



## CHAPTER 1

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# Reflecting on Place and the Local

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### WHY WORRY ABOUT ‘THE LOCAL’ IN RELATION TO CULTURAL POLICY?

In common with other texts on cultural policy, this book provides a call to action to all those interested in how the arts, culture and creative practices are governed and promoted, regulated, resourced and valued. Our

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particular proposition is the urgent need for greater understanding on the role of place within these processes and for critical reflection on the contingent nature of policy with locality. This might be a somewhat bold request given the predominant focus in academic publications on cultural policies as the preserve of the national, and the forces that challenge them as inter-, trans- and supranational (Durrer et al., 2018). However, we make this call at a time when there has been a re-focus on ‘the local’—in its varied forms—in much policy discourse.

There is a growing policy interest globally in addressing long-standing divisions, inequities and inequalities within, as well as between, nations. Supranational and national policies are called upon to remove structural inequalities between towns and cities, the rural and the urban, or to challenge geographic disparities between regions through targeted interventions or by rebalancing investment. Inequalities between places are highlighted by the inclusion of sustainable cities and communities as one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015); in the UK a “levelling up” agenda aims to target the distribution of funding to address the sharp economic and productivity disparity across the nation (DLUHC, 2022). There are similar concerns elsewhere in the Global Northwest, even in federal countries such as Canada (Paquette, 2019), and in small nations such as Ireland (Arts Council Ireland, 2022). Within the Global South, smart cities and ‘start-up urbanism’ are dominating policy agendas in African nations, bringing together statecraft with capitalist interests (Pollio & Cirolia, 2022) alongside accusations of financialised neo-colonialism (Langley & Leyshon, 2022). Meanwhile, what constitutes the ideal scale for government intervention through which to sustain development and support equity of life chances is under scrutiny, with the idea of a ‘20-minute neighbourhood’ or ‘15-minute city’ gaining traction within planning practices in cities such as Melbourne and Adelaide (Thornton et al., 2022).

Academic interest in place-based approaches has examined such attempts to foster conditions in which places might thrive, including the role of cultural and creative industries in local development. Within the literature on place-making, place-branding and culture-led regeneration are both advocates and critics of the use of arts and creative industries, and models from creative cities (e.g. Evans, 2001; Landry, 2000, 2008) and creative classes (e.g. Florida, 2002, 2017; Peck, 2005) to cultural quarters (e.g. Bell & Jayne, 2004), flagships, designated titles and mega-events (e.g. Campbell & O’Brien, 2019; Garcia, 2017). It is no accident that

many of these approaches, and their theorisation and analysis, has come from the Global North, and have been mobilised and assembled elsewhere through policy transfer (Prince, 2010). For such approaches to be effective, it is important to understand why it is that some places seem to have more sustainable, vibrant and valued cultural scenes, ecosystems and economies and how these have come about. To do so we need to be able to assess how differences at the level of specific localities affect the functioning of policy and in turn how policy affects specific localities differently. In editing this book we therefore consider place and the local as separate but related concepts and sought out authors who could offer an examination of cultural policy in practice with a sensitivity to its scalar dimensions and within specific situated contexts. We also looked explicitly for a range of disciplinary contributions that might offer distinctive insights and tools through which to understand the situated practices of policy in place.

While the chapters were all written before the coronavirus pandemic, this is a particularly timely discussion as a re-focus on ‘the local’ has been further enhanced by lockdowns and travel restrictions, which saw people confined to their immediate locality in a manner that many people may never have experienced before. These restrictions put further attention on the proximate and the domestic, as the world spent more time at home and in places to which they could walk or more immediately access. While there is evidence to suggest arts audiences and participants have always valued opportunities to take part locally (see Jancovich & Hansen, 2018, Jancovich, 2018) a return to the local became more entrenched during Covid as arts experiences had to either move online or closer to home. Some cultural organisations made a rapid response by reflecting on their civic responsibilities during lockdown; other organisations and artists made a “pivot to digital” and reached out beyond their local audiences (Noehrer et al., 2021). Digital engagement was not universally possible, exposing weaknesses and limitations within local and national cultural infrastructures and highlighting a continuing digital divide (Dragičević Šešić & Stefanović, 2021; Sibanda & Moyo, 2022; Yıldırım et al., 2022). The parts of the creative and cultural sector where there is a reliance on social interaction, co-presence, and real-time experiences through live presentation of art and creativity in open venues, were particularly affected by Covid and found it more difficult to adapt. Restrictions had particularly detrimental effects in places where a prior reliance on visitor economies for the business models of cultural destinations and venues has put the financial sustainability of these organisations at risk (Walmsley et al., 2022).

