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# Making regional cultural policy: regional government bodies' cultural policy activities in Finland

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## Abstract

In Finnish cultural policy, power and responsibilities have been distributed to various regional government bodies and a distinct regional authority is lacking. This presents a notable difference to Sweden where the self-governing and politically elected assemblies at the regional level function as key regional cultural policy authorities. This article examines how the regional government bodies in Finland are participating in cultural policymaking in contrast to Sweden by recognising different activities that are carried out by the regional level. The analysis is conducted in two case regions (Central Finland and Värmland) based on interview data, legislation and policy documents. The results show that the sets of activities carried out by the regional government bodies are not limited to actual managing of the realisation process but include decisions about the content of a policy and formulation of and decision making about desired outcomes. Key themes related to these activities are *demarcation* (i.e. defining culture as a policy field), *discretion* (i.e. deciding on operations) and *mediation* (i.e. connecting actors). The regional level is not only mechanically implementing given cultural policies but actively participating in cultural policymaking. At the same time, in Finland many factors potentially challenge the regional level's cultural policy relevance and, as a result, regional cultural policy legitimacy.

## Keywords

regional cultural policy, Finland, Sweden, policymaking, implementation

## Introduction

In the three-tier government systems, cultural policy power and responsibilities are often distributed to national, regional and local levels. In Finnish cultural policy, the national and local levels have traditionally been emphasised. Within the regional level, power and responsibilities have been distributed to various regional government bodies and a distinct regional authority is lacking. This presents a notable difference to Sweden where the self-governing and politically elected assemblies at the regional level function as key regional cultural policy authorities. This article analyses how the regional government bodies in Finland are participating in cultural policymaking in contrast to Sweden with a different regional structure.

In both Finland and Sweden, the regional government level in cultural policy has been constructed by the transfer of state power to the regional level, i.e. regional decentralisation

in cultural policy. Both countries have pursued regional decentralisation following the periods of regions as vehicles of welfare policy (1960s–1980s), regionalisation (1990s–mid-2000s) and competitive regions (mid-2000s and onwards). During these periods, the regional level's role and structure in cultural policy have been changed, and it has received new policy tools and capacities in fulfilling shifting cultural policy needs. (Renko et al. 2021).

At the same time, various reform trends have affected policymaking in both countries. Presenting somewhat varying ideas and approaches, the most influential reform trends in (cultural) policymaking have included traditional public administration (PA), New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Governance (NPG) (Osborne 2006, 2009). Elements of these reform trends have complemented and supplemented each other through a process of layering (Greve et al. 2020: 697; Christensen and Lægheid 2011).

PA emphasises hierarchy and vertical line management, highlighting a central role of the bureaucracy in policymaking (Osborne 2006: 382). In the Nordic countries, this included assigning the expanding welfare functions and services to local and regional authorities, signifying a specific “Nordic model” of local and regional welfare systems (Löfgren and Ringholm 2009: 505).

In the 1980s and 1990s, new modernisation programmes inspired by NPM were implemented aiming toward greater efficiency – often in economic terms – within the public sector (Peters 2011: 7; Löfgren and Ringholm 2009: 505). NPM approached policymaking at least partially disengaged from implementation that was ideally conducted through various competing actors within a horizontally organised marketplace (Osborne 2006: 382). Competitiveness was also present in the perception of culture as an instrument in regional development (e.g. Alexander et al. 2017). In both Finland and Sweden, the reforms influenced by NPM have in many ways changed the structure of state administration (Yliaska 2014; Herranen 2015; Sundström 2006; Hall 2013).

During the recent decades, new network modes of local and regional governance have presented a clear departure from the traditional representative chain of command (Löfgren and Ringholm 2009: 506, 513). These reflect NPG emphasis on collaboration and cooperation among and between public sector and other actors (e.g., Greve et al. 2020: 702; Osborne 2006: 382, 384). Governance suggests the inclusion of multiple actors and their networks in policymaking.

The processes described above have in many ways affected the regional level's operating possibilities in cultural policy by changing its structures, power and responsibilities. Various changes have been recognised in both Finland and Sweden's regional levels in cultural policy (Duelund and Larsson 2003; Renko et al. 2021), including a connection of culture and regional development (e.g. Bassand 1993; Lindqvist and Lorentzen 2015). Previous studies in Finland have addressed the regional government actors, structures and funding instruments (Kangas and Pirnes 2015; Pekkala 2012; Jakonen and Mitchell 2014) as well as arguments for regional cultural policy (Häyrynen 2002). In Sweden, geographical and discursive shifts in regional cultural policy (Johannisson 2009) as well as regional cultural policy implementation with focus on museums (Lindqvist 2016) have been examined.

