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ART, CULTURE AND NATION-BUILDING: THE ROLE OF ADAPTIVE CULTURAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

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Abstract

Cultural policies hold a crucial place in nation-building on several levels; however, they risk becoming obsolete over time, which can impede national cohesion and hinder overall progress if they are not regularly updated. This paper examines the fundamental role of art and cultural policy frameworks in nation-building, highlighting their impact on social cohesion, economic development, and the construction of national identity. The authors emphasise that the periodic revision of this framework is essential for addressing the changing needs of society, ensuring cultural relevance, and fostering inclusive growth. Through a detailed analysis of existing literature and relevant case studies from both developing and developed nations, this research underscores the importance of adaptive cultural policies in promoting cultural diversity, creativity, and innovation. The study demonstrates successful examples from various contexts while also identifying shortcomings in the current state of cultural policies. The findings offer strategic insights for policymakers, cultural institutions, artists, scholars, community organisations, and educational institutions.

Keywords: Cultural Policy, Nation-Building, Social Cohesion, Cultural Diversity, Economic Development, Inclusive Growth.

I. Introduction

Art and cultural policy play a pivotal role in shaping societal values, fostering community engagement, and promoting social cohesion. Cultural policies are not merely administrative frameworks; they are instrumental in defining the cultural landscape of a nation, influencing how citizens interact with their heritage and with one another. It infuses direction and vitality into economies of nations, which could reflect in creative industries and tourism. Seregina et al. (2019) emphatically argue that promotion of arts and culture can enhance social capital, which is essential for building trust and collaboration among diverse groups within society. Furthermore, Cultural policies play a pivotal role in nation-building through their influence on social cohesion, economic development, and national identity. However,

when not regularly updated, such frameworks risk becoming obsolete, impeding cultural relevance and national progress. This paper explores the central role of art and adaptive cultural policy frameworks in fostering inclusive growth and sustaining cultural vitality. Drawing on literature and case studies from both developed and developing contexts—including Ghana—the study underscores the necessity of periodic revisions to address evolving societal needs. It highlights how responsive cultural policies can promote diversity, creativity, and innovation while also identifying gaps in current practices. The findings offer strategic insights for policymakers, cultural institutions, scholars, and community stakeholders committed to sustainable nation-building cultural policies can serve as a vehicle for dialogue and understanding among different ethnicities, thereby contributing to a more harmonious society. The significance of these policies is underscored by their ability to reflect and respond to the evolving identity of a nation, making them crucial for both individual and collective expression.

Cultural policy is intrinsically linked to the process of nation-building, as it helps to construct and reinforce national identity. Through the promotion of shared cultural narratives and heritage, Thatcher (2017a) demonstrates how cultural policies can foster a sense of belonging and unity among citizens. The state often utilises cultural policy as a means to cultivate cultural nationalism, which can legitimise its authority and promote social integration. Thatcher affirms how historical examples establish how states have engaged in the preservation of cultural artefacts and heritage sites to reinforce national identity and pride (Thatcher, 2017b). Thus, the relationship between cultural policy and nation-building is characterised by a dynamic interplay where cultural initiatives both reflect and shape the political landscape of nations.

The dynamic interplay between cultural policy and nation building logically demands that the document remain apropos. Outdated national cultural policies pose significant challenges to the creative sectors of nations. As societal norms and artistic expressions evolve, such outdated frameworks can stifle creativity and innovation in the arts. These policies may fail to accommodate contemporary cultural expressions, which often reflect the dynamic needs and aspirations of modern artists and communities (Acheampong, 2021). In this regard, the paper explores the critical role of art and cultural policy frameworks in nation-building, with particular focus on their influence on societal harmony, economic development and the formation of national identity. It argues that adaptive cultural policy frameworks are essential for fostering social cohesion, economic development and a robust national identity. The work advocates for a proactive approach to cultural policy that is responsive to the dynamic nature of society and the arts. Ultimately, cultural policies are not only beneficial for the arts community but are also vital for the overall well-being, unity and identity of nations.

2. Related Literature

2.1 Definition of cultural policy and its components

Cultural policy can be defined as a set of principles and guidelines that govern the creation, dissemination, and preservation of cultural expressions and heritage within a society (Alasuutari & Kangas, 2020). It encompasses a wide range of activities, including support for the arts, heritage conservation, cultural education and the promotion of cultural diversity (Bilovus & Homotiuk, 2022). Understanding cultural policy requires an exploration of its underlying components, particularly the concepts of governmentality and the dynamics of cultural production and consumption.

