WHAT IS CULTURAL POLICY RESEARCH?

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Cultural policy research exists in many contexts, asks many different kinds of questions and adopts a wide repertoire of research methodologies from a raft of academic discourses. This article investigates the research questions and approaches being undertaken by those working in this field. In order to achieve this, the article draws upon readings of contemporary publications in the field and on the authors’ experiences of building a research capacity in the area of cultural policy in a British – and, more particularly, a post-devolution Scottish – university. The article traces the emergence of an academic discipline in the field, and seeks to advance this by reviewing a tripartite research agenda investigating: the history and historiography of cultural policy; the principles and strategies of cultural policy; and, the relationships between cultural policy and cultural theory/cultural studies.

KEYWORDS cultural policy; research questions; disciplinarity, theory and practice

Introduction

The third International Conference on Cultural Policy Research (ICCPR) – the only international event entirely dedicated to exploring the concept, role and impact of cultural policy research and practices – took place in August 2004 in Montréal. Since the inaugural ICCPR conference in 1999, the cultural policy research community has grown and expanded its geographical boundaries considerably. However, discussion with a range of cultural policy researchers and practitioners in the lead-up and during the conference itself suggests that the foundations and aspirations of research in this field remain unclear for many. At the Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR), an institution created in 2001 within the University of Glasgow, we saw the third ICCPR as an opportunity to reflect on our recent experience as an academic centre fully dedicated to this emerging discipline. What follows is an adapted version of our presentation, which acted as an opening paper or, rather, as a discussion generator for those of us who keep wondering ‘what is cultural policy research?’ Our questions are presented here in an essayistic form, linking general concerns about the strengths and limitations of cultural policy research to our direct experience as a university centre.

Background

Cultural policy research exists in many contexts, asks many different kinds of questions and adopts a wide repertoire of research methodologies from a raft of academic discourses. Yet, in this diversity, is there more that unites than divides? In the growing number of voices contributing ideas, findings and commentaries, is there a danger that another kind of disciplinary development will be lost?
In a relatively new subject area – still making its arguments to research councils, university authorities and others – we wonder whether this potential fragmentation or lack of cohesion is a missed opportunity. As the work of cultural policy studies grows and responds to different and even competing institutional, social, political and cultural needs, we should beware of losing the potential to communicate effectively amongst ourselves. As such, we must consider whether we are part of an evolving academic discipline, or whether we must acknowledge insufficient, common currency and merely enjoy the diversity of the research on offer as academic tourists. The key question is what, in short, is it that draws us together? Is it the fluid and unsettled parameters of the subject area; the familiarity or unexpectedness of our case studies, allusions or references; the research questions we ask; or, the research methods we deploy to answer them?

We explore these questions through a tripartite study involving: readings and a review of some recent literature; a reflection on our experience of building a research capacity in the area of cultural policy in a British – and more particularly a post-devolution Scottish – university; and, a series of comments and propositions around the meaning and nature of cultural policy research.

Readings

A key concern here is to reflect on recent work that declares itself in the field of cultural policy research. We might have done this by reference to and analysis of key journals – for example, the International Journal of Arts Management, incorporating Culture and Policy, the International Journal of Cultural Policy, the Journal of Cultural Economics, the Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society, Cultural Trends – or by reference to the curricula of higher education teaching and research programmes internationally. However, reviewing the recent literature, we were particularly struck by the mix of consonance and dissonance in three high-profile book publications in the field: Justin Lewis and Toby Miller’s edited volume Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader (2003); Toby Miller and George Yudice’s co-authored Cultural Policy (2002); and J. Mark Schuster’s Informing Cultural Policy: The Research and Information Infrastructure (2002). These three texts presented themselves as essential to our study not least because their authors are eminent in the field and have contributed texts and studies of significance in the past. However, we were also drawn to the high-profile appearance of the phrase ‘cultural policy’ in the titles of all three books, and saw in that an explicit naming and implicit scoping of the discipline of ‘cultural policy’.

All three volumes present themselves as in some measure committed to the meaning, experience and circulation of ‘cultural policy’ as an academic as well as practical concern. Each volume also anticipates further practical and philosophical enquiry, but none assumes, or rather none prescribes, a research culture. In responding to this implicit challenge this article does not propose a formal review of these texts, but seeks to extrapolate some ideas and principles about how they might relate to a cultural policy research agenda.