Many Swedish studies have focused on the planning, implementation and implications of the Cultural Cooperation Model (Swedish: kultursamverkansmodellen) at the regional level (see, for example, Blomgren and Johannisson 2013, 2014, 2015). First introduced in 2011, the model granted the regions the right not only to receive national government funding as a lump sum but to reallocate this funding based on regional cultural plans formed in cooperation with municipalities and in dialogue with the cultural sector and civil society.

This article focuses on Finland where changes in the regional level's operating possibilities in cultural policy have been recognised, but it remains unclear how the regional government bodies are currently making use of these possibilities by participating in regional cultural policymaking. From a government perspective, the regional level has often been addressed as a uniform whole that is rather mechanistically implementing either the national or the local level policies. Here, I aim to broaden this view by analysing what is actually happening at the regional level in terms of cultural policymaking, instead of assuming the activities that different regional government bodies carry out.

I am approaching the regional level from a government perspective, focusing on the regional government bodies with cultural policy power and responsibilities. In Finland, these government bodies include the regional councils; the Regional State Administrative Agencies; the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment; and the Arts Promotion Centre's regional offices and arts councils. To address this multiplicity, I understand policymaking as a framework that consists of various actors, layers, situations and activities. By suggesting the inclusion of multiple actors and their networks in policymaking, this framework formulated by Michael Hupe and Peter Hill (2002, 2006) differs from viewing policymaking as a sequence of consecutive stages.

In the policymaking framework, *sets of activities* present the ways by which the regional actors make use of their operating possibilities. The activities can be related to decisions about the content of a policy and on the organisational arrangements for its delivery (*constitutive set of activities*), formulation of and decision making about desired outcomes (*directive set of activities*) and actual managing the realisation process (*operational set of activities*) (Hupe and Hill 2006: 21, 23). I focus on the activities conducted by the Finnish regional government bodies, but contrast and reflect them to Sweden. My aim is not to compare the two countries' regional cultural policies as such but instead – by focusing on the two case regions of Central Finland and Värmland – to analyse the implications of different institutional contexts and features (mainly the lack of self-governing regions in cultural policy in Finland) for regional cultural policymaking.

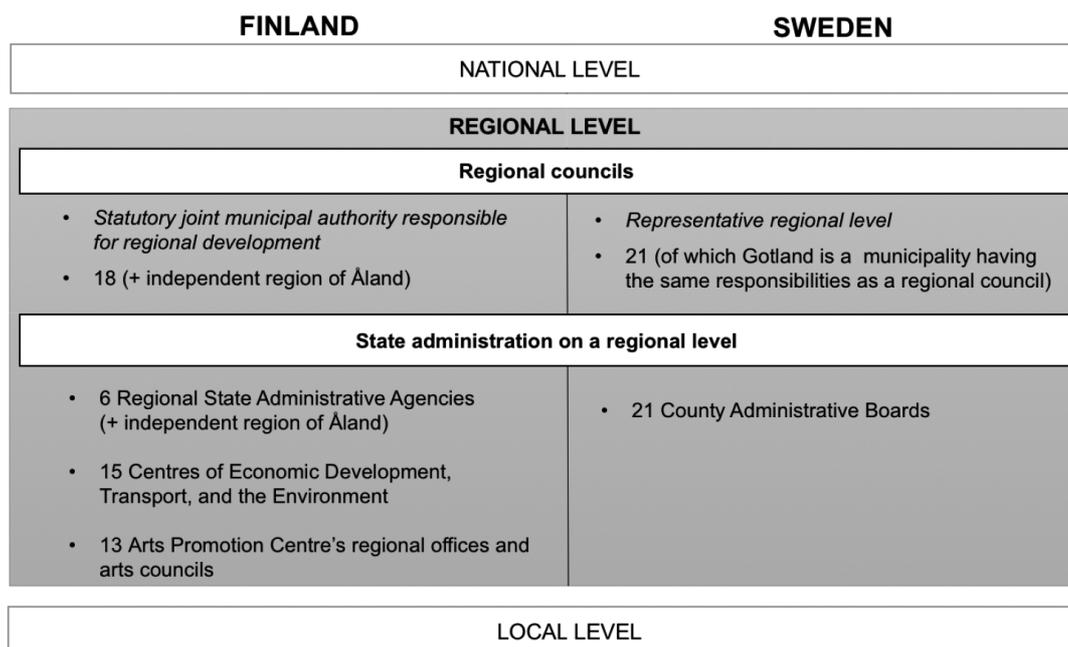
The article is structured as follows. The next section briefly describes the regional structures for cultural policy in Finland and Sweden. The third section introduces data and methods. The fourth section discusses the recognised activities and key themes related to these activities in regional cultural policy in Central Finland and Värmland. The article concludes with a discussion.

