INSTRUMENTAL CULTURAL POLICIES: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND MUSEUMS

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Introduction

While the concerns of the current AHRC research programme relate to instrumentality in the museums and galleries sector it is the case that this policy form has a much wider spread than simply this sector. Indeed, the development of instrumentalism has had a clear impact across the entire cultural policy sector (Gray, 2007), and can also be found in other sectors altogether. Instrumental policy has taken multiple forms across a wide range of policy sectors and is far more fragmented in terms of organisation, intention and location than the general term may imply. There have been multiple factors behind the spread of instrumental policies and, similarly, there have been multiple outcomes in the form of differing policies, with differing emphases and differing outcomes in their creation, implementation and consequences of, and for, this instrumentalisation process. The intention of this paper is to locate instrumentalisation within the context of changes in the structures and processes that are utilised for the public management of goods and services, and to identify the potential and actual results of an instrumentalisation of public policies within the cultural sector.

Instrumentality and Museums and Galleries

There are a range of indicators, both explicit and implicit, that can be used to demonstrate the significance of instrumental policy forms for the museums and galleries sector in Britain. The increasing expectations for clear statements of performance assessment, justifications for public funding, and evidence of policy effectiveness across the public sector (these will be discussed further at a later stage)

have generated an emphasis on formal statements of organisational intent. In this respect the cultural sector is no different to the rest of the public sector, and a range of expectations for the contribution of these services to a range of policy objectives can be identified.

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), for example, has identified a range of arenas that museums are meant to contribute to, only a minority of which are directly concerned with the central elements of museum practice. *Renaissance in the Regions* (Re:source, 2001, pp. 36-9) identifies these areas as being a contribution to 'collections for inspiration and creativity'; 'excellence and high quality in delivering core services'; education and learning; access and inclusion; economic regeneration; and modernisation and rationalisation. More recently the 'strategic priorities' of the MLA have been identified as being concerned with children and young people, communities, economy and delivery (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2006a). In each case the museums sector, in particular, is effectively being used as a tool for the attainment of the policy objectives of actors and concerns that have traditionally been seen to lie outside of the museums sector itself.

At a different geographical level – that of local government - a similar picture can be seen. The Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry for assessing the performance of local authorities in delivering goods and services has, in the case of cultural services, a clear statement of the need for these services to demonstrate their success in 'meeting local, regional and national objectives' in terms of 'healthier communities', 'safer and stronger communities', 'economic vitality', 'learning', and 'quality of life for local people' (Audit Commission, 2005, pp. 8-12). At the very least this indicates

that cultural services are seen as having an impact across more than their own sectoral concerns. At the worst it could mean that these exogenous effects are the only ones that are seen as being of importance in assessing organisational effectiveness in the museums and galleries sector.

Whilst the identification of which of these positions has been adopted in practice is a matter for empirical investigation, it is clearly the case that the connection of museums to questions of wider public policy opens the possibility for an instrumentalisation of the museums (and, by implication, galleries) sector. In this respect Vestheim (1994, p. 65) has defined instrumental policy in the context of cultural policy as being 'to use cultural ventures and cultural investments as a means or instrument to attain goals in other than cultural areas'. Given that all public policy is instrumental in the sense that it is intended to achieve *something* what requires examination is the specific nature of the instrumentality that is concerned in any given case (Gray, 2007, p. 205). Vestheim's vision is one where there is a diversion of primary intention away from the core specifics of a policy sector towards the interests and concerns of other policy sectors altogether.

In the case of the museum and galleries sector, if the core is seen to exist in the areas of curatorship, education, entertainment and infra-structural management of resources (such as buildings, staff, marketing, income generation) then instrumentality would mean a shift away from these, either completely or in large measure, towards other policy intentions altogether. This would mean that internal matters of policy emphasis concerned with the sector's core (a greater stress on entertainment at the expense of education, for example) would become replaced by a concern for social inclusion

(Newman and McLean, 1998; 2006) or community regeneration (IDeA, 2004), or any of a number of other governmental objectives. Whilst it is clear that there has been a much greater emphasis upon these exogenous policy concerns than was the case 30 or 40 years ago the extent to which an instrumentalisation of the museums and galleries sector has taken place remains to be seen. Examining the processes by which a shift in emphasis towards a greater instrumentalisation (at the very least) of the museums and galleries sector has taken place will allow the identification of underlying factors which have affected this process and the potential consequences of it for the sector in the future.

