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PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE

BILDNING as a Central Concept in the Cultural Policy of the Swedish Government

From Arthur Engberg to Alice Bah Kuhnke

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ABSTRACT

This article explores *bildning* as a central concept in the development of the explicit cultural policy of the Swedish government. It takes its point of departure in how the concept of *bildning* was interpreted by Arthur Engberg, the minister responsible for cultural policy in the Social Democrat governments 1932–1939. In his interpretation *bildning* was linked both to upholding the high arts and the national culture and to the idea of re-invigorating these through cultural policy and education. The article continues by looking at the role and the interpretations of this concept in the later government reports and government bills aiming to cover the entirety of Swedish cultural policy, i.e. the government bills of 1974, 1996 and 2009, and the preceding reports. I suggest that the concept of *bildning* – and specifically Engberg’s interpretation of this concept – contributed to shaping the specific form taken by explicit cultural policy in Sweden under Engberg’s leadership, and that this approach has influenced later Swedish cultural policies, including the cultural policy bill of 1974. In more recent decades, more pluralistic approaches to cultural policy and *bildning* appear to have started to replace this path dependency in cultural policy, but the focus on established cultural institutions still remains. The reasoning in this article is based on the concept of path dependency, in the sense that historical decisions are considered to limit possible decisions later in history, thus steering history on a path, which may or may not be in line with the intentions of the original decision-makers.

Keywords

sweden, kulturpolitik, cultural policy, bildning, bildung, folkbildning, arthur engberg, path dependency.

The fundamental notions of cultural policy [«*kulturpolitik*»] are closely linked to those of politics in general. It is therefore possible to speak of democratic cultural policy. It is an expression of striving, in various ways, to enable the citizens to fulfill the demands placed on them by popular self-rule. [---] The idea of popular self-rule is free cooperation between independent personalities, who all for one and one for all have to carry the responsibility for the common good. The result of such cooperation ultimately depends on the individual himself, on his understanding, skill and readiness to sacrifice his own good for the common good. Popular rule and popular enlightenment [«*folkbildning*»] are thus inseparable.

[---]

It is not enough to safeguard for the citizens access to the acquisition of skills and insights. It is also a matter of creating general public participation in the spiritual treasures represented by enlightening [«*bildande*»] art, music, theatre and literature. [---] That which can neither be taught nor learned by repetition, that which we experience in art and religion, is also among the inalienable values which a democratic cultural policy has to care for (Engberg 1938/1945:129ff¹).

Like the corresponding terms in other Nordic languages, the Swedish term *kulturpolitik* can refer to both cultural policy and cultural politics. When Arthur Engberg, who was the minister responsible for education, church and cultural policy in the Social Democratic governments 1932–1939, used this term in the political pamphlet «Democratic Cultural Policy» (*Demokratisk kulturpolitik*), quoted above, he appears to have meant something broader than explicit cultural policy in the modern sense. Yet, the arts and cultural heritage both appear to have played central roles in his notion of *kulturpolitik* (cf. Klockar Linder 2014). While Engberg's views were often eclectic – and sometimes contradictory – (Blomqvist 2001, Vestheim 2014), the notion of *kulturpolitik* expressed in the pamphlet appears to have focused on the idea that such a policy ought to educate the population – or at least enable them to educate themselves – so that they would become citizens more fully. However, it did not stop there; Engberg's goals appear to have included personal growth in a more general sense, a cultivation of the personality. The term Engberg uses when referring to such enlightenment is *bildning*, a term which to him appears to have been almost synonymous with culture. It is also a concept that has remained central to Swedish cultural policy and civil society, especially when combined with a democratic ambition, a combination expressed in the term *folkbildning*, «*bildning* for the people».

In this article, I explore *bildning* as a central concept in the development of the cultural policy of the Swedish government, comparing Engberg's interpreta-

1. All quotes from Swedish sources have been translated by the author of this article. I take this opportunity to thank Veronika Possek for editing its language.

tion of the concept to later views on the purposes of cultural policy expressed in the Swedish national government context, in order to discuss how it has influenced later policies. I focus on explicit cultural policy at the national level in Sweden, thus placing this cultural policy – in a narrow sense – in the wider context of an ambition to accomplish a specific type of popular enlightenment, i.e. a cultural policy in the broader sense of a government policy intended to influence the culture of the people (cf. Ahearne 2009). This reasoning is based on the concept of path dependency, in the sense that decisions taken at formative moments in history (Lagergren 1999) are considered to limit possible decisions later in history, thus steering history on a path which may or may not be in line with the intentions of the original decision-makers (Greener 2005; Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2000, 2004).

I will start this article with a short comment on the origins of the concepts of *bildning* and *folkbildning*, and continue by describing their introduction in Swedish political culture. After this background, I will continue by discussing the role of these concepts during some of the more determining periods in the development of modern Swedish cultural policy, starting with Arthur Engberg, who was the minister responsible for culture, education and church policies in the Social Democratic government that took office in 1932 and which would (with the exception of a few months in 1936) stay in power until it was replaced by a wartime coalition in 1939. The Social Democratic Party (SAP) would continue hold the post of Prime Minister until 1976. Engberg became the main maker of cultural policy in Sweden during 1932–1939, the first seven years of nearly uninterrupted power for a party that would dominate Sweden for the remaining part of the century.² This is in other words a reasonable starting point for a study of possible path dependency in Swedish government policy, although it is also reasonable to take into account how the dominant ideas of that time had taken shape during previous years (cf. Lagergren 1999). The later parts of this article concern the continued development of national cultural policy in Sweden after World War II, focusing on the three government commissions and government bills which have, so far, aimed to cover the entirety of Swedish explicit cultural policy (the bills submitted in 1974, 1996 and 2009 and the government commissions preceding them). The article also tries to describe the general contexts of these reports and bills in terms of cultural policy and related policies on cultural activities within the organizations for *folkbildning*. The article ends with some remarks on recent developments, followed by concluding remarks. It largely builds on existing research, but also on a number of primary sources, including the pamphlet quoted above, as well as government bills and government commission reports on cultural policy and adult education in the *folkbildning* tradition.

