

# Regional Effects of State Cultural Policy in Norway

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## **Abstract**

A few months ago a government appointed committee of social scientist (the Effect Committee) submitted a report on the regional effects of state policy in Norway. The report included studies of the regional effect of 19 sector policies. I was engaged by the committee to carry out a study on regional (and district) effects of state cultural policy. On the basis of this study and the report from the Effect Committee the paper discusses the regional effects of state policy in general with an emphasis on cultural policy. The main conclusion is that in state cultural policy there has become considerably less regional and district policy the last 10-15 years. This is also the case for practically all the sector policies examined by the Effect Commission. Regionalisation and a co-ordinated regionally based policy are the main prescriptions of the Effect Commission to alter the present situation. The paper discusses a possible decentralisation and regionalisation of state cultural policy. Severe doubts are expressed as to whether a planned decentralisation (and regionalisation) of Norwegian cultural policy will lead to any substantial changes within culture and cultural life.

## **Keywords**

Regions, districts, effects, state policy, geographical aspects, social aspects.

## **Introduction**

The question of regional and district development is presently on the political agenda in Norway. Two government appointed committees will this year (2004) present their reports on different aspects of the development, and give their advice to the government. The Effect Committee, a committee of experts (social scientists) whose main task was to study and clarify the effects of state efforts and regulations aimed at realising the political goals for regional development, has already submitted its report (January 2004). The District Commission, a broadly based committee of politicians, whose main task is to present specific proposals to strengthen or to change today's organisation of political measures in the district and the regional policy, will present its report to the government in September.

The basis for this paper is the report of the Effect Committee (NOU 2004:2). As part of their work this committee analysed the regional effects of state policy in 19 separate political areas. One of these fields was state cultural policy. I was engaged by the

committee to carry out a study of this. The main focus of this paper will therefore be on the regional and district effects of state cultural policy.

## Background of the Paper

Compared to most other countries in Europe Norway is very sparsely populated country. This is one of the reasons why there is an important distinction between the districts and the central areas of the country. Economic life in *the districts* is dominated by primary industries and by the municipal sector, and there is a narrow industrial structure. These areas are also characterised by a decline in population and by an ageing population. In *the central areas* there is an opposite situation: economic life is much less one-sided, modern growth industries are strong and there is favourable age-composition.

Norwegian regional and district policy has to be viewed against this background. Since the 1950ies it has been a goal for this policy to contribute to the maintenance of the basic structure of the population pattern and to equal standards of living throughout the country. At the same time it is an important goal that the regional policy also contributes to the development of a competitive, profitable and re-adjustable industry in all parts of the country and to a varied labour-market and a variety of housing and service supplies.

State regional policy is divided into two parts: The “*broad*” and the “*narrow*” regional policy. All parts of state policy have regional effects, and can therefore to a certain degree be looked upon as a regional policy. This is called the “*broad*” regional policy. The “*narrow*” regional policy is the additional effort that is made with a special view to the development of trade and industry and standards of living in the districts. This is called the “*district*” policy, and is mainly the responsibility of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

In 2000 the sum of state expenses within the “*narrow*” regional policy amounted to NOK 2.203 mill, while the total sum of the “*broad*” regional policy was NOK 28.800 mill. Of this the differentiated employers’ tax made up about NOK 7.000 mill<sup>1</sup> and support for agricultural purposes about NOK 10.000 mill. Various measures of cultural support within the “*broad*” regional policy amounted to NOK 564 mill. (NOU 2004:2, p.77).

There are great structural differences between centre and periphery in Norway. During the last 20 years the development has gone in the direction of a larger polarisation between the two. There has been a gradual retrenchment of the “*narrow*” district policy. Together with the reduction in state support measures for industry, agriculture and fisheries the total resources for regional (industrial) development have been heavily cut down the last years (Berg og Borch 2004). The Effect Committee, which made analyses of state sector policies for nearly 20 sectors, concludes that “for practically all the sector policies we have examined, we see that there has become *less* regional and district policy over time”. The committee also observes that only a few of the state sector policies today have *explicit regional goals* and that, mainly because of international regulations and new public management, there is continuously less regional policy within the sector policies. However, according to the committee, the government still has steering possibilities. The main question is whether there is a political *will* to make use of these possibilities.

The negative development in the districts of Norway is the direct background for the work of the two committees appointed by the government. The task of the experts of the Effect Committee was to analyse the effects of state regional policy in general and in 20 separate fields (including cultural policy). This committee submitted few

recommendations. But the experts came, however, not unexpectedly, out in favour of a new pattern of regionalisation in Norway; i.e. a reduction in the number of county municipalities and the establishment of larger formal regions. The committee suggests that some of the regional political measures that today are managed by the state, should be transferred to new and larger regional authorities. Such a decentralisation (or regionalisation) would make it possible to ensure a more effective and targeted regional and district policy.

