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SPECIAL ISSUE: *Mapping an Altered Landscape: Cultural Policy and Management in Ireland*

Editor's Introduction

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Mapping an altered landscape, held at University College Dublin in June 2014, brought together a range of perspectives and stakeholders in the Irish cultural policy and arts management sector. This special issue of the *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy* aims to reflect this conference, and, insofar as is possible, to capture some of the key ideas and questions which were part of the day. While it does not reproduce the contributions of all of the invited speakers, six papers have been selected for publication. Given the wealth of experience and expertise of all speakers on the conference programme, the process of selection was not an easy one, and this essay, together with that written by conference organisers Pat Cooke and Kerry McCall, aims to reflect the greater diversity of voices and perspectives represented on the day.

The six papers selected for this issue represent different perspectives and views on the processes of arts management and cultural policy formation and interpretation in contemporary Ireland. However, as Clare Duignan, Mary Carty and Gerry Godley all point out in their contributions, it is essential to consider the perspectives that remain absent, yet which are critically important. While this special issue includes contributions by those involved in art making, in managing county structures, in broadcasting, in entrepreneurship, in heritage and in education, it could also include voices from the voluntary arts sector, from urban planning, from sports, from those involved in the provision of healthcare services, as well as from those involved in landscape conservation, housing, community development and the creation of jobs and employment. It could (and perhaps should) also include the perspectives of those who consider themselves to be audience members for the kinds of work and activity that were discussed throughout the conference, as well as those who feel themselves removed from those activities for different reasons. The need for a greater plurality of voices and perspectives within the processes of arts management and cultural policy was evident throughout *Mapping an altered landscape*, forming one strand of the debate and discussion about contemporary challenges, opportunities and the shaping of the future.

The papers selected here include diverging and sometimes opposing views on several issues which are, and are likely to remain, central to arts management, cultural policy, art making and cultural life in Ireland. These issues centre on language, measurement and value, and on the role and agenda of the arts within society, and they range from the theoretical and philosophical to the practical and quotidian. Who is the artist in society now? What will be the conditions for art making and for engaging with arts and culture in Ireland in the coming years? What compromises will be necessary? What kind of conditions are people willing to accept? What challenges are to be faced? Is there an opportunity for change and for re-imagining the way that things can be done? To what extent are creativity and policy linked at all? These questions form a web of connections across the presentations reproduced here. They were also evident as key concerns throughout the question and answer sessions, in the words of the panel chairs, and reflected the keenly-felt need for a new, durable and sustainable national

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cultural policy.

The title of the conference implied a period of recent change and the need to create a working plan for the future. The changes most often referred to throughout the day revolved around austerity and a climate of diminished funding and practical support for the arts and cultural sectors in Ireland, as well as the changing circumstances for art makers, for audiences and for those working within the arts management and cultural policy sphere. While the word 'mapping' in the title referred largely to the future, it is also necessary to partake in some historical geography, and to understand the terrain of the past. Pat Cooke situated the present within the context of past by tracing the different places in which arts and culture have been located in government, tracking its various alliances with sport, tourism, and the Gaeltacht. This opening paper, together with his ongoing work on the history of the Arts Council of Ireland,¹ acted as an important reminder that, while a national cultural policy is only now in preparation, Ireland has not been operating in a policy-free environment in these areas, and that the institutional supports and official directions and priorities have been influenced by both implicit and explicit policies and strategy documents, as well as more broadly-held perspectives on the role and position of arts and culture in Irish life and Irish society.

The move to integrate arts with education in particular was outlined by Ruairí Quinn (Minister of Education and Skills between March 2011 and July 2014), and there were several calls throughout the day (by Mary Carty and others) for even greater flexibility, exploring the potential for collaboration in areas of technology, employment, the development of exports, and in areas such as tourism, health and community development. In drafting new directions for the future, however, it is essential to look carefully at past work and experience. The experience and expertise brought to past processes (often in a voluntary capacity) should be considered and incorporated into future planning, and the success and failures of past policy endeavours should be carefully considered. The appropriate financing of policy initiatives requires particular attention. It is crucial that the experiences of the past, both positive and negative, be taken into account in the development of a new national policy in order to avoid the creation of a well-meaning but ultimately unsustainable and unworkable master plan.

It is fair to say that, at times, the array of concerns and perspectives voiced throughout the conference felt overwhelming, reflecting a sector which is strained at best, and in several cases, in crisis. The impact of a lack of investment in human resources and the infrastructure for arts and culture in Ireland was particularly evident, with many MA-level graduates moving from unpaid internships to JobBridge schemes without the opportunity to develop professionally. While Grace Dyas described the importance of the time, space, mentoring and resources provided by the Project Arts Centre to her work, these serious obstacles in the development of creative working lives were mirrored by the creative artists present, who spoke about the lack of opportunity and the instability that they experience as a result. While the conference organisers are to be commended in bringing together a gathering where these different concerns could be outlined, it was clear that each individual issue raised requires space and sustained attention. It was, however, encouraging to see several members of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, as well as the CEOs and chairs of the Arts Council and the Heritage Council present on the day, and actively engaging with issues being raised by speakers and delegates.

