Multiculturalism and Cultural Policy in Northern Europe

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine multiculturalist cultural policies in northern Europe. Almost all societies are multicultural in the sense that they contain two or more languages or religions, and people there live according to many value systems and traditions. Few countries, however, can be labeled as ideologically multiculturalist societies. This multiculturalism implies a positive or at least a neutral government attitude towards cultural diversity, public support for the maintenance of cultural practices and identities, and public efforts to overcome social inequalities based on cultural backgrounds or markers. This article focuses on cultural policy development in Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands. According to the Multiculturalism Policy Index, these countries are, or at least have been, multiculturalist regarding the cultural rights of immigrants and they also share other common features. The main objective is to describe cultural policy evolution in these countries, to search for continuity and change in this development and to trace similarities and differences. Special attention is given to the relation between integration policy and cultural policy, to the incorporation of diversity issues into regular arts policy, and to the implementation of laws and policy objectives. The analysis shows that cultural policy has responded relatively slowly to societal changes caused by immigration. This delay has many reasons but it is obviously difficult to integrate group-specific multiculturalism into a field that has been accustomed to work in terms of universal values, quality-based assessment, individual creativity and national interest. Another finding is the notion that despite numerous efforts to incorporate diversity perspective into mainstream cultural policy, it has actually been much easier to establish special arrangements for immigrant groups and minority communities. Furthermore, the implementation of policy actions shows that activities are often quite modest in relation to formal objectives and the resources available are usually meager.

Keywords: cultural diversity, multiculturalism, immigrant integration, national cultural policy, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands
Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine multiculturalist cultural policies in northern Europe. Before that, we first have to know more precisely what multiculturalism means as a specific attitude to cultural diversity and how it differs from alternative policy approaches. Actually, only a small number of European countries can be classified as multiculturalist states that actively support the maintenance of cultural diversity. Those countries in northern Europe that are, or at least have been, multiculturalist in relation to immigrant groups, in particular, are Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. This article focuses especially on cultural policy development in Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands. Most attention is paid to Finland which, in addition to the cultural rights of immigrants, is officially bilingual, has two legally recognized churches, has granted the Sami cultural autonomy, and has also recognized other historical minorities. A closer analysis of the Finnish case also illustrates different forms of multiculturalist cultural policy implementation. At the same time, it reminds us how important it is to use a variety of sources and to look at cultural policy from different points of view.

Multiculturalism and its alternatives

The basic assumption in western political thought and social theory has been that a society is also a community, i.e. a collective unit the members of which share the same most elementary characteristics such as language, culture and/or ethnic descent. When these societies have formed own political entities, these have, as a corollary, been regarded as states of one nation, nation states.

The idea of an ethnically and culturally united state was very powerful until the second half of the 20th century. The Second World War, however, discredited nationalism as a political ideology, and international jurisdiction regarding human, social, political and cultural rights started to develop. In the 1960’s, many ethnic and cultural minorities gained new impetus at the same time as toleration of differences generally increased in western societies. Different solutions to ethnic conflicts and cultural diversity emerged. (Cf., Alcock 2000; Cordell & Wolff 2004.)

As a result, most European countries have reached at least a minimal recognition of cultural diversity within state borders. A greater challenge for both national self-understanding and cultural policies was formed by increasing international migration that has turned many countries into very heterogeneous societies. In numerous European states, lots of languages are spoken, many religions adhered to, and people have a great variety of ethnic backgrounds and identities. Large cities, in particular, have become super-diverse urban entities. (Cf., Castles & Miller 2009; Vertovec 2009.)

International migration also forced countries to develop policies to meet the needs of newcomers as they attempted to settle and integrate. At the same time the question of their linguistic and cultural rights had to be addressed. (Cf., Geddes 2003.) One basic approach has been to require assimilation into the host society. Assimilation can be seen as a one-sided process of adaptation in which migrants give up their distinctive linguistic, cultural or social characteristics and become indistinguishable from the majority population. The emblematic case of assimilationist policy towards immigrants, and also towards traditional minorities, has long been France which only very lately officially recognized the existence of historical minority languages.

Another European model can be illustrated by Germany where immigrants without German descent had hardly any political rights or the possibility to become German citizens. In this differentiated or
guest-worker system, however, the social and economic rights of foreigners were almost the same as those of the citizens. The maintenance of language, culture and ethnic identity was regarded positively as an asset for people who were later supposed to return to their countries of origin. Because they would return, the cultural structure of German society was not expected to change.

The third solution is in striking opposition to the assimilationist model but it also differs remarkably from the guest-worker system. This approach, multiculturalism, is more than the sheer recognition of diversity within the society. It also implies:

- a positive or at least neutral government attitude towards this cultural diversity;
- public support for the maintenance and development of cultural practices and identities;
- public efforts to overcome social inequalities based on cultural backgrounds or markers.

During the last couple of decades there has been a certain congruency between these models. France has made slow progress in the recognizing ethnic and cultural diversity and has simultaneously restricted its previously very liberal citizenship legislation. Germany, in turn, has accepted that many immigrants are there to stay which causes profound changes for the ethnic and cultural landscape. German citizenship was also opened to ethnically non-Germans at the turn of century. Multiculturalist countries such as Britain, Sweden and the Netherlands have revised their policies, some of them more, some less. The basic differences between assimilationist and multiculturalist countries, in particular, are nevertheless still easily discernible. (Cf., Kymlicka 2012.)

Multiculturalism in Europe

The last few years have generally been regarded as a retreat from multiculturalism. However, despite an undisputable change in political rhetoric, multiculturalism has in fact strengthened rather than weakened in almost all countries during the last thirty years. This can be demonstrated with the Multiculturalism Policy Index which monitors the evolution of policies in 21 Western democracies.

The Multiculturalism Policy Index provides information about national policies in a standardized format for three types of minorities: immigrant groups, national minorities, and indigenous peoples. A look at the immigrant multiculturalism policy scores (Table 1) reveals that in the countries under scrutiny, multiculturalism has increased from 1980 to 2010. The sum total has risen from 28 to 74 points, and the average from 1.29 points to 3.48 points (European average from 0.7 to 3.1 points).

