

National Cultural Policy Reviews: A Method to Discuss and Improve Cultural Policies

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THE PURPOSE OF THE PRESENTATION

The Council of Europe national cultural policy review project has functioned since 1985. This presentation will present the background and the development of the project in different periods.

A scientific model of evaluating national cultural policies will be presented. Some evaluations of the whole Council of Europe national reviews project have been made and one conclusion is to make thematic studies as an addition to overall national policy reviews – that was the idea from the start. Against this background the success and the problems in relation to the goals set up from the beginning will be explained. The last development of the project is that for the first time the model is being used outside Europe, namely in Vietnam.

Finally, some ideas for a possible wider use of the model outside Europe are discussed in relation to a study commissioned by UNESCO. The hope is to get ASEAN to assume the same responsibility as the Council of Europe has had in Europe.

THE START OF THE PROJECT

In the 1970s ambitious national cultural policies had been developed on a broader scale in many European countries. After a period of expanding policy measures many countries had come to a point when the question of the best use of public money was raised. The word evaluation came more and more into use. Based on a growing need for evaluation of the results of the efforts, the Council of Europe started the project *National cultural policy reviews*. The OECD had for many years been developing a method of reviewing national education policies and research policies but had avoided the use of evaluation, finding it too ambitious. The idea was raised whether that model could also be used within the field of cultural policies.

In April 1985 a seminar, where all member states were represented, was arranged by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Swedish Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs in Stockholm, among others. Background papers on the experiences of evaluation in some countries were drawn up, as well as research papers on evaluation and the problems linked to international comparisons. A description of the OECD educational reviews was presented.

The seminar concluded (in the seminar's report, Swedish Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, (1986) by saying that:

- there was a need to develop the methods for evaluating national cultural policies
- the international exchange of experiences and solutions should be improved also between researchers in this field

- in the field of statistical indicators concerted action was needed
- the Council of Europe should initiate national cultural policy reviews for an initial period of two years on an experimental basis, inspired by the OECD model without following it in detail
- it noted the interest expressed by France, Sweden and Turkey to volunteer for a review of their national cultural policies.

Only a few months after the Stockholm meeting the Council of Europe's Cultural Council approved the proposal from the Seminar.

The model approved has three components:

A country review starts out from a country drawing up a national report with a self evaluation that provides the basis for appraisal by a group of experts from other countries - the examiners - who elaborate their own report. The final stage is a meeting between the examiners and the leaders of that country's cultural policies. A report from that meeting is published, usually together with the examiners' report.

THE FIRST TWO NATIONAL REVIEWS

France and Sweden volunteered to be the first to try the new model, while Turkey drew back. Even if the two countries are very different in size and cultural background they had in common a structured cultural policy and an availability of basic statistical information. They had departments for development that were active in the preparation of the seminar in Stockholm.

One basic issue for the first national report was to delimit the area to be covered, as it was clear that it was impossible to cover the whole field of culture. Decisive for the selection of the following three themes were their crucial place in policy making. The idea was to select the areas where there were problems worth discussion and of interest for comparisons. The basic questions in the chosen areas were:

- What have measures to promote artistic creation and artistic production led to?
- What have measures for decentralising activities and responsibility led to?
- What have measures to broaden audiences led to?

These three themes have been dealt with in all later national reports but the exclusion in the first reviews of important areas such as conservation, the media and international exchange has not been followed in later reviews.

A concentrated French national report was elaborated by a senior advisor to the National Audit Office in co-operation with the research department of the French Ministry of Culture, leaving the examiner's report to be more comprehensive, presenting both a detailed picture of the landscape of cultural policy and the comments of the examiners.

The Swedish national report was drawn up within the Swedish National Council for Cultural affairs in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Culture, thus giving a guarantee that the self-evaluation reflected the official viewpoint. The national report gave an important place to the use of the methodology for evaluating cultural policies, described in the next section. The more extensive national report made it possible for the examiner's report to concentrate on assessments and recommendations.

