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Introduction

From the growth of city regions to the calls for more localism, engaging with 'the local' has become an increasingly important part of cultural policy rhetoric in many countries (UNESCO, 2013; UCLG, 2019). Yet despite apparent recognition that the practices of culture are always situated (and hence local), contemporary cultural policy research tends to privilege the national or international as the primary site at which cultural policy is enacted and thus, can be reformed (Durrer, et al., 2018). For all of its increasing use 'the local' remains abstract, seemingly deployed to legitimate activity that is of debatable benefit to the places and practices imagined by its invocation.

In understanding the 'local', focus on the 'city' has clearly dominated not only cultural policy studies, but the formation of policy as well (UCLG, 2019). Conceptualisations of 'creativity' (Campbell, 2018), Florida's (2002) 'creative class' and the transfer of creative industries policy on a global scale (Bell & Oakley, 2015) have been some of the main means for a culture-led and knowledge-based economic approach to addressing the national challenges faced by the decline of traditional industries and the globalisation of labour. Argued to be particularly open to forms of diversity and as strongholds of innovation (Hall, 1998), cities became a pedestal on which both national and local governments could place objectives of economic growth and social cohesion. Much research, including that of Florida himself (2017) has problematised these approaches, calling attention to the problematic of evidencing a case for 'creativity' (Campbell, 2014) as well as the inequalities it has brought to bear on cities and for the people living within them (see also Pratt, 2011).

In considering local applications of these policies and practices, questions have rightly been raised regarding a 'one size fits all' model of cultural policy making. Development approaches that 'work' (or not) in urban areas have been applied (or tried) in other 'types' of locality, for example, towns, suburban and rural areas (Bell & Jayne, 2010; Bain, 2016). Whilst these aim to be responsive to local terms and conditions (UCLG, 2010), opposition to this arguably token localism, has resulted in a body of work that raises the importance of understanding the "situated cultural practices [and] internal logics, histories and structures" of particular places in the study of cultural policy (Gilmore, 2013, p. 86; see also Stevenson & Blanche, 2015; Durrer, 2017). It draws on work that considers the ways in which local relationships

and practices of policymaking, convergence, and transference negotiate and manage national and international policies (e.g. Stevenson *et al*, 2010; Wilson & Boyle, 2004; Johanson *et al* 2014), demonstrating that homogenisation may not necessarily abound (O'Brien & Miles, 2010).

This work has been accompanied by growing rhetoric and advocacy for co-production and citizen-led as well as participatory governance structures (Jancovich, 2015). Many welcome these potentially more democratic approaches and the possibility of a commons of cultural assets, infrastructure, resources and knowledge (Ostrom, 1990; Gonzales, 2014). However, questions equally abound about the application and implications of such approaches, which may weaken local power and decision making by replacing governmental policy (either at a local or national scale) with a neo-liberal governance model, which might perpetuate uneven distribution of resources by placing responsibility for development on already under resourced communities (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2015; Mohan & Stokke, 2000). For example, within the UK, contradictions and tensions are demonstrated through an evidenced reduction in the investment in local culture, despite a professed growing interest in and recognition of 'the local' (CMS, 2016).

Furthermore, there is growing recognition that policy is embodied, temporal, territorial, spatial and scalar (Bell & Oakley, 2015; Volkering, 2001; Paasi, 2004) and thus enacted and experienced personally, socially and specifically. It thus appears evident that a better understanding of cultural policy at a local level is imperative to the development of the field. While there has been a growth in site-specific case studies over time, this special edition of Cultural Trends focuses on better understanding how local cultural policy is practised and understood across a variety of locations. In doing so, this issue seeks to ground site-specific case studies more deeply in their distinctiveness, not simply as appraisals of national and international cultural policy conditions, nor as broader critiques of the conceptualisation of culture (UCLG, 2019; Pratt, 2008) but as discreet examples of the situated dynamics and relations of cultural policy from which policy scholars and practitioners can learn.

