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Between Universalism and Diversity:  
Contradictions of Local Cultural  
Policy in Tower Hamlets and Oldham

Munira Mirza

Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD in  
Sociology

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the past two decades, there has been a substantial growth in the importance of cultural policy in the UK. This is most clearly manifest in the increased rhetoric and resources devoted to culture at local government level. Cultural policy is presumed to confer a number of benefits for individuals and communities, addressing issues of urban regeneration, social inclusion, community cohesion and well-being. Social and economic problems are also increasingly discussed in terms of their cultural dimension, especially in relation to 'identity' and 'community'.

This thesis argues that there is a tendency in academic literature to understand this 'turn to culture' in terms of economic, profit-seeking motivations. As a result, there is less critical attention paid to other rationales, more specifically a shift in political discourse towards a therapeutic, identity-oriented understanding of subjectivity. One aspect of this is how local government has adopted an understanding of culture as something that can promote the principle of 'diversity', as opposed to the universalist orientation of traditional liberal-humanist cultural policy.

This study investigates the development and implementation of cultural strategies in two local authorities: the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Oldham Metropolitan Borough. The case studies reveal variations in how and why cultural policy develops according to local social, institutional and economic expectations. However, I also demonstrate the persistence of certain contradictions in approach, which arise out of the application of 'diversity' in practice. Ultimately, a major tension exists between the universalist and identity-based approaches to culture and this creates problems in dealing with questions of cultural authority, community engagement and identity. To conclude, there are severe limitations in using cultural policy in this way to achieve a range of social and political objectives.

## INTRODUCTION

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 1901 the East End Art Gallery first opened its doors to an excited public. Its founders, Canon Barnett and his wife, Henrietta, were pioneering Victorian reformers who sought to bring great art to local people. Their scheme for a 'permanent Picture Gallery' was intended to build upon the huge popularity of the temporary art exhibitions they had hosted in the area for over twenty years, and which had attracted thousands of visitors (Steyn, 1990: 44). It was one of the first public art institutions in the country to be funded by philanthropy, raising its funds through public subscription and donations from wealthy individuals, such as John Passmore Edwards (who had also paid for the public library next door).

For the deeply religious Bernetts, art and education were important tools to aid the advancement of working class people, native and immigrant alike. Observers at the time might have been forgiven for thinking that a fine art gallery was superfluous to the needs of people living in Whitechapel. Its dingy streets, lined with overcrowded tenement housing, were home to harsh working conditions, ill health, and hunger and were a hotbed of political activity. But the Bernetts maintained that art could serve a worthy, spiritual function. As Steyn (1990) notes, the aspiration was 'to inculcate in the population a higher subjectivity which could transcend nature by offering experiences, feelings and pleasures that were beyond what were perceived as the mindless routines of the working classes' (44). Canon Barnett frequently referred to Pre-Raphaelites as 'sermons on the wall'. For the next hundred years, the gallery would open its doors for free to the public and show some of the most challenging and influential contemporary art in the world, winning both critical success and the affection of local residents.

Fast forward to 2007. The area of Whitechapel is now part of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH). It remains one of the most deprived in the country: 43 per cent of the borough's residents claim income support (LBTH, 2002: 13). It is also one of the most ethnically diverse: most of the Jewish population moved out long ago and there is now a well-established Bangladeshi community. Many of the Georgian terraces that once housed the poor have been converted into stylish

apartments, whilst fashionable local restaurants and bars cater for workers in the financial district of the Square Mile, just across the busy interchange at Liverpool Street. Just a few blocks away from where the old East End Art Gallery still stands (since renamed the Whitechapel Art Gallery) a new arts centre called Rich Mix has opened. A renovated garment factory, Rich Mix's vibrantly designed website describes itself as an 'interesting and inspiring venue for people, cultures and communities to meet' (Rich Mix, undated). The project was conceived in the 1990s - long after the period of Victorian philanthropy - and is funded by a range of statutory bodies including LBTH, Arts Council England<sup>1</sup>, and the Greater London Authority.

Like the Whitechapel Art Gallery, Rich Mix's stated aim is to provide culture and education for local people. Yet whereas the Bernetts' institution was devoted to the narrow sphere of 'fine art', Rich Mix's 62,000 square feet has a far wider scope and 'provide[s] a focus for the arts, culture, music, heritage, fashion, food, architecture, design, ideas and technology'. In line with post-modern sentiment, its definition of culture is protean, referring not only to the cultivated pursuits of an educated elite, but the quotidian habits, customs, and traditions of wider society. Nor is it confined to western European culture - Rich Mix is avowedly global and its corporate literature boasts about the ethnic diversity of the borough.

Rich Mix's website also states that it has ambitions to improve the lives of local people, though this is hardly couched in the language of spirituality and beauty. Instead, this 'entirely new kind of arts centre' aims to drive 'local regeneration...attract tourists...develop commercial products and enterprises' and 'nurture talent by providing training, mentoring and employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people'. Whereas the Bernetts saw culture as distinct from the everyday drudgery of life, existing in a separate spiritual realm, Rich Mix links together the everyday world to culture. Hence, it insists that urban regeneration has a cultural dimension and that culture can generate effects of measurable economic and social value.

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<sup>1</sup> At other points in this paper, I refer to the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), which was devolved into separate national bodies after 1994. Where appropriate, I have used the name of the institution as it existed at the time.

This brief snapshot of the past and present in one borough reveals the complexity of change regarding the meaning, scope and aims of cultural policy in the past century. Whilst the Whitechapel Gallery and Rich Mix are both public cultural institutions, they represent starkly different worlds in almost every respect. Most importantly, Rich Mix Centre has emerged at a time when it seems that culture has increased in political and social importance.

In the past two decades in advanced industrial societies, the word 'culture' has become more prominent in political discourse; reflecting both the increased politicisation of the field of arts and cultural activity, as well as the 'culturalisation' of other policy areas, such as education, economy, urban regeneration, health and community relations. It is not uncommon, for instance, to hear politicians claim that culture today is 'more important than ever'. When the former Arts Minister Estelle Morris MP gave her speech to the Cheltenham Literature Festival in 2003 she stated, 'Art and creativity are more important now than they ever have been' (Morris, 2003). Her successor, David Lammy MP addressed the Museums Association in 2005 by saying: 'In a fragmented, less deferential, more mobile, more diverse society where globalisation affects us all, the role of museums as places for reflection and understanding...is more important than ever' (Lammy, 2005). Most recently on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007, Margaret Hodge, the Minister of State for Culture, Media and Sport, stated on a BBC Radio 4 programme about the arts that there is 'growing recognition within the political class of the role of culture in communities, the link of culture to the sense of identity...I also think there's a growing understanding of the creative industries which come out of culture in the economy'.<sup>2</sup> This rhetoric is only part of a broader shift under New Labour, which has taken an unprecedented interest in culture. Shortly after arriving in government in 1997, New Labour set up the Creative Industries Task Force. In the same year emerged the slogan 'Cool Britannia', when Prime Minister Tony Blair shook hands with the cultural glitterati, described Britain as 'the design workshop of the world', and extolled the virtues of

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<sup>2</sup> Interview for 'National Treasures', BBC Radio 4, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

the nation's fashion designers, artists, musicians, architects, writers, actors, and film makers (Elliott, *et al*, 2007: 83).

It is not only politicians who assert the increased importance of culture. Samuel Jones, a researcher at the left-leaning British think tank, Demos, which has been prolific in producing cultural policy advice, said, 'We live in an age of globalisation, an age in which culture is more important than ever before...It is not a case of culture being put at the service of politics, but rather of culture being a determinant part of politics' (Jones, 2007: unpaginated). In June 2006, cultural leaders in Britain launched a manifesto for the arts. One of its signatories, Tony Hall of the Royal Opera House, stated that the arts were 'not some add-on but absolutely vital to the future of the creative economy on which our future will undoubtedly depend' (Jury, 2006). Writing in the *Guardian* a few months later, Madeline Bunting (2006) stated 'culture and its funding is no longer an add-on but central to any politics committed to the vitality of the public realm'. The editor of the *British Medical Journal*, Richard Smith, even suggested in a semi-humorous, but provocative, editorial in 2002 that central funds for healthcare ought to be reduced slightly in return for a substantial increase in arts subsidy, because their spiritual contribution would improve people's health (Smith, 2002).

At the same time as there has been an increased focus on cultural activity certain aspects of the cultural sector have also changed. Cultural institutions and professionals are now expected to help deliver a range of social and economic benefits. They must open up to wider audiences and be more 'inclusive'. In *Turning Point*, an Arts Council strategy document for the visual arts, published in 2006, the authors state that the Council will seek to put 'people at the heart' of arts policy, implying that arts policy in the past had not been 'people-centred' enough (ACE, 2006a: 6). The arts have undergone something of a revolution, being encouraged to cater for the many and not just the 'same white middle class audience'.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, there is not only increased attention given to the cultural sector by politicians, there is also a changed understanding of what culture is and how it should relate to

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<sup>3</sup> Gerry Robinson, former Chairman of the Arts Council, in his keynote address in 1998, cited in Stallabass (2006: 298).

society. This raises questions about the purpose of cultural subsidy as well as the values that should determine funding and policy. At the forefront of this revolution is the concept of 'diversity': an explicit rejection of the previous model of cultural policy with its notion of 'universal' or transcendent cultural value.

Of course, it is relatively easy to spot a discursive trend in any single policy sector and attach a label to it. But to what extent does this discursive shift indicate a more substantial, coherent social phenomenon with tangible effects? Furthermore, why should these changes in cultural policy be of interest to sociologists? After all, museums, art galleries, theatres and libraries have traditionally been 'low politics' issues, of concern to a minority of academics (Gray, 2002). They continue to receive only a fraction of public spending.<sup>4</sup> Although there is considerably more rhetoric today about how important culture is, this does not mean that culture is actually of great political significance. Ultimately, cultural policy is unlikely to win or lose an election.

Yet, I would argue that the increased attention given to culture amongst policy-makers today *is* important because it reflects wider shifts in the way we think about a range of questions related to identity, community, and social change. The growing sphere of cultural policy (both policies relating to the arts and cultural sector, and the use of culture in other areas of policy-making) reveals a new interest in the cultural dimension of social problems and indicates a changed understanding of the relationship between culture and society. In this sense, the rise of cultural policy follows on from the 'cultural turn', a subject of intense academic discussion since the 1980s, which posits that societies have become increasingly oriented towards cultural issues in political, economic and social life. Culture is more central to policy-making because it has risen to the fore in how we think about society. Krishan Kumar (1995) argues that the discursive trend towards culture reflects a paradigmatic shift in thinking about society at large and therefore requires further attention:

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<sup>4</sup> The main central government body dispensing money to the arts in England is Arts Council England. It was allocated £422m in 2006-7 (about 1.3 per cent of the UK budget). The total DCMS budget, which has a wider remit including public broadcasting, sports and the Olympics, had a budget of £1.6bn (DCMS, 2007a).

Were [questions of culture] simply a matter of culture, in the sense of artistic developments, we might – at least as social theorists – be inclined to leave the whole thing to the cultural critics, if not to late night television programmes and the cultural channels. What continues to make the debates relevant and interesting is that they are part of a much broader debate on the contemporary condition and future direction of industrial societies (112).

The aim of this thesis is to explore the growth in cultural policy in the UK, and the changing ideas and assumptions that lie beneath it.<sup>5</sup> Whilst it touches on changes within broader cultural or artistic movements, it is primarily concerned with how the state relates to cultural activity through subsidy and policy frameworks. Hence, I am concerned with the public dimension of cultural policy, rather than ideas and trends within cultural practice at large (although there is inevitable overlap).

In this study I attempt to tackle a number of separate but interrelated questions: a) why culture has become an increasingly important element in policy discourse today; b) what ideas and rationales govern contemporary cultural policy-making; and c) how the aims of cultural policies fare when implemented in practice, i.e. the 'lived reality'. This thesis argues that policy-makers have increasingly come to see culture as 'useful' in terms of delivering social and economic benefits. Yet, whilst many academic authors point to the importance of economic drivers behind this growing interest in culture, I argue that policy-makers are also driven by political developments. In particular, I point to the orientation towards identity in contemporary political discourse.

I should make clear that I do not attempt to evaluate the success or failure of cultural policies according to their own terms, or even to judge their impact. There is considerable literature on the measurement and evaluation of cultural policies: much

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<sup>5</sup> Although this thesis makes claims about the changing nature of cultural policy in the UK, it does not explore in detail the important variations between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For instance, the historical context presented in Chapter 2 focuses largely on England. However, because the broader sociological arguments presented here are relevant to all these countries, I have decided to keep the claim that this thesis is about cultural policy in the UK.

of it positive (for instance, Matarasso, 1997) and some more sceptical (Merli, 2002; Belfiore, 2002; Selwood, 2002). Rather, my intention is to develop an understanding of the broader ideas that frame cultural policies today, and to tease out what I believe to be internal contradictions. I hypothesise that cultural policy has not only changed significantly in the past two decades, but that the meaning of culture that is deployed has also changed. I suggest this has consequences when cultural policy is put into practice and that this reveals certain problems. I focus especially on how cultural policies translate into practice in the UK, and how ideas shaping cultural policy at local and national levels interact with specifically local political and economic concerns and institutional factors.

There is already considerable literature discussing the shift in the scope and character of cultural policy. Yet, as Oliver Bennett (2004) points out, there exist two halves of cultural policy which rarely meet. On the one hand, there is discussion of the technical, institutional nature of cultural subsidy and support, in terms of decision-making and management. On the other hand, there is the field of cultural studies which seeks to deconstruct the very meanings entailed by the category of 'culture' and how these are deployed by actors and institutions. The ideological component of cultural policy is therefore decoupled, to some extent, from managerial questions of policy development and implementation. Janet Wolff (1999) asserts that academic studies of culture can be shallow and insufficiently sociological in their approach; either because they focus primarily on symbolism, interpretation and 'textual' readings, or else they are positivistic and focus exclusively on empirical data and 'number-crunching'. She advocates a more productive encounter between cultural studies and sociology, combining an attention to the social critique of categories with an understanding of social and institutional structuration processes, in order to yield a more sound understanding of cultural policies in practice.

I agree that an analysis of cultural policy needs to pay attention to how ideas and values relate dialectically to structural and institutional processes. In this thesis, I posit that in order to comprehend the emergence of cultural policy and the novelty of its practice today, one needs to understand it from a more abstract perspective, within the context of changing ideas about the relationship between the individual,

culture and society, and not simply within the sphere of cultural activity itself. I suggest that if we relate an analysis of the development of cultural policy to the wider historical context we will arrive at a much clearer understanding of its contemporary features.

My core argument is that the emergence of cultural policy reflects a discursive re-imagining of the subject at the heart of policy-making – the imagined individual at which policies are targeted. This is the result of considerable social and political change towards the end of the twentieth century and changing expectations about political life.

The first major factor in the rise of cultural policy, I would argue, is a sense of disenchantment with old, conventional forms of politics, and the increasing orientation in policy-making towards issues of 'culture', 'identity' and 'recognition' (Giddens, 1994; Mulgan, 1994; Kumar, 1995). The individual subject at the heart of liberal politics was presumed to be able to abstract from his or her immediate social context in order to develop shared interests with other people. This allowed for the possibility of universal interests and values that transcended people's particular social circumstances. Policy-making was itself premised on the notion of the universal citizen, which implied equal treatment in the public realm. However, in the past two decades there has been a shift. The contemporary prevalence of 'identity politics' both reflects and reinforces scepticism about the universalist approach. For advocates of identity politics, people's differences are no longer something to be overcome, but the basis of their social solidarity and their shared experience of social problems. The recognition of diversity and identity is presumed to be a crucial form of self-empowerment. In this context, the field of culture – with its potential to nurture a sense of identity – has become regarded as a novel way to engage people through emotional and meaningful experience. At the same time, identity is increasingly invoked as a factor in the analysis of social problems. Policy-makers are interested in how nurturing individual and community identities might lead to social improvements. Hence, culture is applied as a tool to achieve social and economic effects through changing individuals' psychology, personal development and behaviour, or nurturing forms of social relationship such as 'community' and 'social

capital'. Culture, I suggest, is increasingly expected to help build communities and improve social relationships, as well as make good, economically productive individuals. In short, cultural policy, with its stress on identity, is seen to be a progressive development out of the limitations of older types of politics and policies.

The second major factor is a change within thinking about culture itself. In the modern era, the development of cultural policy presumed certain key facts: the existence of cultural authority; the notion of universal cultural value; the criteria of 'excellence' and the possibility of a shared canon, which could (in theory at least) be appreciated by everyone. This liberal-humanist discourse of culture, as it might be described, was internally related to the concept of subjectivity and the expectation that the individual was able to transcend his everyday, 'particular' culture, in order to appreciate a 'universal' culture. However, there have been growing attacks on this notion of universality within the field of official cultural policy. Cultural value is no longer regarded unequivocally as durable and transcendent, but relative to each society or community that produces it. This multicultural argument in cultural policy has gained ground since the late 1990s, bringing a challenge to the universalist approach and placing increased emphasis on culture as an expression of particular identities. Cultural policy discourse often expresses ambivalence about ideas like cultural authority and expertise, and tends towards the celebration of the consumer, choice and difference. Although the rhetoric of cultural universalism ('excellence') still permeates cultural institutions at one level, it now jostles alongside the rhetoric of 'cultural identity' and 'diversity', which emphasises the partial and inherently socially-bound nature of cultural life. This tension within the philosophical rationale for culture has opened up the possibility for contradictory effects in the way cultural policy is developed and implemented today.

In order to make sense of both these sociological developments, I draw upon a body of literature which argues that there has been a reconfiguration of subjectivity towards the end of the twentieth century, leading to far-reaching social effects. Whereas the individual was once presumed to be able to transcend difference, today he or she is presumed to be defined by it. Heartfield (2002) calls it 'subjectivity in denial' (238); a standpoint that rejects the universal character of the subject as

transformative and self-creating, in favour of 'identity', which values the particular, fragmented nature of the subject. Others have suggested that the individual is increasingly regarded as vulnerable and in need of emotional support, undermining the idea of the autonomous, robust subject that had once been the basis of political and cultural life (Furedi, 2003; Nolan, 1998), or in need of behavioural re-education (Brown, 2006). According to these different accounts, the subject at the heart of politics and culture has undergone certain revision. I suggest that one manifestation of this (amongst many others, no doubt) is the emergence of cultural policy and the preoccupation with 'diversity'.

To state my hypothesis more clearly in the abstract, I identify one major shift at the level of social consciousness (the transformation of subjectivity and understanding of individual's relationship to society), which in turn leads to twin consequences: the foregrounding of culture as a tool in social policy-making; and the shift within cultural policy itself towards an emphasis on cultural identity and diversity. My concluding argument appears paradoxical: I conjecture a growth of cultural policy, but at the same time, a decline in the conventional assumptions of traditional cultural policy. The rhetoric of contemporary cultural policy champions the culturalisation of politics, and the politicisation of culture, leading to an inevitable transformation of both spheres.

Up to a point, this thesis explores in abstract terms the changing nature of cultural policy and the rise of 'diversity' as an idea. But how do these ideas translate into practice? The aims behind cultural policy and its presumed effects are often taken for granted in the literature, but the inherent contradictions are rarely considered. I hypothesise that the increased emphases on diversity and identity run counter to the values of universalism, which informed the spheres of politics and culture in the past. How do these conflicting values play out in lived reality?

To answer this question, I conducted two case studies: the London Metropolitan Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) and Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC). In their distinct ways, these two local authorities have been at the cutting edge of cultural policy developments in Britain and have pioneered the development

of 'diversity' in practice. Although they have many similarities, there are also clear differences in how cultural policy is developed and implemented in each area, and the problems arising therein. From my research, I conclude that the motivations behind cultural policies are ostensibly economic, but must also be understood as political strategies, shaped by wider concerns about community engagement, social inclusion and multiculturalism. I also demonstrate that, in practice, the emphasis on 'diversity' in both case study areas leads to problems that local actors are all too aware of.

Based on my research, I assert that diversity in practice is a double-edged sword and throws up paradoxical effects. The celebration of ethnic difference is seen by many as positive development of a tolerant culture, but also coincides with growing concern about community divisions. The idea of cultural diversity and widening the canon appears inclusive, but comes alongside anxiety about the crisis of cultural authority in institutions. Engaging with the citizenry through cultural identity is acclaimed as a way to overcome political apathy, but it co-exists with the decline of political debate in public life. Furthermore, whilst many actors and institutions embrace diversity as a concept, its implementation through concrete policies is often met with ambivalence and hostility.

How can we explain these tensions? In the arts and cultural sector, actors have a tendency to blame the authorities, the policy-makers, and even each other, but there is little discussion about the inherent philosophical contradictions of the policies they are shaping. A more sociological perspective shows that the contradictions arising out of cultural policies today relate to the way in which the principle of diversity is fundamentally at odds with the liberal-humanist discourse of subjectivity and culture. The view of the individual as being defined by his or her cultural identity conflicts fundamentally with the universalist notion of a subject that can transcend their culture. This clash means that expectations within cultural policy are often frustrated and limited when developed in practice.

The first two chapters of this thesis provide a context for my research questions, demonstrating the historical shift in the way in which culture is perceived and how it

has gradually become more of an object of policy-making. The third and fourth chapters build on this account by drawing out some conceptual issues and problems with contemporary policy thinking. The final three chapters apply this conceptual framework to an analysis of 'real' cultural policy.

In Chapter One, I define what I mean by 'cultural policy', explaining that any definition of this phenomenon must take account of certain tangible, measurable variables - for instance, which activities fall into the scope of being called 'cultural' and the kinds of actions, decisions or structures that might be called 'policy'. I argue that any meaningful definition of cultural policy must recognise its qualitative dimension, as well as quantifiable factors - attitudes about the relationship between culture and society are themselves integral to the field of cultural policy. I then proceed to document the 'rise' in cultural policy since the mid 1970s. I show how cultural policy has become of increasing concern to official international and national bodies. They have taken more interest in 'managing' the cultural sector in order to achieve certain social, political and economic objectives. This 'rise' is also evident in the way that social problems and issues are increasingly viewed in relation to cultural issues of 'identity' and 'community'. I look in detail at the UK, where increased rhetoric about culture is matched by institutional change and growth, new legislative and other political measures and, in some cases, greater cultural subsidies. In this chapter I explore the growth of cultural *policy-making*, as opposed to the objective growth of cultural activity or the cultural and creative industries, which are dealt with in the following chapter.

In Chapter Two I examine theories of why culture has become more important to policy-makers in the UK. I examine the claim made by a number of academic authors that it is a result of the growing importance of culture to the economy since the late 1970s and 1980s. In this chapter, therefore, I introduce an analysis of the objective economic growth of the cultural and creative industries and argue that they are not as central to the economy as sometimes stated. It is more productive, I argue, to see the rise of cultural policy as a consequence of complex social and political, as well as economic drivers. A social constructionist approach reveals the importance of ideas and political drivers in influencing national and local policies.

Crucially, culture is seen by policy-makers not only as an important economic tool, but also as a strategy to develop novel forms of political engagement and a new kind of citizen. The rising importance of culture amongst this group reflects a shift in broader social thinking about subjectivity; away from the model of the autonomous, transcendental individual subject towards 'identity' towards a preoccupation with the fragmented and diverse subject. In order to properly theorise the rise of culture, we need to understand its role in relation to contemporary political strategies, especially as a way to promote 'diversity'.

In Chapter Three, I focus on the sphere of local government and its uses of culture today. I outline the different arguments that seem to motivate cultural policy, including the development of 'cultural clusters' or 'cultural quarters'. By drawing on the historical account in Chapter Two, I explore in abstract the political, as well as economic, objectives of cultural policy, and identify possible contradictions. This chapter provides a conceptual framework with which to analyse my two case study areas.

Chapter Four presents the research questions and the methods of data collection and analysis I used.

Chapters Five and Six present the empirical data from the two case study areas. I examine in depth the development and implementation of cultural policy in Tower Hamlets and Oldham, relating the data to my conceptual framework. I consider the ostensible social, economic and political arguments for major capital investment projects in both areas. I then proceed to explore how cultural policy is legitimised through the concepts of diversity and identity and how the contradictions I identified previously play out in practice.

In Chapter Seven I relate my empirical findings back to my original conceptual framework and explain the nature of the contradictions I have discovered at a more abstract level. I show that the legitimacy and authority of cultural policy is inevitably compromised by the appeal to diversity and that this leads to conflicts when policies are developed in practice. Ultimately, I suggest, the attempt to use cultural policy to

build identity is flawed by the absence of a universalist orientation. I show that the emphasis on cultural diversity challenges the claim to cultural authority, reifies difference, and leads to a depoliticised understanding of conflict. These problems militate against the very aspirations that cultural policy sets out to encourage.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE RISE OF CULTURAL POLICY**

#### **Introduction**

My thesis starts from the premise that cultural policy has become more prominent in the UK in the past three decades, with greater political and social importance for a range of actors. There is a profusion of 'culture talk', i.e. discourse about cultural policy, and it is commonplace to hear policy makers in national and local government discuss the 'cultural dimension' of social problems, as well as the 'social impact' of culture (Coalter, 2001; Keaney, 2006b). Whilst in the nineteenth century, the British state's involvement in cultural policy was largely confined to technical matters such as licensing arrangements, or explicitly moral but narrow concerns of censorship, culture today appears to be a relatively important issue for government.

To what extent could this be mere fashion? Does the rhetoric about culture indicate a genuinely greater significance for cultural policy? How, if at all, does this 'culture talk' translate into concrete reality through legislative measures, programmes, structures and funding?

In this chapter I demonstrate the tangible rise in cultural policy; both in terms of its prominence in political discourse, but also the increase of institutional, structural and funding frameworks around culture. Of course, it could be argued that the growth in cultural policy is simply part of what Hood (1994) has called 'an international policy boom' in advanced industrialised countries since the 1980s (cited in Collyer, 2003: unpaginated). Like other parts of the state such as education and health, the scale and reach of policy-making has grown with the shift away from bureaucratic governance, towards deregulation, privatisation and the idea of the 'enabling state'. Public policy has now arguably moved to colonise the 'life world': the private, intimate concerns of family, community and leisure (Habermas, 1987). We therefore need to consider the rise of policy in any field in terms of a political discourse current in a nation at a given time (Hall, P. 1993: 275-296). Yet, whilst acknowledging the

salience of these factors I will argue that the rise of cultural policy also has unique features that distinguish it from wider developments.

Before explaining the rise of cultural policy, I need to develop a workable definition of this term; a difficult task considering that it is only of recent nomenclature.<sup>6</sup> One possible formulation is that cultural policy is a set of values and desired outcomes relating to the role of culture in society, and their institutionalisation through state-supported organisations, funding and programmes. However, when probed further, even this apparently straightforward definition widens exponentially in scope, especially if we try to use it across different historical periods.

First, what activities does 'cultural policy' cover? In the mid to late nineteenth century, it was relatively easy to speak with confidence about 'culture', meaning a select canon of literature, fine art and poetry; what that confident Victorian paternalist, Matthew Arnold, described in *Culture and Anarchy* [1869] as 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 2006:5). A century later, postmodern thought and anthropological scholarship have undermined such a neat definition of culture, insisting that it is relative to particular societies. Culture today is an essentially contested concept (Gray, 2004:44). The disciplines of sociology and art history have produced a considerable body of literature to challenge the notion of absolute aesthetic value, insisting that 'culture' should refer not only to high art but also elements of popular culture, and that the value of culture exists only in relation to the specific social group consuming it (for instance, Bourdieu, 1986). There have also been numerous popular publications expounding similar theories for a lay audience (for instance Braden, 1978). Bennett states that since the 1980s, this questioning of 'what is culture' has destabilised the very rationale of cultural policy. A commodified and relativistic approach to culture has ended up changing the remit of cultural policy itself (Bennett, O. 1996).

Hence, the range of activities which fall under the rubric of cultural policy has expanded considerably in the past hundred years. In the early twentieth century, the

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<sup>6</sup> Blandina-Quinn (1998) traces its origins to the 1970s (76).

British state's involvement in culture covered a relatively limited range of sectors: public museums and galleries, and certain types of cultural production, especially visual arts, radio, film, music, literature and theatre. Today, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) defines culture in a far wider sense. It has both a 'material' and 'value' dimension and includes a whole range of new activities and institutions, like the internet and digital media, the National Lottery, as well as political concerns like community-building, race relations and wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> Hence, cultural policy is concerned with delivering a range of social and economic objectives that are not directly concerned with the conventional creation, preservation and display of cultural products.

Cultural policy also extends beyond the subsidised sector into the 'cultural and creative industries'. The DCMS' 'Evidence Toolkit' (DET) definition of the 'cultural sector' includes areas which are not particularly arts-related: tour and travel agents; newsagents; video & DVD rental; TV and radio servicing; jewellers (retail); greetings card shops; furniture retailers; bookmakers (DCMS, 2004b). Nevertheless, the category of 'cultural policy', when referred to in the academic and policy literature, tends to mean public policy relating to those areas defined as part of a 'realised signifying system' (Williams, 1981, cited in McGuigan, 1996: 6). For this reason, I define the scope of cultural policy in this study as the narrower field of the subsidised arts (including local 'arts events' such as festivals and concerts) and cultural and heritage institutions (galleries, museums), but excluding libraries and sports and leisure facilities, which are often deemed to be 'cultural', but I would argue experience very distinct concerns and challenges of their own. Whilst I have adopted a reasonably narrow, arts-based definition, it must be borne in mind that, in practice, such activities frequently overlap with other, broader activities.

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<sup>7</sup> The 'material dimension' includes: the performing and visual arts, craft and fashion; media, film, television, video and language; museums, artefacts, archives and design; libraries, literature, writing and publishing; the built heritage, architecture, landscape and archaeology; sports events, facilities and development; parks, open space, wildlife habitats, water environment and countryside recreation; children's play, playgrounds and play activities; tourism, festivals and attractions; informal leisure pursuits. The 'value dimension' includes: relationships – between individuals and groups; shared memories, experience and identity; diverse cultural, faith and historic backgrounds; social standards, values and norms; what we consider valuable to pass on to future generations. (DCMS, 2004a).

Also, what counts as 'policy'? In his comprehensive survey of policy analysis, Hill (2005) advises against defining policy as a specific and concrete phenomenon, bearing in mind its complex and multi-layered nature. Whilst at times it can be identified as a decision, very often it involves a set of decisions or little more than an orientation (7). This approach treats the word 'policy' as a reference to a general course of action, rather than a single act (Blandina-Quinn, 1998: 11). It also involves non-decisions and impacts that can range from the incremental to the major and the unintended. Hill also points out a distinction between 'policy' and 'public policy', the latter having a certain claim to legitimacy and priority; although this should not exclude the very important role played by the involvement of many other types of non-statutory actors in how policies develop and are implemented, such as pressure groups, voluntary and community groups, professional associations, consultants, academics, and even those who see themselves as passive recipients (10). The origins of cultural policy, therefore, cannot be simply understood as the product of a monolithic state, but rather as lying in the plural, complex network of agencies and actors in wider society.

The state is itself a complex network of institutions which shapes and delivers policy at numerous levels, making it difficult to define. We could begin with a list of institutions that constitute the state and each of their functions (legislative bodies, including parliamentary assemblies, law-making institutions, executive bodies, government bureaux, state departments, courts of law). However, the state also has other agents through which it exercises power, marking what some have termed a recent shift from government to governance (Richards and Smith, 2002: 2; also, at local level, see Stoker 2004 on the proliferation of agencies working in 'partnership'). The state exists at national level, but also has arms at regional and local level, as well as relationships with other states through supra-national and international bodies such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the World Trade Organisation. A purely statutory focus on 'official policies' such as legislation, funding and programmes would also ignore the discretion of public servants or the 'street bureaucrats' who deliver policy (Lipsky, 1980; Hill, 2005:265).

This multi-pronged nature of the state and various other actors would suggest that cultural policy at any given moment in time may be subject to numerous, perhaps conflicting agendas. It may be simultaneously important and unimportant; well funded or financially starved; prioritised by local civil servants but completely ignored by national politicians. An obvious example of this internal differentiation is the way in which a number of left-wing metropolitan authorities in Britain in the 1980s ploughed resources and energy into developing 'community-driven' local cultural policies, in direct retaliation to the Conservative government's funding cuts for the arts and social services (Hare, 2000).

As I have tried to show, defining 'cultural policy' in a straightforward, positivist way is a complex task, for what is deemed to be 'cultural' has itself changed considerably over time, and the scope of government is increasingly complex. McGuigan (1996) argues for a broader definition of cultural policy – not solely related to administrative decisions, but the politics of culture in practice.

[This] emphasises the relationship of policy to politics as a field of contestation between rival discourses, ideologies and interests rather than confining it to the more technical though hardly unpolitical, connotating of policy and policing. Cultural policy raises questions of regulation and control but its meaning should not be restricted to an ostensibly apolitical set of practical operations that are merely administered and policed by government officials. (7)

McGuigan's approach is helpful in allowing us to abstract from some of the particular, empirical aspects of cultural policy, in order to see wider, more durable trends in terms of how people value cultural policy and how expectations for it have evolved. Quantitative indicators only reveal a partial picture of growth, and fail to indicate the qualitative shift in the way in which culture is valued by the political and policy-making classes. Cultural policy is not a fixed variable but a constantly evolving web of decisions and assumptions, developed by an ever-changing network of actors and organisations.

I will therefore seek to show that the growth of cultural policy is evident not solely at the level of practical policy measures, but also in a changed attitude towards culture itself, especially a belief that it should be more amenable to use by governments for instrumental ends. Since the 1970s there has emerged scepticism about the Enlightenment tradition, which portrayed culture as a realm of transcendental, universal value, to be kept autonomous from social and political forces. This shift has coincided with a call for culture to demonstrate its 'usefulness' to society. I do not attempt a comprehensive historical survey of thinking about the relationship between culture and society; rather, I identify certain key ideas that have shaped cultural policy in the modern era and how these have evolved and been reassessed in recent times. I also examine how the discipline of cultural policy studies has grown since the 1990s to respond to this new understanding.

At the same time, we should bear in mind Blandina Quinn's (1998) caution that cultural policy cannot be defined solely in reference to abstract aesthetic or sociological theory but must also be defined in terms of its empirical processes and impacts (4). The amount of discussion about culture is not sufficient indication that cultural policy has grown, or that culture is of greater concern to policy-makers. I will therefore supplement my analysis of this discursive shift by also examining the growth of quantitative indicators since the 1970s, such as state expenditure, policy pronouncements, research and study of cultural policy, and organisational changes.

### **1.1 Cultural autonomy in the modern era**

The birth of 'culture' – as I have thus far defined it in relation to the arts - is closely entwined with the birth of Modernity. In *The Idea of Culture* (2000), Terry Eagleton states that the word 'culture' embodies a 'momentous historical transition', encoding within a vast set of philosophical issues: 'freedom and determinism, agency and endurance, change and identity, the given and created' (2). His analysis of the word and its layered contradictions, reflect the internal relationship between culture as an idea and the philosophical transition brought about by the Enlightenment. Culture, Eagleton argues, developed as a concept at the point when Man began to abstract himself to an unprecedented degree and reflect on the society around him. Prior to

this moment, the word 'culture' referred to the 'thoroughly material process' of cultivation of soil, agriculture and crops, and only as humanity developed did it acquire a spiritual, transcendental dimension (Eagleton, 2000: 1).<sup>8</sup>

Eagleton's explanation of the birth of culture closely follows that set by the post-war cultural theorist, Raymond Williams. In his introduction to *Culture and Society*, published in 1958, Williams described the historical emergence of culture as:

...first, the recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society; second, the emphasis of these activities as a court of human appeal, to be set over the processes of practical social judgement and yet to offer itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative (Williams, 1963: 17).

In modernity, man developed new intellectual and aesthetic tools by which to contemplate his world, freed to a considerable extent from existing social institutions. This process of gradual self-consciousness, Williams, suggests, develops in tandem with the emergence of 'aesthetics' and a notion of artistic truth and value that was distinct from other kinds of human activity (Williams, 1963: 15). Whilst there had certainly been cultural activities - in the sense of music, art, literature and sculpture - in pre-Modern times, the notion of an autonomous aesthetic realm, whose value was determined by something other than the fulfilment of a social function, only came into proper existence as an idea in the eighteenth century. Up till then, church patrons or merchants and lords hired their artists, musicians and sculptors as skilled labourers to decorate their homes and provide pleasure or instruction. Even in great artistic centres of the Renaissance, it was widely accepted that art must ultimately serve the desires of the patron. Music was regarded either as a religious prop or 'folk' culture, and therefore tied to social circumstance and

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<sup>8</sup> In their classic study of definitions of culture Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) state that the romantic, anthropological definition only began to rise to prominence much later. In the mid nineteenth century Edwards Tylor's famous work, *Primitive Culture* [1871] elaborated on the notion that culture was 'ethnographic' and included knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'. However, it was the Webster's *New International Dictionary* of 1929 that 'seems the first to recognise the anthropological and scientific meaning which the word had acquired' (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: 63).

occasion without any greater aesthetic aspirations or value (Hewett, 2003). Yet, the late eighteenth century brought a fundamental rupture between artistic and cultural practice and the institutions of social life. The church and royalty continued to fund their favourite painters, but the artist also emerged as a being with his own impulses, beholden to new obligations to society. This Romantic approach viewed the artist as someone who emerged from a particular social and cultural milieu yet could also exist in a world apart from it. The artist had a consciousness of himself as an autonomous being whose responsibility was to the Truth, transcending the quotidian demands and fickle fashions of society. In his inner, private life, he was free to explore the nature of the human condition without the polite social constraints or political demands of the external world. His responsibility was to universal Truth, to which all humanity is subject.

For this reason, the writer and music critic, Ivan Hewett (2003) explains that classical music is a 'child of the Enlightenment' in that 'it can never answer to an aesthetic or cultural particularism; it aspires to be the voice of anybody with a modicum of training and experience in its language (23). Kantian aesthetics throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries established a view of cultural value as innately natural to humanity, and therefore ahistorical. Humanity's appreciation of beauty lies constant beneath the surface difference of plural cultures. This was connected to the idea of man as universal, or essentially unified. As Friedrich Schiller stated in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795):

Every human being, one may say, carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal (Schiller, 1967: 178, cited in Eagleton, 2000:8).

At the same time, however, we must acknowledge the existence of an opposing tradition during the same period, in which culture came to be seen as bound to particular societies and inherently differentiated. This understanding of culture found its earliest and fullest expression in the German Romantic philosophy of Johann

Gottfried von Herder and Johann Fichte in the eighteenth century, which proclaimed the centrality of culture to the national identity or 'soul of the people' (*Volksgeist*), through its language and folk culture. Culture was part of a collective, historical memory of a nation and could not be understood properly outside that framework. Their conception of culture as inherently differentiated was a deliberate rejection of the Enlightenment ideal of universal man, which transcended difference. As Herder stated, 'Let us follow our own path...let men speak well or ill of our nation, our literature, our language: they are ours, they are ourselves and let that be enough' (cited in Malik, 1996: 78).

Eagleton (2000) tries to capture this twin movement within culture, explaining that 'what culture does, then, is to distil our common humanity from our sectarian political selves, redeeming the spirit from the senses, wresting the changeless from the temporal, and plucking unity from diversity...culture is neither disassociated from society nor wholly at one with it. If it is a critique of society at one level, it is complicit with it at another' (7-8). Culture is both situated within society, yet at a step removed. Raymond Williams, in his 1958 essay 'Culture is Ordinary' insisted on expressing culture's reciprocal relationship to society, as something 'ordinary' and part of common consciousness, but also something autonomous and 'special':

We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life—the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction...Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind. Williams, 2000: 17)

In the fine arts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this twin movement was reflected in ongoing debates about the idea of a national aesthetic versus a civic humanist and universal aesthetic.<sup>9</sup> Hylland Eriksen (2001) explains that the two

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, John Barrell's study of the debates in English visual arts during this period (Barrell, 1990).

models of culture which have co-existed in Modernity can be summarised using the German distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*:

The former, sometimes associated with Tonnies' notion of *Gemeinschaft*, is local, experience-based, unique and is passed on through socialisation and the unconscious assimilation of local knowledge. The latter, the *Gesellschaft* variety, is global, cognitive, universal and passed on through reflexive learning'. (unpaginated).

In the mid nineteenth century, Marx presented this transcendent, yet particular quality of culture as internally related to the social being of man and the individual's dialectical relationship to society. Man's ability to abstract himself, individuate his being and appreciate other cultures was in itself a result of his own changing social relations at the particular historical juncture of Modernity: the transition from rural to urban life, the emergence of private and public spheres and the development of the state. Thus, in the *Grundrisse* [1858] (in what appears initially to be a rather curious diversion from the subject of the means and relations of production), Marx explains that a humanist perspective of art derives from a consciousness of universal humanity:

But the difficulty lies not in understanding that the Greek arts and epic are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and unattainable model. A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child's naivete and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? (Marx, 1978: 246)

Although consciousness is inevitably tied to a historical moment ('bound up with certain forms of social development') and therefore inherently differentiated and relative at one level, the capacity of humans to transcend their particularity means that they are also able to develop consciousness at a more abstract level. It is this that ensures the durability of art and its continued fascination for humans, long after the historical period of their creation has passed.

It is this notion of transcendence and the possibility of an abstracted perspective which explains the recurrent view of culture during this period as a form of independent critique. The presumed other-worldliness of culture reflects the aspiration towards the universal - an existence above the everyday experience of society. In Britain, the most influential thinker in this respect was the Victorian, Matthew Arnold, whose conception of culture's importance left an indelible influence on the liberal-humanist discourse of cultural policy in the UK (Bennett, O., 2005). He regarded culture as a kind of objective critique that could reveal our 'best self', as opposed to the impulses and thoughts produced by an atomised and subjective marketplace (Arnold, 2006: 149). Culture was the inheritor of a religious tradition that enabled humans to turn 'a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically...' (5). This tradition dominated debates about cultural policy long into the twentieth century. Writing in 1948 T.S. Eliot (1962) developed the notion that culture had a critical, reflective value and was closely related to religious life. He distinguished carefully between different levels of culture in society, each with their own value and special contribution: the lowest being 'a way of life', whilst, the highest was the most consciously developed and specialized, which required maintenance by an educated elite. For Eliot, a vocal advocate of such 'high' art institutions as the BBC's Third Programme, it was the responsibility of the state to maintain cultural perfection above the lowest levels of mass culture.

Arnold and Eliot conceptualised 'high' culture as separate from society, distinguishing it from 'low' culture and entertainment, which was entirely determined by social forces like the market and everyday politics or propaganda. This view of culture has become associated with an elite ambivalence towards the masses, sometimes openly expressing itself in contempt (Carey, 1992). For conservative writers like Eliot, the cultivation of a higher, civilized culture was tied to the class structure, and required the domination of a stable and enduring elite. Yet, the idea of culture's autonomy has also had more radical proponents, who have asserted that the instrumentalisation of culture towards consumerism and state control is a tool of oppression which dehumanises the population and presumes their lack of critical

faculties. In his 1967 essay 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', the Marxist writer Theodore Adorno stated: 'The culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchangeable'. He then proposes that culture did not 'simply accommodate itself alone to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived, thereby honouring them' (Adorno, 2001: 99-100).

Adorno privileged autonomous 'high culture' above the 'cultural industry', which was shaped by the vagaries of the market. Time and again, writers have insisted that culture should be allowed its autonomous space, to develop freely from market or state interference. In 1961, writing in the shadow of totalitarian regimes in Europe, Hannah Arendt attacked the deployment of culture by the state for 'ulterior motives' such as 'self-education', self-perfection' and 'entertainment' and insisted that culture required its own valuation according to aesthetic criteria, independent of the tastes of individual men or governments:

From the viewpoint of sheer durability, artworks are clearly superior to all other things; since they stay longer in the world than anything else, they are the worldliest of all things. Moreover, they are the only things without any function in the life process of society; strictly speaking, they are fabricated not for men, but for the world which is meant to out-last the life span of mortals, the coming and going of the generations. Not only are they not consumed like consumer goods and not used up like use objects; they are deliberately removed from the processes of consumption and usage and isolated against the sphere of human necessities. (Arendt, 2006: 206)

## **1.2 The challenge to universalism**

In this necessarily truncated account of the emergence of culture in modernity, I have tried to outline recurrent features in the way in which culture has been theorised, and proposed certain key concepts of transcendence, critique and authority. There is a view of culture as something that exists beyond particular

societies and belongs to the subject of, what might be called for want of a better phrase, 'humanity in general'. Following on from this, I suggest that the framework for cultural policy in the UK has historically contained this understanding of art and culture as requiring separation and autonomy from society; in particular, that it should have a certain distance from the state, which is presumed to be instrumentalist in its reasoning. The paradoxical result is that a key argument for state intervention in the cultural sphere is that this will ensure the autonomy of culture as a 'public good', free from the influence of wider social forces such as political power or the market. Writing in the 1980s, John Maynard Keynes defended the notion of artistic autonomy upon the founding of the Arts Council in 1946:

The artist walks where the breath of the spirit blows him. He cannot be told his direction: he does not know it himself, but he leads the rest of us into fresh pastures and he teaches us to love and enjoy what we often begin by rejecting, enlarging our sensibilities and purifying our instincts. (cited in Garnham, 2001: 456)

Hence, the Arts Council was set up in 1946 to work at 'arm's length' from individual cultural practitioners. Its policies played a crucial role in providing the conditions for such autonomy, by giving grants, funding channels for distribution and running educational programmes to impart cultural knowledge and cultural capital to the population (Brighton, 2006).

Of course, the rhetoric of autonomy has often been undermined in reality. The history of state subsidy in the UK shows how culture has frequently been instrumentalised for other ends, including the preservation of national identity and heritage; the refinement of consumptive 'taste' and artistic knowledge of the population; and the need to boost morale during the world wars and post-war period (Minihan, 1977; Pearson, 1982; Hewison, 1995; Williams, 1979). At different points throughout the history of arts subsidy, this instrumentalism was presented in terms of 'the public good'; for instance, the need to build morale during the world wars, or the aspiration to 'bring art to the people' in line with the egalitarian ethos of the welfare state. Belfiore *et al* (2006) argue that instrumentalism is a fairly typical

feature of most cultural policy, particularly the use of censorship to counteract moral 'negative impacts' in society. At the height of the Cold War in the USA, the political authorities through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) recruited members of the cultural elite to fight a 'propaganda war' against the Soviet Union, promoting art forms such as Abstract Expressionism, which were presumed to be devoid of the radical content of social realism and therefore an advertisement for artistic autonomy in the west. Stonor Saunders (2001) points out in her detailed account of this relationship between politics and the arts in this period, 'One of the extraordinary features of the role that American painting played in the cultural Cold War is not the fact that it became part of the enterprise, but that a movement which so deliberately declared itself to be apolitical could become so intensely politicised' (275). Although cultural policy was constructed along the lines of the Romantic conception - that culture exists partly outside 'society' - as suggested by Arnold, Adorno, Arendt and others, it was inevitably subjected to bureaucracy, arguments for 'the public good', and political propaganda (Levine, 2007).

Yet importantly, the notion of the 'arms length' principle and '*art pour l'art*' remained the ostensible justification for arts subsidy in the post-war period. The rationale for cultural policy adhered, at least in its self-presentation, to the Enlightenment view of culture as something that should be allowed to exist freely of social pressure and need - the criteria by which it would be judged would not be the arbitrary tastes of individuals, private institutions or politicians, but experts who had transparent authority and could ensure standards of 'excellence'. Roy Shaw (1987), former Chief Executive of the Arts Council who had risen to prominence through the Workers Educational Association, combined an Arnoldian faith in culture, with a belief that the welfare state played an important role in disseminating it: 'the task of education, broadcasting organisations and arts organisations...is to make excellence accessible. This is to make the eminently democratic assumption that people deserve the best and need it' (81). The role of the state, therefore, was about preserving and disseminating those forms of culture deemed worthy of support and incapable of surviving in the commercial climate. This necessarily involved judgments about artistic merit and public worth, which were for a long time regarded as uncontroversial.

So far, I have suggested that in debates about the relationship between culture and society, there has emerged a durable 'order of discourse' which posits culture as universal; belonging inside society, yet at the same time, existing outside it.<sup>10</sup> The role of the state was to be kept at a distance, because culture requires autonomy for its own inner logic to unfold.

However, since the 1970s and the 1980s, there has been a groundswell of opinion within the cultural sector, academia and policy circles against the idea that culture can and should exist autonomously from the state and society. The notion of the Romantic artist or the autonomous museum or gallery has come under critical scrutiny, and artistic value is regarded by many as 'an arbitrary aesthetic system', contingent upon the tastes of specific groups who wield social influence (Lewis, 1990: 11). Pierre Bourdieu's work on the sociology of taste, most notably his *Distinction: A Social Critique of Taste* (1986), along with other left-wing critiques of the power relations in the cultural sector, have propagated the idea that cultural value is not transcendent, but grounded in social conditions of power and class. This 'exposure' of the essential contingency and relativism of cultural value emerged as a force in academia, first through the influence of anthropology in the 1950s and then later, in cultural studies in the 1960s. These changes transformed perceptions, and cultures were theorised as relative and incommensurate. The notion of universal cultural value came to be regarded as 'Euro-centric' and elitist. The cumulative effect of these academic ideas was the notorious 'culture wars' in North America during the 1980s, in which the Enlightenment ideals of truth, universalism and excellence became pilloried in debates on university campuses, challenging the epistemological foundations of many academic disciplines (McGuigan, 1996: 7-9; also, Hughes, 1993 and Gitlin, 1994).<sup>11</sup>

Although this shift was momentous and far too wide and varied to cover in this chapter, I will focus on the particular effect it had on how cultural policy was being

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<sup>10</sup> Fairclough (2003) defines an 'order of discourse' as the point when particular representations develop a coherence of ideological meaning and internal logic (3).

<sup>11</sup> For descriptions of how these ideas came to shape debates in the UK visual arts sector see Mulholland (2000) and Stallabrass (2006).

discussed, culminating in the 'cultural policy debate' of the early 1990s (Rothfield, 1999). The debate, which was amongst predominantly left-wing figures in cultural studies, centred on the political ambitions of the discipline and the prospective role of academics as shapers of policy. On one side were those who believed that the political importance of cultural studies lay in its capacity for autonomous critique; impartial analysis of cultural products and representations in order to generate a greater understanding of the structuralist dynamics within capitalist society (for instance, Jameson, 1993; McGuigan, 1996). This position had dominated early cultural studies in Britain and America, with proponents such as Raymond Williams, who sought to radicalise Matthew Arnold's idealist 'criticism of life' (McGuigan, 1996: 13). This approach drew on a Gramscian analysis of the hegemony of state power in shaping ideology, and the aspiration to formulate strategies of resistance through critique.

On the other side were those who argued that the notion of a transcendent space from which cultural studies could operate was itself naive. All cultural study and analysis was itself implicated in the very fabric of state power and the university was never free of practical considerations, regulations, or agendas. As a result, culture – down to its very practice, display and dissemination – has always been 'useful' to those in power. Possibly the single most forceful proponent of this position has been Tony Bennett, trained in the British school of cultural studies and based at the Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy in Brisbane, Australia by the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> In 1992, in his article 'Putting Policy into Cultural Studies' he argued that the notion of culture as critique was problematic, because culture had always been used towards the exercise of power – 'governmentality' – in Modernity (Bennett, T., 1992). In this sense, he challenged any 'evolutionary' account, which supposes that 'high culture' moves from being something pure towards being a subject of policy. Culture is always compromised and partial.

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<sup>12</sup> He helped establish the Institute of Cultural Policy Studies in Australia but moved back to the Open University in England. Other academics influenced by Bennett include Ian Hunter, Toby Miller, George Yudice (see Rothfield, 1999).

Bennett developed his conceptualisation of culture as a 'technology of the self' in his 1995 historical account of the emergence of the modern public museum, *The Birth of the Museum* (itself a derivation of Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*) (Bennett, T. 1995). Following Foucault, Bennett argued that the state's relationship to the citizenry went through a qualitative transformation in the early nineteenth century. The state shifted from a juridico-discursive mode, which consisted of explicit expressions of absolutist monarchical power and coercion, towards a new mode of 'governmentality', through which the citizenry is fashioned to self-discipline and the state is able to 'work at a distance...achieving its objectives by inscribing within the self-activating and self-regulating capacities of individuals' (20). In this historical account, Bennett suggests that museums were part of a 'battery of new cultural technologies' such as parks, leisure facilities, theatres, and halls that were aimed at reforming individual citizens through ideas about good behaviour, self-fashioning and self-education. The 'passionless reformers' of the new public museums were just as concerned with fashioning citizenship as promoting cultural value.<sup>13</sup> For instance, the architecture of public museums was oriented towards teaching people how to behave in public through emulation of the middle classes; the visitor was moulded through the assertion of new norms of accepted conduct (no eating, no drinking, dress codes) (1995: 24).<sup>14</sup>

Most controversially, Bennett has argued that the claim to cultural universalism is itself socially contingent, brought into existence for the purpose of fashioning a new kind of citizen for the modern state. Universalism presupposes an autonomous, rational subject who is capable of self-discipline, improvement, and making a contribution to the social order. It is an affirmation of the bourgeois state. In this sense, instead of insisting on culture's impartiality and independence, Bennett insists it is an integral part of 'governmentality'.

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, Bennett cites William Stanley Jevons, writing in 1883 about the beneficial effects of public libraries: 'We are fully warranted in looking upon Free Libraries as an engine for operating upon the poorer portions of the population' (Jevons, 1883, cited in Bennett, 1998: 122)]

<sup>14</sup> The Museums Bill of 1845 enabled local councils to establish museums. The number of public museums in Britain grew from 50 in 1860 to 200 in 1900, many of which were justified according to their educational function (Bennett, 1998: 72, 148).

Yet, at the same time, Bennett does not entirely close down the possibility of agency and criticism. The pervasive character of discourse generates its own internal tensions and contradictions, making it possible for subjects of governmentality to exercise power themselves. Instead of attacking the prescriptive use of cultural policy and trying to wrestle culture away from power, Bennett argues that society should emulate this approach to achieve the desired moral objectives of our own age. Whereas the Victorians espoused the language of universal citizenship and autonomy, we can emphasise the language of diversity and inclusion:

Are museums not still concerned to beam their improving messages of cultural tolerance and diversity as deeply into civil society as they can reach in order to carry the message to those who the museum can only hope to address as citizens, publics and audiences? And do we not, through a battery of access policies, wish – indeed require – that they do so? (1998: 213)

Bennett therefore dismisses what he believes to be the unrealistic ambition of cultural studies for a Marxist-style social revolution, and advocates a reformist project for cultural policy. Rather than ascribing to the Gramscian bi-polar model of 'the state' and 'the oppressed', mediated to the populace by intellectual critique, he asserts that, 'We need a fuller and richer cartography of the spaces between total compliance and resistance' (1998: 169; also 1995). Bennett argues that Marxist theories of structural determination reduce culture to an effect, rather than a potentially disruptive power in its own right, which people can take for themselves. Power does not solely emanate from the 'top down', but from a multiplicity of sites, including government but also non-governmental organisations, civil society, and even just individuals in their day-to-day lives. Cultural policy can allow for a more 'prosaic politics' that involves 'tinkering with the routines and practices through which [cultural institutions] operate'. (1998: 195). For museums specifically, he asserts the need to discard old universalist logic and for greater space to discuss diverse narratives and values:

...the role of the curator be shifted away from that of the source of an expertise whose function is to organise a representation claiming the status of

knowledge and towards that of the possessor of a technical competence whose function is to assist groups outside the museum to use its resources to make authored statements within it. (Bennett, T. 1998: 104)<sup>15</sup>

The museum should not aim to establish a singular truth claim or narrative, or universal standards of 'the best', but to establish the inherent instabilities of truth claims and narratives, and give different individuals and ethnic or social groups the opportunity to present their own versions of cultural value. He privileges diversity as the primary principle by which cultural institutions should work. For instance, in a policy note to the Cultural Policies Research and Development Unit, Council of Europe, he argues for the need to validate diversity through 'parity of esteem' (Bennett, T., 2001b: 37).

This theorisation of culture knocks culture off its perch, but with it also the unified, transcendental human subject. As Heartfield (2002) states, 'If the singular objective ground is called into question, then so too is the singular and unified subject' (20). It is the capacity to transcend and acquire objective knowledge that allows the subject to act upon the world and change it. Without such capacity for transcendence, subjectivity is not possible. Individuals remain trapped in their partial, different identities, and can only ever understand their own private truths.

As a result of this paradigm shift, Bennett's theorisation of cultural policy and subjectivity itself leaves in doubt such notions of 'intrinsic value', scholarship, beauty, and autonomy, and excellence, which had been the basis of legitimacy of cultural institutions in the modern era. By insisting that cultural value is determined entirely by its functional use in the exercise of power, this transforms the very basis of cultural policy. Cultural institutions are increasingly expected to become facilitators of identity and narrative construction, rather than as guardians of objective knowledge and expertise.

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<sup>15</sup> Bennett highlights how Australian museums have 'ceded to Aboriginal peoples the right to refashion displays of Aboriginal materials in order to make statements on their own terms' (1998: 104). He also praises the People's Palace museum in Glasgow for presenting social history as inherently contradictory and open to interpretation.

Numerous authors have followed Bennett in attacking the legitimacy of cultural policy in the past. With reference to museums, Stanbridge (2002) argues that cultural policy should challenge traditional hierarchies ('universalising modes of thought') (127). Lloyd *et al* (1998) and Lewis *et al* (2003) assert that traditional cultural policy in the past was about creating a good 'compliant citizen' and is in need of reform, to produce a more democratic citizenry. James Clifford (1997) has argued that the role of the museum is no longer to simply display objects unequivocally, but to facilitate different voices and opinions about it: 'It's all about 'the conversation'. He puts forward a new view of the museum:

Detached from the monologic universalism of the museum-as-collection, the object is now the site, instrument and occasion for dialogic exchanges structured, ideally, as non-hierarchical relations of reciprocity, between different cultures and communities. (203).

