

Ireland's Creative and Cultural Industries

Policies, evidence, and research possibilities

The creative and cultural industries in Ireland have been the subject of policy discussion, but definitions remain inconsistent. This article reviews existing contributions, the evidence for the industries' economic significance, and the potential for further research.

Introduction

Ireland's association with creativity is well established in the public imagination both within and beyond the country, bound up with remarkable achievements in literature, drama, film, and music. The Arts Council of Ireland, focusing on arts organisations, individual artists, and groups, provides extensive funding to sustain a pipeline of new work across a range of art forms. These things are well known. But when it comes to defining and understanding the creative and cultural *industries* in Ireland, matters become more obscure.

What exactly are the creative and cultural industries? What contribution do they make to the Irish economy? The tendency to conflate creative with cultural industries (and indeed to use the terms 'art' and 'culture' interchangeably) merely adds to the confusion. This short piece sets out some definitions, looks at sources of insight and direction in policy, and asks what role might be played by universities and funders in fostering research and education in these areas.

Definitions and categories

Perhaps inevitably, given what was initially intended as a branding exercise, contrasting and contested definitions abound for the 'creative industries', 'cultural industries', and 'creative economy' (see, e.g., Lash & Urry, 1994; Howkins, 2001; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; UNCTAD, 2008).

Future Jobs Ireland, in its 2019 report, set out as one of its deliverables to 'Identify opportunities in the wider creative industries sector and develop a roadmap for the support and enhancement of these industries' (Government of Ireland, 2019b, p. 40). The roadmap is still pending, but Creative Ireland, which has taken on the responsibility, defines the areas it will concentrate on. They include design-based companies (such as industrial design, product design, web design and visual communications, UI/UX [user interface/user experience] design, and software design);



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'digital creative' enterprises, including gaming, post-production, and visual effects; and what they call content creation industries, which include advertising, apps, and AR/VR (augmented and virtual reality) (Government of Ireland, 2020a).

Notice, however, that while these categories are porous, they do not include theatre companies, publishing firms, companies running festivals, film production, the work of artists, galleries, or the music industry (although some technical aspects of production overlap, to a certain extent). These activities are the terrain of the cultural industries.

In practice, people tend to jumble the creative and cultural industries together. But they need to be disaggregated if only to track differences in the policies and aspirations associated with them. It's instructive, for example, that the roadmap anticipated by Future Jobs Ireland focuses on technical fields and what might be termed applied forms of creativity – in other words, the commercial dimension of creativity.

In fact, the tension in what *creative industries* refers to surfaces in key policy documents issued by the Irish government. Innovation 2020 (whose successor is currently in preparation) contains no mention of the creative industries. It does allude to Ireland's 'creative economy', with design upheld as the preeminent feature, relevant to medical and electrical devices, food products, construction, and consumer goods. And it does acknowledge that design extends to 'emerging creative sectors such as graphics, film and animation, web interface and ICT design, costume and set design, organisational and service design and even food design, where future growth, exports and job creation are expected to be greatest' (Government of Ireland, 2020b, p. 32).

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By contrast, Culture 2025 (originally published in 2019), from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, adopts a far wider definition that takes in not just industries but occupations. While it focuses on 'creativity as a means to deliver commercial success, export growth and resilient employment' (Government of Ireland, 2019a, p. 7), citing areas such as advertising and marketing alongside crafts, design, IT, fashion, film, TV, radio, and photography, it also includes publishing, museums, galleries, libraries, music, and the performing and visual arts. As Hadley et al. (2020) note:

It is telling that the more expansive definition of creative industries in Culture 2025 differs from the DAHG [Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht] (2015) definition in its framing of the creative industries through an explicitly evaluative lens as those 'industries and occupations which focus on creativity as a means to deliver commercial success, export growth and resilient employment for Ireland'.

Such policies, and the definitions they rely on, matter, because they shape expectations and priorities in government, investment plans, and the resources made available to national funders.

Those who advocate for the arts – for film, music, dance, drama, visual arts, and so on – understandably appeal to the category of the creative industries to enhance the prestige of their work and to foreground its contribution to the economy. Here we encounter the problems of determining how wide a definition of the industry to use, and more fundamentally the lack of reliable data to go on.¹

Indeed, the lack of a robust, categorically precise, and longitudinal empirical basis for debate and policymaking appears to be endemic in the sector. The National Campaign for the Arts in Ireland (2021) has recently noted the arts sector's reliance on 'out-of-date, unreliable statistics to communicate valuable information about our sector'. The significance of collecting, analysing, and using data to inform decision-making was a recurrent theme of the DAHG (2015) Value for Money and Policy Review of the Arts Council report.

Research base

We have nothing like Nesta in the UK or the research conducted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport there. The DCMS concluded in its most recent report that the creative industries contributed £115.9bn to the UK economy in 2019, accounting for 5.9% of GVA (gross value added). This sector 'increased by 5.6% between 2018 and 2019 and by 43.6% between 2010 and 2019 in real terms' (DCMS, 2019). The DCMS notes, by way of comparison, that in the UK the construction industry contributed £129.3bn, the automobile industry £49.1bn, and agriculture £13bn. Its figures for the cultural sector as a defined area show that it contributed £34.6bn in 2019.

