

## **A Discussion Paper on the Four Founding Campaign Objectives of the NCFA.**

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This discussion paper is published in advance of a series four conversations that the NCFA has invited me to curate in 2013. The NCFA Colloquia will challenge the current state of the relationship between arts and arts policy.<sup>1</sup>

To put this discussion paper in context, it is structured into four parts that have been organised directly in response to the four founding objectives of the NCFA, which are:

*1 To work to ensure that everyone in Ireland can experience and participate in the arts.*

*2 To work with others to build an evidence-base that will inform policy and allow the arts to innovate and reach a wider audience.*

*3 To capture more fully the value of the arts in Ireland, working hand in hand with the arts sector, artists, the public, and Government.*

*4 To build a deeper understanding of the mutual values of the arts and education and seek achievable means to embed the arts in education working closely with educational partners.*

In commissioning this paper, the NCFA has asked me to adopt a fully independent position and the following essay is therefore intended as a personal response to these founding objectives. Specifically, the paper reflects on a number of inter-related concepts raised by the objectives, touching on core questions and issues of cultural policy. For example, concepts, issues and questions raised by these objectives include: the question of the public and the arts (definitions, interactions, perceptions, understandings, contexts, expectations etc); the concept and question of evidence and evidence-building (normative views, understandings, imperatives, agendas, impacts, policy cycles, ideology, advocacy); the possibility of establishing shared values,

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<sup>1</sup> See the NCFA Strategy on Research and NCFA Position on Research for details about the National Campaign for the Arts' arguments and proposals; both available at [www.ncfa.ie](http://www.ncfa.ie)

collective intentions, or understandings across the arts (languages, honesty, value systems, legitimacy); and finally, the question of education (imperatives, pressures and expectations).

These interpretations form the basis for this short discussion paper and aim to stimulate debate, rather than address more pragmatic or administrative aspects of policy. They are therefore intended to inform the colloquia and to generate discussion, but not presage the individual contributions of the speakers at each colloquy. Equally, this paper does not intend to 'prove' or provide 'evidence', rather it takes a wider view of interpreting, analysing and provoking questions around key issues impacting on these very pertinent (if recurring) questions. The term cultural policy rather than arts policy is largely used here to denote the wider domain of cultural policy, unless referencing specific 'arts' policies. In order to start this paper however, a consideration of the public is needed.

## 1.

### **A Public Conversation: The Eternal Question of Participation, Access and Engagement.**

*Keywords: 'the public', engagement, hierarchies, expectations, apathy.*

From the outset, the question of engaging the public in a 'deeper conversation' about the arts raises a number of issues, starting with the concept of the public itself. The question of the public and policy (whose etymology derives from the origin of 'public' via the Greek *Polis*), as synonymous concepts, is without doubt the core question of, and issue for, all public policy. What is 'public' therefore, how public are our arts policies, and are arts policies made for the public or should they be made by the public?

Within a policy context, "the public" and the "public interest" have historically been conceived of as a wholly identifiable, singular and knowable entity, rather than a fragmented and contested construct (Parsons, 1995, p171). While this makes things easier for policy makers, other views of the public contend that there are many publics and counter publics, not least of which divide along the lines of those that are interested in the arts and those that are uninterested in the arts. This gives rise to questions of which public (as well as 'public goods' and 'public interest') is being served and how any one policy can represent all publics (a particularly political question for specifically *cultural* policies). The public, therefore, in cultural, as in all public policy, is a *loaded* term.

However, there are other more specific issues with the term public within cultural policy, these are: its (cultural policy's) historic associations with elitism and serving of certain cultural publics (via 'high culture' and 'arts policy' interpretations of 'cultural policy'); awkward issues raised by participation studies (underlining class-based consumption, cultural capital, taste and the role of education); historical questions of the success of access and participation policies (and compatibility issues with concepts of 'access' and 'excellence'); the low status of cultural ministries in government (Gray, 2010); enduring difficulties with democracy in cultural policies (apropos of the prevalence of technical or expert decision-making committees in the arts); questions around whether the focus of cultural policy should be artists or the public (Quinn, 1998, p 126); and as above, which public is being referred to and where do non-participating publics fit in?

