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Art practice, process, and new urbanism in Dublin: Art Tunnel Smithfield and social practice placemaking in the Irish capital

CARA COURAGE

Abstract: This paper presents research with Art Tunnel Smithfield (ATS), Dublin, positioning it in Dublin-wide place-making practices, and situating it within the city’s tracts of vacant land and Dublin’s bespoke new urbanism. It focuses on the project as a form of social arts practice, giving examples of arts activities and agencies in the space, and locating the work within placemaking typology as ‘social practice placemaking’ (SPPM). SPPM is conceptualised as an extension of participatory public/new genre public art (Lacy, 2008) to a ‘new situationism’ (Doherty, 2004). This perspective views the co-production of art as constructive of new spatial configurations and emergent relations between users and space. Locating this work in the socio-politics of urban life, SPPM has to be understood as an art form that dematerializes the built object and is concerned with creative and social processes and outcomes.

Keywords: architecture, art, critical spatial practice, placemaking.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the case study of Art Tunnel Smithfield (ATS), Dublin, one of three global case studies in a PhD research project focusing on performative arts practices in an urban context as practices of the arts in placemaking, undertaken through participant observation and interviews. One aspect of the research specifically focused on the arts practice and process in grassroots, community-led placemaking, a practice the researcher came to term ‘social practice placemaking’ (SPPM). SPPM can be defined as comprising a cluster of co-produced, performative and relational creative practices that employ an arts approach to a four-dimensional placemaking design practice. These are driven by community issues and created by architects, artists and urbanists working outside of strict professional boundaries (Zeiger, 2011) with members of a local community, in a polylogic process connecting subject, object, and space.

This paper will first introduce ATS, its locale and context in the city of Dublin as located in Smithfield, and then go on to illustrate examples of arts practices found in the case study. It will discuss this practice in the context of SPPM, and conclude by critically locating ATS in the wider ‘new urbanism’ concern of Dublin.

Art Tunnel Smithfield, Smithfield, Dublin

Art Tunnel Smithfield was a stretch of community garden and art space initiated by artist and landscape architect Sophie von Maltzan, on the corner of Queen Street and Benburb Street – as one interviewee described it, ‘the worst street in Dublin’ (community member interviewee). It was sited on land surplus to the LUAS tram development at the River Liffey end of Smithfield, and at the foot of Smithfield itself, a large public realm space renowned previously for horse markets and now redeveloped with a cultural and social offer and programme. Smithfield itself is located in what Kearns and Ruimy (2014, p. 108) describe as...
Dublin’s ‘Arc of Disadvantage’ of inner city Dublin: poorly designed social housing; few social and cultural amenities; numerous vacant sites; few areas of public green space; and an area that has been subject to underwhelming and mediocre architectural regeneration (ibid., p. 50). ATS broke ground in 2011 and closed in February 2014. Von Maltzen described ATS as a ‘community pocket park’ (Griffin, 2014), and the space included a native wildlife area, a community platform, garden, art gallery and various site-specific installation spaces. Its mission was to ‘bring Art into the public realm and create a community pocket park at low cost with local community’s, business and the Council’s support’ [sic]. Installations were largely placed in the Art Tunnel section and community artwork in the Art Platform section of the site. There was an area at the far end of the site that formed a bio-diverse ‘micro-neighbourhood park’ (artist interviewee), planted with native plants, and the Art Tunnel and Art Platform areas were further purposed as a community garden. Dublin City Council (DCC) architect Ali Grehan suggested the site to Von Maltzan and its proposed development was agreed in consultation with the land owner, local residents, and businesses. The nature of the design and ongoing activity meant that planning permission was not required and it was financially initiated and maintained by local cash and in-kind business sponsorship and crowd-funding. The space was managed and cared for by a group of volunteers, formed by a predominantly female core group of c. six members, with a larger group of c. twenty, and a further group of c. sixty volunteers. Membership of the volunteer group was fluid, as people dropped in and out of the project over the course of its lifespan, and formed of communities of location (those living in the local area) and communities of interest (those from across Dublin with an arts or gardening interest). Access to the space was via a key code shared amongst the volunteer group, and via open access during events and regular gardening activity times.

Art practice and process at Art Tunnel Smithfield

A variety of arts practices were to be found in place and over time in ATS. Firstly, the space was curated on a basis of three-month installation commissions: these commissions were chosen by the ATS group from an open call and given an under-500 Euro budget, and installed by the artist(s) with or without volunteer help. The installations were architectural in form and akin to ‘new genre public art’ (Lacy, 2008) in nature. Secondly, arts activity took place in the space on both a programmed and ad hoc basis. Those that were programmed took place in partnership with a local school for example, and involved timetabled activity. Those that were ad hoc responded proactively to the flexible and fluid nature of the space and ideas generated from it, and reactively to opportunities presented by individuals or agencies external to the group, as they arose. These activities involved the core group of ATS volunteers, local community members, passers-by and destination-seeking tourists. Arts processes found in the space...
were centred around installations, projects and events, including installation design and build; the display of visual and sculptural art; painting; music; and spoken word. Much of the time in the space was spent attending to the garden, with activities such as planting, weeding and rubbish clearance constituting another kind of performative process.

Example 1 – *Weave*, Paul Terry, and *Loom Seat*, Sorcha Murphy, 2013

Two of the installation commissions comprised an artist/architect team, creating site-specific installations designed to draw attention to the expanse of wall in the site, and by implication, similar end of terrace sites in Dublin. Artist Paul Terry’s *Weave* (Fig.3) was a two-storey rope canopy, placed at the entrance to the site; architect Sorcha Murphy’s *Loom Seat* (Fig.2) was created using surplus rope and placed at the foot of the canopy and in a gardened section of the *Art Platform*. The joint commission saw the artist and architect work with community volunteers in the build, a process that involved skill swapping, the artistic and architectural practices being informed by the other.

Example 2 – *BURDS*, Ruth Daly, 2013

A new genre public art commission was *BURDS* (Fig. 5) by Ruth Daly. Daly was a local community member who had been volunteering at ATS since its inception. The project was enabled by Daly as a gifted thank you to ATS at the time of her emigration from Ireland. The installation was formed of wooden cut-outs of common urban birds. It was created in collaboration with children who were passing-by and who were asked what animals they had seen in the locale; the children responded ‘birds’ and then joined the project by making the cut-outs and placing them around the *Art Platform*; in this way the art practice moved from being participative to co-produced.
Example 3 – Gardening

ATS was sited aside the Luas Corridor, on a strip of land left as wasteland after the development of the tramway across the north of Dublin. The site was gated off by steel palisade fencing along the length of the site, with a small raised platform between the site and the tramlines; this platform was not intended as a pavement but was used as such. The area as a whole was not perceived as welcoming, with little visual attraction or walkability.

One of the stated aims of ATS was to ‘liven up’ the immediate area and redefine the function of the site to that of ‘community liveability’ (from website). It did this via the repurposing of the site as a garden (Fig. 7), a continual work in progress that acted as a ‘civic act and [to] activate further placemaking processes’ and providing a space to spend leisure time in. The garden was tended to on a regular basis by the volunteers through weekly evening weeding and rubbish clearance sessions, after work hours, and on planting sessions during the weekends. The act of gardening formed a performative practice of facilitating community dialogue and neighbourliness; individual and community conscientisation; and area beautification.

Through its art practices and processes, ATS had an affective dimension for those involved. In the examples of Weave and Loom Seat, the team found their respective creative practices extended in the process of making, interaction and collaboration. The architect reflected that their practice was challenged by the fluidity of the artist’s practice and the social aspect of work; the artist found working with the architect facilitated a new perspective on and aspect to his art process and object:

...in that they had that lovely eye of being able to see the possibility of an artistic installations, but then I really enjoyed them making things that were practical as well, so people would be able to use it as a piece of furniture as well... (artist interviewee).
The siting of artwork in ATS as a public realm art space also made demands on the artists and the contextual form of the work:

an outdoor exhibition is still quite traditional, so the way you have to approach this [siting at ATS] and the consequence of that, of the work being created and its actual presence, you have to consider (artist interviewee).

BURDS is an example of an arts practice that was initially participative, with the artist engaging with the public as points of inspiration for the resulting art object. This eventually evolved into co-production with the willing involvement of the public as co-creators, a facet of working in an exposed public realm site, and this too became part of the ATS art practice:

you get plenty of people who are kind of amused by what you’re doing, and they don’t understand why you would be there, and you try to explain to them but they’re really, it makes no sense to them at all, why you would be there, doing that, but definitely curiosity is the best reaction we got from most people and then there were people, you could tell, they wanted to be in there with you too, and there was a point when they started joining the ranks... (artist interviewee).

It is with the example of gardening as a co-produced social practice artform, however, that the aim of ATS to ‘create relationships between worlds’ (artist interviewee) was most keenly observed:

Plenty of people around here living in apartments with no garden. Mondays we do our beer and weeding. It’s just as much about sitting down and having a beer and chatting to someone you wouldn’t normally chat with (community member volunteer interviewee).

It’s a conscious decision to put yourself there, to volunteer, to meet people interested in the same thing, so it’s a kind of not just a garden in a scrap of Dublin (community member volunteer interviewee).

The act of gardening engendered conversations about the role and place of ATS in and of itself; these issues extended wider to Smithfield in Dublin, and then wider still to issues of vacant land in the city. This conversational and embodied performativity in the first instance helped the participants to distance themselves from the life-world of the area to critically reflect on the forces that shape their existence (Julier, 2005; Kester, 2004; Kwon, 2004; Petrescu, 2006). This was seen to have a cumulative effect: as one made a transition from sometime participant to team-member collaborator, it affected the group habitus and begun to effect change in others, as multiplicitous process of assemblage (Tait, 2011, pp. 285-6). The impact of ATS was not just on the material urban form during its lifespan, but ATS seeded ideas with its co-producers and influenced them into becoming more open to their own agency in the urban realm, which in turn, compelled a longer-term behavioural relation to place and the Dublin arts ecology (Tonkiss, 2013; Yoon, 2009). Von Maltzan found ATS to be ‘a great space to make arts contacts, to find people interested in working in the public realm’ (in interview); and members of ATS went on to be involved in the creation of the DCC-initiated Mary’s Abbey community garden off Capel Street, eastward along the Luas

(Fig. 7): Section of the ATS garden, along the Art Platform (Weave by Paul Terry seen in the background), July 2013.
Corridor from ATS, as well as involvement in various other social, cultural and political projects and groups in the Smithfield, Stoneybatter and Capel Street areas of Dublin.

As a social practice artform located in the public realm (Lippard, 1998), ATS can be placed in the arts canon past Lacy’s (2008) “new genre public art” and towards co-produced arts and a ‘new situationism’ (Doherty, 2004) and, as located in placemaking, to SPPM (Fig. 8).

(Fig. 8): An operative and temporal scale of arts in the public realm to SPPM, 2014.

The function of performative practice is to question the idea of city living as well as the practice and roles of artists and architects (Lehmann, 2009, p. 14). As seen in von Maltzan’s own practice in regard to ATS, the practice of landscape architecture was place-led and embedded in the local social, cultural and political ecology, and the arts programming followed this same course, in a localized ‘call and response’ (Lowe, 2015) to people and place. The arts processes in ATS were thus relational (Bourriaud, 1998/2006), the art-in-place practice working with the re-appropriation of urban space, reinventing its use through quotidian activities understood as creative practices in urban contexts. ATS as an urban art intervention is of art as a part of urban design (Miles, 1997), of a bottom-up urban engagement that places the citizen at the root of urban change. A central concept emerging from theory is that such projects are a space to pilot or prototype material alternatives for the urban realm in question (Crawford, 1999; Iveson, 2013; Kester, 2004; Lydon and Garcia, 2015). In a self-activating process, people recognise the potential of a space; they then determine to use the space in varying degrees of creativity; they then use the space and create it to suit their needs and desires (Franck and Stevens, 2007, p. 10). The role of art here is to draw attention to issues and encourage reflexive reassessment via new thinking, acting thus as a catalyst for social change (Brown, 2012, p. 10; Murray, 2012, pp. 256-7) and collective meaning-making via
inter-subjective encounters (Bishop, 2012, p. 257; Froggett et al., 2011, p. 95).

**Social practice placemaking**

This paper will now turn to the thinking of social practice placemaking, a placemaking practice informed by social art practice, extending arts critical thinking on the co-production of art as constructive of new spatial configurations and emergent relations between users and space which impact on public life (Yoon, 2009).

SPPM is a conjoining of social practice arts and placemaking, a practice to be understood as an art form that dematerialises the built or made object and is concerned with creative and social processes and outcomes. It is a ‘critical spatial practice’ (Rendell, 2006, p. 1), an umbrella term for art practices that are contextual, site-specific and in the public realm, and of architectural practices that involve conceptual design and urban intervention. SPPM is a performative artform that ‘engage[s] the public in interactive scenarios, responsive contexts and constructed agencies’ (Yoon, 2009, p. 70). These projects take place in, and claim as their own, pseudo-public spaces of liminal space (Grodach, 2010, p. 475) and ‘non-sites’ (Patrick, 2011, p. 65). Together the use of these spaces, the formal or the informal, calls into question what is public space and what can occur in it. The term participant is dissolved (Brown, 2012; Critical Art Ensemble, 1998; Grodach, 2010; Kravagna, 2012; McGonagle 2007) in SPPM to that of co-producer. Its practice goes beyond a top-down ‘I manage, you participate’ (Saxena, 2011, p. 31) participation model common in architectural practice, and beyond the ‘pseudo-participation’ that Petrescu (2006) talks of. Instead it becomes a horizontal, collaborative process with a deeper level of engagement with those who traditionally would have been thought of as the participants. All participants — arts, non-arts, professional, non-professional — work as ‘urban creatives’ (Klanten and Hübner, 2010, p. 2) in a co-produced practice. The ‘non-artist’ or ‘non-professional’ co-producer may have no formal training but “funds” (Dewey, 1958) the process by bringing another relative expertise, from their lived experience, together a form of expertism assemblage (Hannah, 2009; Tait, 2011, p. 282).

However, the SPPM artist is not shy or anonymous about their expertism nor their agenda, a rethink of the notion of an artist’s sole authorship of works that for Bishop (2006) is informed by Guattari’s (2000) resingularisation. The artist’s expertism is as creative thinker, disruptor and/or negotiator (Kravagna, 2012, p. 243; McGonagle, 2007, p.6; Reiss, 2007, p. 11) who works in ‘radical relatedness’ to others and is a ‘connective, rational self’ (Gablik, 1992, p. 2), bringing people together via a subjective and differentiated experience from one person and instance to another (Grodach, 2010, p. 476). Local and expert knowledge is used as a tool in art creation in SPPM; the function of the art in SPPM is not solely the creation of the art object (and it should be noted that this may not be an object that would be overtly recognised as such by the formal or commercial art sectors) but the collective endeavour of the creation of a material intervention itself. As a relational art practice, SPPM is concerned with human interactions and social context; situated in the urban, they act at a social interstice of the everyday and encourage a rejection of proscribed modes (Bourriaud, 1998/2006). Here, the artwork is created by the community in and for their place (Cleveland, 2001, p. 18; Tait 2011 p. 281) and on their terms (Gablik 1992; Kaprow in Kelly 1993/2003 p. xviii), and the art practice and process together facilitate the negotiation of the personal, social and political of the individual and the collective in space (Petrescu, 2006, p. 83). Such practice faces the same challenges of evaluation as any social practice art, with a concern for discursive, relational and material outcomes, over metric outputs.
The vacant land issue’ and Dublin’s new urbanism

The spaces are there and nobody is using them and they aren’t looking like they’re going to be used for any development that could be of any benefit... take these spaces and use them for exhibition or workshop spaces or what have you... (artist interviewee).

ATS is an example of a growing interest and activism in Dublin in ‘the vacant land issue’, the vernacular phrase spoken by all interviewees relating to the number and city-wide scale of vacant, derelict and not-used land and buildings in the city. This interest is shared by communities local to vacant sites, artists and the city administration. Three hundred vacant sites have been identified by DCC of an estimated, and thought underestimated, sixty-three hectares (Kearns and Ruimy, 2014, p. 66). There is an evident public interest in the re-use of vacant land by the Dublin public, as ninety per cent of Dubliners want vacant spaces to be brought back into public use (Griffin, 2014). In addition, it was claimed in interview that approximately forty thousand people visited Granby Park (artist interviewee), a temporary park created by arts collective Upstart with the local housing estate residents. ATS and other such SPPM projects in Dublin have been instrumental in bolstering a groundswell questioning of how vacant land is being thought of in the city – reimagining them as spaces that can be activated by and for the people using a social practice arts-based approach. Not only did residents and passers-by begin to appreciate ATS as somewhere that one could linger in and not just appreciate as a greening beautification of brown land, some started to link the activation of this space to a local, grassroots and self-initiated activism. For example, one local resident stated their motivation to join the nearby Mary’s Abbey garden project (initiated subsequently), which transformed a derelict end-of-terrace site, was that they ‘didn’t want to be one of those people that complains and does nothing about it’. Additionally, a Granby Park artist stated that feedback to their project had also seeded ideas to undertake similar work in other areas. As one architect respondent stated describing their involvement in a community-led vacant land project:

You’ve got to keep on saying, to all these community groups that we work with, ‘no, Dublin City Council don’t own that land, people own that land’, and you’re [DCC] just looking after it for them. It eventually seeps in... ‘cos its true. (architect interviewee).

This comment prompts consideration of the role of DCC in ‘the vacant land issue’. For DCC, such projects have fulfilled the function of temporary urbanism, ‘an approach to neighbourhood building and activation using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions and policies’ (Lydon and Garcia, 2015, p. 2), particularly in two respects: firstly, that of land tenure; and secondly, of crowdsourcing ideas for scalable prototyping. Despite a public interest in the animation of vacant land, this research found a pervasive acceptance of an ‘othered’ ownership of land and of green spaces to be gated that is holding back temporary use potential:

There’s just this fear that if you open things up then people will destroy them, local community and the council and the parks, you see these parks closed, you just watch it crumble, it’s just that ‘we’ll lock the gates, we’ll keep people out’. Give ownership and the community polices itself, it will happen, ‘you couldn’t do that in Ireland’, well, why couldn’t you? (artist interviewee).

ATS and Granby Park both proved that projects can be of any timescale, but do not have to be forever, and interviewees across both stated how essential this was in dispelling a fear in landlords over land tenure of community arts and garden projects on their land:

everyone benefits from being able to use that piece of land for that amount of time, but then if people want to put their foot down and say, ‘this is our park now, you can’t have it back’, that would probably prevent that from happening again and landlords would be much less willing to give these short term leases, as long as everyone can accept that, then maybe these things can continue... (DCC interviewee).

