



Think Piece: “Seismographs”, “Watch Dogs” or “Change Agents”? Artistic Interventions and Cultural Policy in Processes of Social Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This article opens with two questions: What are the roles of art and artists in the transformation of society? What impact can cultural policy have on the structures of cultural governance or artistic production? These questions are central to global cultural policy (the UN), regional cultural policy (the EU) and local cultural policy (our cities, cultural institutions, projects, and education establishments). This article is phrased as a polemic and a provocation for public officials, cultural policy makers and cultural managers. It asserts that cultural policies should be used explicitly for socially transformative activities, particularly utilising the potential of arts education. In the cause of good governance for culture, it begins by setting out some critical definitional clarifications on culture and its social significance, and then explains how artists can play the role of activists within the social realm through an 'interventionist' approach to culture. With reference to the full range of professional competencies that cultural policy can offer a developing civil society, the article concludes with substantial remarks on the potential of cultural policy for international cooperations as well as constructive responses to migration.

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“Seismographs”, “Watch Dogs” or “Change Agents”?

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What are the roles of art and artists in the transformation of society? What impact can cultural policy have on the structures of cultural governance or artistic production? I will not here be referring primarily to funding systems, markets, finance or economics, but to culture's *social* relevance and its potential for social transformation. This is not a question about representation either, but of *intervention*. And the concerns of contemporary cultural policy are no longer just about local arts organisations, regional support of structures for culture, or national programmes for arts education. They concern the international relationships between artists; culture as a factor in development; and concern knowledge that has been generated by a comparative analysis of cultural management. Culture is now rightly understood as a source of knowledge, creativity and strategy for the development of society. A principal task for cultural policy is therefore to create and support structures that promote the mobilisation of artistic creativity – and of the people who operationalise creativity, the artists and others, and thus ensure welfare, innovation and pluralism.

A dimension of our research enterprise at the Department of Cultural Policy, University of Hildesheim (Germany), focuses on *good governance for culture*, which involved examining the range of aspirations, objectives, control mechanisms and the functioning of institutions, their principles and structures. The concepts of "good governance" for Cultural Policy has hitherto been given all too little attention by researchers (and policy makers). We are thus investigating what transparency and participation, efficiency, accountability, market economy, the rule of law and justice, all mean within and for cultural political action – and crucially, what they mean within the processes of social, particularly democratic, transformation.

Within this complex bundle of subjects resides the question of the role of the arts and of individual artists in the development of society, (and also, of course, in the role of business enterprises within the framework of corporate social and cultural responsibility - though this is not my subject here). Our research enterprise is also demanding further clarification on what freedom, and what regulatory

contexts, the arts and artists need within social development and what form or role arts education should take, given that these contexts can be diverse and changing. Moreover, we need to be able to discuss the connection of the role of the arts in the development of society with *the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions* (cf. The 2005 UNESCO Convention), which itself will entail the question on the nature of the interconnection of the arts with the broader "creative industries". How can the creative industries promote (or inhibit?) the role of the arts in social development?

It is the subject of policy debate, what cultural policy structures are required in the granting of a social role and function to the arts, and the extent to which cultural policies need to be reviewed in the light of this. In this context we need further clarification on which forms of cooperation and exchange will be needed (and between whom), and what demand currently exists for the training of artists and cultural managers in developing countries.

When we think of "good governance" as providing a new basis for society, what is required to facilitate good *cultural* governance? Let us use the term governance as a bridge that serves to advance interdisciplinary dialogue, interconnecting the debates and discourses of different disciplines, and bring together political science and cultural research. Governance requires the coordination and oversight of complex social systems and their semi-autonomous agents and actors; *cultural* governance would require this in the cause of the organization of cultural diversity and cultural participation. Cultural policy therefore needs goals that could provide a basis for governance competency. The implementation of these goals requires strategies that cross the concerns and competencies of state and society. The concept of good governance has an important role to play: how does "society" (civil society; citizens; other public sector agencies) view or comprehend cultural policy? Who should be the principal actors of good cultural governance, what infrastructure is required, and how could it be created?

The goals of cultural policy tend to be based on *content* (kinds of desired or valued arts and culture) rather than pure economics or values of exchange.

“Seismographs”, “Watch Dogs” or “Change Agents”?

