Social Questions, Musical Answers: Local Government Music Policy and Practice

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Abstract

Arts within local government polices and practices has been increasing worldwide. These local government arts agendas are primarily aimed at raising artistic standards, enhancing the quality of life within communities and supporting artists. Further objectives such as developing and promoting social capital are also very apparent within both local government arts remits and initiatives. This paper examines the integration of the arts into local government from a variety of perspectives. An investigation of where local government arts are situated in relation to capital theories and the tensions between arts and social aims are considered. Using Ireland and music development as the focus, specific local government music initiatives are examined. These case studies highlight the significance of local government involvement in music and its importance in enhancing social capital, providing access to music and music making, community participation, cultural diversity and its value in developing identity and a 'sense of place' within communities. Using such an investigation the challenges surrounding the role of local government in fostering and supporting vibrant music communities is explored.

Introduction

The integration of the arts into local government agendas has been a growing phenomenon internationally. These policies and practices, while aimed at raising artistic standards, are also widely understood and often explicitly stated as a means of enhancing social capital amongst communities. This paper examines both the United Kingdom and Irish approaches to and models of local government involvement in the arts/arts education and more specifically in music/music education. Taking Ireland as the focus of the study, specific case studies of local government music initiatives are explored. The critical importance of local government contribution to music and its relevance to social cohesion, access, participation, intercultural promotion and its value in developing a sense of identity and place within communities is highlighted. The study draws together lessons from a diversity of experiences and practices to illuminate current development in music by local government in Ireland. The core issues address the integration of music within a wider arts policy; the status of the arts in local government; the structures surrounding local government arts services; the function of the arts service to local arts and specifically music development. This investigation aims to define the role local government has to play in fostering and supporting vibrant music communities and highlight the challenges and tensions associated with varying remits within arts in local government.

The integration of arts in local government

The impact of World War II had a direct influence on the integration of the arts in local government agendas. Due to the misuse of the arts during fascist regimes, a new political discourse ensued surrounding arts and cultural policies culminating in the setting up of the

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1945. An example of the evolution of the arts into local government arts agendas as a tool for social agendas can be seen in the United Kingdom (UK).

Local government involvement in the arts within the UK has its roots in a reaction to WWII in the setting up of the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in 1940. The organization was aimed at boosting morale and encouraging social good during times of conflict. This in turn led to the establishment of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946 as an arms-length organization allowing for relative autonomy from central government in decision-making and funding. The subsequent setting up of Regional Arts Associations in 1966 and the breaking up of the Arts Council of Great Britain (now the Arts Council of England, the Arts Council of Wales and the Scottish Arts Council) all reveal a growing preoccupation with devolvement of responsibility for the arts at a more regional or local level. Today, local government, alongside the Arts Councils, is the most significant revenue investor of the arts in the UK.

The evolution of the arts into local government in Ireland came about much later than its neighbour. It has been suggested that Ireland was reacting to pressure internationally and particularly from Britain rather than responding out of a firm commitment to the arts (Quinn, 1998). The first *Arts Act* in Ireland was brought into legislation in 1951 and the Arts Council was established with a similar arms-length principle to the UK. Local government involvement in the arts ensued with the second *Arts Act* in 1973. Twelve years thereafter realized the setting up of the first arts office within a local government structure. Since then, the establishment of these local authority arts offices have occurred on a phased basis over a 23 year period. 2007 marked the full allocation of 34 local authority arts offices nationwide.

The influence of changing local government policy and reform also had an effect on local arts development. The publication of *Better Local Government - A Programme for*

Change in 1996 allowed for a more strategic approach to planning and development within local authority arts offices. This period of reform was concerned with the quality of life for citizens within communities and so the arts were now being recognised as a means to enhance the cultural environment of the local community through local arts. The publication particularly highlighted various social needs such as widening participation at local level and providing efficient resources to serve the customer (1996, pp.9-10). Subsequent legislation such as the *Local Government Act* (2001) continued to focus on such social remits within local authorities. This act called on local government to promote activities that enhance 'social inclusion or the social, economic, environmental, recreational, cultural, community or general development of the administrative area…' (Government of Ireland, 2001, p.62).