The development is uneven, however. In 2010, there were only four countries (Australia, Canada, Finland and Sweden) that represent ‘strong’ multiculturalism (at least 6.0 points), whereas eight countries display ‘weak’ multiculturalism (less than three points). As Will Kymlicka (2012, p. 20) has noted, Europe now shows greater divergence than 15 or 30 years ago. However, even in cases of weak or modest multiculturalism, a slight increase is usually observable. The only country that really seems to have abandoned its former multiculturalist course is the Netherlands.

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If we include multicultural policies for national minorities and indigenous peoples in the analysis, and focus on northwestern European countries, we get a slightly different picture (Table 2). On the basis of these findings, it is clear that the three most multiculturalist countries in today’s Europe are Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Finland is an officially bilingual country where the Sami also have cultural autonomy and in which immigrants also have quite extensive cultural rights. Sweden scores higher than Finland in immigrant integration but lower in relation to the Sami people. Nowadays, Sweden recognizes five national minorities and minority languages but these groups don’t have self-government institutions. In the United Kingdom, devolution extended legislative powers to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Norway and Denmark are multiculturalist countries regarding indigenous people but do not otherwise recognize national minorities.²

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As multiculturalism is essentially about cultural rights, it is worthwhile to look closer at what multiculturalism has meant to national cultural policy (cf., Bennett 2001; Ilczuk & Raj Isar 2006; Meinhof & Triandafyllidou 2006). Tony Bennett (2001, p. 12), for example, has argued that cultural diversity poses a profound challenge to traditional formulations of cultural policy, and to our understanding of the public interests served by this policy. The general shift from societal homogeneity to heterogeneity requires a rethinking of different processes, mechanisms and relationships.

The UK has been in the forefront in this process, but because of space limitations, it has to be left out from this article’s analysis. Instead, we’ll focus on cultural policy development in Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands. Even though the last-mentioned country has later changed multiculturalism into assimilation, Dutch cultural policy and integration policy development shares many similarities with the Finnish and Swedish cases. These three countries are also modern welfare states where the equality of citizens has been an important political goal. At the same time, there are clear differences in the national self-understanding and in the history of immigration. Therefore, they form an interesting group for comparison.

The main purpose of this article is to describe the general cultural policy evolution from a multiculturalist point of view and to search for continuity and change in this development as well as to trace similarities and differences. Have the main objectives and implementation measures remained the same throughout the years or can we discover significant changes? Can we talk about a general multiculturalist cultural policy model or is it better to see the national cases as distinct and context-related approaches? Special attention is given to three focus areas:

- the relation between integration policy and cultural policy;
- the incorporation of diversity issues into regular arts policy;
- the implementation of laws and policy objectives.
Cultural policy and cultural diversity in the Netherlands and in Sweden

The Netherlands: from pluralism to nationalism

The permanent consequences of immigration to Dutch society were recognized in the late 1970’s. Against the historical background of consociationalism, the division of society into relatively separate confessional-ideological communities, Dutch multiculturalism was thereafter constructed. This approach emphasized the full and equal participation of members of minority communities in society and the simultaneous right to maintain their own ethnic and/or cultural identity.

The field of art, however, had never formed a genuine component in the classical consociational system. At an early stage, arts policy was removed from political, religious and ideological connections and disputes. Following the rule of thumb of the 19th century liberal statesman, Johan Rudolf Thorbecke, when making decisions concerning the arts, the Government should refrain from any substantial judgment. A system of arts councils and funds was later established to allocate public resources on the basis of common (national) interest and quality criteria. National cultural policy was also geared towards creating space for the expression of cultural and ideological differences. The state was thus supposed to be neutral both with regard to artistic values and in relation to moral and political principles (Bos & Smithuijsen 2010; pp. 2–3; Jong 1998; Cultural Policy in the Netherlands 2009, pp. 23–36.)

Cultural diversity caused by migration and the position of newcomers in the field of arts and culture did not receive much attention in the national cultural policy until the mid-1990’s (de Jong 1998, p. 367; Delhaye 2008, pp. 1306). Some practical initiatives were already carried out before that, however, mainly as a part of the Dutch integration policy. In the early 1980’s, a specific commission (CCM) was established to stimulate and to improve the cultural expression of minorities and to decide on subsidy applications that were difficult to place in the existing system of allocating state grants. This commission also produced an action plan which focused firmly on ethnic groups and their culture and on the freedom of minorities to re-discover and define own cultural background.

According to Eltje Bos and Cas Smithuijsen (2010, pp. 4–5), this resulted in a double regime with both an ethnic target-group cultural policy and a regular arts policy that encouraged the creation of good quality art products. From another point of view, two different assessment procedures emerged, one for foreign (allochtone) and one for Dutch (autochtone) artists (Delhaye 2008, p. 1306).

In 1987 subsidy applications were removed from the CCM to another commission which was located at the Dutch Arts Council (Bos 2011, p. 33). In 1990 the Dutch Arts Council also issued a recommendation which included demands for conciliation from both sides. The official arts policy should become less Dutch but immigrants should also give up their special ethnicity-based position. The quality criteria of Dutch arts institutions would be re-evaluated and the multicultural composition of advisory boards would be enhanced. To encourage the upward progression of newcomers, a budget earmarked for specific ethnic minority use was suggested. The Minister of Culture, Elco Brinkman, did not accept positive discrimination, however, and abandoned the earmarking of arts budgets. The hard artistic core thus remained outside the range of policy reforms. (Bos & Smithuijsen 2010, p. 5.)

In 1995, the State Secretary of Culture, Aad Nuis, published a discussion paper which reflects a certain awakening to the challenges brought by immigration. According to him, Dutch society had
previously been fairly homogeneous. Despite confessional and ideological factions and cleavages there was a certain undisputed common ground and people had learned to live with their differences. Many migrants, however, had arrived from significantly different or partially unknown cultures which has caused a new task for the Government; to guard and foster national unity. Because ethnic and cultural pluralism was hardly visible in public cultural life, the paper went on to suggest that migrants’ specific contribution to arts and culture must be properly evaluated and supported. (De Jong 1998, p. 369.)