At the same time, the pandemic underlined an implicit system for valuing different aspects of society, pitting different industries and sectors and their workers against one another amidst employment insecurity and structural inequalities. Within the professional cultural sector this was particularly the case for those freelancers working outside of institutions. The closing of venues impacted the livelihoods of arts workers maintained through arts production, consumption and participation made available on and off-line (Jeannotte, 2021). It also further underlined longstanding geopolitically informed inequities at both at an international level as well as those spatial and social divides existing within nations, raising further awareness of the precarity of our efforts to promote the Sustainable Development Goals. To “build back better” we therefore need to avoid the tendency to create best practice models that are replicated between places through a process of policy transfer or diffusion (Marsh & Sharman, 2009) and instead develop a better understanding of the different needs and values in different local contexts.

This position is not just an ethical stance but also a practical one, which we argue the cultural sector needs to embrace in order to have any relevance. As people, places and organisations attempt to reimagine a “new normal” post pandemic there are questions about how all those involved in the development and implementation of cultural policy should deal with both the crisis in the cultural sector and the inequalities and inequities that have been made further visible between different locations. To do so requires acknowledgement that arts and cultural policies can act as means to enhance recovery of places but can also exacerbate inequalities. There remains very limited examination in cultural policy studies of how this plays out within different locations and sites (Simjanovska, 2011; Gilmore et al., 2019) or indeed how place-based policy can be used to support recovery of local cultural ecosystems with fairer, more accessible and equally distributed resources for creative production, consumption and participation.

Despite apparent recognition that a) the practices of culture are always situated (and hence local) (Gilmore, 2013; Gibson, 2019), and b) policy is embodied, temporal, territorial, spatial and scalar (Bell & Oakley, 2015; Paasi, 2004), contemporary cultural policy research tends to privilege the national or international as the primary site at which cultural policy is enacted and thus, can be reformed (Durrer et al., 2018). Within cultural policy studies, a place typically serves to represent a form of “case study”, often presented as an example of best practice that may be replicable in

other locations, rather than a topic of study in its own right. We argue instead that it is becoming more urgent to understand the organisation of culture at a local level and the implications of different approaches in different locales to consider the efficacy of cultural place-making as a way to address the persistent inequalities and inequities that exist between different locations. In light of this, a re-appraisal of ‘the local’ in relation to cultural policy is, we argue, long overdue.

We began to address this gap pre-pandemic in a journal special edition that challenged one-size-fits-all approaches to policymaking and instead called attention to “the importance of viewing policymaking as a horizontal, dynamic and relational process involving multiple agents, with different perspectives, areas of skill, knowledge and interests” (Gilmore et al., 2019, p. 1). However, trying to identify and define local cultural policy in practice seems unreasonably hard. Like magnets reversed so that their poles push against each other, the notion of local forms of policy specific to culture (or indeed, cultural forms of policy specific to localities) conjures up more questions than satisfactory answers.

This book offers an opportunity to reflect on these questions, and sets the challenge of whether it is even possible to have non-local cultural policy. Before rushing to a conclusion—which after all is hinted at in the title of this volume—this introduction aims to summarise some of the ways both place and ‘the local’ have been conceptualised. In doing so we seek to address what we see as a critical absence in the field of cultural policy studies and thus the contribution of the chapters in this book.

### CONCEPTUALISING THE LOCAL

As stated above, engaging with both place and ‘the local’ has become an important part of cultural policy rhetoric in many countries, from the resurgence of city-regional governance models to calls for new forms of “localism” involving participatory governance approaches (UCLG, 2019; UNESCO, 2013) intended to engender more active citizenship and to help people feel more empowered regarding the decisions that affect them (Fung & Wright, 2003). One of the dominant discourses about ‘place’ in the academic field of cultural policy studies draws on conceptualisations of creativity (Campbell, 2018) and creative class theory (Florida, 2002) that see culture and creativity as drivers for economic growth and regeneration (García, 2004; Montgomery, 2004). Cultural policymakers have been keen to align themselves to such theories and attempt to put theory into

practice by employing cultural industries strategies to address wider industrial decline. In so doing, culture and place are seen as inextricably linked. However, within wider public policy such economic approaches have been increasingly problematised for creating competition between places that increases, rather than decreasing inequality (Campbell, 2018; Florida, 2017; Pratt, 2008, 2011). Far from cultural policy addressing inequalities in places it has been accused of gentrifying them (Pratt, 2018) and being complicit in a process of ‘artwashing’ that pushes out or silences other voices and values (Pritchard, 2020).