The concept of 'the public' therefore, albeit complex, is the "starting point" for any discussion of governance or public policy. As a result, the question of engaging the public in a 'deeper conversation' about the arts (draft NCFA strategy document), suggests a number of things: that we know the public, that the public are *already* in a conversation about the arts, and/or that the public *should* be in a conversation about the arts. What are the grounds on which we base these evangelical questions, espousing the transformational, social and economic capacities of the arts? What kind of conversation is needed, to what aim is it directed (understanding, engagement, funding), and why should a conversation take place? There is also the question of who is understood as part of this 'conversation', the cultural sector, the outside public, and/or the Department? What values inform the suggestion as to why this conversation should take place at all, *other than the traditional premise that culture is "good for you"* (Belfiore and Bennett, 2006, p 33).

In ascertaining the thorny question of what conversation, if any, is taking place in relation to the public and the arts, while it may not be possible to conclusively or empirically answer this question, it is interesting to consider a number of indicative factors, beginning with the nature of research. Reports on public involvement in the arts are routinely disappointing (from a quantitative view) when compared with participation in the wider creative industries, and are often criticised as inherently problematic in terms of how they are conducted and what methods and samples are used as the basis for the research (Reeves, 2002; Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). Questions are particularly raised in relation to the independence (from the research) of those advocating bodies commissioning the surveys, despite both the lack of interest in conducting arts research outside of the arts sector and the perpetual imperatives behind research in the first place (often linked to funding and survival). This creates a 'catch 22'

situation of sorts, whereby arts organisations are damned if they do conduct research (are the reports reliable?) and damned if they don't (they may not survive if they don't). What does this mean for how these surveys are perceived and received, how trusted are they and how can the cultural sector avoid this methodological trap?

Other more specific factors point to how the arts are publicly and politically positioned in Ireland. From a ministerial point of view, statements from Ireland's cultural policies seem to reflect the view that culture is good for societies and important to national economies and identities ("our strong cultural identity" holds "a distinct and intrinsic value" ... "known the world over").<sup>2</sup> Equally, the theme of the arts as a national reputational enhancer or emollient are also key, demonstrated in calls for the arts to "repair the damage" done to Ireland's reputation by the recent economic downturn.<sup>3</sup> These supportive views are also demonstrated in Ministers' claims of "Ireland's reputation as a cradle for the arts" (O' Donoghue, 2005, n.p.), statements that culture and creativity are "at the core of our status, our well-being as a society and our success as a nation" (Brennan, 2008, n.p.), that Ireland is where "creativity is seen as a crucial bedrock" (Minister for Arts Sport and Tourism, 2009, n.p.) and, descriptions of culture as the "primary driver of Ireland's global attractiveness as a centre of creativity and innovation and as a destination for tourism and business" (Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, 2008c, p. 10). Notwithstanding whether these statements align with certain cultural value systems over others, these benign narratives of rebuilding brand Ireland, restoring its success, and salvaging its lost international reputation, which are by no means unique to Ireland, give the impression that culture and the arts are highly valued here. Equally, industrial references to the importance of culture and creativity (via the Smart Economy and Innovation Island initiatives), the impassioned invoking of culture at Ireland's economic forums (Farmleigh), and Ireland's international reputation for culture, suggest a highly mobilised state approach to supporting the culture sector.

However, though all policies are strategic, these uses for the arts raise questions as to the dominance of what might be perceived as non-arts outcomes proffered in arts policies (as above), if compared with for example, health outcomes in relation to health policies or economic outcomes in relation to economic policies, as well as the balance of types of outcomes and value-systems in policies. Equally, given that cultural policy in Ireland has been described as marked by "benign neglect" (Howlin, 2013, n.p.), it may not come as a surprise that the perception of the culture/arts ministry in government, and by the media, is highly problematic. This refers to

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<sup>2</sup> See URL: <http://www.globalirishforum.ie/PressRel.aspx?yr=2012>, accessed 31st July, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Available: <http://theatreforumconference2011.wordpress.com/> [Accessed 25 June 2011].

broadsheet descriptions detailing how the career path of a new culture minister was cast in “a negative light”, represented a “poisoned chalice”, “ the end of the political road” and was the “last step before departure from Cabinet” (Bacik, 2008,n.p.) a number of years back.