In the late 1990’s, the Dutch integration policy generally started to move from a collective approach emphasizing the cultural rights of minorities (group-specific policy) towards a model that stressed the responsibility of individuals to adapt to Dutch society and culture (integration policy). The concept of interculturality, which was also used by Nuis in his discussion paper, was launched to promote more action between cultures and between representatives of different groups and communities, and to enhance social cohesion and national unity. The specific cultural budget for ethnic minorities was abolished. Because there appeared to be an obvious need for this funding channel it was re-established shortly afterwards nevertheless. (Bos & Smithuijsen 2010, p. 5.)

The most elaborate effort to reform Dutch cultural policy into a more diverse direction took place at the turn of the Millennium. State Secretary of Culture, Rick van der Ploeg, ascertained that the program offered by the state-subsidized cultural sector was too narrow, that participation was too one-sided and that diversity in society was not visible enough in artistic and cultural life. In a policy memorandum, ambition was high: there should be more room for young artists with immigrant origin, the Government should work more pro-actively, and the established cultural sector should be shaken up (Bos 2011, pp. 132–133; Bos & Smithuijzen 2010, p. 5).

In the final policy paper (Cultuur als Confrontatie), however, Van der Ploeg was forced to adjust his proposal for implementation measures which demanded that established institutions play a more explicit role in the policy on diversity (Bos 2011, p. 176). According to Christine Delhaye (2008, p. 1307), the original plan elicited strong reactions from artists’ unions, individual artists and cultural critics, leading to the abolishment or watering down of proposed measures.

According to Eltje Bos, it has been a recurring theme in Dutch cultural policy that despite a strong wish to integrate diversity into the regular cultural policy, in practice specific texts have been written for immigrant and minority issues, and specific measures have been prepared and implemented. In 2001–2004, the main policy measures were the Cultural Outreach Action Plan and the so-called 2%-target group measure. The latter was an instrument which increased funding for arts institutions if they developed their activities regarding certain special groups. (Bos 2011, pp. 176, 114–120.)

New specific institutions were also created such as the Phenix Foundation for immigrant artists, a network of professionals and organizations in the cultural sector with special focus on cultural diversity (Netwerk CS), and Atana, a program to enhance the recruitment and training of new board members for cultural institutions and non-profit institutions (Bos 2011, p. 135). During the years, quite a large number of ‘institutions with a multicultural character’ have been established and put into a system of regular public funding (ibid., p. 175). A major initiative was made by the state-financed Mondriaan Foundation which introduced a Development Award for Cultural Diversity. The award, €500,000, was given in 2006 to Van Abbemuseum for the best strategic plan for programming and communicating special exhibitions especially geared towards attracting minority audiences.
During the last few years, Dutch society has moved further into a nationalist orientation. This development has also manifested itself in Dutch cultural policy. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science commissioned an expert group to prepare a cultural-historical canon of the most important elements in the history of the Netherlands. In addition, a decision was made to establish a new national history museum to present the canon to a wider public. The canon was published in 2007 while the latter initiative has not yet been realized. Before the final physical location was determined, the Dutch Parliament decided to terminate its subsidy.

Cultural policy has been directed further away from multiculturalism and towards social integration and interculturality. The so-called houses for the cultural dialogue were founded as a means to build bridges between ethnic and cultural groups. The umbrella organization for these locations, ‘Kosmopolis’, was already bankrupt in 2009, however, and the Amsterdam branch was never realized. If the implementation of multiculturalist cultural policy has been troublesome, the progress of Dutch neo-nationalism and interculturalism has not been smooth either. Both approaches have been severely complicated by dramatic public sector cuts in Dutch cultural policy.

Eltje Bos and Cas Smithuijsen conclude that the principle of diversity has more or less disappeared from cultural policy programs (see also Delhaye 2008, p. 1307). Immigrants and minority communities should now be integrated so as to participate fully in social, economic and cultural activities. Following the ratification of the Unesco Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions the concept of cultural diversity has been partially reformulated as ‘an extension of the quality spectrum, an extension in a cosmopolitan, international perspective’. (Bos & Smithuijsen 2010, pp. 7–8).

An interesting new initiative is the cultural diversity code. These non-binding guidelines were prepared, following the initiative of the Minister of Culture Ronald Plasterk (2007–2010), by representatives of the cultural sector as a practical self-regulating instrument to survey the state of diversity and to assist the promotion of diversity. The Dutch Government program of 2012 explicitly recommended the use of this code to subsidized cultural institutions. It is still difficult, however, to see how much this voluntary tool will be used in practice and with what consequences.

Sweden: ambiguous multiculturalism

In the Dutch case, immigrant multiculturalism was a logical choice against the background of historical confessional plurality, the centuries-old reception of immigrants and institutionalized consociationalism. Sweden, by contrast, did not have such a tradition of cherishing diversity and promoting tolerance. Since the Reformation, protestant Christianity had held the position of a state church. The Swedish language was the only official language in the monarchy although an explicit Language Act came into force as late as 2009.

In terms of international comparison, Swedish *folkhem*-nationalism was perhaps relatively mild, but there were nevertheless strong assimilating pressures put on both traditional minorities and immigrant communities. Instead of ethno-nationalist fanaticism, the elementary idea was that it would be better for the members of ethnic and cultural minorities to integrate into the progressive and individualistic mainstream Swedish society and culture. This would provide them with better assets and opportunities in life. Seen from the minorities’ point of view, however, this conviction meant that their culture and identity were neither recognized nor respected. (Cf. Wickström 2013, pp. 112–114.)
This basic attitude was still cultivated when Sweden started to receive more immigrants. Refugee policy had already been liberalized during the Second World War, and somewhat later there was a broad consensus about the recruitment of people from abroad to fix labor shortage. Sweden differed from the general Western European rule in that many of those who came to Sweden to work were regarded as future citizens. The newcomers, many of whom came from neighboring Finland, were nevertheless supposed to assimilate into the Swedish society. (Cf., Runblom 1994.)

The shift that then took place in the mid-1970’s can therefore be seen as one of the most sudden and profound changes that has happened in the European history of minority policy and integration policy. Many immigrants from the Baltic countries, and Jews settling to Sweden, refused to assimilate and started to demand linguistic and cultural rights in the 1960’s. The Finnish Government hoped to get some of the emigrants back home and expressed the wish that the maintenance of the Finns’ mother language skills be supported. Furthermore, as Sweden started to receive more immigrants and from more remote regions, expectations of assimilation turned out to be increasingly unrealistic.

