'Espressione e Linguistica Generale* (Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistics), published in 1902. According to Trafton and Verdicchio (1999, 5) the book defined "the aesthetic as intuition, as identical with expression, and differentiated it from pseudo-

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<sup>83</sup> Gramscian thought itself is however, profoundly interrelated with Crocean ideas. Barlera (1998, 19) argues that "Gramsci built his cultural case against a Crocean background" and that he recognised Croce "as the true and most alarming antagonist [...] because he knew that Croce shared some of the same agenda, some of the same background and preoccupations". Barlera's paper (ibid.) offers indeed a good discussion of the 'debt' of Gramscian thought to Croce and the interrelations between the two philosophical perspectives (see also Ward 1996, 45ff.).

aesthetic forms that are often erroneously taken to be art". The 'aesthetic moment' also represents the first moment in the process of evolution of the spirit discussed in Croce's ambitious three-volume work *Filosofia dello Spirito* (Philosophy of the Spirit). This imposing work represents Croce's attempt to develop a philosophical system that can provide a solid understanding of history, human knowledge and activity. This Croce tried to achieve by a personal reworking of Kantian and Hegelian concepts (Ibid.). Although there is much more to Croce's aesthetic philosophy than what can be discussed here, there is a point that needs to be made. One of the most original and important features of Crocean aesthetics is the rejection of any theory that aims to distinguish or judge art on the basis of technical principles. Issues concerning technical problems in art are of no importance to Croce, since, in his view, technical devices only have a merely communicative function. In other words, the technical dimension is fundamentally extraneous to the true and original artistic creation (Paolozzi 2002, 69)<sup>84</sup>.

Art is for Croce 'pure intuition', that is a form of knowledge that is non-rational. Art, rather, is a 'pre-logic and universal' knowledge of reality; and this peculiar form of knowledge is intimately linked, 'fused' in fact, with its expression; it is therefore pointless to expect to understand

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<sup>84</sup>Paolozzi (2002, 69-70) clarifies this aspect of Croce's thought by arguing that, for instance, the division between various art forms (sculpture, painting, music, etc.) on the grounds of principles that are purely empirical and technical does not in fact help towards the understanding of the essential nature of art. This is in fact represented by the aesthetic dimension of the work of art, not its technical one: one could be perfectly versatile in the more complex musical techniques and yet not be able to create significant or artistic musical creations. Nevertheless, technical aspects still have a function, in that they provide true art with a *mezzo espressivo* (a means of expression).

poetry and art in rational terms, nor can they be described scientifically (Paladini Musitelli 1992, 68). Zink (1950, 268) explains Croce's position on the nature and autonomy of art thus:

Croce holds that art is non-scientific, noninstructive in any sense, and, though he does not (to my knowledge) condemn the use of art for other purposes, one gathers from him that such a use does some violence to art. [...] [According to Croce] art incorporates into itself materials from the rest of life, it incorporates them completely, in such a way that these materials acquire a new nature and meaning, independent of their actual sources and potential references.

Whenever these 'external' elements, whose nature can be of an intellectual, political, religious character, etc., are not successfully incorporated in the work of art, their representation appears incoherent and they are classified as 'non-art'. The principal task of the literary critic is therefore precisely to distinguish between pure art and non-art (Moss 1990, 5-7). The legitimacy of this operation rests on the fact that, as Crocean aesthetic postulates, one of the most important attributes of art is its aesthetic universality and, consequently, its eternality (Ibid., 8; see also Moss 1987 and Paolozzi 2002, 56-57)<sup>85</sup>. That notion of Culture with a capital C that was referred to above, is therefore represented by the highest examples of pure art as they are carefully identified by Crocean literary criticism and crystallized into a canon of artistic (and especially literary) perfection. This brings us back to that book-based notion of

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<sup>85</sup> Croce himself famously attempted to identify the fragments of pure art and distinguish them from non-art in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Shakespeare's poetry (see the English translation of Croce's literary criticism in Moss 1990 and Contini 1967, 41).



culture as knowledge of the 'high' literary tradition still predominant in Italy (and still, often at the expense of technical and scientific spheres of knowledge), that was referred to in earlier sections of this chapter, and that we saw particularly evident in the work of the literary critic Alberto Asor Rosa. The long-lasting consequences, for Italian culture, of the influence of this notion of culture is forcefully explained by De Mauro (2004, 4):

This is the common opinion: he who knows by heart a poem by Montale is a learned person, he who doesn't is not. He might be an eminent mathematician or biologist, but he doesn't know Montale: he therefore is not learned. All other forms of culture, intellectual culture included, are persistently in the shade<sup>86</sup>.

The quote above clearly shows that it can be rightfully argued (as indeed it has been done on the part of numerous commentators – see, for instance, Simoni 1952 and De Mauro 2004) that Benedetto Croce constituted the single weightiest influence over Italian culture in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to David Ward (1996, 45), it is precisely because Croce lived in a country where “education was synonymous with literary culture” that the enormous influence of his aesthetics could successfully extend to all age groups and sectors of the political spectrum. Indeed, if we look again at Stajano's collection of essays on Italian culture, the index reveals that Croce is mentioned and discussed in just about all the chapters, whether they present an

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<sup>86</sup> In De Mauro's own words: “Questa è l'opinione comune: chi conosce a memoria una poesia di Montale è colto, chi non la conosce non lo è. Può essere un grande matematico o biologo, ma non conosce Montale: non è colto. Tutto il resto della cultura, anche della cultura intellettuale, è in ombra”. Eugenio Montale (1896-1981) was a poet, prose writer, editor and translator, who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1975. He is particularly known for his highly subjective, introspective and sometimes obscure poems.

overview of the discipline of philosophy, architecture, medicine, theology, social sciences, and so on and so forth. In other words, Croce's influence, though admittedly strongest in the fields of literary criticism, political writing and historiography (even more so than in the philosophical milieu itself, according to some – see Galasso 2002, 310-312) was anyway felt in the broader cultural and intellectual sphere throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, in the reversed role of principal target of criticism, Croce's influence continued to be felt for a long time afterwards.

This sense of absolute predominance of Croce's personality on the culture of his time is apparent in the literature, which is littered with references to the 'aesthetic dictatorship of Croce' and the 'dogmas' of his thought (Dorfles 1953, 184). Angelo d'Orsi (2001, 337) even speaks of *crocianesimo* as a *culto laico* (a 'lay cult') and his discussion of Italian intellectuals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century appears pretty much as a catalogue of the followers of that cult (and, for many, the story of their gradual emancipation from the Crocean teachings). Galasso (2002), echoing De Castris (1981, 133), speaks of *conclamata egemonia idealistica* (self-evident idealist hegemony). Others, referred to Croce as a 'spiritual guide', an 'undiscussed authority' and the 'voice of his time' (Ward 1996, 43). This is an occurrence that Roberts (2002, 116) explains as a result of the crucial formative role that both Croce and Gentile had on the Italian intelligentsia throughout the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: "[t]hose who passed within their orbit constitute a virtual who's who



among Italian intellectuals of the period"<sup>87</sup>. According to Simoni (1952, 12), there is no doubt that "Croce has been the educator of the Italians since the turn of the century"<sup>88</sup>, and Isaiah Berlin once openly expressed his bafflement at the apparent compulsion that Italian intellectuals seem to have at some point in their careers, to confront Croce and his philosophy. Massimiliano Capati (2000, 7) who reports this incident in his book on Croce (significantly entitled *Il Maestro Anormale*, which literally means 'the abnormal teacher') answers Berlin's question with a reference to Goethe, who once said that he who was once extremely influential, cannot be easily forgotten<sup>89</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to point out that, despite being very influential until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and widely read not just in Italy, but also internationally, Croce's popularity (and even, more so, Gentile's) soon declined in the post-war years (Roberts 2002, 118; Roberts 1987, 13 ff.). This discussion, however, aims to show that his influence on Italian culture and institutions, though admittedly less direct, remained

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<sup>87</sup> The validity of Roberts' assertion is further confirmed by the anecdote he provides (Ibid., 116-117) about the decision taken by Eugenio Garin - whose *Cronache di Filosofia Italiana 1900-1943*, though dated is still one of the best account of Italian culture in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - to delete both Croce and Gentile from the index of his volume. The two philosophers' names were cited so regularly in almost every page of Guerin's survey of the era, as to making the whole indexing exercise for them rather pointless! See also Barlera 1998, 18 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Not only did Croce contribute, through his collaboration with the publishing house Laterza to introducing many foreign works to the Italian public, including those of thinkers whose ideas he did not share nor approve of - such as Dewey (De Mauro 2004, 84; Barlera 1998, 23). He also taught and influenced entire generations of students and literary critics. As a result, in 1952, the picture appeared to Simoni (1952, 12) thus: "If his intellectual influence during Fascism was considerable, in liberated Italy it has multiplied and become pervasive. Nearly all the leading art and literary critics are *Crociani*" (see also d'Orsi 2001, 335 ff.; Torriglia 2002, 156).

