

Cultural continuities and cultural policies in small states: The case of Malta

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ABSTRACT: This article explores some of the challenges facing artists and curators living and working in a small state. More specifically, it addresses the tension between ‘openness’ in cultural policies, through artist mobility and arts funds; and ‘closure’, in terms of limitations in issues related to peripherality, identity and the application of the arm’s length approach in cultural policies. Discussion centres around cultural commonalities in small states and their implications on the formulation of cultural policies in a system of networked communities contextualised in a nuanced socio-political climate. Recommendations are offered on less structured and more fluid, actor-oriented cultural policies, referred to as ‘accomplishing’ cultural policies in small states, as an incessant adaptation addressing proactively cultural change while still recognising cultural continuities of small states. This article draws examples from the small state of Malta, to explore the applicability of these cultural continuities.

Keywords: artists, closure, cultural closeness, cultural continuity, cultural policy, Malta, openness, small states

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Introduction

Small may be beautiful, but it is also often equated with vulnerability (Atkins et al., 2000) and challenges associated with remoteness (Streeten, 1993). Small state studies focus on an inclination towards isolation, communal feelings of solidarity and fellowship (Anckar & Anckar, 1995). This article is concerned with some of the cultural commonalities in small states and their implications for cultural policies, as a frame to understanding trajectories of artists as they navigate their artistic career within a tightly networked community.

There are a number of starting points for research on small state narratives, away from the hegemonic discourse perpetuated by large state scholars predominantly dealing with the political economy of small versus large states. This article turns attention to cultural continuities and social practices of small states and their effect on cultural policies. The focus here is to outline the notion of cultural continuity as the process of homogenization involving spatio-temporal diffusion of particular social patterns which are considered to remain stable over time (Patterson, 2004). The term *cultural continuity* used herein refers to the persistence of a given behaviour, cultural patterns or beliefs shared in small states. This acknowledges both the fluidity of cultural processes as well as the predominance of social constructionism: what Berger and Luckman (1967, pp. 47-128) termed as the ‘awesome paradox’ in the sociological problem of continuity.

The sociological exploration of some of the macro-dimensions of cultural continuities in small states is underpinned by an understanding of the constant oscillation between the sense of ‘closure’, in terms of the degree of isolation and experienced limitation, in the application of arm’s length approach in cultural policies, due to the exertion of direct or indirect influence

on artists; and a sense of ‘openness’ in cultural policies, through mobility programmes and export arts funds. This article maps out these two conditions of closeness and openness in two sections. It does so by first outlining the structural system of patronage, political interventions and intimacy, the sense of status-overlap of artists and experienced isolation. Second, it explores ‘openness’ through opportunities for arts-funds for artists to professionalise their career and overcome the challenges brought forward by conditions of isolation.

This article refers to examples in Malta, a small island state in the Mediterranean Sea, with a population of over half a million. The rationale is to present typifying examples and make sense of the implications of peripherality, internationalisation and identity on the art world. While acknowledging that single-case studies do not allow for generalisability, the aim here is to identify patterns in the lived experiences of artists in small states. Nevertheless, while some of these characteristics are present in small states like Malta, these may not be exclusively found in small states, as is the situation of precariousness of artists (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013).

On a more micro-dimension, this article tackles discourse on the challenges of small geographical territories and the implication on artists’ practices by drawing on research from a cultural project amongst Euro-Mediterranean small and peripheral states, as part of the BJCEM (Biennale of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean) programme (BJCEM, 2022). This project involved group and individual interviews with artists and cultural directors, in and from the four European small states of Kosovo, Malta, Montenegro and San Marino. This research aimed at deepening curatorial and cultural knowledge of visual, performing arts and cultural studies in peripheral and/or small states. Some of the research outcomes are discussed in this article to demonstrate the realities of artists in small states art worlds. Specific reference to cultural continuities in Malta is made, followed by references to the three other research locations to support the arguments brought forward. However, these are not presented as necessarily typical realities of other small states.