More recently, another Minister’s reaction to her appointment was so negative that it was described as like a “nasty disease” (O’Toole, 2010, n.p.) and widely interpreted as “a demotion” (O’Toole, 2010, n.p.; Stokes, 2010, n.p.). This response is also borne out by the downward career trajectory of six (former) arts and culture Ministers following their departure (none was awarded another ministry and three resigned from politics).<sup>4</sup> Frequent changes in the names of arts or cultural ministries (comprising of combinations of Arts and Culture, Heritage, the Gaeltacht, the Islands, as well as Sport and Tourism), may also indicate an equivocation in relation to ‘culture’ if not the arts.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, recent accusations of a degree of state cynicism in relation to the honesty of intentions behind the broadly cultural/tourism event of ‘The Gathering’ by (ironically) by cultural ambassador Gabriel Byrne, indicates a lack of consensus as to how governments manage and package major cultural events.

Equally, other factors indicate a certain stasis in relation to both research and the quality of public debate on the arts in Ireland. These are: that there has been little significant investment in research at cultural policy level here (if compared with other similar size countries); newspaper reports typically ignore or polarise accounts of the arts as wholly positive (usually naive narratives of how the arts has transformed something/someone or made it/them more beautiful), or wholly negative (usually damning wastes of tax-payer’s money); there is a paucity of public platforms or debates on the arts in Ireland, and of course, the negative means-ends discourses surrounding funding decisions in relation to cultural institutions (such as the

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<sup>4</sup> The three ministers who resigned were Sile de Valera, Martin Cullen and John O Donoghue. Founding Minister Michael D Higgins (1993 – 1997), on retiring from the ministry following the coalition (Labour, Fine Gael and Progressive Democrats) party loss in the general election of 1997, is the only ex arts/culture Minister to have remained in politics. He became the labour Party spokesperson on Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, was re-elected to Dail Eireann in 2007 and 2011. Sile de Valera, who occupied the ministry from 1997 – 2002, lost her seat in the general elections of 2002, became a Junior Minister and retired from politics in 2005. John O Donoghue (2002 – 2008), was appointed Ceann Comhairle or chairperson of the government, following the elections of 2008, and resigned in 2009. Seamus Brennan died shortly after leaving office, Martin Cullen (2008 – 2010), resigned from his Ministerial office and as a TD in 2010, Mary Hanafin (2010 – 2011), withdrew from public life following losing her seat in the election of 2011.

<sup>5</sup> There have been seven Ministers (including the current Minister) for the Department since its foundation in 1993, and four who have spent less than a year in office and between 2007 and 2011 ( Seamus Brennan, Martin Cullen, Mary Hanafin and most recently, Jimmy Deenihan).

McCarthy report).<sup>6</sup> Cumulatively, these can be argued as pointing to a lack of sophistication in wider public sphere arts conversations.

In considering the nature of public discussion on, or engagement with, the arts in Ireland therefore, these factors (lower than wished for attendance figures, negative perception and changes in the name of the cultural ministry, lack of research, media dismissals) are unsettling. As such, the concept of negativity or worse – apathy – might be relevant to how the arts are perceived by the vast majority in Ireland. In the wake of the international financial crisis, and Ireland’s response to its new financial position, apathy is a word that this country can wholeheartedly relate to, repeatedly voting in the same parties, and apparently alien to the culture of protest, made all the more salient by putative acquiescence to repeated state and religious scandals and more recently, banking accountability. The question of whether there is political apathy (via the ministry) towards the arts is also a legitimate one, particularly given the response to ministerial appointments outlined above, the low status of arts or cultural ministries in governments and the career aspirations of politicians. One of the key questions here is whether political apathy reflects public apathy (or vice versa), or is apathy reflexive?