<sup>89</sup> According to Capati (2000, 23 ff.) one of the main reasons for the hold that Croce established over Italian culture is due to the originality and the often 'subversive' character of his writings, which were bound to make a strong impression in the stale cultural climate of the time.



however remarkable in postwar Italy. The reasons for the decline of his popularity are to be found in the numerous and serious (even virulent, at times) accusations moved against Croce in the postwar years. His detractors felt that his thinking was “vacuous” or “prejudicially conservative” (Roberts 2002, 118). Others felt uncomfortable about the label of ‘idealism’ under which Crocian thought was usually classified. As Roberts (1987, 17) explains, “[b]ecause he relied on idealist categories, Croce has been easily typed – and dismissed – as a late, rather quaint Hegelian by those viewing him from a distance”. Simoni (1952, 7) further suggests that this imprecise (and possibly partly malicious) labelling of Hegelianism contributed to cause the interpretative mistakes that have blighted the reception of Crocean ideas in America (See also Roberts 1987, 8-21)<sup>90</sup>. Another common accusation made against the Neapolitan philosopher is that, by posing historical and literary concerns at the heart of his philosophy, he placed the sciences in a secondary position with nefarious consequences for a country such as Italy, who was forever trying to overcome her industrial and technical backwardness (Galasso 2002, 304 ff.). In many cases, moral responsibility for the enduring disinterest for scientific concerns prevalent in Italy was placed at Croce’s doorstep<sup>91</sup>. A significant confirmation of this common view is proffered by the renowned political scientists Norberto Bobbio’s declaration, in the

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<sup>90</sup> Simoni (1952) also draws attention to the paradoxical character of the label of Hegelian for a thinker like Croce, who effectively sought to “liquidate the Hegelian system” and consistently criticized the confused and transcendent elements in Hegel’s thought, as well as his subservience to the politics of the Prussian State.

<sup>91</sup> Galasso (2002, 309) quotes Gemelli declaring (as early as the 1930s) that “Italian neoidealism succeeded in demolishing positivist thought, but ended up having a harmful effect over the development of Italian science, and it still does” (“l’idealismo italiano giovò alla demolizione del positivismo, ma riuscì ed è deleterio allo sviluppo della scienza”)

1950s, that Croce was primarily responsible for Italy's cultural backwardness (De Mauro 2004, 82). Similar accusations also came from the humanistic front, as the harsh opinions of eminent linguists of the calibre of Luigi Rosiello and Giulio Lepschy prove (Ibid.). This is hardly surprising, however, since after Croce's death, his positions were consistently attacked with vehemence in particular by Marxist critics and those scholars who were becoming increasingly interested in theoretical developments elaborated in the Anglo-Saxon context (neopositivists and linguists in particular) (De Mauro 2004, 84 and Capati 2000, 125-145). Besides the criticisms elaborated within an academic context, Croce was consistently a target of fierce criticism in the national press throughout the Second World War and beyond (Capati 2000, 131)<sup>92</sup>. Antonio Gramsci himself, elaborated his thought as a reaction to Crocian philosophy (Bellamy 2001a, 209)<sup>93</sup>. Barlera (1998, 19) explains that Croce, as well as Gramsci, was well aware of the connections between culture and politics (as a matter of fact, any intellectual had to be in

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<sup>92</sup> It is impossible, in the present discussion, to look in detail at the content and rightfulness of the accusations moved against Croce, many of which do seem indeed unfairly virulent. For instance, as De Mauro (2004, 122-124) argues, the Catholic Church, and its hostility for public education, is more realistically 'culpable' for the country's persistent cultural underdevelopment. The 'attack on Croce' must indeed be seen in the complex cultural and political background of the time. It seems, however, that Tullio de Mauro (2004, 82-83) puts forward a more balanced and fair assessment of the contestation of Croce when he says that it is hard to believe that the development of a whole national culture could be affected so dramatically and directly by a single personality, theoretical position, or by a book. He suggests instead that usually books give voice to cultural elements, tendencies and ideas that are already at work in a national culture. According to De Mauro, it is a characteristic of the Italian cultural tradition (rather than Croce's responsibility) to have refrained from the development of an analytic and scientific attitude to the search for knowledge and understanding. In this perspective, Croce would rather appear to be the quintessential Italian intellectual, rather than the creator of an approach sceptical of scientific research.

<sup>93</sup> Bellamy (2001b, 154-5) explains that "Gramsci saw Croce as a typically aloof 'traditional' intellectual. Despite his protestations to the contrary, he adopted 'transcendent' rather than 'immanent' criteria of truth which he implicitly identified with the prevailing liberal 'hegemony'".



Fascist Italy!) and suggested that Italian politics ought to be guided by 'men of culture' who would act not as a party or parliamentary force, but rather as an elite that would use its influence to affect and shape public policy. Croce saw Culture (*à la* Arnold, that is, rigorously with a capital C) as the redeeming force that would keep the emerging mass society at bay<sup>94</sup>. Gramsci, on the other hand, endeavoured precisely to counter such position, by re-establishing a firm bridge between the practical world and intellectual and cultural activity, and by valuing cultural forms of a popular nature<sup>95</sup>. Unsurprisingly, some commentators have suggested that Croce's idealism represented a conservative and 'philobourgeois' reaction to the crisis of 19<sup>th</sup> century values and beliefs, which in Italy was particularly acute at the time of Croce's most creative phase. According to Marina Paladini Musitelli (1992, 69), Croce's philosophical system constituted the "direct cultural instruments of bourgeoisie hegemony" in Italy.

Whatever interpretation of Croce's role (whether progressive or conservative) in the cultural life of Italy at the turn of the century one wishes to adopt, the centrality of his personality remains unquestionable.

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<sup>94</sup> As Barlera (1998, 23) himself admits, there is a discrepancy between Croce's theoretical positions and his already mentioned activity as editorial adviser for the publisher Laterza (as well as his work for his journal *La critica*). While his aesthetic views were clearly opposed to 'mass culture' and were "in favour of an elitist vision and the establishment of a rigid canon", he displayed a very open attitude in his editorial work, contributing to the rediscovery of popular forms of literature, which also become object of some of his historical writings (see D'Amico 1999 for Croce's work on the *Commedia dell'Arte* of Naples, and Willette 1999 on Croce's contribution to the journal *Napoli Nobilissima*).

<sup>95</sup> As Barlera (1998, 20) puts it: "Symptomatically, the opposition Croce-Gramsci reflects a wider point of division between idealist and materialist philosophies: whereas the former perceives culture ethically as an 'ideal of human perfection', the later sees culture as a 'body of intellectual work'" (including both 'high' and 'low' manifestations).



Indeed, the full weight of the legacy of Crocean thought on Italian cultural policy will become clearer once the focus of the discussion will move on the notions of culture and the values that were at the root of the establishment of the legislative and institutional framework for modern Italian cultural policy in the late 1930s.

## Chapter 5

### **Auditing Culture: the subsidized cultural sector in the New Public Management**

This chapter presents a discussion of 'instrumental cultural policy' in the attempt to understand the phenomenon in its relation to changes that have taken place in the last two decades within the British public sector. In particular, the chapter will argue that changes in the style of public policy-making and administration that can be ascribed to the phenomenon of the New Public Management (NPM) seem to provide a useful framework for making sense of the increasingly instrumental inspiration of British public policies for culture since the 1980s. Although the discussion will focus on the case study of Britain, similar developments have also occurred beyond the boundaries of the UK. So, the general conclusions that the chapter proposes with regards to the British experience might be extended – with due adjustments - to other European countries, and in fact, arguably, to wide sections of the Western world.

The expression 'instrumental cultural policy', whose usage within the academic field of cultural policy research can be traced back to the early 1990s, was first introduced in the attempt to make sense of the trends

shown by public policies for the cultural sector since the 1980s<sup>96</sup>. Geir Vestheim (1994, 65) has defined instrumental cultural policy as the tendency “to use cultural ventures and cultural investments as a means or instrument to attain goals in other than cultural areas”. The goals might refer to job and wealth creation, urban regeneration or – as the current trend goes - social inclusion, community development and social cohesion. In fact, what defines a cultural policy as ‘instrumental’ is not particularly the nature of the aims that the arts can allegedly help to pursue; rather, “the instrumental aspect lies in emphasizing culture and cultural venture as a means, not an end in itself” (Vestheim 1994, 65).

