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Pursuing decentralisation: regional cultural policies in Finland and Sweden

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ABSTRACT

In both Finland and Sweden, decentralisation has traditionally been an essential cultural policy aim. This article explores how, by pursuing decentralisation, the regional jurisdictions have been presented with more possibilities to fulfil their purposes and in this way, gain legitimacy in cultural policy. Based on the analysis of political, legal, and administrative documents, three main periods of regional decentralisation in cultural policies are identified: regions as vehicles of welfare policy, regionalisation, and competitive regions. In both countries, national governments have promoted the regional level's agency, and in doing so, potential institutional change in cultural policy. However, the increase of the regional level's role has been limited by the countries' strongly institutionalised cultural policy systems.

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Introduction

Cultural policy – in its explicit form – is what government proclaims to do for culture through its cultural administration (see Ahearne 2004, 2009). In Finland and Sweden's three-tier government systems, this cultural administration takes place at national, regional, and local levels. Each of these levels is a part of the institutionalised cultural policy system promoting culture as one of the main sectors for national, regional, and local public policies (e.g. Vestheim 1994; Kangas and Vestheim 2010, 277). In this article, we focus on the regional level and its transformed role in between the strong state and municipalities in Finland and Sweden.

While government implies the nation state's formal and institutional processes to facilitate collective action, governance has become an increasingly central concept in public policies referring to new structures, processes, mechanisms and strategies by which society is governed (e.g. Stoker 1998; Rhodes 2007; Pierre and Peters 2000; Jessop 2011; Kjær 2004; Bartolini 2011; Peters 2018). Governance identifies various actors and ways involved in governing vertically, horizontally, and across different networks. Peters (2018, 6) summarises governance as steering that includes government without privileging any particular set of actors inside or outside the public sector.

Originating from studies on European integration, the reallocation of authority points to multi-level governance that includes a variety of actors at the different levels of government and coordination of their goals, interests, and interactions (Baldersheim and Ståhlberg 2002, 78; see also Hooghe and Marks 2003; Bache and Flinders 2004). Multi-level governance presents an essential context for central–local relations and regional development in the Nordic countries (Baldersheim and Ståhlberg 2002; Fotel and Hanssen 2009, 579). Through the process of rescaling, certain functions, responsibilities, and

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authority are transferred between different levels of state organisation (MacKinnon and Shaw 2010, 1277; Brenner 1998; Jessop 1999; Swyngedouw 2000). The promotion of the regional level's agency presents rescaling as one strategy for institutional change (Gualini 2006, 892; Brenner 2004).

Decentralisation presents a form of rescaling as a vertical shift of authority from central to more local branches of the state (Cox 2009; Mwangi and Wardell 2012; Büchs 2009, 39). Decentralisation processes are often promoted to provide greater local autonomy, increase responsiveness to local needs, and facilitate public involvement and greater local accountability. Forms of decentralisation can commonly be found in terms of resource allocation formulas, accountability frameworks, and regulatory mechanisms (e.g. OECD 2019; Kangas 2004, 137).

The international organisations have played an important role in cultural policy decentralisation and governance (e.g. Vestheim 2019; Alasuutari and Kangas 2020). Decentralisation was emphasised by UNESCO already in the 1960s in connection to the delegation of cultural policy authority to community (e.g. UNESCO 1968, 12). The Council of Europe's Cultural Policy Review Programme has since 1985 evaluated and aimed to develop national cultural policies. The programme's main components include drafting national reports, arranging visits by an independent group of experts to a specific country, publishing two reports, and holding conclusions and findings meetings (Council of Europe 2011). In the reports on Finland and Sweden, decentralisation regarding the regional level is addressed. While the regional level's significance was recognised, its role in between state and municipalities remained indistinct in reviews (Council of Europe 1989a, 1989b, 1995a, 1995b) and evaluations based on the reviews (Kawashima 1997; D'Angelo and Vesperini 1999).

In both Finland and Sweden – with already previously decentralised structures and cultural institutions – decentralisation was acknowledged as an essential aim of the 'new cultural policy' formulated in the 1970s (e.g. Ny kulturpolitik 1972:66; Kulttuuritoimintakomitean mietintö 1974:2). The regional level's role in both countries was increasingly emphasised by the European integration and in 1995, the two countries joined the European Union actively promoting the creation of functional regions (e.g. Baldersheim and Ståhlberg 2002).

Despite similar policy aims, Finland and Sweden provide different institutional settings for decentralisation processes. Historically, Sweden is a country with hundreds of years of independence, basing its cultural policies on feudal and aristocratic traditions. Finland as a younger nation-state has developed its national cultural policies and public cultural institutions within a much shorter time span (Duelund 2008, 12). The history of the two countries is in many ways intertwined. Finland constituted a Swedish province for hundreds of years before becoming a part of Russia and gaining independence in 1917 (Kangas 2001, 58).

In regional development, the generally deployed tasks and tools in both countries are to a large extent similar (Page and Goldsmith 1988; Hansen 1993; Fotel and Hanssen 2009). The main difference is that in Sweden – a country of around 10 million inhabitants – there are 21 self-governing, directly elected regions functioning beside the central government and the local government (290 municipalities in 2020). In Finland – a country of 5,5 million inhabitants – there is no self-governing, directly elected regional body operating between the central and local government (310 municipalities in 2020). Instead, the municipalities select their representatives for regional councils. These differences point to variance in the dispersion of authority on a regional level in both countries.

