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EDITORIAL

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EDITORIAL

Cultural Policymaking and Research on the Island of Ireland

With this Special Issue, our intention is to bring to greater light cultural policy study in the North and South of Ireland. While "the study of cultural policy as public policy" is a relatively recent phenomena, we cannot discount the historicity of the relationship between the state and the production and consumption of symbolic goods (O'Brien and Oakley, 2017, p. 2). The study of this relationship in Ireland, is met with challenges that are complicated by underlying philosophical viewpoints regarding conflict, union, identity, heritage, image and self-reflection. Depending on one's standpoint the study of cultural policy on the island can be viewed as simultaneously state, or non-state, initiated policies about the fine and performing arts, voluntary, amateur and community arts, arts and education, creative expression, cultural and creative industry development, and issues related to cultural identity and heritage. The geographical proximity of both territories, along with their "unique... social and structural similarities and differences", further complicates matters (Adshead & Tonge, 2009; Walsh, et al., 2012, p. 349). While on the surface these challenges may not appear unique, they are tied up in post-colonial and unionist sentiments that remain at play (MacGinty, 2014). As a consequence, exploring matters relating to cultural policy in the North and South of Ireland, can involve political overtones, historical hang-overs and critical reflections on cultural identity, citizenship or territory (Connolly & Dolan, 2010).

The presentation of symbols of cultural and ethnic identity in public spaces, in both rural and urban areas of Northern Ireland, is known as a source of division as well as conflict transformation. Bryan (2015) argues that despite the increase in residential segregation after the Good Friday Agreement, a legislative and public policy-based process has emerged to "approximate a greater sharing of space" (p. 570) through festivals and parades such as the Lord Mayor's Show and the St. Patrick's Day carnival. Exploration of the history of the development of each event in the city of Belfast reveals changing practices and policies towards the "politics of Irish Republicanism" and "attempts to reflect more inclusive [cultural] identities", even if not always welcome or straightforward (Bryan, 2015, p. 569-570). The involvement of local state support—perhaps as part of the legal responsibility to promote equality and good relations (Northern Ireland Act 1998)—has been evident in the encouragement of the holding of public events and the discouragement of exhibiting partisan or political flags and emblems at such events. As a consequence, fostering a "culture of tolerance" (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2005) through laws and rules around cultural-political 'display', produces a kind of implicit cultural policy that is both politically and spatially charged (McGuigan, 2004; Ahearne, 2009; Bryan, 2015).

A policy of "cultural suppression" prevalent on the island since the seventeenth century is a legacy to cultural policy here (Kelly 1989, p. 5). It is particularly complicated with regards to Northern Irish cultural policy with a number of "contradictory impulses" regarding the relationship of the fine and indigenous arts to identity as a result (Walker, 2008, p. 78). In the Republic of Ireland, the relationship between the state and the production and consumption of symbolic goods, has witnessed the formal arts as a separate consideration to traditional and indigenous Irish cultural expression. As Quinn (1998) explains, emphasis on cultural nationalism originating in the 1880s, and again in the 1920s during independence (often

referred to as partition), placed a greater focus on traditional Gaelic, and therefore, largely Catholic symbols. With 'the arts' recognised as highbrow (Anglo, largely Protestant) forms of professional creative expression had often been associated with elitism and "xenophobic suspicions" (Brown 2004, p.135; Kelly, 1989). Perhaps as a consequence, understandings of the term 'culture' have developed narrowly in the Republic, with (until recently) perspectives on the term more commonly associated with traditional Gaelic culture.

Cultural policy is often articulated as what governments choose to do (or not do) in relation to culture and local as well as national government has a played a key role in (un)forming the policy landscape across the island (Mulcahy, 2006). Priorities can be visible in ministerial classifications as well as rationalisation exigencies. Since the establishment of a government portfolio for the arts in the Republic in 1994, the Department has gone through dizzying name changes with *arts*, *culture*, *heritage*, *Gaeltacht, islands*, *sport, rural, regional affairs* and *tourism* featuring in the title. This slippery state nomenclature is indicative of a political culture that emphasizes "pragmatic, incremental and [a] short-term-fix" approach (Cooke & McCall, 2015, p. 3) while at the same time, avoiding long term, strategic thinking and planning. The now cumbersome title of Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA), speaks more to a lack of confidence and confusion than clarity and certainty of portfolio.

