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Editorial

Introduction—Cultural policy and the public funding of culture in an international perspective



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ABSTRACT

This special issue on cultural policy in an international perspective brings together experts in various fields to discuss two main themes: the social forces that drive persistence and change in public spending on culture over time and the contours of emerging models of public cultural spending. The two themes are discussed from different angles and with different emphases rooted in country contexts. This editorial outlines the common themes across the papers in the special issue and concludes by setting an agenda for future research.

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Introduction

This special issue on cultural policy in an international perspective brings together experts in various fields to discuss two main themes: the social forces that drive persistence and change in public spending on culture over time and the contours of emerging models of public cultural spending. The two themes are discussed from different angles and with different emphases rooted in country contexts.

Cultural policy refers to the state's involvement in the realm of culture (inclusive of the arts), pursued directly or through agents, and encompassing the many phases in the process that ranges from the production to the consumption of culture (Miller and Yudice, 2002; Schuster, 2003; Mulcahy, 2006). The public funding of culture is the most direct demonstration of cultural policy directives. Nevertheless, the fiscal aspects of cultural policy have been rather neglected in the literature, mainly because of a lack of detailed, systematic, cross-domain (e.g., theater, museums), cross-level (e.g., state, province, municipality) and cross-time data. This lack has also impeded significant cross-national comparisons (Bina et al., 2012). While the papers in this issue do not explicitly engage in testing hypotheses stemming from a cross-national theorization of cultural policy, the richness of their data and the variety of country case studies provide insights into various comparisons.

I hope that the readership of *Poetics* finds the topic discussed here of particular relevance, as it speaks to some of the aims of the journal. First, this special issue is interdisciplinary, written by

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authors who specialize in economics, sociology, arts management, and social policy. Second, all of the papers report findings from analyses of data collected specifically for this endeavor, and try to make a theoretical claim about the need to promote interdisciplinary research on the public funding of the arts. Such theoretical advances will improve our understanding of various cultural policy models and the way they produce different outcomes across contexts and over time.

After a brief introduction of the six different papers I will highlight the common themes that are discussed in them and draw some of the similarities found between the case studies. I will conclude with setting an agenda for future research with an emphasis on international comparison.

Models and determinants of cultural public spending

Bertacchini and *Dalle Nogare* offer a framework for understanding the new way in which different levels of government cope with the tension between the need to minimize failure in the production of culture and the goal of applying public rather than private standards and values to the culture being supported. After exploring a series of models of public support for the arts, they focus on the specific mechanism of outsourcing public cultural services, anchored in the example of Italian cities. They show how such outsourcing reshapes the public intervention in culture by promoting a new institutional arrangement: direct support through the delegation of production.

Another paper that focuses on the local level is *Rushton's* analysis of cultural districts in American cities. Addressing the perception that sees cultural policy as a means of economic development, Rushton investigates the shift from an emphasis on support for artists and arts organizations to support for creative places and districts, and evaluates the dimensions that should be used when gauging the effectiveness of this shift.

The next four papers all examine the determinants of public cultural spending over a period of several decades. *Noonan* builds on his previous work that investigated the fiscal, political, and demographic determinants of state government appropriations to state arts agencies in the United States during 1969–2002. He updates the data through 2011 to determine whether previous models were useful in predicting funding patterns during a decade of economic crisis that posed a dramatic challenge to public arts funding in the United States.

Rössel and *Weingartner* look at the role of Swiss cantons in cultural funding, conceptualizing a model that includes a mid-level agency between the state and municipalities. They study the determinants of cultural expenditures in the 26 cantons between 1977 and 2010, and highlight interesting differences between the cantons in the ways that various economic, political, and demographic variables shape the funding of different types of culture.

Getzner also investigates the determinants of public spending on culture over time, this time in Austria between 1967 and 2013. He shows that in addition to dependence on the general affluence of the country, cultural spending also reflects the interplay between levels of government, in which the central government balances fluctuations in the spending of the provinces. Getzner's paper also asks whether electoral cycles correlate with the cultural spending of the government and whether party ideology intervenes in the process.

Feder and *Katz-Gerro* analyze a similar time frame from 1960 to 2011 in Israel, and propose that patterns of the government funding of arts organizations can be used to construct a cultural hierarchy that reflects priorities in cultural policy. The cultural hierarchy ranks arts organizations based on three dimensions: cultural domains, ethnic orientations, and geographic location in the center or the periphery of the country. The paper discusses various aspects of the correspondence between the social hierarchy in Israel and the cultural hierarchy as depicted in the allocation of cultural funding.

Tensions in the public funding of culture

Previous literature and also the papers in this issue demonstrate that cultural spending is a small part of the public budget in many countries (*Klamer et al., 2006; Mulcahy, 2006*). Although the private, non-profit, and for-profit sectors are often more dominant in financing the arts and culture (*Zimmer and Toepler, 1999; Throsby, 2010*), the state has a central role in influencing both the heritage and the prospects of the arts and culture in society. As such, cultural policy is bound to be under powerful

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