The Arts Council at a Crossroad: Stories from Britain and South Korea

Hye-Kyung Lee
King’s College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT
The Arts Council is at a crossroad today. In both Britain and South Korea, its role has been reduced from the self-organized “policy-maker” to “policy taker,” and it now adopts a broad, relativist understanding of culture. Yet, Arts Council England and Arts Council Korea are envisaging their future differently. The former works within the explicated cultural policy framework and embraces its new roles as a national developmental agency, keenly exploring the broadened understanding of culture. The latter is desperately seeking its future in reinforcing self-organization of arts policy and minimizing the influences by non-artistic factors.

Introduction
The Arts Council is typically understood as a public arts funding body which, on behalf of the government, distributes grants to arts organizations and artists. It may take many different forms and operational models, as the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies’ membership demonstrate. As an institution, however, the Arts Council embodies a specific mode of governing arts funding and policy, which can be described as “self-organization”. Self-organization was believed to be at the heart of the British “patron state” (or “arm’s length” model) in which arts funding policy operated at a distance from the government. It was also what South Korea, as a new patron state, aspired to introduce in its creation of Arts Council Korea in 2005 (Lee 2019; Park and Chang 2020, 110). However, the institution of Arts Council is at a crossroad today with the scope of its self-organization having been significantly reduced. This article identifies two important factors that have driven this tendency over the past twenty years. First, the government developing more hands-on cultural policy and moving to a view of the Arts Council being part of a delivery chain of its policy decisions (Hetherington 2017, 486). Second, the overall diversification of cultural policy goals from supporting arts creation to public participation and creative economy. These have put the Arts Council, as an institution born in a specific socio-political context of postwar Britain, at an important historical juncture, where its relationship with the government is reconfigured and its mission is significantly adjusted.

CONTACT Hye-Kyung Lee hk.lee@kcl.ac.uk Culture, Media & Creative Industries, King’s College London, London, UK

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Britain and South Korea are chosen as cases, each of which tells us a distinct story of the Arts Council's identity crisis, its ongoing reinvention as well as potential pitfalls caused by their reduced self-organization. The connection between Arts Councils in the two countries could be understood as one being the original and the other the derivative; but this article does not focus on policy transfer or the localization of the Arts Council (see Chung, Park, and Wilding 2016; Lee 2012). Instead, it highlights the coevality and commonality of the “crossroads” where the Arts Councils in the two countries – an old and a new liberal democracy respectively – are situated because this may reflect the paradigm shift in cultural policies in many parts of the world. With the rise of an explicit cultural policy led by the cultural ministry, the role of the British Arts Councils has been reduced from the self-organized “policymakers” to “policy takers” that are conscious of socio-economic agendas. More recently, they have actively been oriented toward public engagement and the creative industries. Meanwhile, South Korea ambitiously imported the model of the postwar British style of Arts Council to institute an artist-driven arts policy. But the country’s statist cultural policy allowed little room for “autonomous” arts policy, and the latter has been increasingly occupied with the public-centred agenda of cultural enjoyment and participation. The identity crisis of Arts Council Korea has deepened due to its co-option with the recent conservative president and her allies in excluding blacklisted artists from arts funding.

This research has consulted key policy documents that discuss the identity, mission, visions, objectives, and funding priorities of the Arts Council and arts policy, and the Council’s relationship with the government. They include the cultural ministry’s white paper, review of the Arts Council, funding agreements with the Arts Council (Britain), cultural policy framework and vision statements (S. Korea); the Arts Council’s annual reports, 10-year strategies (Britain), long-term vision statements, and Council minutes (S. Korea). It also considered information collected on peer review (Britain) and the Arts Council’s income and expenditure (S. Korea) via email communication with the Councils. Further insights into Koreans’ initial understanding of the Arts Council as a self-organized policymaker were gained from anonymous interviews (2018) with five artists and arts experts who were involved in its creation and initial operation.

The arts council, and the “self-organization” of arts funding and policy

Self-organization by experts and professionals, as opposed to external control, is one of many ways of governing social activities, which is underpinned by social contracts where “society legitimizes professions and grants them authority and autonomy to carry out their functions” (Røyseng 2019, 156). In the British context, it has traditionally been a dominant form of social control over expert knowledge (Rueschemeyer 1983). When it comes to state arts subsidy, self-organization is justified by the belief that artists and arts experts themselves are the most knowledgeable arbiters and are in the best position to make funding decisions. The belief is grounded in the Kantian idea of art for art’s sake and the disinterestedness of esthetic judgment (Kant 2007[1790]), the British culturalist approach exemplified by Matthew Arnold’s Culture and Anarchy that regards culture as a cultivation of minds and “disinterested pursuit of perfection” (Arnold 1993[1867–9], 89), and the view that sees artists as intellectuals with an
independent mind and culture as a sphere for critical and reflexive communication (Mcguigan 2004; Vestheim 2009, 41–2). Although these propositions do not necessarily accord with each other, their commonality lies in offering a powerful justification for self-governance of the artistic field. External control, for example by the state and the market, is considered unfit to make the optimal decisions on arts funding as it follows the logic of maximizing public utilities and monetary gains, and is likely to be organized by the mode of hierarchy and transaction respectively (Jessop 2016, chapter 7). The Arts Council – an institution led by artists, arts experts as well as cultural elites who broadly share cultural consensus – brings the “autonomous principle” of the artistic field – which prioritizes quality, expert knowledge, and artistic freedom – to the field of public policy by helping to impose the norms and sanctions of the former on the latter (Bourdieu 1993, 40).

