

The Ritual Logic of Cultural Policy

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Introduction

The assumption that public cultural policy has turned increasingly instrumental seems to be an unquestionable truth in cultural policy research. In the analysis of the history of Norwegian cultural policy, ‘instrumental cultural policy’ is the most frequent expression in the characterisation of the last period, i.e. from the beginning of the 80s (see for example Arnestad 1989, Mangset 1992, Vestheim 1994 and 1995, Grothen 1996). Cultural policy in other countries is often described in similar ways in the research literature (for example Skot-Hansen 1998, Duelund et al 2003, Belfiore 2004, Gray 2006). In addition, the concept of instrumentality seems to be incorporated in the everyday language of the fields of art and culture. In this way, the idea that art and culture are treated more and more as instruments in public policy rather than ends in themselves seem to be a view shared by both practitioners and researchers of the field.

The choice of words and concepts are never innocent. By the ways in which we articulate our social circumstances we make contributions to establish social facts that may become naturalised and unquestionable. The names we use to distinguish certain parts of our social surroundings are parts of processes where truths are produced. This is one of the most fruitful and challenging assumptions of discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis focuses on how the social world is constructed through language. The many different traditions of discourse analysis make discourse an ambiguous concept. In this paper, I will apply a discourse analysis perspective inspired by Foucault (see for example 1999 [1970]). Within the Foucauldian tradition, discourse can be defined as the mental possibilities for what can be found meaningful. One way to grasp discourse analysis is to look for what is understood as important, serious, legitimate, good, threatening, acute etc. This implies an ambition of going beyond simply referring and describing statements and expressions connected to a certain topic. In addition, the analysis should show how statements and expressions are produced by the discourse. This version of discourse analysis moves from

the level of the explicit and conscious and aims at the investigation of the underlying and hidden distinctions and connections that is not expressed directly, but nevertheless are present under the surface of the communication (Sirnes 1999:31).

The aim of this paper is to investigate the use of the concept of instrumental cultural policy. What are the premises and consequences of the articulation of cultural policy as instrumental? What are the intellectual roots of the concept? What values are accentuated by this terminology? And in what positions are cultural policy researchers placing themselves by this way of articulating cultural policy? I also want to explore an alternative articulation of cultural policy. To do so I will introduce the concept of ‘ritual cultural policy’. Are there certain features of cultural policy that is better grasped by the concept of ritual cultural policy that we do not see by using the concept of instrumental cultural policy?

In the first part of the paper, I will give an account for what is meant by ‘instrumental cultural policy’ in the literature of cultural policy research. In the second part, I will discuss the intellectual roots of the articulation of instrumentality. In the third part, I will present an analysis of ways in which art and culture is given meaning in the cultural policy discourse that contrasts the instrumental diagnosis. In the last part, I will introduce and specify the concept of ritual cultural policy as an alternative articulation of what characterises the role of art and culture in cultural policy discourse.

The instrumentality diagnosis

The instrumentality diagnosis refers, at least in the Norwegian research literature, to two intertwined features of public cultural policy. Firstly, it is claimed that art and culture increasingly are used as tools to realise external goals. Art and culture are often connected to policy goals in other parts of society. In this way, art and culture appear as political instruments and not as ends themselves.

One of the most striking examples of ‘the instrument logic’ is the idea that culture generates economic growth. Mangset (1992:51) claims that the idea of economic impact is “the most powerful rhetoric of cultural policy and the most important legitimisation principle for public support of culture in Norway in the 1980s” [my translation]. The idea of the economic impact of culture takes as its starting point that activity in the cultural field generates activity in other parts of the market too. As an illustration, it is emphasised that people who buy tickets for a

theatre performance probably are using other services as well. They need transportation to move between their homes and the theatre, and they are possibly visiting a restaurant before or after the performance, etc. In debates on cultural policy, this reasoning is often used in order to strengthen the public support for arts and culture. It is argued that public support to art and cultural activities may in turn be profitable for public authorities.

The idea of economic impact has been supported by research of cultural economics, especially in the 1980s. Several studies calculated that the investment of public authorities in the form of public support to culture in specific geographical areas gave more in return than the money invested (Ringstad 2005:168-172). Some of these analyses have become reference-points for the reasoning that public support for culture pays off. According to Ringstad (2005), one study of the Edinburgh Festival concluded that the public support for the festival gave 500 % in return. However, during the 1990s impact studies proving the impressive economic profits of public support to culture was discredited. Several cultural economics demonstrated that the calculations of the economic impact of culture were problematic and incorrect due to methodological weaknesses (Arnestad 1992, Bille Hansen 1993, 1995, Ringstad 2005). In addition, it was pointed out that these studies often had the character of being commissioned works designed and effectuated in order to produce arguments for the enhancement of public support for arts and culture (Puffelen 1996). Following Puffelen, the cultural economics was operating as “hired guns” for employers in need of legitimisation of their policy. According to the critics it is difficult, maybe impossible, to prove that culture generates economic growth.

