Legitimating cultural policy after the 2008 crisis: learnings from France, the UK, Spain and Greece

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ABSTRACT

This article examines legitimacy and legitimation processes in cultural policies after the 2008 crisis. This is done by studying the relationships between the main institutional and economic reforms carried out by France, the UK, Spain and Greece cultural policies between 2008 and 2012 and legitimation narratives used to frame them. Based on literature and documentary review, this comparative case studies analysis addresses cultural policy models, each country cultural systems' economic power, and continuity and change in policy legitimation strategies. The comparative analysis reveals the importance of the EU centre-periphery dynamics and historical trends for cultural policy legitimation approaches adopted in changing socioeconomic scenarios.

Introduction

The "austerity program" led by EU institutions after the 2008 financial crash questioned cultural policies' capacity to preserve their value for public affairs and hindered their insti-tutional autonomy (Harvey, 2016; Mangset, 2020; Vickery, 2011). At the peak of the crisis, cultural policies were repeatedly framed from creative and entrepreneurial perspectives. Prevailing narratives claimed to leave more space for private businesses in order to foster productivity growth and economic recovery. However, cuts in public budgets and family cultural spending, together with the decline of the cultural democracy paradigm after the "neoliberal turn", reduced this policy to a sectorial pragmatic tool (Bonet & Donato, 2011). This combination of factors led to a general stagnation of public resources assigned to culture(Dubois, 2015). As a result, cultural policies legitimacy, somewhat built on their capacity to provide various public services, was also altered.

Still, shifts in national cultural finances, rationalisation of public bodies in charge of culture and political discourses justifying these measures differed across the EU Member States. For instance, some countries where public cultural spending increased during the last decade, such as Hungary or Poland, have been dominated by illiberal gov-ernments (Bonet & Zamorano, 2021). Instead, artistic work turnover, labour markets, and direct public support to cultural activities were particularly affected in countries with

weaker and less consolidated public cultural systems (Cellini & Cuccia, 2019; Garcia et al., 2018). Moreover, gaps in budget reduction between richer and poorer European states and between more or less interventionist cultural administrations were evident. Historical path dependencies seem to explain Eastern and Southern European cultural policies differences in this regard (Rius-Ulldemolins et al., 2019; Rubio Arostegui & Rius-Ulldemo-lins, 2020).

Relationships between policy framing carried forward by governments and austerity cultural policies have been analysed (Betzler et al., 2021; Borchi, 2017). These studies suggest that both reductions of public expending and their economic justification in the post-2008 period have affected their legitimacy. Used legitimation narratives have been seen as continuity or deepening of historical instrumental and economic justifica-tion of cultural policy's outcomes - also in countries less affected by the crisis- (Hadley & Gray, 2017; Throsby, 2010). Moreover, while studies on cultural policies economic impact multiplied in this framework, they were often instrumentalized in the service of economic growth and urban regeneration projects (Phiddian et al., 2017). The literature has approached this phenomenon from a systemic approach at the EU level and as pri-marily subjected to continental centre-periphery power relations.

In this scenario, this article addresses the following questions: How have material changes in post-2008 European cultural policies been legitimated? What elements explain continuity and change in this regard among different European countries? More-over, to what extent do path dependencies and economic growth influence adopted legitimation strategies? While political sciences have widely studied public policies' legiti-macy (Guy Peters, 1986b; Palumbo, 1987), it has remained partially overlooked by the cul-tural policy literature. Addressing this gap, this article comparatively analyses public cultural budgets and discourses legitimising France, the UK, Spain and Greece cultural policies, focusing on the period between 2008 and 2012. The period covers one govern-ment term and goes from the start of the crisis to 2012, the second year of Eurozone GDP most significant fall (EUROSTAT, 2021). The qualitative and exploratory study of political discourses is based on an extended analysis of presidential and other executive respon-sible speeches over these years.[1] Our focus on the executive level narratives regarding the state's role in cultural policies seeks to capture the structural legitimation of austerity applied to the cultural sector. The study is also based on literature review and analysis of regimes of justification that can be captured following cultural policy programmes (Lemasson, 2017) and cultural budgets by using Eurostat and the Compendium of Cul-tural Policies[2] databases.

