Control, Calculation and Collaboration in Cultural Policy Work at an Australian City Council

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Abstract
The challenges and contradictions of managing publicly subsidised, collaborative arts and cultural projects are considered in this article through a case study of cultural activation in an Australian city. Drawing on empirical research and literature from public administration and governmentality studies, the author critically analyses the practices of policy workers in relation to two arts programs designed to achieve broad socio-cultural outcomes. While demonstrating the potential for creativity, collaboration and innovation in contemporary urban governance, this case study also reflects the difficulty of articulating and assessing the impacts of cultural interventions. The complex interplay of practices involved in managing these programs is portrayed as a governance medley, requiring policy workers to employ a range of skills and different types of knowledge. This article examines the governance of city culture in a particular site, while also depicting the culture of local governance in this municipality.

Biography
Emma Blomkamp is jointly enrolled in a PhD in local cultural policy at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and the University of Melbourne, Australia. She has also studied Media and Cultural Management at Sciences Po Paris, and holds a MA(Hons) in Film, Television and Media Studies from the University of Auckland. Emma's current research interests include interpretive methods of policy analysis, community wellbeing indicators, community cultural development, local government and urban policy.
**Introduction**

The culture of a city is complex and dynamic. Local politicians and policy workers nonetheless attempt to effect specific forms of cultural change and to shape cultural identity in their municipalities through strategies such as urban regeneration and cultural activation. In doing so, policy workers may demonstrate innovative approaches to urban issues, but they commonly struggle to frame complex problems, coordinate diverse actors and achieve broad and intangible socio-cultural outcomes. Applying the lens of governmentality and other theories of public governance and policy analysis to an empirical case study, this article explores the complexity of managing collaborative arts and cultural projects in the context of Australian local government.

There is a vast literature on governance theories and public management models. This article investigates whether certain principles and schemas within the literature correspond with the actual practices of administrators in an Australian municipality. Taking an interpretive approach, I link thematic analysis of policy documents and semi-structured interviews with relevant literature to explore discourses and practices of local cultural governance in the context of a case study of ‘late-night cultural activation’. The selected programs were implemented by officers from the urban municipality’s Arts and Culture branch, in close consultation with colleagues from other parts of the council, and in accordance with the organisation’s plans, policies and strategies. My critical and empirical investigation demonstrates examples of creativity, innovation and collaboration in the design and delivery of services, but it also depicts acts of compliance with council policy and protocols.

In the practice of developing and delivering cultural policy in this city, there is an uneasy jostling of diverse principles and actions within the structure and culture of the institution. The challenges and contradictions of local cultural governance, which is at once neoliberal, bureaucratic and ‘joined-up’, are epitomised in recent efforts to monitor and evaluate the broad and intangible outcomes of the policy of late-night cultural activation. These tensions reflect the significant, sometimes contradictory demands on public servants in the twenty-first century, as noted by George Gallop (2007: 2):

> On the one hand, we ask them to be fully accountable and yet on the other hand we ask them to be creative and innovative. On the one hand, we ask them to be efficient and on the other hand we insist that they be effective and produce real change in the community. On the one hand, we ask them to be inspirational and purposeful in respect of their agency responsibilities and on the other, we expect them to join up, co-operate and compromise with others. And finally, we ask them to perform to particular targets and at the same time to be agile and flexible in the way they operate.

The case study presented in this article suggests that local cultural policy workers are indeed feeling these pressures and find themselves negotiating expectations for control, calculation and collaboration in their day-to-day practice. While these findings are limited to two cultural programs and a handful of policy actors at one Australian municipality, the traditions of governance discussed here affect many public servants working in an environment of complex governing practices. This article demonstrates the need for cultural policy scholars to pay greater attention to the implementation stage and to the complex relationships between strategic planning, policy development, program delivery and evaluation. It suggests that a ‘realist governmentality’ approach, as described below, is a useful lens to help understand the interplay between policy, practice and theory.