In Britain, it is now a well-established practice to define cultural policy rationales on the grounds of the alleged economic and - since New Labour’s election to government - the social benefits, that ‘investment’ in the cultural sector can yield. Current instrumental notions of the role of the arts in society build upon the economic arguments for public arts funding that began to circulate in the eighties. These were founded on the belief that public subsidy for the arts represented a sensible way for the state to ‘invest’ public resources, in view of the arts’ potential for job creation, tourism promotion, invisible earnings, and its contribution to urban regeneration both in its economic and social aspects. Despite severe criticism against the methodology and hence the conclusions of this type of studies, the instrumental rationale in UK cultural policy seems to be rather resilient. Indeed, the most recent development – which

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<sup>96</sup> The expression can be found in: Vestheim 1994; Clancy et al 1994; Bennett 1997, Belfiore 2002.



coincided with the New Labour's victory in the 1997 general election – is that the previous emphasis on the need to subsidise the arts for their positive contributions to the national and local economy has now been placed side by side with notions of the positive role that the arts can have in bringing about social inclusion and cohesion (Belfiore 2002). As a result, in the last decade, arts organizations in the UK have been reinvented as 'centres of social change' (DCMS 2000), and have been expected to contribute actively to urban regeneration and to the government's fight against the plight of social exclusion. The new focus of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's policy and funding on the promotion of social inclusion originated from the Government's commitment to the regeneration of socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods and was an integral part of the development of a social inclusion policy in the context of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (DCMS 1999, 3). In New Labour's view, young people and the socially excluded seem to have become – at least in the rhetoric of the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) – the funding system's top priority:

Following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, DCMS will be reaching new funding agreements governing its grants to its sponsored bodies. These will set out clearly what outcomes we expect public investment to deliver and some of these outcomes will relate to social inclusion (Smith, 1999).

This quote clearly shows how the subsidised cultural sector has come to be officially expected to contribute to social inclusion and the

neighbourhood renewal agenda, in view of its alleged potential of improving communities' 'performance' in the four key indicators identified by the government: health, crime, employment, education (DCMS 1999, 21-22). Such contribution to tackling social problems was explicitly identified as a crucial justification for public 'investment' in the arts. Things have not changed much since 1999, and the belief in the positive social impacts of the arts still holds strong within the British arts funding system. This is a quote from the latest Arts Council of England manifesto, *Ambitions for the Arts*, published in February 2003. It reads:

We will argue that being involved with the arts can have a lasting and transforming effect on many aspects of people's lives. This is true not just for individuals, but also for neighbourhoods, communities, regions and entire generations, whose sense of identity and purpose can be changed through art.

Leaving aside for the moment the worrying idea of a publicly funded body that explicitly sets out to manipulate and change people's sense of identity and purpose, one can undoubtedly conclude that the official rhetoric of public arts funding – in the UK - has taken on board an explicitly instrumental justification for arts funding. This strong formal commitment towards social inclusion on the Government's part has a direct impact on arts funding provision. Indeed, in Britain, the Government sets overarching goals for the arts, which are reflected in the strategic policy that the DCMS draws for the arts sector. The implementation of this policy is then carried out by DCMS in partnership with the Arts Council of England (ACE) and its Regional Councils, the

Department for Education and Employment, and a number of other bodies and directly funded clients, following the “arm’s length principle” (already discussed in chapter 3). It seems thus evident that the major funding bodies and policy makers in Britain have all had to subscribe (whether willingly or not) to a clearly instrumental view of the subsidized arts and their role in society.

This chapter will thus attempt to explore the concept and history of instrumental cultural policy in the United Kingdom by putting current policy debates into the broader context of events that have taken place in the historical and political realms since WWII. The assumption on which the chapter is based is that in order to understand the phenomenon of instrumental cultural policy, this has to be observed in conjunction with - and as part of - structural changes that have occurred in the British welfare state in the last quarter of the twentieth century. These, in turn, can be seen, ultimately, as a result of fundamental social and cultural shifts that have marked the advent of the post-modern society in the Western world (Vestheim 1994, 57). In particular, the analysis will be centred on the subsidised cultural sector, where the adoption of instrumental notions of the arts has been felt to be a major departure from the pre-existing tradition of cultural policy - rooted in the establishment of the welfare state in the aftermath of WWII. In fact, broader changes in the welfare state system and, consequently, in the philosophy and management of public service provision, will provide a crucial key to the understanding of the new, instrumental approach to



cultural policy-making in Britain. As the title of this chapter alludes to, the concept of the 'audit explosion' and the consequent inauguration of an 'audit society' expounded by the accountancy theorist Michael Power (1994 and 1997), will prove particularly useful in providing a framework of analysis capable to account for developments in British cultural policy since the 1980s.

A detailed reconstruction of the origins of state support for the arts in Britain is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, a review of some of the most heated public debates over whether the state should get involved in arts funding - dating as back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century - reveals that instrumental justifications – and in particular arguments related to the belief that the arts can exert beneficial effects on the economy and society – were behind the very first instances of state involvement with the arts in Britain. The original stimulus for the state to get involved in the acquisition of works of arts was the perceived poor design of British manufacture products and the consequent weak position of British-made goods in the international markets. It was therefore with the improvement of British industrial export in mind that, during the first half of the 19th century, the government became involved in the establishment of arts and design schools and the opening of the first museums of fine arts. It is hardly surprising then, that when in 1816, the Parliament discussed the purchase of the Elgin marbles, the positive effect that the beautiful sculptures would undoubtedly have on the refinement of national taste, and hence on the standard of national manufactures, was cited as a good enough reason for the state to finance the acquisition of the marbles. The

connection between arts and manufacture was strongly felt throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was an argument often used whenever the case for public subsidy of the arts was presented to an often-reluctant Parliament (Minihan 1977).

Moreover, there is no doubt that the notion that the arts can provide an effective means to preserve social order, improve community cohesion and aid crime-prevention is hardly a New Labour discovery. Yet again, the Victorians had set an important precedent. They were adamant about the civilizing potential of the high arts. It was generally believed that an improvement in taste and appreciation of the arts would directly result in moral progress. Hence the utility, for the state, to support the arts and make them available to the masses (Minihan 1977; Pearson 1982). Not much room is left, thus, for doubts about the instrumental nature of the intention to introduce the working classes to the fine arts. Sir Martin Archer Shee, when asked to testify in front of a Parliamentary Select Committee on Fine Arts in 1841, declared:

that the object of the Committee is, not so much, to forward the arts themselves, as through their influence to advance their great end, towards which the promotion of the fine arts can be considered but as means, the civilization of our people; to give to their minds a direction which may tend to withdraw them from habits of gross and sensual indulgence; to secure and sustain the intellectual supremacy of our country, not only with respect to the present age, but with reference to posterity... (Quoted in Minihan 1977, 68).

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that in many ways, cultural policy in Britain has been strongly instrumental - both in its practical aims as well as in the rhetoric accompanying it - since its very dawn. In light of the discussion presented so far, it is difficult to consider the developments that have taken place since the late 1970s as a radical break from past traditions. In fact, what seems to characterize British cultural policy is a rather remarkable consistency in the use of explicitly instrumental justifications for government's involvement in arts funding. What was once referred to as 'social order' is now preferably spoken of in terms of 'social inclusion' and 'social cohesion', but this does not alter the identical substance of the various claims. If we turn again to Vestheim's definition of instrumental cultural policy, we cannot but conclude that there is a very long and consistent tradition of instrumental cultural policy in Britain, whereby culture was supported in so far as it represented the means to an end rather than an end in itself (Vestheim 1994, 65).

To declare instrumentality as an almost 'traditional' feature of British cultural policy, however, does not explain the common view among commentators (both academic and professional) that major changes did occur in the period beginning in the late 1970s and culminating in the 1980s (of which more recent developments are seen as a derivation). Oliver Bennett (1996, 7), comments: "The reality of the 1980s was the emergence of a very different set of policy concerns to the pre-occupations of welfare, access and democratisation which had characterised the 1970s". The language in which arts matters were being



discussed also changed radically, as exemplified by a glossy brochure published in 1985 by the Arts Council: *A Great British Success Story*. It was designed to look like a company report, as it befits a “prospectus”: it represented an “invitation to the nation to invest in the arts” expressed in the language of the “enterprise culture”. Cultural activities were referred to as “the product”, the audiences as “consumers”, and the language of subsidy turned into the language of “investment” (Hewison 1995, 258). The term ‘subsidy’ itself became rather unpopular. In fact, as Selwood explains “it did effectively disappear from the language of cultural bureaucracies in the 1980s, when the notion of ‘subsidy’ as welfare was no longer regarded as politically correct and the semantics of business and managerialism were introduced” (Selwood 2001, xlvii).