Before leaving a consideration of arts/cultural ministries or departments however, particularly in relation to their status in government and the impact this has on public perceptions of the arts, their negotiating situation in government needs to be mentioned. One of the key roles of arts ministries (as all ministries) and policy, is to elicit trust and support from the wider sector, a difficult endeavour given the sometimes fraught relationship between the stakeholders of arts policy and thus policy research, suggested to be the ministry, the practitioner and the public (Holden, 2006). However, this triangle of stakeholders misses out on one other key stakeholder, the wider government. In negotiating the making of policy and securing of central arts budgets, wider government or more powerful ministries (ie the finance ministry) ‘buy-in’ to budgets and policies are critical to the success or efficacy of arts ministries, indicating the often unacknowledged chain of persuasion and pressure that works both up and down the stakeholder network. This was illustrated recently in comments from Britain’s culture secretary, Maria Miller. In addition to Miller asserting that in order to “fight the corner” for culture as a “commodity” the ministry’s focus “must be on culture’s economic impact” , she also referred to the critical need to generate trust and support or “traction” from her government “colleagues” (Higgins, 2013, n.p.). This demonstrates the range of pressures working from within government beyond that of the culture or arts ministry itself, and suggests that in considering public engagement and perceptions of the arts, those that are not necessarily

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<sup>6</sup> This refers to the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes set up in 2008, whose work, when published, became informally known as the McCarthy Report.

engaged or interested in the arts are also represented in central and non arts policy departments (as well as politicians).

From these indicators, what is to be gleaned about the current state of the arts “conversation” in Ireland in particular? What can be said of who constitutes the public, and how they are, or can be engaged with the arts (as defined in the Arts Act)?<sup>7</sup> In addition, what is and what can be the arts community’s response to reports on arts attendances, particularly as it compares to the much greater non-subsidised cultural and creative industries (notwithstanding the trickle-down effect of arts subsidy)? What do low arts attendance figures say about the nature and rationale of public subsidy? (i.e. unpopularity = subsidy), and how do we feel about the way the arts is defined in Ireland (in a ‘high culture’ sense), in the context of the belated but growing policy interest in the creative industries here? What impact will the new policy area of the creative industries have on arts policy, and who might manage it, is it a future ally or rival for arts policy in Ireland? And finally, what are the implications of the economically inflected and repeated uses of ‘creative’, ‘creativity’, ‘innovation’ and ‘entrepreneurialism’ in cultural discourses (via academies, courses and reports)?

Many of these questions represent key areas of research and ‘evidence’ for those in cultural or arts policy, most particularly in relation to public participation rates and practices (The Arts Council of Ireland, 2006). These reports and evidences are typically used to help argue for changes in policies, financing, or simply increase understanding about the sector we work in. The concept and use of ‘evidence’ within cultural policy therefore, is far from straightforward and will be considered next.

## 2.

### **Evidence**

*Keywords: ideology, disinterest, discourse and power, state and longevity, civil servants.*

“[...] the exercise of power and the desire of policy makers for the maintenance and enhancement of the prevailing order and of their own status within it can short-circuit the thorough use of the available evidence.” (Stevens, 2011).

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<sup>7</sup> The Second Arts Act of Ireland defines the Arts as: any “creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture, and includes any medium when used for those purposes”. See: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2003/en/act/pub/0024/sec0002.html#sec2> [Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> April].

As suggested above, though evidence in a cultural policy context can be applied to any number of interests or purposes, it has been predominantly used in relation to quantifiable activity, specifically the economies of culture, social inclusion, as well as audience attendances and participation rates. The origins of normative evidence-creation in culture and the arts, essentially reflects a series of management 'turns' that informed policy 'reforms' in the financially constrained contexts of the late 1980s and early 1990s, predominantly in the UK, but also in Ireland. These new functions for arts and cultural policies highlighted the managerial imperative behind (and pressures on) arts and culture sectors to behave like other policy sectors in justifying themselves and becoming more accountable, as well as attempting to gain greater traction within governments. Terms such as 'evidence' have therefore become commonplace and are consistent with management terms such as 'investment' and 'return', purportedly empowering the culture sector as professional and enterprising rather than supplicant and disempowered sectors.

