Final Report

An Investigation into the Feasibility of Establishing an Arts and Culture Research Network

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research on arts and culture policy is not a flourishing field. While there is a Society for Social Theory, Politics and the Arts that holds annual meetings, their research tends to be narrowly focused and lacks the broad framework that could lead to greater impact. Such a framework needs to confront the implications of the rapidly changing demographic profile of the U.S., and the new ways in which people are engaging with the arts. And this framework would need to consider the implications of these changes for the future of arts and cultural policy.

While the concepts "economic policy", "educational policy" and "health policy" have more or less understandable referents, the concept "cultural policy" most often elicits a cognitive blank. For most areas of policy there are clear guidelines on how policy is related to specific sectors, but cultural policy is buried under other policy sectors. Culture, in the United States, is never at the center of policy.

It is not as if thoughtful individuals have not noticed this and tried to do something about it. In the late '80s and early '90s, James Allen Smith (then the president of the Gilman Foundation) tried to interest other foundations in an arts and cultural policy program, but encountered considerable resistance. He did, however, succeed in getting several smaller foundations to fund a Center for Arts and Culture. Then, in 1999 the Pew Charitable Trusts announced a five-year, $50 million program to encourage policymakers to focus on issues like arts financing, intellectual property rights, zoning in historic areas and an arts curriculum for public schools. They recognized, in the words of Marion Godfrey, that "we have no organizing framework for this remarkable cultural richness and no overall context in which to understand and nurture it." A drop in the endowment, however, led Pew to terminate the initiative almost before it started. Some 14 years later we still lack any overall framework that defines a field of cultural policy studies, and there are few scholars engaged in exciting research related to cultural policy.

Why should we revisit the issue? The issue of cultural policy is no less important today than it was a decade and a half ago; arguably it is even more important because of the profound and rapid changes taking place in technology, in the increasingly diverse racial, ethnic and religious makeup of the nation, and the squeezing out of arts education under the pressure of increased emphasis on math and science education.

2. WHY NOW?

The time is propitious because the NEA has, in the last few years, become more active in sponsoring research and has developed its own research agenda. To this end, the NEA recently issued a report entitled "How Art Works." This document features a logic model that explores the relation of both art creation and participation to the larger social system. It also proposes a research agenda that would eventually furnish both substance and detail for some of the relations that, in the logic model, are only presented schematically. The NEA's research agenda and logic model provide a parallel framework to that of a cultural policy framework.

Policy research, however, is something quite different from research on how art works to produce valuable outcomes. Policy research studies how laws, economic and regulatory policies, institutional practices, and cultural norms affect the quantity, quality and kind of art produced. Policy research is oriented toward understanding changes in the systems -- for example, looking at how the provisions of the No Child Left Behind legislation mandating testing for science and

math affect the amount of arts education in schools. By contrast, research on how art works focuses more on the ways arts education impacts participation in the arts, and on the effect of that participation on community and individual well-being. While there is no hard and fast distinction between the two types of research, policy research focuses more on the framework within which artistic practice and arts participation take place and how policy levers may alter that framework to achieve certain ends, while the how art works research focuses more on how current policies encourage arts participation and how that participation produces value for individuals and communities.

3. A NEW APPROACH

So then, how do you create a new field of study? An approach that has worked in other areas is the implementation of a research network, an innovation pioneered by the MacArthur Foundation. A research network consists of a small group of scholars drawn from different disciplines who commit to work together over a period of years to develop a research agenda that will define a field, to share research ideas, and to engage in research that carries out that agenda. With the emergence of new and effective ways of engaging in electronically-mediated collaborative activities, members of a network do not need to be located at a single institution, or even in a single country. The network can be composed of carefully chosen individuals around the world, trained in different disciplines; they become a 'virtual network.'

Experience in the development of the MacArthur networks suggests several principles that are important to the creation of successful networks. The first is that the individuals who participate be carefully chosen for their interest in broad, interdisciplinary research and a willingness to share ideas even if they do not actually conduct research together. Considerable investment in identifying potential candidates for the network is needed. Since arts and culture policy is an emerging field there are not many scholars currently actively engaged with it, but there are a number whose work is tangentially related and who might welcome the challenge of thinking about what serious research in the field might look like. In recruiting members, it would be important to cast a wide net for scholars who can think beyond their own fields and who have an interest in helping to shape a new field of inquiry.

The second principle is that the network has to have a strong leader who keeps the members of the network on track and clearly focused. Members of the network will be successful and busy scholars who have many commitments. The network leader has to insure that the members participate in a timely manner and that they all contribute, but at the same time not be an overbearing force. To be a network leader requires a certain amount of altruism as the products of the network will not be that of the network leader, but of the members both individually and as a group. Finding the right leader will be a challenge but it is essential to the success of the network.