A METHOD FOR EVALUATING CULTURAL POLICY

Probably the deepest theoretical study of the methodology of the evaluations of cultural policies has been done by Göran Nylöf(1997). Nylöf had been responsible for the methods used in the Swedish National Report. That means that everybody interested in concrete examples of how to apply the following theoretical discussion can go to the *Swedish State Cultural Policy, a National Report*(1990).

Nylöf departs from the three fundamental questions addressed in every evaluation:

- 1) What did we *want*? - goals, aims, intentions
- 2) What did we *do*? - efforts, remedies, activities or *input*
- 3) What *happened*? - results and outcome or *output*, expressed in relation to goals.

What is an evaluation? The answer: One evaluates input (what we did) in relation to output (what happened) against a background of goals (what we wanted). An evaluation may concern cultural policy in broad terms or a set of efforts or individual remedies. In essence, an evaluation is always a subjective decision based on assessment of the relationships between input and output, in which output is expressed in terms of goals or intentions.

Nylöf makes a distinction between three perspectives:

- the *political* perspective, an evaluation based on political goals
- the *administrative* perspective, an evaluation against the background of goals of administrative activity, either on the national, regional or local level
- the *actors'* perspective, an evaluation against the background of the perspectives of actors, such as cultural institutions, organisations, groups or individuals.

In the model for evaluation of cultural policy Nylöf discusses the different structures of *goals* and the hierarchy of goals.

The next step is the *means* to realise the goals:

- *money* - grants, support, guarantees etc.
- *norms* - laws, regulations, texts of government bills, advice, general development of knowledge
- *information* - education, investigations, research, advice, general development of knowledge
- *delegating authority* - dividing responsibility between the central, regional and local levels and that of institutions or organisations but also in an informal structure.

The *output* or result can be registered on *six different levels*:

- Structural level
- Activity level
- Participation level
- Level of experience and quality

- Population level
- Societal level.

The next question is about measures and the use of *indicators*. One can measure everything that can be significant in cultural life. One must choose something that briefly but comprehensively depicts or represents cultural life. Cultural indicators are politically relevant but simple. Indicators must be chosen with care, not too numerous, enough to represent the whole spectrum to be evaluated, sensitive to changes. It is also advantageous if they are simple to register regularly.

Qualitative indicators are common. For example, a general statement that a theatre has given performances for children and young people. It will be quantitative when the number of performances is added. One must differentiate between qualitative indicators and indicators of quality. The latter involve artistic quality and are rare, involving many unsolved methodological problems.

Three elements in the evaluation are

- input analysis - operationalisation of means
- output analysis - operationalisation of results
- analysis of causality - to interpret output as effects of inputs, which means to eliminate alternative explanations of changes in output-indicators.

In Nylöf's article he explains the different steps in an input analysis and in an output analysis and how to construct indicators of achievement and effects as well as indices as gauges of productivity and efficiency.

Finally he discusses the problem of causality. In political evaluations what one wants to know ultimately is whether methods adopted and resources invested have had the desired (or undesired) effects. One formulates a hypothesis about a causal connection between input and output. On that point evaluation is similar to all other causal analysis in research in social sciences. He discusses the use of comparisons using parallel temporal series, before-and-after comparisons, quasi experiments, international comparisons and controlled experiments.

DEVELOPMENTS AFTER THE TWO INITIAL STUDIES TO INCLUDE MORE THAN TWENTY COUNTRIES

Since the publication of the two two initial reports fifteen more countries have been reviewed.

The pilot stage of the programme was implemented slowly. After the completion of the French and Swedish reviews in 1988 and 1990 respectively, the following countries have been reviewed: Albania (2000), Armenia (2001), Austria (1993), Bulgaria (1997), Croatia (1998), Estonia (1995), Finland (1995), Italy (1995), Latvia (1998), Lithuania (1997), Netherlands (1994), Portugal (1998), Romania (1999), Russian Federation (1996) and Slovenia (1996). Reviews in process: Andorra (2000/01), Molodova (2000/01), Slovak Republic (2000/01) and Turkey (2000/01). Forthcoming reviews: Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia and Malta.

The most important stimulation to the project came through the fall of the Communist regimes in Russia and Central and Southern Europe. Most of those countries have participated, not to make real evaluations as much as to find new solutions to a totally changed political background. During the conference in Wellington Ritva Mitchell, who was responsible for the co-ordinating work in the Council of Europe during the period when most of the reviews in these countries were accomplished, will present her experiences and conclusions.