Furthermore, such conceptualisations are largely dominated by a focus on the creative city model (Whiting et al., 2022), not only in cultural policy studies, but in the formation of policy as well (UCLG, 2019). Approaches that “work” (or not) in urban areas have been unhelpfully applied (or tried) in other types of locality, for example, towns, and suburban and rural areas (Bain, 2013; Bell & Jayne, 2010). The European Capital of Culture, for example, has begun to shift its focus from cities to regions of culture in the hope of spreading the perceived benefits more widely (Jancovich, 2018). Yet, despite concerns raised in academic literature that such moves ignore contexts and our own call for more situated analysis to better understand these processes in practice, the transfer of creative industries policy on a global scale still informs the main approaches to culture- and knowledge-based economic development for addressing industry development and the globalisation of labour. At its most extreme, in the case of China this has seen a political decision to shift emphasis from industrial development reliant on global supply chains towards cultural development that focuses on innovation, intellectual property and knowledge economy, in a shift from “made in China to created by China” (Liu, 2016).

Depending on their approach, national interventions can exacerbate existing socio-economic inequities between places. Allocation of national investment on a competitive basis requires criteria for eligibility and existing capabilities in making the case for support. While such allocations facilitate ways in which national government bodies and agencies can interact with a specific place, many places do not have the infrastructure to broker such local to national relationships or win resources (Gilmore et al., 2021). Competitive allocation privileges those with this capacity, and hence is likely to reproduce, if not widen, inequalities. Funding approaches favour capital investment as part of broader regeneration as it can meet the metrics of economic development objectives and prove legible to other

policy agendas. Such approaches often follow a national notion of “what works” rather than a place-based, situated analysis of what is needed or wanted at any given place. This can lead to what could be understood as a form of “isomorphism” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) with projects and policies that are uniquely ‘local’ to nowhere. They risk investing in infrastructure—flagship buildings, incubation hubs, educational facilities and cultural quarters—without due consideration to sustainability within locations. Furthermore, they do not take into account the mobility of cultural workers or the complexity of their lived experiences, and how their mobility (or stasis) can impact and transform notions of what is local and what is national (Durrer & Henze, 2020).

For these and other reasons, we argue the case for decoupling policy from ‘the national’ whilst recognising the significance of the local. In practice, cultural policy is carried forward (or not) through local infrastructures, social groups and structures, and strategies, which act as boundary objects (Gilmore & Bulaitis, this volume), translating policy discourses across diverse geographies with distinct political, socio-economic and ethno-cultural and historical identities, including, but not limited to, city-regions, districts, seaside resorts, territories, archipelagos, suburban enclaves and rural hinterlands. Following Prince (2010), for policy transfer and realisation to occur it requires policy assemblages that work within the specific “political contexts, cultural and social norms, local path dependencies, and institutional variation” (p. 171), requiring adequate technical knowledge to bring policies into land. These assemblages are needed to implement policies in place, and their success or failure will also depend on the presence of epistemic communities (Haas, 1992), of local and national state actors, funding officers, entrepreneurs and corporate, cultural and community leaders who are part of the mix. The challenge for policymakers is that statecraft at a national level inherently has an idea of culture that it tries to curate from the top down, in tension with the competing needs, interests and discourses hoping to develop culture from the ground up. In reality, the local provides the sites for assemblage, in which different trajectories, capacities and approaches can interact—and so it is also the site at which there is most contestation over questions of what culture is valued and resourced.

Localism, as an alternative conceptualisation to that of place, addresses the significance of the local context to the everyday lives, health and well-being of citizens. It shifts attention from the provision of physical infrastructure to a people and place-based approach often concerned with

building capacity, focusing on assets rather than deficits and collaboration from the bottom up (Munro, 2018). It also highlights the fallibility of development approaches that are growth-dependent economic models (van Barneveld et al., 2020). Within public policy and development studies these critiques have led to a discourse about the local, as something distinct from place, which recognises the unique and non-replicable nature of what may be happening within different contexts, which we argue in this book is essential for cultural policy studies.

