



Cultural policy through the prism of fiction (Michel Houellebecq)

Jeremy Ahearne

To cite this article: Jeremy Ahearne (2017) Cultural policy through the prism of fiction (Michel Houellebecq), *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23:1, 1-16, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2015.1035266](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1035266)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1035266>



© 2015 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 05 May 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 3509



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Cultural policy through the prism of fiction (Michel Houellebecq)

Jeremy Ahearne*

*Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, Millburn House, Coventry CV4
7HS, UK*

(Received 10 December 2014; accepted 25 March 2015)

Cultural policy studies tends to talk *about* fiction without actually *using* it. A typical move is to place it in an aesthetic realm to be protected, situated and/or critiqued. This is an eminently worthwhile activity. However, this paper explores some ways in which works of fiction may, following their own dynamic, yield significant perspectives upon the world of cultural policy itself. In what ways do fictional works offer us prisms through which to reappraise the worlds of cultural policy? What are the effects of the reconfigurative imaginative play to which they subject the institutions of that world? How are the discourses of cultural policy reframed when redeployed by novelists within free indirect style or internal monologue? The article begins by distinguishing four broad modes in which fictional works refract the world of cultural policy, and then analyses in more fine-grained detail two novels by the leading French writer Michel Houellebecq.

Keywords: cultural policy; fiction; Houellebecq

Introduction: four broad modes of operation

Cultural policy studies tends to talk *about* fiction, like other forms of art, without actually *using* them. Its typical move is to place these in an aesthetic realm or field which it is its job to protect, situate and/or critique. This is an eminently worthwhile activity. However, I want in this paper to explore some ways in which works of fiction may, following their own dynamic, yield significant perspectives upon the world of cultural policy itself. What such perspectives lack in methodological rigour they may make up for in suggestive potency.¹

In order to do this, I propose to focus on some works of literary fiction that address cultural policy. Clearly, we should not expect literary works to reflect reality in any straightforward manner (though one should not discount the experiential and/or documentary base which may inform such fiction). We can instead treat them as prisms through which traits of a social world are refracted and reconfigured. Certainly, one can emphasize the distortion inherent in this process – *quixotism* and *bovarysme* are terms to describe forms of folly that befall individuals trying to navigate their social world with only the reference points of fanciful fiction to guide them. But we can also see the prism of fiction as producing specific analytic effects. As a prism breaks down sunlight into its constituent wavelengths that we normally cannot perceive, so a work of fiction, in its very play with reality,

*Email: j.n.ahearne@warwick.ac.uk

can bring into relief elements of that reality that might normally escape our attention. It defamiliarizes them, to use the term of the Russian formalists (Shklovskij 1965), it makes them strange, and so makes new demands on our cognitive faculties. If one wanted to understand *bovarysme*, for example (an addiction to the schemes of romantic fiction), there are worse starting points than the novel that gave the symptom its name and that staged it so artfully.

Having drawn up a corpus of novels that deal more or less directly with matters of cultural policy, I have provisionally identified four broad and often overlapping modes in which a literary work's prismatic effects of analysis, defamiliarization or revelation might be exercised. These modes can be combined across the work of a novelist, or sometimes within a single novel.

(a) The rarest mode is doubtless that of the 'prophetic' fiction. By this I mean the capacity of a work of fiction not necessarily to foretell the future, but to shape it by revealing or producing a new category of perception.² In the context of this paper, such a work might introduce a new reality into the cultural policy firmament. During the opening decades of the nineteenth century, there was a somewhat decrepit, apparently graceless and publicly neglected building in the centre of the Ile de la Cité in Paris. In 1831 that building became the central protagonist of a dazzling new novel (we know it under its translated title, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, but its original French title is, simply, *Notre Dame de Paris*, i.e. the name of the cathedral itself (Hugo 2009)). The novel was a major catalyst in a 'conversion' of public perception, turning the cathedral into not simply a heritage site fit for an extensive 'restoration' project, but a key symbol of France's relation with its past.³

(b) A second mode might be represented by novels which aspire to recount involvement in cultural policy projects in a 'realistic' manner and, as it were, for its own sake. One might think of novels such as those by Benigno Cacérès recounting in aspirational mode the encounter between a working-class autodidact and the institutions of cultural policy (e.g. Cacérès 1950). Of course, no literary novel can be simply a transcription of reality (the very attempt to seem so is one literary artifice among others). Cacérès's novel certainly contains its own form of mythical warping in its plotting and style. Other works that might be associated with a realistic mode introduce other kinds of prismatic morphing of the recognizable cultural policy world. An example here might be Malraux's own *Anti-mémoires* (1972, 1976), which take deliberate liberties with the genre of the memoir in order to produce a heightened, sometimes mythified and certainly aggrandized perception of the issues in question. The most interesting aspects of these late writings by Malraux are doubtless not the grand historical fresques, but rather the disjointed, novelistically framed mini-scenes that run through the work – some blatantly fictional, some broadly plausible, some somewhere in between (Malraux 1972, 1976).

(c) A third mode in which fictional works integrate reference to cultural policy might be described as 'symbolic realist'. Works operating in this mode, whether or not they are directly concerned with a cultural policy world as their object, refract that world by drawing on cultural policy institutions as symbolic resources within their overall narrative economy. While such institutions will remain clearly recognizable as such, they are likely in this mode to be subjected to various forms of inflection or distortion for literary effect. As in the case of Malraux's *Anti-mémoires*, this third mode may in specific works overlap considerably with the more directly 'realistic' second mode. One genre which often seems to use this 'symbolic realist' mode is the 'spy' novel, or more generally novels dealing with

the covert intelligence operations of competing States. An author like John Le Carré has mobilized this device. The Russian agent run by the infamous ‘mole’ of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, for example, works as the cultural attaché in the Soviet Embassy in London (Le Carré 1974). The interaction between cultural policy fronts and what they hide is worked out with particular richness in *The Russia House*, after its opening scene at an official British Council fair in Moscow for the ‘spread of British culture’ (Le Carré 1989). One could analyse the unfolding of the novel in terms of the interplay between at least three levels of cultural policy: the world of *explicit cultural policy*, which in immediately post-glasnost Russia is that of improving cultural relations between the UK/USA and Russia through artistic exchange and literary translation; the operations of *covert cultural policy*, where the challenge for the anglo-saxon governments is to create a perception among their own people of a Russia still dangerous enough to warrant ongoing massive military expenditure; and the refraction of both these levels within an individual subjectivity who finally settles on a recalcitrant course of action – a kind of individual policy – that is reducible to neither. A similar broad structure is perceivable in a more recent novel like Robert Harris’s *Ghost*, where the CIA spymaster who is running as his agent the wife of the British prime minister is working out of a cultural exchange front institution in Washington (Harris 2007). The course of action settled upon by the central protagonist – the disenchanted ‘ghostwriter’ of the title – is to write before he is killed the manuscript that is the novel and to secure a channel for its publication. In the worlds of both these novels, truthfulness is not to be found within the discourses of public or covert cultural policy, but rather in the reverberation of these discourses within an individual consciousness – or what Le Carré in a later novel called ‘the solitary decision-maker’ (Le Carré 2013). To put it another way, they dramatize, or imagine, or mythify, or simply render perceptible, the collision between institutional cultural policy imperatives and solitary decision-making.

(d) A fourth mode of prismatic effect operates through forms of allegory. It is based on the construction of universes – and in this context cultural policy universes – that are manifestly not our own. Clearly, the whole art of such an enterprise will be to ensure that selected traits of our universe are recognizable – or better, re-cognizable – through the glass of the fiction. A typical genre in which such an allegorical vision might be worked out is science fiction, or space opera. For our purposes, a prime example here would be Iain M. Banks’ ‘Culture’ novels (e.g. Banks 1987, 1996, 2008). These are set in a universe split between different ‘civilizations’, one of which is called, precisely, ‘The Culture’. It is the model, sometimes comically so, of an enlightened, secular and tolerant value system, and it has developed policies to ensure the persistence of this identity. There are, however, dark corners and aporia within its operations, particularly in its dealings with its religious and/or more belligerent and expansionist, or simply more animalistic rival civilizations. This produces variants of the structures described above, split between explicit and covert cultural policies, and the reverberation of the resulting tensions in the consciousness of particular individuals. Revealingly, these individuals, who often work in the ‘Special Circumstances’ section of the Culture’s organization, and who provide the focus of the novels, tend to be looking for a more restless exploration of life’s potential than can be afforded by the calmly superior certainties informing the Culture’s official doctrines.

There is necessarily something rather abstract in this brief typological overview. I will explore in finer grain over the remainder of this article two novels by a

contemporary French author, Michel Houellebecq, whose work consistently engages with questions of cultural policy, broadly understood. It also straddles, if not the first, then certainly the second, third and fourth of the modes of operation outlined above.

Michel Houellebecq: *Platform* and *The Map and the Territory*

Michel Houellebecq is internationally the most prominent of contemporary French novelists. Indeed, if the reader accepts my argument that his novels constitute a prism through which aspects of contemporary cultural policy are reflected, then they may constitute the most widely circulated of all French reflections on cultural policy, broadly understood, over recent years. His public notoriety rests upon the graphic sex scenes that populate some of the novels (though not *The Map and the Territory*) and provocative statements on matters ranging from Islam to Vichy France made either in his own name or that of his protagonists. Underlying these most visible traits, however, though not to be simply dissociated from them, is a sustained imaginative exploration on the relations between work, culture, art and love in the contemporary world. Although he has produced fictions that operate wholly or partially in the fourth 'science fiction' mode designated above (*Atomised* and *The Possibility of an Island*), I will restrict myself here to a study of two works that operate for the most part in the space between the 'realist' and the 'symbolic realist' modes of prismatic refraction as identified above (*Platform* and *The Map and the Territory*). In doing this, I want to pull out two particular aspects of the two novels' functioning: the reimagining of institutional complexes, and the infiltration of an 'undervoice' into the public discourses of cultural policy.

Imagined institutions

It is commonplace to oppose the world of institutions to the world of the imagination. Yet a structural feature of Houellebecq's art is the reimagining of institutional configurations. In the two novels considered here, these institutions are cultural policy institutions, understood in a deliberately broadening sense. The institutional reconfiguration in question does not provide simply a shell for an underlying plot; its development is part of that plot. The shifts in this institutional matrix are an important layer in the novels' significance, and indeed we can see how the matrix developed in *Platform* is echoed and extrapolated in *The Map and the Territory*.

If for the purposes of this article we take the two novels as a single block, we could say that this block is book-ended by references to public arts institutions (the Ministry of Culture at the beginning of *Platform*, and other institutions – German and American – at the end of *The Map and the Territory*). A lot happens in between, however, and we can only bring out the significance of these references if we explore the wider unfurling of cultural policies both explicit and implicit that propels the narratives.

The French Ministry of Culture in Houellebecq: significance through insignificance

Platform almost opens with reference to the national ministry of culture. I say 'almost' because it is preceded by a chapter where Michel, the protagonist, arrives at his father's house in Normandy just after the latter's death. As he zaps between

channels on his father's 32-inch Sony surround-sound widescreen television, his aesthetic tastes are conveyed: among his favourite shows are *Xena Warrior Princess*, or the popular quiz programme *Questions pour un champion* (Houellebecq 2002, pp. 5–10/11–15).⁴ In terms of readerly expectations, we are doubtless supposed to be surprised when Michel tells the police officer at the beginning of the next chapter that he works at the Ministry of Culture (p. 12/18). Far from using this as a symbolic badge of distinction, Michel feels 'overtaken by shame' as he stumbles to explain to the policeman the nature of his work preparing the financing of art exhibitions and spectacles. The policeman puts him out of his misery by suggesting they note simply that he works in the area of 'cultural action', and Michel hastily concurs – 'Yes, that's it ... You could put it like that' (p. 12/18). The policeman, like Michel's hero Julien Lepers, host of *Questions pour un champion*, impresses Michel by his capacity to relate to anything human – even strange creatures like himself working in a domain whose social rationale appears, from the evidence of this exchange, anything but evident. Fortunately, Michel tells us, he is not totally unequipped to navigate this conversation, despite the peculiarities of his professional occupation, as he has watched enough television detective films.

At one level, Houellebecq is clearly here wanting to make mischief with the reader's sense of cultural hierarchy, using the Ministry of Culture as a semantically charged reference through which to create and disrupt expectations among an educated reading public (who might react in an amused, shocked or knowing manner). But the semantic charge of this reference also allows Houellebecq to frame suggestively some of the fundamental issues addressed by the book – notably the decline of French cultural *puissance*, and the significance of work in postindustrial societies. In terms of the typology developed in the first part of this article, the reference to the Ministry of Culture and its history provides a 'realist' canvas (mode b) whose figures are deliberately inflected, reshaped, or simply flattened for symbolic effect (mode c).

Michel tells us that he joined the Ministry of Culture in the mid-1980s, at the time of the 'modernization' of socialism in France, and when 'the illustrious Jack Lang was covering the cultural institutions of the State in splendour and glory' (as often with Michel, one has the sense that he is citing with a kind of placid irony a promotional pamphlet that he has seen lying around) (Houellebecq 2002, p. 25/30). Michel functions, at one level, as a kind of cipher for a routinization and disenchantment that has since overtaken France's most manifest cultural policy agent. He tells us that, since joining the Ministry with the decent salary available during Lang's heyday, he has grown old, witnessing without undue disturbance its 'successive political changes'. We are not told whether he ever invested positive belief in its missions, but if so, then it seems largely to have evaporated. He is fond of his immediate superior, Marie-Jeanne, whose visit at the end of the novel to the psychiatric hospital where he has become a patient is the only human contact that does him any good (p. 346/334). However, he cannot fathom what her work is really supposed to achieve:

Although Marie-Jeanne doesn't, strictly speaking, do anything, her work really is quite complex: she has to stay up-to-date with all the various movements, networks and trends; as she's taken on cultural responsibility, she's always exposed to the risk of being seen as immobile or even obscurantist; it's a danger against which she has to guard herself and the institution. (Houellebecq 2002, p. 15/21)

This is among the first of many subsequent musings on the point or pointlessness of various kinds of cultural, informational and public relations activity in postindustrial Europe. Work at the Ministry of Culture is not the only instance in point, but it is interesting from our perspective here that it is made to function as a kind of limit figure. Michel, in a fictional recasting of the Ministry's organigram, is given an unlikely level of discretion in the projects he selects for artistic support. However, he finds it hard to see more in the artists with whom he deals than self-interested entrepreneurs (p. 183/178). He also struggles to remember anything properly productive he might himself have done with his time at the Ministry (pp. 86, 224–225/88, 217).

I will show later that this provocative undermining of public cultural policy is not the whole story in terms of the institutional layering we can see across *Platform* and *The Map and the Territory*. There are traces even in *Platform* of an enduring role for traditional cultural policy preoccupations. As his package tour party in Thailand visits the ruins of Ayutthaya, it occurs to Michel that 'that's what culture is [...], it's a bit boring but that's good; it returns everyone to their own nothingness' (pp. 80–81/83). He even goes on to wonder, in a flattened echo of Malraux's 'imaginary museum' (Malraux 1967), how on earth the sculptors of the Ayutthaya period managed to give their statues of the Buddha an expression of understanding and majesty. But across the novel as a whole, the cultural ministry of his own nation obtains no such symbolic redress. Indeed, *The Map and the Territory*, the later novel set in France and saturated with cultural policy themes, contains virtually no reference to the Ministry of Culture. It appears only once, when inspector Jasselin is looking for clues to the savage murder of 'Michel Houellebecq', one of the characters in the novel. The tributes from the Minister of Culture, along with others saluting 'an immense creative force, who will forever remain in our memories', are dismissed as 'conformist chicken-feed and mindless platitudes' that would not get them very far in their enquiries (Houellebecq 2012, p. 210/303).

Corporate transnational takeover: 'the power and reality of the world'

The protagonists of Houellebecq live in worlds saturated by powerful cultural forces working to shape symbolic environments. The institutions of the State as such appear to represent a relatively minor aspect of this process (indeed the liberties that Houellebecq takes with regard to a purely 'realist' representation tend symbolically to minimize the significance of these institutions). We have already seen how the mental universe of Michel is organized in terms of television programmes and brand-names (usually low-end brand names – he confesses to some puzzlement as regards the attraction of high-end brand names both for the deprived youth who try to steal them and his colleagues at the Ministry who wear them (Houellebecq 2002, pp. 270–271/262–263)). It is, however, when Marie-Jeanne suggests to Michel that he take a break after his father's death that we are introduced to the principal culture-shaping force in the novel: contemporary mass tourism. We are given a sense of this perspective as Michel waits at the ticket-desk of *Nouvelles Frontières*, the package company that is about to take him to Thailand. *Nouvelles Frontières*, he tells us, founded at the end of the 1960s, is representative, along with other emblematic companies such as Club Med or FNAC, of a new face of modern capitalism born at the same time as the 'civilization of leisure'. By 2000, mass tourism had become in terms of business turnover the world's leading

economic activity, and this had been ‘democratized’ through companies like *Nouvelles Frontières* (Michel appears to be reading as he queues an article on the company from the French magazine *Capital*) (pp. 28–30/31–33). Michel is quite clear that he is less interested in discovering for himself a new country, with all the attendant linguistic and organizational complications, than in purchasing a specific tourism package (his final hesitation is between the ‘Rum and Salsa’ and the ‘Thai Tropic’ packages). If there is any snobbery in his approach, it is of the inverted kind, and directed at those on his party who avoid the most obviously touristically commodified aspects of the tour in the name of putatively more authentic folkloric or artistic attractions (pp. 48–49/52). In the novel, the tourist industry appears as the inescapable mediator of intercultural contact in the contemporary world.

Its success is also presented as a symptom of European dysfunction. As soon as they have a few days freedom from their hectic schedules, Michel says, the continent’s inhabitants jump in an aeroplane and fly half way across the world as if they’re escaping from prison (p. 27/31). Mass tourism is presented as an industry that thrives on thwarted satisfaction. Hence Michel’s apparently logical proposal in the second half of the novel, after his return from Thailand and his amorous involvement with an executive assistant from *Nouvelles Frontières* itself. Why not, he asks, combine the tourism industry with that other apparent indicator of mass thwarted satisfaction, the sex industry? Why not propose organized erotic tourism packages? (pp. 240–242/232–234)

Well there are many reasons why not. Critics have quite rightly drawn attention to the sanitized (indeed, one might even say novelistically *censored*) portrayal of overseas prostitution presented in the text (see Morrey 2013, pp. 13–64). These scenes tend to read like male fantasies, and take scant account of the structural exploitation and violence, let alone the sordidness of detail, that governs such activity. Were too many such structural or material details to obtrude, the heady excitement that seizes the novel’s protagonists as they drive their project forward would surely be hard to sustain. The project turns out to be too big and bold for the major French ‘national champions’ alone in this global economic sector, and Michel’s more corporately attuned friends Jean-Yves and Valérie succeed in bringing on board TUI, the biggest tour operator in the world (based in Germany). The pools of European domestic and professional frustration figure as lucrative seams for exploitation, in all senses of the word, by globalized capitalism.

This aspect of the novel has been much debated. I want here simply to bring out its role in the imaginary institutional matrix that is deployed in the work. Like the communist utopia whose rusting wreck Michel contemplates in melancholy manner in Cuba, it is as if the combined worthiness and modishness that characterized the Ministry of Culture were not built upon ‘forces of attraction’ that were ‘elementary’ enough to sustain it as an effective force in the contemporary world (Houellebecq 2002, p. 235/228). ‘The power of Nike, Adidas, Armani, and Vuitton is indisputable’, Michel notes, he can see it in the *Figaro*’s economic pages, even if it leaves him perplexed (p. 272/263). Likewise, as we have seen, the powers of commercial television programming and mass tourism, which leave him altogether less perplexed. The sex industry appears as one further such institutionalized cultural force shaping aspirations, producing and dissolving norms, and channeling behaviour. That this force is cultural rather than a simple mechanical outlet for physical frustration is made clear throughout the novel. One of the challenges for Michel and his two corporately literate associates is to find a name for the new

venture they are proposing. Valérie's boss Jean-Yves ponders her suggestion of 'Eldorador Aphrodite':

'Aphrodite' ... He repeated the word pensively. 'Not bad; it comes over as a bit less vulgar than "Venus". It's erotic, cultivated, a bit exotic: yes, I like it.' (Houellebecq 2002, p. 247/240)

The package that the protagonists are proposing is based both on a form of censorship (of more sordid realities and relations of force inherent in the international sex trade) and a mode of poeticization (that is, the exploitation of the affective connotative forces of language and image, here combining a neo-colonial and neo-classical register). It is, at least initially in the novel, an irresistible proposition for the institutional investors of global tourism's biggest corporation.

The question of the novel's 'complicity' with the censorship and poeticization evoked above is one that has been discussed elsewhere (the matter is not black and white) (see Morrey 2013). For our purposes, we can see the proposition made by the protagonists, within the institutional economy of the novel as a whole, in the perspective of Jonathan Swift's 1729 'modest proposal' (Swift 2009).⁵ The author is putting forward a proposal that he knows most readers would find unacceptable 'in real life', and whose fictional depiction blatantly excises or marginalizes a host of more murky undercurrents. The very excess of this conceit however, just like the excessive devalorization of the Ministry of Culture's activities, works to put into relief the force of those institutional strategies, both explicitly and implicitly cultural, that are moulding the contemporary lifeworld.

Houellebecq's explorations in cultural-institutional imagination, operating along the lines of the third mode of the symbolic 'refraction' of our institutional world as identified above, are continued in *The Map and the Territory*. They again provide a layering frame effect, here for the affective and vocational life of the visual artist Jed Martin. There are two notable omissions in comparison with *Platform*. Sex and the human body in general are not objects of exorbitant interest for Jed (though they are not excised entirely from his artistic projects – a painting of a clothed escort girl features as one of his series of 65 tableaux depicting the fundamental modes of work in early twenty-first century Western society). Indeed the author 'Michel Houellebecq', who features as a character in the novel and whom Jed asks to write the catalogue for one of his exhibitions, declares this lack of preoccupation with the human body as something of a relief in the contemporary artistic climate (Houellebecq 2012, p. 96/145). Along with this eclipse of the sex tourism motif, there is also virtually no reference to the national ministry of culture (save as purveyor of platitudes, as noted above, after the murder of the character Michel Houellebecq (p. 210/303)). This is significant given the abundance of cultural policy themes in the book.

One of the reasons why the national ministry of culture does not figure in the book is that its place and functions seem simply to have been absorbed by the behemoths of the luxury, leisure and tourism industries. The first exhibition in which Jed takes part after leaving his fine arts college is organized by the Ricard Foundation (pp. 35–37/60–64). It is here that his work meets its first institutional admirer: Olga, a Russian woman who works for the communications or public relations department of Michelin. Jed had recently undergone, among the cellophane-wrapped sandwiches of a motorway service station, the second major

aesthetic revelation of his life, seized by the sublimity of a Michelin regional map, combining for him the essence of modernity in its combination of a scientific and technical apprehension of the world with the essence of a palpitating animal life underlying it (pp. 29–30/51–52). His picture at the Ricard exhibition was the first of a series of photographs of excerpts from the maps themselves (not the territory they represented), designed to bring into arresting fragmented focus the features of his original intuition. We are not, as readers, invited to treat Jed's artistic intuitions with irony, nor even to doubt the sincerity of Olga's interest, though it is obviously overdetermined (Olga, the narrator tells us later, is one of those foreigners whose education has given them a touching faith in the image of France's culture, and who are always disappointed subsequently that the country's reality does not live up to their expectations (p. 41/69)). The agenda of Olga's hierarchical superiors at Michelin is another matter.

Michelin should not be thought as symbolizing in the novel simply a shift from the public to the private instrumentalization of art. Despite its history, it does not figure as an industrial or post-industrial 'national champion' as promoted since the 1970s by French politicians such as Pompidou, Balladur and Sarkozy (Sarkozy in particular was keen to promote 'national champions' in the transnational media and cultural industries) (Musso 2009). Olga has been seconded from the holding Michelin Financial Company, based in Switzerland, to inflect its strategy in France (when she is later seconded back to Russia, her French superior will complain that the wishes of the French branch of the company now count for nothing (Houellebecq 2012, pp. 67–68/106)). She is supposed to 'recentre the communication' of the tourist businesses it has acquired in France, adapting them to a new clientele, 75% of which comes from China, India and Russia. These tourists are attracted above all by enterprises such as *French Touch*, who specialize in packaging France as the home of cultural refinement, luxury elegance, gastronomic sophistication and rural tranquillity. One of Olga's projects is to set up a Michelin Space for Contemporary Art in Paris, which she thinks will take the brand's image more upmarket in Russia and China, though she encounters resistance from some of the more traditionally minded members of the company management (p. 39/65–66). Jed's Michelin map series offers her the perfect vessel to overcome this internal resistance. Michelin organise Jed's subsequent first solo exhibition, entitled 'The Map Is More Interesting Than The Territory', provide him with internet exhibition space and press relations resources, giving him likewise the opportunity to meditate on the 'capitalist mystery par excellence, the formation of prices' (p. 57/91), as his pictures sell for prices that seem to bear no relation to the contingencies of their production and physical existence.

Like Michel in *Platform*, Olga organizes art exhibitions. Unlike Michel, however, she does this not for a national ministry of culture but for a transnational leisure and tourism corporation that puts her operations at the centre of large flows of financial capital. Moreover, in terms of the institutional play of the novel, Michelin's financial and cultural ambitions do not end here. When Olga returns to Paris ten years later, it is to be programme director for her company's new venture in France, *Michelin TV*. The programme's underlying theme is to be the glorification of France's provinces along the lines pioneered by the iconic presenter Jean-Pierre Pernaut in the latter sequences of TF1's lunchtime news since the 1980s (pp. 152–155/225–228). They have even poached Pernaut from TF1, France's biggest commercial television channel, certainly seen as a national media

champion by Sarkozy (Musso 2009) (or alternatively, by the likes of Pierre Bourdieu, as a toxic national cultural hegemon (Bourdieu 1998)). The novel stages a New Year's Eve reception at Pernaut's Paris residence which is evidently meant to signify a shift in power (a *translatio imperii*) in the audiovisual and cultural landscape of the country. The historic director of TF1, Patrick Le Lay, who had tried to acquire a stake in the new channel is reduced to drunken braggadocio, and is steered away by Pernaut, director of the new channel. Le Lay, head of France's hitherto most powerful televisual enterprise, is simply ignored as irrelevant by the three members of the transnational Michelin board. They are seen by Jed Martin at the end of the party as striding away into the new year, framed within a picture he will never execute, symbolizing the 'power and reality of the world' (Houellebecq 2012, p. 161/238).

Enduring public art

Michel in *Plateforme* leaves his ineffectual position in the Ministry of Culture and approaches in oblique manner the power and reality of a corporate world moulding cultural expectations and patterns for vast profits. Jed Martin in *The Map and the Territory* disintricates himself twice from the unlikely embrace of transnational cultural industry (and, more reluctantly, from the associated embrace of Olga). He does this to find again the solitude wherein he can submit to the unpredictable 'messages' that put him on the track of artistic work that will 'give an account of the world' (Houellebecq 2012, pp. 272, 66, 286/385–386, 104, 406). The semi-*ingénu* Jed Martin, amongst the brash powerplays and expansionism of the artistic, cultural and economic fields portrayed, carries through the novel what is quite a Romantic vision of the artist. Despite contingent overlaps in thematic preoccupation (the Michelin maps, his apparent interest in aspects of artisanal work or rurality), his goals are not, finally, those which a market system can accommodate. After the success of his 'trades and professions' series of paintings, which again sell for prices that strike him as wildly incommensurate, he resolves to produce no more work for the art market. He retires to the country and awaits the intimation of his next project. Revealingly, for our perspective, this intimation comes from a set of public arts institutions, before being preserved for future generations after Jed's death in another public art institution. These institutions, which are not French, receive no particular emphasis as such in the epilogue to the novel, but they appear to have taken us full circle from the opening of *Platform*.

Jed spends the last thirty years of his life preparing what is probably one of the most intriguing video art installations you have never seen. The novel recounts his careful use of time-lapse photography to render the rhythms of plant life, the weathering and corrosion of industrial objects and high-tech components, and the induced fading of the traces of individual human forms represented through photographs and playmobil figures. Using specially commissioned superimposition software, he then merges these discretely produced sequences to evoke something of the human condition, technologically mediated, vegetatively framed and temporally doomed. The narrator tells us, writing some time around the year 2070 and well versed in the extant Chinese studies of Martin's work, that these objects produce a sense of malaise and desolation in their audiences (pp. 286, 291/406, 414). There is, though, something elegiac and peaceful in the way the narrator describes these works, and we are reminded of the Buddhist practice of *Asubha*, the contemplation of material dissolution, as practiced by the novel's inspector Jasselin as a

way of coming to terms with the more disturbing aspects of his professional police work (pp. 193–194/280–281). The narrator also tells us that the inspiration for Martin's work seems to have come from a visit to the *Ruhrgebiet* about 30 years before his death (so in about 2010), where a retrospective exhibition of his work was being organized in a series of decommissioned steel factories that had been converted into art centres. Martin had been struck by the combination of an industrial legacy, some rusted and abandoned and some converted into hives of postindustrial activity, and the surrounding forests whose dense vegetation was already starting to reclaim the deserted spaces of factory production (pp. 290–291/413). The narrator also tells us that Martin's work is now housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art (p. 286/406).

We might summarize the ground covered between the beginning of *Platform* and the end of *The Map and the Territory* in terms of the institutional play evoked above. This institutional play operates across the second and third modes of fictional representation as presented in the first part of this article: the institutions are represented in a sufficiently 'realistic' mode so as to be recognizable as such, but are inflected and reframed for symbolic effect. *Platform* begins with the French Ministry of Culture, at its founding in 1959 the first governmental ministry for culture in the Western democratic world. The significance of the ministry in the novel lies in its fictionally augmented insignificance, bringing out by contrast the cultural scope and power of those cultural industries that have expanded exponentially since the 1970s (television, advertising, tourism, the sex industry). The same themes, plus the art market but minus the sex industry, are taken up again in *The Map and the Territory*, but it is clear that the worth and significance of Jed's art meshes only contingently and transitorily with the preoccupations of these transnational cultural dominions. There are fundamental explorations of the human condition for which the market will provide no space, and it is only thanks to the *Kulturpolitik* of the *Ruhrgebiet* and the hospitality of the Philadelphia MOMA that Jed's vision is expressed and preserved. We are returned, in, for Houellebecq, a disarmingly edificatory full circle, to the value of non-market and hegemonically marginal cultural institutions.⁶

Undervoicing

We should not conclude with this edificatory note, which would rather misrepresent the effect of a Houellebecq novel. An achievement of his novels, as with certain other novels dealing imaginatively with cultural policy themes, seems to me to lie not in edification but in something like its opposite: the opening of a space where, underneath the rhetorical certainties of official discourses, moments of doubt, uncertainty and ambivalence are acknowledged and voiced.

Platform and *The Map and the Territory* are novels saturated in the discourse of cultural policy both explicit and implicit. The status of these blocks and fragments of imported discourse is not always clear. Rather as in Flaubert (cf. Culler 1974), there is a pervasive sense of citationality, the impression that the narrative voice or protagonists are quoting ambient phrases – though obviously, the phrases come from institutional repertoires unavailable to Flaubert, combining among others the lexicons of corporate strategy, marketing, tourist guides, pop psychology or policy planning. The status of these apparent citations or borrowings is frequently unstable: are they being used ironically, or because there is unfortunately no better

way to approximate the notion in question, or as a social and cultural marker of position, or simply because they constitute the linguistic and ideational matter traversing the mind of protagonist or narrator? The answer is frequently all of these at once, though in different proportions.⁷

Michel takes up the missionary speak that is the legacy of the French cultural policy tradition to say of himself and Marie-Jeanne: ‘it’s together that we prepare the plans for exhibitions, that we work in the cause of contemporary culture [que nous oeuvrons pour la culture contemporaine]’ (Houellebecq 2002, p. 15/20). The disjuncture between the loftiness of the phrasing and the reality of the work described is patent. Later, Michel concludes that a woman looking for funding and who specialized in making moulds of her own genitalia must have been a good artist because she had led him to *bring a new gaze to bear upon the world* (p. 305/293). As in Flaubert, the device is made deliberately ponderous by italicizing this example of hackneyed phrasing (though the italics are omitted in the English translation). The irony in both cases might be described as weary rather than savage: Michel is fond of Marie-Jeanne though he cannot emulate her zeal, and considers the sculptress as sympathetic for a contemporary artist.

Other institutions project their own versions of zealously corporate or wooden cultural discourse, sometimes bringing their agents to produce incongruous blends of different registers. Olga’s immediate boss Forestier, the head of communications in France for Michelin, is well versed in the language of corporate management, and his first reaction to Jed’s series of photographed maps is that this is a perfect opportunity for a ‘direct commercialization through our networks’. Olga persuades him, however, that this would be counterproductive, and Forestier realises that a different kind of parlance is required. He assures Jed that ‘it is out of question for us to appear to alienate your artistic independence’, tacitly expecting, the narrator tells us, for Jed to admire his ‘elevated perspective’ (*‘la hauteur des vues’*) (Houellebecq 2012, pp. 54–55/89). He even goes so far at Jed’s exhibition as to proclaim to anybody listening ‘the end of the misunderstanding between Michelin and the world of art’ (p. 49/81). He has certainly understood a new use for art in Michelin’s corporate strategy – the irony being, of course, that the underlying misunderstanding remains, at least on his part, as far-reaching as it ever had been.

Yet characters are not simply ‘spoken’ in the novels. The books also stage, as it were, the encounter between some of the protagonists and the various institutional forms of groupspeak (*langues de bois*) that move around and within them. One patent example of this occurs when Jean-Yves in *Platform* returns home one evening in a bad state, and stumbles upon the charter statement of *Aurore*, the tour operator which has poached him and Valérie from *New Frontiers*. The statement, written ten years previously and displayed in all the group’s hotels, is a marketing pitch that is also a kind of private-sector cultural policy pitch, turning *Aurore* into a ‘national champion’ for the projection of France:

The genius of *Aurore* is to blend together different kinds of expertise, to play on tradition and modernity with rigour, imagination and humanism so as to reach a distinctive form of excellence. The men and women of *Aurore* are the safekeepers of a unique cultural heritage: the art of hospitality. They know the rituals and the customs that transform life into an art of living and the most basic of services into a privileged moment. It is a profession and an art: it is their talent. Creating what is best in order to share it, using conviviality to put people in touch again with what is essential,

inventing new spaces for pleasure: that is what has made of *Aurore* a fragrance of France spread across the world. (Houellebecq 2002, p. 263/254)

Jean-Yves literally cannot stomach the language (even if it's the kind of thing he might have produced himself). He is physically repulsed by it as 'nauseous verbiage' ('un baratin nauséux').⁸ Suddenly he realises that its hollow versatility means it could apply to any number of things – notably a well organized chain of brothels. Curiously, his lucid nausea subsides as he plans to integrate the verbiage into precisely that project, and his ambitious attention is absorbed by the prospect of the European tour operators who might be interested.

Jean-Yves's relation to the institutionalized discourses that constitute his professional milieu oscillates between the lucid and the instrumentally absorbed (he doesn't necessarily believe in them, but he is absorbed in them as tools to get him somewhere). The central protagonists in the two novels, by contrast, entertain a more sustainedly interrogatory or puzzled relation to these discourses. When Marie-Jeanne presents Michel to a visitor from the ministerial cabinet as the most important member of the department, perpetually juggling with balances and figures, Michel's first reaction is to try to picture himself literally 'juggling' these things, and he is struck only by the disjunction between this image and the relatively simple operations he carries out on a day-to-day basis (Houellebecq 2002, p. 15/20–21). In a sense, although he seems simply disengaged, Michel takes the discourses around him more seriously than others, trying to give them meaning and stopping when he comes up short. The solitude that accompanies Michel is perhaps a persistent tendency to 'fall out' of the languages that surround him (the only speakers who seem to 'hold' Michel in their language are his lover Valérie and the popular TV quiz-show host Julien Lepers, whom Michel admires because he puts his interlocutors at ease, wherever they're from, and seems to like them (pp. 7, 347/12–13, 334)). He cannot support himself in the self-evidence of his 'work' because, as we have seen, he struggles to assign meaning to what that work produces – he has, in a sense, fallen out of the cultural policy discourse that continues to carry Marie-Jeanne along (pp. 15, 86/21, 88–89). Jed Martin in *The Map and the Territory* seems to have a similarly interrogative relation to the discourses around him (disengaged where we might expect him to be engaged as a 'player' in the art world, but also, rather like Michel, sometimes curious or puzzled where we might expect him to be disengaged). Like Michel, he is persistently exercised by the sense of productive work for its agents (it is the focus of his ten-year mid-life artistic project), but he appears to come to a placid acceptance of what remains obdurately senseless: when asked in a rare interview why his artworks are sold for such astronomical prices, he replies simply that one should not seek meaning in things that have none (Houellebecq 2012, pp. 268, 151–152/381, 224).

Platform and *The Map and the Territory* are populated by manifold forms of official institutional culture-shaping discourses. Some of these are attached to organizations traditionally associated with the world of culture (the national ministry of culture to start with, but also other appendages of the art world, particularly in *The Map and the Territory*). The novels stage, however, the rise to imperium of other culture-shaping discourses, associated for the most part with non-State and increasingly transnational agencies (tourism operators, television companies, global brands, etc.). The resulting configurational play with imaginary institutions provides a frame for the two novels, with an important element of continuous development

across the two. The novels also stage, however, the encounter between the meanings promised by such recognizable institutional discourses and the subjective experience of protagonists. This is an encounter which the novel as a genre is particularly apt to explore. It takes up but repositions in our minds those discourses that constitute the ‘power and reality of the world’. Not only does Houellebecq modulate our reading of these through the insidious play of the *style indirect libre*, the transcription that seems only to cite such discourses but actually insinuates ironic fissures into their compact institutionally endorsed solidity. He also underscores them with a kind of undervoice, a voice that expresses all those things for which ambitious expansionist enterprises have little enthusiasm: ambivalence, doubt and self-doubt, exasperation. This may seem something of a nebulous entity for the reader to walk away with. To put into perspective the space it nevertheless opens up, I will conclude with a quotation from another novel, *NW* by Zadie Smith. Natalie Blake, a central protagonist of the novel, has unwittingly crushed her best friend Leah’s spirit through her very professional and familial success, which she has held out for others’ admiration following the established discursive templates for such success and without any hint of the tensions and cracks that have accompanied it (her friend Leah is aware only of her own tensions and cracks). Natalie has an opportunity to repair some of the damage right at the end of the novel:

She wanted to give her friend something of [...] value in return. If candour were a thing in the world that a person could hold and retain, if it were an object, maybe Natalie Blake would have seen that the perfect gift at this moment was an honest account of her own difficulties and ambivalences, clearly stated, without disguise, embellishment or prettification. But Natalie Blake’s instinct for self-defence, for self-preservation, was simply too strong. (Smith 2012, p. 399)

Institutional discourses aspiring to shape cultures (our norms and values) invite us to identify with them, to espouse their solidity and to neglect the apparent comparative insubstantiality of any inner, unauthorized voice. Novels such as those explored here by Houellebecq turn that voice into the primary reality (they literally author-ize it) and suspend the credence we assign to those institutional discourses, tracing their reverberation but also dissolving their solidity. Such fictions prove nothing, of course, but they may sometimes surprise us in the flashes of recognition and reappraisal they produce, and the density of sense they give to the kinds of undervoice that might otherwise seem drowned in insignificance.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. This harnessing of literary fiction for cultural policy reflection is, of course, not without precedent. Raymond Williams mixes unselfconsciously the study of novels and that of political and cultural theory in *Culture and Society* (Williams 1958). I am grateful to Douglas Morrey and Claudia Chibici-Revneanu for reading and commenting on a first draft of this article, and also to two anonymous reviewers for their feedback.
2. I am drawing here on Pierre Bourdieu’s analyses of figures such as Flaubert or Manet as category-redefining ‘prophets’ (see, e.g. Bourdieu 1996).

3. For Hugo's more general 'prophetic' reflection on the necessity for a State-assured cultural policy see also Thiesse (2001, pp. 152–154) and Thiesse (2010, p. 57).
4. References to *Platform* and *The Map and the Territory* in this article contain two sets of page numbers separated by a forward slash: the first refers to the corresponding passages in the English translations of the books, while the second refers to the original French texts (following the editions listed in the 'References' section at the end of the present article). All translations from the French are my own.
5. Swift's proposal was that the poor in Ireland might alleviate their misery by fattening up their children and selling them as food to 'Persons of Quality and Fortune, through the Kingdom' (Swift 2009, p. 272).
6. Some readers might query whether the novel does indeed establish unequivocally the worth and significance of Jed's art. Clearly, we can never see this art, as it can only be conveyed through the novelistic medium of writing. Moreover, there is a certain 'flatness' to Jed's artistic projects which is not altogether unlike the deliberate 'flatness' of Houellebecq's own aesthetic. This produces an inevitable element of undecidability as to his creations' aesthetic interest, and a reader might conclude that Jed the artist is entirely a product of the artistico-commercial institutional complex depicted in the novel. However, there are recurrent indications throughout the novel that his work should be attributed a greater density of significance than this. In a rare direct interjection, the narrative voice tells us that, whatever their other misperceptions, people were 'justified' in seeing Jed as a 'serious artist' (Houellebecq 2012, p. 43/72). Moreover, key protagonists whose perceptions are portrayed as at least relatively independent of institutional servility are each intuitively arrested by something in Jed's art. This applies to Olga and his agent Franz, but also to the fictional character of 'Michel Houellebecq' himself within the novel. Although, at their first meeting, 'Houellebecq' moves rather cursorily through Jed's early work in the photography of industrial objects, he is so seized and absorbed by Jed's work on Michelin maps and professional occupations that he quite forgets for a full hour and a half to light his habitual cigarette (pp. 89–90/136). The otherwise self-parodistically misanthropic 'Houellebecq' also goes on to tell Jed explicitly that he is a 'good artist' (p. 114/173).
7. For suggestive general treatments of literary style and irony in Houellebecq, see Noguez (2003, pp. 74–153); Bellanger (2010, pp. 89–105, 118–122); Morrey (2013, pp. 34–45).
8. One is reminded of Roland Barthes writing on the 'nausea' produced by 'mythological' discourse – a language that seems to do one thing but actually does another (Barthes 1972).

References

- Banks, I.M., 1987. *Consider Phlebas*. London: Orbit.
- Banks, I.M., 1996. *Excession*. London: Orbit.
- Banks, I.M., 2008. *Matter*. London: Orbit.
- Barthes, R., 1972. *Mythologies*. London: Cape.
- Bellanger, A., 2010. *Houellebecq écrivain romantique* [Houellebecq, romantic writer]. Paris: Léo Scheer.
- Bourdieu, P., 1996. *The rules of art*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P., 1998. *On television*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Cacères, B., 1950. *La Rencontre des hommes* [The encounter with men]. Paris: Seuil.
- Culler, J., 1974. *Flaubert: the uses of uncertainty*. Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Harris, R., 2007. *The ghost*. London: Hutchinson.
- Houellebecq, M., 2000 (orig. 1998). *Atomised*. London: Heinemann.
- Houellebecq, M., 2002 (orig. 2001). *Platform*. London: Heinemann [secondary page references in text to the most readily available French edition, M. Houellebecq, *Plateforme*, Paris: J'ai lu, 2002].
- Houellebecq, M., 2005 (orig. 2005). *The possibility of an island*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Houellebecq, M., 2012 (orig. 2010). *The map and the territory*. London: Vintage [secondary page references in text to the most readily available French edition, M. Houellebecq, *La Carte et le territoire*, Paris: J'ai lu, 2012].

- Hugo, V., 2009 (orig. 1831). *Notre Dame de Paris 1482* [Notre Dame of Paris 1482]. Paris: Gallimard.
- Le Carré, J., 1974. *Tinker, tailor, soldier, spy*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Le Carré, J., 1989. *The Russia house*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Le Carré, J., 2013. *A delicate truth*. London: Viking.
- Malraux, A., 1967. *Museum without walls*. London: Secker and Warburg.
- Malraux, A., 1972. *Le Miroir des limbes I. Antimémoires* [The mirror of Limbo I: anti-memoirs]. Paris: Gallimard.
- Malraux, A., 1976. *Le Miroir des limbes II. La corde et la souris* [The mirror of Limbo II: the cord and the mouse]. Paris: Gallimard.
- Morrey, D., 2013. *Michel Houellebecq: humanity and its aftermath*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Musso, P., 2009. *Télé-politique. Le sarkoberlusconisme à l'écran* [Tele-politics: sarkoberlusconism on screen]. La Tour d'Aigues: Aube.
- Noguez, D., 2003. *Houellebecq, en fait* [Houellebecq, in fact]. Paris: Fayard.
- Shklovskij, V., 1965. 'Art as technique' (1917). In: L. Lemon and M. Reiss, eds. *Russian formalist criticism: four essays*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 3–24.
- Smith, Z., 2012. *NW*. London: Penguin.
- Swift, J., 2009. *A modest proposal and other writings*. London: Penguin.
- Thiesse, A.-M., 2001. *La création des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe-XIXe siècle* [The creation of national identities in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe]. Paris: Seuil.
- Thiesse, A.-M., 2010. *Faire les Français. Quelle identité nationale?* [Making the French. Which national identity?]. Paris: Stock.
- Williams, R., 1958. *Culture and society*. London: Chatto and Windus.



