



A WORLD MEETING PLACE

Cultural strategy for Västra Götaland 2012–

REVISED NOVEMBER 2017



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PREFACE

A good life – for the individual and for society as a whole – assumes access to culture. For that reason, culture is one of Region Västra Götaland's five priority policy areas. Two tendencies in social development are clear: culture occupies an ever greater part of people's everyday lives, and it is becoming increasingly necessary to talk about cultures in the plural tense rather than a single Culture.

Region Västra Götaland has been part of the culture collaboration model since 2011. This implies a regional responsibility for national cultural policy, which particularly emphasises culture's significance for democracy and freedom of speech. The model has also vitalised the dialogue with municipalities and cultural life about culture's significance for sustainable social development.

The culture strategy contains the fundamental principles for the region's cultural policy. This strategy is the comprehensive guiding document for Region Västra Götaland's Cultural Affairs Committee over the next five years. It will be supplemented by the regional culture plan, which regulates the relationship with the government through the culture collaboration model. Certain areas of the strategy have been highlighted as being of particular importance, and for these areas the Cultural Affairs Committee has adopted special guidelines.

It is our hope that Västra Götaland will continue to be a vivid region of culture; a place for creative encounters in and for the world.

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I.

CULTURAL POLICY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE 2010S

Västra Götaland is, and has always been, a borderland, a meeting place.

Region Västra Götaland was established just before the turn of the millennium, on 1 January 1999, to meet the need for new political and administrative structures which societal development demands. Industrial society is changing into the information society. Traditional branches of industry such as textiles, shipyards, vehicles are moving to other parts of the world. In their place, knowledge-intensive branches are being developed in close cooperation with higher education, research and development which is carried on at the region's universities and colleges. Through what are termed creative branches, culture is acquiring economic importance that extends far beyond its traditional role. Intensified globalisation means competition on a world market that is merciless to the losers. There is nothing to indicate that the parts of the world that have got used to being richest can expect to continue to be so.

The information technology revolution has essentially changed the conditions not only for communication between people but also the way society functions; at the economic, social and – not least – cultural levels. Another aspect of globalisation is migration. The scale of migration today is greater than ever before. Irrespective of its cause, migration leads to border crossings and cultural meetings that create new artistic and cultural expression – but which also leads to a risk of segregation, demonisation and confrontation.

All this means Region Västra Götaland, and also the nation and the European Union, face major challenges, not least in the area of cultural policy. Or rather: the challenges that democratic welfare states are facing in the 2010s to a great extent relate to cultural policies.

How do we develop Västra Götaland and its cultural life as a territory of openness, where the world meets? How do we face the trials of segregation, class divides, unemployment and exclusion? How do we counter the forces that use culture in their attempts to differentiate between people? How do we embrace the opportunities for creativity, experiences, livelihood, intercultural dialogue and democratic participation that art and culture offer? How do we make cultural policy infrastructure stronger? How do we justify cultural policy investments when public finances are strained? How do we elucidate the wider social significance of culture?

Region Västra Götaland's comprehensive answer to future issues may be seen in the visionary document "The Good Life". The expression is related to the English economics concept »public good«, which refers to resources that are non-rivalrous and non-excludable; one person's consumption of a resource does not reduce its availability for someone else, and no one can be effectively excluded from consumption of that resource. In Swedish the concept is usually given the rather misleading translation »kollektiv nytthighet« (collective utility). Fresh air and clean water, full employment, health and education for example are all »public goods«. As is also culture. A good life – for the individual and also for society as a whole – presupposes the availability of good culture.

II.

VÄSTRA GÖTALAND'S STORY

Västra Götaland's story is about how a borderland became a meeting place.

The varied landscape surrounded by the North Sea, Lake Vänern, Lake Vättern and the South Swedish uplands is among the earliest inhabited regions in the country we call Sweden. Traces of cultivation and social structure go back to the Stone Age and even beyond. According to the encyclopedia this was »probably the oldest settlement in Sweden proper« and is mentioned by historians as early as ancient times. The oceans and the continent of Europe's Scandinavian promontory meet in Västra Götaland. The coastal landscape changes into mountainous landscape, agricultural plains into woodland. Three nations converge in a borderland that was long disputed and a scene of armed confrontation.