## Regional structures for cultural policy

Both Finland and Sweden represent a Nordic administrative model and tradition (e.g. Læg-reid 2018; Greve et al. 2016, 2020; in cultural policy Duelund 2008). On a national level, ministries and semi-independent central agencies present core bodies in both countries (Greve et al. 2020: 699–700). On a local level, the municipalities enjoy extensive local self-autonomy (Lähteenmäki-Smith 2006: 24). In between, the regional level consists of multiple government bodies that have their distinct position and tasks as a part of the administrative structures for cultural affairs. These bodies include regional councils and state administration on a regional level. (Figure 1.)

In Finland – unlike in Sweden – the geographical borders of different regional government actors are not completely overlapping. Instead, multiple spatial boundaries form various regional entities rather than certain, distinct regions.

## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS ON A REGIONAL LEVEL



**Figure 1.** Administrative structures for cultural affairs on a regional level.

In Finland, the 18 regional councils are statutory joint municipal authorities that are mandated by law as public authorities responsible for regional development and land use planning. Their tasks include strategic planning and development also regarding culture as a part of implementing the regional plans. Every municipality must be a member of a regional council. While the regional councils receive state funding, they are independent public officials with their respective decision-making organs formed by the representatives of the municipalities. In this way, the local politicians operate also on a regional level.

In Sweden, the 21 regional councils are self-governing authorities governed by a regional assembly. The assembly is directly elected by the citizens every four years. The Swedish regional councils formulate their respective cultural policies in a cultural plan that is required in the Swedish Cultural Cooperation Model. Unlike in Finland, in Sweden the regional councils also finance and maintain many regional cultural institutions.

The state administration on a regional level in Finnish cultural policy consists of the six Regional State Administrative Agencies (Finnish: *aluehallintovirasto*, AVI), 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (*elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskus*, ELY) and 13 Arts Promotion Centre's regional offices and arts councils. AVI's general tasks include execution, steering and supervision for example related to libraries. ELY focuses on promoting regional competitiveness, well-being and sustainable development in various policy fields including creative industries. The Arts Promotion Centre Finland is the state's expert and service agency for promoting the arts. Its regional offices operate as expert bodies and carry out regional collaboration. In connection to the regional offices, the regional arts councils allocate grants and awards within their respective regions. This presents a difference to Sweden where the Swedish Arts Grant Committee (*Konstnärsnämnden*) does not have regional offices.

The state administration on a regional level in Swedish cultural policy includes the 21 County Administrative Boards. Their main responsibilities include coordinating the

regional development in line with national policy goals including, for example, cultural heritage policy.

In both countries, the regional government bodies' organisational structures – and culture's position within them – in different regions vary. In some regional bodies, culture may be assigned to a specific public official or a division, whereas in some regional bodies, the tasks related to culture are more dispersed.

## Data and methods

This article analyses cultural policy activities carried out by the regional government bodies in two case regions: Central Finland in Finland and Värmland in Sweden. Both regions are characterised by a similar number of municipalities (22 in Central Finland and 17 in Värmland) of which one is a noticeably larger regional centre (Jyväskylä in Central Finland and Karlstad in Värmland) with, for example, a university. In addition, the distance of these regions from the countries' capital cities of Helsinki and Stockholm is similar.

I am recognising the regional government bodies' cultural policy activities in the two regions based on interviews conducted with public officials. In this way, the analysis elaborates the contemporary practices, possibilities, and limitations of regional cultural policy as experienced by the regional government actors themselves. The interview data is supplemented by legislation and regional policy documents that frame and steer the regional government bodies' cultural policy activities.

The interview data in Central Finland was collected in the summer of 2019. I chose the interviewees by inviting one person responsible for culture from each regional government body for an interview. Following a snowball sampling approach, I asked each to name other persons I would do well to interview.<sup>1</sup> The final group of the interviewees in Central Finland consisted of two persons from ELY and the regional council as well as one person from AVI and the regional arts council. (Table 1.) The limited amount of the interviewees reflects culture's position within these bodies' organisational structures: there are not many persons working with culture.

To contrast Central Finland to Värmland and, in this way, to analyse the significance of the representative regional level in cultural policymaking, I invited an official in charge of culture in Region Värmland for an interview that was conducted in the autumn of 2019. For contrasting purposes, I interviewed the manager of the culture department who holds an overview of the organisation's cultural policy activities.

All interviews were semi-structured. The themes included the regional organisation's position, aims, operations and collaboration related to culture as well as future development. The interviews lasted around 1,5 hours each, and they were recorded and transcribed. The starting point was formed by the interviewees' own definitions and perceptions of culture and cultural policies: they were not given specific definitions but instead, they were instructed to describe their activities in cultural policies as they themselves see and define it. The intention was to allow the interviewees to define the situation based on their own experience and to focus on what they consider relevant (see Alexiadou 2001: 52). To present these experiences, quotations of the interview data are included in the next sec-

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1. I also got suggestions on persons working outside regional government bodies for example in museums and educational institutions in the regions, but – following the research aim focused on government bodies – decided to narrow the group of interviewees to public officials. Nevertheless, the suggestions provided information on the actors that the public officials experienced as important in making regional cultural policy.

tion and have been approved by the interviewees. The interviews conducted in Finnish have been translated by the author.