The integration of arts agendas in local government in the UK and Ireland has been incremental and reactive. Arts within local government in both Isles came about as a response to global and national trends coupled with changing legislative environments. Social agendas and remits are very evident within local government arts policies within the UK and Ireland. For example, the Arts Council of England's Plan *Great Art for Everyone 2008-2011* in investing 1.6 billion over the four years claims; 'Great art inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better' (2008, p.8). This plan encapsulates a growing commitment to enhancing access to the arts, arts participation as well as the importance of the arts as a tool for identity and confidence building.

Local government and capital theories

Terms such as 'human capital', 'social capital', 'cultural capital' and 'creative capital' are increasingly being used throughout national, regional and local government policies. Local

government, through the use of public funds are expected to show accountability, transparency and a type of 'return' for the use of public monies. This is not always easy to apply to the arts as it is for other tangible local government areas.

Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1979, 1990, 2002) extended the notion of capital as a purely economic form (money, property etc.) to non-monetary forms of capital, namely, social and cultural capital. Social capital theorists (Bourdieu, 1977, 1979, 1990, 2002; Coleman, 1988; Putman, 2000) describe social capital as the use of resources such as social connections or networks which result in a valued social outcome, for example, education or status. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu are the internalizations occurring during a process of socialization, education or training which create advantages from educational processes.

The theories of social and cultural capital have come under much debate (Sullivan, 2001; Edwards, Franklin & Holland, 2003;Vryonides, 2007). Many researchers point to the limitations of the terms 'social' and 'cultural capital' as being too narrow in focus, non precise, as concentrating too heavily on the notion of 'family' (Sullivan, 2001; Edwards et al. 2003) and highly difficult to measure (Vryonides, 2007). Indeed, there is a danger with the use of these terms that the assessment or evaluation of 'capital' in any form can be reduced to monetary gains solely. Such an application within local government arts initiatives could serve to threaten artistic freedom and value.

This notion of 'capital' as a non-monetary form has been further extended to include the idea of 'creative capital'. Creative capital can be seen as the combination of societies' assets that enable that society to be innovative and creative. Richard Florida popularized the term 'creative class' which he defines as 'people who add economic value through creativity', including, 'a great many knowledge workers, symbolic analysts, and professional and technical workers' (2002, p.68). Florida developed a measurement tool, 'The Creativity Index' to assess a regions overall creative economy potential.

While the focus is on a non-monetary form of capital, the outcome of such an index tool is restricted in view to economic returns only. Florida's work specifically focuses on the rise of a 'creative economy'. The theory that creativity can be measured solely in economic terms appears to be a narrow view. Florida does not place a high value on social or cultural capital or indeed any output of creativity that is intangible. This goes against what some academics (Evans, 2001; Mercer, 2002) believe is a strong link between creativity and cultural and social capital.

A study commissioned by the Hong Kong government, *A study on Creativity Index* claims (2005, p.32): 'The overall increase in creativity of a country should benefit social, cultural and economic sectors as a whole….' Using the theories of Richard Florida, too often the arts are seen as an engine to fuel economic growth and tangible outcomes that 'fit' with local government measures. Creativity does not however, take place in a vacuum. It is situated in a social and cultural context and therefore to ignore both social and cultural capital as a driver of creativity would be foolhardy. The Hong Kong Government creativity index study (2005, p.34) states; '…creativity needs the institutional backup and support to thrive and prosper'.

Agendas and the arts in local government

Tensions often exist between balancing artistic aims with social or political remits. At local government level this can become especially difficult where Laycock (2008, p. 64) argues, 'The social agenda is uppermost in the formulation of artistic policy at local government level.' There is a danger within local government structures that the arts may suffer from 'policy attachment' (Gray, 2002), seen for their instrumental value as opposed to their inherent worth. Gray (2002, p.p.86) points out:

…the only possibilities for the creative development of the arts as a policy sector depends upon their ability to successfully attach themselves to other policy concerns and sectors.

Policies citing multiple aims and remits are very obvious amongst Irish local authority arts plans which are required to be published by law. These plans predominantly include social agendas such as 'cohesion', 'inclusion', 'diversity', 'identity' and 'participation'. Alongside these are the aims of promoting artistic excellence, building new arts audiences and developing opportunities for artist professional development. This focus on the use of the arts as a social agenda tool can also be seen in the placement of the arts offices within local government structures. Half (51%) of these arts offices are placed within 'community and enterprise' directorates while the other half work under eleven other various directorates (Kenny, 2009, p.43). This placement highlights the perception of the use of the arts within both local community and economy building.