The future pattern of political, functional and geographical organisation of Norwegian regions is a vital question in today's political debate. It is expected that the District Commission will present, maybe suggest, concrete models for the future organisation of the regions in Norway. This is in accordance with the mandate of the commission, which, among other things, is to present specific proposals to strengthen or to change today's organisation of political measures in the district and regional policy. It would be no surprise if the commission comes out, unanimously maybe, in favour of decentralisation and (new) regionalisation.<sup>2</sup>

The District Commission was appointed in February 2003. This committee is to make a complete study of today's district and regional policy, i.e. both the "broad" and the "narrow" state regional policy, that is of importance for the population pattern in the districts and for general regional development. Most of the members of this committee are politicians. The report commission is (partly) to be based on the results and findings of the Effect Committee.

It is well known that the regional profile of different state policy sectors varies. The Effect Committee selected 19 political areas (sectors) that in the opinion of the committee had a substantial effect on regional development and on the realisation of goals in the district policy. Cultural policy was one of the 19 areas of policy. Among the other areas were environmental policy, policy for higher education, labour market policy, research and development policy, industrial policy, health policy, agricultural policy etc. For most of the 19 areas the committee initiated specialist studies of the regional effects of state policy.

On this basis it is possible to make a comparison of the regional effects of state cultural policy and the regional effects of state policy in *other* fields. In this paper I will give a survey of and discuss the relation between state cultural policy and regional (cultural) development in Norway. I will also examine some other political field (higher education, research and development and general industry) and look after similarities with and differences from the cultural sector as regards state policy and regional effects. My hypothesis is that we over time will find a lot of similarities. And that regional cultural development cannot be explained solely as a result of cultural policy.

As far as I can see, cultural policy researchers, at any rate in the Nordic countries, have a tendency to focus on cultural, or rather arts', policy alone, when they are analysing and looking for explanations to the development within the field of culture and art. In most cases this is not satisfactory.

## **Regional and Social Effects of State Cultural Policy**

The regional dimension in Norwegian cultural policy has two aspects: A *geographical* one and a *social* one. The *geographical* aspect has much to do with the relationship between the Oslo-area and the rest of country. The *social* aspect is a question of the relationship between elite culture and popular culture. Sometimes, but not always, the two aspects come together: Elite culture is primarily found in the Oslo-area, popular (or

folk) culture in the rest of the country. In other connections elite culture is an urban culture related to the large cities, while popular (or folk) culture belongs to the districts and the countryside.

The two main lines in Norwegian cultural policy the last 30 years reflect the tensions between elite and popular culture. Mangset (1992) maintains that *one* main line marks the defence for and the distribution of the traditional elite (or “high”) culture, while the *other* line more strongly marks the socio-cultural aspects, i.e. the social, environmental and local parts of the cultural policy. The emphasis on each of these two lines has differed throughout the last 30-40 years. In the same way the degree of concrete connections between national (state) cultural policy and the cultural policy of the municipalities and county municipalities has differed. An emphasis on the socio-cultural aspects in the national cultural policy has brought about a rather close contact between the state cultural authorities and (especially) the regional level, while a more high cultural emphasis implies that professional art and arts’ institutions are the main topics on the agenda of the national cultural authorities.

### ***The geographical aspect***

In 1980 “the cultural sector” in Norway (widely defined as artistic activities, libraries, media, sports and entertainment) had about 11.000 employees, or 0.6 % of the total number of employed people. In 2001 the sector employed more than 34.000 people, or 1.5 % of the work force. (Bolkesjø 2003). 35 % of the employees lived in Oslo (the capital). This was approximately so also in 1990 (Arnestad 1993). The last years there has been a rather rapid growth in employment within this sector. There has also been a large increase in the number of private enterprises within the cultural sector – in Norway as in most other countries (Bolkesjø 2003, Ellmeier 2002). In 2002 26 % of the enterprises were located in Oslo. But we find 36 % of the newly established enterprises in Oslo. The establishment frequency for cultural enterprises in Oslo was 1.69 establishments per inhabitant, while it varied from 0.27 to 0.50 in the other county municipalities. In the group “independent artistic activity” the rate in Oslo was 1.31, while it varied between 0.13 and 0.31 elsewhere in Norway.

The number of members within the organisations for professional artists in Norway increased from 5.885 to 8.306 from 1980 to 1994 (Elstad og Røsvik Pedersen 1996). Today the number is probably more than 10.000 (Mangset 2002). About 50 % of the professional artists are living in the Oslo-area. As far as we can see, this has been so for the last 20 years. The rapid growth in the number of free-lance artists the last years may have increased the share of artists living in Oslo. The last years about 60 % of the prestigious state individual grants (scholarships) for artists have been allocated to artists living in the Oslo-area (Arnestad 2003, Møller 2002).

