Summary

*A white paper on reforms related to the regional level of government has recently been presented in Norway. The intention is to reduce the number of regions and to reform the role of the regional government. The regional government is to have a more strategic role than before. The reform will also entail changes to the responsibilities and powers of the region. Possibly, the regions will be assigned more responsibilities in the domain of cultural policy. This project is an analysis of possible scope and models for regionalisation of cultural policies. The analysis does not lead to clear cut recommendations on the scope and models of reform. However, we do see the recent reform in Sweden as a promising alternative. In Sweden, the national, regional and local government levels cooperate on cultural policies within the framework called ”The collaborative cultural model”.*

*Regionalisation could yield improved dialogue between the branches of government and strategic coordination of various instruments of cultural policy and between cultural policies and other policy areas.*

#### Background

In a recent white paper (Meld. St. 22 (2015–2016) «Nye folkevalgte regioner – rolle, struktur og oppgaver»), the national government has stated the intention to execute a regional reform. The reform will imply a reduction of the number of regional governments from 19 to 10, and new responsibilities will be transferred to the regional level. The white paper highlights the intention to strengthen the regions’ strategic role, including the coordination of different sectoral policies. The reform will also include other changes to the distribution of responsibilities between the three levels of government.

KS (the association of local and regional governments) has commissioned Proba – in cooperation with the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research – to analyse the possible scope and model for regionalisation of cultural policies.

#### Problem definition

KS has defined two goals for regionalisation of cultural policies:

* To stimulate local democracy and the interest and engagement for culture
* To strengthen coordination in cultural policies

The project analyses the effects of the transfer of powers and resources from the central to the regional level.

The project includes policies on sports and leisure, the protection of the cultural heritage as well as other the broader cultural sector and activities.

#### Method

The project is based on a review of relevant literature and interviews with resource persons in the cultural sector as well as with resource persons in government institutions or organisations within the sector .

#### Findings and recommendation

##### The present situation

The Culture Act states that local and regional government are responsible for supporting culture, but does not specify the scope of the responsibility. The act has few practical implications for policies in this domain of government.

In most sectors, there is a clearly defined division of responsibility between the various branches of government. This is not the case in the cultural sector in general. The division of roles and responsibilities appear less systematic in the cultural sector. There is also a lack of arenas for dialogue between different levels of government, even when the different levels share a common responsibility for supporting institutions or activities.

The above description does not apply to sports and policies for cultural heritage. In sports, there is a systematic division of responsibilities. It appears that the division of responsibilities is appropriate to the needs of the sector. The regions have been assigned substantial powers related to the protection of the cultural heritage, and there is an ongoing reform that will lead to transfer of more powers.

##### The collaborative cultural model

The implementation of this governance model in Sweden has transferred the responsibility for several support schemes for the cultural sector from the central to the regional level of government. Formally, the regions prepare cutural policy plans and apply for funding from the central government for the implementation of the plans. The plans are binding for the regions.

Evaluations of the collaborative cultural model indicate that it has had no dramatic effects. It appears that the planning process has stimulated the interest for cultural policies and the dialogue between the authorities and actors in the cultural sector. The impact on the allocation of funds has been moderate. The central government’s power to implement national cultural policies has not been weakened. The reason is that the central level (represented by the Swedish Arts Council) approves each regional plan, including measures that are not financed by the central level. The planning process also ensures that regional policies are linked to national policies.

##### Which responsibilities can be transferred to the regional level?

Premised on past reforms related to the division of responsibilities between the three levels of government, national authorities have formulated a set of general criteria for assigning the powers to the three levels of government. The criteria reflect the dilemmas related to centralisation versus decentralisation, and do not normally yield firm conclusions on the appropriate level for each power.

We find that the following tasks might be transferred to the regional level:

* Regional institutions that are co-financed between the central and the regional authorities
* Support to organisers, events, and locations with mainly local impact and status
* Regional museums
* Support to culture industry/creative industries
* Development grants for libraries
* Support for children and youth culture

##### The interviews

We have interviewed

* Officials responsible for managing central government funds for culture
* Officials in regional governments
* Representatives for cultural institutions
* Representatives for organisations within the cultural sector
* Representatives for the Norwegian Confederation of Sports

Our main impression is that most of the informants have only general views on regionalisation. Grants from the Arts Council of Norway receives more attention than their size should indicate. There is also a tendency that the informants views to some extent reflect their role: Those who are involved in the management of central government funds or who receive stable funding from the central government tend to be sceptical towards regionalisation, while those in other positions are more positive.

In the presentation of findings, we do not emphasize the number of informants who have expressed different views. The low number of interviews and the lack of representativeness make quantitative analysis of the material pointless.

##### General views on regionalisation

Several informants point to the need for a strengthening of the dialogue on cultural policies between the various levels of government and for better coordination of different policies and measures. Presently, it is difficult for actors outside Oslo to be recognised by those allocating grants and other forms of support schemes. Others say that regionalisation will enable the merging of several support schemes, reducing the number of donors the potential recipients must communicate with.

Others are more sceptical towards regionalisation, in particular with regards to a decentralisation of the responsibility for allocating grants based on artistic quality (i.e. The Arts Council of Norway). Some argue that the regional authorities do not have sufficient competence to manage such funds and that proximity between applicants and decision makers will make it difficult to practice management ”at arm’s length”. Some sceptics also point to a higher risk that other considerations than artistic quality will influence the allocations.

##### The collaborative cultural model

Several informants think that the process of producing culture plans, which is an important element in is model, will strengthen the dialogue between different levels of government and between the artists and other actors on the one hand, and politicians and government officials on the other.

Others see the model as rigid and rule based and think it is question the need for a different model for cultural policies than what applies in other policy areas.

Some argue that to ensure that the planning process will actually stimulate the interest and engagement for cultural policies, the plans must have a real impact on allocation of funds and other policy measures. This implies that the regions must have some powers in this sector.

##### Regional funds

Some informants fear that the establishment of regional funds for cultural grants will imply that for each funding scheme that exist on the central level today one will establish a regional version. This would imply that the number of funds would be multiplied by ten.

Others argue that regionalisation should entail the merging of funds with different scope.

The views on the establishment of regional funds to a large extent reflect the informants general view on the need for better information to decision makers by reducing distance and on the possibility to manage ”at arm’s length” with regionalisation.

##### Regionalisation of policies on sports

We asked the informants whether they thought it would be advantageous to give the regional level a strategic function in the planning of sports arenas and other facilities and to reduce standardisation requirements for sports facilities.

The interviews indicate that there is some need for improving the coordination of the local governments planning of sports facilities.

The informants view the present level of standardisation both as an asset and a hindrance, and there are no clear recommendations on possible changes.

##### Regionalisation of policies on cultural heritage

Today, the regional authorities have the powers to decide on the protection of many categories of cultural heritage sites and objects and for allocating grants for managing cultural heritage. We have asked the informants on their views on a possible reform including the transfer of responsibility for all types of cultural heritage to the regions.

The views on a possible reform vary. Some point to the lack of relevant competence in the regional authorities related to some types of heritage, and express doubt on the appropriateness of developing such competence in each region.

on the other hand, there is broad support for the strengthening of a strategic function, and for viewing the policies on cultural heritage in connection with policies for other sectors. Regionalisation could strengthen the strategic function.