

THE CULTURAL COMMISSION

Views from PROISEACT NAN EALAN (PNE) The Gaelic Arts Agency

CULTURAL RIGHTS

The international debate on cultural rights in relation to the citizen's of Europe and the work done on the rights of indigenous peoples (in North America, and New Zealand for example) will be key frames of reference for the Commission. So too, should be the question of language rights, which is of direct relevance to Scotland.

At a "common sense" level the inter-connectedness of culture and language is self-evident. Language is one of the defining characteristics of any culture, and arts and cultural activity are essential to language development, yet this is rarely reflected at policy level. The extent to which the issue of cultural policy overlaps with that of language policy, and the dynamics of their interaction, is only beginning to be addressed and understood. Both the Linguarts and Pyrenne Reports (Interarts, Barcelona for the European Commission 1998 & 2001) highlight the extent to which these two issues are inseparable.

The Linguarts report discouraged... "the idea that there is a huge gulf between minority or regional cultures and 'global culture'; that participation in the one somehow excludes participation in the other, as if minority or regional cultures were merely enclaves or ghettos of folk culture with little or no relevance for the movements of larger cultures, or having no influence on what is termed global culture. In their essential bi-lingualism, members of of a minority or regional language group are bridging the gulf in ways that mono-linguists often do not."

Linguarts was directly focused on issues of policy and saw the need for government to... "use both language and cultural policy as a single tool instead of the separate policy tools that they are at present. All too often it may be seen that language policy limits itself to the sphere of education and and that cultural policies rarely, if ever, address language issues. Both policy areas need to be made aware of the strengths and opportunities to be gained by working hand-in-hand.....As the emphasis shifts from the nation to the region within Europe, this co-operation, the sharing of policy tools, the joint acceptance of responsibility for both aspects of policy will become more and more essential, if any of the regional or minority language cultures are to survive and flourish. Should these regional and minority languages and cultures not survive, the cultures of Europe will lose a great, valuable and irreplaceable richness."

The UK has already ratified the European Charter for Lesser-used Languages and these legally-binding international obligations should be reflected in the Commission's findings in relation to cultural rights. A clear statement of support for Gaelic language rights within the Commission's report will reinforce both the Gaelic language-led cultural progress of recent years, especially in the Highlands

& Islands, and the Scottish Executive's Gaelic Act (2005). If Gaelic is marginal to the report it will weaken the Gaelic Act, challenge the UK's commitment to the Charter, undermine the Commission's findings and pose major problems in the longer-term. The Commission has an opportunity to position Scotland as an enlightened and forward-looking example in an international debate that is already gaining momentum and which will accelerate as the EU expands and the significance of language death becomes more widely understood. ("Language Death". David Crystal. 2000)

PUBLIC FUNDING

All of the public funding support for cultural development in Scotland is driven by the Scottish Executive's own policy statements which then trickle-down through the funding systems. Whilst the agency ultimately dispersing the funds will have its own policy priorities, reflecting the needs of their specific sector, these will usually be measured against Scottish Executive targets set within an economic development context. These same economic performance measures and targets are largely meaningless when used to monitor activities in the arts and culture sector.

Arts and cultural organisations do not exist to create financial profits and are usually operated by trusts, registered charities and not-for-profit community groups. There is a great danger that investment by public agencies in such organisations, will appear not to have been successful when measured in this way. In practice arts and cultural activity can be highly successful in ways which cannot be measured using the standard economic parameters.

If a smart, successful Scotland is going to ensure that its society is enriched by arts and cultural activity then government has to give serious consideration to creating measurement criteria which are appropriate to these activities.

ADDITIONAL ARTS FUNDING SOURCES

The composer's royalty payment on traditional music that is out of copyright is normally dealt with by the "arranged by" convention whereby that payment goes to the musician. Were a small percentage of all such payments, or an new additional royalty payment, to go to a Traditional Music Development Fund it would be possible for a substantial sum to be generated for strategic investment to the collective benefit of the traditional music sector. While fully appreciating the potentially contentious nature of any such a proposal, as in the shorter-term it will inevitably reduce the meager income of traditional musicians, it is still worthy of debate. A new level of strategic investment in the development and promotion of traditional music would ultimately benefit the sector as a whole and increase musician's income in the longer-term.