Self-organization of arts funding requires an institutionalized and stable relationship between the Arts Council and the government, which many scholars discuss using notions such as “institutional autonomy” and “arm’s length principle”: that is, the Council should have capacity to “make decisions based on its own laws, rules, norms and ideals, etc.” (Vestheim 2009, 37) and the government should not intervene in specific funding decisions which are made by arts experts (peer review panels) based on “artistic quality criteria” (Mangset 2009, 278). The Arts Council’s institutional autonomy and its arm’s length relationship with the government can facilitate self-organized “arts policy”. Firstly, a nation’s arts policy may organically emerge from a series of independent grant decisions made by the Arts Council, which in this case functions as an implicit and passive policymaker. Secondly, the Council, as an explicit policymaker, may lead arts policy by setting policy agendas and strategically distributing resources among different policy goals. Of course, the distinction between these two is not clear-cut. In the case of the Arts Council in postwar Britain, the consensus was that “artistic policy should be free from Government control or direction” (HC Hansard 1959, col. 559 cited in Hetherington 2017, 484; Arts Council Great Britain (ACGB) 1946, 3) while the government provided general goal. Although the Council has been never completely autonomous from the government, even during its heydays in postwar Britain, the expectation was that the state-level arts policy should be as broad as possible to minimize the intervention of politicians and bureaucrats into the activities of the Council.

The logic of the art world, which regards artists and arts experts as having “the best knowledge to decide what is good or bad quality or taste” (Blomgren 2012, 522), tends to result in the Council’s preference for artistic excellence and elitist art forms over other goals. Certainly, this was the case of the postwar British Arts Council whose “primary obligations” were “to maintain a limited number of power-house of music, drama, opera and ballet on subsidies which assure a satisfactory standard of performance” (ACGB 1960, 7–9; also Upchurch 2004). Stemming from this approach, the idea of “democratization of culture” (widely disseminating the pre-determined arts) developed (Hadley 2021). Without state-level cultural policy or a cultural ministry, however, the self-organized arts council prioritized arts creation over public accessibility, localizing decision making and decentralizing cultural authority (Blomgren 2012; Upchurch 2016).
As the broad policy environment shifted in Britain, however, the Arts Council’s arm’s length has been shortened and its key roles significantly adjusted. So far, scholarly discussion on the Arts Council in the post-1980s has been focused on neoliberal cultural policy, leaving the fundamental impacts of explicated cultural policy and its diversified goals on the Arts Council yet to be closely examined.

The arts council on the course of reinvention: a story from Britain

Explicated cultural policy shortening arm’s length

The British Arts Councils (Arts Council of Great Britain till 1994; Arts Council England since 1994, Arts Council Wales since 1994, and the Scottish Arts Council from 1994 to 2010) have gone through major shifts. Under the Conservative government (1979–1997), they embraced the market mentality and moved the British arts policy from the “autonomous pole” to the “heteronomous pole” (Alexander 2007) by promoting business sponsorship, arts-led urban regeneration, and the economic impact of the arts. However, it is during the recent twenty years (Labor and then the Conservative governments) when self-organized arts policy has been fundamentally weakened. Party politics affected arts policy as Labor and Conservative emphasize public funding/access and private funding/choice respectively. Yet, the overall trend set by the New Labor government has continued into today.

Firstly, the New Labor government (1997–2010)’s replacement of the passive Department of National Heritage (1992–1997) with the ambitious Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) coincided with the birth of an overarching “cultural policy”. Now the previously separate policy areas were pulled together under the strong leadership of the DCMS, which Alexander (2007, 197) describes as “the interpenetration of the autonomous pole of ‘pure’ art not just by the commercial sector, but also by the state.” Second, the shortening of the arm’s length and the reduction of the scope for Arts Council’s self-organization were facilitated by managerialism and the metric culture that encourage the use of business plans, performance indicators, audits, and measurements (Hesmondhalgh et al. 2015, 90–93). These are key features of new public management (NPM), a marker of neoliberalized cultural policy (Gray 2008). But what they catalyzed was a notable shift of cultural governance in Britain from “self-organization” to “hierarchy” or top-down control (Mangset 2009, 276). The Arts Council’s relationship with the government, which was initially consensus-based, became more hierarchical than transactional. For example, its funding agreements with the DCMS normally demand that the Council deliver on DCMS’s priorities and meet its expectations.