Long before the epoch of nations, the rock carvings in Tanum were created, a testimony to life and cultural connections during the European Bronze Age in a pictorial world that is only partly available to present-day observers. Christianity is among the powerful cultural currents that arrived in Västra Götaland earlier than most places in Scandinavia. The medieval provincial laws bear witness to the relatively strong position of the peasants in relation to the temporal and religious powers and have made historians speak of democratic features. Where the soil was poor, ingenuity and an entrepreneurial spirit were required to survive. From the mid-16th century up to the 20th century, from Gustav Vasa's day to Hjalmar Branting's, peddlers, known as »knallar«, travelled around the country and sold handicrafts made during the dark winter months. Their activities heralded the industrial revolution which from the 19th century – in the form of the textile, quarrying and engineering industries – transformed society and people's lives and work in Västra Götaland. Bohuslän, which for centuries was part of a cross-border cultural circle around Skagerrak and the North Sea, did not become Swedish until the mid-17th century.

Göteborg had at that time recently been founded at the mouth of the Göta river, as a fortress against the Danes. Right from the beginning the town was an international affair. Dutchmen built Göteborg with Amsterdam as a model. Scots and Englishmen played a central role early on in its economy which gave the town the pet name Little London. The East India Company was founded here and in the centuries to follow several of the country's major export companies. Gazes were as often directed outwards, to the west, as inwards to this country and its capital. The distance to the Court and central power in Stockholm contributed to developing a spirit that was sometimes described as materialistic and small minded, sometimes as proudly self-assured. This found expression in the town's social and cultural institutions which in several cases came into being through donations from Göteborg's wealthy families, and they still bear their names.



III.

CULTURAL POLICY AS INFRASTRUCTURE

In its work to realise the vision »The Good Life«, Region Västra Götaland focuses on five social areas: health, work, education, communications and culture. These may all be regarded as infrastructures for the Good Life.

An infrastructural perspective on culture entails responsibility. On the one hand, it means a holistic approach to the various elements and instruments of cultural policy, both those that are to carry on traditions and those that are to satisfy new and changing needs. On the other hand, the perspective is based on an awareness that cultural policy can and should collaborate with other policy areas, and also with the policies pursued at other levels; municipal, national, and within the EU.

Throughout history cultural policy has served many purposes and had several aims. Over a very long period its most essential task was to amuse the sovereign ruler and legitimate his power. At the end of the 19th century national culture was mobilised to defend against the social and political forces that were considered to be tearing the nation apart. The so-called cultivated policy that should rise above party political bickering was called cultural policy. In reaction to this defence of the established social order, around 1920, after the First World War and the Russian revolution, cultural policy was given a controversial identity policy purport. Working-class culture as a new form of culture completely different from middle-class culture was advocated by its promoters (later in the 20th century similar initiatives were taken regarding women's culture, youth culture, the culture of different ethnic groups, etc.). The 1930s saw a first breakthrough for a democratic cultural policy. A policy was launched the aim of which was that the entire population, irrespective of social position or geographic domicile, should be acquainted with the values of culture. In parallel, efforts were made to improve the financial conditions of professional artists. Cultural policy was seen to be part of general welfare policy and was characteristically called »social environment policy«. Redistribution remained the objective until a new cultural policy was adopted by the Riksdag in 1974. The reaction was not long in coming – on the one hand because the scope for reform was no longer unlimited and, on the other, because the widening of culture threatened to break up traditional concepts of art quality. At the same time, new studies indicated that culture played a role when companies took decisions on location. During the 1980s, new trends resulted in a discussion about alternative forms of financing, such as sponsoring, and attempts to evaluate

the role of culture in a wider economic and regional policy context. During the 1990s and 2000s, chiefly through impulses from Great Britain, research was developed into the economic significance of culture. Västra Götaland region's infrastructural perspective on cultural policy comprises several of the aspects mentioned above; cultural policy as a »defence policy«, identity policy, redistribution policy, regional policy, economic policy... The infrastructural perspective above all adopts a comprehensive approach to the importance of culture and art for both the individual and societal development.

It is an approach that is confirmed and problematised by research. The main economic importance of culture is not read in traditional parameters such as turnover, profit developments, number of employees, etc. – although figures for culture in these respects do well in comparison with many other branches of trade. The economic significance of culture is at once more indirect and radical. Research shows that there is a positive connection between innovative ability in a society and citizens' participation in cultural life.

