

From Danish polder model to French decentralisation

Cultural policy in an internationally comparative perspective

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The new Dutch [International Cultural Policy \(2017-2020\)](#) has been in effect for almost a year now. A good time to stop and take a look at how the Netherlands' international cultural policy compares to that of its neighbours.

Meanwhile, a politically-driven discussion has been going on in the Netherlands about the need to invest more in culture at the regional and local level - a matter that also has recently been debated at length in the United Kingdom, for instance. There, as a consequence, the House of Commons is preparing a law stipulating that more than 75% of the cultural budget must be spent outside the London area. In the meantime, Arts Council England (the English branch of the former Arts Council of Great Britain) has already taken this into account in its [National Portfolio 2018-2022](#) (comparable with the Dutch Basic Infrastructure for Culture, BIS). Is this discussion going on just as intensely in other countries?

In response to the above two current situations, DutchCulture examined a number of neighbouring countries for comparable international policies, based on the following questions:

- Do all of them actually have a coordinated policy for international cultural cooperation?
- Who is responsible; what priorities are given to strategies and how are these implemented?
- Does increasing regionalisation undermine the international ambitions of the cultural field, or vice versa?
- Do other countries have regulations to ensure a better balance of cultural expenditures within their own borders?

We looked at Denmark, France, Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Our immediate neighbours, Belgium and Germany, have been left out of consideration because their federal systems also have consequences for the administration of cultural policy. The governmental systems in the selected countries make a comparison with the Netherlands more relevant.

Summary

What stands out is that in comparison with other countries, the Netherlands has a fairly detailed international cultural policy, with clear objectives and a clearly defined framework. As does Denmark, where internationalisation is one of the key concepts of its general cultural policy. In Denmark this is also characterised by shared responsibility between several ministries and a prominent role for a number of institutions. This makes the Danish international cultural policy most akin to that of the Dutch.

France and the United Kingdom also have a framework for international cultural policy, but there the ministerial responsibility is less equally divided, certainly in France. Moreover, these two countries have a strong and widespread executive infrastructure, through the global networks of Instituts Français and British Councils. In Ireland and Sweden, there is a less formal framework for internationalisation in cultural policy, but this does not mean that little emphasis is given to international cultural cooperation in these countries. Both have strategies for promoting their national cultural sector through international regulations.

In most cases, the international cultural policies (or the equivalent) of the selected countries focus more on nation branding than the Dutch policy does, both in terms of tourism and cultural exports. In Sweden and France, however, just as in the Netherlands, there is also a relatively large focus on internationalisation as a means of strengthening the cultural sector. Almost every country works to a certain extent with geographical priorities. The phenomenon of focus countries is most prominent in the Netherlands and Denmark. Not surprising, considering that the role played by their ministries of Foreign Affairs in the formulation of policy is similar.

Whereas in the Netherlands the discussion about the regionalisation of cultural policy is only really getting off the ground now, in a number of countries concrete measures have already been taken. Besides the above-mentioned regulation in the United Kingdom, France and Sweden also have specific policies for a healthier balance of cultural expenditures. In France, cultural policy has been decentralised to such an extent that each region has its own strategy for cultural diplomacy. Remarkably enough, this regional form of cultural diplomacy seem to complement France's strategy for its *image de marque nationale* (nation branding).

In Sweden, a large part of the structural cultural budget (comparable to the Dutch Basic Infrastructure for Culture, BIS) has been shifted from the state to the provincial level. In Denmark and Ireland, perhaps because of their size (5.7 and 4.7 million inhabitants respectively, relatively highly concentrated in urban areas), there is little discussion about further regionalisation of cultural policy and funding.

Polderisation in cultural policy: decision-making by consensus

In Denmark, the policy for international cultural exchange is coordinated by the International Culture Panel (Internationale Kulturpanel). Seated on the Panel from the government side are the Ministry of Culture (chair), the Ministry of Business and Growth, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus, three ministries share responsibility for the policy. Besides the ministries, a number of sectoral institutions make up the Panel, such as the Danish Cultural Institute, the Danish Arts Foundation, the Danish Film Institute, the Danish Design Centre, the Danish Architecture Centre, the Agency for Culture and Palaces and VisitDenmark. Of note is that all of these players *collectively* formulate the framework for international cultural policy.

In the United Kingdom, international cultural policy is the shared responsibility of the Foreign Office, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for International Development. Whereas DCMS is especially responsible for cooperation in and with the EU, Unesco and the Council of Europe, the Foreign Office is responsible for the British Council, which actually determines the internationalisation agenda and independently carries it out (see further below).