*Oslo on the one hand – and the rest of the country on the other* marks the most important regional dimension and regional difference in Norwegian culture and cultural life. It is a fact that we find a large part of the artists, the cultural employees and the cultural enterprises in and around the capital (just as we do in most other European countries). It is also a fact that complaints are frequently heard from other parts of Norway that too large a share of the state cultural budget and of other government cultural grants is distributed to cultural institutions, artists and cultural workers in the Oslo area. Arguments of this kind have been used in the Norwegian cultural debate for decades. To give one example: On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 artists in Trondheim (the third largest city in Norway) demonstrated against what they called “the centrally governed Norwegian cultural policy”. The local artists were “frustrated about low grants and

bureaucratic and detailed steering from Oslo” (cf. Arnestad 2003). There are a lot of parallel examples from other parts of the country.

If we look at the geographical distribution of the grants from the Ministry of Culture in the fields of visual arts, music and scenic arts, we find that more than 60 per cent of the support is allocated to institutions and projects in Oslo. The Oslo-percentage is extremely high in the field of visual arts, more than 80 per cent in 2003. On the other hand the Oslo-share is under 50 per cent in the music field; cf. table 1 below.

Table 1 *Grants – the budget of the Ministry of Culture 1994, 1998 and 2003 for three fields of art. Percentage Oslo.*

Field of art	Percentage Oslo 1994	Percentage Oslo 1998	Percentage Oslo 2003
Visual arts	72	71	83
Music	54	49	47
Scenic arts	67	65	65
<b>Sum</b>	<b>65</b> <b>(N = 929</b> <b>mill. NOK)</b>	<b>61</b> <b>(N = 1.310</b> <b>mill. NOK)</b>	<b>63</b> <b>(N = 1.466</b> <b>mill. NOK)</b>

Source: Arnestad 1999, 2004

In August 2003 the government presented a new and comprehensive report (white paper) to the Parliament on national cultural policy (“Cultural policy towards 2014”). The regional dimension or regional differences of national cultural policy were merely touched upon in the extensive report. From the Norwegian regions objections were soon made that this report did not manage to look beyond the centrally governed part of cultural policy administered by the Ministry of Culture. “A national cultural policy should be more concerned about the fact that cultural knowledge and competence is to be found all over the country”, the regional board of Western Norway said in its statement to the government report. When the report was discussed in Parliament in May 2004, a large majority stated that in the future planning of Norwegian cultural policy the idea of regionalisation should be more emphasised than it has been up to now. And the minority parties asked the government to give a *new* report to Parliament, where the role of the regions in Norwegian cultural policy should be more closely examined. As often before in Norwegian cultural policy, the Parliament proved to be more attentive than the government to the cultural demand of the regions.

### ***Use of cultural “facilities”***

Table 2 below shows the main features of the use of different cultural “facilities” in the 1990ies. This is well documented through surveys carried out by the Central Bureau of Statistics. The four last columns of the table show the difference between urban and rural areas in year 2000; the two last columns showing the difference between these areas among those who have visited professional cultural events in year 2000.

Table 2 *Percentage of people who made use of different cultural activities the last 12 months 1991-2001.*

	1991	1994	1997	2000	Urban areas 2000	Rural areas 2000	Prof. events urban	Prof. events rural
Cinema.....	58	61	60	65	76	52		
Sports events.....	57	59	54	57	54	53		
Public libraries.....	49	51	52	52	52	48		
Museums.....	41	45	44	45	52	38		
Theatre/musicals/revues...	44	45	44	50	55	44	83	51
Arts exhibitions.....	41	44	43	44	52	38	90	65
Concert - popular music ...	32	38	38	39	43	37	76	51
Concert - classical music...	27	34	37	37	39	38	71	40
Ballet/dance performances.	8	9	8	11	14	9	62	41
Opera/opera... ..	5	5	6	6	10	4	92	80

Source: Odd Frank Vaage: Norsk kulturbarometer 2000, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001

It appears from the table that there has been a slow growth in the use of most cultural facilities during the 1990ies, with the exception of sports events. We can also see that there still are large differences between urban and rural areas regarding use of most cultural facilities. In urban areas there is also a much larger use of professional artistic events. With the exception of opera the difference between urban and rural areas is 25-30 percentage points.