**Research Context and Design: An Interpretive Approach to Local Cultural Policy**

The policy under the spotlight in this article is one of several case studies being examined as part of a broader research project on cultural policy in urban municipalities in New Zealand and Australia. There are many commonalities in the structures, responsibilities and practices of city councils in these countries, where local government is characterised by its limited power and lack of constitutional status. While this constitutional weakness and limited scope distinguish Australasian local authorities...
from their international counterparts, their ‘council–manager’ structure mirrors the form of municipal government in England, Ireland, Finland and large towns and cities in the United States (Considine, Lewis & Alexander, 2009: 20).

Established during the gold rush of the 1840s, with historical and structural variations between states, local government is the third tier in Australia’s federal system. The city discussed in this article is a relatively well-resourced municipality of almost 100,000 residents. In order to maintain anonymity, I do not identify the name or the location of the institution or the individual research participants, nor do I fully reference the policy documents cited.

Safety issues and the development of a ‘24 hour city’ have been a priority area for this council since the mid-1990s. In recent years, through the development of a ‘24 hour city’ policy and various initiatives of councillors and staff, arts and cultural activities have been explored as a new vehicle to shape both perceptions of, and behaviour in, the city at night. The council first developed a Safer City Strategy in 1996, in response to community concerns. A 2004 consultant’s report noted that council actions had helped to increase evening activities, which had led ‘to a livelier and safer city at night’ and had enhanced the city’s ‘24-hour appeal’. Over the next few years, council staff researched, drafted and consulted on a ‘24 hour city’ policy, which was endorsed by the council in 2008 and referred to in the Council Plan 2009–2013 in relation to the key strategic activity of improving city safety. In 2010, at the mayor’s request, seed funding was provided to several major cultural festivals to trial late-night programming. Later that year, an innovative arts participation project entitled ‘At Night’ was delivered on a street near the major commuter train station in the central city, both as a means of research and consultation, and to animate a problematic site at night. Following the perceived success of the grants, the city has offered further funding to arts and cultural organisations for late-night programming.

This article considers how, in relation to each of these programs, the attitudes and actions of relevant officers demonstrate aspects of the contemporary practice of local cultural governance. While two programs of late-night cultural activation are used as an anchor for analysis, this article also considers the broader context within which these local government officers work.

This study fits within the broad school of interpretive policy analysis, examining the meanings and material effects of discourses of local cultural policy in a specific location and, in this article, with particular respect to theories of public administration. I treat both policy statements and programmatic enactments as ‘texts’ containing expressive and symbolic meaning, which is created in context (Yanow, 1996). I developed this case study by collecting documents and carrying out seven semi-structured interviews at this council in mid to late 2011. While my primary focus was on the Arts and Culture branch, the particular programs I studied were ‘joined-up’ initiatives involving other departments, so I invited participants from these branches to take part in interviews too. Four of the officers interviewed were employed in the Arts and Culture branch, two in the same Community Development directorate, and the final one in the City Research branch, which sits within the Planning directorate. These seven officers occupy different rungs of the local bureaucracy; in descending hierarchical order: two are branch managers, one is a team leader, two are senior officers/analysts and the remaining two are program managers. I examined the three documents to which interviewees most commonly referred – the Council Plan, Arts Strategy, and ‘24 hour city’ policy – which represent a range of key texts used in this context, as well as different levels within the business planning framework. In addition to gathering information on the selected programs from supplementary internal and public documents, I conducted a thematic analysis of these ten texts (the three policy documents and seven interview transcripts) to identify the types of knowledge and practices deployed in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of late-night cultural activation in this municipality. My methodology can be described as abductive, in that it involved first identifying the prevalent themes in these texts, then moving back and forth between close analysis of these primary texts and relevant literature to create a suitable explanatory framework.
This research takes a ‘realist governmentality approach’, which combines Foucauldian theory with ‘a more grounded focus on the empirical world and the active agents within it’ (Mckee, 2009: 479). Governmentality theorists draw our attention to the ways in which power is embedded within various political, economic, cultural and social ‘technologies’ that shape human conduct (Miller & Rose, 2008). They encourage us to look outside government, but this need not mean the state should be ignored; as Mckee (2009: 481) points out, ‘it remains a significant and powerful actor in neo-liberal welfare regimes’. I correspondingly recognise that non-government actors play a significant role in local cultural governance, but, given that the scope of my study is limited to workers within local government, it does not take into account all the relevant policy networks or communities. Local sites of culture and community have been identified by Foucauldian scholars as new spaces of governing, between the state and the market (Rose, 2000; Hay, 2002: 182–3). It is thought that political strategies can be used to intensify the bonds of reciprocity, create solidarity and establish harmony among citizens (Dean, 2007: 13), in order to allow ‘free and autonomous individuals [to] be governed through community’ (Rose, 2000: 1399). Culture, like community, ‘has often been both the object and the instrument of governmental policy that regulates social life’ (Bennett, 2003: 60; Bratich, Packer & McCarthy, 2003: 6–8).