The third principle is that it takes time for the network to be successful. Members need time to get to know one another and to find a common language. Since they will be coming from many different perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds, the formation of the network into an effective body cannot be hurried. It will take a lot of interaction, exploration of ideas, disagreements and perhaps even fights, before the group coheres into an effective working body. The network leader is essential in moving this process at all deliberate speed, but without pushing things faster than they can reasonably go.

The purpose of this grant was to explore the possibility of establishing an interdisciplinary network of scholars who are interested in developing a research agenda related to cultural policy with special reference to the arts. The goal was to engage scholars from diverse disciplines in a research network that would develop and nurture a field of cultural policy studies. Originally, the idea was for NEA to finance the research network infrastructure, while other funders would support actual research projects. Because of the procedural requirements the NEA works under as a government agency, it became apparent that funding the network itself would be difficult, and that it would be better to seek private sector funding for the network infrastructure, with NEA providing a significant swath of the actual research funding.

During the fall and winter of 2011/12 I had wide-ranging conversations with 22 individuals from various disciplines about the possibility of forming such a research network for the arts and cultural policy. [See appendix A for the names and affiliations of those contacted]. For the most part, they do not consider arts and cultural policy as a field of inquiry in which they do their scholarly work. Nonetheless, all of them work in areas both contiguous and potentially relevant to it. In my conversations with these individuals, there was consensus that the field of cultural policy needed to be strengthened and almost universal interest expressed in the possibility of participating in such a network, but they all wanted to learn more about how this would work out in practical terms before committing further. With only a couple of exceptions, they expressed willingness to participate in at least an initial workshop in order to explore the idea further.

4. WHAT I LEARNED

What is cultural policy? As noted above, there is no generally accepted definition of cultural policy. As a basis for discussion I defined culture as the system of shared attitudes, values, and practices that lie at the heart of a society's identity. Culture is infused with symbols that enrich and give meaning to it. The arts are one expression of these values, as are religion and social structure. Culture underlies the organization and functioning of the economic and political system. It is an integrative force that provides the glue that holds a society together. But it can also be a divisive force when groups of differing identities reside in a single nation, or when their interests conflict and it becomes an organizing principle for asserting those interests. It is what defines the "we" and the "they".

Cultural policy refers to the actions of governments or organizations that foster activities or institutions promoting greater identity and cultural cohesion, and that mediate conflicts of interest between culturally identified groups. Many aspects of public policy have a cultural aspect: for example, immigration policies that are directed toward specific ethnic or cultural groups, or regulatory policies that provide protection for intellectual property.

5. POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1) How can we conceptualize cultural policy so that its meaning is clear and we do not have to explain it?

"Cultural policy", as noted, is not an obvious term that is understood by most people. While it connotes a wide range of policies that affect the arts, humanities and creative industries, it also involves activities that are expressive of deep cultural attitudes and values.

One theme that emerged was that "policy" is plural. We should speak about cultural policies, not policy as if there were a unified, coherent policy that was being put in place. It was recognized that we lack an established vocabulary with which to talk about culture and cultural policies and this has seriously inhibited the development of a vigorous research tradition.

Another theme from these conversations is that culture and the arts should not be thought of as separate domains, but rather as something that is embedded in all human activity. To treat them as a separate sector runs the danger of marginalizing them. Thus cultural policy needs to be something that finds expression in many different realms and that is embodied in economic, educational and social policies.

A challenge that awaits us is to develop a framework and vocabulary that makes this embeddedness understandable, and the basis for policy formulations and debate.

2) Who has responsibility for cultural policy in the federal government? Should there be one body tasked with coordinating policy like OSTP?

The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (PCAH) was established by President Reagan in 1982 as an official body whose mission is to work with each Administration to incorporate the arts and the humanities into White House objectives. Its members include 12 public members representing the agencies that are thought to have the most responsibilities for arts and humanities programs--the Secretaries of the Departments of State, Treasury, Education, and Interior; the heads of the NEA, NEH and IMLS, the Librarian of Congress, the Secretary of the Smithsonian, the Director of the National Gallery of Art, the Chairman of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the Administrator of the GSA. In addition there are 32 private members.

There does not appear to be any body that coordinates the budgets or policies related to arts and cultural activities. Controversial issues such as we recently saw in the arguments about on-line piracy (SOPA) that involve fundamental issues of technology, creative freedom and protection of artistic and cultural property are worked out in isolation from any overall conception of a cultural or artistic policy.

