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'Intellectuals and cultural policy' in

*Power, Media, Culture: A Critical View from the Political Economy of Communication*

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This chapter considers the relationship between intellectuals and cultural policies, in particular on the role played by various categories of ‘expert’ in producing the official discourse on creativity that now occupies the conceptual terrain and has effectively displaced – or at least obscured – the discourse on the cultural industries.<sup>1</sup>

First, as Nicholas Garnham (2005) has pointed out, the discourse relating to creativity is an offshoot of one about the information society. In the United Kingdom, the Labour Party – responsible for introducing creative industries policy – has been profoundly influenced by neoliberalism. This means that in the field of communications the political parties largely share the same ideas on the importance of international competitiveness and where feasible the need for deregulation.

Second, the issue of the information society – or knowledge society – has been developed at an intellectual level. The intervention of Daniel Bell (1974), who noted in the early 1970s the formation of a new post-industrial knowledge-based class structure, was instrumental in the evolution of the intellectual field. We can trace various lines of filiation of this mode of thinking; for example, note some of the continuities in the work of the sociologist Alvin Gouldner (1979), who identified a ‘new class’ of intellectuals, and the invocation of the ‘creative class’ currently proposed by the economist Richard Florida (2002; 2005).

What interests me in particular is the relationship between the level of general ideas and the implementation of public policies. I would like to illustrate my argument by reference to my national context and own research. The community that is influential and active in the field of transforming ideas into practical policies – the ‘policy community’ – is not that large because the costs of entry into the debate – the conceptual and empirical investment necessary – are rather high. In order to have an influence it is not sufficient just to gain access to the disciplinary field surrounding cultural policies: the weight of one’s contribution depends on the structural position one occupies, which is to say that it depends on being recognized by those holding political power and one’s proximity to it. This is why there are very few providers of influential ideas. It is clear, moreover, that the government of the day has its own preferences when it comes to selecting useful ideas for its projects. This brings us to the need to construct a political sociology of intellectuals concerned with the production of ‘official’ discourse.

#### **Cultural Policies**

Cultural policies are formed at the crossroads of the political and the cultural, between various modes of practice and experience and the highly institutionalized form of the state. This is why cultural policies are territorialized and predominantly developed in the national or state context. We do need to differentiate between state and nation. However, considering the impact of the globalization of culture and communication, and given that national borders have become rather permeable, the possibility of a complete sociocultural

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was originally written in Spanish in 2008 as a plenary lecture for a hispanophone audience and then revised for publication in 2010. The present text is a lightly revised version of the chapter published in Luis A. Albornoz (ed.) *Poder, Medios, Cultura: Una mirada crítica desde la economía política de la comunicación* (Buenos Aires: Paídos, 2011). Both expository and critical in intent, this contribution was above all meant to convey to an international readership some of the background to the well-known British contribution to the creative economy debate. Faced with its unexpected and republication in English translation, the choice has been either to try and update and develop what has been said or to leave it largely as it is and smooth the inevitable wrinkles that are evident after such a lapse of time. As much of the detail will be unfamiliar to some readers, and the overall argument doubtless unknown to even more, I am content to let this chapter speak for itself. It reminds us of how we have arrived at where we are now. For those who wish to read it, my subsequent work on this theme is readily available. See, for instance, Schlesinger 2009; Schlesinger and Waelde, 2012; Schlesinger 2013.

closure is fairly limited, even in autocracies. For this reason, academic research cannot focus solely on the national state. Projects termed 'national' must therefore both take into account the external environment and each country's internal imperatives.

Broadly understood, cultural policy is a compendium of individual public policies on the media, communications, heritage and the arts – although it also may extend to policies on education and science. This does not mean that each of these is coherently connected to each of the others, quite the contrary: policy development is not always a rational linear process

In fact, the process of public policy formation and implementation is inherently likely to be sidetracked. To understand what this means, we first have to bear in mind that the dominant contemporary official understanding of culture – and therefore of cultural policies – is closely tied to the economy and to the pluralism of most contemporary societies. Moreover, what we understand by culture is also constantly being delineated by tensions between profitability and aesthetic value, as well as framed by the highly permeable borders between the public and the private, between creativity and banality, and so on.