This case study provides an interesting example of governing through culture, and control through measurement, in line with Foucauldian thought. It can be seen to reflect the use of the arts as a ‘magic pill’ for all sorts of societal ills, from mental health and social exclusion to economic downturn and place-based stigma. More significantly, the city’s policy of late-night cultural activation recognises the cultural dimension of social problems. In particular, it assumes that public perceptions of safety are not based entirely on crime statistics, but informed by various material and emotional factors. The policy workers interviewed for this study acknowledge that the goal of these arts and cultural programs is to improve city safety, particularly by providing an attractive alternative to bars and nightclubs, as alcohol has been identified as a significant cause of incidents of antisocial and violent behaviour. Media reporting of such incidents has encouraged the perception of the city as a dangerous place, especially at night. These officers also recognise, however, that a couple of programmatic interventions cannot achieve this objective on their own. This tension between the means and the ends of the city’s late-night cultural activation policy helps to explain some of the ambivalence around outcome reporting and evaluation.

Following a genealogical approach (Bevir, 2010), I have employed three dominant ‘traditions’ of public sector governance as an explanatory framework: traditional bureaucracy, marketisation and new governance. Traditions can also be described as policy ‘frames’, which are ‘a special kind of story’ that ‘become[s] institutionalized in habits of thought and action, in practices’ (Laws & Rein, 2003: 179. Emphasis in original). In order to avoid reifying concepts through the use of tradition as an explanatory device, I have endeavoured to recognise situated human agency and contingency, and to not reduce meanings ‘to allegedly objective facts’ about systems, institutions or people (Bevir, 2009: 21; Bevir, 2010). Through the primary and secondary source analysis, I identify several traditions of public management and governance as playing a significant role in the practice of cultural policy at this council. Although separating these traditions and presenting them chronologically represents an over-simplified and misleadingly linear view of policy, such an approach is common in the literature, and is the most effective way to introduce these concepts here. This taxonomy will be considered more critically in the conclusion.

Theories of Public Sector Governance in Practice

Basically, the ‘shift to governance’ is generally construed as a two-phased movement from formal to informal authority. It has involved transferring public service delivery from the hierarchy of bureaucratic government, epitomised in the Westminster model (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003), firstly to markets and quasi-markets, and then to networks and partnerships. Both stages are commonly understood as the shift to governance. Within this conceptualisation of governance, we can pinpoint three broad traditions:
Westminster-style bureaucracy, new public management and new governance. In each case, connections can be made between the perceived practice of the tradition, particular types of knowledge, and specific theories and methods developed by political scientists and policy analysts (Hess & Adams, 2005; Tenbensel, 2008). In my analysis of the case of late-night cultural activation policy, I identified a medley of bureaucratic, neoliberal and collaborative structures and practices, treated stroke-by-stroke below.

**Westminster-style Bureaucracy**

Under the Westminster system, authority is delegated firstly by voters to elected representatives, then from the representative government to ‘neutral’ bureaucrats who follow the orders of their superiors. Scholarship on bureaucracy typically refers to Weber’s (1978) legalistic theory of bureaucracy as an ‘ideal type’, characterised by a hierarchical division of labour among non-partisan, salaried professionals. Simply glancing at the organigram in the corporate plan of this council reveals a stratified structure, which corresponds with this definition of bureaucracy as a hierarchical division of labour along distinct functional lines. The process of obtaining consent to carry out this research revealed strict lines of authority within this hierarchy. In addition, the advisory panel structures and the codified funding practices of the Arts and Culture branch continue to represent the traditional British model of an ‘arm’s length’ arts-funding agency (Mangset, 2009).

