Exploring Cross-Border Cultural Policy in Practice, Special Issue Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER, JORDANA CORRIGAN, RONALDO MUNCK

Summary:

This article is an introduction to the Special Issue: Exploring Cross-Border Cultural Policy in Practice. It outlines the importance of considering cultural policy on the island of Ireland in a cross-border context and reflects on learning gained from an event on the subject co-organised by Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland, the Social Innovation Network and Dublin City University at The Garage Theatre in Monaghan in November 2018.

Key words: Cultural Policy; Republic of Ireland; Northern Ireland; Brexit; European Union

Cultural Policy in a Cross-Border Context

In recent years, attention has been paid to the specific role that cultural forces may play in building international relations and in reconciling societal conflict across political and territorial borders (Council of the EU, 2019a, 2019b; British Council and Goethe-Institut, 2018; Figueira, 2017). A range of supranational unions focus on the role of cultural traditions as well as commercial and non-commercial arts in facilitating economic and social integration, diplomacy and cooperation in addition to division and the assertion of political authority and competition within and among global regions and national territories (eg. Durrer and Henze, 2019 forthcoming; Council of the EU, 2019a, 2019b; Hayward, 2018; The African Union Commission, 2018; Dragićević Šešić, 2017; The ASEAN Secretariat, 2016; Teague and Henderson, 2006; Gualini, 2003; Keating, 2000; Nisbett, 2015).

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,

JORDANA CORRIGAN,

RONALDO MUNCK

This attention is also evident at local level. This level encompasses both formal and informal working practices and networking activities of local governments in inter-regional partnerships as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, educational, health and social institutes, and sports, heritage, arts and voluntary bodies and individuals (Durrer and Henze, 2019, forthcoming; Kuznetsov, 2014; McCall, 2014; Rösler, 2015; Rowntree et al, 2010; Keating, 2000). Importantly, such actions involve the traversing and negotiation of territorial, administrative, and ideological 'borders' that play out through everyday personal, social and professional exchanges (Durrer and Henze, 2019 forthcoming; McCall, 2014; Hayward 2007; Keating, 2000).

In this context, the ongoing negotiations regarding the impending process for how the United Kingdom (UK) will make its leave of the project of the European Union (EU), commonly referred to as Brexit, has brought to light the importance of the border on the island of Ireland (Hayward, 2018; Hayward, 2007). The founding of the EU was based on the "functionalist premise that cooperation across [territorial] national borders" provides an "optimal response to shared problems" (Hayward, 2018, p. 240; see also Haas, 1968; Hodges, 1972). More recent populist viewpoints have articulated borders as "lines of defence and distinction between what 'belongs' and what is 'foreign'" (Hayward, 2018, p. 240). As demonstrated in the debates on Brexit, the Irish border complicates this conceptualisation. The only location at which the UK shares a land border with an European country, it is an international boundary, but also a 'border region' (McCall, 2011), argued to be simultaneously invisible, open, lived and contested due to the island's long and complicated socio-cultural and political history (Hayward, 2018; Aughey and Gormley-Heenan, 2011). As Hayward (2018) explains, the Irish border

> exemplifies the conjoined nature of the symbolic, discursive and identity aspects of borders with their 'hard', functional aspects (p. 250; see also O'Dowd, 2002; McCall, 2011).

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,

JORDANA CORRIGAN,

RONALDO MUNCK

Cross-border public and organisational cultural policies is where all of these elements to which Hayward refers come together (see Hayward, 2004; Cunningham, 2001 on the island of Ireland; also Miller & Yudice, 2002; Dewey, 2008; Perrin, 2010). Cultural policy is often articulated as what governments choose to do (or not do) in relation to culture (Mulcahy, 2006), but it is far more complex than that. From our perspective, it involves policies initiated by both state and non-state bodies regarding symbolic expressions and signifying practices (Hall, 1997), such as

> the fine and performing arts, voluntary, amateur and community arts, arts and education, creative expression, cultural and creative industry development and issues related to cultural identity and heritage (Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017, p. 189).

It is created by practitioners (artists, arts and cultural managers), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the community and voluntary sector, and political actors including public administrators, civil servants, and politicians (Schuster, 2003; Paquette and Redaelli, 2015). It is both written and not written (i.e. practiced) (Bell and Oakley, 2015), and takes place in and across meso, macro, and micro levels of government, business, public administration and citizenry (Paquette and Redaelli, 2015; O'Brien and Oakley, 2017). There is growing recognition that policy is embodied, temporal, territorial, spatial and scalar (Bell and Oakley, 2015; Paasi, 2004) and thus enacted and experienced personally, socially, physically, administratively, and particularly; that is, specific to a field or professional area (Knippschild, 2011), for instance in areas of planning, health, tourism, and / or the professional visual and performing arts.