State Change and Public Policy

The development of instrumental policies in the cultural sector would appear, in the first instance, to be a consequential effect of broader changes that have been taking place within the machinery of the state since the mid-1970s (Vestheim, 1994; Gray, 2007).These changes have had an effect upon what the state does, how it does it, and the justifications and reasons that have been put forward to explain them. While it may be tempting to view these changes as a marking a form of political-administrative 'year zero' with sweeping reforms affecting all parts of the machinery of state in like fashion, they are quite clearly part of a continuous process of state re-structuring that has been an ever-present part of all systems of public administration. Equally as clearly, the re-organisations and re-structurings of state organisations since the 1970s have yet to reach a state of completion – similar processes of state change are continuing to take place today. Regardless of this, an examination of these changes is required to understand how an instrumentalisation of public policies could be seen to be a development from them.

In terms of British cultural policy the reforms of state structures and administration have been summed up as representing either a form of privatisation (Wu, 2002; Alexander and Rueschemeyer, 2005, pp. 71-4), or of commodification (Gray, 2000). While the former deals with either the disposal of state assets to private actors or the increasing intervention of private actors in the management and administration of public assets (Young, 1986, pp. 238-44), the latter refers to broader political changes involving a shift from use-value to exchange-value as a consequence of ideological changes within the state. In both cases, however, there is a recognition that these forms of change require a shift in how organisations will work in the process of delivering goods and services before they can become effective.

At a general level the changes that have taken place to the machinery of state began as part of the reforms that took place under the label 'the New Public Management' (NPM), before changing tack into a somewhat different ('modernising') model of public management in recent years. The core ideas underlying NPM were:

- Decentralisation of managerial control

- Managerial empowerment: 'letting managers manage'

- Concentration on results (outputs and outcomes) rather than inputs and processes

- The promotion of competition in the provision of public services

- The promotion of performance measurement

- Management through contract rather than hierarchy (Osborne and McLaughlin, 2002, p. 9; Pollitt, 2003a, pp. 27-8).

The process of introducing these into the public sector led to the introduction of a host of new organisational forms and administrative and managerial techniques, ranging from the development of new general governance arrangements (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Wilson, 2005) to the introduction of specific practices and managerial forms such as Public Service and Local Area Agreements. The extent to which these changes have actually led to equally as wide-ranging changes in formal and informal working practices is, however, another matter. While the *potential* for there to be significant effects on these in public sector organisations is evident (in the case of cultural organisations, for example, see the arguments in Belfiore, 2004; Protherough and Pick, 2002), the reality is somewhat less clear-cut. While the NPM was introduced to have significant effects upon how the public sector was organised and functioned - and there is evidence that there have been some anticipated improvements in public sector operations and service delivery - many of the hoped-for improvements have either not been delivered at all or have only ambiguously succeeded (Pollitt, 2002; Ovretveit, 2005; Joyce, 2007).

If at the level of general results the NPM reform programme has had some intended effects – even if not as many as its' proponents may have wished to see – there have also been many *unintended* consequences (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003, especially ch. 7). These have, at the very least, diluted the intentions of NPM and, in some cases, have led to a retreat from the underlying principles of NPM and the development of new organisational forms and practices to ameliorate some of the problems that reform has bought in its' wake. In the British case, for example, the organisational fragmentation of central government that was created by the establishment of Executive Agencies (or, more formally, Non-Departmental Public Bodies) following the publication of the

Ibbs Report (1988) led to problems of accountability, managerial responsibility and the relationship of elected politicians and appointed managers – with the prime example being that of the clash between the then Home Secretary Michael Howard and the then head of the Prison Service, Derek Lewis. One of the results of this was the introduction of new mechanisms to 'join-up' public policy and develop effective co-ordination between fragmented organisations. This, in turn, has had some, but limited, success in achieving the intention of the process but has also generated many more unintended consequences (Ling, 2002; Pollitt, 2003b; for joining-up in the cultural sector see Gray, 2004).