Other countries do less poldering, work less by consensus. In France, for instance, the responsibility for international cultural policy lies entirely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the Ministry of Culture is occasionally called in, for example to help coordinate cultural programming for bilateral years or Unesco-related projects.

In Ireland, the Department of Culture is solely responsible for the international chapter of Irish cultural policy. Although the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade does have a Cultural Division, which supports international exchange with the embassy network as well as for instance the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris (a private initiative), there is no question of shared competency.

Finally, in Sweden, the responsibility for the internationalisation agenda, just like the national cultural policy, lies with the Ministry of Culture. Remarkably enough, this also applies to guidance for cultural attaches at the embassies, in conformity with the work of other professional attaches. The Swedish Institute (Svenska Institutet), which stimulates international cultural exchange, is in turn supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Institutes throughout the world

The Danish Cultural Institute (Dansk Kulturinstitut, DKII) is an independent organisation supported by the Ministry of Culture that since 1940 has been stimulating cultural exchange and cooperation between Denmark and the rest of the world. For this purpose, the DKII has a network of institutes in six countries (of which the institute in Brussels operates for the entire Benelux). The DKII shares international tasks with the Danish Arts Foundation (Statens Kulturfond), which supports the international activities of Danish artists and cultural institutions.

Just like in Denmark, in Sweden a large number of organisations are involved in implementing the Swedish internationalisation agenda. The most important player is the Swedish Institute (Svenska Institutet, SI), which in turn is an executive agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Swedish Institute supports and initiates cultural activities and promotes international cultural exchange. It shares this supportive and initiating function with the Swedish Arts Council (Statens Kulturråd), which allocates subsidies and carries out EU programmes. Seeing as many of these organisations, both in Denmark and Sweden, do the bulk of the work, there is more contact between them than between the ministries.

For more than 100 years, France's cultural exchange has been realised by the worldwide network of Instituts Français, steered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although the Institut has formally only

been the French government's official partner for cultural diplomacy since 2010. The Alliance Française, the global non-profit organisation that has been spreading the French language and culture for over 130 years, is likewise supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is complementary to the Institut Français. The Alliance Française focuses in particular on teaching French and promoting the French language and (French as well Francophone) culture.

By far the most important player in Britain's cultural exchange abroad is the British Council (which has a presence in more than 110 countries). The British Council is independently responsible for its implementation and formulates the internationalisation strategy itself. Other players in the implementation of cultural exchange are the Arts Councils in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In addition, various private parties, such as Wales Arts International, Creative Scotland and Visiting Arts in England, advise and support artists and institutions on their international ambitions.

