Comparing Cultural Policy: A Reformulation[1]

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The publication of Kawashima's (1995) article in this Journal is an important first step towards the development of a consciously comparative approach to the study of cultural policy. However the approach that is presented for how such studies should be conducted, and the questions that are identified as being significant for them, are both open to debate. In particular the methodological assumptions and the implicit support for a certain form of research strategy that are presented require a great deal more justification than they are given.

The intention of this article is to argue that there is no single 'best' strategy for undertaking comparative policy research in the field of cultural policy, and that there is no all-inclusive list of what *should* be investigated. Starting from different views of what comparative policy research is concerned with provides the possibility for developing an alternative prospectus for future comparative work that incorporates but is more wide-ranging than that presented by Kawashima (1995, ps. 298–303), and which allows for the development of a multiplicity of approaches and areas of study for the comparative analyst.

COMPARING PUBLIC POLICIES

The comparative study of public policies has developed a great deal since the fledgling efforts of the 1970s. A range of strategies have been developed over time that lead to different emphases upon aspects of the policy process: Hancock (1983), for example, differentiates between general and theoretical perspectives, those that deal with the determinants of policy and those that are concerned with policy outputs and evaluation. Heidenheimer *et al* (1990, ps. 7–9) distinguish between six analytical approaches: socio-economic, cultural values, party government, class, neo-corporatist and institutional-political. Hall (1986, ps. 5–20) likewise identifies six approaches: functionalist, cultural analysis, public choice, group, state-centric and institutional.

This plethora of strategies for understanding public policy in a comparative sense by no means exhausts the list of what is available but what is important is that they identify distinct modes of analysis, emphasising certain aspects of the policy process over others and investigating different features of what is involved in this process. In this respect Kawashima (1995) is essentially concentrating on policy outputs and evaluation within a framework that is predicated upon assumptions from economics.

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Such an approach lends itself to certain forms of analysis rather than others and, equally, closes off some forms of investigation altogether. This is acceptable as long as these other forms are not completely ignored. One reason for the proliferation of approaches to the comparative study of policy is that 'policy' itself is a multi-faceted phenomenon (Heidenheimer, 1986) and cannot be easily investigated through the application of a single methodological tool-kit.

Additionally there are a number of assumptions that are implicit within the comparative public policy approach that need to be treated with caution. In particular, non-relativism, functional equivalence, comparability of relevant factors, similarity of relevant factors and similarity of underlying processes[2] all need to be confronted and justified in any comparative public policy analysis. This confrontation and justification raises important methodological issues for how, precisely, comparison should be undertaken and needs to be taken on board in any attempt to compare cultural policies.

CULTURAL POLICY

While all policy areas can justifiably claim to be unique, cultural policy has the added problem that its content is so variable between states, largely as a result of the complexities that arise from trying to define what is actually meant by the term (see, for example, Williams, 1981; Jenks, 1993). While this problem is particularly acute in English (Williams, 1976, p. 76 describes 'culture' as one of 'the most complicated words in the English language') it is also present in other languages.

One entry point to analysis is to essentially define cultural policy as what governments say it is. This is implicit in Vestheim (1995, p. 58), for example, where cultural policy is defined as

> a number of activities which are brought together within a *sector*, which in its turn is a randomly defined category into which certain activities are placed and called culture, while other activities or products are kept away and are, therefore, not to be considered culture.

While this may account for some aspects of difference between countries in a descriptive sense it does not *explain* these differences and, indeed, the absence of state intervention and involvement in particular areas can be seen to be as much a policy statement as can its presence in other areas (Feldman, 1975, p. 300).

How the policy area of 'cultural policy' is defined is going to have implications for what form of analysis is adopted to the subject. A definition that incorporates notions of ideological and hegemonic control, for example, could be usefully analysed from a marxist perspective; a definition that concentrates on the processes of policy formulation could be usefully approached from a neo-pluralist direction concentrating on the role of groups (Gray, 1994, ps. 98–104); Vestheim's (1995) definition of cultural policy, quoted above, could be analysed historically (as it is), in terms of the inclusion and/or exclusion of areas from 'culture'.

Clearly there is no *single* approach to the study of cultural policy; instead a multi-dimensional approach is best suited to the analysis of this area of policy depending upon what the analyst is interested in comparing. In this respect there

are a large number of possible forms of comparison that could be undertaken, each with their own sets of research agendas, appropriate methodologies and in-built assumptions. What is an appropriate form of analysis depends, in the first instance, upon the content of the subject of research.