Policy approaches that adopt the localism agenda can often seek to fill what is perceived as a gap within a location. Rather than seeking to invest in specific, pre-determined aims, such approaches provide resources with little to no preconditions and allow ‘the local’ to create its own governance models and engage with ‘the national’ if, when and how they want to. While a top-down approach to local development often assumes a one-size-fits-all replicable model between places, the localism agenda frames ‘the local’ as the most authentic and legitimate site of decision-making. Yet specifically in relation to cultural policy, there are those who argue that it is not possible for national policymakers to offer resources in every place let alone to attempt to understand and respond to what every place wants to do culturally. As such, there is an inevitable drift towards supporting local culture that most readily aligns with a national conception of what ‘good’ culture looks like. In such cases, localism becomes a mode of governance that has little to differentiate it from previous approaches.

Furthermore, critics of the localism agenda argue that such approaches have a “tendency to essentialise and romanticise the local” (Mohan & Stokke, 2000, p. 249) and risk ignoring the complex, contingent and contested nature of decision-making processes. In particular, there are concerns that without consideration of relations of power that may exist locally, localism offers privileged backstage access to decision-making within localities to exclusive groups. Connotations associated with ‘the local’—both positive and romantic, but also negative signifying mediocrity and provincialism—can mask important ways in which political and ideological values are attached to policy instruments that aim to reform and govern localities in ways that align with national priorities but which the people who live there have not asked for and may not want. In this sense, the concept of localism is used by policymakers as a way to render policy transfer more manageable and legitimate for national policy agencies by co-opting local systems of governance as ‘partners’. As such, more acutely calibrated attention is needed to articulate the relations of power



and the locus of political agency that shapes and defines how ‘the local’ is defined. In addition, any place getting taken into the sphere of policymakers as a site at which ‘the national’ can work can become defined as local *relatively*, by being positioned/positioning itself in relation to a larger and more distant place. Hence, regions can be local if they are framed in opposition to the national government, or the capital city. Towns can be local when they are framed in opposition to regions and regional authorities. Neighbourhoods can be local when they are framed in opposition to district councils, and so on. This capacity for places to be simultaneously ‘local’ and ‘non-local’ depending on the vantage point draws attention to the importance of discussions about who makes decisions on behalf of each location under the auspices of ‘being local’.

The explicit need to take the local into account in any way is challenged by theories from new economic geography that emphasise the need to improve connectivity and mobility of production and capital between regional economies for development (Mel’nikova, 2015). Such theories call for “place neutral” or “spatially-blind” approaches to address global challenges. They emphasise the interdependence of local and global living, and that people are mobile and not bounded by the place they live at any given time. They make the assumption that the similar policy solutions can be delivered more efficiently through tried and tested models for three ‘i’s—institutions, infrastructure and interventions, which are space-blind and have consciously removed the nuances of space and place context (Barca et al., 2012).

The othering of the local, and its conscious removal from policy design, run counter to the case made above for the agency of the local, its importance as a site for establishing sensitivity to context and its potential for democracy, through the devolution and decentralisation of power and decision-making, affording governance to place. This could be considered a driving motivation for denying place in policy. Place-based approaches and the localism agenda are seen as part of the same problem in policy-making whereby places are at best understood in isolation and at worst required to compete to be seen as most deserving (on the basis of existing strengths) or in need (on the basis of limits of capacity) of the resources available. Places are required to align ‘local’ priorities to national agendas to gain access to resources, pre-determined measures of what makes a deserving case for strategic investment, and what constitutes need.

This short summary has shown how conceptions of ‘the local’ in policy can vary significantly and as such we argue that greater consideration is

needed regarding the structures, procedures, processes and capacities enacted whenever cultural policy seeks to govern ‘the local’. This requires an examination of the process of situating ‘the local’ as it occurs in policy-making as well as what happens in ‘the local’ as a result or even despite that positioning. Our concern in this book therefore is what happens to places once they are labelled as ‘local’ in cultural policy. To answer this question we want to move beyond economic geography, and consider different disciplinary contributions to the meaning and interpretation of ‘the local’, to recognise its importance, the policy implications of its use and the practices of enacting ‘local’ cultural policies.