The lack of effective organisational co-ordination in the pursuit of central governmental policy objectives as a result of these changes has also seen the generation of a variety of new tools to allow the centre to introduce or impose overall policy cohesion. Central government has always made use of a wide range of tools to manage the policy process – particularly with regard to non-central government institutions (such as local authorities, Executive Agencies and the National Health Service, let alone the plethora of new governance arrangements that are in place). A combination of circulars, confirmatory and appellate powers, adjudication, inspection, default powers and audit, the control of local officers, local bills, grants and borrowing, and the use of policy planning systems, alongside general legislative and financial controls have been frequently used in the past in attempts to ensure that central wishes are abided by (Gray, 1994, pp. 80-90). More recently these have been joined by the use of NPM-inspired performance measurement tools such as Comprehensive Performance Assessments (themselves to be replaced by Comprehensive Area Assessments in 2009), Best Value Indicators, Key Lines of

Enquiry for Service Inspection, Local Area, Funding and Public Service Agreements, all of which provide explicit criteria against which service provision can be assessed. New organisational forms, such as Local Strategic Partnerships and Regional Development Agencies, and other forms of partnership, network and contract arrangements have also been introduced for managing the delivery of public services.

The precise manner in which this wide range of devices are actually employed by governmental actors - at all levels - will be affected by the goals that different actors have, their access to control of these mechanisms and organisational forms, and the uses to which they wish to put them. The underlying intention is that forms of management, control and assessment will allow for an effective (and potentially efficient) exercise of authority over organisations, individuals and actions. As much of this exercise of power and authority is concerned with ensuring that the top-down intentions of central political actors are lived up to, the relationship between these central actors and those beyond the remit of central government becomes important for understanding precisely how these devices have an effect on the choices and activities of policy actors, and on how far central actors are actually able to exercise effective control over policy sectors.

This becomes particularly important in the context of the new raft of performance measurement techniques that have been introduced into the political system. Whilst these derive initially from the introduction of ideas from the NPM they have been given support by both the attempt to move towards 'evidence-based' policy (Parsons, 2000; Sanderson, 2002), and through the development of organisational mechanisms that are designed to ensure a coherency in the pursuit of public policy objectives in the

context of increasingly complex patterns of inter-organisational governance (Kjaer, 2004, ch. 2; Bache and Flinders, 2004). The former of these, based on a particularly positivist methodology, depends upon there being appropriate measures in place to capture the complexities of both the causes and consequences of public policy. The latter requires a transferable set of assessment techniques across a range of dissimilar (if not directly contradictory) organisations and organisational objectives.

As with NPM in general performance measurement has produced a range of intended and unintended consequences (Bache, 2003). In the context of cultural policy, however, the validity of the entire process of performance measurement is open to question given the problems that the sector has with questions of definition, causality, measurement, attribution and the structure of the sector itself (Gray, forthcoming). Equally, the new organisational forms that have been created for managing cultural policy have either been largely ineffective (as in the case of attempting to 'join-up' cultural policy (Gray, 2004)), or have tended to place the cultural sector as a peripheral component to the 'real' core of policy activity which is to be found in the pursuit of other policy objectives altogether – such as economic regeneration, life-long learning or social inclusion.

Sector Specificity

There are clear consequences that arise from the attempt to impose a top-down model of public policy management for the cultural sector. These arise as a result of the particularly specific nature of the sector itself and have a direct impact upon the development of instrumental policy forms within the sector. The cultural policy sector

is associated with certain structural and behavioural characteristics that serve to place it in a politically weak position when compared with other policy sectors.