The Arts Council’s self-organization became limited to individual funding decisions (“impartially based on expertise, knowledge of and engagement with the sectors”) (DCMS 2017, 22). The government now expects the Council’s activities to take place “within the policy and resources framework determined by the Secretary of State” as the DCMS-ACE Management Agreement 2016–2020 shows (DCMS 2016b, 23). As the DCMS (2017, 15) indicates,
The Arts Council's remit is formalised in a management agreement, which is set by Ministers in agreement with the Arts Council. It lays out the amount of government ('Grant-in-Aid') funding the Arts Council will receive, the government's priorities and expectations for how this public money should be spent, and the performance indicators by which the Arts Council will be assessed by DCMS.

This makes it hard to distinguish the British Arts Council from its Nordic counterparts, which have traditionally been led by strong cultural ministries and been tightly aligned with state policy agendas. For example, the Swedish Arts Council as “a government authority” whose remit is “based on the national cultural policy objectives, decided by the Swedish parliament,” for the Arts Council Norway which is “the main governmental operator for the implementation of Norwegian cultural policy” and “functions as an advisory body to the central government and public sector on cultural affairs.” Per Mangset (2018, 11) even suggests that the arm's length principle may have a weaker position and the autonomy of cultural institutions be more limited in Britain than in Norway because of the object-driven and managerial policy framework. Similarly, Kleppe (2018) finds that Norwegian performing arts organizations enjoy more autonomy than their British counterparts do because Norwegian cultural policy goals are broader and do not translate into specific targets and requirements.

Against this backdrop, Arts Council England has been rebranded as “a national agency” striving to deliver national cultural policy goals and working closely with other stakeholders at the national and local levels. It is remarkable that the Council defined itself as “the national development agency for the arts, museum and libraries” in its first-ever 10-year strategy for 2010–2020 (Great Art and Culture for Everyone) and went on to further articulate its role as “the national development agency for creativity and culture” in the strategy for 2020–2030 (Let's Create), dropping the word “arts” (Arts Council England (ACE) 2013, 2020).

Diversified understanding of culture

The erosion of self-organized arts policy has coincided with and been reinforced by the diversification in the “culture” discourse and the rise of pragmatic ones (Alexander 2007; Gray 2008; Hesmondhalgh et al 2015). The New Labor period (1997–2010) saw subsidized arts becoming put under heavy pressure to offer tangible and measurable outcomes (Belfiore 2002; Gray 2008). The belief in the arts' social and economic power began functioning as the core narrative of arts policy. It is within such a context that the DCMS's Single Departmental Plan, an official document presenting the department's role, objectives, and policy options, sees that it “operates at the heart of government on some of the UK's biggest economic and social issues” (DCMS 2019). The Plan sets goals for the DCMS and its arm's length bodies such as Arts Council England: that is, “global,” “growth,” “digital connectivity,” “participation,” “society,” “EU exit,” and “agile and efficient.” In its main text, “the arts” are mentioned sparingly within the social and economic contexts: for example,

Support the best of our arts and culture in delivering positive social and economic outcomes through cohesive policies focused on building a resilient and sustainable sector
Support UK arts and culture, promote its role in delivering positive social outcomes through effective policymaking and public investment [...] 

This approach is embedded in the DCMS’s (2016a) *The Culture White Paper*, the only white paper on cultural policy after the first white paper *A Policy for the Arts: First Steps* (1965), which was focused on supporting and disseminating the arts. The new white paper recognizes “the importance of political leadership at national, regional, and local levels” (DCMS 2016a, 6), and suggests participation, socio-economic benefits, soft power, and financial viability of the arts sector as its priorities. The Arts Council is expected to “give a high priority to supporting the delivery of the outcomes of The Culture White Paper which sets out the direction for arts and culture policy for this Parliament” (DCMS 2016b, 4).

The popular discourse of “creative industries” furthered the reconsideration of the Arts Council’s remit and identity. Arts Council England has been involved in the government’s promotion of creative industries in varying capacities. For example, the DCMS’s *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy* (2008), its first policy package on the creative industries, states:

> Arts Council England will, therefore, take account of the Creative Economy Programme’s findings and commitments in its next corporate plan and its other work. [...] Arts Council England will also continue to work with the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to learn from current creative industry financing initiatives and to extend its support for small creative enterprises. Arts Council England runs venture capital schemes especially targeted at entrepreneurs in the cultural sector who wish to move from reliance on grants to developing successful businesses. (DCMS 2008, 42)

Those responsibilities were far beyond the Council’s usual tasks, but it went on to look after a creative financing program (a loan guarantee program, 2012–2017) and has offered grants to independent creative practitioners and loans for social investment in the arts. On behalf of the DCMS, the Council currently runs the Cultural Development Fund for broad cultural and creative industries activities outside London but “all decisions on successful applicants will be made by the Secretary of State for DCMS.”