2. The SAP had previously ruled in coalition with the Liberals 1917–1919 and alone in four governments 1920, 1921–1923, 1924–1925 and 1925–1926. 1932 can be seen as a point when the Swedish parliamentary system started to stabilize with SAP leading the government.

CENTRAL CONCEPTS AND BACKGROUND

In his now classic work *The Civilizing Process*, the German sociologist Norbert Elias (2000) described the central position of *Bildung* in what we may consider the implicit cultural policy of 18th and 19th century Germany. According to Elias, this was a country which to a much higher extent than France and England was characterized by class distinction in the relation between the aristocracy and the *bourgeoisie*. The culture of the German 18th century middle class was in many ways largely apolitical. Based in the trade cities and in the civil services of the multitude of German states, but largely excluded from political power, this class came to build its identity on claims to purely intellectual achievements. In the 19th century, German national identity was unified around the idea of a German *Kultur* formulated by the Romantics and often contrasted to French and English *Civilization*. The identity of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* developed around the universities and the humanities, rather than around business or politics. *Bildung* was a term used to describe an ideal of the cultured person, and of learning as a process transforming the person into a more cultivated being, a process that was expected to last a life-time of continuous cultivation of one's own personality. This concept is closely related to the Anglo-Saxon concepts of *liberal education*, but remains subtly different from the latter's ideal of «training good members of society» (Newman 1859/1999:1, 60, cf. Rotblatt 2006), both in terms of its aspect of being a life-long process of maturation and in terms of being less socially and politically inclined, even in theory.

While there were many differences between Swedish and German society in the 19th century, including a more egalitarian tradition in Sweden, it is no surprise that Swedish culture was under a strong influence from that of its increasingly powerful southern neighbors. In Sweden, *Bildung* was translated as *bildning*, but the meaning – in many of its interpretations – remained close its German counterpart. The main Swedish addition to the idea may have been its reinterpretation as *folkbildning*, *bildning* for – or of – the people. This adaption to the changing Swedish society can be interpreted as being inspired by and largely parallel to, but also subtly different from, the introduction of the concept of *folkeoplysning* in Denmark by N.F.S. Grundtvig and others (cf. Bjurström 2013, Gustavsson 1991, 2007, Vestlund 2010). In 19th century Sweden, the concepts of *bildning* and democracy became closely associated. Liberal reformists started «circles» for *bildning* in many Swedish cities, organizations intended to educate and enlighten the lower classes, preparing them for a more influential position in society (Lundgren 2003). At the beginning of the 20th century, groups related to all the major political movements were, in various ways, engaged in *folkbildning*. Especially well known is perhaps the work of the temperance movement and the labor movement (e.g. Sundgren 2007). On the conservative side of the political spectrum, the Young Church Movement (*Ungkyrkorörelsen*) organized a «crusade» of preachers and lecturers working to reinvigorate Christian and patriotic feelings in the population (Claesson 2004, Harding 2015, Tergel 1974). Other intellectuals, with various

political affiliations – from the conservative Valfrid Palmgren to socialists such as Oscar Olsson – were working to extend library services in order to increase access to learning throughout the population, often inspired by similar projects in English speaking countries (Sundgren 2007, Gustavsson 1991). The cultural climate of Sweden at the dawn of the 20th century could be seen as a struggle for the minds of the people, about the values and culture that would guide Sweden in the 20th century. This was a struggle in cultural politics, but far from limited to explicit cultural policy.

Of the popular movements active at that time, one has been the object of significantly more research than the others, most likely because it arguably became the most influential of them, the labor movement, which through the Social Democratic Party came to dominate so much of Swedish politics in the 20th century. In their explicit cultural policy, the first Social Democratic governments had to deal with organizations of primarily three origins. One group of organization where those created by the popular movements, in particular the labor movement, but also the free churches, the temperance movement and the various organizations of the farmers movement and the countryside. In terms of cultural policy, the study associations were the most important of these organizations – especially the ABF, the study association of the labor movement – but there were also others, such as the parks and community houses now included in *Folkets hus och parker* (e.g. Sundgren 2007). The second group where the institutionalized culture organizations already supported by the state and/or *bourgeois* civil society (often in combination), such as city theatres, regional museums, the Royal Theatres, the national museums and the Royal Academies (Duelund 2003, Harding 2009, Hillström 2006). Third, there was the Church of Sweden, the established national church, which for several hundred years had been the most important organization in Swedish implicit cultural policy (cf. Blücker 2000, Harding 2015).

