



## Accomplishing Cultural policy in Europe

Elodie Bordat-Chauvin

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## **Accomplishing Cultural policy in Europe**

Elodie Bordat-Chauvin,

Senior researcher in the Center for Sociological and Political Research in Paris (CRESPPA),  
Assistant Professor at the Institut d'études Européennes - Université Paris 8

This volume is the first in the series "Sociology and Management of the Arts" published by Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group), co-edited by Christopher Mathieu and Victoria D. Alexander, Professor at Goldsmiths. Christopher Mathieu is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Lund University, Sweden, and Valerie Visanish is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Malta. While both editors are sociologists (one is a member of the Executive Board of the European Sociological Association), the contributors come from very different backgrounds: a gerontologist, a theatre director, several researchers who have held positions in business schools or management departments, and others who have worked in anthropology or ethnomusicology departments and finally in cultural institution studies. The contributors come from all over Europe (Malta, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Germany or France), but also from the Americas (Argentina and the USA), which allows the book's perspective to be decentralised. The diversity of the authors' careers, disciplines and backgrounds undoubtedly provides a variety of views on how to implement cultural policies in Europe.

The choice of the word 'accomplishing' in the title is interesting. In the abstract we can read that this concept means: "from policy formulation and administration, artistic and cultural production activities to institutional governance". In the introductory chapter, the authors propose to "unpack" the title in order to "explain the rationale" of the book: "at one level, to illustrate the expanse of activities undertaken by different types of actors in producing the cultural and artistic outcomes influenced by cultural policies" (p. 1). And "the second aim is to show the intricacies and contextual specificities of how these processes play out across countries, policy levels and artistic fields" (p. 1). They point out: "how cultural policy is accomplished in European settings, in its breadth as well as its depth" and that "accomplishing cultural policy involves more than just formulating policy, which is part of the equation, but more or less begins and ends with the political and administrative processes around policy formulation and implementation, including evaluation" (pp. 1-2). "Accomplishing as a movement is a way of conceiving of processes that take place simultaneously across the arts and cultural landscape, at multiple levels, producing very real and significant goals and outcomes, some of which are directly or indirectly influenced by cultural policy" (p.3) and part of it is "incompletion, failure and unintended results" (p. 3). For a French sociologist, as I am, it is interesting to note that instead of the traditional definitions of cultural policy proposed by Guy Saez (in particular the fact that cultural policy is more than the sum of cultural activities) or Philippe Urfalino (a moment of coherence and convergence between the definition of the role that the State can make culture play for society and the organization of public action), we find Alain Touraine, in his writings on social movements. This concept allows the authors to develop their theoretical framework of "primary tendencies and counter-currents".

The recognition of the "hyper-instrumentalisation" of arts and culture, as well as market-driven objectives, is interesting; and the conclusion, taken from Hadley and Gray (2017), is very provocative: "cultural policy is seen as having become non-cultural policy, that is, cultural objectives are sublimated to other priorities". I agree with the authors that cultural policies are increasingly conceived with an instrumental vision, in particular to solve urgent social problems such as the inclusion of marginalised populations or the reception of migrants, or as instruments of well-being and happiness, "using the arts as therapeutic tools to

improve their lives" (p. 9). Mathieu and Visanich state that "arts and culture are an essential component of individual and collective quality of life". This assumption is widely shared by public authorities, in particular the European Commission, which regularly quotes this Eurobarometer survey to underline that 70% of Europeans feel happier living near a cultural heritage site. The author of these lines cannot help but think of "Happycracy" by E. Illouz and E. Cabanas, which highlights the problem of defining happiness using supposedly objective criteria. It is true, however, that public actors at all levels "recognise this intrinsic importance [...] of art and culture", which, according to the authors, makes possible "physical and mental health" (p. 5).

The debate on cultural policy and neoliberalism and public funding of arts and culture presented in this book is still very much alive. The first section of the book focuses on the issue of 'commercialisation of culture and the backlash', while the second section also explores responses to the 'market-centred paradigm' by focusing on the role of cultural policies in social inclusion and, by the same process, in promoting the exercise of cultural rights. Among the populations often marginalised by cultural policies, this book includes case studies on the inclusion of migrants, older people, but also the effects of the state's financial withdrawal from culture, with the example of Greece. The third part, "Procedures in arts funding", seems less clear-cut, as the case studies are so diverse (non-public funding in museums in Europe, project funding in Malta and visual arts in Flanders). Finally, the fourth part deals with the process of evaluation and good governance.

The introduction to the book is so rich and interesting that it could be the subject of a whole review. Space does not permit me to discuss all the chapters, or even the four sections. However, I would like to highlight two very exciting contributions.

Mariano Martin Zamorano's article analyses the cultural policies of Barcelona's left-wing governments, which sought to present an alternative to the Creative City paradigm through the 'commons' approach. Described as pro-commons, these cultural policies aim to enable the construction of collaborative spaces in which social movements would have more power in cultural institutions (on this point, see also Barbieri, 2017).

Zamorano identifies two characteristics of these cultural policies in the Spanish case. The first is a re-territorialisation, with neighbourhoods considered as 'new centralities' in the city (in line with Bookchin's municipal/communist approach), because 'culture is understood as an open space of community convergence' (p.22), rather than something elaborated in the centre and transferred to the peripheries. The second characteristic involves new forms of cultural participation with the extension of the possibility of using "common cultural property by both producers and consumers of culture" (p.23). One of the main questions of this paper is whether these new approaches succeed in overcoming inequalities in access to and participation in culture. The answer seems to be no.

Aleysia Whitmore's contribution on the politics of cultural diversity in the South of France is very stimulating indeed she dares to use many words that are taboo in France.

"A music project whose purpose is to celebrate a culture or community, as opposed to promoting artistic education or access for all (and democracy), is viewed as promoting difference and division and is considered *communautariste*. *Communautarisme*, literally communalism, is the prioritisation of group identity over national identity" (p. 88). As Whitmore points out, the fear of *communautarisme* (a term that appeared in the speeches of the alt-right and was then picked up by the media) hinders the realisation and funding of many

cultural projects. All the more so since the adoption of the law "against separatism" and the "republican commitment contract" (Talpin, 2023). To counter this perceived risk of communitarianism, cultural administrators are called upon to strengthen intercultural dialogue and social cohesion (p. 90). She demonstrates very well the discrepancies between the totally apolitical and 'neutral' description of musicians and arts administrators when they talk about their projects with participants from immigrant backgrounds (such as the Work Songs community choir) and what she observes as a 'North American ethnographer' (p. 91); and their strategies to counter possible critiques of *communautarisme* with the proper communication tools such as 'intercultural dialogue' (p. 94), 'ouverture' and 'cultural exchange' (p. 100). Although her investigation focuses on the south of France in 2018, her findings are quite relevant for other French regions in 2023.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that this is a very interesting book for students of cultural management, but also for cultural policy researchers.

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