As a result, the emphasis on evidence has a strong claim to neutrality and independence and appears to offer a democratic, meritocratic and importantly, convincing mechanism of persuasion (within government). As suggested above, evidence also tactically aligns cultural policy with other policy sectors, framing it as a sector responsible and accountable to the public in the same way as any other. Equally, evidence provides a comfort factor for those making policy, because they can point to it as a rational driving factor behind decisions, creating distance between civil servants/politicians, the focus of policies and decisions. Within the scope of what we mean by evidence however, are 'good' evidences and 'bad' evidences, which are worth clarifying here. Evidence-based policy, apparently driven by 'hard' data, rather than ideological or political imperatives, is generally held up as best practice by all sectors. This is particularly so when compared with advocacy and less quantitative, empirical or 'scientific' reports, the views of experts, and the pejoratively framed concept of policy-based evidence or research.

In contrast, policy-based evidence is evidence that is viewed as dependent rather than independent of political agenda and therefore explicitly (rather than implicitly) hegemonic, as well as 'unscientific'. Not surprisingly, this kind of evidence is decried in cultural policy circles and scholarship, on the basis that it follows the politics (and potentially money) rather than the objective evidences. However, policy-based evidence is a tactical reality acknowledged by policy makers (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2009c, p 9), and though apparently bad practice, is not necessarily more ideologically led than its counterpart, evidence-based policy. Evidence-based policy can be viewed as ideological or at least flawed on the basis of one department, politician, civil servant or agency being responsible for the decision that evidence of something is needed,

pointing to an agenda or policy they wish to pursue (one of the main problems in relation to arts sector commissioning evidence in the first place).

However, evidence in cultural policies has typically represented quantitative or economic evidence and has become part of the widespread conversation about positive and negative 'instrumentalism' (or using culture as an instrument to achieve something non-cultural), suggesting the perception of good or bad uses for culture. Evidence therefore typically points to the apparently unstoppable framing of cultural benefit or value as singularly economic and social. Though social benefits may appear more laudable, they often refer to social cohesion, forming part of transformative agendas for marginalised typically urban areas, and are ultimately intended to generate economic spin offs from making places more liveable and thus ultimately economic. Equally, these social benefits contrast with internal social benefits, which might be considered artistically instrumental, and are directed at evaluating or auditing the personal experience of and engagement with the arts.

Notwithstanding the methodologies developed to describe other kinds of evidences more concerned with the individual's encounter with, and the individual impact of, the arts (McCarthy, Ondaatje and Zakaras, 2005), it is unclear whether the status of this kind of (internal or intrinsic) evidence is as high, or as persuasive as other (external or extrinsic) economic or social evidences. The overwhelming emphasis on the latter, together with advocacy-oriented research, can ultimately be seen as indicative of the poor position of cultural ministries and cultural policy's dependency on, and proximity to, scarce central government funding.

Ultimately in addressing the paucity of research information in a country like Ireland, the question must be asked of what kind of evidence is needed (do we need a balance of *evidences*), how do we understand and contextualise this evidence (intrinsically or extrinsically), what is the status of long-term (necessarily expensive and therefore rare) versus short term evidences, how do we reconcile questions over the methodologies applied in evidence-gathering (i.e. not taking into account comparative investment in other sectors when evaluating economic evidence), and is there a consensus on the purpose evidence serves and to whom it is directed (the public? the state?). Equally, does 'better' evidence (depending on what we mean by this) lead to better policy, given the long cycle of policy-making and the 'moment-in-time' evidence on which it is built. In light of arguably under-resourced cultural agencies, does evidence get serious attention and does it actually make any difference to policy? Can evidence lead to a limited interpretation of value and lock relationships into a restrictive expectation/delivery cycle, creating an inextricable relationship between evidence (as well as research) and advocacy (which cannot claim to be neutral or disinterested) (Selwood, 2002, n.p.)? While few would

disagree with the view that evidence, or at least documentation, provides information, some would argue that it does not present a conclusive image of what is going on within cultural activity and can be problematic when viewed in isolation from wider contexts of understanding, particularly in relation to its limitations and in relation to other valuations of culture. How to reconcile this view and these issues with democratic and publicly accountable policy needs, is a key question for all cultural policies.