In order to be fully understood, these changes need to be considered in the broader context of the political turmoil that characterized the beginning of the 1980s and the advent of Thatcherism. This period has been indeed referred to as a “turning point for the arts”, since “it is during this time that the basis of funding to the arts changed significantly and governmental relationship with, and interest in, the arts would change accordingly” (Quinn 1998, 165). Bennett (1995, 200), writing about that very period, concludes that “the experience of crisis has been widely and genuinely felt”. As a result, “the debate about cultural policy in the United Kingdom appears as a ‘discourse of beleaguerment’” (Bennett 1995, 200). The next section of this chapter will try to offer a possible explanation for this diffuse feeling among commentators that a great,

epochal change took place in the 1980s. A useful approach to this task is to consider the post-1980s developments in the broader framework of changes that occurred in the British political arena and, consequently, in public management style. If instrumental notions of culture cannot be considered alien to the pre-1980s British cultural policy discourse - and therefore do not represent a dramatic break to its tradition - how can we account for the diffused perception that the 1980s represent somewhat of a watershed between radically different approaches to state involvement in cultural funding? In other words, what differentiates the old-fashioned model of instrumental cultural policy that can be seen in action in the nineteenth century, from its most recent forms embodied by the economic argument in the Thatcherite 1980s and, later, by New Labour's rhetoric of social inclusion?

#### THE SHIFT TOWARDS EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

In so far as cultural policies are public policies with specific relevance to art and culture, their evolution over time and their rationales needs to be interpreted against the background of developments in the larger arena of the relations between government and public policy, and the ways in which political motivations shape policy interventions. This is precisely the approach that this chapter will follow in trying to make sense of what has been felt as an 'instrumental turn' in British policies for culture between the early '80s and the present day. In light of the considerations presented so far, we can argue that there are two major aspects in the

present circumstances that differentiate current instrumental cultural policy from the policy rationales in place before the 1980s. Discussing them can help to account for the diffuse perception of the 1980s as a time of radical change, which turned the arts world (but not that alone) upside down.

Firstly, what characterizes the discourse over cultural policy since the 1980s is the fact that the instrumental element in the rhetoric of public arts funding has become more explicit than it had ever been before. Consequently, it is now a major policy rationale, having overshadowed arguments which defended subsidy on the basis of what is usually referred to as the 'art for art's sake' principle. The latter, although never prevalent, had been a constant element in the British cultural policy debate. Such positions are much harder to defend today than in Victorian times, or during the years of post-war cultural policy. This is partly due to changes in public administration modes and the government's emphasis on evidence-based policy that have taken place in the last two decades, and which will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter. However, they are also the result of certain developments within postmodern cultural theory. By questioning traditional, accepted definitions of culture, postmodern notions of relativism have undermined the legitimacy of old cultural policy rationales, leading to what Craig Owens has defined as 'a crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions' (Owens 1990, 57). The concept of cultural relativism thus entered the cultural



discourse, undermining – at the theoretical level – the possibility to justify any longer cultural policy decisions grounded on uncontroversial principles of ‘excellence’, ‘quality’ and ‘artistic value’.

It is important to remember that whilst the effects of this loss of legitimacy were being felt – shaking, and drastically redefining the very notion of culture on which the whole system of public arts funding had been constructed – Britain was also experiencing Thatcherism. This was an altogether traumatizing experience for the British arts world. The newly appointed Conservative government had always been very clear about its ambition to ‘roll back the frontiers of the state’ with a view to reducing public expenditure and increasing efficiency. Unsurprisingly, the level of public support for the arts remained unchanged for a number of years (and that corresponded, in real terms, to a reduction in funding). In this new climate of great uncertainty about future levels of public expenditure, it became obvious that, in order to survive, the cultural sector needed to be able to put forward a strong case in order to avoid further reductions in funding. The economic argument in favour of public support of the arts seemed to provide a most precious lifeline for the public arts sector (Myerscough 1988, 2). In this sense, the instrumental cultural policies of the 1980s could be plausibly labelled as ‘policies of survival’ to which the British cultural sector had to turn to in the face of reduced government spending and the erosion of the legitimacy of its traditional theoretical grounds (Belfiore 2003).

In the light of the arguments presented so far, the developments within British cultural policy discussed above can be described as an example of the phenomenon of policy 'attachment', whereby policy development in certain policy areas takes place through the attachment of that area to other (more influential) policy concerns (Gray 2002, 80). Gray explains that policy attachment "goes beyond simply fitting in with the policy choices made by other actors operating within the same policy sector: it also includes the linkage of one sector with others as a mechanism for achieving policy ends" (Gray 2002, 81). Strategies of this type have allowed the arts, a traditionally 'weak' policy sector to 'attach' themselves to a number of different political agendas that were seen as more politically important, with the result that the subsidised arts have often found their way into mainstream public policy-making. The principal sets of public policy objectives to which the arts have successfully 'attached' themselves are economic development, urban regeneration and social inclusion.

In particular, the positive impacts of the arts in society are today one of the most crucial sources for justification of public arts subsidy. As François Matarasso has recently reiterated, 'Reducing the incidence of social exclusion is currently at the heart of British public policy. If cultural organizations hope to have the importance of their work recognized... they need to take account of these concerns' (quoted in Selwood 2002a, 68). The extent to which the recourse to instrumental policy rationales is a matter of livelihood for the subsidised arts is clear from this extract from

a report published, in 2000, by the Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team (QUEST) and entitled *Modernising the Relationship: A New Approach to Funding Agreements*:

The [cultural] sector cannot continue to compete with other increasing demands for expenditure on education, health, law, etc. without the essential ammunition that performance measurement offers. The greater the impact, the greater the chance that the role and fundamental potential of the sector will be fully recognised across government and by the public (QUEST 2000, 19)<sup>97</sup>.

This passage confirms that the second and most important distinguishing characteristic of what we could define as a later, post-1980s, phase of instrumental cultural policies is precisely the fact that the positive impacts of the arts in society are not discussed any longer in merely general and vague terms. Public 'investment' in the arts is advocated on the basis of what are expected to be concrete and *measurable* economic and social impacts. Moreover, this shift has been accompanied by growing expectations that such beneficial impacts ought to be assessed and measured before demands on the public purse can be fully legitimate. In recent years – and this is hardly a phenomenon limited to cultural policy – the UK has witnessed a clear movement towards *evidence-based policies* for the public sector. According to the Cabinet Office, policy-making grounded in hard evidence (and thus constant monitoring)

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<sup>97</sup> The very existence of a body like QUEST – a watchdog body with the task to improve standards of efficiency and financial management across the cultural sector - is a rather significant fact in itself. According to the DCMS' web site: "QUEST was established by Secretary of State Chris Smith in 1999 following the first Comprehensive Spending Review. Independent of DCMS, QUEST reports directly to the Secretary of State on ways in which the cultural and sporting sectors can best achieve the government's social and economic objectives, and the means by which they demonstrate their performance' (<http://www.dcms.gov.uk/role/index.html>)



is the best guarantee towards the achievement of a more rational and modernised government. Modernisation, together with a growing emphasis on increased managerialism in the delivery of public services, is perceived as resulting in improved efficiency, effectiveness and value for money (Selwood 2002a, 65). Hence the origin of the New Labour's public policy 'buzz words': the public sector must be guided by clear 'strategies', where 'aims' and 'objectives' are clearly stated. Consequently, the 'performance' of the service providers must undergo regular 'monitoring', and provide 'quality assurances' so that the government can be reassured - on the basis of the 'evidence' gathered and of comparisons between policy 'inputs', 'outputs' and 'outcomes' – that the 'targets' are met, and that the 'customers' (formerly known as citizens) receive 'value for money'.

The preoccupation of the present government with evidence-based policy-making, however, is hardly a New Labour innovation. In fact, the concern that, after 1979, successive Conservative governments showed for issues of accountability, and their attempts to introduce a new style of public management modelled on the private sector's, were all clear harbingers of the developments to come (Selwood 2002b, 4). Unsurprisingly, then, from the beginning of the 1990s, *data collection* (especially in the form of time-series) has assumed a central role in cultural policy-making and evaluation. Data were collected in a number of different ways: through audits, performance measurements, time series, impact studies, and studies on audiences (as well as non-audiences).

Most of it was based on the quantitative analysis of policy inputs and outputs, and the results of such number crunching tended to be presented as neat statistics. These seemed to perfectly lend themselves to the comparison between targets and achievements that had become so central to the practice of policy evaluation (Selwood, 2002b, 8).

How can we explain this new stress on the measurement of the arts' impacts in clear and quantifiable ways? What effects has this new managerial style had on the arts? In order to be able to understand and elucidate the implications of the new emphasis on the achievement of measurable social or economic impacts through the arts, we must first put this phenomenon into the broader context of radical changes that have occurred in the sphere of public management.

#### BRITAIN AND THE 'AUDIT EXPLOSION'

Some help in understanding the complex new circumstances in which the public cultural sector now operates comes from the work of Michael Power, professor of Accounting at the London School of Economics. In 1994 he published a pamphlet for the think tank 'Demos' entitled *The Audit Explosion*. In this publication, he points out how "the word 'audit' is being used in the UK with growing frequency". He argues that:

the spread of audits and other quality assurance initiatives means that many individuals and organisations now find themselves subject to audit for the first time and, notwithstanding protest and complaint,

have come to think of themselves as auditees. Indeed there is a real sense in which 1990s Britain has become an 'audit society' (Power 1994, 1).