'Cultural policy' has its own specificity that is defined by the content of the field. In general terms this can be taken to mean that it is concerned with the role that is adopted by governmental actors[3] in dealing with those areas of activity that are concerned with the creation, production and maintenance of certain human artefacts and processes.

Attempting to elucidate what these artefacts and processes consist of can lead to a simple listing of different areas of activity (eg. performance arts (music, dance, drama), creative arts (painting, literature), and so on), or different forms of production (eg. media—television, radio, magazines and newspapers), or different locations of production (eg. national, regional, urban (Crane, 1992)), or different types of process (eg. adult education in Sweden or *animation* in France are both important elements of cultural policy in these countries[4]). The incorporation or exclusion of certain artefacts or processes from such a listing is dependent upon the theoretical and methodological assumptions that are being made by the analyst, and these, in turn, will affect how the subject of cultural policy is itself understood and interpreted.

While the exact content of the field is therefore open to debate the central fact remains that a *national* "cultural policy" is marked by governmental involvement of some sort. Such involvement may take a variety of forms of activity from direct promotion (as in the French Ministry of Culture, for example), to the use of non-governmental incentives (as in the use of tax concessions in the United States), to the use of "arm's-length", quasi-independent, organisations (as in the role of the Arts Councils in Britain).

The policy process itself is a structured activity that is undertaken within the context of an organisational universe that incorporates both public and private organisations, a mode of operation (or policy 'style') that is specific to each particular nation-state (Richardson, 1982) and to each policy area (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992), and which incorporates a number of stages (agenda-setting, formulation, implementation, etc) that cut across each other and do not necessarily form a coherently rational approach to policy.

A comparative study of cultural policy needs at the outset to be clear as to *what* is being looked at—and *why* it is being looked at. The need to approach analysis from a theoretically- and methodologically-informed starting-point is essential. From such a basis it is possible to both clarify the object of study and the tools that are required to do the job.

A STRATEGY FOR FUTURE COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

In the light of the above argument a number of possible directions for future comparative research into cultural policy can be identified, along with possible approaches that might be adopted towards such research. These directions are more

wide-ranging than those proposed by Kawashima (1995, ps. 298–303) who concentrates on particular dimensions of the policy process and omits others that, it can be argued, are as important, and perhaps even *more* important than those that she identifies. Even with this in mind what follows is not intended to be an exhaustive coverage of potential lines of enquiry but more an indicative listing of areas of concern.

The Content of Cultural Policy

What is, and is not, included in the content of cultural policy in different states is clearly an important marker of cross-national differences and similarities. A clear picture of what the content of cultural policy in different states (and in larger trans-national organisations such as the European Union) actually *is* is, therefore, a necessary precursor to comparative study. Some steps towards this in terms of Europe are already in place at the descriptive level (Ca'Zorzi, 1989; Fisher, 1990; Scott and Freeman, 1994) but a great deal still needs to be done to clarify what cultural policy actually consists of in different countries or international organisations.

Given that cultural policy, as broadly defined above, is concerned with the choices of governmental actors as to what is included and excluded within it, the nature of these choices in determining the content of the field is an important area for further study. Apart from the descriptive approach an historical investigation of the development of these choices is essential not only for understanding the processes of cultural policy formation but also for understanding the nature of the context within which these choices are made.

In this respect the contextualisation of description is also necessary. While cultural policy is potentially analysable in isolation from other policy areas a more productive line of investigation may be developed from understanding how it is located in terms of broader patterns of state intervention. The extent to which cultural policy either shares, or differs from, dominant patterns of policy activity within or between states is an important area of comparison, not least for clarifying the specificity of this policy area.

The Policy Process

An important part of comparative policy studies is concerned with the structures and processes that are actually used in creating public policies. Not surprisingly this has been the area that has generated the greatest proliferation of models and theories, with each being appropriate for different reasons. To simplify discussion this section will differentiate between *what* is studied and *how* it is studied: in practice such a split is misleading as the two are intimately connected and is only used here to indicate the range of approaches that are available to the analyst.

What is studied can be split up into:

a) the stages of the policy process;
b) the policy actors; and
c) the activities that lead to a policy output.

How these are studied involves a mixture of:

d) theory; and
e) techniques and methodologies.