Firstly there is the issue of how governments deal with matters of cultural policy. The range of approaches that states can adopt to matters of cultural policy can be placed on a continuum from direct responsibility and control of cultural affairs, usually in either an 'engineer' (as in China) or 'architect' (as in France) fashion, to working through arm's-length quangos or other intermediate institutions (such as the MLA or Arts Council England, or the Australia Council for the Arts (Craik, 2007), or through even more remote mechanisms such as tax incentive schemes (as in the United States) (see Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey, 1989; Craik, 2007, Appendix C). While most governments are prepared to take some sort of responsibility for cultural policy the tendency is for them to adopt relatively indirect forms of involvement. The advantages for governments in taking this role are that they can have some effect on the sector by producing general policies but, at the same time, they can avoid being held directly responsible or accountable for the specific policy choices that are then made on their behalf.

In the case of the museums and galleries part of the cultural policy sector, for example, while central government has provided a general legislative framework dating back to the British Museum Act of 1753, the Museums Act of 1845 and the Public Library and Museums Act of 1892 there is little in the way of direct, hands-on control by central government of the detailed day-to-day functioning of these institutions. Indeed, as with much of the cultural sector, the provision of a large number of museums and galleries in Britain (40% of all registered museums) is

through discretionary, rather than statutory, powers (Lawley, 2003, pp. 75-6), leaving choice in the hands of local, not national, actors. Even with the 'national' museums the role of the centre appears to consist of establishing the direction of general policy (through the use of mechanisms such as funding agreements), rather than with a direct concern with how the targets that are established for these museums are to be met. The consequences of this lack of ability to directly control the day-to-day managerial detail of service delivery are that it is likely that there will be a diversity in approach adopted within the museums and galleries sector and a lack of policy co-ordination across differing geographical levels. The result of this is not only that there will be the creation of un-co-ordinated policies between organisations but also the possibility, if not probability, that contradictory policies may be created where the interests, expectations and intentions of policy actors at different levels and in different organisations not only fail to meet but actively oppose each other (Kiwan, 2007).

A secondary consequence of this is that attempts to create a more co-ordinated approach to sectoral policies (through 'joining-up' policies for example) are problematic - to say the least - as a consequence of the existence of multiple organisations, plans, types of policy and foci of policy in this field (Gray, 2004). This multiplicity of policy action can lead to a position where governments are reduced to making major policy demands that are operationally vacuous or simply impossible to control and manage effectively (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004, pp. 152-4; Gray, 2006). This can, perhaps, be most clearly seen in the priorities that the DCMS has established for the museums sector where the word 'will' becomes a mantra rather than a clear set of organisationally-achievable objectives, and seem to rely on exhortation to a group of

independent organisations rather than direct, hands-on, top-down managerial control (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2006b, pp.27-8).

In part this difficulty can be related to a secondary structural feature of the cultural policy sector, that of the lack of political support, not only at the national level but also at the local level (Gray, 2002), that it has, particularly in comparison with many other policy sectors. Whilst governmental rhetoric from Ministers within the DCMS stresses the importance of cultural policy in its' own right rather than simply as an instrumental mechanism (see Smith, 1998; Jowell, 2004) it is commonly the case that further levels of political support are relatively limited. This political weakness of the cultural sector is not restricted to Britain and has the clear effect of limiting the extent to which culture can garner the administrative and political support that it needs to make an impact in terms of more politically 'relevant' policy sectors (Gray, forthcoming). (Whether the current Cultural Pathfinders project (Local Government Association/Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2005) will start to reverse this position remains to be seen). The result of this is that the cultural sector as a whole, and parts of the sector individually, are vulnerable to pressure from other policy sectors that have a perceived greater political importance or credibility. This differentiation between sectors of 'high' and 'low' politics (Bulpitt, 1983) has real consequences for the cultural sector – not least of which has been the recent drift towards an instrumentalisation of policy within it, where areas of 'high' political significance (such as education or community cohesion) become the focus towards which cultural policy is often turned.

Other sectorally-specific features of the cultural policy arena can be identified as being organisational fragmentation; variation in the geographical scale that it operates within; a tendency towards reactive, rather than proactive, policy activity within the sector; and the absence of a clearly-defined area of action (Gray, 2006). Each of these can contribute, in specific cases, towards policy instrumentalisation as well but could be regarded as being of less importance in this respect than the low priority that governments tend to give to issues of cultural policy and the low political significance that the sector as a whole has.