In this sense, as the distinguished sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1992) has highlighted, culture and 'intellectuals' are profoundly connected. According to Bauman, intellectuals make up a new and crucial layer of expertise, one that first formed during the Enlightenment and that has emerged in parallel to the idea of culture conceived as a distinct space with characteristics of its own.

Initially, Bauman has argued, intellectuals were legislators who in effect articulated the ideology of the new order, rejecting diversity and backwardness, spurred by the desire to centralize political and cultural life. However, with the failure of each and every epistemological certainty in the postmodern era, the legislative role has given way to interpretation. This is a far more modest role, which consists in finding, understanding and recounting the diversity that exists in the huge number of local cultures – including the nation.

This is why intellectuals now have minimal social relevance, says Bauman. They talk above all about themselves, and work in universities and other cultural and scientific institutions. Although they have the consolation of being able to communicate with their peers and earn a salary at the same time, they are essentially disconnected from political power.

Bauman's thesis is brilliant, but he is wrong. Its most insightful aspect is this: that with the collapse of the traditional order, the cultural sphere has emerged as a space for action; that is to say, something that needs to be managed and administered. It is the cultural sphere that stands at the heart of intellectuals' concerns. However, my recent empirical research (Schlesinger, 2009) suggests just the opposite: that the legislative impetus remains strong in some intellectual quarters and disciplines. In addition, states have not yet abandoned hegemonic projects pursued and articulated in the name of the nation, just as governments do not always respect the complexity existing in contemporary societies. In short, Bauman's perspective does not allow us to propose an active role for intellectuals in the evolution of cultural policies.

For his part, Theodor Adorno (1991) takes another point of view regarding the role of experts and expertise. For him, the majority of intellectuals are, to use his expression, 'servile', and not much can be expected of them. We find ourselves in a fallen contemporary world, dominated by a cultural industry that is fed by mass consumption and that in turn creates a cultural scene of 'eternal similitude'.

Moreover, for Adorno, the idea of administered culture is repugnant – and worse still if it is administered by public authorities – since he regards culture as constituted by the so-called 'critical impulse'. That is to say it functions precisely in counterpoint or contrast to the practice of administration. In spite of this, however, he believes that it is possible for a cultural policy to be self-critical and for expertise to be used 'for the protection of cultural matters from the realm of control by the market' (Adorno, 1991: 89). There is a need, therefore, to protect high culture not just from the operations of the administration but also from the ignorant tastes of an uneducated *demos*.

Now, Adorno has chosen the 'least bad' solution, since along with the administration of culture, there is a discretionary space in which those cultural experts capable of critical judgment could make good decisions. In this way they would thus have a legislative function.

This perspective is relevant to my current line of research regarding the role played by experts in the public debate on creative industry policy in the United Kingdom. The problem is that intellectual legislation can be a source of disappointment. No doubt, what is happening in Britain would be a negative affair for Adorno, because it confirms, against his principles, the importance of the market in the cultural sphere.

## Comparison

Each public policy undeniably has its own history. It is embedded in its own institutional context, which is why when thinking about formulating or implementing cultural policies we cannot disregard the functioning of government ministries, arts councils, communications regulators, and other cultural agencies.

Although all countries face global trends— and, in the context of the European Union, the equivocal process of Europeanization – national contexts tend to be very different from one another. It is true that we live in a framework of international governance – which is more or less effective, depending on the global balance of forces – and that the idea of classic national sovereignty has been overtaken, but no one can deny that the international system continues to be constituted by states.

In that sense, comparing the public policies of states and nations may prove very fruitful, providing that the state or national specificity is not eliminated. The problem is that the act of comparing entails a logic that minimizes particularity in pursuit of comparable elements. This is why it is necessary to highlight the differences and similarities deemed essential, because only in this way, by facing up to the limits of a comparative analysis, can we arrive at the cultural and social fabric, at the materiality of difference.