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) a prominent 'new museologist' in the UK has argued that 'History must abandon its absolutes, and instead of attempting to find generalisations and unities, should look for differences, for change, for rupture.' (10)

One of the foremost theorists of cultural diversity, Stuart Hall, has argued for the need to challenge the implicit universalism of the museum display and to develop an explicit subjectivism which shows how unreliable, temporary and relative interpretations of cultural objects can be. As the chairman of the Institute of International Visual Arts in 2001, he gave a keynote address at the Tate in London arguing:

Museums have to understand their collection and their practices as what I can only call 'temporary stabilisations'... [The museum] has to be aware that it is a narrative, a selection, whose purpose is not just to disturb the viewer but to itself be disturbed by what it cannot be, by its necessary exclusions. It must make its own disturbance evident so that the viewer is not trapped into the universalised logic of thinking whereby because something has been there for a long period of time and is well funded, it must be 'true' and of value in

some aesthetic sense. Its purpose is to destabilise its own stabilities (Hall, S., 2001:22).

This championing of diversity and 'access' (i.e. the imperative to include new visitors and audiences on the basis of new epistemological approaches) has meant an inevitable clash with the idea of 'excellence', universal truth and standards (Garnham, 2001). In the field of museums today, it is commonly argued that the old values of excellence and truth have excluded people. One museums professional, Jocelyn Dodd, wrote in 2002:

Art and design museums work well for those who speak the right language, for people who understand the right codes; these museums are used well by those who find connections between their lives and the museum and its collections... However, many people find no connections, no relevance. They see serried rows of precious objects unfathomably presented, with texts that presuppose considerable knowledge and provides a very hands-off, alienating experience (Dodd, 2002: 1).

Dodd argues that museums and cultural institutions need to develop new values and justifications for their existence; to go 'out beyond their traditional roles, seeking their rationale in something external to themselves' (2).

These arguments are also widespread in the visual and performing arts. Justin Lewis, a prominent cultural policy academic and practitioner in the UK argues in *Art, Culture and Enterprise* (Lewis, 1990) that there is a conflict between 'an aesthetic based upon 'the artist's point of view' and the needs and interests of people as potential cultural consumers'. He attacks arts centres in Britain for their 'concern with the culture of the arts centre rather than the culture of the area it operates in' (35). Cultural policy, he argues, should recognise a broader range of objectives and criteria than mere aesthetic judgement, and be used to address issues of economy, individual personal development, tourism and industry, and community.

### **1.3 Growth of discussions about cultural policy since the 1970s**

I have thus outlined a growing discourse about culture in academic circles in Europe, America and Australia, which emphasises its particularity and relativism, and its potential as a tool for government.

This advocacy has coincided with another trend; the growing interest in the management of culture in politics. Since the 1970s, there has been a noticeable expansion in the structures, institutions and discourse relating to cultural policy-making at local and national government level. Whilst the ideal of universal, autonomous culture has not disappeared from cultural policy discourse, it has increasingly come to co-exist with the idea that culture should be managed and deployed usefully in society and that culture is an important policy issue.

Numerous authors have pointed out that discussions about cultural policy first began in earnest in the 1970s, in the international arena (Blandina-Quinn, 1998; Hylland Eriksen, 2001; Barnett, 2000). Article 22 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 enshrined a respect for cultural rights but cultural policy discussions began to be developed more fully by UNESCO, which commissioned the influential anthropological theorist, Claude Levi Strauss, to write *Race et histoire* (1952). His work on cultural relativism had a profound influence on the organisation, and although UNESCO policies were not always consistent in their theoretical approach to culture, the significance of cultural policy grew in its productive output from the late 1970s onwards (Hylland Eriksen, 2001). In particular, culture was seen as important to emerging concerns about citizenship and the situation of post-colonial migration and displaced peoples and minorities within Europe following World War II. As Wallach (2000) also points out, it is unsurprising that the rise of cultural policy discourse in the international sphere took place during this period, following as it did the the growth of cultural studies in academia, particularly in Australia and Britain (5).

UNESCO announced the 'World Decade for Cultural Development' in 1989 and established the World Commission on Culture and Development in 1991, which began its work in 1993 and held 'The Power of Culture' conference in November

1996. Its concept of culture was strategically broad enough to encompass political concerns. In its major report, *Our Creative Diversity* in 1996, the authors stressed the growing clamour to acknowledge the cultural dimensions of development, 'as people realised that economic criteria alone could not provide a programme for human dignity and well-being' (World Commission on Culture and Development, 1996: 8). Importantly, the UNESCO definition of culture, whilst paying lip service to the notion of culture as autonomous, universal culture, placed greater emphasis on culture as 'a way of life'. In its 'World Conference on Cultural Policies' in Mexico City, 1982, culture was defined:

...not in the restricted sense of belles-lettres, the fine arts, literature and philosophy but as the distinctive and specific features and ways of thinking and organising the lives of every individual and every community (cited in Wallach, 2000: 4)

Tony Bennett (1998) notes approvingly how cultural policy statements emerging in national and international bodies during this time were broad in their definition of culture. For instance, he cites Australia's cultural policy strategy, *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy* in 1994 (which would have a subsequent influence on cultural policy in the UK - see Meredyth *et al*, 2000). This deploys an anthropological meaning of culture: 'the work of Australians themselves through what they do in their everyday lives, as communities and as individuals (whether it be as workers in industry, farmers, parents or citizens (DOCA, 1994: 9, Bennett, T. 1998: 89). The South African government's 'Creative Nation' document, states that 'arts and cultural policy deals with custom and tradition, belief, religion, language, identity, popular history, crafts, as well as all the art forms including music, theatre, dance, creative writing, the fine arts, the plastic arts, photography, film' (ANC, Draft National Cultural Policy 1996: 1, cited in Bennett, T. 1998: 90). As Bennett notes, the expansion of the definition of culture stretched the remit of cultural policy:

The cumulative weight of citation of these and related definitions in a wide range of national contexts (the policy rhetorics in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom are very similar) has signalled and, in good measure,

brought about a shift in policy priorities. Their primary role in this regard has been to extend the ambit of cultural policy in authorising a democratic expansion of the fields of activity that can be brought within its compass. (Bennett, T. 1998: 90)

Another indicator of the increased prevalence and importance of cultural policy to governments has been the remarkable growth of cultural policy studies since the late 1980s. Whilst academic study in this field existed previously, it had been a marginal preoccupation, done largely as a 'labour of love' and without political controversy (Pankratz *et al*, 1990: xiii). Over the past two decades, cultural policy studies has grown in stature, generating a considerable volume of academic journals and books. The discipline enjoys prestigious annual conferences, and its rise has led to the creation of numerous university departments worldwide. Since the late 1990s, major think-tanks in the US, Europe, Britain and Australia have also produced pamphlets and research about culture.<sup>16</sup> There has also been growing demand by those within cultural policy studies to have a more prescriptive influence on government policy (Rothfield, 1999, Lewis *et al*, 2003; Lewis, 1990). Importantly, these academics have written for state and supra-state authorities, traversing the divide between academia and policy-making.

#### **1.4 The UK context – a rise in cultural policy-making**

If we look more closely at the UK, we can see a growth in the importance and coherence of cultural policy, particularly since the 1980s. Up till then, the British government's involvement in culture had been uneven and arranged largely on an ad hoc basis. Even during the 1960s, when the position of Arts Minister was created for

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<sup>16</sup> Significant academic publications today include: *Journal of Arts Management*, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, and *Cultural Trends*. Annual conferences include the Conference on Social Theory, Politics and the Arts, Association for Cultural Economics, and the International Conference of Cultural Policy Research. Europe's first university department for Arts Policy and Management (today Cultural Policy and Management) is based at City University in London. Other major departments include the Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, based at the University of Warwick and Centre for Cultural Policy Research at the University of Glasgow. Outside academia, think tanks across the political spectrum have published extensively on cultural policy issues since the early 2000s, for instance: Demos (Landry & Bianchini, 1995; Holden, 2007; 2004) the Institute of Public Policy Research (Keaney, 2006a; Cowling, 2004) and Policy Exchange (Mirza, 2006). Bennett (2001) provides a European overview of the state of cultural policy research and argues that it has increased in significance (21).

the Labour MP, Jennie Lee, the 'arm's length principle' remained reasonably steadfast. Numerous authors have argued that from the 1980s there was a massive growth in government's involvement in arts and culture, especially the subsidised national galleries and museums which become more susceptible to the objectives and will of politicians (Pick, 1991; Throsby, 2001; Selwood, 2001; Gray 2000; Brighton, 1999; Blandina-Quinn, 1998; Bennett, O. 1996; Hewison, 1995; Sinclair, 1995; Hutchison, 1982).

This growth in cultural policy-making can be seen in two key trends. The first is the increased formalisation and bureaucratisation of cultural policy. This entailed the development of explicit performance measurements and objectives tied to funding; the increased centralisation and rationalisation of state-led cultural provision through the creation of government departments and quangos; increased funding for some recipients; and the growth of statutory and non-statutory guidelines and policy frameworks. The second trend is a growing ideological or rhetorical focus on culture and its power to address social and economic issues.

With regard to the first trend, subsidised arts and cultural institutions came under increased scrutiny during the 1980s. The New Public Management approach was tied into a broader bureaucratic reform agenda designed to increase efficiency and standards in the local and national public sector (Hood, 1995, 1991). It applied managerial criteria to a range of public sector areas and introduced models of market-based competition in order to drive up standards. For the cultural sector, this meant an increase of targets and measures unrelated to aesthetic values. In his research into arts policies, Gray argues that the values of art and the art elite have been replaced by the values of bureaucrats (2000, 2002, 2006). This drive towards managerialism did not cease with a change of government in 1997 and in 1998 the Labour government introduced new frameworks for public spending on culture. Its Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), initiated across all government departments, set out three-year agreements with departments, outlining their objectives and targets for efficiency and effectiveness in a Public Service Agreement (PSA). The CSR, and the ensuing policy review *A New Cultural Framework* (DCMS, 1998a) had a significant impact on the way the government related to subsidised

organisations in the cultural sector. DCMS was awarded an additional £290m over the next three years and created new quangos to manage relations with its 'clients' (grant recipients) (Creigh-Tyte *et al*, 2001: 184; Selwood, 2001: 2).<sup>17</sup> As well as establishing PSAs in 1999, DCMS also established QUEST (Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team) to scrutinise the effectiveness of the system (DCMS, 1999a). Taken together, these changes have clearly led to a greater formalisation of how funding is dispensed and made accountable at national level.

The creation of a government department of culture also happened under the Conservative Government which established the Department of National Heritage (DNH) in 1992. This was intended to oversee subsidies for cultural activity and develop a more coherent cultural policy agenda.<sup>18</sup> Two years after the DNH was established, the National Lottery was set up with the stated intention of augmenting rather than substituting for existing public expenditure (although only a few years later Selwood (2001) noted widespread concern that whilst the Lottery had given a significant boost in arts funding, it had indeed become a substitute for central government support). The Lottery initially funded five main strands in equal measure: arts, sport, heritage, charities and millennium celebrations (a sixth 'good cause' was added later; for health, environment and education initiatives). The DNH then became the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and was renamed Department *for* Culture, Media and Sport after New Labour took over in 1997.<sup>19</sup>

To what extent has growth in policy frameworks and institutions translated into increased funding? It is very difficult, given the poor statistical data in the cultural sector, to state whether the increased institutional support and rhetoric around arts and culture in the past fifteen years had a practical impact on subsidy. *The UK Cultural Sector*, a digest published in 2001 was one of the few attempts at a

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<sup>17</sup> This additional funding included £125m to the arts and £99m to museums and galleries, which came 'with strings attached' (DCMS, 1999a).

<sup>18</sup> Its functions were previously carried out by a variety of departments, including the Privy Council, Home Office, the Departments for Education and the Department for the Environment.

<sup>19</sup> The DCMS covers the subsidised sector of public museums, galleries, libraries and arts organisations, and the non-subsidised 'creative industries', defined as 'those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (DCMS, 1998b). DCMS is also responsible for the link between cultural policy and other governmental department remits, for instance, urban regeneration, social exclusion and education.

comprehensive survey of funding. The editor, Sara Selwood, estimated that in real terms, the amount of support given to the subsidised sector grew by approximately 11 per cent over the five years between 1993/1994 and 1998/1999 (see Table 1), which coincided with a period of increased discussion of cultural policy. However, she advised caution about this apparent rise, stating that it has been bolstered by lottery funds. Excluding the licence fee, funding for the sector increased by approximately 9 per cent. Excluding the licence fee and lottery funding, there was a decline of 6 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

Table 1 Overview of funding for the UK cultural sector by source in money and real terms, 1993/94 - 1998/99

	£ millions					
	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
Central government <sup>21</sup>	998	1,044	1,078	995	930	945
<i>Of which</i> DCMS	843	856	895	816	745	768
Local authorities	1,092	1,160	1,121	1,238	1,251	1,256
BBC licence fee	1,684	1,751	1,820	1,915	2,010	2,180
Lottery	N/a	14	663	814	646	369
Business sponsorship	70	83	75	90	107	131
Total	3,843	4,052	4,757	5,052	4,943	4,880
At real	4,395	4,569	5,213	5,363	5,105	4,880

<sup>20</sup> Selwood (2001) advises caution about the reliability of the data, particularly with regards to local authorities (40). Funding from public sources made up just over half of the respondents' income (x1). However, a mere tenth of the respondents overall receive over a third of all public subsidy.

<sup>21</sup> Via DCMS, Scottish Office, Welsh Office, and Northern Ireland Office only.

(1998/99) prices						
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(Adapted from Selwood, 2001: 38)

If we look at more recent statistics, there are signs that funding has continued to grow. In its 1999 annual report, DCMS stated that its resource expenditure was set to increase by £290m between 1999-2002. (Note: this figure for DCMS expenditure is not directly comparable to the figures shown in Table 1.)

Table 2 DCMS expenditure in money terms 2001/02 – 2007/08

	£millions						
	2001/02 outturn	2002/03 outturn	2003/04 outturn	2004/05 outturn	2005/06 outturn	2006/07 estimated outturn	2007/08 plans
DCMS	1006	1227	1,225	1,326	1,423	1,625	1,564
Of which museums and galleries	302	424	446	442	483	596	548
Of which arts	254	286	329	367	407	424	421

(Adapted from DCMS Resource Budget Table [Departmental Expenditure Limit], DCMS, 2007a: 60)

Specifically for the arts, funding has risen dramatically in the past decade. In *Culture and Creativity 2007*, DCMS (2007a) stated that its subsidy to Arts Council England increased by 73 per cent in real terms over the previous ten years, and in money terms from £187m in 1997/98 to £412m in 2006/07. Within this, theatre funding more than doubled, from £47.9m in 1996/97 to an estimated £97.5m in 2006/07. In

2003 DCMS gave an extra £75m to Arts Council England (which included doubling of funds for individual artists) and also £40m to Creative Partnerships, the flagship arts and education scheme administered by the Arts Council (ACE, 2003). Added to this funding boost, the Labour government introduced a policy of free admission to the national museums and galleries. Although institutions have complained that this policy has not been fully compensated for by increased subsidy, the overall effect has been to reinforce the view that Labour is altogether more interested in and devoted to the arts than the previous Conservative administration. This excitement has been tempered more recently, however, because of announcements that funding for the arts is to be capped because of the 2012 Olympics in London. £112m of the arts sector's lottery share is to be diverted to this cause.

With regard to the second trend and the ideological attitudes about culture, we can discern new expectations about what culture can do in terms of delivering social or economic objectives. As I have already suggested, culture has become seen as 'useful' to governments. Under the Conservatives, and later under Labour, the Arts Council and DNH/DCMS began to extol the social and economic benefits of culture: urban regeneration; improving health outcomes; increasing educational attainment; and integrating ethnic, cultural and religious minorities (see DCMS, 1998a; DCMS, 1998b, ACE, 2004; 2006b). Museums and galleries were even described in one DCMS document as 'centres for social change' (DCMS, 2000a).

Rather than being treated as a discrete area or luxury item of public expenditure, cultural policy has become 'attached' to other policy areas that are of higher priority but are increasingly seen to have a cultural dimension (Gray, 2000). Bianchini *et al* (1997) note that the term cultural planning, for instance, is not used merely to refer to the planning of cultural activities in a locality, but to denote a cultural/anthropological approach to urban policy, which recognises diverse interests and identities (84-85). Nor has this growing interest in culture been manifest solely within the DCMS and its sponsored bodies. In 1998/99, the arts and cultural sector received an estimated £230m in funding from other central government departments; evidence of the perceived relevance of cultural issues to other social problems (Selwood, 2001: 39). More generally, cultural policy is now expected to be

part of a wider policy response to sociological concerns about cultural identity and community, made particularly pertinent since the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA and the suicide bombings of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 by British-born Muslims in London.

What these attitudinal shifts show is an increased desire to harness cultural policy for new objectives. The result is a change in the way support for cultural activities is decided. Whereas in the 1970s, decisions over Arts Council subsidies tended to be based on the taste and expertise of its panel of art experts - what Hutchinson scathingly called 'little more than the rich looking after its own pleasures' (1982: 68) - today there is greater managerial control over the type of provision on offer, plus more non-cultural criteria for assessment, such as participation rates and audience attendance figures (Brighton, 2007, Gray, 2000). That is not to say that there is no rhetorical support for the notion of art or culture 'for its own sake'. Oliver Bennett (2007) points out that Romantic language about the 'truth' and 'beauty' of art often infuses contemporary cultural policy statements. However, it now also co-exists with a very explicit and domineering kind of instrumentalism, which measures culture against what it can achieve in non-aesthetic terms. This was exemplified in an essay by the former Secretary of State for Culture, Tessa Jowell MP, who complained that the arts were too often measured according to their social function, yet only a few paragraphs later, called for the arts to address 'the poverty of aspiration', in order to deal with social exclusion (Jowell, 2004). It is not the quality of the culture that is given paramount importance, but how it will serve social or economic policy ends. Numerous writers and cultural figures - often using the national media - have complained about this instrumentalism (Tusa, 2007; Lebrecht, 2006; Delingpole, 2006; Ellis, 2003; Pick, 1991; Appleton, 2001; and Brighton 1999)

If we look away from the national picture towards local authorities, there seems to be even more evidence of a sustained growth of cultural policy. The culture sphere has become more important for local government since the 1980s, as a way to regenerate local industries, create employment, and tackle a wide range of social problems (Miles, 2005; Gray, 2000; Caust, 2003). This has also been noted in the US context (Florida, 2002, Zukin, 1997). City decision-makers have almost uniformly

come to understand culture as a sphere requiring increased political intervention (Bianchini *et al*, 1993; O'Connor *et al*, 1996). The main independent body for local government, the Local Government Association (LGA), observed in its report, *Culture and the shared priorities*, that cultural services are seen to 'play a growing role in meeting the increasingly ambitious objectives for service delivery' (LGA, 2004: 5).

The impetus for this growth is partly driven by central government, through guidance from government departments such as DCMS, but also via major funding frameworks for local initiatives, particularly the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). Culture is also expected to play a core part in the Government's social inclusion strategy, which has inevitably shaped the way in which local authorities perceive its importance (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001; DCMS 1999b). Although culture was not part of a statutory duty, DCMS guidance strongly urged all authorities to develop a cultural strategy by the end of 2002, along with over thirty other initiatives. In 1999, the Audit Commission introduced a Best Value Performance Indicator for cultural services. In 2005, it brought in a Key Line of Enquiry for culture, as well as a culture block in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Also, funding for the arts and culture has risen in some – by no means all - areas, particularly thanks to central government programmes such as Renaissance in the Regions (beginning in 2003), which were designed to address systemic funding shortages that had existed since the 1980s.

Nonetheless, local government has also taken the initiative in developing cultural policies and individual authorities have often led by example, influencing the national discourse. The LGA has initiated numerous reports, conferences, guidelines and best practice guides for local authorities in this area (LGA, 1993, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004; see also the policy briefing by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) (2004). The LGA develops ideas with considerable autonomy from the centre, and encourages innovation according to local needs and resources. It has developed performance indicators in culture, and twelve 'cultural pathfinders' to showcase best practice.<sup>22</sup> Numerous cultural policy associations and networks have also come into

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<sup>22</sup> Email from Mari Davis, LGA Senior Policy Project Officer, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2005.

existence, including the National Association of Local Government Arts Officers (NALGAO), which was set up in 2002 as an amalgamation of two local government arts organisations that were established in the early 1980s.<sup>23</sup> These bodies generate distinct ideas and strategies, which are then adopted by authorities; what Patrick Dunleavy (1980) would term 'stereotyped ideological responses' (156). This cross-regional discourse is arguably even more pronounced today, as increasing numbers of local government officers are professionally mobile and spread ideas nationwide. Thus, even if individual authorities cut their cultural spending, the wider assimilation of cultural policy discourse has resulted in the general growth of cultural policy overall. Another factor that might encourage local innovation is the increasing number of agents involved in local decision-making. Whilst this might create competition for resources within local authorities, it could also spur councils to pursue novel and diverse approaches (Stoker, 2004: 9,19,20; Wilson, *et al*, 2006: 339-340).

Of course, it can be argued that fashions come and go in local government and that the apparent rise of cultural policy rhetoric reflects just that. However, it is reasonable to assume that these ideas are well entrenched. In May 2005, the journal, *Urban Studies*, published a special issue on the theme of culture-led urban regeneration. In the editorial, the authors noted that culture has received a dramatic increase in attention from local authorities in recent years: 'Within the space of little more than two decades, the initiation of culture-driven urban (re)generation has come to occupy a pivotal position in the new urban entrepreneurialism.' (Miles *et al*, 2005: 833)

It is difficult to measure in empirical terms the growth of cultural policy in local government, as the majority of authorities do not have specific cultural departments or they are often joined with other departmental areas, such as education or community services.<sup>24</sup> This also makes it extremely difficult to measure the apparent

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<sup>23</sup> Email correspondence with Pete Bryan, NALGAO. 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2007.

<sup>24</sup> According to an LGA survey in 2002, nearly 9 out of 10 authorities had cultural services reflected in the political management arrangements, but the location of cultural services varied widely. Approximately one quarter of authorities had a separate cultural services department, while another quarter had cultural

growth of cultural policy using standardised indicators across local authorities. Different local authorities might spend money on a range of activities that are cultural but may not be identifiable as such in their budgets.

It is also quite difficult to track funding by local government, as the paucity and unreliability of data makes it hard to assess trends, and each sector varies.

There are 410 local authorities in England and Wales. Although the arts and culture are not a statutory obligation, between 1993/4 and 1998/9, local councils were the largest public funders of cultural activity in the UK, exceeding central government and the National Lottery (Table 1). Despite this, according to Davies (2001), the most reliable conclusion about funding in that same period is that there was an overall fall of expenditure of 6 per cent or 7 per cent in real terms by local authorities across arts, libraries and museums and galleries over the five years between 1993/94 and 1998/99 (112). In a study of public art projects Selwood (1995) states that spending increased dramatically throughout all metropolitan regions in the 1980s, but this was not evenly matched in other areas of arts expenditure, suggesting that the boost in public art expenditure (monuments, public spaces and installations) was particular to the period. In 2002/2003, total revenue spending on the arts by local authorities was small as a proportion of total spending - approximately 0.5 per cent; although this varied across authorities (Fenn *et al*, 2005). The political make-up of the council had no discernible effect on levels of expenditure, but there was some correlation between type of area and level of spending, with cities and service industry centres spending the most, and manufacturing towns spending the least.

A number of councils in the past decade decided to sell (or obtain insurance valuations of) their art collections. Recent cases discussed in the media include the decision of Bury Council to sell an L.S. Lowry painting; Wandsworth Council's threat to close its local museum and reduce funding to the Battersea Arts Centre; the decision of Waltham Forest Council to reduce opening hours and funds for curatorial

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services dispersed amongst several departments, such as a corporate division, or community services (LGA, 2002).

staff for its William Morris Gallery; and Oldham Council’s request to the town’s gallery to value its collection with a view to possible sales (Hunt, 2007; Fox, 2007). The rhetorical support for culture, therefore, cannot be assumed to be synonymous with a commitment to maintaining art collections or production in local institutions.

Yet despite these cases, DCMS’s figures in its Annual Report, 2007 (Table 2.2) show that between 2001/2 and 2006/7, local authority spending on cultural activity is set to rise by approximately 25 per cent (DCMS, 2007b: 64).

Table 3 Local authority spending on functions relevant to DCMS

	£ thousands					
	2001 02 Out-turn	2002-03 Out-turn	2003-04 Out turn	2004-05 Estimated Out -turn	2005-06 Plans	2006-07 Plans
DCMS	3,307,824	3,807,509	4,212,488	3,965,330	4,075,277	4,499,602
Local authority	1,840,253	1,921,554	2,108,205	2,107,459	2,228,945	2,305,686

(Adapted from DCMS Annual Report (2007b: 64))

There are also clear indications that people working in local government believe that cultural services have become more important. In the 2002 LGA survey 84 per cent of respondents from local authorities in England and Wales reported that that the contribution of cultural services in their authority had increased a little or a lot in the previous three years, and 51 per cent believed that the contribution of cultural services would increase a lot over the next three years. A further 39 per cent believed it would increase a little (LGA, 2002).

In addition, the biennial Arts Council England survey of local authority expenditure shows that despite overall falls in funding, local authorities increased the number of arts development officer posts (Fenn *et al*, 2005: 4). It also states that broader social and economic changes have affected the support for the arts. As it says, 'many local economies are becoming increasingly dependent on leisure and tourism', implying that the arts should be used to support these growth areas, although it is rather vague about the extent of this dependency (10). The survey shows that, as with cultural services more generally, more departments are involved in arts expenditure than previously: 'such as education, social services, regeneration, etc' (17). The greater financial security of the arts is noticeable, for instance, when the 2002/2003 survey is compared with comments in the 1993/1994 survey, which alluded to respondents' 'sombre remarks about cuts', 10 per cent decrease in funding for venues, 25 per cent decrease in staff over the previous 3 or 4 years, and the impact of recession on box office figures (Marsh *et al*, 1995:18). The relative optimism of arts officers in more recent times indicates that even if funding has decreased slightly, the arts seem to enjoy a higher status. There has also been greater emphasis on raising private funds, for instance, through the 'Percent for Art' scheme, which obliges all private developers to devote expenditure to public artwork.

Local authorities' arts and cultural policies are also strongly oriented towards urban regeneration objectives. An Arts Council of England evaluation of local authority arts policies drew on qualitative responses from arts officers to suggest that they were increasingly likely to tap into regeneration funds:

There is evidence that local authorities which had pursued cultural policies linked to economic regeneration had increased funding for the arts substantially. There is some evidence that arts and cultural policy which focuses on regeneration may induce arts organisations to move into new areas of work in order to secure regeneration funds. (*Bond et al*, 1998: ii).

At the same time, there is more interest in the relationship between culture and urban planning. In an ESRC funded study, Justin O'Connor at Manchester Metropolitan University stated that over fifty local authorities had developed or were

developing cultural quarters or districts, which might consist of large-scale redevelopments of disused industrial areas into retail, leisure or educational zones, and which could sometimes be centred around a single capital project like a major art gallery or museum (O'Connor, 2001). Comedia stated in a 2004 report that over 150 are thought to be in the process of development worldwide (Comedia, 2004: 13, see also Mommaas, 2004: 508). The objectives behind cultural developments vary widely; some high profile examples include the redevelopment of the docks in Liverpool in the 1980s, which created luxury apartments, retail and art spaces; the development of the 'Northern Quarter' cluster in Manchester in the 1990s to boost retail and creative industries and studio spaces; the reconstruction of the riverside area in Gateshead in the 2000s, which surrounded the Lottery-funded capital project, Sage Baltic art gallery; and most famously of all, the landscape redevelopment of Tate Modern at Bankside in 2000 – a converted power station on the south of the Thames river. As Keith (2005) states, 'the cultural industries have, over the last decade, belatedly achieved a collective identity in the imagination of government officials and city planners in Britain and elsewhere' (115).

The consolidation of an arts policy structure, and the deployment of arts in new policy areas indicates that the arts are being endowed with a fresh significance, at least in terms of local government priorities. However, we must be aware that the development of cultural policy varies considerably between areas, and that the presence of 'paper policies' does not necessarily translate into concrete measures. Bond *et al* (1998) in their evaluation of local authority arts policies point out that, on an individual authority basis, a strong policy does not necessarily lead to enhanced in funding, or vice versa. Much depends on the individual arts officers and the commitment of the members. Therefore, the amount of money spent needs to be considered alongside who spends it and for what expressed purpose. Davies (2001) makes the useful distinction between a growing policy infrastructure and the divergent trend in funding. He states that the election of New Labour in 1997 brought greater policy direction to local government support for culture though this has not always been translated into financial growth:

'Education', 'lifelong learning', 'access' and social inclusion' have given the strongest national policy direction to libraries, museums and the arts that they have ever seen. This has had the effect of opening up considerable new opportunities for these services to demonstrate their value to society through their contribution to these policy initiatives. Valued at community level, they have usually struggled to find this grassroots appreciation easily converted into adequate funding at local or national level. (104).

Therefore, whilst there is only some evidence available to show an increase in funding for the arts at the local level, there is much more proof of a sustained growth in institutional commitment, as well as greater coherence and status for culture within local government. There is more interest in issues that can be said to have a cultural dimension. In DCMS's January 2004 consultation paper on integrated cultural and community strategies, the authors stated that culture plays an important part in community strategies, because 'both are concerned with people's social relationships and how a sense of place and local identity can strengthen community pride and bonds between individuals and groups'. (DCMS, 2004c: 8) In this sense, cultural strategies are part of a wider shift in local authorities' role. Local government evaluations consider 'quality of life' issues like community cohesion, lifelong learning and 'well-being', alongside more conventional measures like housing standards, employment rates and public service use. The rise of policy frameworks around culture is more than matched by an ideological concern about cultural issues in local political life.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter began by arguing that cultural policy has grown in significance in the UK. It showed this first in relation to changing ideas about culture. In modernity a belief emerged that culture could be judged universally, and its value was independent from the fulfilment of immediate social requirements. Although culture was seen as an expression of society, there was a strong belief in its autonomy from religion, private taste, or commerce. This universal quality of culture - to transcend cultural difference and particular cultural needs - was the basis of its use as a form of critique.

I then described a shift in intellectual life and increased scepticism about the concepts of cultural autonomy and universalism. This has led to a growing call amongst academics, politicians and even those working in the cultural sector to demonstrate the 'usefulness' of culture. It has become widely accepted that the state should play an increased role in the practice, dissemination and support of cultural activity. Furthermore, cultural policy is seen as a way to develop a new model of citizenship oriented towards diversity.

At the same time, since the 1970s, culture has come to be seen internationally as an appropriate area of policy-making and intervention, particularly in relation to social policy areas such as urban regeneration, education, and community and race relations. Since the 1980s in the UK, the arts and cultural sector - along with many other policy areas - has been discussed in terms of social and economic benefits, and has come under greater scrutiny to ensure accountability and efficiency. This shift has meant greater bureaucracy is required to measure and direct the provision of subsidised culture at both national and local levels.

To some extent, the increased rhetorical importance attached to culture has led to more funds, although cultural policy remains a poor relation in the wider field of government work. However, I contend that we must not judge the importance of culture solely on the basis of finance (although, this has risen considerably under the Labour government since 1997). We should also recognise the rhetorical importance of culture and the significance of its inclusion as a dimension in other policy-making areas. As Dye (1987) has pointed out, 'Perhaps that is a weakness in policy analysis. Our focus has primarily been upon the activities of governments rather than the rhetoric of governments' (cited in Parsons, 1995, p. 176). Therefore, the messages that government sends out about culture are also worthy of study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORISING THE RISE OF CULTURAL POLICY

#### Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated a rise in cultural policy in the UK. This was shown in both the growing interest in using culture as a tool of government to deliver social and economic objectives, and the increase in policy measures, targets and institutions to manage the sphere of subsidised culture. I have argued that whilst cultural funding remains relatively small compared to other areas of government, there is increased effort to use culture as policy instrument.

This chapter will examine different theories that seek to explain the rise of cultural policy: what objective trends may account for its growth and how these relate to the different rationales actors may have for their own interest in culture. As such, this chapter presents a sociological analysis of the rise of cultural policy and goes beyond a 'market failure' explanation (Creigh-Tyte, 2001; O'Hagan, 1998).<sup>25</sup> The latter tends to explain the state's intervention in any area of policy as a straightforward response to imperfect market conditions. These include: the need to procure 'public goods' such as the preservation of special artefacts for future generations; the requirement to maximise positive 'externalities' of cultural production and consumption, such as increased tourism generated by a festival or the educational benefits of arts provision; and the minimisation of negative externalities, by censoring immoral or offensive art works, for example.

Such 'market failure' explanations generally have limited force because they fail to analyse shifts in policy aims over time. This is certainly the case in cultural policy in Britain, which has evolved through successive 'discursive moments', between the

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<sup>25</sup> The abstract model of the free market assumes that rational agents act with self-interest in the 'perfect' environment, which allows the maximisation of profits by firms and the maximisation of utility by consumers. This scenario assumes the market price cannot be affected by the actions of any of the numerous individual agents, and that everyone involved shares perfect knowledge, information and foresight. However, once these conditions do not hold and one person's conditions cannot be improved without making someone else's worse, there is market failure. This can occur for a number of reasons: imperfect competition or monopoly, where there is no market equilibrium (in the case of externalities, public goods, merit goods) or imperfect information (Creigh-Tyte & Stiven, 2001: 173-4).

post-war period of 1945 and the present day, each justified by different arguments and debates (McGuigan, 1996: 54; Taylor, A. J., 1994). For instance, the demand for greater access for and inclusion of diverse and lower-income groups has only emerged since the 1970s, with the growth of concerns about 'cultural democracy' and 'cultural rights'. Also, the justification for arts funding today is rarely framed in terms of consumer affordability (or 'willingness to pay') but more usually in terms of the positive externalities of culture (such as its role in regenerating cities). The majority of arts-advocacy driven research today is focused on social and economic 'impact studies', something which barely entered the minds of most post-war city planners (Frey, 2005).

A sociological analysis therefore takes account of changing ideas about the value of culture in relation to wider empirical developments. It enables us to develop explanations by abstracting from the rationales used by individual policy actors and institutions, and understanding them within the context of wider social forces (Dearlove, 1973; Cockburn, 1977; Dunleavy, 1980). As I have shown, the rise in cultural policy and its discursive importance have been too widespread and consistent to be attributable to the persuasive rhetoric or preoccupations of a few committed individuals.

Social construction theories, which have gained ground since the 1970s posit that 'social problems' are rarely static conditions but sequences of events that are mediated, sustained and even generated by the activities of complaining groups, as well as the institutional responses to them (Hannigan, 1995: 33). Policies do not silhouette social problems precisely; rather, they involve the interpretation of such problems and they operate within a specific universe of choices. There are variations within the social constructionist approach. Weak social constructionism asserts that social problems are created in reference to objective reality, although subject to constructionist processes. As such, this approach seeks to examine the motives, ideas and conditions that result in popular understandings and responses to issues. By contrast, strong social constructionism asserts that social problems are created without reference to objective reality. Therefore, advocates of this approach caution against the epistemological assumption that one can understand the 'social context',

and they instead emphasise the analysis of language and discourse. I favour the weak approach, because, as Best (1993) argues, strict constructionism's focus on language is unsustainable, illogical and circular. Inevitably, all language must mediate an objective social context and this must be assessed according to standards set by the analyst. Best calls for a 'grounded theory approach' (Strauss, *et al*, 1998), which allows the analyst an empirically based theory of social problems that relies on analytic induction (144).

Ultimately, the value of social constructionism is that it calls into question the notion of the 'rationale', asking us to consider not only how actors' motives are pursued, but how they are constructed in the first place (Lukes, 2005). In his analysis of environmentalism, Hannigan (1995) points to the importance of 'rhetorical idioms' and 'rhetorical motifs' in sensitising people to particular social phenomenon and shaping their consciousness and behavioural responses to problems. He also points to the influence of 'issues entrepreneurs' who vocalise concerns, raise awareness and point to specific examples to build a case for change. Likewise, Collyer (2003) stresses the importance of 'policy networks' in articulating and propagating ideas, in order to gradually effect structural and institutional change. This perspective situates the micro-level of individual actors within the wider structural framework in which he or she operates. Whilst people develop rationales in response to their experience and circulating ideas, it is also important to recognise that there is rarely a single, coherent rationale driving policy development, but a mix of competing and sometimes conflicting drivers. Policy development is also restricted within structural limits and institutions and actors might pursue a particular course of action based on ideological assumptions and institutional routines that have developed over time (Pierson, 2004: 15).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) challenge the positivistic view of policy as something that is proven to 'work' by stating that social institutions are frequently legitimised through 'pre-theoretical', incoherent knowledge ('an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths and so forth', 83). With regards to cultural policy, some have argued that the state's involvement has been characterised by greater incoherence than coherence and that evidence of success is

rarely the decisive factor (Taylor, A. J., 1994; Pick, 1991). At the same time, ideological factors, such as actors' values and beliefs, cannot be sufficient to explain why changes occur at particular historical junctures, or why certain ideas have long-lasting structural effects, whilst others die out as mere fashions. Collyer (2003) argues for a need to link ideological change with structural shifts: '...ideology is the 'organic cement' which does not simply express the reality of the economic base, but is constituted by social practices and institutional arrangements' (unpaginated). For a proper, sociological understanding of how policy change occurs, the sociologist must therefore relate discursive changes to specific empirical trends, whilst acknowledging the inherent conflicts between social groups and classes which are played out throughout all stages of policy-making. The state mediates competing interests and generates policies as a result:

This method of analysis places emphasis on the state as an arena of action, but not one which is separate from capital or other social relations, nor one which is fully determined by capitalism...Thus policy is produced through a process of social struggle. The policy system is historical, unstable, contingent and contested. (unpaginated).

Therefore, by applying the social constructionist approach, we are able to consider a range of explanatory factors for the rise of cultural policy. Due to limitations of length, I focus in this chapter on cultural policy in the UK, although some arguments will be relevant to experiences in other countries.

I first test claims made by various authors that in an era of deindustrialisation, culture has become increasingly important to the UK economy. This argument rests on the assertion that the cultural industries have grown as a proportion of economic production in the UK. I suggest that although cultural policy has ostensibly been driven by economic concerns, we should be wary of assuming that, *prima facie*, culture is more central to the economy. I show that the size of the cultural industries has been exaggerated and that instead we need to see the 'cultural turn' primarily as a development of urban strategies in the 1980s, and as an internalisation of changing political circumstances regarding the role of local authorities. The growing

importance of culture as an instrument of economic policy also coincides with an increased managerialism, derived from New Public Management approaches. Finally, I argue that existing research tends to stress economic drivers for cultural policy and tends to overlook its development as a political strategy, pioneered through the community arts movement and the New Left. Following on from this, I consider the argument raised by a number of authors that in the past two decades there has been a transformation in subjectivity at the heart of political and cultural life. This has led to a preoccupation with identity, both in politics and in culture.

Taken together, I suggest that these varied economic and political drivers have led to an evolution of cultural policy. Whilst the result is the appearance of diverse set of objectives behind cultural policy, I argue that they are ultimately reconciled in the philosophy of New Labour, which stresses both a consumerist or marketised view of culture, and also an inclusive, therapeutic discourse of culture.

### **2.1 Economic importance of culture**

One explanation for growing state intervention in culture is that it is a response to the increased objective importance of culture to the UK economy. It is argued that towards the end of the twentieth century, advanced industrial societies underwent a 'cultural turn'. There was a slowly unfolding process of de-industrialisation in major cities and a decline in the model of politics and economic production associated with 'Fordism'. Whilst there is no single 'culturisation' thesis, the consistent theme is a view that culture has somehow acquired greater importance in political and economic life (Driver and Martell, 1999: 247). Scott (1997: 325) argues that cities at the end of the twentieth century are dealing with a 'post-Fordist economy' (325), of which the rise of cultural industries is one factor. Likewise, American urban theorist, Sharon Zukin argues that the prominence of the cultural industries marks the rise of the 'symbolic economy', which in the 1970s and 1980s 'rose to prominence against a backdrop of industrial decline and financial speculation...The entrepreneurial edge of the economy shifted toward deal making and selling investments and toward those creative products that could not be easily reproduced elsewhere.' (1997:8). Zukin argues that cities have developed cultural policies as an economic strategy to

regenerate themselves through rising house prices and by capitalising on tourism and consumption industries. This wider process, it is suggested, has brought increased attention from policy-makers. For example, Tony Bennett (2001: 48) cites the growing economic importance of the arts, culture and media industries as one factor in the rise of cultural policy research.

The state's interest in cultural policy is therefore a possible economic response to this shift away from industrial production based on manual labour towards a system of production which is increasingly oriented around creative activity, knowledge and information. Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, perhaps the most influential urban policy-thinkers in this respect, have espoused cultural policy in the city planning context, arguing that 'Future competition between nations, cities and enterprise looks set to be based less on natural resources, location or past reputation and more on the ability to develop attractive images and symbols and project these effectively'. They continue that economic development will increasingly rely on '...the generation of knowledge through creativity and innovation.' (Landry *et al*, 1995, 12, cited in Cochrane, 2007:104).

It is certainly the case that cultural policy in the UK grew in prominence at around the same time that academics, government agencies and cultural organisations become interested in the relationship between culture and economics. In 1988 John Myerscough's seminal paper *The economic importance of the arts* was published in the UK and had a far-reaching effect on discussions about cultural policy (Comedia, 2004: 8). Much of cultural policy discourse has developed an explicitly economic rationale. In 1997, the incoming Labour Government established the Creative Industries Taskforce, with the express purpose of developing an economic strategy that would capitalise on one of Britain's apparent strengths: its creativity. On 27<sup>th</sup> June 2001, Lord [Matthew] Evans (2001), the Chair of Resource (Council of Museums, Archives and Libraries), used the phrase 'the economy of the imagination' in his New Statesman Arts Lecture to describe how culture was now a central plank in the country's economic strategy. This link between economic change and cultural policy development has been reinforced by recent high profile cases of cultural regeneration, for instance, the opening of the Tate Modern in a disused power station

had more than a touch of symbolism. The gallery is said to be worth £100m to the local economy and has generated about 3,000 jobs (Cochrane, 2007: 106). Using DCMS definitions, the latest figures from the Government's Creative Economy Programme showed that 1.8m people were employed in the sector (1m directly in culture-producing organisations) and that in 2004, the sector accounted for 7.3 per cent of UK Gross Value Added, compared to 4 per cent in 1998, growing by an average of 5 per cent per year, compared to the 3 per cent of the UK economy as a whole (DCMS, 2007b: 19).

However, whilst economic arguments are frequently used to justify cultural policy development, it does not automatically follow that the kinds of policies being developed correlate to actual economic growth or impact. Much of the rise of cultural policy, which I discussed in Chapter 1, relates to the subsidised arts and heritage sectors, but the majority of claims about the economic importance of culture refer to industries such as advertising, design, fashion, popular music and film and software. Whilst cultural policy discourse talks about the economic importance of art and creativity, the reality is that 'the creative industries' are much wider in scope.

The DCMS defines the 'creative industries' as 'those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have potential for wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property'. These include: advertising, architecture, crafts and designer furniture, fashion clothing, film, audio and other audiovisual production, graphic design, educational and leisure software, live and recorded music, performing arts and entertainment, television, radio and internet broadcasting, visual arts and antiques, writing and publishing (DCMS, 1998b, 2006a). Less credibly, the DCMS Evidence Toolkit also includes: jewellery retail, DVD and video hire shops, manufacturing of television and audio equipment – in other words, a range of activities which it could be argued, are connected to each other more by rhetoric than actual patterns of behaviour or production. Even more confusing is the definition of the 'cultural industries', which includes the creative industries, but also any service, manufacture or provision related to sport, tourism, the heritage industry and certain aspects of the environment (Comedia, 2004: 5). As Michael Keith (2005) cautions, 'When Rupert Murdoch's News International

multinational corporation and a squatting artist are lumped together as part of the cultural industries, it might be time to think about whether there is a degree of chaotic conceptualisation behind the term itself'. (114)

Being aware of this 'definition creep' enables us to unpick the exaggerated claims for the centrality of culture to the economy. In 2004, the creative industries were said to contribute £57b Gross Value Added (GVA) to the economy. However, more than a third of the exports (36 per cent) related to software, computer games and electronic publishing. One might reasonably argue that computer games constitute a cultural or creative activity, but even this section of the industrial category constitutes a relatively small share of the total. According to the *Creative Economy Statistics Bulletin* in 2006, computer games amounted to £969m in gross revenues in 1999 and £503m in exports in 1998, compared to software and computing gross revenues of £36.4b and £2.761b in exports (DCMS, 2006b). Making a similar point, Heartfield (2006) spots that DCMS's claim for a rapid growth in the creative industries was in fact due to different counting methods. In its *Creative Industries Mapping Document* (DCMS, 1998b) it counted the income of the sector at £57b, but the 2001 edition counted it at £112.5bn, or 5 per cent of gross domestic product (DCMS, 2001). The difference was explained by the inclusion of the software sector. He goes on to explain that such 'creative accounting' tended to add to a mistaken picture of the role of creativity in the UK economy, conflating the economic behaviour of two quite different sectors: the subsidised cultural sector which consumes a subsidy of £4.9bn, covering the loss-making performances of theatre, opera, orchestras, as well as museums, galleries, and libraries, and the profit-making creative industries, which produces a contribution to GDP (and which encompass a much wider range of industries and service sectors than are traditionally seen to be 'cultural').

With this 'chaotic conceptualisation' in mind, it can be argued that the expansion of cultural policy is not driven by actual economic developments, so much as a perception of culture's importance to the economy. As such, the rhetoric has obscured the rather limited contribution of the 'real' creative industries within the

national economy and, in some cases, its struggle to compete with international rivals.

Heartfield (2000) counted the actual numbers of people working in the creative and cultural industries as 1,502,000 or 5.4 per cent of the workforce, and that there are three times as many people working in domestic service as there are in advertising, television, video games, film, the music business and design combined (15). British creative industries are overwhelmingly dominated by international rivals. Just to take one sector, financial journalists, Larry Elliott and Dan Atkinson (2007) use a NESTA report in 2006 to show that the UK's film industry was struggling to compete against the US. In 2004, American-financed films accounted for almost three-quarters of UK box office receipts. This is understandable because of the sheer size of the US film industry. However, there are also fewer British films being made in absolute terms compared to previous years. The number of UK films released in 2005 stood at 37, well below the peak of 84 in the late 1990s (NESTA, 2006, cited in Elliott *et al*, 2007: 81).

Even if we accept that the creative industries sector has increased in size in certain areas, we cannot assume that this is stable and continuous growth, or sufficient to account for the increase in rhetoric about the economic value of culture. The Greater London Authority's Economic Department study, *London's Creative Sector 2007* noted that employment in the creative industries (private and publicly funded) in Britain rose between 1995 and 2001, at a faster rate than other commercial sectors they analysed.<sup>26</sup> However, between 2001 and 2004, it declined more sharply:

This does mean that, over a sufficiently long period, their average growth rate may not be higher than the rest of the private sector, but it does show that they are more volatile, and for this reason more vulnerable in periods of general downturn, such as that seen between 2000 and 2004 (Freeman, 2007: 28).

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<sup>26</sup> The authors state from the outset that the creative industries are all private sector industries and therefore any common factors affecting the growth or decline of the latter should be expected to affect the former (Freeman, 2007: 27).

The explanation for this is that the creative industries are reliant on the wider private sector, rather than driving it. Commercially-oriented creative industries (e.g. advertising) are particularly vulnerable to downturns in other business sectors, which will often cut their creative services, such as advertising or design, before other, more vital business functions. Whilst there was an economic upturn in 2005, the arts and antiques sector actually lost jobs (Freeman, 2007:34). Nor would it seem that existing UK companies regard the creative industries as important to their own production or sales. In the Design Council's *National Survey of Firms in 2003*, two thirds of companies believed design had made no contribution to their turnover or profitability, whilst over half had made no use of design either through their own staff or outside consultants (Design Council, 2003, cited in Heartfield, 2006:75).

Another way in which creative industries rhetoric is often overblown is their importance to local economies and city competitiveness. Numerous towns in England such as Manchester, Sheffield, and Liverpool developed cultural quarters but these remain small and the creative industries sector is still dominated by London (DTI, 2001). GLA estimates that 58 per cent of all creative jobs are in London (Freeman, 2007: 39). Manchester is the second largest cultural cluster in the UK after London, but optimistic accounts measure the sector at approximately 5,000 people, or 2 per cent of the workforce, less than the 3.1 per cent in London (Heartfield, 2006: 83). Even those cases of supposedly successful cultural regeneration have come under scrutiny. For instance, Evans (2003) has argued that the Tate Modern's success has come at the expense of Tate Britain further along the river Thames. The economic success of individual cultural schemes may be partly at the expense of schemes operating elsewhere.

Therefore, despite the considerable volume of research which purports to demonstrate the economic impact of the arts and culture, we must be cautious of accepting the grand claims that culture has become more important to the economy. Madden (2001) argues that research into multiple and complex effects of cultural activity have not been conclusive and that the recent preoccupation of arts

advocates with 'size analysis studies' are naïve, as they measure only gross financial quanta, rather than net financial flows:

The losses and gains flow around a complex web of trade and exchange links that is nearly impossible to audit. 'Economic' impacts never successfully account for all financial effects and are prone to overstate the net financial impact on the local economy. (168).

Also, there is the issue of opportunity cost – net economic flows that are generated need to be considered in light of other options foregone. Spending on the arts and culture is spending that could also be used elsewhere, with different economic gains. In this sense, the multiplier effects of one industry need to be considered in light of the inverse multipliers of other industries (Madden, 2001: 163-167). Madden states that nearly every economist who reviews 'economic' impact studies of the arts expresses concern over the technological and practical limitations of the methodologies, and there is concern about the rise of 'misinterpreted authority'. Consequently, we should be cautious about assuming that the rise of cultural policy is linked to a rise in the objective importance of culture to the economy. As Calcutt (2005) concludes in his own investigation:

In quantitative terms, then, the claims made for Creative Britain are difficult to accept. During the 1990s, there was no part of Britain where the economy was defined by cultural production, not even in London where the culture/creative industries were concentrated. In respect of the quantitative production of cultural commodities, therefore, the definition of Britain as a 'culture society' was not in accordance with the restricted growth of the cultural industries as an economic sector. 152)

I concur that culture's relationship to the economy has been exaggerated by policy-makers, and cannot be a sufficient explanation for the rising rhetoric around culture. We cannot assume that the 'cultural turn' is a straightforward reflection of the absolute importance of the arts and culture in relation to the rest of the economy. This is not to suggest that the cultural and creative industries have not grown, for

they certainly have (especially in the 2000s) but we should recognise the possibility that policy-makers may perceive them as being important for other reasons. Any explanation of the rise of cultural policy therefore needs to take into account developments arising from broader changes in British society since the late 1970s and the way in which actors responded to and mediated those developments. This entails going beyond the naïve view that people only develop policies to deal with objective social problems.

## **2.2 Cultural policy and urban entrepreneurialism**

One major factor in the increased prominence of cultural policy is the orientation of urban policy towards city entrepreneurialism and 'place marketing' as a response to the processes of deindustrialisation occurring at the national level since the early 1980s (Cochrane, 2007: 85-103). Although theories of urban regeneration and place marketing had been in circulation since the 1950s in various forms, they acquired a new significance from the 1980s onwards - both in Britain but also in America, the Far East, Australasia and Europe. At this time, changing political conditions and the decline of contestation over national issues relating to taxation, fiscal policy and industrial ownership, meant that there was a new expectation that local authorities should respond individually to problems besetting their local economies. Under the Conservative government, problems arising from national unemployment, industrial relations disputes and deteriorating public investment in services like health and education, became reframed as urban problems afflicting the inner cities; a phenomenon which some have argued has been unwittingly compounded by successive generations of urban theorists and academics, with their preoccupation with urban-centred policy studies at the expense of studying taxation and fiscal policies (Pahl, 2001; also, Cochrane, 2007:2). This coincided with a willingness on the part of local government to demonstrate its value in an era of growing centralisation. Rather than seeing cultural policy as an inevitable reflection of changes in the objective size of the cultural industries or growth of culture in the economy- substantive change - it would be more accurate to see it as a political response, or 'mediation' of changes across wider economic and political life. As cities came under increasing pressure to raise their competitive advantage over others, yet

with increasing subordination to central government in most other areas of local authority activity, cultural planning and place marketing became one such method to appeal to external visitors and investors.

Quilley (2000) argues that this led to a transition in politics from a national framework and older strategies of solidarity between local authorities, to localised solutions and competition to attract inward private and public investment. For example, in the 1980s, Manchester's Labour Party leadership moved away from 'municipal socialism' and worked within the new framework of city entrepreneurship. They may not have been able to develop integrated economic policies in partnership with a strongly interventionist national state, but they could develop supply-side, infrastructural initiatives, such as place-marketing, promotion of tourism, unique events, image improvement and flagship cultural developments, in order to compete with other cities in Europe (Quilley, 2000: 608). Local authorities encouraged private investment through city 'branding' initiatives (Scott, 1997; Gold *et al*, 1994). Whilst the cultural industries may not have constituted a greater share in the national economy, they became feted for providing a solution to the problems of deindustrialisation in towns and cities. Local authorities employed a mixture of strategies to boost the creative industries but also tourism and the creation of higher education institutions that would supply a steady flow of local consumption and inward investment (Cochrane, 2007: 108). Therefore, the increased importance of cultural strategies reveals the changing expectations around the role of local authorities, suggesting a political, rather than a straightforwardly economic explanation.

In their book, *Culture and Urban Regeneration: The West European Experience*, Bianchini *et al* (1993) state that cultural-led regeneration became a central plank of urban revival in many towns and cities in the UK in the 1980s. They provide a typology of strategies, distinguishing between cultural production and cultural consumption approaches. The former followed the paradigm of traditional industrial development, in particular, the attempt to move the populations of former industrial towns into employment in the new service, leisure and knowledge sectors. As already demonstrated, the cultural industries sector has always been relatively small,

but the political imperatives and incentives for local government to harness them for their own urban strategies was key. The latter approach was to orient towns and cities around competing for tourists, private and public investment and achieved a significant impact in terms of rising property prices, cosmetic enhancement of the area and the influx of more skilled (and therefore, more employable) workers.

I have so far explained that the 'cultural turn' was driven by changes in the political landscape as much as the economy. Whilst deindustrialisation is an economic problem, the response was partly politically determined by the relationship between local and central government. As such, these strategies were driven by political imperatives rather than the persuasive power of economic evidence. As such, policies can be adopted, even when they might appear 'irrational', or simply do not 'work', because choices are always constrained by economic and political pressures. Numerous authors have pointed out the ambiguity of the long-term impact of cultural regeneration policies for local people. Bianchini *et al* (1993) admit, 'the direct impact of 1980s cultural policies on the generation of employment and wealth was relatively modest' (2). In discussing the arts specifically, Lewis (1990) argues, 'it is slightly disingenuous (perhaps deliberately so) to argue that local government arts funding is informed by a considered economic rationale' (89) (see also Miles, 2005; Cohen, 1998; Kawashima, 1997).

The poor outcomes of culture-led regeneration can be illustrated by looking at one of the best known examples – the city of Glasgow. In the mid 1980s, the city had experienced a major decline in manufacturing and was slowly beginning to establish a new cultural presence. Its flagship Burrell Collection opened in 1983, and the refurbished Glasgow Concert Hall and McLellan Galleries boosted its reputation as a centre of art. The city won the European 'City of Culture' title in 1989, and instituted the 'Glasgow's Smiles Better' publicity campaign, which was seen to be a resounding success and has since been cited in a number of advocacy reports (DCMS, 2004d: 13; Comedia, 2002). However, Gomez (1998) argues that despite these ostensible successes a substantial growth in employment failed to materialize in the city, and that employment in Glasgow actually fell between 1981 – 1991; the city lost 39,773

jobs in manufacturing and gained only 2,843 service sector jobs.<sup>27</sup> Jobs in tourism and leisure fell by 13 per cent compared to national rise of 14 per cent (115). Its major rise in employment was in the banking and finance sectors, which rose by 17 per cent in the same period. Gomez recognises that the image and physicality of Glasgow was considerably improved 'But this seems to refer only to a very constrained and poor idea of urban regeneration.' (118). Garcia (2004) argues that Glasgow's cultural projects were not integrated into a coherent urban strategy, meaning that the economic achievements were not sustainable in the long-term. Mooney (2004) also argues that the regeneration campaign had very little impact on the city's poorer residents. The three most deprived areas in the UK are Shettleston, Springburn and Maryhill – all in Glasgow (BBCOnline, 2002). Gomez also points out that even after Glasgow had become City of Culture, one of its main local employers, BP, moved its headquarters to Aberdeen in 1992. Research has repeatedly shown that 'soft' factors like culture are not a priority for major companies in their choice of where to locate their headquarters (also see Comedia, 2004: 15-16).<sup>28</sup>

It is therefore clear that although politicians and local government claim to invest in cultural regeneration strategies because they 'work', the reality is that their decisions are driven by a wider range of factors, including expediency. Arguably, politicians have invested in culture for its 'symbolic' effects, rather than more concrete or measurable economic and social impacts (Edelman, 1967). Sills *et al's* study (1988) of urban regeneration programmes - in particular, the Inner Area Programme in the

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<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Matarasso (1996) admits that Birmingham's creative industry-led regeneration only created between 200-300 jobs in the sector, which is far from enough to offset losses in manufacturing.