Discourse on small states

Scholarly sources on the political economy of small states address notions of vulnerability in military and economic security terms and their prerequisite to join alliances to survive, both politically and economically (Handel, 1981; Keohane, 1969; Thorhallsson, 2018). Small states are said to share a number of identifiable features, including their high degree of economic openness, their insularity or ‘enclaveness’, their resilience, weakness and dependence (Sutton & Payne, 1993). Paradoxically, small states are often portrayed as vulnerable yet adept to risk governance, for example in terms of transboundary water management (Koff & Maganda, 2015; Koff et al., 2020; Lusa, 2019). While the constructivist perspective recognises small states’ commitment to international norms (Siitonen, 2017; Graham & Graham, 2019; Nadalutti, 2020), neo-functionalists regard them as global actors, motivated by incentives for trade optimization (Schiff, 2014).

Additionally, small states are synonymous with being cosmopolitan and globalised economically but somewhat culturally provincial (Clément, 2013), with a strong commitment to social welfare (Burlacu & O’Donoghue, 2013). According to Katzenstein (2003), typical characteristics of the small state include having relatively homogeneous populations, being open to international economies, creating niches in global trade, promoting social solidarity due to perceived notions of vulnerability to external shocks, amplifying their influence through regional fora, and possessing efficient and effective governments because of their propensity for interpersonal relations.

Cultural ‘closeness’ in small states

Culturally, the sense of ‘closeness’ and intimacy in small states can be manifested in various ways, often patronisingly considered by larger countries as “parish pump politics in goldfish bowl societies” (Lillis, 1993, p. 6). According to Katzenstein (2003, p. 80), political centralization in small states tends to be “greater and political arrangements tend to be more closely knit”. Requests for patronage and special treatment may be more frequent in small states since officials habitually run into people they know informally and regularly because relationships are more likely to be “closely knit [and] highly personalized” (Farrugia, 1993). Additionally, there is often a tendency for “a greater degree of social homogeneity, cohesion, and identity which encourages the formation of social capital … through the development of social and civic institutions” (Armstrong & Read, 1998, p. 570). Individuals interact in conditions of relatively high socio-spatial densities (Caldwell et al., 1980), harbouring a tendency towards monopoly provision, economies of scope and lower thresholds of intimacy (Baldacchino, 1997). Such a social system often hinders the autonomous operation of the arts for cultural practitioners in small states.

Echoing Bourdieu’s (1993) structuring dynamic in the art field, art-related practices are part of broader socio-structural processes, operating on a determined and hegemonic hierarchy. The actors’ cultural, social and economic capital determine their positions and chances in their struggle for symbolic capital. The network of trust, often based on informal relationships and structures, the degree of reciprocity (Putnam, 1995) as well as nepotism and clientelism redolent in small states, can result in the predominance of self-interest and consequentially an abject lack of community responsibility, impeding corporate action and interest in the common good (Bansfield, 1958). In small-scale societies, decentralisation may prove to be problematic due to the lack of professional capacity to deal effectively with a decentralised public service, often resulting in overlapping roles of professional personnel (de Vries, 2000; Corbett and Veenendaal, 2018). Smallness is correlated with centralisation, thus the smaller the state, the more likely it is to be more centralised (Baldacchino, 2012). This results in having only a limited number of artist/actors in cultural management, academic or other decision-making roles occupying various positions simultaneously in a constricted social space. Consequentially, this can lead to personalism in small societies including having patron-client relationships, corruption and despotism (Veenendaal, 2019). For example, clientelism has been played out in the development of Icelandic politics alongside with accusations of nepotism and extreme level of fragmentation at the local level, giving rise to problems related to service provision and professional capacity (Kristinsson, 2015; Hlynasdóttir, 2020). Additionally, it has been argued that small states’ administration tends to be more flexible and less formal (Raadschelders, 1992), leading to problems when applying hierarchical and strictly routine-based organisational practices in a Weberian sense (Baker, 1992; Sutton, 2008).