Approaching a discussion on cross-border cultural policy in practice we take the view that cross border cooperation refers to relations residing between territorial / administrative authorities, which can take place, for example, through partnerships between local governments or through collaborative

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

activities involving local communities, groups, and organisations in close proximity along a territorial border via European Union funded initiatives (Wassenberg and Reitel, 2015; McCall, 2011). We equally consider cross-jurisdictional cooperation in our interpretation of cross-border cultural policy; that is, exchange situated more broadly across jurisdictions, and specifically, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Such activity exists via, but is not limited to, for instance, the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) (1998) and the associated North South Ministerial Council. Such relations are dynamic, personal, social, political, and complex. As Keating (2000) explains,

> Goodwill at the political level may be undermined by an absence of common working on the ground. Conversely, regional cooperation may give rise to close working relationships and common interests on the ground as a way of circumventing political restrictions from national governments (p. 9).

Considering the relationship of the Irish border to cross-border cultural policy further emphasises this complexity. According to Mercer (2006) cultural traditions and

> artistic forms: novels… folk tales, poetry, … art and museum collections, …, musical and literary traditions, national broadcasting systems, films – have constantly affirmed and re-affirmed, produced and reproduced, the deepest and most embedded sense of the nation and the national: what is inside and what is outside, the borders (p. 1).

In an Irish context, the notion of the 'nation' is not necessarily agreed (Hayward, 2004). In fact, cultural forms, like those to which Mercer refers, are the means by which "contact, communication, and cooperation" (Duff, 1997, pp. 65 – 66; Barnes & Duncan, 1992, pp. 5 – 6) as well as conflict and separation are demarcated, interpreted, imagined and realised across and beyond the Irish border (McCall, 2018; Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017). This

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,

JORDANA CORRIGAN,

RONALDO MUNCK

is not necessarily a unique situation, with circumstances in the Basque in Spain and Tyrol on the borders between Italy and Austria as two examples. Yet, either as a nation-state or a cross-border or cross-jurisdictional construct, cultural policymaking on the island of Ireland involves

> political overtones, historical hang-overs and critical reflections on cultural identity, citizenship or territory that are tangled up with post-colonial and unionist sentiments that remain at play (Durrer and McCall Magan, 2017, p. 189).

At the same time, cross-border cultural policy making comprises well-established partnerships and links that have fostered "cultural spaces" for exploring difference and commonalities along the Irish border (McCall, 2011, p. 201) as well as notions of an "all-island arts space" (McKimm and McAndrew, 2010, p. 105). These include connections and shared projects between local authority arts offices in the border regions and the island's two Arts Councils, the existence of commercial cultural businesses and non-profit companies that work within both jurisdictions, and a number of arts and cultural development agencies and associations that engage explicitly on an all-island basis, such as Visual Artists Ireland and the Irish Museums Association, in addition to those organisations that do so less explicitly.

These networks and practices exist not only due to the institutional frameworks set out by the Good Friday Agreement (1998) and the European Union's PEACE and INTERREG programmes (Teague and Henderson, 2006), but also through, for example, the regular movement of artists to create and showcase their work around the island (McKimm and McAndrew, 2010; Donlon and Ruane, 2004). In other words, cross-border working in the realm of creative expressions are forms of representation that interpret, produce, reproduce, and circulate "ideas, knowledge, values and beliefs" (Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013, p. 188; Hall, 1997). As a result, Irish cultural policy in an all-island context is a significant site in which to consider, herald

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

and question, the socio-cultural, economic, political, and administrative sustainability of not only European, but also global cohesion, particularly among post conflict societies.

As an early part of this investigation, Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland and the North South Social Innovation Network through Dublin City University collaborated to host a discussion event in November 2018. Entitled '*Invitation to a Dialogue: Exploring Cross Border Cultural Policy in Practice'*, the event involved those engaging in the amateur, voluntary, commercial and publicly-subsidised cultural sector to explore a range of questions on cross border exchange in an informal, conversational setting.