In the context of a policymaking framework, the starting point of the analysis was that the regional government level can conduct various different activities in cultural policymaking. Therefore, I firstly recognised cultural policy activities from the interview data: what is it that the regional government bodies do related to culture. Secondly, I categorised these activities following the three sets of activities identified by Hupe and Hill (2006: 23) in their policymaking framework: constitutive, directive and operational. Thirdly, applying thematisation, I identified three key themes in these cultural policy activities and named them as demarcation, discretion and mediation. I found that these themes are connected to one or multiple sets of activities.

Finally, I analysed legislation and regional policy documents' contents in terms of cultural policy to define, position and contextualise the regional government bodies and their activities. Legislation establishes the regional government bodies and assigns them specific tasks and responsibilities, even though legislation as a governing tool is used more in Finnish than Swedish cultural policy (Renko et al. 2021). The analysed regional policy documents were available in 2020 and included regional strategies, annual reports and, in Värmland, a regional cultural policy plan that the regional bodies are responsible for producing. In addition, I analysed strategies related to cultural environment because they were mentioned in the interviews. (Table 2.)

It must be noted that because the data is limited to the two case regions, the analysis only provides information on cultural policy activities in these specific regional contexts.

**Table 1.** Interviewees in Central Finland and Värmland.

Region	Regional government body	Interviewee's position
Central Finland	Arts Council of Central Finland	• Special Advisor
	Regional State Administrative Agency for Western and Inland Finland (AVI)	• Senior Officer
	Regional Council of Central Finland	• Development Manager • Regional Planning Architect
	Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for Central Finland	• Education Specialist • Senior Officer
Värmland	Region Värmland (Regional Council)	• Manager (culture department)

**Table 2.** Analysed policy documents and legislation.

	Policy documents	Legislation
<b>Central Finland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional strategy of Central Finland 2040 (2014)</li> <li>• Regional plan of Central Finland 2018–2021 (2017)</li> <li>• Annual report of the Regional Council of Central Finland 2019 (2020)</li> <li>• Plan of action of the regional cultural environment group in Central Finland (2021)</li> <li>• Cultural environment commitment of the regional cultural environment group in Central Finland (2017)</li> <li>• National cultural environment strategy 2014–2020 (2013)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act and statute on the Regional State Administrative Agencies (<i>Laki aluehallintovirastoista</i> 896/2009, <i>Asetus aluehallintovirastoista</i> 906/2009)</li> <li>• Act and statute on the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (<i>Laki elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksista</i> 897/2009, <i>Asetus elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksista</i> 1373/2018)</li> <li>• Regional Development Act (<i>Laki alueiden kehittämisestä ja rakennerahastotoiminnan hallinnoinnista</i> 7/2014)</li> <li>• Act on the Finnish Arts Promotion Centre (<i>Laki Taiteen edistämiskeskuksista</i> 657/2012)</li> </ul>
<b>Värmland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual report of County Administrative Board in Värmland 2019 (2020)</li> <li>• Annual report of Region Värmland 2019 (2020)</li> <li>• Värmland's cultural plan 2017–2020 (2016)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decree on distribution of state subsidies to regional cultural activities (<i>Förordning om fördelning av vissa statsbidrag till regional kulturverksamhet</i> 2010:2012)</li> <li>• Cultural environment act (<i>Kulturmiljölag</i> 1988:950)</li> </ul>

## Regional cultural policy activities in Central Finland and Värmland

Regional government bodies in Finland and Sweden carry out cultural policy activities in a framework that includes a variety of other actors, situations and activities (Hupe and Hill 2006) as well as layers of various reform trends such as PA, NPM, and NPG (Reiter and Klenk 2019: 23; see also Christensen and Lægheid 2011; Dunleavy et al. 2006). By carrying out the activities, the regional government bodies participate in cultural policymaking.

The analysis shows that the activities carried out by the regional government bodies in the case regions are not limited to actual managing of the realisation process but include decisions about the content of a policy as well as formulation of and decision making about desired outcomes. In this way, the regional government bodies conduct operational, constitutive and directive sets of activities.

The recognised key themes related to these sets of activities in regional cultural policymaking are *demarcation* (defining culture as a policy field), *discretion* (deciding on operations) and *mediation* (connecting actors). Demarcation has to do with the decisions about the content of a policy (constitutive set of activities). Discretion is related to the actual managing of the realisation process of regional cultural policy (operational set of activities). Mediation has to do with both directive and operational set of activities.

