

## ***The Geography of Cultural Policy: Regional Cultural Policy in Sweden***

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents a currently running research project, which aims at exploring potential geographical and discursive shifts in regional cultural policy in Sweden. The backdrop against which these shifts are understood is that of globalization processes, understood as parallel processes of internationalization and decentralization in political-administrative organization. Two regional experiments, Region Skåne and Region Västra Götaland, carried out since the 1990's, constitute the comprehensive case studies of the project. Within both regions, two municipalities and two cultural activities have also been selected for the project. By analyzing strategic documents and by interviewing key agents in the cultural policy field in the two regions and four municipalities, the construction of regional identity is explored. In this process of construction, the relations between strategy and implementation, centre and periphery and formal and informal agents are highlighted.

**Keywords:** cultural policy, decentralization, discourse, globalization, regions, Sweden

**Word count, excluding references:** 6,583

### **Introduction**

In Sweden, like in most late modern Western societies, contemporary cultural policy is considered to be permeated by and inseparable from globalization processes. Such processes are in this paper understood as parallel processes of internationalization and decentralization, which contribute to shifting the allocation of power both within the political-administrative organization and between this organization and its surroundings (cf., e.g., Johannisson 2000; Mitchell 2003). The local, regional and transnational levels of government are from this perspective given opportunities of becoming more self-sufficient agents, threatening and transforming – but certainly not eliminating – the hitherto dominant position of the nation-state (Smith 2001). Thereby, changes in the organization of political practices – here delimited mainly to policy making and policy implementation – can be identified. Rather than succumbing to formal rules applied in easily discernible sectors, policy making and policy implementation are increasingly portrayed as a muddy affair; a set of social practices enacted by a number of different agents, including not only politicians and civil servants from a number of different policy fields, but also professionals and business people (Beck 1994; Halonen 2005). This paper presents a research project, which aims to explore these potential geographical and discursive shifts in cultural policy. The originality of the project lies mainly in the fact that while there is a growing body of critically informed research on national cultural policies, there is a more urgent need for further developing research on regional and local cultural policies.

The project, which is financed by the Swedish Arts Council, consists in a comparative study of cultural policy in Region Västra Götaland and Region Skåne, two results of experiments with regionalization that since the 1990s have been carried out in Sweden (Johannisson & Trépagny 2006; Trépagny 2003). Four cultural activities in four different municipalities – two in each region – constitute the case studies of the project, which will include policy documents and interviews with key policy agents. The overall research question is directed at regional identity construction, while the more operative research questions are directed at identifying and analyzing alliances and conflicts between different levels of government in the cultural policy field, as well as between cultural policy and other policy fields. Since the project runs from 2007 to 2009, the paper is highly tentative in character and based on the project's research design rather than on presenting results. Before introducing this design in more detail, I will outline its theoretical points of departure. The paper is concluded with a discussion of important points of analysis identified so far and on a general level, including some remarks on the particular difficulties of comparative research.

### **A Sense of Place? Democracy, Geography and Cultural Policy**

The research project described here partly emanates and builds on findings made in relation to the study presented in my doctoral thesis (Johannisson 2006). The latter explored the use of different cultural policy discourses in cultural policy (re)construction in the City of Göteborg, Sweden, during the 1990s. Theoretically, I thus strived to make a contribution to the growing body of cultural policy research informed – in very different ways – by discourse theory (cf., e.g., Bennett 1998, 2003; McGuigan 1996, 2004; Miller & Yúdice 2002; Volkerling 1996). Using a neo-pragmatist, discourse-oriented approach inspired mainly by the works of Richard Rorty (1979, 2000), Michel Foucault (1991, 1994) and Frank Fischer (2003), I studied statements<sup>1</sup> put forward in documents and interviews in relation to the shaping of both new visions for and a new organization of the municipality's cultural policy. The statements were produced mainly by agents at the local level of government, but statements by agents on the national and international levels were also included.<sup>2</sup> The discourses used in this process of (re)construction were identified by relating the statements by cultural policy agents to statements put forward in research-based literature on cultural policy or closely related areas. Policy making was thus understood as defined by Fischer, namely as:

... a constant discursive struggle over the definitions of problems, the boundaries of categories used to describe them, the criteria for their classification and assessment, and the meanings of ideals that guide particular actions. (Fischer 2003, p. 60)

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<sup>1</sup> "Statement" is henceforth defined as a linguistic utterance that makes claim on having some authoritative force, in the Foucauldian sense of being classified as "in the true" (Mills 1997, p. 61).

