Prince ADUFAH | Sociology of Social Networks

Who Runs the Arts in England? A Social Network Analysis of Arts Boards

Dave O'Brien, Griffith Rees, Mark Taylor, (2022) *Poetics*.

Summary

The article explores the inequalities in England's Arts and Culture sector by examining direct and indirect connections between boards of directors, and various companies and how these interactions influence fundraising. The authors begin with a brief review of the literature on the problem of inequality in the cultural sector, the relevance of company boards to artistic and cultural organizations and the governance outlook of the boards in the arts sector. The debate mainly follows Griffiths, Miles and Savage's (2008) work on the changing governing structure of elites in the cultural sector[1], Ostrower's (2002) work on close interactions between arts boards and commercial organizations, especially those in banking and finance[2]. The two works posit that there are two major reasons for inequalities in the arts sector, which are the composition of arts boards (the most influential people), and their function (their interactions with other sectors and the interests they represent).

Patterns of inequalities in the arts sector have been examined in both the production and consumption processes. The production process shows an overrepresentation of middle-class white elites underpinned by a notion of cultural fit with markets or organisations. Primarily due to shifting demands by cultural policy makers, refocusing cultural organization into a more market-oriented discourse. Consequently, arts governance in England is experiencing a shift towards a representation of business and civil service persons together with a few academics and aristocrats. Boards of directors, playing the significant roles of setting organisational directives, fundraising and stakeholder management maintain an interlock of relations that become crucial to their responsibilities. This board interlock is manifest when two organizations share a board member, which is fundamental for improving organisational reputation and legitimacy. However, the net effect is inequalities in board membership, as people with experience serve on several boards.

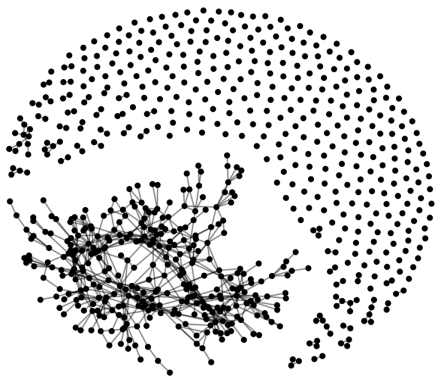
In England's Arts sector, the article establishes that directors play the primary roles of fundraising, setting long-term priorities and advocacy. In a study by Ostrower 2002, it was identified that art board directors were expected to also be donors to the organizations they serve on. These roles reveal that board directors are expected to be wealthy. This becomes a primary reason why board members are mostly recruited from closed groups excluding those who are different. However, the process of selecting members is also noted as a contributing factor to the growing inequalities. In the UK, appeals are sent to professional networks of limited individuals to recruit new board members. What is also observed is that most board members work in banking and finance, highlighting the connection to

[1] Griffiths, Dave, Andrew Miles, and Mike Savage. "The end of the English cultural elite?." *The sociological review* 56.1_suppl (2008): 187-209.
[2] Ostrower, Francie. "The arts as cultural capital among elites: Bourdieu's theory reconsidered." *Poetics* 26.1 (1998): 43-53.

people who are likely to donate. Conversely, finance firms use the opportunity to entrench their commitment to corporate social responsibility, and manage their reputation. Board interlock thus become fertile grounds for inequalities in the arts industry.

The authors queried Special Industrial Classification codes and the list of directors of various companies from Companies House's database of registered companies. Further, a bimodal network was constructed in which every edge connected different types of entities (nodes), thus linking directors to companies. A projection of unimodal networks was developed where edges showed board members between two companies or concerning directors, where edges showed booths both directors were part of. The network was extended through the use of hops. The first network generated is a list of companies in the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) that are companies in their own right. A one-hop network was further developed by hopping to all other companies on which the board members of the NPO network sat. The one-hop network featured an indirect connection of boards of NPOs. It highlighted NPOs and the companies they are connected to. This allowed the authors to further project the network a second time generating a network of indirect ties of NPOs where board members from two NPOs each sit on a third company. What is obtained is five projected networks of companies and directors at the NPO and one-hop level and a network of indirect ties to the NPOs. Allowing them to examine, the most central directors among the NPOs and the broader arts network, the most central NPO with only direct ties and those with only indirect ties, and finally the most central organization whether or not NPOs. The networks were analyzed by calculating the betweenness centrality and clustering of directors and companies.

The study revealed that the largest connected component of the network (NPO network) were companies which were members of Arts Council England's (ACE) national portfolio with very few of them sharing board members (Fig.6). The one-hop network showed a denser ties revealing the Royal Opera House (ROH) as the central organization with a high degree and betweenness. Even though sharing board members directly with only two organizations, the ROH shares board members indirectly with other 17 NPOs. The finding was similar for some of the other central organizations. An indication that the most central networks are not always the ones with the highest shared board members in the NPO network (Table 2). The study also revealed a shift from elites who are scholars and members of gentleman's clubs to elites mostly in business and finance. About half of the top 20 individuals were experts in business, finance and accounting, reinforcing a marked form of cultural governance structure influenced by the market and the state. Nonetheless, it is emphasised that the corporate world is not taking over cultural governance. Central corporate organizations in the general network were noted to be funding film projects and developing properties indicating a commitment to place-based cultural regeneration. However, the Royal Opera House's centrality suggests a continuity of the old gentlemanly cultural governance structure, with members



adapting to the changing elite structure to secure their positions.