The five research articles in this special edition explore 'the local' in cultural policy across seven nations. The first article, by Burke, explores those influences that inform the process and production of cultural policies in the Anglophone Caribbean, in particular the strategies that are employed to mediate the *grocal* at the national level. Arguing that 'the local' is often employed in order to reinforce national imperatives, Burke focuses on the development of Trinidad and Tobago's draft cultural policy, presenting a new framework to illustrate the factors that facilitate and inhibit the possibility of *nocal* exchange.

The second article compares the cultural governance pathways of two UNESCO 'Design Cities' – Bandung and Cape Town. Minty and Nkula-Wenz examine how different cultural policy approaches have been locally adapted by a coalition of non-governmental stakeholders in response to the situated realities of 'place'. Seeking to provide insights that will strengthen urban cultural governance and politics in the global South, Minty and Nkula-Wenz argue that epistemic communities have a pivotal role to play in forging local cultural governance agendas and as such, local governments should offer monetary support and formal partnerships in order to

ensure that cultural policy-making 'from below' is well placed to adapt international 'best practice' to a local context.

Next we turn our attention to Switzerland as Marx offers an analysis of participatory practices and procedures in cultural policy as public policies in their own right. Specifically, Marx argues that the proliferation of participation as a policy idea alongside the formalisation of sites where the participation of cultural groups are expected to take place can result in a depoliticised form of cultural governance that favours those with the greatest experience in navigating bureaucracy. Focusing mainly on cultural policy-making in Basel and Geneva the article provides an in-depth insight into the bureaucratic structures of participation, which Marx argues require time, money, knowledge and connections in order to engage with successfully.

The fourth article, by McHattie, Champion and Johnson, focuses on the lived experience of craft practitioners in the Northern Isles of Scotland. Highlighting the place-based nature of craft work the authors consider both the opportunities and constraints associated with contexts that are often referred to in cultural policy as 'remote' and 'peripheral'. Specifically, they argue that there is a dissonance between creative-economy policies and the political economy of craft work in rural settings. As such, and in contrast to the concern with growth and scalability has been the defining feature of contemporary cultural policy, they contend that future policy development should recognise the value of what they describe as 'fractal growth', which by its multidimensional nature emphasises value beyond a solely economic imperative.

Finally, Durrer, Gilmore and Stevenson offer comparative research on the arts councils (and equivalent bodies) in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Their article considers how these national bodies represent their responsibilities to and affiliations with 'the local', particularly in relation to institutional partnerships and their perceived relevance to local strategies for the arts. They argue that these national policy bodies commonly rely on networked governance to facilitate their relationship to 'the local' resulting in the reproduction of national interests and contributing to the culture of competition increasingly prevalent within contemporary UK cultural policy.

What this body of work therefore offers are both assessments of how cultural policy plays out in practice at a local level as well as alternative forms of policy making involving local actors which may challenge existing decision making processes. The aim is to offer academics and policy makers new directions by which to understand the role culture plays and the resource needs of places of all scales, as a direct contrast to the discursive focus on the urban metropolitan and policy transfer.

By questioning the appropriateness of replicable approaches to policy implementation in different places (whether creative cities agendas or localism initiatives) this special edition highlights the problem with best practice models that have been popular within cultural policy studies. Instead it calls for situated analysis that understands local contexts and supports bespoke practices. However, as a number of the articles identify, the journal also seeks to draw attention to the danger associated with locally-led approaches where local agents may reinforce inequality within their own decision making groups. As such it challenges the traditional binary distinctions between top down and bottom up governance and instead draws attention to the importance of viewing policy making as a horizontal, dynamic and

relational process involving multiple agents, with different perspectives, areas of skill, knowledge and interests. Only by making these explicit, it is argued, is it possible for cultural policy studies to have a more nuanced understanding of the political and social context within which policy is formed and implemented.

By drawing on theories of governance and participation from political science and development studies, the special edition also seeks to broaden the scope of cultural policy studies and step away from the tendency towards cultural exceptionalism by placing cultural policy more firmly within wider public policy debates. In so doing, rather than diminishing the value of culture, it is argued the position of culture may be strengthened.

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