### 3.

#### **The Value of the Arts in Ireland: the Arts Sector, Artists, the Public, and Government**

*Keywords: collective intentions, language, cultural value, honesty, legitimacy/trust, success, and competition.*

The question of 'cultural value' informs and is key to evidence, whereby value systems can determine what is considered evidence (i.e. social and economic) and what is less so (cultural), particularly in relations to the 'responsibilities' of the subsidised arts. Though there are a number of attempts to describe 'cultural value', a now common term in UK cultural policy, it often refers to crucial agreements between the tactical needs/values of the politician and the policymaker, the putatively artistic/cultural needs /values of the cultural practitioner and the audience/participant needs/values (suggested to be artistic or at least not economic or social) of the public (Holden, 2006, p59).<sup>8</sup> The term 'cultural value' was deliberately constructed in the course of the 2000s to create a legitimising cultural analogy to the concept of 'public value' (with its managerial overtones), to garner political traction for cultural ministries, as well as an attempt at creating a shared language for culture, in the hope of establishing a clear mandate for cultural policy. Definitions of public value are legion, but can be considered as involving "contingent" valuation, or the willingness of the public to pay for the service/policy (Frey, 2003, p 20), the capability of the service/policy, and crucially, the legitimacy or trust in the service/policy (Lee et al., 2011, p 290; Keaney, 2006, p 13). Though 'public value' is arguably abused or at least over-used in political rhetoric as a persuasive device, it has formed the basis for thinking about cultural value. As such, along with evidence, 'cultural value' aims to suggest the democratic nature of why states support culture, and more pragmatically, provide an

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<sup>8</sup> This definition of cultural value reflects economist David Throsby's account which rests on a balance between economic and cultural or intrinsic value, defining intrinsic value as "aesthetic, spiritual, social, historical, symbolic and authenticity value" as well as "ideas about pricelessness" (Keaney, 2006, p31) and contrasts with an emphasis on cultural rights (ethics) and sustainability issues (Reeves, 2002, p36-37; Ministry of Education and Culture 2010c).

“acceptable” framework for funding decisions (DCMS, 2010, p5) “commensurable with other calls on the public purse” (DCMS, 2010, p9).

The creation of this term was also intended to hand (back) power to the cultural sector in terms of a shared language to describe value in the arts (and increase trust amongst the stakeholders), a key factor in commissioning ‘evidences’ in the first place. Significantly, attempts to develop more ‘appropriate’ languages to describe culture from a cultural perspective have been noted by British politicians in claims that they have “enough reasons to support culture on its own merits to stop apologising for it by speaking only of it in terms of other agendas” (Jowell 2004, p. 17 cited in Gray, 2007, p206), claims from media commentators that “it is almost impossible to defend art honestly” (Jones, 2012, n.p.), statements from policy researchers concerning a “lack of concern with truth”, or to put it more bluntly, the prevalence of “bullshit” in cultural policy (Belfiore, 2008, p 1), and senior arts figures in the UK demanding a “unique language of the arts” (Tusa, 2011, n. p.). Notwithstanding the difficulties in knowing or agreeing key ideological and normative concepts such as “honesty/ly”, the “truth” and “unique”, the message here is clear: that we need to be careful but also sincere in how we frame cultural policy conversations, so that both pragmatic policy contexts, as well as other value systems and languages are taken into account.

With this in mind, it is easy to see how difficult it might be to reach consensus in relation to value and value systems (which are value-laden), particularly when value can simultaneously mean value as both price and priceless (Miller, 2005, p1122). This perhaps neatly sums up the competing mandates of cultural policies to satisfy what might lazily be described as public, cultural (sector) and government needs. In this respect, cultural value as an attempt to reduce the vastly complex concept of the value of culture, through the ambiguity of the term value, may counteractively represent a reductive “bottom-line” approach, failing by its own criteria “as a means to add value” (Miller, 2005, p 1130). However, as policy analyst Sara Selwood has commented, “it is no good trying to relate all the value of arts and culture to monetary valuations, and equally unhelpful to try to justify the arts as some kind of special case, different from all other spending priorities and subject to unique criteria” (Selwood, cited in DCMS, 2010, p 13). Nevertheless, questions remain as to how to reconcile different value systems in cultural policy, and the non-cultural outputs proffered through it, which may somewhat undermine Selwood’s suggestion that the arts are no different to other policy areas.

