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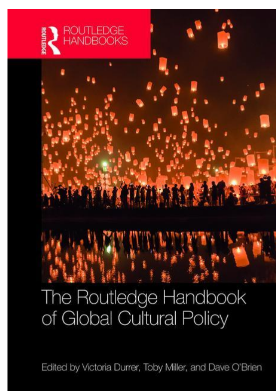

The Routledge Handbook of Global Cultural Policy

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Publication details
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315718408.ch13
Phil Ramsey, Bethany Waterhouse-Bradley
Published online on: 26 Sep 2017

How to cite :- Phil Ramsey, Bethany Waterhouse-Bradley. 26 Sep 2017, *Cultural policy in Northern Ireland from:* The Routledge Handbook of Global Cultural Policy Routledge
Accessed on: 01 Apr 2023
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315718408.ch13

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Cultural policy in Northern Ireland

Making cultural policy for a divided society

Phil Ramsey and Bethany Waterhouse-Bradley

Northern Ireland (NI) is a small region of the United Kingdom with a history of violent conflict associated with the national and religious identities of its inhabitants. Post-conflict societies face complex challenges in the development of cultural policy, particularly where some cultural markers have become associated with antagonism or political affiliation. This chapter will focus on how the social, spatial, educational, religious and political divisions in NI – coupled with deep socio-economic deprivation and a lack of political consensus – mean that many issues relating to cultural policy are neglected. We chart how the history of NI has left significant barriers to shared culture within NI, leading to inertia on policy in relation to community relations and social cohesion. That being the case, we show how the government Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), the main arm's length body for funding, have clear policies relating to how arts and culture can alleviate socio-economic problems. This is shown in the context of how the wider political system gives a central role to cultural policy as a driver of economic development, seen through the work of the publicly funded body Northern Ireland Screen, responsible for attracting international film and television productions to NI through direct financial subsidisation of production costs. With this example, we show that there is much clearer consensus on the economic role for culture in NI than there is in relation to the more contentious cultural issues relating to historic divisions.

The historical context of Northern Ireland

NI is a small region with a population of 1.81 million under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom (UK), sharing a border with the Republic of Ireland (ROI). Following the partitioning of Ireland in 1921, which led to the creation of NI, there has been ethnic conflict between the Protestant (largely identifying as British) majority and the Catholic (largely identifying as Irish) minority for several decades (although conflict and violence in the region dates back centuries). From the late 1960s, NI descended into a violent political struggle known as the 'Troubles', which lasted until the 1990s in its most intense phase and led to the deaths of more than 3500 people in the following 30 years. Attacks and murders that are

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sectarian in their nature, and attacks upon the police and armed forces, continue almost to the present day. The economic and social scars of the conflict remain, with NI rated as one of the most deprived regions of the UK. The divided nature of society in NI can be charted back across multiple centuries, although what Hennessy (1997, p. 1) calls the "deeper roots of conflict" can be traced to the Ulster Plantation in the Seventeenth Century, which involved the movement of (mainly) Protestants from England and Scotland into the province of Ulster (which maps largely onto the present-day NI). This situation led to hostility between the Planters and the already-existing Catholic population, especially in relation to land displacement, cultural and religious differences (Tonge, 2002, p. 5).

Following the 1921 establishment of NI, it was ruled by the Ulster Unionist Party (the then dominant political party aligned to maintaining NI's position within the UK) through the NI Parliament until 1972 (Bew et al., 2002). Because the border of NI was drawn with the specific intent of retaining a majority population who identified as British and as such wished to retain the union with the Great Britain, cultural identity, and thus expressions of culture, became fundamental issues in the jurisdiction. After decades of direct rule from Westminster and several attempts at a political solution to the Troubles, the Belfast Agreement (1998) led to the setting up of a Legislative Assembly at Stormont and a devolved Executive Government to NI. Despite that, the NI Assembly has for some time existed in a precarious state. Ongoing threats to political power-sharing include: dealing with continued political violence, the perpetuation of the main paramilitary groupings many years after their ceasefires, and a failure to reach and implement agreement over a raft of cultural issues that include flags and symbols (Bryan, 2015).

It is impossible to discuss conflict, culture and identity in NI without some generalisation and simplification of what are invariably complex and nuanced issues. The foundations of these are explored in depth in Ruane and Todd (1996) and Nic Craith (2003); a historical examination of the conflict in NI can be found in Hayes and McAllister (2013) and O'Dochartaigh (2016). Within NI entrenched division remains: schools, residential areas and to a certain extent sport and social pursuits remain largely segregated through most of the region, the social and economic costs of which will be discussed later in the chapter. The following sections will discuss the demographic, socio-economic and political backdrop against which cultural policy is developed in NI.