Secular cultural policy in Islamic countries: desirability and feasibility

Abbas Mehregan

To cite this article: Abbas Mehregan (2017) Secular cultural policy in Islamic countries: desirability and feasibility, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23:1, 17-35, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2015.1043289](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1043289)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1043289>



Published online: 21 May 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 516



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Secular cultural policy in Islamic countries: desirability and feasibility

Abbas Mehregan*

Independent Scholar

(Received 11 November 2014; accepted 15 April 2015)

Secularism in Islamic countries is a hotly-debated topic which produces dramatic sociopolitical consequences on the one hand, and wide-ranging academic controversy on the other. The real social potential of secularism among Muslim populations is an issue that is not always estimated properly. The present paper first reviews some historical examples of secular cultural policy in Islamic countries. This review covers the secular reforms in four political, social, legal, and educational spheres. Subsequently, using data from the World Values Survey, it compares empirically the desirability of a public role for religion in 18 Islamic and Western countries. Furthermore, it examines the acceptability of Western secular culture in six countries in the Muslim world. Bearing in mind Casanova's analytical approach to the theory of secularization, it comes to the conclusion that a democratic application of a secular cultural policy in Islamic countries is neither desirable nor feasible.

Keywords: secularism; Islamic countries; cultural policy

Introduction

The history of Islamic countries has witnessed a long-lasting controversy on secularism. The contentious role of religion in the public sphere is to be observed in significant social, political, and cultural transformations from the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, Rezā Shāh and 'White Revolution' of Muhammad Rezā Pahlavi in Iran, nationalist leaders of Egypt, the Socialist Ba'th Party in Iraq and Syria, to the experience of colonialism in many other Islamic countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Religion also played and constantly plays a substantial role in sociopolitical and military reactions to these transformations from, among others, the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran (1979), the takeover of political power by Taliban in Afghanistan (1996), the forming a state for the first time by an Islamic party (Justice and Development Party (AKP)) in Turkey (2002), to the new democratic movement in Arab and Islamic countries, known as 'Arab Spring' (began at 2011) and the subsequent continuous unrest in some countries such as Egypt until present.

What these two kinds of sociocultural crisis have in common is that in both cases cultural policymakers precipitously or progressively tended to ignore the will of the people once they had taken political power. Thus, these transformations

*Email: abbasmehregan@gmail.com

cause, either from the very beginning or progressively a sociocultural crisis at a macro level because the policymakers overlook either the socio-historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds in the milieu which are traditional in nature, or connive with the modern and contemporary cultural demands of the westernized or secular part of society. This refers to the problem of development in Islamic countries in general. The history of the past two centuries in the Muslim world reveals that secular leaders supposed that the only way of development is to westernize society. The successful experience of European industrial countries where socio-economic development occurred simultaneously alongside the process of separation between the church and the state has encouraged leaders in Islamic countries to use this pattern as a template for Islamic societies. Therefore, they attempted to exclude Islam or marginalize it. However, they fail to consider the social desirability of a secular cultural policy in Europe, which was not the case in Islamic world.

It should be said that these secular rulers were not alone in this attitude. Some scholars have likewise argued that secularism and the separation of religion from various areas of public policy-making is one of the vital preconditions for development. Various theories of modernization stress that the social presence of religion interrupts the process of change (Tamadonfar and Jelen 2014, p. ix). From a modernist point of view, religion is either considered as a private matter, which does not relate to public affairs, or as a 'bottleneck to economic growth' (Clarke 2013, p. 3). Indeed this approach considers the elimination of religion as an element of development (Juergensmeyer 2010, cited in Clarke 2013, p. 3). Some also claim that religion has the ability to make the poor even poorer (*ibid.*, p. 5). For Karl Marx and Torstein Veblen religion was an 'imbecile institution' which hindered economic development (Ekelund *et al.* 2006, p. 21). Particularly it is claimed that Islam is incompatible with capitalist development, because of the absence of rationality from its theology (Weber 1963 [1922], p. 265), the stark differences in values compared with the free market economy (Naqvi 1994, Metwally 1997, pp. 941–943, Voigt 2005, pp. 66 and 79), the extended role of government in its economic system (Tripp 2006, pp. 32–33), and because of the fatalistic nature of its teachings (Turner 1978, pp. 375–378).

This paper does not seek to support or refute the proposition that religion generally and Islam in particular is an impediment to socioeconomic development. Rather it will address the following question: whether a secular cultural policy in Islamic countries is desirable and feasible? This question is of supreme importance because it deals with a 'strategic part in the human enterprise of world-building'. Berger (1990 [1967], pp. 3–27) argues that the core of continuous measure of humankind in 'world-building' is in fact culture-building in which 'religion has played a strategic part'. Therefore, secular/religious cultural policy-making is to be seen as a significant element of cultural life in every society. 'Cultural policy' is considered here in its broad sense as a set of policies through which values, norms, beliefs, and traditions, in political, social, economic, legal, educational, and gender spheres are shaped and changed. Answering the above question, the current paper will first briefly review the historical experience of applying an extreme secular and pro-Western cultural policy in some Islamic countries. After that, regarding the research question, it will examine the hypothesis that: applying a secular cultural policy in Islamic countries democratically is neither desirable nor feasible. To prove this claim the paper will compare empirically the desirability of a public role for

religion in 18 Islamic and Western countries. Furthermore, it examines the acceptability of Western secular culture in 6 countries in the Muslim world.

A brief review of secular cultural policy in some Islamic countries

It is safe to say that most of Islamic countries have more or less experienced secular Western cultural policy. However, some of them are exemplary in this regard. Below the application of a secular cultural policy in some Islamic countries will be reviewed. This historical review covers the secular reforms in four political, social, legal, and educational spheres. Turkey is a good case to start with. The origins of Westernization in Turkey can be traced back to the era of Sultan Mahmud's II rule of 1808–1839. Comparing Turkey with Western societies, there was the idea that not only the material features but also some traditional habits and customs should be replaced to achieve harmony with Western civilization as the model of progress. In this regard, Mahmud established the first Turkish newspaper (1831). He initiated or promoted Western attire, etiquette, taste, European music, and European headgear. He disagreed with traditional long beards and the Turkish style of riding (Berkes 1998, pp. 122 and 126). In 1839 Sultan Abdülmecid adopted a new policy which opened the doors wide to Western modifications. *Tanzimat* reforms (1839–1876) were inherently secular and included political, social, economic, legal, and educational changes which affected basic values in Turkish traditional society. The close relations of Turkey and Europe during this period led Europe 'to exert its influence directly' (ibid, p. 138).

The most fundamental phase of secularization in Turkey began in 1923 under the rule of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1923–1938). Cultural modernization was one of his main goals alongside economic development. In order to expedite the cultural modernization, he put religion and traditions on his agenda. He 'sought to break the attachment of ordinary people to Islam, and win them to a Western and secular style of life' (Lapidus 2002, p. 502). He replaced Muslim law in the court by Swiss, French, and Italian law, changed the official holiday from Friday to Sunday, adopted the European calendar in the place of the Muslim *hijri* calendar (1925) (Özyürek 2006, pp. 13–14), abrogated religious institutions, dissolved Sufi orders (1925), excluded religious authorities from political decision-making, and placed them and their economic sources officially under the government control. Furthermore, the Kemalist regime banned the wearing of traditional and Islamic clothes such as turban, robe, and fez, replacing it by the European hat (the Hat Law of 1925), substituting the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet (1928) and simultaneously striving to eliminate Arabic and Persian terms from Turkish and importing German and French vocabulary instead. Also choosing a Western surname was required (1935) (Lapidus 2002, p. 502). The Kemalist regime banned veil for teachers and students, prohibited the official use of some religious titles like *hacz*, *hafiz*, and *molla*, and the 'formation of societies based on religion, sect, and *tariqa*' (1938) (Berkes 1998, pp. 466 and 473). Atatürk explicitly stressed: 'Progress is too difficult or even impossible for nations that insist on preserving their traditions and beliefs lacking in rational bases' (cited in Berkes 1998, p. 466). Among other measures toward secularization of Turkey which were of great importance is the replacing of religious by secular education in secondary schools, which was supposed to prepare the mindsets for the modification of religious thought (Tahirli 2005, p. 66). Thus, with these measures, 'Islam was "disestablished" and

deprived of a role in public life, and the ordinary symbols of Turkish attachment to the traditional culture were replaced by new legal, linguistic, and other signs of modern identity' (Lapidus 2002, p. 503). An early sign of constitutional secularism was the omission of Islam as the religion of the state in 1928. In the Constitution of 1937 secularism was emphasized as a principle (Berkes 1998, p. 482).

Atatürk's secular policies were taken as a model by some other rulers in Islamic countries who believed in the interconnectedness of socioeconomic development and secularism. Tunisian leaders are a good example of this. Like other secular leaders of Islamic countries Ben Ali (r. 1987–2011) considered politically-active Islamic groups as a threat for the country. He cast the shadow of secularism over the sky of Tunisia and excluded Islamists opposition from political competition, branding them as 'reactionary' and 'anti-modernization' groups (Murphy 1999, pp. 6–7). However, the architect of secularism in Tunisia was Habib Bourguiba (r. 1957–1987) who broadened this sketch before Ben Ali in all spheres of Tunisian life. More than any other pro-Western leading figure after Atatürk he endeavored to westernize the whole culture of his country. In his era the religious and cultural legacy of Tunisia 'was overshadowed by an official Francophile culture' (Esposito and Voll 2001, p. 92). French narrowed the field for Arabic in official, educational, and intellectual spheres. He linked Islam with regress (Murphy 1999, p. 70) and consequently suppressed the Muslim 'ulamā' which, in his opinion, were representative of reactionary Islam and was fascinated by the West as the exclusive way of progress (Esposito and Voll 2001, p. 92). Bourguiba believed strongly that the expansion of secularism associated with the nature and task of government. Because of this, when he took the power, he combined Islamic courts in a secular system of the judiciary, made the secular Code of Personal Status into law (1957) and declared some Sharia family laws as illegal. He expressed his hostility to Islamic traditions in society especially when he called the Islamic veil an 'odious rag' (Koplow 2011, p. 55), and banned it (mid-1980s) or when he professed his opposition to fasting in the Islamic holy month Ramadan, arguing that it is an impediment to productivity and development (Sadiki 2002, p. 507). He set reforms in motion aimed at decreasing the influence of Islam in Tunisia, such as altering the education syllabus in favor of secular contents (Murphy 1999, p. 51).

The Shahs of Iran were also emulators of Atatürk's reforms. Reza Shah's (r. 1925–1941) triplex ideology consisted of nationalism (archaism), modernization (Europeanization) and secularism (de-Islamization) (Banani 1961, cited in Fazeli 2006, p. 46). The foundation of the Organization for the Development of Thought (Sazmane Parvareshe Afkar) (1937) was an interesting example of an attempt to inculcate cultural (or ideological) uniformity through mass media, schoolbooks, music, theater, and public speeches (Matin-Asgari 2012, p. 352). Reza Shah put heavy emphasis on militant nationalism instead of religion as the basic element of social cohesion (Boroujerdi 2003, p. 154). Thus, he persistently pursued a policy of anti-Islamism and anti-clericalism (Fazeli 2006, p. 47). Some of his fundamental secular reforms, which resembled strongly to Atatürk's secularization program, included taking the judicial system out of the control of clerics, limiting the access of clergy to endowment (vaghf) as a part of their financial source (1933), enacting a new secular commercial code (1925), criminal code (1926), and civil code (1928) based on European patterns, replacing religious codes by modern civil codes for example in the matter of divorce and marriage (1931), restricting religious materials in primary and secondary schools along with introducing Western-oriented

academic disciplines in the educational system. He established the modern University of Tehran with faculty educated in Europe (1934), dispatching many students to the West to become familiar with secular sciences, changing Islamic and traditional style of dress by presenting the new headgear (1927) and forbidding the wearing of turbans and veils (1936), replacing the Islamic *hijri* calendar by the solar calendar (1935), limiting the practice of some religious traditions in Islamic holy months, and other measures which led to the secularization of commercial, administrative, and judicial systems in Iran (Fallahi 1993, cited in Fazeli 2006, p. 47; Boroujerdi 2003, pp. 89 and 156).

Mohammad Reza Shah (r. 1941–1979) the son and successor of Reza Shah followed his father's secular cultural policies. His modernization strategy, among others, was based on 'Westernization of the culture'. His insight of Westernization, however, was superficial and produced a commercialized culture which was evident in the content of education, art, film and leisure in the 1970s, as well as social relations in everyday life (Farsoun and Mashayekhi 1992, pp. 5 and 64). His 'White Revolution' of 1963 or 'the Revolution of the Shah and the people' comprised six principles among which enfranchisement of women was deemed as 'harmful to Islam' by the clergy. Ayatollah Khomeini considered this reform and Family Protection Laws as anti-Islamic reforms which were 'intended for the break-up of Muslim families' (Sedghi 2007, pp. 128 and 155). The Shah's force-feeding of American values, which was considered as a kind of inner colonialism (Juergensmeyer 2008, p. 30), marginalized the custodians of traditional values namely the Shia religious establishment. One can assess his cultural modernization as harsh changes in social, legal, and educational spheres without regard to the radically religious and traditional context of Iran at that time.

Muhammad Ali (r. 1805–1849), the founder of modern Egypt, is regarded as the first cultural policy-maker in the history of the country.¹ One of his major secular decisions was the subordination of the 'ulamā' to the ruler. He confiscated tax-farms and endowment properties which led to the political debilitation of the 'ulamā' and their economic dependency upon the Pasha. This policy was continued by his grandson Ismail Pasha so that the 'ulamā's' activities were circumscribed to educational and judicial matters. Ismail Pasha (r. 1863–1879), in addition to the technical development of Egypt, also furthered secular cultural reforms. Generating European-style law courts, a secular mode of education, and Western media were all moves in this direction (Lapidus 2002, p. 512). During the reign of Ismail in the 1870s Egypt experienced European colonialism. British colonialism, which influenced educational and cultural systems, intensified the westernization of Egypt. Also the 1923 constitution, drafted and implemented after the independence of Egypt in 1922, treasured secularism.

The era of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–1970) was not an exception to this rule and can be characterized as the era of secular Arab nationalism based on language, history, and culture and not religion. Even his socialism had Western and not Islamic roots. He attempted to supervise Islamic institutions from Al-Azhar University to all public and private mosques which were under the control of the Ministry of Religious Endowments. The land reform of 1952 which dominated the state on endowment properties was the appropriate instrument to reach this goal. Moreover, continuing his secular policies, Nasser closed the Sharia courts which alongside with modern courts were referred since the nineteenth century (Hibbard 2010, pp. 54 and 62). He inserted secular themes of study and women's faculty to Al-Azhar

University (1961) (Carvalho 2009, p. 7). The strategy of openness to foreign values in this period is evident in the specified purposes of the Ministry of Culture, established in 1958, which emphasizes '[t]he enrichment of the national culture by cross-fertilization with foreign cultural values ...' The Minister of Culture, Dr Sarwat Okasha, described this mission as follows: 'Culture in Egypt ... must also be open to a situation of dialogue with influences from abroad. ... [B]y means of cultural exchanges, the cross-fertilization of the cultural heritage with modern and alien cultures can be achieved' (Wahba 1972, pp. 17 and 35).

The two next presidents of Egypt, Anwar Sadat (r. 1970–1981) and Hosni Mubarak (r. 1981–2011), continued and advanced the secular and pro-Western policies of Nasser to the extent that Sadat is featured as a totally Western-oriented leader. Much like his predecessor, Sadat believed in the separation of state and religion. He stated frankly that: 'those who wish to practice Islam can go to the mosques, and those who wish to engage in politics may do so through legal institutions'. For him, mosques were the exclusive place of worship and not anything else. Because of this, his state monitored all non-governmental religious institutions, nationalized many private mosques, chose imams and the subjects of their sermon, and forced Imams to be 'approved and licensed' by the related ministry (Hibbard 2010, p. 77). Mubarak, who was ousted with the waves of 'Arab Spring' in 2011, continued the monitoring and suppression of religious groups. To complete the process of Westernization of the culture, he bluntly demanded people to leave their cultural customs to gain socio-political progress: 'Since we have chosen the road of democracy, we must think and breathe democracy ... work hard and forget our reactionary past' (Youssef 1985, p. 138).

The whole history of Western colonialism in Islamic countries was an alien experience which attempted to impose a secular vision to political, social, economic, and cultural spheres of Muslim life. French colonialism in Morocco (1912–1956) subordinated religious figures and the juridical system to the state, and limited the application of Sharia in juridical processes, 'helped to break down the traditional structure of Moroccan society', weakened the power of religious authorities, expanded the European mode of clothing, art, sport, and lifestyle, constructed new schools, created special education for sons of renowned people to assimilate them into French values (Lapidus 2002, pp. 607–608).

Under the presidency of Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr (r. 1968–1979), a member of the Socialist Ba'ath Party, who sought the improving of Iraqi relations with the former Soviet Union, Iraqi cultural institutions were ordered to persistently 'modernize their structures' (El-Basri 1980, p. 16), 'struggle against reactionary ... trends' (p. 27), move towards socialism, promote a 'progressive [pro-socialist] revolutionary culture' (p. 29). In addition to these, 'moulding a new Iraqi citizen' (p. 28) was one of the cultural goals of Ba'ath Party. According to the Article 3 of the law of 1976, the Board of Education, one of the Iraqi legal cultural institutions, was obliged

to bring about a total and radical change in educational policies, structure, curricula and practices, with a view to harmonizing and complementing educational activities and gearing them to the requirements and objectives of political, economic and social planning aimed at moulding a new Iraqi citizen. (ibid. 1980, p. 28)

Also Saddam Hussein (r. 1979–2003), the successor of Hassan al-Bakr, was characterized as ‘the most secular and unIslamic leader in the Middle East’ (Carvalho 2009, p. 8), who pursued secular policies harshly.

Even though Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon have their independence since 1945 and 1946 and Europeans have no direct presence in this region, ‘the authority of the West’ is still today palpable and Western development is their model of reconstitution (Farouk-Alli 2004, p. 458). For King Hussein (r. 1952–1999) in Hashemite Jordan it was important to tie and strengthen the relationship between global and local culture. From 1948 to 1978 Jordan witnessed a major cultural development: between 1948 and 1961 the number of modern schools increased and many private and public cultural institutions emerged (Al-Amad 1981, pp. 13–14). In 1962/1963 the University of Jordan was set up in consultation with and under the auspices of a British delegation² to serve the Arab world and particularly Jordan and address, among other issues, international cultures. One of the goals of the Five-year Development Plan of 1976–1980 was ‘implanting in the citizen new and up-to-date social, economic, and cultural values’ through all accessible mass media (ibid, pp. 18 and 39). It is needless to say that the revolutionary cultural movement of enlightenment in late seventeenth century was the source of secular sociopolitical order in Europe and the West. In a speech in 1978 the minister of Culture and Youth of Jordan emphasized this cultural revolution and declared the ‘Special encouragement of the universal idea of enlightenment, connected with the hopes of our nation and community and requiring constructive work and a positive attitude’ as one of the aims of the Ministry (ibid., p. 30).

This short review of the history of secularism in some Islamic countries illustrates the long-term efforts to change the culture and worldview of Muslims. Now one may ask in what extent were these attempts successful? The next part of the paper tries to provide an answer to this question.

Materials

The data of this study comes mainly from the fifth wave (2005–2008) of the World Values Survey (WVS) and only about a quarter of the data is extracted from the fourth wave (2000–2004) of the survey.³ In order to examine the attitudes of Muslims to the role of religion in public affairs and policy-making four questions were selected. The questions read as follow: ‘How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statement[s]: (1) Politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office; (2) It would be better for [this country] if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office; (3) It should implement only the laws of the Sharia’; and (4) ‘Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. How essential do you think the following things are as a characteristic of democracy? Use this scale where 1 means ‘not at all an essential characteristic of democracy’ and 10 means it definitely is ‘an essential characteristic of democracy’: Religious authorities interpret the laws’. Furthermore, to assess attitudes towards applying a secular cultural policy in the Islamic world, this question was added: (5) ‘Every country faces a number of regional and international problems. Which are the problems you consider very important (very serious), important, somewhat important, less important or not important: Western cultural imperialism’? The countries concerned were a total of 12 Islamic countries as follow: Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Malaysia,

Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. The first question was not asked in Saudi Arabia. The second question was not asked in Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia. The third question was not asked in Malaysia, Morocco, and Turkey. The fourth question was not asked in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The fifth question was asked only in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. To get a more comprehensive understanding of the topic in three of five of the questions, findings were compared with some Western industrial countries. The first and second questions were compared with Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Sweden. The fourth question was compared in addition to the mentioned countries, with France, Great Britain, Netherlands, and Switzerland. This question was not asked in Italy.

Findings

The frequency distribution of answers to the first question, which is presented in Table 1, shows that the vast majority of respondents in all concerned Islamic countries strongly agreed or agreed that politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office. Pakistan with 95% is the first country in the table. After that respondents in Indonesia with 88.4%, Egypt with 87.7%, Iraq with 86.9%, Algeria with 78.3%, Jordan with 77.5%, Iran with 75.1 %, Morocco with 74.8%, Bangladesh with 71%, and Malaysia with 63.9% strongly agreed or agreed that the political sphere of their society should be in the hands of religious politicians. This relates partially to the high level of religiosity in the Muslim world as well as the politics-friendly aspects of Islamic religious culture. The last Islamic country in the table is Turkey in which 56.5% preferred to see religious politicians in the political system. This may be a reflection of the fact that historically Turkey, more than any other Islamic country, has been under extreme pressure from secular forces, a fact which has already been mentioned above. These findings in Islamic countries can be compared with their counterparts in non-Islamic countries. In the first non-Islamic country in the table, Canada, only 19.6% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that politicians who do not believe in God are not fit to take public policies. In all other given Western countries a minority of less than 12.7% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the idea (in Australia 12.6%, in Italy 12.5%, in Germany 11.5%, in Finland 10%, in Norway 3.9%, and in Sweden only 3.6%).

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of reactions to the second question. Again the majority of respondents in the Islamic countries concerned (except for Algeria (39.7%) and Pakistan (17.3%)) strongly agreed or agreed that it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office. In Egypt 87.1%, in Indonesia 82.7%, in Iran 67.8%, in Jordan 64.7%, in Malaysia 58.1%, in Morocco 57.5%, in Iraq 57.4%, and in Turkey 51.4% of participants preferred public affairs to be run by strongly religious people. Even in Algeria the percentage of supporters (39.7%) of public office being in the hands of strongly religious individuals is higher than opponents (29.9%). Notably, compared to attitudes towards the inappropriateness of politicians who do not believe in God for public office, the percentage of those who strongly agreed or agreed with public office being reserved for strong believers has overall decreased. This decline may be explained by the importance of 'believe in God' in the political sphere compared to 'strong religious beliefs' in general public office although this drop is considerable only in Pakistan, Algeria, and Iraq in which respectively 49.8%, 29.9%, and 29.2% of

Table 1. Comparison of the frequency distribution of agreement with the statement that: 'Politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office', among 18 Islamic and Western countries.

Country	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree + Agree
Pakistan	82.5% (1649)	12.5% (250)	4.1% (81)	0.9% (17)	0.2% (3)	95% (1899)
Indonesia	60.6% (1776)	27.8% (815)	4.4% (128)	4.9% (144)	2.4% (69)	88.4% (2591)
Egypt	70.1% (2104)	17.6% (529)	2.4% (73)	4.9% (148)	4.9% (146)	87.7% (2633)
Iraq	72.6% (3383)	14.3% (667)	2.6% (119)	7.1% (332)	3.4% (160)	86.9% (4050)
Algeria	55.9% (663)	22.4% (266)	8.6% (102)	9.5% (112)	3.5% (42)	78.3% (929)
Jordan	67.7% (1575)	9.8% (228)	1.8% (43)	5.9% (138)	14.7% (341)	77.5% (1803)
Iran	43.4% (1153)	31.7% (843)	11.1% (295)	9.7% (257)	4.1% (109)	75.1% (1996)
Morocco	57.9% (1837)	16.9% (537)	7.1% (225)	9.5% (301)	8.5% (271)	74.8% (2374)
Bangladesh	31.9% (453)	39.1% (555)	5.5% (78)	21.1% (300)	2.4% (34)	71% (1008)
Malaysia	36.4% (437)	27.5% (330)	22.9% (275)	9.3% (112)	3.9% (47)	63.9% (767)
Turkey	27.8% (1247)	28.7% (1290)	14.3% (642)	19.1% (860)	10.1% (452)	56.5% (2537)
Canada	7.4% (294)	12.2% (485)	20.5% (814)	38.0% (1507)	21.9% (869)	19.6% (779)
Australia	5.3% (75)	7.3% (102)	30.2% (424)	28.2% (396)	28.9% (405)	12.6% (177)
Italy	2.8% (27)	9.7% (94)	28.9% (279)	43.0% (416)	15.6% (151)	12.5% (121)
Germany	2.4% (46)	9.1% (177)	19.4% (376)	24.9% (484)	44.3% (860)	11.5% (223)
Finland	4.3% (43)	5.7% (57)	20.0% (199)	43.3% (431)	26.7% (266)	10% (100)
Norway	1.4% (14)	2.5% (25)	6.3% (64)	8.8% (90)	81.0% (824)	3.9% (39)
Sweden	1.1% (23)	2.5% (50)	10.7% (214)	36.6% (733)	49.1% (983)	3.6% (73)

Note: The numbers in parentheses are the numbers of cases.

Table 2. Comparison of the frequency distribution of agreement with the statement that: 'It would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office', among 17 Islamic and Western countries.

Country	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree + Agree
Egypt	53.3% (1586)	33.8% (1006)	8.6% (257)	3.8% (112)	0.5% (16)	87.1% (2592)
Indonesia	42.6% (824)	40.1% (776)	10.3% (199)	6.3% (121)	0.7% (13)	82.7% (1600)
Iran	31.1% (825)	36.7% (973)	20.3% (539)	8.7% (232)	3.2% (84)	67.8% (1798)
Jordan	32.3% (728)	32.4% (731)	13.6% (307)	17.6% (397)	4.0% (91)	64.7% (1459)
Malaysia	21.7% (260)	36.4% (437)	33.9% (407)	6.8% (81)	1.3% (15)	58.1% (697)
Morocco	31.2% (644)	26.3% (543)	24.6% (508)	10.2% (211)	7.7% (160)	57.5 (1187)
Iraq	29.6% (1257)	27.8% (1183)	13.3% (565)	23.4% (996)	5.8% (247)	57.4% (2440)
Turkey	19.2% (850)	32.2% (1423)	21.5% (951)	17.7% (783)	9.4% (417)	51.4% (2273)
Algeria	16.0% (168)	23.7% (249)	30.4% (319)	23.9% (251)	6.0% (63)	39.7% (417)
Canada	6.3% (250)	18.5% (732)	23.6% (934)	36.0% (1423)	15.6% (615)	24.8% (982)
Germany	4.9% (94)	16.1% (310)	27.9% (536)	22.9% (439)	28.2% (542)	21% (404)
Italy	3.6% (35)	14.2% (138)	36.1% (351)	35.5% (345)	10.5% (102)	17.8% (173)
Pakistan	7.0% (132)	10.3% (195)	32.8% (618)	39.8% (751)	10.0% (189)	17.3% (327)
Australia	4.9% (68)	9.3% (130)	28.8% (404)	31.6% (443)	25.4% (356)	14.2% (198)
Finland	2.3% (23)	9.7% (97)	21.5% (216)	42.6% (427)	23.9% (240)	12% (120)
Sweden	1.3% (26)	5.8% (115)	17.5% (349)	38.1% (758)	37.3% (741)	7.1% (141)
Norway	1.9% (19)	4.3% (44)	9.2% (93)	10.7% (108)	74.0% (750)	6.2% (63)

Note: The numbers in parentheses are the numbers of cases.

participants strongly disagreed or disagreed with the idea of public office being the domain of the pious. On the other hand, in Canada 24.8%, in Germany 21%, in Italy 17.8%, in Australia 14.2%, in Finland 12%, in Sweden 7.1%, and in Norway only 6.2% of people who attended the survey strongly agreed or agreed with this proposition. The frequency distribution of answers of Western participants to this and the last question clearly reveals the societal acceptability of secularism in Western countries.

Indeed, the legal system is a substantial institution which not only mirrors the moral, cultural, social, and political values of a society but also can form these values in the long term. The level of secularity or religiousness of a democratic legal system is an indicator of a society's values. As was previously mentioned, secular leaders of Islamic countries initiated drastic secular reforms in their juridical systems. The question related to the exclusivity of religious laws can help us to assess the successfulness of a secular policy to change the people's cultural opinion. Table 3 shows the proportion of the surveyed population who strongly agreed or agreed that it should implement 'only the laws of the Sharia' in their country: 88.1% in Saudi Arabia, 80.2% in Egypt, 79.1% in Jordan, 71.6% in Algeria, 61.5% in Pakistan, 54.7% in Iran, 51.2% in Iraq, 50.8% in Indonesia, and 44.2% in Bangladesh. These findings are in agreement with those by Esposito and Mogahed (2007). Analyzing Gallup Poll data from 2001 to 2007, they found that the Muslim majorities in Jordan, Pakistan, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh say that Islamic Sharia should be the 'only source' of law (p. 48). However, they found that overall in Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan, Morocco, Iran, and Bangladesh 59% of the 'politically radicalized'⁴ Muslims and 32% of 'moderates'⁵ believe that Sharia should be the 'only source' of legislation. This is while 91% of the politically radicalized and 83% of moderates favored sharia as 'a source' of legislation (pp. 92–93).

There is a further legal aspect with regard to the interpretation of laws in a democracy. People were asked to what extent they agree that the interpretation of laws by religious authorities is an essential characteristic of democracy. Table 4 displays the frequency distribution of answers in 18 Islamic and Western countries. The results from adding up of scores 7 and 8 & 9 and 10 on the ten-point scale which expose the tendency towards considering interpretation of laws by religious authorities as an essential characteristic of democracy are as follow: Egypt 75.6%, Jordan 68.9%, Iraq 48%, Indonesia 46.6%, Morocco 42.5%, Malaysia 38.3%, Iran 37.1%, and Turkey 33.7%. It is worth noting that, as the mean score of responses shows, almost all of these Islamic countries tended to consider the interpretation of laws by religious authorities as an essential characteristic of democracy. It is a clear sign of the desirability of religious authorities performing important sociopolitical roles and the confidence invested in them in Muslim societies. In contrast, the results from adding up of scores 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 at the other end of the ten-point scale illustrate that a large majority in all the Western countries did not deem the interpretation of laws by religious authorities as an essential characteristic of democracy; 100% in Sweden, 89.1% in Norway, 87.4% in Germany, 86.6% in Switzerland, 81% in Finland, 79.2% in Australia, 78.9% in Netherlands, 77% in France, 76.3% in Canada, and 66.9% in Great Britain.

The last question directly examines the attitudes of Muslims to Western cultural imperialism (see Table 5). Adding together the frequency distribution of three categories of answers, we find out that in almost all concerned Islamic countries,

Table 3. Comparison of the frequency distribution of agreement with the statement that: ‘It should implement only the laws of the sharia’, among 9 Islamic countries.

Country	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree + Agree
Saudi Arabia	68.9% (974)	19.2% (271)	7.4% (105)	2.7% (38)	1.8% (25)	88.1% (1245)
Egypt	46.7% (1386)	33.5% (996)	10.0% (296)	8.7% (258)	1.1% (34)	80.2% (2382)
Jordan	54.4% (640)	24.7% (291)	12.4% (146)	4.0% (47)	4.4% (52)	79.1% (931)
Algeria	36.7% (432)	34.9% (411)	15.5% (183)	7.3% (86)	5.5% (65)	71.6% (843)
Pakistan	36.4% (710)	25.1% (490)	30.9% (603)	6.3% (123)	1.2% (23)	61.5% (1200)
Iran	24.1% (632)	30.6% (803)	26.1% (684)	10.3% (269)	4.8% (126)	54.7% (1435)
Iraq	31.2% (1385)	20.0% (886)	20.0% (886)	18.8% (836)	10.1% (448)	51.2% (2271)
Indonesia	14.2% (132)	35.6% (331)	25.3% (235)	12.4% (115)	12.5% (116)	50.8% (463)
Bangladesh	21.0% (255)	23.2% (282)	23.5% (286)	22.3% (271)	10.1% (123)	44.2% (537)

Note: The numbers in parentheses are the numbers of cases.

Table 4. Comparison of the frequency distribution and mean score of agreement with the statement that: 'The interpretation of the laws by religious authorities is an essential characteristic of democracy', among 18 Islamic and Western countries.

Country	Not essential	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Essential	7 + 8 + 9 + 10	1 + 2 + 3 + 4	Mean
Egypt	2.6% (77)	0.7% (21)	1.6% (49)	2.9% (86)	9.2% (273)	7.4% (219)	9.3% (276)	11.3% (337)	7.1% (210)	47.9% (1422)	75.6% (2245)	7.8% (233)	8.09
Jordan	13.5% (141)	2.4% (25)	1.9% (20)	1.2% (13)	6.0% (63)	6.1% (64)	7.5% (79)	9.4% (99)	7.2% (75)	44.8% (469)	68.9% (722)	19% (199)	7.36
Iraq	14.7% (362)	5.0% (122)	6.2% (153)	6.8% (168)	11.3% (279)	8.1% (199)	9.5% (235)	11.3% (278)	8.4% (206)	18.8% (462)	48% (1181)	32.7% (805)	5.95
Indonesia	11.4% (203)	5.6% (100)	7.1% (127)	5.7% (101)	15.2% (271)	8.3% (148)	8.5% (152)	10.1% (179)	6.8% (121)	21.2% (377)	46.6% (829)	29.8% (531)	6.06
Morocco	12.6% (119)	5.8% (55)	9.0% (85)	5.8% (55)	15.6% (147)	8.7% (82)	11.3% (107)	10.5% (99)	5.9% (56)	14.8% (140)	42.5% (402)	33.2% (314)	5.69
Malaysia	3.0% (36)	3.6% (43)	4.7% (56)	11.1% (133)	20.4% (244)	18.9% (227)	13.8% (165)	11.9% (143)	7.1% (85)	5.5% (66)	38.3% (459)	22.4% (268)	5.95
Iran	14.3% (372)	8.0% (207)	7.7% (200)	8.1% (211)	15.2% (395)	9.7% (253)	10.7% (278)	10.1% (263)	6.8% (177)	9.5% (246)	37.1% (964)	38.1% (990)	5.31
Turkey	22.3% (286)	9.0% (115)	7.7% (99)	6.3% (81)	13.3% (171)	7.7% (99)	9.6% (123)	8.7% (111)	4.4% (57)	11.0% (141)	33.7% (432)	45.3% (581)	4.88
Great Britain	28.8% (280)	14.4% (140)	13.7% (133)	10.0% (97)	14.0% (136)	8.0% (78)	4.3% (42)	3.5% (34)	0.9% (9)	2.5% (24)	11.2% (109)	66.9% (650)	3.48
France	39.6% (387)	15.7% (154)	13.4% (131)	8.3% (81)	11.7% (114)	3.5% (34)	2.6% (25)	2.5% (24)	1.2% (12)	1.6% (16)	7.9% (77)	77% (753)	2.88
Australia	48.8% (670)	12.4% (171)	11.7% (161)	6.3% (86)	9.8% (135)	3.3% (46)	2.5% (34)	2.0% (27)	0.9% (12)	2.3% (32)	7.7% (105)	79.2% (1088)	2.67
Canada	32.8% (670)	17.8% (363)	16.5% (337)	9.2% (188)	10.9% (222)	5.2% (106)	3.3% (67)	2.3% (48)	0.9% (19)	1.1% (23)	7.6% (157)	76.3% (1558)	3.01
Netherlands	49.8% (495)	12.7% (126)	9.7% (96)	6.7% (67)	10.5% (104)	4.3% (43)	2.9% (29)	1.8% (18)	0.8% (8)	0.7% (7)	6.2% (62)	78.9% (784)	2.59
Switzerland	58.5% (700)	14.5% (174)	9.1% (109)	4.5% (54)	4.9% (59)	2.8% (34)	1.0% (12)	1.9% (23)	1.1% (13)	1.5% (18)	5.5% (66)	86.6% (1037)	2.22
Germany	65.8% (1313)	9.3% (186)	8.3% (166)	4.0% (80)	5.0% (99)	2.5% (50)	1.8% (36)	1.7% (33)	0.4% (8)	1.2% (23)	5.1% (100)	87.4% (1745)	2.6
Finland	38.9% (385)	17.8% (176)	15.4% (152)	8.9% (88)	9.4% (93)	4.6% (46)	2.2% (22)	2.2% (22)	0.5% (5)	0.1% (1)	5% (50)	81% (801)	2.70
Norway	57.9% (584)	16.7% (168)	9.2% (93)	5.3% (53)	5.3% (53)	2.6% (26)	0.9% (9)	0.7% (7)	0.8% (8)	0.7% (7)	3.1% (31)	89.1% (898)	2.08
Sweden	68.3% (674)	12.9% (127)	8.1% (80)	10.7% (106)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	100% (987)	1.61

Note: The numbers in parentheses are the numbers of cases.

Table 5. The frequency distribution of attitudes towards cultural invasion by the West.

Country	Very serious	Serious	Somewhat serious	Less serious	Not serious	Very serious + Serious + Somewhat serious	Very serious + Serious
Jordan	87.1% (1030)	8.0% (95)	3.0% (35)	0.7% (8)	1.3% (15)	98.1% (10,565)	95.1% (1125)
Iraq	82.3% (3592)	12.0% (522)	2.8% (121)	1.6% (70)	1.4% (62)	97.1% (4235)	94.3% (4114)
Morocco	72.2% (606)	15.6% (131)	8.6% (72)	2.4% (20)	1.2% (10)	96.4% (809)	87.8% (737)
Egypt	67.9% (1917)	20.2% (571)	7.9% (224)	2.3% (65)	1.6% (45)	96% (2712)	88.1% (2488)
Saudi Arabia	71.6% (1010)	15.9% (225)	7.7% (109)	2.4% (34)	2.3% (33)	95.2% (1344)	87.5% (1235)
Iran	58.0% (2875)	20.8% (1030)	11.3% (561)	5.8% (286)	4.1% (202)	90.1% (4466)	78.8% (3905)

Note: The numbers in parentheses are the numbers of cases.

namely Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia more than 95% of those who responded felt that Western cultural imperialism is a very serious, serious, or somewhat serious problem for their country. Only in Iran this percentage fell to 90.1%. Again adding together the frequency distribution of only two categories of answers, we discovered that in all countries, with the exception of Iran, more than 87% of participants considered cultural invasion by the West a very serious or serious problem. In Iran this percentage fell to 78.8% while in Jordan and Iraq it increased to 95.1% and 94.3% respectively. Correspondingly, Esposito and Mogahed (2007) found that 60% of 'moderates' in the 10 most populous Islamic countries 'view the United States unfavorably' (pp. 69–70) and 67% describe this country as 'aggressive' (p.82). Also 72% of the politically radicalized and 52% of moderates do not believe that the United States really want to support democracy in the Arab world (p. 83). Furthermore, 64% of respondents in Turkey, 57% in Egypt, and 53% in Kuwait say that 'the West doesn't show concern for better relations' with Arabs and Muslims (p. 60).

Discussion and conclusion

Casanova (2009, p. 7) argues that the theory of secularism consists of three parts: secular differentiation of social institutions (separation of this-worldly institutions from religious institution and transcendent principles); the reduction of religiosity which accompanies the process of modernization; and 'privatization of religion' as a prerequisite for democracy. Observing secularism in Islamic countries in this theoretical framework, it can be argued that: first, the process of secular differentiation of institutions, which can be traced back to the exertions of secular leaders of some Islamic countries as well as the experience of colonialism in the early nineteenth century, is an incomplete project. This reality is evident not only in official combination of religion and state in some countries such as Islamic Republic of Pakistan (founded in 1956), Islamic Republic of Mauritania (founded in 1958), Islamic Republic of Iran (founded in 1979), and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (founded in 2001), but also in the increasing political power assumed by Islamic parties and forces, applying Islamic norms and principles in economic activities (Islamic banking), implementation of the laws of Sharia, planning Islamic curriculum in educational system, cultivating religious culture, and even waging 'holy war' in the contemporary experience of Islamic countries, even those that do not introduce themselves as a theocracy. Not surprisingly, the secular differentiation of institutions is not supported by Muslim masses. The present findings suggest that, although many scholars assume secularism to be a precondition of democracy or emphasize the incompatibility of Islam in particular with democracy, for many Muslims political democracy is characterized by, among other factors, the vital role of 'ulamā' as the ultimate reference for legal disputes, without which democracy lacks a substantial element. This implies a strong tendency among Muslims to indigenize and more precisely religionize Western democracy. This finding is consistent with those described by Esposito and Mogahed (2007, p. 63) who found that 'Muslims see no contradiction between democratic values and religious principles'. They 'would opt for a ... model in which religious principles and democratic values coexist'. Correspondingly Muslim intellectual reformists and thinkers try to theorize this trend by the reinterpretation of holy texts and Islamic traditions.⁶ Islamic reformism, which is called 'Islamic Protestantism', attempts to represent a

peaceful and modern face of Islam. It is a plural project which has been begun with Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn Asadābādī (1838–1897) in Iran and Egypt, continued with his student Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905) in Egypt, and Muhammad Iqbāl (1877–1938) in Pakistan. Today the voice of religious intellectualism is heard from around the Muslim world from Turkey (Edip Yüksel) to Sudan (Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na‘im), Iraq (Ahmed Al-Gubbānchi), Iran (Abdolkarim Soroush), Egypt (Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Ahmed Subhy Mansour), and Algeria (Mohammed Arkoun).

It is noteworthy that the studies of Casanova (2009, p. 13) show ‘the secular separation of religion from political society or even from the state are not universalizable maxims, in the sense that they are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for democratic politics’.

Secondly, recent studies confirm the high level of religiosity in Islamic countries (see e.g. Esmer and Pettersson 2007, Mehregan 2014), and prove that no reduction has occurred in these societies. Thirdly, the empirical findings of the present study clearly establish that the privatization of religion is not favored in Islamic countries. The analyzes show from 56% up to 95% of those who were interviewed felt that politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office, 40% up to 87% of respondents said it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office, and 44% up to 88% called for the supremacy of Sharia. This indicates that the public presence of religion is exceedingly desirable in these countries. Islam is characterized as a ‘religion of life’ which governs practically almost all aspects of life from birth to death. Many Muslims are intensely attached to their faith. They see in Islam a path and practicing its teaching brings about salvation in this life and in the other world. Thus, Muslims favor the expanded presence of religion in the public sphere in order to align their sociopolitical institutions with their private lives according to Islamic doctrine. Also the culture of many Islamic and Arabic countries, which in part is an historical product of interaction between religion and politics, not only does not promote the idea of dismissing religion from public sphere but also severely resists it. Turning to the findings, it is safe to say that the current study does not confirm the idea that ‘[t]he majority of Muslims are secular in the sense that they see that politics and their beliefs can be separate’ (Deeb 1993), or the notion that ‘even the most conservative Muslims are “secular” in their daily lives, professions and basic needs’ (Moosa 1998, p. 520), as far as they relate to public affairs. Further, it does not support the attribution of an ‘enormous potential of secularism’ to the Arab Spring (Kneissl 2011, p. 10) as an indicator of an enormous potential of secularism within these societies.