Many of those that I talked with were ambivalent or even negative about the idea of national cultural policies. The traditions of the United States generally support formulating and executing polices at the state or local levels, and often in a relatively informal manner, or sub rosa. Only recently have areas like educational policy been seen as something in which the federal government should be heavily involved, but they are nonetheless still mired in controversy. There was skepticism on the part of some that the federal government could or should play a

major role in the creation or enforcement of cultural policies. This tradition sets us apart from many other countries that have centralized ministries of culture, and are major players in cultural affairs.

This difference between the U. S. and, for instance, European countries, was seen as one of the reasons that the field of cultural policy studies was so little developed in the U.S.

3) Should there be a "cultural budget" as there is an S&E budget?

Many substantive sectors such as education, science, statistics, health, have some group that looks after the total budget for the sector in the President's budget. Sometimes this is an office in OMB, such as the case with statistics; sometimes it is a coordinating office such as the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) that provides input to OMB in evaluating and advocating for science and technology related budgets of different agencies. OSTP, through the mechanism of interagency coordinating committees, also takes the lead in developing new budgetary initiatives such the recent proposal for a major multi-agency investment in brain research. There is no such mechanism for coordinating support, or for advocating for budget priorities in the arts and culture sector which likely cut across a wide range of agencies.

Although there was skepticism about the possibility of coherent, monolithic national cultural policies, it was recognized that the federal government does provide considerable support for arts and cultural activities not only through NEA and NEH but also through less obvious means such as IMLS, Education and HHS. The dismaying lack of systematic data about budgetary support for arts and cultural activities across a wide range of government agencies results in a distorted picture of what is actually going on.

4) What are the differences between cultural policy at the national level and at the local level?

There seems to be a latent mistrust of the idea of a national cultural policy. Basic ideas about creativity, as well as the founding cultural policy documents such as the Bill of Rights, stress individual freedom.   To many people, the idea of a national cultural policy connotes an intrusion of government into realms where they have no business.   The U.S. is formed as a "nation of nations" and lacks the cultural homogeneity and history of countries where culture and national identity are nearly synonymous.   In the cultural area, the country celebrates "pluribus" more than "unum."

At the local level, there appears to be less concern about governmental involvement in cultural matters. Many cities have Offices of Cultural Affairs that actively promote arts and cultural heritage activities locally and are more active in trying to integrate cultural activities into other programs in the city.

Knowing more about the conditions that promote support for active governmental involvement in cultural activities (directly or indirectly) at the local level might help us better understand the limits to cultural policy at the national level.

5) How should such research in cultural policy be organized and supported?

At the turn of the century, there was an upsurge of interest in cultural policy research that led to the establishment of several cultural policy centers with significant support from the Pew and other foundations. This support has now been exhausted, as is common with foundation support that starts new enterprises. Many of the centers have either ceased to exist or are operating at much reduced levels. No robust field of research has come from them, nor has cultural policy been adopted as a significant field in public policy schools. Is there a way to create or strengthen a nascent field?

The older center model was built on the premise that several researchers would be gathered in a center housed in some larger organization like a university or research institute, e.g. RAND or the Urban Institute. An alternative model, pioneered by the Mac Arthur Foundation, is the establishment of research networks of scholars from different fields who work on related, but not necessarily the same topics, and who are resident in a number of different locales. Through ongoing electronic exchanges and periodic face-to-face meetings, they share ideas and research papers with the goal of developing a new field and giving it greater visibility. It might be thought of as a smaller version of crowd sourcing that is becoming popular in tackling complex problems that must draw on many different talents and knowledge bases.

Several respondents noted that there was no journal devoted to cultural policy research. Those who did write in the area publish their work in European journals. One respondent reported that he had turned down requests to establish such a journal because there was a lack of first class work. It appears to be a classic chicken and egg problem. There is little incentive to write in the area because there are not recognized outlets for the work, and there is no incentive to publish a journal because so little good work is being done.

6. A WAY FORWARD

Can there be an effective research network in cultural policy? What would it take to make it successful?

At this point, I envision a network of from 10 to 12 scholars from sociology, political science, economics, history, technology, and the arts who would be willing to commit initially 10--25% of their time to the network. They would meet face-to-face at least twice a year, undertake research and writing that they would share and , if successful, create a new theoretically grounded understanding of and approach to the study of cultural policy. Without this, the field is at a significant disadvantage and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future.

The development of such an approach would complement and enhance the NEA research agenda as laid out in the recent publication How Arts Works.

The logic model laid out in How Art Works uses a systems approach that connects: a) inputs, b) "quality of life" outputs, and c) broader societal impacts, to the basic system of arts participation and creation. The model is, again, highly schematic but it does identify education and training and arts infrastructure as key input systems, and individual and social benefits of art as key output systems. Because the model focuses on arts participation and creation, cultural policy issues are relegated to a peripheral system referred to as "Societal Capacities to Innovate and to Express Ideas,"(a heterogeneous category that deserves a much more detailed exploration.)