The sense of urgency and of crisis around key infrastructural issues within this sector – from the future of the National Cultural Institutions (as explored by Sarah Glennie) to voluntary and youth arts organisations – resulted in an arena where different concerns were voiced, and revolutions called for, but little space could be dedicated to working out the ways in which

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these issues could be overcome. With each institution pared back to an almost unworkable operational base, and individuals dealing with an unsustainable sense of instability in their working lives, genuine collaboration and conversation can fall prey to defensiveness and the struggle to survive and stay open, fear around necessary risk-taking, and, ultimately, the emptying of this part of the cultural sector as those best able to create the future leave to find more sustainable futures elsewhere.

Parallel to the development of a national cultural policy, there is a clear need for a sustained space for conversation, research and collaboration throughout the sector, where ideas can be explored in contexts other than crisis management, an imminent policy agenda, a public event of political consequence (such as the forthcoming centenary of the 1916 Rising) or immediate advocacy concerns. While this role has, to a certain extent, been filled by gatherings such as the Theatre Forum annual conference, the various workshops and networking events provided by organisations such as Visual Artists Ireland, the Irish Museums Association, the National Campaign for the Arts and groups of local authority arts officers, as well as the many one-off, themed events held throughout higher education and cultural institutions, the recently-proposed all-island cultural policy research network could provide a space for sustained collaborative research. Indeed, the formation of this publication, the Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy, has already played an important role in providing a shared discursive space, free to access and open to all. Similarly, the recent call for research into key policy areas by the Irish Research Council, which lists the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht as one of the participating government departments, may also add to the development of a reflective space for collaborative and interdisciplinary thinking and planning for the future, and learning from the past.²

The need for a sustained space for discourse and the sharing of data and research resources is mirrored in many ways by a need for greater transparency on a number of levels around funding. Like many of the speakers, Clare Duignan emphasized the need for diversified funding models and longer-term funding cycles, allowing organisations and institutions to develop more ambitious programmes, to build capacity, and in many cases, simply to survive. These practical issues around funding and organisational development opened a discussion on different models of work in contemporary Ireland, many of which challenge that of the state-funded institution and which engaged with the idea of artist as entrepreneur and of structural innovation and change within the arts, from Gavin Dunne's presentation on his own working practice as a musician and composer, to organisations such as Monika Sapielak's ArtPolonia, a lab for intercultural cooperation and exchange and Trevor White's new business model for a museum of Dublin. This juncture – between the discourses of artistic identity, art-making, entrepreneurship and innovation – was perhaps the most contentious throughout the conference. Some speakers felt that their work went unrecognized by the 'traditional' value structures of arts and cultural production in an Irish context, making it more difficult for them to access supports and recognition in order to continue to develop. This was particularly evident around relatively new media forms such as gaming.

While infrastructural inflexibility was viewed as a block to necessary growth and development in an Irish context, others voiced anxiety about the increasing pressure for artists to engage in entrepreneurial activity and the discourses of innovation, the culture industries, and creative innovation in order to continue to be valued at all. Alan Counihan's important paper – reproduced in this special issue – explicitly stated his identity as artist, and not as entrepreneur. This emphasis on the role of the artist in society, and the role of participation in the arts and in the cultural life of the country, was reiterated by several speakers, including Conor Newman, Sheila Pratschke and by Michelle Carew in her outline of the importance of the National

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Association for Youth Drama. It was very clear throughout the conference that a national cultural policy would need to engage with these parallel discourses in order to best enhance and support potential opportunities and synergies, and to avoid creating a competitive system privileging one above the other.

A note on the format of this special issue – *Mapping an Altered Landscape* was programmed and delivered by Kerry McCall and Pat Cooke. They asked me to make a selection of papers, and to write this short framing introduction from the perspective of an audience member present throughout the day. We decided to retain (insofar as was possible) the presentations as they were delivered on the day, giving contributors the opportunity to add a short addendum to their original contribution if they wished to include any additional information or clarifications. Editorial assistant Susan Kennelly has transcribed these relatively short papers from the recordings of the day, and I am very grateful to her for her hard work on this issue. Adding to my own framing paper, both Pat Cooke and Kerry McCall have also written an introduction, positioning this special issue within the original conference and its aftermath. Ruairí Quinn, who formally opened the conference in June 2014, has also contributed a response to the papers selected.

While all of the presentations, questions from the floor and contributions by session chairs were stimulating, and addressed key contemporary issues in arts management and cultural policy, these six papers have been selected to provide a wide range of perspectives and stakeholders. These range from the independent artist to the chief executive, in order to explore the ways in which their views converge as well as diverge, highlighting areas of common interest and shared values, as well as areas where their ideas and priorities clash and differ. The entire conference was filmed, creating a valuable archive of the day, the different presentations and comments and questions from the floor. I am grateful to each of the contributors to this special issue for their time and input in bringing it to fruition, and for sharing their insight and experience with a wider audience. I am also grateful to Pat and Kerry for inviting me to make this selection, and to the board of the *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy* for taking the decision to publish this special issue. I hope that this conference, and this publication, will take its place among many more as the national cultural policy for Ireland is developed.

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NOTES

1. Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2015). Stories from our Archive [Online] <http://archivestories.artsCouncil.ie> (accessed 25 May 2015).
2. Irish Research Council (2015). Research for Policy and Society scheme 2015 [Online]: <http://research.ie/scheme/research-policy-society-2015-now-open> (accessed 25 May 2015).