Culture in Knowledge Society

A brief overview

The research programme “Culture in Knowledge Society” (2001-2003) is financed by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and co-ordinated by Prof. Sverker Sörlin, SISTER. It encompasses the following four programme areas:

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Swedish Institute for Studies in Education and Research (SISTER)
Drottning Kristinas väg 33 D, 114 28 Stockholm
Phone: +46 8 545 252 60
www.sister.nu
E-mail: info@sister.nu
1. Background and General

This research programme studies culture as a sector of society in modern knowledge economies. A phenomenon that serves as a point of departure is the fact that culture grows rapidly as part of contemporary Western economies. A second phenomenon to consider is the increasing economic importance of scientific knowledge and the concentration of social dynamics to a limited number of hubs and centres, often possessing good facilities for research, education, and cultural life and cultural production in the same city or region.

From these quite general observations of major tendencies in social change the research programme is designed to deepen the empirical and theoretical analysis of if, how and why these tendencies occur – in the Swedish context but with generous international comparisons. The menu is quite large; the research issues under study are numerous – covering anything from individual cultural career making to research- and culture policy matters – and the geographical dispersion of empirical cases covers regions and cities all over the country.

The first programme area, covering Cultural life, cultural politics, and democracy, analyses aspects of democracy in the cultural policy area at national, regional and local levels. The researchers examine the way in which aspects of democracy have been and are being embodied in cultural policy, the nature of the normative background for the democratic facets of cultural policy and the economic, social and political contexts in which these questions are addressed.

The second programme area, Labour markets, professions, and life forms of the new cultural society, aims to contribute to an understanding of the meaning, conditions and development of cultural work in a contemporary “multicultural” and “experience-industrial” context. One point of departure is the trends towards a radical reformation of the social status of cultural production. The other point of departure is the remarkably underdeveloped state of societal research into cultural work in Sweden.

In the third programme area, Culture and creative places in knowledge society, focus is put on the geographical locations and the production milieus, their local synergies, their local strategies, and their architectural and other place-making features. The hypothesized spatial connection between a flourishing knowledge and cultural production is tested through a number of studies directed at the local level in university and college towns. Also studied are the mobility of academically educated specialists and the attractiveness of cities and regions with varying cultural properties, ranging from strong “social capital” to a rich repertoire of cultural institutions and culturally informed higher education programmes.

The fourth programme area, Culture in the new economy, concentrates on the changes taking place as culture gradually occupies an ever-stronger position in the economy. There is an urgent need to understand the reorientation of cultural life, the new forms of entertainment and the changing use of leisure time. Projects in the programme area range from the study of festivals to studies of the cultural infrastructure of cities and the role of heritage in local development strategies in university towns.
2. Cultural life, cultural politics, and democracy

Research director: Prof. Geir Vestheim, University College of Borås

In recent years, democratic questions have featured prominently on the political agenda and in the social science and humanities research environments. The Nordic countries are soon to publish major democracy reports to which researchers have contributed new ideas and findings to the current and future democracy debate. Our research project can be seen as a further contribution to democracy research, but with a particular emphasis on issues related to cultural life and cultural policy.

The analyses presented in these subprojects are based on developments in Swedish cultural policy during the last decades of the 20th century. The three subprojects give a broad, general analysis of democracy-related issues in cultural policy at national, regional and local levels, and examine the democratic aspects of two associated cultural policy areas: literature and film.

Project 1 (Geir Vestheim)

Democracy and cultural policy

In authoritarian social systems, art, culture and science are subordinated to the political power structures and instruments controlled by an elite answerable only to themselves. In democratic systems, art, culture and science, are in their relative autonomy to be well integrated into society. Nordic cultural policy is based on the later model, which has been its official creed since the 1970s. As in other policy areas, the democratic element of cultural policy embodies the concepts of civil rights, liberties and responsibilities, of knowledge and enlightenment, of participation and action, of the distribution of culture as a resource, of the right to a cultural identity and of power.