While most state legislation imposes a barrier between elected councillors and employed officers, the statute governing this city does not carry this requirement. As a result, meetings are fairly frequently held between senior managers and councillors. Officer F, for instance, ‘work[s] with the councillors a lot’. Whenever there is a major project or review, she would first speak to councillors individually, then ‘present to them in a forum and engage them in dialogue’ (Interview F). Elected representatives do not usually issue specific directives. An exception is the late-night program pilot funding, for which ‘the actual concept came from councillors’, which, Officer F asserts, ‘was really quite unusual’. Similar ideas of hierarchical direction came through in other interviews. Officer A expresses the need for compliance with regard to local government norms and external communications: ‘It’s all about control, brand control, message control … I’ve got to meet the guidelines within my organisation, and the protocols.’ Officers also describe their organisation as slow to adapt to new technology and having a somewhat stale institutional culture (Interviews F and G). These descriptions correspond with conventional understandings of bureaucracy as a rigid structure that fails to adapt and innovate. While Weber saw bureaucracy as a technically superior form of government, he correspondingly recognised the danger of an ‘increasingly depersonalized and mechanical’ system of social organisation (Heywood, 2007: 383–4). This top-down model of government corresponds with the positivist tradition that takes ‘a systematic, institutionalized approach’ (DeLeon, 1994: 77) to policy sciences ‘which privileges objectively verifiable, expert knowledge’ (Hess & Adams, 2005; Tenbensel, 2008).

**New Public Management or Marketisation**

The governmental reforms of the 1980s and 1990s involved transferring public service delivery from hierarchical government to markets and quasi-markets, and introducing principles of managerialism to the public sector. Intensive reform of the Australian public sector was accompanied by efforts to restrain expenditure and tighten accountability in local government through reforms of legislation and structure and the replacement of administration with management (Aulich, 2005). These reforms and principles, summed up as new public management (NPM) or marketisation, were based on neoliberalism, which can be understood both as a political philosophy that rejects forms of direct state control in favour of market value, and ‘as a political–economic practice’ that has become hegemonic in the context of a post-industrial and globalised society (Hay, 2002: 165; Harvey, 2007: 2–3).

Cultural governance in this case study reflects some of the key characteristics of NPM as observed by Hood (1995), notably the emphasis on management, performance appraisal and efficiency, rather than on policy. While other divisions might be constituted by different tiers of policy and delivery roles, the Arts and Culture branch is
very much focused on service delivery. The operational model of inputs (funding) and outputs (grants and productions) dominates the shared understanding that local cultural policy is about delivering services. Although some officers are beginning to talk about results-based evaluation and accountability, they are struggling to make the shift from counting outputs to identifying outcomes. This will be discussed further in the next section, which deals with attributes of ‘new’ governance. In terms of council budgeting and resource allocation, branches deal with each other on a user-pays basis, and have to bid for resources, including labour, research and consultancy services. Even the research office does not conduct all evaluations itself; ‘their mode of operating is more subcontracting out’ (Interview F). Contracts for these services, partnerships and funding grants are typically of limited term and competitive. Some examples of these market-oriented principles and practices are given in this section, demonstrating the extent to which the discourses of managerialism and marketisation permeate this institution.

When asked about their main area of responsibility, every Arts and Culture officer interviewed described a key aspect of their role as ‘managing’, whether a program, a process, staff or client relationships. It was also fairly common to hear officers describe local government or their role as business. For instance, Officer C explains why she did not publish a consultant’s report: ‘It takes a lot of effort to put material into the public domain and that’s not my core business.’ When asked how her branch monitors progress towards its goals, she suggests, ‘We measure ourselves … just the same as any other work environment’. Officer A, describing the strategic planning framework, states ‘Like any good business sense, our programs do need to reflect what council’s goals are’. Officer D describes ‘the current model of local government’ as ‘fifty-two businesses doing different things’. Only once did any of the officers use the term ‘public sector’ when describing their work (Interview F). None described their role explicitly as a ‘bureaucrat’ or ‘civil servant’. Identifying such ‘silences in discourse’ is an important function of interpretive research (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006: 123) and can be as revealing as noticing which words and images proliferate.

