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Arts and Culture in Regional Development in Scotland

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Since the days of Adam Smith, there has been a tradition in Scotland of analysing economic problems within a distinctive 'Scottish Political Economy' approach, taking a holistic view of the world. This suggests that we cannot consider policy issues facing an area in economic isolation, but must incorporate social, historical, political and environmental factors into any analysis. In recent times, the socio-cultural dimensions of community have often been stressed as being essential to successful economies: the invisible factors in economic development are to be found in the history, social norms and culture values of the community as much as in current indicators of economic performance. There is a need to discuss and interpret the impacts of arts and culture on economic development in broad terms. Here, an economic perspective is taken of the importance of culture in regional development, followed by an assessment of the concepts of culture and community and their role in current regional development strategy with special reference to Scotland. Attention is drawn to two main issues. First, it is crucial to situate economic development within our socio-cultural histories and to assess inter-sectoral linkages in these terms. Secondly, community and culture must be viewed as social processes rather than as objectified resources to be delineated and accessed at will.

Economic Perspective

Recent economic change has provoked an interest in the contribution of the arts and culture to regional development. The de-industrialisation of parts of the UK, the loss of male, manufacturing, full-time, skilled, unionised jobs in heavy industry, and a parallel decline in agriculture and other primary sectors in rural areas, has forced restructuring around new areas of activity. There have also been significant changes in EU and UK policies for such areas, with the decline of traditional regional policy in favour of supply side measures. The grants and loans regime based on large manufacturing plants has been downgraded while regional development agencies (such as the Welsh Development Agency and Scottish Enterprise) have re-oriented to act as business development agencies, with greater emphasis on embedding existing inward investment, supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and encouraging new businesses. Different issues entered the agenda, with particular emphasis on social inclusion and sustainability.

Strategies are increasingly founded on the service economy, with agencies seeking new jobs and other income opportunities, frequently female dominated, part-time, temporary, seasonal, casualised and non-unionised, to replace the old traditional sectors. The focus has shifted away from industrial plants and the workplace, with the efforts of the development agencies and their partners in regeneration tending to imagineering and targeting on inner cities, old industrial areas, cultural quarters, heritage centres, events and so on (Griffiths, 1995).

Across the world there has also been a rapid adoption of strategies based on

the promotion of economic development through new partnerships between enterprises, public and private sector institutions. In particular, enterprise networks and industrial clusters based on the notions of partnership, the learning society, the knowledge economy, linkages and networking are being embraced (UNIDO 2000). By arranging economic activity in industrial districts and clusters with a sufficient degree of institutional capacity and support, areas can be more successful in innovation strategies and in embedding development into the local economy. It has become orthodox to see the key component in economic growth and policy-making as the creation of knowledge and innovation, with the institutional framework believed to be critical in this process. Formal organisations, such as the regional development agency, are important in creating the conditions for success, but particular attention is given to the informal institution, which by operating through ... *"tradition, custom or legal constraint, tends to create durable and routinised patterns of behaviour"* (Hodgson, 1988, p10). Consequently, social institutions, local knowledge and informal education are regarded as critical in promoting innovation, the creation of enterprises, the attraction of inward investment and the performance of the local economy.

Hage and Power (1992) suggest that the shift to a post-industrial state has generated a need to be creative beyond the routine and established norms; that is, we need to learn to live beyond what we are now. This requires an accurate assessment of what constitutes 'what we are' and indeed 'where we want to go' and ties in with the trend towards a more reflexive subjectivity (Ray, 1999). Eire's socio-economic transformation, a

mainstay of which has been the country's capacity to strategically deploy artistic and cultural expression for economic gain provides at least one comparable example.

Relationships between agencies and partners are also important in maximising the effectiveness of local knowledge, skills and training strategies in raising the competitiveness, performance and innovation of an area. The role of 'untraded interdependencies' (in labour markets, local conventions, norms, values, public or semi-public institutions) are highlighted as key in these processes. These concepts are fundamental to regional innovation and enterprise, and to the creation of skills, capabilities and attitudes to lifelong learning which are believed to explain the success of certain economies and communities. The spatial and community focus of these developments is fundamental, and so there has been a renewed recognition that self-esteem and self-confidence of individuals and networked groups underpin a successful local economy (Ray 1999).

Late modernity has arguably provided the opportunity to embrace new identities and to occupy 'new flexible spaces'. As our 'traditional role-centred' experiences and demarcations of modern existence have become reshaped into an assumed world of symbolic value and reflexivity we have had to rethink what it is that we expect of our arts and cultural environment. Consequently, culture is now integral to the rhetoric of sustainability and 'meaningful' regeneration processes (Day 1998). With this in mind, we can attempt some broad thinking on where Scotland's relationship with arts and culture might foster economic gain.