It is worth noticing that all of these organizations had educational ambitions, often at their core. We have already discussed the strong association between *folkbildning* and democracy in the popular movements of the late 19th and early 20th century. The educational ambitions of *bourgeois* elite culture were often less pronounced, but far from non-existent. In the 19th century, the new and old cultural institutions developed into a *bourgeois* public sphere following the continental pattern (cf. Elias 2000, Habermas 1989, Duelund 2003). It appears clear that the dominant view of culture in this sphere in Sweden was not dissimilar to the German concept of *Bildung*, as described by Elias. While the idea of art for art's sake was likely as represented in Sweden as in, for example, Germany, the organizations of this public sphere did not lack educational ambitions. Museums were intended to display high art and historical objects for the benefit and education of the public (e.g. Hillström 2006), and the Swedish Academy's original mission was not only the production of good art, but the elevation of the very language that – in the view of many 19th century nationalists – was central to bind the nation together (Harding 2009). According to the statutes of the Swedish Academy, its objective was to «work

on the elevation, purity and strength of the Swedish language» (Svenska akademien 1786, 22§), mainly through the support of aesthetically developed literature. Common to these activities was the *Bildungsidee*, the idea of the cultivation and elevation of the personality – and, by extension, of the nation as a cultural community and metaphorical personality – through learning.

As for the Church of Sweden, teaching not only general doctrines, but also the Lutheran interpretation of the Bible, had been at the core of its mission since the Reformation. Biblical stories were living parts of popular imagination and in the early 20th century, the Swedish translation of the Bible still remained among the most widely spread books in the country. Popular school education in Sweden largely grew out of the educational efforts of the established Church. While schools had, at the beginning of the 20th century, already become a responsibility of the secular cities and municipalities, the Church still maintained its control over religious education in the now obligatory public school system (Bexell 2002, Ekström 2003). At the beginning of the period covered by this article, secular culture was often, in the tradition of the Enlightenment, presented as a challenge to the perceived hegemony of the established religion. Yet, it is not far-fetched to see a parallel between, on the one hand, the Lutheran focus on education and personal faith within the framework of an established church and, on the other hand, the concept of *folkbildning* as a focus for implicit and explicit secular cultural policy in 20th century Sweden.

THE CULTURAL POLICY OF ARTHUR ENGBERG

It was organizations of these three origin categories that faced Arthur Engberg when he became Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs, responsible for culture, education and church policies in the Social Democratic government that took office in 1932. To later generations, his political views tend to appear paradoxical; during his life he was a left-wing Social Democrat, a Marxist – or at least influenced by Marx – an anti-Semite, anti-clerical and an upholder of the state-church system (Blomqvist 2001, 2006, Claesson 2003, Ekström 2003). He is often considered to have moved from radical towards more moderate ideas throughout his life. His views on cultural policy have been described as based on a bourgeois high-art ideal, close to the ideals of Matthew Arnold, or to the French ideal of *l'art pour l'art*. Yet, his was a high-arts ideal that was not only focused on the creation of artistic excellence, but also on the education of the people. Engberg appears to have seen *bildning* and the aesthetic as realms from which the working classes had been previously excluded and to which they now had to gain access – for the benefit of both the people and the arts. This is an example of what has often been described as a neo-humanist perspective (Gustavsson 1991, 2007, Frenander 2010, Vestheim 2014), but it also has a strong connection to Romantic and nationalist ideas:

What can the simplest little painting in a poor home not mean for the shaping of the sense of style of those whose eyes have seen it since their earliest

years? It is not luxury or riches that rear love for the arts. It is the simple, yet fine and exclusive. For the arts to live and flourish, they have to be enveloped in the love of the people and the life of the people. As a parasite on the caste of the rich, they maintain an imperiled existence and are cut off from the power source represented by a commonly existing and schooled sense of style (Engberg 1921/1945: 27).

Access to high quality art was central to Engberg's view of culture; it was not just a matter of teaching people to appreciate art, but also of the effects that this access would have on the cultivation of their personalities, and of the effects this contact would have on the arts. The quote above is an example of how he contrasted an authentic appreciation for the arts with the superficial use of artistic products, which he associated with the *bourgeoisie*. Engberg was not only inspired by French and English aesthetic thinking, or by Marxist understandings of culture, but at least as much by German understandings of the crisis of culture and critique of modern civilization. Engberg appears to have viewed culture not merely as the superstructure of a class society, but as a vital part of the «physiognomy» of Western culture. His writings include numerous references to both Oswald Spengler and Friedrich Nietzsche. He appears to have shared Spengler's idea that Western culture was in a state of decadence or decline, and that this decline was evident in the arts, and in how people related to the arts (e.g. Engberg 1919/1945, 1922/1945, cf. Spengler 1926). Western culture had, according to Engberg, originated in classical Greece, and it was thus classical humanistic culture that was its central feature, not Christianity, nor capitalism (Engberg 1922/1945, Harding 2015). Unlike Spengler, he also, evidently, considered the decline of Western culture to be a process which could be reversed into rebirth. The means to do this was an active culture policy, in the wider sense.