<sup>28</sup> It could be argued that the failure of cultural regeneration is not attributable to the efficacy of local delivery or management, but is inherent in the method itself. Gomez (1998) suggests that territorial policies, by their very nature, struggle to reverse the general phenomenon of de-industrialisation (116). Lewis (1990) admits that the focus on consumption industries forces competition between towns and regions, so that one area's success is another's failure. At the same time, the stress on localised responses to deindustrialisation may obviate the success of creative industries as a whole, when considered from a national perspective. Contrary to the DCMS' enthusiasm for 'clusters' that concentrate industries in geographical areas, the Department for Trade and Industry has argued that they cannot be an effective national strategy for they 'run the risk of undermining the position of a globally competitive cluster' (cited in Comedia, 2002: 9). Hence, there is even discord between central government departments over the recent focus on localised cultural regeneration strategies. Meanwhile, others have pointed out that such strategies are doomed to failure because they are primarily concerned with symbolism and representation, and therefore fail to address 'real' structural and material problems (Mooney, 2004). This criticism is part of a wider critical tradition which sees cultural politics in general as 'political displacement' (Eagleton, 2000; Jensen, 2002; Merli, 2002).

1980s – showed how government authorities often prioritised ‘symbolic reassurance’ of residents above actual efficacy in solving social problems (29). They implied an almost cynical attempt on the part of government to ignore genuine need for structural reorganisation in favour of ‘light touch’ cosmetic solutions that win high-profile attention.

Yet, as Calcutt (2005) explains, we need not presume that actors are cynical in their deployment of culture; rather, they accept the narrow parameters of political action they have to operate within. It is not enough to say that the prioritisation of culture in policy-making is ‘spin’ (a diversion from the character of the real economy as an illusion) or it is not up to the task – we have to understand that culture was believed to have this capacity by actors:

...it is no longer sufficient to reveal the disjuncture between the limits of cultural production and the ‘great expectations’ thereof. Although this is a necessary aspect of the critique of contemporary social relations, it is equally necessary to theorise the role of the expectation of culture as an essential aspect of the production of capital and the reproduction of the commodity labour-power. (156)

We can see how policy-makers in local government were particularly prone to cultural strategies in light of the new emphasis in economic regeneration discourse on regional and city-based responses to problems, over national ones (McCann, 2007). As this conceptual framework developed over time, it is conceivable that actors began to accept, and eventually embrace the changed political circumstances in a wholly positive way. The fact that such a trend was international – occurring in places as far afield as Bilbao, Barcelona, Berlin, Vienna, New York, Las Vegas – reinforced the idea that such a strategy was inevitable and even desirable to maintain the global competitiveness of cities.

Also, it must be remembered that whilst cultural solutions failed to address many deep-rooted problems in cities, they did offer opportunities in terms of accessing public sector funds for large-scale capital projects or infrastructural improvements.

In the competition for investment, a handful of cities won significant prizes. Quilley (2000) states that Manchester Council had a charismatic leadership that made an opportunistic grab for central and EU funding, producing spectacular projects that were the envy of neighbouring northern towns. Sheffield developed a music strategy which failed to generate significant economic outcomes. On the other hand, Liverpool's militant socialist leaders did not develop any entrepreneurial cultural strategy in the 1980s, even though the city probably had the greatest historical claim to being the centre of popular culture in the north-west. Not all cities could win, but for those that did, these benefits could – at least until others caught up – offset wider problems endemic within the economy.

### **2.3 New Public Management and the utilitarian approach to culture**

I have thus far suggested that the rise in cultural policy is partly driven by a changing political climate, which orientates economic strategy around city competitiveness, branding and accessing public funding. At the same time, another factor which drove cultural policy development was an increasingly instrumentalist and utilitarian view of culture, as part of a wider shift in policy towards New Public Management. The fiscal crisis of the welfare state in the 1980s prompted severe economic cuts in public spending, including arts subsidy. In 1987, the Arts Council halved the number of organisations it funded, became subject to new accounting procedures and was instructed to encourage the sector to seek funds from corporate sponsors rather than the public purse. This shift marked a change in attitude – it was no longer sufficient for the state to view culture as 'civilising' and beneficial in itself; rather, cultural expenditure had to be justified according to how useful it was to fulfilling economic or social objectives. In particular, local authorities began to justify spending in terms other than artistic ones, capitalising on the presumed economic effects of the sector. Gray (2000) sees this state intervention as a tactical response to successive economic crises in the 1970s and 1980s, and a turn to the politics of the 'right', with market-orientated solutions to social policy. He calls this process of change 'commodification'.

...the arts being considered not as objects of use (for example providing pleasure for individuals or groups or provoking thought) but as commodities that can be judged by the same economic criteria that can be applied to cars, clothes or any other consumer good. Essentially issues of aesthetic or personal worth are replaced by those of the material and impersonal marketplace. (6)

The arts became subject to more intense scrutiny in this period and were rationalised in terms of consumer-choice and satisfying the criteria of economists or 'marketers' (Blandina Quinn, 1998; Caust, 2003). Selwood (2001) has charted how this increasing attention to efficiency, economics and customer satisfaction resulted in the growth of measurement indicators over the past two decades and their use in the decision to allocate grants (3). Decisions about funding and resource allocation were not made on aesthetic grounds alone, but on more 'business-like' qualities, such as the sustainability of financial income, sponsorship, audience numbers and profile, and success in the cultural market place. New quangos, such as Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA, now Arts and Business), were set up to help cultural organisations develop another income stream and as a result, business sponsorship of the arts rose from £600,000 in 1976 to £20m in 1986 (ABSA, 1986). The economic impact of the arts was also foregrounded from the mid 1980s onwards, with the growth of research in this area (Myerscough, 1988, which prompted the Policy Studies Institute to set up the journal *Cultural Trends* to monitor economic trends in the arts and cultural sector). Faced with threats of funding cuts and lacking confidence in their own status in this new public order, the arts found that the demands to prove their social and economic worth began to displace older concerns about artistic excellence. A corollary to this was that the commercial arts sector in the post 1980s economic boom also became more 'business-like' and oriented towards profit-making practices and speculative investment, culminating in the dramatic success of the Young British Artists under the patronage of advertising guru Charles Saatchi in the 1990s (Ford and Davies, 1998; Stallabrass, 2006).

This increased tendency towards commodification and instrumentalisation have led some commentators to argue that cultural policy is largely driven by a neo-liberal

agenda, whereby culture is 'an empty signifier...articulated most typically for reductive economic purposes according to questionable politics' (McGuigan, 2004: 140). Mooney (2004) describes the culture-led regeneration in Glasgow as 'part of a wider neo-liberal and market-driven agenda that seeks to promote regeneration through wealth creation'. In her study of different culture-led regeneration strategies in western European countries, Garcia (2004) also emphasises the precedence of economic motivations: 'the cases under study reveal that urban cultural policies remain second to the rationale of more ambitious and easy-to-monitor economic development strategies' (324). In their study of Leeds' culture-led regeneration, Chatterton *et al* (2004) bemoan the fact that 'much cultural activity continues to create safe spectacles to increase the saleability of the city, rather than critically engaging with people and their problems...' (377).

However, I would argue that whilst we should recognise that arts and culture became oriented towards economic concerns, this is only a partial aspect of the policy development during this period. The claims for a neo-liberal agenda do not take into account the complexity of the state's expansion during this period. The ostensible marketisation of policy and cultural projects to be judged on economic return coincided with a major expansion of subsidy and regulation by the local state in the 1980s and 1990s. Michael Moran (2003) in his book *The British Regulatory State* challenges the view that the state during this period became more liberal or decentralised. Instead, he describes how it acquired new regulatory functions, intervening in and instrumentalising more areas of social life – including the arts (91-92). This indicates that the expansion of cultural policy was not driven by a strict 'neo-liberal' or deregulation agenda in reality, though it did lead to increased instrumentalisation by political actors.

Furthermore, the purposes to which the arts and culture were being directed by the state were not articulated in solely economic language. Even by the late 1980s, cultural policy was also being justified for its role in raising 'self-confidence in individuals' and acting as the 'cornerstones of urban renewal' (ACGB, 1989, cited in Selwood, 2002: 30). State institutions were developing policies that used culture in building communities, addressing health and mental wellbeing, improving

educational outcomes, engaging with young people, and ameliorating crime and reducing recidivism rates. A LGA sponsored report, *Realising the Potential* (2001a), which reviewed existing research, states that:

The concept of 'personal development' underpins most of the claims about the social impact of participation in the arts – the development of new interests, increasing self-confidence, learning of transferable skills, flexibility, lateral thinking, a sharpened sense of personal identity and a new sense of purpose. Such intermediate outcomes are presumed to be related to increased employability, increased social integration, improved psychological health and a sense of well-being. (*Coalter, 2001: 12*)

The rationales for cultural policy became mixed. Comedia (2004) points out a shift in advocacy in 1993 from economic arguments towards more socially oriented justifications. In 1997 Comedia published Francois Matarasso's highly influential *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in Arts Programmes* (see Merli, 2002 and Belfiore, 2002 on the impact of this report). This argued that arts projects should be cultivated because they had wider social benefits, not simply economic:

The economic importance of the arts is increasingly appreciated, but to consider only the financial impact of cultural activities is to produce a distorted picture of their actual value to society. In fact, they deliver a range of wider economic benefits ...through their associated social impacts (Matarasso, 1997: 13).

Advocates of cultural policy began to oscillate between, on the one hand, hard 'bottom line' effects such as private investment and house prices, and 'soft effects' such as increased local participation, changed attitudes, healthier lifestyles, and community identity. Matarasso's report listed fifty social benefits, including 'Increase people's confidence and sense of self-worth'; 'Extend involvement in social activity'; 'Give people influence over how they are seen by others'; 'Provide a forum to explore personal rights and responsibilities' (11).

The growth of social impact studies in the early 2000s has provided a distraction from the feeble conclusions of economic impact studies (although certain authors argue that there is also lacking a clear and reliable evidence base for the social impact of the arts (Belfiore, 2002; Merli, 2002; Selwood, 2002, 2006). Yet, regardless of the search for new 'evidence' to justify arts spending, I argue that there was a persistent belief in the social power of the arts. Even the most well-known advocates of cultural strategies have, since the 1990s at least, stressed the problems with solely economic approaches and the need to consider questions of local citizenship and planning accountability (see for instance, Bianchini *et al*, 1993). Culture was posited as an important economic driver, but at the same time, an important tool for social inclusion and community engagement.

Paradoxically, the arts became politically attractive to actors in the 1980s as a solution to precisely those perceived failures of economically-driven regeneration in the 1980s and the large-scale 'cultural' capital programmes.

## **2.4 The politics of culture**

As well as the emergence of the urban entrepreneurialism agenda, and the rise of New Public Management, there were new influences arising from the development of 'cultural politics'. In particular, there was a large expectation that cultural policy could address concerns about 'community'. This was manifest in the prominence of the community arts movement and its eventual influence on official state policies towards the arts and culture.

The community arts movement had a decisive influence on cultural policies in the 1980s and led to a radical questioning of the function of art in society (Fremeaux, 2002: 72). The term 'community arts' began its life in the modest, benign initiatives of the inter-war and immediate post-war period, when the government's precursor to the Arts Council, CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) encouraged visual and performing arts to tour the country and engage more actively with a wider audience through schemes like the Art Laboratory centres, Pavilions in the Park, and the 'Scratch' Orchestra. The aim was to broaden access to art and help

artists reach a wider audience. However, in the later post-war years the philosophy of community arts began to develop a growing interest in the political and social value of artistic creativity, and sought increasingly to use the arts and creative activity as a form of 'empowerment' for people.<sup>29</sup>

By the 1970s community arts had become a more vocal and belligerent force whose philosophical outlook led them to attempt to use culture as a political weapon. In 1978, community arts worker Su Braden, published *Arts and People* and estimated there were around five thousand projects involved in the Association of Community Artists (Braden, 1978). She identified four major community arts projects in the cities of Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and London. The implication of these statistics was that the appetite for community arts was growing. Braden's report was funded by The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and was intended to be a study of the artists-in-residence schemes the Foundation had initiated and funded across Britain between 1974-1976, but it was in fact of much wider scope and charted the philosophy behind community arts practice. Braden wrote that the wealth of creative activity taking place at grassroots levels was a challenge to conventional thinking about the 'absolute values and roles upheld by the Arts Establishment' (xvi).<sup>30</sup>

The community artists' philosophy posited that creativity was universal and that traditional aesthetic philosophy was a way of maintaining the low status of ordinary people (Braden, 1978; Kelly, 2003). The aim of 'cultural democracy' was not to teach

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<sup>29</sup> In art colleges a new generation of art educators, influenced by the Modernist ideas of pioneering art institutions like the Bauhaus in Weimar Germany, began to rethink creative practice and develop radical 'student-centred methods' that privileged the psychological process of unrestrained, creative thought above adherence to categories, standards and skills within traditional artistic media. Their aspiration was to promote a new, 'democratised' view of creativity as inherently human and universal. Arts educators were also heavily influenced by psychological theories in the 1960s and 1970s which linked creativity with individual self-fulfilment and argued that society was increasingly concerned with 'post-material' values (Maslow, 1971; Laing, 1964). The changes to arts education influenced a younger generation of artists. In 1960 the *Joint Report of the National Advisory Council of Art Education and the National Council of Diplomas in Art and Design*, chaired by Sir William Coldstream advocated a move away from traditional 'craft' or 'skills-based' education towards a more 'attitudinal' understanding of the arts. (Pearson, 1982:6). By 1981, in an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) entitled 'A Continuing Process: The New Creativity in British Arts Education 1955-1965', the exhibitions director, Sandy Nairne, acknowledged the ideas of these educators as 'the sources of most secondary school and art colleges today' (cited in Thistlewood, 1981). Art colleges were also oriented to a relativised notion of the creative process, where each individual produces different outcomes according to their own skill and perception (De Duve, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> As testament to Braden's influence, Roy Shaw (1987), the Chief Executive of the Arts Council at the time, referred critically to her, years later, in his own book, *The Arts and the People* in 1987.

art to ordinary people (what might be termed the 'democratisation of culture') but to use art to empower people psychologically, by enhancing their identity and self-confidence.<sup>31</sup> Explicit in this approach was the rejection of traditional criteria for cultural policy and subsidy – aesthetic excellence and tradition. If the arts were to enable people to explore the creative process and test their own aptitudes, they had to be free to express themselves without adherence to strict academic standards or the conventional rules of artistic genre. The term 'community arts', therefore, did not refer to a particular aesthetic, but rather to a set of political assumptions about the arts: placing greater emphasis on active participation in creative activity, rather than the appreciation of existing art works; less emphasis on academic standards and skill-sets, and more on the 'creative process' of imagination; challenging traditional methods of critical judgement as 'elitist'; valuing art as a therapeutic practice that increases self-confidence; harnessing art projects and creativity as a way to revive social networks and activism; and stressing diversity of art tastes, standards and practices, in opposition to paternalism of government, academia, or commercial art galleries

This new approach was also generic to 'ethnic art' or 'black arts' campaigns around the same time. Owusu, writing in a Comedia publication *The Struggle for Black Arts in Britain* (1986), identified the political nature of the crisis in British culture and wrote in similar terms as the community arts movement:

The narrow definition of a British national culture and the limited range of arts activity which receives the bulk of subsidy...have seriously undermined the potential of the Arts Council as a creative facilitator of a democratic culture. (71).

Owusu argued that the cultural narrowness of the Arts Council undermined its political role in a democratic society. For him, the recognition of diversity was a necessary part of a democratic society.

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<sup>31</sup> One poet in residence at a community scheme in Edinburgh admitted that the quality of the poetry produced by the children he worked with was not high but that the priority for him was their freedom of self-expression (Braden, 1978:134).

We also need to situate the emergence of the community arts movement within the wider rise of 'cultural politics' and the 'New Left' in the 1970s and 1980s, which expanded the terrain of politics from the realm of production (class-based politics) to the realm of representation (community or identity-based politics). The new social movements in European cities in the 1970s were not defined strictly according to class division, but instead on specific issues in the local community (e.g. local environmental problems, local public services) or cultural or lifestyle identities (e.g. ethnic, cultural and sexual), or broader, single issue concerns (e.g. peace movements, nuclear disarmament, animal rights). Although it is difficult to generalize about these groupings, it is widely acknowledged that there was 'a clear cultural dimension' to them (Bianchini, *et al*, 1993: 9; also Thompson, 2006: 2) and that they began to emerge as appealing alternatives to conventional modes of engagement through mass political parties (Kumar, 1995:122; for advocacy of this approach, see Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). The New Left, repulsed by Stalinism and marginalised from traditional working class activism in the political sphere, viewed organised political parties with scepticism. They instead celebrated decentralised, fluid 'communities' as new agents of 'progress' (Chandler, 2007). These new groupings arose from shared identity, culture and history, and marked a shift away from the traditional left-wing preoccupation with class interest which was supposed to transcend such divisions. The radicals embraced culture as 'an enlarged sphere for the operation of politics and constituencies for change' (Hall *et al*, 1989: 17). The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham was formed in 1964, and the writings of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall called for greater attention to culture as a factor in political life, both as a source of oppression and of liberation. The link between intellectual developments and cultural policy was sometimes quite direct. Not only did they bestow intellectual legacies for a generation of cultural politics activists, these figures were themselves deeply involved in arts and cultural policy-making and inspired the development of politicised arts and cultural movements.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Williams served as a member of the Arts Council during the 1970s; Hall has been a notable figure within black artists networks in Britain since the 1970s (Owusu, 1999:4); and Bennett (as discussed earlier) has emerged as a key figure in Australian cultural policy since the 1980s. However, it is important to note that

Malik (1996, 2002a) links the privileging of culture and community in radical political discourse during this period with the emergence of identity politics. Although anti-racist groups at the time campaigned for a range of material and political issues, there was a growing interest in ideas of cultural recognition amongst parts of this wide movement. This coincided with a perception that older modes of engagement based on class identity marginalised the problem of racism, and there was a need to pursue new kinds of engagement with ethnic groups. Such political shifts, Malik argues, eventually precipitated the emergence of multicultural policies by the state, especially at the local level. He argues that in the case of ethnic groups, policies of 'community engagement' provided specific resources which reinforced their sense that they had separate, particular needs which differentiated them from others. These multicultural policies, in emphasising difference in treatment (as well as through 'educating' local populations about diversity), created a sense of division and alienation (Malik, 1996: 189-90). Eade (1989) outlines a similar growth of multicultural community engagement in east London during the 1980s.

Hoggett (1997) concurs that during the 1980s and 1990s, 'community' became an ubiquitous term in local government discourse, marking a shift away from older models of engagement through the political party process. Community engagement appeared to be an alternative way to address the declining membership of political parties and engagement of the electorate in conventional political life, through the party structure (Quilley, 2000). Certainly, interest in conventional party politics has dropped dramatically since the 1980s (Pierson, C., 1998; Hay, 1996; Mulgan, 1994; Hewison, 1995).

It is with the increased primacy of community and identity, that culture became regarded as a political tool. Bianchini, *et al* (1993) wrote that left-wing local authorities in the 1980s resorted to the political control of culture to re-energise their flagging support base:

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both Williams and Hoggart were highly sceptical about the relativism of community arts and warned that it would erode the democratisation of 'high culture' in the name of consumerism (Sinclair, 1995).

Cultural policy was useful as an alternative form of political communication and mobilisation, responding to the decline of the mobilising power of traditional left ideologies and increased public disaffection with conventional party politics. (11).

Hare (2000) describes how the Labour leadership of Glasgow City Council reversed its traditional 'anti-culture' stance by supporting local museums and galleries, in order to enhance the city's political identity, distinct from the Conservative central government:

Thus it fell to the Scottish cities, and especially Glasgow, to fill this socio-political vacuum by attempting (not always successfully) to identify with the creative forces in the civic community and encourage a strong sense of distinctive cultural identity. (220)

At the same time, 'community-engagement' was emphasised by local authorities as a counter to the alienating effects of private-property-led regeneration initiatives created in the 1980s by the Conservative government, including the Urban Development Grants, Enterprise Zones, City Action Teams and Task Force, the Action for Cities programme and the Urban Development Corporations. Such schemes were criticised for only tackling prime, marketable sites with flagship projects and assuming a trickle down effect on the worst areas. As a result they were perceived to alienate local residents (Imrie *et al*, 2003; Fremeaux, 2002). Ironically, those very regeneration schemes which had utilised culture to attract private investors, were also the ones that community-based cultural initiatives were supposed to ameliorate. Culture was both the cause of the problem and its solution (Oakley, 2006a). In both cases, culture was being asked to resolve the crisis left by the collapse of old industrialisation and the political mediation of those relationships.

In this wider context, certain institutions became exemplary pioneers of cultural policy. It is widely recognised that the charismatic, though often controversial, Labour Party leadership of the Greater London Council (GLC) 1972-1986 played a pivotal role in bringing together diverse strands of cultural policy thinking at that

time – combining its marketised and community-focused aspects (Hylton, 2007; Brighton, 1999; Garnham, 2001). The GLC's cultural policy arose from the confluence of different factors: the surge in the radical left of the Labour party, the increased volume of community-led arts in London, the nascent 'creative industries' who were moving into the metropolis, and a generation of young, active leaders in the anti-racism movement. Although the arts had no mention in the 1981 GLC Labour Party Manifesto, cultural historian Robert Hewison notes 'by 1986 the arts were seen as the leading edge of a radical social and economic agenda' (Hewison, 1995: 238).

The GLC's cultural manifesto, *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning? From Arts to Industry – New Forms of Cultural Policy*, written by Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole, (later to become key advisers to New Labour) shows the heavy influence of the community arts philosophy, stressing that official support for high culture enforced the psychological subjugation of the working class and that the left should support the 'people's own forms of expression and experience.' (Mulgan *et al*, 1986: 29). It also argued that culture was not only political, but superseded conventional politics by engaging with people's emotional worlds: 'People cannot simply be defined by their work, or as it is often expressed, "their objective position in the social relationships of production"' (1986: 12). Art became a direct political tool through the initiation of festivals, commemorative years, sponsorship of community arts projects and direct funding for cultural activities amongst minority groups (Hylton, 2007). It fulfilled a straightforward propaganda role – promoting anti-racism, pro-gay rights, feminism – but was also concerned with establishing new political and cultural constituencies through funding. The black arts budget - to promote art made by and for the ethnic minority populations of London - grew from £400,000 in 1982-3, to £2m in 1985-6 (Hylton, 2007: 47).

At the same time, the GLC was also in favour of promoting a more consumerist ethos in terms of arts funding. Mulgan and Worpole argued that 'the real popular pleasures have been provided and defined within the market-place', not the elitist museums, galleries and theatres funded by the state' (Mulgan *et al*, 1986: 10). The GLC pioneered the earliest creative industries strategies, funding community radio

stations, community magazines and newspapers, and providing studio spaces and support for artists and new media practitioners. The left-wing taste for community arts converged with right-wing support for a more marketised arts system, with both approaches focused on the individual consumer as the ultimate arbiter of taste.

The GLC was disbanded in 1986 by the Conservative government, and many of the arts organisations it supported suffered severe financial cuts as a result. However, its legacy was far-reaching in that it created a model that linked together the economic case for the arts and culture with the case for social justice and community engagement. Both the left and the right began to recognise the value of culture for their divergent reasons (Abercrombie, 1982). By rejecting the old model of 'cultural authority' as the arbiter of taste and subsidy, the GLC combined the marketisation of the arts with cultural democracy. This eschewed the paternalism of old cultural policy and promised a new, consumerised approach to culture, in which people's choices could be celebrated for being relative and diverse: 'In an age when we no longer expect to find a single, all encompassing truth...the best strategies for survival often involve creating alternative, exclusive realms which reject dominant modes.' (Mulgan *et al*:110).

In his analysis of 'commodification', Gray argues that the relationship between the citizen and the state was transformed: 'it was only individuals, and not state organisations, that were in a position to decide what it was that they actually wanted and needed.' (Gray, 2000: 106). I would argue that this statement also applies to the logic of cultural diversity and cultural democracy, and the belief that individual cultural consumption should not be judged according to any objective standards of excellence, but in term of difference. In this sense, there was increasing scepticism from parts of the left and the right towards 'one-size-fits-all' policies and the idea of 'universal citizenship' which had been characteristic of the welfare state.

At a more abstract level, proponents of the urban entrepreneurialism agenda (as described in section 2.2) and the community arts movement shared a critique of class-based political strategies. Community artists believed in the need to engage citizens through culturally or geographically based 'communities' by building their

social capital, rather than pursuing class interests that might transcend such particular identities. Likewise, advocates of urban entrepreneurialism presented economic inequality and problems of deindustrialisation as 'local' issues (Cockburn, 1977; Cochrane, 2007: 3). The pathology of the area had to be addressed through localised cultural and economic strategies, through competitive strategies of place marketing, improved local management and efficiency indicators. Thus, the orientation towards culture and community indicated certain disillusionment with conventional, class-based forms of welfare politics, which had traditionally placed greater emphasis on industrial relations, national public services and macro-economic policy.

## **2.5 A new cultural script**

Thus far, I have discussed the drivers behind the rise of cultural policy at national, and particularly at local level. I have focused primarily on institutional processes that have brought cultural strategies to the fore, in response to economic and political pressures.

A major factor in the rise of cultural policy must also be the development of a new consciousness or ideology of culture, which has taken root amongst actors and agencies. 'Issue entrepreneurs' in the field of cultural policy first emerged in the 1980s, coming out of universities, think-tanks and local authorities, particularly the GLC and other left-leaning local councils which had cultural strategies. These issue entrepreneurs produced volumes of research dedicated to proclaiming the success of cultural regeneration strategies. They argued that other local authorities should emulate British cities such as Glasgow as well as international cities such as Sydney, Barcelona and New York. Partly because of their reputation as 'radical' thinkers, and partly because of the lack of viable alternatives, local authorities and state agencies enthusiastically embraced the 'added value' of cultural policy and planning. The most important consultancy pioneering and advocating cultural policy approaches was Comedia, a Gloucestershire-based organisation that published some of the most influential pamphlets and research papers of this area in the 1980s and 1990s. Tony Bennett (2005) cites Comedia's edited volume, *The Museum Time-Machine* (Lumley,

1988) as highly influential in the cultural sector when it was published in 1988, bringing together many of the arguments of the 'new museology', including his own (17). Francois Matarasso's *Use or Ornament?* (1997) became a constant reference for councils, arts organisations and funding bodies who were keen to demonstrate the social impact of the arts, even though it has since been argued that the methodologies were dubious and accepted rather too uncritically (Merli, 2002; Belfiore, 2002). Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini's *The Creative City* in 1995 foreshadowed Richard Florida's work on creativity and was constantly referenced by local authority planners. Writing in 1998, one of Comedia's early figures, Ken Worpole, stated that since the 1980s they had produced 500 studies and worked in over 20 countries. Because their multidisciplinary approach allowed them to trump specialist expertise they arguably exercised disproportionate authority compared to other actors inside local authorities and cultural agencies. In his article in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Worpole (1998) can barely contain his impatience with those professional experts in the field who are resistant to the role of the new cultural policy entrepreneurs: 'All these areas of public policy investigated were dominated by professional cultures with discourses and practices of their own and seemed no longer able to look at themselves reflexively and critically' (151). He blithely mentions that in the process of writing a major, publicly funded report about UK libraries, *Borrowed time?*, the wider library profession had been 'disheartened to discover the Advisory Board [for the report] contained not a single librarian' (151-152). This reference also illustrates the close working relationship between state agencies and 'issues entrepreneurs', the former usually commissioning the latter to generate cultural strategies and research reports. New ideas about culture flourished in this environment, facilitated by support from the state.

It is worth reiterating the point made by Berger and Luckmann (1966) that any analysis of ideology must appreciate the dialectical relationship between human activity and the objective world. The ideas which humans develop collectively, often incoherently, to rationalise the world become externalised and institutionalised through specific entities, such as the state, its laws and government. These ideas then acquire a degree of durability and legitimacy, and act back upon individuals

through knowledge. The role of the state, therefore, is particularly important as a legitimising function, giving weight to certain rationales and ideas (78-85).

As I have already suggested, local government was one of the first sectors to absorb the new cultural consciousness and develop it to address its own specific problems. But any understanding of the arts and cultural sector in the UK also needs to recognise the impact of the wider crisis and transformation of traditional institutions, particularly the Arts Council, the foremost funding body of the state. Up until the 1980s, the Arts Council had been relatively insulated from the criticisms of community arts and black arts groups. It set up its first Community Arts Committee in April 1975 with seed funding, and also commissioned and funded Naseem Khan's landmark report on ethnic minority arts practice, *The Arts Britain Ignores*, although its immediate impact was limited (Khan, 1976; Owusu, 1986: 47; Hylton, 2007). The Community Arts Committee's budget for the first year was £176,000 which was allocated to 57 projects. This rose to £350,000 in the second year for 75 projects (which still represented less than 1 per cent of the Arts Council's total budget in 1975-6, although this was a significant achievement considering the degree of hostility from Arts Council panel members to community arts practice). Yet the ad hoc nature of Arts Council decision-making meant that policy was often based on the tastes of its board, selected without contention by a political elite (what Williams (1979) described as an 'unusually compact and organic ruling class'). It was only in the 1980s that more significant changes occurred. A number of authors have described the 1980s and 1990s as a period of disorientation for the Council. A. J. Taylor (1994) describes its policy during this period as being in a state of 'paralysis' (136). Meanwhile Pick (1991) points out:

'...although at times the Council may choose to pretend that there is one unifying philosophy, it has plainly become, with increased size, a sophisticated means of accommodating conflict about cultural policies, rather than an instrument of any one clear policy' (14).

The Council was attacked by the left for being culturally elitist, and by the right for not being 'value-for-money'. These criticisms, it should be noted, were made within a

broader context of disillusionment on the part of artists who felt that the Council was out of touch with contemporary practice and was largely unaccountable. Its dependency on government for funding and policy guidance, and its genuine failure to connect to a new generation of artists made the Council increasingly unable to stand up to critics and assert a confident institutional identity. Like many other post-war institutions of the state, the Council began to experience something of a crisis and a fundamental questioning of its core values (Hewison, 1995: 3).

As an institutional response, the Arts Council (ACGB, 1984) formulated its first strategy document, *The Glory of the Garden* in 1984, in an attempt to develop a more transparent and coherent strategy. This embraced the economic and social agenda for the arts. The concession to the demands of government and bureaucracy would mark a shift towards a more instrumentalist view of the arts and orientation towards the consumer. The report highlighted the social benefits of subsidy and its diversification of support for community/ethnic/regeneration arts activity (Sinclair 1995). During the mid 1980s, the Arts Council commissioned research and advocacy papers about art practice from 'non-traditional' areas, such as community arts and ethnic arts (see for instance, *An Urban Renaissance*, ACGB, 1989).

In particular, the Arts Council began to develop its focus on cultural diversity and the role of the arts in shaping identity. This chimed with the wider growth of multicultural arguments, being developed at local and national level, for instance, the *Swann Report* in 1985, which advocated multicultural education as a way to assist the integration of ethnic minorities in the UK. The arts and culture were increasingly seen as important in this new approach to cultural diversity. Internal correspondence of the Arts Council during this period reveals the way in which the body was becoming concerned to rid itself of any past prejudices against marginalised groups. In 1987, one member of staff confided to his colleague in a private memo that subsidised art might be about raising black consciousness but it is 'largely realised within a contemporary, Eurocentric tradition' (ACGB archive material, undated). Staff members were required to attend cultural-awareness training courses in which they learnt that racism was primarily an emotional problem that could only be tackled with emotional tools. In an internal briefing document written in 1988, the head of

the Arts Access Unit, Peter Blackman, justified the consideration of ethnic minority art in the UK because the arts 'predetermine the mental state of each individual; how we perceive each other; form attitudes and opinions; relate our heritage to those of others; how we attribute respect and social status.' (Blackman, undated). The changes in the 1980s led to the growing acceptance of 'diversity', 'access' and 'inclusion' as defining principles of arts subsidy, along with more traditional notions of aesthetic excellence (Owusu 1986, Hylton, 2007).

Creativity and culture were seen as important in relation to race and community relations, but also in other spheres. The business world, for instance, embraced the 'creativity' of artists as an exemplary model for their own working practices. As the management analyst, James Woudhuysen notes, 'For artists to value the freedom of the artist is nothing new. What is new is that economists now claim to do the same' (Woudhuysen, 1999, cited Calcutt: 2005: 100). Whilst cultural organisations were expected to act more like businesses, it is interesting to note that businesses were themselves expected to act more 'creatively'. Since it was set up in 1976, the Association of Business Sponsorship for the Arts (ABSA) organised business secondments to the cultural sector to nurture corporate management skills but by 1994 it was also doing the reverse; organising artists' secondments in corporate headquarters. In his foreword to ABSA's Annual Report 1994/1995, the director, Colin Tweedy wrote of the need to bind 'the experience, values and skills of the arts into the world of business; *to embed creativity into every corporate culture*' (ABSA, 1995, 13 – my emphasis). A new discourse about the importance of culture and creativity to a range of social activities was becoming established.

## **2.6 Reconfiguration of subjectivity**

At a more abstract level, the emergence of cultural discourse also needs to be understood within a wider historical context and changing ideas about the individual subject at the heart of policy-making.

Anthony Elliott (2006) argues that discussions about the self and subjectivity have undergone a significant change in recent decades, claiming that the Enlightenment notion of the subject as unified, stable, rational and autonomous has come under scrutiny: 'all that is modern melts into postmodern' (134-5). He goes on to suggest that major institutional and material developments have reconstituted the fabric of society and had a profound impact on how subjectivity is understood – the rise of the transnational corporation, the expansion of the international economy, the proliferation of global forms of communications, major changes in the production and consumption of goods and services, global population movements, the techno-industrialisation of war, the emergence of identity politics and dominance of mass media and communications technology in daily life (134). Although Elliot does not chart in empirical detail the precise impact of these trends, he points to the fact of a changed discourse around subjectivity in intellectual and cultural life as evidence of a significant shift. This discourse, he suggests, has come to increasingly emphasise the vulnerability, atomisation and fragmentation of individuals in modern industrialised societies. Likewise, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (1996) have presumed a link between broader material trends and a discursive shift, in which the fragmented nature of identity is more pronounced:

The concept of identity as played here...accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern time, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses practices and positions (4).

In a similar vein, Keith (2005) asserts that the transition to a post-Fordist economy – with its flexible and unstable working practices and methods of production - is dialectically linked to a new awareness of the instability of identity. This, in turn, has led to the increased attention to culture from the academy and an interest in issues of selfhood (114).

Although these various claims for a material transition in social relations are hard to determine, there is clearly evidence of a growing intellectual interest in the issue of identity, as they suggest. Heartfield (2002) cites an unpublished paper by the sociologist, Chris Gilligan, that shows that occurrences of the word 'identity' in the titles of academic journal articles rated a stable 200 or so mentions between 1981 and 1989, but rose to more than 700 in 1998 (Gilligan, undated, cited in Heartfield, 2002: 88).

Yet, whereas Hall, Du Gay and Keith regard this generally as a positive development in political and intellectual life, Heartfield (2002) is more sceptical, and has coined the phrase 'subjectivity in denial' to depict a society that is inescapably bound to the notion of the subject (as the central unit of all legal, political, economic and social contracts) yet feels ambivalence towards it. He argues that the increasing orientation towards 'identity' reveals a reaction against what he regards as the positive attributes of the Enlightenment subject:

Cultural identity is a site of resistance, and hence of action. However, identity is markedly different from subjectivity. Whereas the Subject presents itself as pure, abstract and universal, identity is specific and local...Those very features that were portrayed as flaws, or even impurities by Enlightenment thinkers are instead held up as a badge of pride. The particular stance that was rejected before for its partiality is now recognised for its special insight. And that insight is precisely the limit point of the presumed generality of the dominant identity. (89)

In other words, the criticism of the Enlightenment subject is that it had always presumed that certain abstract principles were applicable to all human beings, regardless of their specific cultural or social experiences as subjects. This approach presumed the commensurability of all people, despite ethnic or cultural differences, and belief in the general progression of lifestyles and ethics in a similar way. All of public and political life therefore derives from a universal or 'colour-blind' orientation, which treats all citizens the same; with the same rights and legal status as each

other. By contrast, advocates of 'identity politics' argue that there is no such thing as abstract truth that transcends concrete differences. The notion of 'truth' is always imposed from a position of privilege and power, and any truth perspective is just as partial and biased as any other. Going a step further, such arguments insist that it is actually human differences that give people their identity and basis of self-worth, rather than their grasp of a universal truth. Being a woman, black, disabled or gay gives a partial but special perspective on reality, which should be recognised as equally valid as any other.

Heartfield suggests that the preoccupation with identity represents a diminution of the idea of the self-determining, robust and autonomous subject. The individual is stuck within the prism of his or her own circumstances and thinking: 'Unlike the classical model of subjectivity, identity is contextual and situated. It draws its authority from its given nature, rather than its future orientation.' (89) This concern about the lack of agency lies at the heart of the critique of essentialism, something which posits that people are determined according to a particular identity and cannot change or transform themselves (see for instance, Bayart, 2005 and Kuper, 1999).

To what extent does identity politics discourse represent a genuine shift in social consciousness, or is it an obscure intellectual debate? Of course, the influence of the academy on social life should not be overestimated. Elliott (2001) warns that whilst 'declarations about the 'death of the subject' or 'end of subjectivity' really do influence public perceptions and understandings of the self...It is not true however, that the postmodern playing with texts – of and by itself – reconfigures the complex relations between self, knowledge and power in the wider society' (140).

However, Heartfield (2002) argues that there is clear empirical evidence of this shift in the transformation of political life, 'in which people retreated from public life and social engagement'. This has led to the decline in popular participation in the church, political parties, National Federation of Women's Institutes, The Mothers' Union, Red Cross Society, British Legion, RSPCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, Green Party, National Farmers Union (HMSO, 1994, cited in 163). He also points out the increased power of quangos over politically elected representatives: 'A survey in

1985 showed that 22 important quangos employed more than 44,000 people and spent somewhere in the region of £1,777 million. Appointees to these were often Tory Party members, company directors and landowners. By 1994 there were discovered to be 5521 quangos responsible for spending £48.1 billion a year, or one sixth of total government expenditure.' (Hillyard & Percy-Smith, 1988, cited 158-9). As I argued in section 2.4, the rise of new social movements indicates a growing interest in identity politics over conventional political alliances.

There is also a growing body of sociological work examining how notions of subjectivity are changing, in terms of how people think of their own identity and how they believe society should treat individuals. This perception of selfhood may itself have an impact on how individuals behave and respond to circumstances. A society that emphasises and endorses certain psychological and behavioural traits inevitably ends up encouraging these in the socialisation process.

Andrew Calcutt (2005) argues that 'culturalism' has become the dominant way of thinking throughout academic, cultural, economic and political spheres since the late 1990s. Like Elliot, he links discussions about subjectivity to broader social trends, but he also points more specifically to the decisive impact of political developments in western advanced industrial societies, particularly how the radical (New) left abandoned Marxist theories of structural determination and developed political programmes around issues of culture and identity. This intellectual shift, he asserts, can be explained in relation to the dwindling support for traditional, class-based, left-wing politics, through political parties, trade unionism and collective action.<sup>33</sup> In this context, Calcutt argues, culture, rather than class, became embraced as a new way to mediate the 'essential contradictions' of capitalism. This marked a shift away from radical strategies in the realm of production towards ameliorative and reformist strategies in the realm of consumption, and socio-cultural relations. Culture is experienced at the interpersonal level, in terms of the desire to be 'creative', but also at the more abstract level of social relations, in which all concerns about the

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<sup>33</sup> Cochrane (2007) concurs that there was an 'explosion' of critical theory aimed at redefining politics within an urban framework and understanding processes of social reproduction through collective consumption, rather than the 'base' of production (as Marxists would argue) (7). See for instance, Castells (1996) and Saunders (1984).

limitations of production can be resolved through enhancing everyone's creative potential and sense of 'identity'. He sees the apotheosis of this sociological development as the phenomenon of 'Creative Britain'; the short-lived New Labour programme whose long-lasting legacy was the elevation of 'creativity' in economic and social discourse.

In *Therapy Culture* Frank Furedi (2003) also provides a sociological account of changes experienced in industrialised societies resulting from the transformation of political life in the 1990s. He argues that the demise of older forms of ideology has entailed a profound loss of meaning in society, resulting in a 'therapeutic ethos', in which selfhood and individual psychology has become the focus of intense political and cultural concern. The taken-for-granted relations that had existed between people have weakened and the individuated life-journey becomes the primary way in which to make sense of the world and one's experiences (85). Not only have therapeutic interventions like stress counselling expanded in the workplace, but people's experiences are also mediated through a new 'cultural script' which emphasises their feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. There is certainly evidence of this shift in discourse and policy. For instance, a search of articles in 300 UK newspapers for the year 1990 did not find a single mention of the word 'self-esteem'. A decade later, there were 3,328 references. A similar rise is evident for the words 'trauma', 'stress', 'syndrome' and 'counselling' (3-7). Furedi also charts the growth of agencies, professionals, government and corporate policy or funding oriented toward therapeutic concerns. Between 1989 and 1999, the number of members of the British Association for Counselling rose from 4,500 to 16,000. He states that 25 per cent of the National Lottery's grants to health projects goes to advice and counselling schemes, compared to 5 or 6 per cent to research charities (10).

Furedi states that while long-standing sociological trends have nurtured this therapeutic ethos, they cannot alone explain its current dominance in contemporary society. Indeed, many of the contributory factors, such as the crisis of tradition, the fragility of family and community bonds, are as old as modernity itself, yet were previously contained within the social fabric. Like Calcutt, he points to political developments as the key determinant and the decline of collective identities and

political ideologies in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Whereas such ideologies had once mediated the individual's relationship to society and given public and private experience a framework of meaning, the loosening of these social connections has led to a more individuated and atomised society. This is inextricably linked with the rising importance of identity politics and the politics of recognition; both searching for meaning at a time when traditional institutions find it harder to confer a sense of identity. In this sense, we are not just witnessing a 'turn to culture in general, but towards one with an intense therapeutic sensibility' (163). The therapeutic ethos came to promote a new kind of individual subject as the focus of policy-making and institutional life – not robust, rational and autonomous, but unstable, discontinuous, vulnerable and therefore in need of 'treatment' by authorities and experts. Furedi describes examples of various initiatives since the mid-1990s, led by government departments like DCMS, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Social Exclusion Unit, which have focused on tackling the psychological exclusion of individuals as a way of dealing with wider social problems (166-167). As a consequence, he argues, the therapeutic ethos has encouraged the state to intrude into new spheres of private life by addressing the mental state of individuals and conferring recognition upon them.<sup>34</sup>

The orientation towards the self is also evident in the particular evolution of left-wing politics throughout the 1990s in Britain, Europe and America. Between working at the GLC on cultural policy and taking up his role at the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in 1997, Geoff Mulgan expanded on his view that politics needed to be oriented around the individual citizen. In *Politics in an Antipolitical Age* (1994) he argued that the 'industrial logic' of socialism is no longer sufficient to meet advances in flexible forms of production, working patterns and lifestyle; indeed, it holds back the possibility of new political progress. Mulgan states that the division of left and right is redundant and new forms of politics must emerge to resolve the crisis of individual meaning and identity: 'Beyond elections, political movements have been largely displaced by life or religious movements, and movements of group identity' (Mulgan,

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<sup>34</sup> The rise of 'therapy culture' has also been documented in the US, where state intervention through drugs programmes, prison rehabilitation and education are increasingly concerned with issues like 'self-esteem' (Nolan, 1998).

1994: 9). The problem, for Mulgan, is how to re-engage the electorate and find a new kind of politics that appeals to their needs, because 'symbolic inequalities are as significant as material ones' (Mulgan, 1994: 138). This concern for the individual psychology of the citizen and the 'reflexive self' was a cornerstone of 'Third Way' intellectuals in the 1990s, who would go on to shape the New Labour project (Giddens, 1991, 1994).

Political theories of recognition became influential in the social sciences in Europe and North America during the 1980s and 1990s (Fukuyama, 1992; Taylor, C. 1994; Honneth, 2001; Fraser, 1995; Kymlika, 1995; and for application to local government in England and Wales, see Perrons *et al*, 2003).<sup>35</sup> This approach argues that individuals in contemporary society require not only material welfare provision, but also the positive affirmation of their identity, i.e. recognition. Honneth (2003) wants to go behind the already articulated political demands found in the public sphere in order to examine 'the everyday dimension or moral feelings of injustice' (114, cited in Thompson, 2006: 108). This is an understanding which tries to empower the individual by changing structures, but one which also allows individuals to reach their 'authentic' self by realising their own distinct cultural lifestyle and choices.

Therefore, these theorists posit a new role for the state; to take into account the psychological and emotional welfare of citizens with respect to their sense of identity and sense of belonging – all of which are excluded, from traditional forms of liberal political vocabulary (Taylor, C. 1994). In this sense, they argue that the demand for redistribution and material equality has been joined by a demand for recognition and the need for 'upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups' that have been the traditional focus of welfare policies in advanced capitalist countries (Fraser, 1995: 73). Politics should not only aspire to conditions of universalism, where everyone is treated the same regardless of their cultural or

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<sup>35</sup> The key proponents of the political theory of recognition are Canadian theorist Charles Taylor (author of the seminal essay 'The Politics of Recognition' in 1992), German theorist, Axel Honneth, author of *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995), first produced in German, 1992) and American theorist, Nancy Fraser, who published her essay 'From Redistribution to Recognition' (1995) and then went on to co-publish *Redistribution or Recognition?* (2003) with Honneth. (Thompson, 2006: 10-11).

private identities, but also a politics of difference, in which cultural identities are given freedom and also validation in some form. Culture should be considered a policy sphere of comparable significance to issues such as education, housing, tax and political representation, because it addresses the psychological aspect of the individual's relationship to society.

Many of these arguments have found their way into academic and mainstream discussions about the role of culture in society and the relevance of cultural policy. There have been calls for the theorisation of 'cultural rights' in addition to the portfolio of liberal rights, which will respect diversity and identity as core features of citizenship (Turner, 1993; Stevenson 2001; Rogers, *et al*, 2001). There have also been calls to use culture to explore the changing nature of national, local and global identities, in a world where political frameworks have changed. In 1995, the academic and cultural commentator, Robert Hewison (1995) wrote a scathing attack on relentless government cuts in funding for the arts, and the economic instrumentalism of cultural policy, which veered towards safe, consensus building culture in the form of heritage. But, Hewison himself put forward the use of arts and culture to serve another, more political function concerning identity:

Throughout Europe, and indeed most of the developed world, there is a crisis of identity – national, regional, local and personal – which artists, writers and performers are uniquely qualified to address. This is a political question but only in the arts can these issues be confronted at the level at which they arise, at the level of the individual imagination, at the level where consciousness of being part of a society is formed (xiv).

John Tusa, the managing director of the Barbican Arts Centre in London between 1995 and 2007 has been a fervent critic of the instrumentalisation of the arts for social and economic policy objectives. However, he has also recognised the potential for the arts in relation to questions of cultural identity, particularly national and European identities (as opposed to that of minority groups within nations): 'The importance of the arts and culture in the political scene, and their valuable contribution to the European dimension are easy to overlook', he says, going to on

say, 'A nation that has no clear national identity will also find the definition of its political nature very hard' (Tusa, 1999: 32-42).

Thus, one explanation for the rise of cultural policy is the broader shift in political life and an orientation towards identity, albeit manifest in many different ways. The arts and culture are seen as one tool through which individuals and communities can be empowered and included in the political process, as well as a way to generate meaning – both at national, local and individual levels. This is presumed by some authors to have valuable effects in terms of strengthening citizenship and improving social cohesion, whilst others have argued that this is a 'degraded' notion of the subject, limiting the scope for social change, projecting a diminished notion of the individual, and ushering in measures from an intrusive state.

## **2.7 'Policy Window' – New Labour's cultural revolution**

As I have demonstrated, the social construction approach presents a more sophisticated understanding of determination which goes beyond simple 'cause and effect', highlighting as it does the importance of institutional and social conditions in determining the extent to which social trends flourish. Hannigan (1995) adopts the analytical framework of the 'policy window' which requires three key moments to converge: problem recognition (the characterisation of a social phenomenon as a problem to be solved); the formation and refining of policy proposals (how solutions are theorised and designed into programmes), and politics (the broader political climate, which determines the relative importance of the problem in relation to other events and issues) (88). Whilst many of the political and economic shifts taking place in the past three decades have contributed to the rise of cultural policy, it was by no means inevitable that the trends I have identified should have come to dominate, rather than subside in favour of other ideas and practices. The most decisive political shift has been the advent of New Labour, which institutionalised many of the developments in cultural policy of preceding years. Calcutt (2005) argues that the real ascendancy of culturalism in policy-making came when New Labour was elected in 1997, at which point 'Creative Britain' became more than an idea and took a

pronounced institutional form, affecting the mainstream activities and discourse of organisations and individuals.

The attention given to cultural policy was one of the Labour government's most novel features in the late 1990s. In his insightful study of New Labour discourse, Fairclough (2000) shows that the early years of the administration were dominated by the rhetoric of 'modernisation' in an attempt, he suggests, to distance itself from past socialism as well as previous forms of government more generally. Cultural policy was used to dramatic effect to demonstrate the 'revolutionary' credentials of New Labour against the staid traditionalism of its predecessors. Culture was to become more socially and economically oriented, and made 'relevant' to the needs of society (Stallabrass, 2006). Brighton (2007) points out that in the name of modernisation, Labour's recruitment of business leader, Gerry Robinson in 1998 as the Chairman of the Arts Council led to the removal of arts experts from the specialist panels, and an influx of managers and experts with no expertise in the arts. In a now widely cited annual lecture for the Arts Council of England in 1998, Robinson made it clear that his strategy was to make the arts subservient to political and social needs, and implicitly, to prove how modern and forward-thinking New Labour was:

Too often in the past, the arts have taken a patronising attitude to audiences. Too often artists and performers have continued to ply their trade to the same white middle class audience. In the back of their minds lurks the vague hope that one day enlightenment might descend semi-miraculously upon the rest; that the masses might get wise to their brilliance. (Robinson, 2000: 18)

This 'revolution' required that culture be made more useful to society, implicitly attacking older justifications for cultural value and authority. First, there was a call to make culture more economically valuable by developing the creative industries and the establishment of the Creative Industries Taskforce in 1997 (Driver and Martell, 1999: 253). The Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) also became interested in the potential of the creative industries as an exemplary model for the wider economy. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Peter Mandelson MP, commissioned Charles Leadbetter to write 'Our Competitive Future: Building the

Knowledge-driven Economy' in 1998, which developed into the influential book, *Living on thin air: The New Economy* (Leadbetter, 2000).

At the same time, however, New Labour's embrace of culture was not merely economically driven, but inspired by political developments since the 1980s, as described earlier. As a result, culture also became integral to a new discourse of social inclusion. This was marked by the moment when the Social Exclusion Unit set up Policy Action Team 10 (PAT 10) in 1998, to explore how to use arts, sports and cultural activity to address social exclusion. (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001; DCMS 1999b; Buckingham *et al*, 2001).

The term social inclusion has circulated in European academic discourse since the 1970s, but New Labour has made it one of its defining ideas (Britton *et al*, 2002; Fairclough, 2000). Social inclusion discourse presents a departure from more traditional poverty-reduction strategies associated with the left, towards individuated strategies of self-reliance and self-improvement. This promises to transcend the perceived limitations of the welfare state, by shifting emphasis away from class-based, structural factors and towards the maximisation of individual skills and earning capacity of individuals. Under New Labour, this has revealed itself in a concern to nurture the entrepreneurial nature and 'creativity' of the individual citizen. For instance, Pierson (1998) notes how the Borrie Commission on Social Justice in 1993 - under the helm of New Labour's favourite political think-tank, the Institute of Public Policy Research - sought to reconcile economic opportunity with social justice through a particular focus on education and individual self-development (188).

More specifically, the discourse of social inclusion proposes a modified role for government by redefining poverty as a subjective, as well as objective phenomenon. Social inclusion deals with both the conventional range of problems associated with material poverty (e.g. poor housing, malnutrition, weak employment prospects) but also the subjective and psychological experience which such problems entail (e.g. diminished self-confidence, inability to integrate into wider society, isolation, lack of meaning). As the then Prime Minister Tony Blair stated in his speech to launch the



Social Exclusion Unit, '[Social exclusion] is about prospects and networks and life-chances. It's a very modern problem, and one that is harmful to the individual, more damaging to self-esteem, more corrosive for society as a whole, more likely to be passed down from generation to generation, than material poverty' (Blair, 1997, unpaginated). Mark Kleinman at the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics argues:

... it is now becoming clear that in obtaining such outcomes, 'social' factors such as family structure and individual self-esteem, and personal characteristics such as punctuality, reliability and attitude are of equal or greater importance than 'economic' factors such as levels of inward investment, new floorspace provided, or even formal training qualifications. In other words, 'social capital' is as important to economic development as economic capital (Kleinman, 1998: 16).<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, Britton *et al* (2002) explain that the term 'social inclusion' incorporates income equality and employment but also 'a sense of shared goals and meaning' (14). The term is therefore also related to communitarian discourses emerging from radical politics in the 1970s and which came to New Labour's political philosophy through the writings of 'communitarian' theorists such as Amitai Etzioni in his seminal work *The Spirit of Community* (1995) (Imrie *et al*, 2003; Hoggett, 1997). In this sense, we need to understand how cultural policy has been closely linked to the objective of reviving community engagement and new forms of political relationship. For instance, in the field of urban regeneration, culture has become seen as a way to improve the political engagement of local residents, where conventional politics failed to do so. Fremeaux (2002) states that Labour kept the Single Regeneration Budget introduced by the Conservatives but increased its emphasis on 'holistic' partnership working, in order to gain greater legitimacy than solely economic and property-led regeneration.<sup>37</sup> Imrie *et al* (2003) cite the concern of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU)

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<sup>36</sup> Definitions of social capital vary. Drawing on a range of literature, Kearns (2003) defines its key features as: the social networks used by people, the social norms adhered to in behaviour, and the level of trust people have in their neighbours, people in general and political institutions (42).

<sup>37</sup> In 1993, the sprawling system of regeneration funding and schemes was merged into the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). It was intended to allow greater connection between separate government

that there was 'too much reliance on short-term regeneration' and failure to 'harness the knowledge and energy of local people' (SEU, 2000: 7, cited in Imrie *et al*, 2003: 4). Non-government actors have widely welcomed this approach, and called for greater inclusion of racial and gender dimensions, i.e. 'diversity' (Brownhill *et al*, 2000).

In the context of this reform, arts and cultural policy is seen as another tool to engage with people's needs and, in particular, to address the psychological aspects of social exclusion. In 1999, at a lecture to the Royal Society of Arts, Chris Smith MP, then Secretary of State for Culture stated, 'Involvement in art can give someone, however marginalised they may be from society, a sense of self-worth, a self-confidence, something to live for and to feel good about.' (Smith, 2000: 15). His successor, Tessa Jowell (2004) ostensibly eschewed instrumentalist arguments for the arts, arguing that for too long, policy-makers had tried to justify the arts on the basis of economic value, the creation of jobs, cutting crime or improving education. However, she went on to assert only a few paragraphs later that culture should serve a different function - to address the 'poverty of aspiration', i.e. addressing the subjective, psychological barriers that limit the individual's potential (a view maintained by her successor, Margaret Hodge).<sup>38</sup> Such claims about the psychological value of the arts and culture are a staple in cultural policy documents under Labour, for instance, in the *All Our Futures*, a report compiled by The National Advisory Council on Creative and Cultural Education in 1999 (NACCCE, 1999, and for analysis, Buckingham *et al*, 2001).

The concept of social inclusion also dramatically reshaped the way in which cultural institutions were expected to operate. The onus was placed upon cultural organisations to actively market and attract new visitors, placing emphasis on 'access', 'relevance' and 'inclusion'. The 1998 DCMS policy document *A New Cultural*

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departments, a coherence of themes and objectives, and a clearer, more efficient way for agencies to work together. This and the City Challenge, launched in 1991 'replaced the 1980s emphasis on property-led regeneration and trickle-down with the new buzzwords of partnership, competition and holistic regeneration'. The City Challenge expired in 1998 and the SRB became the central plank of the government's regeneration policy (Brownhill and Darke, 2000: 12).

<sup>38</sup> 'Issues around identity and community link very strongly to the intrinsic value of culture', Interview for 'National Treasures', BBC Radio 4, , 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

*Framework* made funding dependent on improved visitor numbers, especially from disadvantaged groups. The outcome was that spending within cultural organisations between 1993-1999 became increasingly tied to access and educational programmes (Selwood, 2001: xli) .

Since the late 1990s, the subsidised arts and cultural sector, encouraged by funding frameworks and performance targets, also increased its focus on cultural diversity as a key objective in its work. This aligned with Labour's official support for multicultural policies and was encouraged by various lobby groups; for instance, the *Parekh Report* which came out of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, chaired by political theorist, Bikhru Parekh and published by the race relations campaigning organisation, the Runnymede Trust (Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, 2000). The Arts Council published its *Cultural Diversity Action Plan* in May 1998, along with numerous other reports on diversity and access in the arts (Jermyn, *et al*, 2000; ACE, 2001, 2002a, 1998, 2002b). In 1998, it established a number of schemes, including a £20m New Audiences Programme, a Fellowship Programme to place Black, Asian and Chinese Managers in key arts organisations, and a Black Regional Initiative in Theatre (ACE, 2002b). Its flagship scheme for diversity in the arts, 'decibel', started in 2003, with a £5m launch fund and £1.3m per year until 2008. It was followed by Inspire in 2005 - a scheme to place ethnic minority curators in key galleries. The Arts Council made diversity one of its five core aims and designated 10 per cent of all grants for arts to black and minority ethnic groups. In 2002, the Arts Council held a conference entitled 'Connecting Flights: New cultures of the diaspora'. The organisers even dedicated the event to the cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, who has been influential in his critical approval of identity politics (and was also a signatory on the aforementioned *Parekh Report*).

Hence, the Blair government's adoption of cultural policy accorded with its 'Third Way' approach to social development, embracing both the promise of culture as economic wealth (creative industries, new public management efficiency) and also social justice (community, social capital and social inclusion). Recognising diversity is now presumed to boost people's sense of identity and 'wellbeing', build cohesive communities, and contribute to individuals' employability and productiveness. It is

also a strategy for developing creative and cultural industries, and reinvigorating national and local economies. In both senses, the consumerist ethos – judging the value of culture on how much of it is consumed, rather than any quality inherent to the work - has become dominant in the sector.