In this article, we discuss the changing role of the regional level by the increasingly decentralised governmental functions and responsibilities in cultural policy in Finland and Sweden's multi-level governance systems. The underlying assumption is that there are differences in the construction of the regional level of cultural policy in these countries. We explore decentralisation towards the regional jurisdictions in cultural policies of Finland and Sweden since the 1960s until today. By pursuing decentralisation, the regional jurisdictions have been presented with more possibilities to fulfil their aims and in this way, gain legitimacy in cultural policy. We focus on different dimensions of decentralisation: political, fiscal, and administrative (see, for example, Kangas 2004; Schneider 2003; Wolman 1990). The dimensions are operationalised by regional cultural policy tools (laws and decrees, government proposals and decisions, ministries' reports and decisions) that reflect what

is being decentralised: regional actors' political power, financial resources, public authority, or responsibilities. Together, these dimensions point to the extent of decentralisation: weak (deconcentration), average (delegation) and strong (devolution). While there are country-specific analyses on regional cultural policies in Finland and Sweden (e.g. Johannisson 2010; Blomgren and Johannisson 2013, 2014; Kangas 2004; Lindqvist 2016; Lindqvist and Lorentzen 2015; Häyrynen 2003; Ilmonen 2015), as well as in other countries (e.g. Mangset 1995; Kawashima 2004; Sand 2018; Marx 2020), research focusing on the regional level's role in governance and administration in Finland and Sweden is scarce.

This article is structured as follows. The next section identifies different dimensions of regional decentralisation in the context of this article. The third section analyses regional decentralisation in Finland and Sweden during the three distinct periods identified. The article concludes with a discussion of regional decentralisation in cultural policy in the context of multi-level governance in Finland and Sweden.

Defining regional decentralisation

Both Finland and Sweden present 'local autonomy centrally framed systems' (Kazepov 2010, 56) where municipalities have high autonomy in managing and funding policies while the state defines a regulatory context to restrain territorial differentiation. With the key role of the central and local authorities, the role of the mid-level authorities (i.e. regional level) has remained minor (Kazepov 2010, 56; Barberis, Bergmark, and Minas 2010, 377). This is also the case in cultural policymaking: 'new cultural policy' meant decentralising power and responsibilities for example in service production mainly from the state towards the municipalities (e.g. Larsson and Svenson 2001, 90; Kangas 2001, 62).

Over the past decades, twofold tendencies have emphasised the role of the regional. Firstly, these tendencies include *regionalisation*, understood as 'processes of institutional or political development, during which the regions gain importance in policy-making – be it by greater autonomy or by participation in centralised politics' (Benz and Eberlein 1999, 345). Regionalisation has empirically presented itself as a state-led, top-down process where the state explicitly constructs regional centres of power (Paasi 2011, 10). Secondly, the increased emphasis on the regional level is connected to *regionalism*, a bottom-up process where regional actors aim to increase the political influence of specific regions and their residents (McCallion 2008, 584; Malmström 1998). Globalisation has resulted in the complex intertwinement of these 'from above' and 'from below' tendencies and processes. As a reflection, changes in the regional level's role have been recognised for example in social policies where the regional level's authority and responsibilities have increased (Barberis, Bergmark, and Minas 2010, 378), and in healthcare policies where new regional governance structures with larger regional units have been introduced (Hagen and Vrangbæk 2009, 122). Changes in the regional level's role in various policy fields give us reasons to examine the transfer of state power to the regional level, i.e. *regional decentralisation* in cultural policy.

In defining regional decentralisation, we can distinguish *what* is decentralised from *how* it is decentralised. Within the government systems, the standard definitions of decentralisation include three core dimensions: fiscal, administrative, and political (Schneider 2003; Kangas 2004). These dimensions are distinguished here in the context of regional decentralisation to indicate what is decentralised (see Figure 1).

Fiscal decentralisation refers to the revenues or fiscal autonomy of the regional government level (Falletti 2005, 329). A broader definition includes a financial perspective where decentralised are the economic resources allocated to the regional level, and not only the right to levy taxes. *Administrative* decentralisation describes a transfer of public authority and responsibilities to a regional government level, indicating the regional level's autonomy in relation to central control (Mueller 2015, 10; Falletti 2005, 329). *Political* decentralisation is linked to the degree to which central governments allow regional government bodies to have political power and undertake the political functions of governance, such as electoral capacities (Kangas 2004, 134–135; Falletti 2005, 329).

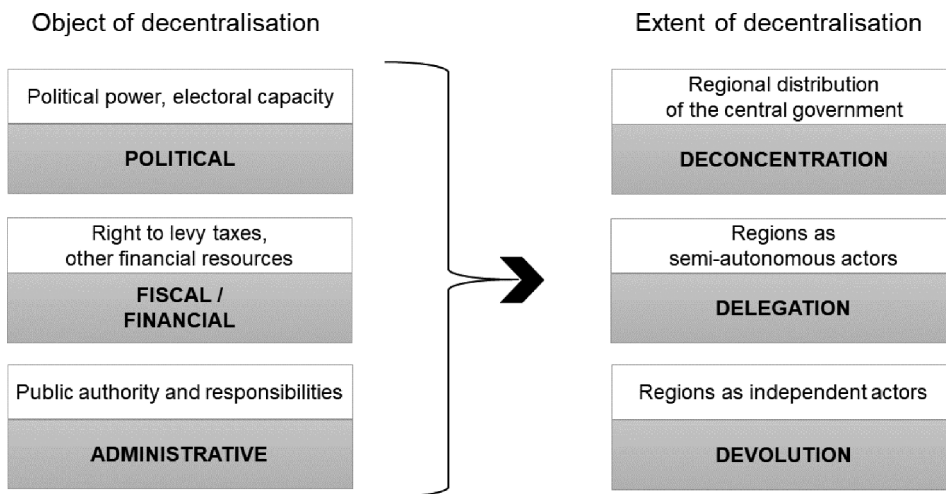


Figure 1. Object and extent of regional decentralisation.