Performance measures appear in plans, policies, reports and reviews. They are used to demonstrate accountability and aim to foster improvement, particularly in terms of efficiency. The introduction of such mechanisms as indicators-based performance management has been seen to epitomise the supplanting of political rationality with technocratic rationality (Vestman & Conner, 2008: 58). Routine reporting as part of the business planning framework occurs quarterly and annually at this municipality:

The way that we manage our budget and the way that we manage our activities gets reported up through a system … that’s directly derived from this Council Plan. We do our reporting on a quarterly basis, our finance reporting is done through another process, and so our activities and our outputs, our outcomes in that sense as well, are tracked and linked to the council plan [and] the business plan that way. (Interview E)

Services that are delivered in connection with one of the council’s key strategic objectives, such as late-night program funding in relation to city safety, require monthly reporting: ‘We’ve had to identify milestones and key targets that need to be met and that’s what we’ll need to be commenting on each month’ (Interview B). The measures in these reports are generally not part of genuine evaluation, and officers tend to perceive them ‘as an additional layer of work that they view as a form of compliance, rather than a way of generating concepts and innovation around a program’ (Interview F).

The Arts and Culture branch regularly engages in efficiency reviews and benchmarking exercises. As Officer C puts it, ‘The strategy sets the scene for us to evaluate and review, and there’s a hell of a lot of it going on’. Both the Arts Strategy and the ‘24 hour city’ policy refer to reviewing several times in their discussion of how their goals will be met. The Arts Strategy proposes reviews of both the annual and triennial arts grants programs as well as of the composition of their reference, advisory and assessment panels. A major arts grant review began in 2009 with a benchmarking exercise undertaken by a consultant, which produced results described by Officer C as
‘challenging’, since ‘it demonstrated that we’re very costly at delivering some of our grant services, and to that end we embarked on an efficiency review of that … program’ (Interview C). Another reiterates, ‘We started benchmarking ourselves nationally and internationally, and what came out of that review was that the granting program was in desperate need of change’ (Interview A). The efficiency review described was part of the city’s ‘continuous improvement program, based on “Lean Thinking” which aims to ‘provide value to customers’ by ‘[eliminating] waste in our processes’ (Council Plan). This focus on efficient customer service clearly corresponds with principles of new public management and demonstrates the dominance of economic knowledge associated with marketisation.

All officers have annual professional development reviews (PDRs), which are aligned with council plans and outcomes. For some officers, at least, there is a ‘very close alignment between what’s written in [the branch] plan and what’s written in [the] performance plan’ (Interview E). These reviews represent an opportunity to identify achievements and track progress towards targets: ‘We have a set of measures, or goals, that we would like to meet, so we can use that as well as a way of seeing what we’ve achieved’ (Interview E). Some officers see these as a compliance activity, which largely involves ‘cutting and pasting into a corporate template’ (Interview A). They can, however, be seen as an enjoyable, collaborative and useful exercise in reflective practice:

I couldn’t do my job without my PDR, ‘cause how do you get a sense of how, if you’re achieving. How do you get a sense of [whether] your notions of success align with council’s ideas of success? … It’s all about synergy around priorities … and I think it’s the chance to actually down tools and talk. So I like the PDR process, not because I get rated, not because it gives me a bonus or anything like that. It’s literally that I can actually unpack and … [take] a helicopter view of my program and have my manager’s take on it. We can have philosophical discussions. (Interview A)

The PDR process thus provides an interesting example of creative reflection and organisational compliance in action.

New Governance

The ascension of neoliberal rationality challenged and devalued public services by favouring market solutions, whereas this century, a ‘more refined version of neoliberalism recognizes the role of government and public services in creating stable social and economic conditions, but in a new coalition with business and civil society actors’ (Hartley & Skelcher, 2008: 4–5). This ‘more refined version’ of neoliberal governance extends its embrace of less formal authority to include networks, partnerships and citizen engagement. This involves a shift from competitive tendering to long-term cooperation and mutual trust. This second stage of the shift to governance, which has ties with Third Way politics, is sometimes distinguished by the labels ‘joined-up government’, ‘whole-of-government’, ‘agile’ or ‘new governance’.