Much like the German critics of modern civilization, discussed above, Engberg appears to have seen a close connection between the cultivation of the personality of the individual and that of the nation. Seen in that light, his mission can be understood as one of reinvigorating Western – particularly Swedish – culture through the active involvement and cultural reawakening of the working classes, understood as the authentic members of the nation or race (cf. Blomqvist 2001, 2006,³ Harding 2015). From his perspective, his support for the arts was thus a means to fulfill this mission «of creating general participation in the spiritual treasures represented by enlightening [*«bildande»*] art, music, theatre and literature» (Engberg 1938/1945:130), thereby creating a culture that would give each citizen «understanding, skill and readiness to sacrifice his own good for the common good» (Engberg 1938/1945:129). The same mission also included his other areas of responsibility as a minister: education as well as church policies. He, in fact, appears to have considered the Church to have been his main opponent in this struggle for the future culture of Sweden, and much of his policies as Min-

3. For a comprehensive analysis of the racist and anti-semitic sides of Engberg's nationalism in the context of the Swedish labor movement before World War II, see Blomqvist 2006.

ister for Ecclesiastical Affairs appear to have been directed at maintaining government control over the Church, while at the same time removing its control over religious education in the public school system (Claesson 2003, Ekström 2003, Harding 2015, e.g. Engberg 1919/1945).

Although Engberg's views had parallels in many of the major cultural movements of his time, from German radical conservatives, such as Spengler, to the Swedish temperance movement (cf. Edquist 2001), his approach to cultural policy also differed significantly from those of many other representatives of the labor movement and proponents of *folkbildning* (cf. Gustavsson 1991, Sundgren 2007, Vestlund 2010). He was mostly concerned with the government bodies available to cultural policy, not with the organizations already created by the labor movement, such as the study associations or folk high schools. This may have been because of his focus on the established art forms. There was also an element of pre-existing path dependency behind this focus – these were the organizations which were under his power in his role as Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs – but the same focus was also present in the way in which he enlarged cultural policy.

His most visible contribution to explicit cultural policy in Sweden was the creation of the Public Arts Agency (*Statens konstråd*) and the National Touring Theatre (*Riksteatern*). The first mentioned being an arm's-length body focused on buying art for public spaces, thus supporting professional artists and making works of art accessible for the public (see Gustavsson 2002). For this discussion of *folkbildning*, the last mentioned organization, the National Touring Theatre, is even more relevant. Rather than just supporting either the existing Royal theatres or the theatre activities of the labor movement (in *folkets hus*, *folkets park* or ABF) in order to make theatre more available, Engberg chose to create an entirely new theatre organization. On the national level, a new professional theatre company was set up. On the local level, the organizations of the labor movement were utilized to set up local member associations of the new organization (Vestheim 2014, Frenander 2010, Larsson 2003). These would work with the local reception of the touring theatre. *Riksteatern* thus combines several features, being a national membership-based organization in the tradition of the labor movement, but at the same time founded by the state and explicitly organized to create access to a centrally provided program of professional government-financed theatre. The organization could be seen as an embodiment of Engberg's ideals of popular access to high aesthetics and popular mobilization in an organization organized in a centralized corporatist fashion. At the same time, civil society organizations dealing with culture and *bildning* remained outside of established cultural policy, or were separated from it (cf. Harding 2012). While many of Engberg's explicit views on the role of culture and the arts in the national community are in many ways very far from those expressed in current cultural policies, some of his views on the role of *bildning* and cultural policy appear to have influenced later policies, much as his emphasis on established institutions integrated in government cultural policy appears to have done.

THE 'NEW CULTURAL POLICY' OF THE 1970S

Several new institutions were created in Swedish cultural policy during the following decades, and in the 1960s, cultural policy became an increasingly discussed topic, but it would take until the government commission appointed in 1968, before a general cultural policy was formulated by the Swedish government (Frenander 2014, Harding 2007). The recommendations of the commission – presented in 1972 in the report «New Cultural Policy» (*Ny kulturpolitik*) – included increased resources for cultural policy, but also an institutionalization of explicit cultural policy which had been narrowed down to the arts, cultural heritage, media and organizations for *folkbildning* (study associations and folk high schools) (SOU 1972:66, Klockar Linder 2014). The report was dominated by issues pertaining to arts policy, which was largely approached with a focus on support for professional artists and cultural policy institutions (SOU 1972:66). High quality arts were contrasted to commercial culture in a way similar to Engberg's disdain for the commercial culture produced by *bourgeois* society. In this respect, the commission continued to enforce the established focus of cultural policy on established art forms and established institutions integrated in government cultural policy (Harding 2007).

When parliament in 1974 decided on the first ever general objectives for Swedish government cultural policy – based on the recommendations in 'New Cultural Policy' – these included that cultural policy should «counteract the negative consequences of commercialism within the cultural area» (prop. 1974:28: 295). Unlike the wording proposed by the commission, this objective held no implications that cultural policy should work against any negative effects of the market economy in general (cf. SOU 1972:22). While the explicit cultural policy of the 1970s represented a different view of society from the one espoused by Engberg – the post-war progressive idea of an expanding welfare state, framing cultural policy as a new area of the welfare sector – it can also be seen as a continuation of the cultural policy of the 1930s, in that it continued to focus on a combination of support for, on the one hand, professionally recognized high art organized via the arm's length principle and, on the other hand, broadening access to such art, both in geographical terms and in relation to «disadvantaged groups» (prop. 1974:28: 295).