Artistic Interventions and Cultural Policy in Processes of Social Transformation

Wolfgang Schneider

Content, structure and processes are some of the dimensions of cultural policy, and where governance is concerned we would need to pay particular attention to structures and processes. Per se, governance is neither a goal of cultural policy, nor a sphere of activity within cultural policy, but serves to question what systems of management and control are actively involved in the attainment of cultural policy goals. Governance goes beyond the goals and competencies of cultural management itself, as it focuses strongly on how such goals are devised in the first instance, and can be constructed, deliberated upon and agreed by all actors and agencies involved. As an administrative concept, and embedded in the idea of the "activating" or empowering State, governance aims to involve civil society and its refined problem-solving skills in order to overcome broader social or public challenges. It is not a question of competition between the various competencies and activities of civil society actors, but rather of a fundamental cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental. Existing efforts and practical successes can be built upon and strengthened using the conceptual and strategic potential of governance.

The concept of governance is grounded in the need for shared responsibility and responsible partnership. The state, the market and civil society are not set against each other, but interconnected. The concept helps us focus on the cultural wellbeing of every citizen, especially in the way the arts can offer every person powers of self-reflection. Arts allows us to recognize values and make decisions in our search for meaning; arts are how people express themselves, gain self-awareness and create works that allow them to expand their limits. So the aim is to use cultural policy to achieve a fundamental cultural competence and good governance.

Artists as Activists

For if we want to talk about individual freedom and dignity, demand them, portray them in all their contradictions, and display them in symbolic forms so as to enable other people to think about them more deeply and (and above all, experience them directly), we do so mainly through the arts. The arts

enable people to become involved in the realities of their individuality, self-determination and the need for social interconnections. In this way the arts have an effect on society far beyond the sphere of artistic communication per se (or the 'art world') because they help to give people a meaning in life and determine human intents and purposes. This is why we need a cultural policy that sees itself as primarily a *social policy*, and thus enables, defends and plays its part in shaping art and culture *within society*.

The function of art and the experience of the representation or expression of things that have previously been unseen, or of which we have never dared to think, is particularly helpful in enabling us to come closer to the world and look for answers to things that move our emotions or weigh us down. Art generates different possible scenarios of the future, and so involves a search for a way to shape our reality in light of the possible futures. Art should maintain a role on questioning pre-existing reality and sparking off new impulses – particularly for development frameworks and situations. Many intellectuals have hitherto viewed art as the most sensitive seismograph of future human crises, opening up themes and leading us to new ways of seeing and perhaps also to alternative ways of dealing with the world.

Art, if it takes the form of an 'intervention', can make inroads into the space of public life, and influence social and political decision-making. Art as intervention can demand an exchange of opinions, and further reflection. It can demand change in the 'real world' about us and our everyday behaviour, by reviving public spaces in urban contexts, or attending to dimensions of the everyday that have previously been regarded as 'normal'. Through art the 'normal' can be subject to surprising stimulating associations, irritations or provocations, and generate new ways of making the future more habitable. Furthermore the rich variety of facets inherent in art offers us opportunities to evaluate individual questions and needs. Critical contemporary art, in particular, throws up fundamental questions. Avant-garde art and transgressive practices in art, in particular, have long been associated with breaking taboos, and reactions to such deliberate provocations today are invariably constructive in that they prise

open realms of thought and life previously concealed or repressed. Art can make us more sensitive to deeper aspects of reality and sharpen our judgement on the truly important things in life, as well as identifying and pinpointing correlations. Artists could also be “watch dogs”, in the sense of being agents of change through identifying and perceiving the inhibitors change. In fact, in development contexts, it is more and more common to expect the artist to play something of a 'political' role – critically, we must recognize that artists could also be subject to instrumentalization by politics itself.

An artist not only discusses and makes claims on the nature of 'freedom and dignity' for every individual, but can present these concepts in all their political contradiction through offering symbolic or other material forms through which they can be thought or even lived. The conditions of individuality can be specified through the arts in all its interconnectedness with social bondage. The arts can effect change far above the sphere of communication through fiction or aesthetic artifice, and play a role in the symbolic order of society, out of which social material can, in turn, form art's human determination (and its aims). Art's social embeddedness can, therefore, only demonstrate the need for a cultural policy that comprehends social policy – that defends and organises art and culture as social practices. For the development of a society can be articulated as one fundamental question: How are people immersed in living culture? I would argue that the prime way of investigating this is to identify and comprehend how people are taking part in the arts. My observations have told me that *participation* is the central term by which we understand this, and so understand the necessary aims of cultural policy!

And from what I have said above, the conditions of cultural policy action are clear: an activation of the relevance of the arts; freedom of the arts to practice, express meaning and to intervene in social or public spaces; access to the systems of the arts, whether markets, institutions or events; and the broad functions of arts management, particularly in audience development or the gathering of a public for the arts.

