

# Official Norwegian Report on cultural policy 2014

The Official Norwegian Report on cultural policy (NOU 2013:4) was compiled by a committee appointed by the Government in spring 2011 to review Norwegian cultural policy since 2005. The committee presented its report, *Cultural Policy 2014*, on 4 March 2013. In the report the committee assessed the relevance of the national cultural policy objectives and reviewed and evaluated the policy measures and instruments implemented at the central and local government levels during the period since 2005. It also identified today's most important cultural challenges and on this basis made proposals for a new cultural policy.

## The committee's evaluation

### *The Government's cultural policy since 2005*

Government cultural policy since 2005 has been shaped by the implementation of Cultural Initiative I and Cultural Initiative II, which were launched by the present government. These initiatives were based on a number of cultural policy goals, including the goal that 1 % of the government budget should be allocated to culture by 2014. The committee considered that this economic investment has contributed significantly to improving the country's cultural infrastructure and to the upgrading of national and regional cultural institutions. The distribution pattern of allocations between the different budget areas has largely been maintained and in some cases has become even more pronounced. In some areas reforms that had already been started have been completed, while in others long-term developments are being continued. A new departure in cultural policy has been the focus on voluntary activities, but much of this support is being allocated to activities that fall outside what the committee defined as expressive culture (see below). Rhythmic music (for example pop, rock, jazz, blues, world music) has been supported since the 1990s, but since 2005 government funding has been increased to the point where it can be classified as a new cultural policy initiative. Many of the goals of the Cultural Initiative have either been achieved or are well on the way to being achieved, including the 1 % goal. The goals that have not been achieved are the improvement of artists' living conditions and the goal that every child should have the opportunity to take part in activities offered by a municipal school of music and the arts.

The committee identified a number of structural problems that need to be addressed if a new cultural policy is to be sustainable. It noted that the increase in allocations to several large and

important budget areas does not seem to have been matched by an increase in artistic production or public support. Furthermore the strengthening of cultural institutions has done little to stimulate artistic creativity outside institutions. The committee noted that in most fields of culture the quality has been enhanced and a more professional attitude adopted, but it also remarked that little has been done in the period since 2005 to develop schemes and methods for systematic implementation of the policy objective concerning quality. Further structural improvements are needed to ensure that the cultural sector reflects the growing cultural diversity among the population. Another structural challenge that is being addressed is digitisation. Substantial efforts have been made during the reporting period to adopt new technology for the conservation and dissemination of knowledge about the cultural heritage in the archive, library and museum sector. Cinemas have been successfully digitised. The development of the market for Norwegian e-books has been slow, but in the committee's view this may have made it possible to formulate a sound literature policy. Digital distribution in the music branch has come far, but the situation for smaller actors is critical. A further structural cultural policy challenge is the growth in cultural institutions' expenses. The committee considers it important that Norwegian cultural institutions are further developed and that the current model of operation is continued, but wishes to point out that the operation needs to be more flexible, so that a larger share of the allocations to these institutions are used to support artistic production and benefit the public. A final structural challenge that needs to be addressed is to improve visual artists' living conditions, which will require clearer cultural policy measures.

#### *County and municipal cultural policy since 2005*

The review of county and municipal cultural policy revealed a mixed picture of developments in the local and regional cultural sectors. On the one hand cultural life is flourishing through the growth of more impermanent cultural arenas, such as festivals. This has had the important effect of decentralising art and culture and strengthening cultural participation among the public. On the other hand, the committee noted that the local cultural infrastructure is under pressure. This applies for example to dissemination services such as public libraries and learning arenas such as the schools of music and the arts, and to leisure time clubs for children and adolescents and voluntary cultural activities. There is therefore a great need to upgrade the local cultural infrastructure. The committee considers that the state support for regional and local culture has made a positive contribution to development of arenas for expressive culture. However, it has noted that there is some tension between the different administration

levels, and cooperation needs to be improved. A more organised dialogue between the Ministry of Culture and local government bodies should be developed.