### Demarcation: defining culture as policy field

[The concept of culture] is difficult for me, it is probably difficult for many others. All that it includes. – And for promoting cultural policy, it is probably quite pivotal to understand. (Interview, Central Finland)

Here we have to speak for the fact that ok, culture an sich is important [...] But then, for this organisation, our task is not to promote culture. Our task is maybe not to undermine its significance, and to bring out that if culture is not doing well, it cannot promote any other things either. (Interview, Central Finland)

We try to stay out of defining [culture]. I think it is more productive if people themselves define it. (Interview, Värmland)

In Central Finland, most of the interviewees discussed difficulties in defining and specifying 'culture' as a policy object. This reflects the general ambiguity of the concept of culture. In Central Finland, there is no formulated regional cultural policy document that would provide a definition and basis for cultural policy. In Finland, a national cultural policy strategy is also lacking. Strategy for Cultural Policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2017) focuses on the operations of the ministry.

Central Finland's regional strategy (2014) includes plans for a long-term development of the region and the regional plan (2017) contains more concrete aims and operations based on the strategy. In both documents, culture is scarcely addressed. The regional government bodies are also differently committed in developing and implementing these documents. The regional council is responsible for writing them, and ELY has been tightly involved in their preparation process and implementation. Instead, according to the interviews, AVI's cultural unit has not participated in the preparation of the documents and while the regional arts council had suggested contents, they had not been included. In this way, a common regional cultural policy in Central Finland has not been formulated.

This presents a significant difference in contrast to Värmland where there is a regional cultural plan (2016) prepared by the regional council. A plan is a requirement included in the Cultural Cooperation Model for the regions to receive state funding. Based on the national cultural policy aims stated in the Government Bill on Cultural Policy (2009), the plans state regional priorities and areas of operation (professional theatre, dance, and music; museums; libraries and literature; promotion of arts and culture; regional archive; film; handicraft). According to the interviewee in Värmland, the plan is significant especially because with it, they "*actually have a policy*" that justifies different activities. While the regional cultural plans need to address specific areas of operation, the contents are for the regions to decide.

In Central Finland, cultural environment presents a distinct case in terms of defining the policy field. Cultural environment is defined in the national strategy (2013: 9) as an environment that is created by human activity and through interaction between humans and the natural environment. It includes cultural landscape, built cultural environment as well as archaeological sites. The interviewees working with cultural environment in Central Finland referred to these definitions that had also served as a basis for a commitment formulated by the regional cultural environment group (2017). Despite the conceptual clarity, many interviewees focusing on cultural environment tasks experienced that cultural environment is often forgotten when discussing culture and (regional) cultural policies.

According to the interviews, in both case regions the regional government bodies have rather broad possibilities to interpret and define the content of their cultural policies. This represents the regional government bodies' possibility for demarcation: they have the authority to decide and limit the sphere of their respective cultural policies. This seems to reflect the broad formulations included in the legislative framework as well as policy documents that frame the regional bodies' activities.

The lack of a specific definition of 'culture' in regional cultural policies was often not experienced as a problem. On the contrary, according to one interviewee in Central Finland, the aim is that the definition of culture "*would not be so limited*". Many interviewees experienced that an open definition is a positive thing because it makes the scope of regional cultural policy flexible. Many interviewees also felt that defining culture comes

naturally in the process. In both case regions, the interviewees highlighted the role of the regional actors in the process of demarcation: if some actor itself defines herself as a cultural actor, it brings that actor in the scope of regional cultural policy.

At the same time, in Central Finland the lack of a formulated regional cultural policy and the regional bodies' broad possibilities for demarcation has led to varying cultural policy scopes depending on the regional government body's general tasks. For the regional arts council, the task as a part of the Arts Promotion Centre is clear: to promote professional arts. However, for the other regional government bodies, the field of operations is very broad. As a result, in these organisations culture is mainly perceived in the contexts of regional development, creative industries, cultural environment and welfare.

Many interviewees in Central Finland felt that culture has a subsidiary role in relation to other fields and aims of the regional body's operations. This is why the interviewees also experienced that a broad definition of culture is required: it needs to be possible to include culture in the regional bodies' general aims and tasks. This highlights the instrumental tendencies in legitimating culture as a regional policy field. As a result, many interviewees experienced that the operations related to culture can be difficult to pursue as they do not have a clear mandate of their own. One interviewee in Central Finland mentioned that *“even if there is a will to promote culture itself, there are no means”*: culture always needs to be connected to other organisational aims such as promoting economic affairs.

To strengthen culture in the regional government bodies' activities in Central Finland, some interviewees – especially within the state administration on a regional level – wished for a more specific definition. When the regional government body's tasks include for example allocating state funding or conducting evaluations, vague definitions can create uncertainty when conducting the activities. Interestingly however, many interviewees pointed out that the regional government bodies themselves would not wish to define culture. One interviewee hoped from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture a definition of culture that the regional government level should promote.