In conclusion, it would seem that, contrary to the situation in the West, secularism does not meet societal desirability and acceptability in Islamic countries. This, in addition to what scholars already specified, can be considered as a ‘cultural cleavage’ between Muslims and the West (Norris and Inglehart 2002, p. 15). The existence of a cultural cleavage is confirmed when we note that more than 95% of those interviewed worry about Western cultural imperialism and consider it to be a very serious, serious, or somewhat serious problem. In such a situation applying a secular cultural policy in Muslim societies can at best be seen as ignorance of the will of the people and a negation of their cultural, religious, and socio-historical background. The contemporary history of Islamic countries testifies that such unilateral policy-making can result in socio-political and cultural crises. Examples of this can be seen in the rise of Islamic fundamental movements around the Muslim

world, in the Islamic revolution of Iran (1979), and in jihadi groups such as al-Qaeda (founded in the late 1980s) which can only be understood by analyzing the role of Western secular culture in Islamic countries.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. WorldCP, 2011. *Egypt/1. Historical perspective: cultural policies and instruments* [Online]. WorldCP: International Database of Cultural Policies. 30-09-2011, Available from: <http://www.worldcp.org/egypt.php> [Accessed 18 November 2014].
2. Official website of The University of Jordan, *Establishment & History* [Online]. Available from: <http://www2.ju.edu.jo/Pages/AboutUJ/EstablishmentHistory.aspx> [Accessed 24 October 2014].
3. WVS 1981–2008 Official Aggregate v.20090901, 2009. World Values Survey Association (www.worldvaluessurvey.org). Aggregate File Producer: asej/jds, Madrid.
4. According to Esposito and Mogahed (2007, pp. 69–70) ‘politically radicalized’ Muslims are the 7% of respondents who ‘think that the 9/11 attacks were “completely” justified and view the United States unfavorably’. ‘Moderates’, on the other hand, are who ‘believe that the 9/11 attacks were not justified’.
5. See Endnote 4.
6. For more on compatibility of Islam with democracy see for example: Soroush (2002, 2003), Shabestari (2012), and Abderraziq (1925).

References

- Abderraziq, A., 1925. *L'islam et les fondements du pouvoir* [Islam and the foundations of political power]. F.A. Ansary (trad.). Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1994.
- Al-Amad, H., 1981. *Cultural policy in Jordan*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Banani, A., 1961. *The Modernization of Iran, 1921–1941*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Berger, P., 1990 [1967]. *The sacred canopy: elements of a sociological theory of religion*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Berkes, N., 1998. *The development of secularism in Turkey*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Boroujerdi, M., 2003. Triumphs and travails of authoritarian modernization in Iran. In: S. Cronin, ed. *The making of modern iran: state and society under Riza Shah, 1921–1941*. London: Routledge Curzon, 152–161.
- Carvalho, J.P., 2009. *A theory of the Islamic revival* [online]. Economics series working papers 424. Oxford: University of Oxford, Department of Economics. Available from: <http://www.economics.ox.ac.uk/Department-of-Economics-Discussion-Paper-Series/a-theory-of-the-islamic-revival> [Accessed 11 November 2014].
- Casanova, J., 2009. Religion, politics and gender equality: public religions revisited. In: J. Casanova and A. Phillips, eds. *A debate on the public role of religion and its social and gender implications*. UNRISD Gender and Development Papers, September 2009. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), 1–33.
- Clarke, M., 2013. Understanding the nexus between religion and development. In: M. Clarke, ed. *Handbook of research on development and religion*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1–13.
- Deeb, M.J., 1993. *The dark side of Islam: with terror, Muslim radicals declare war on Arab states that stray from the religious path* [online]. TIME, By B.W. Nelan, Monday, Oct. 04, Available from: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,979334,00.html> [Accessed 9 September 2014].
- Ekelund, R.B., Hébert, R.F., and Tollison, R.D., 2006. *The marketplace of Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- El-Basri, A.G.D., 1980. *Aspects of Iraqi cultural policy*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Esmer, Y., and Pettersson, T., 2007. The effects of religion and religiosity on voting behavior. In: R.J. Dalton and H.D. Klingemann, eds. *The Oxford handbook of political behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press, 481–503.
- Esposito, J.L., and Mogahed, D., 2007. *Who speaks for Islam? What a billion Muslims really think*. New York: Gallup Press.
- Esposito, J.L., and Voll, J.O., 2001. *Makers of contemporary Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fallahi, M., 1993. *Foundations of education in Iran and education after the cultural revolution of 1980*. MA dissertation. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University.
- Farouk-Alli, A., 2004. Administrative, military, and judicial reform/modernization, political. In: R.C. Martin, ed. *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim world*. New York: Macmillan, 458–462.
- Farsoun, S.K., and Mashayekhi, M., 1992. Introduction: Iran's political culture. In: S.K. Farsoun and M. Mashayekhi, eds. *Iran: political culture in the Islamic republic*. London: Routledge, 1–19.
- Fazeli, N., 2006. *Politics of culture in Iran: anthropology, politics and society in the twentieth century*. New York: Routledge.
- Hibbard, S.W., 2010. *Religious politics and secular states, Egypt, India, and the United States*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Juergensmeyer, M., 2008. *Global rebellion: religious challenges to the secular state, from Christian militias to al Qaeda*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Juergensmeyer, M., 2010. The global rise of religious nationalism. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 64 (3), 262–273.
- Kneissl, K., 2011. *Elements for a scientific analysis of the Arab revolutions in spring 2011* [online]. AAS working papers in social anthropology. Wien, Austrian Academy of Sciences, 21, 1–17. Available from: http://hw3.arz.oeaw.ac.at/0xc1aa500d_0x00290d58.pdf [Accessed 20 September 2014].
- Koplow, M., 2011. Where have all the Islamists gone? In: M. Lynch, S.B. Glasser, and B. Hounshell, eds. *Revolution in the Arab world: Tunisia, Egypt, and the unmaking of an era*. Washington, DC: Slate Group, a division of The Washington Post Company, A special e-book from Foreign Policy Magazine, 54–56. Available from: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/02/24/revolution-in-the-arab-world/> [Accessed 22 September 2014].
- Lapidus, I.M., 2002. *A history of Islamic societies*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matin-Asgari, A., 2012. The Pahlavi Era Iranian modernity in global context. In: T. Daryaei, ed. *The Oxford handbook of Iranian history*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 346–364.
- Mehregan, A., 2014. *Religion, religiosity, and democratic values: a comparative perspective of Islamic and non-Islamic societies*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Metwally, M.M., 1997. Economic consequences of applying Islamic principles in Muslim societies. *International journal of social economics*, 24 (7/8/9), 941–957.
- Moosa, N., 1998. Human rights in Islam. *South african journal on human rights*, 14, 508–524.
- Murphy, E.C., 1999. *Economic and political change in Tunisia: from Bourguiba to Ben Ali*. London: Palgrave/Mac Millan.
- Naqvi, S.N.H., 1994. *Islam, economics, and society*. London: Kegan Paul International Ltd.
- Norris, P., and Inglehart, R., 2002. *Islam & the West: testing the 'clash of civilizations' thesis*. F. John. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Faculty Research, Working Papers Series.
- Özyürek, E., 2006. *Nostalgia for the modern: state secularism and everyday politics in Turkey*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sadiki, L., 2002. The search for citizenship in Bin Ali's Tunisia: democracy versus unity. *Political studies*, 50 (3), 497–513.
- Sedghi, H., 2007. *Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling, and reveiling*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shabestari, M.M., 2012. *Islam and democracy. Interview with J. Kuhlmann*, [online]. August, Persian version Available from: <http://mohammadmojtahedshabestari.com/inter>

- view.php?id=169&title=%DA%AF%D9%81%D8%AA%DA%AF%D9%88%DB%8C%20Jan%20Kuhlmann%20%D8%A8%D8%A7%20%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%20%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%DB%8C%20%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%20%D9%88%20%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%88%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C [Accessed 27 November 2014].
- Soroush, A., 2002. *Reason, freedom, and democracy in Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Soroush, A., 2003. *Democracy and rationality. An interview by Shargh newspaper* [online]. December, Available from: <http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-20031200-1.htm> [Accessed 16 October 2014].
- Tahirli, T., 2005. *Secularization in a society with a strong religious ideology: the case of Turkey* [online]. Linköping University. Available from: <http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:21260> [Accessed 5 October 2014].
- Tamadonfar, M., and Jelen, T.G., 2014. Introduction. In: M. Tamadonfar and T.G. Jelen, eds. *Religion and regimes: support, separation, and opposition*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, ix–xix.
- Tripp, C., 2006. *Islam and the moral economy: the challenge of capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, B.S., 1978. Orientalism, Islam and capitalism. *Social compass*, 25 (3–4), 371–394.
- Voigt, S., 2005. Islam and the institutions of a free society. *The independent review: a journal of political economy*, x (1), 59–82.
- Wahba, M., 1972. *Cultural policy in Egypt*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Weber, M., 1963 [1922]. *The sociology of religion*. translated by E. Fischoff. London: Methuen Co Ltd.
- Youssef, M., 1985. *Revolt against modernity: Muslim zealots and the west*. Leiden: Brill.



Expertise and the making of World Heritage policy

Luke James & Tim Winter

To cite this article: Luke James & Tim Winter (2017) Expertise and the making of World Heritage policy, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23:1, 36-51, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2015.1035267](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1035267)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1035267>



Published online: 07 May 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1588



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 11 View citing articles [↗](#)

Expertise and the making of World Heritage policy

Luke James^a and Tim Winter^{b*}

^a*Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Melbourne, VIC 3125, Australia;* ^b*Alfred Deakin Research Institute, Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Melbourne, VIC 3125, Australia*

(Received 5 January 2015; accepted 10 March 2015)

This paper contributes to two emergent areas of scholarship: first, the role of expertise within the domain of cultural heritage practice; and second, international heritage institutions and their processes of governance. It does so by exploring expertise within the context of World Heritage Committee meetings. These forums of international heritage policy formulation have undergone significant changes in recent years, with larger geopolitical forces increasingly shaping process and decisions. This paper foregrounds the idea of these annual meetings as ‘locales’ in order to explore the inflows of expertise that help constitute authoritative decision-making, how expert knowledge is crafted for and by bureaucratic structure, and how the interplay between technical knowledge and politics via an ‘aesthetics of expertise’ bears upon future directions. In offering such an analysis, the paper seeks to add nuance and conceptual depth to our understanding of international conservation policy and the regulatory, governmental practices of organisations such as UNESCO.

Keywords: World Heritage; expertise; UNESCO; cultural policy; governance

Introduction

There is a growing interest in the role of expertise as it pertains to the governance of heritage and heritage conservation. In line with the ‘critical turn’ in heritage studies, expertise in heritage practice has begun to receive critical attention. As has been the case generally in relation to academic attention to heritage, initial studies of the practice of expertise have tended to be focused on what happens at heritage sites, and in particular the relationships between professional expertise and community knowledge. In this paper we seek to shift the focus on expertise towards a context of international policy-making. While we seek to account for the importance of a localised setting, including the sense of a ‘locale’ that is geographically mobile, the analytical frame of expert knowledge is oriented towards reading practices of institutional governance and policy crafting.

Indeed, our key aim here is to contribute to a growing but important literature on the international institutional landscape which formed over the course of the twentieth century to oversee the governance of culture and nature. Whilst the ‘flagship’ organisation in this space UNESCO has been the subject of considerable attention in recent decades, once again here the bulk of the analysis has been

*Corresponding author. Email: tim.winter@deakin.edu.au

‘grounded’, focusing on the implications of World Heritage Site nomination and questions of tourism, planning, site encroachment and so forth. Where the policies of UNESCO have been considered at the more abstract, conceptual scale, there has been a widespread preference for examining ‘outcomes’ via critiques of charters, conventions or the multitude of policy documents associated with formal heritage designation such as the World Heritage List (e.g. Donnachie 2009, Keough 2011, Rodwell 2012). This study, along with those conducted by Meskell (2012, 2013, 2014), Meskell *et al.* (2014), Brumann (2012, 2014) and Schmitt (2009), shifts the attention towards process. As Kuus (2014) notes in her study of the European Union, focusing on process is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is an analytical frame that reveals how expert knowledge is produced in bureaucratic settings, and how and why certain ideas gain currency and ascendancy in such environments. For Kuus (2014, p. 40) understanding transnational knowledge production is about reading messiness, the formal and informal lives of expert knowledge and how decision-making is contingent upon formal and informal modes of competence; processes considered vital to understanding how an organisation such as the EU produces knowledge about the world. As she notes, it is an analytical approach that pertains to the political struggles of ‘knowledge and power in bureaucratic and especially diplomatic institutions [and] our understanding of transnational regulatory institutions’ (2014, p. 7) more broadly.

In pursuing such a mode of enquiry this paper focuses on the recent meetings of the World Heritage Committee. These annual assemblies are the principal forums for discussing a series of issues pertaining to World Heritage, a concept that reached its 40th anniversary in 2012, and the landmark of 1000 properties in 2014. Spanning 10 days, these meetings include sessions dedicated to financial and budgetary issues, new initiatives, the ‘State of Conservation’ of existing listed properties as well as the appraisal of sites nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List. As we shall see below, despite moving to different locations around the world, they have a distinct, institutionalised culture that comes from a well established format and set of protocols (Brumann 2012, p. 7). Data for this paper is drawn from the attendance at three recent meetings, Christchurch, New Zealand in 2007 (2nd Author), Phnom Penh, Cambodia in 2013 (2nd Author) and Doha, Qatar in 2014 (1st and 2nd Author). We attended as registered ‘Observers’, witnessed formal proceedings across a number of plenary sessions, side meetings and receptions, and engaged in informal interactions during and between these gatherings. World Heritage Committee meetings have been the subject of a small, but growing literature in recent years (Brumann 2012, 2014, Meskell 2012, 2013, 2014, Meskell *et al.* 2014, Schmitt 2009). To complement these valuable studies – which have largely been oriented towards the theme of politicisation – we address expertise and expert knowledge, a critical, yet under-conceptualised, component of these fora. Accordingly, we aim to shift the analytical frame towards the role of expertise as a constituent of decision-making and structuring through a complex mix of knowledge flows, performances and absences.

The following section advances the idea of these meetings as ‘locales’. Accordingly, we point towards the cultures, characters, networks, traditions and conventions of these locales, but turn more specifically to how this situation both requires, and tempers and organises particular forms of expertise. The aim here is to show the convergence of different forms of expertise and how that convergence shapes repeated sequences of debate, deliberation and the crafting of formal decisions. This

is followed by a reading of expertise as flows and performance. We set out how here to elucidate expertise as process, one that is constituted through a series of human and non-human actors. Here we see the complex matrix of reports, expert statements, and so forth which weave in and out of discussions, sometimes harmonising, sometimes overriding.

From there, we seek to understand the interplay between the technical and the political by invoking Saida Hodžić's notion of 'aesthetics' in the production of scientific certainty and applying it to the practice of expertise. Attention is given to how impartiality and objectivity come to be *performed* within existing structures of bureaucracy and protocol. We also introduce the idea of discursive displacements, as a way of understanding those shifts in the discussion of value and significance that are now challenging expertise as an orienting pole within World Heritage Committee discussions.

The World Heritage Committee locale: an arena of converging 'expertises'

The term locale typically refers to a place or locality, especially when connected to a particular event, or set of cultural practices. Here, while we propose the term 'locale' to mean the place where the local is constituted, we once again depart from normative uses of the term which typically refer to sites of heritage, in all their forms. We note from the outset that the constitution of the local is not a benign gesture; it simultaneously positions, distinguishes and privileges particular actors' knowledge and experience and marginalises others'.

We want to focus on a specific aspect of the constitution of the local – local knowledge constructed as local expertise. In expanding the above observations concerning the academic critique of expertise within heritage studies, the discourse around 'local' is also typically concerned with the recognition of 'grounded' knowledge, values and practices; that which emanates from individuals or groups in the locale of a heritage place. Sometimes this is designated as local expertise, as, for example, in the recognition of traditional cultural knowledge about land management, or recognition of indigenous knowledge systems (e.g. UNESCO's *Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems* programme [n.d.](#)). At other times a separation between local knowledge and expertise is implied, even where the intention is to displace the traditional image of expert as sole authority in heritage practice. For example, Walker (2014, pp. 182–3) traces how a growing emphasis on social values in heritage management from the 1960s onwards led to a shift in the role of expert from sole authority to collaborator with, or advocate for, local people. He argues this should be formalised as an 'ethic of collaboration' (Walker 2014, p. 196), but this collaboration inherently differentiates between holders of local knowledge and expert knowledge. Collins and Evans (2007) open the possibility, in some circumstances, to collapse these as distinct but recognisable forms of the same expertise, which they call 'contributory expertise': the expertise of a person who is able to perform a competency in something. In one form, it arises primarily out of local experience, in another, from qualifications. In positioning the World Heritage system as a site of study of local expertise, what has not been explored is whether it should be taken for granted that the local refers just to the heritage place. Our aim is therefore to read the annual assemblies of the World Heritage Committee as a locale, whereby that very sense of place is in part constituted through, dependent upon, and structured around particular forms of knowledge and expertise.

As Brumann (2012, p. 7) has noted, World Heritage Committee meetings are a stable, single site that is reconstituted annually, with an enduring format, personnel and practices. They are comprised of meeting and assembly rooms, and a variety of formal and informal spaces for receptions and dining (Figure 1). A culture of both invitation and exclusion permeates the space, as closed door meetings alternate with moments of open debate and hospitality. The bulk of activity takes place in a main auditorium, where the twenty-one members of the committee congregate, together with the other state parties, expert bodies, representatives from other governmental and non governmental organisations, and observers. Over the course of the ten days, break-out sessions allow sub-committees and working groups to meet, and receptions and exhibition spaces enable those sites vying for attention to showcase their heritage. Running throughout the ten days are a number of closed door meetings between state parties and advisory bodies, with discussions often going on late into the night. The need to lobby means corridors and quiet rooms are important; indeed, the term lobby – used as either verb or noun – refers to both the practice and spaces through which decision makers can be influenced. For those countries on the committee and/or who have a property under discussion, forming relationships is critical. Public displays of support in the main auditorium might well have been months in the making, and sewn up in the corridors and lunch rooms that day.

Vienna is associated with the historical development of modern diplomacy, having hosted the Congress of 1815, and as Berridge (2010) argues, the location of



Figure 1. The World Heritage Committee ‘locale’ at the 39th World Heritage Committee meeting, Doha, Qatar (Credit: Author A).

meetings has been a factor shaping inter or transnational governance ever since. In offering the gift of hospitality, the host country enjoys a privileged position in any negotiation or public discussion. In 2014 discussions over Jeddah and Dubai were indicative of a pro-Arab disposition throughout the committee meeting, given the location of Doha, with visitors aware of being, and being seen to be, good guests. These meetings also have a distinct material culture that is reassembled at each location. As with other branches of the UN, the paraphernalia and technologies of modern diplomacy and internationalism are ever-present: live multi-language translation, country table badges, flags, microphones and overhead screens of texts displaying the live crafting of policy in the international languages of French and English (Figure 2). The event is constantly littered with the gestures and cues of diplomacy – verbal – but also applause, congratulations, gifts, the shaking of hands, hugs. The main auditorium is of course the space for participants to display their international selves – giving thanks, offering profuse congratulations, and swarming in on country desks to congratulate in person.

Trustworthy networks are therefore valued highly and are actively worked on by those delegates seeking to influence proceedings. They define social group membership, and such relationships are built and sustained through attendance at repeated meetings. But it is not only networks that have to be developed. Newcomers typically read from a script when making their interventions, and rigidly respect the rules and protocols of time and order. The more experienced speakers, however, will hone the craft of improvisation, deviating in ways that work within and around the structures of the meeting. As Kuus (2014) puts it, they know how to ‘operate the machine’. Crucially, this improvisation and discursive crafting are important to the decision-making process, intersecting with and remaking the existing structures of these meetings. Here then we see a particular type of international

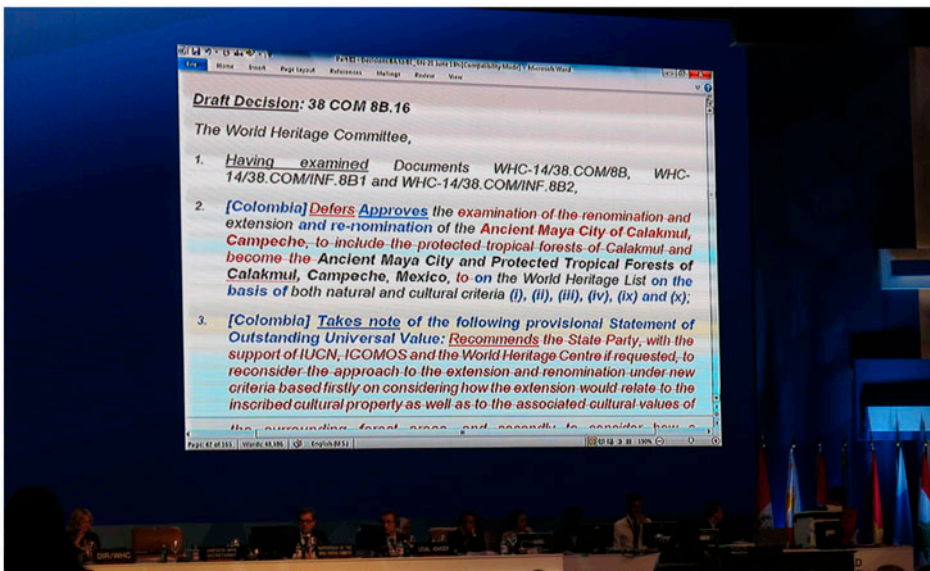


Figure 2. The live crafting of decision texts at the 39th World Heritage Committee meeting, Doha, Qatar (Credit: Author A).

subjectivity, and not just in the diplomats participating on the committee. Many of those in the national delegations and advisory bodies, including experts in archaeology, biodiversity, or architectural history not only have a transnationalism that comes from bi or multi-lingual competencies and international life experiences, but also an aesthetic and political commitment to the supranational, in this case *le patrimoine mondial*. In this respect, these meetings are assemblages of a class of transnational actors familiar to much of the UN system.

Intrinsic to the circling, networking processes are a series of embodied symbolic markers, which contributes to the locale in important ways, including a way of dressing that might be best described as internationalist. The symbolic capital Bourdieu speaks of is embodied and made visible in part through dress codes and mannerisms. For men, the familiar dark suit is common, but for women familiar international business attire might be accompanied by or even replaced with the more colourful signifiers of home culture. A sense of cosmopolitanism is both accomplished and conveyed by embodying both the global and the local. For each meeting the host country provides the chair, a role with considerable leeway in World Heritage Committee practice to direct the flow of proceedings and to make specific tactical interventions. For example, again in Doha, the chair opted to allow a secret ballot for a decision on the Palestinian nomination of 'Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir', whereas during the previous year's meeting in Phnom Penh there was a sense that it was a matter of pride for the Chair His Excellency Sok An that all decisions of the Committee were by consensus. As the 'party moves on', a different location and a different chair can lead to discernibly different practices with materially different outcomes.

Expertise in heritage practice and governance

Smith's (2004, 2006) critical framework, the 'Authorised Heritage Discourse', generated a heightened awareness of the unacknowledged work being done when constituting the category of 'heritage', including the relationships of power and knowledge implicated in its coming into being. It is therefore not surprising that the authority of professionalised expertise has emerged as a concern. In asking the question *Who Needs Experts?* (2014) John Schofield brings together a number of authors to examine the merits and scope of challenging expert knowledge. One of the key questions here, and a recurrent theme within debates about heritage conservation, is the issue of community engagement and the pluralisation of voices within decision-making processes. This critical reading of expertise, also seen, for example, in Walker (2014), has a particular spatial orientation, such that it questions the role of expert knowledge 'on the ground' at physically located heritage sites, and in the practice of heritage conservation, planning and site management. We wish to continue this localised study of expertise in action by regarding the World Heritage Committee as a specific locale, yet in so doing orienting the enquiry more closely to institutional practices of international cultural governance and policy.

If the World Heritage Committee is then an identifiable locale, how is its local expertise constituted? This question is complicated by the mutual constitution of the locale and its particular forms of expertise. The World Heritage Committee is a locale that not just requires, but is actively structured around expertise. Crucially

however, as forms of expertise enter they undergo a level of tempering, reworking, even a transformation by the context and its distinctive culture. The meetings involve an assemblage of three broad forms of expertise: diplomatic, technical and institutional. Expertise lies not just in being a diplomat, archaeologist or biologist, it involves, indeed revolves around, understanding how the dynamic of knowledge production and bureaucratic competencies arises through an entwining of the three: the contextual dynamics of the locale.

Specific *diplomatic expertise* comprising of, among other things, knowledge of and ability to use networks can be identified as a valued commodity in the functioning of the World Heritage system (Kuus 2014). Brumann (2014) notes the sense of familiarity and camaraderie between diplomatic representatives in UNESCO's headquarters in Paris and their command of symbolic capital, linking these attributes to a sense that it is they, rather than the bureaucrats or technical experts, that are in command. He concludes that 'states now agree that something as important as World Heritage cannot be left to political amateurs' (Brumann 2014, p. 11). Despite this assessment, as we discuss below increasingly it seems that diplomatic expertise is not restricted to diplomats and can be regarded as a key attribute of the experienced technical and bureaucratic players.

Technical expertise in World Heritage practice can be identified in the explicit role mandated by the World Heritage Convention (1972, Article 8) for independent advisers: on cultural heritage, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), natural heritage, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and for cultural heritage conservation, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property. It can also be seen in the requirement for Committee members to be represented by people 'qualified in the field' of heritage (World Heritage Convention 1972, Article 9) and also in the Operational Guidelines to the World Heritage Committee (2013) which makes specific reference to various forms of (conservation) expertise. To give some context here, the concept of technical expertise in heritage can be referred back to the scientific construction of conservation practice from its Enlightenment origins as 'a knowledge practice primarily informed by material-centric disciplines that privilege scientific and/or positivist methodologies ... rooted in a discourse of scientific knowledge as apolitical, objective and value neutral.' (Winter 2013, p. 539).

Accompanying this is a relatively under-acknowledged form of expertise, the *institutional*. Practised through the secretariat, this includes the front-stage role of the rapporteur and his or her team, the legal adviser, and the members of the World Heritage Centre who brief and instruct the chair, and the back-stage role of scheduling (and adjusting the scheduling), documenting and reporting (and circulating the documentation). More broadly, and justifying our specific claim that this function constitutes a particular performativity of expertise, we mean the ability to authoritatively interpret which practices are legitimate (which usually means those practices that have become customary). The World Heritage Centre's secretariat's guidance on wording for the decision concerning Virunga National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo), as outlined shortly, provides a case in point.

A specific further characteristic of the World Heritage Committee locale is a tendency for these expertises to blend, or, to put it more accurately, for a single role or individual to embody various expertises. This has an important consequence in shaping the practise of these expertises in a way that affects the resultant discussions and decisions of the forum. Kuus (2014, pp. 3–4, citing Bourdieu) notes that

technical competence rests on social competence. Despite the claim that technical experts' resources of symbolic capital are poorer than diplomats (Brumann 2014, p. 11), the structural fact of technical experts being embedded in states' delegations, especially over time, requires the exercise of diplomatic judgement, of knowing when to speak (and when not to) and how to speak 'for' their state and simultaneously 'for' heritage conservation – in essence, a consummate diplomatic act. Similarly, diplomatic representatives can rarely avoid representing positions which at least implicitly express a position on a technical heritage matter, and, when they do, some technical knowledge is required to recognise when, and how, to defer to or challenge the technical advice, or to hand the discussion to their technical expert, as we describe below in the World Heritage Committee's discussion on Shahr-i Sokhta, Iran.

Experienced diplomatic and technical members of delegations, and advisory bodies, are also capable of learning the institutional expertise of the World Heritage Committee processes and to argue custom or precedent in relation to a procedural matter. Even where diplomatic experts are inexperienced in this particular forum, they can seek to use their externally developed diplomatic expertise by appealing to a broader UN or diplomatic principle, preferably in a forum with a higher perceived standing in the arena of international diplomacy. In those moments where procedure and protocol are to be challenged or clarified, members of the Committee might invoke other multilateral bureaucratic settings – most often the UN – in order to appeal to a broader internationalist cosmopolitanism.

An aesthetic of expertise

Following Kuus (2014, pp. 3, 40), we identify expertise as a process, 'not a thing but a social relation; not something that one has but something that one uses or performs'. This captures a sense of how the discursive flows and embodied practices of World Heritage Committee meetings are characterised by both explicit and more veiled performances of authority. The former can involve the strategic prefacing of interventions that project status and implicit understanding, seen for example in sentences beginning with a linguistic marker 'as an Arab speaker ...' or claims of professional status denoting a specific claim of expertise, 'as a trained archaeologist ...'. To ensure claims of 'scientific rigour and independence' are credible, there is a careful choosing of who speaks, and with what tone. Expertise thus needs to be both delivered in accordance with localised conventions and norms.

For the technical advisers, to ensure claims of expertise are not just claimed but enacted, we see recitations of methodology, data and conclusions. At the recent World Heritage Committee meeting in Doha, this approach was framed from the outset in the words of the ICOMOS representative prior to the nomination discussion:

The ICOMOS evaluation process has been designed to ensure ... a rigorous and institutional evaluation occurs ... Through this evaluation process a number of individual experts from ICOMOS and from the ICOMOS International Scientific Committees are engaged in the task of reviewing all aspects of the nominations ... In order to reinforce consistency of the evaluations and recommendations ICOMOS [uses] a check tool to show how all its evaluations are in requirements with the operational guidelines ... Overall, ICOMOS in its evaluation process aims to maintain a scientific rigour and independence. (ICOMOS representative, 19 June 2014 [World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-20 PM 2014c])

The positioning of State Party expertise in plenary sessions was evident in who was chosen to speak for the State Party and in what circumstances – the diplomat or the delegation’s technical experts. In the 2014 discussion over Iran’s renowned archaeological site Shahr-i Sokta, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List against ICOMOS’s recommendation, Committee member interventions were led by an initial intervention by Finland:

It is clear that ICOMOS do not find that the material supports this theory while the State Party has a quite different view. In discussions with the representatives of the State Party we have got the impression that the archaeological material is more convincing than stated in [ICOMOS’s] evaluation. (Finland delegate, 22 June 2014 [*World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-22 PM 2014d*])

This signalled a technically-oriented response, which was then followed suit by other Committee members. These performances of technical evaluation were frequently accompanied by claims of professional authority by archaeologists on the delegations of Finland, Malaysia, Portugal and Peru, typically by prefacing their comments as did Malaysia’s representative in this response to ICOMOS’s comments on the inadequacy of archaeological investigations on site function: ‘As an archaeologist, I feel that the 22 excavations provided strong evidence on site function ...’ (*World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-22 PM 2014d*).

More subtly, the Finnish representative used the term ‘us’ to speak for his national delegation, objectively evaluating the evidence, before invoking the subjectivity of the archaeologist, and the collective ‘we’ of an archaeological profession:

It seems to us that this nomination stands and falls on the different interpretations of the archaeological material from the site ... Taking into consideration that only a small part of this huge city so far has been excavated leads us to believe that what we have seen so far is just an indication of what will come. This is typical for archaeology: we do test excavations to get an idea of sites and build our theories on that. (Finland delegate, 22 June 2014 [*World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-22 PM 2014d*])

Performances of diplomatic expertise need not be public, and Kuus (2014) emphasises how subtle and ephemeral some of the distinguishing marks of a diplomatic habitus are. Nevertheless, the World Heritage Committee represents a relatively rare opportunity to study a setting involving diplomats performing publicly. For example, the Portuguese ambassador, a newcomer to the World Heritage Committee in 2013, sought to establish his credentials as having relevant expertise by referring to his involvement in Portugal’s UN Security Council membership. This claim to high diplomatic status was then underlined by a performance of not just linguistic competence but mastery. Interventions frequently shifted between French and English, sometimes in concordance with the dominant linguistic flows, at other times seemingly apropos of nothing. At other times, multi-lingual competencies enabled the brokering of meaning between the French and English of decision texts displayed on large screens. The role this can play in shaping the rapporteur’s crafting of prose in the main auditorium in front of all those attending is evident in this excerpt from the discussion of whether to include Tanzania’s Selous Game Reserve on the World Heritage List in Danger:

We must be sure that both texts are identical, because I noted ... there are some discrepancies ... For instance, in ... the French we talk about ‘conservation de la faune pour soutenir les initiative anti-braconnages’ and on the English text we only talk about ‘supporting anti-poaching initiatives’ [pause] I’m not sure if I am right but it seems to me that something is missing in the English text ... I just want to make sure that at the end of the day we have texts that are the same one side to the other. (José Filipe Mendes Moraes Cabral, Portugal’s Ambassador, 18 June 2014 [*World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-18 PM 2014b*])

In this example we see a dominant display of cultural capital, capable simultaneously of projecting expert status and effecting direct influence on the authoritative meaning of decision texts.

What we begin to see here then is that different actors make claims to their respective forms of expertise through particular forms of performance, and in a feedback loop, from then on the type of expertise sought to be invoked sets the parameters for the performance. To explain, the practice of diplomacy aspires less to a scientific or technocratic ideal of objective detachment, favouring instead expressions of active engagement, with such statements typically revolving around those priorities of national interest. By contrast, technical and institutional expertise – arising out of traditions of scientific conservation discourse and rule-based global governance norms respectively – have a greater investment in independence, a continuity of position, and evidential knowledge practices. But in recalling the argument that the World Heritage locale is a site where forms of expertise converge and complicate these tendencies, it is helpful to draw upon Hodžić’s (2013) insights into the ways expert scientific objectivity comes to be smoothed and rendered ‘aesthetically’; that is, coming to be intimately concerned with form.

Hodžić studied a World Health Organisation research project into deadly harms connected with female genital mutilation. The published findings of the study had been criticised as self-serving and ideologically driven to support activist causes. Hodžić sought to recover the study from a simplistic scientific controversy paradigm in which science and politics are reified and represented as ideal-types (politics as inherently dirty and science as inherently pure). Citing the work of Marilyn Strathern and Annelise Riles, Hodžić concluded that the results of the study were not so much the result of ideological orientations but rather arose from aesthetics – the persuasiveness and activating power of (unnoticed) forms and ‘the elicitation of a sense of appropriateness’ (Strathern and Riles cited in Hodžić 2013, pp. 90, 97). Hence, aesthetic in this sense does not take on its usual meaning, but becomes an ‘organising concept to indicate that focusing on the relationship between form and meaning helps us understand how knowledge becomes certain’ (Hodžić 2013, p. 90). In this instance, the aesthetic centred on evidence and objectivity. Hodžić argues that evidence and objectivity were not intended outcomes of the study, but performances pursuant to the role of ‘impartial scientist’ were played out to increase the likelihood of the knowledge produced being authoritative (Hodžić 2013, p. 98). Nevertheless, she demonstrates that the performances of objectivity during the process of the study ultimately succumbed to the dominant aesthetic considerations of the output, a journal article in the prestigious medical journal *The Lancet*. Hodžić thus shows how scientists who admitted to doubt and uncertainty in early discussions of data, later sought to minimise contradictions and erase doubt in accordance with the formal norms of publishing (Hodžić 2013, p. 100).

To ask what are the ‘unnoticed forms’ that bear on the practice of expertise in the World Heritage locale, and how this shapes World Heritage governance, may help expand our analysis beyond politics and ideology. We have already noted how expert status can be signalled by performances of authority, but the concept could also help us pick up on other, less embodied practices of expertise, which bear upon outcomes. By being sensitive to the ‘unnoticed’, we contend it is possible to see how impartiality and objectivity come to be performed as an aesthetic of expertise for the decision-makers’ consumption.

For example, the production of agreed decision texts on large screens is a process which is tempting to reduce to a joust between technical heritage advice and nationalist politics as competing ideologies. But to look afresh, it becomes possible to see an aesthetic as equally determining, in this case, the unstated requirement for finality and authority in what a UN decision ‘should’ look like. In the comments of the World Heritage Centre secretariat officer in discussing the wording of the 2014 decision to retain Virunga National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo) on the List of World Heritage in Danger, we can see how the dominant aesthetic of this locale is set in the performance of bureaucratic expertise, as the preferred language of the Committee is replaced by its bureaucratically and diplomatically ‘appropriate’ form:

I just want to point out the language that was used previously ... the Committee has ‘called on’ companies before but they have not used the word ‘requested’ ... ‘Request’ is what we do to the State Party because they are a signatory to the Convention, but in the case of other actors we usually use the wording ‘calls on’, or ‘launches an appeal’. (UNESCO official, 17 June 2014 [*World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-17 AM 2014a*])

Such shifts are unobtrusive, unspectacular, and appear to be uncontroversially and almost gratefully accepted by delegates, occurring in a bureaucratic register which appeals to the authority of form, an unnoticed and perhaps misrecognised form of authority. Crucially, with such nudges in the discourse systemically embedded in the polishing of prose, the messiness and compromises that characterise these annual meetings disappear as the verbal moves to the written. The publication of documentation, most importantly via the UNESCO website, into the public domain thus involves those forms of smoothing and the veiling of contestation that are the hallmarks of authoritative texts. Of course, even for those cases where technical expertise was bypassed, these published decisions still manage to secure their authority by standing on the shoulders of science, as the privileged knowledge practice of international governance today.

Discursive displacements

In addition to addressing how expertise comes to be assembled through performance and aesthetics, it is also important to read the processes by which new discursive directions can take hold, and the forces by which new parameters of authority and legitimacy can be constructed. To illustrate this we briefly touch upon the emergence of discourses of international peace building, inter-cultural dialogue and cooperation as the basis for challenging the more technocratic forms of knowledge in circulation, a theme that has also been explored by Brumann (2014) and Winter (forthcoming). Brumann (2014) argues that increased prominence of

diplomatic representation in the World Heritage system has led to a clash of cosmopolitanisms, in which a global class of heritage experts has ceded the dominance of their worldview to diplomats who see World Heritage as a broader diplomatic arena for their brand of cosmopolitanism founded in a vision of harmony, equity and peace between nations.

This comes to be practised over the course of these 10 day meetings via a reframing of the debate away from questions of conservation or the historic integrity of a site towards the more broad-based language of international cooperation or the transnational connections associated with the flows of people, objects, traditions and ideas, both past and present. At such moments, the diplomatic logic of appealing to the ideals of an international ‘family of nations’ is clearly evident, despite the international tensions that may carry. To cite just one example in the limited space here, at the 2014 Doha gathering this was exemplified by the Ambassador for Turkey, H. E. Mr Huseyin Avni Botsali, in his endorsement of the successful Palestinian nomination of Battir, as the following excerpt from his speech indicates:

Madame Chair, I fully endorse and second the statement and the proposal of the delegation of Lebanon ... Madame Chairman, distinguished delegates, UNESCO exists to bring creative intelligence to life, for it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace and the conditions for sustainable development must be built. Here is the first provision of the UNESCO charter. It empowers us and puts us responsible to build the defences of peace, and not fences of security. And one nation, if there is one nation to testify about the devastating destructive effect of building fences and walls it is the people of Israel. Madame Chair, we would have very much wished to see that this nomination came as a trans-boundary, multi-state nomination. The world has been waiting for too long for peace, the world has been waiting for too long for state parties to come forward, not to exclude and downgrade the others values and assets, but to move in the direction of safeguarding and collectively preserving, protecting and promoting each other's values. That is why we are disappointed that until now this did not occur in the case of Palestine.

Madame Chair, we recognise that every person has a right to engage with the cultural heritage of their choice while respecting the rights and freedoms of others. As an aspect of right freely to participate in cultural life, enshrined in the United National Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and guaranteed by the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights of 1966. The 1954 Hague Convention, for the protection of cultural property in the event of conflict, and the 60th anniversary of the convention is being celebrated on the 12th of June, this very year, 2014. 2005, the framework convention on the value of cultural heritage for society, the Faro convention, article 7 states; cultural heritage and dialogue develop knowledge of cultural heritage as a resource to facilitate peaceful coexistence by promoting trust and mutual understanding with a view to resolution and prevention of conflict.

Madame Chair, these are the mandatory principles that we have undersigned as state parties, as nations, to build and maintain peace in this world. Given these and the detailed description outlined by the delegate of Lebanon, Turkey believes that The Palestine Land of Olives and Vines Nomination, the cultural landscape of Southern Jerusalem Battir, enjoys [Outstanding Universal Value] and it carries emergency nature and it has all the qualifications for inscription. And I have not only the hope, but I want to be confident that this committee endorses the same position by consensus. (Huseyin Avni Botsali, 20 June 2014 [*World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-20 PM 2014c*])

Of course, the use of terms such as peace, cooperation and human rights are intended to enshroud the tense political tensions between Israel and Palestine, which were a feature of the meetings in Phnom Penh and St Petersburg. At other, less contentious moments, the Turkish ambassador moved to an altogether different scale – the personal – to once again proclaim the virtues of solidarity in the global conservation ethic of world heritage. To support the successful case for not adding Dubrovnik to the List of World Heritage in Danger, he affirmed the presence of an urban civic oriented by a heritage consciousness – one that the committee should recognise and endorse – in a manner that drew on the affective and anecdotal:

Having my daughter at a school very near by, I happen to have visited more than once this beautiful jewel of the region, Dubrovnik, more than once in the course of the past year. I am a personal witness to the sensitivity of the population of Dubrovnik and all the Croatians, they are very proud with their city, and I don't think there is even a single Croatian who would want to undermine it. (Huseyin Avni Botsali, 20 June 2014 [*World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-20 PM 2014c*])

It is important too to take note of the subtle effects of diplomatic protocols that sustain the efficacy of certain interventions by rendering them unchallengeable to subsequent corrections by technical experts. For example in relation to China's Grand Canal, successfully inscribed against ICOMOS's recommendation, the Malaysian delegate's assertion during the Doha meeting that the site demonstrates 'the greatest masterpiece of hydraulic engineering in the history of mankind' (World Heritage – 38th Committee 2014-06-22 PM 2014d) seems primarily a hyperbolic and rhetorical rather than technical claim. Yet it was made during a technical discussion of cultural heritage significance. Nevertheless, diplomatic protocols seem to prohibit technical corrections of contestable statements, such as this one, rather than plain factual errors (e.g. where a site feature is mislocated within or outside the proposed site boundary, or a species is misidentified).

Protocols which prohibit challenging statements such as this are diplomatic commonplace; tactful avoidance of direct contradiction and conflict which maintain open lines of communication. Despite this, such protocols have the effect of allowing such statements to stand unchallenged, remaining on the record, and by their mere presence in the room the technical advisers become tacitly complicit; their silence could be construed as agreement. Yet, as pointed out by Winter (*forthcoming*), such public statements of cultural support from one state to another do significant diplomatic work and position the World Heritage Committee as perhaps the preeminent site of heritage diplomacy.

We would argue such interventions work most effectively at those moments where the body of expert knowledge is somewhat lacking or the subject of contestation. But it is also an entwined diplomatic and institutional expertise that demands a careful reading, and to treat these mediations as somehow inappropriate or irrelevant, would lose the quiet, yet powerful, sub-texts of contemporary international governance discourse to which they connect. Invoking international cooperation and a sense of cosmopolitanism moves the debate towards the higher ideals of diplomacy; a shift that consciously and publicly elevates the World Heritage Committee meeting alongside the UN General Assembly, Security Council and other venues of high diplomatic practice. This shift implicitly casts diplomatic expertise as not just relevant but increasingly necessary to play in this broader arena, thereby increasing its legitimacy.

In observing an increasing propensity for delegations to evoke such high-minded ideals over recent years we wonder whether positioning a World Heritage nomination convincingly as pro-peace and enabler of international cooperation is a subtle and effective manoeuvre drawn from expert diplomatic practice and institutional learning, or, rather, an example of an aesthetic at work, the ‘activated power of unnoticed forms’ of a discourse as it shifts into the diplomatic realm. On either reading, in moments such as these, it may be possible to trace some of the future aspirations of World Heritage as an ‘institution of an emerging world society’ (Schmitt 2009, p. 119) situated within the social objectives of a broader UN project. In particular, this may also help us understand the claim for World Heritage to bolster UNESCO’s bid for the formal representation of culture in the post-2015 development agenda for the successors to the Millennium Development Goals (UNESCO 2014e).

Seen from this perspective, what then is the role of technical heritage expertise as it is challenged by discursive displacements that speak to the wider value regimes and aspirations of World Heritage? Naturally, it will continue to retain a critical role in arbitrating the ‘value’ of sites and their state of conservation. Despite the mounting debates about ‘the role of experts’, we would suggest that the so-called external, objective embodiment of the technical will continue to be a key figure within the regulatory frameworks of world heritage and its governance ideology. At the same time however, it is clear that as heritage continues its turn towards more humanist readings of significance and value – with themes such as sustainable development or human rights continuing to permeate across the conservation sector – those more technocratic, content specific forms of expertise that underpin the world heritage system will be increasingly challenged, and displaced, by a cultural politics that increasingly invokes discourses of cosmopolitanism, citizenship and internationalism.