The idea of the economic impact of culture is often connected to strategies for urban and regional regeneration. Thus, Vestheim (1995) maintains that the ambition of improving the images of certain places is a central element in the instrumental cultural policy. Culture is used to produce flattering pictures of places. Culture is used to make regions attractive as places of residence and as localisation for business activity. The Danish sociologist Dorte Skot-Hansen has analysed how the offensive priority of culture has transformed the city of Holstebro from a sleepy town to a flourishing business city. The study shows how culture has been used as a development tool to make the city attractive. Skot-Hansen underlines that the idea of culture as a development tool was utilised as legitimisation of the growing investments in the culture field already from the 1960s, and that Holstebro in this way anticipated an

instrumentalisation of culture characterising the Scandinavian countries and the rest of Europe in the late 1980s and the beginning of 1990s (Skot-Hansen 1998:253-254).

The enormous popularity of Richard Florida's book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Florida 2002) is by several cultural policy researchers interpreted as a revitalisation of the instrumental use of culture in urban and regional regeneration (Bille 2004, Skot-Hansen 2004). Following Florida, economic growth is at its highest in cities that are tolerant, multitudinous and receptive of creativity. As an illustration Florida has calculated creativity indexes that rank different cities. The clue according to Florida is that cities with a high representation of the creative class are cities in which it is attractive for companies to establish themselves. It is claimed that Florida's theory offers a more nuanced comprehension of the connections between culture, life style and economy than the one presented through the impact studies (Bille 2004, Skot-Hansen 2004). In this way, it seems as if Florida's theory replaces impact studies and meets the demands for scientific legitimisation of the connection between culture and economy.

Another example of what is generally understood as instrumental cultural policy is when culture activities are used to promote health. In Norway, this connection has been implemented through the program *Culture for Health* which started in the beginning of the 1990s. On the basis of statements like: "minor consumers of culture are major consumers of health services" [my translation] (Helsedepartementet 2003:186), Culture for Health was initiated as a collaboration project between the Ministry of Health and Care Services and the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs. The project mobilised a broad spectrum of culture activities in a long list of municipalities and was legitimised by the assumption that money spent on cultural purposes are money saved on the public health budget.

The examples of the economic impact of culture, creative cities and culture for health all illustrate the idea of culture as an instrument to promote policy goals in other parts of society. The instrumentality diagnosis, however, also refer to internal changes of the field of culture due to changes in public cultural policy. Thus, it is secondly maintained that cultural policy is changed in ways that forces the actors of the fields of art and culture to adapt procedures and ways of thinking that primarily are associated with the market and the business world.¹ In

¹ In Norway as in many other countries in the Western World, the share of the institutions' budgets that are public subsidies are 75-95 %.

Norway, this viewpoint is related to a demand from public authorities in the beginning of the 1980s that culture institutions should enhance their profits. Simultaneously, the public support was reduced and the institutions had to increase their box-office receipts. As long as the market appears as the sphere of society where utility assessments take place in the most visible ways (Bourdieu 1992), this development can be interpreted as closely related to the tendency that art and culture is understood as an instrument in the attainment of different policy goals. Not only is culture subject to assessments of utility by public authorities. In addition, cultural actors must adopt and adapt to the logic of utility in order to meet the economic demands from the authorities.

Even if the diagnosis ‘instrumental cultural policy’ is not explicitly mentioned, a study of Bjørkås (1998) illustrates what can be referred to as the marketisation of the production of art and culture. In his study of the working conditions of freelance artists in the performing arts, Bjørkås emphasises that the central structures of Norwegian cultural policy lead to unification and popularisation of the production of big art institutions. Bjørkås argues that the way in which the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs governs the economic constraints of the art institutions reduces the possibilities for artistic innovation and experimentation. Thus, he maintains that the art institutions are lead astray from the basic values of the field of art due to public cultural policy. In this way, it is stated that art and culture to a greater extent than before are treated on the basis of external logics in which utility maximisation is a core value.

The ideas that culture generates economic growth, improves the attractiveness of places, promotes health and that culture more and more is permeated by the market logic, are all used as examples of instrumental cultural policy. However, to call these ideas instrumental is an interpretation, not a statement of an obvious fact. It is a way to give certain initiatives in cultural policy a name. It is a way to construct a picture of cultural policy. This construction has its origins.