Fig.6 NPO Network with indirect Ties
Source: Dave O'Brien, Griffith Rees, Mark Taylor, (2022)

Table 2
Betweenness, indirect, and direct edges for NPOs.

NPO	Betweenness	Indirect edges	Direct edges
Royal Opera House Covent Garden Foundation	0.203	17	2
Aurora Orchestra	0.138	9	1
Bristol Old Vic And Theatre Royal Trust Limited	0.101	9	3
Headlong Theatre Limited	0.101	8	3
Rtyds Limited	0.096	10	5
North Music Trust	0.086	7	1
East London Dance	0.084	9	3
Balletboyz Ltd	0.084	8	2
Dance Consortium Limited	0.080	8	3
National Museum Of Labour History(The)	0.076	5	3

Source: Dave O'Brien, Griffith Rees, Mark Taylor, (2022)

Critical Analysis

The authors establish a connection between the literature on arts boards and the literature on inequalities highlighting the perceptions of a cultural fit with markets or organizations, a strand of research which has been given less attention in previous literature. While most earlier studies recognize the changing nature of arts boards, the specific mechanisms of the changes have received less attention[3].

The authors draw inferences from different arrays of literature predominantly in the Americas and Europe. They develop a firm argument on the inequalities in the cultural sector building on developments by Alexander's (2018) work on the shifting demands placed on organizations by cultural policymakers and the consequent reorganisation of governance of the cultural industry towards a market-driven perspective[4]; Griffiths et al (2008) work identifying the shift of cultural governance from autonomy to 'gentlemanly' upper class of educated elites who are closely connected in a private members club[5]. They further zoom into specific nature, functions and changing characteristics of the board of directors in the arts and cultural world by highlighting notal works by Burt (1998)[6] and Chu & (Davis 2016)[7] on board interlock, explaining how individuals with certain qualities sit on different boards because organizations prioritise high-quality board members.

Further narrowed, are works by Ostrower (1998) and Radbourne (1993)[8] on how these qualities affect the selection of board members to sit on company boards. It was interesting to see the synergy that the authors draw from these different studies and to finally connect them through a social network analysis. On their own, the literature presents different perspectives on power dynamics in the arts

[3] O'Brien, Dave, Griffith Rees, and Mark Taylor. "Who runs the arts in England? A social network analysis of arts boards." *Poetics* (2022): 101646.
[4] Alexander, Victoria D. "Heteronomy in the arts field: state funding and British arts organizations." *The British Journal of Sociology* 69.1 (2018): 23-43.
[5] Griffiths, Dave, Andrew Miles, and Mike Savage. "The end of the English cultural elite?." *The sociological review* 56.1_suppl (2008): 187-209.
[6] Burt, Ronald S. "Cooptive corporate actor networks: A reconsideration of interlocking directorates involving American manufacturing." *Administrative science quarterly* (1980): 557-582.
[7] Chu, Johan SG, and Gerald F. Davis. "Who killed the inner circle? The decline of the American corporate interlock network." *American Journal of Sociology* 122.3 (2016): 714-754.
[8] Radbourne, Jennifer. "Recruitment and training of board members for the nineties and beyond." *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 23.3 (1993): 211-224.

and cultural world with little or sometimes no outlook on the internal dynamics and how that leads to entrenched inequalities in cultural governance. Such separate analyses had not drawn empirical relations between different board members and how their connections on different boards influence company governance. Filling such a gap in the cultural governance literature is a good attempt by the article that can not go unnoticed.

The authors use data from the ACE's National Portfolio Organisations (NPO). They adopt a sample size of about 735 out of 829 NPOs which are companies on their own or are not part of larger organisations. This affords the study of a large sample of arts organisations and those that are connected to arts to construct the needed network structure to draw much more affirmative conclusions. The sample also presents a diverse set of small and large organisations that are directly and indirectly linked to the NPO. By first analysing the betweenness in the NPO network (only arts organisations), and a later series of network projections including other organisations (one-hop network), the authors draw specificities on the interactions between boards of the different organizations. This local level of network analysis eliminates any ambiguities in the construction of the network.

The measurement of degree and betweenness centrality which further takes into account the directors themselves helps to identify any nodes that are powerful in bridging or gatekeeping positions within the network. What is more interesting in this article is the fact that the number and diversity of organisations allow the authors to measure betweenness clustering. This betweenness clustering identifies the edges of greatest betweenness from a connected component, and what parts of that component are left until there are no edges. This helps to observe groups of nodes capable of providing a bridge between clusters that would have otherwise been disconnected from other important parts of the network. This robust methodological approach made it possible for the authors to map the network of board members in the National Portfolio, establish the connections between directors and between companies while determining where there are overlaps, observe the number of NPOs with indirect connections, measure the importance of other organisations through the boards on which NPO board members were part of, and finally identify the most central companies and directors. Such robustness in methodology leads to firm results for all parties interested in cultural governance not just in England but also globally. The article thus became a major contribution to the debate on the connection between politics, and power in the art and culture world.

Even though the article was elaborate in establishing the connectedness among directors and between companies, there happened to be less elaboration on the specificities of the demographic characteristics of the most influential people in the network. Additionally, given that different elite factions were identified in the study, further areas of research could identify the impacts of these elite groups on organisational programs and how that affects the network distribution. Finally, the study draws experiences mainly from the Americas and Europe possibly because of the availability of extensive research in these regions. However, further areas of research would include studies in other countries on other continents and a comparative assessment between different regions.