2.2 Governmentality in Cultural Policy

The concept of governmentality, as articulated by Foucault, refers to the ways in which governments exercise control over populations through various forms of knowledge and practices (Parameswara, 2023). In the context of cultural policy, governmentality manifests in the regulation and promotion of cultural activities that align with national interests and values. This regulatory framework shapes the

cultural landscape by determining which cultural expressions are supported and which are marginalised. He portrays that the political dimensions of cultural policies are critical, as they reveal how cultural narratives are constructed and disseminated to reinforce state ideologies. For instance, cultural policies may prioritise certain artistic forms or heritage sites that reflect a particular national identity, thereby influencing public perception, cultural production and consumption.

2.3 Cultural Production and Consumption

Cultural production and consumption are integral to understanding the dynamics of cultural policy. Siwei (2024) defines cultural production as the creation of artistic works and cultural artefacts, while consumption pertains to how these works are received and utilised by the public. The interplay between production and consumption shapes cultural policy, as policymakers must consider the needs and preferences of diverse audiences. The author further highlights that cultural consumption can be influenced by socioeconomic factors, which necessitates policies that promote equitable access to cultural resources. This relationship stresses the importance of fostering an inclusive cultural environment that encourages participation from all segments of society.

2.4 Economic and Social Dimensions of Cultural Policy

Cultural policy does not exist in a vacuum; it intersects with economic and social dimensions that significantly impact its effectiveness and reach. This intersection projects the multifaceted role of cultural policy as a tool for economic growth and social inclusion. For instance, cultural policy can serve as a catalyst for economic development by stimulating local economies and creating jobs within the creative industries. Baran and Berkowicz (2020) assert that investment in cultural sectors can lead to significant economic returns, as cultural activities often attract tourism and enhance community engagement. For example, cultural festivals and events not only promote local heritage but also generate revenue through tourism, hospitality, and related sectors. Furthermore, the integration of cultural policy within broader economic strategies can enhance the sustainability of cultural initiatives, ensuring that they contribute to long-term economic resilience (Belfiore and Gibson, 2019). As established by Vila et al. (2022), policymakers are increasingly recognising the potential of cultural industries to drive innovation and economic diversification, thereby positioning culture as a vital component of national economic strategies.

Again, cultural policy plays a crucial role in promoting social inclusion and diversity by ensuring that marginalised communities have access to cultural resources and opportunities for expression. Waruguru et al. (2017) confirm that effective cultural policies can help bridge social divides by fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding. Rindzevičiūtė (2021) affirms that initiatives that support under-represented artists and cultural organisations can empower communities and enhance their visibility within the broader cultural landscape. Meanwhile, Zdunek et al. (2019) establish that cultural policies that prioritise inclusivity can address systemic barriers to participation, thereby promoting a more equitable cultural environment. The emphasis on diversity within cultural policy frameworks does not only enrich the cultural fabric of society, as affirmed by Isar (2023), but also contributes to social cohesion by fostering mutual respect and understanding among different cultural groups.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical diagram (fig. 1) illustrates the dynamic and interconnected role of cultural policy in fostering nation-building.
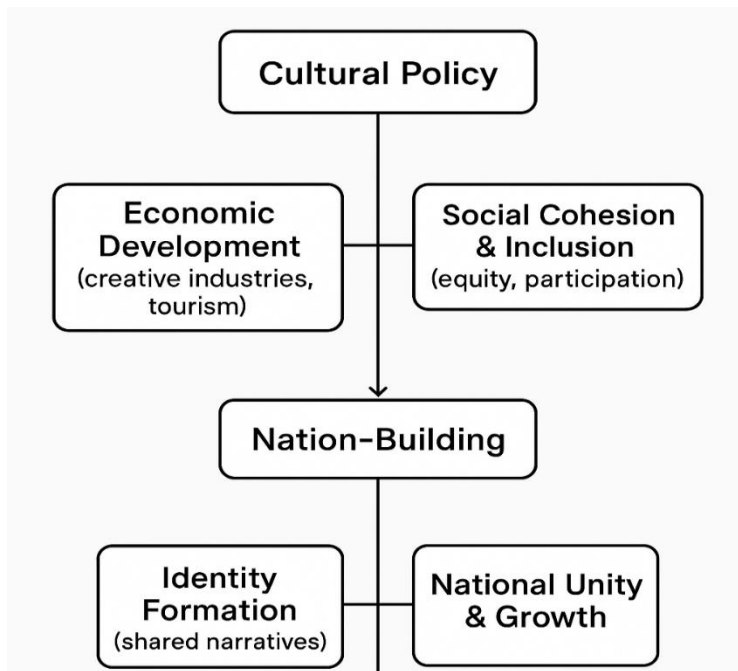
Fig. 1: Cultural Policy and Its Impact on Nation-Building