The Central Bureau of Statistics has more closely examined the use of culture facilities in the Oslo-area and in the rural areas of Norway (Vaage 2000). Vaage finds the same differences that we can see from the last four columns of table 2, but the differences are even larger. He also finds, for instance, that the citizens of Oslo go to the theatre to watch *drama* performances, while the *revue* is the most popular scenic event in rural areas. In Oslo people go to *classical* concerts, in the regions they listen to *amateur quire song* performances and folk music. The cultural inactive people of the capital are also less inactive than those living in rural areas. It is only in the field of sports that there are small differences as regards "cultural behaviour" of people in Oslo and in the regions. The differences are great in the case of "high" arts. But there are also, on the other hand, great cultural differences between different socio-economic groups within the Oslo-area.

The main conclusion is that there has been a small increase in the use of (visits to) most cultural facilities during the 1990ies. But the patterns of cultural consumption remain more or less the same. The differences in the use of the traditional cultural facilities are stable. In spite of the fact that cultural democratisation and decentralisation have been an important (rhetoric ?) goal in national cultural policy for three decades.

### ***The regional dimension in cultural policy***

In Norway, as in most other European countries, new ideas of cultural policy were implemented in practical policy in the 1970ies. The policy had a strong – and a necessary – socio-cultural emphasis. The "new" cultural policy should be administered within the scopes of an extended conception of culture, which (in Norway) also included



sports, leisure and youth activities, amateur culture etc. A new and offensive policy related to the artists was part of the new cultural policy, including for instance a guaranteed minimum income for a lot of artists. A new cultural support scheme was introduced to help the municipalities and county municipalities. To make use of this support they had, on their side, to establish popularly elected cultural bodies within the municipal structure. They were also encouraged to establish their own cultural bureaucracies (cultural administrations). New regional theatres and artists' centres were established in most regions of the country, a new support scheme for regional museums came into force and the state also contributed financially to arrangements in some regions with professional musicians (classically trained musicians).

The national cultural authorities were the motive power in the decentralisation of cultural policy in the 1970ies and early 1980ies. But "the timing" was good. The new cultural policy coincided in time with the large reform of the county municipalities in 1976. In few years the new-organised county municipalities built up publicly elected regional governments with their own cultural administrations under the political control of regionally elected politicians. At first the regional cultural boards and administrations were instruments for the national cultural authorities, but some of them rapidly developed into independent and vital actors in the general cultural policy of the country. We can say that the cultural administration of (at least some of) the county municipalities changed from being loyal implementation agents for state cultural policy into becoming independent actors for a regionalised, national cultural policy.

Besides, there was a general wave of regionalism in Norway in the 1970ies. Popular and folk culture became the norm, and the periphery and the outskirts were for a short period of time in the centre (Fossåskaret 2000). But the celebration of the regional and local aspects and its culture and cultural life, swings up and down. From the point of view of the state, the regions and what they stand for, has been looked upon both as a *resource* and as a *threat*.

It is correct to say that in the 1970ies the national cultural authorities (and most other national authorities as well) looked upon the regions as a *resource*. A close co-operation between state and region was necessary, and the realisation of the new democratic and decentralised cultural policy (based on an extended conception of culture) presupposed tight relations between the two levels of government.

From the middle of the 1980ies the engagement of the state in the regional cultural development was reduced. This had to do with the fact that within the national cultural policy the media policy played a more important role. But it also had to do with changes in the system of money transfer from the state to the regional and local level. The municipalities and county municipalities were also gradually given more freedom with how to organise their own activities.

Since the middle of the 1990ies it is correct to say that the state cultural authorities have lost more and more political interest in regional cultural development. The rise of the new, and partly culturally based, regionalism in several Norwegian regions the last few years has been met with silence from the Ministry of Culture. It is not at all mentioned in the last government report to Parliament on cultural policy. The Parliament, on the other hand, gives much attention to future regionalisation of culture policy. In the view of the Ministry the new regions in Norway has no role to play in cultural policy. The exclusion (omission) of the much debated new Norwegian regionalism from the government report is striking, though not unexpected. It is tempting to say that the Ministry of Culture now look upon the regions as a *threat*.

## ***Development trends in cultural policy***

The change in focus of national cultural policy can be traced through five observations:

One observation is that the last ten years there has been a gradual change in the focus of the national cultural policy from a slight socio-cultural to an obvious high cultural emphasis. This is not due to one single reason. The strong and continuous tendencies of centralisation within the arts' (and artists') field in one reason, together with the general centralisation of both public and private services. A more market-like behaviour and a more commercialised cultural and arts' sector, larger differentiation and a lot of new artistic project (instead of institutions) is another reason. There has also been a reorganisation of regional and local cultural administration, and a reduction in the cultural expenses of the local level (the municipalities) (see below).

