

## Foreword

CIARÁN BENSON

### Introduction

Sometimes it is only when something arrives that you realise that it was missing and has been missed. The *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy* is just such an arrival. While there has long been a commitment to actively shape cultural policy in and for Ireland, often as a means of furthering nationalism, it is only in the last forty years or so that a more self-critical and diverse constituency has emerged with a common commitment to making 'culture', in all its rich variety, a central part of Irish social life and political discourse.

Paradoxically, when financial resources were in uncontrolled spate during the recent boom years, the foundational role of ideas and of argument in the formation of cultural policy seemed to recede into the background. Now that the economic catastrophe has turned that torrent of money into a trickle, the opportunity exists to review what has happened and to wonder where we can and should go next. That is a good thing. Money can mask thoughtlessness and, worse still, can fuel it.

Orthodoxies when unchecked and unchallenged simply flow on regardless. They become 'obvious'. Ireland is painfully awakening from a particularly intense period when it was obvious that the way to go was to build bigger 'signature' buildings; to take the imagined admiring gaze of the rest of the world, conceived as an unfettered global market, as the perspective that would allow us feel that we were 'world-class', when it might have been better for us to have wanted to be of 'world-interest'; and to believe that the best approach to making things happen, and happen well, was what management 'science' was telling us. Had this been the orthodoxy of previous decades much that we now revere and value would never have been made or enabled.

Part of the problem was one of control. Money, temporarily flowing through our hands, created the illusion that we were imaginatively powerful when all we were often doing was buying depleted or ersatz cultural capital and aspirations with other people's money. Ownership is control, but a culture of competitive, imitative ownership – as is now more nakedly apparent – is a treadmill that can only lead to exhaustion. Worse still, it becomes banal.

A key part of the control that goes with ownership is the control of decision-making. If, like me, you think that cultural democracy is a viewpoint that should strongly influence cultural policy-making then it will also be an ideal that accountability and transparency should be qualities of such decision-making. Now, as we look for new sources and loci of cultural and artistic energy, issues of control and influence have not gone away. They may well be shifting to levers of power in other arenas, not least within state bureaucracies whose decision-makers rarely rise, or feel the need to rise, above the parapets to publicly account for the decisions they make.

Ideas have their own lives and make us what we are. Integrating new ideas into our identities can change us profoundly. Ideas can travel through us all, individually and socially, benignly or, like malignant parasites, they can harm us by misdirecting our attention. Like the huge,

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subterranean, filamentous networks of Oregon's famous honey mushroom – slowly growing mile by mile under its woodland floor – the connected networks of ideas that shape what a government department or agency thinks it should do when it addresses 'citizens' as 'customers', for instance, is not without consequence for the nation! Such networks of ideas make some things possible while at the very same time negating others.

There is never a time when there are not choices to be made, and latent ideas with their attendant impulses – as our contemporary understanding of 'thinking', especially as described by Daniel Kahneman in his recent best-seller 'Thinking Fast and Slow' forcefully tells us – shape those choices in ways that are all too often unnoticed and uncontrolled.

To understand such things we need credible research, critical review, imaginative reflection and a journal like the *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy*. This inaugural issue promises well in the range and quality of its contents. We know that the twenty-first century will be highly visual in its ways of making meaning, and McGraw Lewis addresses this as an educational challenge. Mahony considers an aspect of how a modern liberal democratic state might approach challenging visual art projects. Lalor's paper is a timely investigation of volunteer labour in the cultural sector at a time of great stress for cultural organizations. On the issue of accessing funding in straitened times Carew explores the effectiveness with which Irish performing arts organizations access European cultural funds, while King raises the important question of how to generate novel income streams from private sources. Coming from a variety of institutions and backgrounds, these inaugural authors show how an otherwise obscure source of nutrients for nourishing cultural policy can be productively harvested and disseminated by an imaginative new journal like this.

The digital revolution is profoundly reshaping social and cultural life in the twenty-first century, and hence the kinds of decisions that cultural policymakers can and should make. Changes in taxation and its flow into local and regional authorities' coffers should also change the Irish cultural landscape in the coming decades. One would also like to think that dynamic educational policies would do the same. The achievements of cultural policy advocates over recent decades have laid a lively and fertile ground for new seeds to take root and older ones to consolidate. And the signal achievements of Irish artists of all kinds have moved 'culture' to the central role it plays in the thinking of business leaders, for example. These are all positive developments, notwithstanding the need to be vigilant about protecting cultural policy from self-serving political influence, or from becoming the exclusive preserve of secretive mandarins.

The *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy*, especially in its open access format, has the potential to address issues such as these and to re-engineer the gears of cultural policy thinking. All involved are to be congratulated on making it happen, but special thanks to Emily Mark-FitzGerald, Pat Cooke, Kerry McCall and Victoria Durrer for taking those vital first steps.