As the value of Intellectual Property Rights continues to increase, and

international companies set about acquiring the IPR to niche markets, it would be wise to look to the implications of "who owns the tradition" in general in order to safeguard Scottish traditional music for future generations.

SCOTLAND'S CULTURAL STRUCTURES

The SAC submission to the Commission has been widely welcomed as sound strategic thinking and PNE lends its full support to the SAC proposals. We welcome the idea of a new forum that brings together all of Scotland's key cultural agencies to effect more joined-up strategic thinking on Scottish cultural development. The inclusion of Bord Na Gaidhlig on this forum will help accelerate the normalisation of Gaelic.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The role of local authorities in delivering local arts and cultural services is clearly of great importance and will hopefully be further clarified by the Commission. There are, however, enormous disparities between the level of service provided by different local authorities and it is vital that the Commission's recommendations on this are not only clear and unambiguous but backed up by legislation and additional ring-fenced funding from the Executive. A one-size-fits-all approach may work in terms of a statement of fundamental rights but, if national implementation is to be effective, it will be essential to ensure that these geographical disparities are taken into account, with a view to progressively leveling what is a highly uneven playing field.

Local authorities in Highlands and Islands areas, for example, have the additional challenge of Gaelic development as part of their arts and cultural responsibilities. Some, like Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, also have a struggling economy, limited funds, high transport costs and a long history of under-development. If access to cultural provision is to be available as-of-right throughout Scotland, including the islands, then these geographic and historical imbalances should be addressed by the Commission. Otherwise these imbalances are likely to worsen.

It is also the case that local authority-led arts and cultural provision is not always the best or most appropriate approach to the most challenging issues. PNE's national remit has been a key factor in the success of Gaelic arts development over recent years. It has enabled strategic planning, critical economies of scale and led to the creation of an embryonic Gaelic cultural infrastructure that supports a nationally dispersed Gaelic community. This would not have been possible for local authorities whose focus is, by definition, on local provision to meet local priorities.

SAC have been key contributors to this revival of Gaelic arts and culture over recent years and have taken a national lead in the strategic development of

other neglected areas of Scottish culture, such as traditional music, cultural diversity and rural arts provision. Over time this has then fed into, and reinforced, local authority initiatives but would have been problematic for local authorities to lead. In a rapidly changing world this strategic national role is likely to become even more important in addressing future cultural challenges.

EDUCATION

Arts and cultural education, both formal and informal, is probably the single most important issue in relation to Scotland's cultural future. Enhancing the cultural rights and cultural education of young people today will create a new level of expectation amongst the electorate of the future. Given the political will, this is a highly achievable objective as the formal education sector is accustomed to a high level of regulation, and within the gift of the Scottish Executive, and therefore more open to immediate influence.

Gaelic was taught in Scottish schools prior to the emergence of Gaelic-medium education in the late 1980s, but as a foreign language. The rapid expansion of Gaelic-medium education over recent years has been led by public demand and highlights issues of human rights, cultural rights and individual choice. The cultural right to be educated in your native language has been hard-won and should be reinforced by the Commission's report.

"SCOTTISH" CULTURAL EDUCATION

The low level of awareness of Scotland's cultures and languages across a significant proportion of the Scottish public is a cause for serious concern. This is largely attributable to the historic failure of the Scottish education system to educate Scottish schoolchildren about the cultural diversity of their own country. This is a key factor in the prevalence of the stereotypical tartan and shortbread image of Scotland as a lowest-common-denominator solution to a complex question we are ill-educated to deal with. The contrast with Ireland is useful. Whatever the flaws in the Irish education system, they give a higher priority to educating their citizens about Ireland and this has paid both cultural and economic dividends at home and abroad. It has certainly not handicapped Ireland's capacity to function successfully in the international arena.

The Commission has an opportunity to address this by recommending the introduction of some form of Scottish Studies into the formal schools curriculum. This would also create new opportunities for the normalisation of Gaelic and Scots and could be supported by Bord Na Gaidhlig.