Reappraising Arts and Culture in a 'New Scotland' Era

Following the reconvening of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh on 1st of July 1999 the nation was poised to embark upon an era of a 'new Scotland'. The new Parliament set out its agenda by making special reference to the wider 'New Labour' social inclusion project, which runs parallel with a more 'post-national' ethos of an 'inclusive' Scottish national community, which celebrates diversity as well as championing the uniqueness of Scottish culture, history and identity. Implicit in this rhetoric is the constructive development of 'otherness' and the reduction of animosity and discrimination between ethnic, age, gender, sexuality and class groupings. Despite the leaning away from a unified national cultural identity towards a post-modern fusion of a nation which is 'all things to all people', the reality remains somewhat different. There is no easy recipe for community confidence and cultural cohesion. Nevertheless, the Scottish Executive is attempting to forge a new unity both economically and in terms of socio-cultural practice, but how this interfaces with development at a regional level is critically reflected upon next. Two key issues are considered: the first lies in the tension between configurations of the regional and the national, and the second lies with the relationship between culture and the economy.

Scotland suffers, like other Celtic nations including Wales, from an often unequivocal projection of regional identity configuration within a wider UK or British 'nation state' (Nairn, 1997; 2000). This undermines the more internal construction of Scotland, like Wales, of a national space consisting of several distinctive cultural regions which have to compete for centrally provided resources as well as recognition of their 'worth'. The nation experiences a disproportionate distribution of artistic and cultural funding across space and this has been targeted by the policy makers in their current review. Recent attention has been given to the Arts Lottery Funds, for example, and historical inequities are now being targeted for revision. More relevant than of itself is the congruence of these biases with those of national funding decisions, and of the support for the large 'national' organisations and companies. The promotion of certain cultural forms can often result in the neglect of others, a truism not fully appreciated in many debates around constrained arts and culture budgets.

As a result of trying to redress some aspects of past cultural oppression and

marginalisation, certain elements now appear to dominate our perceptions of what is 'good to culturally think with'. Gaelic and Celtic symbolism has, for example, been particularly dominant in terms of exemplifying regional Scotland cultures, for example. Whilst this cultural consolidation appears to speak for those beyond Scotland who sympathise with such identity commodification, the extent to which such a skewed cultural expression speak for a 'new Scotland' or indeed for all Scotland is worthy of further research. It is to Ireland, Wales and Celtic 'others' to whom we as a nation culturally turn, but our links across the North Sea to Scandic countries and northern Europe including England, are relatively undeveloped in any meaningful fashion. Hence, regional arts agendas such as those championed by the Shetlands or the Orkney Islands have had success, but are notable for their capacity to locally flourish in spite of skewed national strategy which appears to favour the Gaidhealteachd and the urban cores of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Other demarcated regions such as the Borders or Dumfries and Galloway have found themselves out in the cold as they suffer from a symbolic mapping of cultural Scotland which concentrates on the central belt and the north, albeit with notable patchiness. So whilst Scotland's regions remain important in the configuration of a diverse cultural identity for the nation, certain agendas appear to steer cultural policy towards a particular set of national narratives which seem to be predisposed towards certain marketable elements (such as 'Celticness') of our cultural history, whilst other aspects appear to be increasingly sidelined.

Secondly, the realities of socio-economic histories shape the current arts and cultural climate of Scotland's communities. As we noted earlier this relationship is both a constraint and a potentially sustainable resource for regeneration. In order to understand this further we need to examine more closely the two core concepts of community and culture. Consider then what is meant by the term 'community'. The Scottish Executive (1999) clearly has a sense of its importance as it figures strongly in the new mission statement: *'We believe that arts and culture have a central role in shaping a sense of community and civic pride in the new Scotland'*. The recognition that culture in general, and community as an expression of everyday lived experience, are open to constant change and negotiation is important. Whilst community can create a focus for shared action, it can so easily be an element of tension and ultimately

fragmentation of resource and support structures. The term 'community' often defies definition and 'boundedness' and this can happen to both those people on the 'inside' as well as those 'outside' any sense of a bounded identity (Cohen 1986). There is a complexity to the often unspoken although not necessarily unarticulated expression of how it is that community is sensed by its members, and any attempt to try to solidify such feelings are tantamount to undermining the very bonds which exist to hold people together. And yet, others demonstrate how community operates to bond people by the very process of articulating what is recognised as important and shared and worth laying claim to. Regeneration projects within communities throughout Scotland's regions constantly struggle with these related yet competing aspects of community expression. Commonality of purpose and cultural identity compete with internal difference and diversity, and this maps onto the wider discourse of 'community' which itself varies over time and space.