Demographic and socio-economic context of NI

The economy in NI is highly dependent on the public sector, and economic policy has been focused on emphasizing private growth, innovation and skills improvement and building a more appropriate economic infrastructure (NI Executive, 2012a). However, during a period of economic decline across Europe and the UK, NI continues to be one of the most affected regions economically, with a 10% drop in Gross Value Added (GVA) between 2008 and 2011 – the largest decrease in the UK (Nolan, 2014). The rate of child poverty in NI in 2012–2013 was 20.5%, one of the highest in the UK, and is predicted to rise to 29% in 2020–2021, a rate higher than in the rest of the country (Browne et al., 2014, pp. 19–21). Unemployment, underemployment and economic inactivity contribute to these problems. Nearly 15% of usual residents in NI aged 16–74 are economically inactive (excluding students and retired persons). Of the almost 5% of working age people who are unemployed (excluding students), 44.98% of them are long-term unemployed and 16.8% have never worked (NISRA, 2012). Poor health among those from lower socio-economic backgrounds is also a significant problem (Bell et al., 2016).

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In addition, there are myriad socio-economic problems among young people in NI, especially in terms of educational achievement among Protestant boys (Nolan, 2014). Segregation in education continues to be the norm, with only 6.5% of children educated in integrated schools (as opposed to Protestant/Catholic schools) (Nolan, 2014). There is no sign of change in these figures, as rather than supporting the education of Protestant and Catholic children side by side with a uniform-curriculum, the Executive has opted for the encouragement of shared schools, where students share campus resources while retaining separate teaching and learning (OFMDFM, 2013). Finally, space and territory in NI remain substantially segregated, and while there has been a significant decrease in 'single identity wards' across the region from 55% to 37% (wards where more than 80% of residents identify with a single community), at a micro level in many areas segregation still persists (Shuttleworth and Lloyd, 2013). In spite of a period of sustained relative peace in the region and a clear shift towards moving away from self-identification as one side or the other, public attitudes reflect a pessimistic view of the future of good relations (McDermott, 2014). As we discuss below, opposing politicians more readily find consensus around economic issues than cultural issues, which often leads to policy inertia.

Northern Ireland and the politicization of culture

In this section we advance a discussion of the politicization of culture within NI and discuss how the notion of a national cultural policy frame of reference is instead undermined by a 'bipolar' notion of culture in NI (Graham and Nash, 2006). NI stands alongside a number of other countries and regions where "ethnic and cultural diversity" (Saukkonen and Pyykkönen, 2008) necessitates the management of cultural policy accordingly, such as France (Kiwan, 2007), the Netherlands (Delhaye and van de Ven, 2014) and Catalonia (Barbieri, 2012, p. 17). Outside of Europe, there is some relevance to NI of the case of cultural policy in Canada, which has long been required to balance linguistic diversity, in addition to ethnic diversity in its cultural policy (Rabinovitch, 2007). In NI culture is often defined within the public sphere, policy development and implementation in a narrow manner. While the reasons for this are myriad, the primary issues are political and historical in their origin (see Nic Craith, 2003).

One prominent issue within cultural policy in NI is the lack of a *national cultural policy* frame of reference (Ahearne, 2011, p. 155), the like of which can "provide a means of reconciling contending cultural identities by holding up the nation as an essence that transcends particular interests" (Miller and Yudice, 2002, p. 8). Were a policy official or politician attempting to invoke the nation within this approach, he or she would not have this as an available option or rather would not have it if attempting to achieve consensus within the political and cultural sphere. (Later, one of the first attempts by a government department to construct a national cultural policy for NI will be discussed.) Rather, as we have seen, with marked heterogeneous national identities being identified by NI's population, cultural policy that seeks to reflect a "distinctive cultural identity" (Mulcahy, 1998, p. 249) immediately alienates almost half of the population.

Moreover, viewing NI through what might be termed the 'two community straitjacket' (Feldman et al., 2005), a cultural paradigm reproduced by many politicians, major media outlets and public policy, suggests the majority of people in the region can be neatly divided into these classifications. This notion is challenged through the most recent census data, which points to a marked change in self-identification of nationality and ethnicity. When asked to identify nationality 29.44% of respondents chose the moniker of 'Northern Irish', eschewing more 'traditional' identification as either British, 48.41% or Irish, 28.35%

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(NISRA, 2012). Also increasing is the number of respondents from national and ethnic backgrounds (4%) falling outside British, Irish and Northern Irish, as increasing migration and the associated increase in births to foreign-born mothers begin to be reflected in demographic figures (NISRA, 2012).

The so-called two-community straitjacket is particularly difficult for those from minority cultures, where race and ethnicity are seen as 'an extension' of sectarian divisions (Graham and Nash, 2006). The creation of cultural identity allied to citizenship, religion and/or nationality is already problematic within NI; it is further problematized when other groups are considered, leaving as it does very little space for layered perceptions of personal identity. Demographic changes, however, are visibly absent or disproportionately attended to by community cohesion and cultural policy. In the next section, we discuss the theory of cultural citizenship in relation to NI and discuss that culture that is consumed by the overall population that tends to be less politicized and shared. We then turn to a discussion of 'traditional' culture in NI, the culture often attached to contested practices and those that are often politicized as a means of identifying oneself as one group or differentiating from the 'other'. We focus here on sport, music and language.