Conclusions

In our focus on expertise as process and practice, we have suggested a number of key reasons for pushing the analysis of World Heritage policy beyond the finished product of charters and conventions, and the more popular critiques of how these policies play out ‘on the ground’. The approach pursued here reveals the complex role different forms of expertise play in shaping these international policy-making arenas, and how decisions and positions taken therein arise from the convergence and interplay between various expert domains.

A focus on these meetings as particular locales also helps reveal how context-specific forces both enable and disable forms of expertise within existing regulatory structures. Crucially, recognising diplomatic expertise as a legitimate form of expertise in these World Heritage Committee settings opens up a space for re-reading politicisation in ways that complicate hard distinctions between the (apolitical) technical scientific, and the political. Hodžić’s concept of aesthetics is productive in understanding the subtle ways in which expertise is performed and subsequently stabilised and bedded down as policy.

Finally, we would also suggest that the discursive displacements brought about by the ascendancy of diplomatic expertise within the World Heritage system is a tangible manifestation of the aspirations and ideals that are now converging upon international heritage discourse and practice, namely sustainable development,

inter-cultural dialogue, community-based values and rights approaches to conservation. Reading these meetings as a locale, comprised World Heritage context specific forms of expertise, thus sheds light on some likely directions for those thousand or so locations that constitute the grounded geographies of world heritage today.

Acknowledgments

Tim Winter would like to acknowledge the support of the Australia Research Council Discovery Scheme [grant number DP140102991] – The Crisis in International Heritage Conservation in an Age of Shifting Global Power. We would also like to thank Toyah Horman for her assistance in preparing this paper for publication.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

- Berridge, G., 2010. *Diplomacy: theory and practice*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brumann, C., 2012. Multilateral ethnography: entering the World Heritage arena. *Max Planck Institute for social anthropology working papers*, 36 [online]. Available from: http://www.eth.mpg.de/cms/en/publications/working_papers/pdf/mpi-eth-working-paper-0136.pdf [Accessed 19 August 2014].
- Brumann, C., 2014. Shifting tides of world-making in the UNESCO World Heritage convention: cosmopolitanisms colliding. *Ethnic and racial studies* [online], 37 (12), 2176–2192. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2014.934261> [Accessed 20 August 2014].
- Collins, H.M. and Evans, R., 2007. *Rethinking expertise*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Donnachie, I., 2009. World Heritage. In: R. Harrison, ed. *Understanding the politics of heritage*. Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 115–153.
- Hodžić, S., 2013. Ascertaining deadly harms: aesthetics and politics of global evidence. *Cultural anthropology*, 28 (1), 86–109.
- Keough, E.B., 2011. Heritage in peril: a critique of UNESCO's World Heritage program. *Washington University global studies law review*, 10, 593–615.
- Kuus, M., 2014. *Geopolitics and expertise: knowledge and authority in European diplomacy*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Meskell, L., 2012. The rush to inscribe: reflections on the 35th session of the World Heritage Committee, UNESCO Paris, 2011. *Journal of field archaeology*, 37 (2), 145–151.
- Meskell, L., 2013. UNESCO's World Heritage convention at 40. *Current anthropology*, 54 (4), 483–494.
- Meskell, L., 2014. States of conservation: protection, politics, and pacting within UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. *Anthropological quarterly*, 87 (1), 217–243.
- Meskell, L., et al., 2014. Multilateralism and UNESCO World Heritage: decision-making, states parties and political processes. *International journal of heritage studies* [online]. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2014.945614> [Accessed 18 August 2014].
- Rodwell, D., 2012. The UNESCO World Heritage convention, 1972–2012: reflections and directions. *The historic environment: policy & practice*, 3 (1), 64–85.
- Schmitt, T.M., 2009. Global cultural governance. Decision-making concerning world heritage between politics and science. *Erdkunde*, 63 (2), 103–121.
- Schofield, J., ed., 2014. *Who needs experts? Counter-mapping cultural heritage*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Smith, L., 2004. *Archaeological theory and the politics of cultural heritage*. London: Routledge.

- Smith, L., 2006. *Uses of heritage*. London: Routledge.
- UNESCO, 1972. *Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
- UNESCO, 2013. *Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage convention*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
- UNESCO, 2014a. *World Heritage – 38th committee 2014-06-17 AM* [online]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9i6AciXQ6Cc&index=4&list=PLWuYED1WVJINV4HyHz7XNqnt-Qry-PUjO> [Accessed 18 December 2014].
- UNESCO, 2014b. *World Heritage – 38th committee 2014-06-18 PM* [online]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3jzi8PeABg&list=PLWuYED1WVJINV4HyHz7XNqnt-Qry-PUjO&index=6> [Accessed 18 December 2014].
- UNESCO, 2014c. *World Heritage – 38th committee 2014-06-20* [online]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9DHtAPostU&list=PLWuYED1WVJINV4HyHz7XNqnt-Qry-PUjO&index=8> [Accessed 19 December 2014].
- UNESCO, 2014d. *World Heritage – 38th committee 2014-06-22 PM* [online]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vytKgGFocGo&index=12&list=PLWuYED1WVJINV4HyHz7XNqnt-Qry-PUjO> [Accessed 19 December 2014].
- UNESCO, 2014e. *UNESCO's vision for the future: post-2015 development agenda* [online]. Available from: <http://en.unesco.org/post2015/> [Accessed 1 October 2014].
- UNESCO, n.d. *Local and indigenous knowledge systems* [online]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/priority-areas/links/> [Accessed 1 October 2014].
- Walker, D., 2014. Local World Heritage: relocating expertise in World Heritage management. In: J. Schofield, ed. *Who needs experts? Counter-mapping cultural heritage*. Farnham: Ashgate, 181–201.
- Winter, T., 2013. Clarifying the critical in critical heritage studies. *International journal of heritage studies*, 19 (6), 532–545.
- Winter, T., forthcoming. Heritage diplomacy. *International journal of heritage studies*, 21 (10).



Beyond the predicted: expanding our understanding of creative agency in international development through practice and policy

Polly Stupples

To cite this article: Polly Stupples (2017) Beyond the predicted: expanding our understanding of creative agency in international development through practice and policy, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23:1, 52-67, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2015.1035264](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1035264)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1035264>



Published online: 05 May 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 392



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

Beyond the predicted: expanding our understanding of creative agency in international development through practice and policy

Polly Stupples^{*,1}

*School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University, Private Bag 11 222,
Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand*

(Received 24 September 2014; accepted 23 March 2015)

This article analyses the framing of creative agency within the field of international development before going on to challenge some of the limitations of that framing. The critique is informed by research undertaken with artist-led initiatives in Central America that reveals the political implications of that framing and, at the same time, points to alternative forms of creative agency at work. The paper highlights the approaches of a number of international development donors whose policies appear able to support more expansive and emancipatory conceptions of agency for artists and artist-led initiatives, and makes a claim for the political importance of such policy platforms, despite some on-going limitations.

Keywords: cultural policy; international development; art; Central America; creative agency

Introduction

The arts have been funded in the global South as part of development assistance since the mid-1990s, yet critical academic engagement with this cultural space remains incipient. This may be partly to do with the rather uncomfortable fit between art (as a space of expression, emotion, experimentation and aesthetic engagement) and development (with its more managerialist approach to measuring and advancing the material components of human well-being). The arts do not find a natural home in either of the dominant conceptions of development – development as economic growth or as human-centred development focused on basic needs and capabilities. In recent years, however, the articulation of the creative economy as a driver of ‘inclusive growth’ for the developing world, has given the arts a more secure toe-hold in development discourse and practice (UNCTAD 2008, 2010, UNDP and UNESCO 2013).

This article explores the way in which the liminal relationship between the arts and development becomes entangled with the politics of instrumentalisation in this transnational and postcolonial context, leading to reductive understandings of creative agency that are experienced as marginalising by recipient artists. Arts advocates labour to point out all the instrumental ways in which the arts can contribute

*Email: polly.stupples@vuw.ac.nz

¹School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, P.O. Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.

to ‘development’ outcomes in order to secure legitimacy (and funding), but in doing so other forms of creative agency are often obscured. This article brings together the perspectives of artist-led initiatives in Central America on the question of creative agency, with analysis of donor policies that try to avoid a reductive approach. As such, it contributes to a more expansive discursive and policy space for art and international development.

Locating arts funding in international development

Funding for the arts as part of development assistance emerged from development’s cultural turn that sought to diversify and democratise development thinking after critiques of the development process in the 1970s and 1980s.¹ Many in the development field sought greater reflexivity about the cultural underpinnings of development, as well as alternative cultural perspectives on development. Other development actors, in a less reflexive move, remained focused on the cultures of others, considering that if cultural contexts were better understood, this would enable the more efficient delivery of projects. The debate about the relationship between development and culture gained traction at the international level through the UN Decade for Cultural Development (1988–1997) that saw a range of high-level international dialogues and initiatives² address this area (Stupples 2014). Although development’s turn to culture was adopted differently by different actors, it contributed to an overall broadening of the development sphere, moving beyond economic growth and GDP as central signifiers of development, and recognising more complex and culturally diverse concepts of well-being (the resulting Human Development Index, that calculates a broader cross-section of well-being indicators, is indicative). The scale of much analysis also shifted, with the cultural turn, from macro to micro (Pieterse 2010, p. 64) – to the specificities of context and a focus on the agency of those previously seen as the ‘targets’ of development interventions or the ‘victims’ of underdevelopment.

It was out of this diversified and more holistic approach to development that funding for the arts emerged in the mid-1990s. This funding signified a more human-centred approach to development, and was seen to support cultural diversity (and local specificity) against the bulwark of Western modernisation. Creative enterprises that could generate income through sales, while at the same time promoting the cultural diversity that development itself seemed to need, were seen as the ideal model.

The UN Decade for Cultural Development was accompanied by increasingly rapid globalisation, the theoretical rise of ‘hybridity’ as a positive engagement with cultural difference, an increase in the values of cultural goods and services to the global economy, and a turn to instrumentalisation in Western cultural policies. Together these elements raised the profile of the socio-economic values of the arts globally, and bolstered donor support for the arts. The rapid increase in world trade of cultural goods and services in the 1980s and 1990s (Jolly *et al.* 2004, p. 215) highlighted their potential to contribute to economic development but it was also tied to heated debate about the role of cultural goods and services in Free Trade Agreements. At trade negotiations in the 1990s, protestors and some governments (notably those of France and Canada) argued for the ‘cultural exception’ amid concern about unequal power relations between trading partners and the possibility of cultural homogenisation. This debate stimulated UNESCO’s efforts to develop the Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) as an international mandate that could be resorted to in trade negotiations. The intensification of

globalisation processes and the number of culturally based conflicts in the post-Cold War era also drew attention to the arts as a means of intercultural exchange that might promote understanding of, and empathy for, others' ways of life.

At the same time, in the West, the neoliberal agenda reduced state support for the arts, leading to increasingly expedient advocacy arguments in which the arts were claimed to be drivers of employment and urban regeneration, promoters of social inclusion, and valuable across a range of social sectors such as health and education (Yúdice 2003, Mirza 2006). Diminishing state involvement in social affairs also prompted grassroots actors to call on culture and the arts as vehicles for activism (Duncombe 2002).

Given the complexity of this context for the emergence of development funding for the arts, it is not surprising that the value of the arts have come to be conceptualised in different ways by different actors. Some in the development field perceive the value of the arts primarily as culturally specific vehicles (using vernacular modes of expression) for the delivery of development messages to enhance the effectiveness of interventions (in, say, health or education). Others value the arts for their contribution to social inclusion (and political stability) and support arts programmes that focus on marginalised or excluded groups. The arts are also valued as contributors to post-conflict peace-building efforts, for example by bringing together formerly antagonistic groups to create performances using music or theatre. Hybridity is seen as a creative engagement with difference that works to counter essentialism, such that 'supporting new, emerging, experimental art forms and expressions' was argued by the World Commission on Culture and Development (1996, p. 41) to be, 'an investment in human development'. Less visible in the development discourse, but still present, is the idea that the arts provide critical public spaces, able to speak truth to power or providing space for the discussion of sensitive or taboo subjects. Under repressive regimes the arts are often seen as bastions of creative resistance and social critique, and as symbols of free expression. The current discourse on the creative economy sees these multiple understandings converge with a strong economic impulse: creative professionals can contribute to 'inclusive growth' (UNCTAD 2008, 2010, UNESCO and UNDP 2013).

This diversity of approaches to art's socio-economic value is matched by diverse policy formations among supporting donors and development organisations. A number of donors (notably those with 'culture funds' of which support for the arts is a substantial part) have clearly articulated arts and culture policies. These include bilateral aid agencies in Scandinavia and parts of Western Europe, plus a handful of independent NGOs (notably in the Netherlands). Other donor nations run arts programmes through their national cultural organisation (such as the Alliance Française or the Goethe Institute). Some large development NGOs (without a specific arts focus) run rather ad hoc arts projects from time to time without clear policy guidelines (Marsh and Gould 2003). In many instances, arts funding is administered through embassy staff on the ground, most of whom have little expertise in the arts.

Although the policy space is varied and, in this sense, reflects the heterogeneous nature of the development field, there has been an overall tendency towards instrumentalisation. Most donors who support the arts strive to articulate what the arts can do *for* development's core concerns of economic growth and human-centred development. The value of the cultural sector in terms of international trade has been highlighted in reports by the UN Conference on Trade and Development

(UNCTAD 2008, 2010). Other arts advocates have linked artistic productivity to human-centred development frameworks, like the Millennium Development Goals (Hivos 2005) or their post-2015 replacement, the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO 2013). Such ‘policy attachment’ (Belfiore 2006) to secure legitimacy for the arts is not surprising, given the context of multiple human material needs that characterises the development context, and given the trend towards policy attachment in the national cultural policies of donor nations. It does, however, obscure other forms of creative agency and this has political implications.

Even those donors who acknowledge broader forms of creative agency in their policies, may employ forms of monitoring and evaluation that are reductionist. The logical framework (a common planning, monitoring and evaluation tool in the development context) requires pre-determined outcomes, usually quantifiably measurable and within a short time-frame. Although this may provide donors with the ‘evidence’ they need that their money has been well spent (and evidence of some kind is required for donors to meet expectations of transparency and accountability),³ such measures reveal little about the value of artistic practices and processes across time and space (Fontes 2015, Forthcoming, Stupples and Teaiwa 2015, Forthcoming).

Overt instrumentalisation is, however, increasingly being counter-balanced by attempts to draw attention to more diverse forms of creative agency, particularly around the non-monetised aspects of the arts and the broader field of culture with which they are imbricated. The Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AECID), for example, describes a concern within the international community to ‘safeguard the specificities of the cultural life of countries as a value in and of itself and an indispensable prerequisite for the economic, social and political development of societies’ (AECID 2007, p. 9). The most recent Creative Economy report ‘Special Edition’ (UNDP and UNESCO 2013) is similarly careful to describe creative processes in ways that contribute to ‘greater normative diversity’ (De Beukelaer 2014). This includes their potential contributions to democracy and emancipatory politics, to securing the rights of minorities, and as triggers for collective action. Here, however, the economic focus seems to be balanced by a largely instrumental social focus. Thus, the creative economy is articulated as: an (economic) *driver* of development, contributing to employment, growth and exports and a (social) *enabler* of development, promoting a culturally sensitive, cross-cutting approach to development (UNESCO and UNDP 2013). Thus, while development’s approach to the arts is certainly broadening, many forms of creative agency remain invisible within its frameworks, and a tendency towards functionalism lingers.

The politics of instrumentalisation in the development context

There is considerable potential for the arts to contribute (instrumentally) to mainstream development outcomes, and overt instrumentalisation itself is nothing new (Belfiore and Bennett 2008). All art is imbricated with the social but the particular way in which that relationship is framed in the development field – as creative professionals are called on to directly address ‘problems’ or ‘deficiencies’ seen to exist only within the local context – has political ramifications. In particular, it reproduces a marginalising politics where the development subject is reduced to a functional rather than an imaginative or intellectual one, and artists from the South are

valued *only* insofar as they can address the problems that are seen to define them and their community. In many countries of the South, independent artists rely almost entirely on international cooperation for financial support and, if that dominant funding modality is narrowly instrumental, then such marginalisation is acutely felt. Below I describe some of the ramifications of this dynamic in the cultural sector in Central America and how artists in the region have responded.

In Nicaragua, development funding from the international community has been the principal support for film-makers for over 20 years since the closure of INCINE, the national film institute, in 1990. Film-makers Jaugey and Pineda argue that without NGO funding Nicaraguan cinema would probably have disappeared, but that NGOs have also demanded 'a certain type of focus' (Jaugey and Pineda 2000, p. 377). They want to see productions with an essentially 'social character'. In the film-makers' opinion, this has the flow-on effect of reinforcing negative stereotypes of Nicaragua (as a place of poverty and problems) and maintaining a form of exoticism that diversifying cinematic production would help to break.

On the other hand, funding for fiction films and features has been much harder to come by. In 2009, Nicaragua released its first feature-length fictional film in 21 years. *La Yuma* tells the story of a strong-willed and rebellious girl from the gang-troubled *barrios* of Managua who dreams of becoming a boxer. Although the social circumstances of the protagonist are hard, the film is also infused with vitality, ingenuity and humour. In interviews (posted on YouTube) the film's director, Florence Jaugey, has pointed out that it took 10 years to get together the modest budget needed for the production that then only allowed for 32 days to shoot the film. All funds were sourced externally except for a small amount coming from private enterprise within Nicaragua, and the support of CINERGIA⁴ (a Costa Rican based fund that supports audio-visual production in the region and whose backers include the Dutch NGO Hivos and the Spanish development agency AECID). The film has been hugely popular in Nicaragua and it gives a more nuanced take on urban life there than is usually on offer. Jaugey sees the film as particularly important because it is so rare for contemporary Nicaraguan life to be portrayed in film and television, and this, she argues, has a negative impact on self-esteem and conceptions of identity.

We can extrapolate a number of things from this example. Firstly, if cultural goods and services are, as Article 8 of the United Nations Declaration on Cultural Diversity claims, 'vectors of identity, values and meaning', then arts funding that only supports cultural self-representation if it is tied to the negative trope of underdevelopment and is only seen as resonant in the local context, will negatively impact identity. This is understood, and met with both irritation and irony by artists in the region. Nicaraguan artist Patricia Belli has commented: 'The stereotype is on us: leave aesthetics to the *superficial* artists of the first world and let artists of the third world think and act on their political issues' (Belli 2007). The problem, as she argues elsewhere, with 'the predisposition to commercial object as much as the predisposition to sociological object' is that it 'stimulates vices and modes that pervert true pluralism' (La ESPORA 2006, p. 4). In other words it promotes self-censorship on behalf of emerging artists and arts organisations in order to get funding and thus limits broader creative, intellectual, expressive and ultimately 'cultural' exploration.

This situation also suggests a somewhat circular logic within the development policy approach. Arts funding is, in many ways, an attempt to recognise the

complexity of the development subject beyond stereotypes of lack and deficiency, and to support transformative processes that move beyond such a functional understanding of human well-being (see Mbembe 2009 for an incisive critique) yet in order to get funding, artists must constantly define themselves *within* the terms of ‘underdevelopment’, thereby reinscribing the dominance of the development imaginary.

This aspect of development assistance, the way in which its policies and practices discursively construct a development subject characterised by lack has been extensively critiqued by postdevelopment theorists in the last 20 years (Crush 1995, Escobar 1995, Rahnema and Bawtree 1997, Esteva and Prakash 1998, Ziai 2007). Drawing on postcolonial critiques of representation of the Third World,⁵ these critics portray development as an amalgamation of texts, practices and institutions that construct a certain way of thinking, talking about and imagining the South and its peoples that, in turn, justifies ongoing external management and intervention. In this sense the development imaginary is argued to have a phantasmatic quality – it involves a ‘social production of space’ that is ‘bound up with the production of differences, subjectivities, and social orders’ (Escobar 1995, p. 9).

That feelings of lack associated with this imaginary are internalised is readily evident. It is an oft-cited perspective, in Nicaragua, to value only that which comes from *outside* the country (or even the region). In another example, at an arts workshop in Managua in 2008, students were asked to bring along works they considered successes and works they considered to be failures in order to investigate their own criteria for evaluating their work. One student presented a work that she considered to be a failure: it was a painting of a pile of shit buzzing with flies she’d seen on the street (her work often explores the abject in everyday life). The facilitator looked thoughtfully at the work and commented that she thought it looked like a map. Another young artist immediately quipped ‘un mapa de Nicaragua’ and the room exploded into laughter.

The marginalisation inherent in instrumentalising the arts for development is paralleled (and thereby deepened) by the approach of global art circuits, which has tended to only recognise artwork produced in the South if it demonstrates its ‘unredeemable cultural difference’ (Cubitt 2002, p. 4), and/or if it reflects a stereotypical or ‘exotic’ image of place. A desire for visibility within dominant art circuits – given Central America’s historical invisibility (Herkenhoff 2011, pp. 3–4) – is met with caution about the terms of that recognition. Those artists from the region who examine themes of violence, poverty, natural disasters or revolution (and particularly those who do so through a highly charged medium) tend to gain greater international recognition. The first show of contemporary Central American art was held in the UK in late 1994/early 1995 under the title ‘Tierra de Tempestades’ (Land of Tempests), showing art from Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua and ‘bring[ing] together nine artists from the three countries who share political commitment and first-hand experience of civil war and social repression’ (Greitschus 1995, p. 79). More recently, Central American artists (such as Regina Galindo and Ernesto Salmerón) have been recognised at the Venice Biennale for overtly political (and, in the case of Galindo, violent) works.⁶ Such recognition is certainly celebrated by fellow artists in the region, who do not take issue with the quality of these individual works or deny the relevance of their thematic content to the contemporary situation. However, there is considerable wariness that it continues to be only works that map onto a narrow, politicised and violent imaginary of the

region that are valorised. Such processes seem to limit the way in which the region is imagined, obscure its complex realities, maintain its distance from the metropolitan centres and reinscribe locality and difference, as well as putting pressure on artists to provide particular kinds of work in order to break into global circuits.⁷

Given the potential for reductionism in these approaches (of the development community and of global art institutions) to obscure other forms of creative agency, there is a political imperative to examine what other forms such agency might take. It is to a deeper exploration some of these other forms of agency that I now turn, through looking at the perspectives of artist-led initiatives in Central America.

Exploring alternative forms of creative agency in artist-led initiatives

An obvious site to explore alternative forms of agency is by talking with artists themselves about how they envisage the agency of their own practices and in relation to what contextual factors. In what follows I draw on doctoral research that used such an approach with Central American independent contemporary visual arts initiatives, focusing particularly on an education initiative based in Nicaragua but active throughout the region, called EspIRA/La ESPORA.

EspIRA/La ESPORA (www.espiralaespora.org) is one of a number of independent artist-led organisations in Central America focused on developing and supporting a critical, reflexive and diverse visual arts practice.⁸ These organisations include curators, critics, magazine collectives and gallery spaces. La ESPORA – an acronym for ‘La Escuela Superior de Arte’ that also translates as ‘spore’ – focuses on education. The school was established in 2006 by Nicaraguan visual artist Patricia Belli and the non-profit artists’ association EspIRA (‘Espacio para la Investigación y Reflexión Artística’/Space for Artistic Research and Reflection) that she founded, with others, in 2003.

Belli was particularly motivated to establish an alternative art academy after finding herself at the centre of a controversy in 1999 that starkly revealed the conservatism of the local art establishment. In 1999 Belli was awarded first prize in the Second Nicaraguan Biennial of Painting but her work, ‘Vuelo Difícil’ or Difficult Flight (draped, painted fabric hung around the base with multiple portraits in tiny frames), did not conform with the dominant local pictorial codes which equated ‘painting’ with a flat, rectangular canvas. The Director of the Nicaraguan Institute of Culture publically complained about the judging and the national art school (where Belli had previously worked) stopped teaching to protest the award. Like other art schools in the region, Nicaragua’s Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas was known for providing a technical but not a critical education (and in a very limited range of media, namely drawing and painting); for reproducing hierarchies between teachers and students; and for reproducing a dominant pictorial imaginary of female nudes and bucolic landscapes (see Stupples 2011, Chapter 5 for a discussion).

Belli fled the controversy on a Fulbright scholarship to undertake a Master’s degree at the San Francisco Arts Institute, where the level of critical reflection and the international cohort of students and staff, led her to reflect further on the value of a globally engaged, critically reflexive and plural arts practice for Nicaraguan students. On her return Belli drew on local and international connections to support the establishment of the umbrella organisation EspIRA in 2003, and the art school La ESPORA in 2006.

Since that time, the organisation (run largely from a spare room in Belli's house but also using facilities offered by embassies from time to time) has been supported by a range of development organisations, including the Swiss and Spanish development agencies, Hivos, The Prince Claus Fund, UNESCO and UNICEF. In most cases support has been for particular one-off projects (a point I return to), although Hivos and the Swiss and Spanish development agencies did provide medium-term support. The challenge of securing funding continues to be relentlessly demanding.

Since that time, EspIRA/La ESPORA has run regular workshops, residencies and exhibitions, as well as running critically informed art classes for disadvantaged children in Managua. They have produced a television series (*La Casa Estrellada*) that brought together popular culture and contemporary art, and a series of interviews (*Husmear*), available online as podcasts, with artists' initiatives throughout Latin America. They have participated at biennales and international shows in Spain (Pontevedra and Madrid) and in New York. These diverse initiatives are all informed by the same critical, dialogic and reflexive approach, valued for encouraging clarity about intention, process, politics, and outcomes, and manifested through the following mechanisms.

Workshops and residencies are characterised by critically engaged, peer-to-peer dialogue. They are open to anyone with a curiosity about art, and thus model a process of horizontal exchange. Horizontal exchange is valued as a counter to the various hierarchies that exist in the local and international scenes, and it also supports the consolidation of networks.

Students bring works in progress to the workshops and the group comments on various aspects of those works. The students are then encouraged to consider how they reached those subjective interpretations of the work. In doing so they unpack assumptions, the influence of cultural norms and questions of politics and power (including processes of legitimation), and explore the mechanisms through which meanings are formed. This generates a broader process of discussion and reflection through which students are encouraged to examine their artistic criteria, as well as exploring the ideological implications of form and content. These workshops also strengthen the voice of emerging students, through the repeated articulation of, and challenge to, their intentions and perceptions.

Students are also encouraged to make work that stems from their own personal interests and experiences, validating the students' own experience and raising awareness about the pressures to conform to dominant modes or external expectations. This means that the work becomes agentic – speaking to and intervening in the complexities of contemporary lived experience – rather than passively reproducing dominant tropes. The starting point for an engagement with social context (itself conceived in complex terms as extending from the personal to the global) is the individual's experience of that context, rather than aspects of context deemed significant by donors. This inevitably brings diversity into play.

La ESPORA also encourages research and investigation as part of its pedagogy. Students explore the work of other artists, and theories of art, that connects with their own interests. In doing so, and in dialogue with their peers, they develop a broader understanding of the diversity of contemporary art, and see their work as part of a global dialogue, in which they have the right to engage.

La ESPORA's residencies bring together emerging artists from throughout the Spanish-speaking countries of the region (from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama and Nicaragua) for 4–6 weeks and are run as a series of

workshops with local and international teachers, based around a central theme (such as art and power, or art and the human/nature nexus). In addition to the forms of agency already described, the residencies further intra-regional dialogue and connections.

For a number of years (until funding dropped away) the residencies were followed by touring exhibitions that travelled throughout the region, and for which the students were responsible. Through this process the students developed a range of professional skills as they physically moved, curated, and mounted the exhibition in different capital cities, liaised with institutions, organised openings and discussed their work in public at diverse venues. Some students used the exhibition openings to interview members of the public about their thoughts on the exhibition and on contemporary art in general, furthering their critical understanding of the relationship of their practice to the social context. Through the extension of friendships and institutional linkages, emergent regional networks were strengthened.

From looking briefly at this one example, it is possible to identify diverse forms of agency that may not be visible in mainstream development frameworks focused on peace-building, economic development or basic needs. For the emerging artists associated with EspIRA/La ESPORA, agency does exist in the professional skills they gain that may lead to employment but, just as importantly, it also exists in critical pedagogical processes that validate the experience and critical reflections of those artists, enabling them to navigate the complexities of context, and to both question and respond to various aspects of local and global cultural politics. These processes are seen to support them in defining their own criteria for their practice, diversifying their thinking about visual arts practices and they encourage an active, responsible artistic production that responds to, and intervenes in, contemporary lived experience.

Such practices are clearly ‘socially engaged’. Indeed, Patricia Belli described La ESPORA to me as a civil society organisation, yet its social value is not constrained within a framework of underdevelopment that is focused on ‘deficiencies’. It does not start from a position of victimization but rather from an assertion of equality which sees Nicaragua as (also) a great place to make art, asserts the right of its emerging artists to address universal as well as local themes, asserts the right to their participation in global dialogue and that provides students with critical tools for understanding their own motivations, intentions and the power dynamics of the systems in which any work of art circulates. Hence, for La ESPORA, the complexity of art’s relationship to social change means that it cannot be incorporated into a pre-determined relationship of means and ends, rather its agency lies in exploration and negotiation, in its occupation of a mediating space between ‘active political engagement and autonomous experimentation’ (Esche, cited in Papastergiadis 2005, p. 291). As such, it feeds into and draws on aspects of contemporary visual arts practice that explore ‘alternative forms of social engagement’ (Papastergiadis 2005, p. 290) – that ‘shuttle between the discourse of art and the cultural politics of everyday life’ (ibid, p. 291). Such practices are often collaborative (with other artists and with non-arts-based communities) and they may be transnational or highly site-specific (see Bishop 2006, Thompson 2012).

EspIRA/La ESPORA’s validation of students’ experience as the starting point for an investigative, reflexive arts practice that assumes the centrality of emerging actors as equals to emerging artists anywhere very likely contributes to ‘development’ goals of self-esteem, empowerment and a reframing of identity and that has

a potentially transformative effect on subjectivity. This is no small matter, given that agency itself ‘takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts and meanings’ (Ortner 2006, p. 110). How we are able to act (what kinds of actions we take and for what reasons) depends on how we think about ourselves – in relation to ourselves and in relation to others. However, it is vital that the space for potentially ‘reframing identity’ is not predetermined by a development framework, but remains liminal to it.

By extension, La ESPORA’s work (along with that of other critically engaged visual arts organisations) can also be seen to contribute to a critical construction of place, but based on an understanding that art’s relationship to place-making involves ‘question[ing] rather than exploit[ing] cultural codes’ (Foster 1983, p. xii). The late Costa-Rican based curator Virginia Pérez-Ratton articulated this position in a regional symposium she organised in 2000, entitled *Temas Centrales* (Central Themes):

And why Central Themes? Central for whom and for where? Weren’t we supposed to be the periphery? Beyond the progressive erasure of the concepts of centre and periphery, it is about time that Central America is not presented as a peripheral area, not only vis-à-vis the international arena, but particularly towards itself. We must assume our right to a complete membership in the international artistic community, and act responsibly, respecting our own context and conditions; understanding them and working from within a context that makes us different, yet equal, which defines us specifically, but that in no way should conduce us to perceive ourselves as subaltern. And, later on, we must never forget where we come from. (Pérez-Ratton 2000, p. 297)

While Pérez-Ratton was referencing the global art world in making this statement, it could also apply to the development community and the development imaginary. Articulating the centrality of artists’ diverse experience from so-called ‘underdeveloped’ countries, validating their right to speak of the global and the complex, and to address universal issues as equal members of a global art world, inverts assumptions about the ‘developed’ and the ‘underdeveloped’, and reduces the social distance between them. Such processes challenge the criteria of legitimacy for how art is valued within the development community and show the limits of the development imaginary.

Supporting an expansive conception of creative agency through policy

How, then, might donors support a broader and more emancipatory conception of creative agency, able to recognise the kinds of agentic processes described above. A small number of donors, including the bilateral development agencies of Spain and Switzerland, and the Dutch NGOs DOEN Foundation, Hivos, the Prince Claus Fund and Arts Collaboratory, share commonalities in their policy platforms that appear more able to recognise and support such forms of agency. The policies of these organisations all prioritise (to a greater or lesser extent) innovation, experimentation and risk-taking; artistic quality; critical reflection; and the professionalization of an independent cultural sector in the global South. Specific support is targeted, in some cases, at non-commercial creative production. Artists are viewed as professionals and global actors. Donors support South–South networks,⁹ or South–North networks that have, at the very least, a horizontal intent, as well as supporting international exchange and broader marketing and distribution networks.

The cultural sector is supported in its own right (rather than as a provider of services to other sectors). Such support includes training and resources, capacity-building, advocacy, the support of networks, international exchange and exposure. The professionalization of the sector, as described by Arts Collaboratory on its website, enables creative professionals to develop ‘high quality artistic capabilities to develop the creative process, include people, connect and innovate languages and finally develop processes and artworks people can relate to, but that also bring new perspectives or thoughts’.

Supporting experimentation and risk-taking means that these donors are (to an extent) able to support the uncertainties associated with genuine processes of exploration and innovation. As such, they move away from overt instrumentalisation, while recognising that art is, as Papastergiadis argues, ‘never outside or above the dynamic field of social change’ (2005, p. 300). The way in which artists are conceived as contributing to social change is indirect and unpredictable. These organisations characterise the artist as a provocateur, a social innovator, someone with the desire and capacity to bring together different groups and individuals in novel combinations to create new perspectives (rather than an interpreter of someone else’s message). The Prince Claus Fund describes creative expression as a ‘catalyst and broker to inspire others to collaborate’ (2012, p. 3). On its website, the DOEN Foundation describes cultural practitioners as creating ‘new imagery and narratives that provide an alternative to existing realities or a status quo’ and artistic processes as ‘tap[ping] into people’s desires and open[ing] up space for imagining new, unexpected associations’. Arts organisations are seen as civil society actors with a particular bent for lateral thinking, who generate cross-sectoral dialogue and open up new spaces and collaborations with the *potential* to trigger processes of change.

Another key policy priority for some of these organisations is to support freedom of expression, particularly in places where, as the Prince Claus Fund notes, that freedom is ‘restricted by conflict, poverty, repression, marginalisation or taboos’. The Fund’s support of creative dissent in Syria is indicative (2012, p. 11). Similarly, the DOEN Foundation argues for ‘the development of the cultural sector in politically unstable countries, where dynamic cultural and media sectors are of great significance’, adding that the ‘independent gathering of news is vital for an open and democratic society’ (Stichting DOEN 2012, p.11). In this case, the freedom to experiment valued across this policy platform is linked to freedom of expression in the face of repression.

There is also an articulation, in policy documents, of the humanising aspects of creative expression, including their contribution to enrichment and joy, and to enabling ‘people to live more satisfying intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual lives’ (SDC 2010, Appendix III). In the instrumental landscape of much development policy, the very mention of emotion and the right of development subjects to pleasure – even entertainment – appears radical.

These donors also experiment with more expansive evaluation methods that are able to capture some of what arises through unpredictable processes of innovation and exploration associated with creative practices. Hivos and the DOEN Foundation have both used narrative-based methodologies in major evaluations (Wilson-Grau and Chambille 2008, Fontes 2010) and DOEN has now adopted ‘collecting stories’ as one of its reporting requests. Such mechanisms assign value to change as it

happens, rather than needing to pre-determine it, and allows – at least potentially – for donors to learn from artists.

Such a policy platform would seem more able to support the forms of agency articulated by EspIRA/La ESPORA. Its relatively expansive scope and its embrace of uncertainty seems to allow for processes of exploration, experimentation, and transformation without predetermining what shape those should take. Its support of horizontal exchange is mirrored by the value of such processes to EspIRA/La ESPORA, and its recognition of both the emotional work within creative practice and the importance given to dialogue and networks seems able to accommodate the range of movement in creative practice, from the intimate all the way to the international. The focus on the professionalisation of the cultural sector seems to encompass EspIRA/La ESPORA's engagement with processes of research and investigation as well as capacity-building.

There are, of course, things that this policy platform doesn't do and it is equally important to acknowledge the on-going issue of short-term funding that supports innovative organisations in the short-term but does not support the consolidation of processes over time, despite evidence that, in uncertain environments, institutionalisation is highly treasured (Laddaga 2004, p. 18). Instead, short-term funding fosters a fragmented landscape of pop-up projects that attract donor funds but disperse agency. Neither does it generally support the development of physical infrastructure (art labs, gathering places, theatres) which again may be part of broader consolidation projects within the arts and cultural sector. La ESPORA, for example, would ideally institutionalise its practices within a purpose-built facility and a five-year degree programme but international funding does not support this. In this sense horizontal exchange between donors and artists only goes so far. Such issues highlight the inequalities that continue to exist within these funding relationships, and recall us to that vital question of '*who* is making the cultural decision' (García Canclini, personal communication 2006).

It is also important to recognise that the struggle to legitimate a more expansive and emancipatory position from which to support arts in the South is ongoing. As is evident from this discussion, these donors inhabit the tensions and contradictions embedded within an attempt to articulate art as (always) social practice, without reducing its complexity and unpredictability. This policy space is balanced between instrumentalisation and a more expansive approach to creative agency and it reflects internal debates (if not contradictions) within donor organisations. Since 2013, for example, Arts Collaboratory has changed its focus to 'Visual Art and Social Innovation'. The organisation's website stated that it needed a 'more focused and clear role' in response to the global financial crisis and a reduced funding base. Arts Collaboratory now supports 'collaborative, inventive and open visual arts practices that are socially engaging and transformative', supporting art projects that 'bring to the fore new approaches, thoughts, and realities on social, economic or environmental problems'. The question of instrumentalisation remains an ongoing tension that such donors negotiate.

Conclusion

Overall, this policy platform that clearly articulates the value of experimental spaces, networks that may produce (only) dialogue, an independent cultural sector, that understands artists as global actors and that tries not to reduce creative value

through evaluation processes, supports a much more expansive and emancipatory field of creative agency than that articulated in mainstream development policy frameworks. This platform is able to recognise many of the forms of agency explored through the case of EspIRA/La ESPORA. While mainstream development policy frameworks do tip their hats to alternative forms of agency, the work undertaken by these donors to navigate the complexities of this terrain serves to expand and inform those mainstream frameworks in potentially emancipatory ways.

This policy platform keeps alive the complexity of art as an inherently social practice, it supports capacity-building in the sector as a whole from which other ‘goods’ can flourish, it allows space for other forms of agency to emerge and has the potential to speak back to the donor community. Using expansive monitoring and evaluation tools make it more likely that programmes are based on the needs of artists and arts communities. It allows for innovation, for experimentation, for uncertainty, for what we don’t yet know. This is imperative for processes that aim to be transformative. One of the most important aspects of this policy space, however, is that it keeps alive the discussion about what creative agency is and what it means, both for the development context and for the societies in which we all live.

Acknowledgments

Sincere thanks to the two anonymous reviewers who provide constructive critique on this manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. These critiques were based around the empirical failures of development in the ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s (connected to structural adjustment and austerity measures), a growing awareness of the environmental limits to development as economic growth, and the collapse of the socialist paradigm as an alternative ‘grand theory’ to liberalism. It was also influenced by postmodern perspectives (informed by postcolonial and feminist scholarship) that analysed development as ‘shaped by a Western and masculinist bias’, as a project that ‘claimed universality but derived from particular interests and understandings’ (Kothari 2002, p. 35).
2. These include: UNESCO’s World Conference on Cultural Policies in 1982 (Mondiacult); the World Commission on Culture and Development and its landmark report *Our Creative Diversity* (1996); the publication of the first UN World Culture Reports; and the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (1998) and its subsequent Action Plan.
3. Accountability and transparency have been enshrined as core principles of effective aid practice at the High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness (see, e.g. the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, 2011).
4. CINERGIA stands for *Fondo de fomento al audiovisual de Centroamérica y el Caribe* (which translates as the Fund for Development of Audiovisual Production in Central America and the Caribbean).
5. The postdevelopment critique of development’s discursive power draws on and overlaps with critiques coming out of postcolonial theory. Escobar’s key text on development as discourse, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (1995), refers to and parallels the work of a number of postcolonial scholars. It builds on Foucault’s work ‘on the dynamics of discourse and power in the representation of

social reality' but also the '[e]xtensions of Foucault's insights to colonial and postcolonial situations by authors such as Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe, Chandra Mohanty, and Homi Bhabha [which have] opened up new ways of thinking about representations of the Third World' (Escobar 1995, p. 5). Escobar extends these insights to the South as a whole as constructed through the discourse of development.

6. In 2005 Regina Galindo (Guatemala) was awarded the Golden Lion for artists under 30 with a series of works including 'Himenoplastia', '¿Quién Puede Borrarr Las Huellas?', and a performance in which she whipped herself 279 times for each of the women murdered in Guatemala so far that year (Goldman 2006). 'Himenoplastia' is a video of the artist undergoing dangerous clandestine surgery to restore her hymen and therefore her 'social status' as virgin (Goldman 2006, paragraphs 16–21). Translated as 'Who can erase the traces?', *Quién Puede Borrarr Las Huellas* documents a performance in which Galindo walked barefoot through Guatemala City carrying a bowl of human blood in which she dipped her feet occasionally. This act left a trail of bloody footprints from the Constitutional Court building to the old National Palace as a protest against former military dictator Ríos Montt's renewed bid for president (Goldman 2006, paragraph 1). In 2007, Salmerón gained a place at the Venice Biennale with his multi-media work entitled 'Auras of War: Interventions in the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Public Space 1996–2007' that examined the fractured legacy of the Sandinista revolution in contemporary Nicaraguan society. This work was part of a larger exhibition of Salmerón's work that was censored in Nicaragua when it was shown at the Palacio Nacional, in Managua. The work was purchased by London's Tate Gallery in 2008.
7. All art exists within systems of legitimation, and while there may be an irony in Central American artists seeking legitimacy from the very circuits that marginalise them, there is also agency in attempting to reframe those criteria for legitimacy from the 'periphery'. As Geeta Kapur reminds us: 'in the [...] Third World context [...] contradictions are rife and you have to put up all the fights at once' (2002, p. 21). In response to 'Tierra de Tempestades', Virginia Pérez-Ratton (then Director of the Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo in Costa Rica) curated an alternative exhibition of contemporary Central American art entitled 'MESÓTICA-the non-representative America' later in 1995. The exhibition (and its subsequent incarnations in 1996 and 1997) was shown in Central America but also toured Europe in a process that aimed to recalibrate external criteria of legitimacy for art from Central America, as well as to point out that artists from the region do not only represent 'the real' of their respective societies.
8. Others include Pérez-Ratton's curatorial practices organised under the Costa Rican NGO *Teor/ética*, the work of Raúl Quintanilla and the Nicaraguan independent arts magazines *ArteFacto*, *Estrago* and *Malagona*, the NGO *Mújeres en las Artes* in Honduras, the cultural supplement *Talingo* in Panama, the curatorial work of Rosina Cazali in Guatemala and a range of artist-led groups such as *Proyecto Ultravioleta* in Guatemala.
9. Hivos and DOEN, for example, have supported the establishment of the ARTERial Network which brings together regional arts representatives from throughout Africa to work on capacity development, policy shaping, advocacy and funding, through regular training workshops.

References

- AECID, 2007. *Spanish strategy for culture and development cooperation*. Madrid: Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation.
- Belfiore, E., 2006. The social impacts of the arts – myth or reality? In: M. Mirza, ed. *Culture vultures – is UK arts policy damaging the arts?* London: Policy Exchange, 20–37.
- Belfiore, E. and Bennett, O., 2008. *The social impact of the arts – an intellectual history*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Belli, P., 2007. *Arts collaboratory – knowledge sharing programme*. Managua: La Espora.
- Bishop, C., 2006. The social turn: collaboration and its discontents. *Artforum*, February, pp. 179–185.
- Crush, J.S., 1995. *Power of development*. London: Routledge.