Using the review project for countries with a federal structure has proved difficult. Both the Austrian and the Italian reviews had major problems and an important country in Europe like Germany has never showed interest in participation due to a complete lack of a national structure.

Summaries of results and problems encountered in the reviews have been done in different contexts referred to in the following. These studies have been used for the summing up of experiences in this presentation, together with my own experiences as co-ordinator of the Swedish National Report and as examiner in three reviews.

An elaborate analysis of the reviews done up to the middle of 1990s was commissioned by the Council of Europe and done by Myerscough (1997) with a detailed description of the main content and conclusion in each review as well as indicators used and read-across on "core themes". The report included proposals about changes of the national reviews as well as ideas on new "thematic reviews". Mitchell (1996) who worked as Programme Advisor within the Council of Europe for the project presented her views about the project in Circular, followed by comments from people who had been involved in the reviews work.

On behalf of Council of Europe Mario d'Angelo and Paul Vesperino (1998 and 1999) have published two works, one a comparative study using the information in the first round of reviews and the other dealing with method and practice of evaluation. In the appendices we find extracts from Council of Europe studies and review reports.

At the end of the 1990s Gordon(1999) made a survey of the reviews up to that year on behalf of UNESCO with conclusions aimed at being considered for reviews outside Europe.

THE NATIONAL REPORTS - ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROBLEMS

Most of the countries entering a review have lacked experience and structured information. Preparing a national report has been a learning process - of value in itself as this experience could later be used in exercises that most countries would probably be obliged to do at the request of the ministries of finance or similar bodies. Without any doubt it is the production of national reports that has been the element presenting most problems in the review work because of the need to combine a scientific method with the political approach. The intention is that the report should be an expression of the country's political system. The problem has been finding the working conditions to achieve such a solution. In some cases the scientific team has taken over responsibility to the extent that the responsible ministry has not found the required ownership to the report. In some cases the scientific team has been over-ambitious and the work has taken so much time that the examiners have not been able to use their report. There are examples of the scientific team being replaced. Reports drawn up by scientific teams alone have a tendency to be removed from policy reality. The difficulties are in fact not surprising. It is a matter of creating a meeting between two different worlds, a split that we can find in most organisations working in the field of cultural policy. The numbers of cases when valuable reports have been produced are, on the other hand, good examples of fruitful co-operation between researchers and policy makers.

To facilitate the work with the national reports the Council of Europe commissioned Robert Wangermeé (1993), the rapporteur in the French review, to present guidelines for the Preparation of National Reports. The report elaborated by Myerscough (1997) presents important additional advice for future work with national reports.

One problem in the national reports has been the difficulty of leaving pure description and achieving the required self-evaluation. Even if the methodology applied in the Swedish report has not been easy to follow it has influenced many reports. Its application necessarily creates problems, as ministries have a deep instinct of self-defence. As the main idea of a review is to seek help in areas where the ministries have problems carrying out their policies the self-defence should not take over. The reviews in Eastern and Central Europe illustrate much more openness towards showing existing problems and thus getting help. These reviews have therefore been more of a search for new solutions without solidarity with the cultural policy implemented in past years under another political regime. The focus has been survival under totally changed conditions and in a changed role from 'gatekeeper' to enabler. Western European countries have been more reluctant to start reviews and show their unsolved problems.

One problem with the national reports has been that many of them have been overloaded with information. The idea in the first two reviews to include only a limited number of problem areas has been left and the tendency in later reviews has been to cover all fields of the ministries of culture. Examples of new themes that have been introduced are education and training, heritage and international dimensions.

The reports necessarily focus on publicly financed culture, but as there is a general tendency everywhere for cultural life to show its most dynamic development outside the publicly supported area, this must be reflected. But information is often lacking. The national report must under all circumstances put the supported area into a wider frame of the whole cultural life. The distribution of responsibility between the institutions and independent artist is a crucial issue in all the reports.

