European Union and Challenges of Cultural Policies: Critical Perspectives. An Introduction

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Abstract

This introductory article contextually frames the contributions to the special issue gathering articles critically addressing the key questions and challenges that the European Union (EU) and national cultural policies are facing in the 21st century. Interdisciplinary contributions in this special issue point to the diverse understandings of culture, the complexity of the EU governance system, and the discrepancy and mismatch of the national and EU levels that regulate the field of culture. The authors detect the inconsistent development strategies on different policy levels, and point to the democratic deficits of the EU governance system and EU policies. Selected contributions address a further focal shift of EU culture policies toward an economistic orientation to culture, while others address the need for a more critical approach that moves beyond predominantly positivistic and normative approaches to cultural policy research in Europe.

The world is changing rapidly and local and global levels are no longer easily separated. In the 21st century, cultural policies have to deal with a (post) globalisation context marked by cultural, social, economic, political, and technological transformations. Cultural policies need to address numerous issues, including rapid technological change and a digital shift driven mostly by economic interests, market concentration, and the dominance of global corporations. New challenges include mobility and migration movements, rapid urbanisation, and social and financial instability, among others. The crisis in Europe and of the European governance model has implications for the cultural field as well. Today's Europe needs to reimagine itself — its aims, values, and identities — and needs to find an adequate model for its sustainable cultural development. All this impacts the conditions under which the cultural sector operates today.

In the context of European Union (EU) politics, culture has often been used as an instrument for different social, political, or economic objectives. Authors such as Vestheim (1994) and Gray (2007) have already addressed the issue of the instrumentalisation of culture for different means and ends. As evidenced by prevailing discourse used in the academic writings and EU funding programmes, the concept of culture as public value is weakening in comparison with its commodity value. Due to the subsidiarity principle engrained in the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union has not been involved in formulating an explicit common cultural policy (Primorac, Obuljen Koržinek, and Uzelac 2017). Nevertheless, the EU has been indirectly contributing to the creation of common cultural policy frameworks through its soft cultural policy instruments and mechanisms. Various cultural policy issues and their related instruments, such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), the Creative Europe programme, the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC), along with EU cultural programme initiatives and other similar mechanisms represent a *de facto* policy approach. Other explicit European Union policies, such as the strategy on the Digital Single Market (DSM), also influence the field of culture and media. Yet a simple transfer of EU strategic goals and legislative measures often proves problematic as it creates unintended consequences in different national contexts (Bilić and Švob-Đokić 2016). National level cultural policies are struggling to tackle complex global problems, especially in the context where many other explicit public policies are increasingly influencing the field of culture.

This is especially evident in the case of the DSM strategy with its wide purview, which influences the cultural and media sector in different ways and on various levels. We find that these issues have not been tackled in a systematic manner in academic or policy-oriented literature.

The Special Issue entitled 'European Union and Challenges of Cultural Policies: Critical Perspectives' gathered contributions that critically addressed different issues and challenges that the European Union and national cultural policies are facing in the 21st century. The authors were invited to analyse in their contributions, including: limits of the subsidiarity principle in the field of culture and explicit and implicit cultural policies in the context of transversality and convergence of policies; impacts of EU soft policy mechanisms on national contexts such as OMC, the Structured Dialogue, Creative Europe Programme or the ECoC programme; the role of the DSM strategy for sustainable digital cultural resources; and new models for achieving sustainability in cultural development. Furthermore, the contributors were also invited to offer new theoretical perspectives on cultural policy and to provide for examples of whether, and if yes, what kinds of new models for achieving sustainability in cultural development are being developed. Although various authors dealt with certain aspect of these issues (Barnett 2001; Bruell 2013; Littoz-Monnet 2007; Psychogiopoulou 2008; Sacco 2011; Schlesinger 2015, to name a few), we wanted this special issue to provide space for a more interdisciplinary framework where different research approaches could benefit from a focused critical discussion. That is why in this special issue we gathered contributions by authors from different parts of Europe who critically address some of the current challenges of cultural policies.