Arts Education needs Cultural Policies needs Arts Education

For me, a critical focus for cultural policy is arts education. The sphere of arts education can contribute to securing cultural participation as a human right. It is a sphere of cultural competency, which is developing a sensitive approach to researching the matrixes of social life so as to make possible new registers of culture, new audiences and publics, new concepts of art, culture and society. Arts Education is a public undertaking and major political task for local authority institutions. It is the basis of cultural diversity (as articulated in the 2005 UNESCO Convention). But arts education requires educational policies!

Culture Resource, a civil society agency in Cairo (in Arabic, “Al Mawred Al Thaqafy”), is prominent as a network for the Arabic Countries. It has initiated the first Masters degree of Cultural Policy and Cultural Management (in the Arabic language), planned for 2016 at Hassan II, University of Casablanca. It is an example of the necessity of a credible qualification to accompany governmental efforts to establish cultural policy. Academic discourse is a necessary condition of the intellectual capacity-building required for cultural policy actions and policies to be articulated and deliberated. For the initial academic feasibility study required to establish the degree, a research team was able to identify the specific attributes and benefits of the arts to Arab societies generally. Cultural and artistic practitioners of many kinds were consulted, and they all emphasised strong connections between the ability to plan, regulate and implement cultural activities, and the processes of social and political change that are acutely needed in the region.

Interviewees consulted by the research team in four Arab countries articulated the following benefits, for 'independent' (civil society), private (enterprise) and public (governmental or government funded) sectors respectively:

Independent sector

- > Improve the ability to market cultural activities and services, and to access new audiences.
- > Strengthen independent cultural organizations and enhance their sustainability.
- > Improve the skill levels of cultural managers.

“Seismographs”, “Watch Dogs” or “Change Agents”?

Artistic Interventions and Cultural Policy in Processes of Social Transformation

Wolfgang Schneider

- › Help independent researchers get access to information and improve their research skills.
- › Develop public cultural policies that would lead to more access to public funding and enhance freedom of expression.
- › Improve the quality of cultural products and services.
- › Enhance the international exposure of independent artists.
- › Develop the capacity for collaboration with artists and cultural organizations inside and outside the Arab region.
- › Provide new career avenues for independent cultural operators as researchers and academics.

Private sector

- › Provide knowledge of best practices and standards outside the region, thus leading to improving the standards of cultural products in the Arab region.
- › Create research that would lead to opening new markets for cultural industries inside and outside the region.
- › Improve cultural tourism, a vital economic resource for all countries in the region, through providing a stronger research and information base for projects in this field.
- › Enable the introduction of new cultural policies that would nurture and support cultural industries.
- › Enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of cultural enterprises through improving the skill levels of professional working in this sector.
- › Improve the marketing of cultural products, which would contribute to economic growth as well as to the creation of more producers and more jobs
- › Create strong connections between commercial enterprises and both the independent non-profit sector and the public sector and encourage public/private partnerships.

Public sector

- › Improve the management of public cultural institutions through offering this programme to public cultural administrators.
- › A more advanced approach to the management of cultural heritage, preservation,

documentation and awareness in this field.

- › Enhance the reach of public cultural institutions and enable them to diversify their audiences.
- › Provide public policy makers with research and information that would better advise public policy.
- › Provide technical tools to improve the accountability and transparency of public institutions thus contributing to their credibility.
- › Enable better cross-sector collaboration and coordination among the public sector institutions, for example with public educational institutions, through providing supporting research and technical tools.
- › Enhance international engagement and implementation of international conventions.

Cultural Policy for Fair Cooperation

'Artistic cooperation' needs to be defined in terms of a partnership, with the aim of creating something new on the basis of a common working process. Cultural capital, according to Pierre Bourdieu, can and should be used as a resource for social inclusion, and not (as is still the case in cultural political practice) for the consolidation of the means of social distinction. Furthermore, in order to mitigate against the overwhelming focus on major cities in cultural policy globally, we need to consider democratisation and access to the arts in terms of decentralisation and rural areas.

The question on how we extend artistic cooperation must go far beyond cultural propagation and exports to the relationships between rich and poor. We need to reflect on how cooperations can often deepen the differences between 'town and country', especially regarding cultural promotion, professionalism and the cultural infrastructure. The question is centrally about what cultural policies can and must be implemented and shaped by whom (in a theoretical or conceptual way and then in a real or practical way). Taking into account the huge challenges present in each and every country – like population growth, environmental destruction and violence, particularly against children and young people –

different national priorities and needs must be articulated.