### Discretion: deciding on operations

The regions have quite a lot of freedom to decide what is actually done and where the resources are allocated. (Interview, Central Finland)

Sometimes I wish that [the Ministry of Education and Culture] could be a bit stronger. [...] One could wish for, not necessarily a steering role, but more of a supporting or connecting role from the ministry. (Interview, Central Finland)

The idea of the Cultural Cooperation Model was that the politicians in the regions should decide [on the operations] themselves. (Interview, Värmland)

Based on the interviews, the key cultural policy operations of the regional government bodies in both Central Finland and Värmland are rather similar: they include awarding funding, consulting and providing information. Region Värmland also carries out specific cultural policy operations that differ from regional bodies in Central Finland: these include interacting with the politicians and preparing the regional cultural plan. While in Finland, the cultural activities rely on central cities and their arts and cultural institutions (Renko et al. 2020), in Sweden the regional councils are also maintaining and financing regional arts and culture institutions. These differences are related to the representative regional level. Because of its self-governance, the regional council in Värmland has a broad discretion on the focus and extent of its respective cultural policy operations.

In both Central Finland and Värmland, legislation addresses the regional government bodies specific tasks that steer their operations. In Central Finland, the regional arts council's task as a part of the Arts Promotion Centre Finland is to promote art – and culture when it is not someone else's task (657/2012). AVI needs to promote due processes and evaluate the availability of library services as basic public services (896/2009, 906/2009). ELY has expert tasks related to “education, know-how, and culture” (897/2009, 1373/2018). The regional council's main tasks include regional development and planning in Central Finland (7/2014). The County Administrative Board of Värmland's task is to function as a supervisory authority for the county's ancient monuments, and to decide if a particularly valuable cultural landscape should be protected as a cultural reserve or if historically valuable buildings and environments should be protected as listed buildings. Region Värmland's task is to organise library activities, but their size and scope is not defined. According to the interview, many of the regional council's cultural policy activities reflect traditions rather than formal necessities.

Within these legislative frames, the interviewees in both case regions experienced that the regional government bodies have in many ways possibilities to decide on their operations and the ways they implement given tasks. According to one interviewee in Central Finland, while there are aims coming from above, the regional bodies “*have various means to implement the aims*”. Especially the regional councils – both in Central Finland and Värmland – have a broad possibility to do things outside of the given frame. Compared to the state administration on a regional level, the regional council in Central Finland can actively apply, for example, for European Union funding to implement its own programmes and strengthen its operations.

In Central Finland, the role of the different ministries in steering regional cultural policy operations is emphasised because of the multiple regional government bodies that belong to the state administration on a regional level. The regional arts council is placed under the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). AVI and ELY are steered by various ministries: the MEC, the Ministry of Finance (funding AVI), the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of the Interior as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (funding ELY). Different ministries have different aims and possibilities to fund the regional government bodies. According to the interviewees, this has resulted in incoherence and a lack of coordination in the regional operations.

Interviewees in Central Finland perceived MEC – that is responsible for the statutory art and cultural policy nationally – as the most important ministry related to cultural policy also on a regional level. At the same time, many interviewees experienced MEC's visibility on a regional level as minor. On the one hand, one interviewee saw it as an advantage that MEC does not apply strict number-based monitoring but gives the regional body possibilities to interpret how the broad aims are approached. On the other hand, another interviewee felt that the ministry gives broad aims but does not provide sufficient funding for the operations. According to the interview, the issue of not having the possibility to promote the aims has often been communicated to MEC but without results. Another interviewee described MEC's role in supporting and connecting regional actors and its connection to the actors' daily work as minor.

The diffused steering of the regional operations is, according to many interviewees, a result of multiple state and regional reforms that have been implemented in Finland. Many interviewees mentioned a significant regional reform carried out in 2010 that grouped together and reorganised the functions and tasks of six different agencies, creating AVI and ELY as two new regional authorities. In principle, the reform aimed at clarifying the roles,

duties, steering and regional divisions of regional government authorities. In practice, however, the results in regional cultural policy were in many ways counterproductive. Many interviewees mentioned that MEC was not visible in the reform, leaving culture disconnected from the new organisational arrangements. In the interviews, the reform was described uncontrollable and the division of tasks – and public officials – in between different regional government bodies as “*completely arbitrary*”. More recently, increasing budget tensions faced by the central government has meant a transfer of tasks and resources to the regional level.

Many interviewees experienced that because culture has been disregarded in the regional reforms, culture’s position on a regional level has become blurred and divided. However, some interviewees stated that the current multi-sourced steering and funding also creates broad possibilities and autonomy for the regional bodies to decide on their respective cultural policy operations.