The intellectual roots of the instrumentality discourse

The term instrumental cultural policy indicates a discursive affinity to social theories which emphasise that the modernisation of society is characterised by the rationalisation of a growing number of spheres in society. Many of the most prominent theoretical contributions to the social sciences are marked by considerable concern that instrumentality is suppressing other forms of rationality. The development of modern society is often described as a

development that undermines the (belief in) the inherent values of social phenomena and practices. It is accentuated that the attitude of calculation is the hallmark of modernity. In the lecture 'Science as a vocation' the classical sociologist Max Weber wrote:

Thus the growing process of intellectualization and rationalization does *not* imply a growing understanding of the conditions under which we live. It means something quite different. It is the knowledge or the conviction that if *only we wished* to understand them we *could* do so at any time. It means that in principle, then, we are not ruled by mysterious, unpredictable forces, but that, on the contrary, we can in principle *control everything by means of calculation*. That in turn means the disenchantment of the world. Unlike the savage for whom such forces existed, we need no longer have recourse to magic in order to control the spirits or pray to them. Instead, technology and calculation achieve our ends. This is the primary meaning of the process of intellectualization (Weber 2004 [1917]:12-13).

Weber found that an instrumental rationality, a belief in the possibility of ruling over everything through calculation, was getting more and more incorporated in the whole spectrum of institutions in the Western society. The Western rationalisation paradigm was not only prevailing in science, judicial institutions, government departments (bureaucracies) and business life, but also within religion and art. According to Weber, the rationalist order had become an 'iron cage'. The rationalist spirit meant that the world was disenchanted.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno (2002 [1944]) argued that the rationality of enlightenment has a dominating and oppressive character. While the human being earlier had an immediate connection to gods and nature, the enlightenment meant that spiritual content and divine influence was eliminated from nature. The human being took possession of nature. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the logic of this process was that an instrumental rationality gradually transferred to all kinds of phenomena and relations. Also art and culture became subject to the instrumental rationality in this process. In the capitalistic society, culture was transformed to industry and contributed to the ongoing process of alienation. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, culture in this situation lost its critical potential and was transformed into entertainment and consumer goods.

In a similar way, Jürgen Habermas (1995) maintains that modern society is exposed to a rationalisation process that undermines important values in society. Habermas' starting point is the distinction between 'life world' and 'system world'. By the concept of life world Habermas refers to aesthetic and ethic spheres based on intersubjectivity, consensus, conventions and expressive relations. The concept of system world refers to scientific, technical and administrative spheres governed by an instrumental logic. Following Habermas, modern society is characterised by a colonisation of the life world by the system world. The rationality of the system world penetrates and undermines the life world perspective through calculation, objectification and end-means relations. In the case of art and culture, the colonisation process means that the value of art and culture no longer are assessed on the basis of aesthetic criteria, but strategically in accordance with standards of efficiency.

The categorisation of cultural policy as instrumental can in this way be seen as an enrolment in a long tradition of critique of culture put forward by central representatives of Critical Theory. In similar ways as Weber, Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas cultural policy researchers stress that art and culture are threatened by a rationalist order originating from spheres of society where economic and administrative thinking is constitutive.

The studies in which the diagnosis of instrumentality is made, most often examines elements in the public administration of arts and culture and the rhetoric of cultural policy. It is not primarily the relation between the instrumental rationality in cultural policy on the one hand and possible changes in the rationalities of the fields of art and culture on the other that has been analysed. It is the cultural policy as such. The conclusions of some of these studies are nevertheless far-reaching. In his analysis of the instrumental concept of culture, the Norwegian historian of ideas Geir Grothen claims: "You can see it as a final secularisation of culture, the final defloration of culture, the natural terminus of the way in which culture has been dealt with in modernity; a way of dealing with culture that started with reckoning culture as a craft, then touching upon the holy – quasi-secular exalted, to end up with culture as a kind of growth promotional factor on the same level as everything else actually and possibly existing" [my translation] (Grothen 1996:106-107). Consequently, Grothen find that cultural policy implies a levelling of culture as a distinct sphere of society. The field of culture is hollowed out and penetrated by the instrumental rationality.

But is instrumentality the only possible interpretation of the above mentioned initiatives and projects in cultural policy? Are there other interpretations that can widen our understanding of cultural policy in contemporary society? Let us see some examples of how arts and culture are articulated in particular projects and in general in Norwegian cultural policy.