This perspective signals a cultural shift in the thinking of Dublin public realm arts practitioners.
At the time of writing, elements of DCC were showing learning and leadership in this regard, displaying and enacting an attitude to urban co-production in Dublin that goes beyond a consultative one. Lehmann (2009, p. 32) saw a culture of temporary land use, such as can be seen as nascent in Dublin, as one that makes significant contributions to urban life through the generation and encouragement of new urban activities. ATS was such an activity, an ‘area catalyst task’ comprising a simple and low cost intervention outside of municipal planning or the professional design sector, with disproportionate individual, community and place gains including increased community confidence and control (Kearns and Ruimy, 2010, p. 206). Some Dublin architects stated in interview that they have been surprised with what they have been able to achieve in terms of the design and function of land with DCC; others have stated that they see DCC learning from cultural programming mistakes, and especially ones in the Smithfield area around large scale public events. In interview, DCC respondents also recognised a measure of their own limitations in engagement in the city’s vacant land: that it cannot be top-down ‘to change the cachet of an area, the people have to manifest it’ (DCC interviewee). However, they also noted that ‘it is time for a new debate’ (DCC interviewee) and that ATS and others had been instrumental in both galvanising an interest in vacant land in the public of Dublin and also in fostering a space and time for this debate. The Government of Ireland/Rialtas na hÉireann Construction 2020 report (May 2014) recognized the need for public engagement in the discussion around vacant land in the city and DCC interviewees recognised that ‘regulation inhibits innovation.’ DCC is part of the EU-funded urban sustainability and resilience network TURAS, and has created Beta Projects, a scheme that actively canvasses for artists’ and residents’ suggestions for the alternative use of vacant land, and pilots these where possible. Interviewees saw this as an example of DCC treating the creative community as valued ‘cultural translators’ (artist interviewee) to bridge the gap between the public and the administration, but, essentially, coming from the level of the street to begin with.

Kearns and Ruimy (2014 p. 48) observe an emerging Dublin urbanism that firstly breaks the ‘liveable-city glass ceiling’ of a ‘bigotry of low expectation’ where Dubliners do not believe the city can become a desirable place for people to live. Secondly, the authors consider that this altered perspective is attempting to redress the contemporary Dublin urban difficulty of a successful, liveable inner-city by rendering its response on a cultural and social reimagining (ibid., p. 15). Thirdly, they claim that this movement is led by communities of ‘urban pioneers’ (ibid., p. 98), a group that would be composed of urban creatives. From the example of ATS as SPPM and its agency within and without its urban creatives, participation in the project can be seen as firstly reflexive and from this, transformative, as based on empowerment to be able to decision-make and coalition build, separate of external organisations (Cornwall 1998, p. 273; Bishop, 2006; Kester, 2004). ATS brought a day-time lease of life to Benburb Street, a challenge Kearns and Ruimy (2010, p. 93) see not being met all over Dublin and its participants saw themselves as urban pioneers (ibid.). The outcome of arts in the public realm may be more politics with a small ‘p’, but this is no less significant, for what can be seen in Dublin is the creation of Guattari’s (2000) ‘neighbourhood strategies’ where local groups at the grassroots are fundamental to transforming society. In this sense, the SPPM of Dublin at this time, as exemplified by ATS, is as much about a co-operational social structure as it is about a material change in the urban form, as the artwork presents itself as the object and site of experiencing as well as the means to start a process of reflection and tactical response. But this is a susceptible process, and here lies the challenge inherent in the notion of Dublin’s new urbanism. Smithfield may still be emerging as a liveable area of the city, a ‘proto-urban space’ (ibid., p. 127) with increasing cultural programming, consumer activity and footfall, but it is still vulnerable, as attested by the closure of ATS and its return to dereliction.
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Art practice, process and new urbanism in Dublin: Art Tunnel Smithfield and social practice placemaking in the Irish capital


‘Just about coping’: precarity and resilience among applied theatre and community arts workers in Northern Ireland
MATT JENNINGS, MARTIN BEIRNE, STEPHANIE KNIGHT

Abstract: In March 2015, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) cut grant funding to some arts organisations by 40-100%, in order to manage an 11% reduction from the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE) in its 2015/16 Budget (ACNI, 2015). This was despite a high-profile ‘13p for the arts’ ACNI campaign, which had lobbied the NIE to preserve existing levels of arts funding (estimated at 13p per capita per week), already significantly lower than in other parts of the UK (‘far less than the 32 pence per week spent in Wales’, Litvack, 2014, online). Alongside cuts to spending on Social Development, Health and Education, and a reduction in European Union Peace funding, these have reduced the financial support available to applied theatre and community arts practitioners in Northern Ireland, despite such initiatives as the 2013 UK City of Culture programme. In these increasingly precarious conditions, how can community-based artists survive?

Keywords: Precarity; resilience; community arts; freelance workers; Northern Ireland; applied drama.

Introduction
This article investigates the personal, political and artistic strategies developed by freelance and full-time arts workers in Derry/Londonderry, Belfast and rural Northern Ireland. Robert Hewison (2015, p. 231), analysing the social and cultural fallout of neoliberal arts policy in Britain over the last 20 years, calls for a ‘reconstruction of the public realm’ and a ‘revival of the local, the diverse and the different’. According to Isabell Lorey (2015, p. 110-1), ‘de-territorialized networks’ of resilience can emancipate us from the ‘subjugating anxiety’ of ‘governmental precarization’. This article explores responses to such ‘subjugating anxiety’ and the development of ‘diverse and different’ local practices that could support a ‘reconstruction of the public realm’.

This research is part of a broader project examining the capacity of artists and artistic communities, specifically within Scotland and Northern Ireland, to survive financially, psychologically and creatively in the context of austerity and precarity. The aim is to develop a clearer understanding of the measures by which artists sustain their practice or ‘stand their own creative ground’, while continuing to support themselves and the communities with whom they work.

This article is based on the findings from an ethnographic study of a core group of 18 community drama, dance, music and visual arts practitioners in Northern Ireland. Practitioners with at least four years’ worth of professional experience of community arts facilitation in Northern Ireland were asked to take part at the personal invitation of the author. Originally from Australia, Matt Jennings has been living in Derry/Londonderry and collaborating artistically with many of these practitioners for over 15 years. Formal research on the topic of precarity and resilience was conducted from January 2012 and until August 2016 and consisted of semi-structured interviews; follow-up questionnaires; participant and nonparticipant observations of practice; and seminar discussions of arts management and cultural policy (Beirne et al., 2017).
Context: Community Arts, the Peace Process and UK City of Culture 2013 Derry/Londonderry – ‘Legenderry’

For the artists participating in this research, the wider political context and related funding policies have been crucial in both supporting and constraining their creative work with communities. Since 2010, there has been a shift in policy focus towards economic regeneration and public health; previously community relations, social cohesion and peace building were the key priorities. Local, national and international bodies have funded arts projects intended to address conflict and sectarianism in Northern Ireland, with varying degrees of success, since the beginning of the ‘Troubles’ in the 1960s (Maguire, 2006; Grant, 1993; Neill, 1995); at the same time, prior to 1998, grassroots community-based artists and theatre-makers had been at the forefront of providing hope and inspiration, supporting critical resistance to violent oppression and sustaining local economies (McDonnell, 2010; Maguire, 2006; Grant, 1993).

These sectors were united through a cultural strategy of conflict transformation following the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998. The ‘peace process’ and its subsequent funding (or ‘peace dividend’) provided opportunities for arts organisations, communities and individuals to develop new collaborative work and cross-community relationships (Jennings, 2009, 2012; Jennings and Baldwin, 2010). This ‘peace industry’ drew down an unprecedented level of funding for social development and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland, particularly from the European Union, which invested over €2.2 billion in the region between 2000 and 2006 alone (Commission of the European Communities, 2008, online). Significant amounts of this funding were spent on community arts projects, although the exact amount is impossible to calculate as money was allocated and accounted for according to policy objectives, rather than modes of delivery (Jennings, 2009, 2012).

In 2013, Derry/Londonderry hosted the inaugural UK City of Culture (UK CoC). This event represented a significant turn in the cultural strategy of Northern Ireland – away from centrally funded social development and peace-building programmes and towards corporate ‘re-branding’, tourism promotion and public relations approaches (McDermott et al, 2016).

Derry/Londonderry was announced as the winner of the bid for the inaugural UK CoC on 16 July 2010. The announcement of the successful bid was made exactly one month after the publication of the findings of the Saville Tribunal, clearing the 14 civilians killed by British paratroopers at a civil rights demonstration in the city on 30 January 1972 (‘Bloody Sunday’) of any wrongdoing. On 15 June 2010, David Cameron had called on the country to ‘come together to close this painful chapter on Northern Ireland’s troubled past’ (BBC News, 2010, online). The announcement that Derry/Londonderry would host the UK CoC event promised renewed hope for the future: ‘But if that event [the Saville Tribunal] closed a dark chapter on the past, tonight’s opened a bright new one to the future’ (Belfast Telegraph, 16 July 2010).

In the run-up to the event, marketing material rebranded the city as ‘LegenDerry’, a move designed to generate a ‘step change’ whereby the city could tell a ‘new story’ (McDermott et al, 2016). A celebrated promotional film for the city’s UK CoC bid featured Seamus Heaney, quoting from his poetic work The Cure at Troy, calling on the viewer to ‘hope for a great sea-change on the far side of revenge’ (‘Voices’, 2010, online).

The expectation in the city itself, bolstered by the ambitions stated in the bid document, was that this event would provide substantial funding and paid work for local artists and arts organisations (Boland et al, 2016). However, the UK CoC title supplied no specific external funding mechanisms of its own. It was primarily a branding exercise. Phil Redmond, chair of the UK CoC selection panel, told the Liverpool Post that: ‘principally, it is merely the badge of authori-
ty around which people can gather to work collectively and collaboratively... the badge should come with no extra funding, encouraging people to collaborate with what they have, not what they would wish for' (Fealty, 2012, online).

This condition was significantly different from the European Capital of Culture designation, which provides EU grants to support the event (Boland et al, 2016). As such, it entailed a 14-month UK cultural programme being delivered by one of the poorest cities in the UK, at its own expense. In 2012, 41.5% of the population under the City of Derry and Strabane District Council was recorded as ‘economically inactive’ (DETNI, 2016, online).

For the UK CoC project, primary public funding was made available from existing Northern Ireland funding. For instance, £12.5 million was granted by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFM DFM) in June 2012. Various other funding streams provided support for the programme; but throughout the event, local businesses, community groups and political representatives expressed disappointment and frustration at ‘the inability of City of Culture to immediately increase employment rates’ (McDermott et al, 2016, p. 622). In 2015, three years after the CoC, the rate of ‘economic inactivity’ among the population of Derry and Strabane was still 41.6% (DETNI, 2016, online). While this cannot be blamed on the UK CoC programme, it could not be claimed that the impact of the event included a legacy of substantial economic improvement.

Boland et al (2016) have pointed out that it was always unlikely that the CoC event would deliver significant economic development in the region, in the context of the global economic downturn and national austerity policies:

In truth, CoC was never realistically going to be a panacea for deep seated and entrenched socio-economic problems in a deprived and peripheral economy (p.14).

Similar cultural events, such as the European Capital of Culture, are frequently burdened with ‘excessive expectations’ of their capacity to deliver significant economic impact (Boland et al, 2016, p. 13); as the official evaluation report on the Derry/Londonderry UK CoC event states: ‘If a major event of this nature is expected to have a major impact on the local economy, it needs to be part of a broader strategy with supporting investment’ (Derry City and Strabane District Council, 2016, p. 61).

While the economic impact of the UK CoC event may have been disappointing, the cultural impact of the event seems to have been more encouraging: ‘there is clear evidence of genuine transformative change... enhanced community relations and sense of unity; intercultural dialogue and cultural exchange; cross-community attendance at events; increased tourism and spend; shared and depoliticised spaces’ (Boland et al, 2016, p. 14).

Impact on Local Artists

During the UK CoC, substantial amounts of funding were spent on flagship performance events, directed by prestige international artists such as Hofesh Schechter and Frank Cottrell Boyce, and including large casts of volunteers drawn from local community groups (Boland et al, 2016; McDermott et al, 2016). Meanwhile, locally-based artists, who had been working with local community groups for years, found themselves struggling to get paid work.

It was during the year of the City of Culture – where I had no work for four months. At all! And that has never happened in all the years that I’ve been at it. I’ve always had something. (Freelance actor/arts facilitator, interviewed 12 May 2015)

Every locally-based artist interviewed for this research reported that, from 2010 to 2013, they
were asked to work for no pay or low pay on projects associated with the UK CoC, usually with an appeal to local loyalty or the suggestion that the experience would enhance their profile. When local artists were contracted for payment, they sometimes experienced long delays before they received that payment.

In some cases, it was more than a year that people hadn’t received their payments; in many cases, despite repeatedly supplying the relevant information…verbal and written promises were broken about payment coming through. (Freelance writer/community facilitator, interviewed 13 May 2015)

People who had 10, 20 or 30 years of experience, who had been embedded in their communities for years, found themselves struggling to survive. While most of these artists did get some paid work during 2013, all of the interviewees declared that they had all experienced periods without any paid arts work at all during 2014, for periods of up to 3 months.

The big noticeable funding cut was after the City of Culture…Definitely for that year after the City of Culture year, work was just so hard to get. There was nothing…January, February and March [of 2014] it was just absolutely dire. There was just no work at all. (Freelance dancer/teacher/facilitator, interviewed 13 May 2015)

Since 2013, some of these artists have had to move out of their homes, relying on parents or partners for accommodation and financial support. Some have been working outside of the arts in order to support themselves – in 2015, one freelance artist, who had been working continuously up until 2013, gave up her arts career altogether to work in catering. Many have left the region, either temporarily or permanently, travelling for work in Dublin or Belfast, as well as England or Scotland. 15 out of 18 artists interviewed in 2015 stated that they were having to commute regularly to other cities or countries for paid work. All reported that many of their friends and colleagues have migrated permanently, often to England, Scotland, Australia or Canada.

While individual artists might have many reasons for migrating, working further afield or changing careers, the loss of this skilled workforce would present a collective problem for social regeneration, peace-building and cultural policy. Over the years, these artists have built up the specific expertise and relationships of trust with arts organisations and community groups necessary to deliver those kinds of projects. They were often asked to contribute to CoC projects, whether paid or unpaid, because of their ability to organise and inspire local community participants. Their individual capacity to travel for employment may be seen as an element of their ‘resilience’, but their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Working outside of community sector</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Working on multiple projects simultaneously</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Working for low pay/no pay</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Relying on Partners or Parents</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working in other parts of Ireland &amp; UK</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working in other disciplines</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Regular yoga/martial arts practice</td>
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<td>Working outside the arts</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Receipt of welfare/tax credits</td>
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long-term departure would be a significant loss to their communities and the arts sector as a whole.

The Position of the ‘Artist’

While committed to community arts practice and the groups with whom they work, almost all of the practitioners interviewed prefer to be identified as artists first and foremost, rather than community development workers. They have been asked to meet social and political funding priorities, but primarily they want to create art. This tension reflects the long-running debate between intrinsic and instrumental approaches to funding and evaluating arts (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008).

Alternative art practice lies outside the framing that we are given by bureaucratic and political practices…

The question is, how do we value and what kind of values do we bring to the input and the creative process?

(Dancer/Choreographer/Artistic Director, interviewed 18 May 2012)

These artists engage in the work because they believe that art itself is intrinsically important. When asked ‘why are you still doing this, when it is so difficult?’, frequent responses included because it is ‘so worthwhile’, because it is ‘fun and enjoyable’, because it creates ‘beauty’, because it is ‘challenging’ and because ‘it makes life worth living’. The value of accessible arts practice was seen as particularly significant in the context of Northern Ireland:

I think that what is special about Northern Ireland – it’s the arts. And without that, and without how accessible the arts are here, what is there left really? (Freelance dancer/teacher/facilitator, interviewed 13 May 2015)

While valuing art ‘for its own sake’, these practitioners also express a passionate belief in the social and cultural value of community engagement.

There is the sheer enjoyment, the commitment, the energy, the passion. The skills base and the wealth of talent that there is in this area is unparalleled, to me, in any other community area. And every time you take your ‘cynical self’ down to do some work or be involved in a project, I think, the sheer joy in it and the energy and enthusiasm is renewed – which is why we are all still doing it. (Freelance writer/community facilitator, interviewed 13 May 2015)

Apart from peace-building programmes, these community artists in Northern Ireland have worked with groups of people with learning disabilities, mental health issues, older people, young people, prisoners, police officer, migrant groups and so on. However, most of these efforts have taken the form of short-term projects, with little long-term legacy.

Working with the adults with learning disabilities, I only had 10 weeks to work with both groups from scratch, to come up with all the aims and objectives throughout and to follow through with I was going to do, right up to a performance with a live audience - theatre, lights, sounds the whole shebang. (Freelance Drama Facilitator, interviewed 22 May 2015)

Some interviewees expressed anger about the ‘use’ of art – the utilitarianism whereby art is reduced, in some sense, to a form of social work or public relations. Steve Batts, Artistic Director of Echo Echo Dance Theatre, succinctly described the difficulty of trying to deploy the arts as a ‘lever’ for social development: ‘Art is not a lever and people cannot be levered’ (interviewed 18 May 2012). While some artists may have been uncomfortable operating as ‘levers’ for social policy, they have become even less happy at being abandoned to an uncertain fate as those levers are removed.

Some of the more established artists expressed a general sense of demoralisation as public funding has declined:

I think one of the biggest changes has been a huge mood swing – a loss of confidence amongst community artists…A feeling of powerlessness – a feeling that significant achievements that have been made by the community arts have not been recognised. (Freelance writer/community facilitator, interviewed 13 May 2015)

While public funding of the arts may have been problematic in terms of instrumentalism, reli-
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Funding has left artists vulnerable when that funding has been reduced or withdrawn. The emphasis of funding regimes on short-term and outcome-oriented programmes has limited opportunities for artists to develop sustainable models of support or alternative sources of funding (Jennings, 2012). In order to be available to work on multiple projects, limited in time, freelance practitioners can be constrained from generating their own long-term projects.

When they are working, they can be overworked. All of these artists reported that they had often worked up to 80 hours a week, juggling 6 or 7 projects simultaneously. This makes it difficult to focus on the needs of the groups with which they are working. But they accept these conditions because they never know when the next paid job will arrive and are afraid to say no to any project. Their anxiety has increased as public funding has declined. They have become a professional precariat (Standing, 2011).

Has work become precarious? Well, yeah (laughs)...because you panic. Everybody I speak to that works in this field feels exactly the same. I think that’s strangely encouraging in a way, because you’re not on your own, you know you’ve got this network of people who go ‘oh my God, there’s no work’...There is so much instability and I understand why so many people can’t handle that. But I’m not ready to give up on it just yet. (Freelance Actor/Writer/Drama Facilitator, interviewed 12 May 2015)

Resilience and Precarity

One difficulty of discussing ‘resilience’ is that there are different definitions and categories of resilience. These include: personal resilience, in terms of psychological and physical health, well-being and development; economic resilience, in terms of sustainable economies and the capacity to support oneself financially; as well as community resilience, such as the capacity to maintain cohesive, integrated and secure societies.