The suggestion of subjectivity at the heart of many of these questions also raises the perennial question of determinations of ‘excellence’ and ‘quality’ in arts decisions. Subjectivity here

should not be interpreted as inexpert, unfounded, unverifiable or lacking in credibility, rather it is an acknowledgment of the extent to which, ultimately, individual judgment is brought to bear in arts decisions, based on the necessarily unscientific, amorphous and shifting nature of the arts (as expressions of shifting humanity), even with the formulation of identifiable and tangible criteria. As such (and arguably), determining quality, though a highly rigorous and expert process, while important for accountability purposes and to consider a variety of judgments, always take place in the context of decisions that might always be otherwise. This is not to disavow concepts such as 'quality', but rather to suggest that these concepts are at all times context-laden. This paper will conclude with a consideration of education, a function of government that is arguably at the heart of understandings, participation, and activity in the arts, and in this way links back to the first objective, public engagement.

#### 4.

#### Education

*Keywords: contexts, alignments, instrumentalism and power plays.*

Few would argue that education is central to the putative 'health' (or active participation) of the arts, given the key role played by education in affirming and forming cultural tastes and experiences (Bennett and Silva 2006). Equally, if the arts are valued in societies, as the font of formative experiences, education must be key to subsequent adult arts participation. Indeed, just as education is a UN human right,<sup>9</sup> initiatives like Agenda 21, promoting the "coordination between cultural and education policies"<sup>10</sup> and 'Cultural Rights',<sup>11</sup> implicitly place education and access as central cultural rights and key to issues of sustainability. From an Irish perspective, after significant work over many years, recent inroads (December, 2012) into this agenda has been achieved in the form of a "practical" Charter for education. This charter has been developed between the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Arts Council and

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<sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/right-to-education/> [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> March 2013].

<sup>10</sup> See:

[http://www.agenda21culture.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=44&I](http://www.agenda21culture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=44&I) [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> March 2013].

<sup>11</sup> Unesco's right to culture, or 'cultural rights' are "seen as part of civil rights relating to: freedom of expression; right to and responsibility for cultural heritage; right to free practice of art and culture and to creative work; right to protect the intellectual and material benefits accruing from scientific, literary and artistic production; right to participate in cultural life and right to equally accessible and available cultural, library and information and leisure services; right to choose one's own culture; right to the development and protection of culture; respect for culture and its autonomy and for cultural identity. See the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe. URL: <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/ethics-human-rights.php>In, accessed September 15<sup>th</sup> 2011.

educational authorities.<sup>12</sup> While it remains to be seen how the charter achieves greater arts or cultural participation, and crucially, how it impacts on residual claims of elitism in the arts (Bonnar Keenleyside, 2000), the suggestion of an implicit 'contract' between the funded (whether artist or arts organisation) and the state, raises questions of whether all artists are inherently educators and / or whether contracts can be fulfilled by the simple production of publically available culture.

However, there are other issues pertinent to considering education and culture together. Many countries have used the 'soft' power of education with culture as a means to self-determination and identity formation. This reflexive use of education and culture acknowledges the inherently educational ethos of the arts and cultural ethos of education, as collective generators of meaning, knowledge skill, as well as modes of communication. As such, education and arts discourses are often interchangeable in terms of their posited role in societies: invoking concepts of citizenship, democracy, civil society, agency, identity, and latterly, the economy. The similarities between education and culture therefore, results in both a shared set of values and imperatives, but also pressures to deliver creative workers and in particular, economies and a labour pool. Educationally, this is the case at both primary and secondary school levels, as suggested in cultural policy discourses of the importance of creativity in education for generating labour market skills, but also third and fourth level, where students are closer to entering the world of work.