In Northern Ireland, issues of representation and consociational party politics have played a significant part in the overall history of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). The recent consolidation of the Northern Ireland Executive and the rationalisation of 12 ministerial departments into nine, led to DCAL, along with aspects of the Department of Education and the Department for Social Development, being subsumed into a Department

for Communities (Northern Ireland Executive, 2017). The elimination of 'art' and 'culture' from the Department name is indicative of what Ramsey and Waterhouse (in press) refer to as a cultural policy of "avoidance" and "ambiguity."

This complexity has resulted in much implicit cultural policy arising out of professional arts strategy on the island. The Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI) grew out from the British model of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) as CEMA NI, established in 1943. Official policies had resided for parts of its history in expenditure decisions (as laid out in annual reports), rather than written policy documents (Walker, 2008). ACNI's work has largely emphasised both the importance of the arts to society in Northern Ireland and the Council in arts development. Key has been its role, along with district councils, in the development of a series of dedicated arts venues across the region. While the activities of the Arts Council of Ireland, established through the Arts Act of 1951 and also influenced by the British model, largely focused on a twin track approach of 'protector and developer' of the professional arts: developing the professional arts / artist and 'bringing the arts to the people' (Arts Council of Ireland, 2017). This situation has led some to conclude that in the Republic one talks "in a formulaic way about 'arts and culture', which might be best represented as 'ARTS (and culture)," thus falling "readily into a default habit of thinking about the arts as a placeholder for culture in a wider sense" (Cooke & McCall, 2015, p.6). The situation leads to explicit arts agency strategies becoming confounded into implicit national cultural strategies, carrying the responsibility for a wider cultural remit and defence.

As 'small nations', Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland provide unique territory for considering notions of co-optation, (dis)empowerment, disruption, creation and subversion in the relationship between arts, culture, citizen and State. The ambiguity of identity and the

relationship to another (former) ruling nation can result in these small nations as having a perceived "lack of confidence" and "uncertainty" (Blandford 2013, p. 7). This may have more to with both the State's capacity to adapt as well as a citizen's "willingness to question" but it can also be argued that intensified interpersonal relations, and a social and geographical 'nearness' to centres of power, means social and professional life is much more personal, connected and layered (Blandford 2013, p. 7; Hjort and Petrie, 2007). The citizen's 'proximity' to institutions of power can therefore provide circumstances that prompt opportunities for participatory models of policymaking or accusations of clientelism, inadvertent and biased decision-making (Bray, 1992; Olaffson, 1998; Quinn, 1998). Implications then arise on how—and who— is represented in political interpretations, conceptualisations and decision-making processes regarding culture.

Despite these complex landscapes, the island has seen a good deal of trans-jurisdictional cooperation and policymaking in the areas of arts and culture. Collaboration between the two Arts Councils through, for example, artform touring schemes and the tourism authorities has been taking place for quite some time prior to the Good Friday Agreement (Greerg, 2002). With the establishment of the North South Ministerial Council, much has been made of cultural cooperation across key areas of work- not only in tourism, but also language and sport.

Recently however, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have experienced shifts in public policy relations, with both territories coming forward with more explicit national strategies relating specifically to culture. In the Republic of Ireland, the last 12 months have witnessed two important governmental imperatives. *Culture2025: a framework policy to 2025*, rises out of the *Programme for a Partnership Government,* and "sets out an overarching

vision and framework for the future and outlines the priorities for action over the coming years"(DAHRRGA, 2016, p. 1). *Creative Ireland* (2017) is the Government's "Legacy Programme" for the commemorations of Ireland 2016 and is "a five-year initiative, from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy". Both recognise creativity and cultural expression as being located at the 'heart of what it means to be Irish' and pojnt towards increased public policy interest in the Republic in explicit cultural policy making (Creative Ireland, 2017; DAHRRGA, 2016). In Northern Ireland, the *Strategy for Culture and Arts 2016-2026* (DCAL, 2015) sets out the stall for how arts and culture may promote equality and tackle poverty and social exclusion and in doing so make arts and culture available to everyone. With no progression since the close of the consultation process in early 2016, the lack of official recognition of arts and culture in the form of an articulated public policy raises concern regarding the Executive's capacity and commitment to supporting the cultural rights of Northern Irish citizens.