This project documents, analyses and discusses these and other aspects of democracy in Swedish cultural policy from the 1970s to the present. It also examines the relationship between the political rhetoric and practical results of cultural policy. One key explanatory and contextual factor in my analysis will be the profound societal changes of a political, social, economic and cultural nature that have taken place over the past few decades. The project mainly deals with government cultural policy, and my empirical material largely comprises political and administrative documents published over the past 20-30 years, records of public debates and cultural policy during the same period, and cultural statistics from Statistics Sweden and the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs. Academically, the text is supported by general political theory, democratic theory and cultural sociological theory.
Project 2 (Jenny Johannisson)

Experiences from Gothenburg: Local Cultural Policy in a Transnational Era.

The project focuses on local cultural policy from the perspective of the presumed increased flow of cultural, financial and political expressions and activities across the borders of nation-states, something that is usually referred to as globalisation processes. These processes are taken to generate changes in transnational relations, and cultural, financial and political activities are hereby faced with both new problems and new possibilities. By studying the revision process of cultural policy in the city of Gothenburg (Sweden’s second largest city with about 470,000 inhabitants) during the 1990’s, the project aims to explore the expressions of globalisation in the Swedish democratic system at the local level.

The political organisation of Gothenburg mirrors the democratic discourse of late modernity: in 1990, 21 city district committees were enforced in order to increase the citizens’ democratic participation, and in 1999 the West Sweden Region was created on a trial basis in order to promote the decentralization of political decision-making and the local and regional construction of identity. These processes of change, partly influenced by discussions on regionalisation within the EU, have had great consequences for the city of Gothenburg. One such consequence is the formation of a new cultural policy programme in 1998, a document where international cultural policy discourse is strongly present.

It is the revision process that led up to this new programme – Strategy of Cultural Policy: Version 1.0 – that constitutes the project’s empirical material. From a discourse analytical point of departure, focus lies on identifying discourses articulated by different agents and on analysing the struggle between these for the preferential right of interpretation as to how cultural policy in Gothenburg should be designed.

Project 3 (Claes Lennartsson)

Challenges to public cultural policy: Swedish national policy in the fields of film and literature in the end of the 20th century.

A preliminary study in the field of national film policy indicate that the situation in the Swedish film market, with strong competition mainly from American film industry, is hardly touched on in official reports from the late 1950s to the early 1990s. In Sweden, there has never been an import quota system, corresponding to regulation in other European countries. Instead, “the great film reform” of the 1960s was the beginning of a co-operation through a formal agreement between the government and the film market. Film policy was then claimed as a cultural policy field, and policy documents are since then marked by the rhetoric of cultural policy.

However, the work of the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) could just as well be described as an economic (commercial) policy and regional development policy directed at the Swedish (for sure) film industry. The concept of quality film, as expressed in the rhetoric of cultural policy, is not included in the formal agreement. Further, only a few of some twenty feature films produced annually in Sweden are not awarded advance funding by SFI. This indicates that a rather wide concept of quality is applied in practice. Since the middle of the 1990s a growing part of the Institute’s funding has been directed towards regional activities, including a number of regional
film companies (e.g. “Film i Väst” and “Filmpool Nord”). These companies have been successful among both critics and the audience. Finally, regional (EU) and international political cooperation, not least within trade policy (WTO), produces new conditions of regulation for national film policy.

This short description indicates the film market situation in Sweden at the time when aspects of economic (commercial) policy and international competition surface in the film policy discourse towards the end of the 1990s. This period seems to disclose an open antagonism on the national level between cultural values and economical values in the field of film policy. But are such conflicts also a salient feature of film policy on the local and regional level? One may ask if the discourse of film policy at the end of 1990s represents the beginning of a reverse trend when it comes to the balance between a cultural policy logic of argumentation and a logic of a more economical and commercial outlook? Against this background a diachronic study on the field of Swedish film policy will be undertaken during 2002/2003. This study will try to answer the question of how the meanings of “economy”, “quality” and “identity” are construed in the film policy discourse between the 1950s and the 1990s. Methodologically the study will try to make an application of discourse theory and theory of globalisation in this field of cultural policy studies.

