

# Rhetoric and reality: Examining the policy-practice interface of European and Irish arts policy

**Ailbhe Kenny**

This paper addresses European and Irish arts and cultural policy as both a form of ‘rhetoric’, or policy intention and ‘reality’, viewed as policy enactment. Taking a sociocultural view, social, economic, cultural and political values cannot be separated from written policies. This paper through a policy analysis identifies both macro and micro perspectives to illuminate and problematise policy surrounding Irish arts communities. The *macropolicy* analysis aims to contextualise the “official perspective” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 128) of Irish arts communities through a policy document analysis of key European Union (EU), Irish and local arts and cultural policies. The *micro* policy document analysis seeks to narrow the gap between rhetoric (policy intention) and reality (policy enactment). Elite interviews with four policymakers illuminated how policies were interpreted and mediated at both national and local levels in practice or ‘reality’.

Through an analysis of key European Union and Irish government documents, this paper investigates the values and remits of arts and cultural policy as they percolate from macro to micro levels. Questions pertaining to how values function within these documents, what approaches within government policies are promoted, and how government is addressing both artistic and political agendas are put forward. Economic values emerged as an overriding theme across the document analysis where a discursive push to show ‘value for money’ was interlinked with arts and cultural development. The affordances and dangers of such an emphasis on the value of the arts to economic agendas are discussed.

A sociocultural lens is employed to theorise the debates of the political and cultural systems surrounding this paper. Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990, 2002) has particular theoretical depth for this line of inquiry where his preoccupation with ‘capital’ extends the idea of capital as a purely economic form to non-monetary forms; namely, social and cultural capital. As such these ‘cultural resources’ are shaped through ‘habitus’ (what is natural and customary) within social worlds.

People and institutions employ these resources within their worlds to establish a ‘field position’ and play within ‘the rules of the game’. Arts and cultural policy are thus used as ‘resources’ for informing and influencing practices to create and reinforce values deemed appropriate by the policymakers.

Since the Maastricht Treaty, the EU have been continually redefining culture to promote EU agendas such as a common European identity, interculturalism, creativity and most significantly economic growth. These agendas or ‘rhetorics’ have caused tensions in reality, and this was reflected in the EU and Irish policies examined. The micro policy analysis investigates how policy intentions are interpreted, mediated and enacted by actual policymakers. This relationship between rhetoric (macro policy) and reality (micro policy) seeks to reveal the perceived ‘gap’ between policy implementation and enactment according to key policymakers.

## **Method**

Taking the sociocultural view that documents are “constructed in particular contexts, by particular people, with particular purposes, and with consequences – intended and unintended” (Mason, 2002, p. 110), the study presents a dual perspective of a macro and micro policy document analysis. The analysis looked at what Prior describes as “documents in action”

(2003, 2004, 2008) where (2003, p. 2): “The status of things as ‘documents’ depends precisely on the ways in which such objects are integrated into fields of action, and documents can only be defined in terms of such fields”. The research situated Irish arts communities in a macro policy context (through key European, national and local policy documents) and examined micro policy implementation (through four policymaker interviews at national and local levels). Key considerations for the policy analysis related to: how policy was applied in context; how the policies were negotiated/mediated, by whom and in what ways and; what was the relationship between policy intention and policy enactment. Through a policy analysis of both the ‘rhetoric’ (document analysis) and ‘reality’ (policymaker interviews) the policy-practice interface is explored to map the directions, make connections and illuminate trends and perspectives within cultural and arts policy development.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The ways government structures integrate into political agendas and how they mediate the possibilities for the development of arts communities in a wider cultural context are examined. Several dichotomies can exist between balancing artistic aims with political remits. These tensions inform the study by examining the influence of European, national and local government policy on arts communities as well as the interface between policy intention and enactment. In this way, the study aims to provide a unique and particular window into this policy/practice interface. Policy recommendations are put forward for both EU, Irish and local policymakers with a view to influencing future directions for not only developing potential arts communities but also sustaining such communities.

## References

- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: an introduction to theory and methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice* (3rd ed.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2002). *Language and symbolic power* (6th ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Johnson, R. (1993). *The field of cultural production: essays on art and literature*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Prior, L. (2003). *Using documents in social research*. London: Sage.
- Prior, L. (2004). *Doing things with documents*. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative analysis. Issues of theory & method* (2nd ed., pp. 76-94). London: Sage.
- Prior, L. (2008). *Researching documents: emergent methods*. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Handbook of emergent methods* (pp. 111-126). New York, London: Guilford.