In the age of global competition, it is a condition of survival for a small country dependent on exports like Sweden – not to mention a region directed outwards like Västra Götaland – to pursue an offensive cultural policy and work to achieve increased participation in cultural life.

The infrastructural perspective implies not just a comprehensive approach. It also means awareness that cultural policy, like all policy areas, has its limits. Cultural policy should not cover everything. Some things are better managed by other policy areas, others by working life or associations or simply by people themselves.

The infrastructural perspective means that cultural policy makes clear what it should and should not pursue.

IV.

THE FIVE PERSPECTIVES OF CULTURAL POLICY

Two trends are in evidence regarding cultural developments: expansion and differentiation. On the one hand culture is expanding.

People's symbol-creating activities occupy an increasingly large part of their everyday lives, working lives and private lives. On the other hand, and partly as a consequence of this, it will be more difficult to adhere to an idea of culture as one homogeneous and continuous unit. It is becoming more and more apparent how varying, hybrid and interacting are the cultures of a society, and how necessary it is to speak of them in indefinite plural terms, as cultures rather than Culture. Naturally, this development has consequences for cultural policy. On the one hand policies run the risk of losing their overview and getting lost in detail by continually trying to extinguish the latest flames flaring up. On the other hand, there lurks a danger that cultural policy become so abstract and watered down that no measure can make any real difference.

Hence, cultural policy faces the challenge of at once widening its target area and becoming more accurate. It has to bring together a bird's and a frog's perspective. In order to manage this task, a clearer prioritisation of cultural policy assignments and greater precision in the instruments of cultural policy is required. The aim here is not to describe exhaustively the importance of art and culture for the individual or society but rather to point out the basic foundations for Västra Götaland's cultural policy:

- 1) Democratic openness
- 2) Artistic quality
- 3) Social relevance
- 4) Economic potential
- 5) Regional image

All democratic cultural policies exist in the tension between democracy and art. Democracy means government by the people and recommends quantity. In elections the person to receive the most votes wins. Art is a communicative act, the quality of which can never be determined by voting. From this perspective, art and democracy may appear to be in sharp contrast to each other. But art may face the democratic challenge of reaching out to and being understood by more people than those already in the know, and urgent questions concerning quality may be put to democracy.

In relation to the principles of democratic transparency and artistic quality, the other principles – social relevance, economic potential and regional image – are secondary. But on closer inspection these principles also embrace the ideals of participation and quality.

1.
DEMOCRATIC
OPENNESS

2.
ARTISTIC
QUALITY

3.
SOCIAL
RELEVANCE

4.
ECONOMIC
POTENTIAL

5.
REGIONAL
IMAGE

REGION VÄSTRA GÖTALAND'S CULTURAL POLICY AIMS FOR

DEMOCRATIC OPENNESS, that is, contributing to creating fair conditions for everyone – regardless of age, gender, ethnic background, social class, sexual orientation, gender-transgressing identity, functional capacity or religious belief – to participate in cultural life as creator, public, participant in the exchange. The principle of democratic openness is based on the UN declaration of human rights (among which is the right to partake of – and participate in – cultural life) and on the national cultural policy's formulation about culture as an 'independent force with freedom of expression as its foundation'. The infrastructural perspective implies considering the financial conditions of professional artists a social investment more than a subsidy. It also means that art and culture are seen in the context of learning and knowledge.

ARTISTIC QUALITY, that is to say supporting the view that quality is a provisional, queried but necessary goal for cultural policy. Without the notion that one piece of art and cultural activity is more valuable than another, cultural policy lacks a *raison d'être*. And as if that were not enough, the critical discussion about artistic qualities is part of democracy's lifeblood. Not because it points out masterpieces and pretentious trash but because it is a continually ongoing public discussion that argues, evaluates, and revises. Cultural policy cannot itself bring about artistic quality, it can only create better or worse preconditions for artistic creation. One way is to make possible meetings between artists and cultural practitioners from different genres and countries. Another is to uphold the principle of keeping an arm's length distance between politics and art. Democracy requires defence of the integrity and critical ability of art. One of the most difficult tasks of cultural policy is to be observant of, and sufficiently flexible to handle, the fact that what is artistically interesting and innovative often turns up in unexpected places and not seldom is conspicuous by its absence in places where you would expect to find it.