At the heart of the model is the assertion that cultural policy serves as the foundational driver that initiates two critical processes: economic development and social cohesion. These two dimensions, though distinct, operate in parallel and often reinforce one another. Together, they form the bedrock upon which a cohesive and resilient nation can be built. Cultural policy, when thoughtfully crafted and implemented, enables the growth and flourishing of creative and cultural sectors. This includes the generation of employment, the development of cultural industries, and the attraction of investment through cultural tourism and events. In this sense, cultural policy acts as a catalyst for economic transformation, particularly when aligned with broader national development goals.

Simultaneously, cultural policy plays a pivotal role in nurturing social cohesion. It provides platforms for expression, recognition and shared experiences, which are vital for building mutual understanding and respect. In multicultural or historically divided societies, such policies can be instrumental in healing, unifying and cultivating a shared national consciousness. These two pathways—economic development and social cohesion—converge to advance the process of nation-building. Through this convergence, a sense of collective identity is nurtured, grounded in cultural pride, civic participation and national solidarity. As a result, individuals begin to see themselves as integral parts of a larger national narrative, bound by common values, goals and aspirations. Ultimately, the outcome of this process is the formation of a strong national identity, accompanied by a deepened sense of unity and belonging. This identity, shaped and sustained by adaptive cultural policy, becomes a driving force for national growth, stability and resilience in an increasingly interconnected and complex global environment. Thus, the framework highlights the indispensable role of cultural policy not only as a cultural instrument but as a strategic tool for comprehensive and inclusive nation-building.

4. Analytical Review

4.1 The Role of Art and Cultural Policy in Social Cohesion

Cultural policy serves as a vital mechanism for fostering togetherness by promoting cultural diversity and inclusion, which are essential for building a harmonious society. The promotion of diverse cultural expressions allows for the representation of various communities, thereby enhancing social ties and mutual understanding. The following analyses the mechanisms through which cultural policy fosters social cohesion.

4.1.1 Promotion of cultural diversity and inclusion

Cultural policies that prioritise diversity and inclusion are instrumental in creating environments where all community members feel valued and represented. Sonke (2024) confirms that inclusive cultural policies can lead to enhanced social cohesion by encouraging participation from marginalised groups and fostering intercultural dialogue. Vila et al. (2022), using a more positive rubric, emphasise that cultural diversity is not only a reflection of societal richness but also a necessary condition for achieving social inclusion and cohesion. Focusing on its instrumentality, Aol (2024) highlights the importance of cultural policies that actively promote participation from diverse cultural backgrounds, which can mitigate social tensions and foster a sense of belonging among community members.

4.1.2 Case studies of successful cultural initiatives that enhanced community ties

Numerous case studies illustrate the positive impact of cultural initiatives on community ties. For example, Aol (2024) attests to how community arts programmes that engage local residents in collaborative projects have been shown to strengthen social bonds and promote a sense of ownership over cultural spaces. One notable example is the establishment of community cultural centres that serve as hubs for artistic expression and social interaction. These centres often host events that celebrate local traditions and encourage participation from diverse groups, thereby fostering solidarity (Rubin et al., 2021). Initiatives that integrate cultural education into schools have proven effective in promoting understanding and respect among students from different backgrounds, contributing to a more cohesive society (Aol, 2024). Such initiatives not only enhance community ties but also empower individuals by providing them with platforms to express their cultural identities.