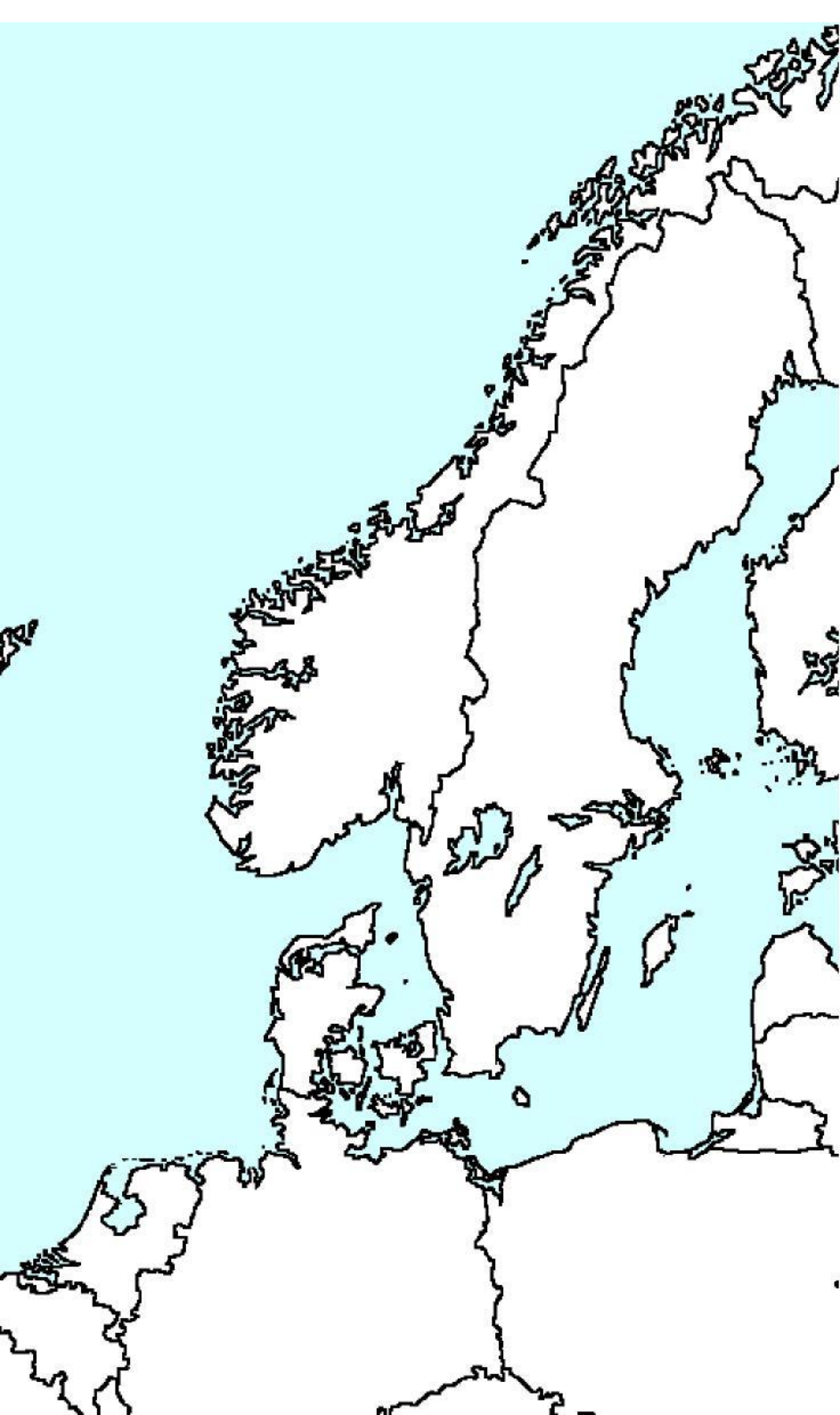
Culture Ireland has been part of the Irish Ministry of Culture since 2005 and is the body responsible for promoting and supporting Irish art and artists throughout the world, among other things by means of direct grant schemes. In addition, Culture Ireland identifies and supports opportunities for the Irish cultural sector to present itself at and join in with large-scale international events by organising platforms at for instance the Edinburgh festivals and the Venice Biennale. It also gives advice on internationalisation to the Ministry of Culture, but also the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Arts Council and Culture Ireland have signed a MoU that clearly formulates their roles: the Arts Council gives professional and financial support to artists and institutions, while Culture Ireland explores strategies and presentations abroad.

Priorities and focus mapped out: nation branding and professionalisation

Denmark, France and the United Kingdom have a specific framework of formal policy on international cultural cooperation, similar to that of the Netherlands' policy.

Sweden does not really have a clearly set framework of policy. There, cultural exchange with other countries is entirely devoted to building the country's image in accordance with the guidelines formulated by the ministries and the Swedish Institute: 'innovative, open, caring and authentic'. In the Swedish model, however, there is no specific formal confirmation of policy. The Irish policy framework for international cultural cooperation is equally limited, although the national cultural policy (current framework: [Culture 2025](#)) does include an international dimension.

The policy priorities of each country are mapped out below.



Denmark

The current strategy of the Danish International Culture Panel concentrates on four objectives:

- developing and renewing Danish art and culture;
- marketing the Danish nation as a brand;
- promoting and supporting cultural exports;
- promoting intercultural dialogue.

As in the Netherlands, the Danish policy has several focus countries and regions: the United States, China, Japan (celebrating 150 years of diplomatic ties in 2017) and South Korea. It also firmly emphasizes cultural cooperation with the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the Scandinavian region. Interestingly, the Panel has published an extensive explanation of these geographical choices, which can be read [here](#).

Sweden

Swedish international cultural exchange should especially contribute to:

- developing strategies for internationalisation;
- ongoing development of the sector's international professionalisation;
- promoting the Swedish stage for international and intercultural work;
- cross-sectoral and sector-transcending cooperation;
- active cooperation within the EU, Unesco, and of course the Nordic region.

France

The French international cultural strategy has four general objectives:

- promoting all forms of French culture and creativity in Europe and beyond;
- promoting and supporting intercultural exchange and cultural diversity;
- receiving and hosting cultural professionals and foreign artists in France;
- strengthening the capacity and dynamics of the cultural sector and networks.