We focus on EU centre-periphery dynamics and address Western-Southern relation-ships (Rubio Arostegui & Rius-Ulldemolins, 2020). Therefore, three axes have been con-sidered when selecting studied countries. Firstly, the model of cultural policy and long-term path dependencies within cultural administration. In this regard, while the UK is inscribed in the "patron" or liberal orientation, France, Spain and Greece follow different approaches to the more interventionist "architect" model[3] (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989). Secondly, we consider each cultural system's relative fragility to the effects of economic crises and dependency on the international financial system(and sub-sequent governmental expenditure in arts and culture). Greece was the epicentre of the crisis and, together with Spain, had very limited budgetary autonomy. Instead, the other two countries had more margin of action for taking their own decisions. Thirdly, we

address the public acceptability of state involvement in the culture realm. Arts and culture are considered an essential public good in France and consolidated area of public policies in Spain; however, it is more instrumental-oriented in the UK and Greece cases under the arguments of creative industries and heritage, respectively. Thus, these cases allow us to represent a good combination of dimensions explaining the legitimation of cultural pol-icies from a systemic and north–south European standpoint.

Public policy legitimacy and cultural policies

The legitimacy of public policies can be understood as a form of valuation supported by social acceptability, which in turn has policy suitability and fairness as critical drivers (Dahl, 1998; Guy Peters, 1986a). In the eighties, some authors framed policy legitimation as a stage of the policy cycle subjected to the institutional approval of legislative o judicial bodies, considering it a type of policy validation (Jones, 1984; Palumbo, 1987). Other authors have conceived legitimation as a process that is transversal to the whole policy cycle, addressing how it interrelates to specific policy decisions(Guy Peters, 1986a).

The procedural legitimacy of public policies has been distinguished from their substan-tive one. The former has been defined as emergent from stakeholders' formal engage-ment in policy design and implementation, following legal requirements (Wallner, 2008). Official practices supporting democratic institutions, such as elections, are inscribed within this framework (Burlaud & Colasse, 2010). Instead, more linked to social acceptability and "intrinsic value" factors, substantive legitimacy stems from public policies aligned with stakeholders and citizens' dominant interests (Montpetit, 2008).

Both procedural and substantive legitimation processes have been presented as con-stituent elements of policy design and conceived as variables explaining policy regimes change and sustainability (Montpetit, 2008; Wilson, 2006). Along these lines, the present article follows the policy narratives framework (Mcbeth et al., 2007). This approach ponders relationships between policy narratives and policy change by focusing on rhetorical mechanisms and narratives deployed by their advocates. Furthermore, it seeks to understand how discourses intervene in policy legitimation and delegitimation, which is particularly relevant when actors frame policy problems and alternatives.

The historical legitimation frames of cultural policies

The state-led promotion of national values, the "civilization of masses" through the arts and heritage protection were some of the relevant justifications blandished by nascent European cultural policies after WWII (Urfalino & Fabre, 2005). The British Art Council and the *Ministère de la Culture* shared in the late 1950s the value of artistic excellence and democratic access to high culture as grounds for their action (Sinclair, 1995). Under these premises, both sectoral and cultural rights-based goals were gradually insti-tutionalised as part of these policies and gained substantive legitimacy as part of the welfare state. This framework rapidly evolved, integrating various sectorial, social and identitarian aims as grounds for policy action. Moreover, cultural policies also incorpor-ated procedural legitimation tools such as those associated with arm's length institutions. Since then, discursive drivers for the legitimacy of cultural policies have ranged from the

exceptional nature of culture and the high arts (the so-called elitist approach) to others focusing on their ordinary and popular nature(Vestheim, 2012).

The entrepreneurial and local turn of cultural policies, since the 1980s, favoured the diversification of the legitimate definition of culture to be addressed by public institutions while questioned the role of the state within the cultural economy (Harvey, 1989). As a result of this evolution, Menger (2013) has pointed out how contemporary cultural pol-icies became characterised by further integrating entertainment and "creative industries" into their scope of action. Together with this, cultural policy showed a tendency towards justifications "on the bases of its contribution to economic growth and to the balance of national social diversity" (Menger, 2013, p. 479). Output-oriented economic narratives and instrumental validations for public cultural action have been constructed over these ratio-nales (Gray, 2007; Hadley & Gray, 2017). For instance, public authorities have often stressed that subsidies to the arts and culture contribute to society to justify their actual existence (Mangset, 2020).

However, evident differences exist between the liberal and central European cultural policies regarding legitimation rationales and specific enactments of cultural democracy principles. Firstly, the degree and focus of state intervention in the cultural sector that is "tolerated" within each cultural policy tradition (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989). Secondly, the dominance of "artistic excellence" and meritocratic criteria within the valuation grounds behind liberal cultural policies (Wyszomirski & Mulcahy, 1995). This can be con-trasted with the importance of social-oriented outcomes in the central European and Nordic models of public cultural administration. Thirdly, different authors have stressed cultural policy models and orientations' hybridity or context-specific developments in this domain (Zimmer & Toepler, 1999). Likewise, the changing nature of policy justifica-tions has also been explained by its accommodation to fluctuations in the offer and demand of cultural services or reconfigurations within cultural exchanges in the frame-work of broader economic and technological disruptions (Menger, 2013). For instance, Tony Blair's governments stressed the contribution of culture to tackling social problems as a justification for public "investment" in the arts at the beginning of the XX century (Belfiore, 2002).