In relation to the first category, ‘personal resilience’, Macpherson et al. (2015, p. 2) define resilience as ‘the capacity to do well despite adverse experiences’. They conducted a literature review of over 190 books and articles on the topic of resilience, specifically among young people with mental health issues or learning difficulties, and identified that arts participation can significantly increase the capacity of a person ‘to feel safe, commit to a group and belong, develop their learning, cope with difficult feelings, help others, develop self-understanding and foster a sense of identity’ (Macpherson et al, 2015, p. 4).

In relation to financial resilience, artists can be resourceful at securing their livelihood within challenging economic circumstances. According to a study by Green and Newsinger (2014), numerous artists and arts organisations in the East Midlands of England, who have been working with disabled children and young people, have demonstrated admirable economic ‘resilience’ since 2010, during a period of politically driven ‘austerity’. They have found alternative funding streams for their work and diversified sources of personal and organisational income. However, their client groups and participants have suffered from a significant reduction in services and programmes.

Newsinger (2016) reflects an increasingly critical perspective on the discourse of ‘resilience’, as it places the burden of managing the impact of ideologically driven political decisions on the people who suffer the most from their consequences, while having the least power to change policy:

Part of the problem with resilience thinking is its role in the de-politicisation of funding cuts, perhaps due to its origin in ecological science...But austerity is not a natural phenomenon; it is a political process that is consciously reshaping society in a myriad of ways to the detriment of those at the bottom, particularly the young and the disabled. So while resilience might be a ‘good thing’ for individuals and organisations, it does not provide much of a platform from which to question the normative dimensions of austerity, or argue for a more inclusive, progressive arts agenda. Down with resilience! (Newsinger 2016, online)
'Precarity' & 'Precarization': The Artist As 'Limit-Point'

Lorey (2015), in response to the analyses of Paolo Virno (2004) and Judith Butler (2010), distinguishes between 'precarity', 'precariousness' and 'precarization'. Butler describes 'precariousness' as an existential condition, the fact that life entails risk: ‘Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed’ (2010, p. 25); while ‘precarity’ refers to the contingency of security within a specific system:

Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. (Butler 2010, 25-26)

According to Lorey (2015), ‘precarity’ has been built into capitalism from the beginning. Workers have always been at the mercy of employers and governments. In Western Europe after the 1940s, the invention of the welfare state fostered the perception that the political system was designed to protect its citizens and provide them with the means of subsistence. The decline in the welfare state and the collapse of the regulated labour market has led to intensified ‘precarization’, whereby ‘precarious living and working conditions are increasingly normalized at a structural level and thus become an important instrument of governing’ (Lorey 2011, online). This concept of ‘precarization’ involves the recognition that the state and capital, rather than providing security for workers and citizens, govern through insecurity:

The third dimension of the precarious is the dynamics of governmental precarization. It refers to modes of governing since the emergence of industrial-capitalist conditions and cannot be separated in occidental modern societies from bourgeois self-determination. (Lorey 2011, online)

Both capital and the state derive power by threatening the security of citizens in practice (e.g. through war or austerity) while promising security in principle (e.g. through surveillance):

Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection. (Butler 2010, p. 25-6)

Global workforces, under neoliberal economic restructuring, are now subject to a process of ‘precarization’. Job security is in decline; workers’ rights are threatened on a range of fronts, from individual contract bargaining to attacks on the European Convention on Human Rights (Lorey, 2011).

The increasing awareness of ‘precarization’ as a global phenomenon has led people to investigate the means by which artists have managed to cope with precarity throughout their careers. Writers such as Virno (2004) and Arendt (1977) have described both ‘post-Fordist’ workers and ‘political activists’ in terms of ‘virtuosity’ and ‘performance’, casting both labour and politics as ‘performance art’ (Lorey 2011, online). Lorey identifies a difficulty with the metaphor:

The concept of “virtuosos” does not apply to all the very diverse precarious conditions, but is restricted to cultural producers, whose function is neither avant-garde nor a paradigm for all precarious workers. (Lorey, 2011, online)

Contemporary fascination with the ‘creative industries’ and artistic workers (or ‘creatives’), at the level of management studies and public policy, has been subject to further critique from political economists such as Frederic Lordon:

A number of recent studies and sociology of work discovered in the figure of the artist a pertinent metaphor, and even more than a metaphor, a common model, for those employees reputed to have personal qualities of strategic importance to the company, notably ‘creativity’...this limit-point of employment, has been turned into a general model for the overall project of neoliberal normalisation. (Lordon 2014, p. 123-5)

But if ‘precariousness’ is a fact of life and ‘precarity’ is inherent to the political and economic...
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system, then the artistic precariat is not a ‘limit-point’ outside of normal experience. In fact, their example highlights the ‘precarity’ to which we are all subject. While we might be able to learn broader lessons from the capacity of the freelance artist to cope with ‘precarity’, due to their commitment, flexibility and resourcefulness, we should also heed the warnings when ‘precarization’ threatens their survival.

Tactical Adaptation: Commercialization and Collectivization

While working conditions and work processes for community arts practitioners in Northern Ireland have become more ‘precarious’, surprisingly few artists have given up altogether. They are not completely burnt out. They are veterans at tackling frustration without despair. They face fear bravely and with humour:

I think it’s fairly useless trying to get government to do anything about it - because they’re not very likely to listen to some artist saying that it would be nice to have a bit more money to teach dance to some children in Donemana, just because they’ve never had the chance to do it before. They’re off privatising the NHS!

(Freelance dancer/teacher/facilitator, interviewed 13 May 2015)

These pragmatic perspectives help them try to ‘stand their own artistic ground’ and preserve their sanity and their work.

In terms of financial resilience, all of the artists interviewed asserted that some projects which had previously been publicly funded have begun charging fees to participants. Organisations, artists and participants also report engaging in fundraising activities such as bake sales, charity raffles and crowdfunding campaigns. While these kinds of fundraising measures might sustain the artist and the organisation, they can exclude the most financially disadvantaged (Green and Newsinger, 2014). These steps have saved projects that would otherwise have perished; but it can mean asking the people who have the least to give the most.

Organisations are increasingly turning towards corporate sponsorship and investment, with some success. However, commercial investment is more sustainable when supported by the state. Sustainable economies – particularly in terms of job creation, quality of life and a cultural offer for attracting new residents and investment – rely on statutory bodies for infrastructural development. In 2016, after the UK arts sector demonstrated the highest levels of economic growth out of all the ‘creative industries’, the Arts Council England recognised this by providing new funding streams, including a ‘new fund… specifically for individual artists to develop their creative practice’ (Hutchison, 2016, online).

While sponsorship and user-pays schemes are solutions typically suggested by the ‘business model’ of the arts as a ‘creative industry’, the legacy of community arts practice suggests a different approach: collectivisation. Globally, workers’ and artists’ collectives have been springing up in defiance of austerity and as means of maximising resources for activism, creativity and survival; examples include the precarias de derivas in Spain (Lorey, 2015), Fora do Eixo in Brazil (2016, online) and the Precarious Workers’ Brigade in the UK (2016, online):

We are a UK-based group of precarious workers in culture & education. We call out in solidarity with all those struggling to make a living in this climate of instability and enforced austerity.

In Derry/Londonderry, Echo Echo Dance Theatre, for example, has begun providing studios and technical support at low cost for a range of community arts groups and individual artists who can no longer afford to continue elsewhere. Unfortunately, Echo Echo are at risk themselves, following the ACNI funding cuts to arts organisations of 40-100% in March 2015. Since the new ACNI warning of April 2017, all staff have been put on notice.

There are also examples of established artists sharing personal income and resources with...
other artists and participants. These include more established artists sharing their fees with younger artists who have a less regular income – or with participants who had personal costs to cover, such as child care or taxi fares, during their participation. Six of the artists interviewed for this research asserted that they had subsidised projects and participants out of their own pockets.

Some local initiatives have begun to support collaborative activity without recourse to specific public funding. For example, the #Derry Creatives group is an interdisciplinary collective who meet monthly to pool resources and support each other’s arts practice. However, the group is led by staff from subsidised organisations, such as Voluntary Arts Ireland and #Brand NI. It is possible to do something with nothing, but it helps to know somebody else who has something.

**Conclusion: A Precarious Future?**

Currently in Northern Ireland, there is an increased atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity in the arts sector and society in general; particularly in relation to the potential impact of impending welfare ‘reforms’ and reductions in public services, following the deal reached between the Northern Ireland Executive and Conservative UK government in 2016. Further cuts to public services could have a disproportionate impact in Northern Ireland, where 28% of those employed are in the public sector, 35% of the population have no tertiary qualifications and 27% of the population is economically inactive (DETNI, 2015).

Perhaps the biggest uncertainty pertains to ‘Brexit’ – the departure of the UK from the EU – which at this stage has no clear policy framework. The outcomes of the eventual strategy could have a serious impact on the stability of peace in Northern Ireland, as well as its economic prosperity. In the context of intensifying ‘precarization’, artistic collectives may provide one possible model for survival. In fact, collaborative creativity may be essential for survival.

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Parts of this article were presented in a seminar and policy briefing, ‘Quality of Life: Inclusion and resilience in community cultural development in Northern Ireland’, for the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) at the Northern Ireland Assembly, 25 January 2017.
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Exporting Art from Ireland: The Alfred Beit Foundation and the Protection of Cultural Property
TED OAKES

Abstract: This article examines the legislative framework in place in Ireland, before and after the events of the Beit sale in 2015. In April 2015, Christie’s of London announced the sale of several old Masters paintings owned by the Alfred Beit Foundation. There was an immediate hostile public reaction. This attempted sale highlighted weaknesses in the existing Irish art export regime. The sale was challenged in court by An Taisce – the National Trust for Ireland - and the court case began a judicial review of the licensing regime. This initiated a series of changes by the Irish government, e.g. extension of the criteria for the issuing of export licences to the European Union. This is a minor change that does not resolve the greater concerns relating to property rights vs. heritage protection. In addition, it exposed the absence of political will to prioritise and legislate for cultural heritage protection in Ireland, in particular, for non-archaeological artefacts. The purpose of this article is to acknowledge that changes were made to the system, and to highlight continuing weaknesses in the regime.

Keywords: cultural property, Alfred Beit Foundation, cultural heritage law, corporate governance.

Introduction

On 30 April 2015, Christie’s of London announced the sale of nine Old Master paintings from the Alfred Beit Foundation (ABF). It was hoped that the sale would help secure a €15 million endowment fund to ensure the long-term future of Russborough House. News of the sale was met with an immediate and hostile public response. The controversy exposed weaknesses in Ireland’s art export regime, and a subsequent challenge in court by An Taisce triggered a judicial review of the licensing system, which initiated a series of changes by the Irish government to export regulation. However, these minor changes do not resolve the greater concerns relating to property rights vs. heritage protection. Neither did these changes, nor the court case, result in the return of all the paintings to Ireland. The controversy exposed the absence of political will to prioritise and legislate for cultural heritage protection in Ireland, and in particular for non-archaeological artefacts. It also laid bare poor standards of corporate governance in the Irish arts sector. This paper will examine the legislative framework for the export of art in place in Ireland, before and after the events surrounding the export of paintings by the ABF.

Origins of the Controversy

Sir Alfred Beit established the ABF in March 1976 out of his home at Russborough House, Co Wicklow. Unfortunately, security at Russborough proved a cause for concern and following a string of violent and high-profile robberies, Sir Alfred donated seventeen of his most famous paintings to the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI) in 1987, where they remain to this day (Mulcahy, 2015). Despite these setbacks, Sir Alfred still hoped that the House, now open to the public, would become, as expressed in Article Two of the ABF’s Memorandum and Articles of Association, a centre to ‘promote and further the advancement of education in the Fine Arts in Ireland’ (Memorandum and Articles of Association, 1976, p. 6). The constant security threat meant many of the paintings were virtually uninsurable and, owing to this, the most famous
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Ted Oakes

pieces of the remaining collection (which still remained the property of the ABF) were put into storage under the supervision of the NGI (O’Kelly, 2015). As Cooke (2016, p. 199) explains this was a practice that began in 1965, when the Beits would spend the winter months abroad, placing their paintings temporarily in the care of the NGI. Sir Alfred also sold land in 1977 to raise an endowment for the ABF to the amount of £370,770, which, as Cooke (2016, p. 201) comments, seems a large sum, but was in fact insufficient to maintain the property long-term. Over the years finances at Russborough remained a headache for the ABF. In 2002 the ABF applied for, and received, the first in a series of conservation grants totalling €2 million from the Heritage Council (Mulcahy, 2015). Conscious of the financial struggles they faced, Lady Clementine Beit, Sir Alfred’s widow, willed her personal collection of Italian bronzes to the ABF in 2005 with the instruction that it be sold and the resulting monies put towards the maintenance of Russborough House. The sale of these sixty-two bronzes garnered €3.8 million (Gartland, 2006).

However, just as with the sale of land in 1977, these amounts were not sufficient to secure the long-term future of both Russborough and the collection, and the ABF began selling further assets piecemeal to finance the upkeep of the House – a practice which the Beits are on record saying they opposed (Mark-Fitzgerald, 2015). Indeed, though Lady Beit had given her approval for the sale of her Italian bronzes for the upkeep of the House in 2006 (Board of the ABF, 2015), this could not be taken to imply her tacit approval to begin deaccessioning and selling assets for the House, as the ABF appear to have assumed. In November 2013, Sotheby’s auctioned a collection of porcelain, raising €1.2 million and in 2014 a Jacques de Lajoue painting, The Cabinet of Physical Sciences, was privately sold raising €500,000. A year later, Christie’s announced the sale of the nine paintings from the ABF collection (Boland, 2015).

The Document and Pictures (Regulation of Export) Act (1945) and EU Regulation 116/2009

On 16 June 2015, An Taisce brought a legal challenge in the High Court claiming that the export licences issued on 16 March 2015 by the NGI to Christie’s Ireland (acting on behalf of the ABF) had been made ultra vires. An Taisce’s legal counsel made it clear that they were not trying to stop the sale, but putting the respondents on notice of flaws in the export licences issued. The case primarily concerned the weaknesses of the Documents and Pictures (Regulation of Export) Act 1945. Since 1985, the NGI had been issuing export licences under the 1945 Act, but despite repeated attempts, An Taisce could find no legal basis for the NGIs delegated licencing authority (Carolan, 2015) as the 1945 Act did not allow for a delegation of authority from the Minister. It later transpired that this function had been delegated in 1985, by way of a letter, to the NGI by the then Minister for State with responsibility for Arts and Culture, Ted Nealon (Leydon, 2015).

As Conlon (2014 p. 206) notes, the 1945 Act was recognised as inadequate and out-dated, even before the Beit controversy. For instance, Section 3 of the Act prohibited the export of any paintings covered by the Act without a proper licence, which had to be delivered to an export officer when leaving the State. This was not practicable owing to Ireland’s membership of the EU and the free market. Despite the fact that the 1945 Act predated Ireland’s EU membership by thirty years, it was never amended to reflect Ireland’s changed international legal obligations. Furthermore, under the 1945 Act definitions were vague. While the Act gave the Minister wide-ranging powers to extend its coverage or exclude items from it, as Conlon (2014, p. 209) notes, there was uncertainty as to the precise coverage of the Act at any particular time. Additionally, the NGI, which acted as the licencing authority, had no power
to refuse the issuing of a licence, that power resting solely with the Minister (NGI Registrar, 2016). As Cooke (2016, p. 207) observes, the Act can be seen to reflect the State’s tendency to favour private property rights over heritage protection, a subject which shall be discussed in more detail below.

As a member state of the European Union, Ireland has transferred competence in the movement of goods (as well as persons, services and capital) to the EU, and EU law is decisive in this area. While the Treaty on European Union prohibits fiscal and non-fiscal barriers to the movement of goods, it makes exceptions for national treasures of artistic, historic or archaeological importance (Conlon, 2014 p. 195-196). In this instance, Ireland must abide by Commission Regulation 116/2009 on the export of cultural goods, which supersedes Irish legislation in this field (Patterson et al, 2014 p.581). Regulation 116/2009 has clear descriptions and stipulates the various categories of cultural object (depending on financial value, type of object/painting, age threshold) which require a licence. The basis for refusal of a license is through Article Two, whereby the goods in question are covered by national legislation protecting national treasures of artistic, historical or archaeological value to a Member State. In practice, there are few refusals (Peters, 2015 p. 143). Most licences are issued through the cultural ministries of respective Member States. In Ireland, these licences for non-EU bound cultural goods are issued by the Cultural Institutions Unit, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) (Conlon, 2014, p. 220).

Although the court case brought by An Taisce primarily concerned perceived infirmities of the export licences issued under the 1945 Act, it also highlighted the complexities of the Irish export regime. While the Cultural Institutions Unit, DAHG issues licences for non-EU bound paintings, certain paintings (provided they were valued at under €150,000, or if a watercolour, under €30,000 – basically, those not covered by Regulation 116/2009) could have their licenses issued by the NGI under the 1945 Act (NGI Registrar, 2016). For paintings in excess of these values leaving the EU, licences were (and still are) issued by the Cultural Institutions Unit, under Regulation 116/2009 (Conlon, 2014, p. 220). Three of the nine paintings originally scheduled for sale (a selection of the highlights, as described by Christie’s) were affected by the latter, but were granted licences under the 1945 Act along with all the others. Christie’s moved these three paintings from London to Christie’s New York and Hong Kong offices to go on view in a pre-sale exhibition. An Taisce alleged that licenses would have been required under Regulation 116/2009 for export out of the EU, but the licences issued for these three paintings did not allow them to leave the Union (Carolan, 2015 and Stanley-Smith, 2015).

Reformed Regime – National Cultural Institutions Act (1997)

Another piece of legislation that came under scrutiny was the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997. When first introduced, the Law Reform Commission commented that the 1997 Act represented a significant extension of the existing export regime in Ireland (for instance, it classified objects for the first time) (Conlon, 2014, p. 207). However, Sections 6 and 49 of the Act, regulating the trade of paintings, were not brought fully into force until 2015, following the eruption of the controversy (DAHG, 2015). As Conlon (2014, p. 219) commented, almost prophetically with regards to the ABF paintings, this ‘piecemeal commencement [of the 1997 Act] is not helpful as regards the transparency … of the relevant regime applicable to the movement, and control, of cultural goods’.

However, on 28 July the High Court recommenced and the State conceded without reservation that the export licences issued by the NGI on 16 March 2015 to Christie’s were unlawful and the NGI had no authority to issue licences: that power still remained with the Minister for
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Arts (Stanley-Smith, 2015). That day the Minister, Heather Humphreys, signed the statutory instrument to commence Sections 6 and 49 of the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 (DAHG, 2015). Section 6 fully repealed the 1945 Act and certain provisions of Section 49 set out stricter categories for export. Any paintings over 25 years, painted by hand and which originated, or had been in Ireland for 25 years, would require an export licence. Although the changes were generally welcomed, observers including the Chair of the Irish Museums Association noted that if not enforced, the new export regime would suffer from similar issues as the 1945 regime (Crowley, qtd. in McGrath, 2015).