We wondered if, taken together, these titles might help frame and test the potential and parameters of cultural policy research. We were concerned to explore: how the object of inquiry was delineated; what research methodologies were applied; what critical approaches taken; and, what was the implied audience. Indeed, one of the explicit challenges of cultural policy research is the variety of audiences that can (and, perhaps, must) be addressed. Each of these three recent volumes has a rather different conception of audience
and, thereby, a different answer to the important question of ‘for whom is cultural policy research – and/or cultural policy studies – undertaken?’

Lewis and Miller’s *Critical Cultural Policy Studies* is a reader text – that is, an anthology of key essays and articles that, the editors judge, are crucial to the historical development and/or contemporary expression of an area of study. In dissecting the status and purpose of any area of research and/or study the role of the critical reader is crucial – acting as a snapshot of the subject and, by its very existence, establishing its thematic area as a mature academic ‘discipline’ with conventions, shared assumptions and, to some degree, common cause. Like the subject-specific conference, the academic reader is a quintessential part of the language of the academy: its existence implies the presence of an intellectual audience that is the incidence of a community of scholars engaged in the discipline in a particular way. One might also suggest that the economics of publishing implies a wider market, specifically an audience of students learning in the field.

The reader is, of course, marked as much by its exclusions as its inclusions and, thereby, becomes a valuable teaching tool for the exploration of the parameters and the ambitions, the rhetorics and the methodologies of the subject. As such, this reader is simultaneously a pragmatic tool, a statement of academic maturity and a kind of *meta*-study of the subject area. In Lewis and Miller’s (2003, p. 8) terms the reader ‘offer[s] a sense of what we have learnt thus far’ in this multifaceted area of cultural production and consumption. The ‘we’ of this assertion projects to a wider community of, by implication, academic scholars, and the ‘thus far’ implies a challenge to those readers to take the project on beyond the terms of study delineated by the collection. Drawing on existing texts, the reader traditionally struggles to be critically or methodologically innovative. Here, however, there is at least one direction in which the study is bold and that is in establishing the limits of the object of study. In this instance, the editors’ approach is rooted in the discourses of cultural studies and political economy, and the object of investigation is the study and management of cultural provision – encompassing the arts, broadcasting, the Internet, sport as well as urban planning and international organisations and infrastructures. However – and again as the result of the reader drawing on existing texts – there is a parallel limiting going on: the authors are almost all based in North American higher education institutions, the others in British and Australian equivalents; and, the case studies are predominantly of Western and developed areas and economies.

Despite their contention that ‘this volume is not a manifesto’ (Lewis & Miller 2003, p. 8), the reader is a polemical intervention: this is flagged by the use of the words ‘critical’ and ‘studies’ in the title; and, asserted in their commitment to the political and social role of culture. For Lewis and Miller (2003, p. 8), the ‘critical’ aspect of their collection is not an explicit critique of their individual editorial choices, but a wider assertion that work in the area ‘must concern itself with progressive politics and … social movements’. In comparison, the appellation ‘studies’ suggests disciplinarity and academisation: a purpose within rather than beyond the academy. Lewis and Miller (2003, p. 1) acknowledge the potential for ‘cultural policy [to be] a site for the production of cultural citizens’ and it is at this level of application – the engagement with the hegemonic and counter-cultural implementation of cultural policies – that the reader operates.

The provenance of the essays included in *Critical Cultural Policy Studies* is similarly revealing: predominantly they are drawn from cultural studies texts and journals. This context yields a mix of, what one might term ‘classic’ texts – such as an extract from Tony Bennett’s 1995 essay *The political rationality of the museum*, an extract from Jim McGuigan’s *Culture and the Public Sphere* (1996) and Sylvia Harvey’s ‘Doing it my way – broadcasting regulation
in capitalist cultures: the case of “fairness” and “impartiality” (1998) – and new interventions aimed at widening the reach of cultural policy studies towards the new media and render explicit the cultural planning aspects of the subject in urban policy debates. While one might not see (nor want to see) a seamless delineation of ‘cultural policy studies’ in this anthology, nevertheless, the research methodologies are almost exclusively qualitative and the debate is focused on representation, meaning and interpretation. The theoretical bent of the editors’ ‘Introduction’ underlines the fact that the key research question for the volume is ‘how does cultural studies relate to policy oriented theorizing and research?’ (Lewis & Miller 2003, p. 23). The volume articulates and explores tensions along the cultural policy/cultural studies divide and it is, therefore, no accident that McGuigan’s chapter and Stuart Cunningham’s 1991 essay ‘Cultural studies from the viewpoint of cultural policy’ constitute the book’s opening section. Against this backdrop, it is easy to see the programme of work represented in this collection as a deliberate response to Angela McRobbie’s (1996, p. 335) now famous declaration that cultural policy is ‘the missing agenda’ of cultural studies, with Lewis and Miller seeking to inhabit that gap.