However, it is in Scotland that a radical transformation happened: the Scottish Arts Council merged with Scottish Screen to become Creative Scotland in 2010, which works across the arts, film, and creative industries. This formalizes the role of the Arts Council as a “developmental agency” for creativity and culture, which the Arts Council England, too, is aspiring to assume. The integration of the arts into the creative industries hinders the argument for the self-organized arts funding and policy: the arts do not necessarily hold a special position in the creative economy where the value of creativity is determined by its economic effect and cultural authority is increasingly diffused.

Finally and most significantly, the past decade has seen the Arts Council adopting bottom-up and relativist interpretation of culture and encouraging public participation. Within this new terrain of arts policy and funding, the virtue of the expert-driven, self-organization of arts policy looks outdated and irrelevant. Public access and participation have been the most important criteria for National Lottery funding: the
breakdown of the Arts Council England’s income source indicates how important this agenda is (see Table 1). Moreover, they are now an essential requirement for most funded projects.

This trend has been accelerated by the idea of “everyday creativity,” which celebrates creative potential and expression of ordinary people and has gained great currency in recent years. This new spirit of arts policy can be summed up as “cultural democracy” (as opposed to “democratisation of culture” or cultural dissemination). Arts Council England, now as “the national developmental agency for creativity and culture,” is concerned with people’s development of personal creativity, and culture-making by and with people in their communities. A remarkable example is its “Creative People and Places” scheme (since 2012) in which the Council identifies 109 places that are at the bottom 33% in terms of cultural engagement and supports cultural and creative engagement projects taking place in those selected areas. Led by consortia which must include community groups and grass-roots organizations, the funded projects involve interactive activities where ordinary people take part in the culture-making process and celebrate their own creativity.

If Arts Council England’s first 10-year strategy concerned disseminating “great arts to everyone”, the second strategy clearly focused on ordinary people’s own creativity. The latter intentionally chooses the word “culture” and “creative practitioners” as it finds that

Many people are uncomfortable with the label ‘the arts’ and associate it only with either the visual arts or ‘high art’, such as ballet or opera. At the same time most people in this country have active cultural lives and value opportunities to be creative (ACE 2020, 9).

The second 10-year strategy goes on to assert that the Council will “help to make connections between the culture and creativity that people enjoy in their daily lives, the organizations that we fund, and the commercial creative industries” (p. 19). Although the document still refers to arts, its conscious avoidance of this term is remarkable. The Table 2 shows the clear discursive shift in arts policy discussion.

As there is no longer a clear-cut distinction between “art-world arts,” “everyday creativity” and “creative industries” at least in the policy discourse, the Arts Council, an institution rooted in the autonomous principle of the art world (Alexander 2007), loses its existing identity as an agent of the art world. The abolishment of peer review panels by the British Arts Councils – a fundamental challenge to the original design

| Year       | Grant-in-aid from the DCMS | %      | National Lottery | %      | Total             |
|------------|----------------------------|--------|------------------|--------|-------------------|
| 2010–2011  | 438,523,000                | 70.9   | 179,728,000      | 29.1   | 618,251,000       |
| 2011–2012  | 393,602,000                | 65.2   | 210,500,000      | 34.8   | 604,102,000       |
| 2012–2013  | 469,227,000                | 63.4   | 270,153,000      | 36.6   | 739,380,000       |
| 2013–2014  | 458,695,000                | 66.8   | 227,461,000      | 33.2   | 686,156,000       |
| 2014–2015  | 447,781,000                | 67.6   | 214,557,000      | 32.4   | 662,338,000       |
| 2015–2016  | 463,146,000                | 63.6   | 268,419,000      | 36.7   | 731,565,000       |
| 2016–2017  | 494,288,000                | 68.5   | 227,475,000      | 31.5   | 721,763,000       |
| 2017–2018  | 462,427,000                | 67.0   | 228,192,000      | 33.0   | 690,619,000       |
| 2018–2019  | 508,138,000                | 69.5   | 223,296,000      | 30.5   | 731,434,000       |

Sources. Arts Council England Annual Reports 2010–11 to 2018–19.
of the Arts Council – might be deliberated from this perspective. Many of the Arts Councils’ current goals might be better guided by priorities of state cultural policy objectives rather than esthetic judgment of expert panels. Arts Council England’s delivery plan of the second 10-year strategy (ACE 2021, 3, 10) highlights three desirable outcomes (“Creative people”, “cultural communities” and “a creative and cultural country”) and shows commitment to “supporting cultural opportunities in places where cultural engagement is low”. Although its actual funding for place-based and bottom-up projects is still lower than support for established cultural institutions, its regular funding recipients today include many people-centred and participatory cultural organizations. Arts Council England (2021) is signaling to refresh the overall criteria for its funding programmes in line with its emphasis on creative people and communities. This can be seen as a further indication of its ongoing reinvention.