Concerns remain. Sculptures are excluded from the scope of the 1997 Act, so in theory sculptures could be exported without record. The role of the NGI in issuing export licences still remains largely perfunctory, the priority being to maintain a record of all artworks leaving the State rather than scrutinising the export requests (NGI Registrar, 2016). Just as they had no power to refuse the issuing of a licence under the 1945 regime, they similarly have no power under the 1997 system. Of greater concern is the legal loophole identified by Conlon (2014, p. 214), which has yet to be addressed. This concerns the temporary movement of a cultural item to the EU, and onto a third country (in a travelling exhibit, for example). In this instance, the Irish authorities could issue a licence for movement of an object to an EU state, and a subsequent license for the final non-EU destination country, yet there is no provision to issue a licence for movement of the object from the interim host EU state to its final destination. In this instance the Irish authorities could, theoretically, lose control of the licensing regime.

Private Property Rights vs. Heritage Protection during Export – A Fair Balance?

The controversy highlighted the challenges that exist in finding a balance between heritage protection and private property rights. This was alluded to by Minister Humphreys in a statement to the Dáil: ‘These issues [the provision to refuse export licences] were examined in the 1980s and the 1990s and the view has always been that there are other issues around property rights. It is not quite as simple as some might suggest' (Humphreys, 2015). Indeed, while the new 1997 Act allows the Minister to require an object to be entered into a register of cultural objects, including paintings ‘whose export from the State would constitute a serious loss to the heritage of Ireland' (National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997), these listed objects are not automatically protected from export. Section 50 of the Act only allows for the Minister to refuse a licence for objects on the register; to refuse a license for a registered object in the care of an institution funded in whole, or in part, by the State; or to issue a stay on any object on the register for a period of one year (National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997). These limited refusal mechanisms and the stay, in particular, can be seen to respect property rights, which are guaranteed under the Irish Constitution (1937).

Owing to similar concerns on the impact on private property rights, the Waverley Criteria in the United Kingdom allows for a stay to be issued on the export of an object, provided it is deemed to be immensely important to national cultural heritage. The stay is to allow time to identify potential buyers and thus keep the object in the UK (Nafziger et al. 2014, p. 3). At the height of the ABF controversy, the NGI, in criticizing the inadequacy of the Irish export regime, made reference to the British and Commonwealth systems of export control. It suggested that the implementation of a Waverly-like system would go a long way towards protecting cultural patrimony in Ireland (NGI Board of Governors, 2015). Despite British efforts to strike a balance between the various interested parties, there has been criticism of poor funding for public institutions, which has resulted in the loss of many valuable cultural items, with national museums unable to afford them (Chamberlain et al, 2014, p. 484). This British effort to
balance the various interests is not unique and the registering or listing of culturally important material is a common mechanism in many Western European states that are wary of the legal implications for property rights of blanket designation of culturally important material (Nafziger et al. 2014, p. 2-3).

The Irish Constitution’s (1937) strong provisions on property rights can be seen to follow the European constitutional tradition of protecting the right to property, with these rights further entrenched under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Article 17 of the Charter provides for the right to private property, including the right not to be deprived of ones property except in public interest, and subject to fair compensation (Conlon, 2014, p. 201). Ireland is also a founding member of the Council of Europe and a signatory of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), of which Article 1 of Protocol 1 provides for peaceful enjoyment of one’s possessions (including cultural property) with a provision for deprivation of this right only where there is public interest (Chamberlain and Vrdoljak, 2014, p. 539). The Convention has force in Ireland through the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003 and Irish Courts must consider the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in their own rulings. The Strasbourg Court has never held against public interest in protecting cultural property in favour of private property rights, but has sought to strike a ‘fair balance’ between the two. Regarding the deprivation of one’s property, the Court has deemed that public interest requires (a) that a deprivation of property must be for a legitimate purpose and (b) that the achievement of that purpose must strike a ‘fair balance’ between the demands of the public interest and the need to protect individual rights (Chamberlain and Vrdoljak, 2014, p. 539 - 540). Regarding moveable cultural heritage, the court considers that ‘the control by the state of the market in works of art is a legitimate aim for the purposes of protecting a country’s cultural and artistic heritage’ (de Clippele and Lambrecht 2015, p. 272).

On this topic Conlon (2014, p. 201) writes that ‘public interest in the [conservation of cultural patrimony] remains outside the actual application of the law, while at the same time a potential applicable legal measure exists’. In other words, although several relevant cases have been brought before the Strasbourg Court, regarding public interest in heritage protection, there has been no definitive comment on the balance struck between the accommodation of individual rights and the public interest in member-states of the Council of Europe, Ireland included. Certainly the challenges to introducing stronger protective legislation raised by Minister Humphreys are substantive, and Irish constitutional protections of property rights are indeed strong. Taking into consideration other trends at national levels to increase heritage protection and recent developments judicially at a European level to strike a fair balance between the rights of the owners and the public interest, the Irish constitutional protections offered to private property rights could be accommodated with heritage protection, where export is concerned, provided there is political will to do so (de Clippele and Lambrecht, 2015, p. 275-6). However, it may take a test case in the Irish Supreme Court, or Strasbourg, to test the boundaries of what might be possible.

**Ongoing Controversy**

Despite the publicity generated by the case, it was not the judgement from the High Court on 28 July 2015 that resulted in the sale of the paintings being postponed. The remaining paintings (the two Grimshaws sold below expectations on 15 June 2015 for a combined £112,500 [Parsons, 2015]) were withdrawn from auction on 25 June 2015 only when the ABF received proposals from private Irish donors about a possible purchase under Section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (Parsons, 2015). The Act allows for individuals to buy cultural property, donate it to the State and receive tax relief, though this did not concern all the
paintings. Through this mechanism the Teniers painting and Rubens’ *Head of a Bearded Man* were subsequently purchased and donated to the NGI, with the donors recouping 80% of the value in tax credits. This turn of events allowed breathing space for the ABF to consider its options and demonstrated the ability of the ABF to find buyers for the paintings in the Irish market (Stanley-Smith, 2016). But as Judith Woodworth, Chair of the ABF made clear, if an adequate, long-term solution was not found to the ABFs financial predicament then ‘the Foundation may have no option but to resume the proposed sales so as to avoid a financial crisis’ (Cullen, 2015).

Unfortunately the financial headaches for the ABF only increased after July 2015. The sale of the remaining paintings was announced in June 2016 on foot of the same export licences that had been issued ultra vires in March 2015, an action itself which was heavily criticised (Stanley-Smith, 2016). Despite renewed protestation from art historians and professionals alike, the *Venus and Jupiter* by Rubens was sold to an unnamed bidder for £1.3 million on 7 July, along with the two Guardis for £135,000 each, which was below expectations, and the Boucher was also sold for €87,500 (Parsons, 2016). However, this still left the ABF well off their target of €15 million and critics feared the sale of assets could continue, unchecked, until the Foundation reached, or failed to reach, its goal (RTÉ News, 2016). Further doubt was cast on the ABF’s overall competency when it emerged that the sale of the paintings would prompt the British Government to trigger a long-standing inheritance tax bill for on Sir Alfred’s estate. In July 2016 there were reports that the ABF was disposing of more assets, this time donating another painting from its collection to the Ulster Museum to offset the tax bill for British Revenue and Customs (Burns, 2016, p. 26). In all, by December 2016, the ABF had disposed of eight of the nine paintings originally put up for sale in April 2015, with the fate of the Van Ostade still under negotiation.

**Operations of the Board of Directors**

The secretive nature of the ABF Board of Directors throughout the controversy also came in for public scrutiny. By the time the sale had been announced, the paintings had been moved out of Ireland and it was only the Christie’s statement that brought the matter to public attention (Boland, 2015). The Board (which voted to approve the sale) includes representatives from the NGI, Royal Dublin Society, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, the Irish Georgian Society and An Taisce, as stipulated by the Foundation’s Articles of Association (1976, p. 7). However, not all of these bodies and representatives supported the sale. While it can be argued that the directors felt bound by confidentiality, the failure, for instance, of Director Consuelo O’Connor to inform her nominating body, An Taisce (which was fiercely opposed to the sale) subsequently led to its withdrawing her as its nominee. Observers noted that this would have been an ideal opportunity for the Board to appoint a cultural professional to the vacancy to strengthen their position. However O’Connor’s subsequent re-nomination as an independent director dismayed these observers and only seemed to confirm the secretive workings of the Board (Mulcahy, 2015).

The presence of the Director of the NGI, Sean Rainbird, on the ABF Board attracted some of the strongest criticism. Under the Documents and Pictures Act 1945, it was the Director of the NGI who signed the export licences (albeit, ultra vires, as it emerged). While the 1945 Act did not allow the Director to refuse the issuing of a licence, Rainbird’s vote in support of the sale of the paintings and, with it, the export of valuable historical art from the State was perceived by some to be an example of a conflict of interests, a claim the NGI was quick to deny (NGI Board of Governors, 2015).
Conclusion

The events surrounding the sale of the Beit paintings in 2015 and 2016 exposed several inadequacies in legislative protection afforded to historically important art works in Ireland. Firstly, it is clear that the licencing regime and legislative framework were outdated. While the full entry into force of the 1997 Act is welcome, it is also clear that anomalies remain in the export regime which need to be addressed. Although the weak legislative framework was not directly responsible for the Beit controversy, successive governments’ failures to enact the sections that would strengthen the art export regime in Ireland exacerbated the problem. The episode also laid bare the complexities that exist with respect to property rights and heritage protection. Keeping in mind the constitutional rights to private property, in cases where the export of art is identified as detrimental to the public interest, an appropriate accommodation must be met where public interest in heritage protection conflicts with private property rights. However, without a definitive judgement, either by the Irish Supreme Court or Strasbourg, it will be difficult to determine the extent of the protection that could be offered. Thirdly, the controversy demonstrated that the standards of corporate governance in the ABF were below what should be considered acceptable. A more open and constructive dialogue between the ABF and the public prior to the sale, would have gone a long way towards mitigating criticism aimed at the Foundation in the weeks following the announcement of the sale.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the assistance and opinions of Pat Cooke, Director of the MA in Cultural Policy and Arts Management, University College Dublin, and Eimear O’Flynn, Associate Solicitor, LK Shields, in the completion of this paper.

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NOTES

1. The paintings included two works by Peter Paul Rubens Head of a Bearded Man and Venus and Jupiter, one by David Teniers the Younger, Kermesse, a religious piece by Adriaen van Ostade, Adoration of the Shepherds, and two Venetian views by Francesco Guardi. Three further paintings belonging to the ABF were also selected for sale and listed separately, a pair by John Atkinson Grimshaw, Two views of Yew Court, Scalby, Scarborough and one by François Boucher Aurore et Amour tenant une torche (Christie’s Press Release, 2015). A license was obtained for a third Rubens, Portrait of a Monk though this was subsequently withdrawn by the ABF, with speculation that its attribution to Rubens could not be verified (Boland, 2015).

2. As Blake (2015, p. 31) notes, the art market in the UK is a large and profitable sector for the UK economy, therefore, private property rights aside, there is a financial incentive for the UK Government to maintain the freedom of movement for cultural property, mainly for art and antiques.

3. Although not concerning export law, these comments made during Beyeler v Italy (2002) ECHR, which concerned the transfer of ownership of a Van Gogh, can be applied more generally to measures designed to regulate the movement of cultural property, including export controls (Chamberlain and Vrdoljak, 2014, p. 544)

4. Negotiations were also ongoing to buy and donate the Van Ostede on a similar scheme (Parsons, 2016)

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A view from the bridge: institutional perspectives on the use of a national internship scheme (JobBridge) in Ireland’s National Cultural Institutions

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Abstract: Ireland’s National Internship Scheme, also known as JobBridge, was in place between 2011 and 2016, and in excess of 40,000 internships were commenced during that period across the private, public and voluntary sectors. This study examines the use of JobBridge and other internship schemes in five of Ireland’s National Cultural Institutions during a time of high unemployment and an extended recruitment moratorium in the public sector. The findings were based on a series of interviews with arts managers within host organisations to broaden the field of research on the use of internships in the arts and cultural sector by focussing on institutional perspectives. The paper concludes that JobBridge had many short-term benefits for the National Cultural Institutions consulted, but that the scheme was a short-term solution to a much greater staffing crisis in the public and cultural sector, as evident by the highly qualified and experienced jobseekers knowingly undertaking internships with no progression routes within those organisations.

Keywords: JobBridge, internships, unemployment, national cultural institutions, passionate labour, social capital.

Introduction

On 18 October 2016 Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar announced the winding down of the controversial national internship scheme JobBridge. In place since 2011, the scheme has been subject to varying views on its effectiveness in supporting the labour market, with the Department of Social Protection consistently affirming its role in coping with job losses in the wake of economic collapse. As with other sectors, arts and cultural organisations have widely availed of JobBridge and its supports to the labour market, especially following the extension of the scheme to local authorities in 2013, although precise data on the exact number of arts and cultural JobBridge interns is elusive. However, the scheme has also been the target of much public criticism and numerous investigations since its inception, often on the grounds of low levels of payment and employer exploitation of the scheme across public and private sectors (Kelly, 2016). The legacy and impacts of JobBridge were therefore the subject of immediate debate following Varadkar’s announcement. In his own statements to the press Varadkar defended some outcomes of the scheme, whilst also acknowledging it was ‘far from perfect’ and in need of replacement (Doyle, 2016; O’Dwyer, 2016).

The closure of the scheme has been accompanied by the publication of the Indecon Evaluation of JobBridge Activation Programme (14 October 2016), the second comprehensive report by Indecon into the scheme, following its predecessor in 2013. As with Indecon’s previous reports, the arts and cultural sector is not segmented as a specific host organisation ‘type’, making extrapolation of its data onto the cultural sector difficult (as data is classified according to categories such as civil service, community, local authority, non-commercial semi state, public body, voluntary, etc., all of which likely include cultural organisations of various kinds). That
notwithstanding, of particular relevance to the arts and cultural sector is the 2016 report’s fifth key recommendation: ‘There is merit in a significant reduction in the number of interns taken on by public sector organisations unless these organisations have the potential to offer future jobs to interns’ (p. xii). This recommendation follows observations of a disparity between subsequent employment rates of the public and community/voluntary sector in comparison with the commercial sector.

In light of these recent findings and the cessation of JobBridge, this essay seeks to offer some qualitative insight into the experience of JobBridge at public sector institutions, by presenting the findings of a short study into the use of JobBridge by a selection of National Cultural Institutions (NCIs). This essay aims to augment this information by focusing on the perspective of cultural employers managing internships in the area of arts administration, during a time of restricted staffing resources and progression routes. It will assess the benefits and weaknesses of the JobBridge scheme from the perspective of employers in the cultural sector; examine the use of the JobBridge in comparison with other internship schemes; address the challenges for NCIs posed by the public sector hiring moratorium; and identify perceived impacts of the scheme on the jobs market in the cultural sector. With the recovering economy now heralding the end of the public sector recruitment moratorium, and an increase in funding for the National Cultural Institutions and the Arts Council in 2015 and 2016 (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2015, 2016), the past lived experience of arts managers in managing internship schemes – the ‘view from the bridge’ – offers valuable perspectives that can inform the development of future employment pathways.

Background

The JobBridge scheme, also known as the National Internship Scheme, was an Irish government initiative introduced in 2011 at the time of the highest level of unemployment since the beginning of the Irish economic recession in 2008. The aim of the JobBridge scheme was ‘to assist in breaking the cycle where jobseekers are unable to get a job without experience’ (Department of Social Protection, 2015a). The scheme involved full-time six- or nine-month internships with host organisations in the private, public and voluntary/community sectors for candidates who had been receiving jobseeker’s allowance for at least three months. Interns maintained their existing social welfare entitlement and received an additional weekly stipend of €52.50, payable by the Department of Social Protection [DSP], the body that also managed and administered the JobBridge scheme.

Since it was launched on 29 June 2011, the perceived advantages and consequences of the scheme have been the subject of much public debate. While positive findings show that over 79% of interns gained have paid employment at some stage since their JobBridge internship (Indecon, 2016, p. iv), issues have been raised regarding the exploitation of interns (O’Rourke, 2014), job displacement (Collins, 2013; Murray, 2015), the ambiguity of policy and terminology surrounding internships (Lalor, 2013; Boughton, 2014; Holmquist, 2014) and failure by the DSP to adequately monitor host organisations using the scheme (Gartland, 2015; O’Halloran 2014). In acknowledgement of these concerns, the DSP commissioned an independent evaluation of JobBridge in 2013 from the economic research organisation Indecon. While this extensive report concluded that JobBridge had been successful in achieving movement off the Live Register, it also acknowledged dissatisfaction amongst participants and offered several key recommendations for revising the scheme, among them the need ‘to improve support...
mechanisms for the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market... [and enable] host organisations to have the option of a more flexible scheme' (Indecon, 2013, p. xiii).

Unsurprisingly, the DSP primarily used the Indecon report to defend the scheme against public criticism, most frequently citing its findings that 61% of interns participating in the scheme had progressed into employment at the time of the report's publication (DSP, 2013a). On foot of this statistic demonstrating that ‘JobBridge is playing a significant role in helping people back to work’ (DSP, 2013b), in 2013 the scheme was expanded to local authorities, with the aim to amplify internship opportunities with local arts organisations. This was done in association with the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, with the objective of building on a long tradition of informal mentorship within the arts community... [and extending] the level of support that local authorities can give to cultural organisations at a time of constrained resources. (DSP, 2013b)

This expansion came during the fifth year of the government moratorium on recruitment that was first imposed in 2009 on all areas of public services, including the National Cultural Institutions. The moratorium was originally intended to be a short-term measure until employment numbers in each sector fell 'to the appropriate level', but remained in place until October 2014 (Labour Relations Commission, 2013, p. 13).

JobBridge was neither the first nor the only intervention of the state into supporting employment and training in the arts and non-profit and wider sectors. Other schemes have included Community Employment, Tús, and the Gateway Programme, however JobBridge was ‘the only activation measure available to short term unemployed’ (Indecon, 2016, p. 92). Nevertheless, JobBridge’s high levels of take-up, with 12,560 internships commenced by November 2012 (Indecon 2016, p. 5); contentious public reception; and use to support the labour market at a time of unprecedented financial collapse warrant a particular focus on its outcomes and impacts. It is hoped that this small-scale study of one particular dimension of JobBridge’s function and effects – that of the experience of managers working with JobBridge and other internship schemes within the NCIs – will add further texture to the assessments now taking place as the scheme formally draws to a close.

Methodology

The research that informs this essay was carried out in two stages. The first stage was a literature review that considered the existing major reports evaluating the JobBridge scheme in the context of the current body of knowledge around the themes of social capital, passionate labour and exploitation, and internship policy. The second stage involved a series of semi-structured interviews with representatives of the National Cultural Institutions. In total, five organisations from amongst the eleven NCIs were selected for the study, based on public records of their use of the JobBridge scheme. All five institutions were also employing the JobBridge scheme at the time of interview, in addition to using one or more alternative internship programmes. Whilst not a comprehensive overview of NCIs’ use of JobBridge – as this research took place within the context of an MA dissertation – this sample nonetheless offers a strong selection of NCI perspectives across a range of art forms and services (museums, performing arts, archives).