Explaining Instrumentalisation

The endogenous features that are specific to the cultural sector and the exogenous features derived from state and managerial changes, have combined to create a position where the pressures towards an instrumentalisation of cultural policies have become stronger than in the past. While there has always been an element of multi-functionalism within cultural policies – having multiple effects across a number of areas – the current developments in Britain have made the nature of the linkages between different policy sectors more explicit and apparent than they were 30 years ago.

The commodification of public policies since the mid-1970s has had a number of consequences: a change in focus in terms of who would be identified as the beneficiaries of public policies (from the social collectivity to the individual consumer); a greater selectiveness in terms of the intended audiences or recipients of policies; a greater direction in terms of the intended impact of policies; and a greater level of information about the costs and methods of financing policies being made

available. The policy process has become more fragmented and economically (rather than politically) rational, and a more limited set of criteria for assessing policy choices are, arguably, being used (Gray, 2000, pp. 25-9). When allied with the focus within NPM on performance measurement it is to be expected that there would be a greater attention paid to the precise mechanics of creating and implementing policies across sectors. The identification of clearly stated policy objectives by governments allows for a more precise set of tools to manage the attainment of these objectives to be developed – at least at a general, systemic, level.

For cultural policy the inherent political weaknesses of the sector make it particularly vulnerable to exogenous political pressures. A result of this could that if these pressures become great enough there may be 'a massive intervention by previously uninvolved political actors and governmental institutions … as the issue is redefined, or as new dimensions of the debate become more salient, new actors feel qualified to exert their authority' (True *et al*, 2007, p. 159). The implication being that a re-direction of the policy sector as a whole, or individual components within it, could be expected if external political forces become strong enough to choose to intervene. In this respect an explanation of some of the pressures towards and instrumentalisation of cultural (and museums and galleries) policy can therefore be found in the increasing attempt to make use of cultural resources for wider policy aims than those to be found within the sector itself. Indeed, these pressures may be even greater if the external policy intentions already overlap with elements inside the cultural sector. Thus the use of Generic Learning Outcomes to assess the impact of museums and galleries on education and learning ties together not only museums and galleries with central government's life-long learning initiatives, but also emphasises this element of

the work of museums and galleries over others, as well as providing a means by which performance measures can be utilised to assess the success of museums and galleries in fulfilling central governmental policy objectives. In this respect it is an empirical question as to whether what is taking place is a full-blown instrumentalisation of museum and galleries policy or whether it is a re-direction of policy within the sector towards one component part of the overall work of the sector.

In other areas, such as the use of museums and galleries as tools for social inclusion or economic regeneration a clearer image of instrumentalisation is evident. As these have not been traditionally seen as being core components of the work of the cultural sector (Bennett, 1995, pp. 205-7 sees the economic importance of the cultural sector as being an underlying theme providing support for state interventions into the cultural sector in Britain, but this is not the same as seeing culture as a mechanism for economic regeneration) a move towards treating them as if they were fits in with Vestheim's view of what an instrumental cultural policy looks like. This movement towards extra-sectoral policy concerns places cultural policy in a precarious position, particularly if the anticipated benefits from using culture in such ways can only be demonstrated in a weak fashion (Gray, forthcoming).

Such exogenous pressures on the cultural sector are not, however, the only ones that exist: endogenous ones can also serve apparently instrumentalising purposes. The process by which this can take place is through policy 'attachment' where actors within the cultural sector associate their activities with those that are found in other policy sectors altogether (Gray, 2002). The reasons for pursuing this strategy are normally where these other sectors have more resources (particularly financial ones)

available to them than are to be found in the cultural sector (as with social inclusion or urban regeneration), or where the other sectors have greater political significance attached to them (as, for example, with education or health). In either case the process of attachment allows the cultural sector to gain access to either scarce resources or political significance that would otherwise be unavailable to it. The consequence of pursuing such a strategy is that the cultural sector has to demonstrate that it is capable of delivering policy benefits for the sector that it has attached itself to, and not necessarily to the benefit of its' own core activities.