### BOOK STRUCTURE

Our book is structured around three themes highlighted above: disciplining the local, through examination of particular understandings of the key concepts from different academic fields of study; managing the local, through examination of policy approaches that engage with the idea of ‘the local’ in different ways; and practising the local, through case studies of how ‘local’ cultural policies are being enacted in places of differing scale and geography.

The contributors to this volume collectively bring different ontological and epistemological frames that shape our understanding of ‘the local’, its position and agency within policymaking and the tensions that emerge as a result for people and places. In so doing they situate ‘the local’ as both a source and lens for cultural policy by allowing us to consider the following overarching questions:

How are places understood as ‘local’, and in what ways are local places ‘made’ through cultural policy?

What tensions emerge as a result amongst the ontologies and scales of policymaking (e.g. national, local, international, centralised, participatory)?

How do cultural policy practices mediate and translate international and national policy discourses to encourage their adoption at a sub-national level?

How do localities resist, adapt and reform this translation in situ? What forms of policy assemblage are created and what and who do they involve?

## PART I: DISCIPLINING THE LOCAL

As acknowledged above, this book makes an implicit critique of cultural policy studies by highlighting an area we feel is long overlooked within the field, and inviting contemplation of new research from other fields, which concerns situated cultural policy practices that have something to offer in addressing this gap. With this in mind, we searched for contributors who could cast a wider conceptual net in consideration of the objects and agents of policy, spatial dimensions and classifications, and geographical and cultural context, to provide a multi-dimensional, multi-scale understanding of the discourses and practices of cultural policy as it relates to the local.

The methodology of the book draws on contributions from a multidisciplinary field of scholars, inviting specific domains of knowledge to engage with the interactions between policy, culture and place. In planning the book we considered what it was that commonly held cultural policy scholars back from presenting local cultural policy as a legitimate area of study, and where we might find work that helps make its significance less abstract.

Cultural, human and economic geographers routinely examine what happens in the local, and define how geographies and spatialities are classified, understood and administered by social, cultural, economic and political forces. Some adopt the position of outside observer in order to comment on their own field, as Paasi does when he takes on the concept of ‘the region’, the resurgence of a “new regionalism” (2011, p. 10) and its ties to questions of identity and ideology. We therefore thought it would be essential to engage with geographers to bring conceptual clarity to epistemological questions about specific spatial categories and think about whether cultural policy could exist outside of ‘the local’, or at least in non-local forms.

Similarly, we wanted to get insights from political scientists who could explore the influence of the idea of ‘the local’ on democracy and participation, and offer insights into the role of arts and culture in governance processes with more neutrality than those who align themselves to cultural policy studies. In our own work the editors of this book have drawn much from the field of political science and policy studies to explore the relations of power within cultural policymaking and to consider different claims about how these might be shifted. Similarly much of the localism agenda itself builds on work regarding “deliberative democracy” (Dryzek & List,

2003) and “participatory governance” (Fischer, 2006) which it has been argued is most effective when employed at a local rather than a national policy level. We therefore argue that a greater understanding of and affinity with the theories of political science would help cultural policy scholars enrich the field of investigation.

But clearly in any book on policy we also wanted theoretical perspectives that could explain how values are ascribed onto the idea of ‘the local’ and become legitimated within the situated interactions between different policy and non-policy actors, and across different spatial levels. For this we turned to a specific cultural sector—heritage—which places, perhaps more than any other cultural province, very special significance on the value of ‘the national’ when making decisions about what should be protected and promoted. In so doing we wanted to look in detail at the contested discourses about both meanings of policy and place for different actors.

The first part of this book therefore offers a trio of perspectives from these different disciplinary contexts: politics, geography and heritage.

The first contribution is from Mark Evans of the University of Canberra, Australia. His chapter, *Bridging the Trust Divide: Understanding the Role of ‘Localism’ and ‘the Local’ in Cultural Policy*, offers a critical reflection on the theory and practice of localism that has been developed in the disciplines of public policy and human geography. Evans identifies public value governance as a site of common ground but highlights that in order for it to be successful at a local level, it needs to be used as a tool for enhancing participation in democratic governance and with a focus on how ‘local’ social issues are understood by those they affect. The chapter goes on to consider how cultural institutions can support public value governance at the local level concluding that in order for them to do so they must be “expert, inclusive, and representative of the communities they serve” (p.?).

