A Critique of the Use and Abuse of Typologies in Cultural Policy Analysis

Abstract:
Typologies used explicitly or implicitly in cultural policy analysis (CPA) do not comport well with basic principles of typology. The research area of CPA therefore suffers from a lack of conceptual rigour. In order to provide an understanding of why CPA finds itself in this unfortunate state, this article examines three specific and relevant typologies, and concludes that CPA would benefit from using principles of knowledge organisation more actively.

1.0 Introduction
The typologies examined in this article provide the framework for a significant proportion of the research conducted within the social science subdiscipline of cultural policy analysis (CPA). More precisely, these typologies are utilised in various analytical attempts to address fundamental CPA research questions such as: How does the public sector legitimise public funding of the arts? As a research area, CPA is predominantly empirical and critical, and to a lesser degree conceptual. There is thus a potential for increasing the conceptual rigour of CPA by applying principles of knowledge organisation.

As Hjørland (2017) has pointed out, it is possible to make a long list of units that can be classified. Although objectives are not on Hjørland’s list of potential units of classification, we may add them to this list. For example, researchers within education might find it valuable to classify educational objectives (Bloom 1956). Correspondingly, researchers within CPA classify cultural policy objectives and cultural policy rationales. Thus, CPA includes both the construction of typologies and the process of assigning empirical observation to them.

Researchers within CPA rarely develop their typologies themselves. More often, they use typologies a priori, for example in addressing questions about the ways in which authorities legitimise public funding of the arts. A priori typologies are applied in analyses of empirical material such as policy documents and interview transcriptions. However, the typologies that are applied a priori to answer these kinds of research questions are rarely scrutinised explicitly by the researchers who make use of them. This lack of explicit scrutiny might be due to the tendency within the social sciences to take

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1 In the relevant literature, “cultural policy studies” is a more common term than “cultural policy analysis”. However, the term “studies” in “cultural policy studies” is often a signal that the publication is intended to be critical, as in critical theory (e.g. McGuigan 2004). “Cultural policy analysis” is a more general term and includes analyses of cultural policy that are informed both by critical theory and by other theoretical perspectives. In this article, which considers cultural policy analysis broadly understood, the term “cultural policy analysis” is therefore more accurate and useful than “cultural policy studies”. However, the abbreviation CPA (cultural policy analysis) is neither an established nor a commonly used abbreviation. It is used in this article for the sake of brevity.

2 This can be observed in prominent CPA journals, such as the International Journal of Cultural Policy, which only rarely publishes articles with the stated aim of scrutinising analytical frameworks.
typologies for granted. As Bailey (1994, 83) has remarked, “because classification is so ubiquitous, it is relatively easy to overlook it”. The methodological apparatus of CPA is derived from several social science disciplines, but most notably economics and sociology. These two disciplines differ considerably in terms of their approaches to concepts. The typologies that these two disciplines offer will be discussed here with regard to two basic requirements of typologies, which are that they should consist of collectively exhaustive and mutually exclusive types (Marradi 1990) and that they should be practically useful.

2.0 Typologies applied in CPA

We will consider three typologies that are frequently applied by researchers within CPA. The conceptual rigour of these typologies is important for the general rigour of CPA, owing to the prominence of these typologies within it.

2.1 Welfare economics

A seminal work within CPA was published in 1966, when Baumol and Bowen (1966) provided an analysis of the economic challenges of the performing arts. The authors stated that the purpose of their study was to “be able to specify objectively the alternatives facing the arts and to describe their costs and the burdens they require society to shoulder” (Baumol and Bowen 1966, 4). This publication marked the founding of cultural economics as a research area. Accordingly, Baumol and Bowen’s book is a starting point for many researchers who wish to conduct CPA from a welfare economics perspective. Their goal was to “describe the logic on which such a decision, one way or the other [public funding or no public funding of performing arts], should be based if it is to satisfy the criterion of rationality” (Baumol and Bowen 1966, 378). The logic that they referred to was the logic of welfare economics. Based on this logic, they presented a typology of three possible arguments for public support of the arts:

1. **Egalitarian grounds** (“public funds devoted to the opening of opportunities to the impecunious”; see Baumol and Bowen 1966, 379).
2. **The education of minors** (“The arts must be made available early, while tastes are still being formed and behavior patterns developed”; see Baumol and Bowen 1966, 380).
3. **The public goods argument of non-excludable and non-rivalrous goods** (Government subsidies of the production of a good are warranted if it is both impossible to exclude consumers from using the good and additional consumers do not reduce quality of consumption for other users; see Baumol and Bowen 1966, 381).
Now, how does this typology fit as an *a priori* tool for analysing and comparing ways in which governments legitimise public support of the arts? The short answer is: not so well. An immediate problem with the “logic” of this typology is that it is easy to suggest additional potential political arguments for public support of the arts that are plausible and yet are not covered by the typology. In other words, the types in the typology are not collectively exhaustive. For example, several authors have pointed out that, historically, public support of the arts has been significantly legitimised through the argument that national pride is increased by excellent arts performances (e.g. Bennett 1995, Duelund 2009). Some Danes, for example, might get an increased feeling of national pride after witnessing an excellent performance by a Danish orchestra of a symphony written by a Danish composer. But how does that argument fit in Baumol and Bowen’s (1966) overview? The “national pride” argument cannot reasonably be claimed to have been covered by the typology. Another example of a potential argument that is not covered is the frequently made claim that the economic output of a nation or region can be increased by governments “investing” in the arts for the sake of economic impacts (e.g. Myerscough 1988).

Contemporary cultural economics has developed somewhat from the overview in Baumol’s and Bowen’s seminal book. For example, Fullerton (1991) lists rationales of public funding that are related to concepts such as *redistribution, merit goods, public goods* and *externalities*. Publications within contemporary welfare economics (e.g. Stiglitz and Rosengard 2015) frequently assume, although implicitly, that these kinds of legitimations are collectively exhaustive and mutually exclusive. In that regard, contemporary welfare economics represents a more developed *a priori* tool for CPA than that of Baumol and Bowen’s (1966) typology. But, while the typology of public funding rationales provided by recent welfare economics might be satisfactory with regard to collective exhaustiveness and mutual exclusiveness, welfare economics is still not a *practically useful* tool in policy analysis. The typologies of legitimations for public
funding that are provided by welfare economics are rarely applied as a priori analytical tools in policy analysis. The reason is probably a lack of phenomenological relevance. For example, if we consider Fullerton’s list referred to above, an analyst using welfare economics as an a priori tool might ask herself: Is the social cohesion that a hypothetical government claims to provide through public funding of the arts an example of a “public goods” argument or of an “externalities” argument for public funding? The problem in answering this is that the technical and abstract way in which the different types of welfare economics arguments for public funding of the arts are labelled significantly reduces their practical applicability within CPA. The lack of practical applicability of welfare economics is due to the fact that ministries of culture, along with other funding bodies, rarely formulate themselves in ways that can easily be interpreted through the lenses of economic concepts such as “public goods” and “externalities”.

In conclusion, when it comes to providing CPA with an a priori tool, what seems to be the major strength of economics as a discipline is that the over decades it has improved Baumol and Baumol’s typology into a typology that consists of mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive categories of legitimation (e.g. Stiglitz and Rosengard 2015). However, a major weakness of welfare economics, from the perspective of CPA, is that the labels that it attaches to different types of legitimation of public funding of the arts are too technical and abstract. The labels lack ‘thickness’ (Geertz 2017). Hence, it is difficult for CPA researchers to assign empirical observations to the types of legitimation that welfare economics provides.

2.2 The intrinsic–instrumental dichotomy

A second typology that has been extensively applied within CPA is the intrinsic–instrumental dichotomy (e.g. O-Kyung 2010). Although this is not always explicitly stated, this dichotomy derives from classical sociological theory – most prominently, Weber’s typology of types of social action. Weber’s typology of social action consists of instrumentally rational, value-rational, affectual and traditional action (Weber 1978). Researchers within CPA have frequently made use of the first two of these types, differentiating between instrumental value and intrinsic value as motivations behind cultural political argumentation, where these two notions correspond to the first two of Weber’s categories.