The event took place at The Garage Theatre in Monaghan which is in the Irish border region, within Ulster and the Republic of Ireland. The exploration was structured over four sessions across which a lively and in-depth discussion was facilitated. The sessions set out an understanding of what cross-border working exists in practice, what frameworks and infrastructures enable and hinder this practice, and what might exist to better support this practice.

The morning session set the scene with a welcome from Professor Daire Keogh, Deputy President of Dublin City University, and Trevor Connolly, Monaghan Town Centre Co-ordinator. Professor Cathal McCall, Queen's University Belfast, opened by reflecting on the social and political context on culture and the Irish Border. This was followed by Dr. Anthony Soares from the Centre for Cross Border Studies who provided background on the political and practical contexts that currently exist for cross border partnership.

The second session explored the question of what exists in the border area. This session was chaired by Cathy Bennet, Public Representative of Monaghan County Council and Operations Manager of The Garage Theatre, with contributions and perspectives from panelists; Joe Lowe, Head of

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

Enterprise, Leitrim County Council, Co-ordinator of the Harnessing Creativity Programme; Freda Manweiler, Producer and Company Manager, Smashing Times Theatre and Film Company; Seán Love, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Fighting Words; and Dr. Briege Casey, Assistant Professor in School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University. Panelists discussed where working relations happen, how and in what conditions. They also shared thoughts on how cultural and creative practice currently takes place by way of negotiating the border.

The third session facilitated a conversation around the frameworks and infrastructures that enable and hinder this practice and was chaired by Dr. Victoria Durrer, Co-founder of Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland. From the perspectives of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively, Dick Gleeson, (former) Dublin City Council Planner and Michael Donnelly of Perspectivity explored the importance of placemaking and cultural infrastructure, both tangible in the form of buildings, and intangible through the form of social and professional networks. Together, participants discussed how institutions and those involved with infrastructure might better support the spatial challenges of creative, cultural and artistic meetings, connections, and collaborations across the island.

Chaired by Tania Banotti, Director of Creative Ireland, the final session provided space for response and future thinking. Richard Wakely, Director of Belfast International Arts Festival opened the session and detailed the festival's reliance on cross-jurisdictional relationships. Raquel McKee posed the following questions for group discussion;

> What are some of the key values shared by both jurisdictions in terms of cultural identity and cultural practice?

> What is our place? What is our role in the future?

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,

JORDANA CORRIGAN,

RONALDO MUNCK

What opportunities / roadblocks do government bodies see for dialogue about putting our region on the world stage?

How do we protect spaces for [those in] the margins and bring them into the centre of policy planning?

Some of the key points / learning gained from this final discussion are summarised below. The papers in this special edition further develop some of these thoughts and ideas.

What Exists?

The sharing of key values by practitioners, who identify their work as cross-border, was generally acknowledged. However, the differences in operational infrastructure and institutions between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was noted. There was consensus that the value placed by Government on arts practice in Northern Ireland is different and / or perceived to be lesser to the value that Government in the Republic of Ireland is perceived to place on this practice. There was a broad sense that there is an encumbrance on resources in Northern Ireland, due in part to successive austerity measures and a lack of a sitting government since January 2017 (NICVA, 2017; Durrer et al., 2019). It was considered that this discrepancy on either side of the border is likely to be widened as a result of the process of Brexit. It was also suggested that the collaborative cross-border and cross-jurisdictional work being done on the ground must be formally captured and recognised so that it can be monitored and developed and thus its value to citizens across the island better understood.

Frameworks and Infrastructures?

Participants explored the existing and potential frameworks and infrastructural supports that facilitate and hinder cross-border working. They expressed a need to improve regional transportation infrastructure between Northern

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, both north / south and east / west. Improving networks and speed of transport was felt to have the potential to increase the ease and efficiency of movement and to reduce the perception of distance and division. At the local authority level, it was suggested that there is a need to take a step away from buildings–led cultural planning, and to develop our local authorities' understanding of cultural planning and assets outside of physical regeneration type projects.

With regard to the management of existing cultural assets The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon's (2019) *Review of Arts Centres and Venues* was welcomed. Seminar participants questioned whether the consumption-value of such venues is emphasised over their value as 'making' spaces. It was stated that there is an apparent demand for more spaces for engaging, meeting and creating, and that there is a need to strike a balance between managing and protecting these physical assets / venues and rethinking what we see as 'community' venues (halls, pubs, libraries) as also being spaces for creative production.

Future Thinking?