In 1975, an official immigrant and minority policy was adopted for the first time. In this policy document, the goals were seen as equality (jämlikhet), freedom of choice (valfrihet) and partnership (samverkan). ‘Freedom of choice’ referred to the right of immigrants to make their own choice about whether they wanted to assimilate (to become Swedes) or to retain their original language, practice own cultural activities, and maintain contacts with their country of origin. As this freedom was supposed to lead to the formation of new ethnic and/or cultural groups, ‘partnership’ meant a concord between the majority population and the various minorities. (Soininen 1999; Borevi 2013.) Ethnic and linguistic minorities also became protected by the Swedish Constitution which declares that opportunities for the Sami people and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own shall be promoted.

This development also had consequences regarding Swedish cultural policy. When the first national cultural policy objectives were regulated in the Government Bill on Culture in 1974, these also included references to immigrants and members of minorities. These groups were put together with children, handicapped people, and other people marginalized in a different way as disadvantaged groups. The position of these groups should be improved through the implementation of a democratic and equal cultural policy. In addition, immigrants and minorities were expected to give inspiration to the Swedish society if they were to have a chance of maintaining their own culture and identity (Egeland 2007, p. 63). State institutions were supposed to give groups and communities as much autonomy as possible in the management of their own affairs (Tawat 2012, p. 10).

Initially, the main concrete means to achieve expressed policy goals were, however, located outside official cultural policy. Swedish schools started to give native language instruction to immigrants and members of minorities. Newcomers and minorities were also encouraged to form their own associations and media organizations and to apply for public funding. A remarkable infrastructure of immigrant groups’ and minorities’ organizations with nation-wide Riksorganisation was thus constructed. Immigrant and minority cultural activities were supposed to take place within these organizational frameworks.

Another culmination took place in the 1990’s. Both Swedish integration policy and cultural policy were reformed. Immigrants and minorities now became regarded as an intrinsic part of a diverse Sweden, rather than as disadvantaged groups and communities. The Government’s cultural policy decision included a number of cultural policy aims and objectives. Cultural diversity should be
promoted and international cultural exchange and encounters between different cultures should be
enhanced. The latter goal was specifically motivated by the need to stimulate integration and to
combat racism and xenophobia, whereas the first goal was more linked to artistic renewal and the
fight against the negative consequences of commercialism (cf., Edström 2006, p. 8).

National cultural policy reform also introduced a new concept, world culture (världskultur) which
took a central place in diversity-related cultural policy and which referred mainly to non-Western
cultures (cf., Harding 2008). In 1998, the Forum for World Culture was established to function as
a coordinating organ to provide information about and to promote inter-ethnic and inter-cultural
expressions (Egeland 2007, p. 73). In 1997 a theater venue in Stockholm (Södra Teatern), originally
supposed to become a local World Culture House, was given the task by the Ministry to include
diversity in its activities (Egeland 2007, p. 200). Furthermore, there was a proposal to establish
regional world culture consultants. This plan was finally realized in 2002 when the Government
allocated money (SEK 3.0 M.) for regional multicultural consultants (Edström 2006, p. 9). In 2004,
the Museum of World Culture was opened in Gothenburg. This museum and three museums in
Stockholm are located under the auspices of the national Government agency; the National
Museums of World Culture.

A multiculturalist approach started to find a concrete shape in the Swedish cultural policy at the
same time as the national immigration and integration policy was turning in a more individualistic
and less multiculturalist direction. As in the Netherlands, there was an increasing recognition that
immigrants from outside Europe in particular had problems in finding their place in the Swedish
labor market and in the rest of the society. A policy reform in 1997 made a conceptual shift from
immigrant policy to integration policy. The diversification of the Swedish society was acknowledged,
and integration was understood as a process which concerned both ‘original Swedes’ and
newcomers. Group-specific policy measures should, however, be limited to such activities that were
needed during the first years after arrival in Sweden. The right to be different was guaranteed, but
responsibility for maintaining their own language and culture was increasingly delegated to
immigrants themselves and the members of minority communities. (Cf. Johansson Heinö 2011;
Borevi 2013.)

Despite the achievements in cultural policy mentioned above, more action was required. The
commission report that preceded the Government’s proposition on integration policy urged
Swedish cultural policy and cultural landscape to better reflect society’s diversity. Swedish cultural
arenas and institutions were challenged to broaden their operational framework and offerings.
Specific state allowances to promote the cultural activities of ethnic or linguistic groups were also
suggested. But in the final proposition these ideas were either omitted or profoundly reformulated.
According to Nina Edström, the Government seems to have had a different view regarding the
value of cultural activities than did the commission. Neither were cultural operations in immigrant
associations considered cultural in the same sense as cultural institutions’ activities. (Edström 2006,
p. 11.)

However, in 2004 the Swedish Government decided to proclaim 2006 a specific Year of Cultural
Diversity (Mångkulturåret 2006). The name of the initiative reflects a more general conceptual shift
from world culture to cultural diversity (mångkultur/kulturell mångfald). The main idea was that
publicly funded cultural institutions and organizations have a responsibility to address and to be
inclusive towards the whole Swedish population. Studies conducted as preparatory work for the
special year had shown that there was a cleavage between people that were regularly involved in
publicly financed cultural activities as practitioners or audiences and those that were rarely or never involved (Pripp, Plisch & Printz Werner 2004). Therefore, everybody’s experiences, skills and values should be reflected and taken advantage of to enrich and to improve publicly funded cultural life (SOU 2005, p. 23).

The official purpose of the year was to permanently extend the range of opportunities for people living in Sweden to participate in cultural life and to bring about an interplay between prevailing cultural traditions. Furthermore, the aim was to devise incentives for those responsible for publicly financed cultural activities to clearly reflect and incorporate the ethnic and cultural diversity that exists in Sweden today. A national coordinator was assigned with a secretariat that worked in dialogue, negotiation and consultation with the representatives of the Swedish cultural and educational field. Diversity (mångfald) was defined to include not only ethnic and cultural diversity but also other perspectives such as gender, age, sexual orientation and functionality. (Ibid., pp. 23–24.)