This utilitarian approach to cultural policy has resulted in a shift away from the authority of the cultural expert to a concern with measuring value according to 'evidence' – both of increased audiences and economic and social impacts. Since the late 1990s, it has been claimed that participation in the arts has many quantifiable benefits to society (Matarasso, 1997). This is not to say that notions of aesthetic value or universal standards (i.e. 'excellence') have disappeared altogether within official cultural policy discourse – they appear frequently in policy literature and ministerial speeches (Bennett, O., 2007). However, there is far more ambivalence about referring to these concepts without some qualification. The notion of 'cultural value' has itself come under scrutiny. The DCMS recently set up a Collaborative Working Group with the think-tank Demos to explore the meaning of 'cultural value'.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, the Arts Council is running a major public consultation between 2006-2008 about 'public value' and the arts (Keaney, 2006b). These exercises show the pressure upon the cultural sector to try to make explicit what was once presumed to be obvious.

At the same time, however, it is clear that the imperative to raise funds and influence budgets means that much of the 'research literature' is driven by advocacy and hence biased in its selection and methodologies: 'funding decisions appear to be made on the basis of expectations rather than "evidence"' (Selwood, 2002: 15). In some cases, positive benefits of the arts are exaggerated by actors, and negative impacts underplayed.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Referred to in minutes of DCMS meeting on 13th March 2006 (DCMS, 2006c).

<sup>40</sup> An interesting example of the inconclusiveness of the evidence is Coalter's (2001) discussion of the educational value of the arts. He asserts that the research evidence indicates the positive educational value of including the arts in schooling and play. However, the actual body of evidence he cites is far less convincing. A study of GCSE results in all subjects between 1994-1996 comparing attainment levels showed that those students taking one arts-related subject (visual arts, music, drama) had better overall results than those not taking an arts-related subject. However, students taking more than one of the three subjects had lower academic attainment than those students taking no arts-related subjects at all (Harland *et al*, 1998, cited in Coalter, 2001: 15). The possibility that including the arts in education might

There are clear signs that this reorganisation of priorities has had an effect on the institutional behaviour of the cultural sector. *The Goodison Review* (2004) (named after the chairman of the working group, Sir Nicholas Goodison, former chair of the National Art Collections fund) examined existing tax arrangements for the cultural sector and expressed serious concern that cultural institutions had far less funds for new acquisitions than before. The Art Fund's survey of 300 museums and galleries (representing a sixth of the total in the UK) in May 2006 showed that respondents had suffered funding cuts for certain core activities (namely acquisitions of artefacts) whilst funds for other marginal areas (education, outreach and marketing) had grown. For the five major museums in the UK (British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery and Tate) funds for acquisitions had declined by 90 per cent over the previous decade (Art Fund, 2006).

Whilst much of the innovation in cultural policy has been driven by government policies, it feeds off a widespread acceptance that culture should be more socially and economically important. Indeed, the cultural sector is complicit in the spread of this idea. For example, a *Guardian* article on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2000 reported that GLLAM (Group for Large Local Authority Museums) felt underrepresented in the PAT 10 report and demanded more recognition for their work on social inclusion (Nightingale, 2000). Brighton (1999) argues that although the state has driven the new instrumentalist agenda, arts institutions have 'conjoined with the political vision of the government to initiate a reshaping of state support' (39). The transformation of cultural policy was therefore not merely led from 'top-down' but happened in a more complex way, driven by a multiplicity of factors and agents.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I sought to explain why there had been such a growth in cultural policy in the UK. I applied a social constructionist perspective to consider various economic and political drivers that had led to the rise of cultural policy. This

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have a *negative* impact on attainment levels, as the evidence suggests, is not even considered by Coalter. But as I have already argued, policies are often taken up, even when they are not proven to work.

analysis necessarily involved a historical reconstruction of trends and influences shaping cultural policy development.

I considered the possibility that cultural or creative industries had become more central to the economy, and concluded that despite their growth in recent years, this factor is neither large nor stable enough to be a sufficient explanation. I suggested that the rise of culture in economic regeneration strategies in the 1980s was driven partly by a limited range of political options and the pressures of New Public Management.

I also suggested that whilst economic motivations and pressures form one aspect of cultural policy-making, another, less examined area is the growing political discourse around culture, which has proved equally, if not more, important. Cultural policy has been shaped by a new political context and the emergence of 'cultural politics' as a way to engage citizens and address issues of inequality and community. I have argued that the combination of these factors during the past three decades has generated a new ideology regarding the importance of culture to society and an orientation towards identity and personal self-development as a strategy for economic and social improvement.

Under New Labour these factors have combined and become steadily institutionalised so that they now pervade the discourse and activities of the cultural sector and policy-making more generally. From 1997, there has been an acceleration of cultural policy development, characterised by an ethos of consumerism, instrumentalism and inclusion.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ARGUMENTS FRAMING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL POLICY AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL – CONTRADICTIONS AND TENSIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I set out a range of factors that shaped the development of cultural policy in the UK in the past three decades. I have established that economic, social and political drivers led actors to pursue cultural strategies in novel ways. More specifically, I showed how actors' motivations for developing cultural policies are not solely economic but have a strong political dimension with regard to nurturing a sense of identity and community, and promoting citizen engagement.

It would be impossible to conduct a research study on cultural policies relating to the entire state. Therefore, in this chapter, I focus in more depth on how contemporary cultural policy operates at the local level, and on strategies pursued by local authorities and their partner agencies. I explore the kinds of arguments used by actors in local authorities today to justify their cultural strategies. My task is not to assess the validity of these rationales, only to consider how they might operate at the local level, and possible tensions or contradictions within.

Local government is perhaps the most interesting area of study because it has pioneered so much of cultural policy development in the UK, but also in parts of Europe and the US (Schuster, 2002; Skot-Hansen, 2002). The widely varying nature of local authorities and their proximity to social problems means they were among the first to pursue socially and economically oriented cultural strategies.

Local authorities develop cultural policies (as defined in the terms set out in Chapter 1) in broadly three categories. The first is at the basic, statutory level of licensing, regulation and inspection of cultural service provision. This is a fairly straightforward and uncontested area of local responsibility and does not receive much attention in cultural strategy documents. Therefore, I will not focus on it here. The second area is in the funding and support of existing organisations which provide a cultural service

to the local population. In this category, local authorities mostly act as silent funders, bestowing grants in return for the delivery of basic objectives. This has been the typical mode of support for municipal museums and galleries. In certain authorities, elected councillors act as trustees on the boards of local museums, but the overall dynamic of funder/client is maintained. The third category is one in which the local authority plays a more pro-active role in the initiation, development and delivery of cultural projects or programmes. This requires a form of strategic thinking - hence, 'cultural policy' comes to mean the same thing as a 'cultural strategy'. In Britain, this approach has been developed primarily through 'cultural clusters' or 'cultural quarters', which are managed by local authorities, usually in partnership with local arts organisations, voluntary and community groups, private sector agents, regional development agencies, regional arts bodies and even other local authorities. This third category of cultural policy is a relatively recent innovation in local authority practice and entails a higher degree of involvement in local cultural activities. It is an increasingly popular approach; as stated in Chapter One, over fifty cultural clusters have been estimated to be in development in the UK (O'Connor, 2001). Depending on the local authority context, the third category of cultural policy can co-exist and overlap with the second category, meaning that existing arts organisations are very often initiating partners in a cultural cluster or strategy; a relationship that might be triggered by major capital funding (from, say, the Lottery) which is then combined into a broader strategy for cultural regeneration.

Kawashima (2004) argues that although local authorities in the UK have for many years been under highly centralised control, they have been able to exercise a relative degree of autonomy in the fields of culture and urban regeneration. Under the Local Government Act 1972, local authorities were granted discretionary powers for arts spending. Later, in the 1980s, a number of councils also exerted increased influence on Regional Arts Authorities (RAAs). As I showed in Chapter Two, many left-leaning metropolitan boroughs took a more proactive approach to developing cultural policies. Kawashima explains that the absence of direct political lines between central government, local authorities and RAAs meant that it was often impossible to enforce the division of responsibilities. At the same time, the local government sector as a whole began to develop and circulate its own theories and

techniques amongst professionals (51-52). This enforces the view that whilst local government has been increasingly constrained by central government in the past two decades, there is also relative freedom to develop substantial policy diversity according to local circumstances (Wilson, *et al*, 2006: 183).

This section begins by abstracting from individual, localised cases of cultural policy and tries to identify certain consistent themes and aims behind them, as well as potential points of conflict in their operation. I will outline the various arguments used by local authorities, which I will then analyse using my own empirical research in the remainder of the thesis.

It should be noted that other studies have also attempted to analyse the different rationales of cultural strategies, particularly cultural clusters. However, these tend to stress the economic arguments and underplay the use of culture for political or inclusion strategies. Mommaas (2004) notes in his detailed study of cultural clusters in the Netherlands, 'behind this common spatial strategy, we see the emergence of a great variety of forms and rationales' (530). He identifies the following rationales in his study: 'strengthening the identity, attraction power and marketing position of places'; 'stimulating a more entrepreneurial approach to the arts and culture'; 'stimulating innovation and creativity' [in the local economy]; 'finding a new use for old buildings and derelict sites'; and finally, 'stimulating cultural diversity and democracy'. However, Mommaas' reference to the last rationale only hints at the changed understanding of culture as a new kind of political engagement, as outlined in Chapter Two. Likewise, Cochrane's (2007) classification of aims behind urban cultural policy also tends to stress economic and 'branding' arguments: infrastructural investment and support to generate cultural production; prestige flagship projects for branding; the mobilisation of architectural symbolism; creating the conditions for a creative class to flourish (104-5).

Therefore, whilst academic studies of local cultural strategies reveal their multiple aims, I contend that they tend to focus largely on narrowly economic arguments behind local strategies, leading to the failure to recognise the importance of more socially and politically oriented concerns.

### **3.1 Arguments for local cultural strategies**

One of the main arguments the local government sector uses today to explain the development of cultural policies is that this will deliver economic benefits to areas. The DCMS has been at the forefront in stressing 'the substantial economic benefits and impacts of culture and the contribution of the creative industries to the local economy' (DCMS, 2004a: 15). The LGA has also stated that one of its agreed priorities for cultural policy at the local level is 'promoting the economic vitality of the regions' (LGA, 2004: 6). Much of the literature about culture-led regeneration starts from the assumption that it is 'obvious' or 'common sense', based on the fact that many cities are doing it already, which 'suggests there must be something in it' (Comedia, 2004: 2). Although cultural regeneration strategies have been promoted around the world, Britain is widely regarded as the pioneer. Major cities and towns have created cultural areas of some kind since the mid 1980s, including Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Leeds, Cardiff, Birmingham, and Sheffield.

A typical method for doing this is the development of a 'cultural cluster' - concentrated space within a town for creative production and consumption 'that offers attractive developmental conditions by securing certain external economies, i.e. those that are apt to be missing or destroyed under conditions of pure market competition' (Scott, 2000: 187, see also Keith, 2005: 116).<sup>41</sup> Clusters take different forms and can have different expected outcomes.

The first objective may be to help generate cultural production in the creative industries as an alternative to manufacturing industries. Thus clusters can facilitate micro-strategies of support such as training, business support, pooled business intelligence, marketing strategies and studio/office space for start-ups, as well as macro-strategies such as designating land for a culture-specific use. In Britain, local

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<sup>41</sup> This is drawn from a definition given by Comedia: 'a designation that has become popular over the past two decades to describe an urban area within a town or city, which has, or is planned to have, a concentration of cultural (usually arts) facilities, creative industry businesses, public realm developments such as artworks or streetscape improvements, together with cafes, bars, restaurants and speciality retail' (Comedia, 2004: 13-14).

authorities have taken different approaches to their creative industries, with variable success. Manchester was relatively 'hands-off' in its approach to local creative industries until the mid 1990s compared to authorities in Sheffield, Glasgow and Liverpool, yet it has a larger cultural sector today (O'Connor, 2001: 2.4.2). As well as developing business-oriented cultural clusters, local authorities may also be directly involved in running production sites, such as theatres, galleries and museums, which are not profitable but nonetheless generate employment, inward investment and local consumption through tourism or night-time activity. In Manchester, for instance, the renovation of the Canalside area in the 1990s has made it a major night-time attraction for the local university population and visiting tourists. Likewise, in Newcastle, the Quayside has been transformed into a leisure zone, with new bars, restaurants, public art, and the building of the award winning Gateshead Millennium Bridge.

The second objective is to use cultural strategies to attract new, high-skilled employment through gentrification - an approach that has been popularised by the influential American urban theorist Richard Florida and his theory of the 'creative class' as 'the dominant class in society' (Florida, 2002: p. xiv).<sup>42</sup> Florida's argument is that towns that develop policies to foster 'tolerance' and creativity will attract high-skill industries and an elite professional class, which will in turn invigorate the local economy through consumption. Cochrane (2007) states that this inverts the usual formula by assuming that cities must attract creative workers in order to kickstart private investment, rather than the other way round (110). Following this logic, local authorities see culture as a way to improve 'soft' factors or 'quality of life' as part of their appeal to this creative class. For instance, local authorities today seek to reverse the decline of their town centres (following the rise of car usage and out of town shopping outlets in the 1990s) by improving the provision of quality leisure and cultural facilities, retail outlets and good transport.

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<sup>42</sup> Florida is frequently cited in literature about urban policy in the UK. He was invited to the Demos conference, 'Boho Britain: Creative Diversity and the Remaking of our Cities' in 2003 which was sponsored by the British Urban Regeneration Agency (BURA), representing all the major public and private actors in urban regeneration, and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

A third economic objective is to use cultural clusters as a way to procure public and private funds, often through major capital projects and sporting or cultural events, such as the Olympics, high profile festivals and public art institutions. These strategies try to copy what is widely referred to as the 'Bilbao' effect: the case of a deindustrialised Basque city in the north of Spain which built the Guggenheim art gallery, thus attracting a considerable number of new tourists, as well as substantial public and private investment. Such 'one-offs' are not only seen to generate income, but also act as an important symbolic tool, producing a positive city image and boosting the confidence of outside investors. Therefore, a characteristic of cultural strategies in the UK is multiple funding sources and partnership between central government (e.g. through the Single Regeneration Budget), agencies such as the Lottery and the Arts Councils, regional bodies and consortiums, local authorities and EU institutions. This public funding may also bring in private money from business, trusts and charitable foundations, and Public Private Partnerships.

However, whilst economic objectives for cultural strategies are important, local authorities are inevitably aware of the drawbacks and the potential for failure and local resentment. The collapse of numerous high profile projects established with Millennium Lottery funds serves as a warning. In Sheffield, the lottery-funded £15m National Centre for Popular Music closed in 1999 due to poor visitor numbers, and was eventually converted into a student union bar. The £9m Cardiff Centre for Visual Arts closed in 2000, again due to poor visitor numbers. The Millennium Dome provoked political controversy and critical condemnation. It ended up nearly £200m over budget and failed to attract predicted numbers of visitors.

In addition to the considerable expense, some critics have argued that top-down cultural policies can alienate residents by producing an inauthentic version of local cultural identity. Zukin (1997) has compared rebranded cities to Disneyworld, seeing them as sanitised, inauthentic simulacra of the original place (see also Garcia, 2004; Mooney, 2004; Harvey, 1989). This imposition of a brand from above has, in some cases, provoked resistance from below. For instance, in Glasgow, Hare (2000) describes local people's resistance to staged events, often resulting in the creation of alternative cultural events. Garcia (2004) states that support for grassroots cultural

activity in Glasgow suffered when funding was channelled to high profile institutions and events. Eade *et al* (1998) argue that the cultural regeneration of Tower Hamlets in East London attracted resentment from the local population as it ignored local working class and ethnic groups in its representations of the past. Cohen (1998) goes further and argues that cultural regeneration strategies in East London do not merely ignore material inequality, but worsen it by creating a 'dual economy' in which the majority of local residents are confined to low-paid, low-skilled work and unstable employment conditions. Some of Florida's critics have argued that his strategy is one of competitive city advantage, rather than a wholesale national increase in wealth and 'creativity', and that this can lead to increased inequalities; something he himself recognises as a problem.<sup>43</sup>

Conscious of these problems, local authorities have begun to talk about the need to 'engage' with local people and represent their culture in an authentic way. Their use of economic arguments for cultural policy co-exist with arguments for the ability of culture to assist a more localised, bottom-up approach to regeneration that supports diverse identities and different needs within the local area. Even Florida states that 'large, top-down government development projects, like stadium building efforts and massive downtown revitalisation plans are a major part of the problem.' He suggests that 'real economic development is people-oriented, organic and community-based' (Florida, 2004: unpaginated).

Therefore, I would argue that whilst cultural strategies have a clear economic rationale, there also exists another dimension, which is to use culture to ameliorate some of the worst effects of regeneration, or to pursue more 'holistic' regeneration. As Oakley (2006a) states, 'culture must both generate growth and save us from the problems of growth' (11).

This more 'holistic' approach emphasises the role of culture in nurturing individual personal development as part of regeneration. In an essay published in 2001 entitled

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<sup>43</sup> 'As this cycle occurs, higher-skill, higher-wage people move in and lower skill, lower-wage people move out. While it may not be fair or even good, these regions continue to gain competitive advantage as a result' (Florida, 2004: unpaginated).

'Shared Terrain? Urban Regeneration' David Briers examined culture-led regeneration through three cultural projects: New Art Gallery, Walsall, the Baltic Contemporary Centre in Gateshead and the Wakefield Waterfront development. He cites the artist, David Mach, and Peter Jenkinson, Director of New Art Gallery Walsall saying, 'The true regeneration is the regeneration of local people's hearts and minds' (cited in Briers, 2001: 37). In his 1990 book on British arts centres and policy, Justin Lewis, argued against an exclusively economic agenda in arts policy, stating that the arts are crucial to 'self-development...personal fulfillment' (Lewis, 1990: 36). An LGA document does not reject the instrumentalism of the economic rationale, but employs a 'broader economic perspective, which deals with the management of both financial and human resources' (Coalter, 2001: 1). The author assesses the impact of creative arts practice in the following areas: increasing personal confidence and self-esteem; education and play; strengthening community cohesion; health and well-being; alleviating poverty; economic impact and employment; and arts and regeneration. Tellingly, in the analysis of each area, the word 'confidence' is employed several times. The author builds his argument for the power of the arts to enact social change on the basis of their psychological impact of the individual. Cultural services are supposed to contribute to social change through transforming subjective experiences and inner lives of individuals. Bristol City Council states this explicitly: 'It is the individual that makes cities interesting! And it is culture that makes individuals interesting!' (Bristol City Council, undated: 4). Similar arguments have been made for the link between the impact on arts involvement on physical and mental health and wider issues of community (Madden *et al*, 2004; Staricoff, 2005).

Numerous authors argue that cultural policies should nurture a sense of identity in response to 'broader processes of globalisation' (Bailey, et al., 2004: 48) This fits into a broader argument about how the focus of urban politics should be 'citizens' wellbeing' including factors like physical environment, family life and personal relationships, self-esteem and health (Wolman et al, 1992).<sup>44</sup> The DCMS guidance

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<sup>44</sup> The word 'well-being' was adopted in the Local Government Act 1972, section 137, which allowed local authorities to spend a limited amount on activities for which it had no power but which 'promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas'. It appeared again in the Local Government Act 2002, in which local authorities were given the power to promote economic, social and environmental well-being in their area. By this point, however, the word had far stronger connotations related to the 'politics of happiness'.

for local authorities on developing cultural strategies in England argued that a 'thematic' approach to culture was superior to a 'service' approach because of 'the need to advocate the contribution of cultural activities to the wider community agenda' (DCMS, 2000b: 36).

Cultural strategies are also seen as playing a role in addressing the cultural dimension of social exclusion. An LGA research report published in 2002 revealed that 56 per cent of local authorities had social inclusion or poverty reduction as a key theme in their cultural strategy (LGA, 2002). In her study of Blackbird Leys in Oxford, Morrison (2003) sees cultural injustice (through negative stereotypes of lower income resident groups) as one aspect of social exclusion in the town, which policy-makers must address (139). Museums, galleries and arts organisations are increasingly seen to have a role in tackling exclusion by recognising diverse identities (see Nobuko, 2006; Newman, *et al*, 2005; Miles, 2005; Stanbridge, 2002; Hooper-Greenhill, 1988).

Another argument made for local cultural strategies is that they can address a 'democratic deficit' and facilitate community engagement in light of the perceived failures of more traditional forms of engagement. For example, Monika de Frantz (2005) argues that the controversial Museumsquartier in Vienna is an exemplary model for deliberative politics which produced 'a plural, conflictive process of political self-reflection' (64). Similarly, Schwartz (2000) eschews 'art for art's sake', citing John Dewey's statement that the arts have the ability 'to remove prejudice, tear away the veils due to wont and custom...perfect the power to perceive' and also to encourage us 'to enter...into other forms of relationship and participation other than our own' (cited on 9; see also Cornwell, 1990). He asserts that art is valuable in promoting multicultural politics that involve respect for difference and plural perspectives: 'the same interpretive, reflective and evaluative skills required to engage art are also constitutive skills of successful democratic life' (72). In her assessment of the failings of UK local culture-led regeneration, Garcia (2004) advocates the use of art to provide 'a platform for the local communities, including

both the average citizen, authorities and specialist agencies, to express their views and expectations and survey the decision-making process' (324).

Chatterton *et al* (2004) contend that despite advocacy from within the sector for using culture to tackle social exclusion and democracy, little of this has been translated into local government practice (368). They assert that competitive bidding, frameworks of best practice and funding shortfalls have driven local authorities to use culture predominantly for 'bottom-line profit' motives (377). However, I argue there is also evidence to show that socially-oriented justifications for culture are not merely superficial. Cochrane (2007) describes how in some cases, urban planning now takes neighbourhood identities into account, for example, the promotion of 'Banglatown' in London's East End, which reflects the presence of a significant local Bangladeshi population, or the 'Balti Triangle' in Birmingham, home to some of Britain's best loved curry houses (run by members of the South Asian population) (119). This concern with engagement through cultural strategies, I would suggest, feeds into the broader preoccupation within local government with community engagement and the politics of participation, as has been noted by some commentators (Hoggett, 1990, Hambleton *et al*, 1984). 'Community-based' culture is seen as a way to recognise the different groups living within an area. More generally, the question of democratic engagement and legitimacy is a clear concern of local authorities in their wider operations. For instance, the LGA's Annual conference in 2003 was entitled 'Making Connections', reflecting how salient the theme has become. Cultural quarters, by embracing notions of diversity, promote the commodification of ethnic cultures and expect to reap the benefits in terms of social inclusion effects.

Local government discourse about culture is also preoccupied with how it can be used to address issues of difference and place. Urban theorist and former Labour leader of Tower Hamlets Council, Michael Keith (2005) sees in the 'romance of the multicultural urbanism' the potential for physical regeneration but also the restructuring of social relations within the wider city (128). In the context of a 'glocalised' urbanism, where people have developed an increasingly transnational sensibility, both economy and identity are complicated by the 'messiness' of the city

beyond the conventional boundaries of the nation state (119-120). He believes that the cultural quarter can 'curate' the ambivalent boundaries of ethnic difference, and the fluidity of cultural hybridisation (124). In the DCMS guidance to local authorities on developing cultural strategies, *Leading the Good Life*, the authors suggest that local authorities develop their 'own local understanding and scope of culture' (DCMS, 2004a: 17) and define culture 'around local concerns' (23). The emphasis is on defining culture in relation to an area, locality or community of people, rather than seeing it as something with a value based on being objective or universal.

Consequently, the concept of 'diversity' is recurrent in local government discourse. It is used to denote an approach to culture which is inclusive, relative and achieves a range of effects, including community cohesion, increased social capital, enhanced city competitiveness, creative industries development and personal wellbeing. Taken together with the wider economic, social and political rationales, the term 'culture' in local cultural strategies is endowed with novel meanings that distinguish it from the liberal-humanist definition which underpinned older models of cultural policy.

### **3.2 The 'lived reality'**

We have therefore established a number of different aims and motivations behind cultural strategies today. However, it is important that such abstraction does not blind us to the lived reality of such policies and the rich empirical variations of each case. After all, many discursive fields overlap when looked at in specificity. For instance, the creation of a safe public space in a town centre may be justified by a number of arguments, both economic and political; in terms of attracting night-time visitors to an area, boosting trade for local restaurants and bars, and creating a public space for diverse groups to meet and feel part of a community. Likewise, the funding of high quality public exhibitions in a gallery could be a tourism strategy, but also part of the institution's 'core mission' to widen access to art. Following on from this, different actors may desire different outcomes from cultural projects, leading to conflicts that are rarely discussed in the policy literature. For example, cultural policy entrepreneurs might talk up the economic justifications for arts festivals in a region

but local businesses may be uninterested in these effects or concerned about their negative impacts.<sup>45</sup>

Also, while cultural strategies seem to be oriented towards different effects, what also might they have in common? Mommaas (2004) is reluctant to draw relations between different types of cultural cluster strategies, suggesting that they are pragmatic, opportunistic and ultimately ad hoc: 'no clear correlations can be identified (yet) between the rationales used and the models developed.' (530). Yet whilst rationales may be distinct at one level, is it possible that they are connected at a more abstract level, in terms of what they reflect about the way actors understand culture, society and the individual subject at the heart of policy-making? As I have so far suggested, the focus on individuated, personalised development seems to be a common thread running through both economic and social justice arguments. For many actors, social and economic objectives are simpatico. A 2002 Comedia report entitled 'Realising the Cultural Potential of our Core Cities' states:

In parallel with their analysis of their economic competitiveness, the Core Cities are building an understanding of the importance of culture in tackling issues of poverty and social exclusion and, indeed, that these are intrinsically linked. This is not a hopeful declaration of faith but a fundamentally pragmatic assertion that cultural inputs translate into social and economic outputs. (Comedia, 2002:9).

Finally, whilst these discursive fields may be connected, they may also contain inherent tensions. Policies often hide compromises and problems, or respond to the 'feedback' of previous policies and discursive fields (Hill, 2005:180). We might then ask to what extent do different ideas about the impact of culture conflict and affect each other in practice? For instance, there seem to be dichotomies in the literature: cultural authority and cultural diversity; identity differentiation and community cohesion; creative industry strategies and therapeutic self-development. Ang (2005)

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<sup>45</sup> For example, in a study of 11 festivals in the UK by DeMontfort University in 2002-3 only a third of local businesses believed the festivals would provide economic benefits for them, and the same proportion said the festivals were either not important or were even disruptive (Comedia, 2004: 19).

argues that despite the desire to develop multicultural practice in the art gallery or museum, its adherence to the principle of 'art for art's sake' remains a fundamental barrier to achieving plural perspectives and more accessible exhibitions. 'The idea of cultural diversity cannot be taken too far', Ang asserts, 'because to do so would destabilise the very purpose of the art museum as a site for universal appreciation of knowledge' (316).

How might these contradictions play out in policy development and implementation? Policies are dynamic, rather than static expressions of a single idea, and they are rarely worked out in clean cut sequence, with ideas first and implementation afterwards. Instead, policy development consists of simultaneous developments, and there is oscillation between policies in formation and policies in practice.

Certain critiques of cultural policy have picked up on some of these internal contradictions and reflect more generally on the problematic relationship between culture and politics. There are those who argue that the use of culture to address social and economic problems is nothing more than mere 'displacement' activity which distracts from policies that could be used to improve schools, healthcare, employment and other spheres (Merli, 2002, Jensen, 2002). This is part of a wider critique of culturally-oriented politics which can only focus on the fields of representation and consumption, as opposed to the very forms of social organisation that give rise to such problems (Calcutt, 2005; Gitlin, 1994; Hughes, 1993) To what extent might such arguments be valid in the way that local authorities use cultural policy today, and is this acknowledged amongst those who make policy or those who are its intended recipients?

Moreover, how well do the aspirations for culture fare when they are developed into actual policies and confront concrete reality? Some authors have pointed out that cultural identity is inevitably differentiating, and therefore not conducive to generating a common political discourse which can transcend ethnic or lifestyle differences. Although authors like Keith (2005) are optimistic about how cultural quarters can curate the 'ambivalence' of fixity and fluidity, others have argued that multiculturalism and its stress on difference inevitably brings notions of universalism,

politics and solidarity into crisis (Malik, 1996; Brown, 2006; Savaric, 2001; Gitlin, 1995). According to these arguments, culture is inherently incapable of replacing more conventional political activity, relying as it does on a particular emphasis on difference. There are also those who argue that the emphasis on difference can reify cultural identity, militating against cultural change and 'mixing'. Lurking beneath the argument for cultural relativism and difference, therefore, is a far more contentious argument for cultural essentialism (Kuper, 1999; Brown, 2006; Bayart, 2005; Appiah, 2006). Within the cultural sector itself, there are those who despair that the stress on diversity presents an essentialised, and effectively, racialised, view of artists and arts audiences (Araeen, 2004; Dyer, 2007). At the level of policy-making, this is exposed in recurrent contradictions as to the expressed purpose of diversity policies. In his comprehensive survey of diversity policies in the UK arts sector, Hylton (2007) explains:

Beyond often suffering a lack of effective organisation...these initiatives have tended to deploy conflicting strategies. These have frequently taken the form of employing 'separate' funding schemes relating to 'Black arts' (such as those employed by the GLC and latterly by the Arts Council), whilst simultaneously espousing the virtues and need for equal opportunity. (13).

Taking these criticisms and entanglements into account, my empirical research explores how they surface in the development and implementation of local cultural strategies within a specific context.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDIES**

#### **Introduction**

In the first chapter, I outlined a gradual shift in the way in which culture and its relationship to society was understood. I explained that culture had become perceived as an object of policy-making, and was being used to fulfil an expanding range of objectives. In Chapter Two I examined explanations for why this development had occurred, considering a range of social and political factors. I argued that the general emphasis in academic literature on the economic drivers behind cultural policy-making had led to a relative neglect of the political drivers that had brought culture to the fore. This, I suggested, tended to obscure the social and political motivations behind contemporary cultural policy. In Chapter Three, I outlined the range of arguments used to justify cultural policy at the local government level in the UK today and set out some of the potential tensions arising from policies in practice. I suggested the possibility of conflicts within cultural policy frameworks over notions of cultural value, cultural authority and political engagement.

The empirical section of this thesis explores how such tensions play out in the development and implementation of policies, asking what is the 'lived reality' of cultural policy at the local level.

Existing research into local cultural policies tends to examine social and economic impacts and, more specifically, whether cultural strategies achieve the objectives intended by policy-makers. These studies tend to uncritically assimilate the same values and concepts as those developed by the policy-makers whose work they are examining. Therefore, there is a gap in the research regarding how arguments about culture are made and the potential ideological tensions that exist within. My research interrogates how these concepts actually work and their limitations in practice.

#### **4.1 Research questions and methodology**

My overall research strategy was guided by the following questions:

- What political, social and economic drivers shape cultural policy-making at the local level?
- How do actors and institutions argue for the use of culture in policy-making and what does this reveal about attitudes regarding individuals and society?
- What are the contradictions and tensions within cultural policy and how do these play out in specific cases?

I chose to study the development of cultural policies at local level through case studies, analysing the cultural strategies of two local authorities in the UK: Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council (OMBC) in the north-west of England and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) in east London.

The case study approach allows a rich empirical study of the policy process within a specific social, economic and political context over a period of time. It is regarded as a suitable tool for open-ended research where questions are exploratory in nature and demand a degree of flexibility in design (Yin, 2003). The case study approach is particularly appropriate for policy study, because it can capture the complexity of multiple variables, agents, ideas and structures that contribute to the policy process and how it is perceived.

At one level, I wanted to consider the 'meso-analysis' dimension of the policy process: how problems are defined, how the policy agenda is set and the formation of policy (Parsons, 1995). I also wanted to consider how such policies were perceived by actors operating within the policy process. Thus, as my initial theoretical framework was quite open-ended and my questions exploratory and multi-dimensional, I used a 'grounded theory' approach, oscillating between the concrete findings of my fieldwork and developing tentative conceptual structures throughout (Strauss *et al*, 1998).

The purpose of the case studies was not to measure or assess the perceived successes or failures of cultural policies in their own terms (although this was

something to consider). It was to analyse the arguments through which cultural policies are developed in order to gain an insight into the drivers behind them, their underlying assumptions, and whether they might contain certain contradictions. The research was intended to analyse the reciprocal relationship between discursive trends and the institutional arrangements and activities of actors, assuming the possibility of dissonance between these vectors.

I chose two case study areas which I believed would be amenable to this kind of analysis because of their significance in the wider national field, but also because their particular local contexts might bring out the tensions of cultural policy in more acute form. In many ways, the two case study areas I chose could not be more different. Tower Hamlets is widely regarded as a pioneer in cultural regeneration policies, being one of London's major centres of creative industries and home to a highly multi-ethnic population. By contrast, Oldham is a declining mill town with a very small creative industries sector and reputedly high levels of ethnic tension. Despite these clear contextual differences, however, both boroughs have won significant recognition in the local government sector in recent years for their innovations in cultural policy. Both authorities have devoted considerable resources to their cultural strategies and have invested in major flagship cultural projects to achieve myriad aims. Also, whilst both areas have strong local concerns, they are heavily influenced by the national discourse of local government practice through the involvement of public agencies and private consultancies. I would suggest that in terms of the problems they try to address and the degree to which they have adopted the cultural policy approach, they exemplify the trends I seek to explore in this thesis and will be useful for 'analytic generalisation' with regards to the wider cultural policy sector (Yin, 2003: 10). At a more practical level, I live in London and grew up in Oldham. My familiarity with both areas and knowledge of local actors (through personal and professional contacts) gave me a fairly high level of access and allowed me to develop a perspective of both areas during frequent and regular visits over the course of the research (between 2005-2007).

To be more specific, I defined my 'unit of observation' as the local authority's cultural strategy, which in both cases incorporates a range of projects, and involves

numerous state and non-state organisations, individuals, and objectives. In order to narrow my focus and study in detail the practical and institutional form of policies, I decided it would be appropriate to pay particular attention to those flagship projects or schemes that are considered exemplary in both areas. In Oldham I was drawn to studying the cultural quarter development, which constitutes the greatest expenditure of the Council's resources. In Tower Hamlets, there was a far greater volume and range of cultural activities supported by the Council so I focused on organisations like the Rich Mix centre, which LBTH had highlighted in its own literature as exemplary. Inevitably, my study of these particular authorities touched on broader issues of regeneration and local authority operations, but I maintained a focus on issues relevant to the sphere of cultural policy. In presenting my analysis of these two case studies, I will relate back to the various strands of my first three chapters.

In order to ensure the rigour and practicality of my case study approach, I developed a broad 'case study protocol' to set out the scope of my data collection (the specific individuals, agencies and structures I would study), the methods of data collection and my analytical strategy (Yin, 2003: 67-68). As far as possible, I tried to replicate this design for both case study areas, although the differentiated nature of each meant that the application of methods was not routine and inevitably varied according to circumstance. One of the advantages of the case study approach is that I was able to deploy a number of methods, in order to gather multiple sources of evidence, and to triangulate data and test the reliability and validity of findings. The methods were primarily: document analysis (of textual statements and archive material); qualitative, semi-structured interviews with key actors; and observation (of buildings and events, and to a lesser extent participant-observation during events and meetings where my own input was appropriate to encourage responses from others). I will now discuss these specific methods in more detail.

The method of document analysis – the close study of documentary texts – can help the researcher explore a range of questions about the policy process. It enables one to make a sophisticated examination of the meanings and ideological assumptions that underlie policy developments. This approach treats language and the

organisation of texts as 'elements in social processes' (Fairclough, 2003: 6). By exploring the choice of vocabulary, semantic relations, the categorisation of events and processes, and the affective or evaluative character of a text, social scientists can begin to deconstruct representations of social reality and their potential effects on social action. Fairclough (2003) describes the general approach of discourse analysis as both 'oscillating' between the specific texts and the more abstract, durable 'order of discourse', in which particular representations acquire a coherence of ideological meaning and internal logic (3). More specifically, there has been an increasing attention to language in social science studies, particularly in cultural policy studies, to interpret the ideological dimensions of policy.

I analysed a range of key policy documents relating to both case study areas, mining them for empirical information, but also deconstructing their language as expressions of a wider cultural policy discourse, i.e. drawing upon Fairclough's interpretative approach. These documents included: policy statements, statistics, qualitative research papers, consultation reviews by local authorities, regional and national government agencies, internal memos, private correspondence, business plans and publicly available literature relating to the key cultural institutions, community and voluntary organisations in both case study areas.

At an informative level, documentary analysis can be an aid to understanding the more concrete, structural determinations of policy – what events and processes have occurred that lead problems to be defined and agendas to be set in the way they are? Archive resources, quantitative evidence (such as council budgets) and internal documents can offer some reliable insight into the specific issues organisations face, and they can help one to reconstruct the chronology of policy creation. One of the recurrent problems in conducting this study was gaining access to internal documents that would help me to understand institutional processes from the perspective of actors at the time, such as fundraising applications, internal memos, and minutes of meetings. I was only able to access documents in Oldham that were publicly available. In Tower Hamlets, I was given a useful store of archive material dating between 2000 and 2003, by one of the councillors and board members of the Rich Mix centre.

Of course, whilst any document analysis is a useful method to explore ideas, it has certain limits. Published texts usually serve a function of rationalising policies and providing justifications to their reader, and therefore need to be treated with caution. They can contain contradictory ideas that are only forced into confrontation at the point of policy implementation. I therefore also used qualitative interviews as a way to fully understand the policy process and its adaptive, self-reflexive and sometimes incoherent character. Both these methods can supplement the concrete account of policy development with verbal reportage, and also provide rich data to clarify the ideas of actors or institutions. I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews in each case study area (18 in Tower Hamlets and 15 in Oldham) with key policy actors from the two local authorities, arts organisations, and community groups. I wanted to test my understanding of cultural policy in practice, as well as explore the views of the 'policy elite' operating in both areas. In addition, I attended a number of public or invite-only events held at cultural institutions in both case study areas, in order to hear local key actors' opinions and to be abreast of their programme of activities. To supplement my grasp of the local level, I interviewed individuals at the LGA and the Arts Council working on issues related to cultural policy and local government. I used Atlas ti. software to analyse the data.

The combination of interviews, documents, and observation allowed me to crosscheck evidence and construct a reliable chronological account of concrete policy developments. At a more theoretical level, this multifarious strategy helped me to consider the full range of rationales for policy development, the plural drivers and assumptions that exist in a policy setting and the merits of rival explanations.

I have organised the presentation of the two case study areas into a discussion of key concepts and discursive trends. These include: introduction to the problems of each area and analysis of the drivers behind cultural policy development; analysis of the assumptions and objectives of the cultural strategies in the specific context of local cultural institutions; and finally, exploration of the contradictions and tensions within the policies. Where appropriate, I have used citations from texts or interviews in order to provide evidence of a claim, or to illustrate the consistency or

inconsistency of responses from a range of actors and institutions.<sup>46</sup> In order to give context and add strength to the citation, I have given details of the respondent and their relationship to the policy process. However, in numerous cases, people requested to speak 'off the record' either in general, or for specific answers; in which case, their citations are sourced as 'unnamed'.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will give a background to these two areas, in order to proceed with the data analysis in the following chapters.

#### **4.2 London Borough of Tower Hamlets – 'London's creative engine room'**

Located in the multicultural heart of east London, Tower Hamlets is widely regarded as a pioneer of local cultural policy and culture-led regeneration. Like many boroughs in Britain, it went through a process of deindustrialisation from the 1970s onwards. Its local factories and garment warehouses fell into decline and its unemployment rates were among the highest in the country. Historically, the area has also been home to large immigrant communities - the French Huguenot silk weavers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Irish labourers and Jewish refugees in the nineteenth century, and most recently, Bangladeshi immigrants arriving from the 1960s – leading to significant ethnic tension, particularly due to the activities of the extreme right organisations like the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s and the National Front and the British National Party in the 1970s and 1980s.

Yet, in the late 1980s and 1990s, the area was able to exploit its 'cultural capital' in a number of ways, turning into what the Council describes as 'London's creative engine-room' (LBTH, 2003:31). Its proximity to the City of London meant that it benefited from the rise of London as a global financial hub with booming residential and commercial property prices, as well as the influx of new 'knowledge' workers. In 2005, Tower Hamlets ranked 19<sup>th</sup> out of 408 local authorities in Britain for 'economic scale' (measured by Gross Value Added per capita), placing it high above national and London averages (LBTH, 2005: 37). Tower Hamlets also gained a strong

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<sup>46</sup> Corden & Sainsbury (2006) point out that researchers rarely explain their rationale for using verbatim quotations, which can leave the reader uncertain about their purpose.

reputation as a creative nucleus in the 1980s when artists moved into the area, attracted by the cheap accommodation and studio space. This bohemian trend soon led to the influx of more commercially oriented creative industries: designers, advertising agencies, fashion and textile workshops and web-based companies. The area also developed its reputation for ethnic diversity as a range of local anti-racist groups emerged, leading to a strong activist network that continues to exert influence today.

According to the 2001 census, the population of Tower Hamlets was 196,106. At the time of writing, the council has a narrow Labour majority and was classed in the most recent Audit Commission Comprehensive Performance Assessment as 3 stars and 'improving strongly'.<sup>47</sup> The Council has received Beacon Award status from the Improvement and Development Agency for five years running. The turnout for the last local election was 41 per cent. As one would expect from a London borough, LBTH is plugged into the discussions and debates about cultural policy at the national level, employing staff and consultants who have worked across the capital city as well as in other parts of the country, and even abroad. Today, the borough has a strong cultural reputation. It houses the highest proportion of artists of any municipality in Europe, and is a centre for many small-scale creative enterprises and highly regarded public and private galleries and museums, as well as numerous local community and voluntary initiatives. The racial tensions in the area have eased considerably since the 1990s and it is now regarded as a successful multi-ethnic area. More than 48 per cent of the population belongs to an ethnic group other than White British. The borough is currently home to the largest Bangladeshi community (33.4 per cent is of Bangladeshi origin) and 'Banglatown' around the Brick Lane area is a busy centre of restaurants, bars, street festivals and community group activity. The council has actively engaged Bangladeshi community groups in its political strategy (Eade, 1989).

From the late 1990s onwards, the council sought to leverage these cultural changes in the borough for economic benefits. Like many of the local authorities I discussed

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<sup>47</sup> LBTH was controlled by the Liberal Democrats between 1986-1994.

in Chapter Two, Tower Hamlets has sought to develop a 'brand' for the area to increase its marketing appeal to tourists and businesses. LBTH has invented names like 'Eastside' to brand the area and give it a distinctive feel: local, yet exotic. In recent years, Tower Hamlets has successfully attracted public funds to develop major capital or community-led projects, often with a cultural regeneration dimension, notably from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), the European Regional Development Fund, European Structural Funds, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, and the Thames Gateway Partnership. Tower Hamlets also works closely with the London Development Agency (LDA), which has responsibility for regeneration, and inclusion issues in London and the Greater London Authority (GLA) which developed *The London Plan* (2004) and emphasised the importance of culture as a source of revenue.

Yet, whilst Tower Hamlets is widely perceived to have developed a successful cultural regeneration strategy since the 1990s, it has also been beset with a range of problems familiar to other areas. The significant boost to the local economy has not been equally distributed and the majority of residents suffer from high rates of unemployment, poor health and educational attainment, as well as poor housing and public service provision. The 'knowledge industries', which have supposedly transformed Tower Hamlets, are concentrated overwhelmingly in one sector - banking and finance - which currently accounts for 40 per cent of jobs in the borough. These are mainly occupied by high-skilled people who commute from outside the borough. By contrast, only half the working-age residents of Tower Hamlets are in work, the lowest in the country (the national average is three quarters are in work) (LBTH, 2005: 13-19). Whilst the City Fringe, Docklands and Lower Lea Valley have seen a significant redevelopment in recent years, once semi-derelict Georgian streets have been restored to their former glory and fashionable new cultural venues, restaurants and bars have opened, there remain pockets of severe deprivation in many other parts of the borough. According to the 2001 census, nine of the borough's wards are in the top ten per cent of the most deprived in the country.

There are also divisions between Tower Hamlets residents, leading to potential tensions. As a Comedia report about the borough has stated, the area's diversity 'is not consistently complemented by strong and harmonious community relations' (Comedia, undated: 11). The creative professionals tend overwhelmingly to be white and middle class and although many of them are attracted to the exotic 'Otherness' of the East End, they are unlikely to enter the more deprived areas of the borough. Those who provide the area's 'cultural diversity' remain the least likely to reap the benefits of the cultural industries (Cohen, 1998).

Anwar Akhtar, the director of the Cultural Industries Development Agency (CIDA) (which is part-funded by LBTH), and someone who had been involved in cultural projects in the area since the 1990s explained that previous regeneration projects had been a 'contradiction' in that they brought wealth to the area but not the local community, particularly Bangladeshis. Whilst local businesses have generally welcomed the cultural branding of the Brick Lane identity, some residents have expressed disillusionment. The nostalgic 're-imagining' of the area has also provoked resentment from local leaders who feel their particular groups' identities and experiences of adversity or exclusion have been ignored (Eade *et al*, 1998). In the late 1990s, LBTH's plans to redevelop the Victorian Spitalfields Market met with strong opposition from local campaign groups, who amassed over 20,000 signatures in protest at the planned creation of office blocks on the land.

Therefore, since the late 1990s, in response to the criticisms of its previous regeneration strategies, the Council has sought to develop a new approach, which emphasises 'bottom-up' and equitable development. As it states in its 2005 regeneration strategy, 'The challenge is to ensure that this new prosperity is shared by all who live and work in Tower Hamlets. The global-city district we seek to create must not be confined to the Isle of Dogs, City Fringe and Lower Lea Valley.' (LBTH, 2005: 10). Today, LBTH's economic regeneration strategy focuses on nurturing those industry sectors 'where there is a trade off between growth and an ability to get a significant number of unemployed people with a relatively low skills base into jobs quickly and efficiently' (LBTH, 2005: 70). These sectors are primarily tourism, hospitality, leisure, and the cultural or knowledge industries. LBTH also seeks to

increase the number of local SMEs (small to medium enterprises) and encourage local entrepreneurs to set up businesses in Tower Hamlets. The regeneration strategy also sets out the need to improve the transport network, educational infrastructure, welfare-to-work initiatives training to address unemployment amongst youth and ethnic groups, investment in new, mixed housing provision and improvement of physical environment, and place marketing (LBTH, 2005).

In addition to its regeneration strategy, LBTH has developed a Community Plan and Local Area Agreement (enforced by the Local Strategic Partnership, which is a conglomeration of different private, public and third sector groups in the area) to ensure regeneration meets a number of different needs (LBTH, 2006, 2007a).

Overall, the LBTH cultural strategy has evolved in a way that is consistent with the new emphasis in regeneration, covering community-led initiatives as well as private-led cultural industries, and integrating cultural activity into the Community Plan. The Council's arts and cultural provision comes within the Learning, Achievement and Leisure pillar of the Council's Community Strategy and supports a range of activities which align with these objectives such as the Oxford House arts and community centre, as well as the highest number of festivals of any single borough in the UK - approximately thirty a year. The Council also has its own in-house arts team operating from the Brady Arts Centre on Hanbury Street, which opened in 1999.<sup>48</sup> It produces events and cultural activities for the local population, including the annual fireworks display, major outdoor festivals and amateur arts and youth workshops. Although LBTH does give funding to certain 'high art' institutions like the Whitechapel Art Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, this tends to be earmarked for education and community work and most core funding comes from other sources, such as the Arts Council. This means these institutions are less connected to the LBTH policy agenda.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For both case studies I exclude mention of sports, leisure, parks, film and libraries services as they fall outside the remit of cultural policy as I define it in Chapter One.

<sup>49</sup> The Whitechapel Art Gallery did receive considerable funding from local government in the 1970s and 1980s but today receives only approximately £28,000 per annum for education and community projects. It received a £1.3m grant from LBTH under section 106 funding for its extension in 2007, but this was a one-off payment and does not tie the gallery into a close working relationship with LBTH. For historical

On top of its existing cultural service provision and commitments, the Council has invested £3.6m in a flagship project called the Rich Mix centre; a £27m mixed funded arts and educational centre. Some regeneration experts have welcomed it as project that will benefit minority ethnic residents, in contrast to large-scale 'global city' developments in nearby Docklands, which have tended to alienate local residents (Brownhill *et al*, 2000: 20). The Olympic Games, to be held in east London in 2012, will have far-reaching effects on local cultural structures and provision (mainly in sports, of course), but the precise impact on cultural provision is not confirmed (LBTH, 2007b).

#### **4.3 Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council – 'A shabby mill town'**

Oldham's involvement in cultural policy is a relatively new phenomenon, emerging out of regeneration strategies that began in the late 1990s. The town is located in the north-west of England and its population was 217,273 in the 2001 census.

Like Tower Hamlets, Oldham suffered from the problems of deindustrialisation in the 1980s, when its long-declining cotton industry was further undermined by intense global competition. The local authority ameliorated some of the worst consequences by improving links to national transport networks and diversifying the usage of former mill buildings for various kinds of commercial manufacturing and distribution. However, Oldham continued to experience a range of social and economic problems. As one respondent put it to me, Oldham is a 'shabby mill town, with all the problems that go with it.'<sup>50</sup> The town has long had a low-wage, low-skill economy, highly dependent on businesses that are liable to relocate and create economic instability in their wake. It ranked as the 38<sup>th</sup> most deprived borough in the UK in 2000, and 43<sup>rd</sup> in 2004. Five of its wards are among the 5 per cent most deprived boroughs in the UK. In Oldham, 37.7 per cent of people had no qualifications compared to 28.9 per

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reasons, one LBTH councillor always sits on the trustee board. (Interview with Stephen Escritt and Caro Howell, Whitechapel).

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Joy Thorpe.

cent nationally. Unlike Tower Hamlets, Oldham has a tiny creative industries sector and manufacturing accounts for 23 cent of employment; higher than the national average of 17 per cent. It has a strong local arts tradition but this is overshadowed by the influence of the largest neighbouring city, Manchester. In contrast to Tower Hamlets' good multicultural reputation in the last decade, mentioned in section 4.2, Oldham has experienced considerable ethnic tensions in recent years. There has been a large ethnic minority population in the town since the 1960s, as a result of attempts by local employers to maintain productivity by hiring immigrant workers from Pakistan and Bangladesh to do night-shift work. Today, these ethnic groups tend to live in geographically concentrated areas and there is a history of racial tension (Cantle, 2001).<sup>51</sup>

Oldham first began to develop a more coherent local economic policy in the late 1990s. As one might expect, OMBC began to take note of the new 'competitive' economy and looked to culture in a manner typical of a de-industrialising town at that time. In October 1995, the Council announced plans to develop a site for retail and business in the town centre, and in February 1996, it unveiled plans for the Oldham Cultural Quarter Development, which involved new buildings and refurbishment in the South Union Street Area, using European and central government funds. This marked the beginning of an economically oriented cultural strategy which would attract tourism and private and public investment. The quarter is currently in Phase III: Phase I was Gallery Oldham, which opened in February 2002 and housed the local art and history collection. The total building cost was £7.5m, split evenly between the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Oldham Council, and the Arts Council provided £10,000 per annum for education development for the first three years (which was then mainstreamed by the Council), plus £40,000 between 2002-2004 mostly for audience development work. Phase II is the new Library and Lifelong Learning Centre (opened in spring 2006), which was financed through a £13m Private Finance Initiative. Phase III is the refurbishment of

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<sup>51</sup> Oldham has a sizeable ethnic minority population: 13.9 per cent in 2001. The largest ethnic group is Pakistani (6.3 per cent, compared to 1.4 per cent nationally), followed by Bangladeshis (4.5 per cent, compared to 0.6 per cent nationally). The ethnic population tends to be geographically concentrated, and in some wards such as Werneth, Coldhurst and Alexandria Park the ethnic population is nearly 60 per cent. The population is also disproportionately young (24 per cent of these groups is under 25).

the Grade 2 Victorian library building, to house the local archives and natural and social history collections. Phase IV will be a new performing arts centre and home for the Oldham Coliseum theatre in the west Union Street area. As part of its strategy, the Council also recently opened University Centre and business districts at the Hollinwood junction of M60 and A62 and the Mumps Enterprise area in Oldham town centre, to attract and nurture creative industries.

However, apart from long-standing economic concerns, another important factor that has come to influence Oldham's cultural policy has been concern about 'community cohesion'. This was brought to the fore after the 'disturbances' in May 2001, when riots broke out in several northern towns, including Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, between local Asian youths and the police. In Oldham on 26-29 May, around 500 people rioted, injuring two police officers and three members of the public and causing damage of over £1.4m. (Home Office 2001:7).<sup>52</sup> The disturbances led to intense public debate about the lack of ethnic integration and the council's subsequent strategy has been influenced by numerous government-funded reviews and strategy documents written during this period. Most influential were: the Independent Review (the 'Ritchie Report') (Ritchie, 2001), commissioned by Oldham Council and the Greater Manchester Police Authority; Oldham Council's own response to the Ritchie Report (OMBC, 2002); and the Community Cohesion Review Team report (the 'Cantle Report' (Cantle, 2001)).<sup>53</sup> Whilst there were some differences of emphasis in these reports they all stressed the need to build 'community cohesion', improve youth facilities and representation, develop a shared identity and tackle

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<sup>52</sup> Another key impact on this debate came from the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 attacks in New York, which raised further concerns about the integration of Muslims into Britain. In December 2001, the Home Secretary, David Blunkett announced new measures to strengthen 'citizenship', such as citizenship lessons and tests for new citizens.

<sup>53</sup> Oldham Council, the Police and the Police Authority commissioned an Independent Review into the riots, which led to *The Ritchie Report* (Ritchie, 2001), named after David Ritchie, the Chairman. The emphasis on community relations informed a broader agenda being developed by central and local government at the time. *The Ouseley Report* (Ouseley, 2001) about Bradford was written prior to the riots there and published shortly afterwards in 2001. The Home Office, from a more national perspective, set up a Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion, which produced the report *Building Cohesive Communities* in 2001 (Home Office, 2001a), as well as the Community Cohesion Review Team which produced the *Cantle Report*, named after the chairman, Ted Cantle (Cantle, 2001). Later reports commissioned by Oldham Council were *Oldham Beyond* (OMBC, 2004a), *Forward Together* (OMBC, 2004b), *The Heart of Oldham* (May 2004c), and most recently, *Review of Community Cohesion in Oldham*, produced by the Institute of Community Cohesion, led by Ted Cantle, which returned to issues in his first report (Institute of Community Cohesion, 2006). These reports' methodologies have been broad consultation with local community groups, council officials and the public.

segregation between ethnic communities, which was seen as hindering social and economic development of the town. The Cattle Report (Cattle, 2001) in particular found that communities in the northern towns were living 'parallel lives' and rarely met or interacted. In many ways, the riots appear to have been a turning point in OMBC's strategy. They precipitated a greater coherence in the Council's policies but also amplified pre-existing regeneration strategies, particularly the cultural quarter and PFI initiatives for capital projects.

The Council's strategy since the riots has been focused on a combination of social, and economic regeneration, informed by the following principles, as first identified in its response to the Ritchie Report in 2002: the improvement of local partnership working through the Local Strategic Partnership and greater cooperation between agencies such as the Council, the Police, local schools and voluntary groups; a programme of change to modernise the Council; a focus on the needs of young people through youth activities, local voluntary partnership activities and the Connexions scheme; securing private and public investment in housing, schooling and local business, through central government schemes such as the Housing Market Renewal Fund, 'arm's length' management and private finance schemes; a focus on crime and anti-social behaviour; and, finally, an effort to combat the rise of extremism and ethnic tensions, through a range of cultural and community-based strategies. Before and after the riots, Oldham Council developed a series of regeneration projects aimed to unlock public and private investment in the area for new buildings, supporting the relocation of businesses, and improving the transport and road infrastructure. It received £53m funding from the New Deal for Communities, £37m from European and Lottery funding for businesses and to create jobs, £20m from the Single Regeneration Budget and it awarded £9m to build the award-winning Gallery Oldham. Oldham Council also sought to develop its tourism industry, which attracts 6m visitors each year, spending £100m (OMBC, 2004d: 20-21). It was awarded £211 million in special regeneration funding for the 18-year period 1993 to 2011 (Ritchie, 2001: 53).

Crucially, in terms of managerial performance, the Council recruited new staff in a range of areas to bring in outside experience and expertise, and also employed the

regeneration consultancy, Comedia, to develop a long-term, borough-wide strategy to look at the economy, community relations, transport and urban design, and culture. This was just one indication that the Council wanted to create a more coherent approach to regeneration issues and assimilate nationwide trends.

Within this wider framework, the arts and culture have come to be seen as a vital part of the Council's strategy. They are expected to contribute to the economic revitalisation of the town centre, as well as to the community cohesion agenda (see Cattle, 2001: 6.23). OMBC supports a range of cultural and arts organisations in the town, such as the Oldham Coliseum theatre, Gallery Oldham (as part of the cultural quarter developments), and smaller arts providers such as Peshkar (a South Asian theatre company), the Saddleworth Museum and the Oldham Theatre Workshop. Since the 2001 riots, the Council has also held (and in some cases, received central government funds) annual carnivals (the August Rush Cart Festival, Spring Bank Holiday Festival, Lantern Procession). It has also celebrated cultural and religious festivals, such as Eid and Diwali, in cooperation with local community groups. Because there is limited private provision of cultural activity in the borough (it is the largest borough in the UK without an in-town cinema, for instance), the local authority plays a considerable role in supporting local cultural life. Although Oldham may not seem to be a cultural centre in the way Tower Hamlets is, it has been recognised for its work in this field, for instance, winning an award for 'Cultural Contribution' in June 2007 from the Academy of Sustainable Communities. OMBC is also the only local authority in England to have included a cultural participation 'stretch target' in its local area agreement, testifying to the Council's commitment to culture in its overall strategy.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CASE STUDY 1: TOWER HAMLETS

#### Introduction

In this chapter I first examine the framework for cultural policy in Tower Hamlets, discussing key drivers and actors behind cultural policies, and how the cultural policy strategy fits within the context of the council's overall regeneration plans. I then examine in more detail the aims of cultural policy, especially the concept of 'diversity'. I look at how this has shaped the evolution of projects and institutions in the area. Finally, I examine how these assumptions play out in the practical implementation of policies and explore ambiguities that arise.