United Kingdom

The British objectives are described in the British Council's [Global Arts Strategy 2016-21](#) and are aimed at doubling British cultural activities internationally:

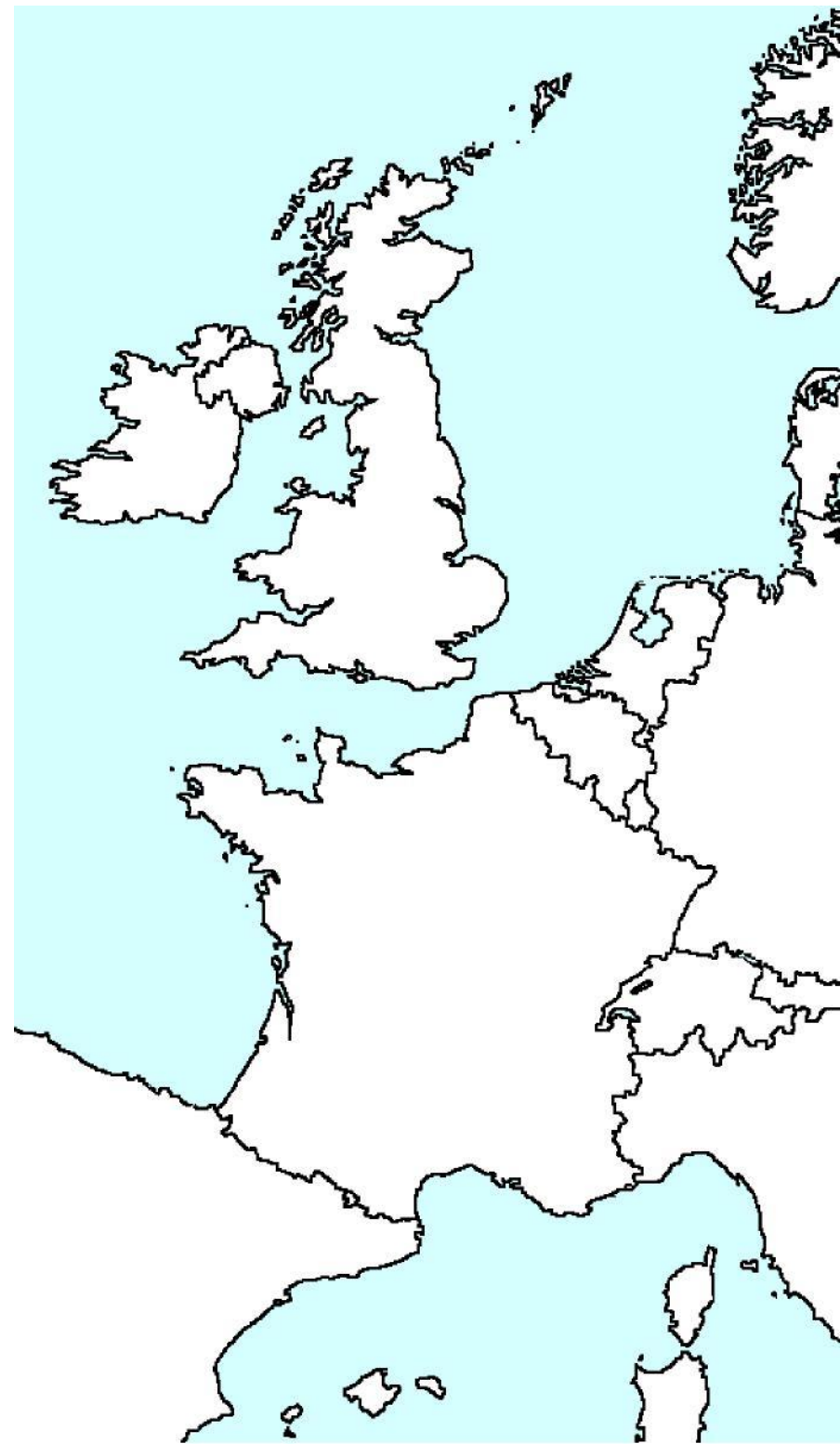
- sharing British Art with the world;
- fostering collaboration and networks;
- arts for social change;
- capacity building;
- policy and research.

The strategy does not specifically highlight a small number of focus countries. Instead, it names several countries in each region of the world that are to be given special attention. It also focuses frequently on bilateral-year collaborations. For example, 2017 is the UK-India Year of Culture.