In the second chapter, David Bell and Lourdes Orozco from the University of Leeds, England, illustrate the complexity of the geography of cultural policy. They bring perspectives from human geography to the study of local cultural policy, drawing particular attention to spatial scale and the scale of ‘the local’ within cultural policy’s geographies. Through the use of a case study on the Donut Pilot Project in Leeds, England, they argue that cultural policy is translocal, describing this as a more dispersed, networked view of the local where local cultural policy is dependent upon multi-scalar and multi-local relations and connections and often embodied in the lives of residents.

The final chapter in Part I is by Helen Graham, also from the University of Leeds, England. This chapter considers the ontological space of heritage policy in terms of its scalability, the visibility (or otherwise) of what is deemed significant and valuable, and the distinct political ontologies relating to, and revealed by, examination of ‘the local’. Graham claims policy as method rather than as document, drawing on Callon and Latour’s (1981) notion of the black box as hiding the terms through which national heritage significance is designated (and providing a platform for dominant and legitimating narratives to stand upon), and Donna Haraway’s (Haraway, 1988) ‘situated knowledges’ as a corrective to show how policy is *always* explicitly localised ontologically. She builds the case for this argument by discussing the disputes that played out around a new visitor centre for Clifford’s Tower, a motte which was once part of a castle in York, northern England.

There are of course other ‘single discipline’ areas that have much to offer this project, from literature, linguistics and history to creative writing, art history and musicology. These disciplines bring insight into the historical and contemporary making of (sense of) place, place identity and locality, through creative expression and cultural production; however, we felt they lacked perspectives with which to offer conceptual clarity of the political ontologies that drive policy and governance processes. We therefore sought the insights brought by particular disciplinary positions to help establish parameters to this enquiry, and—sticking with an analogy of lenses for closer scrutiny—to sharpen the focus and set the apertures to provide depth of field and vanishing point, rather than simply present a compositional frame. Furthermore, we wanted to offer as diverse a range as possible (within a short edited volume) of case study examples through which to apply this looking, across the two main axes of policy and place. The following parts therefore draw on contributions from other fields of study to look at policy and practice.

## PART II: MANAGING THE LOCAL

While Part I takes us outside the field of cultural policy studies, this second part takes us right back into it. As an academic field it first grew out of cultural studies and a desire for research on culture to be useful to practitioners and policymakers (Bennett, 1992; Scullion & García, 2005). Many cultural policy scholars have had close relationships with both policymakers and the professional cultural sector, for example, contributing to the

evaluation of practice and the measurement of cultural value (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) and economic value of culture (Throsby, 2010). In the study of the relationship of culture and place, cultural policy scholars have identified models for creative city development (Landry, 2000) and approaches to cultural sustainable development (Kangas et al., 2019). This proximity with policy and practice has been criticised for jeopardising the independence of scholars, turning academics from disinterested researchers to advocates (McGuigan, 1996). However, critical cultural policy scholarship has maintained a distanced scrutiny of policymaking processes and environments, exposing the discursive practices surrounding the use and production of evidence (Belfiore, 2022) and instrumental uses of culture as a “policy attachment” (Gray, 2007) beyond aesthetic or expressive domains, to other policy agendas such as place-making, economic development, health and well-being and social change.

Correspondingly, there is a growing number of scholars working outside of arts and humanities, in departments of planning and public policy, sociology, geography and politics who are making valuable contributions to the field of cultural policy studies. As material objects of study, culture policies can be seen as texts, articulating power, interest and distinction, and as processes which are evolved and changing they are experienced and practised (Bell & Oakley, 2015). Methods for policy analysis are therefore informed by this interdisciplinarity, drawing on discourse and content analysis from philosophy, classics, communications studies and cultural studies to present critical reading of policy texts and documents (Nisbett, 2013) and assess the quantitative and qualitative evidence of policy problems, actors and actions that are presented within policy life-cycles (Cairney, 2020).

In seeking out contributors for this section therefore, the editors called for policy reviews that came from different academic fields but used analysis of local cases to examine policymaking processes. Each author in this section considers a different policy initiative in a different geographic context. The examples are drawn from England and America but are not concerned with these geographies per se; rather they aim to highlight the contested nature of policy implementation and draw attention to the relationship between theory, policy and practice at a local level. In so doing each chapter considers different forms of policymaking alongside reflections on the organisation of power through policymaking in order to ask questions about who benefits from a focus on ‘the local’ and how.