Contrasting to Värmland highlights the implications of the institutional context in regional cultural policy operations. Because of the regional council as a self-governing regional body, the responsibility of regional cultural policy in Värmland is clear. The County Administrative Board presenting the state on a regional level is placed under one ministry and its operations are limited to cultural heritage.

However, despite the regional council’s freedom in conducting the regional cultural plan, the state’s strong influence is in many ways still embedded in Sweden (Blomgren and Johannisson 2013, 2014; Johannisson 2010). The regional cultural plan must be approved by the national level for the region to receive state funding. State funding for the regional level has remained relatively similar since the establishment of the Cultural Cooperation Model. Therefore, state funding for a specific region cannot be increased unless funding would be deducted from the other regions. This has created a situation where the contents of the regional cultural plans are unlikely to affect the amount of the state funding that the regions receive. This can affect the regional actors’ motivation to invest in the contents and development of the regional cultural plans. State’s influence is also present in creating additional funding instruments that the regions then apply. This emphasises funding as a form of policy steering that the interviewee in Värmland described as “*silent guiding*”.

### Mediation: connecting actors

Somehow, I see our role as a kind of a messenger in both directions. We are in tight collaboration with the ministry, meet with them, and bring messages from the field. We also have a lot of contact with the people from the field, and deliver their messages. (Interview, Central Finland)

This [structure] is very dispersed, let’s put it that way. There are some things in AVI, some things in ELY, some things in Arts Promotion Centre, some things in the regional council, some things in education institutions, some things in municipalities. And no one has a direct contact, for example, to the municipalities [within the region]. (Interview, Central Finland)

–you’re supposed to write the [cultural] plans in close cooperation with the municipalities and have a dialogue with different parts of the society. (Interview, Värmland)

In Central Finland, the interviewees strongly position the regional government bodies as coordinators and mediators in between the various actors and government levels. Many interviewees experienced that the regional government bodies’ key actions include promoting collaboration and supporting networks. According to one interviewee, “*the network col-*

*laboration is probably the main thing we can do*". Collaboration is also a necessity in the fragmented structure of the Finnish regional government level in cultural policy.

The regional government bodies collaborate especially in the context of established working groups. A regional cultural environment group and a cultural collaboration group gather together different regional government bodies as well as other actors such as the municipalities. ELY and the regional council are active members in both, and the regional arts council participates in the cultural collaboration group. Interestingly, AVI does not take part in these working groups. In general, AVI was often excluded when discussing key actors in regional cultural policymaking. This presents the dispersion of the state administration on a regional level. AVI seems to identify itself more as the state's representative, while ELY and the regional arts council see their role as representatives of the region – even though formally all are regional government bodies representing the state. This brings forth the confusing nature of a multi-actor structure in Finnish regional cultural policy.

In addition to the regional government bodies themselves, the interviewees mentioned a variety of government and non-government actors that participate in making regional cultural policy in Central Finland. These actors include municipalities, arts and culture institutions (such as museums and libraries), university and other educational institutions as well as civil society actors such as artist associations, festival organisations, individual artists, companies and independent foundations within the region. In terms of cultural environment, government bodies with focus on the environment (Metsähallitus, Finnish Forest Centre) were also mentioned.

Contrasting to Värmland highlights how the self-governing regions affect the actors involved in making regional cultural policy. In the interviews conducted in Central Finland, the role of the local politicians was scarcely addressed. Some interviewees were even sceptical of including the local (or regional) politicians in making regional cultural policy, mainly because – according to the interviews – the politicians do not have enough expertise or time to get acquainted with cultural policy. In Värmland, the regional politicians present important regional cultural policy actors, even though according to the interviewee in Värmland, they are not involved "*on a day-to-day basis*".

In Värmland, the self-governing regional body clearly holds the main responsibility for regional cultural policy. The County Administrative Board of Värmland's cultural policy tasks are limited to cultural heritage, and in this context the County Administrative Board of Värmland and Region Värmland meet on a regular basis. Otherwise, Region Värmland has in many ways taken over the cultural policy responsibilities within the region. The regional cultural plan that Regional Värmland is required to formulate also presents a distinct context for mediation. The plan needs to be prepared together with various cultural actors within the region and in this way, it creates a platform for discussing regional cultural policy contents.

While in both Central Finland and Värmland the interviewees highlighted mediation, the lack of resources was recognised as a problem in both regions. On the one hand, resources affect the actors' possibilities to collaborate. In Central Finland, the regional government bodies have a strong will to collaborate, but according to one interviewee, "*the problem is that no one has a lot to give, money or other resources*". On the other hand, the regional government bodies may not have other choice but to collaborate in order to compensate the diminishing resources. The interviewee in Värmland discussed the necessity of interregional collaboration in the future because of the stagnant economical resources within the region.