#### 5.1 'Regeneration for all'

As discussed in section 4.2, LBTH's approach to regeneration has undergone a shift in approach since the late 1990s, with greater emphasis on how to spread the benefits of economic development in the borough to a wider constituency of people. LBTH's cultural strategy, written in 2003 and updated in 2007, explicitly links five Cultural Strategy Themes alongside the Community Plan objectives: Cultural Cohesion, Cultural Celebration, Cultural Well-Being, Cultural Prosperity and Cultural Partnerships (LBTH, 2007b, 8, 2003). Stephen Murray, the head of the LBTH's arts service explained that the Council had taken an increasing interest in the role that culture can play in meeting regeneration objectives, particularly after the election of a Labour council in 1994, which took steps to expand and consolidate resources for the arts after what had been quite fragmented and patchy provision. He stated that there were also plans to introduce cultural performance indicators more explicitly into the Local Area Agreement. The former Head of Cultural Services, Ray Gerlach emphasised the importance of cultural provision: 'I've always believed that culture is really at the heart of any decent regeneration.'<sup>54</sup> The Council's cultural strategy is particularly concerned with how to make regeneration address the needs of local people and communities through youth provision; social cohesion; using culture as a

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<sup>54</sup> Gerlach has since left LBTH.

tool for community engagement on issues such as housing and environmental regeneration; and an emphasis on neighbourhood renewal (LBTH, 2003).<sup>55</sup>

A key concept that links together this new emphasis on regeneration and the role of cultural provision is 'cultural diversity'. Through this principle, it is intended that the council's strategy looks beyond a narrow and homogenous group of privileged people, and instead recognise the needs and aspirations of all those living and working in Tower Hamlets.

There is no consistent definition of 'diversity' and different actors use the term in different ways to describe effects and outcomes in the area. In general, diversity is used with reference to ethnic variety in the borough, in terms of local residents, cultural activities, and ethnic based services and businesses. On one level, local diversity is seen to generate significant economic benefits. It creates marketing appeal for the area with its vibrant and 'exotic' cuisine, clothing, and atmosphere. It is particularly associated with the business success of restaurants and fashion outlets in the 'Banglatown' area around Brick Lane in Spitalfields. A report commissioned by Comedia stated that the council saw diversity as '*the* major asset for economic comparative advantage' (Comedia, undated). It suggests that the commitment to diversity focuses on the 'skills, talents and ambitions of people' - implying, of course, that ethnic populations are inherently more cultural or creative (12). This chimes with the broader strategy for London developed by the LDA, whose strategy incorporates the following objective: 'Working to support London's renewal as a vibrant and inclusive city, acknowledging the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of London's people as an asset' (LDA, undated). This approach aligns with Richard Florida's assertion that cultural diversity is key to urban economic success in that it helps to attract the creative class (Florida, 2002).

Whilst the promotion of cultural diversity is seen as commercially beneficial, it is also perceived to be 'authentic' to the area, and part of an inclusive, community oriented approach to regeneration. Hence, the Council's cultural strategy is explicitly wide and

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<sup>55</sup> Other agencies with policy frameworks that affect cultural policy in Tower Hamlets are: the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the London Development Agency and the Greater London Authority.

inclusive in scope: 'culture can mean different things to different people who live and work across the borough' (LBTH, 2003: 6). Ray Gerlach stated that diversity was the key characteristic of culture in the area:

We don't have a high street, where you've got a Next, a Monsoon, etc. What we have got is a tradition of the East End, which is markets. We've got Petticoat Lane Market, Whitechapel Market, Crisp Street Market, Watley Market, that have changed in the way that they're delivered because they're selling cosmopolitan goods now. It is not just a traditional East End; it is this very international, cosmopolitan East End. So you can get this, you can get Bengali food, Afro Caribbean food, it's not the traditional meat and two veg. So there's a wonderful diversity here and it falls into what we see as the culture of Tower Hamlets.

All of the local non-state actors concurred that diversity was an inherently positive quality, and one that local residents feel comfortable with. One local arts professional stated:

[I]t would be interesting if you got to test this but if you were to walk down Brick Lane and to ask a mixture of people – white, black Asian, and asked them what they liked about this area – then diversity would come very high up.' (Andrew Missingham)

One factor in this preoccupation with diversity is the long history of anti-racism and community arts in the area since the 1980s. The groups involved tended to have a strong 'cultural' and community dimension, advocating the promotion of diversity as a way to address social problems like racism, inequality and community participation.<sup>56</sup> Tower Hamlets was one of the first councils to innovate multicultural policies, and to fund groups along ethnic and cultural lines. The local Labour party

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<sup>56</sup> Most community groups were formed during the peak of immigration from the Bengali community in the 1960s and 1970s to help newcomers settle. It is difficult to estimate the number of groups currently operating. One respondent at the Bangladeshi Youth Movement told me there were approximately four hundred 'paper' groups, but only 45-50 was 'real', i.e. operated at a regular and sustainable level of activity. Approximately £2m is given in mainstream grant aid to the voluntary sector in Tower Hamlets (LBTH, 2003: 25).

also engaged in cultural issues in an attempt to develop strong ties with the local Bangladeshi population (Eade, 1989). The ideas of cultural politics have been embedded in the local political culture, especially with the return of the council to Labour control in 1994 and the election of a number of Labour councillors, who went on to develop the Council's flagship Rich Mix centre.<sup>57</sup> Today, the Council supports approximately 30-40 ethnically-focused cultural groups in the borough, ranging from well established centres such as the Kobi Nazrul Centre, the Bangladeshi Welfare Association and the East London Chinese Centre, to smaller organisations such as the Swadhinata Trust and Nzinga Dance. There are also community-based organisations that offer multi-ethnic cultural provision, such as Friends of Arnold Circus and Oxford House. In addition, there is also a strong working relationship between the Council and the local subsidised arts sector.<sup>58</sup> According to the Tower Hamlets online arts directory, there are approximately 85 not-for-profit, community-focused arts organisations in the borough.<sup>59</sup> The Council also funds over 80 public indoor and outdoor events and festivals which are intended to reach as wide a constituency of residents as possible.

Another dimension of this community-focused approach is the emphasis on working in 'partnership' with local community and voluntary groups. Like other councils in the UK, Tower Hamlets established a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to bring together a range of interest groups and service providers and promote 'joined-up-thinking'.<sup>60</sup> In the late 1990s, the Council established independent agencies to work with local third sector groups to help deliver regeneration programmes. Cityside Regeneration was set up in 1997 (it is now defunct) to deliver a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB3) programme called 'Building Business' in the western part of the borough. It developed a number of cultural initiatives, festivals and organisations. Leaside Regeneration was set up in 1999 to drive regeneration in the east of the borough. It too has developed cultural programmes in conjunction with the Third Sector to

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<sup>57</sup> For instance, Michael Keith, Denise Jones, Kumar Murshid

<sup>58</sup> Although I refer to the 'local subsidised arts sector', it should be noted that many individual artists and arts organisations operate within both private and public sectors.

<sup>59</sup> Date checked 11.09.07.

<sup>60</sup> The LSP is also guided by a plethora of other Council plans: Community Plan; Strategic Plan; Race Equality Scheme; Third Sector Strategy, Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy; and the Unitary Development Plan, amongst others.

deliver one of its objectives: 'community celebration'. The Creative Industries Development Agency (CIDA) was set up in 1999 to provide business support to local creative businesses and training and employment opportunities for the local community. The New Deal for Communities (NDC) on the Ocean Estate has used cultural provision to try to deliver objectives for the local community.

Therefore, the Council accepts 'diversity' as a key value, both in terms of economic arguments about enhancing the marketability of the area and boosting local industries, but also for its potential in addressing social exclusion and community issues. This means that LBTH supports and promotes a wide range of amateur and professional cultural organisations and projects in the borough, in line with these various objectives. It supports 'high art institutions' such as the Whitechapel Gallery and the annual Spitalfields Festival for classical music, and enjoys the prestige of having internationally renowned commercial arts galleries in the borough. Yet, it is also keen to stress the notion that culture is particular and community-based, and funds local, ethnically-based community and youth arts activity.

At the same time, many of the artists and arts professionals I spoke had a community arts background and felt that their artistic programme was inextricably linked to community and social objectives. The director of ADFED (one of the UK's leading youth music training organisations)<sup>61</sup> told me that, 'Although music is at the core of what we do, the social angle is also very important - it goes hand in hand' (Sonia Mehti). Another local arts professional, working for a film training charity, HI8US, said:

I don't make that distinction. I think that distinction's a problem. We talk about creativity, we don't talk about social, we don't talk about arts, we talk about creativity, which is fundamental. (Andy Porter)

There is therefore a general consensus amongst local authority policy-makers and the arts organisations they support that the arts and culture have a role to play in

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<sup>61</sup> This organisation is a charitable educational body, set up by the successful music band, the Asian Dub Foundation (ADF). John Pandit, a founder member of ADF is a member of the Rich Mix board.

the regeneration of the area. Indeed, most of the arts organisations in Tower Hamlets receive public funding on the basis that they play a role in addressing particular agendas, such as training young people, creating jobs in the creative industries, providing youth services and building capacity for community-led activity that might become commercially viable. As one respondent told me, during his time in the borough, community arts projects had evolved since the 1970s and become channelled into a clear training agenda, 'because of economics, because of the government, because of the prevailing philosophy'.

At the same time, however, many artists were reluctant to 'instrumentalise' their art and insisted that it had value regardless of the social impacts. Whilst they believed the arts had a social impact, they did not see it as their only role. Keith Khan, the (former) director of the Rich Mix centre talked about the tangible, measurable benefits of the arts, but insisted that it was secondary:

When Ocean (a music venue in Hackney, east London)...closed down, there was a direct correlation, from the police, in street crime increasing once the centre closed down...there's a direct correlation between activities and things happening in the society around it... That's not our role though. That's an outcome.

Therefore, whilst actors within arts organisations value art as a tool for social change in quite instrumentalist, policy-oriented terms, they also articulate the need for 'autonomy' from social objectives. This desire for autonomy was strongest for institutions with core artistic values at their heart. Stephen Escritt, head of strategic development at the Whitechapel Gallery explained that it only received a small part of its funding from LBTH, which meant that the gallery's service level agreement did not have to shape its curatorial work and it can 'stop short of having to tick targets with them, which is good'. They wanted to work with the Council on local policy issues, he stated, but on its own terms. As the Whitechapel Gallery receives most of its funds from the Arts Council and private or earned income, it is less enmeshed in the LBTH policy agenda.

## **5.2 Rich Mix Centre – a flagship project**

I have looked at how LBTH's cultural strategy encompasses a vast range of activities and organisations, but I will now pick out one project whose development has spanned the past decade and which embodies many of the ideas relating to diversity.

In the late 1990s, LBTH decided to invest in a new flagship project called the Rich Mix Centre, jointly funded by Arts Council England, the Millennium Fund, the Greater London Authority and LBTH. The aim of this arts and educational centre was to fuse the diverse objectives of, and approaches to, culture-led regeneration in the borough, bringing together high art and community art objectives in one building. Overall, the project is intended to be a positive symbol of local cultural diversity and was cited as exemplary in LBTH's 2003 cultural strategy (LBTH, 2003). The centre was originally due for completion in 2002, but due to severe delays and budget overruns, it is being opened in phases. Phase I was completed in April 2006 with a three-screen cinema, café and artist-in-residence workspace, plus a permanent home for ADFED. The BBC has also set up an office in the building. Phase II (provisionally set to commence in 2008<sup>62</sup>) will see the unveiling of recording studios, a 200-seater performance venue, an exhibition space, education resources and workspaces creative businesses.

The development of Rich Mix indicates the extent to which local politicians became steadily more interested in culture as a way to address a range of social, economic and political concerns. The centre was first conceived in the mid 1990s by a small network of local left-wing activists, artists and academics, who operated across the political and cultural spheres.<sup>63</sup> Their interest in culture derived in part from the radical left wing politics of the GLC's Labour leadership in the 1980s. They believed that culture could address political issues, such as racism (exacerbated by the presence of far-right groups in the area), and alienation from private-sector-led regeneration. Their first project was an exhibition in 1992 about local cultural history

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<sup>62</sup> Telephone conversation with Amanda White, Head of Learning at Rich Mix, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

<sup>63</sup> This brief outline has been developed through a combination of verbal reports from interview respondents, plus research of archived documents, including personal and internal correspondence at Rich Mix, newspaper articles and council reports.

at Bishopsgate Goods Yard, jointly curated by the University of East London and an arts organisation called Panchayat. Soon afterwards, they developed an idea for a cultural centre in east London that would address ethnic diversity, race relations and contemporary notions of identity.

There are different accounts of the initial intention behind the centre. According to one interview respondent, an early influential figure around the project - a local Bangladeshi Labour councillor called Kumar Murshid - intended it to become a centre to celebrate Bangladeshi culture and history, primarily for the local Bangladeshi community. However, other respondents have stated the project was intended to be wider in scope and be a 'museum of immigration' that would chart the cultural contribution and heritage of migrants to the area. This would also be an explicit political challenge to monolithic notions of Britishness. Brownhill & Darke (2000) refer to Rich Mix as an exemplar of urban regeneration and state that it will house a museum, exhibition spaces, a market centre for food and artefacts from around the world, audio-visual recording and performing facilities, and even a genealogical centre for visitors to trace their roots (20). Despite these multifarious objectives, what is clear is that overall the emphasis on cultural difference in Rich Mix's early years was seen as a way to include *excluded* groups in the power structure, driven more by a political principle of diversity, rather than prioritisation of any particular culture or cultural forms as would be the case for a more traditional cultural institution. One slightly vague conceptualisation of the centre was as a 'museum without artefacts', i.e. a museum which eschewed traditional notions of 'high culture' and instead foregrounded the visiting public's various cultural identities.<sup>64</sup>

This model of the cultural centre was very much in line with community arts thinking of the 1970s and 1980s - to value the active participation of people as a cultural product itself, rather than focus on those objects deemed to have value according to universalist, often Eurocentric standards. The link between intellectual trends and the practical sphere of local politics was expressed well in the rise of cultural politics activists in the borough in the 1980s, of whom most were associated with anti-racist

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Michael Keith.

and Labour party politics. Professor Michael Keith, a sociology lecturer at Goldsmiths University as well as former Labour leader of the council was one of the founders of Rich Mix. He made an explicit link between the project and theories of hybridisation and identity that were circulating in the 1980s:

[Rich Mix] was meant to be about the cultural politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century... All the things that are now ten years out of date but weren't then. Homi Bahaba, Rushdie were writing about, creativity, hybridity... All of that emerges from migration, and the East End should be proud of that.

The institution of Rich Mix was therefore intended to be a political strategy, and a cultural project in its own right. It was intended to be a site where different cultures might interact and evolve into a community, generating exciting new forms of culture. Denise Jones told me that the point of diversity at the heart of Rich Mix is 'about valuing your own culture and your roots'.

By 1994 Rich Mix acquired another dimension, as a number of the original founders became councillors and began to court the support of Tower Hamlets Council.<sup>65</sup> This added impetus to the project and marked a shift away from radical roots operating outside authority, towards institutionalisation as part of official local government policy. In 1996 Cityside Regeneration became responsible for the project and emphasised the regeneration potential of a new cultural centre that would attract tourists and enhance the local brand image. This presented a new facet to something that was originally designed for local residents. At this stage, the council and regeneration partners saw the potential of Rich Mix as a way of marketing the cultural capital of the area to *outsiders* - diversity as an economic asset as well as a political strategy. Tower Hamlets' involvement meant that new objectives were loaded onto Rich Mix: creating jobs, offering education and training for the creative industries, nurturing the area's brand, and delivering a multicultural, community agenda. All the while, the link between identity politics and regeneration was developing, so that one inextricably helped shape the other. During this period, the

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Keith, Kumar Marshid and Denise Jones in particular.

developers began to search for a site, eventually purchasing the former leather factory and showroom at 39-47 Bethnal Green Road. The project team held exhibitions in Bishopsgate Goodsyard and began working with other groups in the area to develop programmes (Rich Mix, 2001: 8).

In 2000, the new London Mayor, Ken Livingstone gave his official backing to Rich Mix. It became important to the GLA as one of a number of 'black projects' within its cultural portfolio.<sup>66</sup> Rich Mix received the largest single grant from the GLA for any cultural project, increasing the political status of the project. The GLA also loaned an officer, Anwar Akhtar, to manage the project. He constructed a stronger board with political figures including the then newly elected Labour MP, Oonagh King and the high-profile, Labour peer, Lord Waheed Ali. These two figures, seen as close to New Labour, secured the political clout of Rich Mix and increased its viability in the eyes of other agencies. The decision of the Millennium Commission to give a major capital grant placed Rich Mix firmly on the map. For another three years, the board and small staff team tried to secure more funds, recruit personnel and develop the building. In August 2004, the board appointed Keith Khan to be Chief Executive of Rich Mix. Khan is a British Indian artist (or 'spectacularist', as he calls himself) who had developed an international reputation for his work on large-scale public arts events and carnivals such as the Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002 and the Jubilee Celebrations. He was an ideal choice to marry together the diverse strands of Rich Mix. A 'black' artist himself, he was passionate about the need to re-define culture according to more anthropological notions.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, Khan was considered to have strong artistic credibility, an attribute board members considered important, particularly under pressure from the Arts Council.<sup>68</sup> He embodied the notion that culture could be both 'high' and 'low' at the same time.

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<sup>66</sup> Interviews with Anwar Akhtar, Michael Keith and aladin. Other projects the GLA supported included the Bernie Grant Centre, the Stephen Lawrence Centre and the Talawa Arts Theatre.

<sup>67</sup> In an interview for the *Independent* newspaper in July 2003 Khan said of his previous role: "At London Arts we were trying to imagine what London could be culturally, getting away from traditional ideas about museums and galleries. So we both, for example, saw carnival as an art form. The thing about culture is who defines it...Coming from a Caribbean background, we see culture as part of the fabric of the way you are brought up" (Stanford, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Khan's talent has been publicly disputed. One scathing article in *Private Eye* pointed out that Khan's previous success 'include, er, the Millennium Dome and Manchester Commonwealth Games ceremony (*Private Eye*, 2007).

Crucially, he was also black, a fact that some board members felt would be important in proving the inclusiveness of the centre to the local community.<sup>69</sup>

However, since that time, numerous problems have beset Rich Mix. According to various sources, there have been recurrent delays to completion.<sup>70</sup> The *East London Advertiser* ran a number of negative articles about the 'ailing' centre, examining its rising costs (in 2002 it was set at £17m, but had risen to £27m in 2006) and low visitor numbers (2006, 2007a,). There have also been practical problems. The Centre was refused a 'premises license' in April 2006 for live music because the walls were not sufficiently sound proofed. This means one of the key features of the centre – late night live music – may be difficult in the foreseeable future. The project has attracted significant criticism from local press, politicians and residents, adding to local disillusionment about the centre's lack of credibility. One councillor has branded the project 'scandalous' and a 'bottomless pit with no proper business plan', claims angrily rejected by the centre's bosses (East London Advertiser, 2007b). Keith Khan resigned in February 2007, after a number of months on sick leave for stress. He was apparently angered when colleagues accidentally advertised his job (East London Advertiser, 2007c).<sup>71</sup> A new Chief Executive, Pawlet Brookes, was appointed in summer 2007 and the centre is scheduled for full opening in 2008 at time of writing.

Today, Rich Mix states that is 'an entirely new kind of arts centre' (Rich Mix, undated). In keeping with the multi-faceted nature of LBTH's wider cultural strategy, the centre aims to deliver a range of social and economic objectives – promoting the local cultural and creative industries; improving the brand image of the area; providing training and skills to socially excluded local youth; engaging the local community in the regeneration process; cultivating a global artistic reputation and experimentation; catering for mainstream popular culture; showcasing innovative new media technology; and supporting voluntary and community organisations. The

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ashwani Sharma.

<sup>70</sup> The minutes of a Policy Implementation Committee meeting for LBTH on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2002 set a completion and launch date of 30<sup>th</sup> November 2002. Later launch dates were for summer 2004, which was then delayed to spring 2006, and finally being part opened in November 2006.

<sup>71</sup> He was subsequently hired to lead the Olympics 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

building is open to the public daily, employs approximately forty staff and has a regular programme of music and arts events, workshops, talks and exhibitions.

Having looked at some of the projects LBTH has supported and the history of its interest in cultural policy, I will now examine in more detail how culture is expected to achieve social and economic objectives in Tower Hamlets.

### **5.3 Creative economy**

As I have explained LBTH has undergone a change in how it approaches the issue of economic regeneration, moving towards a more 'inclusive' strategy. This does not mean it has fully abandoned its objectives of encouraging more private-sector investment, but it has acquired a new dimension: 'bottom-up change'. One aspect of this is an interest in promoting the local cultural economy.

LBTH has identified cultural industries as one of the borough's natural economic growth areas, stating that there is a relatively high proportion of such businesses and jobs in Tower Hamlets compared to the rest of the country (LBTH, 2005: 14-16). However, it is apparent that LBTH defines 'culture' very broadly, in terms of activities that bear a 'family resemblance'. This was clear when I spoke to a representative of CIDA who gave a very broad definition of a cultural industry, which included different kinds of people:

...when you're looking at the [creative] industries, you have to divide into sub-sectors. People who graduate in higher education and find themselves in employment and find themselves wanting to set up in employment. Then there are also, community or third sector organisations. (Mhora Samuel)

The inclusive definition of culture straddles different aspects of cultural life; commercial interests and the public good; local and global; professional and amateur. This 'third way' approach to culture conflates the social and economic effects of large-scale private investment with that of small-scale community work.

In fact, when looked at more narrowly, figures for the cultural industries in Tower Hamlets are not as impressive as the rhetoric suggests. The borough’s commercial cultural sector may be relatively large, but is a small percentage of the total in London (5.5 per cent). The majority of cultural industries in the capital are based in west London (see Table 7). Therefore, there appears to be a limit to the extent to which the ‘cultural industries’ in Tower Hamlets will expand sufficiently to compete with neighbouring boroughs, especially as clustered locations are considered to be crucial in attracting new businesses.<sup>72</sup>

Table 4: Creative and finance/business employment in Inner London<sup>73</sup>

Borough	Creative workforce jobs	Financial Intermediation employee jobs	Percent of all creative employment in London	Percent of all employee jobs into finance London	Ratio of financial jobs into creative jobs
City of London	9,339	125,122	2.1	40.8	14.3
Tower Hamlets	24,085	55,635	5.5	18.2	2.33
Islington	27,344	10,487	6.3	3.4	0.38
Camden	44,613	11,037	10.2	3.6	0.25
Westminster	75,716	31,278	17.3	10.2	0.41

(Source: GLA, 2007: 31)

The cultural sector is also touted positively by LBTH as being particularly accessible for young people and ethnic populations, (throughout the policy literature, diversity and youth are presumed to be natural aptitudes for working in the cultural industries, without any explanation). Yet, it is not clear why policy-makers assume

<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, at least two major private regeneration and development companies in the borough have made formal objections to the council about the rigid allocation of land for creative industries and asked for more flexibility in land use. This would suggest that the demand for creative space is being driven by the policies of the council, rather than a buoyant commercial demand. See representations to the Council from Bishopsgate Goodsyrd Regeneration Ltd (LBTH, undateda) and also Clearstorm Ltd (LBTH, undatedb).

<sup>73</sup> Freeman (2007) selects those inner London boroughs with the highest proportion of cultural industries.

that the creative industries will improve employment prospects for ethnic minority populations in the borough. Indeed, these industries seem to be less ethnically diverse than others. In 2003/2004, 15 per cent of all creative jobs in London were held by ethnic minorities, compared to 23 per cent of all workforce jobs (GLA, 2007: 44). Oakley (2006b) has pointed out that the creative industries, with their patterns of informal hiring and career progression, can indirectly exclude those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Therefore, it would appear that despite the rhetorical claims for the size and inclusiveness of the creative sector in Tower Hamlets, there is doubt about whether it can compete with the rest of London, and address the employment needs of local people adequately. Yet, despite these limitations, the Council's turn to culture should not be measured entirely in terms of how it performs as an industrial sector. Cultural activities are seen to help the economic agenda more indirectly by improving 'residents' competitiveness' through offering training, skills provision, and support for young people making the transition between education and employment. The wider London strategy, as set out by the LDA, supports the view that nurturing the economic potential of creativity requires different policy measures to traditional industrial-based policy: 'Today, it is not premises, infrastructure and transport that are the building blocks of economic development so much as education, training and business support'. (Freeman, 2007: 5) The Council, through CIDA and other local agencies, supports cultural activities that it believes will teach useful skills, confidence and motivation, particularly to the young, so that they can find employment in emerging industries.

The 'cultural turn' therefore, seems to be as much about shaping the individual for a new economic climate as about supporting fledgling industries. Culture is seen to be a way of developing the individual, and in turn, triggering a chain of social effects. A lengthy quotation from CIDA is required to illustrate this approach:

[Culture] can help in terms of community cohesion, in terms of racial understanding, improving the local environment. Just because you do something together around a common cultural form. Whether its around a

festival or event or creating a park – doing something together as a community throws questions up which require answers and if properly managed as an initiative collectively owned by that community, hopefully it throws up questions that can be seriously answered by that community. Whether that's issues around crime, or issues around disharmony, whether it's issues about health or whether its issues about keeping the streets clean...Now within that participatory set of engagements, you can also work with...individuals, to help 'up skill' people in terms of basic skills such as literacy or numeracy. With some skills, some of those tools can raise expectations around desire for further training and to look at employment options within those kinds of activities, i.e. cultural events, community based activity and for some...it potentially sets up aspirations for wider engagement. Now saying all that, you've also got another set with commercial industries, where it's either music, fashion, lifestyle, ring tones on phones...So by helping a local economy to grow around some of those high ground sectors, whether its music or fashion or design or whatever, you will then start to create a structure potentially where people if engaged at a local level have an opportunity to create some of those themselves...And for me there's a bigger issue in terms of people talk about local communities, in terms of regions, etc and if you take it from an economic perspective is that what you're trying to do is increase the economic prosperity of the place to drive the quality of the environment and the quality of living which people in society have. (Mhora Samuel)

In this quote, the respondent makes a number of claims about the power of cultural activity, which link together in a domino-effect, assuming that one change, if sustained, will lead to another. Culture can be a trigger to local community debate, it can help train the individual in practical skills, it can nurture a sense of citizenship, it can generate a mechanics of community engagement, it can improve economic opportunities and so on. Samuel's use of the word 'culture' shows how free-floating it is, describing what might be considered quite different activities and quite disparate effects. For instance, the economic impact of a cultural industry is not the same as the re-education of an individual, nor is it the same as the commercial impact of

tourists visiting a cultural venue. Yet, these separate effects are casually thrown together into the meta-category of 'culture' as if they appear to require no further explanation. This extract is one example of a recurrent technique within the discourse; what Fairclough (2003) calls the 'logic of appearances', as opposed to 'explanatory logic' (94). The text strings together a number of phrases, building up the appearance of a logical, therefore causal, and predictable relation between these effects, yet no explanation is given of how this might happen. In this case, the process assumes that individuals are the locus of change within the community and wider society, and that changing the individual or community mindset will trigger social effects in relation to the local economy.

Hence, a recurrent theme in the economic discourse is a belief that culture can change people's attitudes to their environment and thereby enhance their own economic potential. Gerlach explained how culture can be a way to deal with social tensions and pressures that emerge from material disadvantage, i.e. whilst culture cannot solve all social problems, it can certainly make people feel better about their lives and situations:

Maybe they don't have adequate housing or adequate home space but if you can make these secondary provisions and enhance the quality of life by another factor, by making some cultural provision that wouldn't normally be there, then...it will make the individual feel more satisfied with themselves as opposed to being oppressed.

I would suggest then that whilst there is a strong economic rationale governing Tower Hamlets' cultural policies it is very often framed in terms of improving the employability and potential of individual citizens within the wider job market. It is also about helping the individual psychologically to cope with the consequences of economic pressures and adapt to their circumstances. This is a clearly identifiable discourse, which is shared by state and non-state actors.

#### **5.4 Nurturing a sense of identity**

Whilst council officers may emphasise the economic benefits of cultural policy, there is clearly ambivalence amongst artists and arts professionals about using the arts in an overtly economically instrumentalist way. Most people preferred to talk about the social value of the arts in quite general, abstract terms, such as the promotion of 'creativity' or improving personal self-development. This tension presented itself in a kind of 'idealistic pragmatism', by which I mean they held a belief that their work had valuable social benefits, but that in order to proceed, they had to 'play the system' and talk up the economic benefits, despite their discomfort:

...there's a very strong cultural industries argument, there are jobs in the cultural industries, it moves the knowledge economy. On a more generous level, if you want people to work in society, you need people to have confidence and self-esteem. On one level, if you're fundamentally serious about it and not cynical, I'd say releasing people's core identity if that's what you can do (Andy Porter).

Ashwani Sharma, a board member of Rich Mix and social sciences lecturer at nearby University of East London, explained his discomfort with the market-led imperatives behind cultural regeneration strategies:

What's tricky for me is a market philosophy is being used... I'm not against it being socially relevant but it's all within a kind of market economy model.

We can therefore see here an emerging crack in the way that different actors consider the role of culture in delivering regeneration. The 'official' actors, such as council officers tended to talk about both the economic and social value of cultural policy, whilst the arts professionals were more wary about discussing the commercial orientation of cultural policy. Although they conceded that economic benefits were a consequence, they asserted the primacy of culture as personal self-development. The majority of respondents from arts organisations saw creative activities as having a powerful effect on individual self-confidence and sense of identity. For instance, Caroline Barlow, from a local youth arts group, told me that the arts 'can be a fantastic way to build confidence and achieve...and not just academically'. Similarly,

Andrew Missingham, a freelance arts producer, said 'It's very kind of wishy washy, but the arts improve the quality of people's lives.' This approach views culture as personally transformative but not solely in terms of enhancing employability.

This emphasis on personal development is also evident in the importance respondents attached to using cultural activities to train and socialise young people; in particular, *socially excluded* young people. Tower Hamlets has a high proportion of young people and there has been much concern among local residents and community groups about anti-social behaviour, drugs use and gangs. Cultural activity is seen as important, partly because it 'gives young people something to do' and diverts their energies to productive, safe activity. It also gives them routes into learning new skills and possibly entering the creative sector as a career. All the arts organisations interviewed cited young people as their main target group, and two respondents even explained their move to Tower Hamlets and emphasis on young people partly as a result of funding opportunities in this area. Likewise, the council officer responsible for youth services, Blossom Young, cited culture as a very important way to help young people 'build confidence'.

Local arts workers concurred that one of the problems facing young people is the lack of a coherent identity. This process of identity formation, it was suggested, should be encouraged and managed in a safe, controlled environment, away from the dangerous influence of 'the street'. The space provided by cultural activities therefore allows organisations and local government to intervene with young people and encourage 'safe' forms of identity formation.

There is also particular concern about the added dimension of racial or cultural exclusion that ethnic minority youths may feel. This has become heightened in relation to Asians in recent years because of national and international events: the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the riots in northern mill towns in the same year, and the London bombings of July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005. It is widely accepted that young members of ethnic minorities (especially, Muslim Asians) face cultural exclusion and social alienation to a higher degree, being torn between the pressures of their ethnic heritage and 'mainstream' culture. Paradoxically, most respondents

described a strong local culture in the borough, while expressing anxiety that many young people did not feel a sense of belonging to it. One perceived consequence is the rise of anti-social behaviour. Young people are 'alienated' from social ties, unable to find a community they can identify with, and have no sense of meaning in their life. This is exacerbated by ethnic differences, generational shifts and the new dynamic economy. Sonia Mehti of ADFED stated that young ethnic minority boys are particularly alienated by their inability to identify with much of the culture around them:

A lot of the arts stuff that's on offer, sure it's cultural but it's very traditional and it doesn't always match a young person's needs or interests. They're already trapped in this identity of feeling very young but born to much older parents with very traditional lifestyles and life being extremely different on the streets.

There is also a consensus that the education system and current cultural provision does not reach this group. Cultural activity is therefore seen as a way to address this, by giving young people confidence, improving personal development and promoting culture as an exercise of empowerment:

The whole argument about them is esteem building, confidence building, all the sub skills if you want to talk about it in those terms, soft skills, performance skills. They weren't being trained as class performers, it was about their voice being heard. It was a kind of liberatory performance... (Andy Porter).

This is a long way from the liberal-humanist discourse that had shaped much of national arts policy in the post-war period, as I discussed in Chapter One. I suggest that cultural policy today is less explicitly oriented towards promoting a particular kind of culture ('the best'), and more concerned with using culture to engage with people on their own terms and develop their individual subjectivity for social and economic ends. The choice of culture is determined largely by what engages the end user.

A key factor in this approach is that all the respondents stressed the importance of being able to relate to young people through their *own culture*, rather than imparting an outside culture to them.

I think, if you want to engage with people you have to engage with them from where they are at this particular point in time...You can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. My long-term thing is you've got to develop people's confidence. It's like sticking with what you know, because that confirms who you are. It's partly fear of the unknown, what you don't know.  
(Andy Porter)

Mehti explained that ADFED's staff had to be able to 'relate to their client group in terms of supporting them in making the kind of music they want to make'. The notion of preserving and celebrating 'one's own culture' was repeated by several interview respondents, and expressed in an unequivocal support for local 'diversity'. It was felt that diversity in the area was important for local people's sense of identity, and in turn, contributed to regeneration. This is especially marked for those residents who are economically or socially disadvantaged.

Andrew Missingham also described the importance of diversity in recognising other people's culture and changing attitudes towards people: 'I think hopefully one of the social impacts is going to be about respect for other people's culture and *therefore respect for other people*' (my italics). Cultural policy is seen to be important both in terms of making people feel included within a particular identity, but also generating connections between particular identities – it seeks to place people into different groups and then facilitate connections between those groups. During interviews, artists and people in arts organisations felt strongly that diversity should not just be a 'box ticking' exercise driven by the Council. Again, this tied into the 'idealistic pragmatism' of some actors, who believed that the council was only committed to diversity because it was commercially useful or because they had to 'tick boxes', whereas, they believed that they (as people in the arts sector) were committed to diversity for better reasons, and that 'diversity' was 'second nature' to them.

So far, then, it would appear that there are two different discourses governing cultural policy – economic development and personal self-development - and possibly an underlying tension over which should take precedence. However, I would contend that these two discourses are not mutually exclusive and frequently blend into each other, particularly through the invocation of the concept of 'diversity'. Diversity is seen to have economic value (it generates commercial success) as well as a normative value (it is an inclusive approach to culture), reconciling economic success to community identity and cohesion. From a cultural production point of view, to be a confident, creative person is to also be more economically productive and employable. From a cultural consumption point of view, a greater choice of cultures meets consumer demand and is more 'inclusive' of difference. Above all, the rhetoric of diversity – even when invoked in slightly different ways - is self-avowedly *against* 'traditional' models of cultural policy. Numerous respondents compared the emphasis on diversity today with the exclusory policies of 'the past'. Cultural diversity is seen to be something that emerges from the ground - the marketplace and community centre - not imported from an educated elite, and for this reason it is considered valuable.

Rich Mix expresses particularly well this emphasis on diversity and attempts to reconcile the apparent dichotomies of cultural policy discourse. It aims to: reach local and global audiences; engage amateur and professional artists; provide skills training for young people and a platform for established artists; celebrate ethnic diversity but also a sense of community in the borough; and finally, build the capacity of individuals in terms of both employability but also 'confidence-building'. Akhtar explained that it 'wasn't about a municipal building but a high-profile, experimental place', yet at the same time, he envisaged the centre as being a 'factory for young talent', for Bangladeshi youths. Likewise, Khan felt that whilst the project is not driven by targets, these social benefits should be an outcome as part of the project's justification.

By deliberately refusing to privilege any single aspect of this strategy, Rich Mix tries to perform a delicate balancing act: it embodies the economic model of culture in

terms of the 'big flagship project' that will improve the global 'brand' of the area, but at the same time, seeks to maintain its identity as a 'community-focused', 'black' project, working with 'groups on the ground'.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the discourse of Rich Mix tries to maintain both the particularistic view of culture as something embedded in the 'ordinariness' of society and is 'authentic', with a universalist conception of culture as something that transcends everyday experience, and can be judged by standards outside any particular community.

To reconcile these different aims, respondents discussed Rich Mix as a 'marketplace', whereby different audiences are expected to use the building for their particular interests and in passing, will casually sample other cultural products on offer in a shared space. Individuals can maintain their own identity and cultural choices, in a non-judgmental environment, whilst sampling other options in the market. The model is supposed to satisfy the diversity of funders' requirements (high art, popular culture, mainstream leisure facilities, education), as well as appear linked to many different consumers (international commercial art market to local residents; outside visitors and tourists).

Underlying this model is a rejection of the claims for artistic authority made by curators and artists themselves. This is illustrated in the concern the Rich Mix board has to make the visitors feel included as if they themselves are curators of the space, rather than telling them what is 'good' or 'bad' culture. The authority of the space is not cultural expertise and knowledge, but whether visitors like it or not. Khan told me:

I hope that it becomes the first building to house a different relationship between communities and culture, so that it ceases to be a passive, depository of objects and things and becomes a place that is about the interchange of ideas and people...There are different ways we can go about making projects *which don't have to be telling or teaching people*. [my emphasis]

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<sup>74</sup> Quote from Derek Richards, Head of Creative during event with Afro Reggae at Rich Mix 15<sup>th</sup> May 2007.

This is a different model to that of the civic museum in previous eras, where what was deemed 'culture' was determined by experts and disseminated to the public. The effect of the new approach is that it seeks to appeal to all cultural tastes but has no internally derived agenda. Khan is therefore trying to elucidate a model of the museum that places the visitor's subjectivity at the centre of the experience:

There's no common culture, no. But that's not what we're trying to do. We're trying to actually reflect the complexity of what's around...Because the logic of current cultural institutions is that there is a common culture, hence, you can build a theatre, which is a form of art, which you assume people will gravitate to.'

Rich Mix also places a firm emphasis on novelty and change, in reaction to 'established' or essentialist ideas of 'high culture'. There is concern that the culture inside Rich Mix must remain relevant, fluid, and of the moment. Hence, there is a particular focus on new digital technology and innovative media, which are seen to be more appropriate for this kind of cultural intermixing. In this sense, the Rich Mix concept harks back to its roots, which is about trying to curate change and flux, rather than static objects with unassailable cultural value.

Therefore, in this 'marketplace', people enter the building and shop for their particular taste. They can sample other cultures but the decision is ultimately theirs, and not imposed by some higher authority or 'expert'. We see here the convergence of the left and right relativist critiques of 'high', universalist cultural policy. The emphasis on outreach and difference means that cultural authority is put aside in favour of dialogue, flux and 'conversation', much like James Clifford's notion of the 'cross cultural contact zone':

MM: It's not like the culture is the most important thing. It seems to be more getting people into the building.'

Keith Khan: The conversation is probably the most important thing. The idea that it is at the helm of experimentation. ...[The motivation] is primarily artistic.

MM: You're not setting the standards of what the art is.

Keith Khan: Well we can't set them until we've had the conversations. Because, we can't do it until we set ourselves up in the right way, to be able to reflect what's around us.

The emphasis on diversity harks back to the need to be seen as 'legitimate' in the eyes of the local community and 'relevant' to their needs. It also links together the early, left-wing political rationale of the project and LBTH's community cohesion agenda – to use culture as a way to engage with groups in the locality outside the conventional modes of consultation and political structures. Today, culture is seen as a viable alternative to mainstream politics. Denise Jones, one of the founders of Rich Mix and (at time of writing) Labour leader of the Council, stated that culture was something 'everyone identifies with' and that it is not difficult to get people involved because it is fun and enjoyable, and not overtly political.

Some of the founders of Rich Mix believe that culture offers advantages over conventional forms of politics because it allows non-directional dialogue and 'ambivalence'. Culture is seen as a way in to raise issues inclusively, allowing for conflicting viewpoints to co-exist:

I think my position is that [Rich Mix] is obviously a creative educational space, and it's a political space because it's a public space. And within that, the creative work will become catalysts to have those sorts of dialogue which maybe in the political spaces are difficult to have, *because creative work at least has ambivalence at the heart of it*, or sort of differences and can be quite complicated.' (Ashwani Sharma) [my emphasis].

Rich Mix seeks a harmonious co-existence of different cultures, which encourages discussion and dialogue between each other, rather than contestation, exclusion and disagreement. It presents itself as a new approach to culture, but also a new approach to politics that is based on the acceptance and valorisation of difference, rather than judgements of one over another.<sup>75</sup>

I have thus far outlined discourse of diversity and its presumed benefits at the heart of cultural policy in Tower Hamlets. Although various actors articulate it in slightly different ways, it is seen overall as a way to generate economic, social and political benefits.

## **5.5 Ambiguities**

### *Confusion of values and aims*

As I have shown, cultural policy in Tower Hamlets cuts across a range of social, political and economic objectives in the borough. LBTH works with many different types of organisations to deliver its strategic aims, and diversity is a particularly important principle in determining the kind of activity it supports. However, there are certain problems arising from this framework.

One issue is the confusion about the role and effect of culture in the regeneration process. Most people working in the sector believe that culture plays a key role in regeneration, but they are also conscious that cultural organisations and activity can lead to the problem of gentrification and cultural exclusion for local residents. Many of the arts professionals I spoke to were keen to work with local people, but also expressed guilt about being 'outsiders' and had been treated with hostility by some local residents. This tension is evident in the way in which the Rich Mix centre has presented itself in its external literature. In one section of its 2001 Business Plan

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<sup>75</sup> In his new role as the head of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, Keith Khan spoke at an event at Tate Modern in June 2007, where he echoed this disillusionment with conventional politics. He asked an audience of young people 'so, you're looking for a way to engage that is outside the political arena?' (Williams, 2007).

(Rich Mix, 2001) it emphasises how the regeneration of the area has a 'local' cultural character:

Local cultural activists, artists and entrepreneurs have already contributed massively to the cultural regeneration of this part of London. They are part of a new racial dynamic that mixes Asian youth culture with British popular tradition'. (16)

And yet, only a few paragraphs earlier, it states that the cultural and economic regeneration was not locally driven and may have even posed an outside threat:

There is a discernible divide... Much of the current commercial and cultural regeneration of the area has not greatly benefited the groups that Rich Mix is now targeting' (15)

Although Rich Mix tries to ally itself with the existing processes of cultural regeneration, it also tries to seek legitimacy by claiming to be driven by the groups which have been threatened by this very process.

In this sense, there is an unacknowledged tension within LBTH's definition of culture; whether it is something belonging to a specific community or if it is as universal, high art which has a broader audience. Most organisations in the borough make an implicit choice in their focus between participatory, community arts or more elite, professionally-based arts, and they engage with their audiences on this basis. The Whitechapel Gallery, which was established in 1901 is explicitly concerned with bringing 'high art' to the people and although it has an extensive community outreach programme, its starting point is always that creativity is elevated above the 'ordinary'. It has a strong reputation for its modern art exhibitions and attracts critical praise worldwide. Meanwhile, the Brady Arts Centre is more concerned with participatory and amateur arts in the locality. Its strategic planning is more concerned with demographics and social inclusion objectives. Both these institutions have worked together on occasion in engaging with local people, but on the whole, they operate according to different kinds of values.

However, the tension within definitions of culture are much more apparent in Rich Mix because it has deliberately elided the divisions between different types of culture. It wants to be judged in terms of how authentic and relevant its cultural offer is to the local community (an anthropological notion of culture as relative and derived from a particular community's social habits, traditions and values), yet it also speaks in the language of universality (a kind of culture that is valued for its aesthetic character and 'excellence'). This, I argue, is an unsustainable dynamic and sets up an inevitable conflict over what kind of activity it should prioritise. Rich Mix cannot strive purposefully to be a high profile arts centre without concern to include local community groups. At the same time, it cannot be solely community-led because this would discredit its prestige as an arts institution that is judged upon aesthetic merit. In its different conceptions of culture, the judgement criteria come into conflict: the 'excellent' art of a flagship, high art institution may feel inaccessible to local people; likewise, low-key community workshops will not attract significant profile or praise from the cutting-edge arts community Rich Mix seeks to attract. It dismisses the idea of expertise, yet alludes to notions of judgement and quality. I suggest that this resulted in confusion quite early on in the project. As early as 18<sup>th</sup> December 2001, Anwar Akhtar, sent an internal email noting that that during a design meeting, there was 'some confusion around the table in terms of content and identity'.

As I explained earlier, Rich Mix has been beset with various managerial and financial difficulties since 2002. These could be interpreted as specific to the institution of Rich Mix - a combination of circumstance and poor management. Arguably some of these problems could have been averted with different decisions. Notably, similar managerial problems do not seem to have befallen other institutions in the borough, or at least not to the same extent. However, I would argue that the problems facing the centre are not simply managerial, but arise partly out of contradictory assumptions and confusion over the purpose of the centre and reflect on the idea of diversity which informs the wider cultural policy of the borough.

Despite positive rhetoric about the multiple facets of Rich Mix, those involved admitted their difficulty in holding together its contradictory agendas. Ashwani Sharma explained:

The project is very complicated, full of contradictions, partly because it is overburdened with a number of agencies having different expectations... there's a heavy layer of decision making...It's a project set up to fail, I have to say. Because it has so many fingers.

Some parties questioned whether the centre would have enough artistic appeal to attract an arts audience. Manick Govinda of Artsadmin, a local artists' support agency, suggested that the project was driven by politics rather than art and that 'it will be a battle to make it an arts space because politicians want to use it to address issues'. By contrast, Ashwani Sharma suggested that it was the Arts Council's criteria of funding which pulled Rich Mix away from its original community focus. Another respondent said that there was *no* core rationale or audience in mind:

Rich Mix became a phrase that travelled through different hands. It was confusing who was in charge. People had very different ideas about it. The Elephant in the room was that it had no shape at all – a lot of money has been thrown at it for consultancy work and to write reports but it is not clear who it is for. Which demographic is it aiming at? The ICA crowd, young Asian professionals, or young Asians who live on Brick Lane? I've widely polled people and there is no grasp of where Rich Mix will go- no-one speaks with belief in the cogency of its artistic policy (unnamed)

At different times since the project began in the 1990s this confusion has resurfaced as the board began to offer different rationales to different funding bodies. The business plan 2001 affirms the social agenda of the project, saying that the fundraising efforts will play to the 'increased interest in the role that arts and creative industries can play in social and environmental regeneration'. Yet in a note to Moss Cooper, the Director of Capital Services at Arts Council England, on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2002, Anwar Akhtar stated the project was 'wholly arts driven'. In order to raise

more money and gain artistic credibility, the board applied to the Arts Council and tried to convince them of the project's artistic rationale. Yet, the minutes from a board meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2002 show that the Arts Council had expressed doubts about the artistic focus of the project, seeing it as a politically-oriented project. Akhtar is stated as saying, 'race was always implicit but it needed to be moved into a terrain Arts Council England was comfortable with'. There was also discussion about the need to bring in a high profile cultural figure that could boost the credibility of the organisation, such as Stuart Hall (described by one participant as 'intellectually unassailable'). At the same meeting, they decided to bring in an external arts consultant - Graham Devlin Associates - to draw up an artistic policy. This revealed that the arts rationale was not clear, and was only developed after the project had gained momentum. Graham Devlin Associates reported back in 2003 with a short paper about the 'Artistic Purpose of Rich Mix': 'It is difficult at present to identify the sort of central artistic vision that will be necessary if the project is to persuade the Arts Council...that it should be a priority for funding'. It then goes on to suggest a focus on digital technology and a range of visual art and music.<sup>76</sup> Denise Jones told me that Rich Mix only later began to stress quality in its work and that it had 'become more of an arts centre than it was meant to be originally'.

There also appeared to be a pull from the Council's regeneration department to emphasise the ethnic component of the project, above the artistic side.<sup>77</sup> After the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 in New York, the fundraising applications from Rich Mix made increased reference to problems facing young Asians. In a letter to Gerry Robinson, the Chairman of the Arts Council dated 14<sup>th</sup> February 2002, Chair of the Board, Oona King MP wrote, 'Given the current political climate there has never been a greater need to bring London's diverse communities together in general and, in particular, provide Asian youth with a centre of excellence that they have ownership of'.

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<sup>76</sup> A letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 2002 to Anwar Akhtar from Golam Mostafa, the director of Creative Enterprise, a local BME organisation, shows wider awareness of this internal redirection of Rich Mix. He states he understands 'there has been a fundamental change to the concept and vision of Rich Mix...'

<sup>77</sup> Fax from David Richardson, regeneration manager of LBTH to Andrew Bainbridge of Cityside Regeneration, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2000: 'I understand that an attempt has been made to address BME aspiration but we are at risk of marginalizing the same communities if we overstate the cultural industries as their principal contribution to society at the expense of their education activities and wider economic impact'.

Many actors I spoke to suggested that the reason for confusion around these different objectives lay in the multiple funding arrangements and the need for Rich Mix to appeal to different sponsors. No doubt, this has had a debilitating effect on internal planning. There is, therefore, room for an institutional explanation for the failures of Rich Mix. However, I would suggest that to blame the diversity of funding possibly reads things the wrong way round. The pressures of different funders have arisen as a consequence of the diversity of objectives that Rich Mix originally set out to achieve. The board members sought support from organisations as widely set apart as regeneration agencies and the Arts Council, but only because it believed it could reconcile the many different uses of art and ideas about cultural value. Although this may have been pragmatic to a degree, I have shown that this was also integral to the philosophy of the project itself. Furthermore, it is not the case that the project had lacked coherent aims from the start, and had therefore simply become distracted by different agendas; rather, Rich Mix's *raison d'être* was always to marry together diverse aims and overcome perceived dichotomies. Its founders may not have started from a singular artistic purpose, but they certainly had a political agenda regarding the role of culture. The problems over direction do not arise solely from management problems or external circumstances, but rather, *inherent contradictions relating to the philosophical assumptions of the project itself*.

#### *Debate about the need for 'black' projects*

A recurrent debate about the principle of diversity amongst artists and arts professionals in LBTH is whether there is a need for specifically 'black' projects. This, I assert, reflects the tension between the two models of culture within the cultural policy discourse – the 'identity' model and the 'universal' model. On the one hand, the artists I spoke to believed in the need for ethnic involvement and representation, yet on the other hand they disliked being labelled as 'ethnic'. Manick Govinda, who runs an artist support organisation in the area, described the problems of 'pigeon-holing', as ethnic minority artists become defined according to how representative they are of an ethnic or community identity, rather than the quality of their work. There was also a feeling amongst many younger black artists I spoke to about the

fact that 'black' projects carried a stigma, and were seen to be driven more by political imperatives and 'box-ticking' rather than genuine merit and cultural excellence. This was seen to damage the reputation of council-led projects and alienate younger artists from ethnic backgrounds.

Again, this tension is particularly acute in the case of Rich Mix, which has tried to straddle the different models I have outlined. The original idea for the centre was that it should be 'black' and represent ethnic cultures, particularly that of the local Bangladeshi population. However, this was quickly undermined by the involvement of younger actors who believed the centre should exist as a high-profile, credible arts organisation in its own right. According to one respondent, the chair of the board, Lord Waheed Ali - who himself had a background in broadcast media - insisted that Rich Mix should be about high quality art and he was concerned about the 'community' aspect of the project, which other, founding members continued to maintain was central.<sup>78</sup> Aladin, an arts consultant and member of the GLA cultural group (which was a co-funder of Rich Mix), was keen on a London-wide strategy to diversify cultural provision, but he said he was uncomfortable about the politicised trajectory of addressing 'difference' with projects such as Rich Mix. He felt that the tone was set less by artistic imperatives and risked being 'worthy'. Both he and Anwar Akhtar had backgrounds in 'cutting-edge' urban visual and music practice and disliked the older, multicultural paradigm, which ascribed labels to ethnic artists. In this sense, the evolution of Rich Mix was partly shaped by their sensitivity to the perceived inadequacies of past projects. Both wanted Rich Mix to be about an *idea* of diversity, rather than devoted to a 'worthy' promotion of Bangladeshi culture which might become creatively restrictive:

...urban London, indigenous culture, that wouldn't be tainted by race as a brownie culture...very fun, vibrant, cutting edge, very provocative...it should have 'brown currents' but not be dominant, and not just left and right but should show whole diversity of brown culture, which can be conservative in aesthetics, fashion and not just politically... (aladin).

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Denise Jones.

However, this concern with artistic credibility seems to conflict with the original purpose of the centre which was to question the notion of 'artistic excellence' in itself.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, other actors emphasised that Rich Mix should not be defined simply as a prestigious arts space, but show things that 'ordinary' people would appreciate: 'It wouldn't just be like the Tate Gallery, which tends to just be a place to show pictures. But it means the cultural...things that people are interested in, you know music...' (Denise Jones). Some actors I spoke to even expressed disdain for those cultural institutions that were 'just' exhibition spaces. It was felt that the claim to cultural authority was too exclusive, and that Rich Mix's legitimacy derived from its unique placement of diversity at the heart of the project:

What makes us different from the Barbican, or the ICA. And then what makes us different from a community centre? We would say that cultural difference is at the heart of it...Where the Barbican will do the one exhibition on Islam every five years and tick its boxes or do its outreach project, we're not outreach in that sense, because in a way, everything we do is that... (Ashwani Sharma)

What Sharma is describing here is an aspiration for Rich Mix to move away from conventional criteria for artistic quality and inclusion, and a new basis on which to show culture. This reduces 'artistic quality' to only one factor amongst many in the rationale for Rich Mix.

This tension between the community brand and the artistic focus was manifest at the launch event of the Rich Mix project in 2000, where some artists complained that the centre should be more engaged with black artists who represented communities, whilst others insisted that it was too 'black' and should be focused about the arts in a

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<sup>79</sup> The Rich Mix business plan, dated October 25<sup>th</sup> 2001 states, 'At the heart of Rich Mix is the belief that any division of culture into low and high art is flawed. Rich Mix will offer opportunities to share in and consume excellence in the arts'. This plan also cites a statement from Community Music, one of the projects initially involved with Rich Mix (though no longer): 'We believe the expert live DJ, rapper, junglist, jazzier, or electro-acoustician has as much musical validity as the highly trained instrumentalist' (Rich Mix, 2001: cited, 23).

general, less essentialist way.<sup>80</sup> There was clearly a divide amongst black artists about whether they needed a 'black' project.

The two discourses of 'diversity' and 'excellence' also shaped the expectations of staff. Notes from a meeting with the Arts Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2000, stated that their Chief Executive, Peter Hewitt, had earmarked £20m for cultural diversity capital projects. However, for Rich Mix to be eligible, a key issue was that it 'needed to be headed up by a black Chair and have a management committee that reflects the project's ethos and aspirations'. Figures involved with Rich Mix and the Arts Council may have wanted to hire someone who would be more 'representative' of black arts, but it seems that the person they eventually chose may have been personally ambivalent about being labelled in this way. Khan had, according to one source, publicly stated prior to joining Rich Mix that he didn't like 'black projects', and he has also hinted at his ambivalence since.<sup>81</sup> As Khan said in his interview with me:

It's a fascinating project because it's obviously come about because of the cultural shifts in the capital. I would never have taken it if it were a local community project at all. So my interest is that actually it has its roots in local community and in Tower Hamlets but has an international and national reach.

Whilst at Rich Mix, another (unnamed) respondent told me that, Khan had frequently complained to him that all the Council wanted was a 'black project', ignoring the need for artistic credibility. Even though Khan had himself been vocal in his criticisms of the 'arts establishments' and the need to strengthen diversity, it is perfectly possible that he was uncomfortable with the 'blackness' of the project. Indeed,

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Aladin.

<sup>81</sup> Unnamed source. According to this interview respondent, Khan was one of the people at the Rich Mix launch in 2000 who had complained about the ethnic focus of the project. He also states that Khan had been critical of a Whitechapel Gallery exhibition, he curated, entitled '000', which was devoted to young Asian artists. Khan allegedly said this was pigeon-holing artists according to their ethnicity. Obviously, it is difficult without a direct quote from Khan to substantiate Aladin's claim, but a quote from Khan at a DCMS sponsored 'Cultural Leadership' seminar hints at his ambivalence. When another panellist talked about the need to 'build capacity in the East Asian arts sector – as a simple factor of the lower demographics, Khan mused 'Am I playing in the system, on the system, or is the system playing me?' (Cultural Leadership Programme, 2007).

ethnic artists have expressed considerable discomfort with 'diversity projects' when they feel it will stigmatise their work (Dyer, 2007; Hylton, 2007). In the case of Rich Mix, it has been white artists and arts professionals who have driven the community focus of Rich Mix and the wider cultural diversity policy in London; particularly Nicholas Kent and Graham Hitchens at the GLA and Michael Keith, Denise Jones at Tower Hamlets Council. Notably, prominent Asian figures such as Waheed Ali, Anwar Akhtar and Keith Khan himself, have tended to stress the artistic credibility of the project foremost. It is somewhat ironic that Rich Mix was originally conceived as a direct response to the racial exclusiveness of the existing arts establishment, yet it is ethnic artists today who have tried to restore its artistic credibility by seeking endorsement from established bodies such as the Arts Council.