- Cubitt, S., 2002. In the beginning: third text and the politics of art. In: R. Araeen, S. Cubitt, and Z. Sardar, eds. *The third text reader on art, culture and theory*. London: Continuum, 1–8.
- De Beukelaer, C., 2014. The UNESCO/UNDP 2013 Creative Economy Report: perks and perils of an evolving agenda. *The journal of arts management, law and society*, 44, 90–100.
- Duncombe, S., ed., 2002. *Cultural resistance reader*. London: Verso.
- Escobar, A., 1995. *Encountering development: the making and unmaking of the third world*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Esteva, G. and Prakash, M.S., 1998. *Grassroots post-modernism – remaking the soil of cultures*. London: Zed Books.
- Fontes, C., 2010. *How do you DOEN? Stories of change from the culture sector in Africa*. Amsterdam: DOEN Foundation Culture Programme.
- Fontes, C., 2015, Forthcoming. The what and the how: rethinking evaluation practice for the arts and development. In: Stupples and Teaiwa, eds. *Contemporary perspectives on art and international development*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Foster, H., ed., 1983. *The anti-aesthetic: essays on postmodern culture*. Seattle, WA: Bay Press.
- Goldman, F., 2006. Regina José Galindo. In: *Bomb – a quarterly arts and culture magazine since 1981, 1994*. Available from: <http://bombsite.com/issues/94/articles/2780>
- Greitschus, J., 1995. Tierra de Tempestades: Land of tempests: new art from Guatemala, el Salvador and Nicaragua. *Third text*, 9 (30), 79–84.
- Herkenhoff, P., 2011. Virginia Pérez-Ratton y la reinención de Centroamérica. *Istmo* [online], 22. Available from: <http://istmo.denison.edu/n22/articulos/01.html>
- Hivos, 2005. *10 years Hivos culture fund: beyond diversity – moving towards MDG No 9*. Amsterdam: Hivos.
- Jaugey, F. and Pineda, F., 2000. La Cinematografía y Las Artes Audiovisuales en Nicaragua [Cinematography and audiovisual arts in Nicaragua]. In: J. Oyamburu, ed. *Visiones del Sector Cultural en Centroamérica* [Perspectives on the cultural sector in Central America]. San José, CA: Ediciones AECI, 375–381.
- Jolly, R., et al., 2004. *UN contributions to development thinking and practice*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press.
- Kapur, G., 2002. Contemporary cultural practice – some polemical categories. In: R. Araeen, Z. Sardar, and S. Cubitt, eds. *The third text reader on art, culture and theory*. London: Continuum, 15–23.
- Kothari, U., 2002. Feminist and postcolonial challenges to development. In: U. Kothari and M. Minogue, eds. *Development theory and practice – critical perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 35–51.
- La ESPORA, 2006. *Escuela Superior de Arte* [Higher school of art]. Managua: EspIRA/La ESPORA.
- Laddaga, R., 2004. *Shifting maps – artists' platforms and strategies for cultural diversity*. Rotterdam: NAi.
- Marsh, M. and Gould, H., 2003. *Routemapping culture and development. Creative exchange and DFID*. Available from: http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/Mis_SPC/R8202a.pdf
- Mbembe, A., 2009. African contemporary art: negotiating the terms of recognition. *Johannesburg workshop in theory and criticism blog*. Available from: <http://jhbwtc.blogspot.com/2009/09/african-contemporary-art-negotiating.html>
- Mirza, M., 2006. *Culture vultures: is UK arts policy damaging the arts?* London: Policy Exchange.
- Ortner, S.B., 2006. *Anthropology and social theory: culture, power, and the acting subject*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Papastergiadis, N., 2005. Small gestures in specific places: on collaboration and the politics of art. In: S. McQuire and N. Papastergiadis, eds. *Empires, ruins + networks – the transcultural agenda in art*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 287–302.
- Pérez-Ratton, V., 2000. *Temas Centrales – Primer Simposio Centroamericano de Prácticas Artísticas y Posibilidades Curatoriales Contemporáneas* [Central themes – first regional symposium on contemporary central American artistic practices and curatorial possibilities]. San José: TEORÉTICA.

- Pieterse, J.N., 2010. *Development theory: deconstructions/ reconstructions*. 2nd revised ed. London: Sage and TSC Books.
- Prince Claus Fund, 2012. *The 2012 Prince Claus Fund annual report*. Amsterdam: Prince Claus Fund.
- Rahnema, M. and Bawtree, V., eds., 1997. *The post-development reader*. London: Zed Books.
- SDC, 2010. *SDC's strategic orientation for the promotion of intercultural and artistic exchange with the South and East (2010–2015)*. Bern: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC.
- Stichting DOEN, 2012. *Annual report 2012*. Available from: <http://services.gdl-webservices.nl/DOEN/jaarverslagen/2012UK/#/spreadview/0/>
- Stupples, P. 2011. *Breaking the frame: art in international development*. Doctoral thesis. Available from: <http://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/3678>
- Stupples, P., 2014. Creative contributions: the role of the arts and the cultural sector in development. *Progress in development studies*, 14, 115–130.
- Stupples, P. and Teaiwa, K., eds., 2015, Forthcoming. *Contemporary perspectives on art and international development*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Thompson, N., ed., 2012. *Living as form: socially engaged art from 1991–2011*. New York/ Cambridge, MA: Creative Time Books/MIT Press.
- UNCTAD, 2008. *Creative Economy Report 2008: the challenge of assessing the creative economy towards informed policy-making*. Available from: <http://www.unctad.org/creative-economy>
- UNCTAD, 2010. *Creative Economy Report 2010*. Available from: <http://www.unctad.org/Templates/WebFlyer.asp?intItemID=5763&lang=1>
- UNESCO, 2013 *The Hangzhou declaration: placing culture at the heart of sustainable development policies*. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/images/FinalHangzhouDeclaration20130517.pdf>
- UNESCO and UNDP, 2013. *Creative economy report: widening local development pathways*. Paris: UNESCO and UNDP.
- Wilson-Grau, R. and Chambille, K., 2008. *Evaluating the outcomes of an arts & culture programme in Central America*. The Hague: Hivos.
- World Commission on Culture and Development, 1996. *Our creative diversity – Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development* (summary version). Paris: UNESCO.
- Yúdice, G., 2003. *The expediency of culture – uses of culture in the global era*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ziai, A., 2007. *Exploring post-development: theory and practice, problems and perspectives*. Oxon, OX: Routledge.



On the legitimacy of cultural policies: analysing Québec's cultural policy with the Economies of Worth

Gaëlle Lemasson

To cite this article: Gaëlle Lemasson (2017) On the legitimacy of cultural policies: analysing Québec's cultural policy with the Economies of Worth, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23:1, 68-88, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2015.1035265](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1035265)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1035265>



Published online: 05 May 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 867



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

On the legitimacy of cultural policies: analysing Québec's cultural policy with the Economies of Worth

Gaëlle Lemasson*

Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, Millburn House, Coventry CV4 7HS, UK

(Received 4 November 2014; accepted 23 March 2015)

This paper explores the question of the legitimisation of cultural policies by examining the case of the Canadian French-speaking province, Québec, where the consensus over the legitimacy and the purpose of a cultural policy was not easily reached. To understand the evolution of the justifications for state intervention in this field, we have analysed three major policy statements issued by the government of Québec as well as the criticisms levelled at the moment of their publication using the analytic framework the Economies of Worth. Developed by French sociologist Luc Boltanski and economist Laurent Thévenot, this framework conceptualises different regimes of justification that can be retraced in cultural policy statements. We explore more particularly the concept of 'compromise' which enables us to understand why cultural policies have difficulty achieving consensus. This paper thus aims at assessing the heuristic value of this interpretative device for cultural policy analysis.

Keywords: legitimisation of cultural policies; Economies of Worth; cultural policy of Québec

1. Introduction

More than other public policies, cultural policies seem to have always been particularly prone to debate. The criticisms against the state's project to democratise high arts was criticised in the early 1960s for not being able to achieve its ends and, worse, for reinforcing the unequal distribution of 'cultural capital' as Bourdieu and Darbel showed in their authoritative study on cultural practices, *L'Amour de l'art* (1966). In the 1970s and 1980s, the policies of 'cultural development' that, amongst other things, sought to encourage and foster diverse artistic expressions – including popular culture – were, for their part, criticised for dumbing down culture. The polemical book *L'État culturel: Essai sur une religion moderne* by French essayist Marc Fumaroli is certainly emblematic of this position (1991). And despite the government's effort to respond to the criticisms of pro-market advocates, the more recent economic justifications for public support in the arts have not been spared either; they have been impugned on the ground that other policy measures are more effective in stimulating the economy (McCarthy *et al.* 2004), or that the methods of economic analysis on which these arguments are based are unreliable (Farchy and Sagot-Duvaurox 1994). In fact, despite the governments' efforts to

*Email: lemasson.gaelle@uqam.ca

legitimate the state's intervention in the cultural sector, the rationale behind cultural policies is constantly questioned and criticised.

Given the fact that these policies are still widely debated nowadays¹ – particularly in these times of austerity –, the question certainly needs to be further scrutinised. Conducted during doctoral studies, our research sought to better understand this issue by asking the main question: why is the state intervention in cultural matters so difficult to justify? To transform this question into a realistic research project, we have chosen to study more particularly the specific case of the province of Québec, where most of Canada's French-speaking population live. Like elsewhere, the rationale for state intervention in cultural policy matters has changed over time. Indeed, the government of Québec has been prolific in terms of the number of cultural policy proposals produced: five comprehensive cultural policy proposals have been elaborated in a span of thirty years before the official cultural policy was finally adopted in 1992.² This case thus illustrates the fact that the consensus over the legitimacy and the purpose of a cultural policy is not easily reached. In order to better understand this situation, we have formulated two other questions: (1) How have justifications for state intervention in the cultural field evolved in the province of Québec? (2) How have the critiques against the policies affected the evolution of cultural policy in the province of Québec?

The overall analysis of the argumentation presented in the chosen key policy texts was carried out employing the *Economies of Worth* (EW), an analytic framework that was developed in the 1990s by French sociologist Luc Boltanski and economist Laurent Thévenot. In spite of the fact that our research went beyond the content analysis of policy statements, the use of the EW, which had not been applied so far in the field of cultural policy studies, constitutes an original feature of our research. The aim of this paper is to present some of our main results and to show how the EW can be used as an interpretive device for explaining the difficulty for cultural policies to reach widespread and long-lasting consensus and to be perceived as being fully legitimate.³

2. The Economies of Worth

Before presenting the most important findings obtained using the EW, we will succinctly present the features of this analytic framework that are essential to understanding the use we have made of it.⁴

2.1. *Six polities and six common worlds*

In Boltanski and Thévenot's own words, the EW was originally conceived to 'analyze the critical operations that people carry out when they want to show their disagreement without resorting to violence, and the ways they construct, display, and conclude more or less lasting agreements' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 25). One of the main postulates advanced by Boltanski and Thévenot is that the process of justification entails a capability to refer to some shared conventions or principles to make their claim acceptable to others. These superior principles, or 'principles of equivalence', allow the production and the distribution of worth or, in other words, enable processes of evaluation. The authors have identified six such higher principles on which arguments (and agreements) are generally based – whether explicitly or implicitly – and have modelled them in the form of 'polities' (*cités*):

the *inspired polity* where people's worth is defined through the attainment of a state of grace, the *domestic polity* where worth depends on a hierarchy of trust based on a chain of personal dependencies, a *polity of fame* where worth is the result of other people's opinion, the *civic polity* where worth is based on the renunciation to particular interests, a *market polity* based on distribution of goods, in accordance with the market law, the *industrial polity* where worth is based on efficiency. (Boltanski cited in Blondeau and Sevin 2004, our translation)

After having identified the six higher principles, Boltanski and Thévenot have sought to understand how, concretely, beings are evaluated or, to use their terms, how 'tests of worth' are conducted in everyday situations. In their preliminary studies, they have indeed observed that the process of justification involves an ability to use various 'objects' to assess one's worth. For example, 'good manners', 'gifts' are objects that are used to assess the domestic worth; 'wealth' and 'luxury' can help assess the market worth; 'methods', 'plans' are useful to measure the industrial worth, whilst 'rights', 'legislation' or 'policy' are used to evaluate the civic one. Similarly, there exists various 'subjects' (that can be human or not⁵) who can be associated to one or the other worlds depending on the role they play in a given situation (a father, an elected official, a consumer, a movie star, an executive director, etc.). Common worlds are also composed of other categories that tie subjects and objects together. For example, the 'natural relations among beings' are expressed with verbs. The verb 'function' links subjects and objects of the industrial world; the word 'invite' is a kind of action peculiar to the domestic one; the verb 'dream' is, for its part, typical of the inspired world; and 'mobilise' qualify a type of relations present in the civic one. These categories thus also enabled us to identify the worlds invoked in various texts or speeches along with a list of subjects and objects. Being closely tied to 'polities', 'common worlds' have been designated as the inspired, the domestic, the civic, the market, the industrial worlds and the world of fame.

In sum, 'the model of the *polities* is a *formal* model whilst the *world* is the *concrete* expression of the orders of worth' (Nachi 2006, p. 128, our translation emphasis in the original). We will now examine what results from the coexistence of these various polities and worlds.

2.2. *The plurality of principles of equivalence, source of critiques*

According to Boltanski and Thévenot, '[o]ne can demonstrate empirically that most of what are today ordinary criticisms are made possible by connecting two (or more) of the different worlds' (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, p. 373). The fact that different principles of equivalence can be invoked to measure someone's worth – or, to put it differently, that there exists various ways to assess someone's value in a given situation – inevitably gives rise to disputes. The authors have identified two kinds of disputes: in a '**contention**' (*un litige*), the worth of a subject is contested but the principle of equivalence on which the evaluation is based is not questioned (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 133). In this situation, 'contingent circumstances' may affect the way worth is distributed and 'in order to settle the controversy, the parties involved' will re-evaluate the person's worth under 'valid conditions' by conducting a test that 'draw[s] exclusively upon resources of a single world' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, pp. 135–137). It is the case when a new hired employee (industrial world), sharing a kinship with the boss (domestic

world), is asked to undertake a psychometric test to assess his/her professional competence (industrial worth). The ‘**clash**’ (*le différend*), for its part, is ‘a more fundamental disagreement over the nature of the beings that matter’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 134). In fact, it is ‘the very principle of the test’ that is questioned which might lead ‘to overturn the situation by replacing the test that is under way by a test relevant in a different world’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 218). It is the case when a group of actors (world of fame) asks that the remuneration of artists be based on the worked hours (industrial world) instead of being based on celebrity (world of fame).

If conflicts can be settled ‘through recourse to a test in just one world’ as the contention and the clash require (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 277), they can also be ‘suspended’ by maintaining a ‘composite’ situation. In such situation, i.e. in situation of ‘compromises’, ‘[b]eings that matter in different worlds are maintained in presence, but their identification does not provoke a dispute’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 277). The compromise is thus a form of agreement that holds together different principles and makes coexist beings belonging to different worlds. We will now present further this concept and explain how we used it as a structuring element throughout our research.

2.3. *Dynamics of the compromise*

In a compromise situation, the beings involved are aware of and acknowledge the existence and the worth of beings from other worlds. The beings are also ‘favourably disposed toward the notion of a ‘common good’: they seek to satisfy their own interests but also those of beings not immediately involved in the compromise (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 278). It is the case when a business community (market world) accepts that the state (civic world) regulates to some extent the market so as to strengthen the position of smaller businesses. The compromise not only serves to give smaller businesses means to compete in a global market but it preserves local economies for the good of a given region as well of all citizens. In this sense, the compromise ‘aims at a common good that transcends the two different forms of worth in presence by including both of them’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 278). However, although the compromise seeks a form of common good, the principle on which it rests is not a ‘common good constitutive of a polity’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 278); no higher common principle has been clearly identified. Yet in the absence of such principle, no order of worth can clearly be established which makes this form of agreement more easily dismountable. But Boltanski and Thévenot have observed that a compromise can nonetheless be reinforced by means of ‘composite objects’. These are made of ‘elements stemming from different worlds’ but are endowed with ‘their own identity’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 278). As they explain,

[o]ne way of solidifying a compromise is to place objects composed of elements stemming from different worlds at the service of the common good and endow them with their own identity in such a way that their form will no longer be recognizable if one of the disparate elements of which they are formed is removed. Transformed in this way, the compromise is more resistant to critiques, because it now relies on indivisible objects. (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 278)

These ‘composite objects’ can be identified through ‘formulations and designations that establish references to the worlds of origin in a single utterance’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 281). Boltanski and Thévenot give as an example the designation of ‘domestic employee’ that ‘presupposes a compromise with the industrial world’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 281). As part of our analysis, we have decided to include in this conceptual category any objects, beings, institutions, or concepts that refer to two different worlds, as we will see.

The authors of the EW also point to the fact that a ‘compromise can be worked out more easily when it can be made to accommodate beings or qualities that are *ambiguous* in the sense that they may derive, depending on the way they are understood, from more than one world’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, pp. 279–280, emphasis in the original). Because the word culture has evolved going from a more restricted definition ‘in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which [...] human thought and experience are variously recorded’ (Williams 1998, p. 48) to ‘the meaning attributed to it by ethnologists – that is to say the set of models governing the behaviour and thought of the members of a society’ (Bourdieu cited in Ahearne 2002, p. 62), it can be associated to worlds other than the inspired one. We thus presumed that cultural policy statements seek to preserve that ambiguity and hence render the compromise more easily acceptable. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the fact that the compromise does not allow a reference to a single principle on which all parties can agree makes it particularly susceptible to critiques. As part of our research, we thus examined the critiques expressed against each policy proposals under study.

The idea of ‘compromise’ is of particular interest to us since this paper sets out to demonstrate, on the basis of the Quebecois case, that considering public policies qua ‘compromises’ opens up new interesting heuristic avenues for the study of cultural policies. Instead of being seen as an expression of power exerted on the members of the civil society or as discourses hiding some other interests, we supposed that cultural policies were based on some commonly shared ideals. Moreover, the concept of compromise as elaborated within the EW has not been extensively explored in any other cultural studies.⁶ Although the idea of compromise was not initially conceptualised by Boltanski and Thévenot specifically to analyse policy statements, we nonetheless have endeavoured to test its relevance to our object of study. We indeed hypothesised that the dynamics of the compromise – i.e. the ways it makes different principles coexist, the ways it can be reinforced or criticised – could help us understand the difficulty in legitimating the state’s action in the field of culture. Four underlying questions thus guided our analysis of each policy statements, viewed as ‘compromises’: (1) on what principles is the compromise built? (2) In the name of what common good has it been established? (3) How has the compromise been reinforced? (4) How has it been criticised?

In the next sections we will briefly present each cultural policy under study as well as the context in which they were formulated before drawing general conclusions.

3. Cultural policies under study

To answer our first main research questions (‘How have the justifications for state intervention in the cultural field evolved in the province of Québec?’), we have

decided to examine more closely three statements that were key in the history of Québec's cultural policy⁷: (1) *Pour une politique* (1959); (2) *La politique québécoise de développement culturel* (1978); (3) *La politique culturelle du Québec: Notre culture, notre avenir* (1992). The first two policy statements were formulated by governments which were able to carry out their respective political agenda – at least partially – as they remained in power long enough to do so. The third one is the official cultural policy of Québec which was adopted in 1992 and which remain, to this day, the official strategy for the sector. Our interest in these policy statements also lied in the fact that they were released at wide intervals and therefore clearly mirrored the changing tendencies in cultural policy at different times. To answer our second research question ('How have the critiques against the policies affected the evolution of cultural policy in the province of Québec?'), we have decided to analyse the arguments of the detractors of these policies. These criticisms were formulated as much by journalists as they were by politicians, artists or cultural professionals, and they were assessed through an analysis of their appearance in media reactions to the publication of the policy documents at the centre of the study. The aim of this exercise was not so much to give an exhaustive account of the criticisms made against these policies, or to measure their respective influence, but to highlight the diversity of these criticisms.

3.1. *Pour une politique (1959)*

Georges-Émile Lapalme, first minister for Cultural Affairs, wrote, in 1959 a manifesto entitled *Pour une politique* which was at the very origin of the creation of a new department: the *Ministère des Affaires culturelles du Québec* (MAQC). At the moment of the writing of the book, the social and political landscape of Québec was just about to significantly change. Having been governed uninterruptedly since 1944 by the clerico-conservative party *Union nationale*, the Quebecois society was soon to be transformed by the many progressive reforms that would be undertaken by the *Parti libéral du Québec* (PLQ), bringing about its secularisation and modernisation.⁸ Despite the fact that Lapalme abandoned his role as leader of the PLQ for the profit of Jean Lesage in 1958, many of his ideas have nonetheless directly inspired these reforms (Séguin 1968). Besides, the PLQ's 1960 political programme was prepared by Lapalme himself, following a request made by Lesage to take up, in the programme, the ideas he had developed in *Pour une politique* (Harvey 2010, pp. 20–21). Being profoundly concerned by the cultural situation of French Canada, Lapalme proposed in the first article of the party's programme to create the MAQC. When the PLQ took power in June 1960, Lapalme was named Attorney General and was also given, a year later and upon his insistence (Handler 1988, p. 104), the responsibility of the future *Ministère des Affaires culturelles*. Having specified his vision in his 300-page manuscript (Lapalme 1988), the minister had a clear idea of what policy he intended to pursue.⁹ Indeed, *Pour une politique*, which is composed of Lapalme's personal views as well as political recommendations in various matters, also displays the rationale for a coherent and comprehensive state intervention in cultural matters, and represents, as such, the first sketch of an explicit cultural policy in Québec.

Largely inspired by the works of French Canadians intellectuals such as Edmond de Nevers (1862–1906) and Edouard Montpetit (1881–1954) (Panneton 2000, Harvey 2010), who were both carriers of the ideology of the 'French

survivance' (*survivance française*),¹⁰ which notably entailed a concern for the preservation of traditions inherited from the French settlers, Lapalme developed a policy that sought to enhance the French legacy in cultural matters. Fearing the weakening of the French Canadian culture, Lapalme indeed believed it had to recover its French *grandeur* so as to better resist cultural assimilation (Lapalme 1988). Lapalme's cultural policy also aimed at increasing the French-Canadian influence internationally, again as a means to ultimately guarantee the survival of the French Canadian nation. In order for his party to become, as he put it, the 'champion of a total renovation centred on the cult of French language, guardian of a dynamic and strong culture' (Lapalme 1988, p. 88), Lapalme proposed the setting up of four agencies: (1) a Linguistic Bureau, that Lapalme also called a 'French Renaissance Bureau', whose mission would essentially be to 'guarantee the purity of language' and stimulate good usages of French, but also to supervise a network of libraries in the province¹¹; (2) a Provincial Office for Urbanism¹² whose mission would be to protect the built and natural heritage from losing its French character and history, and to develop a coherent plan for future urban development peculiar to French Canadian culture; (3) an Extra-territorial French Canada Branch whose mission would be to foster the influence of the province outside of its territory, on the international scene, but also serve as a gathering point for all the Francophones living in the rest of Canada as well as in the United States; and (4) finally, a Cultural Affairs Department whose mission would not only be to support the Arts and Letters but to oversee the action of the other agencies (Lapalme 1988, pp. 86–98). This department would indeed coordinate the ensemble of the cultural action in the province and serve the French Canadian culture more globally. If Lapalme's conception of culture was rather traditional, the fact that he ascribed to the state the responsibility of protecting culture to such an extent, was on the other hand, quite progressive (Fournier 1988, p. 159, Panneton 2000, p. 11, Harvey 2010, p. 43).

Our analysis of the 1959 manifesto with the EW showed that it articulated a compromise invoking mainly the principles belonging to the domestic world (traditions), the world of fame (reputation) as well as the civic world (collective will). As said above, a certain line of thought stemming from the nineteenth century maintained that the French genius could act as a shield against cultural assimilation and degeneration. The domestic world thus manifested itself through the desire to revive the 'French spirit' inherited from the settlers and preserved by a certain elite (protection of traditions): '[a] language and a culture stem from a tradition. Also must it have an identity; a French identity, naturally' argued Lapalme (Lapalme 1988, p. 91, our translation). The survival of this nation was also perceived as being closely linked to questions of prestige, which of course, respond to the logic of the world of fame. In effect, the cultural policy proposal aimed at increasing the international influence of French Canadians by reinforcing cultural relations with francophone countries and regions, but also by reaching the cultural standards (borrowed from the French society notably) that would make the nation shine. Lapalme indeed believed the politics of the province of Québec lacked greatness and he hoped to see the French Canadian society retrieve the noble features of the French civilisation. Lapalme's cultural policy thus sought to increase French Canada's image and reputation internationally. The presence of the civic world, for its part, manifested itself through an unprecedented state intervention in cultural matters. According to Lapalme, the Parliament was 'the higher authority capable of activating the common denominator that is a culture peculiar to [the French Canadians]'

(Lapalme 1988, p. 87, our translation). More than any other institutions, the state was thus entitled to defend the nation's collective culture. The creation of a Department for Cultural Affairs asserted the state's new role in cultural matters and made official and tangible the compromise between the civic and the domestic worlds. Its legal status also made it more difficult to dismantle or suppress.

Using Boltanski and Thévenot's analytic framework, we have been able to observe that some accepted the compromise as Lapalme proposed it,¹³ but others revealed the tension that the coexistence of the civic and the domestic worlds posed, notably by questioning the way to legitimately assess the worth of those holding the power to decide what was to be funded and demanded that appointments be made according to well-established criteria and rules (Anon. 1961a, 1962, Picher 1961). Their criticisms reflected a desire to see the civic world prevail over the domestic one (representativity vs. cronyism). Some also put forward worlds that were not dominant in Lapalme's proposal: the industrial world and the inspired one. Some journalists indeed asked for more efficiency when underlining the administrative slowness of the MACQ as well as the lack of a clear orientation (Anon. 1961b, L'Heureux 1962, Picher 1961). Their criticisms reflected a desire to see the industrial world prevail over the civic one (efficiency vs. excessive bureaucratisation). The Prime Minister, for his part, preferred the arm's length model to Lapalme's more interventionist approach, as he believed culture should not be created or directed by the government (Lesage 1961b, p. 6, Thomson 1984, p. 312). State intervention could be detrimental to the 'sacred dialogue' between God and artists, he maintained (Lesage 1961a), and the state intervention had to remain limited. His criticism reflected a desire to see the inspired world prevail over the civic one (artists' independence vs. state interference). Finally, the conception of culture that Lapalme's policy proposal defended was also the subject of dispute. Our research has indeed shown that a disagreement over the very common good to be defended was a source of conflict. Lapalme aimed at enhancing the nation's French origin, however – over time – more and more French Canadians, including the Prime Minister Lesage (Lesage 1961b, 1963), sought to take some distance from the French model to assert their own cultural specificity: they valued what made French Canadians distinct from the French society and wanted to encourage the expression of this very specificity.

In sum, if Lapalme's policy was welcomed by some it also raised various kinds of objections. As we will now see *La politique québécoise de développement culturel*, which proposed a very different vision, was also the target of criticism.

3.2. La politique québécoise de développement culturel (1978)

The 1960s–1970s saw the emergence of a neo-nationalist movement in Québec that promoted the idea of political independence and encouraged the self-assertion of French Canadians. This movement led to the creation of the first 'sovereignist' party, the *Parti Québécois*, which was elected in 1976 under the leadership of René Lévesque. Camille Laurin was part of this new party and given the responsibility of the ministerial committee for Cultural Development. Inspired by the post-colonialist movement (Laurin 1972, pp. 10–22), Laurin developed two policies that aimed at feeding the pride of the French Canadians who, as a recent federal governmental report attested, 'did not occupy in the [Canadian] economy, nor in the decision-making ranks of government, the place their numbers warranted' (Laing

2013). The first policy, *La politique québécoise de la langue française*, ‘made French the official language of the state and of the courts in the province of Québec, as well as making it the normal and habitual language of the workplace, of instruction, of communications, of commerce and of business’ (Hudon 2013a). One of Laurin’s fundamental objectives in writing this policy was ‘to shake the structural edifice and reverse the hierarchy of powers’ in Québec (Rocher 2010, p. 79, our translation), where the minority anglo-saxon community held, since the 1760 British Conquest, most of the power. The second policy, *La politique québécoise du développement culturel*, represented, the next step towards the emancipation of the Quebecois people (Picard 2003, p. 314).

The 1978 white paper was articulated around three ‘dimensions’ that were said to be ‘largely interdependent’: the ways of life, creation, and education (Québec 1978a, p. 139). Fundamentally, this policy aimed at encouraging the advent of a culture, in the broad sense of the word, that would allow French Canadians to reinvent and emancipate themselves from all forms of domination. To do so, the authors believed that ‘Quebecois of French origin’ had to, first and foremost, transform their collective cultural behaviours so as to get rid of the perceived old ‘patterns’ (submissiveness, dependency, lack of pride, multiple borrowings) that were seen as detrimental to the progress of the francophone society (Lemasson 2014, pp. 9–12). And by giving the citizens the possibility to take part in the creation of a culture peculiar to Québec, Laurin and his team believed people, thus attached to their culture, would, in time, more easily opt for the independence of Québec (Picard 2003, p. 315). Besides, in reaction to the 1971 federal policy of multiculturalism (that did not acknowledge the bi-cultural character of Canada), the 1978 white paper conversely sought to favour the emergence of a collective culture that would become a ‘focal point’ (*point de convergence*) for the Quebecois of all ethnic origins; like the use of French as a common language was meant to unite all the citizens living in Québec, the new collective culture was destined to become a ‘landmark’.¹⁴

Our analysis with the EW has shown that the 1978 white paper commissioned by Laurin put forward principles respectively pertaining to the industrial, the inspired and the civic worlds. The fact that this policy statement displayed another combination of principles reflected the appearance of new social preoccupations. The emergence of the industrial world in the white paper notably corresponded to the rise of modernity in Québec. The question of efficiency and progress in cultural matters indeed became predominant in the government’s cultural strategy: to ‘ensure the full, coherent development of physical and intellectual potential of Quebecers’ (Québec 1978a, p. 186), the government had to be endowed with a rational governmental intervention. Besides, the concept of ‘cultural development’ or that of ‘cultural industries’ – new ‘composite objects’ that have been rejected by some, such as Adorno (2005) or Dumont (1979) in Québec, before becoming largely accepted – signalled the emergence of the compromise between the inspired and the industrial worlds. As we have also seen, the white paper was driven by a desire to help Francophones define themselves qua ‘distinct’ and ‘emancipated’ people. As Boltanski and Thévenot put it:

[t]he capacity to *create*, which is an attribute of *genius* in the realm of inspiration, can enter into a compromise with the civic world when it is granted to a *group*. The exaltation of the spirit of an entire people, that is, of its capacity as a collective to

engender literary, artistic, and political forms in keeping with its own genius, constitutes one of the canonical expressions of this compromise. (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 301, emphasis in the original)

Similarly, the white paper sought to initiate a cultural movement that aimed at giving the citizens, particularly the Francophones, the possibility to participate in redefining their collective identity and to rethink their ‘ways of life’, widely speaking. Besides, by calling for general citizen participation, the 1978 white paper pushed further the logic of the civic world that, so far, only concerned the state’s involvement in supporting culture; from then on, all citizens had the right and the obligation to participate in the creation of this collective culture. Finally, the fading out of the domestic world clearly indicated that Québec was breaking with the past and rejecting some of its traditions. However, despite the fact that we could find few traces (or words) remaining of the domestic world, the policy was nonetheless conceived to enhance the culture of one particular group ‘with common ancestors’: the Québécois of French origin.

La politique québécoise de développement culturel was vastly commented on its release. Amongst the criticisms formulated against it, we have found some arguing that the policy was too authoritarian and intrusive in the private life of citizens, whilst some denounced the preferential treatment granted to the French majority in Québec.¹⁵ These criticisms targeted the domestic world and aimed at reinforcing the civic logic (freedom and equality of citizens vs. paternalism and discrimination). Another vigorous criticism of the white paper argued that the creativity of artists was stifled by a collective imperative that did not recognise the singularity of creators, and the government was accused of seeking to instrumentalise the arts (Ricard 1978). Here, the civic and the industrial logics were seen as incompatible with the inspired one (self-expression vs. indoctrination and instrumentalisation). But the most common criticism formulated against the white paper concerned its lack of concrete and practical solutions to reach its ends. In effect, the policy proposal that embraced many sectors (language, arts, housing, leisure, health, work, communication, etc.) left people sceptical over its capacity to accomplish its objectives and over its real impact.¹⁶ These criticisms aimed at reinforcing the industrial logic over the inspired one particularly (realism vs. utopia). Finally, the conception of culture that was defended in the white paper – which was described as ‘the particular tone of attitudes and behaviour, which seem to be the vehicle of a certain mentality’ (Québec 1978a, pp. 46–47) was particularly criticised for being vague and obscure (Cowan 1978, Ricard 1978, Thomson 1978, Bissonnette 1982). The conception of culture put forward by the cultural policy designers was thus again subject to criticism, a pitfall that the 1992 official policy was able to avoid, as we will now show.

3.3. La politique culturelle du Québec: Notre culture, notre avenir (1992)

The 1980s were a challenging decade for many countries around the world which were confronted with a serious world economic crisis. Québec was not spared either (Linteau *et al.* 1989, Joanis and Montmarquette 2005), and at the same time when the crisis developed, the political aspirations of the Québécois were deeply challenged. Not only were the hopes of a sovereign state abruptly suspended in 1980 following the rejection of the *Parti Québécois*’s sovereignty-association project¹⁷ (Linteau *et al.* 1989, Hudon 2013b), but Québec also received a serious

setback in 1982 when the constitution was ‘patriated’¹⁸ and amended without the province obtaining what it sought: the recognition of the ‘distinctive character of the Quebecois society’ which required that Québec be granted specific powers within the Canadian constitution (Woehrling 1993, 2006, Gagnon and Latouche 2006).¹⁹ Moreover, to face the economic crisis, the *Parti Québécois* put in place a series of unpopular measures of financial restrictions and lost, in the process, the support of its main allies: left-wing groups and civil servants (Gow 1990, pp. 698–699, Gagnon and Latouche 2006, p. 34). As a result, the *Parti Québécois* lost more than half of its seats at the National Assembly during the 1985 election, whereas the PLQ of Robert Bourassa won a comfortable majority (Archibald 2007). Bourassa, who was known for his right-wing stance, pushed further the neo-liberal tendency that had begun to permeate Lévesque’s post-crisis policies (Gow 1987, pp. 10–13). In a span of ten years, there was thus an important shift in the preoccupations of the Quebecois society and it is in this particular context that a new cultural policy was elaborated.

In 1990, as the country was entering a new recession, the MACQ commissioned a study to a private firm in order to find new ways of financing the arts. Influenced by what was being done in the rest of Canada, the *Coupet Report*²⁰ (1990) was in favour of the decentralisation of state responsibilities in this matter and encouraged private initiatives as well as the managerialisation of cultural organisations. A few years earlier, worried that the re-elected PLQ might cut the MACQ’s budget, a coalition composed of representatives of the most important cultural organisations formed to defend the interests of the cultural sector (Féral 1990, pp. 226–227, Saint-Pierre 2003, pp. 156–157). To reassure the arts coalition which feared a disengagement of the state, the minister for Cultural Affairs, Liza Frulla-Hébert, made public the *Coupet Report* and at the same time announced the creation of an Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of Roland Arpin (Chartré 2011, p. 2) who enjoyed an excellent reputation within the cultural milieu. The Arpin Committee was asked to submit a proposition for a policy for culture and the arts and to take over the ideas put forward in the *Coupet Report* (Saint-Pierre 2003, p. 183). If the Committee effectively reiterated many recommendations listed in the previous report, it also submitted a comprehensive cultural policy proposal that went well beyond the search for means to alleviate the financial contribution of the state in the cultural sector²¹; it also strongly reasserted the democratic objectives of cultural accessibility, and ‘provided a philosophical and theoretical framework’ (Mulcahy 1995, p. 336) by spelling out the fundamental principles justifying the state intervention in the cultural domain. The *Arpin Report* (Québec 1991) was made public in June 1991 and, following a vast consultation process,²² a fourth principle (below in *italics*) was added to the official cultural policy, which was finally adopted a year later, in June 1992:

- Culture is an essential good and the cultural dimension is, along with the social and economic dimensions, necessary to life in society.
- *Autonomy of creation and freedom of expression constitute fundamental values in all democratic societies.*
- The state must encourage access to culture for the greatest number of citizens.
- The state, in collaboration with its partners, must support and develop the society’s cultural dimension. (Québec 1992, p. 15, our translation, emphasis added)

Hinging on three main ‘axis’ – (1) ‘the assertion of our cultural identity’; (2) ‘support to creators and to creation’; (3) ‘access and participation to cultural life’ –, Québec’s official cultural policy predominantly involved the market, the inspired and the civic worlds although it was also permeated with the industrial logic. With the appearance of the market world, this policy statement inscribed itself in the trends of its time, which was marked by the hegemony of the neo-liberal ideology: cultural organisations had to become more ‘competitive’ and were asked to demonstrate their capacity to attract ‘cultural consumers’ by developing management and marketing skills (this period saw the emergence of other similar expressions such as ‘cultural economy’ or ‘cultural investment’ destined to reinforce the compromise). On the other hand, with the increasing professionalisation of artists, the arts sector became more organised and formed a powerful lobby during the parliamentary proceedings, which contributed to place artists and cultural workers at the centre of the cultural policy. As a result, the 1992 cultural policy granted artists a recognition never before obtained, and explicitly acknowledged the ‘inspired logic’. Indeed, in Boltanski and Thévenot’s inspired world, the worthy beings – often embodied by artists in contemporary societies – must not be ‘subject to industrial measures, reason, determination’ or otherwise they might not be able to ‘welcome what is *mysterious, imaginative, original, unspeakable, unnameable, ethereal, or invisible*’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 160, emphasis in the original) or, in other words, be ‘capable of experiencing the outpouring of inspiration’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, p. 159). By creating an arts council based on the arm’s length principle, where decisions as to which artists or artistic projects receive support is entrusted to peers, the Québec government sought to limit the state interference and minimise the imposition of non-artistic objectives so that creation be left as free as possible. The presence of the ‘principle of autonomy’ in a cultural policy statement therefore aims at reducing the tension that the coexistence of the (industrialised) civic world and the inspired one creates. Finally, as seen earlier, the government of Québec was not able to obtain the recognition of its particular status from the rest of Canada. Embracing more widely the ideology of multiculturalism and giving up all intentions to assert the cultural specificity of the Francophones, the 1992 cultural policy suggested that the Quebecois had solid cultural bases that were not in immediate danger of cultural assimilation and therefore not in need of special protective measures. The quality of the Quebecois artistic outputs and its unique heritage (defined as a ‘an irreplaceable cultural, social and economic asset’) could alone, it was argued, contribute ‘to the emergence of a clear awareness of the Quebecois cultural identity’ (Québec 1992, p. 6). The discussion over the Quebecois collective identity in cultural policy discourse thus went from the original assertion of a common French heritage that needed to be protected, revived (as in the 1959 manifesto) or reinvented (as in the 1978 white paper) to the assertion of a Quebecois cultural identity loosely based on the idea of creativity and common capital. By refusing to claim any form of recognition of the French specificity, the 1992 policy put aside the domestic logic to the benefit of the civic one: from then on, every citizen, independently of his/her ethnic origin, was entitled to contribute to the expression of the Quebecois’ original identity.

Our analysis of the press clippings has shown that Frulla-Hébert’s policy was globally well-received and capable of reaching a consensus. Many commentators underlined the efficiency of the minister herself (industrial world). One of them expressed her satisfaction to see the policy becoming fairer to non-francophone

groups (civic world) and acknowledging the economic impact of culture (market world) (Fraser 1992). Another one appreciated the fact that the policy went beyond the idea of preserving a certain French-Canadian heritage (a sign of the importance of the domestic world fading) (Bissonnette 1992). More importantly, commentators generally agreed on the relevance of creating an arts council based on the British arm's length model (Bissonnette 1992, Fraser 1992, Gruda 1992, Rivières 1992a, 1992b, Arpin 1993, Vanasse 1993). To put it differently, they conceded that the province's cultural policy had to be more attentive and responsive to the needs of artists and creators and saw in the arts council a means to achieve this end (and thus encouraged the compromise between the inspired and the civic worlds). Only Arpin, who was yet generally favourable to the new policy, expressed uneasiness with the presence of the market logic. In his view, the policy treated citizens as mere consumers or buyers transacting in a cultural market; to him, access to culture – regardless of one's ability to pay for it – had to remain the core objective of a cultural policy (Arpin 1993, p. 48) (universal access vs. user-pays). For reason of space, we cannot present a detailed analysis of the reception of the 1992 cultural policy, but let us stress that most commentators endorsed the compromise as it was presented to them, without questioning the principles it put forward or seeking to significantly reinforce any particular principle.

Finally, as we have seen, the definition of culture proposed by Lapalme and Laurin were contested. As Diane Saint-Pierre attests, the *Arpin Report* was subject to the same fate, since more than twenty-five per cent of the reports submitted to the Parliamentary Commission expressed 'important reservations' towards the *Arpin Report's* definition of culture (Saint-Pierre 2003, p. 215).²³ The staff of the Cultural Affairs, which was asked to identify the ideas on which consensus might be reached and to put aside those arousing controversy (Saint-Pierre 2003, pp. 196–202), decided to completely avoid the debate on the definition of culture in the official policy. As a result, although the *Politique culturelle du Québec* includes a section on 'cultural identity' (which suggests that the concept of culture goes beyond the realm of arts)

Table 1. Summary of the findings using the EW model.

Policy statement	Worlds composing the 'compromise'			Common good	Composite object(s)	Critiques
1959 manifesto	Domestic	Fame (or Renown)	Civic	French-European culture	Democratisation of culture; cultural rights	From the civic, inspired, and industrial worlds
1978 white paper	Industrial	Inspired	Civic	Quebecois-North American culture	Cultural development; cultural industries; cultural democracy	From the civic, inspired, and industrial worlds
1992 cultural policy	Market	Inspired	Civic	Left undefined	Cultural economy; cultural consumers, etc.	The compromise was endorsed by a vast majority

nowhere in the policy statement is there any explicit definition of culture or discussion over the notion of culture. It thus appears that the search for consensus resulted in deliberately maintaining the ambiguity on the term 'culture'.

4. Conclusion

As this paper has shown, the use of the EW first enabled us to observe that the 1959 manifesto, the 1978 white paper, and the 1992 cultural policy invoked more than one 'principle of equivalence', as defined by Boltanski and Thévenot. We have also seen that these statements did not express consistent principles, but rather each of them put forward a new compromise (see Table 1). In that sense, cultural policy-making can be seen as a series of compromises that have been regularly questioned and dismantled in favour of new compromises involving elements stemming from different worlds, thereby attesting to the diversity of intents, values and perspectives that can be buried within a cultural policy. The only consistent feature that we could find was the presence of the civic world that gained importance over the years in Québec's cultural policy. Various 'composite objects' could also be identified and served as indicator for the presence of a new compromise. Expressions such as 'cultural rights' or 'cultural democratisation' (1960–1970s) announced the reinforcement of the civic logic in cultural matters, and the creation of a governmental body such as the Department for Cultural Affairs materialised the compromise. The idea of 'cultural development' and 'cultural industries' (1970–1980s) for their part signalled the emergence of the industrial logic in cultural policy and the creation of a *Société de développement culturel* (which was later named *Société québécoise de développement des industries culturelles*) also made tangible the compromise. Finally, notions such as 'cultural economy' or 'cultural consumers' (1980–1990s) corresponded to the appearance of the market one and were accompanied by a series of new (managerial) requirements from the government.

If multiple compromises coexist in a cultural policy, our study has shown that the coexistence of some worlds can be difficult: as the case of Québec's cultural policy reveals, the protection of the cultural features of one particular group of citizens (domestic logic) indeed stands in contradiction with the ideal of equity of all citizens (civic logic). To be acceptable such 'special treatment' has to be justified by the necessity to protect a people for the sake of its survival, insofar as such claim is not denied. Our research has also shown that the coexistence of the inspired logic with the civic or the industrial ones was also difficult to achieve: throughout times, the creative autonomy of artists has always been perceived to be endangered by the necessity to conform to a doctrine, to norms or, besides, to any other constraints.

Even though the three policy proposals presented a different 'compromise', the critiques they raised emerged from the same worlds: the civic, the inspired and the industrial ones (see again Table 1). The 1992 policy answered most of them by giving these worlds more importance, particularly the civic and the inspired ones, and, as a result, these critiques weakened or were even silenced altogether. The appearance or the domination of some worlds over others in cultural policy statements is thus partly attributable to the existence of these critiques, and to the policy makers' desire to respond to them and address the issue they raised, although the acknowledgement of the context in which they were formulated is also essential to understanding the appearance of a world, or of its (re)positioning in the scale of priorities. In accordance with the model, the analysis of the criticisms expressed

against the policy proposals has demonstrated that they either seek to introduce a new principle in the evaluation of the new proposed policy or that they intend to reinforce the presence of one particular principle. In that sense, critiques contribute to the redefinition of priorities in cultural policy matters and therefore to the formulation of new ‘compromises’. However, as we have seen, the choice to give predominance to one or the other principle at a given time is also the result of pressures exerted by influential individuals or well-organised groups as well as the evolution of dominant ideologies, such as French survivance, post-colonialism or neo-liberalism that have successively tinged the cultural policy discourse and rationale. The compromises proposed by the different policy statements are thus also the outcome of force relations that only become visible when undertaking a work of contextualisation and historicisation. The reference to higher principles does not therefore eliminate the play of force relations but only suspends it temporarily by providing justifications that are deemed legitimate and acceptable in that particular time and place.