<sup>2</sup> As a whole, the empirical material consisted of cultural policy statements put forward by agents in the political-administrative organization in Göteborg and on other levels of government during the period 1991-1998. The agents included were primarily of the institutional kind and were mainly situated in Göteborg: the municipal council, the municipal executive board, the cultural affairs committee, the 21 city district committees, and adherent administrations. In addition, institutional agents on the national level were represented by the Swedish parliament, the Swedish government and the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs, but also by the committees responsible for Swedish Government Official Reports. Finally, institutional agents on the international level were included in the form of reports by Unesco, the European Union and the Council of Europe. In total, 117 public documents were analysed and six interviews with key cultural politicians and administrators in the City of Göteborg were conducted.

The analysis resulted in the identification of three cultural policy discourses, summarized in the chart below.

	<b>THE QUALITY DISCOURSE</b>	<b>THE WELFARE DISCOURSE</b>	<b>THE ALLIANCE DISCOURSE</b>
<b>Aim</b>	Professional, artistic quality	Broaden participation in cultural activities and create a good living environment	Sustainable development (financially and living environment)
<b>Concept of culture</b>	Aesthetic	Anthropological (group-oriented) and aesthetic	Anthropological (individual-oriented) and aesthetic
<b>Concept of place/space</b>	Artistic, universal space	National space	Glocal places
<b>Rationale</b>	Humanistic	Sociological	Market-oriented
<b>Model of governance</b>	Profession-oriented patron model	Legal-bureaucratic architect model	Network-oriented architect- and patron model

*Chart 1:* Summary of the discourses used by institutional agents in the cultural policy (re)construction process in Göteborg 1991-1998 (Johannisson 2006, p. 239).

While strongly emphasizing that discourses cannot be separated from the specific articulations – in this case statements in the cultural policy (re)construction process in Göteborg – which articulate the discourses, I still regard them as useful tools of analysis also in relation to the study of regional cultural policy presented here. The discourses should be considered a working tool in the project, and its deployment could and should result in modifications of the discourses described above. My main point is that since the discourses also include research-based literature which is simultaneously based on cultural policy in practice and quite influential in cultural policy development in Sweden and elsewhere, they are possible to use in the study of cultural policy in other places and other processes than those of a specific Swedish municipality in the 1990s. In the following, I will therefore briefly introduce the three discourses, tuning in on their theoretical inspirations rather than their specific and empirical articulations in Göteborg.

### The Quality Discourse

To identify a discourse is to identify a specific set of rules according to which specific categorizations – distinctions – are made (cf. Bartelsen 1993, p. 62). When categorizing the sets of rules at play in Swedish local cultural policy, I am greatly indebted to the Danish cultural policy researcher Dorte Skot-Hansen. In a seminal article (Skot-Hansen 1999), she describes three main rationales that has guided Nordic – and, to a certain extent, also other West European – cultural policies since the 1930s. Skot-Hansen labels these the humanistic rationale, the sociological rationale and the instrumental rationale. The aim of cultural policy

within the humanistic rationale is to further the citizens' progress towards "Bildung" by subsidising professional artistic activities of high quality. The main instrument of cultural policy is to spread such artistic excellence to as many citizens as possible, that is, the role of the state is to "democratize Culture" with a capital C (Skot-Hansen 1999). The humanistic rationale, employed by Swedish government bodies especially in the formation of cultural policy between the 1930s and 1960s, is based on a sector-oriented and aesthetic concept of culture (cf. Vestheim 1997, p. 34, Vestheim 2001). It provides the quality discourse with its central moments, a discourse which transcends the specific places where cultural policies are enacted in favour of the specific quality criteria set up in an artistic, universal space. When related to the organization of public cultural policy agents, the quality discourse includes what the Swedish political scientist Bo Rothstein (2001) labels a profession-oriented model. This is a model where the professional interests in a specific policy field – in the case of cultural policy the artists and art mediators – are allowed a great deal of influence concerning what cultural policy should be and how it should be organized. In Sweden, and in the other Nordic countries, the level of corporatism in the cultural policy field is quite high (cf. Mangset 1995; Mangset et al. 2008). In the quality discourse, this profession-oriented model of governance is expressed in what Canadian cultural economists Harry Hillman Chartrand and Claire McCaughey (1989) have labelled a patron model. The patron model, often exemplified with British cultural policy, stipulates that there should be an "arm's length" between artistic activities and the state. I would therefore argue that the patron model is primarily an arts policy instrument, rather than a welfare policy instrument – the latter being a central moment of the welfare discourse which I will now turn to.