In the final report regarding the accomplishments during Mångkulturåret, the national coordinator finds it promising that there exists a strong and growing will to promote ethnic and cultural diversity in the publicly financed cultural sector. Levels of knowledge and willingness, however, are unevenly distributed within and between different cultural activities. As a whole, the Year of Cultural Diversity is deemed to have helped to lift the issue up the public agenda and to have raised awareness in the field of arts and culture about the importance of a more open, inclusive cultural life. It has also made clear that ‘publicly financed cultural activities must address society as a whole and reflect the wide range of knowledge and experience and the diverse perspectives found in the community’. (SOU 2007, pp. 28–29).

The general atmosphere was not overwhelmingly positive, however. Just as the previously mentioned Dutch initiative by the Mondriaan Foundation (Delhaye 2008, pp. 1313–1314), The Year of Cultural Diversity was often strongly criticized in the Swedish media and among artists and cultural workers. This might be one reason why only some of the official recommendations were realized. Even though there was a clearly expressed wish that the year should be a starting point for long-lasting and structural changes, it was often portrayed as something special and temporary, and even as something that disturbed already existing activities and development. (Edström & Hyltén-Cavallius 2011, pp. 5–12.)

Meanwhile, Swedish cultural policy has been reformed again. A new Government Bill on cultural policy was passed by the Parliament in 2009. Culture in Sweden should be a dynamic, challenging and independent force based on freedom of expression. Everyone should be able to participate in cultural life, and creativity, diversity and artistic quality should mark society’s development. To reach these objectives cultural policy should promote a) everyone’s opportunity to cultural experiences, cultural education and to develop their creative capabilities; b) quality and artistic renewal; c) a living cultural heritage which is preserved, used and developed; d) international and intercultural exchange and cooperation; and e) take notice of the right to culture of children and the young in particular.

Compared to previous cultural policy goals, the changes are relatively small. The much-disputed policy objective to counteract commercialism’s negative consequences has been abolished. Under the heading, ‘diversity and inter-cultural co-operation’ the Government proposal discusses discrimination, participation in culture and the arts, gender equality, national minorities and other forms of diversity. Cultural policy should contribute to increasing diversity and a multifaceted
cultural supply and thus increased freedom of choice for all. (Regeringens Proposition 2009, pp. 22–24.)

So close to Mångkulturåret, references to ethnic and cultural diversity are strikingly short, superficial and ambiguous. Jenny Johannisson (2012, pp. 48–49) has also pointed out recently that there is a clear ranking order in Swedish cultural policy which also reflects the tensions between particularism and universalism and between democratic and aesthetic values. Artistic creativity and cultural heritage receive the absolute majority of state cultural funding, whereas areas such as accessibility and diversity are left to other actors to take care of.

On the basis of recent material, it therefore seems that diversity issues have not climbed up on the Swedish cultural policy ladder. Edström and Hyltén-Cavallius also argue (2011, p. 11) that integration policy and cultural policy have moved further away from each other. During Fredrik Reinfeld’s first Government (2006–2010), there were no specific integration policy strategies for culture. According to Edström and Hyltén-Cavallius, integration policy initiatives have been, at least rhetorically, included in cultural policy.

The fact that the Swedish Arts Council which allocates state funding to many arts and cultural institutions now points to promoting cultural diversity perspective as one of their central tasks might be seen as an illustration of this. In addition to efforts to increase diversity in Swedish cultural life in general, Kulturrådet has introduced specific grants for international and intercultural cultural exchange. Since 2002, there have also been subsidies to promote the culture of the Sami and other national minorities that the Swedish Government has officially recognized.

This might again indicate a certain similarity between Sweden and the Netherlands. Reflecting on the recent development in the latter country, Christine Delhaye (2008, p. 1370) pointed out that the delegation of diversity issues to cultural funds and institutions has caused an almost complete disappearance of the subject from the public debate. Whether this – in the absence of any sanctions – is the right way to update the field of culture and the arts to the changing ethnic and cultural structures, remains to be seen.

Multicultural cultural policies in Finland

Basic principles: multiculturalism and nationalism

Immigration to Finland started to increase in the late 1980’s, later than to Sweden and the Netherlands. However, before that Finland could already be characterized as a multicultural and multiculturallist country, i.e. as a state that recognizes the existence of two or more cultural communities within its borders and which supports the maintenance of diversity through different judicial, political and financial means.

Before independence (1917), Finland had already become an officially bilingual country, and the 1919 Constitution declared both Finnish and Swedish as national languages. The state church system had been dismantled in the 1860’s. The Evangelical Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland have later enjoyed the status of an official religion and been described as national churches (kansankirkko). The Sami language became an official language in comprehensive schools within the Sami domicile area in the 1980’s, and in 1991 the Sami were officially recognized as an indigenous
people in the Finnish Constitution. Efforts to safeguard the Roma language and to support the maintenance of Roma culture have also increased since the 1980’s (Ristimäki 1995, pp.250–251).

Finland’s national identity constructed in the 19th century tells a different story, however. The symbolic community was strongly based upon the Finnish language, Evangelic-Lutheranism and age-old ancestral descent. This so-called Fennoman conception of the nation was still widely shared at the end of the 20th century even though the view had been slightly liberalized during the decades. This means that the Finnish system of organizing diversity has contained tensions and contradictions. It is a quite unique combination of extensive cultural rights and a narrowly defined symbolic community. In other words, it is a mixture of multiculturalism and nationalism. (Cf., Saukkonen 2013.)

According to the Constitution, public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations on an equal basis. In cultural policy, this has meant that the State must provide Swedish-speakers with the same opportunities as the Finnish-speakers and that an extensive infrastructure has been built for Swedish-language arts education and cultural activities. The state also subsidizes associations and other organizations that provide Swedish-language cultural services. (Cf. Ristimäki 1995, pp. 244–245.)

Since 1996, the cultural self-government of the Sami has been exercised through the Sami Parliament. This Parliament, in whose elections only those officially recognized as Sami can participate, decides upon the allocation of money from the national budget for the benefit of Sami culture and Sami organizations. It may also launch initiatives, make proposals, and issue statements on matters concerning Sami languages, culture, and the status of the Sami as an indigenous people. (Saukkonen & Pyykkönen 2008, pp. 52–53; Ristimäki 1995, pp. 248–250.)