It is generally agreed in cultural policy research circles that cultural cooperation of all kinds should fundamentally enable mutual understanding, and contribute to deepening our knowledge of one another. But we must also acknowledge that there is an imbalance between aspirations and reality in this regard. For this reason we need a catalogue of criteria. This criteria should embody substantive information on, for example, how to create partnerships, the basic conditions for cooperation, contextual knowledge, intercultural competence, a common language that can be developed, the kinds of people to accompany the cooperation, context orientated transfers, mutual locations, process orientation, the failure of past experiments, continuities in cooperation, the means of exchange of ideas and opinions. And further, in the last analysis, it may all depend on particular ways of devising a “fair cooperation”, which resists constructing a hierarchical system of power between the cooperation partners, but so pleads for a consistent and continuing debate on the matters of equality, particularly with regard to funding and aims. Meeting in equal terms is an ideal seldom achieved. We should rid ourselves of wishful thinking, for “ambivalent relationships” in the cooperation between the global North and the global South will remain. Yet the notion of fairness needs to be emphasised. Here I would suggest that the concept of “respect” is made a category in such cooperative exchanges.

The Challenge of Migration

Countless academic studies have researched, analysed and reflected on the role of theatre as part of a society's capacity for self-reflection. Many scholars have focussed on theatrical aesthetics as a means of doing this. But cultural policy has also been the subject of research and developments in policy thinking and making have also been mapped, along with its conditions of production and processes of implementation. Numerous research consultations have underscored areas of funding requirement. The following example, serves to make my argument for cultural policy.

One of the greatest social and political challenges in our increasingly globalised world is *integration*. This is the need to ensure that people of all ethnic backgrounds, religious orientations and cultural traditions, are able to participate equally in any given society. The nurturing of respect for cultural diversity in subsequent multiethnic and multicultural populaces should be a critical instrumental element for this challenge. Cultural policy can play a central role here, in part by contributing to the recognition and understanding of cultural difference. “Interculturality” is a key concept in contemporary cultural policy discourse for the identification of appropriate policy and practice to facilitate such integration.

In societies characterised by cultural diversity and fast-paced socio-demographic change, efforts towards equal participation will only flourish if ideas surrounding cultural identity are understood as *process-driven*, and if serious, critical questioning of our conceptions of borders and thresholds is recognised as an impetus for social change (not an inhibitor of such). In the context of cultural multiplicity, discourses around societal forms and the understanding and treatment of difference should be understood to transcend multiculturalism and become “transculturalism”. An equalities-based framework is important, and is also of self-evident practical value in the implementation of intercultural actions in conceptual and policy arenas, in agenda-setting (especially for collaborative decision-making), in the fair redistribution of cultural funds and in the internal restructure of arts organisations. Infrastructure, network-building and access criteria, are mandatory for successful intercultural practice. Opportunities must be created for broad participation to allow for the forging of relationships based on empathy for the new, rather than a fear of the “strange” or alien.

Three major aspects must be lent credence, if the cultural landscape is to be reorganised along intercultural lines. Unless society can provide a broader cultural training within the compulsory education system – a “school for life” – large segments of the population will continue to remain excluded from cultural offerings and, in the best case scenario, new forms of cultural expression will merely eke out a meagre existence beyond the pale

“Seismographs”, “Watch Dogs” or “Change Agents”?

Artistic Interventions and Cultural Policy in Processes of Social Transformation

Wolfgang Schneider

of mainstream cultural policy. We must demand a commitment from policy-makers to honour their rhetoric (say, of annual government education reports or regional plans) and recognise that cultural training can be a significant forms of social responsibility. This could be achieved, for example, through the inclusion of cultural training in the national, regional or local educational curricula, as a subject taught from kindergarten to adult education level. Training policy could emphasise culture as a core aspect of "lifelong learning".

In this, one of the most important areas is that of *audience development*, understood as an integrated component of the discipline of Cultural Management. This is a cross-cutting issue for all institutions that aspire to a holistic form of practice: it can inform their creative and organisational methodology, and allow them to grow alongside their changing public, as well as to nurture that public. Only a self-imposed commitment to cultural diversity by the entire cultural sector will generate the possibility of a culturally diverse public. Traditional marketing methods, focussed on the maximisation of profits and the selling of an existing product to an existing customer, are not equal to this task. In order to plan, position, communicate, disseminate and sell cultural offerings to diverse target groups, audience development must work in tandem with arts marketing, PR, research, education and training.

