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Book Review: Cities, Cultural Policy and Governance

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Cities, Cultural Policy and Governance. 2012.
Edited by Helmut Anheier and Yudhishtihir Raj Isar. London: Sage Publications 448
pages. Soft cover (\$52.99) ISBN: 978-1-4462-0122-0

Reviewed by Gina Weir-Smith¹

Cities, cultural policy and governance discusses cities and issues of governance related to cultural policies in cities. The book is edited by Anheier and Isar and consists of 33 chapters in the first part and nine in the second part. Chapters are written by authors from different parts of the world. The first part of the book deals with metropolitan cultural politics, policies and governance and focuses on overarching issues as well as city experiences. It engages culture in a generic form and considers it in governance frameworks, in the building of city environments and financial markets. It brings out culture as a cutting edge phenomenon since cities are considered as policy actors. Part two deals with indicator suites and focuses on a number of indicators and values of these indicators in selected cities globally. It provides indicators on urbanization and which highlight the globalization processes. Since city life is shaping the experience of the majority of the world's population, these indicators provide an important overview and provide references for the reader who wants to enquire further.

The book examines the interaction between globalization on one hand and culture on the other hand. Governance refers to a multi-level phenomenon which includes transnational actors and governance bodies, business and civil societies. These actors (culture, policy and governance) operate in changing spaces or influence. The book shows that policy-making related to culture now mobilizes a broader part of society and also includes the marketplace. The urban space is ever changing in terms of political, socio-economic and urban development issues.

“Cities have emerged as the main command centres of the world” (Sarikakis) and since they have become decision-making hubs it is important to study and manage their cultural fabric. The intersection between the global city and cultural policy takes place on three levels: 1) culture becomes a significant element in the consumption and leisure practices of highly skilled workers in global cities, 2) the structural configuration of culture stretches across the axes of production and consumption and 3) the consequences of the privatisation and “technologisation” of culture making (Sarikakis). Consumption practices of skilled city workers determine the ‘offer’ of culture - for example the concentration of international workers in Brussels gives rise to a specific type of cultural offer. The second level of interaction is found in a digital format where people can access for example interactive museum installations or digital archives. Thirdly, the privatisation of culture, especially in cities with a large component of international workers, makes it difficult for local governments to manage such culture.

Three global shapers are mentioned: information technology, transnational and trans-local dynamics and socio-cultural diversity. The book aims to provide situations and conditions that capture key aspects of these three global shapers. A global shaper that is not mentioned in this publication is the current global economic situation where national governments have

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contracted their public spending and where culture (in the narrow sense of the word) is not regarded as an essential expenditure. This will have an impact on the way cultural policies in cities are developed and implemented.

It would seem that the definition of a city used in this text, that of the large metropolitan areas, and the criterion for the selection of cities presented in the book are not clear. This lack of definition could be ascribed to the fact that internationally there is no agreement on what a city is. Cities from both the global North and South are discussed in chapters 10 to 31. Cities from the global South are represented by essays on Mumbai, Brazzaville, Johannesburg and São Paulo to mention a few. Although cities from the Global North and South are not directly compared, it is interesting to note the increase in megacities in the Global South. A number of these, e.g. Cairo, Lagos, Mexico City and Mumbai, have “gained influence and stature” in terms of culture. They have seized opportunities of globalisation and often function better than the countries in which they are situated (Isar, Hoelscher and Anheier).

Cultural policies can either economically benefit or harm a global city. In the case of Johannesburg the urban regeneration program resulted in maintaining the socio-economic lines of exclusion (Pieterse and Guernsey) while cultural policy in Medellín resulted in economic growth for a large part of the population, improved education and better access (Tobón). In the case of Johannesburg, the potential of urban culture as part of a development strategy was not completely successful, since it exacerbated the social and class exclusions of the past. The design of the so-called ‘cultural arc’ did not consider who was living in the inner city and how their cultural needs and aspirations could be accommodated in the renewal strategy.

On the other hand in Medellín, policies of social and education investment, dramatically reduced violence in the city centre. Free programmes in business training, computer labs and art galleries increased peoples’ access to education opportunities. In 2010, the ‘Library Parks’ were utilised by 70% of the city’s residents and city tax collection increased by 20% (Collier). Quality of life was improved not only in the city centre, but throughout the city.