Within the culture and creative sector, this system of political intervention, intimacy and self-interest for the benefit of nepotism can limit the application of an ‘arm’s length’ principle in cultural policies. Applying the ‘arm’s-length’ approach – implying that the funds provided to the arts by the state are distanced from interference or direction – has its limitations in small states. The principle of an arm’s length policy model, as examined by the English economist John Maynard Keynes, involves the state’s disentanglement by having semi-autonomous non-government bodies, to allow for greater autonomy in artistic practices (Upchurch, 2011). Yet, this notion is also tied in to the principle of individual freedom and the political philosophy of laissez-faire (Hetherington, 2015). Additionally, it makes sense to align it with neoliberal notions of cultural policy and their effects as “the product of syncretic social processes” (Hall

& Lamont, 2013, p. 2), rather than as an isolated measure within the art world domain. In small states, the proximate environment in cultural policy formulation with politicians, political parties, and representatives of interest-based organisations and citizen groups, tends to exert direct or indirect influence on artists who are willing to establish themselves locally and internationally, in a number of ways. In view of this, the recent National Cultural Policy 2021 (Ministry for National Heritage, The Arts, and Local Government, 2021) affirms the adoption of the arm's length principle in public cultural governance. It emphasises the importance of ensuring a level of autonomy to public entities in developing their own initiatives while increasing transparency in decision making procedures.

Status overlap

One macro-dimension of cultural closeness is the tendency for status overlap in small states like Malta (Baldacchino, 2013). Artists' careers exemplify the situation of status overlap, especially due to the uncertainty surrounding their work (Menger, 1989). The cultural sector operates mainly through the gig economy in which artists are often involved in temporal, precarious and flexible conditions as freelancers. Even though precarious work, as work exhibiting various combinations of 'uncertainty, instability, vulnerability and insecurity' (Hewison 2016, p. 428), is the reality for artists in small states particularly due to limited opportunities in small-scale societies; however these working conditions are also prevalent in larger states. In fact, the precarious conditions of artists in the EU were addressed in the report 'The Status of Artists in Europe' (European Parliament, 2006) with the intention to offer recommendations to improve their socioeconomic status. This report proposes Europe-wide action through addressing five main areas: individual working and contracts relations; professional representation; social security; taxation and aspects of trans-national mobility.

As a mechanism of uncertainty management, artists often establish diversification of revenue streams, and thus experience status overlap when doing multiple jobs to sustain a living. Due to the limitations of sustainable funding opportunities, art practitioners usually opt to work on the arts part-time while having a steady income from a regular full-time job. Moreover, there is the issue of unpaid labour, often through internships, within the so-called 'freebie' culture in the cultural and creative industries which aggravates the artists' degree of precarity.

In small states like Malta, job opportunities within the creative industries are prone to experience instability, low wages, intermittent work and weakened workplace protections. This was accentuated during the Covid-19 pandemic: Visanich & Attard (2021) explored the shared concerns of artists during the unprecedented times of Covid-19. The intensification of the coronavirus curbs brought to fore common themes on the livelihood of artists, especially for performing artists who could not work during the pandemic. This resulted in a major shift in their everyday life and wellbeing, including financial loss for many who had their performances/exhibitions cancelled or postponed. This situation stimulated discussions on the general working conditions of artists in having no form of protection and are underrepresented by trade unions or lobby groups. The recently founded Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) aims at raising awareness on the challenges within the entertainment industry and the arts, covering all the different sectors including Music, Theatre, Dance, Film, Art and Fashion and offer protection and voice to artists, both as individuals and as companies (MEIA Official website).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that despite the precariousness of jobs in the creative industry, there has been a gradual boost within the Maltese creative industry, particularly with an increase of funding opportunities for artists. On a global level, the creative economy generates €1.9 trillion in revenues and creates 30 million jobs, whereas in Malta the creative industries account for 7.9% of total GVA and support 12,000 jobs (Malta Business Weekly, 2020). It was only during the last two decades that investments and funding were targeted to build a creative industry in Malta. In 2007, a number of think-tank sessions, known as the Valletta Creative Forum (VCF), were held at the National Centre for Creativity to try to identify the challenges of the art world in Malta. A series of working groups tabled proposals for a road map to improve the opportunities for artists and overcome these challenges. These discussions highlighted the need to invest in the creative industry and provide avenues for cultural development, especially through funding. This was followed up by investment in the cultural and creative sectors, with increased financial allocation for public cultural institutions in the 2008 national budget. These fora, centred on the promotion and implementation of good cultural governance in Malta, led to the 2011 National Cultural Policy, and were subsequently developed further in the more recent 2021 National Cultural Policy.