Together, these different forms can cause different regional cultural policy outcomes, for example cultural services provided on a regional level (i.e. cultural decentralisation focusing on policy objectives and their outcomes related to the distribution of cultural resources as defined by Kawashima 2004; Duelund and Larsson 2003).

Focusing on how something is decentralised to a regional level, decentralisation is further defined by the concepts of deconcentration, devolution and delegation (Figure 1). *Deconcentration* involves the redistribution of authority only within the central government, where selected functions are taken over by the field offices of the central government on a regional level (Rossi 1999, 17). On a regional level, deconcentration allows only slightly more autonomy than centralised systems. *Delegation* refers to the transfer of policy responsibilities to a regional government level while the regional levels' operation remains largely dependent on the central government. Therefore, delegation implies slightly more autonomy for the regional level than deconcentration does (Kangas 2004, 135 – 136; Cohen and Peterson 1997, 1). *Devolution*, finally, includes central government allowing the regional level to exercise authority over specific policy fields. Devolution is presented in a transfer of authority for decision-making, finance, and management from central to regional level, for example for the regional jurisdictions to elect mayors and councils, raise their own revenues, and have independent authority to make investment decisions (World Bank 2013).

The concepts of deconcentration, delegation and devolution are generally rather uniformly defined, but they are often connected to a specific form of decentralisation (i.e. what is decentralised). Deconcentration, delegation and devolution are often associated with administrative decentralisation. However, these different forms are also applied to fiscal decentralisation (see Bird and Vaillancourt 1998, 3). It seems that the extent to which something is decentralised can refer to the regional jurisdiction's right and possibility to make decisions in a broad sense. The autonomy can be related to the regional jurisdiction's fiscal autonomy (for example, the right to levy taxes), administrative autonomy (for example, autonomy to decide on administrative matters), or political autonomy (for example, autonomy to organise elections on a regional level). Together, this autonomy reflects a combination of all forms of decentralisation.

Pursuing regional decentralisation in cultural policy

In this article, the regional cultural policy tools (administrative actors' authority, funding, and delivery of services) are examined to indicate the object (political, fiscal, and administrative decentralisation) and extent of decentralisation (deconcentration, delegation, devolution). These regional cultural policy tools are presented in the analysed documents: laws and decrees related to regional and cultural policies in Finland and Sweden; changes made to these laws and decrees; government proposals and decisions; ministries' reports and decisions; and government plans. All empirical data is listed in the Appendix (see [Appendix A](#)). All documents are available online and cover the years from 1960 to 2018. We apply content analysis (see Bowen 2009, 28) where the contents of the documents are organised into categories based on different regional policy tools. The documents analysed provide stable information on the regional cultural policy tools, covering a long time period (Bowen 2009, 28, 31).

We have chosen the documents based on their capacity to define and thus steer the regional jurisdictions' name, amount, tasks, and institutional position related to cultural policies. In a broad sense, these reflect the transfer of state power (in fiscal, administrative, and political terms) that create possibilities for the regional jurisdictions to fulfil their aims in designing and implementing cultural policy (cf. Scarpa 2016, 29). In this way, regional decentralisation brings the regional level's political legitimacy as a justification of authority to the fore (Bodansky 1999). In a multi-level context, it reflects legitimacy as 'a product of shifting norms about who should do what and how' (Elliott 2012, 368). Instead of investigating the outcomes of regional cultural policies, we aim to discuss the regional authorities' changing role by the increasingly decentralised governmental functions and responsibilities in the two countries' cultural policies.

Based on the analysis of selected documents, we identify three main periods of regional decentralisation in cultural policies Finland and Sweden: the periods of regions as vehicles of welfare policy (1960s–1980s), regionalisation (1990s–mid-2000s), and competitive regions (mid-2000s and onwards).

Regions as vehicles of welfare policy (1960s–1980s)

Following the emergence of the welfare state in the Nordic countries in the 1960s, culture was promoted as one of the main targets for national, regional, and local public policies (Kangas and Vestheim 2010, 277). As a guiding cultural policy principle, decentralisation was introduced (Kangas 2004, 133 – 134; Duelund 2008, 510). While all government levels worked together to achieve the welfare state aims of equal distribution of artistic and cultural resources to all citizens throughout the national territory, the public services were mainly channelled through municipalities.

On a regional level in Finland, the **Regional Associations** [Finnish: maakuntaliitto], established already in the 1920s, functioned as non-profit actors in their respective regions. Their member organisations included municipalities. Their tasks included to function as forums for cooperation in the fields of culture and local heritage work. Also formed by the municipalities, the **Regional Planning Associations** [Finnish: seutukaavaliitto] established in 1959 functioned as public authorities responsible for regional land use planning also related to, for example, cultural environment and placement of cultural institutions.

State's interests in the regions were promoted by the 11 **State Provincial Offices**¹ [Finnish: lääninhallitus] of which demarcations were based on historical provinces that can be traced back to the administrative reforms of the 17th century when Finland was still a part of Sweden (Haveri 1997; Reina 2012, 13 – 14). The State Provincial Offices functioned as joint regional authorities promoting national and regional objectives of seven different ministries and taking care of implementation of the central government's decisions in their respective regions. Their cultural policy tasks concentrated on administrative matters such as steering and overseeing the libraries (Kangas and Pirnes 2015, 54). Promoting the state's interests, the State Provincial Offices presented deconcentration of central power to the regional level, while the political and fiscal authority remained strictly on a national level.