Cultural policies legitimacy after 2008

Austerity measures in cultural policies were presented as imperative for ensuring this sector's economic sustainability. Thus, reducing the deficit in cultural budgets was assumed as part of such policies' procedural democratic grounds and a core part of cul-tural policy institutional reforms backed by several technical specialists decisions at the EU and national levels (Borchi, 2017). In this sense, they focused on ensuring governability (seen as policy entry) and justified instrumental objectives in the context of a critical social scenario.

However, this perspective has been criticised for its weak substantive legitimacy. For instance, the lack of bottom-up governance mechanisms supporting public debate and social participation questioned this policy's substantive legitimacy and fostered anti-austerity mobilisation within the cultural field (Apor, 2012; Pradel-Miquel, 2021). Still, austerity cultural policies were often justified under polyarchic and technocratic arguments supporting feasibility-centred legitimacy. In this context, the opinions of

elected officials and their electorates were held as the primary source of democratic authority (Park et al., 2015).

These two "regimes of legitimation" entail different conceptions of democratic participation behind them. Hence, policies fostered by the so-called "Troika", the EU institutions and different national governments after the 2008 crisis can be interpreted as procedural-based (Matthijs, 2017). Still, the relative influence of these supranational orientations on cultural policies at the national level must be evaluated case by case since each political programme remains subject to contextual factors (Betzler et al., 2021). In this regard, national path dependencies -understood as historically sedimen-ted social and political institutions (Ulrich Mayer, 2001)-, must be considered crucial in determining legitimation strategies continuity and change in the cultural policy domain.

Case analysis: policy narratives and budget allocation

This section introduces each case studies cultural policies models, describes institutional reforms and addresses legitimating narratives used between 2008 and 2012 to endorse policy change. It also compares national budget allocation during the crisis period.

The French government: an attempt to reframe cultural policies

Following its historical tradition, French cultural policy is mainly directed by the Ministry of Culture. Although this policy has adopted several orientations since 1981, when Jack Lang gave a new direction to it, its relevance and republican character have remained unquestioned (Urfalino & Fabre, 2005). Still, it should be noted that this policy has suffered, during the last decade, a slow shift towards a more decentralised action and reviewed its aesthetic and social values, for instance, by further integrating educational, cultural diversity or gender aspects(Dubois, 2016). Today, from a still rather centralised and widespread system, the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs (DRAC) oversees these public policies' territorial coordination, with competencies in the arts, heritage and creative sectors.

Nicolas Sarkozy's government (2007-2012) debated how to manage this large cultural policy apparatus. The actual legitimacy of holding up a Ministry for domestic cultural affairs was raised as part of the Sarkozy electoral campaign (Looseley, 2013). Once in office, nationalist discourses legitimating support for the arts were fostered although nuanced under the government's right-wing agenda, for instance, concerning the signifi-cance of laicism or "Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism" for French identity (Meunier, 2008). In speeches contextualising the role of culture, Sarkozy pointed out:

> "It seems to me that we would be making a mistake by reducing culture to what it can bring to our economy because French society has a need for identity (…) It turns out that culture also has, incidentally, an economic value, and that it is an important asset for our development; because the arts spark creativity and innovation; because they are backed by cultural industries; because they are factors of attractiveness."(Sarkozy, January 13, 2009).

In his last period in office, Sarkozy presented culture as a "response to the crisis" claiming for the "Bilbao effect". It also called for equal access to it, asserting that it is a "true disaster

that a certain number of French families do not have access to culture" (Sarkozy, October 10, 2011).

> "Culture is the foundation of our cohesion, the reason for the dynamism of the economy and the essential pledge to make us terribly attractive … I would add that it has now been demonstrated that Culture - and this is not to insult it, quite the contrary - is an element of the economic dynamism of our country. This is not to insult it because the 'Bilbao effect' no longer needs to be demonstrated." (Sarkozy, January 24, 2012).

Overall, the government narrative sought to balance the importance of French culture for national identity and social cohesion with the need to exploit culture's economic potential in the crisis scenario. However, calls to renew cultural policies may have lacked responses for cultural democratisation as a counterpart (Dubois, 2016). In fact, while the importance of national culture continued to be part of the French administration discourse, no significant transformations in the state apparatus were made in this period and innovation in cultural programmes was limited (Lebovics, 2011, p. 353).

Cultural policy in the UK: deepening economic liberalisation

Since the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) creation in 1946, cultural policies have gone through several phases(Belfiore, 2019). The British cultural policy system became further federalised by establishing independent national cultural bodies in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, such as the Arts Council of Wales, in 1994 (Zamorano et al., 2018). As a result of this process, the UK Parliament and government's legal competencies should be distinguished between England, where these institutions have full responsibilities, and the rest of the UK, where they are limited to specific domains, including Broadcasting.