Power explores in greater detail his theory of the 'audit society' and the legitimising role of monitoring and evidence collection within it, in a later book: *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*, published in 1997. In this essay, he discusses the growing popularity of audits and other systems of control within British public policy discourse. His conclusion is that auditing has presently reached such a remarkable popularity as to have acquired 'a degree of institutional stability and acceptance' (Power 1997, 3). As an institutionalised practice, audit risks becoming 'an organizational ritual, a dramaturgical performance' (*idem.*, 141), because within organisations, 'pressures exists for audit and inspection systems to produce comfort and reassurance, rather than critique' (*idem.*, xvii). Auditing, thus, is mainly about reaffirming order and providing a source of validation for organizations and their activities, especially when the influence of other sources of legitimacy (such as community and state) seems to be declining (*idem.*, 147). The validating role of audit often entails that the very fact that an organization undergoes a process of auditing becomes in itself a guarantee of legitimacy and transparency, regardless of the audit's actual findings - which are often simply ignored. In this regard, the audit explosion, despite having been originally driven by a programmatic commitment to increase accountability in the name of transparency and democracy, might have had, in fact, the opposite effect (Power, 1997, 13-14).



Power (1997, 10) further explains that “the audit explosion has its conditions of emergence in transformations in conceptions of administration and organization which straddle, or, better, dismantle the public-private divide”. To put it simply, Power sees the growing popularity of audit as directly linked to systematic attempts to make the state more entrepreneurial: the ‘audit explosion’ is the outcome of these changes in the style of public administration. In order to justify this interpretation of the ‘audit explosion’, Powers inscribes the phenomenon within the context of the changes that have taken place in society at large, and in public administration in particular, in the mid 1980s. Such dramatic changes in public management can be associated with the necessity for much tighter financial discipline brought about by the fiscal crisis faced by many Western governments in the 1980s. Public expenditure in countries with generous welfare states – Britain among them – was perceived to be getting closer to dangerous levels. It was feared that, unless public spending was firmly curbed, the public sector might get so big that it might become impossible for the national economy to further sustain it (Jenkins 1995, 11). Hence the break down in the consensus behind the welfare state that had been in place until the 1980s. This resulted in increased pressures to reduce public expenditure whilst introducing a more managerial approach to public administration, in order to make it more efficient and limit waste – thus making the most of shrinking public resources. These developments are behind the immense popularity that the notions of ‘quality’ and ‘efficiency’ have gained in our

contemporary rhetoric where the organization of public services is concerned (Pollitt and Bouckaert 1995, 7). The new stress on quality improvement complemented, without substituting it, the drive for economy. This contributed to the rise of expectations - among beneficiaries of the public services - of more transparency in government's activities. Hence the growing importance of systems of verification, and the flourishing of the 'audit explosion' described by Michael Power.

These new circumstances have resulted in radical transformations in the public sector, and have brought about the establishment of what Protherough and Pick (2002, vii) call the 'sinister new orthodoxy' of 'modern managerialism'. The most remarkable of these transformations is without doubt represented by the *New Public Management* (NPM), and the related spread of *Value For Money* (VFM) auditing. Power (1997, 42) defines NPM as "a label which has been used to characterize observable changes in the style of public administration. Auditing institutions have assumed an increasingly important role in the implementation of these changes and 'value for money' (VFM) auditing has become a prominent and constantly evolving instrument of financial control". Extant literature seems rather vague in pinning down the exact origin of the term 'new public management' to a precise point in time or a specific publication. However, there seems to be a wide agreement that the first systematic attempt to discuss both the doctrinal group of ideas identified by the label of NPM and their intellectual provenance was an influential paper

published by Christopher Hood in 1991 and entitled *A public management for all seasons?* According to Hood's analysis, NPM consists of a cluster of managerial principles and ideas that have been transferred from the administrative practice of the private sector into public management. Its key beliefs are cost control, financial transparency, the introduction of market mechanisms into the provision of public services, the reliance on a 'contract culture' and – more importantly – “the enhancement of accountability to customers for the quality of service via the creation of performance indicators” (Power 1997, 43; Hood 1991 and Kettl 2000).

Such radical transformations of the role of government in public services provision and in conceptions of governance (which ultimately caused the audit explosion) are common - to varying degrees - to most Western societies. Britain has certainly been no exception. In 1982, the UK witnessed the introduction of the Financial Management Initiative (FMI), a clear indication of the direction in which the Thatcher government wanted public administration to head for. FMI required each spending department – as well as their subordinate agencies - to clearly identify their objectives and set targets against which their performance could be measured. Significantly, this practice was also extended to those spheres of activity where performance was not easily quantifiable (and the cultural sector undoubtedly belongs to this group). Each administrative body had to nonetheless declare its aims and assess the extent to which policies had been successful in achieving them, as a condition for its claims on public



resources to be considered legitimate (Jenkins 1995, 232). Unlike previous attempts to restructure and modernise the public administrative system, the innovations introduced by FMI seemed to take root. The tendency towards managerialism in the public sphere was thus first encouraged, in the 1980s, by a Conservative government, and has been supported by New Labour after 1997 without apparent solution of continuity.

The popularity of NPM principles with governments of both right- and centre-left leaning would seem to confirm (at least in principle) its claims to political neutrality, which upholders of NPM consider as one of its main advantages. With its reliance on the logic of cost calculation as a principle for decision-making in public, political and governmental choices, NPM is based on the notion of the universality and superiority of the market as the ultimate decision-making mechanism (Clarke 2001, 5). NPM's claims to political neutrality are thus based on the postulate that different political priorities and circumstances can be accommodated by introducing minimal alternations to NPM principles. These are indeed seen as a "neutral and all-purpose instrument for realizing whatever goals elected representative might set" (Hood 1991, 8). The political significance of such claims, though, is evident. In his discussion of New Labour's financial policies, Alan Finlayson (2003, 114) observes that "[t]he advantage of all this (New Public Management plus a hands-off economic strategy) is that it appears to remove political calculation from the process of economic management. This is deemed an advantage to

the markets but also an advantage to the state, in that it cannot be so easily accused of screwing things up since it was only following pre-set rules. [...] De-politicisation is thus a highly political strategy, with the effect of shifting regimes of accountability and influence away from the elected and thus away from the electors". Interestingly, Clarke (2001, 5) maintains that there are clear linkages between the political movement of the New Right and systematic attempts to de-politicise the public realm: "New Right governments have endeavoured to de-politicise critical public issues through installing economic discourse and managerialism as the dominant frameworks for decision-making". In the light of these considerations, it is interesting to note that the countries where NPM has penetrated furthest are the Anglophone states, the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, that is countries where the influence of neo-liberalism has been historically particularly significant (Clarke 2001, 8). It could thus be argued that strong allegiances to neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism betray the strong political and ideological nature of the sweep of public administration reforms that go under the umbrella term of NPM. As Michael Barzelay (1997, 3) explains "NPM is not just a cognitive device for identifying problems and inventing solutions in public management. NPM plays a role in cultivating support for particular formulations of problems and their recommended solutions". Rather than representing a politically neutral solution to the problems posed by contemporary public administration, NPM and the rhetoric of managerialism seem to go along very nicely with strategies of neo-liberal globalisation, to the extent that Clarke (2001, 3) speculates on whether

we might be witnessing a systematic attempt, on the part of the New Right movement, to dissolve the public realm<sup>98</sup>.

#### NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Unsurprisingly, the effects of the so-called “modernization imperative” (Charlton and Andras 2003) - and the growing managerialism in public service delivery that seems to accompany it - has not limited its influence to public policy-making at the national level. In fact, the long arm of NPM has stretched as far as to encompass local government and its modes of service provision. The efforts towards shaping a more entrepreneurial and efficient local government also date back to pre-New Labour times, as proved by the establishment, in the mid-1980s, of schemes such as the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tender (CCT) for a number of service previously provided by the local authorities themselves. The adoption of CCT has entailed a fundamental revision of the role of local authorities, which now find themselves in the position of often having to contract out the provision of services to private companies (Byrne 2000, 76). No longer would local authorities necessarily be the *providers* of the service; they might only be the *enablers*; that is, local authorities would invite private firms to bid (in competition with themselves) for the opportunity to provide services. For example, many leisure and cultural facilities today are no longer managed by the local authority itself, but by

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<sup>98</sup> Clarke (2001, 3) writes: “The neo-liberal strategy has been consistently hostile to the public realm. It has challenged conceptions of the public interest, striving to replace them by the rule of private interests, aggregated by markets (and forms of corporate collusion and combination). It has insisted that the ‘monopoly providers’ of public services be replaced by efficient suppliers, disciplined by the competitive realities of the market (or, in some of its neo-conservative combinations, by philanthropy). It has disintegrated conceptions of the public as a collective identity, attempting to substitute individualised and economised identities as taxpayers and consumers”.



a private firm contracted by the local authority. The government believed that this procedure would encourage a higher standard of service at a more competitive price. As local authority departments were allowed to bid for the contracts against private competitors, the government hoped that this would provide sufficient incentive for them to keep costs down and standards of service high.