### *Ambiguity of 'community'*

Although I have shown evidence of widespread support for the idea of cultural diversity as a principle – from policy-makers, local arts professionals and the wider public - there is also ambivalence about the idea of engaging with 'communities'. There is awareness of the failings of such models of representation; what might be classed as the 'corporatist model' of multiculturalism, which treats ethnic groups as monolithic blocks that share similar values, aspirations and problems, and are engaged with through 'community leaders'.<sup>82</sup>

One concern is that such an approach leads to an unhealthy sense of division and competition between groups. For instance, although Missingham stated initially in his interview that cultural diversity was the most important characteristic of the area, he also conceded later that there were veiled divisions: 'Cultures tend to live in very small blocks close to one another and they make a bigger picture when you stand back but it's actually not blending that much.' Sonia Mehti explained that there is a territorial attitude over working with ethnic minority people and that her

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<sup>82</sup> The Comedia intercultural report into Tower Hamlets said 'Corporate approach to community engagement is currently managed along a multicultural approach of demarcating community by ethnicity and celebrating difference on these terms.' (Comedia, undated: 26).

organisation, ADFED, had been accused of not being sufficiently 'authentic' to work with young Bengalis:

People who say... who are they, they're not even Bengali, what gives them the right to work with Bengali youth...? I get the feelings that the organisations almost kind of perpetuate that because they have a very community focus. And I don't mean that in the way that we talk about it in a funding, working way. It's like, it's a bit hard to explain, I know you'll know what I mean, it's parochial. It's like they're from my village, and therefore I'm only going to work with them.

One (unnamed) respondent from a smaller local children arts organisation complained that the council was driven by 'political correctness' and should not be providing different services for ethnic groups because they all had similar needs. She raised the problem of segregation and division between ethnic groups and felt that council policies might encourage that. In speaking to local actors, it became clear that these problems are a perennial feature of Tower Hamlets politics.

So what you would start to see is...a little bit of you know, 'My Somalian community doesn't get as much as your Bengali community. (Mhora Samuel)

Ashwani Sharma bemoaned the fact that the political term black was no longer in use because ethnic minorities saw themselves as having separate political interests, rather than being united on the basis of shared experience of racism. When I put this idea of division to one (unnamed) respondent at the council, he tended to dismiss it as the quotidian strife of local politics, rather than a fundamental problem: 'Of course there are challenges working with community groups – everyone's got their own agenda!' However, a Comedia report commissioned by the Council stated clearly that ethnic division was a problem. The authors noted that the Council easily exceeds the legal requirements set by the National Planning Guidelines for local consultation, but they advocated further measures to consult with under-targeted groups and to encourage people to communicate 'across ethnic and cultural boundaries' (Comedia, undated: 30).

One of the concerns arising from the corporate multiculturalist model is that it might give advantage to some groups over others. Some respondents stated that Bangladeshi community organisations were very well supported at grassroots level, and it was the Somalian community who did not 'know how to play the game' (unnamed). On the other hand, others said that Bangladeshis were still not trusted with political or service delivery responsibility. Despite the rhetoric of community engagement and diversity, it was clear that many respondents working in the borough were sceptical about its benefits for ethnic groups.

Another problem with the corporatist multicultural model is that it presumes a degree of homogeneity within groups and the accountability of local community leaders. However, there are various religious and geographical delineations within a single community which can come into conflict, as some people argue, for instance, in the Bangladeshi community (Baumann, 1996; Fremeaux, 2002). Eade & Mele (1998) noted in their study of the area that local opposition to private-sector led regeneration had been very strong, but was not itself coherent or unified, because it contained conflicting values and visions of the area. Hence, alliances could be superficial and prone to conflict. One artist said that when diversity was put into practice, it tended to assume homogeneity of ethnic minorities. Diversity policies "didn't put across that someone can be black and white, have interests and leanings...it didn't understand that things can become. I am an example of that and I don't feel insecure about not fitting into one identity' (unnamed). Blackness is supposed to contribute something, but when that 'something' is defined, it becomes restrictive.

There is also concern about how difference can lead to separateness. In the market research commissioned by Rich Mix in 2000, the consultants noted that local respondents felt uncomfortable with this: 'In order to celebrate difference and different contributions, you have to re-stimulate people's sense of separateness. There is an ambivalence over this.' The authors go on to say, 'Although there is a general support for an institution that will recognise the migrant's contribution to

society, there does not seem to be a strong desire for a museum to celebrate them as immigrants or 'different'.

In the case of Rich Mix, there was acute concern not to fall into the same old problems that have beset Tower Hamlets ethnic politics. The board members have claimed they do not want to develop Rich Mix along a 'corporate multiculturalist model', which pits groups against each other and reifies differences. They want diversity as a principle in its broadest sense. Yet, at the same time, there is an ever-present awareness of the need to represent and include different community representatives in the Rich Mix project. This contradiction was illustrated in my interview with Ashwani Sharma. In the earlier part of our conversation he claimed that the council always put pressure on 'local representation' from black groups, but that Rich Mix sought to transcend such labels:

[Rich Mix] is not black...it's equally about Jewish or white working class people...The difficulty is that the council thinks in representational terms. So there's a black constituency, a Somalian constituency, an Asian constituency. And in a way, it wants all that represented. Whereas we're trying to articulate, it's a more conceptual thing, that culture is more hybrid now.

Yet, later in the interview, he asserted the need for Rich Mix to have representation from the local community on its board and black individuals occupying senior management positions. When I probed Sharma about this apparent contradiction, he accepted that a focus on identities was problematic, and that a focus on 'issues' might be more inclusive. However, it still remained unclear why Rich Mix would need 'black representatives', or indeed, why ethnicity should be the primary concern and not, say, class or gender. Sharma then suggested another way through which Rich Mix could bring together notions of community without being essentialist: the idea of 'diaspora' (interestingly, this was also a key theme of the Arts Council's 'Connecting Flights' conference about diversity policy in the arts in 2002). 'So diaspora would be a way to say there are these communities there but they're not fixed' (Sharma). Yet, I would argue that the notion of diaspora remains problematic because although it allows the possibility of cultural change, it continues to assert that ethnicity is the

primary identification or connection between people. As Eagleton (2000) points out, at a basic level, arguments for hybridity and diversity sound progressive but they presuppose cultural purity and the 'contamination' of cultures; otherwise all cultures would be 'hybrid' by definition. Keith Khan expressed the same assumption that communities were coherent and needed representation, even though he had already suggested that Rich Mix should not be just a community project. He highlighted the need to engage with the 'community' through key contacts.

MM: ...you plan to engage with communities. How do you plan to do this?

KK: Well, by asking them what they would like to see or like to do...we set up peer groups, we set up opportunities for people to come in and be spoken to and listened to. So we do it by outreach, we send in people to find key movers and shakers within the community.

Here Khan is accepting that communities have 'movers and shakers' who can represent the diversity of local people. Again, this ends up accepting the reified notion of community, which Rich Mix was supposedly set up to reject.

The tensions I have raised thus far demonstrate a recurrent problem for Rich Mix; it wants to break out of cultural essentialism and stress the fluidity and change of identity, but by claiming its legitimacy from a particular community, it reproduces this essentialism anew. It wants to celebrate 'difference' in particularity, but ends up reifying it.

Another problem with the idea of diversity is that in attempting to include people through their cultural difference, those who do not share this cultural identity are inevitably excluded. If connections are presumed to form on the basis of cultural particularism and difference, then the converse must also be true; those who do not share this identity are left out. When I spoke to respondents there was overwhelming concern that the one group not being considered in local cultural policy was the white working class. Although no-one could envisage how they could be integrated, it was recognised that this group was ignored by the multicultural ethos of the local state:

...what's kind of missing from it is whiteness, actually and white culture – our project is trying to deal with how you think about white working class communities and how they deal with minorities, in fact they're the minority themselves. (Ashwani Sharma)

...almost the most needy young people around here are the white working class young boys. Their identity, is like, they have very little to identify with that isn't black, American, street culture, what I perceive it as somehow, those in the East End (unnamed)

White here in the east end is a fragile notion that just falls apart when you look at it. (Michael Keith)

This discomfort was apparent in the market research conducted by Rich Mix in 2000, which noted that local white residents were concerned that the centre would just be for 'immigrants' and concerns that 'white people [are] scared off'. This concern about white exclusion and 'political correctness' is a recurrent theme for the local media. For example, there was some controversy about Tower Hamlets Council's decision to make the theme of the annual Guy Fawkes' Night on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2006 a Bengali folk tale. The story attracted numerous media reports about 'political correctness', even though the Council's arts service had held themed events in previous years. One (unnamed) respondent from the Council said that the media reaction fed off wider misperception about the 'loony left' policies of the Council.<sup>83</sup> Although respondents were conscious of the breakdown of 'white' culture or a 'white identity', many did not feel comfortable about promoting it because they associated it with racism, nationalism and exclusion. Although the multicultural logic of diversity stresses the particularistic connections between ethnic groups, there is reluctance to apply this to the white population.

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<sup>83</sup> Media articles about the story include: 'Tower Hamlets replaces Guy Fawkes with Bengali Festival, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2006, (*This is London*, 2006) and 'Fury over PC' Guy Fawkes Ban', 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2006 (*Sun*, 2006), and 'Bengali Bonfire Night' defended', 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2006, (*BBCOnline*, 2006).

Also not discussed in the council's cultural strategy is the increasingly visible local Muslim identity, particularly amongst the younger Asian population. This has been linked to more strident forms of political Islam and the presence of organisations and radical connections, which some commentators have linked to mosques in the area (Hussain, 2006; Eade & Garbin, 2002). The area has already seen some hostility to outside cultural groups from local religious figures. In the summer of 2006, Ruby Films tried to shoot a film adaptation of Monica Ali's novel, *Brick Lane*. However, local Bangladeshi Muslims staged a (relatively small) protest and succeeded in getting the filming moved. Although 'Muslim identity' is diverse and contains a range of opinion - from the politically and culturally conservative, to the moderate, to the radical - there is a restriction placed on the inclusion of these identities in LBTH's 'cultural' policy. Tower Hamlets states in its online community funding guide that 'We will not fund activities which promote the adoption of a particular faith or religion'. Although the council does fund religious groups' activities it is with the caveat that they 'must contribute to promoting mutual understanding and respect between communities' (LBTH, undatedc). This therefore leaves Muslim identity in a strange position, being a part of the local 'community' but effectively being treated differently to others in the 'community project' of Rich Mix. Some young Muslims I spoke to in the area complained that the Rich Mix centre was imposed from outside and did not factor in the needs of the religious community. Knowing that Rich Mix was framed in terms of being a 'community centre', they suggested that it was not 'their' community. By contrast, they suggested that their mosque, which had been funded by donations from the local Bangladeshi population, was more in tune with local need than a council project.

What these two examples - white working class culture and a growing Muslim identity - show is that 'the community' which LBTH cultural policy refers to is not homogenous, and that this diversity can involve feelings of exclusion, conflict and resentment. In the end, because cultural activities and projects are touted as 'relevant' to the area and related to the 'local culture', they risk generating resentment about those groups which are excluded. The more 'ordinary' culture is presented to be and the more it is associated with a specific group's experiences, the more differentiated and exclusive it can appear to others.

Cultural communities are inherently fragmentary and fluid, and cannot be easily contained in categories: Tower Hamlets' 'community' breaks down into Asian, white, Somalian, etc. Likewise, Asian culture breaks down into Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi culture, whilst Muslim culture breaks down into Sunni or Shia, or Muslim men and Muslim women. These apparently stable cultural identities are themselves inherently particular, fragmented and in constant flux. They cannot account for a whole individual, only general aspects of a group. Hence, it is not surprising that although Rich Mix tries to capture people's 'culture' through these categories, it ends up presenting a cultural form which is not an entirely precise representation. Hence, it can reproduce the cultural alienation it was intended to challenge. Ethnic artists feel 'pigeon-holed' when they feel they are expected to represent something about a community, because the label they are given does not adequately capture who they are.

#### *Lack of community buy-in*

As I have explained so far, one of the objectives for cultural policy in LBTH is to develop cultural activities that engage with the local community. In a number of organisations the council supports, this process of engagement is well-established and has developed over the years through local schools, community and voluntary groups, as well as personal relationships. The Brady Arts Centre has worked since its opening in 1999 to bring in a wide range of people into the building and provide activities that are popular. Its priorities are shaped partly by council objectives, but also the expressed wishes of users. Other voluntary organisations I spoke to have used methods of consultation and worked with local schools to engage with audiences. The Whitechapel Gallery, whose history is built upon the notion of bringing fine art to people, is committed to working with local people through schools and community arts organisations. For all of these organisations, engagement is clearly a process which is built up over time, relationships and institutional practices. It can also be hard to monitor precise numbers or impacts on the community because a large part of Tower Hamlets' cultural provision is outdoor events and festivals, which makes evaluation of user experiences more difficult than, say, in a

museum or gallery. On the whole, most respondents believed they were trying hard to engage with their local public.

However, there is also evidence of some disillusionment from locals about the promotion of more commercial or elitist forms of culture by the Council. Some respondents complained that the cultural branding of Tower Hamlets excluded ordinary people in the area, and was a waste of public money:

How on earth is [redeveloping] Brick Lane a priority above the needs of people in the area? The estates where people live are disgusting – they do Brick Lane up for the tourists...a bit like the Millennium Dome' (unnamed).

One interview respondent who ran her own small arts workshop group for children complained that the council gave cheap studio space to artists but ignored housing problems on local estates. She also dismissed many of the artists in the area as being 'complete fakes', producing low quality work, and insisted that her views were 'common'. Some people endorsed the need for the council to encourage cultural activity, but felt that there was already a significant level of cultural life in the area that may be challenged by 'official' cultural strategies, which might be too bureaucratic and heavy-handed in their approach.

As I explained earlier, Rich Mix was intended by the Council to be a flagship project that would overcome this scepticism about cultural regeneration and engage local residents in the arts in a new way. Instead of developing cultural content by professional outsiders, it stated that it would put the 'local community' at the heart of its work. However, despite its claim to be 'community-driven', there is a profound awareness from people involved that they are distant from the 'local community' and that its attitudes to them ranged from indifference to outright hostility. Hence, there is a strongly felt need to overcome potential cynicism about 'ownership'. This concern is all the more problematic because the Rich Mix founders had originally sought to overcome the alienation created by previous regeneration policies. Today, the founders face the same accusations of distance which they had levelled at the political authorities in the past.

I have to say there's probably a far higher degree of cynicism on the part of the locality in relation to Rich Mix which is probably understood as a kind of top down, agenda-driven...you know...coming out of central London as well as Tower Hamlets... (Ashwani Sharma)

Rich Mix has tried to engage with the community through numerous research and consultation exercises. However, the 'community' structures in the area are highly professionalised and institutionalised, meaning that groups are not necessarily representative, and can be guided by their own interests. For example, the large community consultation symposium, which Rich Mix held in summer 1997, was attended by 150 individuals but all of these represented local community organisations or quasi-non governmental agencies, rather than 'ordinary' members of the public.<sup>84</sup> The responses of actors involved in Rich Mix as well as the voices of residents indicate that the project has not emerged organically out of a pre-existing cultural network, but as a political intervention devised primarily by local politicians in relative isolation. As one arts professional living in the area said to me, Rich Mix reminded her of a joke: 'What do you call a horse that has been designed by a committee? Answer: a camel'.

Whilst this thesis was not intended to study local attitudes about Tower Hamlets cultural projects, I did discover strong indications that there was local cynicism, resentment and indifference towards cultural projects, particularly Rich Mix. In 2000, Rich Mix commissioned the Susie Fisher Group to conduct research about local attitudes to the project and their ideas for how cultural projects should develop (Rich Mix, 2000).<sup>85</sup> 85 per cent of respondents were positive about the idea of a 'National Arts Centre' dedicated to cultural diversity and immigration. However, there was concern that the project would be underfunded, of poor quality, 'dominated by moralising middle class white people' and 'promoted by cynical commercial interests'. The focus groups revealed that 'helping artists is a heart-warming idea for many

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<sup>84</sup> Details of attendees given in the October 25<sup>th</sup> 2001 Business Plan (Rich Mix, 2001).

<sup>85</sup> The research involved interviews with 103 respondents and 12 focus groups, including local school children.

people but not without some cynicism'. In June 2005, I did a fairly casual straw poll of twenty people whilst standing on the corner of Brick and Bethnal Green (outside the site of the building).<sup>86</sup> Although the building itself was not open to the public, by that time the corporate literature of Rich Mix was stressing the fact that it was 'community-driven'. Only one of the people I stopped had heard about Rich Mix and knew its purpose, and this was because she worked for a regeneration agency in East London. Also, in my regular conversations with people in the borough there were mixed views. Initially, many people seemed positive about the centre, saying that it was always good to have money spent in the area on local cultural projects and the promotion of cultural diversity. However, when probed, people disclosed negative memories of previous cultural projects. There was also a sense that the council is not in touch with the needs of residents; something that was confirmed in Rich Mix's market research.<sup>87</sup> Many of the residents I spoke to were very sceptical about the idea of 'community groups' and 'community leaders', feeling that they too were out of touch with their local constituents. Over the time I conducted my field research, from spring 2005 to summer 2007, I found that more and more people had heard of the centre, but that there were also increasingly negative comments about its cost, delays and poor quality of provision.

It is also clear from the market research conducted in 2000 that whilst local residents welcomed a cultural centre, they were not favourable to its artistic focus. In focus groups respondents showed overwhelming support of facilities for live music performances (70 per cent) but far less for educational activities (47 per cent). The researchers said 'Evidence shows that there is little support for a recording studio and limited interest in community events' (Rich Mix, 2000: unpaginated). The researchers state that 'the artistic agenda is currently alienating. It needs to be more mainstream and inclusive, at least to begin with'. Their findings indicated that the majority of people would prefer more leisure type activities, and light hobby workshops on aromatherapy or yoga, comedy shows and entertaining music rather than critical artistic work, which could be 'arty farty', as one respondent put it.

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<sup>86</sup> I actually stopped many more people, but most were visitors to the area. I wanted to ask only local residents, i.e. those who would be designated in official terms as part of the 'community'.

<sup>87</sup> 'Just another half-hearted, under funded community regeneration project', as one respondent said in the focus groups commissioned by Rich Mix (2000).

Another said, 'It's heading towards opera, not ordinary people. You've got to be careful not to be too high up'. Some of the people I spoke with were positive about new projects, but they did not believe they would use it themselves; rather, they thought it might be good for *other* disadvantaged groups. This suggests an awareness of the social value of cultural projects, but not one that they themselves feel any stake in. The emphasis of residents was on leisure rather than an intense focus on artistic or cultural identity issues; this seems to contradict not only the artistic aims of the Rich Mix project, but also its objective to provide workshops and training for locals.

It is important to note that these responses do not necessarily show an outright rejection of cultural activities, only that cultural services are understood and valued for different reasons by residents, and that the slipperiness of the word 'culture' elides disagreements over the potential value of Rich Mix. Also, local residents may not necessarily regard a swimming pool as a better or worse thing than an art gallery, but they might prefer to have the former nearby if they had to choose. Early on, Rich Mix promoted its three-screen cinema because this fills an obvious gap in provision, and manages to bridge the divide between 'leisure' and 'art'. However, even this part of the centre has struggled to attract residents. The Rich Mix market research team concluded: 'the philosophical *raison d'être* proves hard to grasp'.

These responses to Rich Mix reveal a number of points: people do not necessarily see the centre as something relevant to their needs; they feel it has been placed there for the wrong reasons; they see it as a reflection of the wider ignorance of the council in relation to real problems in the borough; the centre is 'foisted' upon people by artists. In short, the complaints made about Rich Mix have been the very same ones made by its own board members about previous regeneration policies.

It seems, therefore, that despite its efforts, Rich Mix has failed to get any community 'buy-in'. Yet, unlike other artistic centres, Rich Mix's authority does not rest on a 'conventional' artistic rationale; rather, it relies upon having a relationship to a community. Without this relationship, its whole purpose is cast into doubt. Interestingly, the Whitechapel Gallery, which is far less connected to the LBTH policy

agenda, has a strong artistic rationale but its staff appeared to have greater confidence in engaging with local people. This would suggest that 'high art' is not necessarily a barrier to engagement, as the founders of Rich Mix project may have initially supposed. Indeed, the respondents from the Whitechapel said that they felt that their engagement with local people was much more fruitful if it began from the starting point of the value of the art and the artist, rather than the need to target a specific (invariably 'socially excluded') demographic group, or 'community'.

The lack of endorsement for Rich Mix from the local community is palpably felt amongst those working there. One administrator (herself a young artist who lives in the area) told me that many of her colleagues felt disillusioned and she did not think there was much community support for it. Rich Mix asserted its legitimacy on the basis of support from the 'community' but the disillusionment of the 'community' undermined this legitimacy after all. The centre does not have the claim to artistic authority or expertise that a more traditional cultural institution would have, but nor can it rest upon its 'authenticity'. In terms of project staffing, I would suggest that this has led to a noticeable degree of demoralisation, and possibly defensiveness about the centre, as well as uncertainty.<sup>88</sup> This of course, may change as the centre evolves into possibly new directions under the Chief Executive appointed in autumn 2007.

### *Challenge to artistic authority*

As I explained, one aspect of 'diversity' is its consumerist approach to artistic content, which means that something is judged to be worth supporting on the basis of whether it can attract audiences. Furthermore, cultural projects are obliged to attract the right kind of audiences to meet the criteria of engaging with diverse 'communities'.

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<sup>88</sup> This was shown to me in the final months of my field research in 2007 when it proved quite difficult to retrieve information about the project. There were no publicly available annual reports to examine, and there was confusion when I rang personally to enquire about where information might be kept. This was set to change with the arrival of a new Chief Executive in September 2007, who, at the time of writing, was in the process of producing a detailed brochure about the centre.

For instance, the popular outdoor festivals organised by the Council host commercial music bands and are geared towards attracting large audiences. Rich Mix is self-avowedly consumerist. Although it aspires to be the 'ICA of the East' and show high art, its cinema – the main part of the building open to the public at the point of writing - shows the standard, populist fare of Hollywood blockbusters (the first film it showed after opening was the multi-million action film, *Mission Impossible Three*). This is partly driven by the severe financial pressures of the centre to sustain itself, but also a desire to attract audiences. Some local artists I spoke with see this populism undermining the credibility of the organisation and its original mission to pursue artistic values and innovation. Others believed that the market philosophy makes it difficult to maintain the social focus of the centre and be inclusive.

But the idea of consumer choice is not manifest solely in terms of showing populist culture (which may well have its merits, considering the desire for leisure opportunities expressed by residents). I would suggest that the language of consumer choice is also interchangeable with the language of inclusion – giving people 'what they want' is often framed in terms of 'giving people what they feel comfortable with'. This philosophy of 'cultural inclusion' has led to an orientation in cultural provision on the kinds of culture deemed 'relevant' and familiar, so that young people are not intimidated and feel a ready connection to the culture on offer. Many arts groups in the borough provide urban music or new media workshops on the basis that young people might feel 'put off' by something more 'traditional' or unfamiliar.

This consumerist ethic is seen by many as a positive step away from older, elitist forms of culture which privileged 'the best'. These are seen as insufficiently open to the kinds of culture that young people are interested in. Yet, at the same time, a small minority of respondents expressed concern that the mantra of 'inclusion' might narrow the types of cultural experience that young people were being exposed to. As one respondent noted to me, it is ironic that for all the talk of 'diversity', young people in Tower Hamlets are generally targeted with a limited range of music and arts activity. One woman who was setting up a youth theatre group in the area told me that 'everybody's doing hop hop because it attracts kids and it's easy'. She went

on to say 'using classical texts and forms is just as valid and the challenge is to get their attention with that stuff'.<sup>89</sup> Culture, particularly for ethnic groups, is not assumed to be a matter of education, self-cultivation or novelty, but rather, identity and community. This supposes that people's tastes are durable and unlikely to change, and some types of culture are more relevant than others. One respondent (unnamed) stated that the word 'community' was often used in the wider arts and cultural sector in quite a reductive way, and ignored the fact that people can belong to many communities at the same time and their relationship with art can be complex and varied.

A corollary to this consumer ethic is another imperative on the part of cultural practitioners to be sensitive to the needs or tastes of 'the community'. The audience or visitor reaction is seen as paramount, because that is how cultural policy derives its legitimacy. Yet, this means there is a potential conflict with the artistic impulse to produce work that shocks or upsets conventional thinking.

To examine this further, I asked a number of respondents involved with Rich Mix about how they might cope with putting on a piece of work that caused controversy with one or other ethnic group. As an example, I cited the production of the controversial play about a Sikh community in Britain called *Behzti*, by Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti and staged at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 2004. It caused outrage amongst some local Sikh residents, who then went on to protest violently outside the theatre on the opening night, causing the play to be cancelled. Ashwani Sharma said:

I think we initially would probably not do anything like that actually, because you've got to build up confidence. It's about when you do it and how you do it. ...If I were in that position, you'd do a lot of other projects, around Islam for instance. But you would start off doing stuff, that would be controversial around other religions...We probably wouldn't go down that route and provoke...

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<sup>89</sup> Conversation with unnamed youth worker at an event for youth workers at the Rich Mix centre on 15th May 2007, where I heard similar expressions.

Keith Khan believed there was no potential conflict at all as long as Rich Mix did everything in partnership:

...the thing about that play is that we wouldn't end up in that sort of situation because we would be involving people in our programme and making decisions...most of those projects will likely be collaborations between either individuals or organisations so we won't ever necessarily be in a position where you have one voice in that sort of way. Because in theory, everything is always a partnership.

Khan argued that the cultural content of Rich Mix would never be fully accountable to just one group or person, and therefore would contain diverse and conflicting views. He denied that local groups could even feel excluded as long as the cultural content is determined through deliberation.<sup>90</sup>

However, in 2006, Rich Mix encountered its first major controversy, about the wallpaper hanging outside one of the three cinema screens and designed by the cutting-edge Glasgow-based company, Timorous Beasties. It was called 'London Toile' and depicted a black man pointing a gun at a woman's head (although the company later denied the man was actually black, it was just the shading of the print). The wallpaper, which had been approved by the board, was publicly condemned by 'local community leaders'.

In response, Khan firmly insisted to the local press that the wallpaper was an 'intelligent and humorous' play on society's 'anxieties and stereotypes'. He added, 'I will not bow to McCarthyism. I do not condone the violence in its imagery, but people have to deal with London. It reflects London and is not a sanitised version of it.'

But the same newspaper article in the *Evening Standard* noted that, 'he conceded he might have to take the images down if they offend people'. According to the same

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<sup>90</sup> In fact, the Birmingham Repertory Theatre did consult with Sikh representatives before the play began, suggesting that this is not a sufficient measure (Swain, 2004).

article, local community leaders were said to be angered and a local Liberal Democrat councillor, John Griffiths, said, 'This depiction can hardly be said to be conducive to the promotion of the community's multiculturalism' (Lefley, 2006).

In the end, the wallpaper was not removed. However, this example shows the inherent tension between the discourse of culture as autonomous ('I will not bow down to McCarthyism') and the discourse of representation and sensitivity ('can hardly be said to be conducive to the promotion of the community's multiculturalism'). What might be seen as offensive for a particular community is seen by some to override Khan's judgement of aesthetic value. Similarly, the aim of LBTH's cultural strategy - to engender dialogue and consultation within the locality - is hampered by concerns about not offending groups or touching on controversial issues. This brings into doubt the notion that culture and its attention to difference and 'respect' can be conducive to the kind of political debate that cultural policy-makers intend.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described the motivations and assumptions underlying Tower Hamlets' cultural policies, and looked at how they have influenced the practice of particular projects and activities in the area.

I have argued that the strategic use of culture extends far beyond straightforward economic arguments relating to the local cultural industries, and is part of a wider strategy to develop individuals personally, socially and psychologically. Arguments for culture tend to emphasise its ameliorative effects on individual subjectivity, and in turn, addressing social and community issues. Furthermore, culture is presented as a possible way to engage with minority or disadvantaged groups in a way that older forms of politics cannot.

I looked in more detail at how these ideas translated into policy and certain contradictions that arise from projects. In particular, I explored how these tensions played out in Rich Mix. This centre was intended to be exemplary in the borough, but

I believe it also embodies tensions that are apparent in diversity policies in general. In analysing the problems facing Rich Mix, I suggested that the burden of multiple aims, the crisis of legitimacy and the confusion over cultural authority and rationale cannot be understood in solely managerial terms but arise out of the philosophy of the project itself.

Overall, LBTH's cultural policy is ambivalent about the universalist model of 'traditional cultural policy', which proposes culture as something that transcends communities and is accessible to anyone prepared to understand it as a *thing in itself*. By contrast, the diversity model of culture which frames much of LBTH's policy emphasises culture as identity-based. Culture is tied to a community and has relative standards. Culture is valued for being representative and authentic.

By questioning the universalist basis of culture, cultural projects are forced into the framework of representation and ultimately, their legitimacy as cultural projects depends on being able to prove the 'buy-in' of a particular community. This 'engagement' occurs in terms of talking with people on an interpersonal level – by consulting' through community leaders and trying to represent their cultural choices in the content of their work. This presumes the engagement between the arts centre and community as political, rather than aesthetic. By engaging with individuals through their identity, there is also a risk of alienating artists who feel 'pigeon-holed' into ethnic categories. The desire to 'include' people through recognition of their culture may also exclude those whose own particular culture is not represented. White working class people or Muslims are sidelined from representations of 'community', which are inevitably selective. Moreover, the universalistic, political aspirations of culture are challenged by the limits of representation – the desire for artistic freedom and open debate is compromised by sensitivity to the 'community', and the objective to open residents' horizons is undermined by the concern for 'relevance' and 'respect'.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CASE STUDY 2: OLDHAM**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I begin by giving a brief historical background to cultural policy in Oldham, detailing its main social, economic and political drivers since the mid 1990s. I examine the framework for current cultural policy, how it is constructed and by whom, and the way it fits within OMBC's overall regeneration plans. I then explore in more depth the objectives of cultural policy in relation to economic development and community cohesion, and how this shapes the institutions involved with the Cultural Quarter. Finally, I study contradictions that arise in the implementation of policy and how these relate to internal theoretical assumptions.

#### **6.1 'Committed to culture'**

As for many local authorities in the UK, cultural policy in Oldham had a relatively low profile in the Council up until the mid 1990s. Although the town enjoyed a good reputation for its cultural provision and employed a strong in-house arts and events team, culture was not a high political priority.<sup>91</sup> In the mid 1990s, however, OMBC adopted a more focused, instrumentalised agenda towards culture. It shifted away from its earlier focus on regular activities and events, and began to develop the 'South Union Street Cultural Quarter'; a major capital project intended to generate economic benefits. The objective of the quarter was to kick start much needed public and private investment in the town and broaden the appeal of the site to retail and business developers. It also sought to benefit from the expanding creative industries sector in neighbouring Manchester by providing nearby accommodation and office space. The cultural quarter was only one of numerous initiatives developed by OMBC in the late 1980s and 1990s to attract private and public investment, including two new shopping precincts (Town Square and Spindles) and the Oldham Sixth Form

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<sup>91</sup> This brief history is based on a combination of verbal reports by individuals such as Phil Wood, Sheena Macfarlane and Sara Hewitt, as well as study of archive documents and newspaper articles from the local *Oldham Evening Chronicle*.

College.<sup>92</sup> Through these schemes, the Council was able to secure grants from central government, the Lottery and European Union programmes for major capital development.

The emphasis on securing funds for capital projects initially shifted attention and resources away from lower-key activities. Phil Wood, the lead consultant for Comedia, who worked in 2003-2004 on the *Oldham Beyond* strategy<sup>93</sup> (OMBC, 2004a), reflected back on how OMBC's cultural policy 'seemed so hollow. It just seemed like a megalomaniac's dream of men in suits standing around and saying oh yes, a library there, a museum there...but it's got to come from people at the end of the day, not from a desire to build some nice buildings.'

Another major turning point in OMBC's overall policy trajectory in the past five years was the 2001 disturbances, which brought a series of problems to the fore: poverty, low educational attainment, housing shortages and racial tension. In the responses formulated by external advisers such as the Community Cohesion Team and the Home Office, OMBC was criticised for procuring public funds but not developing a coherent, borough-wide strategy to address deep-seated grassroots problems (see Ritchie, 2001). The subsequent recommendations emphasised how culture could play an important role, both economically and socially and that cultural provision was integral to future regeneration and community strategies. Since 2001, OMBC has received £31m through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. In 2004, it clarified its strategy through developing the Local Area Agreement to channel £500m of public funds towards achieving regeneration objectives (Oldham Partnership, 2006: 2).

As a result of these factors, OMBC has a very strong commitment to culture as part of its regeneration strategy. The head of cultural services, Sheena MacFarlane, said

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<sup>92</sup> In 2005, the University Centre Oldham (UCO) (2005) also opened its doors. UCO is a collaboration with Huddersfield University to provide higher education opportunities for local residents. Although this is part of the Council's broader regeneration strategy, I have chosen not to study this as it falls mainly into the category of 'education' rather than 'culture'.

<sup>93</sup> *Oldham Beyond* was produced by a team of consultants and regeneration specialists (Comedia, URBED, S333, King Sturge and WSP). Its aim was to devise a borough wide strategy on a range of issues. It was published in April 2004 and produced through consultation with over 2,000 people in the borough, through work with schools, workshops, working groups, focus groups, and a travelling 'Thought Bubble'; an inflatable room that toured different venues in the borough.

that the perception of culture's importance had grown in other departments, due to measures adopted by the council, but also because of the external endorsement of winning local government awards. Although the focus of cultural policy continues to be oriented towards capital projects, particularly the various phases of the Cultural Quarter, there is now also increased concern to encourage cultural participation at grassroots level. Indeed, Oldham is the only council in the country to include a LAA 'stretch target' for cultural participation.<sup>94</sup> In its submission to the Academy for Sustainable Communities, Cultural Contribution Award, it stated:

Increasingly, we feel that this stretch target is providing an innovative mechanism for both building community cohesion and helping to address underlying issues of socio-economic deprivation...The arts have the power to transform lives and communities, to define and preserve our cultural identity, and to create opportunities for people throughout the borough. They contribute significantly to improving well-being for all, enabling self-expression, delivering basic and specialist skills and celebrating individual, community and national identity. (Oldham Partnership, 2006).

As testament to its growing reputation as an innovator in local cultural policy development, the town also hosted a conference in 2004 organised by DCMS on 'Role of culture and sport in community cohesion' (OMBC, 2004b: 89), and more recently, the council won award in June 2007 from the Academy of Sustainable Communities for its pioneering partnership work, as well as the Local Government Chronicle Local Strategic Partnership Award in 2006.

We can therefore see that whilst Oldham was regarded for a long time as a poorly performing authority, it has been increasingly open to the influences and lessons of the national local government sector; what Dunleavy has termed its 'stereotyped ideological responses' (Dunleavy, 1980). Since the riots, OMBC also experienced a significant turnover of senior staff in areas like youth and cultural services. According

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<sup>94</sup> Their target is to increase active participation of adult residents (+16 years) by 14,000 (22,000 in total). They are already at 19,000. They wanted to increase target of BME participants by 2,000, which they have already achieved.

to some of these outsiders, they were able to bring with them the ideas and values of other authorities, and inject a degree of critical self-examination. OMBC also chose to employ external consultants, notably Comedia, to conduct research and help develop a strategic direction. In 2003 the Oldham Local Strategic Partnership (known as the 'Oldham Partnership'), along with the North West Development Agency commissioned Comedia and a range of partners to write *Oldham Beyond*, which contained a detailed audit of the issues facing the borough and set out a vision for future development the local economy, culture, community relations, transport and urban design. This growth of external strategic support, most people agree, has brought a greater coherence to policy-making (which up till then had been driven by project bids). It also seems to have integrated 'cultural thinking' into the council's strategy, and spread the view that many of the solutions to Oldham's problems can be developed from learning about experience elsewhere, i.e. managerial solutions and 'best practice'.

As a consequence of this adoption of cultural policy thinking, the cultural strategy in Oldham is tied into the wider social and community strategy. This has also gained coherence since the riots of 2001 and is focused on people and services, as well as buildings and infrastructure. Annie O'Neill, the head of the arts service, stated, 'You've got poverty issues, people not having a lot of money, the town is a mess, you've got ill health, smoking, but then you get a lot of initiatives that will use the arts to address these problems.' The Council has certain priority target groups for its arts and cultural provision: the young, mentally ill and disabled.

The meaning of culture has also expanded, and become oriented around more abstract concepts rather than just particular services. The aim of the cultural services, according to Sheena MacDonald is 'to get culture embedded across blocks', and to broaden the role of culture in other departments rather than just in one. Oldham's cultural strategy states that there is a need 'to think beyond traditional departmental and organisational boundaries and delivery mechanisms' (OMBC, undateda, 2). Phil Wood affirmed this thematic approach: 'I would define culture as all of those things that give meaning. People are searching for meaning.'

OMBC develops its policies in a very strong partnership with local cultural agencies, which form the Oldham Cultural Partnership. This is effectively a 'local cultural policy elite', which meets regularly to devise strategy. It is a highly networked group (participants are involved simultaneously with a range of organisations) which tends to share ideas and common goals. The Council's in-house arts development team also shares a building in the Union Street area with a number of the local arts groups it supports, such as Peshkar, Dreadlions Foundation and Bang Drum, and is a hub for part-time arts workers in the area.<sup>95</sup>

Although OMBC is the driving force behind the local cultural policy elite, individuals in the cultural sector play an influential role. Kevin Shaw, the artistic director of the Oldham Coliseum, is the chair of the Cultural Partnership, and enjoys access to high levels in the Council; something he knows is very unusual for arts professionals in other boroughs. One reason for this seems to be 'policy attachment' (Gray, 2002); to try and gain resources for a relatively low status policy area through association with a more important policy area. Kevin Shaw stated that he pushed through the LAA cultural participation stretch target in order to get 'rewards', such as an increased grant, greater recognition by the council, and a better site for the new theatre: 'if the arts weren't in there, we wouldn't get the funding. It's expediency'. He added that measurements were a vital part of their work and not a hindrance: 'You can say the arts are good but we're crap at measuring. We're rubbish at proving the improvements in people's lives'. Yet, this expediency is not seen to be a 'sell-out' of the 'art for art's sake' principle. Indeed, the theatre's reliance on box office revenues has meant that taking artistic risks has never been a high priority for them. Shaw stated that their commercial populism actually made them more able to deliver a social agenda. This view illustrates quite candidly the convergence of commercial, consumerist approaches and a more socially-oriented agenda, in which both treat the audience as a consumer. Shaw explained that he described this social agenda in terms of personal development of the participant: 'by participating, they're increasing their skills, expanding their imagination and feeling better about where

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<sup>95</sup> According to the Community Development Team page on the OMBC website, the Council gives £1.8m in support to voluntary and community groups each year (OMBC, undatedb).

they live, making links across the communities. They feel better about themselves and where they live.'

One of the regular complaints about arts policy today is the growth of bureaucracy and 'box-ticking', (e.g. Caust, 2003; Tusa, 2007) but this did not seem to be an issue in Oldham. Few artists expressed resentment about having to 'tick boxes', saying that they believed they should be striving to achieve these targets anyway. All of the arts professionals I spoke to appeared highly committed to this agenda. Sean Bagguley, a curator at Gallery Oldham, said that he had never felt direct pressure from the Council and that he and his colleagues worked proactively with the Cultural Partnership to develop targets. When he mentioned that the Council had recently requested a valuation of its art collection, he only said that this made him more conscious of the need to prove the value of their work in terms that they understood. Another employee at the gallery, Joy Thorpe, concurred: 'I don't feel particularly pressured to tick boxes because we are already ticking the boxes through our surveys.' Sheena MacDonald noted that the council was conscious of the problem of bureaucracy and tried to guard against it: 'One of the problems we have in culture is the 'prove it' mentality...but people who work in culture know those links are there. We know that thirty minutes of exercise a day for a young person is good for them, we don't ask people to prove it'. She suggested that funders in general were growing increasingly sensitive to this issue.

Therefore, all the actors I spoke to have a fairly relaxed and positive view of the partnership, implying that they have shared values about the purpose of arts funding in Oldham. Indeed, the majority of arts professionals seemed emboldened by the idea that the arts had a social value. They emitted a strong sense of self-belief about achieving their targets and proving their value to funders, the public and themselves. Because of the high-level political relationship to the Council and the concordance of aims, the local cultural partners said that they felt they had sufficient freedom to programme things they like and think that the audience will like. They were confident that they played an important role in the life of the town and tie into its social policy strategy. Having this sense of purpose and reason clearly furnishes the arts sector with self-assurance. Only one respondent (when probed) began to question some of

the assumptions and express doubt about the claims made for the arts in Oldham ('I must admit I do wonder sometimes, 'is it life changing for people to come in this room?') but she admitted that she had never debated this with her colleagues.

Only a few individuals suggested that the social agenda could pose a restraint on artists' creativity. One respondent (unnamed) expressed some cynicism about how targets and 'buzz words' could get projects funded, even if they were not very good, and that sometimes, artists could feel uncomfortably restricted:

...when you find that every man and his dog is doing a project about identity and what it means to be 'me', I think you should probably be aware really that due to the nature of funding for projects you can find that artistic project ideas are compromised to fit in with the tick box on a funders form.

Yet, this did not seem to mount a strong opposition amongst any single group. Rather, it existed as a mild uneasiness amongst those who still believed that the arts could serve a social value but should not be too heavily bureaucratised. Even Phil Wood, one of the foremost advocates of cultural strategies, said somewhat regretfully, 'I think particularly the problem in the arts is they feel they're the service of everybody else, that whole idea of art for art's sake has been lost.' His approach, however, was not to reject instrumentalist arguments for the arts, but to ensure that cultural thinking is more sophisticated and holistic, as presented in *Oldham Beyond*.

Finally, whilst ethnic diversity is considered an important part of the Council's strategy in relation to objectives such as community cohesion and equality, there is only of limited experience working with ethnic community groups or 'community leaders' at a senior level. As I discussed in Chapter Five, Tower Hamlets has a considerable history of working with local Bangladeshi groups and activists. The level of involvement in Oldham is on a much smaller scale. There is less third sector activism in Oldham to work in partnership with, meaning that such interactions are usually initiated by the Council through its partnership groups.

## 6.2 Creative economy

As I discussed in Chapter 2, a major motivation for cultural policy development is to generate economic benefits and urban regeneration. As I would have expected, this is a primary motivation for Oldham's support for developing the cultural quarter, as well as the University Centre and business districts in Hollinwood and Mumps.

The cultural strategy has a number of interrelated aims: to help nurture local creative industries and creative entrepreneurs; to attract and retain creative professionals and other high-skilled, high-waged employment; to attract and retain private investors and businesses generally; and to bring in public sector investment from central government and agencies. In 2004, *Oldham Beyond* stated that a 'major aspect of the town's future economic strategy is its role as a 'hotbed of creative and knowledge industries where talented people are attracted from elsewhere because of the convivial environment and affordable accommodation'. This approach borrows directly from arguments made by Richard Florida, who sees the 'creative class' as a key factor in urban renewal. The report cites Florida and the Demos Boho Index; a think tank assessment of 40 of the UK's largest cities according to three indicators: ethnic diversity; proportion of gay residents, and the number of patent applications per head. They ranked Oldham 36<sup>th</sup> out of 40<sup>th</sup> in terms of population but 22<sup>nd</sup> in terms of creativity and diversity, although this seems to be based on the presence of ethnic communities in Oldham (OMBC, 2004a: 18; Demos 2003). A key driver behind the creative industries strategy was the consultancy, Comedia, which advised Oldham to focus on the potential of this sector as an economic growth area. Phil Wood believed that Oldham should try to emulate the experience of other authorities he knew, such as neighbouring Huddersfield, whose council had developed a well-run 'Media Centre'. It was also felt by many respondents that Oldham had a natural creative industries potential. One reason is because of the strength of the creative courses (art, design, theatre) at the local sixth form and further education colleges.

Another aspect that is seen to boost local creativity is the presence of the local ethnic population ('ethnicity' is often used alongside 'creativity' in *Oldham Beyond*, for instance, as though the two are inevitably linked). This link has been promoted by

Peshkar, an arts organisation based in Greaves Street. It promotes careers in creative industries and also uses cultural activity to address a range of young people's and community issues. It has an extensive portfolio of community participation and audience development initiatives, funded partly by Oldham Council and the Regional Arts Council. Peshkar supports the development of practitioners in the area, and seeks to challenge preconceptions of creative industries amongst younger Asians. There is a repeated link between the 'cultural community' of Asians in Oldham and the 'cultural industries'. Aftab Hussein, one of the directors of Peshkar told me, 'Potentially, Oldham has a vibrant culture. If you walk through Glodwick, there are sweet shops, food shops, Islamic bookshops, continental grocers...this is integration through commerce'. The creative potential of the Asian population is seen partly in terms of tourism development (branding an area to make it attractive and distinctive), but also in terms of youth employability (young Asians are perceived to be interested in new media, cutting edge cultures and metropolitan). Thus culture has both an ethnic and a commercial dimension, which captures the presumed entrepreneurialism of Asians and their inherent creativity arising from difference to the mainstream.

However, although there is considerable enthusiasm for the potential of home-grown creative industries, many of the arguments about the limitations of this strategy, which I highlighted in Chapter Two, seem to be pertinent. Like almost every other town outside London, the local creative industries sector in Oldham is very small. Comedia's report, *A Survey and Mapping the Cultural Sector in Oldham* (2005) stated that the for-profit cultural sector employed 5,405 people in 998 enterprises, with an annual turnover of £266m. However, their definition of 'cultural sector' seems to include a broad range of activities which are not particularly 'artistic' or 'cultural', at least in the way that policy-makers tend to infer. For instance, the production and distribution of sports equipment constitutes 32 per cent of their total figure (Comedia, 2005: 13). Arguably, this is more closely related to traditional manufacturing and does not mean the kind of culture implied in cultural policy.<sup>96</sup> The

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<sup>96</sup> The Manchester Enterprises Unit's Area Profile for Oldham gives a similarly confusing picture of the relative importance of the creative sector. It states that the sector has 3,900 people: 6.5 per cent of the total working population. The 'public sector' has 3,000 people, constituting 5.35 of the total working population. However, this second figure excludes those working in education and healthcare (labelled 'life

buoyancy of the cultural sector is also doubtful. The report's authors admit that the sector has low rates of 'content origination' and is vulnerable to economic downturn. It does not therefore appear to be an exemplary industry in the town, nor ripe for significant growth. The Comedia report also points out that most of the non-profit organisations surveyed did not believe that they contributed to the economy in the town, suggesting that the presumed economic benefits of cultural *in general* are not as strong as presented by local policy-makers.

Therefore, home-grown creative industries may be a somewhat limited regeneration strategy. However, at another level, creativity is seen as key to attract and keep young, high skilled workers in the borough, many of which would otherwise leave to work in Manchester or further afield. *Oldham Beyond* states that 'liveability' is now the most important issue in the town; using culture as a way to attract workers (14). The authors return to Florida-style arguments by seeing the cultivation of a creative class as part of a virtuous circle: 'a more skilled population with better jobs – increased spending power – a resurgence of the town centre and more money in the local economy – more jobs because the borough is more attractive to entrepreneurs and inward investors – an improved image attracting even more talented people, etc...' (5). Therefore, the economic dimension of Oldham's cultural strategy is as much about attracting a creative class as generating specific industries for local employment.

The economic arguments for culture reflect the increased concern with developing localised strategies for economic development, as I have described in Chapter Two. Local authorities have willingly taken on greater responsibility for economic issues and problems to assert their own role. This is manifest in a durable discourse of 'self-help' amongst local actors in both state and non-state organisations. One of the recurrent statements from respondents was that the town had to 'help itself'. There was a strong sense of self-reliance and autonomy in dealing with regeneration issues. Coupled with this was a belief that the restraints on Oldham's progress have

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sciences'). The impression given is that the creative industries are of comparable importance as the public sector, when this is clearly not the case (MEU, 2007).

been partly psychological. Respondents concurred that a major problem in the town was negative self-perception and a lack of motivation amongst residents; an 'it's too good for Oldham' mentality...'

In *Oldham Beyond*, for instance, there is a psychological rhetoric used to denote people's feelings in relation to the borough: 'a loss of *self-confidence* and *pride* in the borough and its future'; 'people feel faintly *embarrassed* to say that they come from Oldham'; 'change *internal and external perceptions*.' (11). In its vision for the town fifteen years hence, it stresses that Oldham should be '[a] *confident* place, at *ease with itself*'. The report suggests the use of symbols to reflect the transformation of the town. 'To symbolise this, the heart of each of these communities will have been 'marked' with a sculpture or building. ' (4), 'The borough's 138 mills have been refurbished for new business and illuminated as a potent symbol of the borough's transformation'. There is also an emphasis on positive images of Oldham in the media, government and industry to repair damage of the events of 2001 and the confidence of the town itself. Crucially, the issue of perception is linked to economic development:

It is the key to unlocking pride and confidence in all of Oldham's communities. In 10 to 20 years Oldham should be a place of diverse and confident cultural communities – aware of what makes them special and distinct but proud of what they share as Oldhamers. Oldham's diversity will become one its key competitive assets and the source of the innovation on which its economic success must rely.

In his report following the riots, Cattle (2001) also linked the town's deprivation and racial tensions to psychology: 'why are some groups of white youths so lacking in self-esteem and confidence?' (31). Therefore, culture is valued as a way to encourage council officials, policy deliverers and local residents to 're-imagine' their town and address 'low aspirations'.

Culture is also seen as a way to improve personal capacities of 'vulnerable groups', making them more confident and, therefore, more employable: 'to develop personal

self-reliance, self-confidence, and flexibility of approach on which an ever changing job market so frequently depends' (OMBC, undateda: 19). Sheena MacFarlane described the impact of the gallery in similar terms, saying that she hoped that people will be 'learning something, feeling a bit more confident, it doesn't need to be massive'. Annie O'Neill, head of Oldham's arts department, told me, 'We're doing a number of courses, they're all arts based courses, there's confidence building and all that'. The Oldham Youth service has used arts programming for its work on personal and social development, again, using the terms 'confidence' and 'self-esteem'. It has run a number of workshops, summer schools and programmes that are designed to use the arts in engaging with young people.<sup>97</sup> Ustar Rahman at First Choice homes described the arts and music activities they used as a hook to inform young people on their housing estates about education and employment issues, drugs, sexual health, and crime, but also as a 'means of building confidence, team-building, building self-esteem, breaking down certain barriers'. When probed, a number of people working with young people denied that young people lacked confidence, but at the same time, they believed that confidence-building programmes were necessary.<sup>98</sup>

This therapeutic objective is invariably expressed with regards to young people, ethnic minorities and ethnic minority women, who are seen as particularly vulnerable. Annie O'Neill described in detail the Council's Lantern Parade project, which began in 2003 and is 'particularly aimed at women and women from priority areas, giving people skills that will make them more employable.' It is held every autumn and involves local residents in community workshops where they learn about how to make lanterns. O'Neill explained that the workshops were very accessible and not high-level, but then later claimed that the skills people learnt could help them in specialist training for future commercial work. Within this discourse of self-reliance and confidence, there is both a concern with economic objectives (making people employable) but also social objectives (building community). She linked together the industrial nature of the workshops with reference to the way it improves the sense of community:

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Ed Kelly, Head of Oldham Youth Service.

<sup>98</sup> Interviews with Ed Kelly, Oldham Youth Service and Fauzia Chaudry, Fatima Women's Association.

...to pass down skills from the professional artist down to community members to give them the confidence to go forward to do those workshops, so it's like breeding a new generation of arts workers really who can deliver that at a local level. But the events that have come forward through that project have been massively successful in bringing all sections of the community together.

We can see here how traditional community cultural activities have become mixed with a wider economic argument and conversely, how economic arguments for culture are framed in terms of community development and personal confidence and identity. Hence, the cultural policy strategy blurs the assumed benefits of commercially oriented culture and community oriented cultural activities. The Comedia report on the cultural sector for instance, notes the small scale of the commercial cultural sector, but then insists on the considerable influence of the non-profit sector in terms of 'wellbeing' (Comedia, 2005). It measures the non-profit sector - non-profit clubs have 27,000 members and over 5,000 people are active volunteers - and stresses that the Cultural Partnership 'should lobby for the inclusion of culture as part of the delivery process for the objectives of other Partnerships' (7).

As I have described, cultural policy is clearly not being developed exclusively along the lines of a 'universalist' approach. Traditional artistic values of culture, tradition, and knowledge, are seen to be less important than how the arts can further other social aims. The arts are a method of changing people's attitudes and developing their ability to cope with both a changed local economy, as well as building a sense of community.

It would be wrong to overstate the importance Oldham Council attaches to culture in its overall strategy. A number of respondents I spoke with strongly believed that the council was also trying to deal with the problems of poverty and deprivation through other material and structural solutions. The Council has invested heavily in housing

developments, for instance.<sup>99</sup> However, it is interesting the degree to which economic problems are now also seen as a problem of individual attitude and perception. Even the rhetoric of the 'creative industries' is oriented to a considerable degree around changing personal psychology. This opens up a new function for culture as an economic and social tool.

### **6.3 Emphasising diversity**

An important dimension of cultural policy in Oldham is the need to make arts and culture 'relevant' and 'accessible'. This is clearly in keeping with the policies developed by DCMS since 1997, as I suggested in Chapter Two. Foremost, subsidised cultural organisations in Oldham are oriented towards their 'local audience', based primarily in Oldham. Whilst their artistic aims may vary, they have a clear imperative to reach as wide and inclusive an audience as possible. As I suggested earlier, this is not necessarily a radical departure for some institutions. Kevin Shaw at the Coliseum sees the drive for inclusion as merely an extension of their existing commercial principles. Although they do have a certain freedom to experiment occasionally in their studio space if they wish, they primarily respond to the consumer tastes of their audiences, particularly a very loyal season-ticket market.

Gallery Oldham is also very concerned that it is used by a large number of people. It was clear that one of the motivations for widening audiences was the requirement of government funding. Sheena MacFarlane, the head of cultural services, said, 'We're much more conscious of that now. There's a commitment to meet the needs of diverse groups. It makes good business sense!' Also, the concern for institutions to widen and diversify the audience is officially enshrined in the Local Partnership 'stretch target'. This requires all public cultural institutions in Oldham to raise the numbers of those who participate in cultural activities. The inclusion of the target in

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<sup>99</sup> Oldham Partnership has allocated £15m for renovating and building new homes (Oldham Partnership, 2006: 5).

Oldham's wider strategy is testament to the coherence and focus of Oldham's cultural partnership groups.<sup>100</sup>

However, the commitment to 'inclusion' is not driven solely by government targets but also by a very strong ideological commitment from all the respondents. Sheena Macfarlane said, 'We have a duty to do it. You're there for the common good.' Joy Thorpe, the Education Officer at Gallery Oldham, explained that much of the Gallery's work has been about 'building trust' and attracting people into the building. '[We] don't want it to be intimidating: We've built that up, but now it's about getting people's trust that when they come to the gallery, that it's not going to be very formal. It's not like that anymore.' This sentiment of accessibility has been central to the development of the Cultural Quarter. Numerous respondents expressed the view that the Cultural Quarter should not be 'off-putting' or intimidating to users.

Implicit in such statements is a suggestion that cultural provision in the past was *exclusive* and needed to be changed. There is a keen awareness that the majority of people in Oldham feel alienated by 'high culture'. The Comedia report on the cultural sector cites a survey that states 41 per cent of young people said they would feel out of place in an art gallery or theatre. 24.7 per cent said they would feel out of place in a sports centre. Whilst the Coliseum had the highest awareness score for arts and creative venues, it was not well attended. This awareness of their limited appeal means that both the Coliseum and Gallery Oldham fully embrace the prioritisation of access and inclusion in their work.

A common refrain from the interviews was the need to have 'something for everybody'. In Gallery Oldham, Sean Bagguley explained that their large space allowed them to have any number of activities happening at one time. This meant the gallery could attract different audiences simultaneously, bringing them together into a shared space and yet engaging their diverse interests. There is a particular stress on attracting disadvantaged groups - ethnic minorities and lower socio-economic classes - and shaping the collections in a way that will appeal to their

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<sup>100</sup> Full details of the LAA stretch target, and the *Art for All; All for Art* scheme can be found on OMBC's application for the Academy of Sustainable Communities, available online (Oldham Partnership, 2006)

perceived cultural interests or identities. This might range from their support for the local football team (they held an Oldham Athletics exhibition in 2006) or their ethnic heritage (they held an exhibition about Muslim women wearing veils, called 'Sisters' in 2005 and in 2003, an exhibition about Bangladeshi folk art called 'Songlines'). The stress on local identity has been strengthened by the decision to house the local museum and the art collection in the same building (previous to the cultural quarter development they were housed separately). This has meant that artefacts are now collected and displayed according to a more coherent intent to display the local history and identity of residents, as opposed to simply building a collection based on the taste or expertise of a particular group, such as professional curators or private donors. Local events and programmes often reflect the issue of cultural diversity; for instance, the theme of the Oldham Literature Festival in October 2007 is 'Identity'.

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Where cultural institutions are trying to engage people in more mainstream activities they resort to highlighting particular identifications, especially ethnicity. For instance, Gallery Oldham has developed one of the largest collections of Bangladeshi art in the UK. The Coliseum is also seeking to attract ethnic audiences by building up South Asian writers, and has launched a young Asian playwriting competition. Groups are therefore presumed to have distinct needs and tastes which require specific cultural provision. Joy Thorpe explained that the gallery had no problem attracting ethnic groups for family-oriented events but struggled to build an audience for their exhibitions, which 'may be reflecting what we've actually got in our collections...I don't think that the more recent folk who have come to Oldham are represented in our collection, and this is something that we do know, so hopefully that will address that issue that we're looking to address.' She continued by suggesting that museums in the country had done very well in recent years to present 'history from below' but that this was no longer inclusive enough:

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<sup>101</sup> This brief description does not imply that Gallery Oldham *only* hosts exhibitions that are related to local identity. Indeed, the gallery's activities have included exhibitions on subjects as diverse as Picasso, childhood and British sculpture. However, the local component is heavily stressed in its work, and they design at least one major exhibition a year to examine this.

...the celebrating of normal culture has started and has done very well within a couple of museums in Manchester....If you go to places like that and look at some museums all over the show and you see a crafter's cottage, how their people live, what did it smell like, you know...but now we've got to the realisation...that's not everybody, that history is not how it is. We've got different folk that need their history represented as much as the next man.