Cultural citizenship and cultural practices

We can develop this theme by considering the concept of cultural citizenship (Stevenson, 2003). When considering the implications of this theory for NI, we first see that citizenship as a foundational process is disrupted. For example, O'Brien (2010, p. 600) argues that an understanding of citizenship "in the sense that citizens accept the right of other individuals to be citizens" has "never existed in Northern Ireland due to differences in allegiances". Thus, to take Stevenson's authoritative quotation on cultural citizenship, we see that such a concept travels very poorly to NI:

> Cultural citizenship therefore is the struggle for a democratic society that enables a diversity of citizens to lead relatively meaningful lives, that respects the formation of complex hybrid identities, offers them the protection of the social state and grants them the access to a critical education that seeks to explore the possibility of living in a future free from domination and oppression.
>
> *(Stevenson, 2010, p. 289)*

In some regards, Stevenson's conception can be seen to be realizable within NI society, where for example the social state is considered. However, for Stevenson "Only when public spaces become participatory and democratic spaces can we say that the project for an autonomous society has come to fruition" (2010, p. 276).

Far from that being the case in NI, physical markers of cultural identity are signifiers of territory and used as a way of creating internal cohesion while 'othering' outsiders. Many of NI's public spaces are contested and segregated (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006), used for commemoration activities that divide (McDowell et al., 2015) and marked out by the flying of flags that evoke other conflict areas, such as Israeli and Palestinian flags (Hill and White, 2008). Moreover, this co-optation of cultural identity for the purpose of marking territory is extended to government departments, where placement of ministers in certain spaces to ensure dominance of a political perspective in that space is clear (Sinn Féin and DUP always look to the Departments of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and Education – areas where there is strong sense of using culture as a marker in the middle classes).

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That said, much cultural consumption in NI, at the level of popular culture, is largely shared between the two main communities rather than divided. As such, much popular culture is globalized in nature (Drache and Froese, 2006), with an area such as film being akin to the picture across Europe and indeed much of the rest of the developed world. The broadcasting system in NI is dominated by that of the UK (Ofcom, 2015; Ramsey, 2015), leading to strong British cultural influences especially in terms of television drama, and in radio, in addition to that produced locally in NI (Moore, 2003). In many of these areas there are often no discernible differences between members of the two main religious-political communities, while culture broadly construed is being shaped by aspects of 'British culture' (see numerous entries on NI in Childs and Storry, 1999) and 'Irish culture'. However, as O'Malley (2011, p. 159) notes, "Irish culture is deeply entwined with that of Britain" and thus the two are more difficult to demarcate.

Sport

Culture becomes more divided along community lines when the areas of sport and cultural identity are concerned, with sport an area that is greatly divided along religious lines (Hassan, 2005). In NI, participation in playing and watching Rugby Union and Cricket is dominated by those identifying or brought up as Protestant; those identifying or brought up as Catholic almost exclusively participate in and watch the historic Gaelic Games, under the auspices of the Gaelic Athletic Association (Burgess, 2015a, p. 107). While these sports are mainly linked to their community, sporting apparel has caused tensions in the past, and wearing it is banned in certain public places; this is not exceptional to NI. Soccer is played by and has spectators from both Protestant and Catholic communities (Hassan, 2002), although the teams in the premier division of soccer in NI are supported almost exclusively by Protestants (e.g. Linfield F.C.) or Catholics (e.g. Cliftonville F.C.). It is the most contested sport in terms of clashes between fans of teams from opposing communities, and many sporting fixtures are heavily policed for this reason. In addition, support for the national soccer team – Northern Ireland – has been traditionally linked to Protestants, though there have been significant efforts in recent years by the governing body to make international matches more accessible (Hargie et al., 2015). In other areas of cultural identity and traditions, we can see strong demarcations along community lines (Nic Craith, 2003). Space does not allow for a full examination of a range of topics that could be usefully surveyed, and so we choose to focus on music – which "for several centuries … has been used as a primary means of encoding 'party' and religious affiliations" (Cooper, 2010, p. 94) – and language, as two key sites for cultural contestation.

Music

Music in NI has the potential to be evocative in nature by virtue of its relationship to historical conflict. Among Protestants, for example, there is a strong musical tradition that accompanies Orange Order events. The most notable example is that of the commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne – a significant historical marker for Unionists which is symbolic of victory over a Catholic monarch. Each 12 July, King William III's victory over King James II in 1690 (Tonge, 2002, p. 4–5) has been commemorated by those brought up as Protestants, especially in rural areas. Implicit in this is the tradition that members of the Orange Order parade with marching bands, replete with fifes and 'Lambeg' drums (Cooper, 2010, p. 94), which causes significant tensions in some areas (Bryan and Jarman, 1997; Bryan, 2015).

