Comparative Cultural Policy Research in Europe: A Change of Paradigm

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Abstract: Parallel to the ongoing European integration process, comparative cultural policy research has changed its orientation and methods during the last thirty years, moving from institutional, almost "diplomatic" exercises to networking exchanges, and has arrived at an approach which favours integrated research projects. Against this background, this paper reviews the methodological problems of and first steps taken towards a more action-oriented and, at the same time, cohesive ("European") concept of cultural research, which extends beyond a mere comparison of national policies and experiences. This is illustrated through individual research projects and the more recent appearance of ERICarts, the European Research Institute for Comparative Cultural Policy and the Arts.

Résumé: En parallèle avec le processus d'intégration européenne en cours, la recherche comparative sur les politiques culturelles a changé son orientation et ses méthodes pendant les trente dernières années, passant d'exercices institutionnels, presque « diplomatiques », à des échanges entre réseaux et aboutissant à une approche qui favorise les projets de recherche intégrés. Dans ce contexte, cet article passe en revue les premiers pas faits dans la direction d'un concept de recherche culturelle (« européenne ») plus active et, en même temps, plus cohésive, qui irait au delà d'une simple comparaison entre politiques et expériences nationales. L'article passe aussi en revue les problèmes méthodologiques qu'une telle approche soulèverait. À titre d'exemple, il se rapporte à des projets de recherche individuels ainsi qu'à l'apparition plus récente de ERICarts, l'Institut européen de recherche comparative sur la culture.

A few remarks concerning "social cohesion"

While some people regard "social cohesion" as a culturally progressive concept, we should keep in mind that it can have different connotations and may be used by politicians in a very conservative or even repressive manner. In Germany, we are aware of the implications of similarly misleading terms such as *Volksgemeinschaft* which were propagated 60 years ago or, less dramatically, *Formierte Gesellschaft* (used in the early 1960s) and their particularly negative effects on the arts and other unconventional forms of individual and social expression. Similar histories

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have been experienced in other countries around Europe which should make us question the desirability of strategies which try to put cultural processes and, particularly, the arts on national political agendas in every possible way.

Culture is not a remedy for all illnesses in society. In place of "social engineering" efforts, a more constructive objective of cultural policy in pluralist countries could be to improve our means of governing differences and managing conflict. This includes the ability of minorities to uphold what they consider important to maintain their collective and/or individual identity in another (dominant) culture, as well as the cultivation of a climate conducive to the creation of innovative works of art. Both of these well-meaning aims may prove to be highly controversial in practice, however.

Cultural policy researchers should thus try to offer alternatives to the dictates of day to day politics, bureaucracies, and corporate "global players," by working together with, for example, artists and cultural administrators towards achieving more concrete results, the encouragement of greater diversity, and the recognition of a more nuanced spectrum of aesthetic and emotive response.

National comparisons—to what end?

Cultural policy research in general, and research concerning the economic or legal conditions for cultural production in particular, have both undergone decisive changes in the past 25 to 30 years. As regards comparative cultural policy research: its earliest records date back some 30 years ago when a handful of experts wrote specialized papers mainly on behalf of UNESCO. Governments began looking beyond their borders for answers to policy problems at home and first intergovernmental conferences on general aims and administrative or financial aspects of cultural policy in Europe took place in Venice (1970) and Helsinki (1972). Europe then started to develop into a more open playing field, where political actors became increasingly curious about what their neighbours were up to and how they fared in comparison with them. A few forerunners of European comparative cultural policy research, while not always integrated into mainstream decision-making, started to provide national authorities with alternative solutions to quandaries incurred from transborder experiences. Public discussions began to include such issues as the socioeconomic status of artists, arts funding, and cultural diversity or cultural rights. In some cases, the debate succeeded in effecting changes in national legislation, policies, and programs across Europe.

For example, the *German Bundestag* requested a large enquiry into the social status of different groups of artists back in 1972. My Institute (now known as the Zentrum für Kulturforschung), originally founded two years earlier as an independent "think tank" by the German magazine *DER SPIEGEL*, was entrusted with the task of preparing and evaluating an in-depth survey of 4,000 artists. The research started in 1973 and included a comparison of social security measures for artists in other countries, intended to address this same challenge at home. When the *Künstler-Report* (Fohrbeck & Wiesand, 1975) was published and presented to Parliament in 1975, the government promised to improve the situation of German freelance artists and authors. A few years later, a new law introduced contribu-

tions from both state and industry to create an amended social security system, known as the *Künstler-Sozialversicherungsgesetz*.