One of the recurrent explanations for the need for 'relevance' is the belief that visitors need to see themselves reflected in the collection in order for it to appeal. Sean Bagguley stated, 'I've always said that people want to see themselves in a gallery'. Sheena Macfarlane echoed this sentiment: 'People need to see things as relevant to their lives, to be interested in it. They then might go and explore other things in the gallery. But they need that immediate relevance.' One aspect of the Gallery's audience development work is to show how inclusive the gallery is. For instance, Joy Thorpe explained that on a course about the museums sector, which she ran for ethnic minority individuals, she asked them to bring in objects of value to themselves and their families. This was intended partly to assure them that their judgements about what objects were of value were of significance - that a museum is a place: 'things that they thought were important to them and their family.'

When I probed respondents, they were aware of the risk that 'inclusion' could become mere tokenism, and suggested that their aim had always been to 'integrate' people through their differences, rather than maintaining separation. Macfarlane stated that they did not intend to 'herd' people into cultural provision, but use their identity as a 'hook', to bring them into the building and widen their interest in the collection. The gallery's preferred method is to take a theme for an exhibition and then try to make it broad enough so that everyone feels included. To do this, they regularly consult with local community groups to develop their exhibition programming. Another way in which the Cultural Partnership has tried to boost diversity, is through the borough-wide events programme. For instance, the 2006 Festival of Diversity involved over 92 voluntary and community groups, and over 19,000 residents. This would suggest a very high degree of public involvement in participatory activities, at least in quantitative terms.

Thus, it is felt to be very important for cultural institutions in the town to appeal to a diverse range of people, and to engage with their identity in order to build a longer-term relationship. At the same time, the main institutions have a clear cultural direction set by their institutional heritage. As I have already stated, the Coliseum has a loyal season ticket audience, which it needs to cater to. The Gallery Oldham has a well-established collection of social history, art and natural science artefacts, which it is formally obliged to use in exhibitions.

#### **6.4 Bringing communities together**

Another objective of cultural policy in Oldham is to encourage 'community cohesion' in the borough.<sup>102</sup> This became a priority following the riots in 2001, when numerous government reviews pointed to the fragmentation and division between Oldham's different ethnic populations. OMBC's strategy has therefore been oriented towards integrating different ethnic communities, and encouraging greater interaction and feelings of 'togetherness'.<sup>103</sup>

Oldham has had a long history of ethnic tension since immigrants arrived from Pakistan and Bangladesh in the 1960s. These tensions increased in the 1980s due to the dwindling fortunes of the town. Unemployment following the closure of the mills, combined with poor housing stock and decline in local public services, created widespread disillusionment. Moreover, the Ritchie Report, citing a CRE investigation, asserted that racial divisions had been reinforced, if not created, by OMBC's informal segregationist housing policies and local estate agents (Ritchie, 2001:16). This resentment deepened in the 1990s through the system of national regeneration funding, which allocated money to area based initiatives. This invariably fell along ethnic lines according to residential patterns and unleashed a dynamic of competition

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<sup>102</sup> Definitions of 'community cohesion' vary. The Oldham Community Cohesion Strategy states it as: 'people share a sense of belonging and a common identity; people are strong in their own identities and respect others; a more equal Borough; people relate to each other; people play their part and; resilience to threats and conflict' (OMBC, 2007: 3).

<sup>103</sup> There is cross party support for the Oldham Partnership's work on community cohesion. The Leader of the Council holds the Cabinet portfolio for community cohesion and the Chief Executive is the lead officer. The theme was chosen for OMBC's 2003 Citizens' Survey.

between local groups over resources in housing, education and infrastructure: 'pouring petrol onto the fire', as one respondent explained to me.<sup>104</sup> In the weeks running up to the riots, there had been numerous stories in the national and local press about 'no-go' areas for whites in parts of Glodwick and numerous racially motivated attacks. The police released statistics that showed that the majority of victims reporting racial attacks were white, arguably fuelling the resentment between Asian and whites. Surveys following the riots suggested a widespread belief that the different communities were divided.<sup>105</sup>

It is widely accepted that structural conditions and material inequality have reinforced and exacerbated racial divisions. In response, OMBC has tried to tackle the physical divisions reinforced by area-based regeneration funding by moving towards 'theme' based funding, which spreads across geographical areas. Likewise, it is committed to services that bring together a cross-ethnic constituency (such as schooling, health, youth and community work).

However, more controversially, the community cohesion strategy has also been oriented towards changing the attitudes of people living within the borough, particularly in relation to their sense of identity. Both Cattle and Ritchie suggested that residential segregation - 'parallel lives' - had been encouraged by certain cultural attitudes within communities. They explained that immigrant groups had allowed self-segregation to occur by allowing marriage to people abroad, not learning English sufficiently and choosing to live in the same areas, even when offered homes in non-Asian areas. They also suggested that racist attitudes had been allowed to fester in white communities. Their proposed solutions, therefore, focused not only on addressing material disadvantage, but the 'problem' of strong cultural identification.

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Phil Wood. In the Citizens' Panel, conducted by research consultancy, ORC International in 2003, over half of the respondents believed that other people in Oldham received unfair priority over them in public services. White people in Failsworth and Hollinwood were most likely to name Asians and minorities as groups receiving higher priority (ORC International, 2003: 5).

<sup>105</sup> The 2003 Citizens survey asked panellists questions about whether they felt a sense of identification with their local neighbourhood, whether people in their area could be trusted and shared the same values, and whether people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds got on well together in their area. Whilst some areas (noticeably the more prosperous Saddleworth and Lees) felt a strong sense of community identity, the majority of participants' responses suggested that levels of community cohesion were low in parts of Oldham. This was more likely to be expressed by younger residents and ethnic minorities. 83 per cent believed that Oldham was not a place where residents respected ethnic and cultural differences between people (ORC International, 2003: 31).

The existence of strong social capital within communities became presented as a barrier to cohesion with other communities. Cattle even argued that social capital and cultural identity determine economic wellbeing - inverting the usual sociological formula that it is structural conditions that shape cultural factors.<sup>106</sup>

As a result of these diagnoses, there has been a focus in Oldham on 'tackling attitudes' and a rapid growth of anti-racism policies and programmes to enact behavioural change. The Anti-Discriminatory Practice programme in education 'promotes positive identities in children drawing on black perspectives, also sexuality, religion and culture programmes'.<sup>107</sup> This assumption seeks to tackle racism through the realm of ethical-social behaviour and attitudes. Arguably, instead of viewing racism as a political phenomenon, it sees it as a matter of interpersonal ethics and behaviour. People must learn how to negotiate their feelings and interact with people from different backgrounds.

Numerous cultural organisations and initiatives have been set up in Oldham to encourage inter-racial interaction. For instance, Peacemaker was set up in 1997 by young Asian professionals to target young people. Funded by the Youth Justice Board, Community and Young People's Unit, Neighbourhood Support Fund, and the Community Cohesion Facilitation Grant, Peacemaker works with young people to tackle 'racist tendencies' by using mentoring programmes, cultural and youth activities, and anti-racism/cultural awareness training sessions for council staff (7).<sup>108</sup> The Council has also sought to adopt lessons from the experience of Northern

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<sup>106</sup> 'It is accepted that in societies where there is a high degree of community cohesion, there is greater economic growth and strong development. Areas lacking in community cohesion are usually identified as economically deprived' (Cattle 2001: 75).

<sup>107</sup> Other schemes and programmes include: There's No Place for Racism in Oldham Campaign Celebrating Diversity competition, Oldham College; Unity in the Community Project, and various sports programmes run by Oldham Athletics Football Club, Oldham Fire Service, Oldham Metropolitan Police. Also see *Report on Community Cohesion Initiatives in Oldham Primary Schools* (Haddock, 2003). The anti-racism education also extends to the borough's employees. *Forward Together* outlines a three-year Equalities and Diversity Training Plan for staff and the range of race and cultural awareness schemes designed to promote 'cultural sensitivity', training and literature being used in the borough (OMBC, 2004b: 8-9, 31,45).

<sup>108</sup> For instance, Raja Miah, a senior officer at Peacemaker and two school students who are part of Peacemaker gave evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs on 14 Dec 2004. Josie Tyas, said, 'I think it is important to tell what is right in primary schools especially, because as a young person myself, by the time we get to senior school if you are racist, most people do not want to change their views, but if you teach them when they are young, when the generations come through, eventually, I think, Britain will become more anti-racist, full stop.'

Ireland, inviting mediation groups to give training workshops in conflict resolution (Oldham Partnership, 2006: 8). Racism is designated an 'attitude' which needs to be corrected through education, and is possibly driven by deeper, psychological issues. As already highlighted, Cattle suggested that young white working class men suffer from particularly low self-esteem, which may be a cause of tension (39).

In this wider context, then, the arts are seen to be particularly useful as a tool to re-engineer attitudes. Both Cattle and Ritchie recommended the arts, music and sport as good methods of interaction, which can help young people, in particular, to learn about each other.

Some critics have attacked this emphasis on cultural difference and attitudes as a way of avoiding harder questions of material deprivation. Bagguley and Hussain (2003) argue that Cattle and Ritchie blame residents (particularly Asians) for wanting to 'live amongst their own kind' rather than the lack of funds invested by central government in places like Oldham (3). A number of respondents told me that they felt that the policy reviews did not sufficiently emphasise material disadvantage as a cause of the riots. The council itself, in its 187 page response to the Ritchie report, blamed central government funding policies, stating that 'too much emphasis is placed on race as the issue within Oldham and not, as we believe, on poverty, deprivation and social inclusion and the competition for scarce resources' (OMBC, 2002: 6). For instance, although Ritchie had called for more funding for housing, the Council complained that this had not materialised. Unsurprisingly, central government actors have tended to emphasise better management strategies in relation to existing resources, whereas the Council has pursued increased funding from central government. Mahamdillie (2002) asserts that cultural difference has become touted as a convenient way to avoid harder questions about material problems; because New Labour 'refuses to enact policies that meet social need, it argues that the only option open to it is to mediate between different ethnic groups while spreading a general message of 'tolerance' (unpaginated). Mahamdillie's statement supposes that culture has become used almost cynically as a 'soft measure' to avoid other political responses, such as increased funding.

However, I would suggest that seeing the emphasis on 'soft' factors as a cynical strategy underestimates the degree to which social problems like racism have become gradually redefined in policy-making circles as primarily cultural problems. As I discussed in Chapter Two, local government is increasingly preoccupied with the decline of 'social capital' and cohesion. Even OMBC, which has been critical of central government's emphasis on 'soft' causes of the riots, has conceded that community cohesion is a problem and that they must address attitudes as well as structural factors.

In his work on multiculturalism in the UK, Malik (2002a) has argued that multicultural policies emerged due to a growing belief that culture was a primary cause of political division and tension. Councils and activists in the 1980s and 1990s moved from a political assessment of racial division towards a 'culturalist' explanation. It was assumed that people belonging to different ethnic groups inevitably shared different needs and values, which the state should engage with. Phil Wood, for instance, affirmed this process of multicultural engagement had occurred in Oldham, recognising it from his own experience whilst working for Kirklees Council in the 1980s and 1990s.

Multicultural policies thus developed in the 1990s but in recent years, they have come under attack. Phil Wood recollected that the 2001 riots provoked a bout of self-reflection in local authorities about the effect of multicultural policies in the UK: 'We had stopped asking ourselves, why are we doing this? Is it right?' Cattle in particular blamed the divisive effects of council policies and called for greater measures to promote interaction. In this sense, the 'culturalist' approach instigated by the local council, and which emphasised difference, has been presented in the aftermath of the 2001 riots as a problem in itself.

Yet, despite this apparent turn against 'multiculturalism', many of the policies oriented towards 'diversity' and 'identity' have remained consistent in their focus. Whilst the Cattle and Ritchie reports expressed concern about separatist multiculturalism and the focus on difference, they also called for councils to do more to promote greater recognition of diversity and respect for different cultures. Another

example of this can be found in the *Oldham Beyond* report, which criticises previous multicultural policies in the borough, yet advocates a new mode of cultural engagement: 'interculturalism'. This would encourage greater interaction between cultural groups, but still recognise their differences. The assumption of cultural difference that had informed multicultural policies of a previous era, have therefore continued to inform policy post-2001. Consequently, they reproduce the same contradictory tensions that had existed before. I will now proceed to examine how culture is being used to address community cohesion and the problems arising from this.

### **6.5 Using culture to tackle attitudes**

Following the riots in 2001, the renowned British playwright David Edgar set about writing a play entitled 'Playing with Fire'. He spent considerable time consulting with people in Oldham about their experiences.<sup>109</sup> In an article in the *Observer* newspaper, Edgar argued that culture was seen in the town as providing a space for divisions to be overcome:

...there are efforts in the hardest places to challenge community division. This is not through integrating residence, which will take years, nor by integrating schooling, which follows residence, nor even through the workplace. It is happening through culture. And everyone working in this field agrees that the thing you don't do, when attempting to get groups of young people to know more about each other, is to bring one side into the other's territory.

As Edgar suggests, the arts and culture have become seen as a vital part of the Council's community cohesion strategy. In OMBC's document, *Forward Together - Building Community Cohesion in Oldham*, it states:

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<sup>109</sup> The play, set in a fictional northern town called 'Wyverdale', bore a strong resemblance to Oldham, and is about the aftermath of race riots, similar to those in 2001.

Doing, seeing, hearing and feeling are powerful vehicles for creating understanding, and celebration provides an 'x-factor' which explains why communities respond so well to artistic, cultural and sporting initiatives' (OMBC, 2004b: 89)

Cantle (2001) advocated support for the arts as part of the cohesion agenda (see 6.23). In its response to the Ritchie Report, Oldham emphasised 'the major contribution that Oldham's libraries, museum's theatres and music make in fostering community cohesion.' (OMBC, 2002: 35)

All of the actors I spoke to believed that culture had an important role to play in fostering a sense of community and overcoming divisions; it was an uncontroversial point. It was believed that one of the reasons for the highly racialised division in the town was due to the physical separation between groups and the lack of intersubjective interaction; in other words, people feel divided from others because they do not spend enough time in their company. This sense of division is reinforced spatially, as people choose not to enter territory outside their 'community space'. The arts, in this sense, are seen as a valuable 'hook' to get people together in a neutral space and encourage micro-level interaction. They are seen to be 'neutral' and 'safe'. Annie O'Neill stated:

...the aims of the bigger festivals and those sort of events... it's actually bringing communities together, and what we've found is that being based here in this area, it's actually considered quite neutral territory for people.

Phil Wood described the importance of this point in the development of *Oldham Beyond*:

We talked quite a lot about neutral spaces and animating spaces, given that there was so much spatial separation and that was seen as a big issue. Where is the place that all Oldhamers can come together?

Implicit in this positive evaluation of the role of culture is a belief that most other types of public activity fail to bring people together, particularly politics. David Hillary of Voluntary Action Oldham (OMBC's support unit for the third sector) said, 'I think it is easier to bring people together for sporting or cultural activities than it is for other activities, so it can be a very good way to enable people to meet and encounter and have conversations with people from other parts of the community'. The staff I interviewed at the Gallery, Coliseum and in the Arts Centre made this point repeatedly. Therefore, a key objective in Oldham's planning is to encourage social interaction at the intersubjective level. For instance, in *Oldham Beyond* the 'Zones of Exchange' are where the Asian and the White communities can meet and trade' (15). It also suggests using animation and cultural activities to 'break down barriers between young people.' (OMBC, 2004: 19).

The arts are considered particularly good at encouraging interaction because they are accessible, fun, inclusive and safe. They do not require specialist knowledge and all people of whatever level and ability can participate in them. Culture is also seen as 'primal' and emotional. Phil Wood explained that this made it more inclusive than political processes because it allows a people without specialist skills and knowledge to participate:

You need to recognise that people have multiple intelligences – people think about their surroundings in different ways, through stories and histories. It's not just a rational world...we bury our emotions. The arts are a way of telling that in a way that people identify with. You can show them as many statistics as you like but for most people you need a story...

There was a strong sense from people working in the Council, but also in the cultural sector that 'times had changed' and that the emotional, primal connections of cultural identity were more important to people today than in the past. Concomitantly, respondents repeatedly asserted that most people are unable to rationalise their feelings and concerns through intellectual argument. Culture is seen as a new way for the state to engage with the 'community', as well as a new way for communities to engage with each other. Kevin Shaw of Oldham Theatre Workshop

said, 'A public meeting is harder. People find it difficult to put into words. You have to intellectualise your response. This is more about the doing of it...' As an example, he explained how the Cultural Partnership was employing an arts worker to work with the Housing Renewal Team.

Hence, there is a trend towards using the arts to 'consult' with people on particular council projects and regeneration initiatives. The *Oldham Beyond* team used a 'Thought Bubble' to tour around the town and invite responses, sometimes in the form of drawn material. An OMBC regeneration officer, Sara Hewitt, talked positively about using arts activities as a way of engaging the public, and to give them a sense of ownership which traditional types of consultation or political engagement could not do. She cited examples of employing artists to work with 'the local community' to create art which would decorate or mark a council initiative. One of the attractions of using the arts seems to be awareness that consultations are themselves not particularly engaging. Kevin Shaw talked about 'consultation fatigue' and the fact that many residents were no longer interested in attending meetings or filling out forms. Joy Thorpe pointed out that there had been considerable consultation done for the cultural quarter but she was uncertain whether any of it had actually been used or was worthwhile. The arts therefore appear to respondents to be a more fruitful form of engagement.

This shift towards a non-political, more emotional mode of engagement chimes with the ideas of the political theorists discussed in Chapter Two. As I showed, they linked the decline of party politics to the rise of community groups who desired recognition, esteem and a more holistic kind of engagement with their feelings. Implicit in this framework of 'cultural' - or, perhaps to put it more accurately, culturally *therapeutic* engagement - is scepticism that local people will feel connected by an identification with more abstract ideas or principles. This is described as 'old politics' and therefore seen as redundant for most people (especially the young) in the contemporary world.

Culture is thus seen as a way of facilitating micro-level interaction, based on positive, ethical feelings of neighbourliness. The engagement in the cultural space is

not rational – on the contrary, it is about a feeling of fun, celebration and ‘joy’. Because the stress is on positive feelings of connection the cultural strategy emphasises those activities that are perceived to engender this: popular leisure activities, or hobbies or crafts, such as lantern-making, drawing, and music-making. What counts is the opportunity for participation and interaction, not the meaning of the activity or the cultural product itself, which can be relatively banal and uncontroversial. For example, OMBC’s response to the Ritchie Report, highlighted a quote from one participant to show how the arts and leisure can break down ‘the language and cultural barriers’:

‘I don’t really like talking on stage, but we say everything through the shadow puppets and the images in the scenes’ Jameelun Begum, participant in the youth production (cited in OMBC, 2002: 36)

Many respondents see this kind of low-level, but long-term, interaction as ‘healing’ and a way of gradually building relationships between communities. One example of this process was a project devised at the Oldham Coliseum, which brought together NEETS (Not In Employment, Education or Training) from different ethnic groups together to work on a play for a number of months. The therapeutic value of the arts meant that ‘they felt proud of their achievement’ and also began to feel a connection.<sup>110</sup> The main basis upon which people are expected to come together in Oldham is the ‘ordinary’ politeness of everyday interaction. People come together on the basis of their neighbourliness or sense of micro-community, but there is no other notion of ‘transcendent’ identification based on nationalist solidarity or universal political ideas.

This focus on intersubjective interactions has been advocated more widely in academic literature on race and community politics. Lownsbrough & Beunderman (2007) in a Demos report for the Commission for Racial Equality have pointed out that ‘banal encounters’ in a public space can be important for positive, spontaneous interactions that are focused on common and practical activities. The role of culture

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with Kevin Shaw.

is to create such connections in a 'neutral space'. This approach implies that previous forms of political connection and solidarity were inadequate. Paul Gilroy (2004) has used the concept of 'convivial culture' to denote 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban centres and in postcolonial cities elsewhere' (xv). He sees this as a way to avoid the exclusivist tendency of identity politics, which stresses connections based on subjective experiences.

Therefore, the neutral space of culture is designed to focus people from different ethnic groups on the process of interaction. They are encouraged to see each other in terms of their unremarkable characteristics as 'neighbours', inhabiting the same physical space. At the same time, the arts can affirm people's different identities and give them cultural pride in a non-judgemental environment.

## **6.6 Ambiguities**

Oldham has a very coherent cultural strategy and a high degree of consistency amongst different actors about its objectives. There is a durable discourse of social inclusion and economic regeneration, framed through the concept of 'diversity'. Arts and cultural activities are geared towards developing individuals and facilitating their economic and social inclusion. They are also expected to contribute to a sense of community and identity, and foster relationships between groups divided along ethnic lines.

Yet, despite this coherence of aims, there are also certain tensions underlying cultural policy in Oldham. These play out in different ways and reveal some of the philosophical contradictions in the idea of diversity.

### *Divisiveness of diversity*

One of the recurrent tensions is the degree to which cultural activities stress the diversity or unity of people. On the one hand, culture is intended to provide a 'neutral space' in which people can leave behind their cultural identity and even

examine it from a critical angle. David Edgar (2005), in his aforementioned *Observer* article, describes how this 'third space' can encourage people to transcend their cultural identity:

Rather, you create third spaces, unfamiliar to both, in which different groups can share a similar experience of discovery. Sometimes such spaces allow people to detach aspects of their identity (cultural, vocational, sexual) from what they have hitherto seen as its essential and dominating character.

Yet, conversely, the cultural space is also supposed to remind people of their cultural difference and affirm their ethnic identity. As Annie O'Neill stated, 'I think there's room for people to celebrate their own cultures and to demonstrate their cultures to other groups.' Hence, cultural space is not just a place where people 'transcend' cultural differences but it is often where people are encouraged to relate to others *through* their cultural differences. As I have already shown, institutions like Gallery Oldham and the Coliseum engage ethnic groups by emphasising particular ethnic facets in their art. This stresses the particular connection of an individual to their ethnic group identity, as opposed to any another.

Hence, whilst there are considerable efforts by cultural providers to create a landscape of diverse practice, it is not always clear that this leads to more integrated cultural and community activity. Aftab Hussain noted that ethnic groups in Oldham seemed to have their 'own' cultural institutions, which he felt could be a problem. Peshkar's history is important in this regard: It was created in 1991 out of the Asian Arts workshops run by OMBC's Arts Development team. Its intention was to give recognition to South Asian experiences in the mainstream arts sector. Its long-term aim was to integrate South Asians into the theatre by encouraging them to enter the profession and get training ('we intend to become obsolete', Aftab Hussain told me). Yet, sixteen years later, Peshkar remains outside the Coliseum building and is still largely orientated towards representing and exploring the BME experience, appealing to BME audiences and writers. Although it also attracts white audiences, this is not their priority. It is not a deliberate policy of exclusion - indeed, Aftab Hussain seemed regretful that the segregation of cultural provision remained an issue - but it

seems impossible to break away from the conception that different ethnic groups require different cultural resources. This suggests that whilst the long-term aim may be integration, it is difficult to make the transition from the current framework of 'diverse' cultural provision.

Likewise, Oldham Coliseum has a largely white, middle-aged constituency. Although its expanded range of 'participatory' activities attracts large numbers of ethnic minorities, they do not generally become regular theatregoers. It seems that one of the impulses behind expanding participation activities is a realisation that certain ethnic or socio-economic groups will not want to be 'passive' spectators and are extremely difficult to attract. This difference is accommodated by providing different kinds of programming. The Cultural Partnership measures the diversity of audiences through counting participants but this obscures the underlying differences between how ethnic groups experience local cultural activities. As one (unnamed) respondent admitted, the Partnership reached its LAA stretch target for ethnic minority participation 'basically because we put on the Mela', an Asian themed outdoor festival. He recognised that this may have been a shortcut to boost numbers and that more needed to be done in the long-term to boost participation, but he also believed that such pragmatism was inevitable to meet funders' requirements. This point also extends to the engagement of young people, who tend exclusively to be involved in cultural institutions like the Coliseum through participatory programming, rather than as audience members. The impulse behind this mode of engagement seems to be based on finding out 'what appeals to people' in order to match targets, rather than promoting any particular kind of cultural activity that practitioners themselves feel to be worthwhile.

At the same time, cultural experiences also seem to be rather spatially concentrated, being enjoyed by distinct geographical, and therefore, ethnic communities. For instance, the more 'Anglo-Saxon' culture of Saddleworth (e.g. the annual folk music festival and brass band contests) is at a distance from the rest of Oldham. Conversely, there are disproportionately fewer visitors from Saddleworth to Gallery

Oldham in the town centre.<sup>111</sup> Peshkar operates mostly in the Asian areas of Oldham and although its workshops attract a mixed ethnic constituency, its work is largely targeted at Asians. One reason for the spatial concentration of cultural experiences is no doubt geographical distance. Furthermore, Saddleworth is said to have its own regional identity, attached to Yorkshire, which it borders. They do not necessarily think of themselves as belonging to the town of Oldham – a point reinforced by some of the respondents I spoke to. This geographical diversity is alluded to positively in *Oldham Beyond*; that each community has its own identity. Yet, it might also suggest that the cultural consumption of Oldhamers is very different and that – despite the rhetoric of ‘diversity’ – cultural experiences do not necessarily bring distinct ethnic or geographical communities together into a common space.

From my interviews with local actors, there was some indication that a small number of people in the town believed that certain communities have their own events and festivals, and ‘we have ours’. Sheena Macfarlane insisted that although OMBC made strong efforts to provide ‘something for everybody’ and that most people she encountered were satisfied with cultural provision in the town, she did recall overhearing a local resident outside the gallery saying to someone else, ‘that’s where they put all the Asian art’. Even within OMBC, there appears to be some mild disagreement about the extent to which people’s ethnic identities should be an issue. Macfarlane mentioned that the Oldham Race Equality Partnership ‘wanted us to ask all these questions about religion and race on our library card but we said no. It’s too intrusive really’. There is awareness that questions about ethnicity are intrusive, but at the same time, they cannot help but affirm the importance of ethnic identities in their own work. As one respondent at the Gallery (unnamed) suggested, sometimes activities are funded because they are seen to be ‘ethnic’.

In fact, this ambivalence towards cultural identity is carried through to the wider realm of policy-making. Both the Cattle and Ritchie reports hover between wanting to strengthen community identities and wanting to weaken their divisive impact. Part of the problem, they argue, is that the emphasis on diversity has alienated people

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Sean Bagguley.

from each other, making them feel they have different needs and values. The Asian and white communities may have similar aspirations for their town, but they are encouraged to feel culturally separate. This is exacerbated by housing and educational segregation. The dynamic therefore seems to be an acute awareness of difference. Yet at the same time, policy-makers advise greater awareness and sensitivity around cultural difference. They assume these differences to be inevitable and in need of 'management'. Although strong ethnic communal identities are viewed as potentially disruptive, there is an overwhelming concern with building 'community leadership' and identities.

As I have already suggested, the *Oldham Beyond* team articulated this ambivalence in their concept of 'interculturalism', which tries to emphasise *both* diversity and unity: 'Many voices, not just one', but also 'a sense of community'. Interculturalism still presumes that people are primarily linked by distinct cultures arising from their ethnicity and locality ('their own') even if they are also required to be aware of other cultures.

The full logic of this approach creates a further contradiction – in terms of how to conceptualise 'the white community'. Cattle suggests in point 6.48: '[the] white community should be encouraged to develop a leadership capacity in the same way as the black and ethnic minority communities (50). This endorses the racialisation of politics in Oldham by discussing the 'different' needs of communities and the need for 'cultural awareness'. Yet, for others, celebrating 'whiteness' has uncomfortably nationalist and racist connotations. For example, David Hillary of Voluntary Action Oldham argued that in his experience, ethnic groups in Oldham shared the same problems:

I suspect that if the communities involved could have seen that they had the same problems, there wouldn't have been riots but there would have been a demonstration outside the community centre. I would have thought that would have ultimately been more wholesome and resulted in more positive outcomes for Oldham in the long term.

Yet, later in the interview he stated that despite these similarities, ethnic groups require different types of support to the white population. He did not believe that white groups should have their own representation like BME groups: 'I don't think there's a respectable group that would say we work for the white community...no, if that's what you're asking, then I don't think so. No, I would have a problem with that...' The exclusion of Asians is interpreted as a problem of cultural difference, whereas it is not for white people. Cultural recognition is seen as a legitimate form of empowerment for Asians and a way for the Council to engage with them; however, the notion of a 'white' culture is not acceptable. Therefore, there is incoherence in the approach to cultural identity.

Another concern is that the stress on diversity might lead to crude stereotypes about ethnic groups, and ignore the internal diversity of attitudes and interests. Peshkar stresses in its corporate literature that it is a company produced by people of South Asian origin, appealing to those of similar origin: 'Theatre goers know that if they come to a Peshkar performance they will either be empowered (through seeing themselves represented on stage) or stimulated (through being exposed to fresh angles and points of view on contemporary society). Our tours consistently attract a high proportion of BME members.' Yet, on the same page, it explains that it does 'not represent communities, we represent individuals within them'. Peshkar finds such cover-all terms as 'British South Asian 'problematic, failing as they do to adequately reflect the rich variety of that which they describe'. This seems to be a contradiction – on the one hand, ethnic categories are seen to be useful in capturing individuals' feelings and concerns; yet, on the other hand, they are seen to be a restraint and cannot capture the diversity of individuals within the group.

The Asian respondents I interviewed were the most ambivalent about ethnic categories that were used by policy-makers. They were more conscious of the differences *within* Asian communities than their white counterparts, pointing in particular to the gap between generations. Three Asian youth workers explained to me that Asian parents sometimes disapproved of letting their children (especially daughters) engage with theatre, dance and music, fearing that their children might become 'westernised'. Young people also held cultural attitudes and aspirations that

their parents or peers frequently did not share. The rhetoric of diversity, therefore, seems to recognise mostly ethnic differences, but these can belie other, perhaps more significant differences between people.

Therefore, whilst respondents wholeheartedly showed their support for the idea of diversity, they also expressed ambivalence about how it defines groups, excludes others, and can be restrictive in its approach. To some extent, it was recognised that the very words of cultural policy – ‘diversity’, ‘access’ and ‘inclusion’ held little appeal to ordinary people in Oldham. These terms reflected the desires of funders and organisations rather than people at grassroots level. An (unnamed) staff member at Gallery Oldham stated that despite their constant attempts to engage people through identity, it seemed that ethnic groups were not really that interested:

...we’ve said we’ve got a project making banners and we’ll be working with this group, that group and the other group and it’s very difficult and you know you’ve got to do this to get the money, but the actual...I don’t know, but the actual thing of engaging with certain groups is very difficult... until we know what people want, it’s really difficult to know what to do. It’s really difficult to get into communities and say do you want to come in and would you like to do project...and they say we’d love, oh yes, we’d love to turn up and we’d love to do some stitching, and then no bugger turns up. We have to go to their street and knock on their doors - honestly! But you know it’s like with the tick boxes, they’ve got to be made to come, you’ve got to engage, you’ve got to whip them to come!

This suggests that ‘diversity’ is a policy principle driven by official channels, rather than ‘from below’, and that the benevolent promotion of difference sounds a jarring note for those it targets. Despite the concern to promote interaction across difference, through ideas of neighbourliness and politeness, there are recurring references to ‘community’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘identity’ which reinforce the sense of difference.

### *Correcting attitudes and promoting cultural difference*

The rhetoric of cultural identity in policy discourse treats difference as something inherently positive. Ethnic identity is seen as a 'natural' identification that requires affirmation. For instance, the motto 'equal but different' was repeated throughout a film commissioned by Oldham Race Equality Partnership called *Celebrating Diversity*, about the run-up to the Festival of Diversity in the town in 2005 and featured young people preparing performances for the finale event at the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Arguably, however, this celebration of cultural difference depoliticises it by removing it from scrutiny and criticism. Difference is not something to be disagreed over and challenged, but to be maintained through appropriate ethical behaviour. As a result, people are expected to attend the same public events, share public services (like housing or youth centres) or interact at a personal level (through polite, neighbourly relations), but I found very little interest in the policy literature or among interview respondents in promoting political or intellectual interaction and debate. The Council has been particularly keen to support major festivals in the borough, such as the Oldham Carnival which is held every summer and attracts over 25,000 people. In its publicity literature OMBC highlights the numbers of people who attend such events, but does not discuss the nature of engagement or content of the interaction. In this sense, cultural space is about affirming pride and identity, or bringing people together in 'joyous' moments, but it is very clearly not about discussion and exploring disagreements. Aftab Hussain, of Peshkar Theatre noted this fact. When I asked him about the state of public debate in the area, he said that many young people he knew loved to argue about issues affecting them, but there was no place to do it publicly. If people are discussing ideas, it seems to only be in small, private groups, rather than publicly supported 'cultural space'. Cultural activities do not tend to broach controversial issues in Oldham, but stay within the realms of leisure, entertainment or community 'togetherness'.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> McGuigan (1996) might describe riots as forms of 'cultural expression' but it is hard to imagine the disturbances of 2001 being treated as such in OMBC's cultural diversity policies (110).

Malik (2002a) argues that the promotion of difference is an unsatisfactory way to address political disagreements as it ensures the preservation of competing views, rather than a willingness to develop shared ideas and beliefs: 'A cohesive notion of citizenship cannot be based simply on the idea that we should respect other people's values. It requires a positive articulation of the values to which we should all aspire.' To develop common ideas would require laying out competing ethical, moral and political principles and asking people to judge them against each other – in other words, to defend their own positions through debate with the intention of persuading others to agree with them. Conflict and disagreement, therefore, are necessary preconditions for developing a common identity. The stress on tolerating or 'respect' other viewpoints in OMBC's policy literature leads to the precise opposite and an ethics-based approach to handling difference.

As a result, difference is something that cannot be ignored, nor overcome, but exists as an ever-present source of tension which policy-makers must *manage*. This opens up a potentially new regulatory function for the state, in terms of policing what people can and cannot say about controversial issues. This is illustrated in the way in which the Council espouses open debate, yet deems certain views to be inappropriate – particularly any comments that are racist, and therefore illegitimate or 'misrepresentative'. For instance, in one policy document, the authors state the need for open and honest dialogue:

We believe that community cohesion can only come about through people freely choosing to increase mutual understanding, interaction and participation in the life of the Borough, and that the process must be characterised by an honest, fair, frank and open debate using language that is shared and widely understood (OMBC, 2002: 15).

Two pages later, the authors express concern that this debate is properly policed for inappropriate viewpoints and behaviour: 'All agencies in Oldham must work together to tackle racist behaviour and to challenge misleading statements and misrepresentation' (17). As I have suggested, this approach coincides with a growth

in anti-racism/cultural sensitivity training and schemes and an acceptance that Oldham Council has a role in presenting the 'correct' attitudes and ideas about race.

Culture is seen as a way to conduct this type of regulation and behavioural modification, allowing the authorities to monitor and shape the way in which people engage with one another. This is particularly the case with young people, who are regarded as being in need of interpersonal training, to mitigate against the cultural prejudices of their communities. For instance, Ed Kelly of Oldham Youth Service described a project called 'Fusion', which is a week long residential school for children: 'they get put with people they don't necessarily know, so they can learn about different cultures, religions'. He was very explicit that the aim of the project was not to 'just do it for doing it's sake' but to re-engineer thinking amongst young people towards racism.

...we take young people away for a week to stay overnight and because it's quite an intense experience it really does allow us to get into those underlying beliefs and values, and by experiencing being with other young people and other workers of different communities and cultures and taking part in workshops which are geared to raising awareness you can really shift their attitudes...By its nature, music's one of the key mechanisms we can use in terms of creating awareness and understanding and challenging attitudes and changing behaviour, we do a hell of a lot of music.

Here Kelly is describing a project that is primarily designed to change attitudes and engender new feelings towards people of different ethnic backgrounds. This is through arts and cultural activities which are emotionally relevant to all groups, and therefore stress similarities. But in this environment of tolerance and discussion, some attitudes are not tolerated:

I expect all my workers to challenge inappropriate lyrics and use that as a way in. We won't allow any homophobic or aggressive gangland lyrics...I've heard young people give inappropriate comments that we've got to work through. If it's ever too heavy, then obviously follow the racism incident

procedure and if it's really heavy get the police involved but it very rarely happens....

The criterion for intolerance is whether it might cause offence or 'oppression'. 'We're not allowed to promote any particular political belief or religion, though we wouldn't tolerate any behaviour or views that would oppress anyone because of their religion.' Therefore, whilst young people are encouraged to mix with each other, there is a strict expectation that their interaction is shaped by the ethical code of respect for difference. Anyone who does not comply is faced with a challenge from authority. The impulse of this approach is to regulate consensus and tolerance, for fear that it cannot be sustained without official intervention.

This is not to suggest that youth workers in Oldham do not discuss or debate issues with young people beyond the confines of personal ethics – no doubt many do – but their responsibility as set by official policy is primarily at the level of ethics and shaping personal behaviour, rather than engaging with the arguments such opinions represent. It would appear that the imperative is to avoid confrontation by invoking the need to respect cultural difference, even though there may be political disagreements and divisions underlying such attitudes. 'Common values' are simply assumed, rather than debated.

There is, then, an impulse to regulate discussion and enforce the idea of 'respect' in Oldham. 'Respect' is a term that is never properly defined but indicates a sensitivity to, and positive acceptance of, a way of life or set of attitudes. This is accepted as necessary by most policy-actors in Oldham as a way to diffuse tension. The enforcement of this ethical code is apparent in the actions of OMBC, which has sought on a number of occasions to silence controversial opinion or confrontational discussion in the name of safety or 'community relations'. In the 2001 local elections, the far-right British National Party (BNP) gained its strongest electoral result in the UK in more than a decade. Oldham West and Royton, BNP leader Nick Griffin won 6552 votes (16.4 per cent), and in Oldham East and Saddleworth, the BNP candidate Mick Treacy won 5091 votes, almost 11 per cent of the total vote. Aware that the national media was watching, and concerned that the BNP would have a public

platform, the Council banned all political parties from speaking that evening, including the BNP winner, thereby refusing them their chance to speak to the electorate. This 'ban' was seen as a necessary way of alleviating tension in the town; a precedent had already been set by the Commission for Racial Equality which had made an official request to all three political parties not to play the 'race card' that year (O'Neill, 2001). In September 2001, the Home Secretary banned all public marches in Oldham until October on grounds of safety. Cattle (2001) pointed out that there were complaints from the public about the police's over zealous restrictions on political marches against racism in the town, and festivals to celebrate cultural diversity (60). Yet, at the same time, it should be noted that both the Ritchie and the Cattle Reports advocated that political parties work together to agree common rules over how to discuss race – implying that such debate required policing for inappropriate language and statements.

The stress on safety has also led to attempts to regulate interaction between groups. 'The Wall' is a wrought iron fence that was put up between Royle Close and Honeywell Lane in Hathershaw, following the riots. In 2001, the locals welcomed the fence and even asked for a wall to be constructed because the passageway was being used for criminal activity. However, by 2004, locals reported in the newspaper that they wanted it to be removed as it had become rusty and felt divisive for locals (*The Asian News*, 2004). In September 2001, the police were also reported to have looked into applying to the Home Secretary for permission to instigate curfew laws in Oldham for young people in areas where there was likely to be 'trouble' (*The Asian News*, 2001a). Some of OMBC's tactics are borrowed directly from Northern Ireland, which is regarded as an exemplary case of community cohesion strategies. In 2002 the Council initiated the 'Building Good Relations' programme and employed Mediation Ireland to give mediation training to Council staff (Institute of Community Cohesion, 2006). Interestingly, OMBC's role as an arbitrator and regulator of race relations extends to policing. Local authorities have insisted on their right to designate other people's actions and behaviour as racist, even in some cases where the individuals concerned (victims and aggressors) deny this to be the case (O'Neill, 2001; *The Asian News*, 2001b).

These examples show that although there is a strong discourse of shared space and unity in Oldham's cultural and community strategies, it coexists with a concern to manage difference and regulate public space. The reification of difference as something beyond scrutiny or intellectual debate leaves it as a source of potential tension that requires official monitoring.

#### *Role of state and official recognition of culture*

As I have suggested thus far, local policy-makers have taken an interest in culture not only for its measurable economic and social outcomes, but also as part of an attempt to reengineer attitudes of citizens and minimise confrontation. One aspect of this is to use culture to promote tolerance and diversity amongst different groups. OMBC and its funded bodies have taken on a kind of regulatory role in bestowing recognition upon certain cultural identities, symbols or attitudes, as well as censoring or criticising others. This is primarily played out through stories in the local media, whereby OMBC tries to demonstrate its credentials as an inclusive organisation that respects difference.

For instance, in March 2002, Council leaders publicised their decision to fly the Union Jack flag from the Civic Centre, as a way to reclaim it as a symbol from the extreme right. It also stated it would fly the Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi flags for the duration of official visits from those countries (*The Asian News*, 2002). At the level of cultural institutions, as I have already shown, there are numerous projects and initiatives in the town advertised in the local media. These measures are clearly driven by a desire to positively value difference in order to make local ethnic populations feel included.

However, there is also concern that certain identities are confrontational and therefore should not be valorised in public. A particularly live example, which I came across during my fieldwork, concerned the flying of the English national flag, the St. George's cross. Although this is not really a well-established tradition in the town (nor, arguably in England as a whole), it had become a political issue in recent years through the local and national media, particularly since the European Football

Championships in 1996, when England hosted the competition and the flag was visibly popular throughout the country. In the interviews I conducted, some people mentioned that they had heard the Council had 'banned' the flying of the flag, although nobody knew when or why this had happened. One respondent suggested it was because of health and safety issues, whereas another suggested it was probably to cause prevent causing offence to local Asians.

I could not substantiate whether a ban had occurred or not (nobody I interviewed from OMBC or its client bodies seemed to know, and I could not find reports of it in the local newspapers). However, the message of this widely accepted 'urban myth' was clear: Oldham Council did not want white people to celebrate their identity in this way because it was a risk to local community relations.

The truth, however, is far more complex. On the one hand, the Council has acknowledged that white culture needs recognition in some way. In its report, *Forward Together*, OMBC acknowledged comments by a Government Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor that highlighted the need for white communities to be given opportunities to express and celebrate their culture alongside the other communities of Oldham.' An important issue is the need to recognise and value the culture and heritage of Oldham's white, working class communities.' OMBC, 2004b: 9). However, there are also implicit assumptions amongst certain respondents involved in local policy-making that affirming 'white' or 'English' identity could create tensions. For instance, Annie O'Neill was initially very positive about the need for people to celebrate their own cultural identities and show them to other people. When I suggested to her that there did not seem to be many activities that celebrated specifically 'English' identity, she responded that the some groups in Saddleworth and Royton (largely white residential areas) had been supported in non-financial ways to hold events but said that they could not offer funds as their own funding had been cut. I then probed further about why there seemed to be fewer 'English events' in the programme of funded work. She went on to explain:

I think I would be concerned about getting too involved in something that was billed as something that was particularly English event. Yes, I would be

concerned about that really, because I'd rather be promoting an event that was all inclusive.

I then asked why an 'English' event was necessarily exclusive, presuming that Bangladeshi events or projects worked along similar lines and promoted one specific identity that might be more relevant to some people than others. She then responded:

Because I think St George's Day has particular connotations. Because in a way it's been hijacked for political purposes and I think that's something that we'd want to avoid. I know that one of the big parades as part of Streets Ahead in Manchester falls on St George's Day and there was a bit of trouble at that. With the BNP.

This would suggest that the Council is aware that certain cultural symbols and identifications are politically charged and therefore 'off-limits'. In particular, there is awareness that extreme right groups have seized upon the importance of culture and are using symbols like the St George's flag to express their own grievances. Despite the ethic to celebrate all cultures and identities, OMBC is in a precarious position, because some cultures and identities are inherently confrontational and politicised. As a consequence, OMBC must decide which cultures it does *not* wish to celebrate.

Therefore, although OMBC does not have an official policy to exclude white culture, its politicized approach to cultural symbols means that there is a widespread perception that it does. Phil Wood explained with regard to the St George's flag ban, 'it doesn't matter whether it was true or not, it was 'believable'. In this sense, there is a clear paradox in the council's strategy: it has sought to use culture as a way to promote diversity and inclusion but has potentially fuelled a sense of exclusion from other groups. When I asked Kevin Shaw at Oldham Coliseum about whether white people feel they are included or not, he felt that they did not: 'It's an issue, it's a real issue. These economically disadvantaged communities look at the Millennium Centre [owned by the Oldham Bangladeshi Association]...I can understand if you live in squalor....Ignorance breeds resentment.' Although he believed that the council and

Cultural Partnership did try to ensure a fair balance of representation, he conceded that there was still white resentment which they struggled to overcome. Phil Wood concurred that the white population had turned to contentious cultural symbols, for lack of an alternative meaningful identity: 'The flag has become seen as the only way they can express themselves. In places like Fitton Hill, poor areas like that. There's a complete loss of working class culture.'

Whilst the Council may not recognise or acknowledge resentments ('I must admit we've had very little request to do anything about St George's Day, and we've had the odd person ring up...' Annie O'Neill), they seem to surface in other, unofficial discourse, such as rumours and newspaper articles. For instance, one story that circulated was about how the Council had not included Christmas in its official diaries and calendars (*The Asian News*, 2007). A substantial majority of the people I interviewed expressed some concern about 'political correctness' in the town and the need for more honest debate. Although few people believed that words or arguments were actually banned (indeed, there was a sort of light-hearted mocking sense in their statements) there was a belief that certain criticisms could not be made. Some regarded the efforts of anti-racism advocates as unnecessary and self-congratulatory, rather than helpful. One (unnamed) respondent felt that anti-racist groups from outside Oldham overplayed the influence of the BNP and were just 'stirring up trouble' rather than dealing with the 'real' issues of poverty, and education. Aftab Hussain echoed this by saying that he thought the issue of racism had been exaggerated and that there was too much 'political correctness':

I think it's silly...people are entitled to their own culture. Asian people think it's a bit barmy sometimes. That's down to councillors who aren't in touch with the communities they serve. It sends out a dangerous message - we're a special case, we're really easy to offend, we're not chilled out like white people, and others then might say we don't want a mosque in our street...It's bureaucrats making these decisions.

Even if the Council is not actually banning activities or censoring speech, local people can see that OMBC's cultural policy is clearly driven by political sensitivities and a

concern about what might incite tensions. Phil Wood explained that the Oldham Mela, an annual Asian-themed event in Alexandra Park, had had its funding cut a couple of years after the riots because there was concern from the Council that it might be perceived as a separatist initiative. He suggested that this was 'going to the other extreme'. Although he acknowledged that they may have wanted to enforce their policy of integration, he believed that it was also about managing perceptions and lacking confidence in their own leadership to sponsor events that would attract some controversy.

Such an example shows how heavily politicised the arena of culture is, and how difficult it is for the authorities to intervene whilst maintaining credibility as impartial regulators. These 'knee jerk' reactions suggest that the Council is not entirely confident in its role. Yet, in accepting this responsibility, OMBC struggles to balance the resentments that emerge. Rather than seeing the limitations of the local state's capacity to arbitrate effectively between groups, OMBC is called upon to bestow even more recognition. The lack of trust in the authority of Oldham Council leads to a circular pressure on it to consult further with the communities, and thus, to invite further resentment from those communities that have not been properly consulted.

In her study of racial tensions in the US, Terry Ann Knopf (2006) explains how the pervasiveness of race rumours indicates an underlying social conflict. They thrive where situations are ambiguous and officials do not make their positions on particular issues clear. Lack of transparency can lead to suspicion and the loss of trust in official channels. Fine and Turner (2001) suggest that rumours serve an expressive function in a climate where more public channels are censored or closed to certain opinions:

What happens when we dare not speak these beliefs? What happens when we deny - to ourselves and to others - that we hold them because we have come to accept that they are morally illegitimate? We believe that two responses are common. First, we become ashamed; we withdraw from dialogue... Second, following from this, we become too willing to accept claims of 'actual happenings' that support these hidden beliefs' (16).

This reaction seems evident in the UK in recent years. Hewitt (2005) describes how a white backlash developed in South East London in response to race equality measures and the intense media interest following the racially-motivated murder of the young black youth, Stephen Lawrence. He describes how racism was 'tucked away' amongst the politically powerless white working class, who had festering grievances – their rumours grew through neighbourhood talk, rumour, narrative and counter-narrative (34). The authorities' tactics to silence these views by 'scary and oblique references' to the BNP ended up reinforcing the sense of shame people felt, and further drove these views underground without proper scrutiny. Likewise, stories about 'political correctness gone mad' in the media have been shown in newspaper reports to be urban myths (Taylor, D., 2002; Burkeman, 2006). However, the point is that such stories only have credence amongst the public because they reflect the widespread suspicion that cultural policy decisions are driven by political motives.

It would be impossible without proper research to speculate on the extent to which such rumours are widespread in Oldham, but it would appear that at the very least, some white people feel frustrated or excluded from the cultural space. Diversity policies seem to fuel their resentment, and furthermore, their identification with 'whiteness'. This becomes a vicious circle, because as the white identity becomes more politicised and controversial, the harder it is for OMBC to incorporate it into the non-confrontational discourse of diversity.

Hence, there is a contradictory tension between, on the one hand, a reaction against overbearing, intrusive regulation and 'political correctness', and on the other hand, a demand for more official management of diversity and recognition of identity. For instance, Cattle noted critically in his 2006 report that people in Oldham 'wanted to ask questions around faith and culture, but were afraid to do so because it might be thought 'politically incorrect'' (Institute of Community Cohesion, 2006: 49). He argued that a more honest and open debate was needed to broach difficult issues. Yet he then pointed out the need for OMBC to institute more cultural awareness training within the voluntary and community sector, suggesting that people required support from the authorities in how to approach culturally sensitive subjects. Despite

the concern about overbearing political correctness, there is still a belief that the Council needs to do more to 'educate' ordinary people. As long as difference is reified as an identity that cannot be properly debated, it haunts social interactions as a potential source of tension that requires official management. Yet increasingly, OMBC lacks the moral authority or credibility to play this role.

### *Ambivalence of difference*

It is very difficult to judge the extent to which social divisions have increased or decreased in Oldham since OMBC implemented its post-2001 riots strategy. As such, it is hard to assess whether its cultural strategy has achieved its objectives except through anecdotal evidence and abstract statistics. At the extreme level of violent or verbal confrontation, OMBC has achieved a substantial reduction in the number of racist incidents reported to the police - from 160 per month in 2001, to 45 per month in 2003/4 (see Oldham, 2004b: 16). Of course, indicators such as personal attitudes and community relations cannot be expected to change overnight and will need to be monitored over the long-term.

In 2006, the Cattle Report noted that Oldham had taken important practical steps in addressing racial segregation and achieved some short-term successes.<sup>113</sup> Yet, he expressed concern that the problems of division remained pertinent. He suggested, furthermore, that regardless of how much structural change was put in place, division would continue to be a problem as long as communities were stuck in their attitudes about difference:

This is as much in the minds of people as in neighbourhood structures and is at odds with experience in many other areas of the country. Hence our view that if you want to change a community, the community must want to

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<sup>113</sup> In 2004 no BNP councillors were elected, although they had achieved some success in nine other districts nearby. There was also improved ethnic representation on the council staff - 5.7 per cent of the total.

change. In short, polarised communities continue to be a significant feature of relations across all sections of Oldham society.<sup>114</sup>

Yet, although Cantle blames the people of Oldham to an extent for their 'attitudes', it is worth considering how official policy is itself deeply ambivalent and confused about how to 'manage' difference. Policy initiatives and advice (like Cantle's) have been making a paradoxical case; asking people to 'celebrate' and 'respect' their differences, whilst at the same time berating people for feeling that they are different. It may even be possible that such confusion has served to reinforce existing tensions in the town, so that the subtle nuances and confusions of the policy discourse mediate ethnic division anew.

Overall, the stress on cultural difference reflects how Oldham is caught between two contradictory impulses – to forget the riots altogether or to focus on ethnic division as the central cause of the town's problems. In 2004, Oldham MP Phil Woolas and former Oldham Mayor, Councillor Riaz Ahmed reacted angrily to news that a former student of the Oldham Sixth Form College was planning a production of *Romeo and Juliet* set in Oldham, at the Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre. The play was intended to examine some of the tensions arising out of the riots. But Woolas said it was time for the town to 'move on', and 'unfortunately we just can't seem to stop people talking about the riots' (*The Asian News*, 2004). This criticism seems unfair, considering that the Council itself has placed so much emphasis on ethnic divisions and community cohesion, particularly in its own cultural strategy. It seems unlikely that the town could 'move on' from the riots and race-related troubles when they have become the defining feature of Oldham's cultural policy. It is not simply the people of Oldham who remain caught in the prism of 'cultural difference', but the Council itself.

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<sup>114</sup> Ritchie and Cantle made similar points in 2001: Ritchie said: 'There is a willingness to put responsibility onto the shoulders of officialdom, which too easily can be a reason for people not to shape up to their own responsibilities, beginning with their own attitudes. People must be prepared to look hard and honestly at these and where they need to change to decide to change them and then do so' (Ritchie, 2001: 4). Cantle, 2001: 'It is easy to focus on systems, processes and institutions and to forget that community cohesion fundamentally depends on people and their values' (18).

## **Conclusion**

In this case study I have examined how culture is used to address a particular set of social problems in Oldham. The economic dimension of the cultural strategy appears initially to follow the conventional arguments for cultural-led regeneration in terms of building home grown creative industries and attracting the 'creative class. However, when probed further, it is clear that OMBC's cultural strategy is also oriented to improving individual employability, self-confidence and personal development. There is considerable stress on psychological factors to effect social change. The cultural strategy also addresses the issue of community cohesion, which is deemed to be a factor in the town's recurrent problems.

Overall, a guiding principle is that of 'diversity' and recognising different cultural identities. This has resulted in an orientation within the main arts institutions in Oldham towards inclusive strategies that will celebrate cultural difference. Culture – as an emotional, primal form of experience – is seen as a way to bring people together in a way that politics cannot.

I proceeded to show the contradictions inherent to this approach. First, I suggested that there was ambivalence about the principle of diversity. It was applied inconsistently, particularly towards the white population. This exposed the way in which the stress on cultural identity could be exclusive as well as inclusive. There was also ambivalence about the way in which ethnic identities could mask differentiation within groups. Also, culture is regarded as a way of bringing people together through ethical or emotional connections, but this avoids the need for political argument and debate.

Finally, the turn to culture means that the state has willingly acquired a new role as an engineer of local attitudes. The state seeks to manage difference and promote 'respect'. However, the politicised nature of cultural policy and the principle of 'diversity' means that OMBC's cultural authority is treated with some scepticism locally. Cultural policy therefore becomes a source of contention as well as a tool for achieving harmony.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **EXPLAINING THE CONTRADICTIONS AND TENSIONS WITHIN LOCAL CULTURAL STRATEGIES**

#### **7.1 The emergence of a new cultural policy discourse**

The case studies conducted in the previous two chapters explored the lived reality of cultural policy in the local government context. These illustrated some of the complex rationales behind policies and the problems arising from their implementation.

My research into Oldham and Tower Hamlets reveals that although councils may operate in very different local contexts and face distinct challenges with regards to their populations, their development of cultural policy is remarkably consistent in many ways. The two boroughs have slightly different social and economic regeneration issues to contend with but both regard culture as a vital part of their economic and social strategy. As I suggested, Tower Hamlets is widely regarded as a pioneer of cultural regeneration and it was to be expected that culture would play a significant part in its regeneration strategy. Yet somewhat surprisingly, Oldham is as enthusiastic – if not more – for the new ‘rhetorical idiom’ of cultural policy, even though it is widely regarded around the rest of the country as a ‘shabby mill town’. This would suggest that the new cultural policy discourse is sufficiently pervasive in the local government sector that even those towns that are perceived to be ‘behind the curve’ willingly embrace it.

The case studies also show that this cultural policy discourse is not simply imposed by the state, but is fashioned by actors in state and non-state organisations working in ‘partnership’: artists, arts organisations, community and voluntary groups, regeneration agencies, private and public funding bodies. As Stoker (2004) points out about local government in general, policy-making has become subject to a wider variety of agencies. This does not mean that disagreements do not exist between groups and the local authorities. For instance, in Tower Hamlets, local campaign groups strongly opposed plans to redevelop Spitalfields Market, and many local artists expressed their ambivalence about council policies to me. However, there is

greater opportunity for third sector groups to be involved in the planning and delivery of cultural policy. Whilst Dearlove (1973) drew a distinction between 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' groups, others have argued that this is less sharply pronounced today (Wilson, *et al*, 2006: 339-340).

Both councils work in close cooperation with local cultural organisations and individuals, forming local 'cultural policy elites' that are well connected and transmit ideas. These elites enjoy high-level relationships with the council, indicating that culture is not merely a 'low politics' issue, and that they are not merely reacting to council policy but actively involved in shaping it. Indeed, it is often cultural practitioners who are driving the 'cultural turn' and trying to integrate culture into regeneration issues, often 'attaching' themselves to increase their influence, as Gray (2002) suggests. Whilst on this level, they think of themselves as 'players' who are adept at using the system to gain rewards, they also see themselves closely tied to the local state's strategy. Therefore, the 'instrumentalist' position as it is often described, is not only about meeting targets, but is part of a wider ideological commitment to using culture for social ends.

This ideology is also something that cross-fertilizes across regions, as local government personnel increasingly travel to work, spread ideas and cultivate 'stereotyped ideological responses' in the local government sector (Dunleavy, 1980). In both case studies, the local authorities had used external consultants with experience and expertise derived from around the country. Hannigan's notion of 'issue entrepreneurs' is certainly applicable to organisations like Comedia and Urbed which have spread ideas about cultural policy widely.<sup>115</sup>

However, whilst there is a clear consistency about the overall importance of culture to social life, actors in different sectors articulated the rationales for this slightly differently, and sometimes, self-consciously, in opposition to each other.

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<sup>115</sup> Comedia worked in both Tower Hamlets and Oldham. Urbed worked in Oldham, and to my knowledge, have not worked directly in Tower Hamlets, although Anwar Akhtar mentioned his knowledge of their work in his interview.