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Accordingly, the Parades Commission, an independent public body set up in 1998 to reach determinations on which public parades can receive approval, can issue conditions for how they must be conducted.

In recent years, there have been attempts to open up Orangeism to a wider audience, and through the introduction of *Orangefest* to make it more culturally relevant (Kennaway, 2015). That said, such cultural expressions generally play quite poorly on the European and global cultural stage, no doubt contributing to a sense that Ulster loyalists, one group associated with Orangeism, have been called "the least fashionable community in Western Europe" (McDonald as cited in Burgess, 2015b, p. xii). Among those brought up Catholic, there are firm Gaelic traditions, especially in relation to Irish traditional music – itself with clear musical connections to Scottish traditional music (Cooper, 2009, p. 65). The annual traditional music festival *Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann* is a massive event that attracts over 400,000 people (McLaughlin, 2013), remarkable given that the all-island population of Ireland is just ~6.4 million people (CSO/NISRA, 2014).

Language

The use of the Irish language is linked mainly to the Catholic-Nationalist community, from which the vast majority of its speakers are located in terms of expressed national identity. McMonagle (2010, p. 255) argues that "Irish has come to be associated with nationalist/republican identities"; for Pritchard (2004, p. 62), the language is "an important basis of Irish nationalism". Often, this had not just been the 'fault' of one side or the other but about how language – both Irish and Ulster-Scots – has been used as a political tool in the so-called 'culture wars' (Nolan, 2014, pp. 154–162). However, the politicization of the Irish language has occurred in a manner that is extremely reductionist when viewed historically. For example, Protestants "have made an important historical cultural contribution to the preservation and development of the Irish language" (Pritchard, 2004, p. 75), with Presbyterians in particular playing their part. Today, the Irish language has been 'rediscovered' among very small pockets among the Protestant-Unionist population. However, as we discuss below, issues in relation to language remain deeply contested at the policy level, with a continued failure among NI's politicians to find an agreeable role for Irish within Northern Irish public life.

The legal and political context for cultural policy in NI

Under the New Labour government (1997–2010), powers were initially devolved to Scotland, NI and Wales through the Scotland Act (1998), the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and the Government of Wales Act (1998), respectively. Each of these legislatures has a different set of responsibilities (in the case of Scotland, a Parliament and a Government), and different reserved and devolved matters (Trench, 2007). NI had a period of devolved government prior to this from 1922–1972, but the NI Parliament became untenable after increasing ethnic conflict between Protestant and Catholic communities in the region and NI underwent a lengthy period of direct rule from Westminster (McQuade and Fagan, 2002). When devolution was established as part of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, it was a means of establishing the institutions through which conflict resolution could be achieved (Holloway, 2005). Shortly after devolution was established in 1998, there was another suspension of the local Assembly due to disagreements between the main political parties (2002–2007). The most recent incarnation of devolution in NI is still in its early stages – at the time of writing the Assembly is in its third term of a mandatory coalition government – and the Executive is

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currently led by two diametrically opposed political parties: Sinn Féin, the major Irish Nationalist party, and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the major British Unionist party.

The first NI Assembly after the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was elected in June 1998. Led by a First Minister and Deputy First Minister, it was supported by 10 ministries allocated proportionally across political parties (Knox, 1999). The Assembly was based on a consociational model of governance – a model particularly designed for the management of post-conflict governance, which seeks to find a balance between the two conflicting communities and preserve the different identities (Graham and Nash, 2006; McGarry and O'Leary, 2006). However, the manner in which the Executive is constructed entrenches sectarian division and normalizes it in the political sphere (Graham and Nash, 2006). This division has the potential to lead to inhibited decision-making and delays in the policy process, with the failure to progress the proposed Irish Language Act that we discuss below in a notable example. This delay in particular has resulted in international condemnation from the Council of Europe due to failure to comply with the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and is perceived to be a direct result of divisions between the DUP and Sinn Féin, as well as a result of the politicization of the Irish Language in the region (Meredith, 2014). This section will outline some of the key cultural frameworks in the devolved Assembly, as well as provide insight into how political differences play out in the development of cultural policy.

The proposed Irish Language Act

The statutory requirements to promote and protect the Irish language are embedded in regional legislation and international charters, and the commitment to the production of Irish Language legislation was a condition of the St. Andrews Agreement in 2006, which outlines the conditions for the main parties to re-enter power sharing at the local Assembly after a period of direct rule (NIHRC, 2010). The UK is a signatory to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1992), which came into force in 1998. Nation states choose what languages they register and under which jurisdiction to be accountable. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages outlines a commitment to positive, proactive duties on minority language rights and is legally binding under European Law (NIHRC, 2010). Irish and Ulster-Scots are both registered for the region of NI; however, the region has failed to produce evidence submissions to the monitoring reports in the past two rounds due to failure to reach consensus on the submission (Council of Europe, 2017).

