

Growing Similarities in Cultural policies and politics in Britain and in France ?

Since the 1990s, while retaining specificities, the British and French models of State support for the arts have drawn closer. Culture has become a matter for government in liberal Britain as public funding increased and ambitious capital projects sprouted, accompanied by national programmes. Although Non-Departmental Public Bodies are still responsible for distributing subsidies at arm's length, they have to do so within the policy objectives set out by a fairly new — by continental standards — Department. Conversely, the French, while still relying on an interventionist Ministry, have decentralised power, implemented budget tightening and resorted to privatisation and sponsorship. Both countries are currently attempting to reform ("modernise") cultural public services.

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Dernières publications / Recent publications

- **C. Doustaly & C. Gray (De Montfort University), "Labour and the Arts : Managing Transformation ?"**, A. KOBER-SMITH, G. LEYDIER (dir.), « Nouvelle gestion publique et réforme des services publics sous le New Labour », *Revue l'Observatoire de la Société Britannique*, n°8, 2010, pp. 319-338.
- « **La genèse du soutien public aux beaux-arts à Londres aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles** », J. CARRE (dir.), *Londres 1700-1900 : naissance d'une capitale culturelle*, Paris : Presses Universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 2010, pp. 207-229.
- « **Le rôle de la culture dans la renaissance urbaine depuis 1997 en Angleterre : de l'économique au socioculturel ?** », S. NAIL, D. FEE (dir.), *Vers une renaissance urbaine britannique ? Dix ans de politique travailliste de la ville*, Paris : Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2008, pp. 75-95.

[I shall publish a full-length scientific article with due referencing on the subject in a British review in 2011]

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To contextualise today's debate on visual arts education in Britain and in France, it is essential to compare the way the wider policy framework within which the British and French States have implemented arts policies — either through Education Departments, Culture Departments or jointly — has evolved over time. State support for the arts can be categorized into two main models : the Anglo-Saxon or liberal model and the continental one. Although the British and French models have resulted from very different political and cultural traditions, they have shown growing similarities in recent years. Of course, ten minutes is too short a time to do justice to so complex an issue and this paper only aims at shedding light on prevailing tendencies.

In Britain, the arts are an area where governmental support was initiated out of private or voluntary enterprise. The system used to be characterized by a staunch attachment to non interference, politicians contending that no public taxes should be spent for the arts. The continental tradition of royal patronage as a statement of power did not develop in Britain as the famous quote from Lord Melbourne in 1835 — "*God help the Minister that meddles with art !*" — reflects. The full public opening of the British Museum dates back to 1810, which is around 50 years after the opening of the Dresden Museum or the *Galerie royale de peinture du Palais du luxembourg* and 20 years after the *Musée Français* (now the *Louvre*). The British Museum's collections came from the Sloane bequest and the museum was administered at distance from government by a Trust rather than civil servants. Parliamentary allowance being insufficient, a lottery was organised to finance the premises. This example is typical of the way museums developed in Britain : in a piecemeal and unintended fashion.

However, after the Reform Act of 1832, museums were also increasingly seen as passionless reformers offering rational recreation and education for future citizens. While the 1851 Great Exhibition was also organised and funded privately by a Trust, contrary to the French national ones, it triggered public intervention. The Trust spent its profits and donated its collection to help found the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria & Albert Museum) but it also convinced Parliament to administer it and finance its running costs. To do so, a Department of Practical Arts was set up in 1852, soon renamed Department of Science and Art, which was first under the supervision of the Board of Commerce, then from 1856 of the Department for Education. Its task was mainly to improve the quality of British design through collections of applied arts, museums and educational institutions like the schools of design. The Science and Art Department lost its relative autonomy when it was fully integrated to the new Board of Education created in 1899.

The grounds for the British contemporary system of support were laid : the private origin of collections, limited public funding complemented by lotteries, independent administration for arts institutions, a mix of economic, educational & political objectives.

In post-war Britain, tradition, but also the fear of censorship and authoritarianism meant that the Welfare State model did not fully extend to culture. A Culture Department was deemed interventionist and judged as "*as alien to British traditions as that of a ministry of justice*". Public support for the arts was from then on implemented by arm's length bodies such as the Arts Council whose reactive policies long reflected by-partisan consensus. Margaret Thatcher, in her Memoires, declared "*Artistic talent [...] is unplanned, unpredictable. Regimented, subsidized, owned, determined by the State, it withers.*" This ideology based on non interference and limited support dominated the British ruling class until the 1990s. The critics, including Kenneth Clark, described the British attitude to public funding of the arts as philistine and grudging, but William Hoggart underlined that although this was partly true, much artistic success had come out from the system.

France followed the opposite path : although historians disagree on the exact time to date back the idea of a duty of the State to support culture for the population, French monarchs clearly initiated the trend for reasons of power and status. The State funded and ran museums itself earlier on and a strong *Ministère de l'instruction publique, des cultes et des beaux-arts*, responsible for arts policy under the supervision of the Education Department, was created as early as 1832. While cultural institutions remained stable, the ministry was shifted around and it was only in 1959 that it became the *Ministère des affaires culturelles* (14 years after the Arts Council, six before an Under Secretary for the Arts, 33 before a free-standing Department were created in Britain). The *Ministère* endowed increasing subsidies to culture — with the support of a large portion of politicians and the general public. Cultural voluntarism *à la Française* has since been characterized by high levels of political will, public funding and administrative backing. Although deemed natural in France, this approach was alien to other countries where it was equated with the support to an official, State or conformist culture.