The cultural policy of the 1970s also contained a new approach to the issue of *folkbildning*, namely an increased focus on participation in cultural activities, as opposed to seeing access as a question of widening the audience of professional art forms. In order to «give people opportunities for creativity of their own» (prop. 1974:28: 295), the recommendations of the commission included increased financial support for amateur art activities in the study associations. These were the only major educational organizations available to a cultural policy narrowed down to not include the formal education system, but the distinction between these voluntary activities and the obligatory art education of the school system was also stressed in the report. Parallels can be seen between this side of the 'New Cultural Policy' and Engberg's ambition of reinvigorating democracy and the people by means of the arts. For the study associations,

the grants made accessible through the new Arts Council (*Statens kulturråd*) – grants which had been introduced in 1974 and made permanent in 1981 – represented a change in the balance between their various activities, making practical art activities more clearly recognized as a part of their responsibility (prop. 1974:28, prop. 1980/81:127, Hartman 2003, Viirman 2011).

The combination of promoting personal activity and appreciation for the high arts can be noted also in the more practical guidelines provided in the documents authorizing the Arts Council to distribute grants for cultural activities in the study associations (Hartman 2003, Harding et al 2014). In the following quote from the government bill making these grants permanent, both participation and appreciation for the arts are placed within the context of a process of learning and development of personal understanding, entirely in line with the idea of *folkbildning*:

The objective of study circles in these subject matters [practical aesthetic activities] should be to bring participants in contact with arts and culture, to awaken interest in, and ability to, creative activity and artistic interpretations [«gestaltning»], to provide insights into artistic problems and awaken interest in the work of professional artists, and, to that purpose and through integrated practical and theoretical studies, provide the participants in practical study circles with opportunities to train skills and techniques, within their own abilities (prop. 1980/81:127, s. 14).

The ‘New Cultural Policy’ and the decisions that followed it can be seen as a part of a process establishing a new view of the arts as *folkbildning*, one emphasizing active participation in artistic activities as a learning process, rather than on professionally recognized artistic quality (Hartman 2003, Harding et al 2014). Not only access to displays of the arts, but also creative participation was becoming a goal of cultural policy. In terms of organization, the cultural policy of the 1970s can be seen as a re-establishment of the connection between explicit cultural policy and the study associations at the same time as cultural policy was institutionalized as a separate sector of government policy. Yet, this change in the approach of cultural policy to culture and *bildning* remained partial. The established art forms and institutions remained the main focus of cultural policy and the new grants for cultural activities in the organizations for *folkbildning* were distributed by the Arts Council, i.e. by a government agency mainly dealing with arts policy, while the activities themselves were outsourced to the study associations.

CULTURAL POLICY AND *FOLKBILDNING* IN THE 1990S

If the cultural policy of the 1970s moved the study associations closer to the cultural sector by emphasizing and supporting their cultural activities through cultural policy measures, the 1990s started with a separation of the two organizational fields. In 1991, Göran Persson, then Minister of Schools, reorganized

the government agencies dealing with schools, study associations and folk high schools, separating the latter two from the former. Government support for study associations and folk high schools has since then been allocated by the new Swedish National Council for Adult Education (*Folkbildningsrådet*), an umbrella organization owned by organizations representing folk high schools and study associations (prop. 1990/91:82). Later that year, a new non-socialist government was elected and institutionalized the separation further by separating the Ministry of Culture from the Ministry of Education.

The new government also took the initiative to a government commission to review the now nearly twenty years old cultural policy of 1974. The report of that commission – «The Direction of Cultural Policy», presented in 1995 – represents the most thorough evaluation of Swedish cultural policy so far. In spite of that, the activities of the study associations were discussed to a lesser extent than in the report of 1972. Instead, the general impression is that of a view of culture which was characterized even more by a focus on the professional arts and government supported arts and heritage institutions, but perhaps even more so by the fragmentation of cultural policy in several subfields, of which the study associations and folk high schools was one. It is significant that it was in this context that «quality» was added to the official objectives of Swedish cultural policy, whereas the objectives of 1974 had only referred to «artistic renewal» (prop. 1974:28, SOU 1995:84, Frenander 2014, Harding 2007). Much of the ambitions of the 1970s were retained in the proposed objective that cultural policy should «promote participation and stimulate people to cultural creativity of their own» (SOU 1995:84: 85), but the commission also proposed to remove the objective to «counteract the negative consequences of commercialism within the cultural area» (cf. prop. 1974:28: 295). On the whole, the cultural policy proposed in 1995, displayed much less ambition to change Swedish culture as such than the cultural policy proposed in 1972, and even less than that which had once been advocated by Engberg. Instead, the report focused on the practicalities of supporting the art field and the institutions of the cultural sphere, both of which were seen as relatively autonomous.

Unlike the objectives for cultural policy proposed by governments in the 1970s and 2000s, the objectives proposed by the government in 1996 (prop. 1996/97:3) – themselves very similar to those proposed by the commission in 1995 – were changed significantly by parliament. Most significantly, the parliament added the following two objectives:

to promote cultural pluralism, artistic renewal and quality, thereby counteracting the negative consequences of commercialism [---]

to promote the strivings for *bildning* [«*bildningssträvanden*»] (1996/97:KrU2).