According to Vasconcelos-Oliveira three important questions need to be answered to ensure policies address both cultural wealth and socio-economic inequality, namely: Which culture? Culture for whom? Culture for what? In terms of the first question several types of culture need to be part of policy scoping. To answer the question about “culture for whom” policy makers need to obtain full knowledge of the potential beneficiaries of their policies. The third question needs to ascertain what the functions of the specific culture would be and also its sociological dimension. The three questions posed by Vasconcelos-Oliveira can be used as a planning tool to evaluate and elaborate cultural policies and initiatives and are bound to yield sound guidelines for policy-making and might be useful to overcome inequalities of access.

The cultural economy of some cities is portrayed not being in a healthy state and jobs in the creative industry take a long time to recover after economic downturns. For example, when the real motor of London’s economy collapsed in 2008, public funding to the creative economy collapsed (Oakley). After the initial collapse it took six years for the cultural industry to regain its position in terms of employment and output. The closing arguments of this chapter indicate that the greatest impact on the creative and cultural industries (and therefore London’s role as a significant global player) will be the changes to higher education, where lack of funding is leading to the “wholesale dismantling of the creative economy”. Together with the collapse in the creative industry, this has resulted in London’s politics and cultural policies being more fragmented and it is suggested that it may remain like that. Furthermore, the continued negative

economic impact which has plagued Britain and the European Union since the recession of 2008 will probably uphold this status.

Three governance-related issues are explored in the case of São Paulo, namely targets, coordination and the scope of cultural initiatives. In terms of targets, policy-makers should support the production of cultural goods and services and at the same time provide consumption opportunities for citizens. The coordination of cultural affairs is often in the hands of Brazilian municipalities, but more than 60% of these municipalities are unable to achieve funding of 1% for culture (Isar). The author therefore argues that local governments should rather be providing strategies to link funding from different sources. The issue of scope is emphasized by indicating the importance of autonomy at the lowest governance level, e.g. a district level. Such empowerment is important to ensure a bottom-up approach in cultural planning is followed. Isar emphasizes this by advocating for cultural democracy instead of cultural democratization. Cultural democracy provides tools of agency, voice and representation in terms of cultural expression while cultural democratization provides access to a pre-determined set of cultural goods and services (Isar).

On a strategic level, readers of this volume are reminded that cultural policy is central to urban policy and that the first priority of cultural policy should be to increase the resources allocated to culture and to deploy these more effectively. Isar expresses support for the idea that cultural policies should be forward looking and be able to anticipate changes in urban demography and patterns of cultural production and consumption.

Enabling legal and administrative frameworks are essential to ensure the successful public management of culture (Isar). Some cities have not been empowered by their nations to implement cultural policies and therefore such cities are not in touch with the new metropolitan age. Elsheshtawy argues that physical infrastructure (gentrification) in and of itself may be seen as a perverse outcome if it only masks unpleasant socio-political realities.

The second part of the book deals with indicators on city networks and rankings indicate inter-linkages between cities and establishing hierarchies and spaces of flows between them (Castells). Different indicators include connectedness of cities over time, city twinning, Cities of Opportunity and Intercultural City Index. City networking is measured by the PriceWaterhouseCooper's "Cities of Opportunity" which includes for example intellectual capital, innovation, demographics and lifestyle assets. Rankings for governance processes from the Intercultural City Index indicate room for improvement in most cities.

Based on the indicators, the majority of city dwellers in Luxemburg, Stockholm, Paris and Amsterdam perceived the presence of foreigners as good for their cities. Indicators on cities' heterogeneity were compared for a number of cities and the premise of these dimensions are that the more heterogeneous a city is, the greater its capacity for positive creative developments. One of the dimensions of measurement is the employment rate because high levels of unemployment indicate underlying social and economic problems. The share of employees in the service industry is used as a proxy for employees in the cultural or creative economy. Although this is useful as a starting point of analysis, it could be misleading since some countries include employees from government and research sectors and this could bias the interpretation of statistics.

Heelscher warns that care should be taken in interpreting the dimensions of a city's heterogeneity since the data were not collected at the same time or same geographic level. Furthermore, recent developments in the world history like 9/11/2001 in New York and bomb scares in London's underground has resulted in an increase in xenophobia and fundamentalism.