In a development that parallels closely what happened at the national level, the change of fortunes of the Conservatives did not result in a change of direction for local government. Indeed, the 1999 Local Government Act decreed that CCT would be abolished by the year 2000 to be replaced by New Labour's own scheme aiming at the modernization of local government: *Best Value*. Best value, just as CCT before it, is a scheme aiming at the achievement of effectiveness and economic efficiency within local government. Local authorities now have the duty to provide "best value" in the provision of a wide range of services (a wider range of services, in fact, than that previously covered by CCT, now including cultural provision). According to the policy document *Modernising Local Government: Improving Local Services Through Best Value*, local authorities are required "to meet the aspirations of local people for the highest quality and most efficient services that are possible at a price that people are willing to pay" (DETR 1998, 5). In practice, this entails the setting of both national and local objectives, performance measurements, standards and targets. Most of these are devised by the local authority themselves, although, in setting their own standards, local

authorities have to take into account those that have been set at the national level. In particular, central government establishes a set of performance indicators for the assessment of effectiveness and quality with regards to major services. On the basis of these, local authorities set their own targets, and are under obligation to publish these - as well as an assessment of their performance in achieving them - in an annual Local Performance Plan (Byrne 2000, 593-594). This is not all, for local authorities – as Byrne explains – “are also required, as a minimum, to set quality targets over a five-year period which are consistent with the performance of the top 25 per cent of all councils and cost and efficiency targets consistent with the performance of the top 25 per cent of councils in the region” (Byrne 2000, 594). However, as one would expect from an ‘audit society’, there are further systems of control in place in order to ensure that ‘best value’ is indeed provided to public service users. All councils are expected to undertake, every five years, a general performance review encompassing all the services they provide. The aim of such performance reviews is – in what is an enlightening example of the current language of public administration – to establish the extent of the local authority’s success in the pursuit of the ultimate goal represented by the ‘3 Es’, that is, economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local service provision (Byrne 2000, 317)<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> The ‘3 Es’ - and with them the guarantee that value-for-money has been obtained by the effective use of council resources - are to be achieved via the assessment of services against four criteria: the ‘4 Cs’:

- Challenge – why and how a service is being provided;
- Comparison – with the service and the performance achieved by other local authorities and the private sector;

The implications of this process for discretionary areas of local authority spending such as museum, galleries and local cultural provision in general (with the significant exception of the Public Library Service which is, in fact, a statutory local government responsibility) are quite significant. Museums, for instance “will be placed under much greater scrutiny than has been customary and they will have to justify themselves in the context of wider local government priorities and strategies” (Lawley 2003, 79). Moreover, since no local authority is actually required to operate museums (nor in fact any other cultural facility - cultural provision is a statutory duty of local authorities only in Scotland and Northern Ireland) there are some fears within the museum community that Best Value Reviews might be used as an excuse to put in place damaging cost-saving exercises (Lawley 2003, 79). This is a concrete possibility, especially in view of the fact that, in Ian Lawley’s words “[t]he arrival of Best Value has exposed the general lack of consistent and meaningful data collection and analysis within the sector” (Lawley 2003, 80). The lack of data on the effectiveness of cultural organisations in achieving the targets that have been set for them is indeed a serious issue, and it will be discussed in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

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- Consultation – with local tax payers, service users, and the wider business community on how the service can be improved;
  - Competitiveness – ensuring that the service’s performance is competitive if compared to other methods of delivery including those of the private sectors; this involves tendering and market testing and might lead to the contracting out of services (Byrne 2000, 594).



The impacts of such developments in modes of local public administration upon the nature of local authority provision for the arts, however, extend well beyond the museum and gallery sector. Indeed, local authorities are a crucial element in the British arts funding system, providing essential resources for a range of cultural activities and services as diverse as the provision and licensing of venues for the production of artistic events, funding theatres, orchestras and individual performers, commissioning works of art and providing background support and encouragement for arts organisations<sup>100</sup>. Local government, therefore, has a crucial role in the public support for the arts sector in the UK. As a matter of fact, local authorities' spending on the arts exceeded that of central government for the first time in 1988/89; and the spending on the arts by local government is currently larger than that made by the ACE and its Regional Offices, and is only slightly less than that made by the DCMS. According to the most recent Arts Council's review of data on local authority expenditure on the arts, in England alone, this amounted to around £218 million (Jermyn and Joy 2002). Although the distribution of its resources is far from homogenous across the country (spending on the arts varies dramatically from one local authority to another), local government is undoubtedly a key player in public arts funding in the UK, albeit its role seems to be sometimes overlooked in cultural policy research.

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<sup>100</sup> In the year 2000/01, 63% of local authority net spending was on local authority run and contracted out venues and 21% was on grants to arts organisations or individual artists (Jermyn and Joy 2002).

How have the subsidised arts fared in this changed political and administrative climate? In view of the arguments presented in the preceding sections of this chapter, it seems possible to conclude correctly that the subsidised arts sector is currently regulated by policies that emphasise the instrumental role of the arts in society. Moreover, publicly funded arts organizations have also been involved in the data-collection duties that evidence-based policy making entails. As a consequence, the subsidized arts too - in so far as they constitute an area of public expenditure - have found themselves forced to turn to the 'rationalized rituals of inspection' described above. One might even be tempted to suggest that, even more than other areas of public policy, the arts have found in the justifying practices of audit and performance measurement a precious form of official validation. This – it could be argued - might represent for the arts a means to filling the legitimacy void caused by the erosion of cultural authority which followed the diffusion of theories of cultural relativism within the postmodern theoretical discourse. What we are suggesting is that, to a certain extent, rituals of verification (e.g. the obsession for policy targets and outcomes evaluation) might be seen as a surrogate for the arts' lost authority and legitimacy.

Whether or not this explanation is accepted as satisfactory, it is undeniable that the subsidized arts sector, in the UK, is today under increasing pressure to gather data on its impacts on society and on the

national economy. This is a necessary process in order to produce 'hard evidence', to try and demonstrate that the sector can live up to the government's expectations (a crucial requirement in the control-obsessed audit society). This is indeed the conclusion reached by Sara Selwood (2002b), who has researched extensively the uses and abuses of cultural statistics within the British cultural sector. She maintains that DCMS's emphasis on economic impact, social inclusion and regeneration, access (and the whole rhetoric of the 'arts for the many, not for the few') is firmly rooted in Labour's commitment to deliver on its programmes, and to make public services more efficient. In order to achieve its aims, the government has committed itself to base the formulation of policy on evidence and, consequently, expects publicly funded bodies to regularly collect and analyse data (Selwood 2002b, 11). This passage from DCMS' 1998 *Annual Report* is very explicit on the topic:

This is not something for nothing. We want to see measurable outcomes for the investment which is being made. From now on there will be real partnership with obligations and responsibilities.

Such obligations and responsibilities are clearly set out in the Funding Agreements that regulate the relationship between DCMS and its sponsored bodies (and set the targets they are expected to meet), and in



the Local Cultural Strategies that the local authorities are invited to produce<sup>101</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, since 1997, the DCMS has substantially developed its bureaucratic systems of control, in order to ensure the delivery of government objectives and to be able to advocate for increased funding more convincingly, often resorting to explicitly earmarking sums of money for the delivery of specified objectives (Selwood 2002b, 20). These observations seem to point towards the conclusion that – as Clive Gray puts it (1996, 218) - “cultural policy does not operate in splendid isolation from the broader pressures within society”. Consequently, the extent to which cultural policies develop independently or are dominated by other spheres of public policy and by changes in public management style is an important indication of what is actually happening within the field. It is now time to consider the implications and the impacts of the developments described so far on the arts themselves.

In the context of the audit explosion and the shift towards evidence-based cultural policies, what are the main implications for the British subsidized cultural sector? The concluding section of this chapter will look at some of the fundamental issues entailed in the adoption of

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<sup>101</sup> Selwood's comments on this passage seem to reinforce the argument presented so far: This framework, which was ultimately driven by the advent of resource accounting across government, meant 'that DCMS ties its expenditure to its objectives' and that it needs 'to be assured that public money is being used appropriately to meet public objectives'. Moreover, 'investing for reform', as the rhetoric has it, means that the 'more money invested, [the] more results are required'. For DCMS, this implies closure on any possibility of 'grants for grants' sake' (DCMS quoted in Selwood 2002b 12).

instrumental rationales for state involvement in the cultural sector: policy evaluation and issues of quality.