The particularity of each political context thus opens an interesting question: to what extent can we transfer public policies and solutions from one context to another? There can be no doubt that ideas travel. But they do not do so without a certain baggage. Besides, they are susceptible to interpretations shaped by the contexts of reception.

In the case of the United Kingdom, where the discourse of creativity has been produced in precise conditions over the course of a decade, it is highly interesting to examine the question of its exportation and transferability. Moreover, the recent evolution in the country's public policies on communication and its cultural policies raises a series of questions about the creative industries, or the 'creative economy', their new label.

## **The United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom is a state made up of different nations. Due to the devolution of powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the internal differentiation of the British state – that is to say, the growing distinctiveness of the smaller nations in relation to England – is causing institutional variations as well as differences in public policies themselves.<sup>2</sup> For this reason it is necessary to take into account another comparative level, the one existing within the state.

Since the beginning of the century and until very recently, it was not difficult to find differentiated public policies for culture, broadcasting, telecommunications and so on. However, technological change in the UK has gradually effected the growing integration of the audiovisual sector and that of communications. In addition, the increasing use of the label 'creative content' shows how accelerated digitization is bringing about the convergence of sectors that in the past were clearly distinguished from one another. It is not always easy to distinguish communication policies from cultural policies

In this wider context, 'creativity' has established itself as a hegemonic term in our current debate, closely linked to the idea of innovation in trade, education and science. In the context of globalization, the policy of creativity has become an integral part of a discourse of national renewal – both at the British level as well as that of the UK's devolved nations. When that official discourse is analysed, its exponents can be seen to resort rhetorically to the idea that it is an evidence-based policy, in other words, they tend to demonstrate its rationality.

However, underlying the search for facts, beneath the rationality of policy, there is also a credo: a belief associated with a particular vision of the world in which the economic exploitation of creativity is the key to achieving global success. This belief also involves an anthropology of human capabilities, based on the idea of *homo economicus*.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that cultural policies have two key intertwined aspects: the applied and the symbolic. The latter is based on the imaginary of the national community and has to do with the image projected by a public policy. In the case of creativity in the United Kingdom, it was initially an image of rupture, innovation, youth and renaissance, which began to permeate public discourse from 1997, in the shape of 'Cool Britannia' in the early days of Prime Minister Tony Blair's period in office. Now, nearly

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<sup>2</sup> The referendum on Scottish independence held on 18 September 2014 was the catalyst for wider recognition of fundamental faults in the UK's wider constitutional framework. How these will – or will not – be resolved is another matter.

two decades on, we have another much more ostentatious and at the same time more banal imaginary: that of acting as a global cultural hub, capable of influencing trends in cultural production and consumption in the international market.

### **The stages**

It was in 1998 that the new policy was launched. The New Labour government set up a working group with the aim of producing a cartography of the creative industries for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Remarkably, since then the resulting work, titled the *Creative Industries Mapping Document* (DCMS, 1998) has been an important benchmark for contemporary debate not only in the United Kingdom but in many other countries.

The official definition – clearly quite durable – is the following: that the creative industries have their origin in ‘creativity, skills, individual talents [...] which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property’ (DCMS, 1998, p.3.).

In reality, this is no more than a pragmatic list, but for many it has proved to be an ineluctable starting-point for discussion. Rather than a true conceptualization of the creative industries it is an officially designated cluster of chosen sectors, namely: ‘advertising, architecture, art and antiques, design, fashion, cinema, interactive software, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio’ (DCMS, 1998, p.3).

In sum, the creative industries have been defined by two fundamental characteristics: they are conceived as activities based on individual creativity in terms of their ability to generate intellectual property – which is exportable – along with the exploitation of these selfsame activities as a basis for wealth and job creation. In that sense, the British definition is economistic, since the communicative and symbolic functions of a culture – as well as the generation and communication of ideas – is interesting only because it has use-value. In other words, culture is displaced by creativity. Thus, the conception of the ‘creative’ industries constitutes a break with the idea of the ‘cultural’ industries. This has significant consequences for public policies.