4.1.3 Challenges in achieving social cohesion through cultural policy

Despite the potential of cultural policy to foster social cohesion, several challenges hinder its effectiveness. Issues of representation and accessibility in cultural institutions, as well as socio-economic disparities, pose significant barriers to achieving inclusive cultural participation. These barriers reveal that inclusion must be embedded not only in cultural programming but in the policy logic itself. In contexts like Ghana, where socio-cultural heterogeneity is significant, cultural policy must move beyond symbolic inclusion to structural adaptability. These findings affirm that social cohesion thrives where cultural policies are inclusive, community-driven, and continuously updated. In societies undergoing rapid social change, adaptability becomes not an option, but a necessity. The following describe some of those challenges.

4.1.4 Issues of representation and accessibility in cultural institutions

Cultural institutions often struggle with representation and accessibility, which can undermine efforts to promote social cohesion. Castiglione and Zanola (2019) affirm that many cultural institutions fail to adequately represent the diversity of the communities they serve, leading to feelings of exclusion among marginalised groups. This lack of representation can perpetuate social divides and hinder the development of a cohesive cultural narrative. In another perspective, Sarmiento (2021) highlights accessibility issues, such as financial barriers and inadequate outreach efforts, as factors that could further exacerbate these challenges, preventing many individuals from engaging with cultural activities. To address these issues, cultural policies must prioritise inclusivity and actively seek to dismantle barriers that limit participation.

4.1.5 The impact of socio-economic disparities on cultural participation

Socio-economic disparities significantly impact cultural participation, often resulting in unequal access to cultural resources. Castiglione and Zanola (2019) argue that individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to engage with cultural institutions due to financial constraints and a lack of targeted outreach. This disparity not only limits their access to cultural experiences but also

diminishes the overall richness of the cultural landscape. As a result, Sonke (2024) asserts that cultural policies must be designed to address these socio-economic challenges by providing support for low-income communities and ensuring that cultural initiatives are accessible to all. Fostering equitable access to cultural resources could help policymakers to enhance national bonding and promote a more inclusive cultural environment.

While cultural policy has the potential to foster social integration through the promotion of diversity and inclusion, significant challenges remain. Addressing issues of representation, accessibility, and socio-economic disparities is crucial for realising the full potential of cultural policies in building cohesive communities. While scholars agree that economic disparity hinders cultural participation, this paper further argues that static cultural policies deepen such divides. If policies fail to adapt to socio-economic realities, they risk becoming instruments of exclusion rather than inclusion. The evidence suggests that a policy's relevance lies not just in its intent but in its capacity to respond to shifting community dynamics.

4.2 Economic Development through Cultural Policy

Investing in cultural sectors yields significant economic benefits, contributing to job creation, economic stimulation, and the promotion of cultural tourism. These benefits underscore the importance of integrating cultural policy into broader economic strategies. These economic benefits of investing in cultural sectors are seen in the following:

4.2.1 Job creation and economic stimulation through the arts

Cultural sectors, particularly the arts, are vital engines of job creation and economic stimulation. A study by Avcı and Tonus (2022) confirms how investments in the arts can lead to substantial employment opportunities across various creative industries, including visual arts, performing arts, and media, as also agreed by Nasir et al. (2017). The arts not only generate direct employment as Yanes et al. (2019) establish, but also create ancillary jobs in sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and retail, thereby amplifying their economic impact. Focusing on the community, Herrera (2016) emphasises cultural investments' stimulation in local economies by attracting visitors and enhancing community engagement, which in turn fosters a vibrant economic environment, as subsequently noted by Derkacz and Dudziak (2021). The ripple effects of such investments can lead to increased consumer spending and improved quality of life for residents, demonstrating the cascading benefits of supporting the arts.

4.2.2 The role of cultural tourism in economic growth

Cultural tourism is a significant driver of economic growth, as it attracts visitors who contribute to local economies through spending on accommodations, dining, and cultural experiences. Vila et al. (2022) affirm, as agreed by Rashmi and Singh (2024) as well as Throsby (2017) that cultural tourism not only enhances the visibility of a region's cultural heritage but also provides a sustainable source of revenue for local communities. Javid (2019) extends this point by adding that this form of tourism encourages the preservation of cultural sites and traditions, which can further enhance a destination's appeal. However, Vacchio and Bifulco (2022) caution that while tourism can serve as a significant economic driver for cultural heritage sites, it often leads to increased wear and tear on physical structures, changes in local community dynamics, and potential dilution of cultural practices. While cultural tourism is often framed in economic terms, its social implications cannot be overlooked. Heritage tourism, for instance, reinforces a shared sense of identity and pride in cultural heritage. Thus, the intersection of economic benefit and identity formation underscores the multi-layered impact of effective cultural policy—justifying the need for policy frameworks that are responsive and multidimensional. The economic gains illustrated here make a compelling case for investing in the arts and cultural sectors.