The proposal for an Irish Language Act, under a Sinn Féin-led Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, is the NI Assembly's attempt at developing the Irish language legislation promised by the St Andrews Agreement and calls for the following actions (among others): define Irish as an official language; the right to use Irish in courts, tribunals and other legal settings; parity for use of Irish in the NI Assembly; the promotion of Irish in public bodies, including affirmative action for Irish speakers; Irish language schemes in public bodies; parity of English and Irish on road signage and place names and a guaranteed right to education in Irish (DCAL, 2015a). However, there has been strong and consistent resistance from the DUP and other Unionist politicians, with claims ranging from economic wastefulness in times of austerity to Sinn Féin political posturing, to deliberate removal of 'Britishness' from NI (*The Newsletter*, 10 February 2015). The argument around the Irish language is another example of the application of zero-sum politics in the region, where rather than being treated like a minority language, Irish is instead treated as a political symbol or emblem and as such is a threat to the 'other side' of the political community (NIHRC, 2010).

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Good relations and social cohesion

There is a legislative imperative set out by the Belfast Agreement which requires statutory agencies to address issues of equality and good relations. In spite of this imperative, there has been little documented long-term success of community relations. The *Harbison Review of Community Relations Policy* (2002) found that there had been no substantive change in decreasing division "as measured by greater integration of housing and education" (as cited in Graham and Nash, 2006). Measuring the success of community relations policy based on public attitudes, Morrow et al. (2013) found that while there are some reasons for optimism, segregation remains significant and individuals are still sceptical about the possibility of sustained peace and integration. Good relations policy in NI has very rarely been proactive in creating shared space (regardless of the implied language), but is rather focused on creating neutral space to share and maintaining the rights to separate but equal space elsewhere. The first attempt at social cohesion policy post-conflict, *A Shared Future* (OFMDFM, 2005), was imperfect in its response but attempted to address the issue of shared space. It placed some emphasis on putting integration in the foreground and fostering trust and interdependence. The document was not implemented and was ignored in the Programme for Government by the Sinn Féin- and DUP-led Assembly, which took over from the Direct Rule authors of the document. It was followed by the proposed *Cohesion Sharing and Integration,* which was again scrapped after a highly critical reception from both the public respondents to the consultation and other political leadership (Nolan, 2014).

Without public consultation, or the involvement of their partners in government – the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, and Alliance – the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (in the NI Executive) produced *Together: Building a United Community* (TBUC) in 2013. The document, which focuses on children and young people, a shared community, a safe community and cultural expression (OFMDFM, 2013), provides little in the way of new developments in good relations and community cohesion and did not have overt support from government outside of the two main parties (Nolan, 2014). TBUC follows previous policies in the expression of what Dixon (2002) refers to as 'constructive ambiguity' of good relations policy, which allow for them to be interpreted however the audience sees fit. This is not restricted to post-conflict societies but is part of the wider notion of status quo policy making, where this ambiguity can be used to seemingly address relevant concerns without commitment to one or another ideological stance. There is a policy of avoidance in addition to the idea of ambiguity in cultural policy – where discussions of history are often excluded, as is the aspiration for a united Ireland, a regular criticism of Sinn Féin in other policies (Nolan, 2014). Constructive ambiguity therefore becomes both a contributor to and a product of consociational governance. To illustrate some of the policy inertia referred to throughout the chapter, we turn to a more-detailed examination of some current cultural policy in NI by addressing the work of the aforementioned DCAL (Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure) and ACNI (Arts Council of Northern Ireland).

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland

The government department in the NI Executive with responsibility for many areas of cultural policy is DCAL, which has legislative powers for cultural policy issues such as museums, libraries, the arts and language issues. However, not all areas in relation to culture are

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devolved, with broadcasting policy reserved to Westminster (Ramsey, 2015)[1]. The current minister is Carál Ní Chuilín MLA of Sinn Féin, who has been in post since 2011. DCAL had a budget in 2015–2016 of £91.7 million, which had been reduced by 8% since the previous year (DCAL, 2015b). The largest budget item at the department is spending on libraries (£29.4m, 32% of its 2015–2016 spending) (DCAL, 2015b, p. 20). Much of the department's work – like its counterpart the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in Westminster – is carried out by a number of arm's length agencies that include the delivery of the aforementioned library spending through Libraries NI, National Museums Northern Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland (DCAL, 2011).