Focusing on promoting the arts, the Arts Council of Finland [Finnish: Taiteen keskustoimikunta] was established in 1967 under the Ministry of Education to reflect the arms-length principle (i.e. independent experts' bodies). Under the Arts Council of Finland, the **Provincial Arts Councils** [Finnish: alueellinen taidetoimikunta] were created on regional policy grounds to independently promote artistic activities, award grants, and allocate subsidies in their respective regions (328/1967). In this case, both financial and administrative decentralisation were thus applied. The amount of the Provincial Arts Councils followed the number and regional divisions of State Provincial Offices that also appointed the members of the Provincial Arts Councils. In 1988, the Provincial Arts Councils were transferred under the State Provincial Offices, yet their autonomous decision-making position was retained within the financial limits of the central government.

In Finland, the welfare state period mainly presented administrative decentralisation towards the jurisdictions in regional cultural policy. Political decentralisation took place only on a local level. Regional decentralisation presented a mix of deconcentration and delegation as the state distributed cultural policy authority among government levels (i.e. to State Provincial Offices) or to semi-autonomous government organisations (i.e. to Provincial Arts Councils), and the municipalities further transferred their public authority and responsibilities to the Regional Associations. During the same time, a committee report (KM 1974:2) and following legislation emphasised a need for an independent cultural policy on the local level, resulting in municipal cultural boards and Finnish municipalities' increasing role in cultural policies.

The strong priorities of welfare state cultural policy were conveyed to the regions through regional actors' cultural plans. Cultural planning was strong at the regional level and plans were drawn up by all the above-mentioned actors in the 1970s and 1980s.

In Sweden, the **counties** [Swedish: län] represented the central government on a regional level. Like the Finnish provinces, the Swedish counties can be traced back to the administrative reforms by the then-monarchy in the 1630s, and their demarcations have basically remained the same since 1810. In the 1970s, there were 24 counties governed by **County Administrative Boards** [Swedish: länsstyrelse], a national government authority led by a County Governor [Swedish: landshövding] representing the state in their respective regions. In the 1970s, the County Administrative Boards were given a more explicit coordinating role (SOU 1974:84). The County Administrative Board's primary tasks were to coordinate the interests and efforts of both other national government authorities and the municipalities, as well as the interests of industry and civil society, to promote regional development. Related to cultural heritage, the County Administrative Boards had, and still have, supervisory responsibilities (SFS 2007:825). It was also possible for individuals and organisations to apply for grants from the boards. While the County Administrative Boards thus constituted an example of deconcentration of national governing power at the regional level, they could not have any significant influence over regional cultural policymaking apart from cultural heritage.

When the county reform was implemented in the 1630s, it included the abolishment of **county councils** [Swedish: landsting] as the political decision-making body of the then self-governing landscapes [Swedish: landskap]. Self-governing, politically elected county councils were reintroduced into the Swedish political system in the major municipal reform of 1862. The need for a more efficient regional and local administration as a consequence of industrialisation was the primary argument for this reform. Interestingly though, even if the reform was decided in political consensus, there were different ideological views on whether the reform aimed to strengthen central state power on the one hand or the individual citizen's rights on the other (Pettersson 2019, 85). Self-determination, including power of taxation at both the regional and local levels in Sweden, are evident examples of devolution of central power to regional and local political entities. The county councils' primary responsibilities are issues demanding a larger source of tax revenue than that of a single municipality. Therefore, county councils were by national legislation responsible for public healthcare and public transport. For county councils – as well as municipalities – measures in the cultural policy field were voluntary, making devolution seem absolute. However, in the field of cultural heritage, county councils and municipalities were bound by national legislation (SFS 1988:950).

Published in the 1970s, a comprehensive Swedish Government Official Report (SOU 1972:66), led up to the still decisive parliamentary decision on cultural policy of 1974 (Kungl. Majt:s prop. 1974:28). The report also spoke of the need for an independent regional cultural policy, yet this suggestion was not confirmed by the following parliamentary decision (Blomgren 2012, 525 – 526).

In both Finland and Sweden, the regional level's role in cultural policy during the welfare state was under construction. New regional jurisdictions in cultural policies were established with similar regional boundaries. Regions presented vehicles for promoting the welfare-state cultural policy including public cultural service system and cultural planning. In Sweden, several initiatives to increase regional political autonomy also in cultural policy were taken. In Finland, while the regional authorities held autonomy, the self-governing county councils were only discussed (e.g. Mykkänen 2016).

Regionalisation (1990s–mid-2000s)

In the 1990s, the decentralisation processes took a new trajectory in the Nordic countries as state intervention was considerably reduced. The arguments for decentralisation changed as a reflection of a new ideological wave and as a reaction to the economic stagnation (Mangset 1995, 73 – 74). The neoliberal turn introduced the concepts of new public management, technology, innovation, globalisation, and creative industries in the cultural policy discourse, causing noticeable changes in Nordic countries' cultural policy objectives (Kangas and Vestheim 2010, 278; Duelund 2008, 17; Mangset et al. 2008). Rhetorically, the arguments stressing the collective elements of decentralisation (increasing democracy, transferring power from central to local bodies, strengthening local culture) gradually shifted to arguments emphasising more individualistic elements (effectiveness and efficiency in the cultural sector, closer connection between economy and culture) (Kangas 2004, 133).

In practice, the emphasis on effectiveness was reflected in an emphasis of performance management in the public administration of cultural policy and other policy sectors (Kangas and Pirnes 2015, 45 – 46). Simultaneously, decentralised structures increasingly permeated cultural policy decision-making and administration. Regionalisation processes were strengthened when both Finland and Sweden joined the European Union in 1995.