However, unless policies evolve with shifts in global creative economies and local needs, such gains may plateau or regress-making adaptation a strategic imperative.

4.3 Case studies highlighting successful cultural policies that led to economic development

Examining successful case studies of cultural policies reveal the potential for economic development through targeted investments in the cultural sector.

4.3.1 Examples from European Union countries

European Union countries have implemented various cultural policies that have successfully stimulated economic development. Rashmi and Singh (2024) affirm that the European Capital of Culture initiative has demonstrated how cultural programming can attract tourism and investment, leading to revitalisation of local economies. Cities that have participated in this programme often experience increased visitor numbers, enhanced international visibility, and improved infrastructure, which collectively contribute to long-term economic growth (Ohene, 2023). Vila et al. (2022) demonstrate that such initiatives not only boost local economies but also foster community pride and social cohesion, further amplifying their economic impact. These examples illustrate the effectiveness of cultural policies in driving economic development while simultaneously enriching the cultural landscape. These cases demonstrate that cultural policy not only serves as a tool for artistic engagement but also plays a pivotal role in social infrastructure. Moreover, the success of such initiatives often correlates with economic revitalisation in local communities, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between social cohesion and economic growth—a central argument in this paper's call for adaptive cultural frameworks.

4.3.2 Insights from popular culture initiatives

Popular culture initiatives also offer valuable insights into the economic benefits of cultural policy. Castiglione and Zanola (2019) highlight, as also observed by Gross and Wilson (2018), that investments in popular cultural forms, such as music festivals and street art, can generate significant economic returns while fostering community engagement. These initiatives often attract diverse audiences, stimulate local businesses, and create job opportunities within the creative sector. Herrera (2016) further emphasises that popular culture can serve as a platform for social inclusion and economic empowerment, as also confirmed by Derkacz and Dudziak (2021), particularly in marginalised communities. Recognising the economic potential of popular culture enable policymakers to develop strategies that harness its benefits for wider fiscal growth.

4.4 National Identity Formation and Cultural Policy

Cultural policy plays a critical role in shaping national identity by influencing how cultural narratives are constructed and disseminated within society. These narratives not only reflect the collective identity of a nation but also serve as tools for fostering unity and pride among citizens.

4.4.1 How cultural narratives shape collective identity

The concept of cultural narratives is central to understanding how collective identities are formed and shaped within diverse social contexts. Cultural narratives encompass the stories, beliefs, and values transmitted through society, which significantly influence individual and collective self-understanding. McAdams and McLean (2013) affirm this influence begins early in life and continues across different social frameworks, aiding individuals in forming their identities based on the prevailing cultural stories that surround them. McAdams and McLean (2013) establish that cultural narratives about national history, ethnicity, religion, and politics play a critical role in shaping personal stories and individual identities, asserting that these narratives not only reflect societal themes but also serve as frameworks

through which individuals interpret and construct their own life histories. This interaction between cultural and personal narratives can sustain or even transform the broader culture, illustrating how deeply embedded stories can affect group identity. McKay et al. (2020) particularly demonstrate how narrative identities evolve as individuals encounter and negotiate master narratives that represent societal expectations and norms, significantly impacting their psychological development and collective self-concept. Wry et al. (2011) significantly weigh in that the narratives shared among group members are subject to external interpretations, particularly by cultural intermediaries who may shape public perceptions. This highlights a dual process where both internal group narratives and external societal perceptions interact to legitimise and reinforce collective identities. As individuals articulate their identities within a narrative framework, they draw upon collective memories and cultural narratives, creating a shared sense of belonging that strengthens group cohesion. Consequently, collective identities are not static; they are dynamic constructs shaped continuously by the interplay of cultural narratives and personal experiences. As individuals reposition themselves within these narratives, they partake in a broader cultural discourse that informs and shapes their identity, reflecting a cycle of narrative continuity and change.