Sense of ‘openness’: internationalisation and the mobility of artists

One measure to counteract ‘closeness’ in the artworld of small states is through the availability of arts funds for mobilisation of artists to overcome geographical peripheral limitations. Artistic work is often organised as project collaboration with other artistic participants beyond their home territory. Thus, mobilisation is essential to deepening social relations of participants, both cooperatively and competitively, along the chains of production, curation, distribution and evaluation (Bourdieu, 1982; Menger, 1989). Institutional mobility schemes can be considered as organisational ties providing channels for migration.

Artists and cultural practitioners, coming from peripheral and/or small regions, often seek to improve their chances for an international career by moving to countries and cities considered more central in the global art world (Duester, 2015; Fuller, 2014). The need to maintain professional and artistic networks is demonstrated in the gravitation of individuals to cultural production hubs and global art fields (Buchholz, 2018) to acquire visibility beyond their countries of origin (Duester, 2015; Fuller, 2014). The international art world continues to be marked by long-established hierarchies, habitually reflected in the overrepresentation of artists from a select group of countries in biennials and international events (van Hest, 2012) and in rankings (Behnke et al., 2015; Buchholz, 2018).

Cultural strategies by various national cultural institutions in small states (and also larger ones) are often designed to prioritise mobility of artists. For example, the 2021 National Cultural Policy in Malta puts substantial weight on mobility funds through different streams within the arts, both for research and personal development of artists as well as for collaborative endeavours (Ministry for National Heritage, The Arts, and Local Government, 2021). The mobilisation of cultural practitioners has been at the forefront in strategies of the Arts Council Malta (ACM) with the provision of different funding schemes. The restructuring of the Malta Council for Culture and the Arts in 2014 included the development of funding opportunities to assist operators in the cultural and creative sectors to maximise their potential as well as more opportunities to artists for mobility. This newly-redesigned Malta Arts Fund is divided into two main strands: Research Support Grant, based on practice-led research to support creative practitioners to research and develop artistic work; and Project Support Grant, aimed at supporting the development of high-quality artistic projects (Arts Council Malta, 2021).

Despite the increase in travel funds offered by the Arts Council Malta, geographical challenges for mobility of artists in small island nations such as Malta, limit mobility compared to larger countries in central, northern or eastern Europe.

Additionally, different EU funded programmes aim at supporting cultural practitioners and encouraging international mobility among member countries. These programmes also aim at contributing to the emergence of a unified cultural space in the European Union (Farinha, 2012) and foster internal social cohesion in the form of a “bottom-up Europeanization” (Berezin & Schain, 2004, p. 17). Thus, apart from the national Arts Council funding stream, Maltese artists have the opportunity to apply for European funding, including the Creative Europe fund, which is not limited to small states. The Creative Europe programme 2021-2027, with a budget of € 2.44 billion, aims at reinforcing cultural diversity and respond to the needs and challenges of the cultural and creative sectors towards a more inclusive, more digital and better promotion of a sustainable environment (Creative Europe, 2022). It is debatable whether such funds have truly produced a greater identification with the EU itself or with the EU’s cultural community; however, the EU’s overall strategic objectives are based on the positive effects of mobility to support artists and culture professionals by encouraging transnational circulation of cultural and artistic output.