A *second* observation, strengthening what is said above, is that it is hard to find any explicitly formulated goals with regard to regional and local cultural development in the cultural policy documents from the Ministry of Culture. In the annual budget-proposals from the ministry to Parliament the last years we can find no such goals – quite independent of the political colour of the Minister of Culture. The extensive report on cultural policy presented to Parliament in August 2003 (by a centre-conservative government) has little to add in that respect.

A *third* observation is that the activities of the Norwegian Arts Council (Arts Council Norway) the last years have got a more obvious high cultural profile. In the 1990ies the Council spread its activities to fields like “culture and health”, “culture and tourism” and “culture and industry”. Socio-cultural activities of this kind have now been terminated, and the Council concentrates its resources on more high cultural activities. This implies a reduction of the grants from the Council that are allocated to the regions outside Oslo. Per Mangset puts it like this: “The perspectives of the urban cultural elite have achieved a larger breakthrough” (within the Arts Council) (Mangset 2003).

A *fourth* observation is that the state cultural policy no longer has a direct intake to the local (municipal) cultural administration. Most of the earmarked transfers of money from the state to the municipalities in the cultural field are abolished. This has not been replaced by a close dialogue between the Ministry of Culture and the municipalities.

A *fifth* observation is that the county municipalities still play a role as a dialogue partner and implement national cultural policy in some few fields: i.e. the administration of state support for sports centres (sports installations) and of a state support scheme for local and regional cultural houses. This has been so for quite a long time (Vaagland 2002). In addition the county municipalities also have been trusted with the administration at the regional level of the state project “the cultural school-bag”, a project which is to give better possibilities for school children all over the country to take part in cultural activities and integrate cultural and artistic expressions in the public school.

## ***Regional profile: Profits from state lotteries***

It is a fact, however, that the state support for cultural houses and the school-bag project to an increasing degree is being financed through the profits from state lotteries and not over the general state budget. This is a result of the latest revision of the Act on Money Games (Arnestad 2003b). The profits are now divided between sports and cultural purposes. 2/3 of the money reserved for cultural purposes will be mixed with the general budget, while 1/3 is to be spent on explicit cultural purposes (culture and school projects (40 %), strengthening of voluntary activities among youth and children (30 %) and



investment and maintenance of local and regional cultural houses (30 %). Parliament stated that the extra money for these three purposes should not lead to any reduction in the “fixed” grants. But in the government budget for 2003 (and 2004) there was a reduction in the “fixed” grants for local and regional cultural houses and for voluntary activities for youth and children. The project based initiative for culture and school activities is on the other hand a fresh initiative.

One result of the revision of the Act on Money Games is that there will be an increase in the sum of state cultural money for some regional socio-cultural activities. This money is, however, *not* the result of an increase in government grants for such purposes, but a result of a change in the distribution of the profits from state organised lotteries. It is also a fact that the revision of the Act on Money Games was an initiative from Parliament. The government, and the Ministry of Culture, were reluctant to this revision. We can therefore *not* consider the increase in the sum placed at disposal for socio-cultural purposes as a change in the attitude of the national cultural authorities.

### ***Festivals: A regional phenomenon***

Let us finally mention the rapid growth of festivals in Norway – as in most other European countries. In the 1950ies there were about 3-400 festivals in Europe. It has been estimated that the number today is about 30.000 (Ericsson and Vaagland 2003). Most of the Norwegian festivals get some financial support from the public authorities – at national, regional or local level. The largest, and most prestigious, festivals receive most of their annual grants directly from the Ministry of Culture, while about 40 festivals are supported through a festival support scheme administered by Arts Council Norway. Only four of these festivals take place in Oslo. The growth of festivals is in Norway a distinct regional phenomenon. This is also reflected in the state support for festivals. More than 80 per cent of the total annual support (about 50 mill. NOK in 2003) is allocated to festivals outside Oslo; many of these also located outside the other large Norwegian cities. To build up and maintain annual cultural festivals requires a lot of voluntary work. It seems like it is difficult to mobilise this type of resources in the largest cities; especially in Oslo, the capital city of Norway.

### ***Public cultural expenditures***

The last 10-12 years there has been a rather striking change in the composition of the total public cultural expenditures in Norway (see table 3 below). In 1991 the share of the municipalities was 58 per cent, and the share of the state 34.5. The cultural expenses of the county municipality made up 7.5 per cent. This share has remained stable in the period 1991-2002. The share of the municipalities has, however, been reduced from 58 to 50 per cent, and the state's share of total public cultural expenditures has risen from 34.5 to 42.5 per cent. The share of the municipalities has never been so low (we have figures for the period 1968-2002). The state's share of the total public cultural expenditures has been rising since the middle of the 1980ies. We can therefore say that also financially the state is a more important actor in cultural life today than it was 10-15 years ago.