In the first contribution entitled "Camouflaged Culture: The 'Discursive Journey' of the EU's Cultural Programmes" Bjarki Valtýsson provides us with the analysis of the four 'generations' of EU cultural programmes (Raphaël, Ariane, Kaleidoscope, Culture 2000, Culture 2007) as well as the current Creative Europe Programme. He outlines certain discursive shifts visible in the analysed cultural programmes, which are in line with older Pre-Maastricht Treaty discourses of the implicit cultural interventions. Valtýsson shows how cultural sector discourses were shaped by both economic and political instrumentalisations. He illustrates how a further push toward the economically induced discourses is visible in the present Creative Europe programme. Valtýsson highlights how this

shows an actual taking 'back to the roots' of the European Union project. The project was always based on the economic rationale of the Union in which 'culture from the start was camouflaged' (Valtýsson 2018: 34) or, more bluntly, marginally important.

The second contribution by Karsten Xuereb "The Impact of the European Union on Cultural Policy in Malta" contextualises Maltese cultural policy instruments and strategies within the overall European cultural policy framework. The analysis shows the divergences and convergences by comparing EU strategic documents and Maltese legislative documents, funding programmes, and artistic and cultural projects. Xuereb highlights certain drawbacks of the subsidiarity principle, including limits of effectiveness and accountability and an over-arching authority. He calls for a reframing of cultural policy toward a more inclusive, citizen-driven dialogue and cultural exchange better suited to current social development in Europe. His analysis of the European Union's impact on cultural policy in Malta also includes the examination of the European Capital of Culture Programme, Valetta 2018.

The European Capital of Culture Programme is analysed more closely in the third article "From Inconsistencies to Contingencies - Understanding Policy Complexity of Novi Sad 2021 European Capital of Culture" by Goran Tomka and Višnja Kisić. In a thorough case study analysis of the Novi Sad 2021 bidding process, Tomka and Kisić highlight how the existing EU cultural policy framework determines and restricts (local) cultural policy. In the case of transitional Serbian society, this creates 'policy confusions' (Đukić-Dojčinović 2002-2003). The authors show the need to understand the contingent nature of cultural policy making that is far from the 'rational-comprehensive policy ideal'. They recognise the limitations of the positivistic study of politics, its epistemological position, and the imagined norms of policy-making.

Changes in cultural policy research and cultural policy-making are the focus of the article entitled "Internal and External Factors in the Development of a Network Organization in the Arts: Case Study of Društvo Asociacija" by Andrej Srakar. He uses a mixed-methods approach (descriptive analysis, statistical and econometric modelling, and mediation analysis) to outline the development of Društvo Asociacija, the network of non-governmental organisations and freelancers in culture and the arts in Slovenia between 2004 and 2017. He argues that European cultural policies, if they want to have a

larger impact on the performance of network organisations, 'should focus more on micro level initiatives and incentives for organizations and less to the broad "cuts and raises" in the public budget "story"' (Srakar 2018: 109). Therefore, the data in the article provide evidence pointing to where future European policies in this area should be oriented. The data also show that there should be more inclusion of the individual civil society organisations and networks in the policy-making process.

Contributions in this special issue point to the diverse understandings of culture, as well as the complexity of the EU governance system and the discrepancy and mismatch of the national and EU levels that regulate the field of culture. The articles point to the democratic deficits of the EU governance system and EU policies, and detect the inconsistent development strategies on different policy levels. What is also traced in selected contributions is the further shift of the focus of EU policies for culture toward an economistic approach to culture that puts cultural and creative industries at its centre. The presented articles also show the need for a more critical approach to cultural policy analysis that will move beyond predominantly positivistic and normative approaches to cultural policy research in Europe. By collecting these interdisciplinary contributions we argue for a more explicit European cultural policy that will take into account the culture as a way of life, and put citizens and their cultural life to the fore of policy goals. Furthermore, a cultural policy that takes a more bottom-up approach in addressing the diversity of European cultures with a view toward future changes is needed. We hope that these contributions, together with the additional materials presented in this special issue, will provide some starting points for further analysis and discussion on these issues, and will bring about much-needed knowledge of the EU policy impacts on the cultural and media sector, in addition to providing a catalyst for further critical analyses.

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More information about CULPOL project activities and outputs is available at the web page: culpol.irmo.hr

Disclaimer

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Articles