Other measures for having ‘openness’ in the cultural system are shifts towards having cultural decentralisation. In Malta, there have been recent shifts and debates on the promotion of greater public-private partnership in cultural policies to decentralised responsibility. These measures include the drafting of separate cultural regional strategies (at present based on five regions but currently being revised into six regions) addressing socio-demographic and cultural regional dynamics (Arts Council Malta, 2020). Additionally, the direction of the new National Cultural Policy (Ministry for National Heritage, The Arts, and Local Government, 2021) stresses an arm’s length approach, emphasizes decentralisation and actor-oriented measures, while pushing forward the promotion of cultural rights for all. The 2021 National Cultural Policy refers to measures for the implementation of the arm’s length principle to guarantee public accountability and ensure good governance. These measures include having transparent and publicly known criteria for the selection and appointment of leadership positions in relevant councils, commissions, agencies and public cultural organisations (*ibid.*).

It also lists as some of its priorities the following: Strengthening cultural governance, increasing cultural access and widening participation, elevating the status of the artist and professionals in the cultural and creative sectors, improving artistic education and advancing international cultural relations.

Art worlds in small states

Notions related to the tensions of cultural ‘closeness’ as well as the sense of ‘openness’ in small and/or peripheral states were the focus of discussions during a two-year research project taking place between July and October 2016 to study arts worlds and territorial remoteness, cultural marginality and smallness of the states of Kosovo, Malta, Montenegro and San Marino. Reference to this research is made in this article to substantiate claims on the persistence and maintenance of certain cultural elements in small state art worlds and their impact on cultural-policy making: specifically, the marginalisation of artists in peripheral locations and their challenges to overcome this by continuously seeking funds and mobility programmes to internationalise themselves and their arts.

The objective of this research project was to offer a cultural platform for art researchers and curators to understand peripheral cultural and artistic systems and discuss issues of remoteness due to geographical and social isolation. Visits to the chosen research locations were held to map out the differences and similarities in artistic practices. The methodology of this research was based on conversational, dialogical research and organised workshops with artists and local professionals in the art field.

Research outcomes point towards transversal challenges, including the realities of artists in peripheral locations, such as small societies, in their quest for autonomy in artistic work practices as well as in efforts to internationalise artists' profiles and improve their chances of global success by migrating to global art hubs. All research participants stressed the need to engage in European artistic projects with other larger states because such collaborations enhance artistic reputation and professional integration within the European artistic realm. This was the centre of discussion during a meeting with Rita Canarezza, a cultural researcher and practitioner involved in various cultural institutions in the Republic of San Marino, as a state occupying an area of 61km². With reference to the art and research project *Little constellation*, based in San Marino, Canarezza spoke about collaborative practices in small states and geopolitical micro-areas across Europe, to explore the relationship between territoriality and contemporary artistic practices. For Canarezza, marginalized artists require mobilisation both for visibility and validation which are fundamental to symbolic success in the artistic field.

In line with mobilisation, the theme on internationalisation of the arts from the viewpoint of peripheral location was emphasised principally by the Arts Director of the Museum of American Art in Pristina, Kosovo, during the visit at the end of August 2016. Discussion focused on the educational programmes in place to promote the internationalisation of the arts, questioning specifically the peripherality of Pristina as opposed to centralised art hubs, in view of the collection of American art reproductions displayed at this museum. The Director accentuated the relevance of the organised Summer School at this art centre, with the intention to promote various opportunities for artists, in partnership with collaborative international centres, to share knowledge and expertise. These sessions provide an educational programme for the support of an independent cultural scene and enhanced communication and networking with independent organisations in the field of culture. Also, this leads to the processes of opportunities for mobility programmes to obtain artistic legitimation in big European 'centres'. Moreover, mobility programmes are essential for job creation as well as injecting innovation and creativity in different economic sectors. Similarly, the organised ACMLab, consisting of short information sessions organised by the Arts Council Malta, target artists and creative practitioners to obtain information about opportunities for mobility as well as obtain knowledge on how to update their portfolio, performance reel and prepare for auditions.