The progression from measuring performance based on output indicators to evaluating outcomes is a hallmark of the shift to ‘new’ governance. Thinking about outcome evaluation is fairly new at this council, but builds on existing reporting and monitoring practices. Recent efforts to evaluate the impacts or results of council policy and programs include the subcontracted development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for late-night programming, the exploration of cultural indicators by the Arts and Culture branch and the construction of ‘creative city’ indicators for monitoring and reporting on the long-term community plan. At this stage, however, there appears to have been more talk than action when it comes to using outcome measures. Officer D comments, ‘People are starting to think, ok, with all the money we’re putting into activities, what do we have to show? How can we tell we’re doing something worthwhile?’ Officer E adds, ‘There is a lot of interest at [this council] in measuring outcomes … It’s no longer good enough to say “We put this much in and we got this much out as an output”. The next question is … “What effect did that have?”’
They may be well accustomed to monitoring performance, but this shift to outcomes reflects a challenge for policy workers, particularly those in Arts and Culture. As Officer E put it, ‘[I]n local government … we’re really good at measuring those outputs, they’re easy to do, and we do it well. It’s not uncommon that lots of areas within council will find it a little harder to think about, “How do we measure that outcome?”’ In interviews, the terms ‘output’ and ‘outcome’ were used interchangeably by some staff, supporting the observations by an officer more experienced in research and evaluation frameworks: ‘Whether or not people are understanding what an outcome is is another question’ (Interview G). Officer D similarly comments, ‘Most people don’t understand the difference between a KPI and a population indicator. A big barrier is language. We need a common language and an organisational culture interested in measuring outcomes.’

The interest in, and challenge of, identifying results is connected with the recognition that one program, one policy, or one branch is not the only attributing factor in any outcome. Not only are policy workers recognising the role that other agencies play in influencing outcomes, but they are actively working with others to achieve shared goals. ‘Joined-up’ and adaptive approaches appear to be infiltrating local government from both the top down and the bottom up, as will be described below. The need for flexibility and strategic coalition-building is not new, though. These can be seen as necessary conditions of the dynamic political environment in which local bureaucrats work, perhaps exacerbated by the increasingly fast pace of change in wider society. Several officers suggest the changing priorities of councillors and senior managers makes it a volatile working environment, with comments such as ‘[some programs] are at the whim of a CEO’ (Interview D) and ‘that challenge is always there – next year we’re getting a new council, and there’s nothing to say that they will have the same priorities. That’s the local government framework in which we operate’ (Interview B). As a result, officers ‘need to have a great deal of political acumen, and you need to be quite strategic in your approach to your work’ (Interview F). This is particularly true in the case of late-night cultural activation, since city safety is ‘an election issue’ (Interview G), and in relation to cultural policy more generally, ‘because the arts is a disposable item’ (Interview F). Officers therefore take extra care when developing policy and programs in the cultural sphere.

Encouraged and in some cases required by state legislation, policy actors consider their work within a broader institutional and societal context through integrated strategic plans and the pursuit of partnerships. Like many others, this local authority has an ‘Integrated Planning Framework’, which aligns strategic and operational plans and focuses on broad, sustainable outcomes (Council Plan). An awareness of context and desire to respond appropriately to it comes through in documents such as the Arts Strategy: ‘We regularly review our portfolio to reflect environmental, social and artistic change, ensuring that we have a balanced approach and reflecting the diversity of our population’. Similarly, the ‘24 hour city’ policy stipulates plenty of reviewing and monitoring of context and policy impacts. For instance, it states that data on trends and perceptions of safety will be used to monitor changes to the late-night environment, including ‘cultural shifts’. The ‘24 hour city’ policy offers a prime example of the rhetoric of a ‘whole-of-government’ and ‘networked’ approach, even if this is difficult to achieve in practice. Its overarching vision is designed to guide ‘the breadth of the [City]’s local government responsibilities’ and its implementation will draw on ‘the skills and resources’ of a wide range of groups, including service providers, businesses, government departments and enforcement agencies. Both the Arts Strategy and the ‘24 hour city’ policy are littered with references to partnerships, which are identified as important vehicles for achieving strategic objectives. The Arts Strategy also recognises multi-level governance, with local, state and federal government depicted as united by their interest in the municipality’s status as a capital city and creative hub, and working together to enhance the contribution of the arts to national wellbeing.

