

## Preface

### *Government action in the modern world*

The age of the command economy has passed. Governments across the continent increasingly recognise the limits to their ability to make things happen. The complexity of contemporary society and the interdependency of local and national economies mean that Governments must influence rather than direct change. They must work with and through a vast range of public, private and independent sector partners. Nowhere is this more true than in the fluid, changeable world of culture, where the state's efforts in one direction will often produce unexpected, perhaps unwanted, results elsewhere. In the cultural sector, individual vision can have a huge and unforeseen impact, where substantial public resources can appear to produce no change at all.

The culture minister deals with a field which is inherently changeable and often seen as marginal to the government's central objectives. While health and education ministers have thousands of hospitals and schools, and millions of public employees under their control, the culture minister typically has few directly managed resources. The development and management of cultural policy is therefore one of the most complex areas of modern government, a kind of a balancing act, not so much between competing priorities as in other areas of policy, but between competing visions of the role of culture in society.

## *The value of marking the edges of policy*

This note is intended to help with the thinking process which must underlie that balancing act. In doing so, it develops a metaphor of strategic dilemmas originally conceived by Franco Bianchini and Charles Landry as a way of crystallising the poles of a number of policy issues – for example, the extremes of no state intervention in the cultural sector and government control of cultural resources.<sup>1</sup> It is increasingly unlikely in contemporary Europe that there will be countries wishing to position their cultural policy at one or other of these extremes. But where they place themselves on the spectrum between the poles, the balancing point which suits local circumstances, will vary from one country to another. The value of identifying the extremes lies in being able to recognise one's own position in relation to them. Does policy lie exactly in the middle? Or does it represent something closer to a 60-40 split, a 90-10 split, or a 30-70 split? A tightrope walker is always conscious of the two ends of his balancing pole, continually making slight adjustments to preserve that elusive point of balance.

In creating a dichotomy between extremes, we do not expect cultural policy-makers to make a simple choice between two options, but to consider where local policy currently lies, or should lie, on the spectrum between them. To reinforce this sense of a spectrum, we have appended a little chart under each of the policy dilemmas, on which some readers may find it interesting to visualise or mark their own situation, whether ideal, or actual. It must be understood, of course, that these dilemmas are not self-contained, as they are presented here: they overlap continually, and decisions taken in one area will affect room for manoeuvre in others.

In most cases there are other ways of looking at the issue which will enable us to break out of the oppositional strait-jacket and establish new policies which combine as many of the strengths of existing alternatives, and as few of the weaknesses, as possible. The task of identifying and developing these third ways for cultural policy lies at the heart of the challenges now faced by policy-makers and planners in the cultural sector.

The paper begins with the underlying conceptual issues, presented here as " framework dilemmas ", since the course of cultural policy depends on how government positions itself in relation to these strategic choices. The questions they pose depend almost entirely on political, social and ethical values, and how they are addressed will fundamentally affect the shape and outcomes of cultural policy. The remaining sections focus more on the tactical decisions which arise when we begin to consider how to put policy into practice.

In passing, we should explain that we have deliberately avoided defining terms such as " art " or " culture ", words of which we make continual use. Their definition is itself open to interpretation or dispute, and is inseparable from the other dilemmas we present. We have judged it preferable to allow the reader to consider these questions along with the others we present. Nor do we make any pretence to objectivity in formulating or presenting these dilemmas. We have presented them in this booklet for debate based on our own experience and involvement in cultural policy making. Although we believe that the best answer will normally lie at some point on the spectrum between the dilemmas appropriate to local circumstances and interests, this does not

mean that a happy mean is always, or often, appropriate. Policy formulation involves clear, often difficult, choices, and we have not been afraid to note where good practice currently lies, or to show an inclination towards one or other pole. We hope that this occasional expression of our own view will assist the reader in clarifying his or her own opinion and in stimulating critical comments and offers of other dilemmas for discussion that could be incorporated in any future editions. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the contribution of Franco Bianchini and Colin Mercer to this process, and express our gratitude to the Council of Europe for giving us the opportunity to articulate our thinking in this paper.