Such early examples were also inspired by the increasing participation of national authorities or experts in transborder activities. Official international and European organizations, particularly the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), and the International Labour Organization (see Organisation Internationale du Travail, 1977), all contributed to this process.

We have to be aware, however, that such transborder references had an "inter alia character," that is, research was conducted either directly by a few existing research units of national Ministries for their planning purposes (e.g., by the Service des recherches et études in Paris), or as additions to national surveys, historical assessments, and internal political or legal considerations. These internally driven constrictions thus influenced the methodology and content of research.

A good example of this trend favouring domestic agendas is found in the report of a working group led by the Swedish National Council of Cultural Affairs entitled "Cultural Policy Research and Development" (*Kulturpolitisk forskning och utveckling*, Stockholm, 1978). While this comprehensive report probably constituted the first of its kind in Europe, its main purpose and orientation remained Swedish-centric as defined by both the government and the national universities. It offered few cross-cultural references even within the Nordic bloc of nations and consequently did little to assist researchers in other countries interested in applying the "Swedish example" to their own situations.

In terms of cultural policy research, foreign experiences were consistently pressed into national-specific research and decision-making priorities. This trend persisted in exercises of European and international bodies such as the Council of Europe or UNESCO. A few examples are instructive:

- While efforts were being made towards developing or harmonizing indicators for the *collection and evaluation of cultural statistics*, dating back to the late 1960s when the Council of Europe introduced a discussion paper for "national cultural accounting," methodological frameworks remained oriented towards the systems employed by national statistical offices. First discussed in a meeting of administrators and a few researchers in May 1971 (CCC/EES [71] 86), the situation remains largely unchanged today, despite the most recent efforts made by UNESCO and the European Union.
- Already in 1974, the increasingly important role of regional bodies in financing cultural creativity and related activities was being documented in scientific meetings and reports, such as a conference organized by the Yugoslav National Commission for UNESCO.
- The Conference of Ministers with Responsibility for Cultural Affairs of the Council of Europe in Oslo, 1976, provided a forum for the presentation of studies by S. Mennel ("Cultural Policy in Towns") and F.

Jor ("The Demystification of Culture"), both of which were based on examples from different European countries.

- It was again the Council of Europe which, in 1977, convened the first *meeting of cultural researchers from different European countries* to discuss common aims and methods, as a pioneering attempt to resolve the widely varying national approaches to culture at the time. It took three more years before another initiative was launched by the same organization, involving experts from cultural research and documentation centres—most of which later became involved in networks like CIRCLE and institutes like ERICarts.

- A collection, taxonomy, and comparison of *experiences and "good practises" in the fields of funding or promoting cultural creativity in literature and the visual arts* across 25 European countries was commissioned by the German government as a means of preparing the ground for the creation of national funds in these fields (see Fohrbeck, 1981; Wiesand, 1980).

- Augustin Girard and Geneviève Gentil, in their 1982 UNESCO report *Développement culturel: expériences et politiques*, proposed a very "modern" approach to the topic of cultural creativity by emphasizing the development of cultural industries. Their study examined cultural animation and education as well as ideas for the improvement of cultural research and statistics. Despite these daring steps, the authors remained bound to the needs of *national authorities*, as they themselves acknowledged (see the introduction to their report).

A paradigm shift

On the other hand, one can also find examples of studies with a different outlook over the same 30-year period:

- Already in 1972, a forum of intellectuals, researchers, and futurologists was convened by the Council of Europe to draft the "non-diplomatic" *Declaration of Arc-et-Senans, The Future of Cultural Development*. The spirit of such exchanges paved the way for a continental re-orientation of cultural policy both on the micro (individual national) and the macro (pan-European) level.

- The report *Culture and Working Life: Experiences from Six European Countries* (Heurling, 1980), a so-called "joint study" conducted under the auspices of UNESCO in 1980, proved to be both influential and pioneering. This study addressed not only governments and their agencies for the first time, but also local trade unions as well as the press and company management operating at both the regional and the national levels. The team of researchers and editors concluded that "differing problems and ways of acting in the field of culture and working life" on the national level were definitely limiting the chances

of "developing a new (and here we should add: transnational) dimension to cultural policy."