Table 3 *Distribution (percentage) of public net running expenses for cultural purposes – state, county municipalities and municipalities 1980-2002. Inclusive and exclusive of sports expenses for county municipalities and municipalities.*

	Total net running expenses, sports purposes <i>included</i>				Total net running expenses, sports purposes <i>not included</i>			
	State (Min.of Culture)	County municipalities	Municipalities	Total expenses (mill.NOK)	State (Min of Culture.)	County municipalities	Municipalities	Total expenses (mill.NOK)
1980	41,8	6,5	51,6	(1.665)	56,0	7,5	36,4	(1.244)
1983	39,9	6,7	53,5	(2.667)	53,4	7,9	38,7	(1.991)
1987	34,6	7,9	57,5	(4.053)	46,0	9,3	44,7	(3.052)
1990	38,9	8,4	52,7	(4.705)	49,4	9,8	40,8	(3.707)
1991	34,5	7,5	58,1	(5.292)	43,5	8,6	47,9	(4.194)
1994	39,2	7,1	53,7	(6.460)	47,3	8,1	44,5	(5.355)
1998	41,0	7,5	51,5	(7.918)	49,2	8,4	42,4	(6.608)
2001	42,9	7,8	49,3	(9.111)	49,7	8,5	41,8	(7.859)
2002	42,5	7,5	50,0	(10.007)	49,6	7,7	42,7	(8.578)

Sources: NOS Culture Statistics 1982, 1985, 1988, 1992 and 1996-2002. Government White Paper “Kultur i tiden” (1992). Oslo is *not* included in the municipality figures 1980-90. The figures for 1991-2002 *include* Oslo.

## Summary

*To sum up:* Cultural statistics show that during the last 20 years or so the distribution of artists, of other cultural workers and employees and of cultural enterprises between the Oslo-area and the rest of the country has been more or less unchanged. We find the same picture if we look upon the distribution of (individual) state grants for artists. Cultural statistics also show that there has been a remarkable stability with regard to the social and geographical patterns of cultural activities (use of cultural “facilities”) among the Norwegian population. Although there has been a slight increase in the total cultural activities, the differences between social and geographical groups remain much the same. This is not very surprising. But it is still a fact that during most of the period since the beginning of the 1970ies cultural decentralisation and democratisation has been one of the distinct goals of Norwegian state cultural policy. But this policy has not resulted in any profound changes in Norwegian cultural life.

Over the last years there has been a gradual change of focus in state cultural policy; from a socio-cultural to a (much) more expressed elite-cultural focus. There have been few opponents to this change, with the exception of some of the spokesman of a new Norwegian regionalism. The majority of those are outside the cultural sector. In the traditional high cultural fields likes scenic arts and visual arts 65-83 per cent of the government grants are allocated to the Oslo-area. We can also observe that there has been an increase in the state’s share of total public cultural expenditures and a decline in the share of the municipal sector. In some respects we are, as regards national cultural policy, back to where we were in the beginning of the 1970ies.

In some few respects there has been a new focus also on regional activities. This has mainly been due to a change in the allocation and in the key of distribution of the profits from state lotteries, outside the ordinary state budget. This reallocation has been disputed. An evident regional bias is to be found only in *one* field in state cultural policy: the distribution of state financial support to the increasing number of festivals in Norway.

Most of these festivals take place in the regions. The capital seems to lack the cultural entrepreneurs and voluntary cultural workers that are needed to initiate and organise viable cultural festivals.

The main conclusion is that in state cultural policy there has become less regional and district policy during the last 10-15 years. As mentioned above the Effect Committee concluded that this was the case for “practically all the (19) sector policies we have examined”. Let us therefore give a brief review of some of the other 18 sector policies.

## **Regional Effects of Other Sector Policies**

### ***Higher education***

There are four universities in Norway. In addition Norway has a system of 26 state-owned college universities. Four of these are located in the university cities, the other 22 are spread all over the country. During the period 1980-2000 there has been a large growth in this sector. The (college) university sector is probably the state sector that has experienced the largest growth of all state sectors over the last 20 years (NOU 2004:2, p.149).

The purpose of the considerable geographic distribution of higher education in Norway has been to even out the geographic differences in the recruitment to higher education and to make it easier for the regions to get a good supply of competent labour. “There is no doubt that this has been a success”, the Effect Committee concludes (ibid.)

The committee ascertains that the educational level has increased in all parts of the country. This has been of vital importance for as well industry as public service in the regions. The state policy for higher education has, through the growth of the state university colleges, had a large regional political effect (op. cit., p. 150).

But the committee points at the fact that most of the university students settle down in the central areas of Norway. In this way the growth in higher education may contribute to further centralisation, something which will especially hit districts without institutions for higher education and districts with few jobs requiring higher education.