The ambition to «counteract the negative consequences of commercialism» was thus retained. *Bildning* was introduced as a goal in its own right, at the suggestions of the Centre Party, and specifically referring to official comments made by the Arts Council. Judging from the discussions in the parliament committee on culture, this objective was introduced in recognition of the importance of organizations working with it, such as the study associations (1996/97:KrU2, Harding 2007). Normatively speaking, both of these new objectives appear to have represented norms already held in high regard, both in the field and in the parliament committee on culture. The following year, a new intention was added to the intentions guiding the government grants distributed by the Swedish National Council for Adult Education: that the grants should «contribute to broadening interest in culture in society, to increasing participation in culture and to personal creativity» (prop. 1997/98:115). Much like the introduction of *bildning* as a goal of cultural policy, this should be understood as recognizing the importance of existing activities, in this case continuing in line with the cultural policy of the 1970's. At the same time, there is little to contradict that the term *bildning* was now primarily associated with the study associations and folk high schools, organizations outside of the sector for which the Ministry of Culture was directly responsible. In this sense, this government bill could be considered to be moving away from Engberg's view of explicit cultural policy as an instrument for *folkbildning*, while at the same time recognizing *bildning* as an explicit objective of cultural policy.

CULTURAL POLICY, FOLKBILDNING AND BILDNING IN THE 2000S

While the 1990s can be seen as a period of growing separation of cultural policy and *folkbildning* on the policy level, this does not mean that cultural activities took second stage in the study associations. Instead, the period from the late nineties and onwards has been marked by a constant increase in artistic activities in the study associations. Between 1992 and 2013 the number of reported public performances (*kulturprogram*) in the study associations increased from 95 000 to 360 000, while music became the most common topic of their study circles. Much of this activity consisted of amateur cultural activities and was especially directed at the young and the elderly. The study associations also play a role as a springboard for artists in the early parts of their carriers. For cultural amateur associations in Sweden, cooperation with the study associations today is a common way to gain access to government-funded resources, and this is where the vast majority of national government funding for cultural amateur activities is channeled (statistics from Folkbildningsrådet, SOU 2009:16, Harding et al 2013, Harding et al 2014). This is a development which could be seen as a continued path dependency, which can be traced back to the support for amateur art activities established in 1974.

On the government level, cultural policy remained fairly stable during the Social Democrat governments 1994–2006. It was only after the Persson government was replaced by a non-socialist government in 2006 that a new cul-

tural policy commission was appointed. Its main recommendations, when it submitted its report in 2009, included the transferal of government funding for regional institutions from the national government to the regional governments, as well as increased efforts to analyze and evaluate the implementation of cultural policy. In other words, decentralization of decision-making in combination with increased central evaluation (SOU 2009:16), i.e. a policy change entirely in line with currently prevalent norms on government administration. These were also the major points of the government bill that followed the report later in 2009 (prop. 2009/10:3). Although the report had dealt extensively with the relations between cultural policy and the study associations, and to some extent with the role of civil society in cultural policy, few practical recommendations were tied to these issues. With some exceptions, primarily in the historical background included in the report, the terms *bildning* and *folkbildning* were used mainly in relation to the study associations and the folk high schools, rather than as an objective for cultural policy as a whole (SOU 2009:16). Much like the word ‘culture’, these terms had now come to refer to a specific sector of policy, rather than to a general approach to politics, or aim of the government.

Support for professional artists and cultural institutions remains the dominant part of Swedish explicit cultural policy on the national level, combined with a stated ambition to increase access to culture.

Yet, the cultural policies of Swedish governments in the 2000s have included several features which indicate a change in their general approach to cultural policy. The first such feature is the increased tendency to emphasize the usefulness of arts and culture for the benefit of other objectives. The most common example of this is the increased emphasis on cultural policy as a means to support financial growth, particularly on the local and regional level and in relation to the creative sector (SOU 2009:16, prop. 2009/10:3, Johannisson 2014, Frenander 2014). The 2009 government bill on cultural policy also emphasized other areas, such as culture in the schools:

To give all children and young people the opportunity to creativity and to take part in cultural activities in cooperation with professional artists, within the framework of school work, contributes to the development of their creativity, as well as to reaching the school’s knowledge objective (prop. 2009/10:3: 69).

The Creative Schools program was one of the main programs introduced by Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth during her time as Minister of Culture 2006–2014. In 2009, culture for children and youth was also introduced as one of the general objectives for cultural policy (prop. 2009/10:3). However, it is worth noticing that when the government, as in the quote above, argued for increased cultural activities in the schools, it was by referring to its impact on schoolwork in general. Education or enlightenment as a goal for cultural activities directed at adults was, on the other hand, less prioritized in the cultural policies of this period.

The Living History Forum is one of the few exceptions. It stands out as a government agency founded on the initiative of Prime Minister Göran Persson in 2000, explicitly aiming at the use of knowledge in order to promote certain values and understanding among the people, i.e. an aim similar to, but more limited than, Engberg's idea of cultural policy as a way to achieve popular political and cultural awakening:

The aim was to spread awareness and information about the Holocaust and to use it as a starting point for a wide-ranging discussion of such issues as democracy, tolerance, compassion and the equal worth of all people (SOU 2001:5: 17, in the English summary).

While similar ideas have occasionally been expressed regarding «world cultural» or multicultural activities (Harding 2007), the main concept of culture at the beginning of the new millennium was a different one, which can be exemplified by the cultural policy objectives decided by parliament in 2009:

[Cultural policy should] promote opportunities for everyone to participate in cultural experiences, *bildning* and develop their creative abilities (prop. 2009/10:3: 26).