DCAL is focused on two main areas: economic development; and equality and social inclusion. This is clear in its *key objectives*:

1. To ensure that culture, arts and leisure activities positively impact on promoting equality, and tackling poverty and social exclusion
2. To ensure that culture, arts and leisure contribute to the growth of the economy and building a united community. (DCAL, 2015b, p. 7)

Taken collectively, we can first see the policy approach of DCAL is towards equality and social inclusion as underpinned by economic development. The first of five DCAL *strategic pillars* focuses on how the arts can help to 'rebalance' the economy, stemming from a long-held notion that the NI economy is too dependent on the public sector. This is followed by the fifth pillar, which is "social inclusion and equality" (DCAL, 2011, p. 16). In its corporate plan, the department identifies the results that it expects within the year 2015–2016 on these matters, through the utilisation of the Promoting Equality, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion framework. Here for example, the department's target is to "increase the proportion of people in the 20% most deprived areas who engage in the arts to 79%" and to "increase the proportion of people in the 20% most deprived areas participating in sport to increase to 50%" (DCAL, 2015b, p. 14). In terms of its targets for economic development, it focuses on ongoing and planned redevelopment at Windsor Park and Casement Park, NI's main stadia for soccer and GAA respectively.

The aforementioned lack of an overarching national cultural policy for NI has been tentatively addressed by a DCAL draft strategy (DCAL, 2015c), which had just completed its consultation period at the time of writing. The draft strategy maintains the themes of equality promotion and alleviation of poverty and social exclusion. As one of its five themes, Creativity and Skills places an emphasis on the contribution of arts and culture to the economy, a theme discussed in more detail below. The draft strategy attempts to fit within current government programmes under the NI Executive, with a cross-departmental approach. However, the draft strategy is very light on detail, particularly in terms of implementation. Indeed, for a policy that strives for innovation, it has a strikingly similar vision statement to the department's existing 'key objectives' discussed above. In this version, the vision is: "To promote, develop and support the crucial role of arts and culture in creating a cohesive community and delivering social change to our society on the basis of equality for everyone" (DCAL, 2015c, p. 11).

In an arts and cultural sector heavily dependent on public funding, major financial cuts have a substantial impact on many organisations important for the sustenance of diverse sector. To mitigate cuts across government departments in the Assembly, DCAL significantly reduced funding to ACNI, the main arm's length body working in the arts in 2015–2016

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(ACNI, 2015, p. 18; Meredith, 2015a). These cuts were set to be passed on to many of the organizations in receipt of ACNI funding, such as the Grand Opera House Belfast, the MAC and the Ulster Orchestra (Meredith, 2015b). In terms of its direct funding of outside organisations, ACNI is responsible for distributing funds to community organisations, many of which are tied almost exclusively to one side of the ethno-politico-religious divide or the other, such as in the funding of marching bands that represent narrow community groupings (Nolan, 2012). At the time of writing, it is unclear what the long-term impacts of austerity will be on the arts sector, but one can infer that it will have knock-on effects for cultural policy and good relations, given the inextricable links between policy and society, as outlined in this chapter thus far.

ACNI's policy approach, like DCAL's, is marked by an emphasis on fostering social inclusion within the arts. For example, it reported that in the period 2010–2013 74% of its funding had "gone directly into the most deprived areas" (ACNI, 2013, p. 7). Moreover, through its *Arts and Older People Strategy* it conducted programmes with the aim of ensuring older people in NI were not cut off from the arts, a programme underpinned by principles that were recognisably social democratic (Ramsey, 2013). As part of its current five-year plan, the ACNI planned to "increase the proportion of arts activities delivered to the top 20% of the most deprived Super Output Areas" (ACNI, 2013, p. 14). Despite such an approach, the ACNI has reported during this five-year cycle that "Arts engagement rates for the least deprived group was 86%, falling to 70% for the most deprived group" (ACNI, 2014, p. 3), and thus much work remains to be done in this area.

ACNI's *Intercultural Arts Strategy 2011–2016* (ACNI, 2011) acknowledges that NI society had become more markedly ethnically diverse in the ten or so years leading up to that point. Accordingly, it set out that ACNI ought to "seek to foster the expression of cultural pluralism; build dialogue and promote understanding, through interchanges within and between communities and their cultures" (ACNI, 2011, p. 10). In the detail of the strategy, it set out six 'strategic themes' that included *Using the Arts to Develop Community Cohesion*; *Using the Arts to Develop Good Relations; Using the Arts as a Vehicle to Tackle Racism* (ACNI, 2011, p. 67). Finally, and akin to DCAL, ACNI is also concerned with economic growth, where it argues "Stimulating the growth and development of our creative sector will optimize our economic potential and increase our competitiveness" (ACNI, 2014, p. 7). The ACNI also has responsibility for the NI's Creative Industries Innovation Fund, which takes us to the second point, where cultural policy is seen in the service of economic development, a path that closely follows the wider UK model (e.g. DCMS, 2008).

Cultural policy as a driver of economic development

The creative industries (CIs) in NI have assumed a similar place in the political economy as is the case in the wider UK, where successive governments have sought to stimulate and measure the sectors (DCMS, 2001, 2011). Statistics for the CIs are measured in the same manner as in the rest of the UK and their contribution to the economy highlighted by government departments. The most recent figures available at the time of writing show that the CIs comprised 3.9% of NI's GVA in 2014, an 11.7% increase since the previous year (DCAL, 2015d, p. 5). Compared with a national GVA of 5.2%, the NI rating is remarkably high given the weak NI economy, highlighted above. At the forefront of this development has been NI Screen, which has a key economic role to play in the development of the film and television industries. In place since 1997, it was originally named the Northern Ireland Film and Television Commission (NI Screen, 2015a).