The dichotomy is frequently used as an a priori analytical tool in CPA, but the dichotomy is also contested within CPA, for two reasons. First, within CPA publications, the notion of instrumentality has de facto become inextricably associated with value-laden CPA, in that the term “instrumental policies” has become synonymous with “undesirable policies” (e.g. Belfiore 2015). This means that it is has become difficult to use the term “instrumental” in a value-free manner (see Weber 1949). Second, the intrinsic–instrumental dichotomy is conceptually contested, in the sense that researchers within CPA disagree on whether it is at all plausible, in any context, for a political body to make the claim that a policy is motivated by the intrinsic value of art. Some researchers have concluded that it is logically fallacious to apply the proclaimed intrinsic value of art as an argument for public funding (e.g. Bakhshi et al. 2009; Culyer 1973;
Vestheim 2007). Now, let us assume that a researcher would like to conduct a value-free form of CPA, and to ask a research question based on the intrinsic–instrumental dichotomy, such as: To what extent is contemporary cultural policy (for example, in Denmark) underpinned by the assumption that cultural policy is *instrumental*; and, by contrast, to what degree is contemporary cultural policy underpinned by the idea that the arts have *intrinsic* value? Going further, the CPA researcher will now have to answer a number of non-trivial questions: What does the researcher understand by the term “intrinsic value”? What does the researcher believe that the authorities mean when they convey their intentions to legitimise public funding of art through the intrinsic-value argument? Does the researcher assume that the term “intrinsic”, whether this is communicated literally or intentionally, refers to a value that is independent of the existence of human beings? Does the notion of the “intrinsic value” of art invoke religion or spirituality?

In other words, the intrinsic-value concept elicits a plethora of follow-up questions. This is because the concept seems to be notoriously elusive, in that researchers who rely on its relevance rarely provide an intensional definition. What seems to be the case is that the concept is either defined in the negative, as the opposite of instrumental value, or through a form of “family resemblance” (Wittgenstein 1958) or extension (Marradi 2012). Researchers seem to assume that readers will know what intrinsic value is all about, although the readers themselves cannot be assumed to be able to define it by its intension. For example, one researcher concludes that the arts are “*intrinsically* valuable to society” (Belfiore 2004, 200, emphasis in original), without defining intrinsic value. Without imputing too much to this quote, the assumption seems to be that readers do not need a definition of intrinsic value because they will know from practical experience what intrinsic value is. But if researchers wish to analyse the degree to which cultural policy is instrumental – and, by contrast, the degree to which it is underpinned by notions about the intrinsic value of art – it is reasonable to expect a conceptual elucidation of the concept of intrinsic value. Hence, applications of the intrinsic–instrumental dichotomy within CPA are likely to provoke more questions than they answer.
What this tells us is that if a researcher within CPA states, explicitly or implicitly, that he or she will apply the intrinsic–instrumental dichotomy as an *a priori* analytical tool, this is a decision that requires at least two follow-up questions: (1) Is the use of the intrinsic–instrumental dichotomy in a CPA publication intended to convey that the publication is value-laden, or is the dichotomy used in an analytical, value-free manner? (2) If the researcher’s aim is to analyse the intentions in the empirical material, how does the researcher define the term “intrinsic value” in terms of its intension? The problem with publications within CPA is that these questions are rarely asked, and thus rarely answered. Hence, the intrinsic–instrumental dichotomy is a rather confusing *a priori* tool that lacks conceptual rigour.

2.3 The orders of worth

The final *a priori* CPA tool that deserves to be scrutinised here is the so-called *orders of worth* framework provided by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). This framework is much more recent than the two previously discussed tools, but its prevalence within CPA during the last decade or so has been considerable.

Boltanski and Thévenot state: “we have been able to observe the operation of six higher common principles to which, in France today, people resort to most often in order to finalise an agreement or pursue a contention” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 71, emphasis in original). Subsequently, they describe how their observed “common principles” extend into various “political forms of worth” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 83–124). In other words, the common principles are considered to apply to the political realm, not just to the social world in general. It is this application of the common principles to the political realm that has paved the way for the entrance of the “orders of worth” framework into CPA as an *a priori* tool.