Historically, this system has been characterised by an underpinning philosophy dominated by the arms' length principle, which guides Councils' and other independent public bodies administering cultural heritage and resources(Upchurch, 2011). Under these coordinates, cultural policies adopted some elements from continental models, such as the establishment in 1997 of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), with responsibility for culture and sport in England.

After the 2008 crisis, the UK cultural policy system, integrated by public corporations such as the BBC, and other institutions depending on the National Lottery, suffered several changes. Gordon Brown's administration (2007-2010) rationalised the Arts Council England, deepening a trend initiated before the crisis(Selwood, 2007). Its nine regional offices were integrated into four geographical areas, in charge of London, the North, the Midlands and South West and the East and South East (Doustaly, 2013). Budget decreases and staff reductions were also significant. Gordon's foreword to the 2008 DCMS strategy framed this policy by stating:

> "This is a strategy with the flexibility to adapt to and support a sector that is changing faster now than ever, and I hope it will mark the beginning of a fresh new partnership with our crea-tive industries. But it is just a start: the Government can provide the framework, but we must rely on our country's talent and the vision and commitment of all those working in the field if we are to build an even more creative Britain." (DCMS, 2008).

This trend continued with the new conservative government led by David Cameron (2010-2016) after the Arts Council England took responsibility for museums and libraries

in 2011 (Abdullah et al., 2018). The Department for Culture, Media and Sport confronted noteworthy staff downsizing within implemented austerity policies. As a result, the grant-in-aid budget provided by the Arts Council fell one third between 2010 and 2014, leading to changes in several cultural institutions, including museums(Alexander, 2019).

Cultural policies were not a relevant component in Cameron's discourses. However, cultural matters were integrated into narratives rejecting multiculturalism and concerning entrepreneurism, meritocracy, and responsibility in austerity:

> "A culture of thrift at the heart of government, and a culture of saving at the heart of our economy: these changes will provide strong foundations for the new economy we plan to build." (Cameron, 2009, January 5).

> "But the continuing existence of the welfare culture is down to one other important thing: the reluctance of all political parties to stick their neck out and confront it." (Cameron, 2009, March 13).

Once in government, Cameron maintained this constitutive approach to cultural policies. However, he also provided grounds supporting limited governmental action, such as entrepreneurial-based support for cinema:

> "Our role, and that of the BFI (British Film Institute), should be to support the sector in becoming even more dynamic and entrepreneurial, helping UK producers to make commercially successful pictures that rival the quality and impact of the best international productions" (Cameron, 2012, January 11).

The reduction in public spending within the cultural domain has not been recovered in the last decade, within a process seen as a continuity of the neoliberal agenda under the "disguise of austerity" (Newsinger, 2015, p. 311). Along these lines, cutting direct investment in culture can be seen as part of the overall conservative rejection of welfare policies which transformation required questioning hegemonic civic culture while creating the market conditions for economically profitable creative industries.

Cultural policy in Spain: between instrumentalization and neoliberalism

During the democratic transition, the Spanish Ministry of Culture was established following the above delineated French model. The 1978 Constitution established a quasi-federal system where the Ministry regulates cultural industries, supporting national heritage and institutions, and the Autonomous Communities have almost full powers in the cultural domain(Rius-Ulldemolins & Zamorano, 2015). Within this institutional design, local governments are also crucial, being in charge, for instance, of local libraries and civic centres. Following this scheme, during the eighties, public cultural action and investment multiplied, and the transference of legal powers and resources to regional governments contributed to the system development, also helping to reduce the gap between cultural policies inherited from Francoism and those of central European countries(Rubio Aróstegui, 2008).

Spain suffered several changes in its cultural policies within the studied period. With the Socialist Party in office (2004-2011), cultural institutions were initially reinforced, giving further resources to cultural industries. However, the Ministry of Education and Culture was reorganised and rationalised during the last two years of this administration, following EU institutions' austerity policy (Rius-Ulldemolins & Martínez i Illa, 2016).