The EW model particularly enlightened our understanding of the role of the ‘common good’ that, if it remains ambiguous, argue Boltanski and Thévenot, can render a compromise more easily acceptable. As we have seen, the three cultural policy proposals under study all defended the same common good: ‘culture’. But the ‘culture’ that was defended in the 1959 manifesto was different from the 1978 white paper, and their respective conception of culture was, moreover, subject to dispute. For their part, the designers of the 1992 cultural policy avoided being trapped in such controversy by refusing to give any explicit definition of ‘culture’.

In sum, in spite of the fact that we could identify some limitations to the device, the EW enabled us to clearly bring to light the multiple logics that cultural policies seek to reconcile and, by the same token, we have been able to highlight the multiple contradictions they contain that make them vulnerable to different kind of criticisms, rendering their legitimation difficult. The concept of compromise, more particularly, was useful as it enabled us to better understand the dynamics at play in the construction Québec’s cultural policy; and by dictating the four underlying questions (on what principles is the compromise built; in the name of what common good; how has it been reinforced; and how has it been criticised), it played an important structuring role for our research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Eleonora Belfiore at the University of Warwick as well as two anonymous reviewers for their comments.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Fonds québécois de recherche – Société et culture [grant number 150235].

Notes

1. As an example, in 2012, an online debate on arts funding, asking: ‘should governments fund the arts?’ was launched by *The Economist* (2012). In Canada, similar debates on

- the public funding of culture have taken place in the media. See for instance Elgrably-Lévy (2011a, 2011b, 2011c), Lemieux (1996) and Worthington (2011).
2. *Pour une politique* (1988), *Livre blanc de la culture* (1965), *Pour l'évolution de la politique culturelle* (1976) and *La politique québécoise du développement culturel* (1978b), and *Une politique de la culture et des arts* (1991).
 3. For the complete reference of this research see Lemasson (2013).
 4. For reason of space we cannot present the model in detail but we suggest the reading of Nachi (2006).
 5. If people refer to a 'spirit' or a 'god' to justify their behaviour or to assess others' worth, these will be included in the list of subjects. Similarly, if a group of political activists has the power to influence the action of other human beings, it will then also be considered as a subject.
 6. Thévenot and Moody (2000) and Chiapello (1998) sometimes refer to the concept of compromise, but none of them use it as a structuring element for their analysis or explore further its peculiar dynamics. Similarly, Daigle and Rouleau (2010) have studied the 'compromise nature' of the arts organisations' strategic plans, but they have not pushed further the comprehension of the concept of compromise itself by seeking to understand its fragility.
 7. For a complete overview of Québec's cultural policy, we suggest the reading of Bellavance and Fournier (2004) and Saint-Pierre (2011).
 8. These reforms notably included the development of the welfare state in Québec, the secularisation and democratisation of education, the nationalisation of private electricity companies, and significant legislative reforms.
 9. Ten or so copies were distributed within the party in 1959. In 1988, the political scientist Claude Corbo obtained the authorisation of Lapalme's family to posthumously publish the manifesto.
 10. Admittedly, neither Nevers nor Montpetit were defending a clerical-conservative vision of society that is sometimes associated with the ideology of 'survivance'. If they were undoubtedly concerned with the preservation of the French legacy, both men defended forward-thinking ideas in political, economical and social matters for their time, as Lapalme himself did.
 11. Lapalme put great hopes in the Linguistic Bureau. He presented his ambitions for this bureau in several working documents. See Lapalme (1961a, 1961b, 1962).
 12. The Provincial Office for Urbanism was never created.
 13. Amongst those who welcomed Lapalme's initiative stood Prince (1961), Laporte (1961), Jenson (1961), and more.
 14. Amongst the main instruments that were created following the release of the white paper was the *Société de développement culturel* designed to favour the development of the cultural industries in Québec by supporting the production and diffusion of cultural products; and the *Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture*, an independent research centre in charge of assessing the evolution of the Quebecois culture.
 15. See, for instance, Ernhoffer (1978), Goldbloom (1978), Thomson (1978), and Gagnon (1978).
 16. See, for instance, Adam (1978), Bernier (1978), Cowan (1978), Roberge (1978), Roy (1978), and many more.
 17. One of the electoral promises made to the population by the *Parti Québécois* in his 1980 campaign was the holding of a referendum on 'sovereignty-association'. The objective was for Québec to acquire the exclusive power to make its law, levy its taxes, and to establish relations abroad whilst maintaining with Canada an economic association. The referendum took place in May 1980 but sixty per cent of the Quebecois voters finally rejected Lévesque's sovereignty-association project.
 18. The terms 'patriate', 'patriation' are mainly used in Canada. The justification for this neologism comes from the fact that the Constitution has never been under Canadian jurisdiction; hence it could not be 'repatriated' or 'returned' to Canada.
 19. To know more about the modification of the constitution as well as the Meech Lake Accord, we suggest the reading of Woehrling (1993, 2006) and Balthazar *et al.* (1991).

20. Entitled *Étude sur le financement des arts et de la culture au Québec*, the study was realised by the private firm Samson, Deloitte & Touche.
21. Despite the fact that the committee recommended the devolution of responsibilities and the increased managerialisation of cultural organisations, it nonetheless clearly recommended that the budget of the MACQ be increased.
22. See Saint-Pierre (2003).
23. Arguing that no definition of the word culture was ‘fully satisfying’, the Arpin Committee proposed an ‘empirical approach’ of culture by delimiting the domain of cultural activities covered in their proposal. Without being explicit as to how they finally made their selection, the authors identified six domains that a cultural policy should address: visual and performing arts; literature; cinema and television; living environment; cultural heritage; cultural industries. To these they added ‘three means that have a determining influence over [culture]’: professional resources; a network of presenters; school education.

References

- Adam, M., 1978. Comment concilier cohérence et liberté [How to reconcile freedom and coherence]. *La Presse*, 8 Jun, p. A4.
- Adorno, T.W. 2005. Culture and administration. In: J.M. Bernstein, ed. *The culture industry: selected essays on mass culture*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 107–131.
- Ahearn, J., 2002. *French cultural policy debates: a reader*. London: Routledge.
- Anon., 1961a. Pourquoi a-t-on ignoré le reste de la province? [Why have they ignored the rest of the province?]. *La Tribune*, 28 Nov, p. 4, author unknown (photocopy). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/159.
- Anon., 1961b. L’argent et la culture [Money and culture]. *Le Droit*, 18 Dec, p. 2 (photocopy). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/159.
- Anon., 1962. Enfin un programme d’action pour aider les minorités françaises! [Finally, an action plan to help French minorities!]. *Le Nouvelliste*, 3 May, p. 4, author unknown (photocopy). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/160.
- Anon., 2012. Arts funding – should governments fund the arts? *The Economist* [online], 22–31 Aug. Available from: <http://www.economist.com/debate/overview/236> [Accessed 5 Mar 2015].
- Archibald, C. 2007. Parti Québécois. *The Canadian encyclopedia* [online]. Available from: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/parti-quebecois> [Accessed 5 Mar 2015].
- Arpin, R., 1993. Enjeux de la politique de la culture au Québec [Issues in Québec’s cultural policy]. *Revue française d’administration publique*, 65, 43–49.
- Balthazar, L., et al., 1991. *Le Québec et la restructuration du Canada 1980–1992: Enjeux et perspectives* [Québec and the restructuration of Canada 1980–1992: issues and perspectives]. Sillery: Septentrion.
- Bellavance, G. and Fournier, M. 2004 [1992]. *Rattrapage et virages: dynamisme culturel et intervention étatique dans le champ de la production culturelle* [Catching up and shifts: cultural dynamism and state intervention in the field of cultural production]. Les Classiques des sciences sociales. Chicoutimi: J.M. Tremblay.
- Bernier, C., 1978. Une déchirante révision de la politique du livre [A harrowing revision of the book policy]. *La Presse*, 10 Jun, p. D2.
- Bissonnette, L., 1982. De notre agonie - 2 [On our death throes – 2]. *Le Devoir*, 18 Sep, p. 14.
- Bissonnette, L., 1992. L’art, et le possible [Art, and the possible]. *Le Devoir*, 20 Jun, p. A10.
- Blondeau, C. and Sevin, J.-C. 2004. Entretien avec Luc Boltanski, une sociologie toujours mise à l’épreuve [Interview with Luc Boltanski, a sociology always put to test]. *ethnographiques.org* [online], 5. Available from: <http://www.ethnographiques.org/2004/Blondeau,Sevin> [Accessed 5 Mar 2015].

- Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L., 1999. The sociology of critical capacity. *European journal of social theory*, 2, 359–377.
- Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L., 2006. *On justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and Darbel, A., 1966. *L'amour de l'art: Les musées d'arts européens et leur public* [The love of art: European art museum and their public]. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- Chartré, D.-C. 2011. La politique culturelle du gouvernement du Québec de 1992, un événement phare de l'action du gouvernement du Québec en matière culturelle [The government of Québec's cultural policy, a flagship event of Québec's state intervention in cultural matters]. *Colloque 50 ans d'action publique en matière de culture au Québec*, 4–5 April 2011 Montréal, HEC Montréal.
- Chiapello, E., 1998. *Artistes versus managers* [Artists vs managers]. Paris: Éditions Métailié.
- Cowan, P., 1978. Ambiguity is key to culture paper. *The Gazette*, 7 Jun, p. 9.
- Daigle, P. and Rouleau, L., 2010. Strategic plans in arts organizations: a compromising tool between artistic and managerial values. *International journal of arts management*, 12 (3), 13–30.
- Dumont, F., 1979. L'idée de développement culturel: esquisse pour une psychanalyse [The idea of cultural development: a sketch for a psychoanalysis]. *Sociologie et sociétés*, 11 (1), 7–32.
- Elgrably-Lévy, N. 2011a. Élitisme culturel [Cultural elitism]. *Le Journal de Montréal*, 19 May, p. 25.
- Elgrably-Lévy, N. 2011b. L'art de tromper [The art of deceiving]. *Le Journal de Montréal*, 12 May, p. 25.
- Elgrably-Lévy, N. 2011c. Non au mécénat public [No to public patronage]. *Le Journal de Montréal*, 5 May, p. 27.
- Ernhoffer, K., 1978. PQ's culture paper 'a mouse' – Ryan. *The Gazette*, 10 Jun, p. 3.
- Farchy, J. and Sagot-Duvaurox, D., 1994. *Economie des politiques culturelles* [Economics of cultural policies]. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Féral, J., 1990. *La culture contre l'art: Essai d'économie politique du théâtre* [Culture against art: essay on the political economy of theatre]. Sillery: Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Fournier, M., 1988. G.-É. Lapalme: culture et politique [G.-É. Lapalme: culture and politics]. In: J.-F. Léonard, ed. *Georges-Émile Lapalme. Les leaders politiques du Québec contemporain*. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 159–166.
- Fraser, J., 1992. It could have been far worse. *The Gazette*, 22 Jun, p. B2.
- Fumaroli, M., 1991. *L'État culturel: Essai sur une religion moderne* [The cultural state: essay on a modern religion]. Paris: De Fallois.
- Gagnon, L., 1978. Pas de statut particulier pour la minorité anglaise [No special status for the English minority]. *La Presse*, 7 Jun, p. B2.
- Gagnon, A.G. and Latouche, D., 2006. *Allaire, Bélanger et Campeau et les autres* [Allaire, Bélanger, Campeau and the others]. Chicoutimi: J.M. Tremblay.
- Goldbloom, M., 1978. Government getting into everything: PAC chief. *The Gazette*, 7 Jun, p. 10.
- Gow, J.I., 1987. Repenser l'État et son administration [Redefining the state and its administration]. *Politique*, 11, 5–41.
- Gow, J.I., 1990. L'administration publique dans le discours politique au Québec, de Lord Durham à nos jours [Public administration in Québec's political discourse, from Lord Durham until now]. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, 23 (4), 685–711.
- Gruda, A., 1992. Culture: la ministre accorde ses instruments [Culture: the minister fine-tunes her instruments]. *La Presse*, 22 Jun, p. B2.
- Handler, R., 1988. *Nationalism and the politics of culture in Quebec*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Harvey, F., 2010. Georges-Émile Lapalme et la politique culturelle du Québec: genèse, projet et désillusion [Georges-Émile Lapalme et Québec's cultural policy: genesis, project and disillusionment]. *Les Cahiers des dix*, 64, 1–46.

- Hudon, R. 2013a. Bill 101. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* [online]. Available from: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/bill-101> [Accessed 15 Apr 2013].
- Hudon, R. 2013b. Quebec Referendum (1980). *The Canadian Encyclopedia 2011* [online]. Available from: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/quebec-referendum-1980> [Accessed 30 April 2013].
- Jenson, M., 1961. La première réalisation d'une politique de grandeur longuement pensée et réfléchie [The first realisation of a politics of grandeur thoroughly thought out]. *Le Rivière-du-Loup*, Oct–Nov, p. 6 (photocopy). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/153.
- Joanis, M. and Montmarquette, C., 2005. *La problématique de la dette publique au Québec: causes, conséquences, solutions* [Issues of public debt in Québec: causes, consequences, solutions]. Montréal: Centre interuniversitaire de recherche en analyse des organisations (CIRANO).
- Laing, G. 2013. Royal commission on bilingualism and biculturalism. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* [online]. Available from: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/royal-commission-on-bilingualism-and-biculturalism> [Accessed 15 Apr 2013].
- Lapalme, G.-É., 1961a. Note générale sur la conception et le fonctionnement de l'Office de la Langue française [General memo on the conception and functioning of the French linguistic Bureau] (working document). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/147.
- Lapalme, G.-É., 1961b. Quelques considérations sur 'L'office de la Langue française' [Some considerations on the 'French linguistic bureau'] (working document). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/147.
- Lapalme, G.-É., 1962. Conférence prononcée par G.-É. Lapalme, ministre des Affaires culturelles, devant les membres de l'Alliance française de New York, à New York: Le français en Amérique, son passé et son avenir [Communication presented by G.-É. Lapalme, minister for Cultural Affairs, to the members of the French Institute in New York, New York: French in America, its past and its future]. (working document). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/162.
- Lapalme, G.-É., 1988. *Pour une politique: Le programme de la Révolution tranquille* [For a politics: the programme of the Quiet revolution] (with intro. by Claude Corbo). Montréal: VLB éditeur.
- Laporte, P., 1961. Israël et la Turquie l'ont fait, pourquoi pas nous? [Israel and Turkey did it, why not us?]. *Le Devoir*, 1 May, sec. p. 4 (photocopy). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/159.
- Laurin, C., 1972. *Témoignage de Camille Laurin: Pourquoi je suis souverainiste?* [Testimony of Camille Laurin: why am I a sovereignist?]. Montréal: Editions du Parti québécois.
- Lemasson, G. 2013. Evolution of the rationales for Quebec's cultural policy from 1959 to 1992: in search of a compromise. Thesis (PhD). Coventry: University of Warwick.
- Lemasson, G., 2014. Cultural development: a new policy paradigm in the cultural policies of the 1970s in Québec. *International journal of cultural policy*. doi:10.1080/10286632.2014.943753.
- Lemieux, P., 1996. Réflexions libres sur l'État et la culture [Free reflections on state and culture]. In: F. Sauvageau, ed. *Les politiques culturelles à l'épreuve: La culture entre l'État et le marché* [Cultural policies challenged: culture between the state and the market]. Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 151–169.
- Lesage, J., 1961a. L'Université, l'État, la Culture. Discours de l'Hon. Jean Lesage, Premier Ministre, prononcé à l'Université Laval de Québec à l'occasion de la remise d'un doctorat 'honoris causa' le 20 janvier 1961 [University, State and Culture: discourse by Hon. Jean Lesage, First Minister, delivered at the Université Laval of Québec at the occasion of the awarding of a honoris causa doctorate on 20 January 1961] [online]. Available from: <http://www.archivespolitiquesduquebec.com/discours/p-m-du-quebec/jean-lesage/autres-discours-officiels/> [Accessed 17 Apr 2013].

- Lesage, J., 1961b. Notes d'un discours prononcé à l'Assemblée Législative par l'honorable Jean Lesage, Premier ministre, en présentant le projet de Loi relatif à la création du ministère des Affaires Culturelles - Le ministère des Affaires culturelles [Notes from a discourse delivered at the legislative assembly by the honourable Jean Lesage, First Minister, presenting the bill related to the creation of the Department for Cultural Affairs]. Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/145.
- Lesage, J., 1963. Discours de l'Hon. Jean Lesage, Premier Ministre, prononcé à l'occasion d'un dîner offert au Ministre des Affaires Culturelles de France et à Mme Malraux par le gouvernement de la province de Québec au Château Frontenac, le 11 octobre 1963 [Discourse of Hon. Jean Lesage, First Minister, delivered on the occasion of a dinner offered to France's minister for Cultural Affairs and to Mrs. Malraux by the government of the province of Québec at the Château Frontenac, on 11 October 1963] [online]. La Société du patrimoine politique du Québec. Available from: <http://www.archivespolitiquesduquebec.com/discours/p-m-du-quebec/jean-lesage/autres-discours-officiels/> [Accessed 17 Apr 2013].
- L'Heureux, C., 1962. La politique culturelle du Québec [The cultural policy of Québec]. *Le Droit*, 5 May 1962, sec. p. 2 (photocopy). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/160.
- Linteau, P.-A., et al., 1989. *Histoire du Québec contemporain* [History of contemporary Québec]. Montréal: Boréal.
- McCarthy, K.F. et al. 2004. *Gifts of the muse: reframing the debate about the benefits of the arts*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.
- Mulcahy, K.V., 1995. Public Culture and Political Culture. In: G. Lachapelle, ed. *Quebec under free trade: making public policy in North America*. Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 335–362.
- Nachi, M., 2006. *Introduction à la sociologie pragmatique* [Introduction to pragmatic sociology]. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Panneton, J.-C., 2000. *Georges-Émile Lapalme, précurseur de la révolution tranquille* [Georges-Émile Lapalme, precursor of the Quiet revolution]. Montréal: VLB.
- Picard, J.-C., 2003. *Camille Laurin: L'homme debout* [Camille Laurin: the standing man]. Montréal: Boréal.
- Picher, C., 1961. À quand la création d'un ministère de l'intelligence [When will they create a department of cleverness?]. *Le Soleil*, 9 Dec, p. 4 (photocopy). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/159.
- Prince, V., 1961. La mère patrie face à la 'Diaspora' [Motherland and its 'Dispota']. *La Presse*, 24 Nov, p. 9 (photocopy). Fonds Georges-Émile Lapalme, Service des archives et de gestion des documents, Université du Québec à Montréal, 109P-630/159.
- Québec, 1965. *Livre blanc (par Pierre Laporte)* [White Paper (by Pierre Laporte)]. Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles.
- Québec, 1976. *Pour l'évolution de la politique culturelle: Document de travail* [For the evolution of the cultural policy: working document]. Québec: Ministère des affaires culturelles.
- Québec, 1978a. *A cultural development policy for Québec*. Québec: Comité ministériel permanent du développement culturel.
- Québec, 1978b. *La politique québécoise du développement culturel* [A cultural development policy for Québec]. Québec: Comité ministériel permanent du développement culturel.
- Québec, 1991. *Une politique de la culture et des arts: proposition présentée à madame Liza Frulla-Hébert, ministre des Affaires culturelles du Québec* [A policy of culture and arts: proposal presented to Mrs. Liza Frulla-Hébert, minister for Cultural Affairs in Québec]. Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles.
- Québec, 1992. *La politique culturelle du Québec: notre culture, notre avenir* [Québec's cultural policy: our culture, our future]. Québec: Direction des communications.
- Ricard, F., 1978. Le livre blanc sur la culture [The white paper on culture]. *Liberté*, 20 (4–5), 3–12.

- Rivières, P. des 1992a. L'Union des artistes accueille favorablement la politique culturelle [The Union des artistes welcomes the cultural policy statement]. *Le Devoir*, 19 Jun, p. A4.
- Rivières, P. des 1992b. Quelle sorte de Conseil des arts du Québec aurons-nous, s'interroge le milieu culturel [What kind of Québec arts council will we have, wonders the cultural sector]. *Le Devoir*, 20 Jun, p. A2.
- Roberge, F., 1978. Ryan prône la création d'un Conseil de la culture indépendant du ministère [Ryan advocates for the creation of a culture council independent from the ministry]. *Le Devoir*, 10 Jun, p. 7.
- Rocher, G. 2010. Camille Laurin: analyste et psychiatre du Québec [Camille Laurin: analyst and psychiatrist of Québec]. In: J.-F. Simard and Y. Leclerc, eds. *L'œuvre de Camille Laurin: La politique publique comme instrument de l'innovation sociale. Chaire Fernand-Dumont sur la culture* [The work of Camille Laurin: public policy as an instrument of social innovation]. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 71–86.
- Roy, M., 1978. Le livre blanc sur la culture [The white paper on culture]. *Le Devoir*, 9 Jun, p. 4.
- Saint-Pierre, D., 2003. *La politique culturelle du Québec de 1992: continuité ou changement?* [Québec's cultural policy of 1992: continuity or change?]. Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Saint-Pierre, D., 2011. Le Québec et ses politiques culturelles: l'affirmation d'une identité nationale et d'une culture distincte, créative et ouverte sur le monde [Québec and its cultural policies: the assertion of a national identity and a distinct, creative and open culture]. In: D. Saint-Pierre and M. Gattinger, eds. *Les politiques culturelles provinciales et territoriales du Canada: Origines, évolutions et mises en œuvre*. Québec: Gouvernance et gestion publique. Presses de l'Université Laval, 183–245.
- Samson, B., Deloitte & Touche, 1990. *Étude sur le financement des arts et de la culture au Québec* [Study on financing of the arts and culture in Québec]. Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles.
- Séguin, F., 1968. Georges-Émile Lapalme, politicien [Georges-Émile Lapalme, politician]. *Sel de la semaine* broadcasted on 18 Nov 1968 [online]. Archives de Radio-Canada. Available from: http://archives.radio-canada.ca/politique/provincial_territorial/clips/13800/ [Accessed 15 Apr 2013].
- Thévenot, L. and Moody, M. 2000. Comparing models of strategy, interests and the public good in French and American environmental disputes. In: M. Lamont and L. Thévenot eds. *Rethinking comparative cultural sociology: repertoires of evaluation in France and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 273–306.
- Thomson, D.C., 1978. One culture boosted at others' expenses. *The Gazette*, 13 Jun, p. 9.
- Thomson, D.C., 1984. *Jean Lesage & the quiet revolution*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada.
- Vanasse, A., 1993. La création du Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec: et alors? [The creation of the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec: so what?]. *Lettres québécoises: la revue de l'actualité littéraire*, 69, 3–4.
- Williams, R., 1998. The analysis of culture. In: J. Storey, ed. *Cultural theory and popular culture: a reader*. 2nd ed. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 48–56.
- Woehrling, J., 1993. *La Constitution canadienne et l'évolution des rapports entre le Québec et le Canada anglais, de 1867 à nos jours* [The Canadian constitution and the evolution of the relationship between Québec and Canada from 1867 to this day]. Edmonton: Center for Constitutional Studies, University of Alberta.
- Woehrling, J. 2006. Les référendums constitutionnels du Canada et du Québec [The constitutional referendums of Canada and Québec]. *XVIIe Congrès de l'Académie internationale de droit comparé*, 16–22 Jul 2006 Utrecht.
- Worthington, P. 2011. Sun TV's Erickson gets it right [online]. Available from: <http://www.torontosun.com/2011/06/30/sun-tvs-erickson-gets-it-right> [Accessed 10 May 2013].



Cultural participation in Europe: shared problem or shared problematisation?

David Stevenson, Gitte Balling & Nanna Kann-Rasmussen

To cite this article: David Stevenson, Gitte Balling & Nanna Kann-Rasmussen (2017) Cultural participation in Europe: shared problem or shared problematisation?, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23:1, 89-106, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2015.1043290](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1043290)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1043290>



Published online: 26 May 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2697



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 23 View citing articles [↗](#)

Cultural participation in Europe: shared problem or shared problematisation?

David Stevenson^{a*}, Gitte Balling^b and Nanna Kann-Rasmussen^b

^aQueen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK; ^bRoyal School of Library and Information Science, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark

(Received 25 November 2014; accepted 17 April 2015)

Europe has a ‘problem’; it is becoming a ‘less cultural continent’ as fewer Europeans are ‘engaging in cultural activities’. This conclusion has been reached due to the findings of the latest cross national cultural participation survey. This paper questions the existence of this ‘problem’ and instead suggests that there is a shared problematisation across Europe sustained by common discursive archaeology that employs various discursive strands in relation to a dominant institutional discourse. The argument is that the ‘problem’ of ‘non-participation’ legitimates a ‘solution’ that predates its emergence: the state subsidy of arts organisations. The paper recaps the comparable problematisations that the researchers have previously identified in the policy texts of their respective countries. It progresses to consider three distinct but interwoven discursive strands upon which the problem representation in both countries, and potentially across Europe, appears to rely.

Keywords: comparative cultural policy; cultural participation; Scottish cultural policy; Danish cultural policy; non-participation; cultural participation surveys

Introduction

Europe supposedly has a ‘problem’, it is becoming a ‘less cultural continent’ (European Commission 2013a) as fewer Europeans are ‘engaging in cultural activities’. This conclusion has been reached due to the findings of the latest cross national cultural participation survey: The Eurobarometer – a Europe wide version of similar national studies that have become increasingly common in the last 30 years. And so the ‘problem’ of cultural participation – or more specifically the problem of ‘non-participation’ is one that is shared across the majority of Europe’s members states. This paper proposes to consider this ‘problem’ as a problematisation sustained by discourses common to countries across Europe (the *enlightenment* discourse, the discourse of *redistribution through the democratisation of culture* and finally the discourse of *social inclusion and cohesion*). This problematisation persists irrespective of the specific findings of any particular survey because both the ‘problem’ and the conflicting positions related to it are a necessary part of an institutional discourse that gives them meaning. The ‘problem’ of ‘non-participation’ legitimates a ‘solution’ that predates its emergence: the state subsidy of specific types of arts organisations.

*Corresponding author. Email: dstevenson@qmu.ac.uk

While traditionally, comparative policy analysis often seeks to identify the efficacy of the differing approaches taken by different countries to tackling policy ‘problems’, this paper instead compares two countries in order to identify a shared problematisation (Bacchi 2009). The countries in question are Denmark and Scotland, both of which measure cultural participation¹ rates and both of which have high levels of recorded participation relative to other European countries. In fact, according to the same Eurobarometer detailed above, Denmark enjoys the highest levels of active participation in Europe (European Commission 2013b, p. 10). Likewise, the Scottish Government (SG) states that 90% of its population is ‘engaged’ with culture (SG 2014). Yet despite this apparent success, cultural policy in both countries suggests that there is still a ‘problem’ with cultural participation rates, so much so that it necessitates specific state intervention and the continued expenditure of public funds on the organisations with which the populace are not participating. After a brief discussion of the methodological framework used, the paper moves on to outlining the problematisation that Scotland and Denmark appear to share. In doing so, three distinct discourses are identified that appear interwoven as fundamental discursive strands within the problematisation of ‘non-participation’ in both countries, and arguably across Europe.

Cultural participation surveys

The reason for measuring cultural participation is rarely made clear. In answer to this question, UNESCO (2012) suggests that measurement is a way to secure citizens’ rights to culture and help to address some of the definitional problems of cultural policy-making through providing a greater understanding of what present-day cultural participation is (UNESCO 2012, p. 10). Thus, UNESCO has developed standard definitions and a framework for cultural statistics in order to allow comparison across countries and with a desire to facilitate a deeper understanding of cultural participation around the world. However, Schuster (2007) has offered an extensive discussion as to the difficulties of measuring cultural participation and in particular comparing international rates of cultural participation both through analysis of existing national studies and specifically commissioned cross-national research. Although a majority of studies share an individual’s participation rate over a specified (retrospective) period of time as their dependent variable, he highlights that the ‘certain crispness and precision’ of cultural participation studies ‘belies the difficulties and compromises entailed in their creation’ and which limit the capacity for meaningful comparison. While studies such as Schuster’s have clearly questioned the validity of the data produced by cultural participation surveys, their critique is primarily focused on the quality (or lack thereof) of the evidence they provide. The analysis tends to focus on the difficulty of accurately measuring ‘cultural participation’ rather than questioning the emergence and construction of the ‘problem’ that the surveys are designed to measure. In doing so, they fail to consider the discursive nature of these surveys, the extent to which their existence and enactment contributes to the creation and perpetuation of not only the ‘problem’ but also the subjectification of certain individuals through the acceptance of uncontested categories (Bacchi 2009). The present research takes a more argumentative, or interpretative position so as to allow for a more critical reflection on the ‘problem’ in question.

Method and methodology

This research has been shaped significantly by Bacchi's (2009) interpretive method for analysing and critiquing policy texts. Entitled *What's the Problem Represented to Be* and revolving around six core questions, the method focuses on both the meaning-making of policy formulation and the 'conceptual logics' that lend those meanings validity. In doing so, its aim is first to understand how particular policy 'problems' have been made manifest, nameable and describable (Foucault 1970) and how these manifestations are then discursively sustained. This understanding then allows the researcher to 'problematisé the problematisations' that the policy under analysis is attempting to address.

Influenced by Foucault, this approach is concerned with the governmentality of the modern state. In particular, the way it establishes norms of desirable behaviour to which people as political subjects are expected to conform. In turn, these norms limit what it is possible to think, say or do about the perceived 'problem', and therefore conflicting representations become silenced, discounted or marginalised. Informed by social constructionism and concerned with the role that language plays in establishing 'the real', it argues that although many competing constructions of a 'problem' are possible, governments 'play a privileged role because their understandings "stick"' (Bacchi 2009, p. 33). Although Bacchi's systematic method utilises six questions in order to analyse the chosen policy these questions need not be followed sequentially but should rather act as a heuristic framework within which the researcher conducts their analysis.

In this study, Bacchi's method has informed the analysis of core policy papers and surveys from both countries. From Scotland, documents produced and published by the SG (e.g. *Culture Delivers*, 2008) and the latest Scottish Household Survey on People and Culture (2009) have been included. From Denmark, the latest cultural policy strategy *Kultur for Alle*, 2009 (Culture for All) and the latest participation survey (Bak *et al.* 2012) have been included. Further speeches and press releases in relation to recent government strategies or focus areas have also been analysed. The two primary types of documents considered (policy documents and surveys) work on different levels. Whereas the policy papers are strategic documents that are intended to work as guidelines for those individuals and organisations charged with delivering government objectives, surveys are intended to function as an information source back to the political level so as to inform and improve the development of strategy. However both types of document are of relevance when studying problematisations as both are discursive sites that simultaneously reinforce the problematisation and rely upon it for their meaning.

Denmark and Scotland: a shared problem representation

The following paragraphs offer a brief comparison of cultural policy in the two countries in addition to an analysis of contemporary policy documents, in order to evidence how the same problematisation is manifest in both Danish and Scottish cultural policy. Thus two previous pieces of research are recapped in which the tools used for measuring cultural participation in Scotland and Denmark had been analysed (Balling and Kann-Christensen 2013, Stevenson 2013).

Cultural policy infrastructure and public spending

At a macro level, Scotland and Denmark exhibit some broad similarities. Both have a population in the region of five and a half million that is primarily located in a few densely populated urban centres with the remainder spread over broad areas of rural countryside. Their citizens enjoy relatively high average salaries as part of a mixed economy and enjoy a significant welfare state financed by general taxation. In both countries, culture is represented at a ministerial level with a central government department that attempts to implement its policies and objectives via a range of other organisations and institutions with which they have various types of formal and informal relationships.

In Denmark, the Ministry of Culture² supervises and supports cultural provision at the national level via the funding of organisations and at the local level through (voluntary) cultural agreements with local authorities, support for cultural projects (via development grants), and via state block grants to municipalities. Thus, although ‘official’ cultural policy is primarily defined at a macro level, it is interpreted and delivered through a network of arms-length organisations and non-departmental government bodies who are charged with subsidising and supervising the cultural sector in Denmark. The overarching and on-going cultural policy is regularly supplemented with specific focus areas, such as children’s literacy and enthusiasm for reading. In these cases subsidies are ring-fenced to support those activities seen to best support delivery of the strategic objectives. The budget for culture in Denmark is generated through a combination of taxation and lottery funds with license fees supporting the provision of national television and radio.³ In Denmark approximately 22.7 billion DKK was set aside for culture in 2013 with approximately 57% appropriated by the state and 43% by municipal authorities (NYT fra Danmarks Statistik 2013). Focusing on the state level, this expenditure mainly supports institutions related to theatre, art, literature and architecture with the majority funding large-scale organisations working in these fields.

Although Scotland is not an independent country it is a semi-autonomous nation within a larger state. Having regained its own parliament in 1999, cultural policy is one of the areas in which the newly formed SG gained devolved power. However despite some specific policy actions diverging from those taken in the rest of the UK, at a macro level cultural policy in Scotland still appears broadly aligned with that of its southern neighbours. Schlesinger (2009) has argued that the first political administrations of devolution simply adopted the rhetoric and policies of the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, while Stevenson (2014a, p. 135) has suggested that although ‘the rhetoric of Scottish cultural policy post-devolution might have become increasingly divergent from that found elsewhere in the UK, arguably less progress has been made in operationalising this rhetoric’ (see Galloway and Jones 2010, Stevenson 2014b for a more extensive discussion of the development of cultural policy in Scotland).

However, leaving the specifics of the UK’s constitutional arrangement to one side, on a more practical level a broadly similar network of governance exists in Scotland as can be found in Denmark. The Ministry for Culture and External Affairs provides a block grant to a number of organisations, not least Creative Scotland (CS) who has a remit of supporting the arts, film and creative industries. CS support a variety of individual artists and small to medium sized cultural organisations, but not the 14 major national organisations and companies⁴ as they have a

direct funding relationship with central government. As in Denmark, the SG makes use of ring-fenced funding in order to ensure certain strategic priorities are addressed, one of the largest of these being the Youth Music Initiative that supports music tuition in schools. Likewise, the majority of public spending on culture in Scotland subsidises large-scale professional organisations (CS 2011, SG 2011). In the 2012–2013 draft budgets, of the 149.2 million pounds set aside for culture, 65% is to support the provision of the 14 national organisations and companies (SG 2011). Of the remaining 35%, distributed by CS, the majority primarily funds a network of theatre companies and galleries, (CS 2012). In addition to each of these organisations with a national remit, there are 32 local authorities whose combined expenditure on culture from their own budget has consistently been greater than that of the SG since 1999 (Bonnar 2014).

Increasing cultural participation – breaking down barriers

Turning now to the cultural policy documents of Denmark and Scotland it becomes clear that the cultural policy of both countries includes a commitment to increasing cultural participation. The current coalition government agreement in Denmark echoes the principle desire of the core cultural policy that they inherited from the previous government: *Culture for All* (Kulturministeriet 2009). The new agreement states:

All Danes should have the opportunity to participate in cultural life. Especially children and young people's meeting with art and culture should be prioritised. This is where we create the foundation for the arts dissemination and a creative and innovative Denmark. (Regeringen 2011, p. 69, our translation⁵)

Likewise, in Scotland, although there is no definitive statement of government cultural policy and no statutory definition of what 'culture' is understood to be (SG 2008a), the SG nevertheless states it is:

'fully committed to widening engagement with culture for all communities and individuals' and that they desire 'for access to, and participation in, cultural activities to be as wide as possible'. (SG 2010)

These commitments to increasing cultural participation manifest themselves in various types of activities and interventions. These are primarily intended to address different types of 'barriers' that are seen to be limiting the capacity of some to access and 'participate in culture'. At one end of the spectrum these policy actions can be broad and un-targeted such as free access to state museums and galleries or financial support for touring work to more remote locations; policies that have been adopted in both Denmark and Scotland. At the other end, more focused interventions include the subsidy of theatre tickets for certain demographic groups or time limited 'outreach and engagement' projects with certain 'communities' defined in various ways. 'Barriers' are one of the discursive keywords in the problem representation and are primarily represented as being demographic, environmental, socioeconomic or psychological.

Furthermore, in both countries, removing these 'barriers' is presented as being one of the primary interventions that cultural policy should focus on. In both Denmark and Scotland any organisation receiving public funding must be seen to

have a clear strategy for engaging those who are statistically absent from their audiences. For example, in Scotland, any organisation receiving funding from CS are required to ‘work collaboratively and imaginatively to increase opportunities for people to engage and participate’ (CS 2014b, emphasis added). While in Denmark, large cultural institutions such as the Royal Theatre, the National Museum and the National Gallery of Denmark all have contracts with the Ministry of Culture that include objectives which require them to ‘provide its art to audiences of all kinds’, ‘engage in dialogue with a broader audience’ or ‘break down barriers’ (Finansministeriet 2014). What is interesting is that both national and international surveys do not appear to show that either economic, geographic nor psychological barriers are the main reason for non-participation. Rather it is a lack of interest or lack of time that is the main barrier (Bak *et al.* 2012, p. 329, European Commission 2013b, p. 5). In the Danish survey, it is concluded, ‘Very few experience cultural or social barriers’ (Bak *et al.* 2012).

However the dominant use of this keyword within the discourses of cultural policy stresses the structural factors to the detriment of individual agency and thus contributes to those not currently ‘participating’ being represented in one of two ways. Firstly, as people who have the desire to participate and engage but are limited in some manner in their capacity to fulfil that desire. Alternatively, as people whose lack of interest is due to a lack of understanding caused by the extent to which ‘barriers’ have limited their ability to participate in the past. While the authors do not seek to suggest that structural inequalities do not exist that may account for some patterns of behaviour, what is proposed is that in both of the primary representations of ‘non-participants’ the possibility that they may have made an active choice to use their time in another manner is not considered. Neither is the degree to which the structural inequalities that do exist may be limiting their capacity to ‘participate’ with cultural activities and organisations that do not receive public subsidy. As the recent Warwick commission acknowledged, while it is troubling that the wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of the UK population makes most use of publically subsidised cultural organisations and events (and thus enjoys a significantly higher public spend per head on their cultural interests) what the focus on these figures obscures is that the ‘participation gap’ ‘is not caused by a lack of demand among the public for cultural and creative expression’ (2014, p. 33). Indeed the work carried out by Bennett *et al.* (2009) presents clear evidence of the rich and diverse nature of people’s everyday lives.

Measuring cultural participation – reproducing dichotomies and categories

Denmark has a particularly long history of measuring cultural participation and surveys have been conducted on a regular basis since the early 1960s.⁶ The objectives of the surveys have changed gradually over the years (see also Balling and Kann-Christensen 2013) and early surveys had a more explicit focus on citizens’ leisure time, both in terms of the amount of it and how it was used. Furthermore, and potentially due to them having been conducted during a period in which average working hours were gradually reduced and holidays increased, the early surveys were based on a broad concept of culture; asking about a spectrum of activities that spanned gardening to museum visits. Come the 90s and 00s and the focus shifted towards attendance (i.e. to what extent the citizens used cultural institutions, in particular those that were the recipients of public subsidy).

The primary objective of the 1993 survey was ‘to provide an overview of participation in cultural activities’ (Fridberg 1994, p. 9) and to ‘illuminate the cultural habits of the population from the age of 7 and upwards (...). The 2004 and 2012 surveys have the same focus but elaborate it further by including ‘changes in activities and patterns of use due to new cultural possibilities and activities’ as well as a stated desire to focus on priorities of the citizens (Bille *et al.* 2005, p. 13, Bak *et al.* 2012).

The primary measurement tool of cultural participation in Scotland is the rolling Scottish Household Survey (see McCall and Playford 2012 for a discussion). While more probing questions about perceptions and barriers are asked on a less regular basis as part of a culture and sport ‘module’ of this survey, the two consistently asked questions focus on attendance at, and participation in a given list of ‘cultural’ activities. These figures are then rolled up so as to give a headline engagement figure for the country. This figure is reported on a yearly basis as one of the SG’s 50 national indicators through which they measure and track progress towards delivering the ‘national outcomes’ and delivery of the government’s ‘single purpose’: the delivery of sustainable economic growth (SG 2014).

The key binary evident in the cultural policy documents of both Denmark and Scotland is between those that do ‘participate’ or ‘engage’⁷ and those that don’t. The lack of action by those who do not ‘participate’ is represented as being a result of their failure to understand the benefits they would accrue through ‘participation’ (culture as a merit good) and by association their failure to understand the ‘value’ of ‘culture. Despite the fact that the ‘value of culture’ is something that eludes all those that try to measure it, a dichotomy is presented between those who ‘value’ and ‘celebrate’ ‘culture’ and those that don’t. To the extent that in Scotland, CS feels that its work will support Scotland becoming a place where ‘everyone, everywhere, is interested and curious about creativity’ (CS 2014a, p. 7). The implicit suggestion being that this is not the case currently. The SG identifies ‘[t]hose living in the most deprived areas, older people, [and] those with a disability or longstanding illness’ (SG 2008a) along with those on lower incomes and with no or fewer qualifications (SG 2008b) as being much less likely to take part in a cultural activity. In Denmark, as in Scotland, these non-participants are primarily identified as a conglomeration of other demographic groups all of which require special intervention in order to allow ‘culture’ to ‘reach’ them: ‘Non-participants are a variety of groups, including young people, immigrants and socially disadvantaged’ (Kulturministeriet 2009, p. 10). In both cases policies stress the need for special action to reach out or ‘target’ these groups (SG 2008a, Kulturministeriet 2009).

The problem representation

The discussion above is intended to show that the two countries’ policies on cultural participation exhibit a discursive affinity indicative of a shared problem representation – that of the ‘non-participation’ of those citizens from certain demographics who do not have some sort of involvement with certain types of publicly funded cultural activities and organisations. However the evidence for this argument does not lie solely in the manner which high level surveys are constructed and conducted but also in relation to the manner in which they are analysed, presented, discussed and acted upon. To a varying degree, the participation surveys considered measure a variety of cultural activities (museums, theatre,

libraries, TV, sport, leisure time activities, computer use, etc.) that exceed a simple suggestion that what is of concern is participation with 'high culture'. Nevertheless, when it comes to identifying 'non-participants' a more narrow understanding of 'culture' is employed. For example, the latest Danish survey contains an analysis of non-participants where the quantitative approach is expanded with qualitative group interviews. The survey has been subdivided into three main categories: Art & Culture, Leisure Time, and Media. Art & Culture includes concerts, theatre, film, museums, libraries and books, whereas media, sports and computer games are left out. The analysis of non-participants' reasons for their non-participation is based on the opinions of those not participating in the cultural activities contained in this first category alone (Bak *et al.* 2012, p. 330). Gripsrud *et al.* (2011, p. 523) suggests that new media and increased access to internet contributes to the privatisation of cultural consumption. Technology improves the possibilities for cultural consumption at home but in the latest Danish survey activities related to new media and the internet do not 'count' once it comes to identification of the 'non-participant' (see also Balling and Kann-Christensen 2013, Stevenson 2013). From this perspective around 1/3 of the populace in Denmark are thus understood to be non-participants in need of some sort of intervention by government via publicly funded cultural organisations; the 'solution' to the 'problem' of 'non-participation' primarily being related to attendance at, or interaction with, the organisations that receive state support.

It is the authors' assertion therefore that the dominant discourse of cultural participation in both Scotland and Denmark creates a category of citizen who would be required to alter the use of their leisure time so as to align with a normative position of 'valuing', 'celebrating' and 'engaging' in 'culture' through 'participation' with primarily state supported cultural organisations. However it is important to consider that the majority of the organisations people are encouraged to 'participate' with were not established in order to address the 'problem' of cultural 'non-participation'. In the majority of cases their establishment pre-dates the emergence of the 'problem' for which they are now the apparent solution. Many of the cultural organisations that receive the majority of state subsidies in Scotland and Denmark were established at other times, for other reasons, but their existence is arguably now simultaneously both the cause and solution to the 'problem' in question. If the 'non-participation' of certain individuals with the organisations upon which their taxes are spent was understood as a legitimate subjective choice then the 'problem' of 'non-participation' would be significantly different and of a far more political nature.

As it is constructed the problematisation renders 'the problem' technical and thus solvable. It is presented as a question of 'barriers' that can be removed through rational actions based on objective evidence. It is not the intention of the authors to suggest that there are not individuals for whom the structural inequalities in society do mean that they face limitations in pursuing the cultural activities in which they are most interested. Rather, it is the extent to which there is an obscuration of an alternative problem representation, one of 'relevance as well as accessibility' (Warwick Commission 2014, p. 34).