### The Welfare Discourse

The welfare discourse includes the sociological rationale, which Skot-Hansen (1999) presents as an important addition to – but certainly not a replacement of – the humanistic rationale in Nordic cultural policies from the 1970s and onwards. The aim of the sociological rationale when applied in cultural policy is to liberate the citizens, that is, to provide the citizens with possibilities to engage in cultural activities on their own terms, rather than being the recipients of professional artistic activities. The main policy instrument of the sociological rationale is, therefore, "cultural democracy", where democracy refers both to a broader, anthropological concept of culture, and to a potentially broader number of people allowed to engage in cultural and artistic activities. In the welfare discourse, the sociological rationale is applied in relation to groups rather than individuals – in Swedish cultural policy this is expressed in the priority given to what is considered marginalised groups, such as children, people with other ethnicities than the Swedish one, and people with physical or mental impairments. Due to its universalist welfare moment, the welfare discourse, like the quality discourse, tends to be rather placeless, relating instead to a national space and national cultural policy, that is, where welfare policy is mainly positioned in Sweden. The model of governance related to the welfare discourse is what Rothstein (2001) labels a legal-bureaucratic one, that is, a model based on the traditional Weberian notion of a strict division between decision-making politicians and neutral, implementing civil servants. Cultural policy is in this model a policy field among others, the utmost aim of which is to contribute to the overall welfare of the citizens. This model presupposes a strong state, which doesn't always keep an arm's length in its interventions in the cultural field, but rather plays the role of the architect pointed out by Hillman Chartrand and McCaughey (1989). The Nordic countries are often given as examples of the architect model (cf. Vestheim 1995), even though they have also, by Mangset et al. (2008, p. 2), been portrayed as a combination of "the French Ministry of Culture model and the British 'arm's length' model".

## The Alliance Discourse

In opposition to the rather placeless character of both the quality discourse and the welfare discourse, place is a central moment in the alliance discourse. In the alliance discourse, the inherent instrumentalism of all political practices – including cultural policy – becomes an overt tool in furthering the aim of sustainable development, both in a narrow economic sense and in a broader sense, alluding to the general living environment of the citizens. The alliance discourse doesn't hide the “double technique” that Swedish cultural policy has made use of since its formal establishment in the 1970s, that is, to simultaneously claim the autonomy of the arts in relation to the political-administrative organization and the positive role of culture in local, regional and national development. It is based on the rationale that Skot-Hansen (1999) labels instrumentalist, thereby illustrating the turn that Swedish and Nordic cultural policies took in the 1980s towards market-oriented arguments for public intervention in the cultural field. In order to illustrate the fact that all cultural policy is instrumental (cf. Franzén 2002), in the sense that in all cases cultural policy is about promoting culture in order to reach objectives beyond culture itself – whether the objective be that of facilitating the citizens' access to culture, promoting freedom of speech, or urban regeneration – I label the rationale at play in the alliance discourse “market-oriented” rather than merely instrumentalist. It is this obvious (re)turn of cultural policy to the market's way of working that is specific for the use made of culture in the alliance discourse. Like the welfare discourse, the alliance discourse is tied up to an anthropological concept of culture, but in the alliance discourse this concept is directed at the individual rather than at groups. Cultural policy is about facilitating the fulfilment of individual preferences and lifestyles in a global setting where everything has become “culturalized” (Skot-Hansen 1999), not about helping marginalized groups to take part in a predetermined range of activities. And in order to further individual lifestyles, cultural policy has to start off from what makes a specific place unique regarding cultural resources.