Nevertheless, in his 2009 "State of the Nation" speech, President Zapatero defended cultural industries as a relevant sector to fight the crisis and develop the economy from a cultural diversity approach:

> *"Or, of course, that of the cultural industry, which allows us to exploit economically one of our most valuable assets: our culture and our languages." (Zapatero, 2009, May 12).*

The liberal-conservative Popular Party's subsequent governments deepened this line of action, integrating the cultural area into the new Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports and introducing significant cuts to cultural budgets. While cultural policies based on direct state intervention were associated with obsolete action models, modernising claims supported rationalisation. For instance, the Popular Party's electoral programme pointed out in 2011: "We will decisively promote patronage as an active support for cultural entrepreneurs and creative innovation, restoring its leading role to society and replacing the outdated subsidy strategy" (Popular, 2011, p. 128). The following year, the central government's overall expending in culture was reduced by 50% in relation to 2008 and the General Value Added Tax (VAT) was raised from 19 to 21% (Corredor & Bustamante, 2019). Mariano Rajoy justified this measure by arguing:

> *"To judge the goodness or not of a decision, it is not enough to pay attention only to its own content, but it is also necessary to see the context in which it is adopted. I don't like raising taxes on culture or other products or services, nor to individuals, but we made this decision at a time, in July 2012, when Spain was about to enter a rescue situation." (Rajoy, March 19, 2014).*

Moreover, while a discourse of fiscal responsibility in relation to the EU was used to justify new taxation, the importance of civic culture to foster entrepreneurship was stressed in the "State of the Nation" speech:

> *"Another line of action aims to encourage entrepreneurial activity. It includes measures in the field of education, which seek to create in our country a culture conducive to investment and wealth creation." (Rajoy, February 20, 2013).*

In this way, the Popular Party followed a similar trend to British Conservatives, addressing crisis-driven cultural change as a way to legitimize a new role for the administration in the arts field. Moreover, this reorientation of cultural policy to focus on social change was opposed to anti-deficit claims and the need to fight against the "culture of subsidies". In parallel, the importance of Spanish culture and language for nation branding was stressed to defend the need to follow the austerity policy agenda while ensuring international investment (Rius Ulldemolins & Zamorano, 2015).

Driving austerity and tourism-led reforms in Greek cultural policy

After the Ministry of Culture's establishment in 1971 and its reform with the beginning of the democratic transition three years later, Greece followed the European cultural democratisation model by focusing on high culture, national traditions and education. During the eighties and nineties, Minister Melina Mercouri's role was vital in establishing a more open and decentralised cultural policy system with a particular focus on cultural heritage and international relations (Zorba, 2009). However, these policies remained underdeveloped and restrained by corporatism and a lack of dynamic governance.

In the last decade, the power of public institutions within the arts and cultural domains has declined. Cuts, privatisation and rationalisation of public cultural institutions were significant in some domains, such as the publishing sector (Kabouropoulos, 2017). It has been estimated that public cultural investment dropped 35% between 2008 and 2012, affecting workers and resources in many institutions, including museums and festivals (Ganter & Sarikakis, 2013, p. 13). In this context, while no major changes were made regarding the constitutive dimension of cultural programmes, institutional changes included merging the Culture Ministry with the Tourism area in 2009 by the Socialist party (PASOK) during the George A. Papandreou period (2009-2011). This decision was followed by its downgrading to Secretary of the Ministry of Education in 2012 with the government led by liberal conservatives, and its transformation into the Ministry of Culture and Sports one year later (Zorba, 2015).

The profound country's political and economic crisis was reflected in the institutional instability of the cultural area and the emergence of a new orientation during the PASOK government, which further articulated culture and tourism. While Papandreou did not directly mention cultural policies in its institutional speeches, his Minister for Culture and Tourism stressed links between the two areas in many forums.

> "*The identity of modern Greece is seen by the way in which it manages its enormous cultural heritage, the way in which it protects it and with which it spreads knowledge of it to every corner of the globe.*" (Geroulanos, September 30, 2011).

Making touristic services more accessible for foreigners was a strategy supplemented by protecting and promoting Greek cultural assets, such as with the "Thessaloniki Cultural Crossroads" international programme, launched in 2010.

> "*The VAT reduction will make Greek tourism much more competitive, bring people to Greece and fill hotels*" (Geroulanos, November 18, 2010).

As part of its recent history's most profound economic crisis, the fusion of the Culture and Tourism areas was seen as a strategic measure in a country with a valuable part of its economy dependent on tourism-related services. In this way, Papandreou's government initially advanced an instrumental understanding of culture, particularly Greek ancient heritage's use to attract tourists and promote associated services (Howery, 2013; Kouri, 2012). Before the forced resignation of the government, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism set up a Working Group to assess cultural policies. The Group proposal, subjected to public consultation in March 2012, included the promotion of public art organisations, regional intervention in the sector and international dissemination of Greek creative industry and arts. However, this attempt was rapidly reoriented by successive New Democracy and SYRIZA governments, which opted to give this area a minor role.

Comparative budget framework

The continuity and change analysis of studied cultural policy trajectories reveals many shared institutional reforms. After 2008, all governments reproduced liberalising actions, reframing cultural policies under the EU agenda. Measures taken included reducing cultural budgets, rationalising public organisations, carrying forward fiscal reforms and modifying cultural Ministries or Agencies' status.