Considering cities within the context of the United States, the contribution of Eleonora Redaelli, from the University of Oregon, USA, highlights the importance of examining local government engagement in cultural policy development. Despite the development by several American cities of local cultural plans, there has been very limited critical examination of the goals of these plans. Through her close examination of five cultural plans published between 2011 and 2018 in Chicago, Denver, Dallas, New York and San José, her study highlights common themes and goals emerging within quite different and geographically distant urban contexts, raising new questions regarding policy transfer across different localities and the extent to which these plans can be understood as ‘local’.

The next chapter comes from Bethany Rex from the University of Warwick, England. Titled *Community Management of Local Cultural Assets: Implications for Inequality and Publicness*, the chapter examines the localism agenda, as it has played out in the UK’s policy to support community asset transfers as a means towards ensuring cultural spaces “are more community-responsive and more closely related to local needs” (DCLG, 2007, p. 16). This national policy has seen at least 6325 previously state-owned assets being transferred from local authority to community control (Power to Change, 2019, p. 21) often without ongoing public investment. She asks important questions about the kinds of future asset transfer promises for such spaces within this context and demonstrates through empirical case studies how the approach risks embedding inequality and reducing the ‘publicness’ of public space.

Focused on discursive practices, the final chapter in this part, *Devolved Responsibility: English Regional Creative Industries Policy and Local Industrial Strategies* comes from Zoe Bulaitis of the University of Bristol, England, and Abigail Gilmore of the University of Manchester, England. Using an initiative to pilot Local Industrial Strategies (LIS) in two regions of England as a case study, Bulaitis and Gilmore consider the social relations between cultural and creative industries (CCI) strategies, regional governance structures and national policy agendas concerning place. They argue the Local Industrial Strategies act as boundary objects, mediating ‘the local’ and facilitating interaction between policy actors at different levels of government by promoting symbolic repertoires that align different political interests through a common language, although not necessarily by establishing shared meanings.

## PART III: PRACTISING THE LOCAL

The first two parts examine how ‘the local’ is conceptualised and activated from elsewhere, by different academic disciplines or by national and regional policymakers. The final part of this book provides a microscopic lens on places within which it is played out in practice through policy. The aim here is to move beyond the tendency to use cases to represent places or offer replicable policy models. Rather they are chosen as objects of study in their own right, to examine the range of tensions within policy assemblages operating locally. We take the view that policy is not something simply done to a place by governments and funding bodies, but rather is practised and enacted by anyone with the ability to exert power and influence decision-making within that place. As such the chapters consider policy delivered in as well as policy developed by locales. But we are also cognisant of the fact that local decision-making is subject to discursive power, exclusions and vested interests as it is at a national level. As such, the contributors have been encouraged to think critically about who gets to make policy decisions locally and in particular who gets to define what ‘cultures of place’ are valued. In so doing the chapters problematise questions raised elsewhere in the book, about how power, distinction and culture are negotiated locally. The cases considered come from Australia, Greece, Ireland and South Africa. They examine different policy actors and the relationship between ‘the national’ and ‘the local’. They demonstrate the way ‘local’ culture can be appropriated or romanticised in some cases and in others question who gets to make local cultural policy and how. They consider bottom-up models of policy development and the role of expertise and the state. All of them contribute to our understanding of policymaking as an action or process rather than an aim or outcome.

Olga Kolokytha, from the University of Vienna, Austria, considers the meaning and importance of the rural in local cultural policy in her chapter *Reclaiming Place: Cultural Initiatives in Cretan Villages as Enablers of Citizen Involvement, Local Development and Repopulation*. Kolokytha presents Giortes Rokkas, a cultural event organised by the residents of two small villages on the island of Crete, as a case study that challenges established notions of expert programming and cultural expertise, as well as the role of the state in cultural policy. The chapter shows how the local community has simultaneously fulfilled the roles of policy maker, producer and audience, driven by a desire to secure a sustainable future for their villages built on a distinctive, local, cultural identity.