At the same time, council officers are willingly engaging in constructive dialogue and collaborative practices, not only with colleagues within their branch, but also with other departments, and occasionally with external networks and agencies. Every officer
interviewed described liaising and engaging with other units within council as a significant part of their role. The Arts and Culture branch is heavily involved in cross-sectoral collaboration, as described by Officer F, when asked which areas of council her team works with regularly. She quickly described projects and connections with seven other branches, before concluding that Arts and Culture is ‘quite a collaborative branch’ (Interview F). The participatory arts project ‘At Night’ came about through a productive working relationship between officers in two different branches. The Community Safety officers responsible for the ‘24 hour city’ policy ‘had decided that it was important to have ... an ongoing relationship with branches who could impact change’ (Interview G). Arts and Culture was one of four teams identified as a potential partner for a cross-branch initiative. Meanwhile, an arts officer had become concerned about media representations of ‘night-time violence’ in the city, and began thinking about the possibility of a relevant project:

I started thinking about a project ... [and] having conversations with other people within council, looked at all the policy, looked at the ['24 hour city' policy], and that's when I hooked up with the 24 hour policy person ... and we just started having a conversation. (Interview A)

That conversation led to the pair developing a brief based on a former artist-in-residence program. Distributed through artist networks, the brief generated eight expressions of interest. Following an assessment process and a lengthy period of contract negotiation, a trio of artists began exploring the central city site from December 2010, and performed a series of live art works at a busy intersection there between February and April 2011. Once the arts project was complete, internal dialogue about the site continued at the council. Officer A presented the findings of the ‘At Night’ project to internal and external stakeholders in September 2011.

This project represents an interesting example of a creative approach to a complex issue, and effectively operationalises the aim in the Council Plan to involve ‘creative thinkers … in decision-making for the city’. While the Arts Strategy notes that ‘critical debate adds a welcome perspective to our planning processes’ and sets out the specific strategy of collaborating with creative practitioners ‘to gain arts perspectives’ in significant design projects, artists are not normally invited to participate in council planning processes. ‘At Night’ exemplifies how this strategy can be achieved in practice, by using artists as researchers to ‘broaden our perspectives’ (Interview A). While the ‘process-driven project’ was full of challenges, it managed to influence the dialogue between council branches about the site redevelopment, particularly by drawing attention to the aesthetics of the site – ‘the traction happening around the imagery that the artists created (from) the site, the beauty that's already there’ – and suggesting that ‘to sanitise the place isn’t the right thing to do’ (Interview A).

Officers from outside Arts and Culture also saw the value of the artists’ insights and representations:

[T]he best part about having artists do research, if you could call it that, is that they have less of a narrow focus, so things that you would just not even consider to be topics of interest, huge rats, for example, are topics of quite important interest to people who work in that area ... [The artists] told us things like ... no one had any ownership of the space, and ... it was such a disorganised chaotic space that it felt a bit like a vortex. Having artists explain emotions and feelings fairly succinctly and coherently, although somewhat abstractedly, does allow a different interpretation, which researchers can’t provide. (Interview G)

This policy worker suggested that after they had made a presentation on the findings, including showing a video of this project to council officers, there was ‘a much more realistic expectation amongst the engineers and designers that there is a need for change’. He added, ‘Having that video and having that artistic program ... really cut through all the complexity quite quickly’ (Interview G). Officer A similarly describes the feedback to her presentation: ‘Now, if an engineering department got a hold of a project
that had to go into that site and reflect on that site, you would not get outcomes and imagery like that. But those images and that narrative sticks in people’s minds.’