Ireland

The long-term priorities for the international aspect of Ireland's Culture 2025 are:

- supporting the Irish cultural sector on the world stage;
- supporting tourism: cultural richness as a tourist attraction;
- internationally promoting the commemorations programme (including the now-past Ireland 1916 Centenary commemoration of independence). [Creative Ireland](#) is a legacy programme for the period after the 2016 centennial, including strategies for presenting Ireland's image to the rest of the world;
- extra focus on the role of culture in relations with Northern Ireland and with the post-Brexit United Kingdom.



Bigger than the capital

In the United Kingdom, and particularly in England, there has been a lengthy and ongoing discussion about the distribution of cultural funds between London and the rest of the country. Arts Council England supposedly shows a much greater preference for cultural institutions in London at the expense of those in regional areas. While local governments do indeed provide more funding for the cultural sector than Arts Council England does, there also have been relatively more cuts at the local level than at the national level.

Arts Council England already spends 75% of its income from national lotteries on areas outside of London. In total, around 56% of its cultural budget is devoted to regional areas. In December 2016, the parliamentary commission for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport proposed reserving a uniform 75% for areas outside of London. Three months earlier, upon being appointed Minister for Culture and Digitalisation, Matt Hancock had already set the stage: 'No one should be excluded ... because of their postcode.' Meanwhile, Arts Council England has [presented](#) its plans for the coming four-year National Portfolio (comparable to the Dutch Basic Infrastructure for Culture, BIS), including a more healthy regional balance in funding.

An interesting contrast: cultural budgets in France have risen more at the local and regional levels than at the national level. Increasing decentralisation has thus also affected France's cultural strategy. Ever since the beginning of the 21st century, regional authorities have developed their own cultural strategies. Parallel to that, the French Ministry of Culture has set up decentralised offices of its own. The state concentrates on a coordinating policy and several large institutions and has its own strategy for each region, while keeping an eye on balance in cultural planning and organisation. For their part, the regions support local institutions and promote their own cultural interests, also internationally.

To that end, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institut Français have made an agreement with all of the *administrations territoriales*, which have their own cultural diplomacy. This agreement entails:

- close collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Institut Français and the cultural department in the *territories*;
- joint promotion of the artistic and creative sources of the entire country;
- financial support for hundreds of projects each year.

An atlas of such territorial international projects can be found [here](#).

In Irish cultural policy, discussion about the issue of regionalisation is limited, certainly when it comes to funding. Local authorities have great difficulty in maintaining the local sector and (often fairly recently constructed) facilities, particularly after the severe cuts that were also made in cultural budgets in Ireland. Even so, no arrangement exists for allocating funding to local regions.

The [Creative Ireland](#) programme does, however, require local governments to each provide a specific Culture and Creativity Plan, which must be brought in line with Creative Ireland. Each city or township is expected to set up a Culture Team, made up of professionals from all disciplines, in order to increase its cultural capacity. Each municipal government receives a budget for implementing the Culture and Creativity Plan. So, work is definitely being done on professionalising culture in Ireland's regional areas. The

hope is that this will have a positive impact on the international plans, but no stipulations or goals have been formulated in this regard.

The city of Dublin is the biggest recipient of national cultural funding: in 2016, around 43% of the budget went to the capital, where the most important national institutions are also to be found. By way of comparison, one third of the total population of Ireland lives in Dublin. Perhaps this is why the allocation of monies is basically not a discussion. The other big cultural centres are Galway (Cultural Capital of Europe in 2020) and Cork.

In Sweden, 45% of the total cultural budget is spent at the national level and 55% at the regional or local levels. There too, a big shift from the national to the regional level has occurred in cultural policy over the last few years, with the so-called Kultursamverkansmodellen: more and more of the responsibility for distributing structural financing, which previously came from the national government, is being transferred to the provinces. However, this only happens after the Swedish Kulturradet has approved the plans made by the region in question, so it is not entirely decentralised. When making these plans, regional authorities also have to consult the local cultural sector and local civil society. Just as with the internationalisation agenda (see page 5), this therefore emphasises a cross-sectoral approach.

Furthermore, Sweden has a regulation requiring all institutions that receive state funding, including at the regional level, to demonstrate a certain amount of international ambition. As a result of increasing decentralisation, there is a lot of interest in international networks and collaboration with regions beyond the country's borders.

Want to know more?

Would you like to know more about the internationalisation and regionalisation of cultural policy in the Netherlands or in these countries? Get in touch with DutchCulture!

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