4.4.2 The role of arts in reflecting and constructing national identity

The arts play a profound role in both reflecting and constructing national identity, serving as a vessel through which cultural narratives are expressed and reenacted. The integration of traditional forms, such as folk dances and music, encapsulates the essence of national culture, enabling individuals to connect with their heritage while simultaneously fostering collective identity. Kussanova et al. (2021) indicate that traditional dance not only embodies the values and narratives of a nation but also functions as a platform for exploring and preserving ethnic identities, thus becoming crucial in the collective experience of national belonging. Through dynamic art forms, societies negotiate their historical contexts and contemporary realities, reinforcing a sense of unity that is pivotal for national development.

Moreover, featured narratives within the arts can aid in the formation of a cohesive national character, as demonstrated in various cultural policy frameworks. Wirayuda et al. (2024) affirm the importance of educational curricula in embedding national identity through art, underscoring how artistic expression and character education are intertwined. Such frameworks not only convey a society's core values but also provide a means for individuals to engage with and understand their place within the larger national landscape. The role of contemporary artists, as highlighted by Zakaria et al. (2022), further illustrates how local cultural elements inform artistic practices, facilitating the construction of a nuanced national identity that is both reflective of historical contexts and responsive to global influences. This interplay of art, education, and public policy highlights the need for continual updates to cultural policy to ensure it effectively nurtures and articulates the evolving narratives of national identity. As national identities are constantly negotiated in response to globalisation, migration, and digital influence, static policies cannot capture the complexity of contemporary belonging. Adaptive cultural policies, therefore, become vital tools for articulating evolving identities while fostering unity.

4.5 The importance of adaptive cultural policies in responding to changing identities

As societies evolve, so too must the cultural policies that govern them. Adaptive cultural policies are essential for ensuring that national identity remains relevant and reflective of the diverse experiences within a society.

4.5.1 Historical context and evolution of cultural policies

The evolution of cultural policies has historically been influenced by various sociopolitical changes and cultural dynamics. Initially, cultural policies were largely focused on the preservation and promotion of the arts, reflecting a desire to elevate the cultural status of nations and provide access to cultural heritage

for wider populations. According to Bonet and Négrier (2018), this evolution traces back to the 1950s and 1960s, when nations began adopting policies aimed at cultural democratisation, recognising the importance of inclusive access to cultural resources for national identity formation. This period marked a significant shift towards viewing culture as a central component of social policy, reflecting broader societal values and aspirations. As globalisation intensified, Barbieri (2012) observes, the dialogue surrounding cultural policies expanded to include aspects of cultural diversity and creative economies, indicating a more nuanced understanding of how culture interacts with economic and social development.

As cultural policies evolved, there was a notable shift from top-down approaches toward more participative models that actively engage communities in the policymaking process. Zhou (2023) describes how the adoption of new institutional frameworks enabled the incorporation of public input, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and legitimacy in the cultural policy landscape. This engaging turn not only reflects historical awareness, affirms Stevenson (2006), but also addresses contemporary societal challenges such as urban decline and social exclusion. The adaptive nature of cultural policies is crucial as it allows for continual revisions that respond to the changing needs of society, ensuring that cultural policies remain relevant and effective in promoting national development. Historical analysis demonstrates that as cultural narratives shift and evolve, so too must the policies that govern cultural expression and support, highlighting the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation in cultural policy frameworks (Никитина et al., 2021).

4.5.2 The need for periodic revisions to maintain cultural relevance

The need for periodic revisions of cultural policies is vital in maintaining cultural relevance within a rapidly changing societal landscape. As cultural landscapes evolve due to globalisation, demographic shifts, and technological advancements, cultural policies must adapt to ensure they continue to reflect the values, needs, and aspirations of diverse communities. Castellani et al. (2017) illustrate that just as medical practices necessitate re-evaluation and adaptation based on new evidence and societal needs, so too do cultural policies require ongoing assessment to remain effective. This impermanence reflects the dynamic nature of culture itself, wherein ongoing dialogues among stakeholders can influence policy revisions and implementations that are more reflective of contemporary cultural realities and experiences. Without such revisions, cultural policies may become outdated, failing to engage or represent the individuals they aim to serve and potentially exacerbating social divisions rather than fostering inclusion.

