Issues in cultural policy
Editorial for special Australasian edition of Cultural Trends, Volume 20 Issue 1, 2011
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Welcome to the second volume in this special Australasian edition of Cultural Trends. The first volume (volume 19, issue 4, 2010) contained articles on issues of measurement and cultural statistics. This second volume focuses on analysis of particular policy issues and reports on survey findings.

The aim of the special edition is to expose to an international audience a selection of issues occupying the minds of cultural policy researchers and statisticians in Australia and New Zealand. As noted in the first volume’s editorial, there is a certain logic to exploring Australian and New Zealand cultural policies together. The two countries have many things in common – from their similar colonial histories and social developments, to the comportment of ‘antipodean’ backpackers and working travellers around the world. Close ties in cultural statistics, described in the first volume, provided a good example of the often cosy relations between the two countries, but also exposed fundamental underlying differences between the nations. Despite their similarities and their close ties, Australia and New Zealand have equally important constitutional, governmental, social and cultural differences that cannot be ignored when considering cultural policies. Below I provide a brief outline of the cultural policy systems in each country and explore some key current issues being tackled by policymakers, researchers and academics. References are provided for those wishing to follow up in more detail.

Cultural policies
A natural starting point for exploring cultural policies in Australia and New Zealand is to look to the past, to the historical foundations and developments that gave rise to the current systems. In this, we are very fortunate to have two excellent cultural policy histories: for Australia, in the Parliamentary Library’s Commonwealth arts policy and administration (Gardiner-Garden, 2009); and for New Zealand, in The government’s historical role in the cultural sector: a brief survey (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 1998).

These histories show that the ‘modern era’ of national cultural policy began in each country with the establishment of an arm’s length arts council. The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (now Creative New Zealand) was established in New Zealand in 1963. The Australia Council for the Arts was established in 1975. At the time these arts councils were established, central government cultural administration was scattered across portfolios, centred mainly around departments for domestic affairs – the Department of Internal Affairs in New Zealand and the Department of Home Affairs in Australia. Since then, national governments in both countries have progressively rationalised and centralised their cultural administrations, most notably with the creation of a new Department of Arts, Heritage and Environment in Australia in 1984, and with the creation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (now the Ministry for Culture and Heritage) in New Zealand in 1991.

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By the 1990s, the basic foundations had been laid for the cultural policy systems seen today. Under Chartrand & McCaughey’s (1989) ‘facilitator-patron-architect-engineer’ taxonomy, the cultural policy systems of each country would be described as ‘mixed’. They adopt a mixture of approaches and institutions, from arm’s length agencies supporting culture via peer review, to central government agencies undertaking strategic activities and disbursing support via bureaucratic and ministerial prerogative, to direct provision of culture through state owned and operated cultural institutions (for more about the taxonomy and cultural policy models, see Madden, 2009).

The cultural policy systems in each country may be mixed, but, in their heritage and underlying philosophy, the systems could still be categorised as more closely aligned to a British ‘patron’ model than a French ‘architect’, USA ‘facilitator’, or socialist ‘engineer’ model. And, as with other mixed systems, growing central government interest in culture has been gradually eroding the independence of the state as patron, gently tipping the balance of the system inward to central government. This ‘shortening of the arm’ is evident not just in the establishment of central government agencies in the 80s and 90s, as described above, but also in the expansion of the focus and role of those agencies and their ministers.

There are therefore high level similarities in each country’s approach to cultural policy. But, equally, there are critical differences. Most importantly:

1. Australia has three tiers of government (Federal, State and Territory and Local), where New Zealand has just two (National and Provincial). Australia’s second tier state and territory culture agencies are predominantly government departments or ministries rather than arm’s length agencies.
2. Lottery funding plays a greater role in supporting culture in New Zealand.
3. The key national central government cultural agency in Australia is a department, while in New Zealand it is a ministry.
4. In New Zealand, the policy scope of the national government’s core culture agency (the Ministry) includes broadcasting and sport and recreation; in Australia it does not.

These differences make for distinct differences in the cultural policy landscapes of each country. In terms of funding, Australia’s second tier state and territory governments contribute the most to total cultural funding. In 2007-08, nearly half (47 per cent) of total government funding for Australian culture came from state and territory governments, 37 per cent from federal government, and 16 per cent from local government (National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics 2010). In New Zealand, the national government contributed 72 per cent of total cultural funding in 2003-04, national lottery grants 3 per cent, and local government 25 per cent (Statistics New Zealand and Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2005).

The existence in Australia of a national government department – rather than a ministry as in New Zealand – also leads to some differences in cultural policies. The Australian Department is more engaged in delivering specific support programs and disbursing grants. The work of the New Zealand Ministry focuses more on advice, research and other strategic activities.