## The committee's recommendations

### *Expressive culture as the sphere of cultural policy*

The committee considers that the cultural policy sphere should be defined in relation to what it has termed “expressive culture”. This means that cultural policy should cover (i) services and activities related to the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, such as museums, libraries and archives, and (ii) artistic activities in the broadest sense, in other words art and culture at the professional level, popular culture and voluntary cultural activities. The committee emphasised the social importance of expressive culture, and pointed out that maintaining and strengthening the cultural infrastructure is a precondition for a viable democracy. In the committee’s view the three main national cultural policy objectives should be democracy, equity and diversity.

### *Time for a local cultural initiative*

The committee considers it particularly important to strengthen local cultural arenas, and proposed that future cultural policy should take the form of a local cultural initiative. The municipal schools of music and the arts, the libraries, and voluntary organisations like school bands and choirs will need to be strengthened. This means that central government will also have to focus more strongly on the local cultural sector and allocate more financial support for its development. The committee recommends that earmarking government funds for a local municipal cultural initiative for a limited period should be considered, and that such funds should be directed particularly at public libraries and municipal schools of music and the arts.

### *From cultural infrastructure to cultural content and artistic quality*

The committee considers that the focus should now be trained on promoting artistic production, high quality and public participation. It recommends the following measures:

- more flexible administration of theatre and orchestra institutions,
- the introduction of a new corporate governance system for cultural institutions that addresses the goal of high-quality production,
- closer cooperation between cultural institutions and independent performing art companies,
- greater encouragement of creative artistic activity by cultural institutions,

- a greater focus on dissemination when allocating support,
- strengthening the support schemes under Arts Council Norway.

#### *A knowledge-based cultural policy*

The committee pointed out that the present cultural policy is based on knowledge to a lesser degree than other national policy areas. If the Government's cultural policy is to fulfil the goals of for example increasing production by and public support for cultural institutions, and promoting high quality and a more inclusive cultural life, it will have to strengthen cultural policy research and establish a sounder knowledge base for its policy. The committee therefore supports the proposal made by another ministerial committee to establish a new centre for cultural sector research.

#### *Responsibilities in the cultural sector*

Culture is a cross-sectoral field, and most of the ministries are responsible for certain cultural activities and parts of the cultural heritage. This should continue, but the committee's evaluation of developments in parts of the cultural sector indicates that a number of organisational changes are needed. It therefore proposes that the responsibility for certain areas should be transferred from other ministries to the Ministry of Culture.

#### *The legal basis for cultural policy*

The committee considers that the legal basis for cultural policy should be strengthened in several areas. The committee also supports the proposed introduction of an act relating to fixed book prices, and expects that the act will build on the literature policy that has functioned so well for so long.

#### *A sustainable policy for artists*

The committee described the cultural policy challenges related to artists' living conditions, but pointed out that no definite steps have been taken since 2005 to address the problem. Cultural policy should seek to ensure that everyone has the same opportunity to explore their artistic talent. However, it should also recognise that few people will succeed in becoming a professional artist. The committee considers that a twofold strategy should be adopted for improving artists' living conditions: the standards of quality under the current scholarship and project support schemes for artists should be raised in such a way as to allocate more funds to

fewer people, and better use should be made of policy instruments to enable a larger number of artists to live on the income from their work.

*Inclusion in cultural life*

In order to be legitimate, a cultural policy should promote an inclusive cultural life that reflects society's cultural diversity. The committee considers that the twofold strategy adopted by the Government in this area should be continued by establishing and building up cultural institutions and arenas for minority groups, and seeking to ensure that the large cultural institutions are more inclusive. The committee is aware of the difficulty of ensuring that major cultural institutions are in practice open to all social groups, but considers that such inclusiveness is essential. It also considers that the efforts to promote inclusion should place greater emphasis on local cultural arenas and meeting places.