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Mapping regional cultural policies in Canada

Diane Saint-Pierre & Monica Gattinger (Ed.)

Cultural Policy. Origins, Evolution, and Implementation in Canada's Provinces and Territories.

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Review

Cultural policymaking is connected to geographical place. This perspective is embedded in the book titled *Cultural Policy. Origins, Evolution, and Implementation in Canada's Provinces and Territories* edited by Diane Saint-Pierre and Monica Gattinger. Published in English spring 2021, a French edition has been available already since 2011. For the English version, the contents have been “revised and updated to take into account key developments in cultural policy and administration” (p. xxiv). For a contemporary reader, the book provides a broad angle on the provincial and territorial cultural policies in Canada.

The book sets out aims that are “admittedly ambitious” (p. 28): to examine cultural policy basis, definitions, objectives, outcomes as well as to describe cultural policy history and developments in all ten provinces and three territories that Canada currently consists of. According to the editors, the book “-- employs the case study approach, with an emphasis on the origins and evolution of government intervention in the cultural sector” (p. 31). In addition, the editors focus on comparative research methodologies. Based on the collected

data, the volume concludes with a proposal of a comparative framework for studying provincial and territorial cultural policy and administration in different countries.

In Canada, the territories have delegated powers under the authority of the Parliament of Canada whereas the provinces exercise constitutional powers in their own right, receiving their authority from the Constitution Act (1867). As territories and provinces have a different position in relation to the national level, the focus on the regional level provides a specific and diversified setting for cultural policy research.

Cultural policy research has often tended to focus on the national. Also, local level has especially in the Nordic countries received scholarly attention with the key role of the local initiatives and ideas of participation in promoting cultural democracy. Despite the regional level being a part of the three-tier government structures, the regional level in cultural policy has remained less researched in comparison to the other government levels, even though Nordic country-specific analyses have been conducted especially in Sweden (e.g. Johannisson 2010; Blomgren and Johannisson 2013, 2014; Lindqvist 2016; Lindqvist and Lorentzen 2015) and Finland (e.g. Häyrynen 2003; Ilmonen 2015; Renko et al. 2021). For its part, the book sets out to fill this recognisable gap.

Majority of the book is delegated to chapters focusing on each Canadian province and territory at a time. These chapters are written by various authors following a similar structure and set of questions presented in the introduction. In order “to facilitate comparison” (p. 31), each chapter includes an abstract, overview of key characteristics, description of the history of cultural policies in the region and an overview of the evolution of public administration related to culture.

However, despite the aim of providing similarly structured chapters to enable comparisons, the titles of the sections within each regional chapter somewhat vary, partly reflecting the collaborative nature of the book. This variety makes it somewhat difficult for a reader to directly compare for example two specific territories and provinces. This difficulty is partly due to the different structures of the chapters and partly to the variety of the regions and their cultural policies.

Nordic perspectives on a Canadian context

In cultural policies, sharing power between different levels of government including the regional level is something that Canada and the Nordic countries have in common. The regional levels have been constructed based on a mix of different models and administrative traditions. These different historical developments have led to the regional levels' currently varying structures and operating contexts in different countries.

For a reader familiar with Nordic cultural policies, many aspects and elements identified in Canadian provincial and territorial cultural policies are well recognisable. These include cultural policy tendencies such as instrumentalization, cultural democracy, decentralisation and the rise of cultural industries that have taken place across the regional level. In addition, in both Canadian and Nordic regional cultural policies, culture seems to have been increasingly connected to regional development. Promoting culture in regional development points to instrumental tendencies as culture is used to enhance well-being and promote economic growth of the regions. Culture is then perceived as a service and a business.

At the same time, in Canada's federal system, the regional level is much stronger in contrast to the Nordic structures in general (even though there are notable differences in between the Nordic countries). The Canadian regional level has power over, for example, legislation and steering the local level also in cultural policy. Hence there is also a lot of

variation in terms of formulation of cultural policy and its objectives in between different provinces/territories. These broad operating possibilities of the regional level seem to have led to regional differentiation more than in the Nordic countries where the traditional welfare state aim has been to provide similar services and opportunities around the country.