Conversations at the Dado Gallery, Cetinje, with the Head of Art Museum Montenegro and founder of Institute of Contemporary Art in Montenegro on Wednesday 31 August 2016, concentrated mostly on connectivity issues in the contemporary art scene and the required investment in the local cultural infrastructure in Montenegro. In order to obtain an understanding of the investment in the cultural infrastructure, a visit to the Obod Factory, a former fridge factory was organised. This former factory, bearing remnants of its Communist past, was chosen as the site for the Abramović Community Center Obod Cetinje, an arts centre designed to host various cultural and artistic activities in Montenegro and eventually to give an economic boost to the creative industries. Here, investments in cultural infrastructure was treated mainly in terms of utilitarian means and justified through foreseen economic growth.

Another transversal theme with cultural professionals and artists was the significance of representations of national identity in relation to the post-colonial context of peripheral locations and to how inhabitants perceive the sharing of common culture, values and experience. In line with Armstrong & Read (1998) view on the tendency for greater degree of social homogeneity and a sense of identity in small states, artists who were involved in the research felt that it was essential to define their own cultural identity as a small nation by focusing on notions of independence and post-colonial/post-dictatorship mentality. This representation of identity was particularly prevalent in one discussion with a Kosovar artist Ana Čigon, after viewing the video installation ‘Remembering the Other’s’, a documentary about the meaning and power of public monuments, as undisputed stories in Kosovo. The artist explored socio-demographic factors, including the exclusion of marginalised groups and women in monument representation. Parallel to this work on power and identity was the work of the Maltese artist Austin Camilleri. In his studio in Gozo, Camilleri discussed representation of political power in his work *Zieme*, a three-legged horse, which was temporarily displayed at the entrance of the Capital City in Malta during the Valletta International Visual Arts Festival in 2014. Camilleri talked about the conveyed meaning on the immortalisation of historical political triumphant in monuments within the context of past colonial power.

Using the arts to engage in political reflections and geopolitical preoccupations was also the core focus of discussion with the Kosovar artist Flaka Haliti, an artist who represented Kosovo at the Venice Biennale in 2015. Haliti spoke about territorial boundaries by referring to national borders and representations of power and raised questions on national identity. During fieldwork in Malta, the artist Pierre Portelli spoke about identity through a more socially-engaged process by exploring the personal narratives of inhabitants. Discussion with Portelli took place at the Maritime Museum, the venue which hosted his exhibition *REL. INK-Indelible narratives*. His work is an investigation into the history of tattoos characteristic of Malta’s port and sea culture through the narratives of elderly Maltese participants. Portelli’s insights and artistic work is specifically based on the study of people in a participative approach through employing research-based practices. He discussed his subjects within a contextual frame of Malta’s colonial economy and documents by conducting archival research and interviews to meticulously present the contextual meaning of tattoo in Malta for port workers or seafarers.

Debates on cultural policies in the research locations focused on the growing interest towards greater decentralisation, increased autonomy and increased initiatives to attract private collaboration in the arts and culture. Various culture professionals and curators, such as Natalija Vujošević and Rita Canarezza, who were involved in group discussions in the BJCEM research accentuated the promotion of an active role of the private sector as well as having public-private partnership both in the formulation of cultural policies as well as in the implementation of artistic projects. For instance, the Ministry of Education and Cultural Institutes in San Marino has been working, since the late 1990s, on achieving greater autonomy by increasing joint cooperation of the public and private sector actors in the current cultural policy model. In Montenegro, Natalija Vujošević, the curator and founder of the Institute of Contemporary Art, an independent organisation dedicated to contemporary art theory, education, research and archives, stressed the significance of autonomous institutions within the arts. Such institutions are an indispensable alternative to the state funded arts institutions, following national cultural policies and often based on utilitarian goals towards economic growth. This is explicitly vital in locations with cultural policies shorn of arm’s length principles in small societies. Even though the limitation in the process of having an arm’s length approach is not only in small states, however the prevalence of systems of patronage, political interventions and intimacy,

peculiar to small societies complicates further the process. Thus, in line with Farrugia's (1993) argument on the frequent request for informal and special treatment in small states, often leading to patron-client relationships, thwarts the application of an arm's length approach in state administered cultural governance. While written strategies and policies promise decentralisation, cultural access to all and strengthening cultural governance, in practice this may not be straightforward to implement due to the persistence and maintenance of the mentioned cultural factors in small states.