However, these reforms had a different scope in each country and were asymmetrically reflected in cultural policies' material resources. Table 1 shows the evolution of national public investment in providing cultural services[4], which includes the administration of cultural affairs, facilities and institutions. Significant differences in this item across countries concern the initial level of investment -which increases in the case of France- and cuts in public resources, which are substantial in Spain and Greece during this period.

As shown in Graphic 1, reduction of cultural budgets concerning Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is observed in most countries after 2008 (an initial 1% drop in this category between 2008 and 2009 must be considered in Greece), except for France, where this percentage remained almost stable. The 2009 decline in cultural expenditure can only be associated with GDP evolution in Greece, where the GDP went back to positive rates after 2012. Instead, while GDP also reached positive rates after 2012 in Spain and constantly grew in the UK after 2012, this did not mirror the evolution of public cultural investment, which did not recover at the same pace.

The progression of per capita investment presented in Table 2 provides additional information to the above national trends in public cultural expenditure concerning GDP. On the one hand, Spain and Greece show an abrupt drop in this variable. On the other hand, the UK and France per capita reductions were limited and non-existent, respectively. In fact, France's cultural expenditure increased between 2008 and 2012. Moreover, while the UK per capita reduction did not substantially impact per capita expenditure, data suggests that budget reductions in Spain and Greece considerably hindered these administrations' installed capacity to offer cultural services.

Discussion

In general terms, governments from the UK, Greece and Spain[5] adopted similar discursive approaches to the application of the EU austerity programme in cultural policies. Policy changes were translated into a narrative that presented the state's retraction in the cultural policy domain as "unavoidable" or explained by exceptional circumstances. This is in line with the idea of "tactic depoliticization", where material constraints and various justification narratives are "employed to construct imperatives around a narrow selection of policy alternatives" (Moury & Standring, 2017, p. 1). Depoliticising arguments and narratives included the need to follow European policies, the lack of financing options, and pragmatic arguments such as the potential of culture for recovery led by the private-sector's entrepreneurial projects.

However, variations in countries' cultural policies and expenditure after 2008 were also supported in specific and contextual legitimation narratives. By 2010, when the effects of the austerity policies became evident, policy reforms were attempted to be legitimated

Table 1. Total general government expenditure in culture between 2008 and 2012 (in million euro).

Country/ Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
France	14.114,0	14.608,0	15.229,0	15.481,0	16.067,0
United Kingdom	7.020,1	6.220,4	6.658,6	6.278,5	6.634,8
Spain	7.771,0	6.985,0	6.974,0	6.143,0	4.835,0
Greece	388,0	231,0	177,0	216,0	236,0

Source: Own elaboration based on (EUROSTAT, 2020).
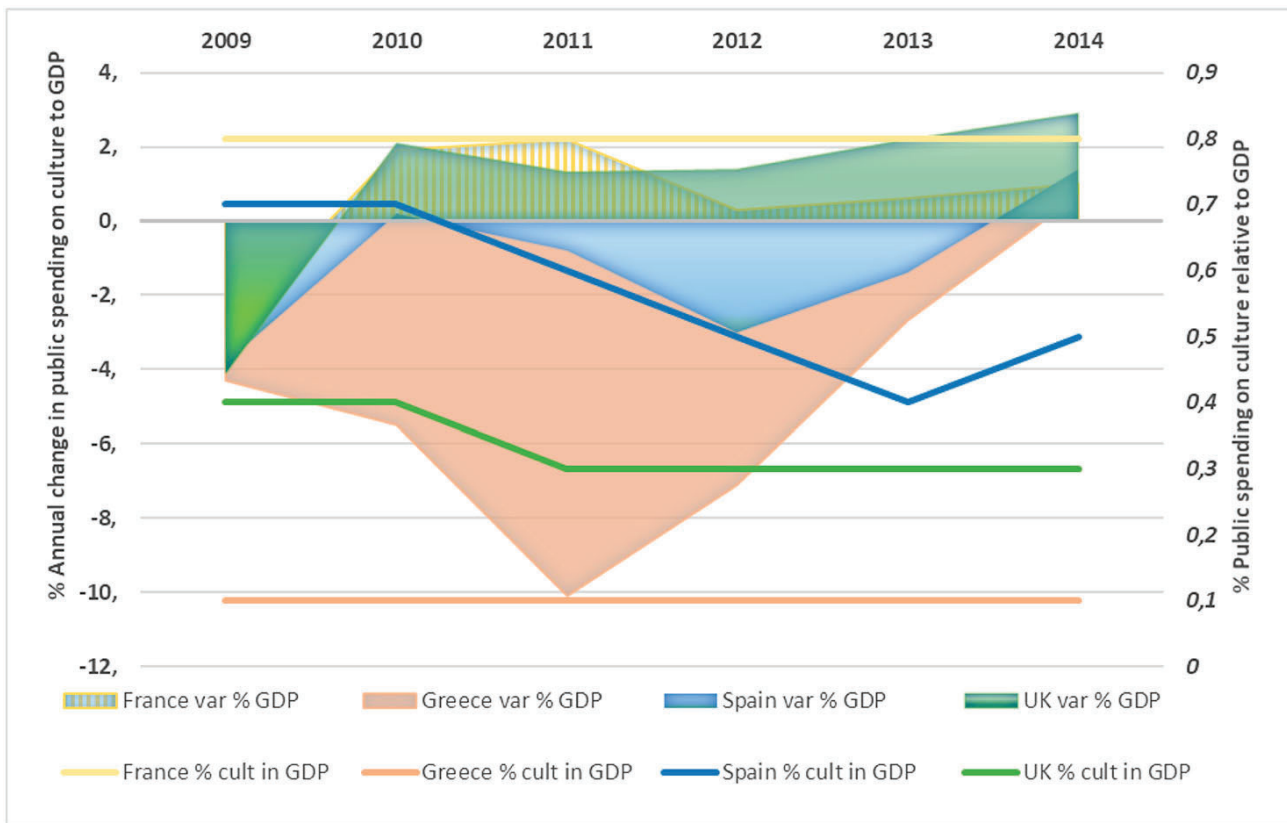
Graphic 1. Percentage of the GDP spent on cultural services and its annual evolution by country (2009–2012). Source: Own elaboration based on (EUROSTAT, 2020).