- A strictly scientific approach less prone to "political" influences was adopted in other UNESCO exercises. These include "Le Projet pour l'élucidation et la promotion de la communication entre les cultures," leading to the report *Introduction aux études interculturelles* (1980) and the comparative research program on the cultural industries (resulting in *Cultural Industries: A Challenge for the Future of Culture*, published in 1982).

With the advent of the 1980s, national policy lines were gradually abandoned in favour of a new purpose and outlook. Today, that abandonment is not yet complete, but organizations such as the European Commission and the Council of Europe, as well as foundations with a global or at least European perspective, are increasingly "investing" in truly comparative cultural research projects (see D'Angelo & Vespérini, 1998).

Consequently, one can trace the emergence of research "networking" exercises from the early 1980s (what later became known as the CIRCLE Network), as well as research and documentation centres with a mainly European or international focus. Table 1 provides an overview of these developments, culminating in the establishment of the first fully "integrated" co-operative European management structure (ERICarts between December 1993 and 2002).

The road ahead

In view of the paradigm shift in comparative cultural research, we must now ask how this new perspective may affect the ways in which we think about the future of cultural policies in Europe. How will leftover national or even regional policy approaches and instruments continue to affect a more integrated Europe? How can diversity and conditions fostering creativity be sustained and even improved in such an environment, which is definitely leaning towards globalization and new technological horizons? And what types of research models should we employ in order to properly monitor these processes?

Dan Brandström gestures towards an answer to these questions in his report to the Plenary during the 1998 UNESCO World Conference in Stockholm. He saw "a great need for comparative cultural research projects but also other joint initiatives for innovative co-operation between the State agencies, foundations and other bodies financing cultural development, research and innovations." In other words, research communities should leave academic ivory towers and try to form partnerships with initiatives and institutions within their own societies and beyond national frontiers. Some examples of these "joint ventures," such as those between Brandström's own Swedish foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond) and international teams of researchers, can already be cited, showing that his plea was not made in vain.

While various global and regional initiatives have supported truly comparative/cross-cultural strategies, on the whole, actual research experience still lags

**Table 1: 25 Years of European Collaboration
in Comparative Cultural Policy Research***

Year	Place	Event/Action	Results/Follow-up
1975	Helsinki	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and subsequent Expert Meetings	"Basket III" of the Final Act foresees the creation of a "European Cultural Data Bank" (ECDB). Working groups on comparative cultural statistics, documents and bibliographies, joint studies ("Network Research"), and thesauri (see Dienes, 1982)
1977	Strasbourg	Council of Europe (CoE) Meeting of national cultural experts	Further co-operation is advocated (no clear follow-up)
1978-80	Stockholm	First "joint studies" conducted under the auspices of UNESCO	1980 report *Culture and the Working Life*, prepared by Swedish and Yugoslav scholars
1980	Strasbourg	First "Meeting of Centres for Cultural Information, Research and Development" at CoE	Future research co-operation is debated
1982	Namur/Paris	ECDB tasks transferred to UNESCO	Co-operation between statisticians is encouraged
1984	Strasbourg	4th "Meeting of Institutes for Cultural Research, Information and Documentation" at CoE	The name C.I.R.C.L.E. is adopted and a networking structure founded serving the needs of CoE
1985	Budapest	"European Cultural Forum" held under the auspices of CSCE	A Resolution introduced by 16 countries, including the Soviet Union and the U.S., underlined the importance of "comparative research" and asked for a "European Association for Cultural Research to promote international expert meetings and comparative joint studies"
1985	Stockholm/ Oslo	Meetings on "Methods for Evaluation of National Cultural Policies"	Introduction of the CoE Review Programme of National Cultural Policies, starting with France in 1987-88
1980s	Vienna	Joint projects for UNESCO based on research by the MEDIACULT group	1986-89 international task force follows up on studies from the 1970s (e.g., "Production and Dissemination of Cultural Goods and Services: Training of Personnel")
1987	Budapest	EUROCIRCON (European Culture Impact Research Consortium) founded	Some overlap with the CIRCLE membership (active until the early 1990s)