Canada is a vastly multicultural country with an officially recognised bilingualism and nearly 5 percent of the population self-identifying as Aboriginal people. The variations of regional cultural identifications, multiple understandings of culture and cultural heritage in Canada show high differentiation also in regional cultural policies. In the Nordic countries, the countries' geographically smaller size and population mean less – even though still multiple – identifications and understandings in the field of regional cultural policies.

It seems that in many Canadian provinces and territories, influential individuals such as politicians have had a strong say in the formulation and development of cultural policy in their respective region. This individual influence has not been as present – or at least it has remained less recognised – in the Nordic regional and local cultural policies.

Descriptive focus

The straightforward structure of the book presents the different territories/provinces rather in-depth. At the same time, the structure often creates unnecessary repetition that could have been avoided with stricter editing and restructuring.

For example, general historical developments related to the regional level as well as key facts (such as population size and location) could have been presented in the introduction instead of in each regional chapter. Instead of providing information on the policy formation or regional jurisdictions dispersed in different regional chapters, it would have been clearer to present the general historical developments at the beginning and discuss regional characteristics more in the respective regional chapters.

And not to forget or underestimate visual information: at least for a foreign reader, a map would have been extremely useful to better grasp the geographical dimension.

The approach of the book is more descriptive than analytical. Conceptual discussion is rather thin: regional cultural policy features and developments such as regionalism (p. 48), regionalization (p. 231), centralization (p. 207), administrative decentralization (p. 302) and devolution (p. 354) are mentioned but not really defined. Without a conceptual discussion and framework, these concepts are left disconnected. While the focus is on the regional government level, even 'regional cultural policy' as a concept is not really mentioned – instead, 'provincial and territorial cultural policies' is referred to (p. 16).

A discussion more related to concepts (in a broader sense than just in terms of 'cultural policy') could have brought more depth into the analysis and contributed broadly to the field that has – as the volume mentions – remained less researched compared to the national level and thus also lacks the terminological coverage. In this way, conceptual definitions are something that the field of regional cultural policy research would greatly benefit from. These definitions would also make the volume particularly relevant for cultural policy research also in the Nordic countries.

The book seems to answer the questions set in the introduction, but the implications of regional cultural policies are not discussed much further. For example: What does it mean for artists or citizens that the regional level is differentiated? In which ways do regionalisation and regionalism shape regional cultural policy? Are there differences in between provincial and territorial cultural policies and in which ways?

The volume ends with a proposal of a framework for comparative analysis of cultural policies. Short descriptions of cultural statistics and contextualisation of Canada in relation to France, United Kingdom and the United States in terms of regional level in cultural policy are provided. The choice of comparisons lies in the history of Canada as a nation as well as the cultural, economic and political links to the other three countries.

The comparison focuses on both idealised types of national policies as well as a hybrid approaches and aims first and foremost to be a tool for analysis of the complexity of cultural policy research. In the end, the hybridization of culture as well as regional life need a research approach open for multiple particularities and variations.

Limited target audience

The book serves well as a very useful handbook for researchers of Canadian cultural policy that need a background and contextualisation. For a Nordic researcher, the book provides interesting perspectives on different ways to organise and implement regional cultural policies. Also, the comparative framework presented by the volume could serve as a reference point in developing international comparisons. The lack of conceptual definitions however means that the book does not provide a theoretical background for Nordic regional cultural policy research.

With a structure similar, for example, to *Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*, the book provides a good cultural policy database on the Canadian regional level and provides opportunities to contrast different provinces and territories. Interestingly, the provinces/territories themselves are not mentioned among the target audience of the book (p. 36) even though it seems that this could be most useful for them in developing their cultural policies forward.

The book format provides an edited and comprehensive background, but for tracking and updating information on cultural policy developments in different provinces and territories, an online database would be a useful addition.

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