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Designing policy: collaborative policy development within the context of the European Capital of Culture bid process

Stephen Kinsella; Niamh NicGhabhann; Annmarie Ryan.

How do ideas become policies? What route do they take from inception to implementation, and what criteria are used to evaluate one set of proposals from another? This paper examines the development of the Creative Work Fellowship programme in Limerick city, tracing the origins of the idea, itself a contended and negotiated object, from discussions between academics and policy-makers through to scoping, selling, and scaling the policy to its eventual users. This policy idea was designed during the Intelligence Unit (IU) commissioned by Limerick2020 as part of Limerick city's bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2020.

This bid for the designation of European Capital of Culture, which was unsuccessful in its main aim, provided an accelerated context and high profile for cultural planning and policy development. The IU took place in Limerick's city centre, as opposed to the more removed UL campus, and engaged with as many different stakeholders as possible during its five-week tenure at Ormston House (a visual art gallery) and FabLab (a university-affiliated 'maker-space').

While the bid development process, and the contribution of the IU to that process, merits scholarly investigation across a number of axes and perspectives, this paper focuses on the development of the creative work fellowship as one of the key outputs from the lab. By critically examining the interactions of those involved in the ECOC bid process, it is possible to observe and consider the place of culture within local public discourse and policy, but also to gain an understanding of emergent cultural policy making.

Through an analysis of key qualitative data gathered during the policy development process, and an analysis of the resulting policy proposal itself, this paper examines the role of an interdisciplinary IU or 'think tank' in designing policies like the CWF, and in bringing such a concept from idea formation to a policy considered for implementation. The qualitative data includes interviews, images, documents produced and excerpts from email conversations, while critical discourse analysis will also be employed in the consideration of key contextual documents and

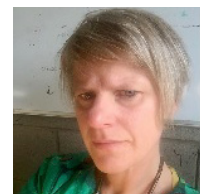
AUTHORS



Prof Stephen Kinsella
Dept. Economics
Kemmy Business School
University of Limerick



Dr Niamh NicGhabhann
Assistant Dean, Research
Faculty of Arts,
Humanities and Social
Sciences
University of Limerick



Dr Annmarie Ryan
Dept. Management &
Marketing
Kemmy Business School
University of Limerick

related policy frameworks. The findings presented in the paper include an analysis of the collaborative nature of this policy development process and the implications of this process for the future development of regional cultural policy in Ireland. The role of the ECOC bidding process is also considered as a catalyst for policy development in a regional context.

Throughout this article, the position of the creative work fellowship is explored as an object that emerged by being sufficiently flexible to adapt to the varying concerns of those inputting to the policy during the IU (academics, students, artists, local business development representatives, Limerick2020 team etc.), coming from a range of disciplines (performing arts, visual arts, business, economics, architecture, public policy etc.), as well as concerns of others represented in the lab itself (i.e. politicians, European capital of culture adjudicating panel etc.), and yet remained “robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites”

Art work happens in many different ways, and careers in art making follow many different paths. The Creative Work Fellowship is a structure that supports the development of sustainable creative careers in Ireland. Responding to the absence of a system that invests in emerging artists and art-making practices, the Fellowship invests in the future of creative work in Ireland. The Creative Work Fellowship is designed to create space for artists to develop their own work, and to recognize that this often happens in an unpaid capacity. In order to develop the creative and cultural industries in Ireland, and to create space for artists to develop their own reflective and creative practices, this Fellowship reframes the current model of support in a way that respects this work as an integral part of Irish life, economy and society, and which supports creative work in a meaningful way.

Conclusion

While this process is certainly far from ideal in terms of the careful management and building of policy, it is responsive both to multiple stakeholders, and to the practical exigencies of cultural policy making in the contemporary Irish context. In an atmosphere of fiscal austerity, the ECOC bid provides a welcome space for policy development and shared discussion - in its absence, it is unlikely that cultural planning would be given such a central place within the broader regional development planning sphere. The development and publication of the first cultural strategy for the city and region is evidence of the increased priority given to cultural policy and planning as a direct result of the bid. The IU also took place within the context of the first Irish national cultural policy development process. This process involved consultation with multiple groups, and a wide-ranging submissions process. As a national policy, this is obviously a more complex project with a more capacious remit. However, the ‘lean’ policy development process explored by the IU, involving multiple iterations, crits, and the creation of flexible and durable ideas, could be used as a potential model for policy building.

Rather than attempting to mollify or side line dissenting views in order to form consensus as quickly as possible, the IU process provides a space for multiple, and often competing and clashing, priorities and perspectives. The space and format of the IU provides a place for these valuable clashing views to be heard, but attempts to create a frame, informed by interdisciplinary perspectives, robust models of working, a wide-ranging overview of national and international trajectories and policy frames, as well as a wide range of data sets, through which new, stakeholder-led policy ideas can begin to be forged.

The underlying study was published in the *Journal of Cultural Trends* 26(3), 233–248
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Authors:

Kinsella, Stephen, NicGabhann, Niamh, Ryan, Annmarie

For further information and comments, please contact:

Prof Sheila Killian

Assistant Dean, Research

Kemmy Business School

University of Limerick, Ireland

T: +353 61 202237

E: sheila.killian@ul.ie

Forthcoming Research Bulletin

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