A new reform in the Norwegian university sector (“the quality reform”) has given the institutions more freedom than before to establish new and close down existing studies. In this way the college universities may more easily adapt to changes in the regions where they are located. This may strengthen the position of the college universities in their regions, and make them more useful for the regional labour market and for regional trade and industry. The new system of financing the universities may, on the other hand, make it difficult for them to maintain studies that are marginal for the universities, but that may be important for regional trade and industry.

The main conclusion of the committee is quite clear: From a regional-political point of view the (state financed) system of regional higher education has been successful. This sector has also been a state budget winner the last years. The regions with a differentiated supply of higher education and at the same time a varied labour market are doing especially well in this field. This is true of regions with rather large or middle-large cities.

The last years there has, however, been a rather strong reduction in the number of young people who are interested in being students at the university colleges in the more marginal districts. On the other hand there has been an increase in the number of students at the universities in Oslo and Bergen and at the university colleges situated in the large and middle-large cities. To an increasing degree young students seem to prefer the urban universities to the university colleges in the periphery. It is a possible scenario that we will see a reduction in the number of university colleges (26) the next 10 years. In any case there will be no further decentralisation of Norwegian higher education.

### ***Industry and research and development (R & D)***

The empirical studies that have been carried out for the Effect Committee in this field, conclude that an r&d-oriented policy on trade and industry only to a little degree “hits” the enterprises in Norwegian districts (NOU 2004:2, p. 147). This is because the enterprises situated in the districts do not themselves invest much in r&d, partly because they are small, partly because they belong to industries that normally do not invest much in r&d, and partly because they are situated far away from large “r&d-heavy” enterprises and r&d institutions.

State policy directed towards trade and industry in the districts has the last years been characterised by experiments and re-organisations in the use of instruments. Generally there has been a reduction of the state financial means especially aimed at trade and industry in the districts.

The (industrial) r&d-policy has its impact area mostly in the Oslofjord district, along the coast down to Arendal and around the cities of Stavanger and Trondheim. There are no visible effects of this policy in northern Norway and in the inner parts of eastern Norway. In these and other regions of Norway there are different kinds of “intermediaries” (state officials) working to help the enterprises to establish contact with r&d institutions, but the effects of this have been small. An advice from the Effect Committee is that more state resources should be used to build better relations and networks between enterprises in the district and the large, “r&d-heavy” enterprises and the r&d institutions.

### ***Other relevant sectors***

*The municipal sector* is what the Effect Committee calls “a girder” (NOU 2004:2, p. 14) in the Norwegian welfare state and also the largest employer in most of the municipalities in the Norwegian districts. State policy towards the municipal sector is of great importance for regional development and for the realisation of district political goals. A lot of the political changes that have been made the last years have had negative consequences for the municipal finances, especially for municipalities in the districts. State policy towards the municipal sector is among the policy areas which has the largest regional effect. A further weakening of the financial position of the (rural) municipalities will therefore have strong negative effects.

Another important area, or rather instrument, has been the *differentiated employers’ tax*. A very accurate, unbureaucratic and important instrument as regards contributing to increased use of labour in enterprises in the districts, the Commission says. As we have already mentioned above, this instrument is abolished from 2004 (with an exception for the northernmost areas of Norway) following a decision by the EC court of justice. Large parts of this arrangement are therefore to be changed within three years. This change may have large negative regional effects. It is the opinion of the Committee that the new

schemes for regional support that will be worked out to compensate for the abolishment of the differentiated employers' tax, should be administered at the regional, and not at the state, level.

The Effect Committee also points at the fact that state *environmental policy* may have negative consequences for regional trade and industry. As regards the *public health sector*, the state recently took over the financial and political responsibility for all hospitals from the county municipalities. There is now a very strong focus on efficiency. This may lead to the close-down of a number of small and medium-sized hospitals in the districts. There is also some uncertainty attached to future state policy in the *agricultural field*. The strict regulation of Norwegian agriculture has resulted in low efficiency and low economic growth. Operating a district policy through agricultural support is expensive, but there are few alternatives to agricultural employment in many rural districts. The committee also emphasises the importance of better *transport and communication systems* in the regions, and that it is an obligation for the state to offer the regions an optimal infrastructure of *electronic communication*. This is something the market will not take care of.

As regards *cultural policy* the committee refers to my report and its conclusions. But the Committee adds that cultural policy includes more: "In the districts it is the state support for the newspapers and the common public room they create, that is of greatest importance".

Only a few of the sector policies today have explicit regional political *goals*, the committee says. But there are a large number of policy sectors that have a distinct regional or district *pattern* in their activities. It is the sum of all this that constitutes the regional policy of the state, i.e. the "*broad*" regional policy. The effects will be the best when the different sector policies are working together. A territorial co-ordination, where the different policy areas are seen in connection with each other in a regional context, is therefore needed. Besides, the committee advocates a strengthening of the "*narrow*" regional policy with its selected and more targeted (and effective) instruments.