The Feis movement offers a highly successful model in terms of informal out-of-school activity that could be transferable to other areas of Scottish culture. A Feis is a community-run, Gaelic arts and music tuition festival for young people.

Most run for a week or two weeks of the school holidays and some are residential. The first began on Barra in 1981 and there are now 35 such Feisean involving thousands of young people and multiple follow-up classes across Scotland throughout the year. The young talents and skills developed by the Feisean have been a key seedbed for the current resurgence of Scottish traditional music. They fulfill a vital educational function, enhance the quality of life in their area, contribute to community confidence and cohesion and provide significant employment for artists and musicians. They are also fun events. Over the past 25 years the Gaelic community has gained significant experience in this field and the Feis umbrella organisation, Feisean Nan Gaidheal, should be seen as a national resource which can be built upon to the benefit of wider Scotland.

Another model for young people would be the Castle Toward residential arts and music summer schools for Glasgow's senior secondary pupils which have been a hugely influential stepping-stone for generations of talented young people hoping to go on to advanced study at art school or music college. Castle Toward was a critical catalyst to choosing a career in the arts for working-class pupils in particular.

The Commission has an opportunity to reinforce and further develop the provision of intensive arts and cultural experience for young people, outwith the formal school system, by recommending that such experience should be a part of their cultural entitlement.

LIFELONG LEARNING

Until very recently the Scottish summer schools were seen as what colleges and universities did with their downtime over the summer vacation. Irish summer schools are different in that dozens of such events are run by communities all across the country throughout the summer season. There are also winter schools and, regardless of season, they attract thousands of fee-paying adults to what are often remote locations. The communities offer adult tuition in music, song, dance, art, literature, language archaeology and even Dracula at the Bram Stoker summer school in July. The Willie Clancy Summer School in Co. Clare attracts 1,500 students and upwards of 50,000 fellow-travelers in the course of the week.

The Ceolas arts and music summer school on South Uist is modeled on the Willie Clancy but employs tutors from both Scotland and Cape Breton, Canin Gaelic Music and Language at the local Lews Castle College/UHI Benbecula campus. Ceolas has also won the Scottish Tourist Board's Thistle Award for excellence in Cultural Tourism and is currently a case-study for the University of the Balearics new Cultural Tourism course. Ceolas offers a model of community summer school that is transferable across Scotland to the cultural, community and economic benefit of the host area. It also offers a means of enhancing adult arts education provision and lifelong learning.

INTERNATIONAL WORKING

Another lesson from Ireland could be their support for Centres of Irish Studies in universities worldwide. There are dozens in the USA while Scotland has none whatsoever. This has enabled the promotion and study of Irish culture at a level that has ensured a high profile for Ireland in academic circles and subsequent spin-off effects in the wider host community. It has also enabled Ireland to maintain links with its diaspora. Over and above the good work of the British Council, consideration should be given to supporting the emergence of Centres of Scottish Studies in universities overseas.

SCOTLAND'S "NATIONAL" AGENCIES

Scotland's current definition of "national agencies" is problematic and should be reviewed. Not all of Scotland's national agencies work as "nationally" throughout Scotland, nor indeed as internationally, as a number of other much smaller arts organisations including PNE.

Although based in the Western Isles we work throughout Scotland and have developed a wide range of international projects. At the time of writing PNE has the Leabhar Mor exhibition at the European City of Culture Festival in Cork and it will go on to tour Ireland, Canada and the USA over the next four years. We also have approx £1m confirmed towards another transnational project involving five European countries and St Kilda; are providing a cultural tourism case-study of the Ceolas summer school for the University of the Balearic Islands; are supporting the linkage between Gaelic Psalm singing Black American Gospel and working with two American researchers on a pioneering arts and global-satellite-positioning initiative that could have worldwide implications. Scotland's Gaelic community has built up strong international networking links including Interarts, the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, the Columba Initiative and the Celtic Film and Television Festival. BBC TV's Gaelic programme, "Eorpa", is the only European current affairs programme on UK television. Gaelic's international connectivity is an important resource in promoting Scotland overseas.

International working is essential to a culturally vibrant Scotland and a new form of support system is required. This should recognise that this "national" role in promoting Scotland overseas, is not restricted to the current National Institutions.

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