There are of course significant advantages to the arts satisfying social aims and remits. Ideas around participation and identity are particularly relevant when examining the role of local government in the formation of individual and communal identities through arts or music initiatives. Music participation as a means of forming both individual as well as community identity has been argued by many researchers (Bennett, 2000; De Nora, 2000; Pitts, 2005; Finnegan, 2007). The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in Ireland highlight the importance of arts participation in promoting 'social solidarity and social cohesion' amongst communities (2007, p.8). The report goes on to highlight arts specific benefits outside of other communal activities such as sport claiming; 'the arts allow private

feeling to be jointly expressed, something that people may desire but cannot achieve in any other way but through the arts' (NESF, 2007, p.11).

Small similarly draws attention to the link between music and social activity claiming (Small, 1998p.208):

> The big challenge to music educators today seems to me to be not how to produce more skilled professional musicians but how to provide that kind of social context for informal as well as formal musical interaction that leads to real development and to the musicalizing of the society as a whole.

With such a view, the place or context where 'musicalizing' may occur is of great significance for music education. Ruth Finnegan's (2007) ethnographic study of amateur music making in Milton Keynes, England, refers to 'musical worlds' within communities that are described as: (2007, p.32):

> …distinguishable not just by their differing musical styles but also by other social conventions: in the people who took part, their values, their shared understandings and practices, modes of production and distribution, and the social organisation of their collective musical activities.

In this way, music through local government initiatives can be perceived as means of exploring the link between identity and the social world where one exists.

Examples from Research

The report *Knowing the Score: Local Authorities and Music* (Kenny, 2009) sought to investigate the contribution and role of local government in music in Ireland. This was a two-

year partnership project between the Arts Council (Ireland), a third level institution as well as local government bodies. Mixed Method research methodologies were used including a literature review, shadowing/observation, questionnaire, drawing up music profiles for all arts offices as well as interviewing arts council personnel, local authority arts office staff and musicians. The significant findings of the research included: the fact that arts offices are now an integral part of local government; the wide and diverse range of music initiatives happening around the country due to these arts offices; there is no uniform model of arts officer practice; the arts offices have an influential role on communities, musicians, music; and that partnerships are hugely important to support the work of local government arts offices.

A further significant finding in this research was the evidence of core values such as access, participation, social inclusion, and supporting artistic excellence made apparent through local government initiatives. Four examples of such values inherent in such initiatives are chosen to illustrate how such aims and remits manifest themselves in local government music practices in Ireland.

Access

The Vogler Quartet Residency involved an international string quartet in developing a long-term approach to music education in County Sligo. Access to instrumental tuition and performance within local areas was a primary concern within this project. The residency involved both local and national cross-sectoral partnerships between the arts office, a national music resource organization, local schools, a local community centre, a local music promoter, a local ensemble and private music school.

The initiative was longitudinal in nature (1999-2004) and focused on the three areas of music education, instrumental tuition and performance. An important strand of this initiative

was the Vogler primary curriculum support programme whose main aim was to provide access to live music in classrooms throughout the wider communities within the county as well as build capacity in music development through the schools. A facilitator provided training and resources for teachers throughout the residency to ensure that Vogler Quartet work in schools was not just a 'once-off experience' but rather the teachers and children would build on the work between visits.

Through post-residency evaluation, the music education programme inspired professional development workshops for local musicians to continue the music education work in schools throughout the county and provide further access to live music within schools. This initiative is a fitting example of where artistic excellence in the form of a well established international quartet was upheld alongside other social aims, in this case a focus on access.

Participation

A large scale project carried out in Wexford, 'The Whisper of Ghosts', was an orchestral and choral composition which focused on high community participation. This was a collaborative composition between composer Elaine Agnew, writer Kate Newman, pupils of three rural primary schools and an active retirement group. Elaine and Kate worked collaboratively for six months in a series of improvisational workshops involving creative writing and music making with the pupils and teachers from these schools and in addition with members of the active retirement group. The poems written from the creative writing workshops served as the basis for Elaine's composition. The end piece was performed by the pupils and retirement group members alongside the Irish Chamber Orchestra. A live recording was made and a book published including the writings of the participants in the project.

The community participation element was evident in both the process and product of the initiative. A local advisory group were involved in the planning and realization phases of the project, all workshops encouraged full participation, the participants contributed directly to the musical piece through composing workshops, and were also involved in the performance. The arts officer commented that the initiative was 'not imposed on the community but for them, by them and with them' (interview, 2007). In interview the composer stated that such a participatory initiative was vital in the promotion of community involvement, confidence and creativity and in this way she felt she went beyond just imparting skills onto the participants (interview, 2007).