In contexts characterised by multiculturalism, the intersection of various cultural narratives necessitates a continuous reappraisal of existing policies. Harrison et al. (2024) establish the importance of integrating feedback from diverse cultural groups to ensure that policies not only resonate with current societal sentiments but also respect cultural histories and identities. Engaging in periodic revisions allows for a more inclusive approach to policy development that acknowledges diverse perspectives and encourages active participation from different community members. However, as Langa and Gone (2019) argue, cultural policies designed without consideration of the evolving identities and values of various groups risk alienating segments of the population, thereby undermining social cohesion and national identity. Thus, the continual evolution of cultural policies is essential not only for their relevance but also for fostering a sense of shared identity and unity in an increasingly complex societal framework.

4.6 Case Studies of Adaptive Cultural Policies

The examination of various cultural policy frameworks across different countries reveals successful examples of adaptive cultural policies that have effectively responded to societal changes and needs.

4.6.1 Successful examples of adaptive cultural policies

The analysis of diverse cultural policy frameworks across countries reveals successful examples of adaptive approaches that have effectively responded to societal changes. Nations have tailored cultural policies to their unique social, political, and economic contexts, demonstrating the potential for flexibility and responsiveness. Vila et al. (2022) and Daly et al. (2022) discuss how European Union member states have developed cultural policies aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), prioritising sustainability, inclusivity, and community participation. In China, rapid urbanisation and globalisation have necessitated a re-evaluation of heritage preservation strategies, prompting more flexible cultural policies (Jiang, 2023). Similarly, Long (2024) illustrates how cultural policies have contributed to economic recovery and community well-being by stimulating consumption and attracting investment.

Sacco et al. (2018) emphasise the role of cultural policy in fostering social cohesion and economic development in Italy, while Cetină et al. (2020) advocate for a systemic approach that optimises cultural policy benefits by integrating local needs, economic services, and international development agendas. Dousin and Aralas (2024) highlight the importance of considering community well-being in cultural tourism policy to balance socio-cultural benefits with potential costs. These examples highlight the value of adaptive, inclusive cultural frameworks that not only preserve heritage but also promote social integration and economic revival.

4.6.2 Thematic areas that highlight adaptability and responsiveness

Case studies of successful cultural policies provide valuable insights into the importance of adaptability and responsiveness. For instance, the implementation of community-driven cultural initiatives in various regions has demonstrated how local engagement can lead to more effective cultural policies. Daly et al. (2022) affirm that involving community members in the decision-making process helps policymakers to ensure that cultural initiatives address the specific needs and aspirations of the population. Additionally, the experiences of countries that have successfully integrated cultural policies with broader social and economic strategies highlight the importance of cross-sector collaboration (Kristóf, 2017). This approach enhances the effectiveness of cultural policies and fosters a more holistic understanding of culture's role in society. The lessons learnt from these case studies underscore the necessity of ongoing evaluation and adaptation of cultural policies to ensure they remain relevant and impactful.

4.7 Identification of gaps in current practices

Despite the successes of adaptive cultural policies, there remain significant gaps in current practices that hinder their effectiveness in addressing societal needs.

4.7.1 Areas where cultural policies fail to address societal needs

Gelbard's (2023) work, as well as that of Fatorić and Biesbroek (2020), identify critical areas where cultural policies often fall short, particularly in terms of inclusivity and representation. Many cultural institutions continue to prioritise mainstream narratives, neglecting the diverse experiences and contributions of relegated groups. This lack of representation can lead to feelings of alienation and exclusion among these groups, undermining the potential for cultural policies to foster community bonding. Khan (2022) further stresses that cultural policies frequently fail to address obvious inequalities that affect access to cultural resources, resulting in inequitable participation in cultural activities. Adaptive policies must navigate ongoing structural and political challenges, such as lack of

political trust, political instability, lack of funding, and community tensions still fall among issues to be addressed in order for these policies to become successful in their execution.

These gaps further accentuate the need for cultural policies' consistent updates to address emerging challenges so as to reflect and negotiate the dynamic nature of society. Irfan et al. (2020) confirm the need for policymakers to engage in ongoing dialogues with communities and stakeholders to ensure that cultural frameworks remain relevant and effective in embracing differences. This responsive nature is critical to meet the evolving aspirations and identification of various cultural expressions across diverse populations.

4.7.2 Problems associated with outdated national cultural policies: the case of Ghana

Ghana's cultural policy aimed to promote the nation's traditional values, human dignity, unity, and national solidarity, among others, was formulated in 2004 (Boamah et al., 2012), after which there has been no update since. Such an outdated document risks becoming a hindrance rather than a facilitator for cultural growth and national prosperity. As it may fail to account for contemporary cultural expressions and the evolving needs of artists and communities.