Comparisons between countries are difficult because of the basic differences in the division of responsibility between the central, regional and local level. The same is true of the system of taxation and deduction from taxation. The original hope of including more international comparisons has not been realised because of the lack of comparable indicators, a question that will be taken up later in this presentation.

In most cases the national reports have - in spite of what has been said - well served their basic purpose to be a base for the work of the examiners.

THE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

In the team of examiners have been included people with broad experience from cultural policy work in their own countries, from the cultural field and from research institutes involved in cultural policy issues. It has usually been found suitable to include at least one person who is familiar with the whole historical and political background of the country under review. In the OECD reviews former ministers of education have often been involved, which has not been the case in the cultural reviews.

The visits of the examiners have been in principle limited to two weeks' stay in the country concerned, mostly one week in the capital and one week travelling around the country. In larger countries more time has been used. A basic idea has been that the examiners are free to talk to everybody they wanted to meet and to go where they wanted to go. The country under

review could of course give advice but should not intervene in the review meetings except for necessary additional information. The examiners are totally free in the formulation of their reports.

All the examiners' contacts are recorded in annexes to their reports. The idea has been to meet both persons representing the decision-making bodies at central, regional and local levels and representatives of cultural life and cultural organisations. As examples can be mentioned that the examiners in France met 46 witnesses and the Finnish team 138.

The rapporteurs, chosen within the team of examiners, have played an important role. They have usually stayed longer than the other examiners, collecting information and meeting people. In close collaboration with the team of examiners the rapporteur elaborates a draft of the report to be discussed in separate meetings with the examiners after the visits have been carried through.

In many of the reports from the examiners they have summarised their conclusions in a list of conclusions or recommendations, a technique very useful for the follow up of the reports.

THE REVIEW MEETING BETWEEN EXAMINERS AND THE RESPONSIBLE MINISTER

The third step in a review is the meeting between the team of examiners and the responsible minister or - if he/she cannot attend- senior officials. The ministries are always represented by delegations of officials. The discussions have been arranged within the framework of the Council of Europe Cultural Committee, a huge committee with representatives of all member countries of the Council of Europe. The idea is that the exchange should be of general interest for all members who are invited to participate in the discussion. The meetings have also contributed to informing countries that have not participated in reviews about the project's aim and outcome.

As Gordon(1999) underlines, active Ministerial involvement underlines the value which the participating member countries ascribe to the process. This also suggests that the key lessons learned should go beyond mere defensive tactics on the part of the officials, since there is an additional pragmatic political perspective. The occasion allows for a clarification of issues and expression of any significant differences of opinion and analysis. The meeting enables - at least in theory - the members of the different national delegations to take a stand on the evidence and conclusions set out in the two key documents.

The quality of the exchange between examiners and the minister has varied much. It is important that a minister can participate. Even high ranking officials do not dare to participate in an open discussion. The risk is that the exchange has been too much dominated by an exchange of information instead of an open discussion on problems on a general level. The instinct of many ministries has often been self-defence. A lack of the custom of participating in international dialogues has in many cases made a constructive exchange difficult. But we also find many examples of a good, meaningful open exchange of views to be registered in the report of the discussion.

THE FOLLOW-UP AND OUTCOMES OF THE REVIEWS

Printed reports have no meaning if they are not used. Each country promotes the results of the review in the way it finds most suitable. Meetings, conferences and contact with the media have in some cases led to broad press coverage. The media coverage has been important to

stimulate a sometimes poor debate on cultural policy with viewpoints from outside. The reports have in some countries been spread widely and used in education in universities. It has been important that summaries are available.

In some countries the follow up at the decision making level has failed, for example because the minister that commissioned the review has left and has been replaced by a Minister without interest in the project.