### Table 2. Discursive shift in Arts Council England’s strategic documents (the number of key terms mentioned).

| Key terms | Great Art and Culture for Everyone (2010–2020) [67 pages] | Let’s Create (2020–2030) [42 pages] | Let’s Create Delivery Plan [22 pages] |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Arts (excluding names such as Arts Council) | 172 | 40 | 23 |
| Artists | 25 | 27 | 2 |
| Culture | 112 | 88 | 27 |
| Creativity | 3 | 53 | 8 |
| Creative | 13 | 91 | 40 |
| Creative industries | 1 | 16 | 7 |
| Creative practitioners | 1 | 14 | 8 |
| Everyone | 48 | 15 | 1 |
| Quality | 21 | 32 | 11 |
| Excellence | 21 | 1 | 0 |

Sources. ACE (2013, 2020, 2021).

The arts council in identity crisis: a story from South Korea

The statist tradition of cultural policy and the limits of arm’s length

In South Korea, the British Arts Council was long admired as a symbol of autonomous arts policy. With successful democratization, politically motivated, nationalistic understanding of the arts dissipated and freedom of expression became the norm. Self-organized arts policy was seen as an extension of artistic freedom (Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT) 2004a, 2004b; Presidential Advisory Policy Planning Committee (PAPPC) 2008). Arts Council Korea was born in 2005 with an expectation that it would transform the country’s arts policy into a policy based on artists’ participation. Unlike its predecessor, the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation directly under the cultural ministry, the Arts Council would operate independently from government intervention so it was even viewed as “private” or “private autonomous” (MCT 2004b; PAPPC 2008). Here, “private” refers to the government’s nonintervention, not private funding: suffering from the lack of audience, the Korean arts sector heavily relies on state subsidy.
The journey to the Council’s creation was a bumpy one; setting up an Arts Council was regarded as a project of the liberal government and many established artists and arts associations initially opposed it. Eventually, a consensus formed that shifting the state-led arts policy to an Arts Council-led one would align with the democratic spirit of the time (H.-K. Lee 2012). Policymakers and artists examined overseas examples such as the Arts Council England and the NEA and then decided to emulate the former as it looked more suitable for the centralized structure of Korean cultural policy (Chung, Park, and Wilding 2016; Interviewee C 2018; PAPPC 2008, 24–26).

The government and arts communities thought that the historical significance of the Arts Council was in its realization of “the autonomy of arts policy and administration” (Interviewee D 2018; MCT 2004a, 2004b; PAPPC 2008). For example, the cultural ministry stated in Creative Korea, the ministry’s 700 page-long vision statement:

There is a need to transform [the country’s arts funding] to an Arts Council system in order for artists, who have good knowledge of the field, to autonomously make arts policy through discussion and consultation. […] Arts Council will allow artists to set policy agenda autonomously and democratically participate [in policymaking…] (MCT 2004a, 290–291).

This hope was advocated by the Arts Council Korea itself as the White Paper of the 1st Council of Arts Council Korea notes:

The significance of the transformation into Arts Council is found in that it provides a basis where artist can make policies on arts subsidy by themselves. The transformation meant an important change aimed to achieve autonomy and professionalism in arts subsidy policy. (Arts Council Korea (ARKO) 2008, 3)

The Council’s autonomy was even regarded as the most important goal of the nation’s arts policy. For example, the cultural ministry’s New arts policy: a draft put forward “new arts policy of private autonomous nature” as its No. 1 policy objective whilst rather vaguely commenting on artistic creation, diffusion and expansion of the arts’ social function (MCT 2004b). The idea of “self-organized arts policy” informed the shape of the Arts Council. The Council set up a structure and process to strengthen its autonomy and capacity as a “policymaker.” Artists’ participation in policymaking was seen as essential for the Council’s autonomy, and this led to a complicated structure where numerous artists and some arts experts provided input into every stage of the Arts Council’s operation: nominating Council members, selecting a Council chair, peer reviews, sitting on sub-Councils, and so on (PAPPC 2008).