In summary, one might interpret this collection as representing the arts-humanities wing of cultural policy, with its players engaged in debates of aesthetics and taste, art and culture, policy and citizenship. This application of the cultural studies agenda towards not just praxis, but public policy is central to contemporary work in the field of cultural policy research, and has certainly proved influential in casting and testing our shared research culture.

In some degree of rhetorical contrast to the implied scope and disciplinary perambulations of Critical Cultural Policy Studies is the bald assurance of a text entitled Cultural Policy. Miller and Yudice’s authored text Cultural Policy has, arguably, a similarly academic audience to that for Critical Cultural Policy Studies, but it has, perhaps, a different role and purpose. Here the authors argue for their particular view of the implied discipline. Here, it seems, is a particular ‘state of the discipline’ address, with the writers aspiring to an authoritative positioning of the topic within their preferred discourses of history, economics and society. For Miller and Yudice, the disciplinary nexus of a history of ‘cultural policy studies’ is that of economics, social theory and arts provision. The frame is, again, cultural studies and the methodologies those of historical and philosophical enquiry, as well as literary and cultural theory and, to some degree, maps the so-called ‘cultural turn of sociology’ (e.g., Thompson 2001). Historically and geographically, specific case studies are deployed to illustrate research into the discipline’s rhetoric as much as the potential of the discipline itself. In Miller and Yudice’s (2002, p. 3) words: ‘our categories of culture … were chosen partly because they are the areas in which a critical cultural policy literature exists’.

In contrast to the rather contemporary case studies implied by the reader text, one key aspect of Cultural Policy is that it delineates a history and historiography of the research agenda. This study, thereby, adopts a historiographical approach to the topic – implying a history of both the policy making and implementation in the field and a history of the explanations, justifications and critiques of that policy making. This is an essential aspect of the academic research agenda – its history and historiography – and we will return to it as a crucial plank of cultural policy research later in this article.

Drawing on Cunningham’s ‘reformist’ or ‘centrist’ agenda (Lewis and Miller 2003, p. 14ff; Miller & Yudice 2002, pp. 29–30), Miller and Yudice seek to harness the countercultural potential of cultural studies and its rhetoric. Miller and Yudice argue that cultural policy
could provide a radical recontextualization of the present, such that our understanding of ourselves is itself subject to critical historicization via a questioning of each statement’s conditions of existence. … This turn will not be welcome to all, especially those inclined to critique for its own sake. … But getting to know cultural policy and intervening in it is an important part of participating in culture. (Miller & Yudice 2002, p. 34)

The implied challenge is to strike a balance between the ideas, meaning and theories of cultural policy and their application – that is, between work that reflects back on the academisation of cultural policy and applied research – perhaps responsive or consultancy-led research – that feeds into policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. With its roots in academic cultural studies, we might argue that Miller and Yudice seek to harness the counter-cultural potential of cultural studies and its rhetoric when they argue that ‘getting to know cultural policy and intervening in it is an important part of participating in culture’ (Miller & Yudice 2002, p. 34).

As might be deduced from the prioritising of Bennett, Cunningham and McGuigan, the volume is strongly influenced by the Foucaudian concept of ‘governmentality’, and the exercise and control of power through culture and the role of the individual and communities within that (Foucault 1979; Burchell et al. 1991; Rose & Miller 1992; Rose 1999a, 1999b). And it is in relation to this trope that we would see two key interrelated questions for cultural policy research as being: how is culture shaping contemporary notions of governance; and, how is culture administered and regulated?

This, then, marks a further aspect of our cultural policy research agenda – and linking back to our first area of research concern – the articulation of cultural policy research with cultural theory and cultural studies. It is also a particularly important strand of the academic research agenda as it evolves from and is rooted in the academy and its theoretical and critical concerns. It is not, therefore, reactive of a government or sectoral agenda: this being an ever present pull for research activity in this area. This is an important point that links this arts-humanities approach to the applied research tradition: cultural policy activities (research and teaching) within the academy is not just historically rooted and conceptually robust, but it is also fully justified in its active engagement with making as well as commenting on policy. This also constitutes a further building block of cultural policy research: an engagement with policy formulation, policy delivery and evaluation. We will comment more on the practical and philosophical challenges inherent in this applied work.