As the label indicates, the alliance discourse is about creating and using the networks that policymaking is in this discourse based on (cf. Rothstein 2001); networks that transcend both the political-administrative organization and professional bodies and extend to all agents involved in shaping a place. Traditional distinctions and borders – between public interests and market interests, between professional and non-professional activities and between high and low culture – are contested and give way to partly new power hierarchies. In my study of cultural policy (re)construction in Göteborg, the empirical political practices that the quality discourse is used to underpin is arts policy while cultural policy is mainly based in the welfare discourse. The alliance discourse is in Göteborg used when promoting new perspectives in cultural policy, for example, in the shape of what has come to be known as cultural planning (cf., e.g., Bianchini 1993). The alliance discourse thus puts place into cultural policy, both as a commodity to be sold on a global market, and as an aesthetic and cultural artefact to be shaped, reproduced and transformed by those who live there (cf. Stevenson 2004, p. 122). In my study of Göteborg, the place was a city; in the project presented here, the place is the region. In both cases, a city or a region is not understood as something given or static, but something that is continuously shaped, reproduced and transformed in social interaction between a wide range of different agents. As British political scientist Louise Fawcett (2005, p. 24) puts it: “a simple territorial definition might not take us very far – we need to refine regions to incorporate commonality, interaction and the possibility of cooperation”. I find her definition of region as “units or ‘zones’ based on groups, states or territories, whose members share some identifiable traits” (ibid., cf. also Massey 1994, 1999) a useful starting point for

exploring regional cultural policy in Sweden. I'm interested in exploring how regions are created as "zones" through statements given by cultural policy agents.

## **The Geography of Swedish Cultural Policy: Research Design**

The aim of the research project described here is to provide research-based knowledge about the potential geographical and discursive shifts in cultural policy against the backdrop of globalization processes, by a comparative study of two Swedish regions, including four cultural activities in four municipalities. The research questions are directed at regional identity construction and at identifying conflicts and alliances between cultural policy on different levels of government. More specifically, the project will explore both cultural policy strategies on different levels, and their implementation through specific measures. "Strategy" is henceforth defined as the aims decided upon for cultural policy in the narrow sense, that is, as "public measures in the cultural field",<sup>3</sup> but it also encompasses the connections between cultural policy aims and aims in other policy fields, such as regional or industrial policy. "Measure" henceforth refers to the specific (formal) agreements and activities which are the result of the implemented strategy. The project is based on a document study on the one hand, and an interview study on the other. The document study mainly concerns formal cultural policy documents produced and decided upon in the political-administrative organization at hand, including budgets. They consist of instructions for comprehensive cultural policy strategies, as well as guidelines for the specific activities selected for the study. The interview study includes the political chairs of the boards of culture and development in the regions and in the municipalities, as well as the administrators who are in charge of implementing the strategy at hand, and the leaders of the chosen activities. In addition, representatives of the national Swedish Arts Council,<sup>4</sup> and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)<sup>5</sup> will be interviewed. In total, almost 20 people will be interviewed.<sup>6</sup>

### **New Places, Old Stories? Region Västra Götaland and Region Skåne**

The regions chosen for the study – Region Västra Götaland and Region Skåne – are not chosen for being representative of how regional cultural policy in Sweden is organized, but for being examples of current experiments with how regional (cultural) policy could be designed in the future. Both regions are the result of a political process that was formally

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<sup>3</sup> In Sweden, cultural policy in this sense is said to consist in the fulfilment of the following criteria: "goals, methods, routines for evaluation, responsible political and administrative bodies, and financial resources" (Swedish Council for Cultural Affairs 1997, p. 7, my translation). This definition is well in accordance with the criteria given by the Council of Europe (1997, p. 33): "We define cultural policy as the overall framework of public measures in the cultural field. They may be taken by national governments and regional and local authorities, or their agencies. A policy requires explicitly defined goals. In order to realise these goals, there need to be mechanisms to enable planning, implementation and evaluation".