While popular access to culture has a long history as an objective in Swedish cultural policy, it has gained a new meaning as the emphasis on artistic quality has changed. In the 1970s, cultural policy was expected to work against the inferior influence of commercial culture, much in line with Engberg's educational ambitions. In 2009, the Cultural Policy Commission proposed to remove not only that objective, but also the word «quality» from the objectives of cultural policy, since it was found too difficult to give it a precise meaning, and its inclusion in a cultural policy was considered to be contrary to artistic freedom and renewal (SOU 2009:16: 46). While the word quality was included in the objectives decided by parliament, the ambition that cultural policy should actively counteract certain cultural expressions has been rare, possibly non-existent, in the cultural policy of Swedish governments for some time. Instead, the ambition appears to be to uphold certain (high quality) forms of culture as alternatives within a supply of cultural products and experiences much larger than that provided by state-supported bodies in order to guarantee access to a plurality of cultural expressions, so that «creativity, pluralism and artistic quality should mark the development of society» (prop. 2009/10:3: 26). Much like in Engberg's view of cultural policy – but also like the cultural policy of 1974 – this is cultural policy framed as a method for creating a better society through the influence of art on the population.

Looking at the concepts of culture, *bildning* and *folkbildning* discussed within the study associations, a new concept has also become noticeable in the discourse in the last ten years, *participatory culture*, a concept originally invented by American anthropologist Anthony Jenkins (2003) to describe an emerging mode of production present, for example, in fan cultures. One of the study

associations describes the concept as follows, when recommending a book on the topic (Nordqvist 2011):

The cultural activities surrounding us today have few points in common with institutionalized culture. Established roles and borders are becoming increasingly outdated. The separation producer – consumer, professional – amateur, are examples of dichotomies with decreasing meanings and which are increasingly questionable. [...] The book argues for a new way of looking at culture, one which includes the human as co-creator and participator (Bilda 2013).

This concept is connected to the idea of *bildning* as a process where new experiences, including artistic experiences, lead to reevaluation of one's earlier worldview, and thereby to personal development (Nordqvist 2011, Harding et al 2013, 2014, cf. Gustavsson 2013). In this view, artistic quality plays a less explicit – and sometimes more subjective – role than in the views expressed by Engberg or in the cultural policies of the 1970s, but *bildning* as a general aim is still retained. In the general cultural policy, the goal appears to be to increase pluralism in cultural life. This goal could have been understood in terms of «opportunities for everyone to participate in cultural experiences, *bildning* and develop their creative abilities» (prop. 2009/10:3: 26), with *bildning* understood as a process, but this does not appear to be how the term is used in the rest of the government bill of 2009. A more likely interpretation of this general objective for cultural policy would be that it uses the term *bildning* primarily to refer to the activities of study associations and folk high schools.

The national budget presented by the new Social Democratic and Green Party coalition government in 2014 (prop. 2014/15:1), but rejected in December 2014, included what can be seen as a change of emphasis in cultural policy, if not an entirely new cultural policy. Alice Bah Kuhnke (Green Party), the new Minister of Culture, was also made responsible for democracy and civil society policies, and has previously been the head of the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society. The proposed national budget for 2015 included a major new grant for support of suburban arts and culture for 2015–2018, presented as a measure to support the cultural initiatives of local civil society organizations. The budget also increased support for municipal music and art schools, as well as for the Creative Schools program created by the previous government. The Swedish Arts Council was given strategic responsibility for policies on LGBTQ issues and the Forum for Living History was proposed to receive increased funding for spreading information about historical and present racism. Taken together, these proposed changes appear to imply increased integration of policies on democracy and equality in general cultural policy, as well as an increased emphasis on efforts to «promote opportunities for everyone to participate in cultural experiences» (prop. 2009/10:3: 26), this time with an emphasis on the active participation of civil society based in areas housing a large population with immigrant background. These proposed policies also

appear to imply a continued belief in cultural invigoration and enlightenment as parts of a larger project of building a more inclusive and enlightened society.

At the same time, the government as a whole has been accused of abandoning the concept of *bildning*, especially in the discussions concerning its, later retracted, proposal to end funding for the Swedish institutes in Athens, Rome and Istanbul (prop. 2014/15:1), a move that was widely seen as an attack on research in the humanities (e.g. Johansson 2014). Like many controversies regarding implicit cultural policy in Sweden, the issue of the Swedish institutes in the Mediterranean is not included in explicit cultural policy (in this case, the issue is a part of research policy), but the debate does serve as an example of how the concept of *bildning* is still a relevant part of Swedish public discourse, and possibly of its concept of culture, if not of the self-understanding of explicit cultural policy. However, a more thorough discussion of the roles played by this concept in public debate in Sweden today would require more research. Whether or not a more civil society oriented cultural policy will be closer tied to the idea of, or the organizations focused on, *folkbildning* remains to be seen. The issue of implicit cultural policy which led to the rejection of the government budget – and nearly to the fall of the government – was one less related to *bildning* or *folkbildning*, than to the demands for a more restrictive immigration policy presented by the Sweden Democrats, whose cultural policy appears to rest on an essentialist view of national culture, to which immigration is presented as a threat, but which appears to include an ambition to utilize cultural policy as a means to change national culture to better fit the party's vision (cf. Lindsköld 2013).