To all this, it must be added that the discourse of the creative industries is embedded in the discourse of the knowledge economy. The approach is individualistic and seemingly democratic because, according to the doctrine, all individuals can be conceived as creative subjects. Ostensibly, then, creativity is a quality equally present in all of us. But, as Antonio Gramsci (1971) once observed, the fact that all can use their intellectual capabilities does not mean that they all therefore have the function of intellectuals.

The seductive power of this new anthropology of creativity is strengthened in the technological age of user-generated content. For example, all those individuals that can now access technological resources are able in principle to produce content for the Internet, most notably for most, distributing messages through social media.. However, this does not mean communicative equality. Barriers remain in respect of quality, extent of circulation, impact and profitability, among many others. The democratizing image of communication technologies is thus strongly linked to the persuasive power of the new doctrine of creativity, which in turn constitutes a break with the ideas of ‘originality’ traditionally associated with creative artistic production.

The key idea of the current British doctrine of creativity is to maximize the economic impact of the thirteen industrial sectors identified. As we can see, this concept represents a distinct stage beyond cultural industries policy – an approach initiated in the 1980s. Indeed, the list of selected industries combines formerly separate sectors – communication and the arts – to which information and communication technologies have been added. Accompanying the doctrine of creativity, there is an underlying ideological current: the apotheosis of business innovation as a model for all other practices, along with the need to develop human capital, trained – ideally – to a high level of skill.

It is important to point out that the DCMS’s intervention brokered two crucial ideas that have continued to influence British public policy and that of other countries. On the one hand, there is the conception of the United Kingdom as a competitive nation facing the challenge of the BRICS countries – the acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. On the other, the belief that state intervention is necessary and legitimate to ensure the wellbeing of ‘UK plc’.

### **Empirical research**

The evolution of the United Kingdom's national policy highlighted the importance at an early stage of a particular segment of intellectuals, those working in New Labour think tanks. Such bodies typically produce an expert discourse geared towards the fields of politics and the media, thereby participating in a day-to-day ideological struggle. Indeed, the New Labour think tanks were set up with the aim of waging a war of positions in the struggle for hegemony at the level of ideas.

The importance of think tanks in today's British political culture lies in the fact that they are in charge of mediating ideas and disseminating public policy proposals in the public sphere; they are driven by a clear intention to produce political effects – that is, they seek to influence the policy domain. Thus, they are themselves actors within the wider media field.

This type of activity touches on the question of the role of expert government advisors in our societies. The political role of such experts has been important since the early twentieth century, since those close to power possess a structural advantage: they are able to both influence politicians and public policies as well as position ideas and launch debates onto the public agenda.

In the case of New Labour, as previously in the case of the Conservative Party, think tanks have functioned not only as efficient ideological laboratories but also as producers of political talent. Important prime ministerial advisors, senior civil servants, two Culture Secretaries, one Trade and Industry Secretary, and one Foreign Secretary all came to power following a period of training in think tanks. Similarly, other key figures have moved between the BBC and Ofcom (the communications regulator) and government.

While the United Kingdom has occupied a key place in developing the discourses on creativity, the idea of the creative industries has also been widely disseminated throughout the world. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) *Creative Economy Report 2008* and its successor versions have contributed to the globalization of the discourse.

### **The Creative Economy Programme (CEP)**

From 2005 onwards we can trace the creation of elements in the new public policy through a series of official reports initiated by Gordon Brown, who at the time was Chancellor of the Exchequer, later becoming Prime Minister in succession to Tony Blair.

The *Cox Report* (2005), chaired by the design expert Sir George Cox, proposed as its central line of argument the exploitation of the nation's creative skills and the establishment of closer ties between business, universities and cultural creators. Along with this, it also invoked the importance of innovation as a mediator between creativity and design. The substance of the report was, to use Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) expression, a *doxa* shared by the authors of other reports of this type. The underlying beliefs thus consisted of economic nationalism, the affirmation of the role of the state and of public agencies in global competitiveness, and the need to transform business and organizational culture into a creative culture for all.