<sup>4</sup> The Swedish Arts Council is a government authority whose principle task is to implement national cultural policy determined by the Swedish parliament. Its responsibilities are:

- "The allocation of state cultural funding to theatre, dance, music, literature, arts periodicals and public libraries, and to the fine arts, museums and exhibitions.
- Providing the Swedish government with the basic data it needs to make cultural policy decisions, by evaluating state spending in the cultural sphere, etc.
- Providing information about culture and cultural policy" (Swedish Arts Council 2008).

Recently, the Arts Council made an interesting discursive shift – from the welfare discourse to the quality discourse – when it abandoned its previous title: The Swedish Council for Cultural Affairs.

<sup>5</sup> SALAR represents the governmental, professional and employer related interests of Sweden's municipalities, county councils and regions (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions 2008).

<sup>6</sup> As of May 2008, the document study is nearly completed. Interviews in one of four municipalities have been conducted and the rest of the interviews will take place in the autumn of 2008.

initiated with the appointment of a national, parliamentary committee on regional affairs in 1992 (cf. Johannisson 2006, p. 104ff.). In the instructions to the Committee (Dir. 1992:86), given by a conservative government, it was argued that the existing division of responsibility between different levels of government in Sweden was not working efficiently, neither from a democratic nor financial viewpoint. From the national government perspective, especially the regional government level in Sweden, which was at the time divided into 24 geographically based administrative units – the county councils – was not considered to function properly. The increasing internationalization of the Swedish political-administrative organization was pinpointed as an important reason for a readjustment towards the formation of regions better suited to further the aim of “sustainable development”. This aim is clearly formulated within the framework of New Public Management (NPM), where the border between public and private interests and organization is blurred and cost-efficiency is a dominant theme.

In the final report given by the Committee on Regional Affairs in 1995, culture is not a dominant theme, although the role of culture in supporting sustainable development is highlighted: “a rich cultural life strongly endorses an improvement of the citizens’ quality of life, furthers their creativity and thereby fills an important function in identity construction” (SOU 1995:27, p. 341, my translation). But, the Committee argues, this role can never replace the fact that “culture also has an independent value” (ibid., p. 342, my translation). The Committee hereby provides an evident example of the double technique introduced above, where all discourses – the quality discourse, the welfare discourse and the alliance discourse – are put to use. But it is also evident from the report that the Committee doesn’t consider cultural policy a key instrument within a predominantly market-oriented welfare policy which primarily aims at creating financially sustainable regions.

The government bills, issued by a Social Democratic government as follow-ups to the committee report, lead to decisions in the Swedish parliament on the formation of four new regions on a trial basis. Region Skåne was formally established in 1997 and Region Västra Götaland in 1999, and they are the only regional experiments still active today. There are both important similarities and differences between the two regional experiments. The main responsibility of both regions is, as was the case with the former county councils, to coordinate public healthcare in the 33 municipalities (1,17 million inhabitants) of Region Skåne and the 49 municipalities (1,5 million inhabitants) of Region Västra Götaland. In 2008, the total budget of Region Skåne is 2,9 billion EURO, and the total budget of Region Västra Götaland is 3,9 billion EURO. The two regions share an organizational model, where the publically elected county councils have been conglomerated into a new publically elected regional parliament, which have been granted authority over certain regional development issues by the national government. In the cultural policy field, however, Region Skåne has also been granted authority to allot national government funds to regional cultural institutions (SFS 1996:1414, § 2), while Region Västra Götaland is working together with the national Swedish Arts Council in allocating the corresponding funds to its regional institutions. In addition, Region Skåne has the strategic responsibility for cultural policy in the region, including the operative responsibility for the regional cultural institutions. Region Västra Götaland has instead chosen a model where the regional board of cultural affairs commissions cultural activities from the institutions at hand (Johansson 2004). The two regions thus constitute examples of what cultural policy researcher Nobuko Kawashima (1997) labels political decentralization, that is, the transfer over political decision making from the national to the regional level. In the cases of Region Skåne and Region Västra Götaland, political decentralization also implies what Kawashima labels economic decentralization. Finally, while Region Skåne is a formal, administrative region based on a supposedly identifiable and

homogeneous cultural region, Region Västra Götaland, while also being a formal region, is considered a more heterogeneous entity and the result of regionalisation rather than regionalism (cf. Malmström 1998, p. 50ff; Trépagny 2003, p. 68f.; Törnqvist 1998, p. 60). As a result of the latest decision in the Swedish parliament, both regions will continue on a trial basis until 2010.