Interviewees were selected because of their direct experience of managing interns and internship training schemes. Four of the interview subjects had direct experience managing JobBridge interns within their department: Helen Beaumont, education and outreach officer at the National Museum; Jenny Siung, head of education at the Chester Beatty Library; and
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Interviewed jointly, Tom Quinlan and Helen Hewson, keepers at the National Archives. A further two interviews were conducted with contributors who could offer a comparative perspective on the use of alternative internship schemes. Phil Kingston, community and education manager at the Abbey Theatre, was interviewed on his experience of managing interns on the Tús’ programme; and Dr Marie Bourke, former head of education at the National Gallery, gave an insight into her department’s independent internship programme, which she herself had founded in the early 90s.

A clear limitation of this study was its exclusion of intern perspectives at the corresponding NCIs. Lack of forwarding contact details for many previous interns, and the practicalities of canvassing such a large population within the study’s timescale, led to the choice to focus on institutional perspectives. Importantly, however, the bulk of published research to date has primarily focused on interns’ perspectives, and the voice and perspective of the employer is more frequently omitted – an imbalance this study sought to redress. Therefore whilst this research cannot be taken as wholly reflective of the full scope of the scheme’s outcomes – either in terms of all NCIs, the wider arts/cultural sector, or in correlating both intern and employer perspectives – it does nevertheless fill a gap in sharing the lived experience of arts managers working with JobBridge and similar schemes.

Evaluating the JobBridge scheme

The ongoing use of internships is an important and topical issue in the context of current social and economic developments, and has drawn increasing academic, public and media interest. JobBridge is a government initiative unique to Ireland, but analysis of the scheme by the DSP prior to 2016 was limited to only one evaluation commissioned in 2013. Increasing concern about the scheme and its effects encouraged trade unions and advocacy groups to conduct independent parallel research, contributing significant reports with a narrower focus on the use and outcomes of JobBridge. Despite this, the author’s analysis of existing evaluations of the scheme revealed some limitations in terms of methodology, plurality of perspectives and analysis of data specific to the cultural and public sectors.

The first major independent evaluation of JobBridge was published by Indecon in April 2013, which examined the use of the scheme broadly across four sectors: private, public, community/voluntary, and unspecified (Indecon, 2013, p. 16). Problematically, the cultural sector could fall across any of these categories, owing to a variety of potential legal structures. While the 2013 Indecon report details findings of an extensive survey of both interns and host organisations, there is only one case study presented of a public sector host organisation, from which comparisons might be drawn with National Cultural Institutions. This case study offers very little detail, despite the organisation in question having taken on eighteen JobBridge interns (Indecon, 2013, p. 81). The public sector experience is noticeably neglected overall in the Indecon report, beyond passing references to possible consequences of the moratorium on employment opportunities in the sector (2013, p. ii, 15, 19, 59). The absence of data on public sector organisations is a weakness of the report, considering almost a quarter of JobBridge internships undertaken to that point had been in the public sector (Indecon, 2013, p. 111).

The more recent and final 2016 Indecon report aimed to deliver an evidence-based evaluation on ‘the suitability, effectiveness and relevance of the JobBridge Activation Programme’ (2016, p. 1), using varying methodological tools to assess three key outcomes of the scheme. Firstly, a counterfactual impact evaluation monitored a control group to determine the likely
employment outcomes in the absence of the JobBridge scheme, of which it concluded that ‘most of the benefits in terms of employment outcomes would have occurred in the absence of the Scheme’ (2016, p. viii). The results do however suggest ‘much more positive impacts for JobBridge than has been evident for many other labour market activation programmes’ (2016, p. iii). This is interesting when considered in light of another distinguishing feature of JobBridge amongst other labour market activation programmes, being that it is ‘the only activation measure available to short term unemployed [people]’ (2016, p. 92). Secondly, an ‘economic cost-benefit evaluation’ was undertaken (2016, p. 1), which returned results suggesting that JobBridge only offers a ‘net direct financial benefit for the Exchequer’ if interns enter into employment that lasts for two or more years following their participation in the scheme (2016, p. 80). Finally, and most relevant in this context regarding its use in the cultural sector, Indecon carried out a participant survey assessment ‘to ascertain the views and progression outcomes of interns and host organisations’ (2016, p. 47). Notably as was the case for the 2013 report, the response rate to the Indecon survey was significantly higher for interns (33.5%) than for host organisations (23.3%) (2016, p. 47). Indecon cites that these survey findings provide ‘a very strong foundation for the research’ because ‘all of the interns were given an opportunity to input’ (2016, p. 47). However, it is unclear whether all host organisations had the same opportunity to contribute to the survey, which suggests a limitation on the insights presented there regarding the experience of host organisations of the scheme.

Indecon reports that the methodology for assessing this third outcome is particularly sound because of the very large number of respondents it received, stating that ‘the survey evidence is much stronger than could be obtained from selective anecdotal material or from the results of very small samples’ (2016, p. 47). While this may be true for the overarching purposes of the Indecon report, it is remarkable that the research shows that nearly a third of interns surveyed were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with JobBridge. While perhaps unsurprising, it is important to acknowledge that interns who were not currently in employment expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction (2016, p. 59). We know from Indecon’s research that the progression rates into employment overall are greater for those who undertook internships in the private sector than in public sector or community and voluntary organisations (Indecon, 2016, p. 52), and this is to be expected given that the public sector recruitment moratorium only recently came to an end. However, an extended methodology that allowed for subsequent case studies, or further contributions from those interns and host organisations who expressed dissatisfaction with the scheme, would surely have offered greater insight to help shape Indecon’s recommendations for change in this report.

This is particularly significant given Indecon’s fifth recommendation in 2016, the most pertinent in the context of the National Cultural Institutions. Indecon advises ‘there should be restrictions on the number of interns taken on by public sector organisations unless they have the potential to offer interns future jobs’ (2016, p. 89). This is despite nearly half of the host organisation survey respondents citing a ‘very important’ or ‘important’ benefit of the scheme being that it ‘overcomes restrictions on increasing employment’ in their organisation (2016, p. 48), although only 6.7% of host organisations surveyed are Public bodies. Furthermore, the combined percentage of total internships in Public, Voluntary, Local Authority or Non-commercial semi-state host organisations is only 14.15% (2016, p. 9). It seems discriminatory to significantly reduce interns in Public bodies going forward, without investigating further the considerable amount of host organisations in other sectors who equally seem to lack the potential to offer future jobs to those interns.
Further assessment of the areas of dissatisfaction with the scheme could also shed light on the findings showing that a majority of interns expressed discontent with the value of the top-up payment provided by JobBridge (2016, p. 86), demonstrating the interns’ estimation of the value of the work they were contributing to their host organisations. Indecon recognises this concern in relation to the top-up payment, noting that ‘interns are making a valuable input, and in some cases may after an initial period be undertaking similar activities to paid employees’ (2016, p. 88). This statement echoes the wider industry concerns around defining internships, avoiding job displacement, and balancing the benefits received by both intern and host organisation. Yet, nearly 59% of host organisations surveyed stated that ‘the most important reason [for participation in the JobBridge scheme] was that it enabled them to evaluate potential future employees’ (2016, p. 48). This could indicate a risk of job displacement if employers are regarding internships as extensions of their recruitment process at the expense of the Exchequer, and without having to follow due diligence and HR procedure to protect those interns.

The grey area between the activities and contribution of interns and their status as ‘interns’ or ‘employees’ in their host organisations is mirrored by a lack of clarity or consistency in Indecon’s 2016 report around the terminology used to refer to the JobBridge scheme and its participants. In the length of the report, the following variations are used to describe the JobBridge internship (the Scheme, the JobBridge Activation Programme, the Programme, trainee work experience, internship work experience), without clarification behind the variety of terms used. This echoes other findings on the consequences of the ambiguity of terminology (Lalor, 2013; Boughton, 2014; Holmquist, 2014), highlighting the dearth of clear policy guidelines detailing how internship and employment contracts should be distinguished. However, in a way Indecon’s sixth recommendation addresses this concern by suggesting that JobBridge internships should be capped at three month terms, a time-frame which would allow for ‘significant work experience benefits’ for the intern, and after which time the interns should be hired as employees or their internship should be extended at the cost of the organisation (2016, p. 90).

Advocacy groups investigating the use of the JobBridge scheme in relation to specific sectors or socio-economic groups identified similar failings prior to the publication of the 2016 Indecon evaluation. A report published by The National Youth Council of Ireland (Doorley, 2015) surveyed and interviewed interns aged 18-25 years on their JobBridge experience to deepen knowledge of the scheme’s outcomes for young people. However, Doorley’s report omits the perspective of host organisations altogether (2015, p. 11), although the recommendation ‘to enhance and reform the scheme to improve quality and support progression to sustainable employment’ (2015, p. 29) would surely benefit from input by the organisations responsible for achieving these aims.

In a similar vein, a report published by the Education Division of IMPACT trade union was ‘prompted by growing fears...at the improper use of the JobBridge scheme within the [education] sector’ (Murphy, 2015, p. 3). In contrast to the Doorley 2015 and Indecon reports, the fifteen interview participants in the IMPACT 2015 study were a well-balanced sample group of ‘academic, policy, trade union, non-government organisation and claimants groups’ (Murphy, 2015, p. 5), although more detailed information about the interviewees is not provided. Overall, Murphy echoed Doorley’s recommendations, stressing the need to dissolve the ‘one size fits all’ nature of JobBridge and ‘reframe, resize and refocus internships in Ireland’ (Murphy, 2015, p. 7). The IMPACT report stressed that as the Irish economy continues to recover and employment opportunities increase, the use of schemes such as JobBridge should be
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reviewed to ensure they were still relevant and viable pathways for jobseekers and host organisations in each sector (Murphy, 2015, p. 4). The DSP welcomed this suggestion and, in April 2015, advised that this feedback would be incorporated later in the year into ‘an in-depth econometric evaluation of jobseeker outcomes from a range of activation programmes, including JobBridge’ (DSP, 2015b).

In contrast, there has been minimal research undertaken regarding the use of JobBridge in the cultural sector, despite an Arts Council partnership with the DSP and local authorities that aimed to facilitate the scheme’s expansion into the cultural sector (DSP, 2013b). In January 2014, Visual Arts Ireland published what it termed ‘best practice guidelines for internships’, in response to complaints by interns regarding their experience of JobBridge and other internship schemes (VAI, 2014, p. 8). Ninety-one individuals responded to a nationwide survey on internships, and provided some details of their experience. The authors also consulted with sixteen host organisations, including several of the National Cultural Institutions. However, VAI’s report does not specify the data collection methods of the consultation process or explain the selection of organisations consulted, and their qualitative comments are summarised in very general terms. Ultimately the best practice guidelines presented (2014, p. 14-6) almost wholly address the needs and perspective of interns, rather than those of the host organisations, excepting their legal obligations in terms of health and safety, Garda vetting, annual leave, etc. Additionally, while the report declares that ‘a strategic aim of internships should be to ensure that employment in the arts is seen as a sustainable career choice’ (VAI, 2014, p. 8), it does not offer specific recommendations as to how internships can be managed by organisations to support a healthier and more balanced labour market.

Other arts resource organisations, such as Theatre Forum, have regularly featured sessions on precarity of labour and internship culture at annual professional conferences; however, this has not translated into data collection or reports on cultural labour, apart from that of artist practitioners. The recently published Irish Museums Survey 2016, the first survey of Irish museums in a decade, included for the first time questions on usage of JobBridge and other employment schemes (Mark-FitzGerald, 2016, p. 39-42). Overall it noted that Community Employment was the most common scheme utilised by museums (32.1% of respondents), followed by unpaid internships (25.6%) and JobBridge (24.4%), but more detailed information (apart from a few qualitative comments) was not pursued. The Arts Council has also rarely intervened with respect to employment issues in the arts, and failed to deliver on the initial promise of a ‘toolkit of best practice’ for cultural employers engaging JobBridge interns (DSP, 2013b). Perhaps ironically, the Arts Council’s latest strategy document Making Great Art Work (2016) omits any mention of work in the cultural sector itself, beyond that of the individual artist and the internal governance of the Arts Council. With the wrapping up of JobBridge as a government programme, there is some danger that its impacts to date on the cultural labour market will go unevaluated. Therefore, the sharing of information and experience of interns and organisations is vitally important in adding to our understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

A view from the bridge: employer experiences of JobBridge internships

Much press attention has focussed on whether JobBridge offers participants valuable work experience and improved corporate knowledge and skills. It is worth remembering that the purpose of the scheme’s expansion into cultural organisations was twofold: offering work experience to potential interns, as well as offering new forms of support to cultural organi-
sations at a time of constrained resources’ (DSP, 2013b). An important consideration is the form this support takes, and the extent to which benefits are derived by employers as a result of taking on JobBridge interns. This includes agreeing the appropriate duration for any internship providing temporary staffing solutions, to avoid potential recruitment inertia. In the cultural sector, the increasing number of skilled candidates available to arts organisations on a voluntary basis has been acknowledged as being of particular benefit to employers, and of consequence for interns themselves who encounter a high level of competition for places on these schemes (Lalor, 2013, p. 31). In contrast, a study on the impact of internships on other stakeholders within cultural organisations indicated that incidences of job displacement, unclear employment terms, and the time-consuming supervision of voluntary staff often reduced the overall benefit of any contribution made by interns to an organisation (Siebert and Wilson, 2013, p. 716-7). These studies informed the author’s interview framework as detailed in the methodology, the findings of which will now be presented in detail.

Experiences managing internships in five National Cultural Institutions

The research findings discussed hereafter are based on interviews with the following arts education professionals, who agreed to be interviewed, quoted, and identified within this study:

• Helen Beaumont, education and outreach officer at the National Museum;
• Jenny Siung, head of education at the Chester Beatty Library;
• Tom Quinlan and Helen Hewson, keepers at the National Archives;
• Phil Kingston, community and education manager at the Abbey Theatre;
• Dr Marie Bourke, former head of education at the National Gallery

Their views and perceptions are compared and contrasted throughout to the findings of the 2013 and 2016 Indecon reports on JobBridge, particularly the latter, given its recent publication and summative nature.

In the first instance, the qualitative research carried out for this study supported Lalor’s theory (2013) that internships in the cultural sector are as beneficial for employers, and in some cases arguably more so, than for interns. There were several benefits perceived by employers using JobBridge and other internship schemes in the National Cultural Institutions, albeit to varying degrees. Firstly, in all cases organisations experienced an element of either direct or indirect value as a result of hosting an intern. An interesting spectrum became evident: the interview subjects who were most strongly affected by the staffing restrictions in their organisations (Beaumont, 2014; Siung, 2014; Kingston, 2014) also described their interns as contributing to the core work of the organisation. At the National Museum, the Abbey Theatre and the Chester Beatty Library, interns assisted in carrying out day-to-day delivery of outreach programmes; at the latter organisation interns also assisted in the management of the Library’s social media platforms and membership programmes and which served to offer ‘training opportunities for interns as well as address areas [of administrative support] that needed attention’ (Siung, 2014). At the National Gallery, participants on Bourke’s independent graduate internship scheme also contributed to the delivery of the organisation’s public outreach programme, but it was stressed that the intern’s involvement was primarily to offer ‘training and experience’ (Bourke, 2014). It was cited that educative tasks were allocated to JobBridge interns at the National Archives solely ‘to offer people a bit of experience…and keep their skills current’, albeit that the product of an intern’s work could be ‘mutually beneficial’ in some cases - for example, digitisation projects could ultimately be added to the Archive’s online
catalogues (Quinlan, 2014). While in all cases, it was apparent that interns provided work of value, the contributors’ estimation of the significance of that value to the organisation varied, from the provision of essential resources, to unsolicited but convenient by-products.

It was also noted in some cases that the interviewees expressed concern about the nature of work being undertaken by interns, when organisations had suffered extreme job losses. For example, Beaumont stated that in relation to the staffing restrictions resulting from the moratorium, ‘JobBridge [interns] are not supposed to replace permanent staff…but how do you not have somebody doing work that somebody paid used to do, when you have those kind of losses?’ (Beaumont, 2014). Such comments reflect a trend observable in the museum sector more broadly: in the Irish Museums Survey 2016, 40.6% of respondents across 118 Irish museums reported they were ‘very dependent’ on voluntary or unpaid labour (Mark-FitzGerald, 2016, p. 41). Another respondent noted that public demand of free cultural outreach services increased during the recession (Siung, 2014), while the number of paid staff to deliver these services remained stagnant or decreased. This resulted in an unsustainable workload for many education departments, which in turn prompted the use of internship schemes (Siung, 2014; Beaumont, 2014; Kingston, 2014).

These observations relate to a second benefit for employers identified in the research findings: the correspondence between the contributions made by interns of valuable work to each organisation, and the prior abilities and skills of those interns. In theory, the JobBridge scheme’s top-up payment structure should offer a broader spectrum of candidates to organisations and bring those furthest from the labour market closer to the workforce. This would also circumvent the prevailing issue of unpaid internships in the cultural sector, which excludes candidates who cannot afford to work for free (Siebert and Wilson, 2013, p. 716). However this author’s research again supported Lalor’s theory (2013, p. 31): according to interviewees, the demand for internships offered by the National Cultural Institutions was very high, with many applicants exceeding the minimum education (degree-level) and skillset requirements set by the organisations. The resulting high calibre candidates applying for these internships were likely to already be closest to the labour market. This mirrors data that has been reported by Indecon in organisations using JobBridge across all sectors. National figures in 2013 showed that 40% of JobBridge interns had a primary degree and nearly 75% had more than two years of employment prior to taking part in the scheme (Indecon, 2013, p. 12-3).

This study’s original research revealed that in some cases, the number of applicants for each JobBridge placement was so high that it required multiple interview rounds (Siung, 2014). This gives an indication of the level of competition for these placements, and the level of discretion and selection available to the organisations taking on interns. Despite many applicants having already completed multiple internships, some employers remarked that remaining close to the labour market by undertaking another internship was considered preferable by interns to being unemployed. At the National Museum, for example, Beaumont noted that exit interviews with interns had consistently reported that participants felt placements were valuable and worth doing; in one instance, a JobBridge intern wrote that the placement ‘greatly helped me grow as a person and repair some of the harm being unemployed can cause to your self-esteem and confidence’ (Beaumont, 2014). As a result of the high interest in these internships, other interviewees reported that the JobBridge scheme offered the organisations ‘very highly qualified people’ whose skills ‘matched the organisation’ and whose contribution was ‘highly valued’ (Siung, 2014).