In Finland, the number of the State Provincial Offices representing the central government on a regional level was decreased from 11 to five (Southern Finland, Eastern Finland, Lapland, Western Finland, Oulu) in 1997. At the same time, tasks related to culture and cultural environment were transferred to the established Centres for Environment and Employment (57/1995) and the Economic and Development Centres (23/1997). In the following year, Provincial Arts Councils' amount was differentiated from the number of State Provincial Offices, resulting in 13 **Regional Arts Councils**. In neither case did the changes affect the regional authorities' cultural policy roles.

Simultaneously, the system for municipal representation on a regional level was transformed. At the beginning of 1994, the Regional Associations and Regional Planning Associations were joined, creating new **Regional Councils** mandated by law (1135/1993) as public authorities responsible for regional development and land use planning. The Regional Councils' assemblies were and remain formed by municipal council members and chosen in relation to municipalities' size and distribution of political power on a local level. Therefore, the Regional Councils' decision-making reflects the results of municipal elections and thus implies the decentralisation of political power to the local level of government.

As Finland entered the European Union, the Regional Councils' cultural policy role expanded as they were made responsible for managing and allocating European Union's Structural Funds programmes in their respective regions (7/2014, 8/2014). This shift reflected regionalisation with the regional level gaining importance also in cultural policymaking. In the context of broader regional development, the Regional Councils were granted a broader role in the fields of creative economy and cultural policy. Elements of promoting creative industries were transferred on a regional level.

In Sweden, the County Administrative Boards continued to represent the central government on a regional level, but the independent county councils' cultural policy role underwent reform. In the mid-1990s, the county councils took a major initiative to increase regional political autonomy in relation to the then ongoing national government report on cultural policy (SOU 1995:84). The arguments were partly fuelled by the more independent and self-sufficient role of regions then advocated by the EU. They were also inspired by the parallel national government report on regional self-governance (SOU 1995:27), which resulted in a parliamentary decision with far-reaching consequences (SFS 1996:1414).

Firstly, in Western and Southern Sweden, several counties were merged into two larger ones. Secondly, in the same territories, several county councils were merged into two larger ones. Thirdly, the responsibility for regional growth was transferred from the County Administrative Boards to these larger county councils, who were then given the right to call themselves regions (Region Västra Götaland, 1.5 million inhabitants, and Region Skåne, 1.2 million inhabitants). These developments resulted in **regions** on a trial basis. In Sweden, regionalisation was therefore supplemented by regionalism, including the ambition to increase the political influence of specific regions and their residents. Interestingly, this process of regional decentralisation ran parallel with a process that resulted in the first national library act (SFS 1996:1596), thus limiting the acting space of both regions and municipalities in the public library field. Generally, and unlike in Finland, legislation is a governing tool rarely used by the Swedish government in cultural policy. While the reorganisation at the regional level would seem to reflect political devolution, the state simultaneously introduced increased elements of centralisation.

In both Finland and Sweden, the period of regionalisation brought an emphasis on the regional level and furthered the processes to shape functional regions. Entering the European Union also emphasised the international level that became more influential along with the national, regional, and local levels. As the aims and demands of regional development were increased, also the role of culture in regional development was highlighted, affecting regional cultural policy instruments and financing. In Sweden, regionalisation was supplemented by regionalism, an ambition to increase the political influence of specific regions and their residents (Malmström 1998). In Finland, despite an aim to create a regional government level like that of Sweden, the lack of a system for regional self-government remained, preserving the national and local levels as key actors in the field of cultural policy. In pursuing regional decentralisation, increasing aims of effectiveness were reflected in creating larger regional units with broader tasks in both Finland and Sweden. These amalgamations of regional units can relate to strengthening regional government level and governance tendencies.

Competitive regions (mid-2000s and onwards)

Entering the 2000s, the period of competitive regions emphasised efficiency and differentiation for example in privatisation, competition, and selection in the public sector (Julkunen 2017, 258). On a regional level, this period implies an overall strategy to make the regions more competitive on a global market. In a Swedish context, market-oriented arguments in favour of a strengthened regional level were introduced already in the 1990s (Johannisson 2010). Still, such arguments were integrated into a more general cultural policy framework from the mid-2000s and onwards. In both countries, regional cultural policy was connected as a central element in regional development. The regional government level actors were transformed into multifunctional entities combining different tasks, values, and organisational forms. The increasing variety of actors and ways involved in governing presented a shift towards governance.

In Finland, the provinces were abolished at the beginning of the 2010s as the regional administration reform grouped together and reorganised the functions and tasks of six different agencies – State Provincial Offices included. The stated aim was to clarify the roles, duties, steering and regional divisions of regional government authorities. Two new regional authorities were created: **Regional**

State Administrative Agencies [Finnish: aluehallintovirasto, AVI] with six offices and **Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment** [Finnish: elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskus, ELY] with 15 offices (896/2009, 897/2009). The larger regional units and combined tasks reflected competition state tendencies. Despite of the aim of clarification, the division of cultural policy tasks was not distinct. Tasks related to libraries – mainly in terms of financial decentralisation – were first addressed to Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in 2010. In 2014, they were transferred to Regional State Administrative Agencies.

Currently, the Regional State Administrative Agencies' main cultural policy tasks include evaluating basic public services, including cultural services, in their respective regions as well as redistributing state funding in the fields of library and youth services. Besides administrative decentralisation, the tasks present decentralisation of financial resources. The six Regional State Administrative Agencies' responsibilities do not entirely follow the borders of their respective jurisdictions. For example, the Southern Finland office has national oversight in the administration and development of public libraries' statistical databases and coordination of libraries' customer enquiries. This presents a dispersion of the distinctly defined areas of the regional jurisdictions.