Included under this rubric are markets and subsidies, politics, technology, demographics, cultural traditions, and factors of space and time.

Where then does a research agenda related to cultural policy fit into this model? One way to conceptualize cultural policy is to think of it as the set of rules that guide the flow of activities within the various systems that make up the model and that allocate resources to various parts of the system. A few examples:

- budgets and curricular policies in school districts govern the availability and support for arts education;

- tax policy dictates incentives for financial support for the arts infrastructure;

- intellectual property laws and regulations both support and inhibit creative activities, as well as the economic and civic benefits of art;

- economic policies involving subsidies affect the market for artistic and cultural products.

In some cases the relation of policies to cultural activities is both obvious and transparent, as is the case for the advantageous tax treatment of charitable contributions to cultural organizations. In other instances, the relationship is not explicitly laid out, but can nonetheless have profound and enduring consequences for artistic expression, as in the case of proposed legislation (SOPA) to prevent unauthorized sharing of artistic creations on the internet. And in a third category, policies adopted to achieve a goal that appears totally unrelated to the arts might end up having long-term unintended consequences, as in the case of the No Child Left Behind Act that mandates testing for math and science in schools with the consequence that arts education gets either reduced or eliminated altogether in order to make curricular room for science and math instruction.

How does the NEA research agenda differ from a possible policy research agenda as proposed above? The NEA research agenda outlined in How Art Works is mapped onto the elements of a systems model, with arts participation and creation at the center of the agenda. It explores the relations of activities in the different systems of the model to one another.   The focus of the NEA agenda is on how elements of the systems work on arts participation and creation, e.g. empirically connecting the infrastructure and the education and training nodes to arts participation and artistic creation, and on the direct and indirect outcomes that benefit individuals and communities, e.g. audience impact, effect of arts participation on individual subjective well-being or economic benefits. This agenda calls for research on the functioning of the systems as they are currently configured.

The agenda of a cultural policy network would differ from the NEA research agenda inasmuch as it would probe more deeply into the dynamics of the systems--calling for careful exploration of the ways in which policies set the rules that govern the activities in the systems, and how they actually shape the activities and their interactions. It would explicate how current policies combine to create the social and economic and cultural environment in which the How Arts Work systems operate, and how policy changes might alter the environment -- alternately enhancing or diminishing the shape and vitality of the arts and cultural sector.   Investigating the effects of arts education on children's lives would, for example, be within the NEA agenda; by

contrast, the study of educational policies that affect the types and amount of arts education, either directly or indirectly, would be on the agenda of the research network.

All this suggests that we have a large and complex challenge ahead in our efforts to understand the principal policy areas that impact the strength and vitality of the arts and culture sector, and then to integrate them into systematic thinking about their effects. The establishment of a research network of scholars from diverse disciplines who could devote time to these issues would jump start our efforts to start developing a new field of cultural policy studies. It would take a sustained effort over a number of years, but it could lead to greater awareness and better theoretical understanding of the policies that, for better or worse, currently shape and support arts and cultural activities. This in turn would lead to (at least) the possibility of more carefully reasoned arguments about policies, as well as a greater appreciation for the types of data needed to evaluate the effects of different policies.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEWEES FOR CULTURAL POLICY NETWORK

Andy Abbott,   Sociologist, Univ. of Chicago

Mark Bauerlein   English, Emory University

Alan Brown, Arts consultant   San Francisco

Nancy Cantor,   Psychologist , President Syracuse University

Paul DiMaggio,   Sociologist   Princeton

Betty Farrell,   Sociologist Cultural Policy Center   U of Chicago

Rob Gertner,   Economist   Univ. of Chicago

Anthony Grafton,   History   Princeton

Jennifer Homans,   Historian, NYU

Paul Hunter,   English   Univ. of Chicago/UVA

Stanley Katz,   Law/history   Princeton

Arlene Keizer,   English Univ. of California -Irvine, declined

Ben Knapp,   Computer engineer,   Virginia Tech

Jennifer Novak-Leonard,   Arts consultant/Senior Scholar, Cultural Policy Center/University of Chicago

Jerry McGann, English   UVA

Damon Phillips,   Sociologist   Columbia University Business School

James Allen Smith,   Historian   Rockefeller Archives

Catherine Stimson,   English   NYU

Steven Tepper,   Sociologist   Vanderbilt

Marta Tienda,   Sociologist   Princeton

Ximena Varela,   Arts Management/Cultural Policy   American University

Ruth Waalkes,   Arts Management   Virginia Tech