I do not wish to multiply the examples, but it is instructive to acknowledge that the same ideas penetrated the field of education, not only at university but also secondary school level. The thinking of Professor Ken Robinson (1999), who propounded the need to develop creativity in the school context, has been highly influential since the late 1990s. The basic concept is that the specific skills acquired at school might ensure a student's personal success in the so-called knowledge economy. For its part, the Department for Education – in close collaboration with the DCMS – promoted the *Roberts Report* (2006) on the nurturing of young people's creativity. According to ministers and their advisors, in order to establish a global hub of creativity, it was necessary to mobilize the UK's young creative talent. To do this they proposed forging connections between selected secondary schools and the creative industries.

A significant moment came with the launch of the Creative Economy Programme (CEP) in 2005 by the DCMS in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and with the support of the Treasury. In a statement that was almost a declaration of faith, the Culture Secretary pronounced that 'every industry must look to become a creative industry, in the broadest sense of the word' (Jowell, 2005).

The CEP, in typical New Labour fashion, was initiated by working groups that produced reports on particular issues: access to funding, training and skills, diversity, technology, testing and analysis. Leaving aside any discussion of the detail, it is important to be aware of the conceptual effort involved first in identifying and characterizing a creative economy and second in trying to draw out the main implications.

Much of this conceptual work was undertaken by experts outside the DCMS: advisors, consultants and, of course, think tanks. Two important steps should be noted.

First, a leap was made from a mere list of creative industries to an attempt to conceptualize the creative economy. That is to say, after years of operating with a more or less arbitrary and non-differentiated list of creative industries, the CEP experts suggested grouping the industrial sectors into three categories: production, services and arts. At the same time, a group inside the DCMS agreed that, in fact, there were no adequate or reliable data on the creative industries. Ironically, this happened after years of insisting that the 'creative sector' had an economic importance equal to that of the financial sector.

Second, in a more radical step, a first elaborate conceptualization of the 'creative economy' was finally produced. This came in the report *Staying Ahead: The economic performance of the UK's creative industries*, published in June 2007 and written by members of the Work Foundation with the sponsorship of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The title of the report, *Staying Ahead*, reflects the widespread obsession with competitiveness: the desire to maintain the cultural and linguistic advantages already gained by the United Kingdom.

It is also relevant to note the publication, just a few months before *Staying Ahead*, of the significant report written for the European Commission titled *The Economy of Culture in Europe* (KEA European Affairs, 2006). The main author of this study observed in a discussion that the use of the word 'culture' was not fortuitous. Clearly, at that time, the label 'creativity' was not acceptable to the European Commission as a mobilizing idea. Notwithstanding the terminological differences, there was a conceptual convergence between the two reports regarding the fundamental role fulfilled by culture in the generation of wealth.

According to *Staying Ahead* (Work Foundation, 2007), we need to radically rethink the functioning of the economy, reimagining it as a figure composed of concentric circles. In this new model, the cultural fields – the fruit of expressiveness – are at the core, followed by the cultural industries, then the creative industries and finally the rest of the economy. It is an invitation to imagine that the fundamental dynamic of the economy might come from 'cultural creativity'. This project and its imaginary are actively seeking adherents around the globe.

In the United Kingdom, however, as elsewhere, this particular framing of the creative economy has sometimes been met with scepticism and resistance, even within government. The DCMS's project encountered reservations on the part of the DTI and the Treasury. In fact, even within the DCMS, the Work Foundation vision was not accepted, because it was considered too radical and critical of current public policies, in a clear example of the limits to the influence of think tanks when civil servants oppose a proposal.

The *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy* report (February 2008) subsequently produced by the DCMS turned out to be a compilation of public policies without any underlying integrative or strategic conception. In some respects, this was the last of a particular sequence of reports, and in many ways marked the high watermark of official thinking regarding the creative industries, as attention subsequently shifted into addressing the impact of the digital revolution and the key role of intellectual property in the creative economy. By that stage, in any case, as the groundwork had been done, the set of concerns outlined above had become so naturalised in the dominant discourse that it easily made the transition, post-New Labour, into the everyday framing of policy by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government that took office in May 2010.

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