SOCIAL RELEVANCE, that is, contributing to the creation of living environments and activities which are perceived as meaningful and stimulating by all those who live and work in them, without discriminatory exceptions. Social relevance can only be created if more people become involved. The goal of broadened participation assumes a power shift. Those who traditionally hold power in culture, who have had the more or less exclusive privilege of formulating the tasks and value of culture must, in keeping with the region's rights-based working methods, enter into dialogue with the general public that contributing to the financing of state-supported culture via taxes. Region Västra Götaland works to achieve a cultural life characterised by equality, sustainability, equal opportunities and diversity, on a democratic basis.

ECONOMIC POTENTIAL, that is to say collaborating with other policy areas in an awareness that the economic importance of culture does not just lie in ordinary enterprise but also fundamentally impacts on a society's and a region's ability to develop. Region Västra Götaland therefore wants to contribute to the launching and development of companies in the cultural sector, and also to the further education of those active in the field in the art of supporting themselves on their art. It is of strategic importance to increase knowledge about the broadened economic role of culture and for this reason Region Västra Götaland will initiate and encourage research in this area.

REGIONAL IMAGE, that is to say contributing to further strengthening Västra Götaland's good reputation as a cultural region and to qualify this expression with regard to participation and quality. The foundations for a good reputation are laid by the inhabitants of a region. The reputation of being of cultural interest of regions, rural municipalities and towns affects global streams of tourism and companies' location decisions. A vital non-establishment cultural life can be as important for the regional image as cultural institutions, book fairs, art biennials and music and film festivals. Being right at the front edge is what counts for all of them.



V.

FIVE STRATEGIC AREAS

It is impossible to predict the future, however some areas may be highlighted as being of particular strategic importance during the remainder of the 2010s.

These strategic areas have been selected by a broad majority of the region's politicians on grounds of its traditions as a borderland and meeting place, and also following an analysis of changes in the surrounding world discernible in the autumn of 2011. The key word is collaboration.



1. WIDEN PARTICIPATION

Broaden participation through collaboration with schools, adult education, universities, club activities, working life and the health service. Active, long-term efforts to counteract the discrimination reasons, but also geographic distances that prevent participation in the region's cultural life or make it difficult. Work to achieve a cultural life characterised by gender equality and inter-cultural dialogue. Make special efforts for children and young people and view participation in culture from a lifelong learning/creating perspective. Let investments in culture be part of educational work and thereby strengthen democracy.

2. DEVELOP CAPACITIES

Region Västra Götaland's task as unifying and coordinating force is critical. The regional level is particularly suited to a cooperating role and to cross-sectoral solutions. Developing capacities means inspiring and supporting collaboration between the various actors in cultural infrastructure: municipalities, businesses, participants. Capacity development is carried out by means of financial support, knowledge transfer and networking. In this way the region will contribute to a method development in social planning which, based on the needs and resources of the local community, will strengthen culture's possibilities.

3. PROMOTE INNOVATION

Create the conditions for innovative art, relevant research and new working forms. Contribute to making the charged relationship between established cultural institutions and independent cultural life take the form of productive collaboration. Stimulate cultural expressions that challenge society and cultural life as they currently are.

4. UTILISE TECHNOLOGY

Make use of digitalisation's revolutionary possibilities regarding creation, mediation and acquisition of art and culture. Digitalisation appears to imply a deathblow to the time-honoured difference between creators of culture and the consumer. Among other things this means the memory institutions' collections and competences can be safeguarded, exposed and used – artistically, educationally, scientifically – in an entirely new way.

5. INCREASE INTERNATIONALISATION

Extend and intensify cultural exchanges with other regions in and outside the EU, both as regards individual artists and through festivals, but also by exchanges of knowledge and investments in further education in collaboration with international partners. Work to achieve a democratic cultural life through international networks and organisations. International work also aims to counteract xenophobic atmospheres and increase understanding of different forms of culture. Extend Västra Götaland as a borderland and meeting place to embrace the whole world.

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THE CULTURAL STRATEGY WAS REVISED
BY THE REGIONAL COUNCIL IN NOVEMBER 2017

WITH SUPPORT OF MIKAEL LÖFGREN

GRAPHIC DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION:
MARIA KASK

PRINTED BY:
CELA GRAFISKA