In Tower Hamlets, cultural policy is accorded high priority within local regeneration and community strategies but the relationship between the council professionals and the cultural sector is imbued with a degree of strife and conflict. Local cultural organisations may work 'in partnership' with the council, but within their own network they express cynicism and resentment about the council's policies. The community-based artists' network, which is self-avowedly 'radical' and anti-establishment in character, is fairly critical about what it sees as the economically driven nature of Tower Hamlets' cultural policy. This does not tend to translate into practical opposition of much consequence, but it results in a widespread feeling of suspicion. People in this sector oppose what they see as the commodification of culture whilst justifying their work as more 'holistic', and socially oriented. At the same time, there is also ambivalence amongst artists about the community orientation of arts and cultural support. Although the local state talks in terms of community and wellbeing, local artists appear to be uncomfortable with this language. I will go on to explore the reasons for this in more detail in the next section.

Also, the development of cultural policy in Tower Hamlets is subject to the concerns of many other agencies, such as the Greater London Authority, the London Development Agency and the Arts Council. This 'crowded' nature of policy-making may mean that it has less coherence and actors feel greater distance from its construction. Tower Hamlets itself has a somewhat incoherent identity. People are likely to commute in and out of the borough for work and leisure, meaning that residents are just as - if not more - likely to see themselves as Londoners within the wider city, rather than as only belonging to this area.

By contrast, Oldham seems to have achieved stronger integration between its cultural and regeneration strategies. This is somewhat unexpected considering that there is a much smaller scale of cultural activity in the borough and the council itself has only recently adopted the ideas of cultural policy thinking. OMBC has a close working relationship to the local cultural sector, and has championed cultural initiatives like the cultural quarter development and local area agreement target. This suggests that culture is given high priority. A key factor seems to be that OMBC

has considerable autonomy over its regeneration strategy – the strategies it pursues do not strongly conflict or overlap with other towns so there is a sense from local actors of ownership and influence. Whereas LBTH is a major borough in the capital city, OMBC is a relatively small town in the north-west of England and these positions undoubtedly affect their approaches.

Another major difference between both case studies is the degree of autonomy and scale of the cultural sector. Oldham's cultural sector is highly reliant on state support and does not have a strong independent space in which to develop a critical mass of ideas. According to the Voluntary Action Oldham online directory, there are approximately 20 arts-based groups in the borough compared to approximately 85 in Tower Hamlets. Nor is there a commercial art sector in the town (except for one private art dealer based in Saddleworth), compared to over one hundred private and public galleries (not to mention freelance artists and dealers) in Tower Hamlets. In Tower Hamlets, institutions which receive very little LBTH money - for instance, the Whitechapel Gallery - play an important role in the artistic network and maintaining its critical voice. Therefore, Oldham's network of cultural professionals develops ideas about cultural policy in tandem with the local state, rather than autonomously, with its own values and objectives.

## **7.2 A reconfiguration of subjectivity: the emergence of cultural policy explained**

I suggest that the arguments framing cultural policies in both case study areas can be reduced down to a number of key elements. The local state expects cultural policy to contribute to local regeneration, and the policy documents are governed by a clear economic rationale. Cultural institutions and projects are perceived to help increase employment in the creative industries and boost inward investment and tourism, a finding which reinforces the arguments found in the existing academic literature, which I discussed in Chapter Two. This economic rationale is strong, even though the evidence in both case studies shows that the creative sector is unlikely to provide a sufficiently high volume of jobs or generate significant business activity to meet local needs.

However, the case studies also show that economic arguments are not solely framed in terms of conventional economic objectives, such as job creation or industry growth. Indeed, in Tower Hamlets there seems to be strong resentment about the economic-led cultural regeneration strategies of previous years – especially from arts and community organisations - which tended to focus on high-skilled jobs, private investment and cosmetic redevelopment of buildings and land. Some actors even believed that this approach had increased inequalities.

In this sense, the economic arguments for cultural policy contain another dimension: *individuated personal development*. The focus of much cultural policy is about making socially excluded individuals employable in a new, flexible labour market, and generating economic opportunities by changing individual behaviour. This is about making individuals responsible, economically productive, confident and connected to a community. One could argue that this is still articulated in the conventional economic language of 'upskilling'. However, there is also a tendency in this skills discourse to refer to 'soft skills', such as communication, creative-thinking, and empathy, which all have a clear psychological emphasis. Cultural projects and participation enable people to gain 'confidence', 'self-esteem', and 'well-being', which in turn is supposed to help them become productive and entrepreneurial. Furthermore, cultural policy helps individuals deal with the emotional effects of structural problems which they feel little control over.

This emphasis on psychological factors supports Furedi's description of 'therapy culture' in broader society and its promotion and perpetuation by the state. Policy-makers have turned to cultural policy as a way to address the presumed demand for recognition, positive self- image and representation. As I have already suggested, the rhetoric of cultural policy reflects the dominance of the ideas of the New Left, which Stuart Hall states was partly about recognising 'the return of the subjective' in social and political analyses (Hall, S., 1989: 120-121). Terry Eagleton (2000) argues that the turn to culture in this way is fundamentally utopian, a desire to achieve in the realm of the imagination a resolution of the fundamental structural contradictions of capital. For him, the post-structuralist turn to culture attributes historical agency

to individuated, culturised strategies of representation at the realm of consumption, thus abandoning collective strategies at the level of production.

The use of culture to change attitudes also has a strong political, as well as economic dimension. As I showed in Chapter Two, culture has become regarded by the local state as an alternative way to engage individuals and mediate the contradictions of social experience – alienation - under capitalism today. It is clear from the two case studies that cultural activities are perceived to help generate a sense of community and cultural identification. In Tower Hamlets, cultural projects such as Rich Mix centre, the Brady Arts Service and various other smaller, ethnic-based arts organisations are expected to engage the local community in the regeneration process and help nurture their cultural identity. In Oldham, arts and cultural activities are valued for encouraging participation in a way that more conventional modes of political engagement seem unable to. As I have pointed out, there is some evidence from these case studies that local government cultural policies often fail to achieve these aims and may even create local resentment. Thus, there appears to be a gap between the intentions of policy and actual outcomes.

But leaving the consequences of policies aside, it is accepted wisdom that culture offers a new, updated approach to engaging with citizens, particularly minority groups. Culture allows room for *emotional* engagement and subjective experience. It is not 'rational' and therefore, based on judgements between one type of idea over another, but rather, it allows differences and competing value systems to co-exist. This approach focuses on people's different and particular cultural identities as members of communities (being black, Asian, female, gay, disabled, etc) rather than on the ideal of the colour-blind, 'universal' citizen who is engaged with through abstract ideas and argument. The concept of diversity is also part of a desire to change attitudes about difference and teach people to be more 'tolerant' and 'respectful'. In this sense, cultural policy has both a practical/instrumental dimension, but also a moral/ethical one.

As I have suggested, many of the artists, activists, and community organisations I spoke to in Tower Hamlets and Oldham accepted the economic, instrumentalist

objectives for cultural policy, but they tended to combine it with broader arguments about personal development. In Tower Hamlets, it was especially important that the benefits of cultural-led regeneration were about the 'local community' rather than the local government or private interests. Thus, whilst there are differences and, to some extent, antagonisms between how groups rationalise cultural policy, they largely share an instrumentalist view of culture. I have shown that there is a mixing of economic and social/community discourses. Only a few individuals (and these were in Tower Hamlets) were sceptical of the instrumentalist agenda and proposed a defence of the idea of 'art for art's sake'. These also tended to be the people least tied into the LBTH policy agenda.

In order to tie together these various strands it would be helpful to restate the conceptual framework I presented in Chapter Three about the rationales behind cultural policy.

I asserted that cultural policy in the modern era necessarily relies on a notion of 'universality' for its legitimacy. The public nature of cultural policy means that its authority cannot rest merely on the arbitrary, private taste of individuals, but upon more objective criteria of judgement, derived from knowledge that is (theoretically at least) available to everyone. Internally related to this are aesthetic concepts of hierarchical standards, quality and judgement. Culture is presumed to be something one cultivates through learning, reason and experience over time, rather than something one is born with or inherits from living within a local or particular community in a more anthropological sense. The appreciation of culture is supposed to be something that transcends the different relative experiences of human beings and, therefore, can belong to humanity as a whole. The implied purpose of a universalist cultural policy is to impart 'the best' of culture. This might be a changeable body of work, yet contains a core integrity based on this principle.

I then proceeded to argue that the idea of universality is currently in retreat. The breakdown of cultural authority and changing attitudes about subjectivity has led to a newer model of cultural policy that rests on the principle of diversity. This has been promoted and institutionalised over the past three decades through the New Left/

community arts movement, and it self-consciously rejects the older model of cultural policy. It is not concerned with promoting a particular kind of culture which is seen to be 'high' or the best in the Arnoldian sense, but which is appropriate or 'relevant' to the needs of the end users, or consumers. As such, this approach not only argues that the cultural 'canon' is outdated or irrelevant, but that its very premise – the ability to compare cultural products in relation to each other through aesthetic categories – is flawed. The value of culture is also presumed to be relative, resting solely upon its 'authenticity' and representativeness. This emphasis on diversity is also ethically instructive about the nature of citizenship and behaviour in social life, teaching people how to tolerate differences. Ultimately, the fashioning of a new kind of citizen is presented as a strategy to deal with a range of problems; economic and social regeneration, rebuilding communities, and nurturing a sense of identity.

I suggested this shift in cultural policy goes beyond questions of culture in the narrower, artistic sense, and is concomitant with a shift in social attitudes towards the human subject itself, particularly towards the idea that individual humans can transcend their subjective experience and acquire a more objective position from which to view the world and their place in it. The meaning of culture is emptied of the dialectical tension which Williams (2000) captured in his twin-fold definition of culture (as 'ordinary'/quotidian but also reflective/critical). Calcutt (2005) explains that, by privileging the 'ordinary', cultural thinking inevitably stops at the level of surface appearance and meaning, and its potential for critique remains limited. Culturalism, he argues, is an expression of conventionalism, and a circular emphasis on intersubjective relations rather than social relations (104, 118). It ceases to have any penetrative power, i.e. it is 'nothing special' or transcendent and everyone has their own 'cultures'. The emphasis on culture today is not a celebration of its universality, but rather, a rejection of abstract thinking and the ability to distinguish the merits of certain truth claims against others. This, I suggest, has implications for the cultural sector, but also reflects changes in broader political life today.

To clarify, I present here two models of cultural policy relating to Universalism and Identity, in order to draw out their distinct characteristics. These are 'ideal types' in

the Weberian sense, and have never existed in pure form in reality. They distil the essential features of competing ideological models of culture.

Table 5. Two 'ideal' models of cultural policy

<i>Universal cultural policy</i>	<i>Identity cultural policy</i>
Assumes a stable and unified subject. Capable of transcending subjective realm through abstraction.	Assumes an unstable, fragmented subject. Perspective is inevitably particular.
Possibility of objective knowledge. Culture as critique.	Subjective knowledge, partial insights are the limits of truth.
Subject can mediate ideas through reason and argument.	Subject can mediate subjective experience through emotion and empathy.
Unifies the general and the particular.	Splits the general and particular.
Robust, autonomous individual who determines own identity.	Vulnerable individual, dependent on recognition by others.
Culture is open to development and change.	Culture requires protection and continuity.
Subject shapes culture.	Subject shaped by culture.
'Nothing human is alien to me'.	'Relevance'.
Hierarchy of judgements.	Relativisation of judgements.
Autonomy: trusted to form relations with others.	Invites regulation: inherent differences can lead to conflict.
Social subject.	Atomised subject.

### **7.3 Contradictions of cultural policy discourse**

Thus far I have demonstrated the emergence of a new cultural policy discourse and proceeded to outline its slightly different but interconnected rationales. I will now proceed to explore some of the tensions that have emerged in its implementation. To

what extent did the case studies embody contemporary ideas and to what extent did they reflect their inherent contradictions?

*The crisis of cultural authority and cultural value*

I would suggest that there is a fundamental contradiction within the diversity model of cultural policy – the cultural institution necessarily gives value to its chosen display of objects, but at the same time, it must seek to show this value as relative; what Stuart Hall (2001) describes as the need 'to destabilise its own stabilities'. This contradictory pull in the discourse is barely acknowledged in official cultural policy literature, yet I would argue that it undermines a foundational premise. The *raison d'être* of the cultural institution – taking objects, words, or images out of ordinary life and placing them in a special, public space – means that it *cannot but* make a claim to universal value. The basis of this gesture invokes a claim about the worthiness of the object, which deems it appropriate for public esteem, rather than private preference. Conversely, if cultural institutions are expected to recognise all people as being equally creative and capable of producing great culture, it reduces all creativity – all culture – to being ordinary. What, then, is the point of the special space of the museum? Why should it have any value that distinguishes it from the everyday street? With what authority does the cultural institution choose, display or perform particular cultural forms if the only criterion is that it is authentically 'ordinary'? The recognition of culture cannot be empowering if a body without any transcendental authority bestows it. This confusion about the nature of cultural authority played out in the two case study areas though in different ways.

In Tower Hamlets, there are few clear criteria by which all art and cultural activities are judged in a commensurate fashion. Although the Council uses the word 'culture' repeatedly, this usually refers to many disparate activities that are often disparate. As a result, there is confusion about the purpose of culture. This fact was most exemplified in the 'crisis' of the Rich Mix project. On the one hand, Rich Mix rejects the notion of universality, which historically guided the work of older galleries (for instance, its neighbour, the Whitechapel Art Gallery), and claims that culture is always bound to the logic of particular community traditions, i.e. 'identity'. Hence 'high art' inevitably excludes minority cultures. However, the project has no other

authority upon which to build prestige. It is not sufficiently 'authentic' and by privileging artistic excellence over leisure, it does not provide the 'community' with what it wants. According to people involved in Rich Mix and the wider cultural network, many local residents either resent the centre for being too 'arty', too 'populist', or being 'too ethnic', i.e. 'not for them'. This tension is unsurprising when artists involved in the project at a senior level have also expressed ambivalence about it being a 'community project'. Whilst they support the idea of diversity in principle, they personally do not want to be seen as 'black' artists, or judged on the basis of how 'authentic' or representative they are of a particular community. Interestingly, whilst Rich Mix began its life as a critique of the arts establishment, it is now in the position of seeking its legitimacy and credibility from it. This pattern of ambivalence about excellence versus representation is recurrent throughout much of the cultural sector in Tower Hamlets.

Connected to this is considerable ambivalence amongst artists in LBTH about the pragmatic instrumentalism of cultural policy, and a concern that this might impede a 'pure' artistic rationale. Artists agreed that culture was important for improving society yet there was also resentment about instrumentalism, 'box-ticking' and tokenism. On the one hand, they wanted their art to be relevant to the social circumstances of the local community, but on the other, they resented having to tailor their art according to external, non-artistic criteria. This tension between competing notions of value – authenticity and aesthetic excellence, instrumentalism and artistic autonomy – no doubt represent two very different strands of influence - a strong independent artistic community, and a strong community/voluntary sector. Many artists working in the area are tied into both sectors and therefore judge themselves according to the pressures and expectations of each.

Of all the projects I examined in Tower Hamlets, Rich Mix struggles most to combine universal and particularistic conceptions of value, and is least able to satisfy either. Its lack of coherence has led to internal anxiety about the content and purpose of exhibitions or performances. Without a regular visiting public or founding vision to guide the centre, it has become free-floating, unstable and infinitely malleable to diverse expectations. Actors involved in Rich Mix believe the problems it faces arise

from conflicting partners, lack of funding or local cynicism, but I have shown that they actually reside in the philosophical contradictions of the project itself. These contradictions then amplify the institutional problems of securing an audience, funding and credibility.

At first glance, this level of anxiety does not seem to exist in Oldham. The cultural professionals and council officers have a much stronger and more consistently instrumentalist view of cultural policy. There is a firmer belief in its value and actors pursue cultural projects with greater confidence. It is of course possible that because there is a far longer history of cultural policy in Tower Hamlets, actors are more aware of its downsides compared to actors in Oldham.

However, I would suggest that other factors have played a role in stabilising Oldham's cultural strategy. First, Tower Hamlets is part of a metropolitan artistic centre in London, and therefore has a greater local tradition of aesthetic excellence. Universalism plays a stronger role in the discourse of the local cultural sector and there is a greater possibility of conflict over the values dictating policy-making. By contrast, cultural institutions in Oldham - like many smaller towns in the UK - have less independence and are closely tied into the Council's community cohesion agenda, especially following the 2001 riots. Historically, Oldham's main cultural institutions have also focused on representing the life of the local population, particularly in the case of the museum and gallery. Through the trope of 'community', they can easily reconcile themselves to the new socially oriented discourse of cultural policy.

Another factor that insulates Oldham's cultural institutions from the problems of diversity policies is that they have long-established, highly developed collections, audiences and reputations. In contrast to newer projects like Rich Mix in Tower Hamlets, where artists have tried to develop entirely new content according to unstable and contradictory criteria, Oldham's institutions are more rooted in their cultural content. Gallery Oldham has a fixed store of artefacts that it is formally obliged to display in exhibitions. Likewise, the Oldham Coliseum Theatre has a loyal season ticket following which it must keep satisfied. With this in mind, it is arguable

that with the right institutional arrangements and planning, many of the problems of diversity that I have identified could be mitigated.

Yet, I would maintain that the fundamental problem of cultural authority – on which basis cultural content is to be decided – remains an issue in Oldham, although it is experienced in a very different way than in Tower Hamlets. Cultural policy is not determined by transcendent criteria based on objective artistic or cultural principles, but on the basis of what is authentic or politically desirable. For this reason, cultural issues are particularly contentious, particularly amongst part of the local white population. OMBC's cultural policy is visibly expedient, and concerned with addressing the wishes of certain parts of the 'local community'. Whilst recognition through benevolent symbolic gestures might 'reassure' members of minority groups, it can result in anger others. That this resentment is expressed in anger about cultural symbols (rumours about flag flying, etc) is not surprising as this is the way in which inclusion issues are often discussed in the area. From my interviews with local actors, it would appear that there is an attitude amongst some residents that cultural institutions like the gallery and theatre are being run by people who are not 'like us'. To what extent this is actually true is not the point – the politicisation of culture opens up the possibility for mistrust.

In both case study areas, the evacuation of universalism has led to the undermining of cultural authority. This means that there is a less clear and transparent basis upon which cultural institutions can carry out their work. Brighton (1999) makes the point that managerial expertise has replaced cultural expertise as the basis of authority, and that despite the claims to being more democratic and participatory this allows a creeping authoritarianism. Cultural policy is determined according to the arbitrary wishes of a political elite and is increasingly concerned with fulfilling non-artistic objectives, such as boosting visitor numbers, increasing the ethnic diversity of the audiences, addressing social problems and cutting costs. Without the claim to the impartiality of aesthetic criteria, the cultural institution exposes its political agenda explicitly, depleting its own moral authority and claim to accountability. It is paradoxical that whilst cultural policy is presented as a spur to greater participation

from the citizenry, in reality, there is evidence to suggest that citizens feel disengaged from cultural policies in their area.

Politically, this approach also undermines the democratic conception of the individual subject. The state presumes that culture should be used as a tool, almost like marketing or advertising, to re-engineer the citizen's attitudes and behaviour. This approach expects people to engage with culture passively, as uncritical consumers. Adorno's critique of 'the culture industry' seems pertinent here:

Although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but its object....The culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchangeable. How this mentality might be changed is excluded throughout (Adorno, 2001: 99).

Although Adorno's critique focuses on commercial culture, it is his critique of a consumerised relationship between individual and culture which applies to state policy here. Individuals are presumed unable to develop their taste beyond the familiar and comfortable. In this way, the consumerist approach also reduces the legitimacy of cultural content to whether people like it, i.e. if it can attract an audience. If the cultural content is controversial or offends a particular ethnic group, it is deemed to be of less value. Again, in Tower Hamlets, there was some discomfort amongst artists about self-censorship for this purpose, yet at the same time, a clear desire to gain legitimacy by showing more 'sensitivity' to a particular ethnic community. This concern about the offensiveness of culture means that it is inevitably more subject to policing. The artist's freedom to explore the 'truth' is compromised by political sensitivity to the feelings of the local community. The principle of consumer choice further relativises the authority of cultural institutions such as museums and galleries, because it maintains that the worth of art on display can only ever be based on subjective judgement or 'taste'.

Yet, if the stress on diversity and consumerism cannot deliver the required cultural authority for an institution to operate, is it desirable to return to some more traditional notion of 'universalism' in art? Clearly, the idea of absolute, dehistoricised value seems naïve to us today. The period of Modernity has brought with it a greater understanding of the contingency of value and its relative nature to society.

Yet because cultural value is not absolute or 'divine', this does not mean, *prima facie*, that it is entirely fluid, insubstantial or 'unreal'. The value of culture is not inherent to the material particles of the object, but rather, the substance of its relationship to human society as a whole. As such, culture emerges as a concrete product of a particular society, but is also capable of achieving a degree of abstract separation from this in another realm. Culture is bound also to its own internal, constantly unfolding logic. This internal value relies on the capacity of humans to abstract an object from its particular nature and judge it in relation to other cultures and knowledge. Such an approach presumes that all cultural products have – at some level – a degree of commensurability. Of course, cultural judgements are rarely static and change constantly throughout history due to fashion and taste. But in making the truth claim 'this object is of cultural value', we implicitly reach for a definition of value that exists beyond the mere subjective and temporary.

Art historian Steven Edwards (1999) explains that the canon is not intended to be an unchanging collection of paintings or texts defined by an eternal standard. Indeed, the point about the endless contestation of the canon is that it is dynamic and exists in tension with its own critique. He argues that it is the self-critical contingency of the canon that signifies its universality – feminist and post-colonial negations can only exist in relation to the assertion of the eurocentric body. An essential paradox therefore exists when those who believe that value judgements are only historical, then assert the value of other, less recognised, works:

Some recent art historians seem to believe that judgements about works of art can be avoided in a kind of happy pluralism where any interpretation, and any object of investigation is as good as any other. Interpretation, however,

always establishes kinds of critical hierarchies that we call value judgement....This does not mean that it is possible to return to transcendental judgements: judgements are always made by social actors who carry their specific investments with them, but neither can the issue of value be dissolved into historical explanation (Edwards, 1999: 14).

When people disagree about the value of a poem or the significance of a painting they do so on the basis that concepts such as 'excellence', 'value' and 'best' have some durability. Without this claim to universality, there is no basis upon which cultural authority can be legitimately exercised. By default, the claim that all cultures are valuable becomes meaningless because value itself is without basis.

Ultimately, the museum or gallery is an artificial contrivance, designed to momentarily 'remove' culture from its particularity and place it in a neutral context. By doing this, it presents the artefact as something to be studied in isolation, according to certain rules and standards of judgement. The modern museum and art gallery creates a rupture by abstracting the cultural product from its 'ordinariness' and ascribing it with a new, 'otherworldly' value. For example, the African mask in a museum is no longer an artefact invested with mystical powers as its tribal owners believed; it is a cultural object that signifies a whole system of meaning and belief. It has value because it may have beauty, or is explanatory. Its value is something that exists beyond its particular use value in a particular culture. This does not mean that cultural artefacts do not belong to particular traditions and cannot be understood in that way; only that in the gallery, the object's relationship to the particular society from whence it came, does not determine its value in relation to the sum of human knowledge.

### *Reification of difference*

In both case studies, culture is seen as a way to engage a greater diversity of the population because it emphasises and celebrates their difference from the mainstream and established notions of 'value'. The case studies show not only a turn to culture in general, but more specifically, a turn to cultural difference and identity.

As I argued in Chapter Three, the conception of identity articulated in political theory emphasises the given nature of the individual, as opposed to its self-constitutive nature: the individual's 'being' as opposed to its 'becoming'. This mode of subjectivity is passive and unreflective. Related to this passivity, the individual is always situated within subjective experience (ordinary, everyday 'culture'), which is inevitably different to that of other people's. This approach rejects the possibility that humans might transcend their subjective experience and develop a more abstract perspective of their world. There is no such thing as universal reason, or universal culture, as proposed by liberal-humanist discourse.

The concept of identity presented here runs counter to the Enlightenment model of subjectivity. The former views human beings as determined by their cultural experience and constituted by something beyond their control. Yet, if culture is all-determining, how can we explain the ability of humans to transcend their cultural perspective and develop new understandings of their world? In short, how can we explain the human *creation of* culture, as well as human creation *by* culture? The essentialist view of culture has been criticised for reifying identity and treating it as though it were fixed, monolithic and stable (Kuper, 1999). Bayart (2005) writes that 'the culturalist argument does not allow itself to reflect on the ways in which social actors produce their history in a conflictual manner, by defining themselves both in relation to their perception of the past and in relation to their conception of the future' (71). Malik (2002b) also emphasises this active, creative side of culture:

Clearly no human can live outside of culture. But to say this is not to say they have to live inside a particular one. To view humans as culture-bearing is to view them as social beings, and hence as transformative beings. It suggests that humans have the capacity for change, for progress, and for the creation of universal moral and political forms through reason and dialogue'. (Malik, 2002b: unpaginated).

There are a number of consequences which arise from the identity model. The first is that without the notion of transcendence, human cultural difference is naturalised

and reified. Culture is not something that one acquires actively through self-development and 'cultivation' but something that one imbues through passive consumption. The impulse of this approach within the context of a cultural institution is to make art 'relevant' to cultural groups and engage them with 'their culture', i.e. what is presumed to be familiar to their way of life. Whilst cultural policy borrows the universalist rhetoric of showing new worlds and cultures, it is in fact also concerned to 'give them what they want or know'. Hence, in both case study areas, cultural activity is often oriented towards exhibitions, performances or events that people are presumed to 'identify' with through a durable, coherent ethnicity. There is a perception that the individual is unable to easily transcend their cultural identity and needs it to be reinforced through recognition. This arguably leads to a kind of essentialism, which presumes a limitation on what cultural content people are likely to enjoy. It is an irony that some respondents in the case studies complained about the 'lack of diversity' in local cultural provision, because it was 'all hip hop, and giving kids what they want'<sup>116</sup>. Some of the ethnic artists in Tower Hamlets were particularly conscious that the 'burden of representation' they faced was only the flip side of prejudices about what Asian or black audiences enjoyed.

More generally, there is considerable empirical research that questions the virtue of trying to build communities on the basis of cultural/ethnic identification, indicating this may be flimsy ground for shared values. Baumann (1996) believes that public discourse about ethnic minorities in Britain has become dominated by a notion of a reified, homogenous cultural identity, which belies the underlying diversity and conflict in any 'community'. Eade & Mele (1998) also point to the internal conflicts and diversity within the East London Bangladeshi community and question the validity of even calling it a 'community' at all. The dominance of 'community' as a term in local discourse does not necessarily reflect the existence of strong community dynamics, but may instead be a pragmatic response for certain groups to 'play the game' in a way required by the state. Anthony Appiah (1994) has accused multiculturalism of the desire to 'freeze' cultures and deny individuals the autonomy to criticise others within the same culture or choose alternative identities (157). As I

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with unnamed respondent at a youth arts event at Rich Mix, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2007.

have shown in the case studies, the fixed categories of identity proposed in official policy can often jar with the messier identifications and fluidity of people's identities in lived reality. This was revealed in the reaction of some ethnic minority respondents to the idea that they were 'black'. On the one hand, they recognised the label, yet on the other, they rejected the way it closed their identity in official discourse.

#### *Divisiveness of diversity?*

Although cultural policy aspires to achieve unity across ethnic divisions, paradoxically, the turn to identity inherently draws attention to cultural differences.

In his critical study of the UNESCO *Our Creative Diversity* report, Hylland Eriksen (2001) detects a romantic view of culture which is bound to identity and belonging to a society. Whilst the report argues for greater tolerance between cultures, he points out that it also insists on their inevitable difference: 'Cultures need to talk to each other and tolerate each others as it were, but they remain bounded cultures nonetheless' (unpaginated). Such a view, he suggests, leads to an unresolved tension between difference and the desire to achieve a global identity or set of values that might bring nations and ethnic groups together.

In a compelling reading of Stuart Hall's work, Chris Rojek (2003) argues that the foremost theorist of cultural diversity is himself bound by this contradiction between anti-essentialist arguments and a basis for solidarity. Much of Hall's work has been a repudiation of the Marxist privileging of class as the primary difference, stating that it has no greater objective basis than cultural difference. For him, there is no such thing as the 'universal subject' - working class or not - and hence, no basis for transcendent solidarity in the structures of capitalist society. He borrows from Charles Taylor's theory of the post-Cartesian subject who is fundamentally dialogically constructed. Yet, at the same time as Hall wishes to reject essentialism, he seeks to ground identity in something that is more substantial than mere lifestyle. Whilst he desires the fluidity and multiplicity of identity, he seeks the unity that can allow subjects to form durable connections. Rojek states that because Hall rejects

universalism, and specifically class, he has nothing else to fall back on except culture. However, this is unsatisfactory because it always leads to 'Otherness' and divisiveness rather than the possibility of unity. Hall himself has admitted that he is uncertain of how to construct solidarity from the particular (Hall, S., 1992).

At a more concrete level, high profile advocates of cultural diversity policies have noted this tension in practice between connectedness and division. Franco Bianchini has warned that the promotion of cultural diversity in public discourse, risks entrenching 'community' divisions and ethnic differentiation along spatial lines (Bianchini, 204: p.220ff, cited in Cochrane, 2007: 119). The desire to bring people together through cultural identity is simultaneously undermined by the exclusive nature of cultural difference. The more recent stress on 'interculturalism' by some authors is an explicit recognition of the limits of multiculturalist discourse, yet also reveals the extent to which cultural difference remains firmly embedded as a way of viewing the citizenry.

This raises the question of whether culture, in its inevitable emphasis on difference, can be a successful way of forging a meaningful unity between groups. In Tower Hamlets respondents complained that it was difficult to satisfy one group's needs without creating tensions with another. In Oldham, the gallery has tried to attract people from an Asian background by showing displays of 'their culture', but this inevitably suggests to non-Asian people that such culture is not theirs. Although both authorities seek to use culture to bring communities together, the logic of diversity raises sensitivity to differences and entrenches the primacy of ethnic identifications.

Finally, the emphasis on cultural difference is not wholly inclusive. Whilst black and Asian communities are supported in their difference, there is no similar level of support for white communities, even though respondents in both areas concurred that white working class people were often the most disadvantaged. Whilst ethnic identities are seen as positive, enriching and to be celebrated, white identity is seen as threatening and confrontational, representing grievance and exclusion. This means at the heart of cultural policy discourse there is a constant ambivalence about

difference. It exists as a fact, but the authorities hover between celebrating it and seeing it as an inevitable source of tension.

### *Failing to transcend difference*

As I have shown, the impulse towards promoting diversity in cultural policies emphasises difference and division between groups at the local level. Linked to this is an uncertainty about how to construct relationships that can transcend difference. Policy-makers clearly doubt that conventional politics can play this role.

Yet the scope of politics to forge connections is different to that of culture. In politics, the individual is required to have the ability to abstract from his or her immediate personal interests in order to develop solidarity with other people, based on shared interests. This process occurs through the exercise of reason and critical judgment. The system of democracy is premised upon an equality and potential universality of interest, mediated through elected politicians and parties. Cultural politics, by presuming the inescapability of partial identities, seeks to build political identities around differences between people, which derives from their partial and subjective perspectives. Yet, without a universalist orientation, I suggest that the possibility of solidarity simply falls away. As I have already asserted, emphasising cultural identity can be divisive as it presumes the existence of separate communities with different, fixed and even conflicting interests.

Although cultural difference is arguably benign in the private sphere, it brings with it more problems when pronounced in the public, political sphere. Cultural identity is necessarily exclusive, being open only to those who have directly experienced particular traditions, lifestyles or 'heritage'. Being a woman, or ethnic minority or disabled, inevitably involves different cultural and lifestyle experiences to being a white, middle class male. Political identities are supposed to transcend these subjective experiences, and allow us to identify with others on the basis of a shared set of ideas and values. As such, people can develop values more freely based on their judgement and cognition. Whilst individuals cannot vanquish their cultural identity, it is reasonable to expect that they exercise greater autonomy over the

things they identify with in the public realm than in the private realm. This capacity for transcendence allows us to not only reassess our culturally inherited values, but also to identify with other values and ideas which are initially unfamiliar.

Without the notion of universalism in politics, differences are also depoliticised. To call a value 'cultural' is to relativise it and mark it out for special immunity from scrutiny. For this reason, Brown (2006) argues that cultural politics ignores rather than resolves political disagreements. The reification of difference leads to a belief that cultures are 'simply there' and should be tolerated: 'there is no suggestion that the differences at issue, or the identities through which those differences are negotiated have been socially or historically constituted and are themselves the effect of power and hegemonic norms...' (16). By framing cultural identities in terms of 'respect', they are endowed with cogency and insulated from critique.

Writing about Northern Ireland, Savaric (2001) argues that multicultural policies since the 1980s, which enshrine the principle of 'parity of esteem'<sup>117</sup> - the recognition and support of different cultural identities - reinforces segregation because it leaves untouched the political conditions that have led to division in the first place. By asserting the importance of cultural difference in only a positive way, it ignores the possible problematic causes of such division, which may be a result of underlying political tensions. The Cultural Traditions Group, set up in 1988 to support community relations states its support for multicultural engagement by asserting that 'conflict [is] more likely to be contained in a multi-cultural society with pluralist values' (Savaric, 2001: unpaginated). Yet Savaric cites the theorist, Michel Wieviorka, in order to claim the opposite:

To think [of] the conflictuality culture implies, even if it is not necessarily built practically, put in shape on the ground, expressed and lived as such, enables us to overcome the simplistic or partial conceptions of what a politics of alterity or an acknowledgement of otherness could be. Indeed, if such an

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<sup>117</sup> This phrase appears in Article 1 of the Good Friday Agreement 1998 and also as a defining principle of the Cultural Traditions Group, set up in 1988 and absorbed into the Community Relations Council in 1990 (Thompson, 2006: 68).

acknowledgement is nothing but a mere ethical operation, or is reduced to the a-sociological, a-historical, or a-political idea of a moral exigency to learn to live together with our differences, it ignores the necessarily conflicting reality of social life (Wieviorka, 1997, cited in Savaric, 2001, unpaginated).

Instead of seeking to engage with differences of opinion and belief through rational debate, cultural politics avoids debate altogether. Differences are left to continue, rather than be resolved. In my two case studies, this reification of difference leads to alternative attempts to generate solidarity. Primarily, people are urged to 'set aside' differences and forge connections on the basis of common feelings and empathy, or an ethical responsibility. There is a focus on the banal, 'joyful' encounters around food, dress, cultural activity, and leisure.

Yet, whilst these are presented as ways of developing 'togetherness', in fact, they denote a shallow kind of connection which places questions of substance and meaning in parentheses. A consequence of this shift is that the resolution of political conflict is reduced to the realm of intersubjective interaction. In Oldham, this means the state takes on the role of retraining individuals to educate them in the positive notion of diversity.<sup>118</sup> In Tower Hamlets, there is also a desire to use culture to educate the population in the value of diversity. Both councils aspire to train citizens in order to 'manage' their differences. Brown points out that the invocation of tolerance as a political strategy means that a "justice project is replaced with a therapeutic or behavioural one" (16).

Intersubjectivity leads to a focus on emotion and psychology; so instead of racism being an ideology which one can argue against, it is viewed as a pathology, a psychological disposition that needs to be retrained. It is purely subjective and needs to be managed. 'Cultural awareness training' is intended to educate people that differences are inherently positive and need not be questioned (note the word

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<sup>118</sup> Michel Foucault's theory of 'governmentality' is pertinent here: 'In its simplest terms, governmentality refers to the arts and rationalities of governing, where the conduct of conduct is the key activity. It is an attempt to reformulate the governor-governed relationship, one that does not make the relation dependent upon administrative machines, juridical institutions, or other apparatuses that usually get grouped under the rubric of the State. Rather...the conduct of conduct takes place at innumerable sites, through an array of techniques and programs that are usually defined as cultural.' (Bratich *et al*, 2003: 4).

'awareness', suggesting passive observation of a phenomenon). In his book, *After Identity*, Jonathan Rutherford (2007) endorses this ethics of interpersonal relationships as a way to forge a more 'social identity'. Drawing on the writings of the French philosopher, Paul Ricoer, he states, 'There is nothing more in the world than individuals and what is between us. After identity, there is ethical life, which is what we make out of what lies between'. (36). How we interact with others on a daily basis and the emotional connections forged through friendship and compassion are, Rutherford argues, the foundations of solidarity. This focus on interpersonal relations through ethical behaviour and training is presented as a new moral consensus which can form the basis of a collective, shared identity in the absence of universal truth claims. However, the problem with this approach is that as long as cultural diversity policies insist that individuals, groups, and communities all have their own separate truth regimes which are incommensurate, there is no basis on which we can expect them to develop mutual regard.

In the nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold pointed to the essential relationship between truth and social solidarity. *Culture and Anarchy* warns the reader of the fragmentation of society against the dissipating force of market logic. Arnold believed that the philosophy of cultural relativism, which espoused that 'every man may say what he likes' (38), would diminish the collective spiritual project to pursue perfection. A society that lacked a desire to develop a shared, universal culture would inevitably tend towards fragmentation, relativism and mutual disregard and come to believe that:

...there is no such thing at all as a best self and a right reason having claim to paramount authority...that there is nothing but an infinite number of ideas and words of our ordinary selves, and suggestions of our natural taste for the bathos, pretty equal in value, which are doomed either to an irreconcilable conflict, or else to a perpetual give and take; and that wisdom consists in choosing the give and take rather than the conflict, and in sticking to our choice with patience and good humour (89).

He goes on to draw out the relationship between the idea of truth and social solidarity: '...without order there can be no society, and without society, there can be no human perfection' (149).

The concepts of cultural authority and expertise, of Truth and Perfection, are no longer as customary as they once were. Whilst cultural institutions invoke them in their work, they also challenge their own rationale by using the language of diversity, multiplicity, and hybridity. The attempt to use culture to create community cohesion is undermined when policy-makers stress at the same time the fragmentary, particularised nature of culture itself. Also, as the case studies show, attempts to short-circuit this problem are received with ambivalence. The moral enforcement of 'respect for diversity' does not automatically lead to stronger feelings of solidarity; indeed, the opposite may be the case; moralising programmes may provoke resentment and feelings of division.

#### *Regulation of consensus*

In his critique of the Beamish Museum in the North of England, Tony Bennett attacks its unified, sentimentalised, and depoliticised portrayal of the past. By trying to show history as a singular narrative, he argues, the museum denies the possibility of ambivalence and disagreement. Bennett not only criticises the particular representation of the past offered by the museum, but the very notion of a singular, universalised narrative; a destabilised perspective would, he argues, be inherently more political because it allows a plurality of truths to co-exist.

*Contra* Bennett, I suggest that the celebration of ambivalence (which is at the heart of the strategy to foreground cultural diversity in the political realm) renders difference inscrutable and fixed. I have suggested through my research that cultural policy discourse treats differences as worthy of 'respect' because they are seen as the defining features of people's identity. In this sense, they are associated with people's sense of self-worth and put beyond the reach of critical scrutiny. Ambivalence obviates disagreement, because it allows the 'safe' co-existence of contradictory and conflicting arguments, none of which need to be tested in the heat

of debate. Culture is celebrated as non-confrontational and 'safe', whereas politics is seen as divisive. Culture privileges consensus at the level of behaving well towards each other, but preserves differences as immutable.

In this way, both case study areas regard culture as a way to forge consensus and connectedness. However, the reality is that disagreements and conflicts cannot be submerged under politeness for long, and conflicting opinions surface. Without the political means to resolve disagreements, they are, by implication, seen as a source of disruption and require regulation.

This is particularly pronounced in Oldham, where the official rhetoric of cultural diversity espouses open and honest debate, but the actions of OMBC suggest fear of any debate that may lead to conflict. In Tower Hamlets, the minor controversy surrounding the wallpaper design in Rich Mix revealed the extent to which subjects are deemed off limits if they disturb the harmony of community relations.

In this sense, diversity as a principle privileges the regulation of consensus above the notion of truth, which is central to liberal-humanist discourse. Beng-Huat (2005) provides a useful illustration of this dilemma in his description of the highly institutionalised multicultural regime in Singapore. He notes (positively, I should add) how the preservation of consensus regarding race issues legitimates attacks on individual freedom:

A person raising a public issue regarding management of race is vulnerable to being charged and potentially imprisoned, under various legislations, for being a 'racial chauvinist' who threatens public peace. The rights and freedom of speech are thus severely circumscribed as one of the ironies of maintaining racial harmony. (420)

Wendy Brown (2006) also exposes the regulation of consensus in the name of tolerance. In her study of the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance (MOT), opened by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre (a museum devoted to racism and remembrance of the Holocaust), she exposes the strictly authoritarian character of 'tolerance talk' in

practice. Opinions are deemed appropriate or inappropriate, and questions posed to the visitors are highly moralised, making it impossible to discuss moral statements made by museum authorities throughout the visit. The set-up of the museum is to privilege consensus but through moralised enforcement rather than rational persuasion. Of course, she says, it is a tricky balancing act. The MOT makes contrived attempts to ask visitors' for their opinions and encourage them to think, but overall 'it is hard not to conclude that in urging it's visitors to "think", it is actually urging something closer to the opposite: namely to accept without question the MOT's version of reality and its values' (127).

The prescriptive character of contemporary cultural policy – deciding what are appropriate and inappropriate attitudes – bears some resemblance to the Victorian moralism of the nineteenth century, which regarded culture as a tool to fashion correct behaviour and attitudes. Yet, the use of cultural authority today is significantly different because it lacks the same degree of legitimacy. As it cannot account for itself in terms of cultural value, it is more explicitly politicised. This in turn leads to greater scepticism amongst the subjects of cultural policy, leading them to regard the local state's decisions as 'politically correct'. Savaric argues that in Northern Ireland, paradoxically, cultural politics does not tackle underlying conflicts but reproduces them in new form through debates over culture (such as the legitimacy of Orange Marches or Gaelic language teaching). Hewitt (2005) argues that multicultural policies at the national and local level have led to an 'unfairness to whites discourse' in places like South East London (128). He describes in detail how young white people in Greenwich in the 1980s, for instance, appropriated English cultural symbols like the Union Jack flag. Instead of viewing this as a merely racist gesture, Hewitt regards it as a complex attempt to resist stigmatisation and counter the perceived double standards of the authorities against their 'white community'.

In this sense, whilst the local state tries to defuse conflicts by pushing them into the cultural sphere, it ends up doing the opposite: politicising culture and creating further conditions of mistrust. The divisions and tensions between groups are not properly resolved, so require further management and mediation by the state. As the inclusion of one group inevitably leads to the exclusion of another, this constant

motion of providing recognition brings the state further into the workings of the cultural sector, undermining the universal rationale for cultural policy and the legitimacy of decisions as 'aesthetic' rather than politicised.

Most importantly, the hollowing out of cultural value and authority denudes it of its moral force. Cultural institutions are expected to play an increasingly political role at a time when they lack legitimacy in their own sphere. This tension lends a certain anxiety amongst cultural policy-makers, who are seeking connections with the public but can no longer rely on the moral force of the values that had once made such connections meaningful.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have brought together the various strands of argument discussed in the case studies, and tried to incorporate them into a more abstract theoretical framework. I have argued that the turn to culture entails a specific model of subjectivity which is distinguishable from that of the liberal-humanist discourse of culture. I have outlined the novel features of this new approach and detailed some of its underlying contradictions. Principally, the orientation towards diversity undermines the nature of cultural authority, reifies differences, reinforces divisions and encourages a new, regulatory role for the state in the cultural realm. Despite efforts, this new moral project lacks legitimacy and shows signs of strain when developed in lived reality.

Importantly, the subject of cultural policy – relating to the narrow sphere of arts and cultural activity – leads us to the broader issue of difference and identity. In this sense, my empirical study of the turn to culture touches on more general discursive trends relating to political space, and citizenship. The turn to culture therefore reveals contemporary social expectations about individuals and how they relate to wider society, as well as the limitations of policy-thinking when implemented in reality.



## CONCLUSION

In my thesis, I set out to examine the rise of cultural policy in the UK in the past two decades and the increasing concern with cultural issues in political discourse. My starting point was that there had been an expansion of state funding, policy measures, programmes, and targets related to culture. In Chapter One I gave evidence of the scale of this growth in the UK, in terms of the practical support for culture, increased government intervention in the cultural sphere and the growing acceptance that the arts and culture should be socially useful.

In Chapter Two, I used a 'weak' social constructionist approach to explain why this development had occurred. Although many authors tend to view the rise in cultural policy as a reflection of the increased importance of culture to the economy, I showed how the 'turn to culture' is, in fact, the mediation of a range of social, political and economic conditions, and has been pressed since the 1980s by 'issue entrepreneurs', as well as the state. In particular, New Public Management approaches, urban entrepreneurialism and community activism have brought cultural strategies to the fore at the local government level. These factors resulted in a new consciousness of 'culturalism', whereby actors since the 1980s have come to see culture as an alternative way to pursue economic and political objectives. At a more abstract level, I related these conditions to a broader shift in social understandings of subjectivity. I explained how culture is part of a growing concern with 'identity' and 'recognition' in political discourse. These various factors became particularly pronounced under New Labour after 1997, which sought to harness cultural policy to its Third Way approach to community, individual entrepreneurialism and diversity. The result, I argued, is that policy-makers today are not only interested in culture, but more specifically, the way that it addresses questions of individual subjectivity. The rise in culture reflected a changed understanding of the relationship between culture and society and increasing scepticism the about liberal-humanist discourse and 'universalism'.

In Chapter Three, I examined how cultural policy operates in the local government sector and various arguments made for pursuing cultural strategies. Instead of

seeing economic and social rationales as oppositional, I argued that both rested upon the idea that the state must intervene to produce a particular kind of citizen – one that is economically productive, entrepreneurial and self-supporting, as well as one that is tolerant, respectful and has a sense of cultural identity and community. In Chapter Four I set out the questions guiding my empirical research. Although critiques of culturalism are widespread in political theory literature, I decided to analyse how they might apply to sociological research. Although no one to my knowledge has analysed these tensions in the local government context, a small number of previous studies suggested that there might be practical consequences arising out of contradictions in policy in the arts context (Ang, 2005).

My empirical research on two case studies revealed how the ideas and assumptions of contemporary cultural policy discourse play out in 'lived reality'. As I showed in my review of the existing literature, most authors tend to highlight the economic, profit-seeking motivations of local authorities' cultural strategies (Mommaas, 2004; Cochrane, 2007; Mooney, 2004; Garcia, 2004; McGuigan, 2004; Chatterton *et al*, 2004). Certainly, the conventional economic objectives they highlight - building creative industries and employment, attracting a creative class and training individuals in employable skills - were all present in Oldham and Tower Hamlets. However, my research also revealed a wider range of objectives that do not fit into this framework. More specifically, 'economic strategies' were strongly orientated towards therapeutic objectives such as 'improved confidence', 'self-esteem' and 'well-being'. In order to make sense of these, I argued that we need to relate policy-making to the change in ideas about subjectivity, which I had discussed in Chapter Two. Actors were genuinely committed to 'bottom-up' regeneration, dispelling the notion that cultural strategies are merely cynical strategies or conscious attempts at political displacement.

The case studies also revealed a strong political rationale amongst policy actors, who seek to use culture to engage with people in novel ways. There was a particular emphasis on the emotional, subjective state of citizens and for the state to engage with people's identities as members of groups, as opposed to their status as universal citizens. This, as I discussed in Chapter One, reflected the concern

amongst some that 'diversity' could be useful as a principle to design a new ideal of citizenship that is more inclusive and democratic (Bennett, T., 1995, 1998, 2001b). It also chimes directly with the trend in political theory for a politics of recognition, as I discussed in Chapter Two, and the rise of multicultural policies in the UK (Malik, 2002a, 2002b; Eade and Mele, 1998). In the local government context, the principle of 'diversity' is seen as crucial to delivering regeneration 'from below', and addressing myriad concerns, especially social capital, community cohesion, and democratic participation.

Yet, despite the aspirations of policy-makers, my case studies also showed how the philosophical contradictions arise when cultural policy discourse confronts the messier reality of cultural policy in practice. Restating my hypothesis, I posited that there are certain fundamental tensions within contemporary cultural policy that would inevitably play out in lived reality.

As Heartfield (2002), Malik (2002a, 2002b), Bayart (2005), Kuper (1999) and Savaric (2001) argue, the principle of cultural diversity tends to lead to the reification of difference and the undermining of the rational, transcendental subject. My case studies show that these tensions are certainly live in contemporary cultural policy. The principle of diversity in Tower Hamlets and Oldham, resulted in a number of consequences. First, it challenged some of the basic assumptions of the cultural institution (e.g. gallery or museum), particularly its claim to accountable, transparent cultural authority, and its aspiration to engage people in 'the best'. The principle of cultural diversity also challenged key assumptions of political democracy, namely the notion of the universal, autonomous subject, and its potential for transcendence through rational debate.

I demonstrated that the theorisation of culture, albeit crude in most policy thinking, contains latent assumptions, which are ultimately unsustainable in policy implementation. The shift towards cultural diversity – as a principle in both politics and culture – undermines the foundational premises of politics and culture by extinguishing the idea of universality. Although advocates of diversity like Tony Bennett see it as a way to make politics and culture more inclusive and democratic, I

have shown that it actually militates against these ideals. Indeed, diversity undermines a range of desirable objectives, such as social solidarity, equality, free expression, autonomy and aesthetic standards; objectives, which are still supported in principle by many actors operating in the cultural sphere today. The desirability of cultural diversity policies does not evacuate these ideas from discourse explicitly, but it threatens the basis of their existence.

I presented evidence in both case study areas to support my arguments, describing people's ambivalence towards particular policies and cultural initiatives, and also examining local disputes and discussions about culture. Through a triangulation of methods – qualitative interviews, archive and documentary analysis, and observation – I gathered sufficient data to support the hypothesis that cultural policy implementation manifests tensions at the philosophical heart of cultural diversity policies. In Chapter Seven, I developed a critique of contemporary cultural policies and the model of subjectivity it is oriented towards. Although I acknowledged that liberal-humanist discourse is not without internal tensions or problems of its own, I asserted that in the final analysis, the universalist approach is better able to handle the dialectical relationships between culture and politics, and the individual and society.

Apart from the philosophical tensions within cultural policy, my research also shed light on the way in which ideas inform policy-making at local government level. I demonstrated that there is a national discourse of cultural policy, spread by professionals and consultancies, as well as policy-making bodies and advisors. This reinforced the value of the social constructionist approach in highlighting the influence of rhetorical devices and issue entrepreneurs. It also showed how actors and organisations respond to and assimilate abstract policy ideas in unique ways, according to specific local and institutional conditions.

This thesis explored the theoretical contradictions of diversity in an empirically-based way, and although it focused on the local government sector, the conclusions will inevitably be relevant to contemporary cultural policy in general, inasmuch as it adopts the idea of diversity. For instance, many of the issues I have highlighted

about the crisis of cultural authority are relevant to the activities and rationales of the national Arts Councils, or national museums and galleries. Although these institutions operate under quite different administrative regimes to local government, and are unlikely to have the same preoccupation with issues of community cohesion and social capital, they are likely to confront the same philosophical contradictions of diversity. Likewise, these same contradictions may well surface in the cultural policies of other countries.

At the same time, however, my research has shown that the local context is crucial in determining how tensions are mediated and channelled. It would, therefore, be interesting to analyse the experience of diversity policies in an area with a different ethnic composition or history of race relations, or to see whether public opposition is greater or weaker depending on local political structures. As I have shown, widespread political disengagement may contribute to the feelings of suspicion and scepticism about local cultural policies. In an area where people are far more engaged with local political processes, or communities are more cohesive, might cultural diversity policies be less divisive in their impact? Whilst the tensions I have identified are inherent to the philosophy of diversity, they might be expressed in quite different ways; from the minor complaints of local actors to each other in private conversation, to major public outcry elsewhere.

Finally, cultural policy ideas can have different effects on institutions within the same locality, depending on their institutional arrangements. A particular historical legacy or the responsibility of maintaining a permanent collection may counteract the most debilitating effects of diversity policies by giving institutions a sense of purpose. The idea of universalism can also continue to flourish within individual institutions, like the Whitechapel Art Gallery, or amongst individual practitioners, even if the wider local and national policy framework they operate within promotes a cultural model based on diversity. In this sense, it is important to recognise that the policies I have studied in this thesis are subject to continual revision and self-critical examination. Although the idea of diversity is firmly embedded in the discourse of the state at local and national level, criticisms of it are likely to become more and more vocal as actors' concerns grow. This may mean that cynicism to such policies may intensify,

but also that alternatives may develop. As my account of the case studies reveals, the positive or negative experience of existing cultural policies can influence the way actors develop and implement them in the future.

There are a number of limitations to my empirical research. First, due to practical constraints, I was only able to explore two local authority case studies in depth. This means that I was unable to test as wide a range of variables as I would have liked with regards to how cultural policy develops and is implemented. The key issue was that both case studies I had chosen had relatively large ethnic populations and a history of racial tensions. It is conceivable that a borough with a smaller ethnic population may not have experienced some of the problems I identified, particularly concerning ethnic division. Also, the impetus for anti-racism programmes and engineering attitudes may have been less pronounced. However, it is also clear that multicultural policies are embedded deeply in the discourse of the local government sector and have become part of general practice, even in those areas which are relatively ethnically homogenous. The role of the local state in 'tackling racism' has also become more pronounced with the advent of legislation like the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) which places a burden on all public bodies to 'promote good relations' between communities. In this sense, the ideas of diversity can proceed in an area, even where local needs might suggest they are irrelevant.

In terms of my research methods, I believe my understanding of the case study areas would have benefited from greater access to internal documents and correspondence. In the case of Rich Mix, this provided a valuable insight into how actors rationalised their decisions and potential conflicts therein. I was unable to access similar material in Oldham, despite my efforts. Of course, interviews, public documents and media coverage remain useful sources of data in terms of understanding the dynamics of a given situation, but they each contain separate risks in terms of bias, selection and inaccuracy. Any future research on this topic should consider the possibility of access to documents and archives in the selection of case studies.

Finally, I would suggest there are a number of potentially rich seams for further research. I will highlight three in particular.

The first is an assessment of public attitudes towards cultural policies and to what extent ideas like diversity and community either resonate or create resentments. This thesis touched on this dimension but due to practical methodological constraints, I had to rely largely on local key actors for their perceptions. As Hewitt (2005) suggests in his study of the 'white backlash' in the UK, this is not always sufficient, as those in authority often neglect or wilfully ignore negative public attitudes towards multicultural policies. The resentment towards cultural diversity policies may, therefore, exist in low-level form, in rumours and urban myths, only surfacing on occasion for official channels to notice. In order to approach this subject, a questionnaire survey of local residents, plus focus groups and qualitative interviews would help the kind of data needed to build a picture of local opinion about cultural policy issues. It would be particularly interesting to explore contentious cultural issues or projects in a town, assess the degree of scepticism or mistrust around them, and identify what local or national variables might contribute to this.

A second area to research is the way in which ethnic groups feel about diversity policies. It was clear from my interviews that there was deep ambivalence over the relevance of ethnic categories and the way in which state authorities relied on them for community representation. Yet, whilst ethnic minority individuals may express cynicism about the way in which the state uses diversity discourse, many also see it as an ethically desirable approach. Obviously, this area does not relate solely to artists and the conclusions of this research would have wider implications for policy-makers using the term diversity in their own fields.

Finally, this study concentrated on the field of local government, but many of these issues play out at the national level, through Arts Council initiatives, as well as in other spheres such as education. It would be interesting to see to what extent the conceptual framework I have developed might illuminate some of the challenges in

these other sectors. In this way, my analysis of cultural policy and the problems of 'diversity' might serve as a starting point for problems emerging in other spheres.

## **APPENDIX**

### **INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS AND DATES OF INTERVIEWS**

#### *Tower Hamlets*

Andrew Missingham, (formerly) The Hub arts consultancy – 10/01/05  
Mhora Samuel, (formerly) Creative Industries Development Agency (CIDA) –  
24/01/05  
Anwar Akhtar, CIDA – 25/01/05  
Ashwani Sharma, University of East London/Rich Mix board member – 04/02/05  
Michael Keith, Goldsmiths University/London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH)–  
28/02/05  
Ray Gerlach, (formerly) Cultural Services, LBTH – 11/03/05  
Keith Khan, (formerly) Rich Mix – 11/03/05  
Marcus Richmond, Community Empowerment Network/Weavers Community Trust –  
11/03/05  
Blossom Young, Youth Service, LBTH – 13/04/05  
Sonia Mehti, ADFED – 13/04/05  
Manick Govinda, ArtsAdmin – 21/04/05  
Denise Jones, LBTH – 27/04/05  
Caroline Barlow, Arts for All – 27/04/05  
Andy Porter, Hi8us – 27/04/05  
Fanu Miah, Bangladeshi Youth Movement – 20/05/05  
Aladin, (former) GLA cultural advisory group/freelance arts practitioner – 21/05/07  
Stephen Murray, Arts Service, LBTH – 16/11/07  
Stephen Escritt & Caro Howell, Whitechapel Art Gallery – 04/12/07

#### **Oldham**

Fauzia Chaudry, Fatima Women's Association – 05/10/05  
Aftab Hussain/Sazzad Rahman, Peshkar Productions – 05/10/05

Nick Brown, Oldham Sixth Form College – 05/10/05  
Bernard Phillips, Breeze Hill Secondary School – 06/10/05  
Susan Kirkham, Research Department, Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council  
(OMBC) – 03/11/05  
David Hillary, Voluntary Action Oldham – 03/04/06  
Joy Thorpe, Gallery Oldham – 03/04/06  
Ustar Miah, First Choice Homes Oldham/Peacemaker – 04/04/06  
Ed Kelly, Oldham Youth Service, OMBC – 05/04/06  
Annie O’Neill, Arts Service, OMBC – 05/04/06  
Sara Hewitt, Regeneration Department, OMBC – 11/06/07  
Kevin Shaw, Oldham Coliseum – 11/06/07  
Phil Wood, Comedia – 12/05/07  
Sheena Macfarlance, Cultural Services, OMBC – 13/06/07  
Sean Bagguley, Gallery Oldham – 13/06/07

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