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Northern Ireland Screen

The NI Screen approach to investing directly in productions, and seeing the economic benefits returned, correlates directly with that of its core funder Invest NI. Invest NI is a publicly funded body, which provides grants to international companies to locate in NI and for regional companies to invest and expand with the aim of stimulating a private sector that was greatly suppressed by the Troubles. Seen in its two most recent strategies, in *Driving Global Growth* (NI Screen, 2010) and *Opening Doors* (NI Screen, 2014), NI Screen argues for the value of economic return on investment, alongside a role in education and the development of a skills base with the television and film industries. The sector grew from being mainly involved with production for local television networks to an industry competing internationally for major productions, the best known of which is HBO's *Game of Thrones* (GOT) (2011–present), which has filmed six series of the show predominantly in NI at the time of writing (NI Screen, 2015a).

NI Screen provides direct funding for productions, with a limit of £800,000, "up to a ceiling of 25% of the overall project budget" (NI Screen, 2015b). For those companies choosing to film in NI, the UK's tax relief schemes apply, where companies can claim a maximum of 25% relief on qualifying expenditure, either under the UK Film Tax Relief (BFI, 2015a) or under the UK High-end TV Tax Relief (BFI, 2015b), with various caveats. The Northern Ireland Screen Fund budgeted resources of £15.89m between 2010–2014, while NI Screen's *Opening Doors* strategy budgeted £36.3m between 2014–2018 (NI Screen, 2014, p. 84). Much of this spending has gone, and will continue to go, to GOT production (though NI Screen notes that it was able to reduce GOT funding from £3.2m to £1.6m when the UK tax relief was introduced) (NI Screen, 2014, p. 38) with an anticipated return of £136m by the end of 2018 with an 11.25 ratio between cost and return (NI Screen, 2014, p. 48). To date, NI Screen "has invested £12.45m in the series … For that investment, it is estimated that £110.7m has been spent on goods and services in the Northern Ireland economy" (Meredith, 2015c).

The Irish Language Broadcast Fund and the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund

NI Screen also administers the Irish Language Broadcast Fund (£3m in 2015–2016) and the Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund (£1m in 2015–2016). Both are available for application by production companies for the support of broadcasting in the Irish language and on Ulster-Scots themes and have aimed to support 55 hours of Irish programming and 12 hours of Ulster-Scots programming in 2015–2016 (NI Screen, 2015c). Broadcasters who have utilized content supported from these funds include the BBC, RTÉ, TG4 and UTV (Ofcom, 2014, p. 29), with a supposed direct relationship between the public funding and spending in the broadcasting sector.

The Belfast Agreement provided an impetus for such an initiative, though only in relation to Irish (NIO, 1998, Section 6, Paragraph 4), not to Ulster-Scots (Ulster-Scots was solely mentioned in the context of it being "part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland" (NIO, 1998, Section 6, Paragraph 3)). Little (2004) observes that Irish language was prioritized over Ulster-Scots in the GFA and that the latter has always enjoyed a slightly tenuous position in NI. He argued that "making a special case for Irish language does not breach the general intentions of the Agreement given that Irish language is not, in itself, disrespectful towards the culture of other groups" (Little, 2004, p. 17). This differentiation is also marked in the UK's commitments to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages,

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where Ulster-Scots is listed only under category II, focused on the principle of protection in general, and Irish is listed under parts II and III, which dictate specific measures to be undertaken in statutory agencies (NIHRC, 2010).

Discussion

Following our previous discussion of cultural citizenship, we now return to this theme as a means of further exploring the contested nature of cultural policy in NI. Rather than cultural citizenship taking form – in the Stevenson mould that we discussed above – the equation of citizenship with cultural identity in NI (on both sides) in ways that are binary and oppositional, perpetuates the politicization of culture at every level (Graham and Nash, 2006). This brings us to some key cultural policy questions for NI: is it possible to implement a pluralist cultural policy, one where the concept of cultural citizenship might take root, when culture and territory are inextricably linked, and where territory remains entrenched and divided as contested space (Hughes and McCandless, 2006, Knox, 2011)? What would such a 'Northern Irish' cultural policy look like, taking account both of the past and of the changing nature of NI society with increased immigration? Such an endpoint is so distant under the current paradigm as to seem almost unimaginable, and as we have seen, the recent DCAL attempt falls somewhat short.