Other internal factors that can affect this process include internal re-configurations of policy sectors or components such that new room for manoeuvre can be generated for policy actors. Such activity has been identified as taking place within the museums sector as a whole (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Harrison, 2005) with a subsequent reappraisal of what museums and galleries exist for and how they may be made to operate in these new conditions. This would indicate that there is a process of internal choice taking place within the museums and galleries sector that alters the balance between differing functional activities (particularly between education, entertainment and curatorship). This process of choice can serve to make the sector more, or less, open to instrumentalising tendencies, depending upon how the new balance is managed and what ends or objectives it is directed to.

The development of instrumental tendencies within the museums and galleries sector (as with cultural policy in general) is not simply a matter of deliberate, top-down, central government action. The role of endogenous factors, including internal sectoral changes, working from the bottom up, is of some significance in explaining this

phenomenon – particularly as central government does not have the power to directly control, in a managerial sense, what takes within the sector. The use of a large number of distinct governmental tools can push actors within policy sectors towards certain activities but it does not mean that these will necessarily produce the results that the centre either intended or desired (see, for example, Sullivan *et al*, 2004 on the case of public participation initiatives). The importance of unintended consequences in these processes of organisational and policy change indicates that a simple mechanistic explanation of instrumentalisation that is dependent upon an all-powerful central government is unlikely to hold true for all examples of such changes. While the centre can manipulate much of the context within which policy-making takes place the specific detail of what will happen, and the choices that will be made, also need to be taken into account.

The results of an instrumentalisation of policy are, likewise, dependent upon how the implementation stage is managed within the organisations that are concerned. If instrumentalisation has been consciously adopted through attachment strategies then there is a possibility that the entire focus of the policy sector can become skewed away from the core concerns of the sector itself. In such a case the necessity to meet the instrumental aims of policy becomes even greater than would be the case if these core concerns were still in place. A failure to meet these aims may lead to an even greater loss of political support – and funding, and this may then reinforce sectoral weaknesses and make it even harder to generate support in the future. The motivations and intentions of those using such attachment strategies, and the context within which it occurs, would need to be examined to understand the potential for this to occur.

However, whether instrumentalisation arises from exogenous sources, such as sponsoring or funding bodies, or from endogenous sources, such as policy attachment or internal change, the opportunities to manage the evaluation process of performance management are important. The sorts of measures that are adopted, how they are then measured, and how they are employed by both data gatherers and external bodies have important implications both for the assessment of policy success or failure and for the inter-organisational relationships that tie the system together (Selwood, 2002). The management of this process of evaluation therefore provides opportunities for the management of the instrumentalisation process itself. Indeed it may even serve as a form of organisational displacement activity where attention to the process of evaluation and performance measurement replaces that on the actual provision of goods and services to the public, with the consequent creation of the modern-day equivalent of Merton's (1940) bureaucratic dysfunctionalism. Whether this occurs or not, involvement in this stage of the policy process has become increasingly important in recent years and needs to be investigated further.

Conclusions

Whilst an instrumentalisation of cultural policies in general, and museums and galleries policies in particular, can be traced back to changes in governmental ideology and the subsequent reforms of public management that arose from this, it should also be stressed that political actors within these policy spheres have also had an effect upon the process in turn. Instrumentalisation is unlikely to be a conscious governmental strategy, appearing, instead, to be either an unintended consequential effect of other reforms, or a co-incidence of endogenous and exogenous changes that make it appear to be a viable policy response for policy actors in conditions of

uncertainty. In either case the process of instrumentalising public policies gives rise to a need to manage what is taking place - and how it is to be evaluated – and is subject to conflict between actors within differing organisations (Gray, 2000). Developing appropriate mechanisms for managing both the process, and the assessment of, the new tendencies in cultural policies is a continuous activity for participants in the field and is unlikely to be unambiguously resolved in the short-term in a fashion that will prove satisfactory for all of the participants who are involved in the process.

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