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# It's all about policy

*Introduction to issue 1/2018*

Sakarias Sokka

Ph.D., Senior researcher, Center for Cultural Policy Research CUPORE, Helsinki  
[sakarias.sokka@cupore.fi](mailto:sakarias.sokka@cupore.fi)

This issue of the *Nordisk kulturpolitisk tidsskrift / Nordic Journal of Cultural Policy* consists of six referee articles and one commentary article. As the editor-in-chief, I'm happy that we have now had commentaries in two consecutive numbers of the journal. They are a sign of a vibrant and healthy research community of cultural policy research in the Nordic countries. In this number, **Håkon Larsen** calls for new angles and approaches to studying elite cultures. Larsen argues that scholars of cultural policy should take elite culture "seriously as a culture in itself".

Based on his commentary, it remains somewhat unclear how "elite culture" should be defined in other than socio-economic variables. I am however sure that he is right in claiming that the existence of elite culture is not explained wholly by plain social benefits. You can read the commentary in the end of this issue. In a broader view, Larsen continues the discussion on what cultural policy research is (or should be), which was touched upon also in the last commentary article (in no. 1-2/2017). My initial personal response to "taking elite culture seriously as a culture in itself" is that cultural *policy* research is forever bound to analyzing how cultural contents are 'policed': Whenever there's a policy for something, there are also teleological aims, normative protocols, and power relations. When we speak of power and political influence, we cannot afford to leave social variables out of the picture.

Against the question of the essence of cultural policy research, I'm glad to present you six referee articles that all reflect on some of the most essential points of cultural policy. First, **Tobias Harding** analyzes the core values incorporated in the heritage policy of churches in Sweden. As he writes, heritage policy – as a part of cultural policy – is a "policy aiming to create good living spaces for the people, anchoring their daily life in local identity and history."

The second article also deals with something that has been very essential for the development of cultural policy in each of the Nordic states: *Bildung*. In this context, **Ann Christin E. Nilsen and Ole Marius Hylland** analyze the Norwegian art education model from the *Bildung* perspective. They show how art education creates possibilities for individual growth and creation of new cultural contents. It is also a question of democracy and politics, as art education is very much connected to the level of assimilating (or not assimilating) children to (high) culture in institutionalized settings.

In the third article, we take another look at heritage policy. This time, **Sofie Rosengaard and Trine Øland** examine the emergence of three canons (culture, history and democracy) in Denmark. They consider the canons as examples of symbolic and political power in cultural policy and analyze the role of intellectuals in the public debate regarding the canons. They show how intellectuals take actively part in the definition processes of concepts like history, art and democracy, which all can also be used as tools for culturalization and racialization of human differences. In cultural policy practice, political and symbolic power are entangled to questions of giving “right” definitions to concepts and sorting out which kind of contents should be valued by the society. These are moreover questions that belong in the core of cultural democracy – questions that cultural policy researchers ask over and over again.

Fourthly, we look at the aesthetics of the Swedish *Rikskonsserter*, an organization that was aimed to bring music of high quality across social and geographic borders. In a sense, its aim was to offer “elite culture” to large audiences (i.e. realizing the idea of democratization of culture). In his article, **Erling Bjurström** describes the development of *Rikskonsserter* from the late 1960s until the termination of the organization in 2010. *Rikskonsserter* was primarily built on aesthetic arguments and seems to have been unable to update its goals and guiding principles in line with the changes in the surrounding society before its activities were terminated.

Like Bjurström, also the fifth article takes a historical view to Swedish development. It however also reflects international developments, as **Geir Vestheim** scrutinizes the background and context of the evaluation programme of cultural policies of the member states, launched by the Council of Europe in 1985. Vestheim concludes that the evaluation programme as such marks an ideological change: Whereas political arguments from the 1970s were still valid when the Swedish cultural policy was evaluated in 1990, they were no longer considered to be sufficient. We may reflect this observation back to the case of *Rikskonsserter*.

In the last referee article, **Trine Bille** and **Cecilie Bryld Fjællegaard** examine the livelihood of Danish writers and translators. In addition, they consider who is defined as an author and who is not. Ultimately, the definition of artist is based on the applied criteria. It's not that simple to tell who the producers (authors, artists) of any particular “elite culture” are, let alone to make a clear-cut distinction between which forms of culture are labelled as ‘high’ and which are not. We come back to the question of using power in making definitions and controlling borders.

Finally, I'd like to remind you of our **Call for Papers**. In addition to the continuous general Call, we are opening a new Call for a thematic issue about LAM-institutions to be published in 2019. Please see the last pages of this issue for more information.

I wish you a nice read!