From the perspective of CPA, there are problems with this system that have not been sufficiently acknowledged by researchers. According to Boltanski and Thévenot themselves, “our list of principles is not exhaustive; we can discern the shape of other polities that might be constructed” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 71). In other words,
if we apply the “orders of worth” framework as an a priori tool in the analysis, we cannot simply assume that all possible justifications of public funding of the arts are covered by Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) system. The system is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the various forms of legitimation that are used in relation to public policies. In addition, it seems clear that the types of justifications that are identified in their book are not mutually exclusive. The authors describe six different polities, or “worlds”. These are the “inspired world”, the “domestic world”, the “world of fame”, the “civic world”, the “market world” and the “industrial world”. However, nowhere do Boltanski and Thévenot claim that these worlds are supposed to be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, it seems reasonable to conclude that they are not. For example, there is nothing in Boltanski and Thévenot’s definitions that suggests that agents cannot be associated with both the “world of inspiration” and the “industrial world” simultaneously. This also means that the different ways of justifying an action, such as the action of public art funding, cannot easily be assigned to the typology of worlds from which these justifications emanate, because one specific form of justification might emanate from more than one world.

Let us look at some studies that use the “orders of worth” system in an a priori manner. One study concludes that “the world of inspiration is the most important value regime in the creative industries” (Nijzink et al. 2017, 609). Presumably, artists and creative workers are therefore of the opinion that the “world of inspiration” should inform the public authorities that fund the arts. But this is trivial. It is not necessary to have an advanced education in the social sciences to predict that, of Boltanski and Thévenot’s various “worlds”, artists will prefer the “world of inspiration”. In addition, Nijzink et al. seem to misunderstand Boltanski and Thévenot’s conceptual system by implicitly referring to the system as a typology of collectively exhaustive and mutually exclusive forms of legitimation. They simply rank the different worlds in terms of their importance as cultural political legitimations for different shareholders (Nijzink et al. 2017, 609), without much regard for the openness of the system that is emphasised by Boltanski and Thévenot. In another study, Lemasson concludes that “the coexistence of the inspired logic with the civic or the industrial ones” has been “difficult to achieve” in cultural policy in Quebec (Lemasson 2017, 81). But this is just a way of concluding, in a language coloured by the framework of Boltanski and Thévenot, that the arts sometimes need public support to survive. Yet another study concludes that, of Boltanski and Thévenot’s orders of worth, it is the “civic world” that has dominated the legitimating rhetoric of cultural funding in Norway and Sweden at the beginning of the 21st century (Larsen 2016, 129). But does this mean that “the inspired world” has become less important? Where are the borders between the “inspired world” and the “civic world”? Has artistic excellence become less important, while inclusion of different demographic groups of society has become more important? If the latter is the case, then how does it bring us deeper insights to embed these observations in Boltanski and Thévenot’s conceptual system? This seems entirely unclear.

In summary, Boltanski and Thévenot’s orders of worth appears, at first glance, as a productive a priori tool in analysis, owing to the authors’ use of the phrase “on justification”, for example in the title of their book. The phrase “on justification” might suggest that the system is tailor-made for analysing how public bodies justify taxpayer funding of their services. However, as an a priori tool in CPA, this system has two major
weaknesses. First, the system is not intended to consist of collectively exhaustive and mutually exclusive types of legitimations. Second, the system is made up of labels that tend to obscure empirical findings more than they provide insights into them. Thus, the main benefit of the orders of worth system, from the perspective of the CPA publications that make use of it, is not conceptual rigour. The system has managed to “conquer the academic scene” in CPA (Mangset 2010, 48), but it seems reasonable to ask whether there have been guru effects involved in the conquest (Sperber 2010, Elster 2011).

3.0 Conclusions and implications

This article has questioned the ways typologies are used in an *a priori* fashion within a specific area of the social sciences, namely cultural policy analysis (CPA). The aim has not been to provide an exhaustive presentation of typologies that are applied by contemporary researchers, nor has the goal been to provide an exhaustive examination of the methodological problems associated with the typological systems examined. Instead, the goal has been to show that Bailey’s (1994) warning – namely, that we should not take our typologies for granted – needs to be continuously repeated in the social sciences.

The problem addressed in this article might be due to a too deep divide between theoretical and empirical investigations. It is important to avoid a situation where theory within the field is used as “sacred texts to be worshipped as totems” (Turner 1998, 245). The construction of typologies is ongoing work, and better typologies of cultural policy rationales can be mined out in a collaborative effort by the research community as a whole. Thus, analysts should be encouraged to reflect on the typologies that they use, and to do so explicitly in the methodological sections of their publications. It might be tempting, especially for younger researchers, to adopt a readymade typology, in particular, if they observe that this typology has already reached paradigmatic status. But such a paradigmatic status should not be allowed to deflect researchers within CPA from explicitly scrutinising their typologies.

References