The Regional Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment have three main areas of responsibility: Business and industry, labour force competence and cultural activities; Transport and infrastructure; and Environment and natural resources where they function as public authorities and channel public funding. In practice, some of the 15 centres only have one or two areas of responsibility. Therefore, some centres with all three areas of responsibility function also in other regions besides their own. In the context of the main areas of responsibility, the centres' cultural policy role focuses on creative economy.

In 2008, the **Regional Arts Councils** started to function under direction of the Arts Council of Finland instead of the State Provincial Councils, clarifying their administrative position in supporting the arts (1236/2007). However, the power to appoint the Regional Arts Councils was transferred to Regional Councils. In the beginning of 2013, the Arts Council of Finland was replaced with the Arts Promotion Centre, again affecting the Regional Arts Councils' position. The Regional Arts Councils started to function as the Arts Promotion Centre Finland's expert bodies in regional matters and their members were also appointed by the Arts Promotion Centre. In this context, the Regional Arts Councils lost their previously independent decision-making power, and their role was limited to administrative matters. However, the decision-making power related to supporting the arts remains. The Arts Promotion Centre Finland has 40 regional artists who initiate and carry out national and regional arts promotion projects throughout Finland implementing the Arts Promotion Centre Finland's development programmes. This dispersion of distinct regions makes regional cultural policy more indistinct.

In 2021, the changes in Finnish regional administration are still ongoing. Until the beginning of 2019, a health, social services, and regional government reform was prepared. The reform aimed to establish 18 new counties and reform the structure, services and funding of health and social services as well as to transfer new duties to the counties from Centres for Economic Development, Regional State Administrative Agencies, Regional Councils and other joint municipal authorities and municipalities. These duties were related for example to regional development and the promotion of regional culture and identity. In many respects, the planned new counties reminded of the self-governing, politically elected county councils in Sweden. However, the Finnish counties would not have had their own taxation power but be financed by the state, indicating political but not fiscal decentralisation. Affected by problems in preparation and upcoming political elections, the reform was cancelled. However, the political discussions related to the reform are still ongoing.

In Sweden, the period of competitive regions brought along similar discussions related to the regional level's role. A national government report on regional self-governance (SOU 2007:10) suggested that from six to nine regions would substitute the county councils of today, but this suggestion was not introduced to parliament due to the lack of political support. A similar suggestion by an additional Swedish Government Official Report in 2016 (SOU 2016:48) met the same fate.

Still, county councils were given a possibility to apply for the right to call themselves regions, granted that they are given decision-making power over regional growth. Today, Sweden consists of 21 county councils that were in 2019 all given the right to officially call themselves regions.

The regions played an important part in one of the key administrative reforms in Swedish cultural policy since the 1970s, the so-called Cultural Cooperation Model. The model was introduced in 2011 (SOU 2009:16; prop. 2009/10:3), and today, all regions except the capital region of Stockholm are included. Reflecting primarily administrative decentralisation, it is a new way of allocating national government funding to regional cultural activities that were previously earmarked directly at the national government level by the Swedish Arts Council.

In the Cultural Cooperation Model, national funding is granted as a general subsidy by the Swedish Arts Council, based on a 'cultural plan' that each region is responsible for producing in cooperation with municipalities and in dialogue with the cultural sector and civil society. The emphasis on cooperation and inclusion of various actors reflects governance tendencies. The model could be said to be the national government's answer to the regional government's request since the 1970s and onwards; that the political and fiscal autonomy of the latter should not be overly circumscribed by national administrative regulation. While the budget routines have changed and now involve increased dialogue between national, regional, and local levels of government and between policymakers and cultural workers, the model includes several elements that promote administrative centralisation rather than decentralisation. The cultural activities that are eligible for national government support are nationally regulated, as well as instruments for follow-up and evaluation (SFS 2010:2012). Even if it is too soon to truly assess the consequences of the model, research so far shows that this administrative reform, presenting itself as a decentralisation reform, has rather increased national government control over regional cultural policy (Blomgren and Johannisson 2013, 2014). Even though the Swedish regional bodies formally enjoy greater autonomy in cultural policy than before the Cultural Cooperation Model was introduced, it would seem as if they are in practice primarily subjected to regional delegation.

In both Finland and Sweden, the period of competitive regions has included aims and actions to emphasise the role of the regional level. The national government levels have been transferring economic power and responsibility to regions as well as to groups of municipalities (see also Myndigheten för kulturanalys 2018, 17). In Finland, the number of regional cultural policy actors has increased while their tasks have been diverged, creating administrative silos. Decentralisation has been a tool for promoting economic efficiency and flexibility by decentralising the administration of economic, social, and public policies – including cultural policies – to regional and local levels (see also Lobao, Martin, and Rodríguez-Pose 2009, 4). In Finland, the transfer of authority to the regional level has taken place as deconcentration where the state has redistributed authority only within the central government. The transfer of the authority to the regional government bodies has taken place administratively but it has not been based on regional policy or distinctions. In the Swedish Cultural Cooperation Model, there are many elements promoting centralisation rather than decentralisation. Therefore, the competitive regions period can be said to reflect tendencies of (re)centralisation of regional cultural policies in both Finland and Sweden.

Concluding remarks

In the multi-level governance systems in both Finland and Sweden, pursuing decentralisation in cultural policy has aimed at changing the role of the regional level. By creating regional jurisdictions and allocating cultural policy authority, national governments have been promoting the regional level's agency, and in that way, potential institutional change. Seemingly, many reforms have been made and various changes have been carried out in the regional jurisdictions' structure and cultural policy tools. Nevertheless, the regional level's role has remained minor and limited in both countries' strongly institutionalised cultural policy systems.