Even though they are formally conducting their activities on a trial basis, both regions should be considered as established agents in the Swedish political-administrative organization. This includes their strategies and measures in the cultural policy field. Both regions have regional parliamentary decisions on comprehensive cultural policy strategies. Region Skåne adopted their cultural policy strategy in 2003, when the majority in the regional council was held by the Social Democratic Party. Region Västra Götaland adopted their strategy in 2005, in a council run by a minority coalition between representatives of the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Party and the Centre Party. A preliminary analysis of the documents shows, perhaps not surprisingly, that in both regions, cultural policy is a matter of combining different discourses. While both documents argue that the arts and culture have value in themselves, they should also be used in furthering sustainable development in the regions, both financially and socially. That culture can and should be used in order to further regional development is even more evident in the strategies for regional development that constitute the primary objective of both regions (Region Skåne 2004; Västra Götaland 2005). Due to the close relation between cultural policy and regional policy stipulated in both regions, interviews with representatives of the regions will not only include the political chairs of the regional boards of culture, but also the chairs of the regional boards of development. In a similar manner, interviews with administrators in charge will include both administrators in the cultural policy field and the regional development field.

As experiments with the Swedish political-administrative organization, Region Skåne and Region Västra Götaland are interesting to study in themselves, as examples of new and alternative ways of working with cultural policy at the regional level – even though the new moments at present seem to concern the organization of cultural policy rather than its aims. In the research project outlined here, the regions will thus be studied as a new addition to the agents that shape, reproduce and transform the distinctions and hierarchies that constitute cultural policy; that is, as an addition to the agents that Michael Volkerling (1996) has labelled the “difference-engines” of cultural policy. Thus, the regions are not only interesting to study as formal agents in the political-administrative organization, but also as tools in the governance of regional identity in a more discursive sense. In the following, I will briefly introduce the four municipalities and activities chosen for the research project, where one important research question concerns how the municipalities relate to this new form of regional governance.

#### Filling the Region with Meaning: The Cases of Four Cultural Activities in Four Municipalities

Swedish political scientist Jörgen Johansson, who has done a lot of research on democratic aspects of Region Skåne and Region Västra Götaland, argues that an evident discursive shift has occurred concerning the ways in which the two regions present themselves as political agents (Johansson 2004, p. 22). When the regions were established in the 1990s, the rationale applied when arguing for the necessity of a new regional organization was clearly related to the European Union and the notion of “A Europe of Regions”. In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, focus lies instead on the relation between regions and the municipalities they encompass, and how regions can best serve the interests of the local communities they’re set to co-ordinate. Regardless of this discursive shift, it is of course interesting to note that the

national level is not related to, even though it implicitly is an active agent, portrayed either as an obstacle or vehicle in the furthering of regional interests. It is in order to illuminate these shifts in relations between government on local, regional, national and international levels that four municipalities – two in Region Skåne and two in Region Västra Götaland – have been chosen as case studies. Furthermore, these case studies focus on four cultural activities in the municipalities, since I not only seek to create an understanding of cultural policy at the comprehensive, strategic level of the municipalities, but also to develop knowledge on the relation between strategies and measures in the cultural policy field. In addition, I want to highlight the relation between centre and periphery, and therefore the two largest cities in each region have been chosen, together with two small municipalities who at least on the surface represent the periphery in relation to the two cities.

The two larger cities are the City of Malmö in Region Skåne and the City of Göteborg in Region Västra Götaland. Malmö is Sweden's third largest city of about 280,000 inhabitants, and Göteborg is Sweden's second largest city of about 470,000 inhabitants. Malmö and Göteborg should be considered the hubs of the functional regions where they're positioned, which is not least evident in the cultural policy field. Both cities are run by a majority of the Social Democratic Party. Together with the Swedish capital of Stockholm, the cities display highly specific organizations in the cultural policy field, and are therefore difficult to compare; both with each other but of course even less with the rest of the 287 Swedish municipalities. Even though they express different organizations, the strategic cultural policy documents of Malmö (City of Malmö 2005) and Göteborg (City of Göteborg 1998) share many traits. In particular, they are both evident examples of "the double technique" put to use: the quality discourse, the welfare discourse and the alliance discourse are all articulated in both documents. Cultural policy should, according to the documents, promote artistic quality, the Bildung of citizens, quality of life and sustainable development. As I have shown in my study of the City of Göteborg (Johannisson 2006), conflicts in the cultural policy field are seldom expressed in the strategic visions, but in the organizations that are set to implement these visions. In the case of Göteborg, both the regional and national levels are considered as threats to the city's preferential right of interpretation as to how the city's cultural policy should be organized. It remains to be seen how the City of Malmö relates to other levels of government, but preliminary results show similar traits to that of Göteborg.