While the reader might articulate in historical and theoretical ways with the co-authored Cultural Policy, one might suggest that neither of these important texts – the implied critical weight of the academic reader and the disciplinary provenance that is declared by Cultural Policy – feature as part of the ‘infrastructure’ mapped by Schuster’s book which certainly points to this very active, ‘applied’ engagement. While Critical Cultural Policy Studies and Cultural Policy assume an academic consumption, Informing Cultural Policy points to different kinds of engagement. The ‘tell’ is the active verb in the title, implying its utilitarian purpose and guidebook potential: this is a book with a job of work in mind. It is a book that wants to ‘do’ something. Clearly it wants to ‘inform’ cultural policy, but, to our mind, it seems to want to inform cultural policy making rather more than cultural policy research – although it is a valuable resource for the latter too.

Certainly this text has something of the directory about it: it offers itself as a mapping exercise, a reference text of resources and sources of information. Specifically Schuster seeks to understand the ‘changing landscape’ of cultural policy research (Tepper 2004, p. 84) and
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he does this by reviewing the information infrastructure of arts and culture, suggesting tensions between different research agents and different research priorities and protocols, and speculating as to the potential and the reality of transnational cultural policy research. His focus, however, is principally the cultural policy research of governments, ministries and related agencies. To link to McGuigan’s review of policy analysis, Schuster’s text is more explicitly about the ‘applied’ (or in Adorno’s terms ‘administrative’) aspects of cultural policy research rather than the ‘critical’ ones. Nevertheless, he does ask some testing questions around data analysis and the relationship of researchers to funders: is available data being minded regularly and appropriately; are methodological developments being applied to data gathering and analysis; what is the role of government – at local, regional and national – level in creating and utilising culture-related data?

Schuster’s emphasis on the ‘applied’, on ‘advocacy-inspired research’ (Bennett 2004, p. 243), focuses attention on cultural policy as public policy and as a policy goal of government, but excludes the conceptual engagement with issues of governance and of identity and representation that such policy might be seen to generate. In Bennett’s words, Schuster’s cultural policy research is a discourse ‘from which history, values and meaning … have been drained’ (Bennett 2004, p. 244), thereby exposing a particular danger of policy research – the exclusion, deliberate or otherwise, of the self-reflexive edge of a theoretically ‘critical’ approach.

These three key books – published in the space of less than two years – are, in their different ways, about ‘cultural policy’ and, more specifically, about naming and shaping cultural policy research. In these books – influencing in particular the Lewis and Miller, and the Miller and Yudice volumes – is the articulation of cultural policy research in relation to cultural theory and cultural studies. Here is cultural policy research rooted in the academy and its theoretical and critical concerns, and cultural policy research that is aware of, but not necessarily reactive to, a government or sectoral agenda. This complements what we see to be a different but linked building block of cultural policy research: and that is an engagement with policy formulation, policy delivery and evaluation. These two discourses inform our case study.

Case Study

Devolution in 1999 saw the establishment of the first Scottish Parliament in almost 300 years. The new Scottish Parliament consists of 129 elected members – chosen through a mix of first-past-the-post and proportional representation. This leads, almost inevitably, to coalition governments – and, in the first two parliaments, the Scottish government (from now on called the ‘Scottish Executive’) has been a left-of-centre coalition of Labour and Liberal Democrats, with the Scottish National party as the official opposition. The Scottish Parliament can legislate on a wide range of areas including health, education, housing, planning, environment, natural heritage, sport and the arts. Matters reserved to the Westminster Parliament include constitutional matters; defence and foreign policy; the fiscal, economic and monetary system; data protection; and broadcasting.

Devolution provided the impetus for higher education in Scotland to examine ways in which it could contribute to the new forms of governance – and specifically how academic research could contribute to public policy making in keeping with contemporary notions of ‘knowledge transfer’. Further, one of the key groups that argued and lobbied for devolution for Scotland was the cultural sector (McCrone, 2001; McCrone et al. 2004; Paterson, 1994) – its commitment to devolution was ‘rewarded’ in the first parliament with the appointment
of a Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport and the publication of the National Cultural Strategy, and, now in the second parliament by the appointment of a high-profile Cultural Commission reviewing cultural provision and seeking to make recommendations for the development of arts, culture and creativity in Scotland.

For the Scottish Executive, one of the issues which quickly emerged in the post-devolution context was the lack of a resource in the new Scottish government with the capability to undertake research into areas of policy that had previously been the responsibility of Whitehall. With new forms of political scrutiny in the structures of the parliament, and with a target-driven administration, the issue of ‘evidence-based policy making’ came to the fore. The Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow was established in 2000 to address some of these (and related) policy (or ‘administrative’) concerns both within and without the cultural sector in Scotland and beyond.