Quite apparent from the final discussion was that while the challenges of working in a post-Brexit environment were acknowledged, there was a strong consensus that continued collaborative working and maintaining established relationships on the ground, and locally, will be essential to bolstering and implementing the political will in each jurisdiction, which is imperative for maintenance of all-island links. The discussions surrounding the border and the potential for divisionism were described as being more prevalent than twenty years ago. The process of Brexit was viewed as having the potential to reinforce separated cultural identities to the detriment of established relationships, thus further highlighting the importance of maintaining and developing existing Northern Ireland-Republic of Ireland collaborations and relationships.

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

However, it was also suggested that there is a different atmosphere in both jurisdictions, with an arguable perception that the Republic of Ireland is in a 'better' position. A perception was shared by those attending from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that individuals working in the arts and cultural sectors in the Republic of Ireland are operating with the support of stronger national cultural frameworks and policies and funding alignment than their colleagues in Northern Ireland. This examination prompted the question 'do those working in the Republic of Ireland need to embrace those working in Northern Ireland?' While this question raised much concern among those attending, it nonetheless points out that perceived divisions do exist and thus require attention. Whether or not more could be done from those working in the Republic of Ireland to assist those working in Northern Ireland was also posited. While different views on the issue were expressed, it was clear that the notion of all-island working must be addressed if we are to achieve harmonious development in Ireland.

Finally, there was a discussion as to how we create consensus on common themes and values in relation to cultural policy on the island and if so, how might we move forward. More questions than answers were raised and a need for further research was clearly established: participants wondered if there is scope for bi-lateral agreements; where opportunities to network and discuss ideas and opportunities might exist; what may be preventing cooperation across the border and can more be done; why is there not more support by the Arts Councils for cross-border work; is there a need for an All-Island Cultural Engagement Framework; and is there potential for a Cultural Heritage Alliance.

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

Summary of papers

The papers selected for this special issue reflect the diversity and breadth of perspectives and experience of the participants that attended the conference in Monaghan in November 2018, and more widely, those working within cultural and/or all-island policy frameworks. The papers make a significant and very timely contribution to our understanding of cross-border working and policymaking in changing political circumstances. These contributions develop some of the ideas which were initially discussed at the event in Monaghan. They begin to explore the challenges and opportunities which lie ahead, and the resources and energy that will be demanded from our key stakeholders and institutions in adapting to the changing environment as we navigate the process of Brexit in a unique social, political and spatial context. As an ever-changing situation, the pieces herein reflect hopes and concerns at a particular moment in time.

Cathal McCall discusses the Irish cultural borderscape. He describes how the EU is a producer of this borderscape, which is the epicentre for the development of cross-border cultural policy. The borderscape is stated as providing the opportunity to escape territorial conflict and advance peacebuilding with cultural differences and commonalities being explored at a local level, through a process of 'contact, communication and cooperation on a cross-border, cross-community basis'. Where PEACE projects have funded efforts that encourage the search for commonalities and a respect for difference, the Brexit process is a destructive one which threatens the peacebuilding process and nature of the borderscape by disrupting 'mobility, contact, communication and cooperation across the border'. McCall posits that the Brexit process reasserts the differences that the Irish borderscape has been challenging for twenty years.

In the second paper Anthony Soares describes the discrepancy between the political context within which cross-border working operates and the

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

practicalities of cross-border cooperation and the partnerships this entails. He describes the institutional spaces which have promoted increased and improved cooperation and cross-border working in recent years. He queries how we take cross-border working forward and who funds it in a changing socio-political context. While these considerations pose challenges, the experience to date identifies the reasons for, and opportunities to harness and develop this valuable cross-border work. Soares describes how it is more important now than ever to continue cooperation across the border given the provisions for post-Brexit north-south cooperation. As a reproduction of the thoughts he shared with us in Monaghan in November 2018, some post-script reflections by Jordana Corrigan are provided at the conclusion of his piece.

Dylan Quinn provides a unique practitioner's perspective of working in a border region in the third paper. He describes the experience and learnings of the *Here & Now* project which promoted engagement in the arts by a community, and in a physical location, shaped and influenced by the history and culture of the border. Quinn describes the unique aspects of relationship-building and community engagement in a cross-border, cross-community context. He describes how unique times require unique solutions and the arts, and by extension artists, have a key role to play in giving voice to those excluded from mainstream discourse, prompting new conversations, among new communities in a creatively-engaged future. However, he outlines how this requires systemic change, specifically with regard to agency and power in policymaking in addition to long-term funding practices.