In addition to their corporate value, in some cases interns were described as providing a psychological and morale-boosting benefit. This was a surprising result of the study, as it
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was originally anticipated that host organisations might have experienced tension within the institutions as a result of offering internships, especially while staffing restrictions remained in place in the public sector (as per Siebert and Wilson’s findings, 2013, p. 716-7). In other cases, the presence of interns was described as having more neutral effects on the work environment: in the National Archives and the National Gallery, internships were described as mainly educative in nature, and interns as supplementary, not integral, to core staffing. However, in the case of institutions where the prescribed scope of internships was stretched to aid in delivering the organisation’s core activities, the interns’ presence was also said to ‘increase the amount of imagination, contribution and collaboration in the room’ at the Abbey Theatre (Kingston, 2014); bring a ‘new energy and new enthusiasm that lifts everybody’ to the National Museum (Beaumont, 2014); and simply add to the resources at the Chester Beatty Library, which had been significantly reduced during the period of the recruitment moratorium (Siung, 2014).

The positive environmental effect of internships on some host organisations demonstrates an unexpected outcome of government internship schemes that has not been reflected in evaluation of other public services subject to similar staffing crises (Indecon, 2013; Murphy, 2015). However, the range of varying institutional experiences of JobBridge reported by respondents also supports the recent suggestion that the application of JobBridge across various industries in a ‘one-size fits all’ method is unsuitable in many cases, and needs to be revised accordingly to cater for the needs of different organisations (Doorley, 2015; Murphy, 2015). Even those benefits perceived as ‘positive’ by host organisations (e.g. the infusion of new perspectives by the presence of interns) run the risk of being superficial or over relied upon in the long term, if they are not managed and acknowledged as part of an overall staffing strategy. Employers could ideally be supported to build internship schemes into the organisation’s strategic planning, to ensure they are creating job opportunities for these interns who will have valuable corporate knowledge, and who should be encouraged to return to the organisation when future job opportunities are made available.

Contributors to this study also identified the inflexibility of JobBridge internships as a weakness of the scheme from the perspective of the cultural institution, particularly in relation to the fixed and often problematic duration of JobBridge internships, and their relation to the possibility of subsequent employment. While JobBridge can take the form of either six- or nine-month internships, the average JobBridge placement lasted nine months (Burton, 2014). The interview findings showed that in two cases the organisation wished to keep the intern on after their nine-month placement had finished, although there was an understanding that internships ‘can’t be open-ended’ (Beaumont, 2014). In these examples, interns successfully delivered core work that might previously have come under the remit of paid roles, but the hiring moratorium prevented these organisations from offering interns a paid position (a situation interns were made aware of from the outset). This resulted in the organisations losing their investment in experience and knowledge at the end of each nine-month internship period (Beaumont, 2014; Siung, 2014). This form of ‘brain drain’ in the publicly-funded sector was echoed in one of the comments on the Irish Museums Survey 2016, where a museum respondent noted the difficulty in keeping excellent workers, and was resigned to a role where they ‘endeavour to give them as much varied experience as possible so that they can apply for full time positions elsewhere’ (Mark-FitlzGerald 2016, p. 42). This once again highlights the aforementioned critical dearth of sector-specific data within the Indecon reports, which prevents knowledge of the extent to which cultural sector internships resulted in employment within the sector. Anecdotally, in terms of whether previous interns had gained employment, interviewees of this author’s research reported that: some past interns had progressed into
employment for cultural organisations in Ireland or abroad (Beaumont, 2014; Bourke, 2014; Quinlan, 2014); others pursued freelance opportunities (Siung, 2014); several engaged in further study (Beaumont, 2014; Bourke, 2014; Kingston, 2014); one intern engaged in voluntary work in the sector (Kingston, 2014); and one entered full-time employment in a different sector (Beaumont, 2014); nevertheless, it is difficult to determine how representative these responses are within the wider context of internships in the sector.

It is yet to be determined why JobBridge was initially developed to offer six- or nine-month placements rather than any other duration, and a call for explanation of this ‘random sort of figure’ (Hewson, 2014) was echoed by many contributors to the research (Beaumont, 2014; Siung, 2014; Quinlan, 2014). Bourke indicated that the twelve-month scheme she had independently developed for the education department at the National Gallery was, in her experience, the optimum internship length. A year-long programme marks the maximum recommended duration of internships on the international spectrum of best practice (Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum, 2013, p. 9), and this longer duration is also aimed predominately at graduate internships (CIPD, 2010, p. 7). Without any obligation for a cooling off period, the recruitment timeline for Bourke’s scheme was staggered to facilitate a community of interns within the organisation and a ‘gentle overlap’ of outgoing interns providing handover training to incoming interns (Bourke, 2014).

While job displacement has often been at the centre of public criticism of the JobBridge scheme, it is worth considering the technicalities surrounding the use of this term. In the case of JobBridge, displacement has been defined as any occasion

where the internship opportunity being advertised is replacing an existing job vacancy or where a company terminates the employment of a staff member and then seeks to take on an intern to cover the duties previously undertaken by that staff member. (Burton, 2013)

This description falls within a grey area in the case of the institutions interviewed for this study, where owing to the restrictions of the moratorium, respondents observed that ‘there aren’t any jobs to be taken’ (Beaumont, 2014). However, the research showed that the resources provided by JobBridge interns were sorely needed in some of these institutions, indicative of a workload that was exceeding the capacity of each organisation’s existing staff. The maximum internship duration therefore caused problems for organisations that needed ongoing support (Siung, 2014; Beaumont, 2014). This was further complicated by the cooling-off period of six months before which a different JobBridge candidate could be offered the same internship; a sensible control rule initially implemented to prevent displacement and exploitation by organisations of interns and the JobBridge scheme, during a time of low job opportunities in these same companies. However, following a recommendation by Indecon (2013, p. 121) this rule was adjusted so that host organisations could be exempted from this cooling-off period if the most recent intern ‘moves directly into employment, either with the host organisation or another company’ (Burton, 2014). Yet, there was no possibility of exemption by direct employment for employers in the National Cultural Institutions operating under an inflexible recruitment moratorium. Furthermore, it was reported that a large proportion of the employers’ time was spent training up interns whose placement would end several months later, resulting in the loss of corresponding corporate resources (Beaumont, 2014; Siung, 2014).

Interestingly, between the 2013 and 2016 Indecon reports, the position on optimum internship length has flipped. The 2013 report recommended that longer internships would ‘maximise the learning for the intern’, as employers prefer to hire candidates with at least a year’s experience (Indecon, 2013, p. x). Indecon suggested the introduction of twelve or fifteen-month JobBridge internships whereby the employers would be responsible for contributing the top-up payment for the additional months, rather than the State (2013, p. x). While this comment
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appeared to refer to the scheme as a whole, in reality, this alternative would only relieve the State of the top-up payment in the case of the private sector. The proposed extension, mooted in 2013, was met with protests regarding potential job displacement, and the cap on a nine-month maximum duration of each JobBridge internship remained in place. More recently, in a reversal of position, Indecon recommended that the maximum period of trainee/work experience (supported by public expenditure) should be capped at three months, after which interns should be paid or hired (Indecon, 2016, p. xiii). However, the 2016 report justifies this position by noting that ‘in periods of very high levels of unemployment, nine- or even 12-month internships may have been valid but this no longer applies’ (p. xiii). The extent to which the arts/cultural sector no longer has ‘very high levels of unemployment’ is highly debatable. In any case, it is clear from the 2016 report that levels of dissatisfaction with pay and conditions of JobBridge interns generally has prompted Indecon to recommend the payment of minimum wage (at least) following a three month internship. Whether arts and cultural organizations, including the NCIs – several of which received small increases in grant-in-aid in the 2016 budget – can or will follow suit, remains to be seen.

JobBridge: compensation and employment pathways

While one justification for the introduction of JobBridge into the cultural sector in 2013 was to continue to deliver on the scheme’s policy of helping to get unemployed people back to work, the expansion of the scheme was also presented by the DSP as a logical step for cultural organisations, which have ‘a long tradition of informal mentorship’ (DSP, 2013b). This trend was also apparent in the research for this study, as the interview subjects offered examples of a rolling and generational culture of unpaid employment in the sector, themselves having done ‘plenty of work for nothing’ (Kingston, 2014), and acknowledging that within the NCIs, whether through JobBridge or other schemes, internships ‘offered an opportunity to gain experience in areas of interest as well as provide training, and were the way a lot of people started their careers in the arts and cultural sector’ (Siung, 2014). However, in the case of the recent JobBridge participants, rather than starting their careers with an internship, interviewees indicated some interns already possessed significant previous work experience. The research revealed that in many cases the interns provided skilled support to the cultural organisations in the form of a staffing stopgap.

Government schemes such as JobBridge and Tús were preferred by most commentators over those that offer no compensation at all, as they provided some financial support and removed barriers to access for those ‘who could not afford to do an unpaid internship’ (Beaumont, 2014). As Beaumont also noted, facilitating internships are an important form of the National Museum’s access provision to the public, and are valued by the Museum as a means of supporting professional development in the sector. However, informants were also of the view that these nominal top-up amounts were not meeting an acceptable level of financial compensation (Beaumont, 2014; Siung, 2014), and it was expressed that there was a desire for ‘some system whereby graduate interns could be paid a small stipend per internship, which would give those who are more disadvantaged greater opportunity’ (Bourke, 2014). Bourke indicated that JobBridge internships were only considered for use in the National Gallery’s education department on a case-by-case basis, as and when graduates made enquiries as to whether such opportunities could be made available in the department, but stressed that ‘this did not preclude the scheme being used elsewhere in the Gallery’ (2014). Bourke expressed that an additional reason for not using JobBridge in her department was that the criteria for her ‘highly refined’ internship scheme required candidates to be recent graduates of Art History, and interns could therefore avail of the opportunity to generate some income alongside their
unpaid internship by working casually as guides within the National Gallery (Bourke, 2014).

Such means of additional earned income opportunities were not available in the other organisations interviewed, and several of these contributors demonstrated a heightened concern for the intern to maximise learning gains as an alternative form of compensation for their valued contribution to the organisations, as in one case ‘it would feel like exploitation and I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night’ (Kingston, 2014). The structured nature of the National Museum’s internships in the Education department, for example – which include learning contracts establishing mutual expectations, on-going processes of evaluation, and exit interviews – evidence how careful management of the JobBridge experience was pursued to ensure a high quality of experience in spite of the low levels of possible compensation (Beaumont, 2014).

Despite the concern expressed by contributors with regard to cultural organisations accepting a temporary culture of reduced-cost labour in times of severe staffing restrictions, it is essential for these organisations and the sector as a whole to consider the potential consequences on the job market in the long term. The perpetuation of a culture of free or reduced-cost labour undermines recruitment competition between organisations, and normalizes unpaid employment. This latter shift has been publicly acknowledged by interns in Ireland, with some describing unpaid internships as ‘a necessity’ and ‘an investment’ (Holmquist, 2014). This is a particular concern in the cultural sector where the biggest employers have been restricted by a recruitment moratorium, and smaller arts organisations have limited paid opportunities available. It has been argued that paid entry-level and graduate positions in the cultural sector are at risk of being subsumed into internship positions if jobseekers have previously been competing to offer unpaid work of equivalent value to employers (Holmquist, 2014).

The issue of job displacement has been of ongoing concern in the two Indecon reports. For example, in 2013 public sector organisations were the least likely (0.6%) to have taken on a paid employee in the absence of the JobBridge scheme (Indecon, 2013, p. 86). This result could be attributed to the long-term public sector hiring restrictions at the time the report was undertaken, further reflected in the evidence that the public sector organisations were also least likely to have considered employing interns in the absence of the JobBridge scheme (Indecon, 2013, p. 86). While the 2016 Indecon report does not offer sector specific statistics on potential job displacement, it does acknowledge ‘evidence of some level of displacement in a minority of cases’. However, the report goes on to estimate a relatively high but precautionary level of the scheme’s job displacement at a rate of 29.1% (2016, p. 67), to take into account the methodological shortcomings of the DSP’s internal audit report on the JobBridge scheme which concluded that ‘it was not possible to verify or not that the internship was displacing a potential job vacancy’ (2016, p. 63). Rather than adhere to ‘general employment law requirements’ JobBridge operated on a reliance on host organisations to self-declare compliance and be subject to random inspection visits, a decision which Indecon determines reasonable ‘given the nature and scale of the JobBridge scheme’ (2016, p. 63). However the Indecon report suggests that ‘a more targeted Programme with a smaller number of host organisations’ (2016, p. 91) would facilitate their recommendation that enhanced measures of monitoring should be included in any new government initiatives to target the resulting vulnerability of the scheme as regards identifying and preventing potential job displacement (2016, p. 63). Such a recommendation highlights once again the lack of legal framework relating specifically to the legal protection of interns in Ireland, which if in place could better inform and guide the development of clear guidelines on engaging interns, as recommended by Lalor in her analysis on the status and regulation of unpaid personnel in the cultural sector (2013, p. 32).

The discrepancy between transitions to paid employment within the public, community, and
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voluntary sector, versus its commercial counterpart, were starkly evidenced in the 2016 Indecon report. According to their survey of more than 10,000 previous interns across JobBridge, only 19.8% of interns hosted by public sector organisations, and 19.5% in the community and voluntary sector, went on to employment in those same organisations, in comparison with 31% of interns in the commercial sector (Indecon, 2016, p. 52-3). Overall rates of employment were also lower outside of the commercial sector: 77.8% of former interns in public sector organisations had gained employment of any kind, and 72.3% of those in the community and voluntary sector, versus 81.9% in the commercial sector (Indecon, 2016, p. 53). This is a clear indication that prospects of advancing to paid employment within these sectors was significantly worse, leading to the 2016 core recommendation warning that ‘as part of the proposed targeting there should be restrictions on the number of interns taken on by public sector organisations unless they have the potential to offer interns future jobs’ (Indecon, 2016, p. xii).

The lack of consistent segmentation of Indecon data into sectors hampers the ability to draw conclusions about the cultural sector overall. Nevertheless, this information indicates significant consequences for access to employment in the sector through the ongoing use of JobBridge and other internship schemes.

Conclusion

The findings showed that internship schemes have been readily established in the National Cultural Institutions included in this study. Overall, it would appear that JobBridge had many short-term benefits for the National Cultural Institutions consulted, with the scheme providing highly skilled interns who contributed work of value and boosted morale in departments that had suffered severe staffing restrictions during the recruitment moratorium. However, there were also strong indications that qualified and experienced jobseekers were knowingly undertaking internships that were not leading to paid positions, a point reinforced by the 2016 Indecon data. This highlights that the dearth of job creation for graduate and non-managerial roles at NClIs is of major concern, and will likely have long-term consequences for the sector. In some cases of this study, there was a perception of the scheme as a short-term solution to a much greater staffing crisis in the public and cultural sector. It was nonetheless expressed that restrictions on the duration and overlap of JobBridge internships were a disadvantage of the scheme for those same institutions that considered themselves under-resourced, and who had come to rely upon such schemes. Despite this, the research revealed feelings of unease by contributors as regards the continued use of the scheme by highly capable and qualified candidates, and the prevailing culture of unpaid internships during a time of economic recession. Therefore the increased dependency on internship schemes should be a matter for both internal assessment and wider sectoral discussion, which should be aligned with the creation of real progression routes within cultural organisations as the economy recovers.

With the recruitment moratorium now lifted and a boost in funding announced for the National Cultural Institutions (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 2015, 2016), it is recommended that specific attention be focussed on further evaluation of the use of internships in cultural organisations. While it is unclear whether JobBridge will be substantively replaced or simply follow in the direction of previous similar government schemes and ‘quietly disappear’ (Bourke, 2014)\(^9\), the presence of internships within cultural organisations (paid and unpaid) is unlikely to evaporate. Evaluation of other experiences of JobBridge (and other schemes) may offer insight on preferable duration of internships and progression routes, as well as developing systems of equitable compensation. Consultation of cultural stakeholders and employers in the sector, using a qualitative interview methodology, could also offer key data for analysis of outcomes to expand on the research findings yielded here. A collaborative research and
evaluation approach between representatives of the Departments of Social Protection and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional and Rural Affairs, as well as the Arts Council and the local authorities that have been managing the scheme's expansion at a regional level, could provide a strong basis to address all outcomes of the use of JobBridge and other internship schemes in the cultural sector. This research could feed into a timely informed and dependable toolkit to be distributed by the Arts Council, which to date has not substantively addressed the issue of internship culture and employment at the organisations it funds. Ultimately, leadership at national and regional levels would benefit both host organisations and interns, and provide a much-needed framework for the future creation of real pathways to work in the Irish cultural sector.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following people who generously participated in research conversations for this study and consented to its publication, sharing their experience of the use of internship schemes in the National Cultural Institutions: Helen Beaumont, Dr Marie Bourke, Helen Hewson, Phil Kingston, Jenny Siung, and Tom Quinlan. The author is especially grateful to Dr Emily Mark-FitzGerald, who supervised the original thesis and guided its transition to article form.

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NOTES

1. Segmentation of JobBridge data by Indecon (carrying out analyses on behalf of the Department of Social Protection) is divided variably, but often across the three broad categories of private sector/commercial organisations; public sector organisations, and community and voluntary sector organisations. Data specific to arts/cultural organisations (subsumed within the last two categories particularly) cannot unfortunately be extracted.

2. This essay is based on research carried out as part of an MA thesis in Cultural Policy and Arts Management at University College Dublin, 2014.

3. As of September 2016.

4. FÁS, The Irish National Training and Employment Authority, originally administered JobBridge. However, FÁS was dissolved in 2013, at which point JobBridge came under the full remit of the DSP.

5. There are eleven National Cultural Institutions in Ireland. A Director of each of these organisations sits on the Council of National Cultural Institutions, a statutory body established under the Heritage Fund Act, 2001.

6. The NCIs comprise the National Archives, National Library of Ireland, National Museum of Ireland, National Gallery of Ireland, Arts Council, Heritage Council, Irish Museum of Modern Art, National Concert Hall, Chester Beatty Library, Abbey Theatre, and Crawford Art Gallery.

7. The Tús scheme began in 2010 and provides 12-month part-time (less than 20 hours per week) work placements in community and voluntary organisations for people who have been unemployed for at least 12 months. Managed by the Department of Social Protection, Tús allows candidates to maintain their social welfare payment while receiving a small weekly stipend of about €20 (Citizens Information, 2014).
8. JobBridge interns receive an allowance from the Department of Social Protection equivalent to their current Social Welfare allowance plus an additional €52.50 per week for the duration of the internship. This top-up payment is made by the DSP and organisations must not pay top up contributions.

9. The term ‘reduced-cost labour’ is used to refer to JobBridge here, as the DSP is responsible for paying the weekly stipend, and therefore the JobBridge labour comes at a reduced-cost basis to the organisation, whose primary indirect costs include staff time and management of internships.

10. Bourke stated on her experience of managing interns at the National Gallery ‘for quite a number of years we did work with Manpower and Fás, and then those schemes just, with the Celtic Tiger, seemed to quietly disappear’ (2014).