In this article, we’ll focus mainly on how Finnish national cultural policy has responded to the existence and needs of other minorities, with particular attention to the new groups and communities brought about by recent international immigration. A major reform took place in 1995 when an amendment was made in the constitutional rights of people living in Finland to one’s language and culture. This revision formed part of a larger renovation concerning basic rights and liberties. In the new formulation, the Sami, as an indigenous people, as well as the Roma and other groups, were given the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

The expression is open to different interpretations, but the Government’s proposal regarding the matter made a couple of important clarifications. Firstly, it was stated that this regulation includes not only the negative right not be interfered with by public authorities while practicing one’s own culture, but also the responsibility of the Finnish state to support the maintenance and development of the language and culture of the groups in question. Secondly, the somewhat obscure reference to ‘other groups’, does not refer to traditional minorities only. The paragraph will be applied to new groups and communities if they can be regarded as minorities.

Finland has also ratified the two central instruments of the Council of Europe regarding minorities and cultural rights; the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Both came into force in 1998. In the context of these conventions, Finland informs the CoE about the situation of Swedish-speakers, the Sami,
the Roma and some other groups. In contrast to Sweden, Finland does not legally recognize any minority languages or national minorities.

Together with the search for role models from the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, these new statutes and thoughts probably guided the understanding of Finnish immigrant integration in a multiculturalist direction. In a Government Resolution regarding tolerance and racism (1997), integration was defined as participation in Finnish society while maintaining one’s own language and culture. This right of immigrants and cultural minorities to keep their own ethnic and/or cultural identity was considered beneficial to both newcomers and the Finnish society as it would smooth the integration process. When the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999) was approved, this approach took a legal form.4

Finnish cultural policy also adapted to the societal change quite swiftly. The first policy guidelines of the Ministry of Education concerning immigration were published in 2003. In this document, cultural services and the support mechanisms in the field of culture and the arts, together with sports and youth work, were considered important means to advance integration. Of the basic principles, three were clearly related to the arts and culture. First, the needs of minority cultures should be better taken into account in the general system for supporting arts and culture and in the functioning of cultural and art institutions. Second, the cultural needs of immigrants should be taken care of by increasing the financial means for supporting minority cultures to correspond with the changes caused by immigration. Third, systems for supporting professional artists belonging to ethnic minorities and their organizations should be developed.

These guidelines can be seen as a key document which has laid the general framework for Finnish cultural policy regarding cultural diversity. We’ll describe later how these policy principles have been put into practice. The immigrant policy guidelines in the Ministry of Education and Culture5 were updated in 2009. The right of immigrants to maintain and develop their own language and culture is again mentioned, as well as the Ministry’s responsibility to support immigrants’ culture and to enhance the accessibility of cultural services from the point of view of immigrants.

The overall emphasis in the guidelines, however, is in the promotion of the integration of newcomers into the Finnish society. This reflects a basic feature in Finnish integration policy. Generally speaking, integration contains both the participation of immigrants on equal terms and the maintenance of collective cultural identity. In practice, however, integration is usually narrowed down to finding of one’s place in mainstream society and the majority culture, and in the labor market in particular. Integration policy is, in reality, thus much less multiculturalist than it appears to be at first. (Cf., Saukkonen 2013.)

In the specific section concerning arts policy and cultural policy, questions related to accessibility play a more prominent role than in previous documents. This might reflect a certain change in cultural policy thinking towards ’mainstreaming’ and away from group-specific measures. However, it can also be a simple consequence of the fact that most concrete activities had already been put into this area. As in Sweden in the 1970’s, immigrants and minorities are first and foremost seen as disadvantaged people and groups. The Ministry aims to assist integration and promote equality through enhancing participation in artistic and cultural activities and services.
In the same year, the new strategy for Finnish cultural policy was published. In this document, the Ministry confirms its positive notion of growing cultural diversity and multiculturalism:

Finland is a multicultural country with a strong cultural identity. Cultural diversity springs from a wealth of diverse regions, languages, indigenous cultures and cultural heritage—diverse cultural expressions and mores. (…) Immigrants are a new creativity and talent resource, and the positive effects of multiculturalism add to the vitality of Finnish culture. (Ministry of Education 2009, p. 16.)

However, there is also increased recognition that pluralisation and multiculturality involve risks. According to the strategy, part-cultures may become differentiated and isolated from the rest of society, and this can lead to further polarization. In addition, the risk of immigrants becoming marginalized from the mainstream culture is mentioned. The prevention of such a trend is considered an important task for cultural policy. The European trend of viewing immigration, cultural diversity and multiculturalism as a source of potential problems has thus reached the Finnish coast as well. Compared with many other countries, it has so far affected policy formation very little and it is expressed in relatively mild terms.

Among the measures needed to implement the strategy, multiculturality and immigrant integration are also dealt with. Cultural diversity should be taken into account in all activities relating to cultural policy. Local activity and everyday practices are considered especially important, and development needs will be addressed together with other administrative branches. Research into multiculturalism and its effects will also be increased, and the Ministry will explore the need for an immigration policy programme on culture in the context of the futures of culture report.

The last-mentioned report was delivered to the Parliament in 2010. In this document, cultural diversity and multiculturality forms one of the seven core areas. Diversity, multiculturality and mutual interaction are regarded both as a basic prerequisite for creative capital and as a key to assist integration and to prevent marginalization. The report also makes some concrete suggestions. A national language strategy, for example, should be prepared which would strengthened the position of national languages, the Sami languages, the Roma language and sign language as well as of other language groups. In addition, immigration policy programme on culture should be prepared.

Policy implementation: yes and no

In the Finnish case, our analysis can also dive a bit deeper. In examining any public policy, we shouldn’t be satisfied with laws, policy documents or discursive material alone. In all policy fields, there is presumably some gap between general principles and objectives, on the one hand, and the implementation of laws, programs and plans, on the other hand. In cultural policy, which at the rhetorical level often contains ambitious ideals and eloquent expressions, and in which many central concepts such as culture, creativity and diversity can be interpreted in widely divergent ways, this methodological enlargement is essential.