#### INSTRUMENTAL CULTURAL POLICY: PROBLEMATIC IMPLICATIONS

One of the most compelling repercussions of instrumental cultural policies – especially against the background of the increasing reliance on evidence as the basis for public policy-making – is that issues of performance measurement and policy evaluation become of crucial importance. If we refer, once again, to Vestheim's definition of an instrumental cultural policy as an emphasis of arts as a means towards the achievement of a non-specifically artistic or aesthetic objective, then it will be clear that establishing the extent to which the arts are a *successful* means to an end is essential.

The main implication of this instrumental view of cultural policy is, therefore, that the claim that investment in the arts actually *does* produce positive economic or social impacts has to be convincingly proved. Moreover, for the argument to hold - in the context of the current 'audit explosion' and of the importance of evidence to inform policy – it becomes necessary to demonstrate that the arts can, in fact, make a *significant* contribution to the cause of social inclusion or economic development. In fact, the arts must show that they represent the best option for the profitable investment of increasingly limited public resources; they must convince government and citizens/consumers that

they can provide the ultimate goal: value for money. Hence the central role - within instrumental cultural policies - of the evaluation of arts programmes and policies. In particular, the issues of evaluation throws light upon the vexed question of collecting reliable data in order to substantiate the claims that are being made for the arts and the ever growing expectations of their impacts.

Unfortunately, despite the governments' and the funding bodies' claims, such positive beneficial impacts of the British cultural sector over social disadvantage and the economy are far from being proved (Belfiore 2002; Merli 2002). A major problem is represented by the quality of the extant cultural statistics on which cultural policy-making has become growingly reliant. Such statistics are not harmonised (they have been collected at different times and with different methods) and cannot therefore be neither compared nor aggregated (Selwood 2002, 68). In fact, DCMS itself has recently concluded that, with regards to the positive impacts of the arts, "we do not have enough information to judge whether such gains are enough or are efficiently and effectively gained" (DCMS 2002, *Evidence on Cultural/Creative/Sporting Effects*. Unpublished document quoted by Selwood 2002b, 19). Moreover, a report commissioned in 2001 by the Local Government Association reached a similar conclusion: "[t]he absence of certain types of basic information indicates a widespread lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation, which limits the ability of cultural services to define precisely the nature of their contribution to the new policy agendas and to manage for the



achievement of claimed outcomes. It is increasingly important to define precisely the desired *outcomes* of cultural services and assess the extent to which they have been achieved” (Coalter 2001, 1).

Extant evidence is simply not sufficient to justify public expenditure in the arts solely – or mainly – on the grounds of their impacts in the social and economic sphere, and methodologies on which the evidence collection is based are rather dubious. Criticism has been moved against methods for evaluating the social impacts of arts programmes, and the quality of the ‘evidence’ produced has been criticized for being anecdotal and unsupported by adequate systems of data collection (with the result of making comparisons over time impossible) (Belfiore 2002; Merli 2002, Selwood 2002a). Similar arguments have been made against the alleged economic impacts of the creative sector (Hansen 1995; van Puffelen 1996, Belfiore 2003)<sup>102</sup>. Arguably then - skimmed of the rhetoric that hides vested interests - the instrumental notion of arts and culture seem to provide a rather weak justification for public support of the arts.

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<sup>102</sup> Similar arguments have also been made with regards to the creative industries. James Heartfield, for instance, in a pamphlet meaningfully entitled *Great Expectations: The Creative Industries in the New Economy*, argues that the creative industries are far from being the amazingly productive sector that they are claimed to be in the government's official rhetoric. Indeed, he cites an EU survey, carried out in 1999, according to which Britain performs above average in manufacturing innovation but lags behind with regards to innovation in the service sector (a bizarre result for what claims to be a ‘creative economy’). He therefore explains the strong emphasis placed by the government on the cultural industries with its intention to re-brand the UK as ‘cool Britannia’, in an attempt to cover up, with a clever design solution, the political problems that it was unable (or unwilling) to solve. Ultimately, he believes that “the great expectations that individuals, companies and governments invest in the creative industries cannot be met. These expectations are not related to the real potentialities of creative work, but to the fantasies of those who hold them” (Heartfield 2000, 27). This last consideration is very important in so far as it throws light on the crucial problem of the politicisation undergone by the process of data collection. This has resulted in a blurring of the boundary between research and advocacy on the part of both government and cultural organizations recipient of public funding.

## DEFINITIONS OF QUALITY

The last section of this chapter aims to tackle problems of 'quality'. How can we define quality in the cultural sector in the context of instrumental cultural policies?

There are two possible alternative ways of defining quality relatively to the subsidized cultural sector. Firstly, aesthetic quality can be defined according to criteria of aesthetic value, a position exemplified, in Britain, by the Arts Council's belief in the promotion of "excellence" in the arts.<sup>103</sup> Notions of quality and artistic excellence have in fact never been explicitly codified by the Arts Council, although those working within it seem to base their activities and decisions concerning fund allocations on some understood and shared notion of excellence and quality within the arts, and share the belief that judgement of artistic quality are central to the Council's work. In Clive Gray's words, "there is no doubt that the ACs [Arts Councils] and DCMS are the dominant organisational forms within the network for the arts and, as such, must serve as the focus for discerning which values are dominant within the system" (Gray 2000, 98).

Although a discussion of the evolution of conceptions of culture and aesthetic values promoted by the Arts Council is beyond the scope of the present chapter, it seems legitimate to maintain that notions of aesthetic values and quality beheld by decision-makers within the Arts Council

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<sup>103</sup> 'Excellence' together with 'access' has been the guiding principles of the Arts Council of England since its very inception in the aftermath of WWII (see Belfiore 2002; Hewison 1995).



have historically tended to coincide with traditional cultural values. This might be explained by the very social composition and cultural background of key people within the organisation. In the words of Hugh Jenkins, “[t]he Council is a group assembled by a series of chances, a collection of random choices made by a very tiny and ingrown electorate advised by the Council’s own bureaucracy and finally approved by a Secretary of State or Prime Minister who knows little about the people concerned and naturally opts for what he is told is safe, which means the arts establishments” (Jenkins quoted in Hewison 1995, 176; see also Williams 1979). Indeed, over time, accusations have regularly been made against the Arts Council, its recruitment practices, and its criteria for grant allocations of representing something of a patronage system instrumental to a self-indulging cultural elite (see for instance Hewison 1995; Jenkins 1979). According to Clive Gray (2002, 78), the adoption of the ‘arm’s length principle’ with regards to public arts funding “has generated the creation of a set of policy oligarchies within the state-supported arts sector in Britain that have considerable power to influence the manner in which policy is both created and implemented”. Jenkins himself, recounting his experience of working within the Arts Council, explains how he became increasingly frustrated as he attempted to “loosen the grip of the snobocracy on the arts scene” (Jenkins quoted in Hewison 1995, 177). Things seems to have slightly changed, at least at the level of rhetoric, as shown by this passage from the 1992 Arts Council’s discussion paper *Towards a National Arts & Media Strategy*: “One of our key responsibilities is to make judgements about the allocation of scarce



resources. The concept of quality is central to the making of such judgements, and we believe that it should be central to all those who work in the arts. But the concept is not associated solely with particular art forms, and we entirely repudiate the idea that some forms are of themselves superior or inferior to others” (ACGB 1992). Notions of what constitute the arts might have changed over time, but there is no doubt that the conception of artistic quality as a primary criteria for grant allocation has been a consistent feature of the Arts Council’s code of practice throughout its existence.

Secondly, quality can also be defined according to principles of quality in public service provision as they have been elaborated in the rhetoric of the New Public Management. In this framework, the meaning of quality in the public sector relates directly to concepts of effectiveness, performance measurement and, ultimately, the provision of ‘value for money’.

It is evident that there is a tension between these two competitive notions of quality, and the friction this causes can be clearly seen at work within the Arts Council England (ACE). When ACE defines as one of its aims the financing of arts projects characterized by high quality, does it refer to projects and programmes that are successful in reaching the expected standards of quality artistically, socially, or economically? It is clear that it could easily happen that such notions of quality and success might ultimately be incompatible and therefore might not successfully co-exist.