The discursive strands of contemporary cultural participation policies

Through the identification of a discursive affinity, this paper has thus far argued that Scottish and Danish policy share a common problem representation in relation

to the ‘non-participation’ with ‘culture’ of certain groups in society. The argument now moves on to consider three broader discourses present in both Scottish and Danish society, each of which have been employed in legitimating state subsidies for the arts. It will be suggested that these discourses, central to the construction of a European understanding of a ‘good’ society, help to explain why the same problem representation appears to have been constructed not only in the two countries in question, but across much of Europe. This assumption can be made given the extent to which the European Commission has felt it necessary to undertake research and publish guidelines so as to ‘set directions and provide Member States with recommendations on providing better access to culture and participation in it’ (Tomka 2013, p. 260). While each of these discourses have emerged independently and enjoyed distinct periods of prominence in relation to the discursive field of cultural policy, they should not be understood in a linear historical sense in which the emergence of one eradicates the possibility of the other. Over time, these three discourses that have been employed to legitimate state subsidised cultural organisations and activities have become intertwined in a discursive knot that is central to the problematisation of the ‘non-participant’ in the cultural policies of Denmark and Scotland.

The discourse of enlightenment

Both Danish and Scottish⁸ cultural policy draws on a discourse of ‘culture’ that originated in the Enlightenment and which is predicated on a belief in the potential for ‘culture’ to foster an educated and cultivated people. As a way to understand the value associated with ‘cultural participation’ in this discourse it is worth briefly recapping the key components of its discursive archaeology. The Enlightenment, and the rise of liberal humanism that accompanied it, saw a discourse of ‘culture’ in which it was celebrated for its capacity to support the development of the ‘enlightened’ citizen through developing what is understood in the German Romantic tradition as the *Bildung* of the individual. The notion of ‘culture’ within this discourse has its etymology in the Latin term ‘cultura’ that relates to the agricultural processes of cultivating land and crops. This metaphor of growth has a classical pedigree, given that Cicero talks about ‘cultura animi’: the cultivation of the mind, both as self-development and as a pedagogical process that all children should undergo (Fink 1988). It is not simply a process but simultaneously the intended outcome of the process – a cultured citizen. Within this discourse ‘culture’ is most commonly understood as specific cultural artefacts and activities, as opposed to more anthropological understandings of ‘culture’ that are bound up with the way different people live and which it would be impossible to avoid. ‘Culture’ is represented as something that everybody could and should devote themselves to so as to become educated and cultivated citizens, fit to perform their role in society to the best of their abilities.

In Denmark, support for cultural institutions and artists primarily began as an expression of the interests of the aristocratic ruling class of the sixteenth century. It was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the growing influence of the bourgeoisie that an increasing number of organisations were established and supported, including The Royal Academy, The Royal Library and the Royal Theatre (Engberg 2001). With the end of absolutism and the introduction of the Danish Constitution in 1849 the state took over the funding of culture. Cultural

policy as an aim to educate the population is strongest in relation to the establishment of the Danish public libraries which is dated to the first Library Act in 1920. The purpose of the public library was to enlighten the whole population through transformation: ‘to develop the random reading into serious reading and generally to encourage the library user to move into a better category of reading’ (Skouvig 2007). In the UK the government first began to take a role in the ‘provision’ of culture to the populace in the nineteenth century. This legislation manifested itself primarily in the creation of public libraries, art galleries and museums, although many of these were as much a product of bequests that were received as any conscious desire to enter a new area of policy (Gray 2000). Until this point, the majority of state involvement with the arts had been one focused on the control of artistic production, through censorship and licensing (Gray 2000). However O’Neill (2008) argues that these sorts of publicly funded institutions were often established on the basis of their supposed capacity to educate and civilise the populace, a belief predicated on the enlightenment discourse of ‘culture’ outlined above.

When considering the full spectrum of ‘culture’ that receives public funding today, it is not only the classical art forms most associated with the ruling classes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (literature, art, theatre) that are supported. Likewise the anachronistic terminology of ‘civilising the populace’ is no longer employed. However it remains the case that the discourse of ‘non-participation’ is concerned with participation in those *specific* art forms and institutions identified by a group of elites as being capable of providing a ‘transformative’ experience that will produce ‘enriched’ citizens capable of contributing to society in an appropriate manner. This discourse is evident in numerous policy texts e.g. in the Scottish policy document *Culture Delivers*, in which it is stressed that ‘[t]here is clear quantitative and qualitative evidence of the positive transformational impact of cultural and creativity activity on individuals’ which thus supports the assertion that cultural activities can be ‘targeted at people at risk [to] provide diversionary activities and make a positive impact on the incidence of crime and anti-social behaviour’ (SG 2008a). Even though the rhetoric in Denmark is somewhat softer, the discourse is clear – art and culture has a positive impact on citizens development as it ‘sparks reflection and insight’ and ‘shapes us as citizens’ (Kulturministeriet 2014).

The discourse of redistribution and the democratisation of culture

As discussed above, ‘barriers’ are one of the discursive keywords in both Scottish and Danish cultural policy. The assumption being that these are impeding people from ‘participating’ in the sort of culture that unimpeded they would ‘naturally’ want to. Indeed one of the two objectives set out at the inception of the Danish Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1961 was to secure access to art and culture for every citizen (Jeppesen 2002, p. 31, Duelund 2003, p. 42). This policy objective is most commonly understood as one concerned with ‘the democratization of culture’, a strategy focused on breaking down economic and geographic barriers to ‘the arts’. This strategy is well described (see i.e. Skot-Hansen 1999, Jeppesen 2002, Duelund 2003) but in essence it is concerned with providing access to those cultural activities and objects that had historically been seen as the preserve of the elite; be that the aristocracy or the ruling bourgeoisie. More specifically it means that although the state accepts some degree of responsibility to meet the mental,

spiritual, and cultural needs of the population, it is predicted on a presumption that the state (or their chosen ‘arms-length’ representative) knows best how these needs are to be met. This position is closely connected to the European model of the redistributive welfare state (Duelund 2003); the core assumption of which is that the wealth of a society should be evenly distributed amongst its population. The ‘culture’ that is contained or produced in the museums, theatres and concert halls that receive public subsidy is understood as part of the intangible wealth of the nation and should not therefore be the preserve of any one group.

Evidence of this discourse is present throughout the language of post-war cultural policy in Denmark and Scotland. For example, the 1975 Danish participation survey is described as a tool for politicians to think about if there was ‘motivation for a change in the unequal distribution of intangible wealth in society (Kühl and Koch-Nielsen 1976, p. 9). Likewise, when the Arts Council of Great Britain was established in 1946, its stated aim was to deliver ‘the best to the most’ (Sinclair 1995). The implicit suggestion in this language being that ‘the most’ lacked access to cultural capital to the same degree that they lacked access to financial capital.

This discourse of an ethical obligation to redistribute the cultural capital of society is still present in contemporary cultural policy. In the Danish policy document *Culture for All*, it is stressed that ‘all Danes should be able to participate in relevant cultural activities. Everybody should feel welcome. And everybody should be able to participate. There is no art that is too difficult’ (Kulturministeriet 2009, p. 4). Correspondingly, the Scottish minister with responsibility for culture stated in a speech: ‘I believe that culture and heritage in Scotland is of us all and for us all, so I want to talk also about access and participation and how we work to enable all of Scotland’s communities to benefit, not just from the great cultural wealth and heritage of this nation, but also the world’s’ (Hyslop 2013).

The policy actions associated with this discourse of redistribution could, from one perspective, be seen as a success. As noted in the introduction, the latest participation surveys show that up to 90% of the populations in both countries ‘participate’ in cultural activities. Yet despite this, ‘non-participation’ with culture continues to be represented as growing ‘problem’. In spite of a half a century of ‘breaking down barriers’ in order to ‘democratise culture’, many individuals and groups remain absent (Warwick 2014).

The discourse of social inclusion and cohesion

The most recent discourse upon which the rhetoric of cultural participation policies is constructed is related to the role that ‘culture’ has in connecting people as communities, societies and nations. In a Scottish context it is stated that: ‘Cultural activity can add to a local community’s positive reputation, and contribute to positive perceptions of the nation as a whole’ (SG 2008a, p. 12). In an era of increasingly multicultural and economically unequal societies, concerns about the dissolution of a ‘common’ or ‘shared’ identity, have allowed cultural policy to be seen as an opportunity to promote ‘a common culture that transcends the social, political and cultural divisions of the nation’ (Kawashima 2006 p. 64). Although a distinct discourse in its own right, this draws upon both of the previously mentioned discourses in relying upon the notion of a universal aesthetic and a focus on the redistribution of cultural (rather than financial) capital. In the UK, as part of their move towards a political ‘third-way’, the new Labour Government of 1997

stopped talking about tackling poverty and began to speak of addressing social exclusion. When Peter Mandelson announced the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit he stated that social exclusion was ‘about more than poverty and unemployment. It is about being cut off from what *the rest of us see as normal life*’ (emphasis added). Those excluded were ‘the growing number of our fellow citizens who lack the means, material or otherwise, to participate in economic, social, cultural and political life in Britain today’ (Mandelson 1997 cited in Stephenson, 2011, p. 40).

This discourse was further supported by the correlation commonly found across many cultural participation surveys that suggests those most likely to be socially ‘excluded’ (for example those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and migrants) were also most likely to be a ‘cultural non-participant’. As the Danish cultural strategy states when discussing who ‘non-users’ are: ‘[they] are a variety of groups, including young people, immigrants and the socially disadvantaged’ (Kulturministeriet 2009, p. 10). These groups’ ‘non-participation’ was pointed to as evidence of their ‘exclusion’ and thus facilitating their ‘participation was synonymous with facilitating their ‘inclusion’. Whilst in Denmark this discursive strand was never given the explicit title it gained in Scotland and the UK, it was still present, informed not least by the rise of multiculturalism that was increasingly informing public policy across Europe. In discussing a new project called *Denmark Reads*, the Minister of Culture evoked the cohesive and inclusive nature of cultural activities when she stated that: ‘Literature helps to bind us together as a country. We use it to understand ourselves and the society that surrounds us. Literature opens the lifeblood of our democracy: conversation and dialogue’ (Kulturstyrelsen 2014).

What is interesting to note is the extent to which one policy text can employ all three strands to justify the desire to increase ‘cultural participation’ (and in doing so legitimate state subsidies for existing arts and cultural organisations) despite the inherent tensions that exist between them. For example, while the discourses of enlightenment and redistribution rely upon the legitimacy of the elite expert and canonical culture, the discourse of social inclusion ostensibly values the individual to a degree that problematises the expert’s role significantly. Likewise, while the discourses of redistribution and social inclusion often stress the need for a transformation in some of the structures of society, the discourse of enlightenment stresses the need for a transformation in the individual and the contribution they can make to society. Yet these tensions are negotiated by virtue of the assertion common to all these discourse that it is unproblematic to understand any and all ‘cultural participation’ as beneficial for both the individual and the society in which they live. While Tepper’s (2011) study about protests over art and culture in America might be a good starting point to critique this unifying assumption, there is not the scope in this paper to do so at present.

Concluding discussion

This paper has argued that there is a shared problem representation in Scotland and Denmark where ‘non-participants’ are constructed as individuals from certain demographics that do not interact with specific types of publicly subsidised cultural activities and organisations. The problem representation is to a large degree defined through the way in which ‘cultural participation’ is measured and the type of

actions that are put in place in relation to these measurements. What counts as cultural participation in surveys remains primarily related to what one might call 'the arts' and in particular, attendance at state funded cultural organisations. This is despite a persistent conflicting discourse that calls for a broader understanding of 'cultural participation' – perhaps most explicitly promoted by UNESCO – not to mention the extent to which digitisation has diversified the ways in which people might now be 'participating' in 'culture' (Tepper and Ivey 2008, Gripsrud *et al.* 2011). It has been suggested that fundamental to this shared problem representation are three discourses that have been of equal importance in the discursive construction of the modern European state and which have been woven together in the problematisation of cultural 'non-participation'. To conclude, some consideration will now be given to what discursive 'work' this problematisation 'does' that might explain why it continues to be employed not only in Denmark and Scotland but across Europe as a whole.

In a market economy, when the state does intervene, it must be seen to be for a purpose (Gray 2000, p. 38). Simplistically, that purpose must either be the protection of the populace or the improvement of their lives to some degree. These purposes legitimate the transference of personal wealth from the individual to the state but in order to do so, the interventions and their outcomes must be seen to be legitimate themselves. In light of the financial crisis of 2007 and the subsequent budgetary constraint shown by many governments, this necessity for legitimacy has gained increasing prominence, as debates about what public spending should be cut have become increasingly common. In a 2014 speech, Harriet Harman, UK Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, stated that '[t]here is a democratic imperative for the arts to show why the hard-pressed taxpayer – struggling with the cost of living crisis – should fund the arts' (2014). Kangas and Vestheim (2010) indicate that a similar challenge faces cultural institutions in Denmark. Indeed even before the financial crisis, Holden (2006) had written of a contemporary 'crisis of legitimacy' faced by the subsidised cultural sector in which those receiving funding would need to turn to the public in order to gain the necessary support for their continued subsidies.

This proposal evokes Moore's (1995) assertion that any publicly funded organisation has a clear understanding of what their *raison d'être* is in the eyes of citizens, and that only by measuring success against these 'refined public preferences' (Coates and Passmore 2008) can they gain the approval of what Moore describes as the 'external authorising environment' (1995, p. 34). However, this 'crisis of legitimacy' is not new. To some degree state expenditure on culture has always been in question, and it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that the 'crisis' is rather that the previous means of legitimacy – the logic of 'democratic elitism' in which various 'experts' and the organisations they work for make decisions on behalf of an institutionally-separate public (Gray 2012, p. 507) – has become increasingly challenged in the market oriented, liberal individualistic Europe of the twenty-first century. The slow demise of 'objective expertise' in legitimating the 'value' of cultural subsidy and the organisations they support has been accompanied by the rise of 'objective evidence' to fill its place. The increasing importance of measuring cultural participation is a consequence of this, as governments arguably seek to show increasing rates of participation, and thus by inference, popular support for the 'culture' they subsidise. From this perspective the 'problem' of 'non-participation' is not a 'problem' for those who are not participating, but rather

it is a problem for those organisations and activities that receive public subsidy and yet attract a small percentage of the population to partake in what that subsidy supports.

Yet the 'value' of cultural organisations and thus the justification for their state support need not solely rely on their use. Holden (2004) highlights the 'non-use values' of cultural organisations as being equally important. These values encompass potential societal benefits such as the ability of these organisations to offer visibility and prestige internationally and the legacy that they provide from one generation to the next. So why then do cultural organisations and governments in both Scotland and Denmark primarily seek to legitimise continued subsidy through pointing to their attempts to increase use and in doing so represent the 'non-participation' or 'non-use' by some as a 'problem' that they must be seen to be attempting to address? This paper argues that it is because of the three discourses discussed, each of which has enjoyed various points of prominence in legitimating subsidies for cultural organisations in the past, but all of which are now interwoven into the current problematisation of cultural 'non-participation'. The narrative of each of these discourses is predicated upon a physical interaction between the 'culture' receiving subsidy and the populace. The individual cannot be enlightened and enriched at a distance. Intangible societal wealth cannot be redistributed to those who are not there to collect it. The 'excluded' cannot be 'included' if they continue to be absent from what is deemed 'normal'.

As such, 'non-use' can never be accepted as unproblematic, or even to be expected considering DiMaggio's (1978) proposal that any attempts to facilitate universal participation are bound to fail given that one of the key functions of culture is for one social group to differentiate themselves from another. Doing so would significantly problematise the legitimacy of state funded 'culture' as the archaeology of their discursive legitimacy has always presupposed 'use' or 'participation' as a given in relation to their societal value, while simultaneously implying that those who do not 'participate' suffer from a 'cultural deficit' that limits their capacity to be a fully cultivated and included citizen, unable to generate cultural capital of their own. It cannot be accepted that some people might gain exactly the same benefits through other activities or that it is conceivably the case that 'most people's cultural needs and aspirations are being met, for better or worse, [...] by the market as goods and services' (Garnham, cited in McGuigan 2004, p. 42).

Denying or blurring historical divisions questions the very distinctiveness of what it is that cultural subsidies and the organisations they support are 'providing' to the individuals whose taxation finances them. It would bring into question the very existence of the 'non-participant'; a discursive subject upon which the legitimacy of state funding for existing cultural organisations relies significantly. For ironically the solution to the 'problem' of 'non-participation' is the continued subsidy of the very organisations with which the 'non-participants' are not participating. Overcoming their own failure to attract a majority of the populace as 'participants' becomes central to their *raison d'être*. What this paper argues is that as such, cultural participation policies in Scotland and Denmark are not orientated towards the particular and specific problems that individuals may face in 'participating' in their preferred modes of culture. Instead they are primarily orientated towards the 'problem' of legitimising the organisations that are a legacy of decisions made by previous generations. In seeking to evidence the value of the existing cultural infrastructure through the proxy of participation, cultural policy in

Scotland and Denmark continues to overlook the cultural values of the heterogeneous communities that make up their citizenry. In doing so, access continues to be privileged over relevance and quantitative equality continues to trump qualitative equity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1. There are significant difficulties in making comparisons between countries (see Schuster 2007 for a discussion) however for the purpose of this argument, the positive comparisons are taken at face-value.
2. The Ministry consists of a Department, two government agencies and a number of institutions in the areas of: (1) Art and artists, (2) Preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage, (3) Higher education in arts, (4) Radio and TV, (5) Public information, (6) Sport and leisure facilities and (7) Castles and Cultural Properties.
3. In Scotland, the majority of media policy and the collection of the license fee that supports the BBC remains a reserved power of the Westminster government.
4. These are: National Galleries of Scotland, National Library of Scotland, National Museums Scotland, Scottish Library and Information Council, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Scottish Ballet, National Theatre of Scotland, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Opera, Museums Galleries Scotland, National Mining Museum of Scotland, Scotland Fisheries Museum, Scottish Maritime Museum.
5. All following quotations from Danish policy documents have been translated by the researchers.
6. Surveys have been conducted in 1964, 1975, 1987, 1993, 1998, 2004 and 2012.
7. The terms 'use' is also prevalent in Danish policy texts, suggesting interaction with some sort of service provision.
8. Although Scotland has its own parliament with devolved power over cultural policy this has only been the case for just over a decade. As such, in reflecting on the development of cultural policy one must broaden the focus so as to consider the UK as a whole over the past century and a half.

References

- Bacchi, C., 2009. *Analysing policy: what's the problem represented to be?* Frenchs Forest: Pearson.
- Bak, L., et al., 2012. *Danskernes Kulturvaner 2012* [Cultural habits of the Danes 2012]. København: Kulturministeriet.
- Balling, G. and Kann-Christensen, N., 2013. What is a non-user? An analysis of Danish surveys on cultural habits and participation. *Cultural trends*, 22 (2), 67–76.
- Bennett, T., et al., 2009. *Culture, Class, Distinction*. London: Routledge.
- Bille, T., et al., 2005. *Danskernes kultur- og fritidsaktiviteter 2004 – med udviklingslinjer tilbage til 1964* [Cultural and leisure time activities of the Danes 2014 with developments from 1964]. København: AKF Forlaget.
- Bonnar, A., 2014. What does culture mean to you? The practice and process of consultation on cultural policy in Scotland since devolution. *Cultural trends*, 23 (3), 136–147. doi:10.1080/09548963.2014.925278
- Brown, W. and Novak-Leonard, J., 2011. *Getting in on the act* [online]. Available from: https://irvine-dot-org.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/12/attachments/GettingInOnTheAct2014_DEC3.pdf?1418669613
- Coates, D. and Passmore, E., 2008. *Public value: the next steps in public service reform*. London: The Work Foundation.

- Creative Scotland, 2011. *Investing in Scotland's creative future: corporate plan 2011–2014* [online]. Available from: <http://www.creativescotland.com/resources/our-publications/corporate-plan>
- Creative Scotland, 2012. *Foundation organisations and flexibly funded organisations*. Available from: <http://www.creativescotland.com/investment/foundationandflexiblyfunded>
- Creative Scotland, 2014a. *Unlocking potential, embracing ambition* [online]. Available from: http://www.creativescotland.com/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/25500/Creative-Scotland-10-Year-Plan-2014-2024-v1-2.pdf
- Creative Scotland, 2014b. *Creative-Scotland-annual-plan-2014–15* [online]. Available from http://www.creativescotland.com/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/26696/Creative-Scotland-Annual-Plan-2014-15-Printable-v1-2.pdf
- DiMaggio, P., 1978. Cultural democracy in a period of cultural expansion: the social composition of arts audiences in the United States. *Social problems*, 28 (2), 179–197.
- Duelund, P., ed., 2003. *The Nordic cultural model*. Copenhagen: Nordic Cultural Institute.
- Engberg, J., 2001. *Hovedtræk af dansk kulturpolitik 1746–1953* [Main features of Danish cultural policy 1746–1953] [online]. Nordisk Kultur Institut. Available from: <https://www.yumpu.com/da/document/view/17692656/hovedtraek-af-dansk-kulturpolitik-1746-1953-af-jens-engberg>
- European Commission, 2013a. *Press release: survey shows fall in cultural participation in Europe* [online]. Available from: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-1023_en.htm
- European Commission, 2013b. *Special Eurobarometer 399. Cultural access and participation, Report* [online]. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_399_380_en.htm#399 [Accessed 9 November 2014]
- Finansministeriet, 2014 *Finanslov for finansåret 2014* [Fiscal Act of the year 2014]. Tekst og anmærkninger (ajourført) [Text and Annotations (revised)] [online]. Available from: http://www.fm.dk/publikationer/2014/finanslov-for-finansaaret-2014/~media/Publikationer/Imported/2014/AFL14/Finanslov%2021_WEB.pdf
- Fink, H., 1988. Et hyperkomplekst begreb. Kultur, kulturbegreb og kulturrelativisme [A hyper complex concept. Culture concept and cultural relativism]. In: Hauge and Horstbøll, eds. *Kulturbegrebets kulturhistorie* [The cultural history of the concept of culture]. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 9–23.
- Foucault, M., 1970. The archaeology of knowledge. *Social science information*, 9 (1), 175–185.
- Fridberg, T., 1994. *Kultur- og fritidsaktiviteter 1993* [Cultural and leisure time activities 1993]. København: Socialforskningsinstituttet.
- Galloway, S. and Jones, H., 2010. The Scottish dimension of British arts government: a historical perspective. *Cultural trends*, 19 (1–2), 27–40.
- Gordon-Nesbitt, R., 2009. The culture of capital, critique. *Journal of socialist theory*, 37 (4), 553–564.
- Gray, C., 2000. *The politics of the art in Britain*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.
- Gray, C., 2012. Democratic cultural policy: democratic forms and policy consequences. *International journal of cultural policy*, 18 (5), 505–518.
- Gripsrud, J., et al., 2011. Changing relations: class, education and cultural capital. *Poetics*, 39, 507–529.
- Harman, H., 2014. *Speech on young people and the arts at the roundhouse* [online]. Available from: <http://www.harrietharman.org/speech-on-young-people-and-the-arts-at-the-roundhouse-09062014Black>
- Holden, J., 2004. *Capturing cultural value*. London: DEMOS.
- Holden, J., 2006. *Cultural value and the crisis of legitimacy*. London: DEMOS.
- Hyslop, F. 2013. *Past, present and future, culture and heritage in an independent Scotland*. Speech. June 5, 2013. Edinburgh: Talbot Rice Gallery. Available from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Speeches/Culture-Heritage05062013>
- Jeppesen, M.F., 2002. *Kulturen, kunsten og kronerne: Kulturpolitik i Danmark 1961–2001* [Culture, Art and Kroner: Cultural policy in Denmark 1961–2001]. København: Akademisk Forlag.
- Kangas, A. and Vestheim, G., 2010. Institutionalism, cultural institutions and cultural policy in the Nordic countries. *Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidsskrift*, 13 (2), 267–284.

- Kawashima, N., 2006. Audience development and social inclusion in Britain. *International journal of cultural policy*, 12 (1), 55–72.
- Kühl, P.H. and Koch-Nielsen, I., 1976. *Fritid, 1975* [Leisure time, 1975]. Meddelelse 14. København: Socialforskningsinstituttet.
- Kulturministeriet, 2009. *Kultur for alle – kultur i hele landet* [Culture for all – Culture all over the country] [online]. Available from: <http://kum.dk/servicemenu/publikationer/2009/kultur-for-alle-kultur-i-hele-landet/>
- Kulturministeriet, 2014. *Strategy for pre-school children's encounter with art and culture* [online]. Available from: http://kum.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenter/English/Publications/2014/rh_kum_ENGbrochure_smaaboern_05.pdf
- Kulturstyrelsen, 2014. *Danmark læser* [Denmark reads]. Baggrund [Background] [online]. Available from: <http://www.danmarklaeser.dk/baggrund/>
- Levitas, R., 2010. Let's hear it for humpy: social exclusion, the third way and cultural capital. *Cultural trends*, 13 (2), 41–56.
- Matheson, J. and Summerfield, C., 2000. *Social trends*, vol. 30. London: Office for National Statistics.
- McCall, V. and Playford, C., 2012. Culture and the Scottish household survey. *Cultural trends*, 21 (2), 49–172.
- McGuigan, J., 2004. *Rethinking Cultural Policy*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Miles, A. and Sullivan, A., 2012. Understanding participation in culture and sport: mixing methods, reordering knowledges. *Cultural trends*, 21 (4), 311–324.
- Miller, T. and Yudice, G., 2002. *Cultural policy*. London: Sage.
- Minihan, J., 1977. *The nationalization of culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Moore, M., 1995. *Creating public value: strategic management in government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nyt fra Danmarks Statistik, 2013. nr. 535, 3. oktober 2013 [online]. Available from: <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2013/NR535.pdf>
- O'Neill, M., 2008. Museums professionalism and democracy. *Cultural trends*, 17 (4), 289–307.
- Regeringen, 2011. *Et Danmark der står sammen* [Denmark stands united]. Regeringsgrundlag [Government platform]. Available from http://www.stm.dk/publikationer/Et_Danmark_der_staar_sammen_11/Regeringsgrundlag_okt_2011.pdf
- Rousseau, J., 1975. *The social contract and discourses*. Trans. G.D.H. Cole. London: JM Dent.
- Scheurich, J.J., 1994. Policy archaeology: a new policy studies methodology. *Journal of education policy*, 9 (4), 297–316.
- Schuster, J.M., 2007. Participation studies and cross-national comparison: proliferation, prudence, and possibility. *Cultural trends*, 16(2), 99–196.
- Schlesinger, P., 2009. The SNP, cultural policy and the idea of the 'creative economy'. In: G. Hassan, ed. *The modern SNP: from protest to power*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 135–146.
- Scottish Government, 2008a. *Culture delivers* [online]. Available from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/12/22094149/0>
- Scottish Government, 2008b. *People and culture in Scotland: results from the Scottish household survey culture and sport module 2007* [online]. Available from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/24104710/0>
- Scottish Government, 2010. *Widening access to the arts and culture* [online]. Available from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/ArtsCultureSport/arts/CulturalPolicy/workinggroup>
- Scottish Government, 2011. *Scottish spending review 2011 and draft budget 2012-13: chapter twelve culture and external affairs* [online]. Available from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/10/04153155/17>
- Scottish Government, 2014. *Cultural engagement in Scotland* (attendance and participation). [online]. Available from: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/ArtsCultureSport/Sport/MajorEvents/Glasgow-2014/Commonwealth-games/Indicators/C6>
- Sinclair, A., 1995. *Arts and culture: the history of the 50 years of the arts council of Great Britain*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson.
- Skot-Hansen, D., 1999. Kultur til tiden – Strategier i den lokale kulturpolitik [Culture in time – Strategies in local cultural policy]. *Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidsskrift*, 2 (1), 7–27.

- Skouvig, L., 2007. The construction of the working-class user: Danish free public libraries and the working classes, 1880–1920. *Library history*, 23 (3), 223–238.
- Stark, P., Gordon, C., and Powell, D., 2013. *Rebalancing our cultural capital* [online]. Available from: http://www.gpsculture.co.uk/downloads/rocc/Rebalancing_FINAL_3mb.pdf
- Stephenson, M., 2011. *Young people and offending*. 2nd ed. Oxon: Routledge.
- Stevenson, D., 2013. What's the problem again? The problematization of cultural participation in Scottish cultural policy. *Cultural trends*, 22 (2), 77–85.
- Stevenson, D., 2014a. Scottish cultural policy. *Cultural trends*, 23 (3), 133–135.
- Stevenson, D., 2014b. Tartan and tantrums: critical reflections on the Creative Scotland 'stooshie'. *Cultural trends*, 23 (3), 178–187.
- Tepper, S.J., 2011. *Not here, not now, not that!*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Tepper, S.J. and Ivey, B., eds., 2008. *Engaging art. the next great transformation of America's cultural life*. New York: Routledge.
- Tomka, G., 2013. Reconceptualizing cultural participation in Europe: Grey literature review. *Cultural trends*, 22 (3–4), 259–264.
- Unesco, 2012. *Measuring cultural participation: UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics Handbook No. 2* [online]. Available from: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/culture/Documents/fcs-handbook-2-cultural-participation-en.pdf>
- Vandersypen, S.C., 2012. A genealogy: tracing the origins of museum admission charges. *The journal of arts management, law and society*, 42, 176–188.
- Warwick Commission, 2014. *Enriching Britain: culture, creativity and growth* [online]. Available from: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/>



The participation myth

Leila Jancovich

To cite this article: Leila Jancovich (2017) The participation myth, International Journal of Cultural Policy, 23:1, 107-121, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2015.1027698](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1027698)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1027698>



Published online: 07 Apr 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2906



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 40 View citing articles [↗](#)

The participation myth

Leila Jancovich*

*Carnegie Faculty, Leeds Beckett University, Cavendish 211A, Headingley Campus, Leeds
LS6 3QS, UK*

(Received 1 October 2014; accepted 3 March 2015)

Policy rhetoric around strategies to and the value of increasing participation in the arts has been well documented internationally over more than a decade. But in the UK, which is the focus for this article, targets to increase participation have been consistently missed and there remains a direct correlation between those taking part in cultural activity and their socio-economic status. The starting point for this article is to examine the barriers to increasing participation in the arts and question the way that such policy has been implemented within the English context, which may have relevance for policy-making in other countries. What is demonstrated is that policy implementation is influenced by vested interest of those in receipt of funding and that a narrow range of voices, from a powerful cultural elite, are involved in the decision-making in the arts. The article makes a case for widening the range of voices heard in decision-making in order to support both artistic practice and public engagement.

Keywords: cultural policy; cultural politics; public participation; participatory decision-making

Introduction

Arts policy in England has long been characterised as focussing on the supply end (the artist) at the expense of the demand side (the audience) but it is claimed that from 1990s this shifted, with new priorities around increasing participation levels from a wider cross section of society (Bunting 2006). Cultural policy and investment was also increasingly developed not only through the traditional arts agencies, such as Arts Council England, but through local authorities, and policy attachment to broader public policy agendas such as health and well-being, social inclusion and economic development (Gray 2008). Not only the arts practices currently funded, but the decision-making structures that supported these were thereby brought into question, which under the New Labour government which came to power in 1997 led to calls for a wider range of voices to be involved in decision-making (Smith 1998).

But the arm's length principle that operates between the British government and its delivery agents, such as Arts Council England, means that while the government might suggest the need for a wider range of voices to be involved in decision-making in the arts, civil servants are limited in their capacity to determine in what way this should be implemented. Instead this is left to agencies such as Arts Council

*Email: L.jancovich@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

England themselves to determine. It is suggested that by its nature this may reinforce the dominance of self-interest in informing policy formation, rather than opening up decision-making as proposed (Garnham 2005).

This is demonstrated in the way that the new participation policy was lambasted by some establishment figures within the arts sector, for the failure to guarantee the preservation of the established arts canon and widening the range of voices involved in the arts was said to risk damaging quality (Tusa 2000, McMaster 2008). Rather than challenge these views, critics from the arts establishment were invited to advice on the way arts policy was implemented in practice. This supports the claims that a cultural elite, of well-funded institutions, wield power and influence in arts policy-making (Griffiths *et al.* 2008).

It is acknowledged that the influence of cultural elites is not unique to countries operating under the arm's length principle indeed it has been argued that the problem may be reinforced through a centralised Ministry model, and that greater localism is needed to reduce such power (Anberrée 2012). This article therefore examines two contradictory theories on power. On the one hand Steven Lukes (2005) argues that elites will always dominate policy decisions and override weaker voices, due to the uneven distribution of power in decision-making groups. This is challenged by theorists who argue that widening the range of voices involved in decision-making can bring about change in policy and practice (Bevir and Rhodes 2010).

Focusing on empirical data collected in an English context, this article therefore aims to have a wider international relevance, by analysing cultural policy decision-making in relation to such theories about the exercise of power. This article explores the gap between the claims that there was a shift of priorities, with an increased focus on participation and the concerns that nothing much changed in practice, by examining the way the participation agenda was interpreted and implemented in England from 1997 to 2013.

The participation agenda

Despite the rights granted in Article 27 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights that 'everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts' (quoted in Bollo *et al.* 2012, p. 7) there have been growing concerns internationally that participation in the arts is by no means universal. Participation rates are consistently shown to be correlated with socio-economic position (the middle classes and more affluent being much more likely to participate). Governments have responded by introducing strategies and measurements to assess who is taking part, In England, in 2006 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) started an annual survey on who participates in cultural activity, in order to measure the success of their arm's length agencies in achieving increased engagement from different socio-economic and cultural groups (DCMS 2006). However, between 2006 and 2011, despite increased investment in the arts during this period, this showed that the hoped for engagement of a broad social constituency was not being realised in the subsidised arts (DCMS 2011). Significantly the main barriers to engagement were also identified as being a psychological feeling of exclusion or lack of interest in the arts on offer, rather than the practical limitations of wanting to, but being unable to participate (Bunting *et al.* 2008).

Conversely participation in amateur and community arts was said to still be vibrant in the UK during this time, but woefully under resourced (Dodd *et al.* 2008). Evidence suggests that such activities are more successful at achieving the social impacts that the New Labour government aimed to achieve through increased cultural investment, rather than attendance as a spectator (Matarasso 1997, DCMS 2006, Edgar 2012), but despite this the evidence was not used to redistribute funding from one area of the arts to another. In reality the arts organisations in receipt of funds broadly remained the same. In 2004, 85% of Arts Council England funding was going to the same organisations as it had the decade before (Frayling 2005) and in 2008, despite Arts Council England promising a departure from the historic funding patterns of the past, in reality 76% of those previously in receipt of funding gained an increase in the level of funding they received (Arts Council England 2009).

This may suggest a tendency in policy-making to follow a path dependence (Liebowitz and Margolis 2000) where it is deemed easier to implement new strategies, such as the one to increase participation, through partnership with the existing funded arts institutions. But this article argues that it is also the influence of powerful voices from a cultural elite, who as Lukes (2005) suggests are able to dominate over newer voices, that contributes to maintain the status quo and reduce the potential of new policy initiatives.

Evidence suggests that the existing funded arts organisations tended to define the participation problem as a deficit on the part of the public (Miles 2013) who needed to be coaxed into engagement through education programmes or concessionary prices, rather than a deficit on the part of the cultural offer they provided. The reliance on the very institutions towards which the data suggested there were psychological barriers, may therefore have reinforced disengagement and contributed to a 'crisis of legitimacy' of the subsidised arts sector (Holden 2006).

A crisis of legitimacy was not just seen in relation to cultural policy during this period, but to the more general perception of an increased democratic deficit, both within the UK and abroad (Keaney 2006). But for many public policy theorists the participation agenda is seen as part of an international trend towards what is described as a shift from government to governance (Goss 2001), where the state has less direct control over decisions, working instead in partnership with delivery agents. In the arts sector, in many senses the arm's length principle has meant that the arts have always been delivered through an agency approach but the shift from a narrow range of voices from the professional arts, with a self-interest in retaining the status quo, was very different to the participatory decision-making, that includes not only professionals but users, that became discourse elsewhere in public policy (Brodie *et al.* 2009). Such changes in the decision-making unit have been argued can bring about change in policy and practice, and militate against the power of a cultural elite (Bevir and Rhodes 2010).

The principles of participatory decision-making have their roots in the work on deliberative democracy (Habermas 1994) which argues that decisions should be made through discussions between all interested parties, including the public. But such theory has been accused of ignoring the power relationships within the decision-making unit, which may, as Luke's argues, always advantage the expert (Lukes 2005). Co-production instead is based on the principles that both professionals and users must contribute equally to a planning process and for there to be a real opportunity for change, rather than pre-set agendas (Ostrom 1996). However the

concept of co-production and co-creation, within the arts, more commonly involves the public in the creative process only once the funding has been distributed and the planning stages have been completed (Walmsley 2013).

In Brazil in contrast the model of participatory budgeting, has seen large scale redistribution of funding through community activism at all stages of decision-making (Community Pride Initiative 2003). This principle has been adopted and adapted internationally by everyone from the World Bank (Herz and Ebrahim 2005), OECD (Caddy *et al.* 2007) and the British government (DCLG 2008). But despite being adopted by a number of local authorities in UK, and evidence suggesting that such practices did increase levels of engagement from a broad cross section of participants from different backgrounds (SQW Consulting 2010) there is limited evidence of it being trialled with specific arts budgets either within the local authorities or at Arts Council England.

Instead what the BBC and Arts Council England adopted was a public value approach, which used deliberative consultation techniques to 'bring public opinion closer to the centre of ... strategic decision-making process' (Lee *et al.* 2011, p. 295), but retained decision-making where it had always been. This may be argued to provide an appearance of greater engagement while retaining existing power structures (Lukes 2005).

What the public value surveys demonstrate is that the public consulted were largely supportive of the principles of arts funding, but policy-making was seen as too insular and self-referential, with decisions on what is funded being made by a limited number of people working professionally in the arts (Opinion Leader 2007). There is evidence of support for the concept of wider public involvement in decision-making, specifically for the distribution of funds. Arts Council England did consider strategies to address this including recommendations for a gold, silver and bronze standard for engagement, which by definition suggests a hierarchy to the choices (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting 2009). Only the gold standard involves the public in funding decisions, but significantly, despite the evidence from the public value survey, it was not adopted. Instead the silver standard, engaging with those that Arts Council England already funds, through peer review, was adopted.

This directly reflected the recommendations made by Baroness Genista McIntosh, in her review of Arts Council England's 2008 funding decisions (McIntosh 2008). As McIntosh's professional experiences has been within the major national organisations this may suggest a clear example of the cultural elite's ability to prevent a challenge to their power and influence. However the resistance to involving the public, amongst arts professionals, which is also identified in other research (Fennell *et al.* 2009) may equally suggest the potential of including a wider range of voices. The remainder of this article therefore examines some of this resistance and the potential for change through changing the decision-making unit, through analysis of the findings from empirical research undertaken in the arts sector in England.

Methodology

The central question this research explores is whether participatory decision-making can challenge the status quo within the arts, and what the implications of this are for the public, artists, arts organisations and policy makers.

Some theorists identify the power of institutional frameworks in setting agendas for decision-making and the structural defects within arts policy which may limit change (Gray 2000), while others argue that individuals make structures as well as structures influencing people (Giddens 2000). This research therefore analyses individuals as objects of study, identified by the sampling methods outlined below, and the institutional context within which they operate in order to examine the extent that the individual influences the organisation or vice versa.

Participatory decision-making has already been shown to take as its starting point the belief that changing the people involved in decisions would change outcomes (Lowndes 1995, Bevir and Rhodes 2010). This assumes that people's voices are not just heard, but that they are able to assert their interests over those of others, which is at odds with the notion of the overarching power of elites (Lukes 2005). This research therefore examines the extent to which the views of different units of study had equal status in the decision-making process and whether alternative viewpoints can change the discourse and practice or whether they merely become subsumed into existing attitudes and actions. Consideration is also given to the extent to which actors believed they had changed their views, through the process of involvement in participatory decision making, and whether as has been suggested there is less resistance to such processes once people have engaged (Fennell *et al.* 2009).

The use of these theoretical frameworks supports an interpretative approach which allows this article to move beyond a review of how written policy is or isn't implemented. Instead it aims to develop an understanding of how the agendas for decisions are set and what areas participatory decision-making is deemed appropriate for and which areas it is not. This allows for analysis of the potential and limitations of participatory power.

In order to undertake this research multiple methods were used. Pre-existing quantitative datasets, from the Taking Part survey (DCMS 2011) are analysed to examine the evidence for levels of participation and engagement. Quantitative data on funding levels, from annual reports of Arts Council England and from the National Association of Local Government Arts Officers, were also examined. The aim of this is specifically to compare the policy discourse with the actual levels of funding provision.

In addition, I was granted access to a number of internally produced reports, including the unpublished Arts Council England report on participatory decision-making mentioned above (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting 2009) and a sample of applications from arts organisations who applied for Arts Council England's new national portfolio funding in 2010. These were subject to content analysis of how the concept of 'participation' was articulated and the different interpretations given to it by both the applicant and Arts Council England officers reviewing the applications.

A survey questionnaire was sent to a selection of 20 local authority arts officers who had identified themselves as having an interest in participation by adopting a voluntary national cultural indicator (DCMS 2008). The survey asked respondents to describe their approach to meeting the targets set by the national indicator and to reflect personally on the value and impact of national participation policy. The data provided a comparison between thinking and action in a local authority context compared with the views of national policy makers. These were captured through nine semi structured interviews with Arts Council England staff, four from central government and six policy advisers. The interviewees were identified through

purposive sampling (Silverman 2006), to ensure that they included staff at different levels in the arts policy hierarchy from advisers to senior management to officer level.

Arts practitioners from a range of organisations and individual artists, who both had and had not experience of participatory work, were also interviewed, along with community participants involved in projects that involve participatory decision-making. The projects were selected from those whom policy makers commonly cited in the interviews and local authority surveys to test the theory that those who have actively engaged in participatory decision-making are less resistant to the concept that those who have not (Lowndes 1995, Fennell *et al.* 2009).

Alasuutari (1995) says that a sample of similar people is useful for comparing differences of opinion but a sample of many different types of people is more useful in finding similarities. In an attempt to identify similarities and differences, while covering a range of different types of people, more than one person was selected in each category to ensure that conclusions are not drawn on the basis of what might be particular to an individual. As a result a total of over sixty interviews were conducted.

All interviewees were asked questions about their first arts experiences, their current level of engagement, and the role they see art playing both in their own lives and the lives of others. The function of this is to test the core values of the interviewee in relation to the arts and the importance they place on the participation and engagement agenda. This is then analysed and compared across respondents to assess whether there are correlations between the personal background and their values, which might help determine whether they can be classified as part of a pre-existing cultural elite (Griffiths *et al.* 2008).

They were all asked to define what they understand by key terminology, such as 'art' and 'participation'. This allows the responses to be compared and contrasted in order to analyse whether there are shared understandings of concepts. As with the local authority surveys interviewees were then asked to reflect on the effectiveness of participation policy and whether they agree with current priorities on participation and engagement. Finally, people were asked to talk about their personal experiences of participatory decision-making, as well as identify the pros and cons of such a process for the arts.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed to avoid 'specific listening' on my part (Hill 2006) and ensure that the analysis is based on definitions provided by respondents and not by my own assumptions or recollections. The mixed methods approach to data collection, combining published text, unpublished applications, survey data and interviews also aims to increase the reliability of the data, by allowing the triangulation of findings from different sources at the analysis stage.

To this end the survey data collected from local authorities and the applications from the arts organisations were used as the first stage in creating themes to be used as codes to interrogate the data more closely and cross reference findings in a number of ways (Robson 1993). Some of these themes are: the use of language and how much definitions were shared; the personal background of the person interviewed; the extent to which they felt able to influence policy; attitudes to the decision-making process; the perceived opportunities and threats of widening the range of voices involved; the relationship between processes and outcomes in participatory process. In addition speculative analysis continued throughout the data

collection phase, by way of taking notes on other emerging themes and relationships and building on the codes throughout.

Once all the data was collected respondents were grouped according to their category (e.g. Arts Council England staff, local authority officer, artist, arts organisation, and participant) and according to their background (level of arts participation from childhood, any arts training, and level of arts engagement currently) to allow more rich comparisons between theoretical positions and practical experience. The following section identifies the findings from this research.

Analysis of findings

It is clear from the review of the personal background of all interviewees that most of those who worked professionally in the arts felt that their personal background provided them with the connections to get ‘a foot in the door’ to working in the arts (Audience Development manager). All had been introduced to the arts when young and described practices such as going to theatre or galleries, more commonly than participatory practices or popular culture. This was seen as a prerequisite to being accepted as a professional in the arts. The public participants interviewed in contrast were more likely to cite everyday culture such as drawing and playing music at home, as evidence of a cultured childhood. While some professionals defined their backgrounds as providing invaluable arts expertise, many of the public participants questioned the knowledge of the professionals, referring to them as self-appointed experts. This was supported by the fact that many of the ‘experts’ interviewed, acknowledged that they knew little about arts practice outside their specialism. This lack of diversity of perspectives within arts policy, one person argued ‘tend to produce organisations that have certain sorts of people in certain sorts of roles, which can be ... stultifying’ (Arts Council England staff member). This supports the case for involving a wider range of voices in policy-making (Hatzihrysidis and Bunting 2009).