To illustrate these parallels, recent UK discussions of the role of education in government are notable. As a key feature of human capital theory and the knowledge society (a key industrial agenda in Ireland through the Innovation Task Force and Smart Economy agendas), both concerned with the creation of value through highly skilled and educated workers, the question of the purpose of education and education policy within society, whether that be serving the market, positing the individual learner as an employee/entrepreneur in development, or positing education as a wider space for questioning and considering important issues, can be seen to reflect key problematics of arts and cultural policy.<sup>13</sup> As in cultural or arts policies, the knowledge economy has come to dominate education discourse, with the UK positing

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<sup>12</sup> See: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Arts-In-Education-Charter.pdf>[Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> March 2013].

<sup>13</sup> Education policy often shares a Ministerial portfolio with culture (i.e. Finland). See also New Zealand, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, URL: <http://www.government.nl/ministries/ocw>, accessed 5th July, 2012., Austria, Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, URL <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/austria.php>, accessed 5th July, 2012. Netherlands, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, URL <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/netherlands.php>, accessed 5th July, 2012..

universities as at the “center of the knowledge economy”, and Ireland, the “third side of the iron triangle of government and industry”, and “an essential component in the new labour market system” (Kenny et al., 2009, p28, p29). Also like culture, as part of the economisation of education, universities are claimed to “function more like cost-cutting retailers” “competing on price” in order to “equip’ ‘young’ people to get jobs” and to “contribute to ‘growth’”, rather than represent places of learning (Collini, 2012, pp, 2- 4).

Equally, the question of what education is ‘for’ resonates with questions of what culture is ‘for’; it implies a familiar ‘means-end’ rationalism, and the attribution of non-educational outputs to education policy, mirroring the non-cultural outputs posited for cultural policies referred to above. Like cultural institutions, the pressures on universities to fulfil “admirable” civic and social goals (through discrete approaches rather than long term outcomes) have been claimed as undermining the open enquiry they are primarily intended to serve (Collini, 2012, pp, 2- 4.). Similarly, universities are asked to consider students as a means to generate money or investment, using the most efficient or fewest resources, rather than inculcating understanding in those students, arguably its core function. Also, by positing education as a consumer or service-provider, its status as a ‘public good’ is effectively undermined. In this context, the claim that “what lies at the heart of a university is closer to the nature of a museum or gallery than is usually allowed” or that “universities would be comfortable with” (Collini, 2010, pp 2- 4), is instructive for what it reveals about the similarities of both sectors, but also attitudes to cultural institutions. Thus, though some might view difficulties with education and culture’s relationship with the market as elitist, these demands disavow both the knowable and unknowable, wider and longer-term benefits to societies that are arguably (until we have good enough evidence) incrementally accrued from both education and culture.

However, while there are obvious mutualities between education and culture, and while these similarities suggest a natural alignment, caution needs to be applied in considering the two together. This refers to the power plays between the two sectors, where arguably, education, being more tightly aligned to the economy, has a greater role within governments, and unequivocally so if considered in relation to financing. Education is typically cast as the backbone of a country’s status and critically, economic success, and tends to be more readily, if not “unquestioningly”, accepted as a “public good” than culture or the arts (Holden, 2007, p 9, p 12). This indicates the senior nature of education in its relationship with culture and is important for how collaboration might or should take place. One of the key questions to be asked therefore in relation to both education and culture is how to make sure that the arts or creativity does not become solely an economic instrument within educational systems.

This paper has considered questions of the public and public engagement, querying how we understand these terms, the nature, value and agendas behind evidence-creation, the possibility of a shared cultural value system amongst cultural stakeholders and finally, the role of education as core component of arts engagement, but also a political ally. These issues raise tough questions, and like most debates, are prone to ideological contest. While they are not particular to Ireland, in this particular moment when Ireland may have finally reached the mid-point of its current financial devastation, it seems like a good time to critically consider 'where we are at', or *might* be at, in relation to the public, the arts and cultural sector, and the government.

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