In the fourth paper Gina O'Kelly from the Irish Museums Association looks at the shared education and cultural policies among museums that have encouraged cross-border partnerships, and the role that museums have played in supporting intercultural dialogue and inclusion. The impact of new policy frameworks and EU funding programmes are also addressed. The paper concludes that despite the wealth of activity amongst museums, the wider impact of this work remains largely undocumented and arguably

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

undervalued. The challenges posed by Brexit are described – specifically for partnerships and networks. However the author highlights the opportunity that exists for the NI sector to approach Brexit from a position of authority, providing knowledge and expertise from which the regions can draw, taking the role of museums in supporting intercultural dialogue and inclusion from objectivity to activism.

Catriona O' Reilly reflects on her extensive professional experience of cross-border working in a local authority. She discusses the meaning and origins of cross-border working, and the importance of this work and the relationships which are formed in resourcing and nurturing the arts. O'Reilly's contribution also includes the views of artists, senior council officials and community leaders which adds greatly to our understanding of the practicalities and challenges of working in a local context and the ways forward for ensuring a sustainable approach to arts development.

To conclude Richard Wakely provides an international perspective on cross-border working through his experience as CEO and Artistic Director of The Belfast International Arts Festival. Richard reflects on the policy frameworks which promote cross-border working at the macro level, and the projects which operate at the local level, whereby border communities consider matters of global political significance, and explore the themes of cultural diversity, tolerance and inclusivity, particularly in respect of the entire island. Richard suggests that the potential impact of Brexit on cross-border working and collaborating will be wide-ranging and concerning artist mobility, funding, government policy, and managing competition in a market with currency fluctuations. However, he posits that the most urgent issue to address is how to prevent Brexit from dismantling the complex and multi-layered notions of identity in Northern Ireland and how we articulate our common European heritage.

Conclusion

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

While the question of cultural difference can be an emotive one, particularly in the border area, it is clear from the contributions made that there is an overwhelming desire to protect the collaborative and cross-border work done to-date and the associated relationships from the destructive process of Brexit. There is also an understanding of the important role that culture and cultural policy can play in addressing the challenges posed by changing socio-political contexts and international relations.

While there are more questions than answers as to how that protection can be afforded, and there is a clear need for further research, there is no doubt that there is significant willingness on the part of those practitioners, academics, and policymakers engaging in and with the cultural sector to work towards protecting the significant collaborative work done, relationships established and the shared identity and respect for difference that has developed over time.

The editors wish to thank the attendees of the event in Monaghan in 2018 that shared their thoughts so generously. We are grateful to Kerry McCall Magan, Co-Founder of Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland who co-curated and organised the event. We would also like to thank the authors of the papers, which provide a range and depth of experiences and perspectives.

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

Victoria Durrer is Senior Lecturer in Arts Management and Cultural Policy at Queen's University Belfast, UK. From January 2020, she will be an Ad Astra Fellow in the School of Art History and Cultural Policy at University College Dublin in the Republic of Ireland. She is co-founder of _Brokering Intercultural Exchange_, an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research network on arts and cultural management, and the all-island research network, _Cultural Policy Observatory Ireland_. Among publications in academic journals, she is a contributor and co-editor of the _Routledge Handbook of Global Cultural Policy_ and _Managing Culture: Reflecting on Exchange in Global Times, forthcoming from Palgrave_.

Jordana Corrigan is the co-ordinator for the North-South Social Innovation Network at Dublin City University which is dedicated to the sharing of knowledge and learning across sectors (health, education, justice, culture and the economy), and promotes cross-border engagement in the area of social innovation. She was co-editor of the publication _Social Innovation in Ireland; Challenges and Prospects_ (2017).

Professor Ronaldo Munck is Head of Civic Engagement at DCU and a Visiting Professor of International Development at the University of Liverpool and St. Mary's University, Nova Scotia. His publications focus on globalisation, international development and social movements. He has led research consortiums around social engagement / innovation themes funded by a number of research councils and organisations, including The British Academy, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), The Nuffield Foundation, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Horizon Fund (EU), and EU Peace and Reconciliation and the HEA/Irish Aid Programme of Strategic Co-operation.

#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

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Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

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#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

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Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
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#6

Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
JORDANA CORRIGAN,
RONALDO MUNCK

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Introduction

VICTORIA DURRER,
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