While moves towards official high level and forward looking cultural policies in both territories are welcomed, many remain circumspect to the actual and real traction. Potentially indicative of a move towards long term, visionary and strategic thinking, these changes may just be 'business as usual' for the creative and cultural sector on the island (Visual Artists Ireland, 2010). The impact that Brexit may have is a source of further anxiety, not least the threat to co-funding and artistic touring arrangements, cross border co-productions in the fine, performing and audio-visual arts, potential changes in VAT regulations, and the Common Travel Area which facilitates ease of cross border movement of arts and cultural sector staff and expertise (DAHRRGA, 2017).

With no fully documented history nor a tradition of research on cultural policy either side of the border, it is hard to know where we have been or where we might go (McCall and Durrer, 2015). Within this context, this Special Issue of *Cultural Trends* presents a unique opportunity to consider how the approaches and understandings of culture by researchers across different disciplines can build a deeper understanding of cultural values and cultural policy on the island of Ireland. This Issue brings together three papers presenting new empirical, research as well as two commentaries on prescient policies associated with arts and culture on the island. The inclusion of each, represents how epistemic cultures for cultural policy are shaped and established through the work, experiences and efforts of individuals from different realms and disciplines—academia, government bodies, and cultural and creative industries and organisations (Paquette & Redaelli, 2015).

Mark-FitzGerald's long paper highlights the importance of a research culture in developing our understanding of the social, economic, cultural, institutional, state and public value of cultural provision and policy through a review of the first comprehensive survey of museums in Ireland in a decade – the Irish Museums Survey 2016. The study, undertaken as a collaborative project between the School of Art History and Cultural Policy, University College Dublin and the Irish Museums Association also illustrates the potential of partnerships between academia and the arts and cultural sector to foster critical reflection on arts and cultural sector practices and policies. It addresses a significant gap in our knowledge of the current state of Irish museums by bridging the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

McKnight and Schubotz remind us that "the most important forms of cultural policy" are not always where one expects them to be (Mulgan & Worpole, 1986 cited in Ahearne 2009, p.

144). Their article guides us through the values and perspectives of young people in Northern Ireland using data drawn from the Young Life and Times (YLT) survey, an annual attitudinal survey of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland alongside responses from adults in the annual Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey. Their research provides insights on the dynamics involved in transitioning to a "more shared society." Issues such as integrated neighbourhoods, shared educational initiatives and the importance of formal and informal religious mixing, indicate the complex ways in which questions of cultural value are not only tied up in notions of belonging, collective identity and otherness, but also require youth voice (Manchester & Pett, 2015).

Kinsella, NicGhabhann and Ryan explore new processes for policymaking that emerged during work undertaken for Limerick's bid for European Capital of Culture (ECOC). An initiative as part of the bid process brought together a group of academics, students, and arts and cultural practitioners to develop policy proposals regarding the role of culture in Limerick city and the surrounding region. What resulted was a policy proposal aimed at addressing what has become a common, international experience of precarity for arts and cultural workers in Ireland. The authors argue that the ECOC bid context, which can lead to tensions and competing viewpoints about local decision-making, cultural planning and artistic provision can equally be an opportunity in which "new, stakeholder-led policy ideas can begin to be forged."

The commentaries by Kenny and Livingston throw light on arts in education and local arts development specifically within the context of recent public policy initiatives. In her review of the Arts in Education Charter in the Republic of Ireland, Kenny highlights how arts in education is often viewed as the "magic bullet" for solving society's ills (O'Kelly, 2008). She

questions whether arts in education initiatives are "misguided goodness where opportunities for deep engagement and learning can be missed." Livingston, based at ACNI, reflects on the potential of—and place for—the arts against the backdrop of massive restructuring and reform to local government in Northern Ireland. New powers for Community Planning provide an opportunity for local government to connect and respond to the cultural rights, interests and needs of its local citizens in a more holistic way. Yet, how this may play out remains to be seen.

This work, along with other all-island initiatives like the Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland[1] and the *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy,*[2] reveal the rich potential in developing further understanding of the politics of culture and cultural policymaking on the island. In bringing them together in this Special Issue, we hope to not only stimulate that interest in cultural policy research in and of Ireland, but also contribute to a broader understanding of what cultural policy means in an Irish and global context.

1. Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland: an all island research network, https://culturalpolicyireland.org/.

2. *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy,* http://www.culturalpolicy.ie/index.php/ijamcp.

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