The belief in the transformative power of arts and culture

Cultural diversity is one of the most celebrated goals in cultural policy during the last years. In 2006, the Norwegian Parliament (The Storting) adopted a resolution to celebrate the Norwegian Year of Cultural Diversity in 2008 (Kultur- og kirkedepartementet 2006).² On the website for the secretariat of the Norwegian Year of Cultural Diversity we find the following statement:

The major idea is to gain a greater sense of respect for and knowledge of cultural diversity throughout Norwegian society by pairing established mainstream institutions with representatives from the independent minority groups.

Keeping in mind that art and culture have a unique potential to create dialogue and contribute to the understanding of complex questions in a society, the main focus in 2008 will be to highlight ethnic and cultural diversity.³

What I find interesting here is the expression ‘unique potential’. This articulation implies an opinion that art and culture have inherent qualities that create something. This is underlined by art and culture being a grammatical subject in the sentence. In this way, the text on the website for the Norwegian Year of Cultural Diversity suggests that art and culture *does* something good for the society. It is placed confidence in art and culture being transformative powers of society.

Another important area in Norwegian cultural policy is different schemes for dissemination of professional art and culture. Since 2001 The Cultural Rucksack has been established as a permanent scheme in Norwegian schools. This means that school pupils aged 6 to 16 regularly and systematically experience a wide variety of cultural expressions, such as the performing arts, visual arts, film, music, literature and cultural heritage. Similar schemes are now being developed in order to fill other parts of the life-course, for example The Cultural Walking Stick. In one of the Norwegian counties (Vestfold) a scheme called The Culture Sail

² <http://www.kultureltmangfold.no/art.html?catid=41&subcat=&artid=13>

³ <http://www.kultureltmangfold.no/cat.html?catid=41&subcat=40>

of Working Life⁴ is established for the dissemination of professional art and culture to workers in private companies. In the book “Culture creates the future”⁵ this initiative is described in this way by a work researcher:

Exciting experiences of art and culture triggers creativity and enhance the well-being at the work place. (...) To meet art and culture can lift us up from our daily thinking and give new angles to our problems at work. Theatre visits became the starting points for conversations and discussions among the employees about things they had been working with in their company. [my translation]⁶

It is possible to argue that this articulation of the value of dissemination of art and culture to workers has affinity to Aristotle’s thoughts on art. Following Aristotle, art may be the key to our own possibilities as human beings. At the theatre, human problems are displayed so that we can see ourselves from the outside. A play is mimetic – it imitates human beings in real action. Catharsis is the Aristotelian concept on how theatre (or the tragedy) works on human beings (Aristoteles 2004 [ca 350 BC]:31). Even if the meaning of catharsis is much debated in the specialist literature, the concept normally connotes purification. The concept of catharsis suggests that theatre does something good to human beings. It makes us better. A similar transformation is suggested as the possible outcome of dissemination of art and culture in the context of work.

As we have seen, art and culture are central elements also in strategies for urban and regional regeneration. But how is the connection articulated? The strategy for art and culture of the city of Drammen is one example that is quite typical:

In our time, art and culture appear as ever more important for the development both of the individual and the society. Drammen municipality (kommune) wants culture to be a driving force in the further development of the city. [my translation]⁷

Here culture is articulated as a driving force. Culture is pointed out as the motor of development. Culture provides the energy that can generate something positive for the city. In this way, transformative power is assigned to art and culture.

⁴ My translation. In Norwegian the project is named Arbeidslivets Kulturseilas.

⁵ My translation. The Norwegian title is ”Kultur former framtida”.

⁶ Myskja et al 2007:97.

⁷ Myskja et al 2007:95.

Finally, some formulations of the present Minister of culture underline a belief in the transformation power of art and culture in a very explicit way. After he had been sitting in the position for half a year he was encouraged to present his plan for cultural policy in the biggest Norwegian daily newspaper (Aftenposten). In the debate that followed, he specified his views on the role of art and culture in society:

Art and culture can wake us up and make us conscious, create good growing up conditions, build bridges between people and fight racism. People can become more whole by the challenge and stimulation that art give. Art can change society to the better. [my translation]⁸

This quote bear witness to an almost unlimited belief in the good powers of art and culture. Almost every problem either it is apathy, laziness, passivity, poor growing up conditions, segregation or racism can be fought by art and culture. Everything that has come apart can be made whole again when exposed to art and culture. The Minister of Culture expresses that art and culture can noble the human being and improve society. Art and culture do good things.