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# Framework dilemmas

## 1. Culture as the arts or Culture as a way of life

Raymond Williams called culture “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language”.<sup>2</sup> There have certainly been many attempts to define the term, though in themselves they need not concern us here. But it is a pre-requisite of cultural policy to define the parameters of the cultural domain itself. In some countries, culture is almost synonymous with the arts, and policy tends to focus on the visual and performing arts, literature, festivals and similar areas. In these circumstances culture ministries may tend to focus on infrastructure, especially theatres, galleries, museums, historic buildings and so on, and on recognised artists and arts companies. Their responses to more recent art forms such as film, rock music, digital art or comic book graphics may vary widely.

At the other end of the spectrum is the view of culture as everything which we do not have to do : culture as the distinctive way of life which distinguishes a German town from a French one, or a Swedish community from a Spanish one. In this conception, the arts are simply one of many manifestations of the unique cultural identity of a place and its people, and policy may concern itself with anything from folk dance to local food traditions, or from street life to fashion. Of course, countries with a narrow view of culture as art may also value their distinctive way of life very highly, while see-

ing it as different from culture itself, and not a matter for cultural policy. The area of broadcasting encapsulates much of this dilemma. It can be seen as central to arts policy, both as a medium in its own right and as a means of access to other art forms such as classical music or ballet. At the same time, both in its content and in its place in the everyday life of society, broadcasting can claim to be a primary force in the culture and way of life of a nation, a view which is reflected by policy in France, Israel and elsewhere where legislation has been introduced to limit external, especially American, influence.

In practice, therefore, and from one place to another, the responsibilities of cultural ministries may embrace any or all of the following areas : visual and performing art, architecture, museums, libraries, sport, festivals, film, print and broadcast media, adult education, community and voluntary cultural activity, parks and gardens, traditional and immigrant cultures, digital media, fashion, commercial design, historic buildings and landscapes and much more. Where definitions of the cultural sector are broadest, further policy distinctions and priorities are inevitable, given the different responses demanded by these very different areas of activity. Whether the conception of culture is wide or narrow will therefore shape cultural policy itself.

- How wide ranging should cultural policy be ?

Wide focus							Narrow focus				
5	4	3	2	1	-	1	2	3	4	5	

## 2. Cultural democracy or Democratisation of culture

The post-war period has seen a steady increase in the engagement of European states with cultural issues, reflected in increasing public subsidy of cultural activity. This has reflected and nurtured a huge growth in the sector itself, in terms of the numbers of people working in it, its audiences, types of expression and forms, economic importance and public attention. Until the 1960s, this expansion of government involvement in the arts was largely driven, from both sides of the political spectrum, by a long-standing belief in the civilising value of the arts and a consequent desire to democratise access to it. Cultural policy driven by this belief has tended to prioritise access issues in terms of reduced admission prices, education programmes, free entry to museums, popularisation through state broadcasting and similar types of initiatives. It has been pursued with more or less commitment following the ebb and flow of political and cultural fashion.

But these values came under severe pressure during the late 1960s and in the subsequent period, as many argued that giving people access to a pre-determined set of cultural values, expressions and products was an inadequate response by democratic states. It was seen to reflect a " top-down " dispensation of elitist cultural values developed in the context of time and class, and which neglected or dismissed many forms of cultural expression and identity. It was argued that cultural policy should go beyond educating people into appreciation of approved culture and, recognising that the everyday expression of people is culture, should involve them in the fundamental debates about the nature

and value of cultural identity and expression. This approach, while more recent than that of the civilising value of culture, had precedents in some 19th century cultural movements, and inter-war initiatives in working communities. The principle of cultural democracy, which is concerned with increasing access to the means of cultural production, distribution and analysis alongside those of consumption, has subsequently vied for primacy with that of the democratisation of culture. Although, given the changing nature of society, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they have tended to polarise political debate around cultural policy in many European countries.

- What is the political conception of cultural policy ?

Cultural democracy						Democratisation of culture				
5	4	3	2	1	-	1	2	3	4	5