The concept of audience development emerged in the Anglo-Saxon world in the 1990s. It is embedded in an understanding of cultural management that uses its public as the central reference point for cultural organisation. This is a departure from the supply-based model traditional in other European countries. It is important to understand that a demand-based model does not necessarily lead to a reduction in artistic quality (as per Bourdieu's claim).

Equality of participation, the democratisation of culture, and the dismantling of elitist structures, are amongst the most important aims of audience development. Yet other considerations exist alongside such socio-cultural perspectives. Cultural policy-makers have the right to demand to see a wide social cross-section of the public in state-funded institutions, based on the belief that art can have a sustained and enriching effect on people's

lives, and can strengthen communication, identity and sense of community. The benefits reaped for even one participant can justify the public money invested.

The belief that the arts are intimidating, boring or difficult to understand, can only be combated through increased accessibility and education. The public should be engaged in a lively debate on the topic of culture. For this to become a reality, it must be provided with the knowledge and tools to decipher cultural codes. In the short term, this can be achieved through direct education within cultural institutions themselves, through media-based interpretation tools such as audio guides, dialogue-based tours or creative discussions in workshops. The quality of the intermediary is of paramount importance in this regard.

A structured, long-term cultural training strategy orientated towards the entire population is essential. Increased collaboration between cultural organisations and associations, facilities used for out of school activities and the schools themselves, will help to this end. Only such an approach can guarantee that early engagement with art and culture is available to all, and, in particular, is not dependent on a child's social background. Short and long-term engagement activity should understand cultural training as intercultural training. The content of training should be developed with a focus on strengthening intercultural perspectives.

Another area intrinsically related to this, is the nurturing of the community-focussed and mandated cultural *hubs* that have emerged throughout Europe, but which remain fragile in terms of their financial sustainability and capacity for long-term planning. These hubs contribute to an overall shift towards participation in the arts by a wider spectrum of society: they include people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds or social classes living in the vicinity of cultural institutions and who are beginning to involve culture in their day-to-day lives without being explicitly targeted. Cultural institutions are tried and true locales for intercultural communication and participation, and are increasingly also sites for the performing arts, including visiting independent productions and participative arts work.

Substance, brilliance and relevance as categories for Cultural Policy

The arts constitute much more than cultural institutions, however. Cultural policy should not lose sight of the broader societal meaning, capacity for intervention and stimulation of social change I have briefly discussed above. We need to cultivate the ability to question and interrogate perceived norms.

This is why we could learn from other disciplines of inquiry, not least philosophy. Philosophy may have begun as follows: perhaps the first philosopher stubbed their toe on a stone. This accident led them to ponder on why the stone was there, why there was anything there rather than nothing, why the stone was so hard, what comprised the essence of the stone. Why did they trip on the stone, and what should they do about it? Was there something wrong with their eyes, and what is seeing in the first place? No one is certain how these questions were answered long ago, though we have the certainty that not everyone who looks also sees. Seeing is also ‘overseeing’, ‘seeing to’ and ‘foreseeing.’ ‘Looking’ is perhaps our attempt to make the obscure transparent, to see what customarily goes unseen. How should we go about looking in order to be able to actually see? In an age in which we are subject to visual over-stimulation and continually assaulted by the mediation of symbolic language, it makes sense to *teach the act of seeing*. An effective method is to awaken interest in *what* is being seen. As I argued above, the arts offer a distinctive way of undertaking this general developmental task. The arts present the opportunity not simply to learn “seeing”, but to integrate seeing with communication, to learn to code as well as decode our world through a dialogue between those playing on the stage and those playing in the audience; the arts teach us how seeing is a social practice. To be sure, the arts must be sufficiently captivating, must stimulate curiosity, must have something meaningful to offer. Good art, will always demand a sense of purpose in order to engage our attention beyond the superficial, and move us, preoccupy us, urge us to action, initiate a relationship with us based on what psychologists call mutual dependency. It demands substance,

brilliance and relevance in order to care about itself and to express itself. Once we put our minds to reforming the Cultural Politics of our arts landscape, artists will become both motivated and equipped to attain to these aims.

In contribution to current scholarly questions that animate so many reports on the arts and international development, and the arts in society, and the value of the cultural economy, I will conclude with the following statements: the markets for art needs explicit regulations for artists; creative economy needs cultural policy; the UN Development Goals need to cite cultural participation as a human Right. And all this means that it is time for a revised international concept of cultural policy, with respect to the role of arts and artists as social change agents, to fully acknowledge the power of artistic interventions for the processes of transformation that are necessary to generate a genuinely sustainable society and cooperative global order.

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