Let us now reflect on the use of the term 'culture'. Culture has been defined by the Scottish Executive as: *'all distinctive spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional features which characterise a society or group'*. However, the term culture, like community, is notoriously difficult to pin down. Hence, the Scottish Executive consulted with the Scottish people on a proposed new National Cultural Strategy for Scotland (Bonnar Keenlyside 2000). The key elements of this process have been a focus on the debate on culture; a recognition of the diversity of cultural aspects within Scotland; a shift towards a strategy which celebrates the 'future' with special reference to youth; and a recognition that arts and culture underpin a sense of a 'whole person' and a 'whole people'. This implied holistic approach echoes Bianchini's (1996:7) argument that urban and regional cultural policy makers should move towards a 'cultural planning approach' which integrates both the aesthetic of arts and culture with other aspects of everyday life such as sport, recreation, crafts, local history, architecture and so on.

Key agencies such as the local authorities association, COSLA, have also embraced devolution as a unique opportunity to 'rethink and redefine what is meant by culture'. COSLA appear to support moves towards a clearer strategy on 'culture' and the integration of arts into the main structural facets of people's lives: *'full and reliable information is essential properly to understand and measure the impact of culture at a national and local*

level in terms of employment, education, tourism and regeneration." One key issue proposed was to have a centrally co-ordinated research and information service which will improve the rather limited understanding of how expenditure on arts and culture across regions is actually realised in socio-cultural terms. COSLA go on to state that *"Public discussion to date about a national cultural strategy has centred around the perceived difficulties in achieving a fit between local priorities as represented by local government and local communities of interest and the priorities of national cultural agencies. A regional emphasis may offer a better strategic fit between the local and national."* COSLA are therefore proposing the setting up of a regional networking body which will focus on the integration of key areas such as economic development, tourism, health, lifelong learning and community development and learning. This networked body should be in a position to influence and broker cultural activity that may be *"most appropriately based upon regional collaboration"* – such as marketing, cultural tourism, education, and social inclusion consortia. However, this new networked body should not replace or overlap with the existing remit of local authorities and cultural agencies. We would broadly support these steps, as this regional interface is useful, but it should be noted that regional governance does not always map onto cultural territory then we are back to the complexity of a small country's cultural identities defying objectified boundaries.

In these terms then we can see how the Scottish Executive's decision to take this opportunity to reassess the cultural and artistic policies is crucial. Responses from the consultation process were wide-ranging and have real implications for the long-term vision of cultural development. In addition to more obvious issues such as criticism being levelled at the current arts structures and agencies as being too bureaucratic and 'remote', there was a perceived need to improve access to all but especially the young. It was suggested that we in Scotland should enhance and develop the overseas' perception of our culture and arts, and this indicates a role for the national community to unite behind a bolder 'for-Scotland' voice. Yet, from within our boundaries we will continue to debate what constitutes 'national' companies. Who or what can be said to represent all Scotland? Consequently, any engagement with the cultural and socio-economic diversity of our communities at large has to be much more than the current sporadic tokenism or worse, disinterest. Perhaps, more telling of all, the responses

provided an insight into a sense of collective failure within Scotland regarding our cultural knowledge and heritage understanding. Improved education provision and training initiatives were highlighted as imperative, but in the current educational climate there is little scope to develop creative thinking. The recent news of the proposed 'dumbing-down' of BBC Scotland's Radio programming is indicative of the contested nature of cultural provision and economic agendas.

Regional Diversities and Cultural Realities

One of the most important aspects of understanding Scottish arts and culture development is to appreciate the tensions between the national configuration of such expression and the mapping onto more 'local' as well 'global' aspects. This balancing act is at the very core of how Scotland is currently seeking to understand what it means to have an arts and cultural policy which is inclusive yet challenging, and one which is commercially successful whilst targeting areas of 'need'. This small country experiences a fusion of the regional and local with the national, which is internally driven by a desire to unify Scotland in the face of external threats. This is while dancing to the tune of funding bodies which often require place specific commitment and the competitive advancement of 'local qualities' which are often more constructed than real.

Both in the Gaidhealtachd, with initiatives funded from Objective 1 sources, and in central Scotland, local economies have moved to a commodification of culture and heritage only to find that a lack of funds and a lack of an integrated policy to other sectors has placed them in an untenable financial position. The recent debate over the lack of sustained funding of our industrial museums drew attention to the disproportionate nature of support for such a cultural resource. The domination of the Scottish museums cultural strategy by the 'national museums' based in Edinburgh and the threats to community and thematic enterprises such as Industrial Heritage are now key concerns. Currently, 96% of National Museums funding goes to 'National Museums of Scotland' leaving only 4% for all other projects. For example the Scottish Maritime Museum; the Scottish Mining Museum; and the Industrial Heritage Park at Coatbridge are all facing serious financial constraints at the present time. Closure of such museums creates a double blow to communities who have already experienced a slump in fortunes historically, and the 'cultural industries'

promise of a shiny new future has been tarnished by a lack of national government commitment, and cash-strapped local authorities are facing real problems in sustaining such enterprise. Perhaps one lesson to learn here is that those people who spoke out in the debate over the proposed closure of the heritage museums argued that such heritage should be made available for consumption whether people (local or otherwise) choose to actually visit or not. The symbolic presence of cultural histories were viewed as important to the local communities and seen as statements of their worth beyond any calculation based on visitor numbers, and they serve an important purpose of artistic inspiration as well as contention.