Policies that prioritise traditional art forms over modern or experimental practices can inadvertently marginalise emerging artists, notes Adjei (2020), ultimately limiting the diversity and richness of cultural production. When a cultural policy fails to recognise the importance of a variety of artistic expressions, it risks constraining the creative landscape, making it less responsive to current trends and ideas. Whilst Owusu (2022) warns of cultural policies that lack inclusivity regarding diverse cultural identities, as it can worsen existing social tensions and undermine national unity. In a multicultural context like Ghana, it is vital that cultural policies embrace a wide range of identities and expressions to foster a cohesive national identity. Mensah (2021) further warns that neglecting this diversity can lead to feelings of disconnection and alienation among different groups, further complicating efforts toward national solidarity.

Baffour-Awuah and Kusi (2023) critically affirm that outdated cultural policies often do not adequately address pressing issues such as cultural appropriation, the protection of intellectual property rights, or the equitable distribution of cultural resources. This oversight can result in exploitation and cultural homogenisation, which diminishes the unique attributes of Ghana's cultural landscape. Annan (2023) concludes that such scenarios limit the vibrancy and expressiveness of Ghana's cultural sector, making it less equipped to leverage its rich heritage for economic and social development. Ghana's cultural policy framework urgently needs reform, and regular adaptive updates will be essential for achieving effective and integrated development moving forward.

4.7.3 Recommendations for improving cultural policy frameworks

To enhance the effectiveness of cultural policies, several recommendations can be made. Avcı and Tonus (2022) suggest that policymakers should prioritise inclusivity by actively engaging marginalised communities in the cultural policymaking process, a concept also affirmed by Nasir et al. (2017). This engagement can help ensure that cultural initiatives reflect the diverse identities and experiences within society. Additionally, Herrera (2016) advocates for the integration of cultural policies with broader social and economic strategies, emphasising the importance of cross-sector collaboration in addressing systemic barriers to cultural participation, to which Derkacz and Dudziak (2021) also agree. In sum, the analytical evidence across the social, economic, and identity domains clearly demonstrates the centrality of cultural policy in nation-building. Yet, it also reveals a consistent theme: without adaptability, these policies risk obsolescence. This reinforces the core argument of this paper—that only through strategic revision and responsiveness can cultural policy frameworks continue to serve as effective instruments of national development.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the multidimensional role of art and cultural policy in the broader project of nation-building. Drawing from theoretical insights and a range of global and local case studies, the analysis underscores that cultural policies are far more than administrative guidelines—they are powerful instruments for shaping national identity, fostering social cohesion, and catalysing economic development. In diverse and evolving societies, particularly in postcolonial contexts such as Ghana, cultural policies that remain static or outdated risk alienating marginalised communities, stifling creative innovation, and undermining the inclusive ideals central to nation-building.

The study has argued that adaptive cultural policy frameworks—those that are periodically revised to reflect contemporary realities—are crucial for maintaining the cultural vitality and developmental potential of nations. Evidence from both developed and developing contexts demonstrates that policies grounded in flexibility, inclusivity, and responsiveness tend to yield stronger outcomes across cultural, social, and economic dimensions. Conversely, when cultural policies fail to evolve, they often become impediments to progress, unable to address the shifting identities, values, and aspirations of their societies.

The implications of these findings are significant. For policymakers, the need to institutionalise regular cultural policy reviews is urgent. For educators, artists, and cultural institutions, the call is to remain actively engaged in shaping these frameworks through research, advocacy, and creative practice. Equally, for scholars, this research reaffirms the importance of interdisciplinary engagement in cultural policy discourse—bridging the fields of economics, political science, sociology, and the arts.

Moving forward, national cultural policies must embrace technological advancements, support cultural entrepreneurship, and embed mechanisms that ensure meaningful participation from all segments of society. In doing so, they will not only preserve heritage but also empower future generations to innovate and redefine what it means to belong and contribute to a national identity. Ultimately, cultural policy must not remain a relic of the past but evolve into a dynamic and inclusive framework—one that reflects the complexity of contemporary society, supports the aspirations of its people, and anchors the transformative power of culture at the heart of nation-building.

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