However, the Korean arts policy has been far from being “self-organized” as it is shaped by the hierarchical mode of governance. The idealist aspiration for autonomy was quickly subjugated to the Council’s stable hierarchical relationship with the government. In fact, the Council turned out to be a “hybrid” Arts Council. It had formal features of the idealized institution of Arts Council: for example, artists and arts experts serving as Council members and many other artists and experts taking part in thematic or art-form specific sub-Councils and peer-review panels. Yet, its autonomy was compromised by budgetary procedure, audit and habitual intervention from the government.
First, its funding planning requires approval from the cultural and economic ministries and then the National Assembly. Throughout this process, bureaucrats and politicians can modify the Council's budget by removing or adding projects without consultation. Second, strong audit culture prevails: the Council is subject to evaluation by the cultural ministry, management assessment by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, audit by the Board of Audit and Inspection, and audit by the National Assembly in addition to self-evaluation. Third, the strong bureaucracy exercises big power over arts policy via day-to-day consultation with the Council (without any formal funding agreements between two parties) (Park and Chang 2020, 117). These tendencies have been reinforced by the designation of the Council as a “semi-public institution” by the Act on the Management of Public Institutions (2007). At the same time, the government’s decision to decentralize arts funding has resulted in a transfer of some resources from Arts Council to regional arts foundations, narrowing the Council’s resource and remit.

Consequently, the Council became more interested in self-organized grant decisions rather than self-organized policy decisions concerning macro-level policy directions (Chung, Park, and Wilding 2016). Simply put, the fairness of individual grant decisions rather than actively leading policymaking has been the key issue for the Council (Interviewees B and C 2018). For this reason, the rigorous peer review of grant applications is thought to be the most fundamental function of the Arts Council. As for the power imbalance between the government and the Arts Council, a continuing tendency is artists and arts organizations’ preference for direct subsidy from the cultural ministry (via the ministry’s own programs) and their reliance on “hierarchy” over “private (non-governmental)” (Interviewees A, B and E 2018). A pragmatic reason might be that the ministry's direct funding is based on commissioning whilst Arts Council grants are subject to open competition and strict peer review. The continued tendency for the arts sector to work directly with the government and rely on its money seems to be another explanation for why it is difficult to apply the art world logic to arts policy.

**Increasing emphasis on “cultural enjoyment”**

The identity crisis of Arts Council Korea has also been fueled by its growing focus on public cultural enjoyment over the promotion of artistic creation. Clearly, the decrease of its original income source (the Culture and Arts Endowment and interests generated) and its reliance on Lottery income, the cultural ministry’s direct grants and income from the Sport Fund, Tourism Fund, and Cycle & Boat Race Fund (see Table 3) triggered its noticeable reorientation.

The Council’s main concern has shifted to access and public engagement, although this would “go beyond the original remit of Arts Council” (ARKO 2013, Minutes No. 129, p. 29; M.-A. Lee 2018, 197–198). One example is the “Culture Voucher” for disadvantaged households, the Council’s biggest program. As of 2016, the majority of vouchers that were given to qualified households were used on books (not limited to literary books, 50.6%), film (28.5%) and flight/train/ferry tickets (7%) while the proportion used on performances (1.7%) and exhibitions (0.05%) was minimal. This
program is thus not simply about dissemination of the arts but more about the public’s own choice of “cultural enjoyment” which is very flexibly defined, including popular cultural consumption and leisure activities. The Council’s Vision 2020 goals indicate four goals “creativity” (arts creation), “sharing” (accessibility and cultural enjoyment), “diffusion” (private patronage and regional culture), and “responsibility” (management efficiency). Yet, its funding distribution prioritizes “sharing” (cultural enjoyment) over “creation” as indicted in Table 4.

**Arts council Korea’s own negation of autonomy**

An additional pressure on the Arts Council’s autonomy came from the criticism that the liberal government appointed its allies to key positions in cultural institutions including the Arts Council (H.-K. Lee 2012; M.-A. Lee 2018; PAPPC 2008). This was followed by the two conservative governments’ “restoring of the balance” by appointing their chosen artists (and experts) to key positions and, more recently, imposing the Council – along with other public cultural institutions – with a blacklist of artists that were critical of the conservative regime (H.-K. Lee 2019, chapter 4). The Arts Council was at the core of the scandal because it secretly excluded blacklisted artists from funding on the request of the now-ousted conservative president. This was an alarming regression of the country’s arts policy and when the existence of the blacklists was

| Table 3. The breakdown of the Arts Council Korea’s income (1 million Korean won). |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| Income | 2005 | % | 2018 | % |
| Culture & Arts Levy | 268 | 0.3 | 0 | 0 |
| Interest on the Culture and Arts Endowment | 28,090 | 29.2 | 1,225 | 0.4 |
| Donation | 6,509 | 6.8 | 23,176 | 8.1 |
| Cultural ministry | 0 | 0 | 50,000 | 17.5 |
| National Lottery | 50,405 | 52.5 | 82,103 | 28.7 |
| Sports Fund | 0 | 0 | 50,000 | 17.5 |
| Tourism Fund | 0 | 0 | 50,000 | 17.5 |
| Cycle & Boat Race Fund | 0 | 0 | 16,775 | 5.9 |
| Others | 9,948 | 10.4 | 12,991 | 4.5 |
| Total | 96,040 | 100* | 286,280 | 100* |