**Table 1: 25 Years of European Collaboration
in Comparative Cultural Policy Research* (Continued)**

Year	Place	Event/Action	Results/Follow-up
1987-88	Hamburg/ Budapest	First Conferences of CIRCLE outside of Strasbourg (with partners)	Training for Arts Administration, with Zentrum für Kulturforschung, in Hamburg; East-West Round Table ("The State – Market – Culture") with the Institute for Cultural Research, in Budapest. Resolution to meet henceforth on an annual basis (see also Bodo & Fisher, 1997)
1989	Zagreb	CULTURELINK founded (supported by UNESCO and Council of Europe)	Regular publication of a journal outlining worldwide networking activities, databases, conferences, and publications (see also Culturelink, 1995)
early 1990s	Maastricht, Umea, etc.	American scholars and research priorities influence studies in Europe	e.g., Association of Cultural Economics; economic impact studies; comparative studies
1991-93	Salzburg – Linz, Bonn	Main idea to create a European Research Institute was developed (in the context of work for the Austrian Cultural Policy Review). An association of researchers was founded in 1993 and called "ERICarts" to establish a pan-European Institute	An "integrated" European Institute is proposed in the place of loose networks, devoted to challenges and complexities of comparative research projects, which led to the foundation of an association of researchers as a first step
1994	Hull	International "Crossing Frontiers" Conference on comparative cultural research, organized by the International Comparative Policy Group (Government of Canada)	This event proved influential in strengthening ties between experts from North America and Europe (see Butt, Cliche, & Robineault, 1995)
1999	Bergen	International Conference on Cultural Policy Research	Increased interest for cultural research in academic circles
2000-01	Luxembourg	Working Group on Cultural Statistics (E.U./EUROSTAT) intensifies work	Task forces (e.g., on Cultural Expenditure) try to harmonize statistical definitions and instruments (see EUROSTAT, 2000)
2002	Strasbourg	Foundation of the ERICarts-Institute decided by researchers' association	Since 1997, the ERICarts Association had been active in 22 transnational projects (see ERICarts, 2001)

*Tentative overview with a few examples of events and organizational developments, including the emergence of ERICarts

behind. This is why the European Research Institute for Comparative Cultural Policy and the Arts (ERICarts) initiated interdisciplinary programs of studies and monitoring exercises that try to integrate these concerns, by motivating different players on the European stage towards more co-operative approaches in the field

of cultural research. An increasing demand on the part of the European Union to monitor and evaluate the cultural dimensions of its policies (see Article 151.4 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997; Parliamentary Group of the PSE, European Parliament, 2001) and, in particular, the ongoing process of enlargement in the East and South will further increase demands for these activities. As well, other political bodies are developing new forms of co-operation with researchers, as can be seen in the Compendium *Cultural Policies in Europe* staged jointly by the Council of Europe and ERICarts (see URL: http://www.culturalpolicies.net). All of these efforts will not diminish the value of studies and documentation carried out in more restricted territories, particularly those carried out on local and regional levels or in special constituencies, but will put them into a wider framework and enhance transborder dialogue. On occasion, however, this work could occur at the expense of some networks without a clear profile or of traditional gatekeepers on the national level if they have not adapted to the new situation.

Indeed, ERICarts offers a very promising avenue of comparative and possibly even "integrated" cultural policy research in Europe. This may be so because ERICarts has developed into what is now sometimes called a "community of practice," whose practitioners may be recognized by "a coherence among three dimensions: a joint enterprise, the mutual engagement of its members, and a shared repertoire of resources" (Wenger, 1998). Even before it could be established as a regular institution, it has proven to be flexible enough to cope with the different political challenges and methodological approaches to comparative cultural research currently found in Europe. These approaches can be condensed into the following four types:

- *Type A: Pre-comparison documentation,* like the *Handbook of Cultural Affairs in Europe,* which was initially published by the Zentrum für Kulturforschung in 1985, with the support of CIRCLE and the Council of Europe. The third edition was published in 2000 (Wiesand, 2000).

- *Type B: Top-down comparison,* starting with national or European Union perspectives but also focusing on more topical issues. See, for example, the study published in 2000 as *Pyramid or Pillars: Unveiling the Status of Women in the Arts and Media Professions in Europe* (Cliche, Mitchell, & Wiesand, 2000).

- *Type C: Bottom-up comparative development efforts,* which are a typical fruit of "networking" and which could be exemplified by different projects, conferences, and media activities dedicated to small- and medium-sized "culture industries" (such as a 1999 fact-finding and reconciliation conference in Sarajevo called "Reconstructing Cultural Productivity in the Balkans").

- *Type D: Post-comparison synthesis,* currently under development in ERICarts' "Creative Europe" project, funded by the Network of European Foundations for Innovative Co-operation (NEF).

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