Since the 1990s, however, the British model of public support and administration of culture has drawn closer to the continental model while retaining idiosyncrasies.

Culture has become a matter for government in liberal Britain as public funding increased and iconic capital projects sprouted, followed by centrally-led programmes. The sector has become more politicized and the State has integrated culture within the larger political agenda thanks to a Department for Heritage in 1992, renamed Department for Culture, Media and Sports in 1997 when Labour came into power — incidentally, it was the first use of the word "culture" in the title of an official body. Local authority funding for the arts is still not statutory and, in the birth place of democracy, public funding for the arts is still not allocated by elected people but by nominated

members of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (the MLA, the Arts Council) which are still responsible for distributing subsidies at distance from government. However, they now have to do so within more precise policy objectives set out by the Department — although the capacity of the centre to actually impose these has proven limited. The National Lottery as a source of revenue for the arts has stemmed from a liberal ethos, but the way lottery funds have been awarded and spent has been typically welfarist and interventionist: they have been allocated to large capital projects such as the Tate Modern or the Baltic but also to smaller community projects — both of which would be subsidized by taxes in France.

In Britain, public spending for the arts has become more popular with the wider public because it has been regarded as being more evenly spread between classes and regions, benefitting the country and a larger part of the population directly or indirectly, for instance through its educational, social or economic impacts (the creative industries represent around 7% of British economic activity). Very visible British national programmes such as Creative Partnerships, which subsidize cultural activities for school children, or the free entry to museums for all (leading to a 79% increase in children's visits and some amount of democratisation towards ethnic minorities and social classes C2-E since its introduction in 2001) have been implemented in the last decade. But what also helped was the fact that not all expenditure came from taxes but also from alternative sources of funding such as sponsorship and the lottery. Public opinion polls have shown that now, as in France, the general public in Britain considers public "investment" in the arts as acceptable and agree that the arts play an "important part in the life of the country".

Conversely, the French, while still relying on an interventionist Ministry, have decentralised power, developed outreach and education programmes, implemented budget tightening and resorted to privatisation and sponsorship. In both countries, but more so in Britain, culture has been more and more attached to other policy sectors, which — some argue — has a detrimental effect on artistic objectives as such. Both countries are currently attempting to reform ("modernise") cultural public services to improve return on investment. It is therefore not relevant anymore to oppose liberal and interventionist countries, but it is striking that the two systems grew closer together as a Labour government was ruling Britain and France mostly elected conservative governments.

However, Britain still spends less public funds on the arts than France does and still attracts more private sponsorship, and it goes without saying that the recent economic crisis, current public finances tightening and the election of a new coalition government in Britain will all have an impact on the amount of public subsidies the arts sector will receive in both countries.

In Britain, the conservative Manifesto for the last general elections called for an increase in private and lottery investment, less government interference and fewer social considerations in arts policy. It pledged to allow NDPBs and cultural institutions to resort to private funding directly (Museums and Heritage Bill) and to increase the share of Lottery devoted to the arts by scraping the Big Lottery Fund

— which was mainly used for socio-cultural projects — (National Lottery Independence Bill) while Philanthropy is to be encouraged by tax reform. Even though this would reinforce the liberal components of the system, some of the evolutions discussed here such as the creation of a Department, the free museums initiative and arts education for all children have been upheld by all leading parties. The Conservatives have used fewer economic rationale to support the arts, contrary to the Labour party rhetoric and policies when they were in power. According to the Conservative Manifesto, education in the arts is necessary on grounds of sheer enjoyment, but also because it teaches skills and discipline. The text also vowed to bring coherence and stability to arts education programmes which would not be cut — the 95 million pounds however would be used as part of a single coherent national strategy. It is also expected that the new government will abolish some of the 50 or so arm's length bodies under DCMS responsibility which stood for non interventionism in the liberal system and are now judged as lacking in accountability, transparency and value for money in times when Treasury demands spending cuts.

In France, the economic situation has not yet led to a decrease in public subsidies on a national level (1.7% increase in 2009, around 5% in 2010) and the arts and culture educational programme funding has increased too (6%, 4% in 2009 and 2010). Nonetheless, as in Britain, it is on the local and regional levels that budget tightening has been implemented since other areas of expenditure have increased and been prioritized (social programmes notably). The free entry to museums, although implemented on a more limited scale in France (EU members under 26 and French teachers) than in Britain — for budgetary reasons and lack of consensus on its real ability to democratise museums — has had a positive impact on visitor's entries. The paradox lays in the fact that the most wide-ranging free entry policy might have been expected from an interventionist State like France rather than a more liberally-oriented one like Britain¹. However, what was very French about it was that it was a presidential promise, imposed on a reluctant Minister, in the monarchic tradition so often associated with the French political approach to culture.

Be it in France or in Britain, be it for political, economic or social reasons, the arts have always been instrumentalized by the State to some extent rather than funded only for « art's sake », but increased funding has led to increased attachment. If France is exceptional to some extent, it is not because of interventionism anymore, but because it has a long tradition of being so, and that the amount and variety of funding remains high there.

¹ To go back to the roots of the British people's relationship to free museums would be too long here but museums have a particular status within culture as opposed to live arts which were not publicly supported until after the second world war when in France the Académies royale de danse et de Musique (Opera) were founded in 1661 and 1669 respectively, the Comédie française founded in 1680.