Pierson (2004, 22 – 23) has stated that the longer an institution exists, the greater are the investments and adaptations in the institution, and the more difficult to undertake significant institutional change. When institutions have been established through complex struggles and bargaining among organised groups, they have a continuing effect on subsequent decision-making, policy, and the processes for building new institutions (Kangas and Vestheim 2010). This kind of path dependency is apparent also in the development of regional cultural policy in Finland and Sweden. The two countries' different historical backgrounds and established institutional contexts have limited the possibilities for change in the role of the regional level and created differences in what and how has been decentralised. Key differences between these institutional contexts are the self-governing and politically elected county councils that were reintroduced into the Swedish political system in the 19th century. In Finland, similar regional jurisdictions have not been created in the context of the established position of the strong state and municipalities.

Pursuing regional decentralisation in Finland and Sweden has followed similar paths which we have identified as three distinct periods: regions as vehicles of welfare policy (1960s–1980s), regionalisation (1990s–mid-2000s), and competitive regions (mid-2000s and onwards). During these periods, the regional levels in both Finland and Sweden have received capacities and gained new roles in fulfilling shifting cultural policy needs. This can be seen as a process of legitimisation, where cultural policy legitimacy on a regional level has been claimed, justified, and accepted (e.g. von Billerbeck and Gippert 2017). This legitimacy has given the regional jurisdictions authority to function and make accepted decisions in a multi-level context. However, the countries' ways of doing regional decentralisation are different in terms of object and extent. While Finland has applied mainly administrative decentralisation, in Sweden also political and fiscal decentralisation have been applied. The extent of decentralisation in Finland has mainly been limited to deconcentration and delegation, while Sweden has also applied devolution. These differences are connected to the key differences between the roles of regions in the two countries' institutional contexts.

In both countries, pursuing regional decentralisation has been affected by international organisations' external influences. UNESCO's aims of promoting a broad provision of arts and cultural services and guaranteeing access to these services by establishing a cultural service system to cover different parts of the country are visible in the basic idea behind the welfare state's cultural policies including the promotion of arts and culture as an autonomous social sphere (see, for example, Duelund 2008). The European Union has in both countries affected structural adjustments and created arguments for promoting the regional level. These external influences can be interpreted as isomorphic and coercive pressures, i.e. forces that persuade and trigger institutions to pattern or recreate themselves towards, for example, the model of the international organisations and, consequently, towards homogeneity (e.g. DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 1991). While they are visible in the similarity of the periods of regional decentralisation in Finland and Sweden, the countries' key institutional differences have remained.

The different ways of organising the regional level in the two countries reflect these institutional differences. In Finland, cultural policy authority has been transferred to an increasing amount of regional government bodies and one distinct regional authority in cultural policy seems to be lacking. Here, the regional level includes complex and fluid, overlapping jurisdictions as well as functionally specific jurisdictions as required by specific governance demands. In Sweden, the county councils (*regions*) have remained the key regional cultural policy authority. They oversee, for example, coordinating and formulating the cultural plans required in the Cultural Cooperation Model. Here, multi-level governance on a regional level presents the dispersion of authority to a limited number of non-overlapping jurisdictions.

In Sweden, the established representative regional level has in some ways been able to promote the regional level's cultural policy agency. An important case in hand is the reallocation of authority towards the regional level as the Cultural Cooperation Model instigated a public debate on the role of the regional level in cultural policy. In Finland, it seems that partly because of the lack of a distinct

regional cultural policy authority, the regional actors have not been able or interested in affecting rescaling processes in cultural policy in a way similar to Sweden.

In both countries, the main idea of promoting arts and culture as an autonomous social sphere remains and is realised by organisations supporting and promoting the arts (Arts Promotion Centre in Finland and the Swedish Arts Council in Sweden). Still, the regional level's role is different between countries. The Swedish Arts Council formally operates on the state level involving the regions as vehicles for state policy. At the same time, the Arts Promotion Centre Finland's operations are officially carried out by actors on a regional level but directed by the state-level agency. This presents a difference in allocating authority in arts policy on a regional level.

In this article, we have presented how institutional changes in Finnish and Swedish cultural policies have been concretised by a creation, reformation, and discontinuation of regional jurisdictions in cultural policies. Regional decentralisation has been done in both countries as a response to different ideologies and needs on how to organise the public sector. As a result, the political-administrative systems in the countries' cultural policies have been changed. However, the established role of the state in both countries' cultural policies seems to remain. Even in Sweden with a representative regional level, the state holds a lot of authority in regional cultural policies in terms of funding. In this way, while the regional level's cultural policy agency has been developed, it remains limited. Further research is needed on how the authority and legitimacy gained by the regional level so far have affected the regional cultural policy processes as well as the regional levels' operations on the cultural field, and in terms of people's access to cultural activities, what kind of outcomes the process of regional decentralisation has brought.

Note

1. Excluding Åland Islands region with an autonomous status.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix A. Empirical data.