Interestingly, while various actors participating in making regional cultural policy were mentioned in the interviews, citizen participation was not discussed in neither of the case regions – even though the Swedish structure allows participation through regional elections. However, the interviewees in both regions generally experienced that those who want to do have a possibility to take part and affect in regional cultural policymaking. In Central Finland, for example, the regional council's aims and tasks are defined together with the municipalities and other public regional actors as well as other collaboration partners.

## Concluding remarks

In both Finnish and Swedish cultural policies, the regional level has received new policy tools and capacities and, in this way, gained operating possibilities in making regional cultural policy. The analysis shows that the regional government bodies currently make use of these operating possibilities by carrying out activities that include decisions about the content of a policy, formulation of and decision making about desired outcomes and actual managing of the realisation process. In this way, the regional level is not only mechanistically implementing given cultural policies but it is actively participating in cultural policymaking.

Key themes related to the regional cultural policy activities are demarcation (i.e. defining culture as a policy field), discretion (i.e. deciding on operations) and mediation (i.e. connecting actors). These themes have many implications for different actors' possibilities to participate in cultural policymaking framework on a regional level. Demarcation confines the scope of regional cultural policies by defining the policy field. At the same time, it defines which actors can participate in regional cultural policymaking as *cultural* actors. Discretion follows demarcation, but the operations can also be used to limit the scope and participants in regional cultural policymaking. Mediation itself presents one operation that directly affects which actors the regional government bodies involve in their activities.

Within a three-tier-government structure, the regional cultural policy activities are activities that the state has found important to be carried out at the regional level. This suggests that demarcation, discretion and mediation should not be handled separately in every single municipality, but they should be carried out closer to the citizens than at the state level. From this perspective, the regional cultural policy activities should have relevance within a specific region. The possibility to make different regional cultural policies in different regions is included in both Finnish and Swedish structures. In Finland, especially the regional councils have broad possibilities to formulate their own cultural policy aims and activities within a specific region. In Sweden, differentiation is encouraged through the regional cultural plans.

The analysis however suggests that in Finland, many factors potentially challenge the regional level's cultural policy relevance and, as a result, regional cultural policy legitimacy.

Firstly, unlike in Sweden, the established structures in Finland have not allowed a creation of a regional government body with distinct cultural policy mandate. This has resulted in the lack of formulated regional cultural policy and coordination in regional cultural policymaking. The scattered regional cultural policy structure seems confusing even for the regional government bodies themselves. It also requires a lot of knowledge and effort for different actors to interact with the regional government bodies and make sense of their cultural policy activities.

Secondly, in Finland there are no clearly defined ways for different actors to participate in cultural policymaking through the regional government bodies. While various regional

bodies provide multiple financing and collaboration possibilities, distinct structures are lacking. In Sweden, a possibility to participate in the formulation of a regional cultural plan creates a formal context for collaboration. It also creates a need as well as the means to formulate a regional cultural policy.

Thirdly, the territorial divisions of different regional government bodies in Finnish cultural policy are not distinct. This makes it unclear within which region the regional cultural policy activities should have relevance. For example in Central Finland, some of the regional arts council's activities cover the whole country, dispersing regional divisions.

The scattered regional level in Finnish cultural policy suggests that within the country's institutional context, the regional government bodies have not been able – or interested – in affecting the distribution of cultural policy power and responsibilities on a regional level. Instead, cultural policy has been disregarded in different regional reforms. This has led to the current regional cultural policy activities that are not necessarily relevant even for the regional government bodies themselves. For example, according to the interviews, defining culture as a policy field is not something that the regional government bodies themselves necessarily wish to do. For cultural policy to be included in future regional reforms, it is important that the regional government bodies as well as other regional cultural policy actors are acknowledged and included in the process.

With multiple regional government bodies, the Finnish regional cultural policy structure presents a more network-oriented model than the Swedish structure. From an NPG perspective, new network modes of local and regional governance can reach effectiveness by collaboration among and between public sector and other actors. In Finland, the regional government bodies seem to have embraced their role as mediators. However, the collaboration seems to lack a clear coordination. Interviewees from different regional bodies experienced that *their* respective organisation is the key cultural policy actor in the region. This differs from Sweden where the regional cultural policy framework and the regional council's coordinating position are more clearly defined. At the same time, the multiplicity of regional government bodies in Finnish cultural policy brings more possibilities for differentiation in terms of focus areas and activities than in the Swedish model.

Despite strong emphasis on mediation, the regional government bodies' possibilities to enable or encourage new forms of citizen participation in cultural policy do not seem to be highlighted in neither of the countries. This can increasingly challenge the regional level's cultural policy legitimacy and raise questions such as why and for whom the regional government level in cultural policy exists. This calls for further research on different actors' regional cultural policy experiences and expectations as well as regional cultural policy differentiation in both Finland and Sweden.

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