Victoria Durrer from University College Dublin, Ireland, provides a chapter called *The Public Administration of ‘place’: Labels and Meaning in Local Government Arts Development in the Irish Urban-Fringe*. Durrer explores the effects of cultural policy processes on making and re-ordering places at micro- and meso-levels through a case study of local government activity in Ballyogan, on the outskirts of Dublin city in the Republic of Ireland. The chapter charts how practices of local arts administrators form specific representations of place in Ballyogan through the knowledges acquired and shared during a programme called Exit 15, which was designed to remedy a perceived deficit in participation within this suburban residential estate. Durrer shows how the dominant labels and “place-meanings” for Ballyogan—as cut-off, obscured and disadvantaged by socio-economic deprivation—are challenged by the processes that the arts officers gradually adapt and adopt when delivering policy resulting in a more place-sensitive approach, which may endow new place-meanings to the locality.

*From Streets to Silos: Urban Art Forms in Local Rural Government and the Challenge of Rural Development* by Emily Potter and Katya Johansson, both from Deakin University, Australia, present the Wimmera-Mallee Silo Art Trail in Victoria, Australia, as a case study that highlights the benefits and risks of employing creative place-making as part of a local government-driven desire for rural development. The Silo Art Trail showcases the benefits to communities of collaboration between a rural local council, higher levels of government and private corporations, when it is led by locally generated needs and insights. At the same time, despite the achievements of the Silo Art Trail, a lack of explicit cultural policy and the differing priorities of different policy agencies created tensions between competing priorities. Reflecting on this case offers opportunities to consider the ongoing significance of local government to cultural and economic development and strategies to strengthen its capacity to achieve positive impact, especially in rural contexts.

The final chapter in the book comes from Rike Sitas of the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Sitas reflects on a five-year collaboration between the African Centre for Cities where she is based and the City of Cape Town’s Arts & Culture Branch. Her chapter focuses on what it means to make and do policy locally, on an everyday basis. Revealing considerations of how policy is something that is constructed and negotiated as a daily practice within the context of fiscal restraints (exacerbated by the

Covid-19 pandemic), shifting politics and urban priorities, the study gives pause to think about local cultural policy as an experience and process that is *embodied, emplaced, enacted* and *embedded*.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Collectively, the chapters in this book provide a multi-dimensional, multi-scale understanding of the discourses and practices of cultural policy as it relates to ‘the local’. Some examine how the idea of ‘the local’ brings places into dialogue, conflict or collaboration with ‘the national’, while others consider how a place comes to be labelled as ‘local’ and what this does to our understanding of who makes policy and how. The contributing researchers suggest that focusing on ‘the local’ will help us to understand the diversity and disparate nature of places, which in turn will lead to better policymaking. However, there is also evidence that ‘the local’ remains primarily a rhetorical vehicle through which national policy actors can enact performative processes to legitimise their priorities and help maintain control over very different places.

What appears clear is that ‘the local’ is a floating signifier that is regularly employed in cultural policymaking without a shared conception of what it refers to or why it is important. Being ‘local’ is employed as a proxy for relevance and in turn bestows a form of legitimacy onto policies that are discursively attached to it. However, the labelling of any given place as ‘local’ in a cultural policy context necessitates a process of othering by which alternative locations are seen as ‘less local’. The realpolitik of cultural policy means for top-down rather than federal regimes, only a limited number of places can be supported through the resources from national funding pots, so there is a material incentive for places to claim this label and to do so by questioning the ‘localness’ of other locations.

While in this short edited volume we have attempted to offer a diversity of perspectives on ‘the local’ from across a range of disciplines and localities, the breadth of what remains absent highlights the difficulties in attempting to represent ‘the local’ in all of its forms. Everywhere is local to someone and thus irrespective of the site of its inception, all policy can be understood locally at the point of implementation. Indeed one of the arguments that is made on the back of the contributions in this book is that any analysis of cultural policy that does not consider how it has been understood, implemented, adapted and resisted across different locales will only ever be partial. The absences also serve as a reminder to cultural

policy scholars that our insights on questions of national and international policymaking are heavily informed by what is ‘local’ to us. In turn, the way in which ‘the local’ is imagined within cultural policy studies is skewed towards the places, locations and locales with which those studying cultural policy are most familiar, reproducing perceptions and epistemologies, which reify particular policy models and potentially reproduce inherent spatial inequalities. Conversely, therefore, we argue that by anchoring our understanding of policymaking for culture in the local, we can recognise these biases, to critically inform cultural policies that are both place-sensitive and extra-local.

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