There have been concrete instruments to achieve the stated policy goals in the 2003 guidelines, some of which were already founded a little earlier in fact. At the national level, the main channel to support the maintenance of language, culture and identity financially has been in the form of grants delivered by the Ministry of Education and Culture to support multiculturality and combating racism. This allowance was originally established in 1997 to subsidize minority cultures and anti-
racist activities. In 2005, it was renamed to support multiculturality and work against racism and, in 2009, the promotion of immigrant integration through arts and culture was explicitly added as a specific purpose. The Helsinki City Library had already started to function as a Multilingual Library in Finland in 1995. The aim of the Multilingual Library is to enhance library services for foreigners, to establish connections with domestic and international organizations, to provide information and guidance and to purchase materials in rare languages for the interlibrary use by ethnic minorities in Finland. The state finances the Helsinki City Library for these activities with an annual subsidy. In 2008, there were books available in sixty languages, the largest collections in the Multilingual Library being in Chinese, Arabic, Persian and Somali.

The cultural needs of immigrants and cultural minorities have also been included in more general efforts to secure everyone’s equal opportunity to participate in culture and to express creativity. In order to achieve this task, the Ministry of Education started financing the Culture for All Service in 2003. This service functioned until 2013 under the aegis of the Finnish National Gallery, after which it has been supported by an independent association. In 2005, the Finnish National Gallery also established a specific position of a cultural minority coordinator to evaluate how the needs of immigrants and ethnic minorities were recognized in the functioning of this institution. This task was later changed into a cultural diversity adviser and merged with the Culture for All Service.

In 2009, The Arts Council of Finland received an allowance from the Ministry of Education for art projects promoting multiculturalism in Finland. The overall aims were, on the one hand, to strengthen the opportunities for immigrant artists, and for artists belonging to national ethnic minorities to engage in artistic activities and to take part on an equal basis in Finnish artistic life. On the other hand, the objective was to support the multicultural work of other artists and working groups and art projects promoting intercultural interaction in Finland. The Arts Council of Finland founded the Subcommittee for Multiculturalism for the preparation of decision-making. In 2012 the total sum of €100,000 was distributed to 35 applicants. (Karhunen 2009; Saukkonen 2010.)

The Ministry of Education and Culture also made an interesting move when the Institute for Russian and Eastern Europe was recently reorganized as a private organization. The Cultura Foundation began its operations in 2013 and its task is now to support the maintenance and development of the linguistic and cultural identity of the Russian-speaking population in Finland, and to otherwise promote bidirectional and multi-dimensional integration. The foundation should also enhance intercultural interaction nationally and internationally. The foundation provides different services and runs a meeting point for all interested in Russian language and culture in the center of Helsinki.

It would thus be unfair to say that multiculturalism in the Finnish cultural policy should be mere rhetoric. However, a closer look also reveals some qualifications to the general picture. In a recent study (Saukkonen 2010), one of the most important results was the observation of a discrepancy between the general and the specific level of cultural policy documents. Immigration, minorities and overall ethnic and cultural diversity, and the new challenges that these changes pose for national cultural policy, were easily discernible in the general cultural policy documents such as the cultural policy strategy. In policy documents closer to the implementation of cultural policy and arts policy,
such as policy plans and programs for music, visual arts and performing arts, these questions were much less pronounced and, in particular, were far less systematically dealt with.

This observation is also in keeping with the results of a survey carried out in 2007 (Saukonen, Ruusuvirta & Joronen 2007) in which arts and cultural institutions in the Helsinki region were asked how they take immigration and the ethnic and cultural diversification of Finland into account. The survey revealed that there was undoubtedly a lot of goodwill in the Finnish arts and cultural institutions to do something. However, there were very few examples of concrete action, especially when the institutions explicitly devoted to immigrant work or cultural diversity, such as the International Cultural Centre Caisa or the ethnographic Helinä Rautavaara Museum, were excluded. In many cases, these activities were considered something additional to start implementing if there is extra funding available.

True, the implementation of public policies can hardly ever be carried out without due financial resources. Therefore, it is also relevant to ask how much money there has been in Finnish cultural policy to achieve the stated policy objectives regarding cultural diversity. On the basis of the material available, one can only conclude that the amount of money available for the maintenance of language and culture and for multicultural arts projects has been relatively small.

Until 2005 the total sum of grants for the support of multiculturality and work against racism was only €252,000. Since then it has grown to €650,000 in 2013. This increase is quite modest in relation to the simultaneous growth in immigration and the consolidation of new ethnic and cultural minorities. The largest individual grants in 2013 were €55,000 and €47,000. The sum total of subsidies distributed by the Arts Council of Finland has remained at the same level of €100,000. The largest grants in 2012 didn’t exceed €5,000. This means that public funding is only enough for relatively small-scale project-like activities.13

To sum up, officially Finnish authorities are strongly committed to multiculturalism, including cultural policy multiculturalism. Many principles have also been put into practice, and some of them already have an institutionalized character. At the same time, we can observe similar difficulties and tensions in Finland as in the Dutch and Swedish cases, in the incorporation of ethnic and cultural diversification of society into regular arts policy, for example. The gap between policy rhetoric and policy implementation also appears to be wide. In addition, development seems to lack coherence regarding both the explicit recognition of those groups supported and the different objectives in diversity-related cultural policy.

Conclusion

In contrast to what one might assume on the basis of recent public debate, a multiculturalist approach towards the cultural rights of immigrants has never been widely spread in Europe. Just as surprising might be the observation that instead of a retreat, multiculturalism has generally increased in the last couple of decades. Also against expectations perhaps is the fact that the road to incorporate multiculturalism into national cultural policies has been full of obstacles, tensions and other difficulties.

This article has presented and analyzed three northern European multiculturalisms from the cultural policy point of view. Sweden and Finland represent strong multiculturalism in contemporary
Europe, and the Netherlands is a country that used to celebrate diversity but has since shifted to the assimilation of immigrants and even to some kind of official neo-nationalism. In the two Scandinavian countries, the changes throughout the years have been more gradual. However, there too we can observe a move from a collective to an individual approach and from a celebration of diversity to the acknowledgement of social tensions and problems and of the need to prevent these. Little by little, ethnic and cultural diversity is becoming normalized as a social and political issue.

There are significant differences between these three countries in terms of nation-building and national identity, arts policy and cultural policy, as well as immigration history and integration. Nevertheless, they also share important similarities with regard to how cultural policy has reacted to the changing ethnic and cultural structures of society.