## **State Cultural Policy and Future Regional Development**

It is quite clear that there has become less regional and district policy in the general cultural policy of the state. This is not very surprising, since this is the case for most state policy areas. We should also bear in mind that other sector policies are much more important to regional economic development than culture policy is.

In the cultural field it is a distinctive feature that we have, and have long had, quite strong tensions between the capital area and the rest of the country. The tensions have been increasing over the last years. And representatives of the cultural sector in most regions are quite sceptical to what they experience as a lack of understanding of legitimate regional cultural needs from the Ministry of Culture.

As mentioned above the attitude is a bit different in Parliament. The Parliament's committee on culture is for instance less "hostile" than the Ministry to the ideas of a cultural regionalisation. But the further development in the field of regionalisation is not in the hands of the cultural authorities. Other political areas will be (far) more decisive. Probably there will be a large public and a political debate on this issue when the District Commission submits its report to the Government in September 2004. The outcome of this is unknown. *One* result may be a decentralisation (through new regionalisation) of

state policy in some important fields. To a certain degree this will (probably) also include the cultural policy area.

*On the other hand:* Most representatives of the mainly state financed cultural institutions in the regions are sceptical to and rather strongly oppose a decentralisation of cultural policy. They do not fully rely upon regional politicians. One million kroner from the *state* today is worth more than expectations of two million *regional* kroner tomorrow (Arnestad 2003c). Among state financed regional institutions there is a fear that regional politicians will be too instrumental, too short-term and somewhat populist in their cultural policy. So there is no claim for cultural regionalisation and decentralisation from these institutions. This claim is heard from the non-institutional and slightly commercial regional cultural life.

Another question is to what degree cultural life, cultural behaviour, artistic performance etc. can be influenced or changed through cultural policy? Cultural policy of course influences the framework for cultural expressions. But will – or can – a more decentralised and regionalised cultural policy alone counteract the strong centralisation forces in society? Can such a policy do anything to change a rather well-established (geographic and social) hierarchy within the cultural and artistic world? Per Mangset maintained in 1992 that there are good reasons to doubt whether Norwegian cultural policy the last 20 years really has changed cultural life to any degree (Mangset 1992). In the period 1972-1992 there was no obvious increase in the cultural activities of the population, and the social and geographic pattern of cultural activities was rather stable. This has been so also for the last ten years. It's true that we have seen a new and large variety of cultural activities, most of these more or less commercially financed, but this growth on the supply side has not (yet) been followed by large, measurable changes on the demand side.

Mangset formulated it like this: "It is difficult to reach cultural policy goals through systematic cultural policy and planning because culture has a core of basic creativity that can hardly be subordinated to the instrumental ways of thinking within policy and bureaucracy" (Mangset 1992:265). I share this view. I therefore doubt whether a planned decentralisation (and regionalisation) of Norwegian cultural policy will lead to any substantial changes within culture and cultural life itself.

It's true that there are no formal obstacles that may hinder a decentralisation of cultural policy. It is merely a question of *political will*. The large cultural "imbalance" between the centre and the districts may be a good argument for changing the balance of power between the central and regional cultural authorities. But it does not necessarily follow that such a change will have profound effects on cultural life – neither in the centre nor in the districts.

In the few months that have passed since the report of the Effect Committee was published there has been some public debate on the question of decentralisation and regionalisation; also of cultural policy. Focus in the cultural field has, as could be expected, partly been on the question of the Oslo-region and the rest of the country, and partly on the new role of culture as a possible regional welfare good that may also be a fundament for the development of regional trade and industry and for regional economic development (Berg og Borch 2004, Fredriksen 2004). But if this is going to be realised, the critics say, a considerable redistribution of the state cultural budget in favour of the districts is called for.

But at present there are few indications that this will happen in the very near future. And we can safely say that such a redistribution will happen in other, and more important, policy sectors before any changes will be made in state cultural policy in this respect.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The differentiated employers' tax is abolished from 2004 (apart from the northernmost areas of Norway) as a result of a decision by the EU court of justice. New guidelines for regional support to compensate for this are at present being worked out by the government.
- <sup>2</sup> In the discussion of Norwegian regionalism today we can distinguish between "*modernisation regionalists*" and "*opponent regionalists*". Both the groups oppose the centre and the state. But the "modernisation regionalists" favour new and large regions, while the "opponent regionalists" want the present pattern of 19 county municipalities to continue (cf. Bukve 2003). The experts of "The Effect Committee" were mostly "modernists", while the majority of the politicians of "The District Commissions" probably are "opponents".

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