However more significant to the values of those interviewed, than their background, was their current employment. There was a clear difference when comparing those working within local and central government and those working for, or advising, Arts Council England. All the local authority surveys described the arts as a tool for ‘working towards wider outcomes’ (local authority survey) and one said they were ‘not interested in artists [but only] in the role that artists play’ (local authority survey). This clearly relates to the demand approach to arts policy mentioned above and was supported by the public participants surveyed. Those working at and advising Arts Council England in contrast ‘tended to focus on the production of new work by a selected array of artists and arts organisations’ (Arts Council England staff), or the supply side. Many felt that it was appropriate for their focus to be different to that of local authorities, as the only organisation that puts the interests of the artists first. One policy commentator expressed ‘a sort of missionary zeal’ (Audience Development manager) for the arts over other cultural activities, which they said contributed to the dynamism of the sector. But others were concerned that this led those in the arts sector to always operate in the role of self-advocates rather than self-critics, creating what has been defined as an ‘interminable circuit of inter-legitimation’ (Bourdieu 1984, p. 53) and reducing the arts ability to look outside its existing structures. Some also questioned the conflation of artists and arts organisations in policy rhetoric, and suggested that organisations had

always been ‘more interested in celebrating the dead, than discovering the living’ and so failed to support creativity of either professional artists or the public (local artist).

This difference in focus may be to do with the fact that local and central government are accountable to an electorate, and therefore more public facing by nature. In contrast, by virtue of the arm’s length principle, Arts Council England has not historically been required to consider the audience so directly. But the majority of Arts Council England officers did believe that the policy focus on increasing participation in the arts was a good thing and acknowledged that public money required a more public facing attitude than there had been hitherto. Many also pointed to participation as a key stated goal in their 10 year strategy (Arts Council England 2010). However, although most people stated that they personally saw participation as a priority, when asked how much people felt that their views were shared across their organisation, there were differences of opinion.

The view that the ‘pendulum was swinging too far’ in favour of participation (government policy adviser) was in the minority among this sample, but where it was expressed it was done so by those with influence. It was described as a political shift between secretaries of state for culture. While Chris Smith [Secretary of State for Culture 1997–2001] was said to have ensured that DCMS were putting ‘efforts into driving up rates of participation ... a shift more towards excellence ... was going to be [the next minister’s] thing’ (government policy adviser). One person described this refocus as ‘an attempt to reassure certain sectors of the cultural world’ that they retained their influence in policy-making (arts policy adviser). This is demonstrated by the fact that many claimed that reports by Baroness Genista McIntosh and Sir Brian McMaster (McIntosh 2008, 2011, McMaster 2008), held more sway in the reaffirmation of the excellence agenda than either government policy on participation, or the individual perspectives of those working at Arts Council England. One person even suggested that what they say becomes ‘policy edict’ (Audience Development Manager). This provides evidence that certain voices do indeed wield greater power than others in decision-making (Lukes 2005). In this case those from the funded organisations having greater influence than those working in the organisations which fund them.

It was also acknowledged that it was ‘really difficult to ... define [participation] ... because everybody’s interpretation of what it is ... is different.’ (Arts Council England staff). This was clearly demonstrated to be the case in the sample of applications supplied by Arts Council England, where the term is defined in multiple ways. Indeed within any one application the term is often used in different ways.

Applicants are asked to demonstrate which of the Arts Council England’s five goals they are responding to in all funding requests to the Arts Council England. Goal two relates to participation and engagement by getting ‘more people [to] experience and [be] inspired by the arts’ (Arts Council England 2010, p. 7). While applicants are only required to respond to one of the goals, only six of the sample of eighty applications provided chose not to respond to goal two. This might suggest that participation is considered a high priority, but as the goal only really asks people if they are taking the public into account at all it is surprising that everyone would not address it when applying for public money.

By analysing definitions in relation to the widely accepted ladder of participation (Arnstein 1969) it is clear that the vast majority of applicants define

participation at the bottom rung of the ladder, as a process of ‘informing’ the public about the arts offer through marketing and distribution. A much smaller number talked about ‘involving’ them through outreach programmes, which sits in the middle of the ladder. There is almost no reference to the aims at the top of his ladder which relate to ‘collaboration and empowerment’.

Many people interviewed acknowledged that in practice organisations were increasingly addressing the participation agenda by targeting ‘audiences that are already attending and already have an interest’ (Audience development manager), to get them to attend more regularly, rather than reaching out to people who are not already interested in the arts. This is counter to the aims of the participation agenda which were clearly articulated by the New Labour government in relation to social inclusion and engaging those who were seen as not currently engaged at all (Policy Action Team 10 1999).

But the Arts Council England assessment comments on the applications do not provide any sense that one definition is prioritised over another in the decision-making process. Furthermore, despite many of the claims lacking evidence to support how the plans would be achieved, or targets for measurement, the assessors’ do not address this or suggest targets based on them achieving what they proposed. Instead the willingness to take the organisations’ claims at face value, suggests a tendency to define anything as participation. This runs the risk of making the word meaningless, a function Fairclough (2000) argues is used by policy makers to create a rhetoric of change while retaining the status quo.

Many of the local authorities surveyed who had chosen the government target to increase cultural participation (DCMS 2008) define participation more specifically, in terms of involving people in active creative expression rather than engagement as an audience member. However although most were aware of council strategies that sat at the top of Arnstein’s ladder of participation by collaborating and empowering participants in public service delivery, they acknowledged that such practices are not being used widely in the arts. Furthermore, when asked to specify strategies used to meet the government target, it is clear that there is more focus on getting current audiences to attend more regularly, rather than attracting new audiences, or developing new creative opportunities. Some argued that this was because participation targets encourage easy wins to increase numbers, and ignore the fact that reaching new people is much slower, and engages smaller numbers. As such policy interventions may lead to a ‘defensive instrumentalism’ (Belfiore 2012) where the arts feel obliged to justify how they are addressing policy without adopting the values which underpin it.

Almost everyone acknowledged the findings of the Taking Part survey (DCMS 2011) that the arts still attracts an elite minority of the public, which remained largely unchanged despite initiatives to increase participation. There was a consensus with the view that ‘at many of the cultural events that I go to I see an audience of white, middle-aged, middle-class people – actually not even middle-aged, but even older’ (arts policy commentator). This was identified as most apparent where work is from western classical traditions, which takes by far the largest proportion of arts funding. But although some recognised that having an effective participation policy meant being ‘brave enough to consider that [funding] will look very different for some people’ (Arts Council England staff), there was no sense of a real appetite for this degree of change, either within Arts Council England or the local authorities. Instead, change was seen to happen at an inevitably slow pace ‘incorporated into

what people do' (Arts Council England staff), rather than through policy directives or redistribution of funds. There was a sense of resignation that social inequalities will continue to be replicated in arts funding where '80% of our funding goes to 20% of our clients ... [and] the people who participate and attend the most make up about 9% of the population' (Arts Council England staff). This is further evidenced by the acknowledgement that participatory organisations were hit hardest in cuts in funding levels from 2010.

Most of those interviewed described the barriers to change in relation to the complexity of implementing policy changes against a backdrop of 'the orthodoxy of 60 years' (Arts Council England staff). One commentator suggested that the distribution of funds, through participatory budgeting in Brazil, was made easier due to the lack of their historical funding traditions in the cultural sector. This supports theory on path dependency mentioned above (Liebowitz and Margolis 2000). But it was also widely acknowledged that there are 'powerful organisations that have a strong stake at the table' (Audience Development manager) who militate against change and through the arm's length principle limit the capacity of governments to create the 'legislative impetus ... which is about stick more than carrot' (Arts Council England staff), which may be needed for change to occur.

The remainder of this article therefore considers where a legislative impetus was imposed by the New Labour government in 2008, through a duty for all public services (including Arts Council England) to involve a wider range of voices in policy-making and delivery (DCLG 2008).

Despite the introduction of the 'duty to involve', the staff member interviewed from DCMS said that 'there are all sorts of internal government things that are happening, [but] it's not something that we took an active lead in' (government policy adviser). There was therefore no directive from DCMS about how the duty might be applied in the arts sector. Likewise several people at Arts Council England supported the claim that it is 'a question still to be looked at seriously. We haven't gone down that route thus far' (Arts Council England staff). Even with a legislative impetus therefore vagueness is evident in relation to its implementation.

Other parts of the cultural sector, such as English Heritage, were cited as gaining considerable profile and increased public support, through projects involving 'an audience vote for what should get the money' (Lord Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport 1997–2001). The arts sector was said to be lagging behind. But some of the arts policy advisers interviewed disputed this. They cited evidence of arts organisations, involving their audiences better in dialogue than they had historically. This was said to be happening independently of policy makers or directives. Some argued that the best policy responded to changes developed in the arts sector, rather than trying to lead them. This was supported by the artists and arts organisations interviewed, who argued that participatory processes should be practice-based or community-led, rather than policy impositions. Some theorists, have also argued that the notion of top-down directives to impose bottom-up participatory processes may be counterproductive (Hay 2007, Peck 2009).

But the perceived growth in bottom up initiatives is challenged by the fact that even those interviewed who said it was more widespread were unable to think of many examples when pushed. In practice it was acknowledged that 'we use the same five kind of examples at the moment' (Arts Council England staff), whenever providing specifics of practice.

It is also clear, from the language used, that for those who felt such practices were common their definition was once again closer to Arnstein's concept of 'inform and consult' (Arnstein 1969). While those who were more sceptical of how many organisations involved the public, tended to refer more specifically to the definition outlined in the duty to involve (DCLG 2008) which aspires to reach the top of Arnstein's ladder by involving public participation from agenda setting through to monitoring outcomes. This is supported by evidence that demonstrates that although consultation might not be unusual, decision-making itself has to date had more impact in other public policy areas than in the arts (Fennell *et al.* 2009, SQW Consulting 2010).

In the few examples, where participatory decision-making was cited and involved long term public involvement, it is further worth noting that the organisations, or individual cultural leaders involved, often came from the community arts movement, which some suggested meant that nothing much had changed in wider practice. Furthermore although such strategies may not have been introduced in response to a policy directive, many of the practitioners acknowledged that such practices were only effective where the boards of organisations or funders were involved. Some community participants said that they had been demanding to have a voice for years but that until policy on public engagement came into force they were not heard.

This highlights a problem: whilst vision without policy or organisational support is hard to realise, policy imposition without individual buy-in may be counterproductive. A policy that relies on delivery within existing organisational structures, as has been demonstrated to be the case in England, rather than changing the structures and redistributing funding to facilitate change, may therefore be doomed to fail.

However short term experiments in regularly funded galleries and theatres, involving the public in co-curation of exhibitions or seasons of work, were seen to be becoming more common and everyone who had had experience of them, believed they are successful at challenging thinking about artistic practice and bringing in new audiences. From a marketing perspective it was recognised that such practices both increase attendance and improve public opinion on the arts. Despite their short term nature, over a longer period of time those who had some involvement in such processes felt that 'inevitably arts practice would change if the kind of involvement ideas or techniques filtered through a lot of arts organisations' (Arts Council England staff).

But one commentator argued that practices, restricted to arts organisations, rather than funding organisations 'remain ineffective because [funding decisions are] done in the old usual way' (arts policy commentator). The only example given, of participatory budgeting in the arts, was in Arts Council England's North East regional office. An experiment had been run that involved young people in mock funding decision panels along with Arts Council England staff. It was said that it was not possible to engage the young people in real funding decisions, without the agreement of Arts Council England national office, which was not forthcoming. But even so it did lead those involved to believe that there was an appetite for such engagement. The decisions were said to have been treated with the utmost care and seriousness by those taking part and 'if managed well it could be dealt with on a much broader level' (Arts Council England staff). Despite being seen as a success this initiative has not been replicated let alone extended. This supports the

argument that centralised power, whether in the arm's length or the ministry model may reduce opportunities for such practices (Anberrée 2012) but the nature of the resistance at national office is also worth examining.

Some national policy advisers questioned whether there was evidence that the public wanted to get involved in the formation or implementation of arts policy. But the evidence for this is demonstrated through the arts debate in which the public asked for greater involvement in decision-making (Opinion Leader 2007). It is also demonstrated by the growing numbers of people that have engaged in participatory budgeting initiatives within the UK and overseas, the longer the initiative has lasted (Community Pride Initiative 2003, SQW Consulting 2010). All the people interviewed for this research who had direct experience of such processes also concurred that there was an appetite for engagement in decision-making.

Some staff at Arts Council England and some arts managers of organisations who had no direct experience of participatory decision-making expressed concerns about the unrepresentative nature of participatory practices, as 'there are communities that are much more able, through confidence, skills, money, attitude, to engage ... than others' (Arts Council England staff). This was said to challenge the legitimacy of decisions taken through such processes. However those who had experience of participatory decision-making in practice said there was evidence that where people 'genuinely made an effort [to engage people] and went to different venues that you weren't normally seen in ... people turned up who hadn't normally turned up' (government policy adviser). Furthermore, it may be argued that the narrow background of those currently involved in the arts sector is already unrepresentative of the broader public. There was less resistance to the concept amongst local authorities who are themselves more accountable. Resistance to such processes from non-accountable bodies may therefore be seen as an attempt to hold onto power rather than based on a commitment to representation.

The other main concern over public involvement, expressed by those without direct experience, related to the fears of a risk averse public. Arts expertise was seen, by many of those working in the arts, to be necessary to avoid the 'potential for dumbing down content if you allow the public to choose' (Audience Development manager). But based on specific examples where participatory decision-making had been used, it was suggested that often 'the most unusual and radical of solutions was the one that was successful' (Arts Council England staff). This is also said to be the case in other research on such practices, which found that the public were more open to risk taking than expected (Fennell *et al.* 2009). Artists interviewed, with experience of such processes in action also said it had allowed them to take more, not fewer risks.

The evidence from interviews, in line with the findings from literature (Fennell *et al.* 2009) demonstrate a clear disparity in perceptions between those who have engaged in participatory decision-making practices and those who have not. The greatest resistance to the concept exists where there is least experience of it in operation. While this may reflect that those who have engaged are likely to be those who are already predisposed to believe in its potential rather than its risks, there are indications that the initial fears and perceptions are seen to be misplaced and eradicated over time. But this requires 'the humility to accept that you might learn something from your community as opposed to knowing best about what they want' (Arts Council England staff).

Conclusions and implications for policy

This article has questioned, based on evidence, whether the perceived shift in policy towards participation that is claimed in literature, ever really had an impact in the arts. Funds have been shown to have continued to go to the same institutions and policy initiatives, such as increasing participation, have relied on them being delivered by existing funded organisations and leaders who may not embrace such values.

The findings from empirical research support the theory that widening the range of voices involved in decision-making can be a valuable learning experience for those involved (Bevir and Rhodes 2010), but there is little evidence that this is able to challenge the status quo in the broader arts sector. The resistance to change, from parts of the arts sector, coupled with an approach to decision-making which ignores the unequal nature of power within decision-making are the greatest barriers to increasing participation.

Further research would be worth undertaking to determine whether public engagement is becoming more commonplace, as some suggest, or whether the arts do lag behind other parts of the public sector. In addition some longitudinal studies on the impact of involvement in such processes may shed light on whether resistance to participatory decision-making may reduce over time.

But rather than relying on the existing arts infrastructure to lead the change, I would argue that redistribution of funding is required, both to reduce the power of the cultural elite and to widen the range of voices involved in the arts and participatory decision-making offers a model to genuinely give arts policy and practice a more public facing approach. In return the public may become a more powerful voice to advocate for public funding of the arts in general although requiring acceptance that the arts they fund may be different to those funded today.

While the principles of participatory decision-making and widening the range of voices involved in the arts, may be argued to be more important in organisations operating under the arm's length principle than within central or local government, where there is some accountability through the electorate, it is acknowledged that cultural elites also wield power under the ministry model in other countries, so further international comparison would therefore also be valuable.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

- Alasuutari, P., 1995. *Researching culture: qualitative method and cultural studies*. London: Sage.
- Anberrée, A., 2012. What personal responsibilities towards the construction of a cultural democracy? Involvement of the public in the construction of a cultural democracy: improvements and restraints. In: J.R. Hendry and A. Barraquier, eds. *IABS 2012 – personal responsibility for improving society*. Asheville, NC: International Association for Business and Society, 261–272.
- Arnstein, S.R., 1969. A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American institute of planners*, 35, 216–224.
- Arts Council England, 2009. *Annual review 2008*. London: Arts Council England.

- Arts Council England, 2010. *Achieving great art for everyone, a strategic framework for the arts*. London: Arts Council England.
- Belfiore, E., 2012. "Defensive instrumentalism" and the legacy of new labour's cultural policies. *Cultural trends*, 21, 103–111.
- Bevir, M. and Rhodes, 2010. *The State as cultural practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bollo, A., et al., 2012. *Measuring cultural participation. UNESCO framework for cultural statistics*. Montreal: UNESCO.
- Bourdieu, P., 1984. *Distinction*. New York: Routledge.
- Brodie, E., Cowling, E., and Nissen, N. 2009. *Understanding participation, a literature review* [Online]. Pathways through participation. Available from: www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk [Accessed 6 June 2012].
- Bunting, C. 2006. *Public engagement with the arts: arts Council England's strategic challenges*. London: Arts Council England.
- Bunting, C., et al., 2008. *From indifference to enthusiasm: patterns of arts attendance in England*. London: Arts Council England.
- Caddy, J., Piexoto, T., and McNeil, M. 2007. *Beyond public scrutiny: stocktaking of social accountability in OECD Countries*. Washington, DC: World Bank Institute.
- Community Pride Initiative, 2003. *Slicing up the pie, community involvement in participatory budgeting, Porto Alegre, Brazil* [Online]. Available from: <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/documents/Slicing-20up-20the-20Pie.pdf> [Accessed 10 January 2011].
- DCLG, 2008. *Participatory budgeting: a draft national strategy*. London: Communities and Local Government.
- DCMS, 2006. *Taking part survey* [Online]. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technical-report-taking-part-survey-2005-to-2006-year-1> [Accessed 1 April 2011].
- DCMS, 2008. *Technical Note N11* [Online]. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Available from: www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/Technical_Note_N11_FINAL.pdf [Accessed 1 June 2011].
- DCMS, 2011. *Taking part survey, the national survey of culture, leisure and sport* [Online]. London: DCMS. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taking-part-the-national-survey-of-culture-leisure-and-sport-january-december-2010> [Accessed 2 March 2012].
- Dodd, F., Graves, A., and Taws, K., 2008. *Our creative talent, the voluntary and amateur arts in Britain*. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
- Edgar, D., 2012. *Looking back, moving forwards, state of the arts*. London: Arts Council England.
- Fairclough, N., 2000. *New labour, new language*. London: Routledge.
- Fennell, E., Gavelin, K., and Jackson, R., 2009. *Participatory budgeting and the arts*. London: Involve.
- Frayling, C., 2005. *'The only trustworthy book ...' art and public value*. London: Arts Council England.
- Garnham, N., 2005. From cultural to creative industries. *International journal of cultural policy*, 11, 15–29.
- Giddens, A., 2000. *The third way and its critics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goss, S., 2001. *Making local governance work. Networks, relationships and the management of change*. Houndsmills: Palgrave.
- Gray, C., 2000. *The politics of the art in Britain*. Hampshire: Macmillan Press.
- Gray, C., 2008. Instrumental policies: causes, consequences, museums and galleries. *Cultural trends*, 17, 209–222.
- Griffiths, D., Miles, A., and Savage, M., 2008. The end of the English cultural elite? *The sociological review*, 56, 187–209.
- Habermas, J., 1994. Three normative models of democracy. *Constellations*, 1, 1–10.
- Hatzihrysidis, M. and Bunting, C., 2009. *Public value programme: a wider range of voices*. London: Arts Council England.
- Hay, C., 2007. *Why we hate politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Herz, S. and Ebrahim, A., 2005. *A call for participatory decision making: discussion paper on World Bank-Civil Society Engagement* [online]. Available from: <http://sitere>

- sources.worldbank.org/CSO/Resources/World_Bank_Civil_Society_Discussion_Paper_FINAL_VERSION.pdf.
- Hill, M., 2006. Representin(g): negotiating multiple roles and identities in the field and behind the desk. *Qualitative inquiry*, 12, 926–949.
- Holden, J., 2006. *Cultural value and the crisis of legitimacy*. London: Demos.
- Keaney, E., 2006. *From access to participation, cultural policy and civil renewal*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Lee, D., Oakley, K., and Naylor, R., 2011. ‘The public gets what the public wants’? The uses and abuses of ‘public value’ in contemporary British cultural policy. *International journal of cultural policy*, 17, 289–300.
- Liebowitz, S.J. and Margolis, S.E., 2000. Path dependence. In: B. Bouckaert and G. De Geest, eds. *Encyclopedia of law and economics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 981–998.
- Lowndes, V., 1995. Citizenship and urban politics. In: D. Judge, G. Stoker, and H. Wolman, eds. *Theories of urban politics*. London: Sage, 160–180.
- Lukes, S., 2005. *Power: a radical view*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Matarasso, F., 1997. *Use or ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*. Bournes Green: Comedia.
- McIntosh, G., 2008. *Review of Arts Council England’s regularly funded organisations investment strategy 2007–2008 – lessons learned*. London: Arts Council England.
- McIntosh, G., 2011. *Review of Arts Council England investment process 2010/2011*. London: Arts Council England.
- McMaster, B., 2008. *Supporting excellence in the arts: from measurement to judgement*. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
- Miles, A., 2013. Culture, participation and identity in contemporary Manchester. In: J. Wolff and M. Savage, eds. *Culture in Manchester: institutions and urban change since 1800*. Manchester, NH: Manchester University Press, 176–193.
- Opinion Leader, 2007. *Arts Council England, public value deliberative research*. London: Opinion Leader.
- Ostrom, E., 1996. Crossing the great divide: coproduction, synergy, and development. *World development*, 24, 1073–1087.
- Peck, J., 2009. The creativity fix. *Variant*, 34, 5–9.
- Policy Action Team 10, 1999. *The contribution of sport and the arts*. London: DCMS.
- Robson, C., 1993. *Real world research*. London: Routledge.
- Silverman, D., 2006. *Interpreting qualitative data*. London: Sage.
- Smith, C., 1998. *Creative Britain*. London: Faber and Faber.
- SQW Consulting, 2010. *National evaluation of participatory budgeting in England*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.
- Tusa, J., 2000. *Art matters*. London: Methuen.
- Walmsley, B., 2013. Co-creating theatre: authentic engagement or inter-legitimation? *Cultural trends*, 22, 108–118.



Cyberfactories: how news agencies produce news

David Lee

To cite this article: David Lee (2017) Cyberfactories: how news agencies produce news, International Journal of Cultural Policy, 23:1, 122-126, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2016.1223648](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1223648)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1223648>



Published online: 14 Sep 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 200



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

BOOK REVIEWS

Cyberfactories: how news agencies produce news, by Barbara Czarniawska, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2011, 240 pp., £28 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-85793-912-8

Media independence: working with freedom or working for free?, by James Bennett and Niki Strange, London, Routledge, 2015, 290 pp., £90 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-138-02348-2

The ‘turn’ to researching cultural work over the last decade has been well documented by scholars working in the field (Banks 2007; Hesmondhalgh 2008; Lee 2013; McRobbie 2015). While studies of cultural labour have historically comprised a vital, but at times somewhat peripheral sphere of media and cultural studies, there is little doubt that there has been a significant upsurge in research in this area in recent years. This has occurred alongside an institutional embedding of media and cultural work research, including the creation of international research associations and centres dedicated to its study, the creation of journals, dedicated academic conferences and publicly funded research projects. Research in this area now has its own sub-fields, including media ethnography, journalism production research, the cultural studies of production tradition and the production of culture perspective (see Paterson et al. 2016). The key underlying factors for this growth of the field are theoretical (a growing concern with work in a post-industrial context; sociological concerns with identity, governmentality, social capital and inequality), political (the global rise of creative industries policy-making) and economic (the growth of media and cultural work within the economy).

Research trends in academia are complex, prone to fluctuations, yet there is no sign that this area has ‘peaked’ in popularity. Indeed, significant new research continues to be produced, identifying important new insights and original data. For example, emerging research into inequality and social class within the cultural industries has opened up new avenues of enquiry, with particular political relevance to debates about inequality (e.g. Oakley 2013; Oakley and O’Brien 2016). Another welcome development has been the increasing internationalisation of the field of enquiry, with for example, important research emerging on new media work in Nigeria (Enaholo 2015) and China, (Kennedy and Xia 2014) amongst other locations. So, in many ways we have moved a long way from 2003, when Simon Cottle wrote ‘[i]t is disconcerting how many studies of media output are conducted with a complete disregard for the moment of production and the forces enacted or condenses outside the production domain’ (2003, 5). This concern is still valid, but is arguably less pressing today in the wake of the transformation of the field of cultural production research.

Two recent but very different books, both concerned with cultural work and media industries, but from diverging theoretical and methodological perspectives, illustrate the continued need for detailed empirical work in this area as well as displaying the rich, productive analysis that can emerge from media industries research. Barbara Czarniawska’s *Cyberfactories: How Agencies Produce News* is a

highly detailed study of news agencies, analysing everyday work and information overflow in three news agencies: Swedish TT, Italian ANSA and the worldwide Reuters. *Media Independence: Working with Freedom or Working for Free*, edited by James Bennett and Niki Strange turns its focus on the independent sectors of media production, and is fundamentally concerned with the paradox of freedom and exploitation within these sectors.

Cyberfactories is a study that is fundamentally about ‘overflow’ and how workers in news agencies manage it. Czarniawska is concerned with analysing overflow, assessing what it is, and if it is reached within an organisation, what are the strategies for dealing with it. News production is specifically chosen as a key site for studying overflow because it is argued that it is a phenomenon that is particularly likely to occur within such a setting. In a wider context of information overload, this subject is of particular relevance today, and Czarniawska asks if agencies play the role of gatekeeper, or if they contribute to a more abundant flow of information, particularly as increasingly stories come from citizens as well as professional journalists (Allan 2013). While Czarniawska is interested in the production of news in this book, she is predominantly concerned with theorizing overflow and the increasing role of technology within news production, rather than deliberating on the content that is actually produced. An extended discussion about overflow is set up, drawing on Callon’s notion of framing, which moves beyond the critical discussion of overflow as a negative phenomenon. For Czarniawska, following Callon, it is framing that produces overflow, rather than flow (in other words, when frames are created to categorise and organise information, in itself that process creates distinct conceptual and discursive entities from which information can overflow into other categories).

It is important to note that this is not a typical media studies study (its primary concern is not news content), and it does not offer observations on the profession of journalism. This is the strength of the book, as well as setting the frame for its limitations. Rather, the focus is on the process of news production in news agencies, and what globalisation and digital technology does to journalism. News agencies, for Czarniawska, are seen as mediators, the producers of the news, even if they are merely a link in the production chain. A particularly fascinating aspect of the book is its focus on what the author calls ‘cybernization’ (where machines have a more central role in news production) and ‘cyborgization’ (where workers rely increasingly on machines and technology). This allows the book to add complexity and nuance to simplistic understandings of automation by showing the complex relationship that we have with technologies in the context of contemporary work. These processes, as described in great detail in the book, can be seen to generate intense complexity (both systemic and cognitive) making it impossible for many workers to understand the dynamics, processes and interactions that take place within complex organisations such as a news agency. For example, Reuters is described as an ‘enormous cognitive network performing operations that practically nobody within it is able to grasp, and because they are performed by cyborgs’ (175). The consequences of this are circularity, where information (the products of news agencies) causes a response which then returns to the producers in a feedback loop. Her findings also build on and update Gaye Tuchman’s famous assertion in 1978 that ‘news media set the frame in which citizens discuss public events’ (1978, ix), by arguing that while news agencies do form the public discourse, that process

occurs ‘from the inside, by filling it with forms dictated by their software – software that, to a certain extent, decides the content’.

This is undoubtedly an important book, with significance beyond news agencies, as it provides a powerful, theoretically informed insight into the implications of information overflow and automation in advanced societies. However, in the book’s focus on the process of news production, the question of journalism and its relation to public knowledge seems to have been displaced. In this sense, this is a study that somewhat lacks a normative perspective on news production and why it matters. The book does not claim to be a critical account of media production, rooted in media studies and an understanding of power. Instead it is rooted in the theoretical world of science and technology studies. It explicitly seeks to provide knowledge about ‘organizing rather than journalism’, looking at the cybernization and ‘cyborgization’ of news production. But crucially, what does this mean for journalism, in terms of its role as the ‘fourth estate’ and its role within democratic debate? Such questions are left for other researchers to ask – and it is this sense of normativity that is foregrounded in a welcome way in Bennett and Strange’s edited collection.

Media Independence: Working with Freedom or Working for Free focuses on independent media, across cultural sectors from journalism, cinema, television, music, cyberspace, games, and works with the notion of independence across national boundaries, with chapters on independent media in UK, America (King), Russia (Rodgers), China (Fung et al.) and the Middle East (Khiabany). In the opening chapter, Bennett unpacks the term ‘independent’, and sets out how it has functioned discursively throughout the history of media transformation as a utopian concept, but also as one that has been manipulated and appropriated by powerful commercial and political interests at key junctures. In various contexts, and in different eras, it has come to suggest the ideal of ‘working with freedom’: from state control, from monopoly, from market forces and without fear of persecution. Yet as numerous commentators have argued, it has also come to mask (self) exploitation in media sectors (Gill 2002; Lee 2012), where working with freedom also means working for free; and it has often been a discursive front for the assimilation of counter-cultural autonomous forms of cultural production by monolithic corporate entities.

Therefore, the book is theoretically concerned with media independence as a contested notion, framed in different ways by for different purposes by a variety of social, economic, cultural and political actors. For example, Bennett’s account of UK television highlights the way in which the concept of independence had a vital discursive role to play in the formation of the independent television sector in the UK and continues to do so. Similarly, Hesmondhalgh and Meier show the complexity of the concept of independence in the music industries, where indies are assimilated into major labels, and where notions of alternative music exist alongside highly commercialised and commodified practices.

The sophistication of the collection is apparent from James Bennett’s opening chapter, which illuminates the debate by distinguishing between media independents (referring to specific media formations such as independent cinema, television, games and so on) and media independence, which refers rhetorically to the kinds of qualities that might be enjoyed by media producers operating in conditions of ‘good work’ (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2013). Bennett goes on to argue that independence can be present or contested across four sites: the socio-political, the

industrial, the formal and the rhetorical. This is incredibly useful as it highlights the significance of the discursive/rhetorical mobilisation of the term ‘independent’ and allows us to critically evaluate how the term ‘independent’ emerges and for what purposes. Later on in the book, Hesmondhalgh and Meier’s chapter on the music industry focuses in depth on this issue, considering the emergence of ‘indie’ music in the 1990s, and the current challenges for independence for musicians.

Other work in the book expands the concept of independence across domains and meanings. For example, Jukes and Allan’s chapter considers contemporary shifts in journalism and provides a useful history of the concept of the fourth estate. In arguing why newspaper independence is so vital, it calls for a rethinking of the fourth estate ideals ‘for today’s realities’ of hyper commercialisation and entertainment values. Khiabany’s chapter provides a rare and vital insight into the emergence of independent media during the Arab Spring, and ways in which these news platforms presented narratives of the events that unfolded which came into conflict with mainstream media representations. Fung et al.’s chapter shines a light on the altered meaning of ‘independence’ in China, and the need for contemporary understandings of ‘independence’ to catch up with how the term is mobilised in authoritarian, but modernising political and social contexts. All authors are concerned with the sustainability of independent production in the face of the variegated national and international forces of commercialisation, political repression and labour exploitation. Yet all stress the need for media independence in spite of these structural challenges.

These are two very different books, each with their individual merits. *Cyberfactories* is undoubtedly an impressive piece of scholarship, which provides vital insights into the changing nature of work within a particular sphere. But ultimately there is little sense in the book that the media and cultural industries have a particular political and cultural significance, as sectors which specialise in symbolic production and create cultural goods which have the potential to transform perspectives and generate public good. The changes that Czarniawska identifies can be found across many advanced sectors, from advanced manufacturing, to technology (Lanchester 2015); so while this book is a vital case study into the increasing automation of work, it lacks a sense of the specificity of journalism and the political and public value of journalism. *Media Independence*, by its nature as an edited collection, has less detailed empirical, ethnographic insights to offer. But by identifying a vitally important area of the cultural industries, the collection does scholarship a service by encompassing an impressive critical body of research across a range of creative sectors, by authors who share a collective sense of the public value of culture.

References

- Allan, S. 2013. *Citizen Witnessing: Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis*. Oxford: Wiley.
- Banks, M. 2007. *The Politics of Cultural Work*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Cottle, S. ed. 2003. *Media Organization and Production*. London: Sage.
- Enaholo, P. E. E. 2015. *Cultural Context of Creative Labour: An Empirical Study of new Media Work in Nigeria*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Leeds.
- Gill, R. 2002. “Cool, Creative and Egalitarian? Exploring Gender in Project-based new Media Work in Euro.” *Information, Communication & Society* 5 (1): 70–89.

- Hesmondhalgh, D. 2008. "Cultural and Creative Industries." In *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, edited by T. Bennett and J. Frow, 552–569. London: Sage.
- Hesmondhalgh, D., and S. Baker. 2013. *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*. London: Routledge.
- Kennedy, H., and B. Xia. 2014. "The Role of Chinese Internet Industry Workers in Creating Alternative Spaces." In *Online China: Locating Society in Online Spaces*, edited by P. Marolt and D. K. Herold, 300–321. London: Routledge.
- Lanchester, J. 2015. "The Robots are Coming." *London Review of Books*, 37 (5). Accessed April 21. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n05/john-lanchester/the-robots-are-coming>.
- Lee, D. 2012. "The Ethics of Insecurity: Risk, Individualization and Value in British Independent Television Production." *Television and New Media* 13 (6): 480–497.
- Lee, D. 2013. *Creative Labour in the Cultural Industries*, *Sociopedia.isa* [online]. <http://www.sagepub.net/isa/resources/pdf/CreativeLabour.pdf>.
- McRobbie, A. 2015. *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Oakley, K. 2013. "Making Workers: Higher Education and the Cultural Industries Workplace." In *Cultural Work and Higher Education*, 25–44. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oakley, K., and D. O'Brien. 2016. "Learning to Labour Unequally: Understanding the Relationship between Cultural Production, Cultural Consumption and Inequality." *Social Identities*, 1–16. doi:10.1080/13504630.2015.1128800.
- Paterson, C., D. Lee, A. Saha, and A. Zoellner. 2016. "Production Research – Continuity and Transformation." In *Advancing Media Production Research: Shifting Sites, Methods, and Politics*, edited by C. Paterson, D. Lee, A. Saha and A. Zoellner, 3–19. IACMR. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tuchman, G. 1978. *Making News. A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press.

David Lee

University of Leeds

d.j.lee@leeds.ac.uk

© 2016, David Lee

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1223648>

To defend the revolution is to defend culture. The cultural policy of the Cuban revolution, by Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, Oakland, CA, PM Press, 2015, 398 pp., \$24.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-62963-104-2

In these historic days of the end of the US blockade of Cuba bearded revolutionaries (*barbudos*) share the cover of *Granma*, the main Cuban newspaper, with the smiling face of US President Barack Obama. Interest in Cuba, its past and present, is growing, which makes the book by Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt very timely, particularly due to the author's goal of exploring the cultural policy of the Cuban revolution during first 15–17 years after the revolution of 1959.

Gordon-Nesbitt's book focuses on the importance of culture for the leaders of the revolution, seeking to show that in spite of limited freedom for creative intellectuals at the end of the 1960s and, particularly, in the 1970s, cultural life in the country preserved its revolutionary spirit. The book consists of eight chapters designed around different aspects of cultural politics and time periods, with the main attention paid to the first post-revolutionary years: the first chapter attempts to define the cultural changes in Cuba that resulted from the revolution; the second chapter maps new cultural institutions which were created after the revolution; while the two next chapters deal with the earlier development of culture.



To defend the revolution is to defend culture. The cultural policy of the Cuban revolution

Yulia Gradska

To cite this article: Yulia Gradska (2017) To defend the revolution is to defend culture. The cultural policy of the Cuban revolution, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23:1, 126-128, DOI: [10.1080/10286632.2016.1248954](https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1248954)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1248954>



Published online: 03 Nov 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 197



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

- Hesmondhalgh, D. 2008. "Cultural and Creative Industries." In *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, edited by T. Bennett and J. Frow, 552–569. London: Sage.
- Hesmondhalgh, D., and S. Baker. 2013. *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries*. London: Routledge.
- Kennedy, H., and B. Xia. 2014. "The Role of Chinese Internet Industry Workers in Creating Alternative Spaces." In *Online China: Locating Society in Online Spaces*, edited by P. Marolt and D. K. Herold, 300–321. London: Routledge.
- Lanchester, J. 2015. "The Robots are Coming." *London Review of Books*, 37 (5). Accessed April 21. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n05/john-lanchester/the-robots-are-coming>.
- Lee, D. 2012. "The Ethics of Insecurity: Risk, Individualization and Value in British Independent Television Production." *Television and New Media* 13 (6): 480–497.
- Lee, D. 2013. *Creative Labour in the Cultural Industries*, *Sociopedia.isa* [online]. <http://www.sagepub.net/isa/resources/pdf/CreativeLabour.pdf>.
- McRobbie, A. 2015. *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Oakley, K. 2013. "Making Workers: Higher Education and the Cultural Industries Workplace." In *Cultural Work and Higher Education*, 25–44. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oakley, K., and D. O'Brien. 2016. "Learning to Labour Unequally: Understanding the Relationship between Cultural Production, Cultural Consumption and Inequality." *Social Identities*, 1–16. doi:10.1080/13504630.2015.1128800.
- Paterson, C., D. Lee, A. Saha, and A. Zoellner. 2016. "Production Research – Continuity and Transformation." In *Advancing Media Production Research: Shifting Sites, Methods, and Politics*, edited by C. Paterson, D. Lee, A. Saha and A. Zoellner, 3–19. IACMR. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tuchman, G. 1978. *Making News. A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press.

David Lee

University of Leeds

d.j.lee@leeds.ac.uk

© 2016, David Lee

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1223648>

To defend the revolution is to defend culture. The cultural policy of the Cuban revolution, by Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, Oakland, CA, PM Press, 2015, 398 pp., \$24.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-62963-104-2

In these historic days of the end of the US blockade of Cuba bearded revolutionaries (*barbudos*) share the cover of *Granma*, the main Cuban newspaper, with the smiling face of US President Barack Obama. Interest in Cuba, its past and present, is growing, which makes the book by Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt very timely, particularly due to the author's goal of exploring the cultural policy of the Cuban revolution during first 15–17 years after the revolution of 1959.

Gordon-Nesbitt's book focuses on the importance of culture for the leaders of the revolution, seeking to show that in spite of limited freedom for creative intellectuals at the end of the 1960s and, particularly, in the 1970s, cultural life in the country preserved its revolutionary spirit. The book consists of eight chapters designed around different aspects of cultural politics and time periods, with the main attention paid to the first post-revolutionary years: the first chapter attempts to define the cultural changes in Cuba that resulted from the revolution; the second chapter maps new cultural institutions which were created after the revolution; while the two next chapters deal with the earlier development of culture.

A separate chapter is dedicated to the cultural congress of 1968. Only one of the last chapters is dedicated to the period of the early 1970s and deals with the 'grey years' of 1971–1976, when prominent cultural figures were persecuted.

Chapter 2 is called 'Revolutionary rebuilding' and is dedicated to the new institutions of cultural policy (predominantly focusing on The Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industry (ICAIC), Casa de las Americas and the National Council of Culture). While the author stresses the importance of the ideological orientation of resisting the commercialisation of culture and the Soviet didactical approach to culture (41), she does not compare Cuban developments with the Soviet cultural revolution of the 1920s–1930s (Kelly 2001) or East European cultural policies after the Second World War. This is unfortunate, because if regarded in the context of the development of Soviet cinematography of the 1920s (Sandomirskaja 2008), the ICAIC's activities of presenting and explaining land reform and urban housing reform to Cuban citizens through films would not appear to be particularly unique. The same can be said about Cuban mobile cinema (54) that could be easily compared with early 1920s Soviet practices of *kinoperedvizhka* (mobile cinema for peasants). Furthermore, the politics of free distribution of copies for educational purposes (disregarding copyright regulations) and state programmes for changing everyday habits and consciousness (114, 115) discussed in Chapter 3 could also benefit from comparison with the many similar studies in Soviet history.

In making her argument Gordon-Nesbitt has collected archive materials and created a detailed appendix with a chronology of the most important events in Cuban cultural life. However, while bringing into discussion a lot of interesting episodes from the life of creative intellectuals and leaders of such important cultural institutions as the Casa de las Americas or ICAIC, the book leaves its reader with a kind of unclear but persistent feeling of dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction, most probably, is connected to the concept of cultural policy itself, which Gordon-Nesbitt uses to refer mainly to the high level intellectuals responsible for its production. Furthermore, although the author shows that Cuban cultural policy was developing in the context of the Cold War and was embedded in broader cultural processes in the world, primarily in Latin America and Europe, she does not engage in discussion with other important books dedicated to similar issues (e.g. Artaraz 2009). Indeed, it is exactly this broader contextualisation of Cuban cultural policy in the 1960s–1970s that needs much more attention and elaboration.

In her book Gordon-Nesbitt suggests that while the relationship between culture and the state was particularly important, Cuba somehow managed to escape the state's dictatorship in the sphere of culture. This is taken as evidence that Cuban cultural producers' agency was mainly situated in the creative field, which was rather independent from the political, economic and social environment. The fact that Cuba never accepted the Soviet idea of socialist realism is presented as one of the important indicators of the autonomy of the Cuban cultural field. Discussing the conflict between freedom of expression and the revolutionary duty of intellectuals, something which is almost unavoidable in the case of governmental intervention in cultural life, Gordon-Nesbitt discerns several different tendencies in the state control of culture that characterise different periods. However, according to Gordon-Nesbitt, most Cuban artists could choose their style and manner of artistic expression rather freely, even during the notorious 'grey years'. This freedom was possible as long as artists followed the line of the revolution (136). Nevertheless, it also has to be noted that Gordon-Nesbitt also observes that it is possible to speak not about just 5, but 15 'grey years' that lasted until 1983 (29).

If the situation of artistic freedom is not particularly clearly accounted in this book, the diversity of cultural contexts inside Cuba is likewise underdeveloped. The reader learns about the development of Cuban popular culture, such as the campaign of alphabetisation, and of the programme of cultural training for non-professional artists (*aficionados*). But other dimensions of popular culture, such as the American/Soviet/global/Latin American hybridity that is so characteristic of Cuban development (Loss and Prieto 2012) is almost absent from the analysis. Instead of analysing hybridity or, for instance, the cultural influence of racism (compare with Law 2012), or even religion, Gordon-Nesbitt prefers to

externalise the issues faced by the communist Cuban culture by attributing the bulk of the problems of Cuban cultural policy in the 1970s to the Soviet dictatorship.

In spite of these limitations this book will be a very interesting read for anybody interested in twentieth century Cuban culture and in the role of Cuba in cultural discussions on the American continent. The book contains a lot of pictures and presents some interesting detailed material, particularly pertaining to relationships between the state and culture during the first 10 years after the revolution. Hopefully this study will inspire further debate and research. Due to the growing interest in Cuba and Cuban cultural history, we need a history of Cuban cultural politics written from the perspective of everyday life, cultural transformation and conflict. Such a focus could offer a different picture of Cuban cultural policy, one centred not so much on top-down decisions about the organisation of cultural life, but rather focused on reception and implementation.

References

- Artaraz, Kepa. 2009. *Cuba and Western Intellectuals since 1959*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kelly, Catriona. 2001. *Refining Russia. Advice Literature, Polite Culture and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Law, Ian. 2012. *Red Racisms. Racism in Communist and Post-Communist Contexts*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Loss, Jacqueline, and Jose Manuel Prieto, eds. 2012. *Caviar with Rum. Cuba-USSR and the Post-Soviet Experience*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sandomirskaja, Irina. 2008. "One Sixth of the World: Avant-Garde Film, the Revolution of Vision, and the Colonization of the USSR Periphery during the 1920s." In *From Orientalism to Postcoloniality*, edited by Kerstin Olofsson, 8–31. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola.

Yulia Gradska
 Samtidshistoriska Institutet, Södertörns Högskola, Huddinge, Sweden
 yulia.gradskova@gmail.com

© 2016 Yulia Gradska
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1248954>