3. The labour markets, professions and life styles of the new cultural society

Research director: Svante Beckman, Linköping University

The programme area has two principal specialisations: One directed towards a conceptual examination of the meanings and parameters of modern cultural work, and one directed towards specialised empirical sub-studies, including three theses (co-funded with other sources).

Project 4 (Helene Egeland)

Is there diversity in cultural life?

In the spring of 2002, I made a study of how easy or difficult it was for immigrant cultural practitioners to establish themselves in the fields of music, film and theatre, art, journalism, writing and dance in Sweden in a contemporary context. The study was based on interviews with 30 or so people on different levels (including the government’s Counsellor for Cultural Affairs, different interest groups, unions, colleges etc.). Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, I have focussed on how these different areas can be seen as separate fields upon which different players discuss and define the concept of acceptable quality, on our understanding of and attitudes towards diversity etc.

A discourse analysis of the interviews revealed a number of factors that are critical to a cultural practitioner’s possible career. Besides ethnicity, it emerged as equally relevant to focus on the important of class, gender and social affiliation (to name but a few). It is also essential to study the extent to which the different fields orientate themselves towards a national or international
arena, something which in turn can be either advantageous or disadvantageous to an immigrant cultural practitioner intending to enter one of these fields. I also contend that it is important to take a more detailed approach towards and further develop the concept of “immigrant cultural practitioner”, a concept that embraces innumerable differences between distinct individuals and groups. These differences should form an active part of a continued discussion if we are to avoid falling into a situation that reinforces stereotyped representations of what Edward Said calls “us” and “them”.

During the autumn and spring of 2002/03, I will be developing some of the results of the above study in my thesis, in which I will also be examining different practitioners and rhetoricians in the increasing popular, but also problematic concept of diversity.

**Project 5 (Lars Lagergren)**

**Reaching into the limelight**

Even though today’s mushrooming cultural and experience industry is giving more and more young people free tickets to stardom and fame, there still exist professions that require extensive and committed physical and social disciplining. There can be no short cuts into the limelight. It is not only the demands of the public that see to this, but also long-established cultural ideals and values. Three such professions are those of the ballet dancer, the circus acrobat and the professional ice hockey player – three completely different performance systems with the shared feature that the body constitutes the principal tool. This project is part of a larger study entitled “Culture as a profession”, and by making a comparative analysis of these three training options aims to create a deeper understanding of the conditions and dynamics of the performance segment of the culture and experience industry. How is the individual raised and formed in a professional, highly specialised experience-industrial context – and what is her life like within it? How is her professional identity – her motives and ideals and her way of passing on her knowledge and skills – developed and maintained in a rapidly changing contemporary world? In what ways do the three types of spectacular, performative professions differ from each other? In what respects are they similar? What means are used to deal with the downsides of the professions – the cutthroat competition, the constant, often arduous training and the premature end of a career resulting from a failing body? The study will also look at the training available in Sweden for each profession from an international perspective.

The project was begun in the spring of 2001, and a great deal of empirical material has been gathered in the form of interviews, surveys and analyses of documented material and other texts concerning, in particular, ballet and ice hockey. Material relating to circus training along with the relevant follow-ups and supplementary material will be collected during 2002 and 2003; all material will be fully compiled and analysed and the report written in 2004.
Models of cultural work

The theoretical definition of cultural work derives from two broad and ambiguous concepts – “culture” and “work”. The former encompasses a number of conceptual approaches: a distinction can be made between, on the one hand, concepts whose main function is to distinguish between categories of object (the “artefact” concept of culture), and, on the other hand, concepts whose main function is to distinguish between the behavioural patterns of different groups and society (the “anthropological” concept of culture). Both of these can be found in broad and narrow versions.

Cultural work relates primarily to the narrow-artefact concept of culture, and is identified primarily with products that are endowed with intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, existential or otherwise “spiritual” properties, functions and values. Cultural work involves the design, production, development, spreading, performance, commentary upon, preservation etc. of such artefacts. This cultural concept is subject to different types of conceptual manipulation that primarily render it more inclusive and stretch the classification “culture” over a wider spectrum of professional fields. One such type involves expanding the area of application for artefacts imbued with cultural value. Another involves adjusting the quality criteria required by an artefact for it to be endowed with, for instance, aesthetic value, and thereby increasing the number of things that can be considered as aesthetic. A third is a synthesis of the artefact concept of culture with the behaviourally focused anthropological concept.