It is possible to identify a number of distinct *stages* in the policy process (from issue identification to policy change, succession or termination: see Hogwood and Gunn, 1984, p. 4; Jordan and Richardson, 1987, ps. 8–9; Hogwood, 1987, p. 12) which involve a range of distinct activities. Unfortunately these stages do not necessarily occur in a rational or logical manner meaning that identification of these steps is no guarantee that they will actually occur in any given set order. While this limits the utility of concentrating on the separate steps that are involved in any set of policy decisions it does still provide a framework for organising analysis that provides a coherence to the investigation that is being undertaken.

Investigating the *policy actors* is concerned with the actual participants in the policy process. How these participants are understood, and therefore who will be investigated, is determined by the theory that is applied, with different theories concentrating on different sets of actors as being the key participants in the process (Gray, 1994, p. 95). This dimension concentrates on the power, resources, strategies and tactics that are bought to bear on policy issues by classes, groups and individuals.

This component of analysis is central to an understanding of the mechanics of the policy process itself and is an important element of comparative policy analysis. Without an investigation of this behavioural strand the similarities and differences between political systems remain largely inexplicable, being, as they would be, hidden within a policy 'black box' where inputs and outputs are known but not how the one becomes the other. Given this centrality for the comparative policy process it is not surprising that so much work has been undertaken in this field.

Clearly, this line of analysis is closely tied in with the *activities* that give rise to policy outputs. Policy is the result of the inter-relationships of a range of participants, operating within structured contexts. What these inter-relationships comprise of, and how they relate to different contexts are, again, important dimensions of the policy process. Similarities and differences in the patterns of activity that give rise to policies between, and within, states have important implications for the range of options that will be considered by policy actors and how these will be presented and acted upon and are thus central to an understanding of comparative policy.

These areas of concern can only be investigated through the application of *theory*. The theory that is used must be appropriate to the subject that is being analysed: thus a concern with input-output efficiency may be suited to analyses based on economic theory, while a concern with group involvement in the creation of policy may be more suited to analysis on the basis of pluralist theory.[5] Theory is a necessary under-pinning for any form of analysis that is undertaken and is the determinant of the *methodologies* that are appropriate for the practice of comparison.

These methodologies can incorporate a host of possible forms of analysis, from the quantitative to the qualitative. Each, however, is tied in to the particular theo-

retical perspective that is being adopted, and makes sense only in so far as it is theoretically-informed. A quantitative analysis based on the assumptions of pluralism, for example, is a very different form of analysis to a quantitative one that is based on the assumptions of marxism.

Different methodologies have their own strengths and weaknesses and a knowledge of these is important if analysis is to say anything useful about cultural policy (see, for example, Schuster, 1987; Hansen, 1995 on economic analysis, and Marsh and Stoker, 1995, on political analysis). The choice and use of particular methodologies cannot escape the limitations that are attached to them, implying that the use of different methodologies in conjunction with each other may be of greater benefit than simply relying on a single approach to analysis.

Policy Change

Cultural policy is not a static phenomenon. It is subject to a variety of forms of change affecting its content, its management and administration and the processes that are used within it. Understanding the 'why' and the 'how' of these changes is important for comparative cultural policy research, especially given the relatively low political weighting that this policy area commonly attracts. The extent to which cultural policy operates independently of other policy areas, and the extent to which it is dominated by other non-cultural policy pressures has important implications for assessing what is occurring within the field.

The process of change is of great concern in a number of countries at present given the drive towards the introduction of a more 'managerial' or 'privatised' approach to public policy (see, for example, Dressayre and Garbownik, 1995 on France, and Gray, 1995a, on the United Kingdom). The mechanisms by which change is introduced and the conflicts that it generates are both central to charting the trajectories that cultural policy is following: the role that is played by political, ideological, social and economic factors in affecting the direction that cultural policy is moving towards needs to be understood. Cultural policy does not operate in splendid isolation from broader pressures within society. The chains of causality and the consequences of change for the practice of cultural policy within and between nation-states is thus a key area for analysis.

Cultural Economics

A strong tradition within the study of cultural policy is to be found in the analysis of the economics of cultural policy (Baumol and Bowen, 1966; Blaug, 1976; Myerscough, 1988). This has been increasingly taking on board a comparative dimension (Ca'Zorzi, 1989; Hansen, 1995; Schuster, 1987, 1995a, 1995b), raising questions about different forms of state economic investment in the arts and the role that cultural policy can play in issues of economic development (Bassand, 1993; Bianchini, 1990; Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993; Griffiths, 1993).