Whenever 'culture' is invoked in NI, in policy or in discourse, there is division to be found. Graham and Nash's (2006) point that the language of culture has been co-opted as a means to justify or classify division is relevant here, further underlining how much work would be required: "In Northern Ireland, the attempt to deal with sub-state patterns of ethno-sectarian antagonism though principles of parity of cultural respect and esteem has inadvertently created a legitimating vocabulary of 'culture' and 'cultural rights' for antagonistic expressions of separatist difference" (Graham and Nash, 2006, p. 258). That said, the work of DCAL under Sinn Féin has often been rather oddly non-political at the level of party politics, apart from the proposal for an Irish Language Act. While the emphasis on social exclusion and equality is stronger than may be the case from the main Right and Centre-Right Unionist parties, examples of where ire has been drawn from Unionist parties have sometimes been found elsewhere (e.g. the February 2016 publication of a book about the Republican Bobby Sands, part funded by ACNI (BBC, 2016)). Herein lies one particular issue in relation to the formation of cultural policy. Due to the consociational nature of the NI Assembly, as discussed above, and the nature of a power-sharing Executive, DCAL often fails to take on any real kind of political direction as shaped by the Party with that Ministerial responsibility.

While DCAL is now under the control of Sinn Féin, it was previously under DUP control. There are some differences in the discourse used by these Parties – e.g. "in this part of Ireland", used by DCAL under Sinn Féin in the department's mission statement (DCAL, 2015b), as opposed to using the term 'Northern Ireland' – however it is less of a politicized department than might be assumed given the myriad cultural issues we have considered here. Indeed political differences at DCAL, depending on which party controls it, are not discernible in the same way that they would be in relation to DCMS either under the control of Labour or the Conservative parties in the UK. As the parties in the NI Executive are tied into the *Programme for Government* (NI Executive, 2012b), the work of individual departments cannot deviate far from the collectively agreed policy positions. It is worth noting, however, that these priorities are inherently impacted by party divisions given that they must be approved by both Sinn Féin and DUP, who are the two main parties in the Executive and hold the current powers for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

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Rather, the policy approach of DCAL has been more in keeping with Bonet and Négrier's (2011, p. 578) notion that the dominant cultural policy trend since 1980 has been one of "economic and cultural development". In addition to its work on socio-economic matters, the DCAL's approach here mirrors that of where the NI Executive has arguably found its clearest *shared ground,* that of economic development driven by inward investment and actualized in the built environment as the hegemonic political-economic vision for NI. This is shown in its work in supporting NI Screen and its apparent dedication to GOT as a driver of economic growth through jobs creation and tourism transcends the community divide. In some ways this is unsurprising, with consensus over job creation perhaps more easily reached as compared to some of the more contentious issues. However, the unquestioning nature of some of the economic assumptions relating to investment and growth exposes the depth at which the neoliberal paradigm has become engrained.

While government departments in NI are required to take delicate steps over territory and space when it comes to political and social issues, the economic imperative for NI Screen with the blessing of the NI Executive seemingly trumps all other concerns. In this understanding, NI's space is 'ripe' for development, with the attendant picturesque vistas ready to be exploited by global television businesses. Attracting HBO to NI has spurred growth in the tourism sector, with fans travelling to numerous filming locations around NI (e.g. Boland, 2014). Further attention was drawn to filming in NI through visits by Queen Elizabeth II in 2014 and the British Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015. Such examples are then used by the supporting politicians to further justify support for the film and television sector. However, the work that NI Screen does and the excitement generated by GOT's filming in NI means that the enterprise has escaped with almost no criticism or detailed scrutiny over its operation, either from journalistic or academic sources. A dearth of analysis has meant that very little has been said about the precarious nature of HBO's relationship with NI, the ethics of providing public funding to a global-national on the scale of HBO (ultimately owned by its parent company Time-Warner), the nature of the employment it creates – often employing workers on short-term contracts – or indeed on the impact on the environment.[2]

Conclusion

NI remains very much shaped by the events of its past in terms of cultural identity, in the division of society, and in terms of socio-economic conditions, which often lag considerably behind the rest of the UK. NI's political institutions, while they remain based on consociational principles, are often found to be inadequate to deal with key cultural policy questions due to a lack of consensus. The agreement between the main parties, that using publicly funded agencies to attract investment into NI, especially in the area of the creative industries, has led to NI becoming a somewhat unlikely leading site outside of London in film and television production. However, pointing to the cultural policy 'success stories' cannot mask what are deep-rooted problems, further underlined by wider divisions within NI society. Cultural policy could contribute to a more-shared future in NI, but what are at times seemingly intractable cultural problems remain as significant obstacles to be surmounted. Future research on the subject is required to develop a theory of cultural policy in NI – the current literature specific to the subject is limited – to further understand the role of culture in the context of political, economic and social progress in the region. To this end, more empirical work that deals with arts and cultural institutions is required, along with the further policy analysis that will be required when DCAL transitions into its new departmental context.

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Notes

1 In January 2015 it was proposed that the work of DCAL could be amalgamated with that of two other government departments in a new department, the Department of Social Welfare, Communities and Sport (Gordon, 2015). The department was eventually named the Department for Communities.

2 Thanks to Steve Baker for drawing our attention to this point about the environmental impact.

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