Source. Information provided by the Arts Council Korea on the author’s request (October 2019).
*The percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

| Table 4. The breakdown of the Arts Council Korea’s annual spending 2013-2018 (1 million Korean won). |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| Categories | 2013 | % | 2014 | % | 2015 | % | 2016 | % | 2017 | % | 2018 | % |
| Arts creation | 17,753 | 14.8 | 59,181 | 32.6 | 35,114 | 18.2 | 31,468 | 14.7 | 29,651 | 14.3 | 33,545 | 15.1 |
| Training | 1,970 | 1.6 | 7,999 | 4.4 | 7,727 | 4.0 | 12,281 | 5.7 | 14,004 | 6.7 | 13,483 | 6.1 |
| Regional arts | 20,548 | 17.1 | 24,060 | 13.2 | 24,807 | 12.9 | 24,803 | 11.6 | 7,381 | 3.5 | 7,188 | 3.2 |
| Arts for tourism | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25,454 | 11.9 | 24,393 | 11.7 | 24,877 | 11.2 |
| Arts policy & fundraising | 21,573 | 18.0 | 29,292 | 16.1 | 31,787 | 16.5 | 27,350 | 12.8 | 25,560 | 12.3 | 24,759 | 11.2 |
| Cultural enjoyment | 58,164 | 48.5 | 61,135 | 33.7 | 93,442 | 48.4 | 92,457 | 43.2 | 107,008 | 51.4 | 117,952 | 53.2 |
| Total | 120,008 | 100* | 181,667 | 100* | 192,877 | 100* | 213,813 | 100* | 207,997 | 100* | 221,804 | 100* |

Source. Information provided by the Arts Council Korea on the author’s request (October 2019).
*The percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
reported, many artists protested. In May 2018, the Council issued a formal apology following an earlier one issued in 2017:

The creation of Arts Council Korea meant the autonomy and independence in making of arts subsidy policy. However, the Arts Council Korea forgot this responsibility, could not conscientiously refuse the wrong directive (from the cultural ministry) and became an accomplice of anti-constitutional state crime. (ARKO 2018a)

Because the Council was born out of the consensus between “ruling and oppositional forces (yeoya habui in Korean)” (Interviewee C 2018; PAPPC 2008), political dynamics in the country play fundamental roles in conditioning the Arts Council’s autonomy. The importance of politics has been also demonstrated by the fact that the autonomy of the Arts Council was not successfully fought for by “self-organization” of the arts field itself – despite a series of anti-censorship events initiated by artists – but instead was restored by the change of government from conservative to liberal.

Currently, the arts communities and the Arts Council itself propose a range of measures to increase its autonomy, including transforming its relationship with the cultural ministry from hierarchical to horizontal, reorienting its funding toward arts creation, and systematizing artists’ participation in policymaking (ARKO 2018b). Such a proposal calls for self-organization of arts policy; in many aspects, it looks like a call for “going back” to 2005 when the Arts Council was born. Intriguingly, at the core of the proposal is a demand for “expanding/transforming the Arts Council Korea into a State Arts Council” directly under the president (pp. 30–31). Although this could put the Council on equal footing with the cultural ministry, it epitomizes the fundamental dilemma the Arts Council Korea is facing: the arts communities’ continued reliance on the state power to institute self-organized arts policy and funding. Moreover, the damage caused by the blacklist scandal to the confidence in the Arts Council, the rise of “cultural enjoyment” as the top policy agenda and the shift in the Council’s income sources, mean that relieving the pressures on the Arts Council Korea is no easy task.

Conclusion

Since the creation of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946, the idea of autonomous Arts Council has been internationally popular and influential. Often, the discussion tends to adopt some kind of “ideal type vision” of the arm’s length principle and institutional autonomy (Mangset 2009, 285–286). However, the reality is that the British Arts Councils had to adapt to the evolving political and socio-economic context; and a fundamental transformation of its mission and relationship with the government occurred in the recent two decades. The ideal model and formal structure of the Arts Council were transplanted in South Korea, and yet the actual operation of the Council has been embedded in the country’s politics and statist cultural policy.

In both countries, the Arts Council is under an environment where it can hardly impose the logic of the artistic field on arts policy and its self-organization is limited mostly to independent grant making, which was recently threatened by a regressive conservative government in the case of Korea. The Arts Council has been responding to the overall social and economic shift. There was top-down imposition of explicit
social and economic agendas during the New Labor period and expectation of the Council’s contribution to creative industry policy. More recently, however, Arts Council England itself has actively initiated a reorientation toward public participation and everyday creativity. Arts Council Korea, too, has adopted a broader understanding of culture in line with the government’s prioritization of “cultural enjoyment”.