Our cultural policy research begins in an academic tradition that explores the relations between culture and society; between cultural forms and expressions and practices; and between institutional modes of production and dissemination. It is an academic tradition that is, at root, about understanding and critiquing cultural production and reception. Equally, an academic tradition that is fundamentally engaged with performance is, to a greater or lesser degree, studying policies as they are experienced at some point along a supply/demand chain of production. Within a British context, the academic tradition that frames this work is that of the Birmingham School and, as we have alluded, the influence of Foucault and ideas of ‘policing’ and ‘governmentality’. It is a route to cultural policy studies most clearly associated with Tony Bennett (2003), whose engagement with cultural representation and analysis moved so significantly to issues of policy and an exploration of the ‘critical’ and the ‘applied’.

The Birmingham School–Tony Bennett line of development is not uncontested, particularly in the United States where, Fredric Jameson (1993) questioned the intellectual robustness of the left-wing, liberal academy working with and within public policy. In addition, and despite Jameson’s distaste and the traditional façade of academic objectivity (generally cast as ‘neutrality’), academics cannot and do not sit on the sidelines of policy development and implementation. In this tradition, Cunningham (1991, p. 19) outlines the theoretical paradigm that activates the cultural studies agenda and ‘commits [it] to a reformist strategy [and] engagement with policy’, but there are other, more pragmatic, influences. While Jameson attacked the ‘applied’ potential of British cultural studies, Bennett’s work also (very directly) influenced the so-called ‘cultural policy’ school in Australia where an explicit deployment of the Foucaudian concept of governmentality forged a new (or at least refreshed) role for the academy through connections between intellectuals and state institutions (Bennett, 2003). Underpinning this was, of course, a concern with citizenship. This was not only explored within academic discourse, but was also, for a time, an area of policy concern and investment for government (marked as an area of priority by the Australian Research Council). In contemporary Scotland, one of the most immediate challenges to the academy is its role in relation to post-devolution government and the governance infrastructure. Again, the Foucaudian model of governmentality facilitates an appropriate understanding of modern forms of rule, new forms of political power, the proliferation of public policies and systems of social administration that affect the conduct of individuals.

In responding to this complex political and theoretical framework, and the tension of ‘applied’ and ‘critical’, we have identified some key points – two pragmatic and two more conceptual – for cultural policy making in Scotland. They are that: there is a pressing need for
high-quality research and robust data to establish a clear evidence base; policy makers and practitioners have to be realistic about the economics of culture and the creative industries; policy makers and researchers need to review their understanding of the ‘national’ in a post-devolution context and in relation to an expanding Europe; and policy makers, researchers and practitioners must review structures and agencies in light of the above. The research questions that derive from these points are multiple and might be seen, simultaneously, to focus in on the immediate context of Scotland and work out using that place as a point of departure.

An example of this might be seen in the citizenship debate that is a key feature of contemporary British and Scottish politics. Citizenship is in some respects framed by national discourses, but the debate may be cast transnationally both conceptually – not least in relation to the cultural rights debate and the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN 1966) – and administratively – perhaps in relation to UNESCO engagements with culture. The culture/citizenship/creativity nexus is a potent one for policy makers and cultural theorists alike as it plays out at both local and global levels. All Western and most developing countries have a role to play in the world economy and are simultaneously devolving power to sub-national, regional, local governments and communities. In short, the centralised nation-state is giving way to both supra-national and sub-national institutions: this combination of globalisation and localisation is often referred to by the ugly neologism ‘glocalisation’. It may be argued that both pulls are about the empowerment of individuals and communities at the expense of the monolithic nation-state. Our experience in working in post-devolution Scotland – and responding to the political agenda (see McConnell 2003) – as well as building an academic research agenda, similarly negotiates the small and the large, the near and the far, the local and the global.

In some respects, these pragmatic issues could be addressed by a consultancy agenda of data gathering, sector mapping and management review. However, the danger of such an approach is its potential to fragmentation and its limited view of the audience (defined as the government client or the cultural sector itself). Since devolution, the cultural sector in Scotland has found itself closer to ministers and politicians than had ever previously been the case. This has been regarded as both an advantage and disadvantage. There has been a growing interest in policy debates, but the cultural sector has realised that they lack quality information with which to engage fully in these. Such practical issues – the new role for higher education, the need for evidence to underpin policymaking and the demands of the sector – have helped to shape our research agenda, but they do not constitute it entirely.