over different discourses expressing unequal value grounds. These narratives provided different answers to the question: why do we defund cultural policies?

In France, the Nicolas Sarkozy administration looked for modernisation of cultural policies under a nationalist conception of cultural democracy. This may be interpreted as an attempt of fostering a switch towards liberalisation. However, such an approach coexisted with identitarian and social-oriented policies backed by expenditure stability. In the UK case, the Conservative party's substantial reduction of cultural expenditure since 2009 and its amendments of cultural policy over the following years can be seen as a continuity of pre-crisis policies. Entrepreneurial discourses supporting these policies now underlined "minimum state" demands. Together with reducing public resources, the administration fostered a new "civic culture" that might be needed to overcome the crisis through individual responsibility. In Spain, cultural policy justification was also reoriented from welfare grounds related to its central European orientation towards more liberal ones, following both economic and constitutive arguments. After the Socialist technocratic reforms, aspects such as the productivity of creative industries or the importance of fiscal

Table 2. Total per capita government expenditure in cultural services by country between 2008 and 2012 (in euro).

Country/ Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
France	219,0	225,7	234,2	237,0	244,5
United Kingdom	113,6	99,8	106,0	99,2	104,2
Spain	168,9	150,5	149,7	131,5	103,3
Greece	32,8	20,8	15,9	19,5	21,3

Source: Own elaboration based on (EUROSTAT, 2020).

Table 3. Common and specific legitimating narratives (2008-2012).

Country	Policy change	Common narratives	Specific narratives
France	Maintenance of cultural policies under rhetorical liberalisation	• Cultural industry and heritage assets instrumentalization	• National pride (legitimating public intervention) • Liberal modernisation (mostly during initial phase)
UK	Further liberalisation of cultural policies	• Entrepreneurship and new civic culture	
Spain	Liberalisation of cultural policies- increasing of cultural VAT rate	• Entrepreneurship and new civic culture • Cultural industry instrumentalization	
Greece	Cutting direct funding of cultural policy services under liberalisation- merging with the tourism sector	• Culture-led economic growth	• Competitiveness and socioeconomic development linking cultural heritage and tourism

Source: Own elaboration.

responsibility and individual entrepreneurship were key legitimacy frames for recourses reduction. This concerns, for instance, the promotion of the failed Patronage Law, the downgrading of the Ministry of Culture, the imposition of the general VAT rate on most cultural services, or how the government framed and boosted the contribution of culture to the Spanish brand (Rius Ulldemolins & Zamorano, 2015). Lastly, the only left party in office by 2010, the PASOK led by George Papandreou, also embraced instrumental narratives associated with the potential of national heritage for socioeconomic crisis recovery. However, this represented an attempt to present economic pragmatism as a justification for policy change under substantive arguments based on the tourism industry's social return.