This phenomenon is not addressed in this book and needs to be considered in a multi-cultural global city. The indicator part of the book is useful to confirm some trends and characteristics referred to in part one. It adds more substance to the publication and a handle on common aspects related to global cities. This part of the book provides references for further analytical inquiries.

The concept of culture is loosely defined and each author focuses on different aspects, e.g. some consider only creative arts while others include public parks and libraries in their analysis. It is therefore for the reader to interpret and distil what is useful in their context. Urbanization and globalisation and cities are explored from the angle of the political power that makes them central in the governance of culture internationally. The book furthermore shows that there is not a single cultural solution to fit the diversity of cities.

Economic infrastructure should be seen as secondary to ecological and social-cultural infrastructures (Isar) – in Medellín systematic investment in education, leisure, social, public and low-key economic infrastructures in poor neighbourhoods dramatically improved the quality of life for large numbers of people. In the same breath, sustainability is an important factor to consider. Isar mentions the example of organising urban functions in such a way that it reduces their carbon footprint. The operation of plants should be changed so that they contribute as little as possible to environmental pollution or minimize their use of non-renewable energy. Considering the cyclical nature of the economy and the current global financial crises, the number of people employed in the cultural sector is expected to have dropped. Building on the premise of the London's experience statistics should take a while to recover and therefore there would be a vacuum in this field until such recovery.

A number of chapters in the book indicate the great challenge of growing the cultural industry (e.g. in London). In the bigger picture of the technological age, e-communities like "Second Life" and "Facebook" are continually growing. Facebook has 1 billion subscribers (or a seventh of the world's population) it is an extremely large community with its own culture, policies and governance frameworks in place; it is not homogenous and spans most continents of the world. Even though this aspect of the global city was mentioned as underpinning this volume, it could have been explored more to advantage planning for the future city. The authors coin the phrase "glocalisation" which neatly combine global and local aspects of city life and can be used in future research to explore the dichotomy between a global city with a local footprint. Understandably this is a difficult culture to pin down, but it will have an impact on future city infrastructure networks and since clear sub-groups exist within e-communities city planners should be able to effectively provide for their needs.

Few chapters in the book focus on practical or scientific ways to address the challenges related to cultural policy and therefore the book largely remains a collection of essays which highlights important issues, but does not offer a deeper investigation. Since the aim of the book is indicated as being a reference tool for students of contemporary culture it therefore achieves this purpose. The book is aimed at students and readers of contemporary culture, city planning and urban policy. Since it does not suggest ways to scientifically solve cultural issues, the book is not aimed at practitioners.

Despite chapters focussing on different cities and issues, there is general agreement that culture should be part of a city's development policy. This inclusion plays out in different ways because cities have different characteristics. E.g. the developmental needs of downtown Medellín is different to that of downtown London. Each chapter focuses on different cultural issues, because of the loose definition of culture.

Finally, the economy (global and local) plays an important role in the sphere of metropolitan culture and governance and this is reflected in a number of statements throughout the book, e.g. “It’s the economy, stupid! That is why Venice (*the global world*) is what it is...” and “Creative strategies should seek to nurture enabling environments for all spheres of local governance” and “Detroit now represents a history of urban disinvestment and abandonment”. These examples contribute to the diversity of economic perspectives required in city development policies. Some cities require economic rethinking, e.g. Venice, while others require revamping of infrastructure, e.g. Medellín.

In conclusion, although several authors argue that cultural policy should be part of a city’s development to ensure that such policies are encompassing and beneficial to all its inhabitants, it seems that in most cities presented here the beneficiaries of these policies are the wealthy. Most essays refer to policies that affect people that can be classified as Lifestyle Segmentation Measure (LSM) groups 6 to 10 (these represent the higher income groups in society with 10 being the highest). The characteristics of cities in Asia, Africa and South America are very different due to large proportions of the population being in lower LSM groups and these groups are not covered by solutions or suggested policies in *Cities, cultural policy and governance*. Issues of governance are not clearly addressed in this publication and a stronger focus would have shed more light on a very topical issue in our ever-changing world. Further research on cities which have successfully used cultural policy to improve their living environment would have been valuable. Such research would provide supplementary information on the current edition on how to overcome the challenges related to cultural policy.