Within the context of what has been termed the ‘modernising government agenda’ and an emphasis on ‘evidence-based policy making’ (Mountfield 1997; Prime Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office 1999; Cabinet Office 2004), culture is lagging behind. In policy terms, the cultural sector is not a ‘special case’. It must be able to ‘talk the talk’ of government, and present its arguments alongside other issues and other portfolios. Part of that is about presenting the right kinds of information in the right way. The politicians, civil servants and public agencies need good-quality qualitative and quantitative research data and analysis. Similarly, the cultural sector has realised that it lacked quality information with which to engage fully in policy debates. However, it faces some fundamental challenges around research: first, it is often the case that there is simply not enough money in the sector to support good quality research programmes; and, second, what the cultural sector really wants from research is the killer evidence that will release dizzying amounts of money into the sector. Its expectations of research can be unrealistic.
And yet, as Schuster’s audit of the variety of locations of cultural policy research demonstrates, there is more to ‘applied’ research and the immediate policy demands of government than justifications and supporting evidence. Cultural policy research can facilitate important conceptual change. However, one element that makes this difficult is that applied research is so often context driven. For example, the re-emergence of political and ethnic nationalism in Europe and beyond has led historians, social scientists, artists and critics alike to reconsider issues of identity. This has led to an interrogation of the critical orthodoxies of cultural imperialism, colonialism, marginalisation and their neat binary oppositions. The ideas of nations as ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983), and of identity in modern societies, in modern Britain, as fragmentary and ‘fuzzy’ (e.g., Cohen 1994) have significant ubiquity when considering the evolution of identity politics and its impact on our critical vocabulary. Within Scotland, the debate around the ‘national’, ‘representation’, ‘hybridity’ and ‘interculturalism’ has developed very significantly within the academy (e.g., McCrone 1992; Craig 2002), but we might ask whether this critical frame, so important in resetting ideas around national and gender identity, has been picked up in policy debates and decision making.

The huge changes in the political life of Scotland – delivering a new model of governance – build on history and on the traditions and institutions of the existing and independent civil society. However, these changes and innovations also create new structures, new modes of organisation and new policies. Both the social science discourse of McCrone and the arts/humanities context of Craig have identified something new in the critical construction and understanding of Scotland. An important question might be: Does this intellectual and theoretical resetting also impact in terms of policy and, in particular, in terms of cultural policy?

In relation to the systems and structures of cultural policy, a starting point might involve a rethinking of the ideological frame of cultural policy management. It is a subtle but important point that the locus of the Scottish Executive’s authority is not predicated on areas dispensed from Westminster. In fact, quite the opposite is the case, as the devolution settlement empowers the Holyrood parliament legislative powers over everything not reserved to Westminster. The Executive can legislate on absolutely anything – up to and including taxation – that is not reserved by Westminster. Is there something here with which we can rethink policy making in Scotland?

Building on the issues exposed so far, we feel that a new cultural policy infrastructure should address the distinctive structures of the new Scottish democracy as well as society’s contemporary concerns, values and ideologies. The type of thinking required around these ideas might not sit so easily within a context of evidence-based research and yet they raise fundamental questions about the principles of cultural policy provision, its historical ubiquity and its theoretical conceptualisation – the key building blocks of a cultural policy research agenda.

Commentary

The policy and disciplinary readings that we had to undertake to establish our research protocols has proved a useful one: rooting our work within both an ‘applied’ and a ‘critical’ discourse. Such self-reflection should not be restricted to establishing a new research capacity, but must be inherent in our shared research agenda. As noted throughout this article, cultural policy studies and cultural policy research are part of a new and distinctive kind of
academic discipline – one that is predicated on competing (and sometimes contradictory) audiences, purposes and even academic traditions – as such, we might see it forefront of reflexive research practices, implicitly questioning the role of the academy and its contribution to ideas and practice.

Cultural policy research is interdisciplinary. It draws on the social sciences for both quantititative and qualitative research methodologies and to articulate its social and economic role, its models of application and territorial difference. From the arts/humanities it draws on history and historiography – to understand policy making in the past and influence its future development and implementation – as well as cultural studies, from which come a concern with sign, representation and identity and, indeed, definitions and experiences of culture and its role in society.

Research in this field is undertaken in government, non-departmental bodies, consultancies and university units of varying kinds and funded through equally diverse routes. However, from this wider frame we are concerned to extrapolate a research agenda that is rooted within (if not limited to) the academy. With this aim in mind, we might suggest that research in cultural policy might develop in three interconnected areas: the history and historiography of cultural policy; the principles and strategies of cultural policy; and cultural policy and cultural theory/cultural studies. These broad categories of history, practice and theory resonate across the humanities and social science, and might allow cultural policy research to evolve its own questions, as well as articulate with other research areas in each category.