In their approach to cultural planning, governments in both countries have tended toward ‘invisible’ or ‘implicit’ cultural policies. This has been particularly evident in
Australia, where policy developments have been largely undertaken reactively through a number of stand-alone major independent policy reviews were undertaken between 1997 and 2007 (for details see appendix G in Craik, 2007). Neither government has what might be called a traditional ‘monolithic’ cultural policy that sets out a grand ‘whole of government’ vision for culture.

The most famous exception to this invisibility was the Creative Nation policy launched in Australia in 1994 by the Labor government of Paul Keating (Commonwealth of Australia 1994). The full vision of the policy was not realised due to a change of government in 1996, but Creative Nation remains unique in the history of Australasian cultural policy. If nothing else, the policy is a testament to the facility for cultural policy to be elevated in the agenda of Australasian governments, especially when it has strong Prime Ministerial backing – a lesson that also appears in New Zealand’s recent history, with cultural funding rising as a proportion of total government expenditure under Prime Minister Helen Clark’s time as Minister for Arts and Culture.

There are recent signs that visibility is about to return to Australian cultural policy. In October 2009 the then Minister for the Arts, Peter Garrett, canvassed opinions online about developing a national cultural policy (nationalculturalpolicy.com.au). This comes after a strong, if not widespread, public debate about the need for a cultural policy. More on this in the next section.

Policy developments and issues
A reading of the websites of key agencies and cultural policy news from each country reveals a range of cultural policy issues familiar to countries everywhere: the impact of technology on culture; how to encourage greater private philanthropy and corporate sponsorship; how to improve support for indigenous arts and cultural diversity; how to promote sustainable cultural organisations; and how to encouraging broader cultural engagement.

Some specific policy adjustments are currently under way in New Zealand. The New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage is undertaking reviews of two major cultural support agencies, Creative New Zealand and the New Zealand Film Commission. Besides that, cultural policy is relatively quiet. The Ministry’s strategic plan to 2013 focuses more on whipping cultural sector organisations into shape than on grand policy visions. The key challenges and strategic priorities identified by the Ministry include: sustaining performance of funded organisations; increasing coordination and cohesion in both the cultural sector and in government policy; and helping the sector respond to changes in technology and audience behaviour.

In Australia, a more fundamental debate has been brewing over the last 10 years, much of it about whether the country should have a national cultural policy. The debate began to gain traction at a 2004 forum What should an Australian cultural policy look like? A number of essays and opinion pieces ensued, and the session’s presentations were published in Oakley & Anderson (2008). (See, in particular, Throsby, Madden, Gibson, and Mills). Most commentators offer qualified support for a cultural policy, not least for bringing coherence to disparate cultural policies, facilitating a ‘whole of government’ approach to culture, and making visible and transparent government’s cultural aspirations.
These core themes were repeated in deliberations at the ‘creative stream’ of the 2020 Summit, a conference convened by a new federal government in April 2008 ‘with the purpose of discussing the agenda for the nation’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008: 1). Most of the practical recommendations arising from the stream represent relatively minor or unrealistic policy adjustments. Participants did, however, identify a fundamental need to raise the profile of culture in government and to develop a ‘whole of government’ approach to culture. To achieve this, participants called for the creation of a ministry of culture and the development of a ‘national cultural and design strategy and policy.’

The Minister for the Arts appears to have listened and responded to this debate in his call in 2009 for ideas for a cultural policy. Since then, however, an election has intervened. Although the government was returned, a new Minister for the Arts has been appointed and it is unclear at the time of writing (October 2010) whether the development of a cultural policy will proceed.

The Australian policy debate has taken place over what has been an extraordinary period in Australia’s cultural sector. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveal momentous shifts in Australians’ creative engagement, and something of an upheaval in artists’ employment. The Bureau’s Work in selected culture and leisure activities survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007) shows that between 2001 and 2007, the number of Australian adults undertaking cultural work rose by 1.2 million people: a 52 per cent rise - nearly six times the growth in the population! Over roughly the same period, employment in artist occupations declined by 15 per cent. This is a dramatic decline when it is considered that total employment rose by 10 per cent over the same period and that, even more starkly, it is the first time since at least 1986 that employment in artist occupations has not outgrown total employment. The census also reveals declining relative incomes among artist occupations. The picture of upheaval is reinforced by the results of the latest survey of Australian artists (Throsby & Zednik, 2010). The data all point to upheaval within the cultural sector’s ‘creative core’.

Interestingly, the Australian picture is not mirrored in New Zealand data. New Zealand’s cultural indicators (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2009) show employment in cultural and creative occupations rising faster than in total employment between 2001 and 2006. Could it be that there is simply a ‘lag’ in the New Zealand experience, or is there a more fundamental explanation?

Exploring recent trends in detail is well beyond the scope of this editorial. However, one explanation advanced in Madden (2010) is that Australia’s arts sector is considerably oversupplied, and that policy may be partly responsible. Australian policy has been strongly balanced toward stimulating supply. Creative Nation was almost obsessively industry and supply-side focussed, and the autonomous policy reviews mentioned earlier represented substantial injections of new money into the sector’s supply-side. New Zealand does not appear to have had similarly large supply-side injections of funding into the cultural sector.