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

During the interbellum period, Swedish cultural policy could be viewed as a part of a wider policy intended to change the culture of the Swedish people, using arts and culture – as well as formal education – as tools to create a cultural re-awakening, deepening democracy. The core perspective of Arthur Engberg, the minister responsible for cultural policy 1932–1939, can be summarized as a view of cultural policy as a process of *bildning* directed at the entire people, focusing on the cultural re-awakening of the working classes and the reconnection of the arts to the people of the nation. Engberg was also an example of a politician without a firm footing in the culture and education organizations which were already forming in the popular movements. Together with his respect for high art, this appears to have influenced his policies and thus the early part of the establishment phase of Swedish cultural policy, making it more focused at the central institutions of cultural policy and less focused on existing popular movements than it could otherwise have been. During the second half of the century, cultural policy largely became a support system for professional arts and culture, aiming to enable the entire population to gain access to the high quality arts produced by these, in that particular sense continuing this *folkbildning* project. Yet, the ambition to use explicit cultural

policy as a part of a wider policy directed at changing the culture of a nation through popular enlightenment has continued to reoccur in Swedish cultural policies. It appears that approaches institutionalized during the formative period of the 1930's continued to guide Swedish cultural policy in a path dependent way for a considerable period of time.

Folkbildning has – in the context of cultural policy documents and discussions – gone from being the general aim of cultural policy to becoming a term referring specifically to the activities of study associations and folk high schools. Cultural policy and *folkbildning* have thus been both separated, becoming distinct fields of organization and government policy, and narrowed down through a process of institutionalization. This separation between, on the one hand, an explicit cultural policy focusing on established cultural institutions and, on the other hand, the popular movement organizations associated with *folkbildning*, appears to be a clear case of path dependency established when Social Democratic cultural policy ideas were operationalized by Engberg with a focus on the established institutions.

Over the last few decades, we may have seen a new trend, where cultural policy has begun to see the established art forms and government-supported institutional culture as parts of a larger cultural field – including the commercial expressions of culture which earlier cultural policies worked actively to counteract, or even to suppress – but also viewing active participation in culture (as opposed to being a passive audience of cultural events) as something that the citizens should be gaining access to.

The general aim of cultural policy and *folkbildning* have become less of a process of societal transformation and more of a support for, on the one hand, the professional arts field and the institutions of cultural policy, and, on the other hand, the individual development of members of the public, thus, in a sense, returning from Engberg's concept of *folkbildning* as a transformative process on the societal level, to something closer to the original notion of *Bildung* as a process of personal development within the context of the arts and the public sphere. Yet, central aspects of *folkbildning* – in a broader sense than in Engberg's interpretation – are retained and developed in that the ambition, in both cultural policy and in the study associations, remains to extend opportunities for personal growth to everyone by offering access to a wide range of cultural experiences (that may or may not be judged in relation to quality or depth of experience). Even the ambition to politically activate those taking part is often retained, sometimes even with the ambition to alter the cultural attitudes of the population at large. The cultural policies of the Sweden Democrats remain an exception in this context, focusing much more clearly on changing Swedish culture according to a pre-decided vision, a view which at least superficially appears to have more in common with other Swedish cultural policies in the 1930s than in the present.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the role of quality – and of *bildning* in a classical academic sense – have both been questioned and defended. In

spite of recent changes, national cultural policy in Sweden has remained focused on supporting professional arts and institutional culture, largely bound by the path dependency established in the mid-20th century. Quality remains a central goal. This situation is only rarely questioned. The path dependency is enforced both by the norms of the cultural policy field and by the investments made in its currently dominant institutions and organizations since Engberg's time (and, in the case of the institutions already supported by the state at that time, since much earlier). A tension is thus created between, on the one hand, a concept of quality based in established institutions and fields and, on the other hand, a view of culture as a larger field of expressions, which are ascribed value primarily by the wide spectrum of experience which they offer. In this context, proponents of established forms of culture may have to argue that they offer a deeper level of experience, but whether this, or other, arguments will be convincing remains to be seen. The same is true of whether *bildning* and *folkbildning* will remain central concepts in Swedish cultural policy and, if so, if they will develop in a more individualistic and/or civil society oriented direction.

This article has been entirely focused on developments in Swedish cultural policy. To answer questions of the wider international development and influence of the concepts of *Bildung*, *bildning* and *folkbildning*, or of similar concepts in other countries, more international comparative studies would have to be made. Historically, these concepts have had close parallels at least in the other Nordic countries and in Germany. Although Hylland (2014) observes that while the similar Norwegian concept of *folkeopplysning* cannot be considered current in Norwegian cultural policy, it has had lasting influence on its development. In terms of research needs regarding Swedish cultural policy, several areas of knowledge have been highlighted in this article as being in need of further research. While Engberg is only one of the creators of Social Democratic cultural policy – and the Social Democrats is only one party among many – this short discussion of his perspectives on arts and culture suggests that it would be fruitful to increase research in the earlier influences on cultural policy of ideologies which have later lost their influence on West European cultural policy, at least for a time, e.g. radical nationalism and radical conservatism. Other cultural and ideological trends during the first half of the 20th century which have been largely overlooked as possible influences on cultural policy debates in Sweden during that time includes Christian conservatism and reformism, as well as fascism. There is a large body of research on the main cultural trends of the early 20th century – both in Sweden and internationally – but regarding their influence on later Swedish cultural policy, there remains much research to be done, especially when talking about trends outside of the main popular movements and the ideologies still adhered to by modern political parties. The same appears to be true of the influence of implicit cultural policy ideals and ideologies – such as the ideal of *bildning* – on other policy fields, such as social policy, public health policy, military conscription and integration policy.

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