Ritual cultural policy

When art and culture is connected to many other policy goals in society I think the logic in question is of another kind than what is indicated with the term instrumental. It is not primarily the calculating interest and the utility maximisation rationality that is the impetus of this political reasoning. Rather it is the belief in the transformative power of art and culture. This political logic rests on a confidence in the potential of change inherent in art and culture. Something positive happens to people exposed to art and culture, and something positive happens to the societal sectors where art and culture are introduced. How these positive effects come about is hard to tell. As the discouraging critique of impact studies illustrates, it is difficult to find unambiguous proves for such connections when they are subject of scientific investigation (Arnestad 1992, Bille Hansen 1993 and 1995, Ringstad 2005). But the belief that something really happens seems to be quite rooted in cultural policy discourse. In this perspective art and culture represent unique and life-giving powers to heal all the defects and damages that burden the societal body. It is placed confidence in the healing energy of art and culture. When the questions of what we should do with the problems of integration, depopulation, social inequality or health problems is getting to hard to answer, and there is no reliable knowledge of what really works, we turn to art and culture in hope of positive change.

⁸ Trond Giske, feature in Aftenposten 15 March 2006

As an alternative interpretation to instrumental cultural policy my suggestion is to call this logic ‘ritual cultural policy’. The concept may, however, be easily misunderstood. When something is referred to as ritual, we often think of it as forms of practice which render empty shells. Rituals are often understood as surface. We go to church on Christmas Eve, but we do not believe in the gospel that is preached. It is only a ritual for us. Ritual cultural policy may in this way be interpreted as a cultural policy repeating itself without real content. And I suppose there are many who perceive cultural policy in this way. However, it is not in this sense I want to use the concept here.

When cultural policy can be interpreted as ritual it is because cultural policy is based on the idea that art and culture possess magical powers that transforms and heals. In a similar way as anthropological studies of so-called “primitive cultures” describe how people who struggle with illness and childlessness through rituals is connected to supernatural forces that can make them healthy and fertile (Gennep 1999 [1909], Turner 1996 [1970]), the ritual cultural policy connects the problems that burden the societal body and the transformative powers of art and culture. Art and culture are introduced in the regional policy, the integration policy, the health policy and the innovation policy, because it is believed that art and culture can make people want to move to the rural districts, that art and culture can create cohesion between social groups with little or no common cultural references, that art and culture can make the ill people healthy and that art and culture can supply commodities with irresistible cultural excess value that contribute to economic growth. The problems of society is placed before art and culture, and one is hoping and wishing for the best, as you have to when it is the logic of magic you deal with. The magic sometimes work, and sometimes not. When art and culture is introduced in the regional policy, the integration policy, the health policy and the innovation policy, it is not primarily utility estimation that is the rationality involved. It is the belief in the transforming powers of art and culture.

While the concept of instrumental cultural policy indicates that external powers subordinates and reduces art and culture, the concept of ritual cultural policy indicates the reverse. When art and culture are introduced in order to realise a broad spectrum of goals in society it is because it is believed that art and culture possess healing powers that can solve any problem of society lacking a solution. Art and culture get the role as a kind of source of energy sending life-giving powers to its surroundings. Art and culture expand it’s field of action.

It is necessary for me to make some reservations in relation to my introduction of the concept of ritual cultural policy. When I use ritual cultural policy to refer to the same parts of cultural policy as is normally referred to as instrumental it is not because I want to deny that there are political situations where art and culture are subject to utility assessments. All linkages between art and culture and external problems of society are not necessarily based on the belief in the transforming powers of art and culture. My point is rather that the instrumentality diagnosis overshadows and makes other aspects of cultural policy invisible. The concepts introduced by the representatives of Critical Theory tend to overestimate the strength of the system world and to underestimate the powers of the life world. The Norwegian anthropologist Sørhaug request social researchers to be what Niklas Luhmann has called 'divine detectives' (Sørhaug 1996:16). As social researchers we must be willing to focus on how the modern society creates and reproduces its sacral aspects. And it is important to realise that the sacral aspects of society is not always acknowledged as sacral.

The instrumentality discourse can also be seen as political. When researchers are warning that art and culture primarily is appreciated by virtue of its impact and not in its own right, they make contributions to an understanding of the fields of art and culture as particularly vulnerable. In the light of the insights presented by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (2002 [1966]), the instrumentality diagnosis may be seen as a sort of cleansing process. Douglas point is that ideas of pollution not only appear when our material conditions are threatened, but also when our symbolic conditions are in danger. Ideas of pollution activate cleansing processes. When it is called attention to the increased use of a utility perspective in relation to art and culture, it is focused on the way in which the impure is trickling into art and culture. In this way, the instrumentality diagnosis can supply the fields of art and culture with a strength that the same diagnosis denies. It is nothing wrong with that. My aim is however to identify what the discursive consequences of the instrumentality perspective of cultural policy research are.

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