Cultural Diversity

It was reported that 72% of local government arts offices in Ireland rate world music in top five most frequent genres supported (Kenny, 2009, p. 47). This finding reflects local governments' concern with reflecting and supporting the cultural diversity in a growing multi-cultural society in the country. The Cork City arts office funded an ensemble of ten resident musicians in setting up 'The Clear Sky Ensemble'. The musicians as well as reflecting a wide range of nationalities also reflect a wide variety of musical backgrounds and genres. The ensemble perform to sell out gigs not only in Cork but throughout the country. As all of the musicians live in Cork there is a feeling of ownership surrounding the group within the local community. The community too are being exposed to cross cultural music reflecting their changing musical landscape in the city. The Congolese ensemble leader, Niwel Tsumbu commented in interview that the community view him now as their 'local boy' due to his involvement in the group (interview, 2007).

The 'Festival of World Cultures' carried out through the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown office in County Dublin was set up in 2001 to reflect the changing cultural environment of the

local area. This festival runs annually and provides a broad range of concerts featuring many international artists and world musics. The success of the festival is reflected in its high profile in the media each year. While the festival enjoys elevated status amongst arts communities and within the local government itself on interview with the arts officer she felt the arts office was seen as the 'cute child' of local government business (interview, 2007). This reflects a feeling that despite gaining both national and local status through high quality arts office initiatives, arts offices still may have a long way to go into being considered a serious part of local government work.

Identity & Place

Traditional Irish music has a deep cultural and social heritage in County Clare and wide support and audiences for this genre exists within the county. This strong engagement with Traditional Irish music is capitalized on by the arts office through the employment of a part-time specialist regional arts co-ordinator for the traditional arts. This particular focus on Irish Traditional music manifests itself through the many music festivals, music series, residencies, youth projects, research and traditional DJ competitions all in the traditional music genre organised by the arts office.

County Kerry also shares a rich tradition of Irish music. Despite such strong roots however, one community in consultation with the Kerry arts office decided *not* to embark on an initiative in this musical genre. Since there was already widespread support of Irish traditional music in the local area, one particular large-scale initiative focussed on the development of youth garage bands and song-writing instead. The project involved students ranging in age from 12 to 17 years and professional musicians. These musicians facilitated song writing workshops in the local second level school and offered technical resources and mobile recording equipment to the school. These workshops culminated in a CD recording

and a performance for the larger community. Many of these bands continued to make music together long after the initiative had ceased.

These two arts offices demonstrate two differing approaches to developing and enhancing a sense of place and identity within communities. One arts office harnessed the strengths of a local area in its programming while the other identified gaps in provision and tailored its programming to those needs. As well as highlighting a diversity of ways of approaching community identity, these examples also reflect the flexibility arts offices enjoy in varying their approaches to local areas.

Challenges

Some tensions emerged during the research process and analysis. A disconnect between the dual priorities within local government arts work of serving both the public and the artist was often apparent. Conflicts often arose between what was seen as having artistic value and what was considered artistically valuable in the public domain. This will undoubtedly be a continued debate particularly within a structure that must show accountability for public spending. The arts within a local government structure while a very positive step in arts development in Ireland is not always seen as an inherent part of local government work. One arts officer commented that she felt like the 'good news department', of worth only when a local authority needed a profile boost in local media. This corresponds to what Laycock describes as the 'poor relation status' of the arts at local government level (2008, p.65).

There is no doubt that the integration of the arts within local government in Ireland over a 24 year period has had a significant impact on the growing arts landscape nationwide. A striking example of this is reflected in the broad and diverse range of music initiatives that local government arts offices engage in through such activities as festivals, residencies,

bursaries, choirs, orchestras, concerts and commissions. However, the challenges of global and national pressures, fluctuating economic conditions, competing political agendas, multiple purpose initiatives and a need to show a return for public money all have direct implications on arts and music policy and in turn on implementation at local government level. It is imperative that local governments continue to strive to marry artistic and social agendas in meaningful ways, to ensure that future decisions and directions for music and arts development are sufficiently supported by best practice. Continued research into local government music initiatives is one such means to make certain that such practice is backed up by a strong researched knowledge base.

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