In case of conflict, which one of the two notions of quality should prevail? A typical example of this kind of difficulty might be provided by the case of those cultural projects that are targeted at disadvantaged and 'socially excluded' communities, where often the participants have little or no previous experience of the arts. Despite the formal recognition, on the part of the arts 'establishment', of the intrinsic value of participatory arts in the community, quality is still a bone of contention between the national funding bodies (such as ACE) and community arts groups. The former, as discussed above, base their criteria for subsidy on principles of artistic quality and excellence in the arts. On the other hand, community arts groups place more emphasis and value on participation in the artistic process (because of its alleged empowering effects) rather than on the artistic product itself (Webster 1997, 1-2). Should community arts projects with a social aim be evaluated on the grounds of the same criteria of 'excellence' and 'quality' that inform ACE's relationship with its traditional client organizations or should they rather be assessed merely on the grounds of their positive effects on the participants, with little concern for their artistic merit?

Things are further complicated by a clear ambiguity (or, possibly, hypocrisy?) in ACE's position: on the one hand its policy documents are imbued with the rhetoric of social inclusion that is so dear to the government. On the other hand, a quick glance at actual funding statistics reveal that the share of available funds devoted to community or specifically inclusive arts is in no way proportionate to the rhetorical

emphasis they receive. It would seem that while preaching in favour of socially inclusive arts and on the importance of participation, ACE still holds on to aesthetic criteria that can sometimes be incompatible with those values (Belfiore 2002, 100-101).

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the arguments presented by this chapter, it seems possible to conclude that there are many possible ways to provide explanations for the clear tendency displayed by the British government to justify public involvement and support of the arts in instrumental terms. Public arts funding and encouragement of the arts have been justified on the basis of economic arguments and references to their contribution to preserving social order since Victorian times – that is, since they were first officially admitted into the sphere of public policy. Instrumental cultural policy is, therefore, not a novel phenomenon. Its most recent evolution - from the 1980s to present - might be accounted for by the erosion of the legitimacy of traditional notions of culture (largely founded on the Eurocentric, white, male and fundamentally exclusionary aesthetic canons of Western civilization) at the hand of postmodern cultural relativism. However, the recent evolution of cultural policy can also be seen as one specific area where broader changes in public management style and policy-making are reflected. Whatever the point of perspective one decides to choose, it is obvious that instrumental cultural policies force the arts sector to face a number of troublesome questions, some of which we have just looked at. These problematical issues can be



reduced to the difficulty, in the contemporary world, to justify public arts spending (and consequently the need for a body like the Arts Council to even exist) independently of instrumental arguments. Justin Lewis (1990, 1) has described these circumstances very well:

[w]e live in an era of priorities, not ideals. Under any form of government, there is not enough public money available to fund everything worthy of support. Money spent on art and culture needs, like everything else, to be justified against other areas of public subsidy... Without a substantial increase in all forms of public spending, it is socially irresponsible to spend money on arts and culture if it cannot be rigorously justified.

Since the chances of a 'substantial increase' in public spending across all sectors seem today rather slim, the arts world is left with the need to make its own case in favour of public arts funding convincingly. Regrettably, the way out of the justification *impasse* that the arts have chosen, or have been forced to follow, has been to 'attach' themselves to other policy spheres that carry a heftier political weight. As a result, arts organisations have increasingly endeavoured to highlight the contribution they can make to the national and local economy and to a more harmonic and integrated society as a sensible reason for the state to support the arts. This has put the arts in a very awkward position indeed. On the one hand if – as it seems the case – the arts cannot provide convincing evidence of their impacts, the argument automatically breaks down. If, on the other hand, the arts should become able to substantiate the public utility argument, the consequence of this on the future of the arts might not be necessarily positive. Indeed, if we took the instrumental argument

to its most extreme, yet intrinsically logical, consequences, then there would be no point in having a cultural policy at all, for its functions might be carried out just as well by economic and social services departments. In this perspective, arts provision could be easily absorbed within existing economic and social policies.

Significantly, government itself has recently come to acknowledge the tension between 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' values that dominates the public debate over arts funding in Britain. So, in 2003, Estelle Morris, then Minister for the Arts, speaking at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature, confessed:

I know that Arts and Culture make a contribution to health, to education, to crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being but I don't always know how to evaluate it or describe it. We have to find a language and a way of describing its worth. It's the only way we'll secure the greater support we need.

A year later, Tessa Jowell, caused a general stir when she published a personal essay entitled *Government and the Value of Culture*, where she made what many felt to be a startling indictment of the politicians' reliance on instrumental arguments to justify public spending on the arts<sup>104</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> In Jowell's (2004, 8) own words: "Too often politicians have been forced to debate culture in terms only of its instrumental benefits to other agendas – education, the reduction of crime, improvements in wellbeing – explaining – or in some instances almost apologising for – our investment in culture only in terms of something else. In political and public discourse in this country we have avoided the more difficult approach of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself. There is another story to tell on culture and it's up to politicians in my position to give a lead in changing the atmosphere, and changing the terms of debate".



The paper was hailed in the media as a sign of support for 'art for art's sake' (Fenton 2004). And yet, Jowell's essay is far from being a coherent call for the adoption of the so-called 'art for art's sake' principle as the guiding rationale for British cultural policy. As a matter of fact, Jowell's essay, with its inconsistencies and contradictions, is a typical representation of the stumbling block the cultural policy debate is presently facing. For, together with the emphasis on the need for 'improved access to culture *for what it does in itself*' (page 8; emphasis in the original) and for an understanding of culture 'on its own terms' (page 13), a number of residual instrumentalist concepts still find their way into Jowell's argument<sup>105</sup>, and her language is still very much inscribed into the post-1980s rhetoric of the public 'investment' on the arts (as opposed to the old-fashioned and now supplanted notion of 'subsidy'): "By accepting culture is an important investment in personal social capital we begin to justify that investment on culture's own terms" (*Ibid.*, 16)<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> David Edgar's (2004) comments that "Jowell edges uncomfortably close to a new social mission for the arts when she argues that culture has an additional part to play 'in defining and preserving our cultural identity – of the individual, of communities, and of the nation as a whole'".

<sup>106</sup> Jowell's essay is also fraught with internal contradictions, and it is ultimately far from being a repudiation of instrumentalism in cultural funding and policy. One the one and, as we have seen, Jowell argues for a change of language amongst all parties involved in cultural policy-making and arts administration, in order to find ways to express the 'intrinsic' value of the arts. On the other, Jowell herself cannot seem to avoid the reliance on many of the usual 'instrumental' arguments for arts advocacy. Jowell (2004, 8) openly admits: "We lack convincing language and political arguments for how culture lies at the heart of a healthy society" and, as was noted above, she seems to condemn the excesses of the prevailing instrumentalism in current cultural policy-making. However, Jowell (*Ibid.*,3) also claims that one of the main tasks of government in today's society is to eliminate "the poverty of aspiration which compromises all our attempts to lift people out of physical poverty. Engagement with culture can help alleviate this poverty of aspiration". On page 15 she adds: "Addressing poverty of aspiration is also necessary to build a society of fairness and opportunities". I would suggest that this final statement brings us back full circle, for, if the arts can and should



In her essay, however, Tessa Jowell does indeed put forward an important observation. She fundamentally agrees with the view of Estelle Morris cited above when she says:

We lack convincing language and political arguments for how culture lies at the heart of a healthy society. This might be a peculiarly British thing, and it might be part of a reaction on the one hand against the totalitarian regimes of the past who have tried to enrol culture as a tool of political oppression. On the other hand it might stem from a national distrust of intellectuals.

In other words, Jowell here raises the question of how to develop a case for the arts that is able to sidestep the sterile dichotomy between 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' values that seem to prevail at the moment. She also makes it clear (as Morris also did) that facing up to this challenge requires the construction of a new language that can articulate what the arts do 'for themselves' – in other words, how they affect people and societies and, thus, their place and role in today's society. However, it is interesting to observe that the notion of 'complex culture' - which Jowell herself puts forward as an antidote to simplistic and instrumental views of the arts prevalent today – though often referred to in the essay (nine times in eighteen pages, to be precise) is in fact never defined. This makes one wonder to what extent a simple change in language (or, rather, jargon) can really effect a significant shift in the cultural policy discourse - and ultimately policy - if it is not substantiated by a critical

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address poverty of aspiration (as ostensibly Jowell is arguing), and addressing poverty of aspiration can bring about a just society, then the arts are entrusted with the task of bringing about the conditions for such a "society of fairness and opportunities" to exist. In other words, we are back to valuing the arts for the benefits they accrue to society and, in effect, to an instrumental rationale for cultural policy-making.

exploration and understanding of what lies behind formulas and buzzwords.

In conclusion, there seems to be a fairly good chance that instrumental cultural policies, which started off as 'policies of survival' attempting to put forward a stronger case in favour of arts subsidy, might in fact turn out to be 'politics of extinction', and further undermine the legitimacy of the arts sectors' claims over the public purse. An altogether healthier exercise for the arts sector would probably have been the attempt to elaborate a definition of what makes the arts *intrinsically* valuable to society - the definition of their 'unique selling point', as marketing would have it. So far, all the arts have achieved is to generate ever-growing expectations which they are, quite simply, unable to meet.