In order to explore this point of analysis further, and in order to increase the possibility of fruitful comparisons between the two cities, the activities chosen in the case studies are the opera houses situated in Malmö and Göteborg. They have been chosen since they both started off as prestigious municipal institutions, but have recently been transferred to the Region Skåne and Region Västra Götaland who are now the main owners of the two opera houses, both organized as limited companies. When they were owned by the municipalities, the opera houses were used as instruments in positioning local cultural policy on a national map. When having been transferred to regional ownership, they are rather positioned on a regional map, relating to the regional level and the municipalities the regions encompass. Therefore, the opera houses provide two interesting examples of highly concrete power shifts between different government levels in the cultural policy field, with a potential to illustrate both conflicts and new alliances between cultural policy agents. Interestingly, the Malmö Opera presents itself as "the opera house of Southern Sweden, centrally positioned in the Øresund Region" (Malmö Opera 2008), thereby aligning itself with yet another new player in the cultural policy field. The Øresund Region, presenting itself as "the human capital of Scandinavia" (Øresund Region 2008), is a semi-formal organization representing

municipalities and regions on the Swedish and Danish sides of the Øresund.<sup>7</sup> The strategy of the Øresund Region is decided upon in the Øresund Committee, a forum consisting of political representatives of the municipalities and regions who are members of the organization. The Øresund Region has, of course, a long historical tradition, bearing on the fact that Skåne was Danish until 1658. According to the region's homepage, conditions for a new close relationship between the Danish and Swedish side weren't created until the 1980s, when the bridge over Øresund, which opened in 2000, was decided upon. Today, "power struggles of the past have been replaced by regional cooperation and increasing integration across national borders" (Øresund Region 2008). So, while the Malmö Opera is owned by the formal, administrative Region Skåne, it strategically relates to the more informal, transnational Øresund Region.

As has been noted before, the situation is different in Region Västra Götaland. Even though the Region Västra Götaland also presents itself as a region with a common cultural history ranging thousands of years back (Västra Götalandsregionen 2008), it isn't based in the same kind of informal region as Region Skåne. This informal base is rather found in the four regional associations of the municipalities comprised in Region Västra Götaland. And, perhaps accordingly, GöteborgsOperan presents itself as an institution positioned in the latter, formal region: "our assignment from our main owner Region Västra Götaland is to give all citizens of the region access to opera, dance and musicals of top quality" (GöteborgsOperan 2008, my translation). While displaying important similarities regarding line of activity, organization and funding, Malmö Opera and GöteborgsOperan also express potentially decisive differences when legitimizing their existence.

The two smaller municipalities chosen for the project is Vellinge in Region Skåne and Mellerud in Region Västra Götaland. The smaller municipalities are not chosen for being similar to each other; on the contrary, the differences between the municipalities by far overshadow their likeness. The point of comparison between the two focus on the fact that they are small municipalities, but have both succeeded in receiving funding from the European Union's regional programmes (Interreg IIIA). They are included in the project to illuminate the relations between local cultural policy and international policy agents (cf. Mitchell 2003), as a way of further exploring the relations between the local, regional, national and international levels of government. In addition, the activities chosen are run on a project-basis and relate mainly to the alliance discourse, as opposed to the institution-based opera houses of Malmö and Göteborg who relate mainly to the quality discourse.