The most important question is what has been the outcome in the form of changed policy in line with the examiners' viewpoints or recommendations. Have the huge and costly efforts led to an improved policy? Myerscough (1996) noted a number of positive effects in reviews accomplished until the middle of the 1990s. But in general it is impossible to be precise about cause and effect. Major changes in cultural policies are usually the result of a complex series of motives for a reform. The reviews can nourish such a process but it is usually impossible to distinguish each background factor in the work of reform. It is also important that reviews often do not introduce totally new ideas but stress reform tendencies that exist in the reviewed country. Isolated ideas in a review have often been quoted and used as support for an idea a politician or a party is fighting for. Thus ideas from reviews have also been used in debates in parliaments. Often the recommendations of the examiners function as clear-sighted "early warning signals" that will be taken up long after the review. Reforms of cultural policy are often caused by changes of the Minister or Party in power more than by entirely rational considerations. Furthermore in most countries impulses for a reform of a more basic nature are usually collected during a period to be taken care of by a special committee or working party as a preparation for a Government Bill.

In general the country reviews reflect questions that exist in all cultural policy motivated research, namely to what extent changes in policy are based on the result of the efforts of researchers. We very often meet a feeling of resignation among researchers that the political decision-makers do not pay attention to their results. But researchers must always bear in mind that political decisions are in general seldom entirely based on rational considerations. Researchers must be satisfied with making a contribution to solutions. That is also true for the national cultural policy reviews. In spite of all the problems the review processes have shown it seems evident that they represent a unique procedure where, within the procedure itself, the interaction researchers - policy makers must function to get a successful result.

THEMATIC COMPARATIVE STUDIES

In Myerscough's (1996) study he submitted a proposal to add - besides the national reviews - thematic reviews. They should highlight the comparative dimension and be targeted on identifying "effective policy". They should seem less threatening for ministries and cheaper than the national reviews. The idea is to address a policy theme - not a research area - in a dynamic field. A range of countries, perhaps five to eight, should be involved. The procedure should be the same as for the country reviews. Participating countries might supply team members to visit each other's countries to amplify the peer review aspect. The hope is that thematic studies could have a bigger impact by engaging simultaneously the energies of a range of countries.

The Council of Europe accepted Myerscough's proposal. The first thematic study has been concerned with "*National Cultural Institutions in Transitions*". The exercise involves six countries or regions. Cyprus, Finland, Hungary, Lower Saxony, the Netherlands and Poland. Issues discussed include downward fiscal pressures and the need for greater economic self-reliance targets; public/private partnerships, and the role of the third sector; issues of

governance, and appropriate or reducing roles for Ministries; issues of decentralisation, affecting central, regional and local authorities.

UNESCO'S INITIATIVE TO DEVELOP THE PROJECT OUTSIDE EUROPE

The report of the World Commission on Culture and Development *Our Creative Diversity* and the political conclusions drawn by the Ministers of Culture of the World in the *Stockholm Action Plan on Cultural Policies for Development*, underline the need for a new broader approach to national cultural policies. UNESCO has the task of the follow up of the plan both to help governments in the carrying out of their policies but also to invite needed basic research on cultural policies for development.

In a Workshop on Cultural policies in Gällöfsta in Sweden September 1999 the representative of the Council of Europe presented the national reviews project on the basis of the paper elaborated by Gordon (1999). The seminar concluded that there were reasons for using the model outside Europe, of course considering the necessity for an adaptation to a different situation compared with countries where cultural policies have been developed over a long period.

The same year the author of this paper became involved in discussions between the Ministry of Culture and Information in Vietnam and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) on a new agreement between the two partners. The Vietnamese representatives were interested in getting expert support from Swedish experts in different fields to realise a cultural policy in line with the Stockholm Action Plan, the ideas of which had been approved by the highest decision making body, the Central Committee of the Communist Party. When informed about the cultural policy review model they expressed interest in the idea of using the review model for getting impulses for improvement of their policy. The idea was further discussed later that year and in Spring 2000 a new cultural agreement between Sida and the Vietnamese Government was concluded and an important element in it was substantial support for carrying through a three year project of the three phases of a national review.

A research institute, the Vietnam Institute of Culture and Arts Studies, VICAS, is responsible for preparing the national report and co-ordinating the other steps in a review. A researcher from VICAS, Dr Luong Hong Quang, will present the ongoing work for the Wellington conference.