The collaborative and creative relational practice described above requires different forms of knowledge from those used in bureaucratic or technocratic models of government. Professional experience, local knowledge and interpersonal skills are paramount here. The dynamic, adaptive and participatory nature of creative activity is rarely mentioned in the governance literature, but it may be particularly relevant to speak of agility and collaboration with reference to cultural policy and arts administration. This is the argument put forth by Meg O’Shea (2011), who suggests that manifestations of creativity can increase the strategic capacity of government agencies to recognise and pursue innovation, particularly by increasing the diversity of inputs into the policy sphere, while also engaging and empowering citizens. She joins others who highlight the need for policy actors to deploy different types of knowledge and interdisciplinary thinking (Tenbensel, 2006; Landry, 2011). In particular, a constructivist understanding of knowledge, and policy workers’ use of stories rather than numbers to communicate, have been highlighted as contemporary features of (new) governance (Hess & Adams, 2005; Rhodes & Bevir, 2006).

Conclusion: The Governance Medley

Many of the practices described above can be read as an interplay of governance styles. Efficiency reviews aided by external consultants would appear to indicate that new public management is alive and well in local government. At the same time, the common practice of reviewing could be seen to represent an ethic of adaptability and desire to be responsive to change, which conforms more to principles of new governance. Occasionally, this may even interact with the reflective practice of individual agents, such as Officer A’s embrace of the professional development review process as a space for dialogue and ‘dreaming’. Strategic planning seems to fit the logic of control within both traditional bureaucracies and marketisation, as well as with the long-term, integrated approach of new governance.

Table 1: The local cultural governance medley

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<td>Management techniques</td>
<td>Efficiency reviews</td>
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<td>Audit culture</td>
<td>Reporting and performance indicators</td>
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<td>New governance</td>
<td>Collaboration and creativity</td>
<td>Joined-up government</td>
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<td>Networks and partnerships</td>
<td>Collaborative and creative relational practice</td>
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Table 1 presents a simplified representation of the complex array of governance practices described in this article. I acknowledge there are overlaps in these categories, and their interpretation depends on the context.

For each governance tradition depicted in this article, the examples come from varying sources. The characteristics of Westminster bureaucracy and marketisation relate mostly to the broader institutional structure and organisational norms, whereas the descriptions of collaborative and creative practice largely emerge from interviews about the participatory arts project. This may indicate that the ‘At Night’ program is an unusual example that deviates from normal local government practice, or it may suggest that attention to programmatic enactments and the practice of local officers can reveal characteristics of new governance that are rarely evident in an analysis of high-level structures, plans or strategies. This article is too limited in scope to determine the credibility of these potential explanations, although I note that other researchers have suggested that arts and culture processes (O’Shea, 2011) and local government practices, in New Zealand at least (Leonard & Memon, 2008; Ryan, 2011: 110), may offer lessons for policy-makers and analysts interested in contemporary approaches to governance and public administration. Further research is required, particularly at the level of programs and practices, to furnish a more complex and fine-grained picture than is commonly found in (cultural) policy studies and public administration literature.

Describing local cultural governance as a medley enables us to see it as a mixture of theories and practices. That is, local cultural governance in this case study involves the simultaneous deployment of various theories and practices. This can also offer the perspective of policy actors as a collaborative team of swimmers, some of whom are better at particular strokes than others, while a rare few are capable all-rounders. The analysis of texts and practices above suggests this metaphor can be fruitfully applied to the policy of late-night cultural activation in this city. It also serves as a useful reminder that neither the policy process nor the traditions of governance are linear or singular. Furthermore, it fits with ‘realist’ studies of governmentality that illustrate how ‘subjects are reflexive and can accommodate, adapt, contest or resist top-down endeavours to govern them if they so wish’ (Mckee, 2009: 479). In this respect, it differs from (neo-) institutionalist approaches, although the continuities in traditions may seem to resemble a certain ‘path dependency’.

This article has elucidated abstract patterns of governance by capturing detailed information about a particular policy objective and the circumstances of its implementation. I have only considered one case here, but it provides an example that suggests avenues for further exploration. This case study also serves to suggest that local cultural governance is likely to be an incredibly challenging environment in which to work. If this medley of governance styles is present in other sites, the actors involved would require an array of skills and various types of knowledge in order to navigate competing expectations and requirements in their pursuit of broad outcomes.

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