There is typically an inherent tension to concepts such as cultural production, cultural policy and cultural work that is concertina-like in scope. If you want to contract this scope, you do so primarily by aestheticising the concept so that the things produced by the art form in question become core to the concept and cultural work accordingly. Conversely, culture can be expanded by broadening the underlying spiritual concept (e.g. “skills” or “experiences” in general) or by anthropologising.

Explaining the structure of concept formation is essential to our attitudes towards the numerous different ideas about the size of the cultural sector that are circulating. A report on the substudy will be made in connection with a book to be published in 2003, in which the following perspectives on the relationship between work and culture are discussed: Cultural work as work; Cultural work as work and lifestyle; Core aspects of cultural production; Cultural production as creation and interpretation; Culture and experience; Cultural work as sacrifice.

4. Culture and creative places in knowledge society

Research director: Prof. Sverker Sörlin, Swedish Institute for Studies in Education and Research

Below are listed projects that are in progress in the fall of 2002. A small study of cultural strategies and networks in three Swedish cities (Stockholm, Malmö, and Umeå) at three different periods in the 20th century is already finished and reported. A study is planned on “Scientific Stockholm: A Spatial and Architectural History”.

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Project 7 (Maria Wikhall)

Culture and Regional Attractiveness: Migration Decisions of Highly Educated in a Swedish context.

Recent research shows that labour market related factors are becoming less important as reasons behind migration in Sweden. Factors that relate to the regional milieu are on the other hand becoming more important. This, together with changes in values, from materialistic to post-materialistic, and the fact that groups in the population with a high demand for certain kinds of culture (e.g. people with higher education and retirees) are growing, has given rise to the notion that culture might be an increasingly important part of the regional infrastructure. Cultural infrastructure is in different political contexts assumed to attract residents, tourists and firms, and thus increase economic activity and employment. There are however processes that challenge this line of reasoning. People are becoming more mobile; they commute over longer distances, they travel more and some reside in more than one place. Culture on the other hand is becoming more easily accessible through different electronic media thus bridging over geographical distances.

The objectives of the research projects are 1) to investigate the importance of cultural infrastructure in relation to other regional and individual conditions when people choose home region and 2) to study the complexity of this choice, not only considering individual preferences but also exploring the importance of work, mobility and recreational activities.

The project uses a theoretical framework based on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of economic, social and symbolic (cultural) capital. The nature and magnitude of these individual assets are thought to be of importance when choosing home region. But it’s also important to recognize that these forms of capital can be more or less geographically embedded. Geographically embedded assets has in migration literature been called insider advantages, a concept discussed and developed in the project. Insider advantages are assets that are difficult or costly to bring, replace and make use of in another region, e.g. real estate property, relations to family, friends or work colleagues and professional knowledge related to a specific work place. The insider advantage theory together with Bourdieu’s notion of capital has got implications for the propensity to migrate as well as for the choice of home region in a broader sense.

The capacity to attract people by offering a good quality of life is of crucial importance for regional competitiveness. In studying regional attractiveness, it’s important not only to consider what makes people move but also what makes people want to stay. The study is based on a questionnaire sent to 3,000 persons, 30 to 35 years old residing in Sweden 2001. The study involves people with degrees in civil engineering, arts, media-communication, specialist teaching and an additional group of people with upper secondary education as highest education.

Project 8 (Maria Wikhall and Carolina Sigfridsson)

Arts in Universities: A study of higher education in Sweden

Universities are facing important challenges. Their traditional role of pursuing academic goals and striving for international excellence are continuously being challenged by their role as national
and regional boosters of wealth and prosperity. Universities are also to an increasing extent competing with knowledge producers and educational organizers at an international arena. They therefore have to develop explicit strategies to meet rapidly changing demands and preconditions in the surrounding society.