Perhaps one example of relative success in these 'production to consumption' terms is Dundee. Through a programme of flagship development including the Discovery Quay, and a recycling of past industries into cultural tourism, the city has demonstrated how it is possible to rebuild a sense of regional confidence. Like Glasgow, Dundee has been reasonably successful in capitalising on arts and culture in terms of 'reinventing' its identity. However, commentators are more cautious over the extent of economic 'trickle-down' gains (McCarthy and Pollock 1997). Dundee may well have secured an improved 'internal' confidence, but it has yet to counter the tendencies of external agencies to unfairly view it as a place somewhere between an economic blackspot and a cultural cul-de-sac. Similarly Glasgow has yet to satisfy critics that it has successfully moved beyond a 'dual city' model.

Undoubtedly, the working and living conditions which created the communities based on coal, steel, shipbuilding and heavy engineering, and on remote and relatively poor rural sectors have left endemic problems, poverty and deprivation (Hoggart et al 1995). Further, the restructuring of the economy has made not only workers but also their occupations, skills and processes redundant and unsuited for the enterprising economy. The capacities and competencies of such communities are often underdeveloped so they are less able to compete, or to be included. Many of the former strengths have become weaknesses, with for instance the factory discipline required in the old industries being inappropriate for the modern demands for flexibility, initiative and innovation.

We have shown above that economic development theory and the experience of successful economies now also stresses norms, values and institutions. The very cultures which were

engendered in old industrial areas and rural communities may have advantages which were neither recognised nor welcomed by the owners of these former traditional sectors, nor appreciated by the agencies of today. The new strategic approach to economic development may well offer their cultures as the genuine bases for sustainable growth rather than as straitjackets from the past. The characteristics of these areas: cohesion, partnership and community are the fundamentals of successful economies, not the barriers, and their arts and culture become essential elements in strategies for regeneration.

We should not be naïve to the competing agendas of each sector: arts and economics have often crossed swords. The Royal Society of Edinburgh, for instance, recently insisted that the economy was not the 'primary purpose' of the arts and consequently any 'therapeutic value' such as social inclusion should be considered 'incidental rather than essential' (Wishart 2000, p6). As Wishart notes this may well be a 'minority' view and flies in the face of recent funding commitments, but its hegemonic privileging of the 'arts for arts' sake cannot be underestimated in terms of how various arts projects must compete on the still uneven stage of cultural evaluation.

Conclusions

The culture of an area is an essential foundation of a prosperous community and not some detached characteristic. Many of the economic, social and political processes which define and renew the culture are either endogenous to the region, or legacies of former industries, struggles and patterns of development. There is a need to reconsider the cultures of old industrial areas such as South Wales and Clydeside to determine whether they are indeed dependent on their pasts, suffering from antipathy to enterprise and innovation, as often claimed by business development agencies and policy makers, or whether there are actually strengths in their communities which could promise an alternative future.

To what extent economics shape artistic and cultural expression has been discussed in detail by Bianchini (1996) and the specifics of the Scottish experience have been touched on here. Both the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Arts Council aim to develop both 'popular' culture and new forms of 'hybrid culture'. The recognition that regional cultures are, like national cultures, difficult to objectify and isolate from globalisation effects as well as the

more established understanding that culture has never been monolithic, is currently shaping regional arts policy throughout Scotland. Whether full advantage will be taken of this opportunity to underpin economic development with the cultural diversity that exists in Scotland remains to be seen. Indeed, at the EU level, some have identified the inherent conflict between cultural diversity and economic cohesion (Graham and Hart 1999). While tensions and debates remain unresolved there is a threat that neither cultural nor economic development will be satisfied. Yet commentators on the past and on more recent times have identified the critical importance of social cohesion and community self esteem to economic and social renewal. Evidence shows that a sense of collective culture, social cohesion and the enterprise capacity of a community are seen as the bedrock upon which economic success is based; similar arguments are advanced for the promotion of land reform and community ownership in Scotland today. Rather than a past dependency and a lack of entrepreneurship characterising these communities, their enterprise is dependent on the intrinsic norms and values of their cultures; allowing them a voice is then the liberator not the obstacle to development. Pyke (2000) argues, the community is increasingly recognised as a source of competitive advantage and a wider recognition of that resource is a necessary condition for regeneration. Understanding the complexities of artistic and cultural elements as an aspect of any predisposition to economic initiatives and practice within Scotland's communities is therefore a strategy well worth pursuing in current times.

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