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One benefit of the DCMS approach is that it has published its definitions and methodologies. The standardised (and increasingly globally exported) definition of the creative and cultural industries remains the DCMS's, which, as of 2015, recognised nine creative sectors:

- advertising and marketing
- architecture
- crafts
- design: product, graphic, and fashion design
- film, TV productions, TV, video, radio, and photography
- IT, software, and computer services
- publishing
- museums, galleries, and libraries
- music, performing, and visual arts. (DCMS, 2015)

When we look at its classification of creative occupations that make up the creative industries, it is evident that this is the (unacknowledged) source of the Irish Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media's inclusive definition of the field in Culture 2025. The wide compass of Culture 2025 (wider, that is, than Innovation 2020) is welcome, but what we really need are the statistics to go with it.

Nesta, meanwhile – originally established with funding from the UK lottery and now operating as a registered charity – has established a Creative

Industries Policy and Evidence Centre. This is significant not least because it is a consortium of nine UK universities, supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of its Creative Industries Clusters Programme. Thus it has a strong academic and research foundation. Among its contributions is a recent submission to the UK spending review in September 2021 (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, 2021).

One may question some of the effects of UK policymaking and its tendency to foster metrics-based decision-making and notions of innovation that can result in pre-packaged productions and formulaic approaches. Nonetheless, this body of work provides some foundation for taking creativity seriously and recognising its economic contribution. When funding is tight, as it always is, such analysis may turn out to matter.

If we were to look for insight in Ireland, where might we turn? ‘Assessment of the Economic Impact of the Arts in Ireland’, an extensive report by Indecon for the Arts Council in 2009 (updated in 2011) provided some orientation on these questions, geared partly around areas supported by the Arts Council specifically but investigating the wider arts sector and beyond. The analysis in 2009 concluded that GVA amounted to €782m, a modest 0.5% of total national GVA. For the creative industries (defined along the lines of the wider view taken in the UK), it concluded that GVA was close to €5.5bn, representing 3.5% of the national figure for the year (Indecon, 2009).²

In 2010, Declan Curran and Chris van Egeraat drew on this report, among other sources, for their working paper ‘Defining and Valuing Dublin’s Creative Industries’. They offered nuanced definitions, suggesting a focus on creative occupations as a complement to industrial classifications in measuring economic activity and contribution (Curran and van Egeraat, 2010).

Outlook

All of this was more than a decade ago, raising the question of why our research base is so limited in this area. One exception is the 2017 ‘Economic Analysis of the Audiovisual Sector in the Republic of Ireland’. Although its focus is targeted, the report determined that the sector generated €1.05bn in GVA in 2016 and direct employment of 10,560 (Olsberg SPI with Nordicity, 2017; see also Indecon, 2021).

The other significant exception is the Western Region, which has been the subject of a number of reports and projects. In a recent report for the Western Development Commission, Patrick Collins adopts a definition of the creative industries that encompasses three overlapping sectors – craft, cultural, and creative – and concludes that the area as a whole constitutes up to ‘12% of all enterprises in the West of Ireland’ (Collins, 2021, p. 7). Notably, a major source of the data came from a special request to the Central Statistics Office rather than information standardly available from government departments. The challenges in gaining an inclusive clear picture and tracking developments over time are therefore considerable.

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If we had more settled definitions and statistics on economic contribution, we could begin to map the provision of teaching programmes onto the cultural and creative industries. Many courses exist producing graduates with key skills. There are arts management courses at several universities: NUI Galway has an MA in Literature and Publishing; Maynooth University has an MSc in Design Innovation; and the Creative Futures Academy (a consortium of the National College of Art and Design; Institute of Art, Design and Technology; and University College Dublin, funded under the Human Capital Initiative) has been established to bridge the gap between higher education institutes and industry. Creative digital media can be studied at undergraduate level at Technological University Dublin and NUI Galway. These are but a few; many more instances and opportunities could be mentioned.

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These rivers of policy and debate run deeper than this initial overview can describe. As shown by ongoing work from NUI Galway in partnership with the Centre for Cultural Value in Leeds, approaches to measurement and monitoring reveal much about the sensibility behind Irish policymaking – alongside the embedding of ideas of creativity in national identity, soft power, and cultural diplomacy, where this article began.

We are yet to truly begin the process of reckoning which takes off when the accumulation of data ends. Questions of meritocracy (O'Brien et al., 2016), class, race, gender, and inequality in the cultural and creative industries remain to be addressed in an Irish context.

To close with desiderata:

- We need proper research on the scope and contribution of the creative and cultural industries in Ireland, delegated to a specific government department reporting on an annual basis.
- Given our historic associations with creativity, we should develop a Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre of our own. Funders like the Irish Research Council are well placed to support such an initiative.
- The successor to Innovation 2020 should recognise the importance of the creative and cultural industries, incorporating the humanities in its vision of national research priorities.

NOTES

1. The same conclusion was drawn at European level by KEA (2015, p. 6): 'The scrutiny of Eurostat sources shows that the European Union still has an incomplete and narrow picture of its creative capacity and the contribution of its cultural and creative sectors to its economic and social achievement. As a result, citizens and their political representatives often take the view that investment in culture is not a priority and have difficulties in linking culture and innovation.'
2. For these figures, see Indecon (2009), pp. xiv, xvii, 28, 36. For definition of the creative industries, see pp. xvi–xvii.

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