In the end of the 2000th century the technical and science areas were considered to be especially important in the educational and research policy debate. Large government led investments in research and higher education within these areas was, amongst other things, expected to increase the competitiveness of the Swedish industry. Today politicians and researchers are talking about a new economic paradigm, where firms not only compete based on technological innovations. Rather, narratives, spirituality, feelings and experiences are expected to be an increasingly important element of both goods and services. In this project we ask how universities act to meet changes in the surrounding world with a focus on the production of experiences and culture as a new economic paradigm.

The aim of this project is to consider the role of culture for universities in a broader sense and to illustrate and analyse this role empirically by investigating the growth and development of higher education directed towards the cultural domain or the experience industry.

The empirical part of the study shows that there are an increasing number of interdisciplinary educational programmes integrating art with subjects from other disciplines, e.g. economy and technology. These educational programmes educate, amongst other things, cultural managers, event designers, cultural analysts and product designers. The empirical data shows that the "cultural strategy" is important at the regional university colleges, as well as the three newly founded ones, the university colleges of Malmö, Södertörn and Gotland.

It is a feasibility study and one important result therefore will be a number of proposals about future research projects.

Project 9 (Henrik Karlsson)

Artistic and practice-based research training in Sweden

Although the Swedish university reforms of 1977 endowed arts colleges with university status, no resources were freed up for research and postgraduate research training. Today, art colleges, inspired particularly by Finland and the UK, are demanding the institution of an artistic research degree, and have already self-funded the employment of 20 postgraduates. The area is strongly supported by the Swedish government as one of eight high-priority research fields, and in the past six months has been the object of further attention along with the government’s increased focus on design research. It is obvious that aspects of economic policy weigh just as heavily as those of research policy and culture.

The study (carried out in 2002) analyses the arguments for and against such a training programme, the different artistic and scientific paradigms, the discussions surrounding unique artistic methods, the concept of “reflection”, the form of the thesis and the titles of the degrees conferred. To thwart possible allegations that this would simply result in uninteresting research and mediocre artistic quality, which could be the case with a strict partition into one artistic and one scientific component (that are then assessed by a separate panel of judges working from separate paradigms), two discrete degree types are proposed. One should be a purely artistic
degree, with a form dictated by the conditions of the field of art in question (e.g. 100% of the thesis might consist of artefacts, a portfolio of works, or a performance). The other should primarily be taken at special research schools and denote full research competence but based instead on artistic experience and hypotheses. The two degree types should also be differentiated by their designations, e.g. Dr of Arts (Music, Dance etc.) for the former and PhD for the latter.

If this new research field is to make headway, the actual overlap itself between art and science should be given further examination, as the foundations of a new paradigm, on the basis of the assumption that artistic production, reproduction and experience comprise a unique artistic form that requires new languages, new modes of presentation and new formats. These must, in turn, be designed so as to be comprehensible and acceptable to the scientific community in general.

5. Culture in the new economy

Research directors: Prof. Åke E. Andersson and Prof. Folke Snickars,
The Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm

Below are listed projects in progress in the fall of 2002. To be added to the list is a PhD-project on heritage values attached to buildings and the role of heritage in local development strategy in a university town.

Project 10 (Åke E. Andersson)

Culture in the emerging knowledge economy

The industrial economic system carried with it a use of time and an organization of cultural life, peculiar to the industrial society. According to the principle of division of labor each worker should be specialized on a repetitive sequence of standardized and simple tasks, requiring little or no formal education. The necessary creative, entrepreneurial and administrative tasks could be allocated to a small and very well educated elite. This organizational strategy was followed in the early stages of European and American industrialization. The social and cultural consequences of such a strictly hierarchical economic structure were first discussed by 19th century British liberal and socialist economists and most profoundly by John Stuart Mill, who proposed education of the masses for the sake of cultural development and social stability. These ideas were later to be developed into full fledged cultural strategies in countries like Britain, the Scandinavian countries and parts of the United States. Often firmly localized to industrial towns popular associations took a responsibility for providing laborers with a suitable number of cultural and educational activities in their limited leisure time.