If cultural policies are partly the cause of the employment difficulties in the creative core of Australia’s cultural sector, then the paper by Tim Hazledine in this volume is a
timely reminder of the need for balance in cultural intervention. Voucher obsessed cultural economists periodically remind us of the importance of demand-side policy mechanisms. But it so often seems that the supply side exerts a gravitational pull too strong for policymakers to escape. Recent trends in Australian culture indicate that it may well be time for policymakers to reinvigorate efforts to stimulate demand for culture.

Articles in this edition
This second volume of the special Australasian edition of Cultural Trends contains five articles covering a range of cultural policy issues currently being tackled in Australia and New Zealand.

In Multiple job-holding and artistic careers: some empirical evidence, David Throsby and Anita Zednik report results from the fourth survey on the working lives of Australia’s practicing professional artists (previous surveys relate to 1983, 1987, 1993 and 2002). In their article, the authors interrogate the new data for what it says about the factors that influence artists to take work outside the arts and the extent to which artists are able to apply their creative skills in non-arts work.

Many of the non-arts businesses in which artists apply their artistic skills are situated in the wider creative industries (media, design, advertising, etc.), so Throsby and Zednik’s analysis sets the scene well for the next two articles. Stuart Cunningham’s Developments in measuring the ‘creative’ workforce reports on developments in measuring employment in the creative sector in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, and on what the data say about linkages between artists, creatives, and the non-creative sectors of the economy. Stuart suggests the data show a need for greater recognition of creatives in innovation policies, and a more nuanced understanding of employment ‘precarity’. In Education-to-work transitions of aspiring creatives, Sandra Haukka investigates the early career experiences of creatives. Using a range of Australian data sources, her analysis suggests that recent graduates from creative courses have worse labour market experiences than other graduates measured across a range of indicators including: employment, wages, job security, career mobility, education and training, and meeting skills needs of employers. The data reveal the degree of ‘precarity’ in the work experience of Australia’s early career creatives.

These first three articles are deeply intertwined: Throsby and Zednik looking at artists working in creative and non-creative sectors; Cunningham and Haukka looking at a wider range of creative people working inside and outside the creative sector. As cultural policy researchers, we constantly refer to the intimate and multiple linkages between arts, creative and other sectors. But, as the experience economy has grown and the interest of policymakers in culture and creativity has been piqued, we have not always been able to meet these new information demands with detailed ‘hard’ evidence of the linkages. Yet, reading these and similar articles from around the world, it is hard not to get the impression that we are at least moving toward a focal point in our understanding – a ‘unified theory’ even – of the arts, cultural and creative sectors combined.

The final two papers in this volume address specific policy issues. In Arts funding in New Zealand: A proposal for reform, Tim Hazledine proposes a novel demand-side arts support system. The problems inherent in supporting supply have been around
since the dawn of arts subsidies, but this does not make them any less urgent. Despite periodic calls for policies that stimulate demand, and despite the existence of successful overseas precedents, both Australia and New Zealand still rely heavily on supply-side policy instruments. In light of the possible overstimulation of supply by Australian cultural policy, as discussed earlier, this may well be a timely call for an urgent revision of policy settings. Tim offers a novel solution. Measured against the standard cultural ‘value chain’ – from creation, to production, to distribution and finally to consumption – the proposed model intervenes at the distribution stage, rather than at the consumption stage as with other demand-side initiatives. Tim’s model ‘shoe horns’ the influence of demand into the supply-side of the sector. One of the strengths of this approach over traditional demand-side initiatives is that it taps into the nuanced expertise of arts marketers. It may also be more acceptable to the sector than other types of demand-side initiatives that bypass producers to support consumers.

If the proposed model is too radical for some, the principles and argument should at least resonate and stimulate thinking about new ways to support the arts.

In the final article of this special edition, Change for change sake: Are tax reforms required to assist the Australian arts sector?, Brett Freudenberg reports on a survey on tax issues in the arts. The survey asked people in the arts sector about a wide range of topics such as their awareness of tax provisions, how they find tax information, and their opinions about perceived tax problems. Echoing overseas research, the survey finds that improved knowledge of and access to arts tax provisions are required more than any specific reform to the system itself.

I hope you find the articles in this and the first volume of the special Australasian edition of Cultural trends interesting and thought-provoking. Many thanks to the authors for contributing, and special thanks to reviewers for giving their time and expertise. I would also like to thank Sara Selwood for coordinating the issue, and for her guidance and encouragement.

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References

All web addresses retrieved 7 October 2010.


**Cultural policy resources for Australia**

**History**

**Current structures**
- Craik (cited above)
- IFACCA directory www.ifacca.org/directory/country/australia/

**Policy issues**
- Craik (cited above)

**News and publications**
- IFACCA resources Australia www.ifacca.org/directory/country/australia/resources/
Cultural policy resources for New Zealand

History


Current structures


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