Finland	Empirical data
Laws and decrees	<p>Building Act (Rakennuslaki 370/1958)</p> <p>Act on the Number of Provinces (Laki läänien luvusta 201/1962)</p> <p>Promotion of the Arts Act (Laki taiteen edistämisen järjestelyistä 328/1967)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment (1236/2007) - Statute (Valtioneuvoston asetus taiteen edistämisen järjestelystä annetun asetuksen 1237/2007) - Amendment (Valtioneuvoston asetus taiteen edistämisen järjestelystä annetun asetuksen 11 §:n muuttamisesta 1201/2010) <p>State Provincial Offices Act (Lääninhallituslaki 1233/1987)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment (22/1997) <p>Regional Development Act (Laki alueiden kehittämisestä 1135/1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment (1651/2009) - Amendment (Laki alueiden kehittämisestä ja rakennusrahastotoiminnan hallinnoinnista 7/2014) - Amendment (Laki alueiden kehittämisen ja rakennusrahastohankkeiden rahoittamisesta 8/2014) <p>- Statute (Valtioneuvoston asetus alueiden kehittämisestä ja rakennusrahastotoiminnan hallinnoinnista 356/2014)</p> <p>Statute on Centres for Environment and Employment (Asetus alueellista ympäristökeskuksista (57/1995)</p> <p>Act on the Economic and Development Centres (Laki työvoima- ja elinkeinokeskuksista 23/1997)</p> <p>Act on the Regional State Administrative Agencies (Laki aluehallintovirastoista 896/2009)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment (Laki aluehallintovirastoista annetun lain muuttamisesta 932/2013) <p>Act on the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Laki elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksista 897/2009)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decree (Valtioneuvoston asetus elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksista 1373/2018) - Amendment (Laki elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksista annetun lain 3 §:n muuttamisesta 933/2013) <p>- Decree (Laki elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksista annetun lain muuttamisesta 1131/2014)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statute (Valtioneuvoston asetus elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksista 1392/2014) <p>Act on the Finnish Arts Promotion Centre (Laki Taiteen edistämiskeskuksesta 657/2012)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decree (Valtioneuvoston asetus Taiteen edistämiskeskuksesta 727/2012) <p>Public Libraries Act (Kirjastolaki 904/1998)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment (Laki kirjastolain 6 ja 7 §:n muuttamisesta 935/2013) <p>- Amendment (Laki yleisistä kirjastoista 1492/2016)</p> <p>Act on Financing Education and Culture (Laki opetus- ja kulttuuritoimen rahoituksesta 1705/2009)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amendment (Laki opetus- ja kulttuuritoimen rahoituksesta annetun lain muuttamisesta 938/2013) <p>Government proposal HE 95/1989 (Hallituksen esitys Eduskunnalle maakunnalle maakaupaliittojen ja seutukaavaliittojen yhdistämisen mahdollistavaksi lainsäädännöksi)</p> <p>Government resolution 147/1998 (Valtioneuvoston päätös maakunnista)</p> <p>Government proposal HE 52/2012 (Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laeiksi Taiteen edistämiskeskuksesta, valtion taiteilija-apurahoista annetun lain muuttamisesta ja alueiden kehittämisestä annetun lain muuttamisesta)</p> <p>Government proposal HE 114/2013 (Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laeiksi aluehallintovirastoista annetun lain ja eräiden siihen liittyvien lakien muuttamisesta)</p> <p>Government proposal HE 14/2018 (Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle maakuntaudistuksen täytäntöönpanoa sekä valtion lupa-, ohjaus- ja valvontatehtävien uudelleenorganisoimista koskevaksi lainsäädännöksi)</p>

(Continued)

Appendix A. (Continued).

	Empirical data
Finland	
Ministries' reports and decisions	<p>Cultural Committee Report (Kulttuuritoimintakomitean mietintö [KM] 1974:2)</p> <p>Government Arts Policy Report. 1978 (Hallituksen taidepoliittinen selonteko)</p> <p>Cultural Policy Report 1982 (Kulttuuripoliittinen selonteko)</p> <p>Government Cultural Policy Report. 1993 (Valtioneuvoston kulttuuripoliittinen selonteko eduskunnalle)</p> <p>Ministry of Education. 2005. Report of the committee on the development of the arts council system. 2005:41.</p> <p>Government report on the future of culture. 2018. (Valtioneuvoston selonteko kulttuurin tulevaisuudesta. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2011:8.)</p> <p>Ministry of Education and Culture's decision 2012 (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön päätös Taiteen edistämiskeskuksen aluetoimipisteistä 11.12.2012)</p> <p>Ministry of Education and Culture. 2018. Arts and culture as part of regional development; Outlook for 2025.</p>
Sweden	Empirical data
Laws and decrees	<p>Cultural environment act (SFS 1988:950 Kulturmiljölag.)</p> <p>Act on a reformed regional organisation on a trial basis. (SFS 1996:1414. Lag om försöksverksamhet med ändrad regional ansvarsfördelning.)</p> <p>Library Act. (SFS 1996:1596. Bibliotekslag.)</p> <p>Decree on County Administrative Boards. (SFS 2007:825. Förordning med länsstyrelseinstruktion.)</p> <p>Decree on the distribution of certain national subsidies to regional cultural activities. (SFS 2010:2012. Förordning om fördelning av vissa statsbidrag till regional kulturverksamhet.)</p>
Government proposals and decisions	<p>Government proposal on state cultural policy. (Kungl. Maj:ts prop. 1974:28. Den statliga kulturpolitiken.)</p> <p>Government proposal on cultural policy. (Prop. 2009/10:3. Tid för kultur.)</p>
Ministries' reports and decisions	<p>Swedish Government Official Report on cultural policy. (SOU 1972:66. Ny kulturpolitik.)</p> <p>Swedish Government Official Report on co-operation between national and local levels of government. (SOU 1974:84. Stat och kommun i samverkan.)</p> <p>Swedish Government Official Report on the future of regions. (SOU 1995:27. Regional framtid.)</p> <p>Swedish Government Official Report on cultural policy. (SOU 1995:84. Kulturpolitikens inriktning.)</p> <p>Swedish Government Official Report on a reformed regional organisation. (SOU 2007:10. Hållbar samhällsorganisation med utvecklingskraft; Ansvarskommitténs slutbetänkande.)</p> <p>Swedish Government Official Report on cultural policy. (SOU 2009:16. Betänkande av kulturutredningen.)</p> <p>Swedish Government Official Report on a reformed regional organisation. (SOU 2016:48. Regional indelning – tre nya län.)</p>