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REVIEW:

Communities of Musical Practice (Ailbhe Kenny: Routledge, 2016)

FRAN GARRY

Communities of Musical Practice by Ailbhe Kenny provides an in-depth and invaluable insight into ‘situated’ collaborative music-making practices on the ground in Ireland. The central research question – ‘how are ‘communities of musical practice’ developed and sustained in practice?’ (p. 1) – is addressed through qualitative case study research in Ireland’s mid-west region and situated within a broader sociocultural theoretical and contextual framework concerning music education. The author analyses and interprets complex practices using a Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) framework, adapted from Lave and Wenger’s Community of Practice (CoP) model, in addition to drawing on the sociocultural theoretical perspectives of Bourdieu, Becker and de Certeau. CoMPs are examined within their sociocultural, political, geographical and economic contexts (p. 29) with individual and collective voices of experience emerging within this theoretical frame. The three case studies include the Limerick Jazz Workshop (LJW), the County Limerick Youth Choir (CLYC) and the Online Academy of Irish Music (OAIM). Given the current focus on metrics, economic impact and return for investment in the arts, it is refreshing to read a book that focuses on actual practice and actual people, and includes the voices of participants, tutors and facilitators in an exploration of musical learning spanning multiple genres, contexts and age groups. By focusing on musical learning, inseparable from its social context, this study provides a deeper layer of understanding of the social aspects of musical engagement from individual and collective perspectives than is currently evident in much arts and cultural policy literature in Ireland and internationally, thus addressing a widely acknowledged research gap (Arts Council England, 2014; Belfiore, 2002; Belfiore and Bennett, 2009, 2010; Byrne, 2013; Gilmore, 2014; Hawkes 2001; Kaszynska, 2014, 2015; McCarthy et al., 2001; Tomka 2013).

The real value in this study is in its in-depth look beyond the pervasive, primarily quantitative research emphases on the economic value of the arts to society, in terms of supply and demand, regeneration of communities, and tourism. While this much-needed study focuses primarily on educational policy, it has implications for arts and cultural policy in general by incorporating first-hand experiential data relating to meaningful arts experiences, and social relationships unconfined by broader social agenda terminology or intrinsic/instrumental debates. Moreover, this book offers fresh perspectives on how, why, and where musical learning takes place within communities, particularly in terms of meaningful sociocultural engagement in lifelong musical endeavours in formal, non-formal, and informal settings.

Kenny’s study addresses an information gap that exists on the practices within music and broader arts communities, particularly in terms of research outside of formal institutions. She suggests that the book presents an important ‘window’ into the connection between community and music with key questions and concepts of ‘community’, ‘identity’, ‘practice’ and ‘meaning’ underpinning the study. She prefaces the study by providing an insight into her research
perspective, grounded in personal experience of long-term engagement in musical practice, at amateur and professional level and, ultimately, an academic career specialising in music education and research, choral direction, cross-disciplinary arts performance and management. In the first part of the book, Kenny provides a comprehensive outline of the Irish music education landscape, highlighting a long history of debate and outlining the tensions that exist in all forms of all arts education; the existing dichotomy between two separate departments for the arts and education; the lack of a cohesive national plan; and the pressure of funding cuts to music education in Ireland in recent years. She also provides a very useful overview of the various funding initiatives and music partnerships that exist in Ireland, particularly highlighting supports that are in place outside of central government. An underlying theme throughout the book is the recognition of the existence of many other avenues of musical engagement such as ensembles, bands, choirs, stage schools, online platforms and peer groups, some led through arts organisations (p. 4), but, significantly, not all of them. By examining actual musical and community practices as they occurred within the CoMPs, the author captures, analyses, and interprets valuable experiential data by exploring themes such as participation, collaboration, musical identity and creativity. The central idea is that ‘individuals participate within music communities to construct their own social realities and identities through musical and social interaction’ (p. 29).

One of the book’s great strengths lies in the author’s analysis, within a qualitative case study approach, which highlights the importance of engaging in research not to measure, but to ‘capture’ the complexities of multiple viewpoints in different contexts and genres. Multiple viewpoints and identities ultimately emerge from real life experiences. Qualitative research methods included video recording, observations, interviews, participant logs and online forums over a nine-month period. Kenny argues persuasively that the selected ‘cases’ helped to illuminate the CoP model in practice and relate it to the ‘real world’ (p. 31) by illustrating common relationships, issues and themes across all three communities. She highlights the power of CoMPs as a rich music education resource and sustainable model for musical participation, ultimately furnishing specific recommendations to value and promote these insights in policy and practice.

The author’s arguments are bolstered by a comprehensive ongoing analysis of contextual literature in the field, drawing on, for example, Ruth Finnegan’s extensive study (2007) of the ‘musical worlds’ of Milton Keynes in the 1980s, which highlighted the too often ‘taken for granted’ roles of schools, churches and many community groups in music education, omissions Kenny addresses in her work. Kenny persuasively argues that there is a need to expand the view of music education to take account of these multiple and overlapping CoMPs that occur in local communities, cyberspace, and across society. This could be further developed and applied to arts and cultural research in general, with a view to expanding the methodological approach to include experiential data utilising arts based methods and artist/researcher/participant perspectives. Another strength of the study is its recognition and acknowledgement of multiple sources of learning, for example, current technology in the form of YouTube videos, recording and playback equipment and online forums alongside the learning that occurs in tutor/facilitator/participant and peer-to-peer relationships. Ultimately, the insights from the study enable her to persuasively argue that, in terms of policy making, it is imperative to balance bottom-up approaches informed by local practices, with top-down approaches informed by international, national and local policies.

Finally, here is a comprehensive volume that explores the social and musical processes of arts engagement and values the deep commitment involved in individual and collective musical participation. It provides the reader with clearly defined and substantiated insider perspec-
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REVIEW:

The Cultural Intermediaries Reader (Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews, eds.: Sage, 2014)

JANE HUMPHRIES

In The Cultural Intermediaries Reader, Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Mathews aim to offer the first comprehensive introduction to the contemporary conceptualisation of cultural intermediaries. In the introduction, the editors offer an initial definition of cultural intermediaries as the taste makers defining what counts as good taste and cool culture in today’s marketplace. Working at the intersection of culture and economy, they perform critical operations in the production and promotion of consumption, constructing legitimacy and adding value through the qualification of goods. (p.1)

The editors propose that by identifying and recognising the functions of those professionals deemed as cultural intermediaries – for example artists, food and wine experts, fashion gurus and so forth – contemporary cultural production can be more closely analysed and situated within current capitalist economies. According to the editors the rise of cultural intermediaries is linked to the expansion of a new middle class, stemming from education changes fostered by the new cultural economy. Such shifts are also symptomatic of wider global changes that have occurred since Pierre Bourdieu first published Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (Harvard University Press, 1984), which sought to analyse the effects, primarily in the west, of a post-Fordist society.

Although Mathews and Smith Maguire make a convincing argument for their working definition, determining what (or who) constitutes a cultural intermediary remains conceptually woolly throughout the text. The causes and effects of the plethora of cultural workers who can be labelled new cultural intermediaries within the global economy are discussed comprehensively in the second section, but this is indeed ‘a broad church’ (p.2), and the analysis is rather selective in the cultural areas included as examples. However, these conceptual challenges also render this collection of essays discursively interesting, particularly in terms of scrutinizing the power relations within cultural and economic hierarchical interchanges, and identifying those ‘actors’ who consciously work against, as well as with, the new cultural economy.

The seventeen selected essays cast a wide interdisciplinary net, including sociology, cultural studies, media studies, fashion, and art history. These provide the reader with an excellent introduction to the field and further indicate the expansion of the cultural and creative industries that have mushroomed in the last two decades. Both editors (Smith Maguire as a sociologist of consumption, and Mathews, who specializes in the cultural work of journalists) have assembled a fine and timely array of essays from this ever-growing field of research. In addition, they provide an excellent introductory chapter which historicizes the area and outlines their aims coherently. These ambitions are to furnish readers with a practical guide to the central features and challenges of conducting research on cultural intermediaries; propose theoretical and methodological approaches; incorporate case studies from eminent writers; and suggest new directions and possibilities for future research to develop. Both editors also provide
insightful contributing essays that focus on their own specialist areas.

The book is divided into two separate sections. Part one (‘Conceptual and Methodological Foundations’) is mainly theoretical, exploring the conceptual and methodological foundations for study, whereas part two (‘Cultural Intermediary Case Studies’) covers specific areas such as advertising, branding, public relations practitioners, arts promotion, fashion, popular music, lifestyle, media, fitness, clothing, book retail, food and drink. This collection appears to be a more thorough exploration of ideas that the editors published two years previously in the European Journal of Cultural Studies, in an article entitled ‘Are we all cultural intermediaries now? An introduction to cultural intermediaries in context’ (Sage, 2012). Here, the editors broached the need to give greater empirical attention to the stratification and differentiation of cultural intermediaries as market actors. Refocusing attention on cultural intermediaries, they argued, may help in analysing and understanding cultural policy as well as helping formulate future new directions for policy makers.

According to the editors, previous research in the field has mainly followed two directions. The first extended Bourdieu’s seminal study on taste and class by viewing cultural intermediaries as exemplars of the role of the petit bourgeoisie in the mediation of production and consumption. The second research trajectory has concentrated on social intermediaries as market actors involved in the qualification of goods, thus mediating between the economy and culture. As both these approaches appear to be dated in the contemporary world, the authors advocate a more thorough, novel contemporary examination. Within this new approach they propose to reconsider the conceptual definition of who could be deemed as cultural intermediaries, and the relationship between these two traditional areas of research. It is this ‘third way’ of research which they have sought to pioneer within this new edited collection.

Turning to the essays contained within the volume, a very good account of the inherent problems of definition is included in Liz McFalls’ contribution ‘The Problem of Cultural Intermediaries in the Economy of Qualities’ (p. 42-51). In this eloquently written essay McFalls quotes Karl Marx’s famous critique of political economy, which highlighted the contingent links between production and consumption, noting that Marx ‘neatly introduces intermediation without labouring the theoretical problem raised by its status as a necessary movement between spheres that are simultaneous, unified and identical’ (p. 43). Like many of the authors in the book, she acknowledges the importance of Bourdieu’s analysis of the petit bourgeoisie and cites his work as a good foundation from which to identify and conceptualise the new cultural intermediaries. Furthermore, she is aware that the roles of intermediaries are fluid, as workers in the cultural field are often employed in flexible roles, whilst acknowledging many scholars still prioritize a ‘narrow and reductionist aesthetic definition of culture’ (p. 43). However, she warns that ‘as soon as cultural intermediary work is described, the list of occupations that can reasonably claimed to be engaged in it grows’ (p. 44), a recurring theme and problematic throughout the volume which is perhaps not ultimately resolved.

Victoria Durrer and Dave O’Brien’s essay ‘Arts Promotion’ was of particular interest for this reviewer as an art historian. In this probing essay the research focuses on arts promotion, examining public participation in art galleries and museums to investigate how cultural intermediaries negotiate the boundaries between the public and the ‘art world’. Although the intricacies of what defines the ‘art world’ could have been developed more extensively, their observations offer a useful exploration of how government policy impacts on artistic production and audience reception. The researchers conducted interviews based on the delivery of 22 arts programmes by 10 different organisations in Liverpool, which at the time of research were targeting ‘socially excluded’ groups in order to follow the direction of the New Labour Govern-
ment’s cultural policy in the UK. Their research included mainstream and traditional-style art galleries or museums in Liverpool, as well as contemporary art centres and festivals. In their analysis, Durrer and O’Brien acknowledge the difficulties experienced by arts professionals in following government policies that fund projects based on social policy objectives, rather than focusing on artistic freedom or creativity. As they observe:

While cultural intermediaries may be offering new audiences the freedom and flexibility to reach and value their own interpretations and even creation of art, above or equal to professional artists, critics, and historians, in doing so they risk simultaneously devaluing the institutions in which they themselves are situated. (p.109)

Those interviewed in Durrer and O’Brien’s study evidence awareness of the complex relationship between taste, consumption, class position, and social mobility. In an especially revealing quote one undisclosed interviewee stated that ‘A lot of people do not want to see the (art) democratized. They do not want to see what they would regard as the great-unwashed turning up in large numbers’ (p.110). Negative perceptions of the art world as a closed network of elites, including curators, dealers, art schools, government agencies, and artists themselves, emerge repeatedly, and invoke the paradoxical position faced by cultural workers:

It is the cultural intermediary who must negotiate the terms of inclusions, but who is also simultaneously limited in their ability to do so. This situation places them in a constant state of negotiation between audience and institutions: personal beliefs and structural beliefs, quality and democracy. (p.110)

Durrer and O’Brien’s essay further seeks to challenge the view of arts policy as mere ‘instrumentalism’ or a re-imposition of Victorian social values. Primarily interested in assessing how government cultural policy has affected arts production and vice versa, they observe, for example, the growth of relational art practice (and its funding) as indicative of government cultural policies that sought more public engagement with the arts. This is a particularly interesting insight into a form of art practice that has experienced significant recent growth across Europe. Although the authors’ study is explicitly centred on English examples, such commentary provides a useful touchpoint from which subsequent cross-cultural analyses might be extended. As the authors note, many of those labelled as new cultural intermediaries have held the potential to either perpetuate government policy or be critical of it, depending on the individuals involved. Durrer and O’Brien’s method of analysis, which probes the rationale and processes by which cultural workers engage with the wider field of policy and practice, would thereby find intriguing application to parallel Irish phenomena.

Some particularly probing essays serve particularly well as methodological orientations to the field. Smith Maguire’s essay ‘Bourdieu on Cultural Intermediaries’, for example, offers a comprehensive historical account of theoretical developments since Bourdieu’s seminal work, and expands upon why his work continues to be a useful starting point for scholars. In a related vein, Lise Skove’s essay focusing on fashion takes issue with Bourdieu’s notion that cultural intermediaries always have a pedagogical agenda, although her case studies remain heavily inflected by readings of his work. Her examination of the fashion clothing industry, one of the most market-driven areas amongst the creative industries, offers a refreshing alternative view of cultural intermediaries as detached observers of consumer markets, who refrain from imposing their own cultural values to a greater extent than many of the other intermediaries discussed in the volume. Indeed, the collection might have benefited from more essays that considered further the potential oppositional effect of cultural intermediaries, and their ability to disrupt the new cultural economy rather than merely bolstering the status quo.

One additional flaw of the collection is that several essays appear to plough the same furrow, albeit from different perspectives. For example, there are two case studies dedicated to fashion and clothing, yet no essays extensively address the growing role of cultural intermediaries within social media networks. The volume therefore sidesteps an in-depth scrutiny of the
proliferation of ‘market actors’ with ‘expert orientation’ (the two key components the editors argue are required to qualify as a new cultural intermediary) that have mushroomed due to new forms of online engagement. Another weakness in the collection is that the case studies, although purporting to offer a wide ethnographic perspective, tend to be heavily weighted in favour of British cultural examples, although this is acknowledged to some extent within the introduction.

These points of critique notwithstanding, as the volume’s key intention is to lay the foundations for future research, it certainly meets such aims and is a welcome introduction to this widening area of academic research, and will be especially valuable to researchers new to the study of production and exchange in cultural and creative industries.

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REVIEW:


ANDREW MCCLELLAND

The Great Reimagining: Public Art, Urban Space and the Symbolic Landscapes of a ‘New’ Northern Ireland is written by Bree T. Hocking, a Research Associate at the Open University with a background in exploring the intersection of art, spatial politics and society. This book critically investigates the global and local processes shaping public spaces in the two largest cities of ‘post-conflict’ Northern Ireland: Belfast and Derry. A particular emphasis is placed on interrogating selected state-financed public art commissions, questioning their intended impact, the sometimes contested and unforeseen community responses, and the insights derived as to the vision of citizenship the State is seeking to engender in the ‘new symbolic landscapes’ of Northern Ireland (p. 4). In essence, the study explores the dissonance and contradictions that typically manifest in the spatial restructuring of urban space, particularly where public art is mobilised by policymakers and funding bodies as a means of promoting local reconciliation and shared space while simultaneously calibrated to attract global investment capital and ‘consumer-tourists’. To this end, the author posits a conceptual framework for the analysis of official discourses shaping such ‘transitional space’ and asserts its wider applicability to other post-conflict and post-industrial societies.

The use of physical regeneration and reimagining as tools in conflict mediation is a familiar subject for scholarly attention in the Northern Irish context. The creation of high-end shopping malls, new public spaces, coupled with marketing slogans, spectacle events and other boosterist strategies, have prompted numerous critiques by academics and others. This is perhaps most amusingly characterised by William Neill’s (1995) questioning of the urban redevelopment processes underway in Belfast in the 1990s as akin to putting ‘Lipstick on a Gorilla’. Nonetheless, an overview and in-depth focus on prominent examples of public art within the transformation of the wider built environment marks a welcome contribution to the debate, particularly in the afterglow of Derry’s year as UK City of Culture. The Great Reimagining addresses ongoing attempts to ‘reimage’ Northern Ireland, acknowledging the struggle of successive Direct-Rule administrations during the Troubles to project ‘normality’ in the face of seemingly intractable conflict, while primarily concerned with the stop-start period of devolved government following the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998.

From a theoretical perspective, the work of a well-known cast of cultural and economic geographers, sociologists and anthropologists is drawn upon in theorizing the power dynamics, role of the image, and contestation in the social production of space and ‘symbolic landscapes’. Scholars such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Denis Cosgrove, Sharon Zukin, Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu, amongst others, are referenced in the introductory chapter. Following their lead, the author proposes a number of designatory terms to denote public art. For instance, public art that is abstract in composition and typically overlaid with non-controversial location specific narratives and safe heritage themes – with a view to har-
monising symbolic forms, distinguishing place and bolstering cultural capital – is termed ‘civic identikit’ art. Borrowing from Manuel Castells, the worldwide replicability of the production process by which such art is created is labelled the ‘civic identikit of flows’, while the use of a ‘limited menu of nostalgic images’ in the theming and commodification of space is referred to as the ‘civic identikit of place’ (pp. 7-8). These terms are regularly evoked throughout the book to categorise the specific pieces of art discussed.

The theoretical contribution goes beyond the terminology adopted. The two latter classifications above are incorporated within a broader conceptual framework orientated towards the analysis of transitional space (including public art) in post-conflict societies, which is offered as a structuring device for investigating official discourses. Five key discourses are identified by the author in the model, although they are not assumed to be definitive. The globalisation and consumption discourses are taken to represent ‘top-down’, global processes closely aligned with the civic identikit of flows. In contrast, the community and troubled history/reconciliation discourses relate more to the local scale and the civic identikit of place. A cultural discourse effectively bridges these other discourses, acting as a potential mediator of global and local forces, and whose malleability makes it attractive to public authorities seeking strategies to circumvent the various realms of contestation in conflicted societies. The ultimate limitations and contingency of this latter discourse in practice, however, are laid bare within the book in the discussion of Derry’s year as UK City of Culture.