ASPECTS TO CONSIDER IN A FOLLOW UP IN ASIA

The intention of UNESCO has been to start review projects in many parts of the world. The rapid start of work in Vietnam had a very special background. Reviews in other countries should not necessarily be of the same size as in Vietnam, as in that case the review project involves many costly elements that are not at all normally included in reviews projects, such as travels abroad and the carrying out of broad national investigations. Reviews in Asia should be more like the reviews done in Eastern and Central Europe with limited budget frames and with fewer elements of strict and systematic evaluation and more of looking for ideas for discussing and reforming their policies. The large number of countries with reviews in process and forthcoming reviews shows very clearly that the project as it has developed seems to satisfy more the need in countries with a need of developing and renewing their policies than the countries with a long tradition where maybe the thematic studies are more suitable.

Cultural policy reviews in the future - within and outside Europe - will have a different methodological and political background compared with the reviews already carried through.

First of all we have the *Stockholm Action Plan* (published in the Final report from the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies, UNESCO (1998)) and the underlying reports *Our Creative Diversity* and the Council of Europe sub report *In from the margins*. The Action Plan starts with the following two basic principles “Sustainable development and the flourishing of culture are interdependent.” and “One of the chief aims of human development is the social and cultural fulfilment of the individual”.

The introductory statements are followed by five policy objectives recommended to member states. The idea is to present a basis for the overall planning of development that includes culture, a goal to be considered seriously in all future cultural policy reviews even if the goals of the Action Plan have not been formally approved by the country under review.

A basic underlying question for discussions on cultural issues in line with the wider concept of culture used in the Action plan is just the definition of the concept of culture. It must be taken up for discussion. The concept used in the European reviews is not sufficient for use outside Europe. An article *The concept of culture in the Stockholm Action Plan and its Consequences for Policy Making* (Kleberg 2001) is meant to be a contribution to this discussion. It is necessary that every country considers carefully what is and should be included in the responsibility of their Ministry of Culture.

As one of the weaknesses of the previous work has been the lack of good and relevant indicators, the hope is that the project supported by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) *Improving the tools for the planning, reporting and assessment of cultural policies for human development (Towards cultural citizenship)* should provide necessary help in this very important methodological issue. The project report will be presented separately in Wellington. The lack of relevant and comparable indicators has been a shortcoming in all completed reviews, thus omitting one of the original aims defined by the seminar that drew up the guidelines for the reviews' project in 1985. The reason is that no organisation has had the responsibility of making the necessary concentrated efforts to start a systematic research based development of indicators. For the project-planning group it has been important that indicators really reflect the important policy issues in countries in all parts of the world. Therefore a number of national studies have been made with the purpose of widening the base for the elaboration of the final report.

Gordon (1999 p.18) presents a number of well motivated pieces of advice to be considered in future reviews. He stresses that “peer group evaluations (subject to the 'peers' being appropriately professionally engaged with, and responsible for policy and its implementation) should be a central feature. The Examiners' Report should retain its fully independent status... The national report should be a reasonably rigorous document intellectually, but not loaded with too much supporting detail. It should also include some self-appraisal as well as encompassing a description of institutional/financial/ systems and managerial issues.” He also underlined the need for a final stage involving public debate and media comment.

In Europe the national reports and the examiners' reports have been printed in English, French and the reviewed country's own language. In Asia it will suffice with the use of the national language and English.

For reviews outside Europe one aspect needs special consideration, namely the regional framework corresponding to the Council of Europe in which the review meeting should be arranged. UNESCO has no regional structure that is suited for that purpose. For South-East Asia the natural solution would be ASEAN, which has an ambitious cultural programme. In comparison with the Council of Europe its more limited number of members is an advantage, thus facilitating an active contribution from the representatives attending the meeting between examiners and the minister. Contacts with the representative for contacts with ASEAN in the

Vietnamese Ministry of Culture and Information have indicated an interest for the involvement of ASEAN, thus hopefully creating an interest from other countries to follow the example of Vietnam. For ASEAN such an involvement can widen the organisation's knowledge in the field of cultural policies, which has been the case for the Council of Europe - a knowledge that can be used in a necessary supervision of the outcome and use of the reviews. A spread of the information in the reviews could stimulate the ongoing international exchange within the region and between the region and other countries in the world.

For the research community in the Asian region a number of reviews could make a very important addition of basic knowledge that can be used in different studies.

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