Discussion

What are the implications of cultural continuities in small states on the cultural policy making process? This article explored this by examining the realities of artists operating in small states and presented accounts on issues related to peripherality, internationalisation, identity and artist mobility. Certain cultural continuities outlined in this article are visible in peripheral small-scale societies, yet are not exclusively to these locations.

The contribution of this paper is in the exploration of the implications of certain cultural continuities in small states, mainly in terms of the tensions between the degree of openness and closure in cultural practices. It substantiates claims on the peculiarities of small states' art worlds, specifically by focusing on Malta, as a system of networked communities contextualised in a nuanced socio-political climate. This article outlined the significance of collaborative cultural and artistic programmes for artists and curators as well as the centrality of funding schemes in cultural-policy making to overcome issues of peripherality and isolation in small states. During talks with artists and art professionals, discussion was steered on how institutional mobility grants, internships, artist residencies opportunities and exchange programmes are gateways for artistic careers in small states because they provide a setting for a new, social and professional integration in big cities.

The positioning of artists within the culture and creative industries is key in processes of formulating cultural policy and decision-making within densely political and state entangled jurisdictions. The degree of nepotism and clientelism evident in small states, as outlined by Bansfield (1958), can facilitate self-interest and lack of community responsibility, thus impeding good cultural governance. Moreover, prioritisation of the arts in small states is often reduced to utilitarian goals by focusing on the increased awareness of the social and economic benefits of the creative industry to society at large, resulting in less critical but more predictable art practices. Such factors habitually act as a barrier for the implementation of arm's length cultural policy models. In the policy implementation and administration process, policy officers and civil servants at various levels in cultural policy public bureaucracies, play a key role linking the policy formulation process with the actors in the arts and culture sector. Thus, a need for an activity-oriented way of encapsulating the long series of intertwined actions is required to address the continuous shifts as well as cultural continuities within small states. "Accomplishing cultural policies" (Mathieu & Visanich, 2022) are suitable for small states in view of the dynamic process of engaging with different actors and work within the peculiar cultural continuities of small state locations.

Reference made in this article to fieldwork in small state Euro-Mediterranean locations consolidates the evident resilience of certain cultural elements. On-going evaluations of cultural policies from key stakeholders, in an arm's length approach to the state, are prerequisites for a more autonomous process in cultural policies. In line with Belfiore's (2004) suggestions, it is essential to have policy-based cultural and artistic processes where periodic

assessments of activities and their reception are undertaken to ensure continuous policy formulation based on the feedback of key stakeholders.

Conclusion

Archetypal macro-dimensions, contributing to the sense of cultural ‘closeness’, typical in small states such as Malta, are explored to frame the context for cultural policy-making and the implications on artists at large. Some of these dimensions are outlined by referring to notions related to the degree of size, specialisation, formalisation, centralisation, the situation of status-overlap of artists and the experienced isolation and its implications. Herein, this article acknowledged the predominance of cultural continuities as a form of social constructionism, shaping the lived experiences of artists.

A better understanding of the art worlds and cultural policies in small states contributes to the growing body of literature dealing with artistic mobility, yet situating it within the broader domain of small state studies. Thus, the focus of this article was largely on the macro dimensions of the lived experiences of artists in small states, including the persistence of centre-periphery dynamics, also outlined in the referred fieldwork in this article. Result outcome of this project exemplifies some of the challenges experienced by artists in small and/or peripheral locations and contribute to a better understanding of the tensions between a sense of openness as well as closeness in small states. Discussions dwelt on the absent or limited arm’s length model in cultural policies in these locations.

Nevertheless, despite efforts to present a comprehensive appreciation of art worlds in small states, an understanding of the structures of social inequality, such as social class and gender, are intentionally absent in this article. Furthermore, Covid-19 has in general shifted art worlds and cultural policies considerably. More specifically, it impacted the career development of artists, destabilising the financial situation for some and restricting them in their quest for mobility schemes. This situation, coupled with the degree of geographical and social isolation of small states, merits further study.

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