Despite the dissimilar national contexts, the Arts Councils in both countries are at a crossroad. Yet, there is divergence when it comes to how Arts Council England and Arts Council Korea are envisaging their future. The former works within the explicated cultural policy framework, embrace its new roles (as a national developmental agency) and keenly adopts more democratic understanding of culture. This move is likely to continue to weaken the key characteristics of the Arts Council as an institution grounded on self-organization and institutional autonomy. One important question is about the context where the shortening of the arm’s length took place: the stable liberal democracy in the UK. This implies that autonomous arts policy and institutional autonomy would be more demanded in different political contexts characterized with divisive politics or politicization of cultural policy: e.g., the UK cultural ministry’s recent request for museums and heritage organizations not to remove contested (colonial) statues and heritage assets and the Hungarian government’s politically motivated rules on public arts funding. Another question is around the effects of the Arts Council’s embrace of cultural relativism. If the relativist idea of culture is fully taken on board, the Council’s funding structure and criteria would require radical transformation, further delegitimizing the institution of the Arts Council. One may wonder what this would mean for professional artists and organizations: how they can articulate their unique roles and contributions and justify their eligibility for arts funding when every creative and cultural expression is valued equally and becomes a potential object for public support.

Arts Council Korea’s future vision seems more inward-looking and retrospective. It is because the Council experienced potentially the worst scenario of what can happen when its autonomy shrinks. Thus, it is prone to project its future onto its past: i.e., going back to 2005 and (re)practising artist-led self-organized arts policy. In response to the demand of arts communities, the Korean government has changed the status of the Arts Council from “semi-public body” to “other public body”, lessening the monitoring and scrutiny of its performance (Maeilgyeongje 2018). With this change, the Council’s chair is now selected among Council members by these members themselves rather than being appointed directly the cultural ministry. Another decision is to enact a law that protects “artists’ status and rights” in the near future. This move is understandable given the negative effect of the blacklist scandal. In short, the future of the Arts Council seems to depend on if it can truly embody the idealized model of Arts Council and self-organize arts policy whilst it is not clear how this can happen with the divisive politics continuing and state-driven cultural policy being remarkably stable. Arts Council Korea may continue to support “cultural enjoyment” as long as the relevant funding is provided; but it does not show big interest in exploring the broadened and relativist idea of culture.

This article has observed that British Arts Councils are trying to move beyond the institution of Arts Council and more willingly respond to the shifting sociocultural environment, risking self-organization of arts policy. Meanwhile, their Korean
counterpart is desperately seeking its future in reinforcing the institution of Arts Council and minimizing the influences by non-artistic factors. Further research is called for to examine if and how the Arts Councils in the two countries succeed with their reinvention or affirmation of the initial identity and to contemplate what the success or failure of their attempts imply for arts communities and the broader society.

Notes

1. https://www.kulturradet.se/en/about-us/how-we-work/ (accessed 29 July 2019, emphasis added).
2. https://www.kulturradet.no/english (accessed 29 July 2019, emphasis added).
3. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/cultural-development-fund/9-things-you-need-k now-about-cultural-development-fund (accessed 20 May 2020).
4. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places-national-portfolio-progr amme-2022-2025 (accessed 21 April 2021).
5. Additionally, this can be understood in the context that its funding is a much bigger economy now and a substantial amount is repeatedly given to regularly funded organizations (e.g., some 800+ “national portfolio organizations” in England). Reflecting the prevailing audit culture, the Council’s emphasis is now more on evaluation of completed projects, which uses hundreds of external assessors. Meanwhile, Arts Council of Wales is planning to involve external reviewers (its “Arts Associates”) in the grant making process in the future. Currently, all grant decisions are handled in house, with some exceptions (ACW 2019).
6. Since the late 1990s, Korean politics have been dominated by conservative and liberal parties with Korean characteristics. The former focuses on economic development and deregulation while being proud of the state-led industrialization under the dictator Park Chung-Hee; the latter on wealth distribution and welfare while being critical of the statist industrialization. Historically, the biggest national artist federation (associations affiliated with it and some leading artists) had close relationship with the ruling conservative party. This tradition was broken by the arrival of a new federation, members of which had close connections with the liberal government and supported the idea of creating an Arts Council (see Lee 2019, chapter 4).
7. See https://www.arko.or.kr/m1_05/m2_02/m3_04.do (accessed 20 May 2020).
8. See https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/arms-length-policy-risk-contested-heritage-debate (accessed 20 April 2021).
9. See https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/13/arts/hungary-theater-orban.html (accessed 20 April 2021).

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