Therefore, as shown in Table 3, instrumental and economic values behind the retraction of the state in the cultural domain were a crucial part of legitimation processes in Greece, Spain and the UK. Framing applied to these policies included the internationalisation of heritage to foster touristic attraction in Greece, but also creativity, entrepreneurship and flexibility in the UK, and the existence of solid and successful creative industries in Spain. As Gupta and Gupta (2022, p. 285) pointed out, this also included positioning the concept of "resilience" as a laudable capacity of organisations and individuals to confront the lack of resources. Our examination shows how feasibility-centred legitimacy was integrated into the cultural policy realm to justify reductions in public expenditure while other legitimation grounds typically associated with culture, such as social development or education, were relegated. Furthermore, the actual cultural dimension of social change aimed at reforming the state while fostering entrepreneurship was part of the UK and Spanish legitimation narratives. Only France addressed the intrinsic social value of culture underlying nationalist narratives to legitimate cultural policies. The more substantive understanding of legitimacy regarding both material and discursive levels of French cultural policies is explained by its power position in the EU, its historical model of action in this field, and a hegemonic social understanding of cultural policies.

Likewise, governing parties' ideological adscription only partially explains national differences in used narratives. This is seen Rajoy and Cameron governments' conservative agendas, fostering structural transformations, and the Greek left-wing administration's

pragmatic approach, inscribed in the weak power negotiation capacity of its left governments at the EU level.

Conclusions

This article addresses cultural policies' legitimation strategies after the 2008 financial crisis by analysing four European national cases. As discussed, the importance of culture expenditure in relation to national GDPs was already limited in all countries at the beginning of the crisis. Moreover, in line with Menger (2013), left and right-wing forces had integrated outcome-oriented, economistic and quantitative strategic discourses into cultural policies, even without significant evidence of their economic effects (Mangset, 2020; Throsby, 2010). Along these lines, the analysis suggests that the substantive legitimacy of cultural democracy, historically related to welfare policies and the social value of culture, was in question before the examined period.

After 2008, many changes within the legitimation basis of cultural policies were fostered. Budget cuts gained procedural consent as the foremost mechanism for reducing budget deficits, integrated into the "efficient" public expenditure rationale. Still, most governments opted by different instruments to frame and legitimate liberalising policies, cuts or privatizations. On the one hand, more negotiation capabilities for applying austerity measures are observed in wealthier countries. While the UK development expresses the continuity of neoliberal trend, under the civic and welfare criticism approach fostered by Cameron's administration, considerable differences in budget evolution between France, and the group formed by Spain and Greece are observed. On the other hand, French, Spanish and Greek administrations represented somewhat different crisis-driven or opportunistic narrative transformations, focusing on modernisation, liberalisation and heritage, respectively.

EU centre-periphery dynamics and wealth distribution (i.e. Greece and Spain limited autonomy in decision making in relation to France or the UK) seem to explain different legitimisation narratives used to support policy orientation. Dissimilar countries such as the UK and Spain developed instrumental discourses that used austerity as an umbrella to foster cultural policy change while seeking for this transformation to go beyond the cultural realm. Thus, our examination reveals the critical role of EU institutions in setting austerity as a procedural legitimation scenario for cultural policies, particularly affecting those countries with less funding autonomy. Besides this crucial element, three other factors should be taken into account. Firstly, pre-existing cultural policy models and orientations manifested, for instance, in the UK model supporting a trend towards liberalisation. Secondly, the use of the austerity agenda to foster a liberal programme that involves structural changes to the national model by the Spanish Popular Party. Lastly, the importance of exceptional cultural assets for the national economy in the Greek case, the most EU dependent country during the studied period.

Similar inequalities can be identified concerning the degree and type of measures different EU countries take as responses to the COVID-19 crisis, although under an expansive economic orientation (Betzler et al., 2021). However, methodological limitations of this article should be considered, including the scope of the analysis narrowed to Western-Southern Europe relationships and limited to the executive level of government. Further research is needed to contrast these findings regarding cultural policy

legitimation in the EU in a broader comparative perspective. In addition, more national cases corresponding to different levels of the administration, as well as social variables explaining institutional response to bottom-up demands and capturing substantive legitimacy, should be addressed.

Notes

1. *Hundreds of presidential speeches were classified and examined by using online databases such as https://conservative-speeches.sayit.mysociety.org/, https://www.vie-publique.fr, https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es or https://www.newsit.gr.*
2. *The Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends (www.culturalpolicies.net) is an online information and monitoring platform initiated in 1998. It provides updated and comprehensive information concerning cultural administration in all EU Member States and supports the comparative study of the sector in Europe.*
3. *It should be noted that we consider state intervention's capacity, degree and general orientation more than governance models, so we do not address Nordic countries as a separate model.*
4. *Classification 08.2 (COFOG Group) and national accounts indicator (ESA 2010) are used.*
5. *In the Spanish case, this occurred with some delay due to the local and regional electoral calendar - the main culprits of cultural spending - and an initial Keynesian strategy led by the PSOE until the change imposed by the European financial authorities.*

Disclosure statement

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