As with any other form of public policy what is spent, how it is spent, and what effect such spending has on cultural policy are key issues. Changing patterns of

expenditure are informative about the directions that policy is taking and the impact that changing values and ideologies have on it (Hogwood, 1987, ps. 129–30). While there are problems with comparative expenditure data (Feist and Hutchison, 1990), studies of public expenditure on cultural policy are an important source of information about changing pre-occupations on the part of government and require development.

In particular, longitudinal studies of expenditure are a key resource for the analysis of policy change. Such change is rarely sudden, requiring a period of time for the effects to work through the system (Gray, 1995b). Analyses of change over time, therefore, are more informative than those that use a 'snapshot' approach that concentrates on a single year. Comparatively such studies would be a particularly fruitful line for future research to take in identifying the relationship of cultural policy with economic, political and social concerns.

Alongside such longitudinal research, studies of economic efficiency (the relationship between input and output resources) are also important. While many claims are made of the effectiveness and efficiency of different forms and methods of supporting (or not supporting) cultural policy through the public purse, the actual effects of financial choices for cultural policy are noticable more for their absence than their presence. Indeed Hansen (1995, p. 319) argues that many of the existing economic studies of cultural policy start from an 'incorrect basis' in the first place. Clearly further development of such studies through the development of more sophisticated methodological tools needs to be undertaken.

The Structures of Power

Cultural policy is managed, administered and controlled through a network of agencies which have some relationship to the formal structures of the state. In a comparative sense there is a world of difference between the relatively centralised form of state control of cultural policy in, for example, France and the more dissipated control of cultural policy that is exercised through private and charitable institutions in the United States, where the state has only a very limited role to play. How these networks operate, and the consequences of them for cultural policy, are clearly of importance for understanding both the content of cultural policies in different states and how the policy process operates.

While some information on the organisations of cultural policy in different countries exists (eg. Rouet and Dupin, 1991; Cummings and Katz, 1987; Fisher, 1990) there has been little investigation of the administrative context within which these operate. The processes and results of administrative organisation are central to any understanding of what occurs within differing nation-states, especially given the inescapably political nature of cultural policy.

Certainly much can be gained by appreciating the distribution of power that is contained within administrative organisations: the major elements of British cultural policy as it affects the arts, for example, is largely an elite preoccupation and this elite operates through mechanisms and structures (eg. the Arts Councils, the British Broadcasting Corporation) that reinforce the power that it holds through

its position at the centre of the system (Gray, 1995c). A comparison of this picture with other states would serve to clarify the similarities and differences that exist.

THE FUTURE FOR COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Clearly a great deal needs to be done in developing comparative research into cultural policy. This article has identified a number of areas of potential future research that, in conjunction with the research agenda of Kawashima (1995), provides a rich terrain for study and analysis. Such analysis, however, needs to be both theoretically and methodologically sophisticated if it is to go beyond mere description.

The extension to Kawashima's argument that is presented here shows how much room for development there is. This is exemplified by the choice of topics and issues that were identified as being worthy of further study (Kawashima, 1995, ps. 298–303). These topics and issues were:

1) identification of issues;
2) scope of state involvement;
3) policy objectives;
4) policy measures;
5) policy efficiency;
6) policy effectiveness;
7) cross-national research.

While there is a clear overlap with the areas of research identified in this paper (content; process; change; economics; structures) the stress on theory and methodology that is made here extends the argument and points to further issues of central importance for the study of cultural policy. Given the relatively recent growth of interest in the comparative study of cultural policy it would be surprising if major advances were to be made rapidly. It is to be hoped, however, that a start to exploring the complexities of comparative cultural policy can be made on the basis of the proposals that have been put forward and that this Journal will show the results in coming years.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thanks are extended to Franco Bianchini, Oliver Bennett and two anonymous referees for their comments on this paper. All arguments, however, remain my responsibility.
2. These technical terms are explained in Gray, 1992, ps. 3–9 and are basically concerned with how national contexts, the role of policy, the underlying determinants of policy, the choice of theory in explanation and the understanding of the stages of the policy process are understood and conceptualised in the comparative enterprise.
3. Non-governmental actors are, of course, also important in the creation of a general cultural policy for a society. In the present context, however, the emphasis is placed on governmental actors alone. The arguments that are presented here are equally applicable to both governmental and non-governmental actors and would need to be incorporated into any study that was concerned with the boundaries between, and the roles that are adopted by, public and private actors.

4. My thanks to Oliver Bennett for this distinction between process and artefact.
5. See Zuckerman, 1991, for a general discussion of the application of theory.

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