Schuster’s (2002, p. 15) study notes that much cultural policy research in the United Kingdom is often driven by consultancy income, or has come through individual works of scholarship. For many academic cultural policy researchers there is a temptation, sometimes a need and always a pressure, to think about the quick buck through consultancy. This is not an approach that should be completely dismissed – in addition to financial benefits, such work raises profile and gains researchers particular access to the processes of decision making and policy evaluation. However, the weakness of an over emphasis on consultancy is that it makes it difficult to develop a coherent body of research and near impossible to develop longitudinal projects. In addition, if cultural policy research is undertaken on the back of consultancies and commissions, then researchers turn less frequently to the core budgets of their institution or research councils. The negative side of this is that if funders see cultural policy-related applications only infrequently, they will not develop the skills and vocabulary appropriate for their fair evaluation, ‘case-law’ will be slow to develop and, consequently, more myths and half-truths will circulate as to what cultural policy research might actually be.

More crucially, a significant obstacle to developing a coherent area of research is the difficulty inherent in cross- or inter- or multi-disciplinary working. If we accept that this area called ‘cultural policy research’ crosses discipline boundaries, then we are faced with a practical and conceptual challenge. As already suggested, what we have been pursuing, and are keen to continue to pursue, is a model that does not exclude these approaches, but rather integrates them in a collaborative manner – which is, perhaps, more in line with social science protocols – and understands that at root we are researching in a university context.

This has been the approach taken towards one of the Centre’s core research projects: a three-year investigation into the implications for developing city-based cultural policies as tools for urban regeneration in post-industrial cities. The project has balanced its theoretical aspirations with a practical – empirical – approach: the study of Glasgow’s experience as a
city pioneering culture-led regeneration and urban cultural planning strategies in Europe since the early 1980s. The project’s main aims were to interrogate the long-term cultural legacies of championing culture and creativity in a city – Glasgow between 1986 and 2003 – and to establish the social and political conditions for this investment and subsequent legacies. The first aim led to an assessment of the soft cultural impacts of investing in culture, which, following recent discussions (Evans & Shaw 2004, p. 6; García forthcoming), were defined in terms of image change; evolution of perceptions of the city and city narratives; and its effect on local identities, self-perception, aspirations and civic involvement. The second aim led to the assessment of approaches to urban cultural governance and its effect on notions of citizenship (see CCPR 2004). In addressing these aims, the project has sought to merge theoretical frameworks and methodologies from a wide range of disciplines: communication science and media studies to study city images and develop a narrative analysis; human geography, urban studies and urban sociology to investigate notions of the city, citizenship and urban identities; and political sociology and public policy analysis to assess approaches to local governance. Furthermore, the longitudinal nature of this study, surveying over two decades of cultural policy development, required borrowing questions and techniques from historical analysis. The project thus exemplifies our ambition to interconnect history, practice and theory in cultural policy research.

Indeed, such a combination of theories and research practices also imposed a major challenge in terms of peer review. A way to address this potential difficulty was to embed an additional method within the project: a series of ‘workshops of experts’ taking place after completion of the research design, on completion of the first phase of data-gathering and on completion of the analysis of findings. These workshops consisted of day-long meetings with senior academics representing those disciplines for which the project team could not claim particular expertise. The project’s first workshop tested the project design and theoretical framework and resulted in key recommendations to enhance its sociological basis without weakening its historical dimension. Indeed, the purpose of the workshop was also to convey the value of an interdisciplinary collaboration and, as such, the need to make concessions that may affect the purity – but not necessarily the validity – of a given discipline. Subsequent workshops tested the data-gathering and analysis techniques, respectively.

In our experience, it was the negotiation of a combined theoretical framework rather than the need to mix methodologies that brought the greater challenge. This was evident not only during the workshops, but also in our attempt to attract funding from established research councils. In approaching the United Kingdom’s Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB), we noted some level of distrust towards such an ambitious blend of disciplines and uncertainty about the general classification or categorisation – social sciences and/or arts and humanities – of the project. In addressing this rather pragmatic issues, the workshops also helped to strengthen our arguments by informing them with the key concerns expressed by established scholars and the negotiated response resulting from the debate.