The municipality of Vellinge has 33,000 inhabitants, of which approximately 8,900 live in the village of Vellinge, and is situated on the southwest point of Region Skåne, just south of Malmö. In a Swedish context, it stands out as one of the municipalities longest run by a conservative majority. The municipality is financially well-off, and takes pride in being ranked as one of the most enterprise-friendly municipalities in Sweden by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Vellinge 2008). Mellerud is situated in the northern part of Region Västra Götaland – 120 km from Göteborg and 230 km from Oslo, Norway – and it has 9,600 inhabitants, of which approximately 3,800 live in the village of Mellerud. Financially, it is struggling against depopulation and it is still ranked as one of the weaker municipalities in the Region Västra Götaland, even though it's displaying a positive trend (Kommunforskning i Västsverige 2007). Both municipalities have decided on cultural policy strategies in their

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<sup>7</sup> The Øresund Region comprises Zealand, Lolland-Falster Møn and Bornholm in Denmark, and Skåne in Sweden. The total population of the region is 3,6 million (Øresund Region 2008).

municipal councils (Vellinge 2006; Mellerud 2005a). A similarity between the two documents is the evident closeness to the cultural activities at hand in the municipality, as opposed to the discursively more elaborate documents of Malmö and Göteborg. But while Vellinge’s document is clearly dominated by the alliance discourse, Mellerud applies the quality and welfare discourses in addition to the alliance discourse.

As noted above, Vellinge has been chosen for its participation in an EU-financed project, more specifically under the Interreg IIIA, Øresundsregionen. The project is called KNUT, which, in Swedish, is an abbreviation of “culture-driven enterprise development”. The project has 15 members from Denmark and Sweden, and in addition to funding from the EU, the project receives funding from Region Skåne. The aim of the project is “to create new means of income for both enterprise and artists” (KNUT 2008, my translation), by furthering increased co-operation between the two. Mellerud has been chosen for its participation in UNITON, a project financed by Interreg IIIA, Sweden and Norway. The project is based in municipal musical training programmes for children and young people, and it has 11 members from West Sweden and East Norway. The twofold aim of the project is to “make visible and develop the common culture of the region” and to “increase understanding, integration and better organized cooperation between students, educational trainers and leaders in municipal musical training” (Mellerud 2005b, my translation). While displaying evident differences concerning line of activity, the projects in Vellinge and Mellerud both link up to informal and transnational regions rather than to the formal and nation-based Region Skåne and Västra Götaland. Furthermore, the preliminary analysis shows that both projects position themselves in no relation whatsoever to the national government level. With that remark, I’ll move on to the conclusion.

### **Conclusion: Points of Analysis and the Difficulties of Comparative Research**

In the chart below, I attempt to summarize the agents and activities included in the project, and which relations they are thought to illuminate.

<b>Zone (Formal/Informal)</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Relations</b>
Municipality of Vellinge (Formal)	KNUT (Culture-driven enterprise development)	Local – International
Municipality of Mellerud (Formal)	UNITON (musical training for children and young people)	Local – International
Municipality of Malmö (Formal)	Malmö Opera	Local – National
Municipality of Göteborg (Formal)	GöteborgsOperan	Local – National
Region Skåne (Formal)	Malmö Opera	Regional – Local
Region Västra Götaland (Formal)	GöteborgsOperan	Regional – Local

Øresund Region (Semi-formal)		Regional – Regional
West Sweden – East Norway (Informal)		Regional – Regional

*Chart 2: Zones, activities and relations in the research project.*

Given the chart above, the important points of analysis in the project can thus far be identified as follows:

- How is regional identity shaped, reproduced and transformed by different agents and activities?
- How do formal, administrative regions relate to informal, functional regions?
- How and in what ways do new ways of relating to regional identity contribute to discursive and geographical shifts in the power allocation between different levels of government in the cultural policy field?

The point of the case studies summarized above is to increase the possibility to create a well-founded and nuanced understanding of regionalization in the Swedish cultural policy field. The drawback is, of course, that the relatively great number of cases enhances the risk of the project producing superficial knowledge on a wide range of agents and activities that are highly different in character. But, as Norwegian cultural policy researcher Per Mangset (1995) notes, perhaps it is more useful for comparative research to start off from differences rather than similarities. This approach also goes well together with my other starting point, namely that place makes a difference, that is, that the construction, reproduction and transformation of cultural policy cannot be separated from the specific conditions of the place where cultural policy is enacted.

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