The five public art cases investigated by Hocking, each of which relate in some way to the ‘shared space’ agenda promoted by government in Northern Ireland, are structured around the discourses identified above in the conceptual model. The cases include Rise, a large geodesic sculpture situated at Broadway Roundabout on the southern arterial route into Belfast city centre; Spirit of Belfast, an abstract sculpture at Cornmarket, in close proximity to the new Victoria Square shopping centre; Hewitt in the Frame, a community artwork project focused on the Cupar Way peace wall in West Belfast; the Diamond War Memorial in Derry city centre; and Mute Meadow, an abstract art piece located at the former Ebrington Barracks site in Derry. In addition to being differentiated according to the five discourses, the cases also contrast in the several other distinctive ways. For example, the Diamond War Memorial does not constitute a new work, but rather represents what is characterised as a ‘cognitive “recasting” as a “shared monument to joint Catholic-Protestant First World War military sacrifice”’ (p. 20). Furthermore, the cases illuminate an array of behind-the-scenes differences, contradictions and unspoken opinions evident in their conception, creation, and use. By way of illustration, the contrasting ‘public’ and ‘hidden’ transcripts of those participating in, or reflecting upon, shared commemoration initiatives, were exposed by the Diamond War Memorial case. Traditional community narratives were, in effect, unspoken and subsumed for wider public consumption. In the case of the Rise sculpture, the mutability of the message propagated by public officials in their efforts to secure local community ‘buy-in’ for the project, both in advance and following its construction, was a notable feature of the process that was largely met with scepticism and indifference. The narrative teases out such nuances from each of the cases and relates them in a convincing manner to the broader conceptual framework.

The exploration of experiences in other countries within the book is particularly informative and helps frame the Northern Ireland case within a much wider debate. The discussion of continental Europe and South Africa in the concluding chapter is especially interesting. The similarities detected in the public art processes between Northern Ireland and the Balkans, for instance, where the ‘absence of a shared struggle or unifying narrative’ is asserted to lead to ‘the proverbial path of least resistance’, and, in effect, a ‘two-tiered aesthetic portfolio’, is a pertinent observation (pp. 179-80). In short, the proliferation of abstract urban forms in city
centres and prominent public spaces contrasts with the toned down (in some cases), essentialist, and ‘simplistic heritage tropes’ that characterise the symbolism and many public art examples in working-class areas (p. 173). Somewhat ominously, this speaks to a conflict frozen, rather than resolved, and is considered indicative of the weakness of the Northern Irish state, given the relative ease with which official discourses on public art were circumscribed in practice. Further discussion of these issues would be welcome in the context of the inability to constructively deal with ‘legacy issues’ and the past in Northern Ireland, as evidenced by the talks impasse over the reforming of a power-sharing Executive.

Notwithstanding the broadly positive review, a number of criticisms are merited. On a relatively superficial level, the eccentric chapter numbering system, whereby the introduction and conclusion chapters are unnumbered, in contrast with those in-between, is slightly confusing. In addition, the book could be better illustrated as many of the images are poorly reproduced, making it sometimes difficult to appreciate the object under discussion. On a more substantive point, however, the role of planners and the land-use planning system in mediating the use and transformation of urban space is largely absent. This is regrettable, firstly, because a rich seam of planning-focused literature already engages with the subject-matter of public art in regeneration and place-branding initiatives (for example, Peel and Lloyd, 2007). Secondly, other literature critiques the ‘neutral’ and ‘technocratic’ culture of planning that emerged in Northern Ireland in response to the political-administrative circumstances of the Troubles, and which had a bearing on regulatory decision-making processes impacting the built environment (see, for example, Ellis, 2000). None of the approximately 60 interviewees appear to represent this important dimension. Finally, the fact that the Diamond War Memorial is a ‘listed’ structure suggests the ascription of a range of other state-sponsored values related to its historic and architectural interest, quite apart from the social and other meanings derived from the local community. Again, this aspect arguably merited some consideration.

Nevertheless, this book offers valuable sightlines into the public art creation processes in Northern Ireland. The well-written, informative and accessible narrative can in part be read as a cautionary tale, and is unintentionally satirical in places in its account of the backstage happenings in several of the cases explored (see, for example, pp. 60-1). The subject matter could easily have lent itself to polemic, ideological heavy-handedness, or overly-normative prescription. However, the anthropological approach taken ultimately succeeds in its attempt to understand some of the complex socio-economic dynamics and nuances at play. Hardened aesthetic judgements are largely avoided, and, although the author recognises that each of the cases were a failure to varying degrees, their perpetual state of ‘becoming’ is acknowledged, ensuring they are constantly open to reinterpretation and re-appropriation over time. Nonetheless, one of the conclusions that resonates is the recognition of the ‘credibility gap’ and disjuncture between the local social reality of the places where much public art has been imposed in Northern Ireland, and the hyperbolic way in which it is repeatedly sold for consumption to an outside audience (p. 191). This opens up a host of potentially interesting avenues and future research questions which are sketched out in the concluding chapter.
useful comparative against which future public art processes can be judged in the changed institutional, and changing societal, landscape of Northern Ireland.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


REVIEW:

**Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain** (Robert Hewison: Verso Books, 2014)

CLAIRE POWER

Robert Hewison’s latest book provides a cultural historian’s perspective on publically funded culture in Britain from 1997 to 2012. What emerges over this two hundred and thirty-four page narrative of a particular period in British cultural history – from Cool Britannia at the end of the twentieth century through to the splendor of the Olympics in 2012 – is a considered reflection on the relationship between publically funded culture and the State. It raises interesting questions for anyone either working with or interested in cultural policy, and in view of Ireland’s recently published Culture 2025 policy framework, the book makes for an educational read. It counts the true costs of what happens when government takes a direct interest in arts and culture for the pursuit of other policy aims. Ominously, as Hewison forewarns us, ‘the lesson of this is: be careful what you wish for’ (p. 3).

Hewison’s approach is broadly chronological but each of the eight chapters has a specific theme – for example, the government’s agenda for the arts and social inclusion is discussed in chapter three, ‘The Many Not Just the Few’. The source material for the book is largely secondary, relying on an analysis of the ‘grey literature’ of policy reports, government documents, together with academic commentaries and newspaper reporting. At times, the book makes for heavy reading as we are led from one commissioned report or policy document to another. This perhaps reflects Hewison’s central concern throughout the book, which is the increasing bureaucratisation of culture in Britain during the years of Tony Blair and New Labour, and the consequent impact upon publically funded culture.

Hewison makes his position clear from the outset: ‘this is a book about culture in its traditional sense, meaning the arts and heritage, but it is also, about the political economy of culture’ (p. 3). He argues that despite New Labour’s rhetoric about a new dawn of national renewal, its moves to integrate arts and culture into the mainstream of government was really a continuation of the neoliberal programme established by the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher. In 1997, when New Labour began its thirteen years in government, publically funded culture was in a state of neglect. Overall spending on culture was less than 0.5% of government spending. Under New Labour, culture would receive significant investment, as it was mobilized as the means by which Britain would be transformed. Bywords like ‘creativity’ and ‘Creative Britain’, personified by Oasis and the YBAs (Young British Artists), became part of New Labour’s political lexicon. Throughout the book, Hewison argues that New Labour’s approach ‘was an act of cultural capitalism on a grand-scale’ (p. 7). Cultural policy would become economic policy, and the arm’s length principle, upon which arts and culture in Britain had been administered since the formation of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1945, would be compromised. For Hewison, the new relationship between publically-funded culture and New Labour government was something of a Faustian pact.
Each chapter of the book begins with a meditation on the value of culture, a quote offered by a cultural leader, a thinker or an artist. The opening quote from a former director of the National Theatre, Richard Eyre, is one of the more striking:

We can justify the subsidised arts on the grounds of cost effectiveness, or as tourist attractions, or as investments, or as commodities that can be marketed, exploited and profited from, but the arts should make their own argument. They are part of our life, our language, our way of seeing; they are a measure of our civilization. The arts tell us truths about ourselves and our feelings and our society that reach parts of us that politics and journalism don’t. They entertain, they give pleasure, they give hope, they ravish the senses, and above all they help us fit the disparate pieces of the word together; to try and make form out of chaos. (p. ix)

The other constants throughout the volume are the white elephants and grand-scale public projects that Hewison references throughout as instances of policy failure. In his chapter ‘Under New Public Management’, the controversy over the Royal Opera House’s deficit of £5.5m in 1997-1998 marked for New Labour the transition between the privileged old establishment and a new culture of accountability for the arts and culture more broadly. In 1997, the newly established Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned Richard Eyre to conduct a review of the state of the Royal Opera House: in his report, Eyre made clear that the failings of the RHO had brought the entire arts funding system into disrepute. He was equally clear that the old ways of managing would have to change; concomitantly, by the end of the twentieth century New Labour had shifted the system for arts and culture funding from arm’s length towards direct accountability. However the wresting of control from agencies back towards central government does not escape Hewison’s critique, and he cites the Millennium Dome stands as a lasting monument to New Labour vanity: a failed project in which style triumphed over content. It demonstrated the negative result of too much direct government involvement in a pet project. A personal project of Blair’s, he later admitted that ‘if I knew then, what I know now, about governments trying to run a visitor attraction of this sort, it would probably have been too ambitious to have tried to’ (p. 60); indeed perhaps the same might be said retrospectively about New Labour's centralised attitude to funding arts and culture.

In 1998, Chris Smith, the first minister of DCMS, oversaw the enactment of the National Lottery Act. Unlike in Ireland, the National Lottery in the UK provides a source of funding for culture independent of the Arts Council. Whereas Arts Council England grant-in-aid provides core recurrent funding, the National Lottery provides funding for capital projects, training and once-off special projects like the Olympics 2012. Tate Modern was one of twelve Millennium grands projets that received funds of £50 million under the new National Lottery Act. Standing in Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall in 2007, Blair gave a speech to the leaders of Britain’s cultural establishment inviting them to look back on his ten years in office as a ‘golden age of the arts’ (p. 7). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Tate Modern signified a new, confident and creative Britain. Yet, ten years on from when New Labour first entered office, what did their legacy look like?

In 1998, DCMS ‘discreetly encouraged’ leaders of the culture establishment to seek a meeting with the prime minister to make a case for increased funding (p. 63). Three weeks later it was announced that the Treasury was releasing an extra £290 million to the DCMS over the next three years, beginning in April 1999. The announcement was widely welcomed. By the time Gordon Brown, Blair’s successor, left office in 2010 the landscape of culture in Britain had been transformed from its neglected state in 1997. Hewison summarises these achievements: government spending on the arts had nearly doubled, and the removal of entry charges to all national museums and galleries had helped to raise the annual number of visits from 24 million to 40 million. Furthermore there had been substantial help to regional museums. After years of neglect, the nation’s cultural infrastructure had been refurbished and extended, from the Great Court of the British Museum to the Sage Gateshead. The National Lottery had
been turned into an engine of urban regeneration. The film industry was flourishing, theatres were adventurous and their seats full. Labour’s 2010 cultural manifesto, ‘Creative Britain’, boasted that the ‘creative industries’ contributed 10% of gross domestic product.

This is an impressive picture. Hewison argues, however, that all of this progress came at great cost. The ‘previously, semi-autonomous field of culture’ became a tool or an instrument for New Labour to achieve their agenda of social inclusion and economic progress. The real legacy of New Labour, he argues, was the rise of managerialism, with its numerous targets and overwhelming requests for quantifiable evidence as the baseline for evaluating culture. New words began to creep into the language of cultural professionals: ‘stakeholders’, ‘measurement’, ‘participation’ and ‘cultural diversity’, to name a few. Indeed, New Labour even inaugurated a new public watchdog body, QUEST – the Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team – with a mandate to ‘look at the process through which DCMS allocates funding to its sponsored bodies in return for specific outputs’ (p. 68). The trickle-down of government policy through the ‘delivery chain’ negatively impacted relationships between DCMS and the agencies it funded, including the Arts Council. While many organisations took their responsibility for social and economic progress seriously, their fundamental missions became subordinated to Labour’s social and economic ends. Trust, that fundamental requisite for positive relations, was being eroded.

Hewison uses another white elephant to illustrate this point. The Public in West Bromwich was a multi-purpose venue and art gallery that opened in 2009. In 2001, a quality-of-life study for the Sunday Times named West Bromwich as the second-worst place to live in the United Kingdom. As a de-industrialised city, it was ripe for New Labour regeneration. Hewison sees ‘the process by which blighted West Bromwich became home of The Public – the largest community arts building in Europe and the most expensive failure in the Arts Council’s Lottery building programme’ as illustrating ‘the extent to which the demands of government policy can override good sense’ (p. 89). According to a subsequent Arts Council investigation, The Public’s Lottery assessment panel recommended rejection of its initial proposal on several grounds, including an unsound cost plan and likely overrun. Despite these warnings, the Arts Council went ahead, but in November 2013, The Public closed. Why despite early warnings did the project receive the green light from the Arts Council? The author of a subsequent Arts Council report, Anthony Blackstock, noted that the Council was ‘seeking too far to fulfill the social agenda of the Government of the day’ (p. 90). Blackstock invoked the failure of The Public to send an important message to government: the Arts Council’s charter, he pointed out, ‘limits its funding to the creation of arts and their enjoyment,’ capital projects like The Public ‘may lead to meeting wider social and economic goals but cannot be the primary aim’ (p.91). Hewison similarly argues that all of New Labour’s demands on arts and culture led to an overvaluing of culture. Whilst arts and cultural programmes and activities are capable of producing social and economic effects, this is not their core purpose, and in Hewison’s view it has proved consistently counter-productive to instrumentalise them in this way.

At a midway point in New Labour’s reign, in 2003, a change of leadership at the National Theatre ‘created an opportunity to demonstrate the sector’s new readiness to stand up for itself’ (p. 168). The Theatre’s new director, Nicolas Hynter, went public in an article for the Observer, entitled ‘To Hell with Targets’. Throughout the book, Hewison highlights the readiness of the UK’s cultural establishment to speak out, question and criticise the actions of the government. However, if New Labour’s true legacy was not in fact a ‘golden age’ for the arts but an era of managerialism and diminished trust between the state and the arts, Hewison takes further aim at their opposition, employing a graphically deadening metaphor for the Conservatives’ handling of the arts in a chapter entitled ‘The Age of Lead.’ Nevertheless, he credits New
Labour with forcing the Conservative Party to take culture seriously, as evidenced by the Conservatives’ official election commitment in 2010, a two-page document entitled *The Future of the Arts* which promised ‘coherent and sustained support for the arts, the removal of targets, and the addition of a fourth pillar to the mixed economy of culture through the establishment of endowments’ (p. 162).

Once in power, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition reduced the DCMS budget by £400 million in its first Comprehensive Spending Review for 2014/2015. This meant a 30 percent cut for the Arts Council of England, which represented a decline from £449 million in 2010/2011 to £350 million in 2014/2015. In October 2010, Tate’s director, Nicholas Serota, condemned the Coalition’s policy as a ‘blitzkrieg on the arts’ (p. 164). Initially, the Coalition’s response was both pragmatic and ideological. National Lottery funds, which continued to increase in 2012/2013, would be used to fill the gap and government incentives would stimulate private investment from commercial sponsorship and private philanthropy. As Hewison writes, ‘it was counter intuitive… to expect a burst of private and corporate generosity during what was turning out to be the worst recession of modern times’ (p. 165).

The Coalition’s private investment approach favoured London over the regions and large organisations over smaller ones, and the new infrastructure constructed by New Labour for the public enjoyment of culture was coming under strain. Hewison is convinced that the Coalition’s response to the economic crisis failed to create the conditions to support their policy of private investment and charitable support for the arts. In the seven years since Blair’s speech at Tate Modern, the golden age had, as Hewison puts it, ‘turned to lead’ (p. 172). In spite of the ideological differences between Hewison and New Labour’s instrumentalist, Conservative-light approach, he credits New Labour with ensuring that, ‘whatever the economic prospects in 2015, the future of culture would be an issue in a way it had not been in 1997’ (p. 172).

Hewison’s book appeared before the British general election in May 2015. When a majority Conservative government was elected, the future of culture in Britain was once more placed in the balance. In writing and publishing this book, Hewison aims to educate voters about ‘both experiments’ and to inform the ‘judgment’ that is passed (p. 8). While Hewison declares that the central focus of the book is on ‘publically funded culture’, it is really about cultural value. His opposition to New Labour policies is pragmatic, as well as ideological. In Hewison’s view New Labour instrumentalised arts and culture to serve their agendas of social inclusion and economic growth, which led to the rise of managerialism, target-setting and the demand for hard evidence of culture’s social and economic value. This worked against the core purpose of many arts organisations. While New Labour’s cultural policies and actions were always intended for ‘the many, not just the few’ (p. 197), the actual outcome was different. The 2009 Theatre Assessment, for example, demonstrated the ‘narrow social foundations on which theatre audience is built’ (p. 203), where levels of education and social factors were strong predictors of attendance. ‘The problem,’ Hewison writes, ‘is that these factors were in play right across the cultural sector’ (p. 203). Evidently, New Labour’s policies did little to change the make-up of audiences. What Hewison credits New Labour with is a loosening-up of barriers between high and low culture, which has precipitated new possibilities for how society as a whole may value culture:

> Alongside official culture there exists an informal culture that also expresses the value of society, shapes its identity, and is a source of creativity and pleasure. Culture is by no means the exclusive property of the Arts Council; nor is it limited to what is broadcast on BBC Radio 3. For the great majority of people it comes in the form of recreation, some of it self-generated and non-professional, but chiefly through the market, in forms that need to make themselves as commercially appealing as possible. (p. 220)

He contends that the values and purposes of ‘official culture’ and ‘commercial culture’ are in-
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(Robert Hewison; Verso Books, 2014)

Claire Power

The world is changing at speed, led by technology and the dominance of the marketplace, and everything, including culture, is impacted by such forces. Today’s new by-words are ‘co-production’ and ‘collaboration’, while we hear less about ‘gate-keepers’, ‘establishment’, and ‘hierarchies’. Hewison welcomes this new openness, what he terms the ‘art of with’ (p. 223). The future of culture rests within this shared space, this re-determining of culture, as a public value and not as a government instrument. Hewison’s more generous and open ideal of culture finds expression in Danny Boyle’s realisation of a ‘temporary Utopia’ for the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games:

The thousands of volunteers working alongside the professional artists in the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games were an example of the synthesis between amateur and professional, between audience participation and performance, between elite and popular art forms. (p. 172)

New Labour’s golden age advanced in this direction of shared public space with its expansion of cultural infrastructure, the removal of museum entrance fees and an emphasis on participation. But the problem with all of this for Hewison lay in the narrowness of the demand and the audience for these expanded offerings. Social and economic factors were shown to be the main influencers on participation, and education to be the most important bridge. However, he sees digital technology as a ‘liberating force’ altering the relationship between producers and consumers of culture and attenuating the traditional role of the expert. In this changed world, pluralism is a key value, as nobody has a monopoly on information. The ‘new gatekeepers’, Hewison writes, ‘must be persons who open windows and doors’ (p. 233). The future of publically funded culture, if it is to be of real public value, must embrace the ‘many and not just the few’, create trust and respect the arm’s length from government. Ultimately, Hewison proposes that the future of culture in Britain depends on its value as a common good, and not as a commodity.

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