One important observation is that cultural policy seems to have responded to societal changes caused by immigration relatively late. One reason might be that in immigrant integration, issues like labor, education, housing, health and social welfare are considered more important than the linguistic and cultural rights or artistic activities. When newcomers settle down, they are immediately confronted with needs related to a place to live, health services and social security. Learning the language of the host society is also important and is strongly connected to other skills required for employment. Children need education, and the school system is forced to find solutions to this demand. No doubt, people also crave culture but in the hierarchy of needs this demand takes a lower position. The pressure on cultural policy to adapt to changing circumstances is therefore weaker. As a corollary, action is more dependent on political will.

However, the delay can also be a result of the strong, historically constructed autonomy of culture and the arts within which there is generally more reluctance to reform policy according to political needs and expectations. Art for art’s sake might be an extreme principle that has never been fully applied to any cultural policy. However, in liberal democracies in the 19th and 20th centuries a widespread sense of a need to protect the field of artistic expressions against political intrusion developed. In the course of time, this principle and the institutional mechanisms to safeguard it have also produced a defensive mentality among those communities of artists and arts workers that regard efforts at political interventions with suspicion and resistance.

Furthermore, it is obviously difficult to integrate group-specific multiculturalism into a field that has been accustomed to work in terms of universal values, quality-based assessment, individual creativity and national interest. The full incorporation of communal cultural diversity in cultural policy provokes questions about the primary criteria behind artistic value judgments. Opening this box might be quite a task unto itself. Furthermore, the true recognition of minorities and their traditions might lead to the necessity to approve the simultaneous existence of different but equally valid quality criteria. In this sense, cultural diversity really challenges some basic components of contemporary arts policy, and from this point of view, opposing change is quite understandable.

Another finding, closely related to those above, is the notion that even though there have been conscious efforts later to incorporate diversity perspective into mainstream cultural policy, the results are quite meager. In particular, it seems to have been much easier to establish special arrangements for immigrant groups and minority communities such as special grants, specific institutions, and plans and programs with particular focus on newcomers and members of minorities. Initiatives striving for a more profound and all-inclusive change have usually been essentially watered down, if not completely abandoned.
In all three cases, we can also find both conceptual change and terminological ambiguity. It is obvious that one doesn’t really know yet how to talk about these issues, and changes in the public debate can have a significant influence on cultural policy vocabulary. When public multiculturalism-bashing became generally accepted after the infamous remark by Angela Merkel, many actors and policy makers started taking their distance from the concept. The policy content, however, does not always change in tandem with conceptual development. Institutional arrangements change slower and more reluctantly than discourses.

Also, many concepts such as ‘diversity’ can be understood in widely different ways. In addition to ethno-cultural pluralism, it can refer, for example, to all kinds of differences and inequalities, to the global diversity of national cultures, and to the variety of artistic and cultural expressions in a given context. Different meanings sometimes appear in the same document without explicit definitions. Even on the same page cultural diversity can denote both diversity of expressions and diversity of cultural communities, sometimes making interpretation quite difficult. A reader of policy papers has to be very careful not to come to hasty, misleading conclusions.

Our uncertainty is further increased by the fact that the objectives of diversity-related cultural policy vary greatly from time to time and from document to document. This should function as a strong incentive to direct cultural policy analysis regarding these matters to the implementation of policy plans and programs. As the Finnish case, in particular, demonstrated, this is also important because even though there might be true action discernible, it might be much more modest in terms of public financial support, for example, than one might assume on the basis of laws, strategies and policy plans.

Ethnic and cultural diversification will certainly continue in European societies. Whether we prefer multiculturalism or not, it will be increasingly interesting to follow the implications this development will have on national and local cultural policies. Experiences so far tell us that there could be interesting debates and discussions ahead.

References


1 In evaluating multiculturalism policies related to immigrant minorities, MCP uses eight indicators. For each indicator, policy documents, program guidelines, legislation, government news releases and secondary sources have been examined to assess the extent to which a country meets or exceeds the standard outlined in the indicator. The indicators were 1) Constitutional, legislative or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism at the central and/or regional and municipal levels and the existence of a government ministry, secretariat or advisory board to implement this policy in consultation with ethnic communities; 2) The adoption of multiculturalism in the school curriculum; 3) The inclusion of ethnic representation / sensitivity in the mandate of public media or media licensing; 4) Exemptions from dress codes (either by statute or court cases); 5) Allowing dual citizenship; 6) The funding of ethnic group organizations or activities; 7) The funding of instruction in bilingual education or the mother-tongue; 8) Affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups.

2 For the points system related to these groups, please visit the MCP website shown below the table.

3 For the points system related to these groups, please visit the MCP website shown below the table.

4 A new Act on Integration came into force in 2011. There are slight changes in terminology and definitions but the basic tenets remained unaltered.

5 In 2010 the Ministry was renamed since when it has been called the Ministry of Education and Culture.

6 In this paper, I’ll translate the Finnish concept ‘monikulttuurisuus’ as ‘multiculturality’ in cases when it seems that ‘cultural diversity’ could be misinterpreted. I thus avoid translating it into ‘multiculturalism’ because I want to save this concept for the political-ideological use defined in the beginning of this paper.

7 The strategy also mentions that the activities of the Sami Cultural Centre and new creative production arising from Sami culture will be supported financially in order to secure the position of Sami culture as an indigenous culture.

8 However, Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen’s Government prepared a language strategy that was limited to the two national languages, Finnish and Swedish.

9 Nowadays Sami culture is subsidized via other channels.

10 The task of the Multilingual Library does not include large European languages or Russian and Estonian, because the purchasing material in these languages is every city library’s own responsibility.

11 The Arts Council has also had a system of regional artists (läänintaiteilija) who work for the good of professional and amateur artists in their local area while also carrying out their own artistic work. Work related with immigration and cultural diversity has been included in the job description of some regional artists.

12 Many Finnish cities also have these meeting points or international or multicultural centers. Some cities also distribute grants for immigrant associations’ artistic and cultural activities and for art associations and communities for their diversity projects.

13 By way of comparison, in 2013 the private Kone Foundation allocated 1.9 M€ for projects on the theme Multilingualism and Art.

14 Merkel’s statement about multiculturalism as a failed policy was quite peculiar especially since Germany has never actually applied such an approach in its integration policy.