Our experience with this and related projects leads us to agree fully with Cunningham (1991) that undertaking cultural policy research is not about adopting a magpie-like approach to the tools of research, but is instead about locating the discipline of cultural policy research in a theoretical rather than methodological frame. In this, the ambition is to move the cultural policy research agenda debate beyond the uneasy peace of social sciences/humanities discourses and recast its essential interdisciplinarity as a relevant, flexible and robust model for public policy research that is sufficiently distinctive and sufficiently
self-reflexive so as to represent an academic discipline of ubiquity and utility. Indeed, such a contextualised and potentially shared research agenda necessarily implies the conditions of an academic discipline with shared questions, methodologies and critical practices. The establishment of ongoing workshops of experts with a similar format to the above may be the way forward in making interdisciplinary negotiations possible.

In addition, the lessons from Australian experience of cultural policy research, as well as the implicit and explicit critiques undertaken by Lewis and Miller and Miller and Yudice, lead us to extrapolate four useful propositions regarding cultural policy research. We would suggest that cultural policy research should respond to three key challenges. First, the challenge of combining an applied and a critical discourse – the applied is important because it roots the discipline in cut and thrust of policy development at all levels, while the critical tempers that by insisting on an intellectual and theoretical hinterland. Second, the opportunity of being interdisciplinary – cultural policy research challenges conventional institutional and agency arrangements, but that can be seen to liberate the researcher to a raft of shared research questions, methods and practices (by extension cultural policy research might have a particular propensity to be collaborative – both within and outside the academy). And third, the potential of multiple audiences and, maybe even, funding sources – this as a result of the applied and critical discourses, interests in representation as much as implementation, operation and heritage. Additionally, it is the case that many of the factors that affect the way cultural policy can evolve as a discipline are country/nation-specific: and, herein, is a further challenge for establishing the parameters and the rhetorics of a potentially shared or common research agenda.

In 2005 the funding landscape certainly looks more encouraging for cultural policy research than it did in 2001 when CCPR began. Although each application will still stand or fall on its own merits, we grow increasingly optimistic because funding bodies (and, in particular, the research councils) in the United Kingdom, albeit slowly, keep progressing in their understanding and tolerance towards interdisciplinary research. The AHRB currently incorporates a strand of funding into cultural policy and, partly as a result of the global growth of culture-led regeneration and related strategies to accelerate urban development (see Evans & Shaw 2004), the ESRC is also increasingly interested in culturally informed approaches to urban economic and social research. The progress made in this direction can also be interpreted as evidence that cultural policy research is being established as an academic discipline in parallel to its existing relevance within consultancy and government circles.

One of the important things about our research centre is its location within Scotland, and, further, within post-devolution Scotland. Yet as well as being an important and indeed unique selling point for our work, this situation might also limit our research and narrow the view others have of us – with the implication that both our critical and applied work circulates and resonates only within that immediate legislative frame. While the Scottish context and frame offers crucial research questions across all three of our research themes – history, application and theory – the wider resonance of citizenship and radical shifts of governance allow the recasting of the close investigation of the representations, structures and policies of Scotland.

Conclusions

Cultural policy research aspires to undertake ‘policy-relevant research’, contribute to ‘evidence-based research’ and applied policy studies, and advance demands to make
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research critical, reflective, self-aware and rooted within the contemporary theoretical paradigms. In this, the lessons of both British cultural studies and Australian cultural policy move the research debate beyond the uneasy peace of social sciences/humanities discourses. Cultural policy research is about understanding the ‘policing’ (in Foucault’s terms) of the state and combines an engagement in representation and formulation. Addressing both sides of the supply-demand chain insists that the research questions are, in traditional terms, multi-disciplinary. However, this is research that inhabits the gaps and fissures of making, doing and interpreting, and requires research approaches that are (truly) inter-disciplinary.

Indeed, such a contextualised and potentially shared research agenda necessarily implies the conditions of an academic discipline with shared questions, methodologies and critical practices. It is in this interdisciplinarity that we will find the communalities and confluences, ‘the shared constituent parts and the clash of ideas’ (Bennett 2004, p. 246), and the shared concerns and problems of the challenging, vibrant and living academic discipline.

NOTES

1. In passing, from our readings and our practice, we see that cultural policy research is marked by the diversity of its audiences: academics certainly – and in both the specialist researcher and the student market – but also public bodies and specialist agencies involved in culture and the arts; cultural institutions such as consultancies and think tanks; and, of course, policy makers and politicians at every level from local to international. This leads us to conclude that the diversity of audiences that cultural policy research seeks to address is a distinctive and even defining condition.

2. Reflecting on our political and academic context in a post-devolution Scottish university, this is a potent call to action – an important recognition of the potential of applied research in this field.

3. Jameson’s essay, “On cultural studies”, might have been an interesting one to have seen anthologised in Lewis and Miller’s anthology, if only as an explicit counterpoint to the volume’s thesis of cultural policy studies.

REFERENCES


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