Since then the economic structure has changed in a radical way. The level of education has increased in the OECD countries to an average of twelve to fourteen years of formal education. Meanwhile the variance around the average level of education has decreased, reducing the possibilities of hierarchical organization of economic and cultural life. The steady increase of real income per capita has caused two long term transformations of importance for cultural life:
• a decrease of yearly working time from 3000 to less than 1700 hours,
• an increase of two to three years of duration of life.

In the long run most people will use up no more than 8 per cent of their total life time for income motivated work.

The average mobility by transportation has increased towards fifty kilometers per capita per day in Europe and even more in the United States. Cultural strategies based on a non mobile local population are increasingly threatened by the mobility of people and information. A third important long term change is the shift of corporate strategies from productivity towards creativity in terms of new design efforts, research and technological product development. In the creativity oriented and knowledge dependent firm there is only limited possibilities of division of labor.

Project 11 (Jerker Söderlind & Erik Dahlrot)

Cultural infrastructure

This project explores culture as infrastructure as well as the infrastructure of culture. Culture as infrastructure for other businesses, e.g. visitor industries and production, and services in the pre and post phases of cultural activities.

The town’s organisation comprises an infrastructure for culture, in the form of high or poor quality premises, rents, accessibility and creative diversity.

State and council-run activities and financing systems form an economic infrastructure for culture.

A book, currently under production, examines the conditions for cultural activities, its obstacles and opportunities, from a consumption and production perspective. This perspective, rather than being political or “intracultural”, aspires instead towards new ways of seeing and thinking which can help to build a vital and dynamic cultural sector. The book combines the authors’ own data with published material to generate fresh, forward-looking issues. One key area is “the external profitability of the cultural enterprises”. Example: revenue from arts activities often falls into the hands of people other than the individual artists. Moreover, the financial situation of people engaged in culture is discussed in terms of concepts like “passion” and “cultural entrepreneurship” as well as the conditions and impact of state subsidies. Example: What is the aim of cultural policy - to provide targeted project subsidies or general healthy conditions? How can a more direct link be created between applause and revenue? The relationship between culture and the urban environment examines inter alia culture as a counterweight to commercialised city centres, as “urban acupuncture” and as a remedy for increased attractiveness, and culture in regional development. The book also looks at the correlation between high, fixed costs and limited mobile resources, the pros and cons of general versus targeted subsidies, sponsoring and the competitive situation within the sector.
Project 12 (Eva Hemmungs-Wirtén)


Since the 1960s we have witnessed an expansion of intellectual property on several fronts; 1) in subject matter, since it today includes not only text, music, or film, but databases, software, and potentially also traditional knowledge (TK); 2) in the prolongation of the period for which this monopoly is granted (basically from 50 to 70 years); and 3) in the unparalleled spatial reach through the Agreement for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) administrated by WTO, which for the first time makes the relationship between intellectual property rights and trade explicit on a truly global scale. Perhaps more critical in light of this undertaking is that these developments have brought with them a simultaneous diminution of the public domain.

This project will focus on this Other of intellectual property rights, “[t]he realm of publications, inventions, and processes that are not protected by copyright or patent” (italics mine, quote Black’s Law Dictionary); or in other words the public domain (sometimes also referred to as the cultural commons) and the main resource under scrutiny is information. The starting-point will be the 1970s, when UNESCO sought to formulate a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The conclusions of the controversial International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, documented in the MacBride Report underlined that economy and information were two concepts of equal standing, deeply enmeshed and interdependent, and the Report stressed that the two major programs of NIEO (New International Economic Order) and NWICO had to be considered together, even suggesting that concrete plans of action linking both processes should be implemented within the United Nations system. This ultimately failed attempt to secure both information and more tangible riches as a common heritage and resource represents, I believe, a critical moment in time when the stakes in regard to owning information became increasingly global, interconnected, and polarized. Using the MacBride Report as a temporal frame will of course not preclude further historical analysis, nor will it exclude other case studies pertinent to the overall design of the project.

The envisioned book will be structured around a set of overarching themes by which the public domain can be theorized. Each theme represents one chapter in the book, and while the main focus will be on Europe, a perspective cognizant of global and local repercussions will be implemented throughout. As of this outline in November 2002, the current themes are: space, place, time, form, difference and control.